

# China's Maritime Security in the East China Sea

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, East Asia has become a region of prosperity and economic growth. Its prominence comes from China's rise and other resurging economies in the region, such as Japan and South Korea. In 2016, East Asia's GDP reached USD 22 trillion. The rise of China has shifted the balance towards East Asia. China is already seen as a great power in East Asia that has risen commensurate with its geographical expanse, with an eye on regional dominance. China is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest economy in the world, and its GDP has reached USD 10.83 trillion. Furthermore, China has pursued building up its military capabilities and modernizing its navy. This has led to a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape in East Asia with implications for the regional security architecture.

In 2010, China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest economy. This has considerably changed how China views the region and how China is viewed in the region. Notably, in 2010, the Japanese Coastguard confronted a Chinese fishing boat in the waters near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The confrontation led to a collision where the Japanese accused the Chinese captain of ramming two Japanese ships. Japan filed a damage suit against a Chinese fishing boat captain who rammed two Japanese Coastguard ships in 2010. Chinese spokesperson from the Foreign Ministry Hua Chunying responded to the incident, saying the Japanese side obstructed the legitimate rights of the Chinese fishermen to carry out fishing activities and underscored Chinese sovereignty; therefore, any legal action by Japan is invalid. There is a noticeable change in China's behaviour, which has happened because of the shift in terms of the size of the economy. Beijing's behaviour has become a cause of concern for its neighbours, and there are visible fissures between Beijing and its neighbours on many issues. Among them, China's dispute with Japan over Diaoyu Island

is becoming irreconcilable as both countries refuse to acknowledge the other's position in the dispute.

In 2012, the Japanese government purchased three of the disputed islands, prompting large-scale protests in China. The islands were privately owned before the Japanese government bought them. The Chinese government increased the number of patrols near the islands. In 2013, China announced an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea. China's assertion of sovereignty and territorial claims has become more aggressive than before.

Such incidents indicate that China, with its increasing military capabilities, can undermine prevailing international laws and can make access to the commons increasingly difficult for other states. The East China Sea could be a potential reservoir of oil and natural gas, but what is even more significant is that the sovereignty dispute could consequently lead to military build-up and regional dominance by China, eventually calling into question the established regional order. Japan's security is aligned with the security policies of the United States under the San Francisco security agreement.

The chapter delves into why Japan and China entered into a diplomatic row over the Diaoyu Island after the 2012 nationalization of the Diaoyu Island by the Japanese government. It is in contrast to Shinzo Abe's visit to Beijing in 2006 to reset ties. It was his first overseas trip to the Asian giant that came after a year's freeze in China and Japan summit-level visit. With the new situation developing due to China's economic rise since the end of the global financial crisis, the chapter looks into the Diaoyu problem, which flared up between China and Japan since 2010. The chapter maps the evolution of the dispute from the 1990s to the present. Although economic engagement between the two countries remained normal, politically, bilateral relations are fraught with problems carried on from the past. The dispute between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands has taken a sharp turn, which

many have termed as a new assertiveness of China. The Chinese government asserts sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea (ECS), and Japan denies any sovereignty dispute over the island features. There are overlapping claims over the surrounding waters, which will require both countries to enter negotiations and delimit the maritime boundary. China pitches its claims based on historical occupation.

The chapter argues that the present feud between China and Japan is a consequence of similar geo-economic ambitions leading to rivalry. The chapter asserts China's claim over the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands is inextricably linked to Beijing's growing demand for energy resources and increasing dependence on seaborne trade. The chapter maintains that China and Japan have both used historical memory as an instrument for economic and political ends.

The chapter underscores that China has shown less willingness to solve the dispute over the Diaoyu. Although Beijing proposed joint development of resources, it didn't materialize. However, due to economic interdependency between China and Japan situation has been managed by both sides, and the conflict was avoided. Japan is dependent on the United States to insulate it from threats and is constitutionally not allowed to become a 'normal power'. Nonetheless, the shifting geopolitical dunes in East Asia and pressure from regional middle powers are demanding a greater role for Japan to resist Chinese assertiveness in the region. Against this backdrop, the second section of the chapter discusses the geography and historical background of the islands in the East China Sea. The third section explains the warm economic relations and cold politics between China and Japan. The fourth section analyzes China-Japan's regional engagements Japan's overseas development assistance and history textbook revision. The fifth section of this chapter describes the energy security competition between Japan and China. The section further discusses China's increasing assertiveness, and the subsection discusses surging nationalism and exclusive regionalism. The sixth section is about surging nationalism and the dispute. The seventh

section examines the Diaoyu dispute and the U.S.-Japan alliance. The eighth section further explains the militarization of the disputed island and nearby waters. The ninth section highlights regime legitimacy and the role of collective memory in the Diaoyu dispute. The last section concludes the chapter.

### 1. 1 East China Sea: Geography and Historical Background

Interestingly, geography and historical vicissitudes are inextricably linked. Therefore, this section delineates both these elements below.

#### *Geography*

Japan, located off the East coast of Asia, is an archipelago nation comprised of four main islands, from North to South: Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, and over 3500 smaller islands. The southernmost reach is the Ryukyu Islands. Japan stretches over 2,360 miles, so the people enjoy climatic variety. The Japanese people define their country as a "small, resource-poor island country." Japan has fewer coal seams, little iron ore, and non-existent petroleum resources; it is reliant on imports and hydroelectric and nuclear energy production. China, the world's fourth-largest country, is considerably larger than Japan. China has an eastern coastline along the East China Sea, Korea Bay, the Yellow Sea, and the South China Sea.

The East China Sea is semi-closed. To its north lies the Yellow Sea, which is bordered by the South China Sea and Taiwan in the south, and Japan's Ryukyu and Kyushu islands to the north form the border. The East China Sea has an area of 482,000 square miles, consisting mostly of the Okinawa Trough and a basin formed southeast of Shanghai. The eight small disputed islands of Senkaku/Diaoyudao are located northeast of Taiwan. Among those small islands, the largest island is two miles long and less than a mile wide.<sup>1</sup> According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) report of 2013, 1.4 million barrels/day of crude oil that arrived at the Malacca Strait goes to Singapore and Malaysia to be processed out as refined petroleum products, while the rest of the

<sup>1</sup> US East China Sea  
<https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/regions-topics.php?RegionTopicID=ECS>

amount of crude oil goes to important Asian consumers, China (5.4 mb/d) and Japan. According to the Energy Institute Administration, the East China Sea has about 200 million barrels of oil as probable reserves.

## 1.2 Historical background of China-Japan relations

The bilateral relations between China and Japan are of significant importance to the international politics of East Asia. As the region's two most powerful states, their relations are crucial for the stability of the Asia-Pacific. Historically, war and friction were not necessarily the "norm" between the two states. Until the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, Japan and China had clashed only three times in the 7<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both Japan's and China's entry into the European international order in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century changed this relatively peaceful pattern of interaction. Japan colonized Taiwan in 1895 after defeating China, and starting in 1931, it launched an invasion of China on a massive scale. These fifty years of war and conflict have, to a certain extent, set the tone of Sino-Japanese relations today. The two countries' relations with each other can hardly be called friendly indeed; the two seemed to be trapped in an almost endless cycle of "friction and friendship" with close relations frequently punctuated by acrimony. There is an extra factor in Sino-Japanese relations that gives the two states' relations that extra "edge", which is the "history" factor. Numerous war crimes were committed by the Japanese and have left a painful mark on the Chinese psyche. This frequently results in highly emotional anti-Japanese outbursts and strong diplomatic reactions from Beijing whenever there are disputes with Tokyo. These dynamics will ensure that Sino-Japanese relations will continue to be rocky for some time.

Japan and China are neighbours located in East Asia. China's contribution to Japanese civilization is extensive. Japan's written language and many other elements, such as religious, moral codes and aesthetic beliefs, are heavily influenced by Chinese culture. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many Chinese revolutionaries were immensely influenced by Japan's domestic initiatives of the Meiji rulers. China, with its civilizational elements, is successful in creating a cultural hegemony in East Asia. Japan, unlike Vietnam and Korea, which accepted and remained under the

Chinese tributary system, was never brought under the Chinese order. (Dreyer pp.7-9)

After the successful Meiji restoration initiative of Japan, it became quite powerful. China and Japan confronted each other during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. The war involved naval conflict over the Korean islands, in which Japan was seen as a rival by a few Chinese reformers, such as Li Hongzhang and Zeng Guofan, who were advocating "self-strengthening" reforms and had observed Japan's rapid growth rate after the Meiji reforms or restoration. Under the Shimonoseki treaty, China ceded to Japan the islands of Taiwan, previously known as Formosa, along with other islands. While there is no mention of the eight small islets, China maintains that these islands were ceded to Japan, and later, according to the Potsdam Declaration, they should have been returned to China. Japan denies the acquisition of these islands from China and insists on the acquisition under *terra nullius*. In the war of 1894-95, China's defeat at the hands of Japan changed the traditional balance of power in East Asia. A combination of both naval blockade and land campaign captured the Beiyang fleet, thus establishing a new order through a naval campaign. Even though the Chinese fleet was far superior to the Japanese in terms of numbers, however, they could not put up a resistance to the well-trained Japanese soldiers. (Elleman 2006, p.5) (Dreyer) In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sino-Japanese War in 1931 Japanese occupied the Northeast of China and by 1932 proclaimed a separate state of Manchuria. (Mitter 2000) Occupation of the northeast of China by the Japanese sparked protests all over, but it was difficult for the Nationalist government to defeat the Japanese and free the region. Agitation against the Japanese was not allowed, and nationalists who protested against the Japanese occupation of the northeast were displaced from their homeland. (Mitter 2000, p.129-30) (Dreyer pp.9-10) These war memories still haunt China, making it difficult for it to come to terms with Japan. The second Sino-Japanese War from 1937-1945, also known as the Resistance War in China (抗日战争), at present forms the narrative of modern Chinese nationalism that lends political legitimacy to the Communist Party of China and its rule in contemporary China. In modern history, the war memory foments animosity in Sino-Japanese relations. (Elleman 2006) The Japanese Guangdong army, which had ambitions for expansion

in the Liaodong peninsula, fabricated a story of a railway attack by the Chinese, attacked Mukden (Shenyang), and took over that region. They created a puppet state, and it made the Japanese Imperial Army ambitious, which brought major changes in the security policy of Tokyo. On the domestic front, Japan faced challenges from Western capitalism, a nationalistic China, and a communist Russia. The challenges Japan faced from the increasing economic interdependence could be solved by constructing a self-reliant economy. Thus, Japan started constructing a wartime economy that supplied Japan's wartime needs. (Bush 2007 Brookings) (Duara 2001) (Mitter 2007) Along with the puppet state of Manchukuo, the Japanese economic bloc flourished by the mid-1930s into the East Asian League and the East Asian community, and later it evolved into a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. There were major changes in the economic policy of the Japanese Empire. It is a form of imperial regionalism that intensified with the industrialization of Taiwan and Korea. These economic blocs were formed and given self-governing status with concessions; sometimes these were nominal nation-states, although they were militarily attached to the imperial power. However, these economic blocs proved to be unsustainable because often the national interests of the imperial power conflicted with the ambitions of these quasi-sovereign nation-states. (Duara 2003 pp.18-19)

Japanese invasion induced a sense of threat to the nationalist regime that necessitated the nationalists to create a perception among all Chinese about the dichotomized Other. (Mitter 2000 p.131) Chinese nationalist leaders Chiang Kai-shek and Zhang Xueliang decided to report the issue to the League of Nations, seeking international intervention against Japan's aggression in Manchuria, and put pressure on Japan to withdraw under international pressure. However, Britain and France refrained from interfering in the issue due to their interests in the region. The Chinese nationalist government came to realize its diplomatic status in the international system and the hollowness of the international organizations. This realization called for a collaboration between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Kuomintang Party into a united front to put up a resistance to the Japanese aggression that subjected common Chinese to atrocities such as burying them alive and raping

Chinese women in Nanjing. The KMT-CCP United Front managed to defeat the Japanese. CCP ultimately established its rule in 1949. (Mitter 2000 pp.2-4)

Nation-states consciously select events from their past and create a narrative that not only shapes the collective memory of their people but also gives a sense of being more unique than others. China has used the Opium Wars as a significant symbol of Chinese nationalism. The nineteenth century has been depicted as a period of decline of Chinese influence in the region due to the onslaught of Western imperialism. Much of the early Chinese nationalistic discourse highlighted the plight of the Chinese. However, there is a new discourse in China on nationalistic expression that has come into place, in which the War of Resistance against Japan has become a symbol. The new nationalism underscores the political legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party's rule. (Mitter 2000 pp. 2-6) The political regime in Beijing used the War of Resistance between China and Japan during 1937-42 to shape the new narrative of Chinese nationalism and patriotism. In China, the memory of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sino-Japanese War particularly received attention because of the large-scale brutality by the Japanese, which remains fresh in the memory of the Chinese people, making it difficult for both states' political elites to reconcile differences.

The next section discusses Japan's attempt to appropriate its history of militarism towards the end of the 1980s and through the 90s. Japan desired to expand its political influence in the 80s and attempted to whitewash its image. However, Japanese atrocities during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War are still heavy on the hearts of the Chinese people. The war memories affect the two societies in developing a feeling of amity. Japan attempted a history textbook appropriation to whitewash Japanese militarism. The next section highlights that even when the Diaoyu Island rift did not become a major issue in the China-Japan relationship, other issues have arisen from time to time, underscoring the enduring political rivalry between these two neighbors.

Another event that invokes nationalist sentiment in China is the controversial Yasukuni shrine visit by Japanese political leaders. The war memorial Yasukuni Shrine commemorates 2.5 million war dead who laid their life for Japan's Meiji government, and

also includes 14 Class A criminals from World War II. Trips to this shrine evoked nationalist sentiments in China, which suffered miserably at the hands of the Japanese. Historical memory has entangled the Sino-Japanese bilateral relations in darkness, where issues like the Yasukuni Shrine visit, comfort women, and Japan's glossing over of its wartime crimes in history textbooks do not allow these two states to ameliorate ties. Although during the Cold War period, China and Japan could reach an understanding and establish diplomatic relations, prickly issues reemerged in the relationship, eclipsing economic interdependence. Enduring political animosity is a salient feature in China-Japan relations.

In the 1980s, Tokyo revised history textbooks to gloss over its image of wartime atrocities. Memories of Japan's wartime crimes ravaging many countries in Asia today remain vivid, and the correction of history books elicited strong responses from Japan's neighbours. Japan's move to sanitize its militarist and expansionist history led to the eruption of protests in China. Beijing started protesting against the Japanese government's effort to sanitize history textbooks for image correction of Japan and did not balk until the Japanese government removed the particular textbooks from schools. (Smith 2015) (Rose 1998) (Vogel 2019) (Yahuda 2015) The memories of bitter history have led to an enduring pattern of enmity that shrouded China and Japan's bilateral relations. In contemporary times, the bitter historical past has led to national mythmaking in China and Japan, respectively giving rise to nationalistic feelings. (Buzan 1992) There is a victim mentality existing in China, which fuels hypersensitive nationalistic sentiments and is the root cause among Chinese decision-makers to view any regional initiative proposed by Japan as a measure to promote Japan's sphere of influence and to contain China's regional aspirations. The bilateral cooperation and the economic presence of Japan have also come under jingoistic attack from the common Chinese, perpetuating a sense of victim mentality. (Deng 1997, pp.375-377) (Mitter 2002) (Wang 2009)

China had managed to seek Japanese foreign investments by leveraging Japan's past atrocities and history of militarism. These historical issues have caged China and Japan in a deeply rooted animosity. Furthermore, the historical memory also dampens the

chances of any joint regional initiatives. China stopped raising the history issue after the Belgrade Chinese embassy bombing in 1999, as maintaining normal relations with Japan in East Asia became crucial. (Sato) (Yahuda 2015) The above discussion shows that the Yasukuni shrine visit and history textbook issues are challenges to China-Japan bilateral relations.

Currently, Japan exerts administrative control over the islands and has based its claims on the Senkaku Islands' narrative of discovery and occupying the islets as *terra nullius* (land that is legally deemed to be unoccupied or uninhabited) under the Okinawa prefecture after the Shimonoseki War in 1895. China and Japan confronted each other in a war in 1894. As a part of the treaty, China, which was defeated in the war, ceded to Japan the islands of Taiwan, previously known as Formosa, along with other islands. While there is no mention of the eight small islets, China maintains that these islands were ceded to Japan and later, according to the Potsdam Declaration, they should have been returned to China. Japan denies the acquisition of these islands from China and insists on the acquisition under *terra nullius*. Therefore, from the perspective of the Japanese, the islands do not have any sovereignty dispute.

At present, the islands are under Japanese control as a result of the Okinawa Reversion Treaty signed in 1972 between the United States and Japan. Before the Okinawa Reversion treaty, the islands were under the administration of the US under the 1951 San Francisco Treaty of Peace. The administration of the Senkaku/Diaoyu was retained by the United States till the early 70s. After the transfer of the island, surveys were conducted since there were no claimants or evidence of human settlement. The Japanese government made the Senkaku Islands a part of the Okinawa prefecture through a cabinet decision.

China has based its claim on the disputed Diaoyu Islands, citing historical occupation and discovery. China created the narrative of discovering these islets during the Ming dynasty in 1372, and therefore, they are described as inherent territories of mainland China. The Chinese argue that in the past, the emperor regularly dispatched imperial envoys to reinforce China's tributary system. However, under the United Nations Convention Law of the Sea, these groups of

islets do not generate any maritime rights based on historical occupation.

In 1968 United Nations Economic Commission (UNEC) for Asia and the Far East reports declared the region between Taiwan and Japan as a promising future oil province for the world. This has given rise to sudden fresh claims by China, Japan, and Taiwan. The surrounding water areas near the disputed islands are not only rich reservoirs of hydrocarbon resources but are also rich in fisheries. Furthermore, the international shipping lanes that pass through are important for maintaining crude oil supply to important energy-importing countries like China, Japan, and Korea.<sup>2</sup> Increasing dependency on the import of raw materials and resources consequently led China and Japan to view the East China Sea and the South China Sea as strategically important. The sudden eruption in claims on the islets and assertion by China highlights the growing interests of both China and Japan to dominate this maritime zone and the islands.

The chapter argues that China-Japan historical animosity has deepened owing to their respective geostrategic ambitions. Historical memories of war and enmity do act as a precursor to the East China Sea dispute. Japan and China have similar interests, but due to differences existing within Japanese society and domestic structures, such as a Pacifist Constitution and Article 9 that condition Japan from becoming a 'normal' power, and the emphasis on non-military institutions creates constraints.

### 1. 3 Warm Economics and Cold Politics:

Stable China-Japan bilateral relations are crucial for maintaining sustained peace and order in a growing and prosperous East Asia. In the 1980s, the Japanese economy was thought to be becoming robust, and therefore, Tokyo attempted to increase its political influence in the region. Japan's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) diplomacy could be seen in this light. Tokyo's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) extension to China in the post-Tiananmen period is one example. In the 1980s, due to

the efforts of Yoshida's government, Japan revived its economy, leading to an increase in its influence in the region as a political power. In the 1980s, Japan's economy was marked by extraordinary growth due to a balanced investment and consumption boom. During this time, overseas investment from Japan is growing rapidly, making it the largest creditor. Japan, since then, has been providing aid to developing countries with development finance and capital. Although initially, Japan's ODA was free of any political purpose, later on, development aid was mostly directed towards Indo-China and West Asia to increase its influence in the region. Japan's ODA diplomacy is an attempt to influence secondary state alignments through growing economic influence. (Drifte) In another way, Japan's ODA to many Asian countries was an attempt to whitewash Japan's image in the 1980s, and its efforts to expand its influence are seen as Tokyo trying to assert an independent role for itself in Asia in the post-Cold War period. (Noguchi 1994, p.291)

Japan extended help to China in the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident. The overseas development assistance (ODA) given by Japan to China in the post-Tiananmen period is an attempt to engage China in the comity of nations, thereby ending China's isolation and transcending it from a revolutionary framework towards a stable and socialized China. The munificence extended by Tokyo to Beijing is US\$27 billion between 1979-2005. (Smith) Rose argued that according to Japan's "progressive intellectuals" like Ogata, Tokyo owed China redress for its wartime aggression. (Rose, 2004 pp. 21-22) China is the third largest recipient of Japan's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Rose argues that Japan's ODA towards China is shaped by two factors: one is 'cultural indebtedness' and the other is Japan's post-war 'guilt complex'. However, apparently, under the present circumstances where China is rising rapidly, Japan seems to be experiencing "apology fatigue." As China incrementally grows in military and economic terms, the effectiveness of Japanese ODA wanes. (Rose, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/explained/article/2187161/explained-diaoyu-senkaku-islands-dispute>

The period of the 1990s in Sino-Japanese relations is marked by not only economic cooperation but also exhibited friction. In 1989, for the first time, Japan registered a trade deficit of US\$2.7 billion, and its trade with China reached USD\$19.6 billion. (Whiting 1991 pp. 109-110) It reached US\$57.9 billion in 1995, US\$85.5 billion in 2000, and US\$267.0 billion in 2005. The trade between the two countries reached \$207.3 billion in 2006. Japan's direct investment in China exceeded \$58 billion, and there are more than 30,000 Japanese multinational companies and enterprises operating in China. Japan's 20 percent share of foreign trade came from China, including Hong Kong, and the figures are released by Japan's Ministry of Finance. Japan's trade with China has been driven by China's surge, but it has mainly come from using China as a production base for Japanese cars, computers, and electronic gadgets that are shipped across the world. Although the United States is still the largest single foreign market for Japanese exports, overall, Japan's trade with China is higher because Japan imports much more from China. During this period, Japan's economy made a two-year recovery based on exports.<sup>3</sup> Further economic integration through cooperation in novel areas prevents China not to escalating the conflict. China's stand largely is a reflection of its dependency on Japan for technological and financial expertise. According to Kokuban, Sino-Japanese bilateral relations exhibited a "North-South relationship" which is generally observed between a technologically advanced, industrially developed country and a developing country in the initial period after the normalization of China-Japan bilateral relations. In the early 1990s, trade frictions between the two countries existed, and Beijing complained about the low level of Japanese investment in China, which was in short-term and high-profit businesses like hotels rather than in productive businesses. (Kokuban, 2013 pp. 173-176, 179-181). Narayanan, argues that China and Japan can successfully overcome any domestic political barrier and engage with others who have different political ideologies for domestic growth and development (Narayanan 2007). Japanese foreign direct investment in China grew from US\$1.8 billion in 1990 to US\$8.3 billion in 1995 and

accounted for 8% of China's total FDI in 1995. It reached US\$36.3 billion in 2005, and in 2012, after reaching US\$13.5 billion, Japanese foreign direct investment had been declining gradually. Sino-Japanese bilateral trade started declining after 2011, from US\$345 billion to US\$270 billion in 2016, due to issues such as the Diaoyu/Senkaku island issue. The shift in the balance with the rise of China in the region makes it imperative for Japan to prepare for alternative approaches to respond to the flux. In the 1980s, Japan took many initiatives to expand its influence base in the region, mainly through financial aid. Tokyo considered taking on a more influential role in Asia by extending Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). However, Japan's enthusiasm to elevate its position in the international society of nations through economic aid and assistance has received a lukewarm response. The ODA diplomacy of Japan did not show the anticipated results. As a result, Tokyo started emphasizing the regional multilateral arrangements. Also, along with Australia and other regional powers such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan tried to establish various free trade areas by organizing the economic institutions in East Asia and the Pacific, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. In 2002, Japan initiated a Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Partnership to promote bilateral trade agreements. In the context of a rising China, Japan has resorted to active diplomacy. In the year 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe promulgated the idea of the "confluence of the two seas," focusing on the economic integration of the region partnering with like-minded countries like India and, US and investing in the least developed and developing small states across the Pacific and Indian Ocean, aiming to promote connectivity to revive the Japanese economy. Later, the "confluence of the two seas has been termed as Indo-Pacific. The concept aims to bring economic development and promote peace and stability in the region. Although China and Japan carried on bilateral trade, political tension did not decrease.

In 2004 Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy nuclear submarine entered Japan's 12 nautical mile

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/27/business/world-business/a-growing-china-becomes-japans-top-trade->

[partner.html#:~:text=TOKYO%2C%20Jan.,and%20its%20rapidly%20expanding%20neighbor.](#)

territorial sea. According to a report in the *Japan Times*, the intrusion of the Chinese submarine into Japan's territorial waters was a highly provocative act by the Chinese navy. According to many officials, the Chinese military was trying to use the short trespass to show off its sea power. One article states that the Japanese government decided to set out the procedures through which Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) units could be mobilized smoothly in case a submarine appears near territorial waters. After the 2004, Chinese submarine incident, the government reviewed policies and accelerated procedures for the Decision making process. (Dutton 2009: 4). One of the most significant statements is in the 2004 PLA defence white paper's discussion of naval operations. Enhancing "nuclear counterattack" capability was described as one of the PLAN's most important missions. Until the mid-2000s, the Chinese naval strategy focused on near-coast defence and near-active defence. The purposes were to defend the territorial waters and be capable of naval operations within the "three seas"—the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea. After the mid-2000s, Chinese naval strategy was extended to include far-seas operations beyond the three seas and within the second island chain.

In 2004, political activists and members of the mainland China-based "Chinese Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands" landed on one of the islands. In response, the Japanese government simply repatriated the Chinese activists to the Chinese mainland. The government in Beijing, for its part, prevented further attempts by the group to travel to the islands. Both Tokyo and Beijing repeatedly made efforts to contain the impact of their activists. Beijing suppressed press coverage and prevented organized protests by the activist group, and Tokyo refused to officially recognize the efforts of its nationalist groups and sought to limit their activities.

China's "good neighbour policy has become a top priority in Chinese foreign policy in the first decade of the twenty-first century. But China's behaviour towards Japan in 2004-05 was at odds with the 'good neighbour' policy. There was a sharp increase in anti-Japanese government sentiment in China over the territorial dispute, as well as was rise in nationalistic sentiment. The anti-Japanese sentiment reached the

point of mass demonstrations against Japanese diplomatic officials and businesses, leading to a chaotic situation. Chinese government officials, contrary to their commitment to peace and development and good neighbour relations, where the emphasis was on the peaceful resolution of disputes, allowed demonstrators to carry out violent actions for several days before the activists could be stopped by the Chinese government. Chinese government officials were trying to accommodate international norms on one hand and strong popular sentiments against Japanese government policies on the other, resulting in the decision to allow demonstrations to continue for several days before restoring order. (Sutter 2012 p.41-42). Uncertainty prevails regarding Chinese Decision making during the April 2005 demonstrations against Japan. Sutter says that assessments offered up to now have dealt with general trends and have been speculative, with no awareness of who was making decisions and what issues and priorities were driving their decisions. Although now many facets are known in the past about Chinese decision making, especially as it involves economic issues, major political and security issues remain secret. Those who reveal information that is defined by the Chinese authorities to be under the purview of national security are arrested and prosecuted.

After the financial crisis in 2010, Sino-Japanese bilateral trade volume and Japanese foreign direct investment registered a decline. There were repeatedly assertive actions between 2008 and 2010 by the PLA Navy, maritime surveillance forces, and Chinese foreign policy organizations employing forceful actions against others over fishing activities, energy prospecting, and maritime surveillance involving Chinese claimed territories and other maritime rights along China's rim. (Sutter 2010 p.43) As the Chinese economy's demand for resources grows, China's commercial ships are venturing farther from shore and its navy is enforcing claims in disputed waters. The 2010 incident required both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the PLA Navy to manage the situation. The trawler rammed two JCG vessels, and after 40 minutes of chasing, the JCG boarded the Chinese trawler and detained the 15 crew and captain. The captain was tried under Japanese domestic law. China initiated a range of hostile approaches. It put an unofficial embargo on the export of rare earth elements to Japan.

As the latter's technology-based industry is dependent on rare earth elements, it is an example of weaponization of trade by China, putting pressure on Japan. China initiated escalatory measures. The collisions are an example of rising tensions between the two countries over territorial rights in the East China Sea.

In 2012, the Japanese government bought the Diaoyu Islands, leading to an escalation of the situation. Following the purchase, China unleashed harsh rhetoric and anti-Japanese protests (Hughes 2009, p.12) and (Fravel 2016). The 2010 collision and subsequent 2012 purchase were therefore decisive turning points for the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Since 2012, official Chinese maritime vessels have conducted regular incursions into the island's territorial waters, and official Chinese aircraft have repeatedly appeared in the airspace above the islands. Both the Japanese Self-Defence Forces and the People's Liberation Army have established a maritime communication mechanism for improving communication and minimizing the risk of conflict. The area around the islands has become more crowded, and the possibility of serious conflict remains. At this point, one should ask what it is about the contested island's material value that has motivated such tensions. Another approach would be to adopt a cynical perspective in which the governments involved intentionally initiated the dispute to distract from domestic concerns to leverage in other areas. The material value of the islands remains insignificant because if oil and hydrocarbon were the only reasons, then tension should have flared up much earlier. One argument for the strategic value of the islands is that possessing them would aid the Chinese military in breaking through the first island chain separating continental China from the Pacific Ocean. The first island chain stretches from the Korean peninsula southward across the Japanese Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and beyond to the Philippines. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are located inside this island chain northeast of Taiwan on the Western edge of the Okinawa trough. But while nearer to the first island chain than the Chinese continental coastline, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are at their closest still at least 60 miles (100km) away from any feature in the chain. Consequently, even if the People's Republic of China possessed the islands, penetrating Japanese-

held sections of the chain would still require Chinese military vessels to transit a considerable distance and pass-through bottlenecks, mostly through the Miyako Strait.

Balzas Szanto argues that incidents involving fewer decision makers are more subject to expressive considerations: for example, the 2010 Chinese fishing boat ramming a Japanese Coastguard vessel incident, where a single captain can make decisions that are easily swayed by patriotic zeal or animosity for a certain opponent. But when more levels of Decision making are involved in the process the influence exerted will be a rational one. Multilevel decisions are less impulsive and more deliberate, as it takes time to run through the chain of command and reconcile the varied perspectives. The duration and number of units involved are good indicators of conflict level. A crisis involving a single incident with one or two vessels is likely indicative of a single decision making level. In contrast, a prolonged standoff involving dozens of vessels is indicative of multilevel decision making. These conflicts reflect the thinking of the state as a whole than of the biases or mistakes of individual agents of that state. (Szanto 2023 p.35)

Deeper economic engagements did not translate into a genuine friendship since China escalated the situation in the East China Sea. As China's economy flourished due to reforms, a robust Chinese economy gave rise to a "China threat" theory, making inroads in Japan. China-Japan trade relations initially were based on the export of raw materials to Japan, and in exchange, it benefited from a shifting production base and technology transfer by Japan. However, as China transformed from a cheap export-oriented economy towards a more sophisticated technology-driven one with superior quality finished products, problems started emerging in the bilateral trade arrangements. Such problems were also seen in the US-Japan economic engagement. As Japan became a developed economy and advanced technology, friction between the US and Japan started emerging. In the 1980s, the US-Japan trade friction stopped Fujitsu from acquiring semiconductors. (Bown and McCulloch 2009, pp.3-6)

Post-Tiananmen Japan, being a neighbour to China and an East Asian power, realized the necessity of engaging China in the international system through trade and development to stabilize the latter's internal

society for the overall stability of the region. Hence carried on a policy of engagement with China. Japan extended help to China as prolonged internal tumult in China is not beneficial to regional stability. Moreover, the imposition of sanctions from the West based on human rights violations, considering their own past aggressions, Japanese officials were unwilling to condemn China on the grounds of human rights violations after the Tiananmen incident. (Drifte) Therefore, in the 1995 Diaoyu incident, when activists landed on the Diaoyu island, China's reactions were not as strong as they were in the 2010 incident. China's reactions in the 90s were muted. Unlike during the 2004, 2010, and 2012 incidents when China deliberately escalated the situation, Japan and China have also taken into consideration that they cannot engage in permanent conflict, as it will lead to a loss for both economies.

In the late 80s and early 90s, Sino-Japanese bilateral relations experienced a bonhomie. Japanese assistance flowed into China under pressure from feelings of guilt for the heinous crimes committed by Japanese imperial forces during World War II. Bilateral relations enjoyed a conducive environment for economic and political engagements. It deteriorated from the mid-90s, marked by renewed political disputes over sovereignty and a downward spiral in mutual popular perceptions. In 1992, Japanese Emperor Akihito visited China, leading to the thawing of the ice in China-Japan relations. The visit, especially after the Tiananmen massacre, implied international recognition for China. It is followed up with reciprocal visits. The then Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Jiang Zemin visited Japan in 1993. For the first time, non-LDP Japanese Premier Morihiro Hosokawa visited China in 1994. In 1995, Tomichi Murayama visited China. In 1998, President Jiang Zemin visited Japan. In 1999, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin in the Chinese leader's compound, Zhongnanhai. In 2000, Prime Minister Zhu Rongji visited Japan. During his visit, he avoided the historical issue of Japan's conquest; rather, he focused

on economic and security issues that could bring the two countries together for cooperation. However, Zhu Rongji soft-pedalled the issue. The motive behind such soft-peddling is China's continuing need for economic aid and investment from Japan.<sup>4</sup> In 2002, Chinese parliamentary leader Li Peng visited Japan. The trip marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic ties between China and Japan. The Chinese parliamentary leader was initially set to visit Japan in the spring, but the trip was put on hold when Japan approved history textbooks that, in China's view, did not accurately portray the extent of Japanese World War II atrocities in Asia. Besides the history textbooks issue, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi also visited the Yasukuni shrine, a war memorial that commemorates Class A war criminals. Mr. Li Peng's visit to Japan, therefore, signals that relations between Tokyo and Beijing are continuing to get back on track.<sup>5</sup> During 2002-2006, Beijing suspended mutual state visits. Japan began to cut ODA to China in 2001 and later decided to phase out new loans because the Japanese public is increasingly suspicious of China, and Japan's government is concerned about China's military buildup. Many Japanese now see China as the chief threat to their country's position in Asia. During 2001-2006, top-level diplomacy received a setback due to Beijing's protests because of Koizumi's Yasukuni shrine visit. There is always a strong undercurrent of distrust. By 2004-2005, bilateral disputes over gas and oil resources in the East China Sea escalated. (Yinan He 2013). On 8 and 9 October 2006, in response to an invitation by the Japanese government, Premier Wen Jiabao made an official visit to Japan. The joint statement has mentioned the East China Sea in particular. Both sides agreed to maintain dialogue and consultation over the East China Sea to make it a "Sea of Peace, cooperation and Friendship". From the above discussion, it can be said that although many top-level visits have happened, China-Japan relations do not share genuine trust because of issues like history textbooks, the Yasukuni

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/16/world/china-s-premier-on-japan-visit-wears-a-friendly-face.html> China's Premier, on Japan visit wears a Friendly Face. By Howard W. French

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-a-2002-04-02-12-china-s-67423807/277718.html> China's Parliament Chairman in Japan for an eight-day visit.

shrine, and the East China Sea.<sup>6</sup> (Meng, p.51) (Shambaugh 1996, p.87) (Dreyer, 2019)

Since the end of the Cold War, Sino-Japanese economic engagements have grown and increasingly become robust. Economic growth led to China's internal social stability due to economic prosperity. Therefore, China and Japan realized the importance of economic interactions. However, political interaction between Japan and China cannot be said to have brought about positivity.

#### 1.4 China and Japan's regional economic engagements:

Towards the end of the Cold War in the 80s Soviet economy started declining, and Japan emerged as the wealthiest state in East Asia. Japan desired to expand its sphere of influence, framed as an 'international obligation' as the largest creditor nation. Japan has usually extended financial help during any regional crisis. (Green 2001 pp. 4-5) Through the 1980s, Japan's role as the largest creditor to the developing countries received a lukewarm response, and the regional states are demanding that Japan shoulder more responsibilities in maintaining regional stability. However, Japan's pacifist constitution and norm-based domestic structures are deeply embedded, limiting the scope of Japan acting as a "normal power". At present, in Japan, concerns are due to China's rise in East Asia and the narrowing gap between Beijing and the US in terms of economic power. Japan's security agreement with the US is another important factor that will influence and shape China's policy choices and have implications for the Senkaku dispute.

After the Cold War ended, China emerged as a major power in East Asia, but it was economically backward. With no alternative economic model, Beijing and other countries aligned themselves with the US-designed system. China gradually integrated itself into the international liberal order for trade. In 2001, Beijing entered the World Trade Organization (WTO). Beijing actively participated in the multilateral institutions. With the economic rise, China started engaging with the regional countries and beyond that. Since then, one of the regions China has economically

integrated with is the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Many Southeast Asian states are economically growing and are known as the Asian Tigers. China took a broader view and reiterated its emphasis on a peaceful neighbourhood policy based on trade and economic interdependence with the less developed countries in its neighbourhood. Maritime Southeast Asia provides a gateway as it cannot afford to consume high-end and expensive products of the US, and therefore, China offered an alternative. US engagement with these economies remains low as the low-quality products of these countries are not preferred in US markets. Whereas China has increasingly become an important market for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. After the Asian financial crisis, its sphere of influence in the region increased. China proposed to set up the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) in 2002. In 2002 ASEAN-China Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (FACEP) was signed. Since 2005 onwards both China and Japan have been competing to establish the ASEAN Free Trade Area (FTA). In 2007, there was an agreement between China on Trade in Services. In 2007, China also became the largest trading partner of Japan. In 2015, China established another FTA with Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar. Between 2008 to 2016 the volume of trade between China and ASEAN reached USD560 billion by 2016, a jump from 250 billion in 2008. In this period, China's overall trade has grown by about 180 percent. It highlights the complementarity between China and ASEAN, as economic growth and development prospects suggest. (Ramezani and Kamali 2021)

On the other hand, when the Cold War ended, the challenge for Japan was not to organize its economy but whether Tokyo should bring in a change to its dependent military-political posture and become a "normal" state. After the Cold War ended, Japan emerged as the most powerful state in Asia, second only to the US. Japan's GDP reached US\$3.3 trillion, compelling it to take on a more international role as the largest creditor. Also, around this period, the US balance of payments was not robust as Japan's

<sup>6</sup>

<https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/63>

economy touched a trade surplus in 1992. Trade frictions between Japan and the US started emerging, and US exports declined in Japan. Moreover, as a security guarantor, the US started putting pressure on Japan to commit more funds to maintaining the security and stability of the region. (Hossain1994, p.74-5) Japan adopted a pacifist constitution, which put a halt to the expansion of its military capabilities under Article 9. The circumstances under which the Japanese society adopted these norms have come to define Japan's national identity. Since the end of the Second World War, these norms have come to define the bilateral security agreement between US-Japan relations and define Japan's position in the world, but are also a pillar in East Asia's security architecture. In the early 2000s Buzan argued Japan was pioneering a new type of state 'civilian power' or 'trading state' would be a permanent transformation and by following the realist logic would come out of its long hangover from the memories of defeat, and would at some point resume the normal great power role by removing Article 9 of the constitution (Buzan 2003 p.146). A shift in the balance puts pressure on Japan to undertake a more time-appropriate decision, which would require Tokyo to revisit its deeply rooted norms in domestic structures (Buzan 2003, p.146). Furthermore, Jonathan Green argues that after the Cold War, Japan had no clear articulation of foreign policy apart from some initiatives toward Russia and Southeast Asia from Japanese leaders toward the world, which underscores the conservatism of the Japanese public towards international affairs. While the international system is in flux, an ideology-based approach will not yield Japan a broad coalition. In the absence of a clear foreign policy vision and with institutional constraints on the use of the military Japanese political elite is still risk-averse (Green 2001 pp.5-6).

According to Heginbotham and Samuels, a key feature in Japan's policy in the background of a rising China has been to carry out segregated economic and security policies. To counter the effect of entrapment US-Japan alliance in economic relations, Japan carefully cultivates its relations with other countries through economic cooperation, and China is one of them. (Heginbotham and Samuels 2002) Japan adopted a strategy of "hedging" that mixes economic engagement that attempting to socialize China, while

the US-Japan defence alliance acted as a countervail to Beijing's intention to dominate the region. (Drifte, p.3) On the other hand, China-Japan trade relations also gained momentum. The rise in Japanese exports to China since the end of the 90s has skyrocketed. Owing to the increase in domestic demand in China, where people living in the urban areas along the coast are seeing a surge in demand for household consumer items like television sets, digital video players, and recorders, and in addition, demand for automobiles is increasing rapidly. China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 also led to a surge in Japan's exports to China, as it has come up with lowering of tariffs and deregulating the entry process (treating foreigners and locals equally), and other domestic reforms laid the legal foundation to establish China's market economy is established. Foreign direct investments from Japanese companies quickly rebounded. China lowered tariffs on automobiles as well as IT-related industries and made a jumpstart where the final assembly of products is being done in China, while core parts of the products are being developed in Japan. This has resulted in "de-industrialization" in Japan due to the transfer of plants to China, which might become a challenge to the Japanese government in the long term. Scholars argue that although Japan and China's business relations are positive, as they see these developments are market-dependent dependent no one can guarantee China and Japan trade ties will continue to grow devoid of frictions, especially with a territorial dispute remaining unresolved. (Sasaki and Koga 2003, pp.2-4)

Other factors might have led to such moves by the Japanese firms. Japan is an island nation and therefore constraints compared to a continent-based power are more. Tokyo is overwhelmingly dependent on imported resources as well and is dependent on other major powers for insulation from threats. Japan's disadvantage is its geography, and therefore, for Japan to be counted as a regional pole will require Tokyo to have an ample number of resources to assist its region-wide military deployments based on its capabilities. The possibility of this seems bleak shortly, as it lacks strategic depth and its vital interests are vulnerable to external threats from the sea. In the past, dependency on imported resources guided its imperialistic policies, motivated by its search for economic autonomy. (Ross 2009 pp.50-53) Since the early 1990s, there has been

an asset bubble burst when the Japanese economy was going through negative growth, coupled with price deflation. The 1990s in Japan are referred to as a lost decade for Japan.

Meanwhile, China's trade relations evolved both with the US and other countries as the former has emerged from a developing country poor in technology to a country with a high GDP and export-oriented. In 1989, the US trade with the PRC, which included the special administrative region of Hong Kong, was at 9% of the total trade of the US, and the share of Japan at that point was 45 percent. This picture changed by 2008 when the PRC's share rose to 31% while Japan and the rest of East Asia were at a staggering 9%. The rapid transformation is possible as PRC outlets of Japanese manufacturing firms imported inputs from Japan and exported the final product to the US. (Bown and McCulloch 2009 pp.3-6)

The above section discussed how China and Japan maintained bilateral relations through trade and economic interdependence. However, the deeply embedded memories of the historical past and Japan's security alliance with the US demand that Japan remain committed to maintaining a liberal and open order in the region.

#### 1.5 China –Japan Energy Security Competition and China's increasing assertiveness:

In the backdrop of economically rising China, the competition between Beijing and Tokyo has become more prominent as both countries are dependent on imported energy. Since the mid-1990s, China has started engaging with countries rich in energy resources. In 1993, China became a net importer of oil. Since then, energy security has become a major concern. In 2003, China's energy demand surpassed that of Japan's, and therefore securing access to energy resources became a national security concern, which is echoed in China's 2006 White Paper on energy security titled *China's Energy Conditions and Policies*.<sup>7</sup> The paper mentions the imperative to expedite supply, and therefore China needs to "exploit

oil and natural gas in new areas.... on the land and major sea areas." The paper did not explicitly mention the East China Sea as a region of hydrocarbon reserves, although the paper did refer to Bohai Bay and Tarim Basin.

Similarly, Japan, a small island nation, is heavily dependent on imported resources. A scholar argues that Japan is "innately more preoccupied with energy security than most nations, even in the most tranquil of times," driven mostly by Japan's geographic position and insufficient supply of natural resources. In 2007, Brookings Foreign Policy Studies conducted a series on Energy Security, taking four key energy-consuming nations—China, India, Japan, and the United States.<sup>8</sup> In the paper, Peter C Evans argues that a task force of academics, ex-bureaucrats, and industry officials argues that a 'paradigm shift' is taking place in the energy market where oil and other fossil fuels are becoming strategic goods due to volatile market mechanisms. The paper examines the competing visions of energy security that have shaped the energy policy debate in each of these countries. The paper mentions that Japanese policymakers are concerned due to China's rate of growth and will be prone to shocks if there is no comprehensive planning.<sup>9</sup> The debate over the most appropriate energy security strategy has moved up the political agenda. The voices of Japan's energy internationalists—who believe in markets and multilateral cooperation—are still present. However, they are becoming harder to hear as energy autonomists raise the alarm that markets cannot be trusted and the government must act more aggressively to shape and protect the country's energy mix. The paper argues that the role of the government to be more assertive in shaping energy markets is becoming a major part of the discourse. However, it cautions against government intervention in energy markets, which might jeopardize established rules and give other countries the excuse to move away from established international energy markets. Interestingly, both of these papers recommend how China and Japan have benefited from the existing international energy market mechanism and a stable international energy

<sup>7</sup>

<http://www.china.org.cn/english/environment/236955.htm>

<sup>8</sup> The Brookings Foreign Policy Studies Energy Security Series Japan by Peter C. Evans

<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/12japan.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

market through multilateral cooperation such as the Energy Working Group of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plus China, Japan and ROK (10+3) Energy Cooperation, International Energy Forum, World Energy Conference, Asia-Pacific Partnership Clean Development and Climate.

Nonetheless, China's energy security concern is reflected in a Brookings paper and is underpinned by China's actions in the East China Sea over the drilling of gas and oil resources. In April 2007, China's national oil company CNOOC announced that it had begun producing gas at the Tianwaitian field despite Japan's objections, and it was ready to begin production from the Chunxiao gas field. Japan protested and spurred renewed negotiations. In June 2008, Japan and China agreed to shelve their boundary dispute in the East China Sea and jointly develop the resources. Under the agreement, Japan and China were to jointly develop China's Longjiang gas field. Moreover, Japanese companies would also invest in China's Chunxiao gas field and discuss Tianwaitian and Duanqiao gas fields. However, the joint development of resources did not materialize because of the hard-line interest groups such as the military, maritime law enforcement agencies, the energy sector, and propaganda interest groups, which act in tandem with security provided by the PLA.

President Hu Jintao, on the day of assuming the role of chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), explicitly mentioned the broadening scope of the People's Liberation Army (Navy) PLAN's possibilities of new responsibilities through "new historic missions" [*xin de lishi shiming*], indicating the navy's responsibility in protecting imported crude oil. In 2004, a Chinese Han-class nuclear submarine entered the Japanese territorial sea beyond 12 nautical miles near Okinawa prefecture, and then a Chinese destroyer entered the contiguous zone of the East China Sea. In 2005, the dispute escalated when five Chinese naval vessels, including a guided missile destroyer, entered the Chunxiao gas field. China has gradually steered away from a navy-centric approach toward an approach that employs Maritime Law

Enforcement agencies as first responders, front-line units, and the PLA as a backstop force. The rationale behind this transition is that it enables the PLA to invest in blue water capabilities to fulfill what the Chinese leadership envisioned in the early 2000s as the institution's "new historic missions" to protect China's strategic waterways away from its immediate periphery. Despite the PLA maintaining its presence in a supporting role, its presence is sufficient to indicate China's determination and ability to defend territorial claims by force. The PLA enables Maritime Law Enforcement agencies and other civilian actors, such as fishermen and national oil companies, to expand the scope of their activities and establish a constant presence in the disputed maritime territory. In the event of any confrontation, the PLA can approach as ultimate security guarantor for these actors. This presence-without-interference approach is perceived by the PLA and China's civilian researchers as having a stabilizing effect through deterrence. (Shuxian Luo 2023, pp.94-95)

In 2007, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited Japan. It is seen as an effort to assuage growing concerns in the neighbourhood and pave the way for the Chinese Head of State Hu Jintao's visit. The joint statement issued articulated making the East China Sea a sea of peace, cooperation, and friendship.<sup>10</sup> The Joint Statement included five points on East China Sea. On the East China Sea both sides attained common understanding such as "1) Firmly adhere to making the East China Sea a sea of peace, cooperation and friendship. 2)conduct joint development as a provisional framework until the final delimitation based on principles of mutual benefit principles, on the premise that it does not prejudice the position of either side on various issues concerning the law of the sea. 3) Hold higher level consultations as necessary. 4) Conduct joint development at relatively large waters which is acceptable for both sides. 5) Accelerate the process of consultation and aim to report concrete measures on joint development to the leaders in this fall."<sup>11</sup> Wen Jiabao visited Japan in April 2007, which was touted as a reconciliation between the two East Asian powers as Sino-Japanese ties reached their low during

<sup>10</sup> China-Japan Joint Press Communique [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/200704/t20070411\\_679175.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/200704/t20070411_679175.html)

<sup>11</sup> Japan-China Joint Press Statement <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/pv0704/joint.html>

Koizumi. After a period of lull during Prime Minister Koizumi, which dented the bilateral relationship due to his annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Wen Jiabao, during his visit to China, said in his speech, “To reflect on history is not to dwell on hard feelings, but to remember and learn from the past to open a better future”. The joint statement during Wen Jiabao’s visit avoided any mention of sensitive historical issues.<sup>12</sup> It became clear to Beijing that China could not reap benefits by bringing in historical issues anymore. However, Hu Jintao when he visited Waseda University raised the issue of Japanese aggression. In his speech he mentioned, “in modern times, our friendly relations were devastated by the war of aggression the Japanese militarists waged against China. This unfortunate chapter of history inflicted untold sufferings on the Chinese nation and also brought misery to the Japanese people. History is a textbook rich in philosophical wisdom. We stress the importance of remembering history, not to perpetuate hatred but rather to take history as a mirror, look forward, and cherish and uphold peace, so that the people of China and Japan will always live in friendship and the people of the world will always enjoy peace.”<sup>13</sup>

The above discussion underscores that while economic engagements between these two countries have deepened, political interactions have oscillated between periods of friction and restoration over the growing significance and increased economic value of the disputed territory. (Huth 1996) (Fravel 2008), (Valencia 2014), (Otago 2014)

#### 1.5.1 China’s increasing assertiveness in the East China Sea:

Furthermore, since 2001, its regional economic engagements have flourished and consequently led China to participate in many multilateral organizations. This has led China to often maintain a flexible and cooperative behaviour towards various organizations and use them for effective diplomacy. This period is often seen as China’s engagement at the global and regional levels. Therefore, China was careful during

this period to make any substantial claims or take any actions towards the territorial dispute. The period from 2003-2007 witnessed both China and Japan downplaying their differences over the territorial dispute.

However, signs of discord in the Japan-China bilateral show up during this period. In 2006, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited China and attempted to restore the bilateral interactions. Japan has become apologetic fatigue for the atrocities committed in the past. China-Japan summit-level visits and diplomatic channels have failed to freeze the downward spiral in bilateral relations since 2007 due to rising political tensions over a range of issues. Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party avoided reviving Japan’s past militarism. Japan-China relations entered a stalemate during Koizumi’s years over a visit to the Yasukuni shrine (Tsunekawa).

Due to China’s constant pressure, the latter discarded any sign of remorse. By 2007, China had grown in terms of economy and had become Japan’s largest trading partner, replacing the United States. Not only China’s economic power but also its growing military capabilities have become a concern. Beijing started pressing in the East China Sea during this period as a result of its growing economy. Furthermore, Japan’s economic recovery and active international diplomacy during 2006-07, with its increasing defence budget, will automatically expand Japan’s influence in the region. This makes it difficult for China to achieve a common understanding with Japan over regional political aspirations. Thus, it can be said that the East China Sea issue intensified in this period.

Fravel argues that in a territorial dispute state’s perception of the strength of its claim or bargaining position shapes the incentives for escalation. Since 1949, China has never used armed force against Japan in the case of the Senkaku Islands. An important reason for the absence of the use of force is the absence of a credible deterrence that does not allow China to carry out a limited aims operation to seize and then defend the islands. The fact that armed conflict over the islands has been avoided is a major

<sup>12</sup> China-Japan Joint Press Communique [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/200704/t20070411\\_679175.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/200704/t20070411_679175.html)

<sup>13</sup> Speech by Chinese President Hu Jintao at Waseda University <https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPCH/20080508.S1E.html>

accomplishment and one that deserves detailed examination, because in many ways it is unexpected. The analysis focuses mostly on China for several reasons. First—unlike Japan—China has used force in its other territorial disputes since the end of World War II, and in half of its offshore island disputes. Second, as the challenger in the Senkaku dispute, force remains a viable option for China to regain sovereignty of the islands to improve its otherwise weak position or to compel concessions from Japan. (Fravel pp.149, 2010)

The incidents of Chinese submarines in Japanese territorial waters, electronic surveillance by Chinese aircraft, and the entry of Chinese exploration ships raised security concerns in Japan. Owing to the evolving new situation in the region serious debate in Japan started in the policy circles, whether Tokyo should consider expansion of its military power. China's military developments in the region pose security challenges to Japan, putting Tokyo under pressure to consider expansion of its defence capabilities. According to a neo-realist explanation, as China's relative power capabilities improve, it will begin to assert its security-based interests. (Fravel 2008), (Khoo 2014) The resource competition between China and other states has become the guiding rationale for China's investment in its military modernization. In 2006, the PLA defence white paper elevated the operational aims of the Navy to the gradual extension of the strategic depth for offshore defensive operations to enhance its capabilities through maritime operations. The 2006 defence white paper of China expands the operational objectives of the air and artillery forces, as well as aiming to improve its strategic deterrence and strike capabilities under conditions of high intelligence and information. The elevation of operational aims for each of the forces indicates China's aspirations to achieve long-range projection capability to become formidable in the eyes of its neighbours. (Blair) China's growing military capabilities have become a cause of concern for the Japanese, and are reflected in the defence outline published in 2004 by the Japanese Defence Agency named the Chinese as a potential threat.

In 2016, in the East China Sea, a frigate belonging to the Chinese navy entered the contiguous zone surrounding the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. While ships belonging to various Chinese agencies had entered both the contiguous zone and territorial waters around the islands in the past, it was for a Chinese naval vessel. Meanwhile, in Tokyo, a team assembled inside the center of the prime minister's office to monitor the situation. In the early hours of the morning, the Chinese ambassador was summoned to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, where Vice Minister Saiki Akitaka met him and urged him to withdraw the Chinese naval vessel. The Chinese ambassador declined to accept the demand and conveyed that escalation was undesirable, and he would report it to Beijing. The Chinese naval vessel exited the contiguous zone. The 2016 incident could have become a military-to-military confrontation, unlike the previous non-military showdown between the Japanese Coastguard and non-military Chinese vessels. Had the Chinese naval vessels entered the island's territorial waters, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces could have employed force. Actions by either side could have sparked a military escalation intentionally or unintentionally.<sup>14</sup>

Economic interdependence between the two countries is irreversible, but it has not led Japan and China to manage controversial political issues amicably. In the event of China's militarization of the East China Sea, Japan feels threatened, thereby strengthening existing multilateral and bilateral engagements and security alliances with the US. Japan has played an important role in maintaining the regional security architecture, and its bilateral defence agreement with the US is a fundamental pillar for a stable East Asia and is significant for maintaining open access to the commons. Japan's alignment with the US underscores its preference for a continuation of the existing international order, and the established regional architecture and multilateral institutions reinforce that order. Even though the US has shown its commitment towards Asia through force restructuring has increasingly pressed its allies in Asia towards increasing their share in managing emerging security challenges. (Naidu 2006) (Smith 2015) (Rose 2004)

<sup>14</sup> <https://tnsr.org/2019/09/more-significance-than-value-explaining-developments-in-the-sino-japanese-contest-over-the-senkaku-diaoyu-islands/> More

significance than value explaining developments in the Sino-Japanese contest over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Todd Hall

Manicom argues the dispute in the East China Sea has two dimensions, one ideational and another material value of the maritime space. He suggests that both countries have been able to cooperate over the contested space when both manage to compartmentalize symbolic issues and material issues. Strategic concerns that are an amalgamation of material and ideational values hinder cooperation. Cooperation is further limited in the ECS due to the withering of mutual perceptions. (Manicom: 2014)

Therefore, from the above discussions, it can be said that even though China did not assert itself in the dispute in the early 2000s, it became increasingly assertive in the territorial dispute as its interests in the region grew and its military capabilities improved in the region. It largely therefore depends on Japan, the US, and China to maintain the peace around the East China Sea.

#### 1.6. China's surging nationalism in the East China Sea and exclusive regionalism:

In the above section, it is evident that since 2007, China and Japan have both been trying to assert themselves as regional hegemon. As Japan's economy made a recovery during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's tenure, Tokyo began to increase its influence in the region. In this section, it is argued that since 2008, China has been unwilling to downplay the Diaoyu Island dispute. This occurs against the background of certain developments, such as the 2008 economic crisis in the Western world. In 2010, China overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest economic power, just behind the United States in terms of GDP. This shift in the economic power of China is reflected in Beijing's assertion in the East China Sea. Decision-makers in Japan view China's increasing power in the region as a long-term security concern. Uncertainty about the kind of role Japan is eyeing for itself in Asia-Pacific has made China view Japan as a competitor. (Sutter 2002 p.37)

Both countries are competing with each other to increase their sphere of influence to win out neighbours and partners, rolling out similar development model policies such as the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) initiative of China, and Japan's Shinzo Abe has called for investment in quality infrastructure to assist the region's developing

countries. Yahuda argues that since the end of the Cold War, China and Japan have been facing each other in a relative power symmetry in a long history. The author contends that although scholars and pundits profess through power transition theories of IR and even China's leaders regard the US as the key challenge to China's great power status, it will also face significant constraints from Japan. China is dependent on economic ties with Japan; if that fails, it will hurt the Chinese economy. Although the Japanese economy experienced a serious downturn after the Cold War, it still has the edge in technological innovation. (Yahuda 2013)

Beijing's sovereignty claims over its disputed territories have strengthened since 2009. Under the present Xi Jinping administration, China has even buried the Deng Xiaoping dictum, which remained its guiding principle, "maintain a low profile, hide your capabilities and bide your time".

A few incidents that took place in 2010 and 2012 require discussion, as China and Japan's bilateral relations encountered major setbacks due to the East China Sea dispute. In 2009, Japan protested Chinese activities at the Chunxiao/Shirakawa field across the median line, which formed the basis for the Japanese delimitation of both sides' territory. According to Chinese estimates, the net reserves of oil and gas are 70 billion cubic meters, and other sources with much higher estimates underscore the importance of Chunxiao as a gas and oil source. Preceding this incident is China unilaterally decided to develop the Chunxiao (Shirakawa) gas field located just along the 'median line' in the East China Sea, which has been proposed by the Japanese government. Japan's median line is drawn through the middle of the overlapping Exclusive Economic Zone of both China and Japan. China does not accept this median line and bases its claim on the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf, which extends a country's border as far as its underwater continental shelf extends. Manicom argues that due to competing maritime claims, China and Japan disagree on the exact 'disputed area' in the East China Sea; therefore, the area is subject to joint development. Considering Chinese energy security, a source of oil and gas close to China's sphere of influence bears considerably high value in China's strategic calculation.

Fravel and Johnston argue that an increase or decrease in the frequency of patrols is part of Beijing's strategy of coercive diplomacy, and China uses these patrols to assert its claim by increasing the number of patrols as well as whitewashing its image in its neighborhood by decreasing the number of patrols. A persistent and more frequent presence in the contiguous zone of the Diaoyu Islands to challenge Japanese claims. Through these patrols, which are part of Chinese signaling, Beijing wants Japan to recognize that there exists a dispute over the island and maritime rights in the surrounding areas. However, this signaling has not led Japan to acknowledge that there is a dispute over the islands.

Since 2009, China has remained determined in asserting its claims by passing the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Offshore Islands" and in 2012, China published a white paper titled "Diaoyu Island is an inherent territory of China." The Japanese government bought three of the Senkaku Islands in September 2012 from a private Japanese citizen. The Japanese government said the decision to nationalize the disputed islands was to bring the situation under control. Japanese officials, for months, tried to assuage the Chinese side, clarifying Japan's intention towards crisis management, which might not be easy to control if the islands remain in the possession of private citizens. In retaliation, Beijing went ahead with announcing the establishment of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the disputed maritime space. China's announcement runs counter to efforts to de-escalate tensions that erupted last summer over the Senkaku Islands. China's deployment of patrol ships to the Senkaku waters prompted a presence by the Japan Coastguard around the islands. Subsequent Chinese efforts to test Japan's military preparedness in and around the disputed islands have also put pressure on the Japanese Self-Defence Force (SDF). U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel criticized the move, saying "the development is a destabilizing attempt to alter the status quo in the region. The unilateral action increases the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculations". Keeping militaries apart and alert to the consequences of miscalculation is the biggest challenge for China, Japan, and the U.S. The new ADIZ announcement only enhances risk and deepens suspicions. China deployed patrol ships in the Senkaku waters, which

prompted a 24/7 presence by the Japanese Coastguard around the islands. A Chinese Ministry of National Defence spokesman, Yang Yujun, rebutted and cautioned the United States "not to take sides" in the dispute between China and Japan. China has deliberately made efforts to check the military preparedness of Japan. Maritime risk reduction measures are badly needed. The nascent High-Level Maritime Talks, which began in 2011, were halted after tensions erupted again in 2012. Popular sentiment in Japan and China has become highly sensitive to the island dispute, and both governments are hard-pressed to find a way of managing their differences.

China's objectives in strengthening the anti-access capabilities are to obstruct both the US and Japan from intervening in the region and keep the US out of the East China Sea and South China Sea by claiming the territory and resources to create a regional order that serves China's interests. This relentless escalation between the two sides underscores that there is an ongoing power rivalry between Beijing and Tokyo to assert individual spheres of influence over the disputed maritime space. Also, it has become quite clear that Beijing is no longer a benign power in East Asia, given its behaviour in the late 90s. China used to back down under pressure; in recent times, China has not only confronted Japanese maritime agencies it has also increased its presence through its coastguard vessels.

According to Saana Yasmin Hafeez, there is a constant attempt from Japan to maintain the status quo in the East China Sea by taking crisis management initiatives, as Japan's Pacifist Constitution shapes its actions. Saana Yasmin Hafeez analyzes three incidents that erupted in the East China Sea and how they were managed by both sides. Each case study reveals the interplay of various actors, Decision making structures, the role of individuals, and domestic political contexts impacting the overall crisis and its outcome. However, given that China's interests are served by not maintaining the status quo, how far taking crisis management initiatives will help remains a question. (Hafeez 2015 pp.81-82) Japan's aversion to balancing China stems from its deeply embedded anti-militaristic norms and principles, which weigh heavily on international structural pressure. According to Koga and Hughes, Japan's objective in foreign policy

has been to achieve prosperity and security for the country by remaining under the security umbrella of the US. (Koga 2018) (Hughes 2009) Japan is pursuing a strategy of 'defensive realism' while avoiding active balancing. Tokyo balances China through the US-Japan security agreement. Japan is caught in a dilemma as the regional dynamics have shifted in the region. Given that the US itself has come under challenge from China's rise, it will be difficult for Tokyo to manage its ties with Beijing solely based on the Yoshida doctrine.<sup>15</sup> Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for a quadrilateral security dialogue in 2007 to include Australia, India, and the US in the dialogue.

In 2013, Japanese media published reports about the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs elevating the Senkaku Islands to a "core interest". Chinese militarization in the vicinity of the Diaoyu Islands is a concern for its neighbours, more so because China declared the disputed islands as a "core interest". The question arises as to why China has labeled Diaoyu as a 'core interest'. What does it mean by core interest?

Chinese officials designate specific issues as "core interests" because those issues become significant in Chinese foreign policy at certain times. Stating some specific issues as its "core interests," Chinese officials use pressure tactics to take commitment from the US not to oppose Chinese policies. By applying the label of "core interests" to the Diaoyu island, Chinese officials have indicated their willingness to use force on the disputed island has increased many times. (Campbell, Meick, Hsu, and Murray 2013) Chinese core interests are protecting the political regime of the Chinese Communist Party, state sovereignty, and the unification of Taiwan. Klaus Dodds argues that boundaries form the central argument of sovereignty since they separate entities that are culturally and politically distinct from each other. A government draws its legitimacy from an authoritarian regime, which is associated with safeguarding the sovereignty of the state from another. According to the

Westphalian notion, boundaries are inalienable from political legitimacy and closely linked to sovereignty.

Swaine argues that since both China and Japan have linked the Diaoyu dispute with historical issues, any third-party intervention will make the situation worse, given its historical basis. For example, after September 2012, when the Japanese government bought the islands, it irked the Chinese government. It published a white paper on Diaoyu Island declaring it a core interest. Interesting to note that during the visit of Obama, the Chinese side, for the first time, clarified the term "core interests". China started patrolling near the islands and dispatched its coastguard within the 12 nautical miles that come under Japan's sovereign territory. An increase in the number of patrols also increases the chances of a collision.

The sovereignty of offshore islands is linked to gaining maritime rights for assertion, projection of naval capability in the region, and countering threats on the sea lines of communication. China adopted a delaying strategy to solve the issue of control of offshore islands; it never participated in the dialogue process with any party. After the 1982 UNCLOS, controlling offshore islands helps states in claiming exclusive economic zones (EEZ). Under Article 56 of UNCLOS, the jurisdiction rights provided in the Exclusive Economic Zone enable a state to establish and use artificial islands, installations, and structures. Article 57 states that the Exclusive Economic Zone shall not extend beyond 200 nautical miles from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured.<sup>16</sup> The extent of EEZ is one factor for which states like China are bargaining hard, as the maritime domain takes precedence in the current century, and a lot remains dependent on a stable regional maritime order.

Fravel argues that claiming an offshore island does not directly impinge on the bilateral relations when the disputants cannot control the surrounding waters and airspace. If it had impacted China's economy, it would have had to let go of its claims over the offshore islands and surrounding waters. Fravel also cites

<sup>15</sup> The Yoshida Doctrine was a strategy adopted by Japan after its defeat in 1945 under Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida. He concentrated upon reconstructing the Japan's domestic economy while

relying heavily on the security alliance with the United States.

<sup>16</sup>

[https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreement/s/texts/unclos/part5.htm](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreement/s/texts/unclos/part5.htm)

another major reason: China has been able to bargain these offshore islands even when its power projection naval capability remained poor because the islands are quite far away from strategic cities, also the vast swathes of sea in between provide the stopping power of water. (Fravel 2008 p.268)

Defensive considerations are frequently factored into the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute. Utilizing its power advantage in the South China Sea, China tends to adopt an offensive behaviour. In contrast, the equilibrium of power in the East China Sea means that China holds only a weak bargaining position, which leads it to behave primarily defensively. During incidents in 1996, 2010, and 2012, China's goal was to dissuade Japan from taking actions that were perceived as reinforcing Japanese sovereignty over the islands, thus representing a negative shift in bargaining position. In none of these incidents did China seek a meaningful alteration of the territorial status quo or a considerable power advantage, which would be necessary to classify the behaviour as offensive. Importantly, if a country's bargaining position is weak enough, even administrative actions can represent a perceived negative shift that requires a response, as was the case in 2010 and 2012. In both incidents, the trigger was simply a display of Japanese administrative control. In the absence of signaling continued opposition, a party can reinforce another country's claim to prescription (extended possession, even if the origin of possession is unclear), especially if it possesses the majority of the disputed territory, as is the case in the Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands dispute. (Szanto 2023 p.37)

#### 1.6.1 Increasing tussle on Diaoyu from delay to escalation: China's changing strategy

Manicom posits that in the 1960s-70s, Beijing had more pressing issues to tackle. In the 70s, China and Japan managed not to let the East China Sea issue stall the process of normalization of bilateral relations due to the immediate threat from the Soviet Union. In the 80s, due to Japan's deferential treatment towards China, a symbol of Sino-Japanese pragmatism and conflict in ECS could have been averted. The situation started changing in the mid-1990s; since then, the East

China Sea issue has come to a boil time and again. (Manicom, 2014, p.) In the 90s, China's claim over the Senkaku island and the surrounding maritime zone was not strong enough as present to become a security concern for Japan.

In 1992, China passed a Law on the Territorial Sea. One Japanese account finds that China did not include Diaoyu Island in its 1992 reform of the Territorial Sea Law. Kazuyoshi argues that 1992 was an important year for China when it could break through the Western sanctions post-Tiananmen incident, Deng Xiaoping undertook a "Southern tour" to revive his economic reform policies, and the thrust of the Chinese military shifted from land to the ocean. Therefore, Chinese domestic dynamics are significant in bringing the issue back from a dormant state. (Kazuyoshi 2017 pp.1-2) The author could access a few internal documents on the Territorial Sea Law of 1992

and some relevant information from National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee member Huang Shunxing, a member of the legislative assembly and a staunch critic of the Guomindang party, who supported unification of China. He represented Taiwan in the NPC as a standing member. Kazuyoshi is shown a document by Huang Shunxing titled "Opinions of the related section of the central and regional governments concerning the draft of Territorial Sea Law," which highlights the contestation between the military and other relevant departments. The draft document did not name the Diaoyu Islands but mentioned "Taiwan and associated islands" in the Territorial Sea Law. Although the draft Article 2 particularly mentioned most of the disputed islands like "the Penghu archipelago, Xisha archipelago, Nansha archipelago, the Dongsha archipelago, and all other islands that belonged to China," Diaoyu Island is not mentioned. (Kazuyoshi 2017 p.3) Kazuyoshi's findings highlight that the defence dispensation and other relevant departments in China are divided in opinion on the issue of mentioning Senkaku explicitly, as the Japanese Emperor's visit to China was scheduled in October of the same year.



Fig 3.1 East China Sea Dispute (Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands)

Source: <https://www.eapasi.com/east-china-sea.html>

However, Prime Minister of Japan Miyazawa Kiichi protested against the Chinese law and highlighted the earlier understanding reached with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. The point of making Japan's position clear immediately to the Chinese side is to underscore that there is no

dispute on the sovereignty of the islands and therefore Deng Xiaoping's proposition of "putting

on the shelf" does not hold value according to Japanese policymakers. (Drifte 2008, pp.6-8) The dispute has become even more challenging as China has started distorting facts to legitimize its

claims on a historical occupation basis. Tensions surfaced as Beijing introduced the law on the

territorial sea and announced its sovereignty claims over a few islands, and also promulgated baselines to determine the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone. In the 1992 Territorial Law, China did not declare any baseline for the Diaoyu. (Drifte 2008 p.11-12)

There is no immediate reaction from Japan over China's Law of the Territorial Sea. Yet, Japan did not cancel the scheduled visit of the Japanese Emperor to China that year. In 1992 Japanese Emperor made a historic visit to China. Kazuo Sato writes that the visit is requested by Beijing to promote its economic ties with Japan. Also, for Japan, the visit brought a chance to set the historical memory behind. However, China's domestic suppression of protests at Tiananmen changed public sentiment in Japan. A Japanese Government survey in 1989 scored only 51.6 percent of Japanese have "close feelings" toward China.

But relations turned sour in 1996 when some members of the Japan Youth Federation repaired a lighthouse on the Diaoyu Islands. It elicited strong objections from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Chinese activists from Hong Kong and Taiwan reached Diaoyu Island to challenge the Japanese Self-Defence Force (JSDF), which the Japanese government has stationed near the disputed maritime area. Amidst violent protests, a Hong Kong activist died, leading to a volatile situation around the East China Sea. The situation is brought under control by both China and Japan, and peace is restored, as further escalation could have possibly destroyed the economic development that has been achieved. The incident marked a change like the maritime imbroglio between China and Japan in the East China Sea. State-to-state visits between the two countries came to a halt. Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan insisted that a joint statement could only come out if Japan takes recognition of the historical past and the Taiwan issue and does not let go without Japan mentioning the word 'apology'.

The next sections will highlight the correlation between the increasing strategic value of the disputed islands in the perception of political leadership and the changing behaviour of China towards the territorial dispute in the context of the evolving importance of the maritime domain in the region.

In 1999, only CNOOC was actively involved in the East China Sea. Due to a lack of foreign investment in the East China Sea, oil and gas exploration was slow. China insisted its national oil companies carry out resource exploration activities. This led to cooperation among China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), Unocal, and Shell for the joint development of the Xihu trough in 2003. China's State-owned oil company, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), aims to bring as much gas as possible to the eastern side of the Chinese market in competition with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). As mentioned in Manicom, according to energy security experts, it costs Beijing \$3-4 million British thermal units to ship from the East China Sea, while shipping oil through the East-West pipeline costs \$8 per million British thermal units. In an interview, Chinese Land and Resources Minister Tian Fengshan noted that the East China Sea could become an important site for oil and gas resources.

During the mid-2000s Chinese navy managed to resist Japanese exploration plans in the Chunxiao area. In 2011, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), a Chinese state-owned oil enterprise, divulged that China is extracting oil from the Chunxiao/Shirakawa oil. China has constructed a pipeline connecting Chunxiao, and it maintains an extraction platform above that. Chinese state-owned company CNOOC started managing the Chunxiao islands completely as its dependence on Japanese capital was reduced. (Manicom 2009) The competition for energy resources is one reason China is becoming aggressive in the East China Sea. James Manicom argues that the East China Sea issue involves ideational and material aspects, as territorial disputes become intractable and difficult to get each national constituency to understand the imperative to resolve the dispute, as they might feel alienated. Manicom analyses Sino-Japanese bilateral relations through the ebb and flow of cooperation and management in a disputed maritime space with material value. He posits that the objectives derivable from the maritime space by policymakers have a direct linkage with the significance of the disputed space. Contested maritime space may not pose a direct challenge to the integrity of a nation-state, but it may alternatively threaten the interests of the constituencies within the state. He asserts that if the contended maritime space promises to bring greater internal stability, then states will compromise on territorial space.

On the other hand, one account says that the resources in the East China Sea are of little use to Japan, which does not support the claims of the Japanese officials. The Xihu trough is a shallow water area therefore exploring and transferring gas from offshore areas becomes costly than drilling it in deep waters and then transporting it to Japan increases the cost of transporting gas. For instance, the Koizumi government pledged assistance to drill for gas in the waters near the Xihu trough, but it didn't materialize. It is extremely difficult to liquefy natural gas undersea; first, it needs to be transported. Running a pipeline and reaching till Okinawa, through which descends beyond 2000 meters, is nearly impossible, very expensive therefore not feasible. East of the median line that Japan has proposed to delineate the boundaries of the East China Sea, the prospects for discoveries of oil and gas resources seem bleak. No

Japanese company is willing to undertake such exploration work due to fewer profit incentives, and importing LNG from Indonesia and Australia is thus preferred. (Manicom 2014 p 154.) Throughout the 1990s, before the discovery of commercially viable hydrocarbons, but at the height of the nationalist activity, the ideational school was dominant. Subsequently, as China began to exploit resources in the East China Sea, the material dimension became more accepted as a motive. As the disputed maritime zone's strategic importance increased, the area became important to Beijing, and it linked sovereignty to the disputed East China Sea. (Shambaugh p.67)

As maritime space gradually becomes significant to both countries to pursue their individual development goals for securing resources, controlling the important shipping lanes becomes significant in the foreign policy of these countries. The East China Sea territorial dispute took center stage and became an important issue fueling tensions in China-Japan relations.

#### 1.7 Diaoyu dispute and the US-Japan alliance:

Dependence on the US to insulate it from threat is a major reason behind Tokyo's security policy not considering it seriously towards becoming a normal power. Since Japanese policies haven't varied much, even in the changes that occurred in international structure to the point that Japanese security policy has become stagnant. (Hughes 2016 p.112) The security agreement between Japan and the US has made it a security protectorate and is a center of the U.S. hub and spoke system of alliances in Asia.<sup>17</sup>

A security agreement has its advantages and disadvantages. The security agreement between a small state and a major power insulates the small state, but it exposes it to losing political authority and military assets to the large state. It increases the chances of exploitation for the small state. Japan has no joint and combined command military relations with the US. As a result, it limits US forces from having any command authority over Japanese forces. Furthermore, Japan has been able to deny and limit its

liability towards any coercive military action of the United States. The American use of Japanese military bases insulates Japan without worrying about having any obligation towards regional stability, which relatively frees resources to be spent on other important areas like the economy. However, when it comes to conducting military operations beyond its borders, Japan has little room to manoeuvre due to Japan's Peace Constitution and Article 9. It is therefore often argued that Japan's security policy has become stagnant.

Nonetheless, to completely discard that Japan has remained in stasis and not evolved its security policy would be a mistake.

The US has abstained from taking any side in the dispute and has asked both Japan and China to peacefully settle the dispute, although maintaining that in case of the use of force US will defend Japan's national security. Dreyer argues that as Beijing's economic capabilities improved, it showed a nonchalant attitude. Beijing expected Japan to continue its large loan program

even after a warning from Tokyo requesting that Beijing curtail the defense budget and discontinue arms sales. There is a growing resentment in Tokyo about Beijing's reluctance to express gratitude towards Japan's role in the face of a crisis. Moreover, the loosening of stringent sanctions around this time from Western countries meant China could be less sensitive about Japan's security concerns. Beijing paid less attention to Japan's sensitivity to its nuclear tests, arms sales, and increasing defence budget.

Under these circumstances, it is natural that Japan will consider building up and bolstering its capabilities to respond to unprecedented scenarios arising, which will entail robust surveillance and patrol capabilities. For China, Japan's attempt to become a 'normal power' evokes concern due to its historical past, which will bring back Japanese militarism in the region, a major factor of concern for the Chinese. Japan has emphasized developing its military power after the 9/11 incident to counter terror attacks. After the attack

<sup>17</sup> Evans, Michael Power and Paradox: Asian Geopolitics and Sino-American Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0030438710000645>

Japanese government passed an anti-terrorism law and dispatched its Self-Defence Force in the Indian Ocean to support the American and British forces. In 2010, Japan revised its National Defence Programme Guideline (NDPG), which has taken into consideration the changing regional security environment and equips Japan to prepare for uncertainty.

#### 1.8 Chinese militarization of the disputed island and nearby waters:

Nationalism as an attribute influencing sovereignty disputes has been rigorously studied, but the geopolitical attributes have comparatively received less attention from scholars. Ralf Emmers and Richard Bush have taken into account the impact of the geopolitical elements in shaping bilateral relations. The increasing significance of the maritime sphere for China as it competes for resources and other vital interests, such as seaborne trade, shapes the dynamics in the East China Sea. The elements that drive a territorial conflict intractably cumulatively form part of the comprehensive power of a country. The power shift consequential to economic rise can make sovereignty claims non-negotiable, enabling other geopolitical elements to reinforce their significance in the conflict. These elements are necessary to advance other considerations of the state. China's determined military modernization effort catapulted its territorial claims and energy interests. Emmers observes East China Sea has traditionally been influenced by territory, natural resources, and power relations. Also, the interplay process of geopolitical attributes has two distinct phases from the early 1990s and 2006, characterized by a combination effect of power and territorial claims, which affected the Sino-Japanese relations. The territorial and geopolitical factors act in an escalating manner, reinforcing the sovereignty claims of both countries. The sovereignty dispute has been aggravated by increasing domestic nationalism and competition between China and Japan, leading to the militarization of the enclosed sea space. (Emmers, 2009) According to Duan Xiaolin, the contest over hydrocarbon and maritime rights is still divisible between China and Japan, but what cannot be shared is the relative shift in power between the two claimants that renders this dispute more conflict-prone. (Duan 2018 p.419) Ke Wang holds that states would generally adopt a cooperative policy in a territorial

dispute when the economic value of the area is higher than the military value. On the contrary, if the military value increases, states can abandon a delaying strategy and the status quo in a territorial dispute and are willing to use military force rather than cooperation or concessions. (Wang 2014, p.6) Use of force remains a chosen option to regain the sovereignty of the islands. Fravel contends that the chances of Japan using force to stop Chinese provocative actions like sending survey ships or Coastguard vessels, and to arrest its declining position in East Asia, are higher. (Fravel 2008 pp. 144-150) A state's intention to claim an island increases when it promises economic value and increases the chances of the use of force. (Fravel 2008 p.146) However, direct conflict is not in the best interests of any of the parties involved, as it might prove to be debilitating.

Robert Sutter argues that Japan's perception of China as a rival contending for regional influence exacerbates the Sino-Japanese rivalry. Japan's bid to secure a permanent position in the United Nations has elicited a strong negative response from China, which is a significant diplomatic means to maintain the status quo in the region. A negative trend in the Sino-Japanese relationship has prompted warnings of intensified rivalry for leadership in Asia. The rise of China's power and influence in Asian affairs in the 1990s and China's military assertiveness over Taiwan and the South China Sea coincided with a protracted period of lackluster Japanese economic performance and weak political leadership. The past disparity in the economic relationship between the two powers adds to ongoing differences over territorial, strategic, historical, and economic issues and has strengthened mutual wariness and antipathy. (Sutter 2002 p.37) China views Japan's regional initiatives as a counter-effect to its strategic endeavors. Japan is reluctant to accommodate China's increase in activism, particularly in the military, and views it as a loss of moral standing, in the words of Sutter. He further posits that China's effort to isolate Japan reinforces a downward spiral in bilateral relations, which are contradictory to its otherwise publicly announced regional initiatives for goodwill.

In keeping with China's political objectives to be achieved in the first island chain, China has been building and strengthening its military surface vessels,

submarines, and missiles. The first island chain (*di yi daolian* 第一岛链) stretches from Vladivostok to the Strait of Malacca, including Japan (Ryukyus Islands), the Philippines, and the South China Sea. The blue water naval capability (*yuan yang haijun* 远洋海军) merges with that of the second island chain (*di er daolian* 第二岛链) and the Bonin and Mariana Islands and Papua New Guinea in the South. Chinese naval strategists now clearly divide near seas and far seas because of the rising pressure from the littoral states. The Chinese feel that the island states, like Japan in the East China Sea and the Philippines on the periphery, are trying to contain Beijing within those perimeters. Admiral Zhang Lianzhong identified defence perimeters for the long-term preparation of naval campaigns. These defense perimeters are formed taking into consideration the political objectives that China wants to achieve. The first island chains form the first perimeter that would be safeguarded by deploying conventional and nuclear submarines, and by medium-range aircraft from the navy. The middle defines a perimeter that extends 150 miles from the coast and comes within but does not touch the first island chain. Safeguarding this perimeter will be tasked upon anti-ship aircraft, destroyers, and escort vessels. The interior defence perimeter extends to 60 miles from the coast. The second perimeter will be the theatre for the main naval air force, fast attack boats, and land-based anti-ship missile units. (Kondapalli 2000 p.1) The reforms in Chinese naval strategy are induced because of its historical experiences, and with due consideration towards international political developments, compelled the political leadership to chalk out its naval modernization. (Kondapalli 2000, p.1) According to the expanding Chinese naval strategy, the navy from 2001 to 2020 will be concentrating on the construction of several light aircraft carriers of 20000 to 30000 tonnes and several warships to supplement the carrier task force. To strengthen the offshore combat capacity of the Chinese navy, it is carrying out naval campaigns at various locations, leaving its confined strategic theatre in the western Pacific. (Kondapalli p.2040) The coastal defence strategy remained the guiding principle for the People's Liberation Army (Navy) PLAN for subsequent decades. The principles of the coastal defence strategy are consolidating seashores and defending cities. Three political tasks are assigned to

the PLAN to “wipe out pirates in the coastal areas, to assist the army in taking over Taiwan when the time is ripe, and to resist an imperialist invasion from the seas.” (Kondapalli) The development plan of the Chinese naval strategy, as sketched by Liu Huaqing, is formulated into three phases to establish PLAN as a world-class sea power by 2040. With the gradual expansion of China's maritime goals, the Chinese navy will have to shoulder more responsibilities and develop a blue-water strategy of power projection into the high seas. The force modernization effort objectives are as follows: handling the situation in Taiwan militarily if required, asserting a greater degree of control in the Near Sea region, specifically in the South China Sea region, where China's strategic Sea Lines of Communication linking China with the Persian Gulf, through which energy supply and commercial exchanges take place. To enforce China's right to keep a check on foreign military activities within the 200 nautical mile maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). (Congressional Report 2021) Medium-range ballistic missiles and long-range ballistic missiles can be a serious challenge to forward-deployed US military bases in Japan and its forward-deployed forces. Not only this, but China's Sovremenny-class destroyers can increase the risk to the US carrier group. For example, in 2010, Chinese navy helicopters flew close to the destroyers of Japan's Self-Defence Force in a provocative manner. Another Chinese ship chased a Japanese Coastguard survey vessel, bringing to a halt its surveys after the Japanese captured a Chinese navy vessel captain. China escalated the situation when it saw a declining position for itself. Sutter mentions that China generally dispatches its Coastguard near the disputed islands and maritime areas. (Sutter 2008 p.6)

China increased the PLA budget around 2000, while the spending pattern remains uncertain, but the outcomes are reflected in the increased navy and air force programmes. According to Chinese strategic analysts, the external security environment has become more hostile to China's political leaders and strategic analysts, policy-making circles, and defence planners. The PLA now maintains a more active presence in the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait against the backdrop of a growing US military presence due to its Asia Pivot policy and strengthening

of ties with allies.<sup>18</sup> The military reforms are introduced in the context of the intensification of territorial conflicts with Japan. The dispatch of Chinese fighter jets increased in response to the growing friction between the two countries. Many Chinese military aircraft, mostly from the People's Liberation Army (Navy), participated in flight missions to enhance their level of competence. Recently, aircraft from the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) have also joined these missions, underscoring the Joint Operations capabilities China wants to achieve. The PLAAF H-6K bombers involved in the long-distance mission took off from Shaanxi province and headed to points beyond the first island chain. The H-6K bombers belong to the Lanzhou Military Region, which is placed under the Central Theatre Command and exhibits excellent cross-sea combat support capabilities. The deployments from the Central Theatre Command have caught the attention of strategic analysts from Japan and Taiwan. Such military developments are alarming to China's neighbours, and the growing insecurity manifests in various exponentially growing bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral security exercises and dialogues in the region.

In 2017, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who is seen as a champion of pro-constitutional revision in a video addressed that the "time is ripe" to consider a change in the constitution which will significantly transform Japan's defense posture making it able to deploy the country's Self-Defence Forces and bring Japan as more an independent actor in the international realm however, within the limits of Article 9 and the post-war constitution that renounces war. (Mark 2017) It underscores that mutual mistrust and insecurity are deepening. However, according to a report in the Washington Post, it wouldn't be an easy task for Japan to change the MacArthur constitution, as it would be met with resistance from Japanese citizens. Making any significant changes to the Constitution will require a referendum for the public to approve. The Liberal Democratic Party that Shinzo Abe represents came to power with one of its political promises to create a new

constitution. Since the 1990s, the party has been pressing for the issue<sup>19</sup>.

Drifte observes that Japan can start reconsidering its earlier position in crisis management through the Japanese Coastguard and gradually opening up for the military, and using a deferential attitude towards China. He further argues that a prominent feature in Japan's China policy, which cannot be explained through Realist theories, is Japan's restraint in exercising its military power. The reason behind restraint in the use of power is Japan's post-war pacifism, which is best explained through the lens of the Constructivist school. However, the deferential attitude of Japan might come to an end because Chinese militarization can largely damage the normative foundations of Japanese society. Some of the measures that have already been taken by Japan to re-establish the Japan-US alliance are revising the guidelines for Japanese-American security cooperation, even though Japan continued its pacifist doctrine. (Drifte, 2003 pp. 2-26)

Japan still has an edge over China in terms of finance, research, and innovation, and exporter of high-tech manufacturing. Japan also possesses state-of-the-art military know-how as Japan's Self-Defence Forces (JSDF), which, under the US security umbrella, plays a crucial role in maintaining peace in the region. JSDF is supported by the sixth-largest defence budget in the world, even when it spends the smallest percentage of GDP. If Japan decides to increase its defense budget, it will be another security threat to China.

1.9 Regime Legitimacy and role of collective memory in the Diaoyu island dispute:

The change in China's behaviour is alarming because, after the Tiananmen incident, when China was isolated by Western powers, Japan, as an Asian country, came forward and gave China financial assistance and helped arrest its internal social instability. Despite deeper ties in trade and economic relations, China, in a determined way, has started escalating the situation near the disputed islands by sending its naval vessels. Although China and Japan have both acted in a

<sup>18</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/the-early-returns-of-chinas-military-reforms/> Ying Yu Lin accessed on 12th February 2022

restrained manner to keep the dispute not spiralling into a war. China's steady building up of naval capabilities, compounded by the intrusion of naval vessels, has heightened Tokyo's concerns over China's growing power and influence in the East China Sea. Ideational aspects influence perceptions. On the other hand, Japanese political elites have drawn their legitimacy either by visiting the disputed island or by buying the island. The conflict in the East China Sea is shaped by the collective memory in China of the Japanese atrocities in the past, and the nationalistic sentiments are high towards the disputed islets in the East China Sea. It happens because nationalistic sentiments are not only within the common people, but they are also present within the policymakers as well, hence impacting policy outcomes. (Manicom pp.18) Michael Yahuda argues that negative perceptions lead to a lack of empathy between the rival claimants that resists the formation of any institutionalized mechanism that will facilitate dispute resolution, leading to amicable relations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government is adjusting to the new realities of the internal and external environment, and as a political tool, the Communist regime takes recourse to nationalism. Since the Chinese Communist Party had put an end to its revolutionary image, Chinese political elites took recourse to nationalism as a tool for regime legitimacy. Zheng Wang, in his book *Never Forget National Humiliation*, writes, "the collective memory of the past that binds a group of people together." On the national level, identity determine national interests, which in turn determine policy and state action. Collective memory helps to better understand national interests and political actions. Nationalist leaders can use history as a mobilizing tool in times of international conflict, and it is intertwined with domestic politics. Most International Relations scholars focus on realism and liberal institutionalism. The importance of the ideational aspect in determining the foreign policy behaviour of countries remains an understudied aspect. However, only the ideational aspect cannot unilaterally determine foreign policy behaviour, but it is connected to the rise of nationalism because myths, memories, and symbols of ethnic heritage render nationalism powerful, which makes a conflict intractable. (Wang 2012 p. 7-27) Different studies on the East China Sea suggest that increasing nationalism in both countries influences Decision

making by shaping the views of political elites and decision-makers. The friendly image or the adversarial image constructed in the minds of decision-makers is often shaped by politico-cultural communication established between the two societies. The parochial interests of the domestic leaders are channelled as parochial interests of national leaders, which are sometimes championed as national interests and invoke nationalist sentiment among civilians. (Meng, 2014 pp.17, 33) (Emmers 2009) Therefore, the East China Sea issue reflects the interplay of ideational and materialist interests of policy elites. According to Munday, considerable domestic legitimacy anxiety influences security policies in both countries. (Kokuban in Lam p.2) (Manicom: 2009, pp.17) (Munday 2014, p.1) Nationalism in China spread like wildfire among the youth as the Chinese economy is growing fast with a double-digit GDP growth rate, and Japan, after a series of feeble Prime Ministers accompanied by a bubble burst, is experiencing a decline in economic condition. Various reasons have contributed to the rise of nationalism in China, but the collective memory of Japanese atrocities in China remains the main element shaping a negative image of Japan. Often, China maintains a double standard where it uses history as propaganda, but Beijing itself resorts to a symbolism of war through competitive historical discourse, leading to a breakdown in diplomatic relations.

## II. CONCLUSION

The third chapter describes the China-Japan relations. The chapter focuses on the Diaoyu dispute and China-Japan relations. The chapter highlights that the Diaoyu Island dispute has turned into a contentious issue since 2010, after the global financial crisis. In 2008, joint development of resources in the disputed waters between China and Japan could not materialize. In 2010, China surpassed Japan to become the second-largest economy in the world after the United States. Since 2010, China has displayed its willingness to escalate the situation after a Chinese fishing trawler rammed into a Japanese Coastguard vessel, in 2013 by creating an ADIZ after Japan bought the islands, and in 2016 by sending in a naval vessel. These developments, along with China's military modernization, have turned China assertive in the territorial dispute. China's rise in economic power and

military capabilities impacted Chinese nationalistic sentiments towards Japan. The bitter historical memories of the Second World War have shaped China-Japan's political ties, and the territorial disputes are also affected due to historical animosity between the two countries. Political leaders in China have drawn legitimacy from the island dispute by attaching it to the historical memory that Beijing has carried on from the past. The Diaoyu island is impacted by nationalistic sentiment in both China and Japan, and joint development of resources could not materialize, making Diaoyu a dispute that has increasingly become intractable. At present, the islands are under Japanese administration, and China vehemently resists any unilateral move by Japan that entrenches Japan's sovereignty over the islands. Both sides have taken measures to protect their maritime rights, such as control of SLOCs for safe passage of seaborne trade, imported energy resources, and arms acquisition, and assertively deploying non-military vessels, which have led to a situation of hostile atmosphere in the Senkaku/Diaoyu areas. China's hostile nationalism can adversely affect rational calculations. It is therefore necessary to counter the narrative of China's patriotic myths. A crisis with China is often an interplay of opaque strategic designs, national emotions, and a non-unitary chain of command. De-escalation is only possible once China recognizes that escalatory behaviour will deliver no strategic utility.

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