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China, Japan, and East Asian regional cooperation: the views of 'self' and 'other' from Beijing and Tokyo

Christian Wirth

Global Institute for Asian Regional Integration, Waseda University, 1-21-1 Nishi-Waseda, Bldg. No. 19, 508, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 169-0051, Japan
Email: chwirth@gmail.com

Abstract

China–Japan relations are frequently analyzed either in the light of disputes about different interpretations of history, the consequence of a strategic power shift in the Asia-Pacific resulting from the rise of China or as a conflict between Chinese and Japanese national identities. This paper argues that bilateral relations should be assessed on the basis of a comprehensive approach. It concludes that the current state of bilateral relations can be understood as the result of identity crises of the political systems in Beijing and Tokyo. Owing to the rapidly changing environment in East Asia and their inherent conservative natures, both political systems' perceptions and policies lag behind present realities. This renders it difficult for them to effectively address important domestic and international problems and consequently affects bilateral relations negatively as it complicates the accurate redefinition of the representation of 'self' and 'other' with regard to foreign relations.

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1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, the world has witnessed a China continuously increasing its 'comprehensive national strength' while promoting its 'peaceful development' and the construction of a 'harmonious (international) society'. At the same time, Japan is pursuing the path towards a 'normal state', becoming increasingly active in foreign and security policy. Both developments coupled with the influence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific represent considerable potential for rivalries and frictions between great powers in Northeast Asia. Over the past decades, economic development has caused a surge in intra-regional trade flows and led to a certain degree of division of labor. This contributed to the emergence of a region in East Asia. Globalization and economic development, in particular, are rapidly altering social structures and raise questions about economic, energy, as well as social and environmental security. In the light of the predicted climate change that threatens to exacerbate the existing problems, new challenges to East Asian governments are on the rise. However, in spite of steadily growing interdependence, regional political cooperation has remained modest and distrust continues to hinder further integration of markets and societies. Perhaps, the most striking example of this phenomenon is the uneasy relationship between the two major actors of the region, China and Japan.

This paper seeks to clarify the current state of bilateral relations between China and Japan. It tries to identify emerging trends by evaluating the underlying factors of foreign policy-making. On the basis of a comprehensive analysis encompassing systemic and domestic issues of traditional and non-traditional security, I argue that difficulties in China–Japan relations result from the rapidly changing environment in which Beijing and Tokyo find themselves today. The transformation of national and regional economic, social, and political conditions brings about numerous new challenges to governments and societies in both countries. These necessitate the adaptation of common ways of thinking about the state and its role in the emerging East Asian region. Both governments are experiencing identity crises as the ideational and material conditions that their policies had previously been based upon have significantly changed. First, the ruling parties in Beijing and Tokyo, having been in power for decades, and in the face of new challenges to their rule, cling to ideas and worldviews which brought them to power

and were constitutive to the building of the modern Chinese and Japanese states before and after the Second World War. This perpetuates the enmity of the past and leads to clashes of historical interpretations and symbolism. Second, albeit on different levels, but largely due to the imperatives created by their earlier success in modernizing their countries, both parties' struggle to address new challenges to their societies' economic and social security. On one hand, the resulting domestic political pressures and loss of legitimacy greatly reduce their flexibility and effectiveness in foreign policy-making. On the other hand, the inability to deal with domestic challenges increases the strategic uncertainties that neighboring states face. Third, the nature of both political systems conditions conservative views on foreign political issues which contribute to problems with collective action. It is therefore of more explanatory value to describe the current state of bilateral relations as the result of identity crises of the political systems in Beijing and Tokyo than as the results of a power shift, disputes over history, or conflicting identities. While material structures, collective memories, and understandings of the own nations and its roles in East Asia are very important factors, more emphasis should be put on the interplay of the various determinants and how they affect the evolution of cooperation in the region over time.

The first section of this paper provides a short explanation of the applied methodology. The second and third sections analyses, respectively, domestic and systemic determinants of the Chinese and Japanese identities as constituting elements of their respective foreign policies toward one another. The fourth section concludes the argument and identifies the drivers of future developments.

China's reform and opening policies of the late 1970s were a success as economic growth remained high over many years. The stunning macroeconomic indicators are frequently contrasted with stagnating economic growth rates in Japan. Against this backdrop, the question arises as to what is next after the successful industrialization and modernization of Japan, and as to what the future holds for a developed China in East Asia. After decades of relatively scarce economic, social, and political exposure, globalization and economic development brought China and Japan ideationally and materially closer together. As a result, each country's role from the perspective of the other has drastically gained importance.

Controversial debates about bilateral relations reflect uncertainties about how to address domestic, regional, and global challenges. Many questions which affect the whole region remain unanswered and some grow in salience. How long will economic growth in China be sustainable? Will the Communist Party of China (CPC) be able to cope with growing disparities in income distribution, environmental degradation, water shortages, and corruption, and thus be able to legitimize its rule and stabilize the country? In contrast, will the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-led coalition in Tokyo be able to secure at least moderate economic growth? How will it handle the challenges of an aging population and growing concern about social security and societal cohesion? How will China and Japan make sure that their energy demand can be met in environmentally sustainable, stable, and inexpensive ways? How will China and Japan address climate change and ensure food security and safety? How will a stronger China conduct foreign and security policies? How will the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) look in 30 years? How will a 'normal' Japan's security policies look? How will the Northeast Asian region develop over the next decades and what roles will China and Japan play? These issues are often discussed by politicians and scholars. Yet, they tend to focus on specific aspects and thereby miss the overall picture while at the same time neglecting important domestic factors in China and Japan.

2 Collective action problems in international relations

Given the complexity and interdependence of security problems in Northeast Asia, it is often argued that none of the three major theoretical approaches to international relations is able to explain the reality itself (Katzenstein and Okawara, 2001). Wendt (1994) suggested a comprehensive sociological approach to explain international relations. He argues that the ability to overcome collective action problems, realists describe them as security dilemmas, and liberalists as prisoners' dilemmas depends on whether the actors' social identities favor self-interests or collective interests. Self-interest is determined by representations of the relationship between the 'self' and the 'other', that is, from social identity. Explaining the formation of self-interest, Wendt distinguishes several domestic and systemic determinants. By incorporating domestic

attributes of states and focusing on the interactions between social groups, this approach does not depend on the interpretation of concepts such as the Westphalian state, power, or democracy. In order to explain why cooperation happens in some situations and between some actors and not in other situations and with other actors, it examines the representation of 'self' and 'other' within a group's social identity, looking at states as the biggest social actors in the international arena.

When the environment of an actor significantly changes and patterns of social interactions alter the uncertainty pertaining to a present situation and the predictability of future developments increases. This is especially true when change happens at a pace which forces human individuals to reconsider the fundamentals of their social knowledge, that is, their views of their own and other societies during the span of one lifetime. As a result, in order to come to terms with the challenges stemming from the new conditions of life, actors need to redefine their identity, that is, their understanding of 'self'. This is only possible through the re-evaluation of relationships with 'others'. Thus, the more pronounced the need to be clear about the 'self' and to reduce the level of uncertainty, the more the actor needs to be clear about the nature of the 'other'. However, this often requires radical changes in assumptions about social, political, and economic realities and their correlations which formed the bases of previous strategies. Such transformation of social structures runs against the desire of people, social groups, and states to preserve the established order and their position within that order. Therefore, actors often show reluctance to change established practices and habits, especially when they were perceived successful in the past. In order to avoid significant changes and to maintain what is often termed 'stability', actors tend to seek definitions of 'self' and 'other' which are clear, understandable, simple to communicate and, most of all, harmonious with previous understandings. The result is a process of 'othering', which means that the differences between 'self' and 'other' are emphasized in order to create a seemingly clear picture about the new situation and the roles each actor plays. However, this only superficially reduces the uncertainty since the actions and policies to address the new challenges, which are still based on previous assumptions, are inadequately able to solve problems effectively, reduce uncertainties and reconstruct a society's confidence and political trust in its leadership. The longer problems are seen as unresolved, the more the

legitimacy of political systems decline while questions about national purpose and societal security increase in salience. Thus, the question is tantamount to how well an actor is able to adapt its identity to new situations and whether the recalibration of the representation of 'self' and 'other' is responding to the changed conditions or only superficially addresses the new circumstances. Only if this adaptation processes happen, the strategic uncertainties connected to this mismatch can be reduced and lead to increased predictability and to a sustainable sense of stability and security.

Since states and their political systems are often unable, sometimes unwilling, to properly categorize and understand new situations because they are reluctant to adapt themselves, actors display a tendency to try to bring their environment back to a state which fits with their known understandings of the situation. In order to do this and to deflect pressures for change they tend to securitize issues. As a result, new situations are described as extraordinary events which require extraordinary measures to be addressed. The subsequent formation of threat complexes helps significantly to mobilize political support for leadership and provides a renewed sense of purpose and unity to social groups and states. However, the securitization of an issue and a related actor change the representation of 'self' and 'other' by disconnecting them. The other actor is depicted in specific terms highlighting ways in which it is different from the 'self' and subsequently becomes an object of politics rather than a subject. Therefore, securitization is a direct consequence of the inability to deal with a new situation through the normal political processes (Buzan *et al.*, 1998).

According to Pye (1971, p. 110), 'when a community finds that, what it had once unquestionably accepted as its physical and psychological definitions of its collective 'self' are no longer acceptable under the new historical conditions', an identity crisis occurs. Habermas (1975) asserts that an identity crisis comes about when a limit is reached, beyond which a system can no longer resolve its problems without losing its identity. In order to achieve its new level of performance, the participants in the system need to redefine who they are and how they are different from other political and social systems. According to Habermas, a legitimacy crisis of a political system is therefore also a form of identity crisis.

3 Domestic determinants of identity formation

The following section describes domestic factors which influence the ways Chinese and Japanese leaders perceive their roles in East Asia, how they look at other actors, and subsequently enact foreign policies. It therefore focuses on issues which have particular impact on the perceptions of 'self' and 'other' in the bilateral context.

According to Wendt (1994), domestic determinants of identity formation can be categorized into three groups. First, the corporate nature of the state is of relevance. The mere fact of be part of a group creates a feeling of 'self' (insiders) and 'others' (outsiders). Second, the nature of state-society relations is important. Finally, nationalism, the collective identity based on cultural, linguistic, and ethnical ties, is a domestic determinant of self-interest.

The rapid changes in contemporary Chinese society have the effect of adapting and replacing the ideas of Deng Xiaoping's era to an extent hard to qualify. It is therefore impossible to paint a static picture of a single national identity. What is useful though is the description of sets of ideas and discourses which form the bases of foreign policy lines. Shared understandings of the past and common history are major factors which constitute (national) identities and thus the unity of social groups and states (Rose, 2005). The history of European colonization of China in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century led to the understanding that Western colonial aggression contributed to the demise of the Chinese dynastic system and thereby turned the country into chaos. It was mainly because of the lack of technological progress that domination by colonial powers was possible, subsequently bringing about the 'century of humiliation'. The role of Japan stands out because it managed to master modern technologies, resist western colonization, and used its newly acquired power to subdue the disintegrating Chinese state. China's self-understanding as a 'victimized state' played a crucial role in the reconstruction of a national identity and unified state (Smith, 2000). It prompts the leaders to strengthen comprehensive national power in order to prevent history from repeating itself and restore the nation's international position. This is a dictum which still seems very much alive (Rozman, 2002; Yan, 2006). For this undertaking, national cohesion under the leadership of the CPC is essential and the common understanding of 'self' as a victim of foreign

aggression has a unifying effect. Suzuki (2007) sees Japan's emergence as 'the other' in the Chinese national identity as a by-product of China's attempts to assert its 'victimhood' and regain its social and moral legitimacy within an international society which is still differentiated between core and periphery.

China has commonly viewed itself as a developing country, often claiming the lead in advancing poor countries' interests. Van Ness (1993) argues that starting in the 1980s, China has become a supporter of the status quo and is no longer the champion of the 'have nots'. He concludes that a Third World identity will no longer match the new Chinese self-image as a technologically advanced and strong state. However, Beijing does not yet consider itself a developed country. Economic indicators such as per capita income do support this stance. The status of a developing country also serves as a justification for certain protective economic policies and tight political leadership on the still long way to 'scientific development', that is, the building of a strong modern state. Also, politicians in Beijing deem what was once called the Third World as an important area where China can play a global leading role and increase its status. Moreover, in times of surging demand for natural resources, it helps to conduct China's diplomacy in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. The Chinese and Indian led opposition of developing countries to the WTO Doha Round, which failed in July 2008, and the Chinese stance on measures to address climate change are but two recent examples.[1]

Since the period of Meiji Restoration, Japan embarked on the modernization project and found itself capable of not only holding Western colonial powers at bay, but also of expanding territorial control far into East Asia. However, the official narratives of history have concentrated on the final phase of World War II and created a sense of victimhood in Japan (Satoh, 2006). This has contributed to the pacifist Japanese identity and the focus on economic development instead of power-based foreign policies. However, it has also disconnected the understanding of parts of the Japanese society from historical events prior to 1945 and

1 People's Republic of China, White Paper on Climate Change 2008, available at http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7055612.htm; 'West told to keep its promises on tech transfer', *China Daily*, 29 October, available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-10/29/content_7151707.htm (last accessed on 29 October 2008).

continues the ideational distance from East Asia. Commenting on history-related disputes between China and Japan, Satoh argues that the present state of China–Japan relations is a result of the Cold War East Asian regional order which made China and Japan exist in different circles for many decades. This order is now changing and leads to new debates about their relationship. This is important because interpretations of the past are crucial in defining a nation's role and place in international society. It is not just about studying history, it is about defining contemporary national identities (Bukh, 2007).

In China and Japan, the turbulent history from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century led to the creation of narratives about the past which helped rebuild the identities of modern states after the end of World War II and the Chinese civil war. These common understandings about the nation were formed by the respective elites to bolster their rule and to stabilize the state as a social construct (Rose, 2005). Within these narratives, the respective views of China and Japan of each-other played a decisive defining role. The emergence of the Cold War alliance structure and the resulting nature of national political systems perpetuated these official understandings about the past and thus shaped the nations' views of their own role in the region (Hundt and Bleiker, 2007). The ruling elites continue to base their legitimacy on their success in the making of modern states even today. Dittmer and Kim (1993) contend that a comprehensive investigation of national identities should not only look at categories which differentiate the insiders from the outsiders, but also encompass the symbol-system of a nation-state with which the community identifies. While there is no space here to discuss this argument, this point may be verified, for instance, by looking at the two countries' bank notes. Mao Zedong's portrait stands for the CPC's role as creator and legitimate leader of modern China while Japanese bank notes portray prominent political figures of the Meiji Period as the founding fathers of the present Japanese state. Later, as part of the Cold War order, the two states existed in the two separate worlds 'East' and 'West' (Satoh, 2006). Thus, political and social interactions remained largely confined to formal diplomatic contacts. This situation lasted until the mid-1990s and is sometimes referred to as the 'friendship diplomacy framework' (Mochizuki, 2005). Discourses in China and Japan which depict the nation as a victim of past conflicts do still influence views on 'self' and 'other'. By adopting a victim-mentality, the 'self' and the

'other' are completely disconnected. The entire responsibility for what happened is projected onto the victimizer, that is the 'other' who is subsequently perceived as solely responsible for the reconciliation process. In China, evidence may be found in the continuing commemorations of wartime events involving the Japanese Imperial Armies' atrocities, as well as daily TV series depicting the glorious fight of the CPC against the Guomindang and the Japanese invaders while a critical assessment the CPC's earlier history is missing. In Japan, the Yushukan museum adjacent to the Yasukuni Shrine glorifies war as part of modern state-making while a permanent exhibition in Tokyo focuses on the hardships endured by Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia while paying some attention to the sufferings of the civilian population in Japan and none to any foreign nationals affected by the war.[2] The result of this self-victimization is continued antagonism since neither of the actors is able to address the protracted collective action problems alone.

Considering the long common history of China and Japan, it becomes apparent that each is an important point of reference for the other's understanding of 'self' and therefore an indispensable part of the other's national identity. Numerous uncertainties pertaining to questions of whether and how the two governments are able to solve salient problems within their respective societies (which are discussed below) make people look to the past in order to find solutions and self-confidence. This may lead to growing nationalism since 'pride in past accomplishments can translate into confidence about an uncertain future' (Barbalet, 1998, p. 107). This selective 'othering' of other actors complicates bilateral and regional cooperation.

Following the discussion of domestic influences on a state's understanding of its identity, the next section looks at how these aspects fit into the context of the regional and global environment. In order to comprehensively analyze systemic effects on international cooperation, three types of mechanisms which influence collective identity formation at the international level should be considered: structural contexts, systemic processes, and strategic practice (Wendt, 1994). The description of the inter-subjective structural context includes the discussion of mutual threat perceptions which arise from social knowledge, shared understandings, and expectations. These give meaning to material structures

2 http://www.heiwa.go.jp (last accessed on 20 April 2009).

consisting mainly of patterns of economic and political power distribution. However, inter-subjective structures are not static. They are influenced by systemic processes and strategic practices. Systemic processes are dynamics in the external context of state action which alter the environment for all subjects. Strategic practices describe rhetoric and behavioral actions by states which affect the perceptions of other actors (Wendt, 1994). The next section outlines perceptions of the structural context based on the ideational foundations previously outlined.

4 The inter-subjective structural context

The Chinese view takes into account the unipolarity of the global system dominated by the United States. Thus, Washington seeks to prevent China from challenging the US primacy in East Asia. It reacts to what is perceived as a 'power shift' through the strengthening and building of alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, and possibly ASEAN states. In short, the United States seeks to reinforce the 'hub-and-spokes' or San Francisco system established in the 1950s. Japan, the Korean Peninsula, and Taiwan are cornerstones of this strategy (Armitage and Nye, 2007). Taiwan and the Okinawa Island chain jointly block the passage to the Pacific Ocean and thereby control the sea lanes of communication between Northeast and Southeast Asia. In view of this potential confrontation it is imperative that Chinese comprehensive national strength increase. Moreover, China needs to prevent a US-led containment by forging good relations with all of its neighboring states while deterring Taiwan from seeking complete independence.

In contrast, the Japanese perspective focuses on the growing Chinese economy which produces the resources for the modernization of its military. Beijing's economic clout enables it to strike favorable political bargains with its neighbors, especially ASEAN and the Koreas. It also increases the economic dependence of Japan on China. Beijing has also put a focus on the development of space technology (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2008). These policies could be interpreted as an expression or even a proof of China's willingness to (re-)gain regional hegemony and may threaten Japanese maritime claims and freedom of navigation at sea. The alliance with the United States is therefore seen as the crucial pillar in Japan's foreign and security policies.

To explain the above-mentioned subjective views on the regional structure, we need to ask for the rationales and the ideas which are behind strategic calculations. Central to these are the actor's understandings of the regional and global environment. If it is seen as generally cooperative, an actor will display and reproduce cooperative policies. If it is perceived as unstable and conflict-prone, an actor will display policies that reproduce this non-cooperative structure (Wendt, 1999). This means that states will implement policies which mirror their threat perceptions and thereby support and fuel threat perceptions of other actors in the system. Evaluating these problems of collective action is tantamount to asking which factors promote a strict delineation of 'self' and 'other' and which factors bring these two dimensions within a state's identity closer together.

Therefore, the next section addresses determinants which *change* the environment states are embedded in, as well as the very nature of states. The phenomena discussed under the category of systemic processes alter perceptions of structures and actors through dynamics which lie outside of deliberate state action. A decisive role play processes which lead to the increased interdependence of states.

5 Systemic processes

The most important recent development in the East Asian region is the increasing integration of the East Asian economies. Since the mid-1980s, intra-regional and bilateral trade and financial flows have risen significantly (Asian Development Bank, 2008). This means that China and Japan have strong interests in a stable political environment which provides a climate conducive to investment and consumption. This imperative is an integral part of their national security strategies and is reflected in their respective defense white papers. However, increased interdependence also increases vulnerabilities, and states may pursue confrontational policies in order to regain more control over areas that are perceived to affect their national interests. This leads to the securitization of issues that could easily be solved through intergovernmental or business cooperation from an outside perspective. Paradoxically, rapidly increasing interdependence sometimes makes governments adopt political strategies that contradict their economic interests. This phenomenon is often termed as 'warm economics – cold politics'.

A corollary of the surging regional economic growth is the importance of energy supply. Especially since China became a net-importer of oil in 1993, oil and natural gas supply has become securitized (Toichi, 2008). Because China, Japan, and South Korea are all importers of large quantities of fossil fuels, future competition or conflict is often predicted, especially for crude oil and natural gas (Goldstein and Kozyrev, 2006). A crucial point in calculations of energy security is the need for oil and gas flows to be steady, sufficient in quantity and reliable in the long-term. Moreover, the security of shipping lanes from the Middle East through the Straits of Malacca and Taiwan to China, Korea, and Japan grows in salience. Disputes over territorial boundaries around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea are also negatively affected since they also revolve around the demarcation of the Chinese and Japanese exclusive economic zones (EEZ). Despite the fact that market mechanisms are able to provide increasing quantities of natural resources, and that Chinese investment in oil and gas exploration increases the amount traded on the world markets, mutual threat perceptions throughout the region linger (Buszynski and Sazlan 2007; International Crisis Group, 2008). This stands in stark contrast to the very modest efforts which are made to reduce energy consumption, not only in China, but also in Japan. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine how shipping lanes frequented with thousands of cargo ships which are, for instance, owned by a US investor, operated by Korean shipping companies under Panamanian flags, staffed with Southeast Asian nationals, transporting freight for Chinese subsidiaries of Japanese, French, and German companies, can be nationalized as the discourses about sea lane security in China and Japan assume.[3]

Another consequence of the economic boom in East Asia is environmental degradation. Main concerns for neighboring states are trans-boundary air and sea pollution which affect public health and has detrimental effects on farming and fishery (Kim, 2007). Climate change exacerbates the existing problems of food and water shortages, and

3 International Maritime Organization, *International Shipping and World Trade: Facts and Figures*, November 2008; available at http://www.imo.org/includes/blastDataOnly.asp/data_id%3D23754/InternationalShippingandWorldTrade-factsandfigures.pdf; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan, *Report on Maritime Affairs*, July 2007; available at http://www.mlit.go.jp/english/2006/j_maritime_bureau/report.pdf (last date accessed on 9 May 2009).

increases the frequency and impact of natural disasters. Owing to the high economic growth rates, these problems are affecting China in unprecedented dimensions. As the water quality is often too bad even for agricultural use, daily life of the general public is negatively affected. Local communities start to protest against businesses and local authorities which are often corrupted.[4] The problem with the enforcement of the rule of law affects the legitimacy of the CPC considerably. The leaders in Beijing are aware of the situation and have the willingness to address the issue. Their dilemma, however, is that the same governmental structure they want to stabilize seems to be the main obstacle to the enforcement of the rule of law. Moreover, when applying conventional economic models, the costs of measures to protect the environment may negatively impact economic growth, an imperative which has become the major source of legitimacy for the CPC's leadership.

The very processes which started with the opening of the Chinese market to the world economy also brought about new challenges to the Chinese society and the leadership of the CPC. While the success of the Chinese modernization project through accumulated wealth and international status provided new legitimacy for the government, the increasingly unequal income distribution and problems such as the illegal seizure of land, the pollution of air, soil, and water, and the commercialization of healthcare and social insurance systems, however, increasingly undermine it (Shirk, 2007, p. 29). Economic growth according to the model of embedded liberalism can only be sustainable if it is based on a stable and effective political system and a cohesive society. The CPC leadership tries to address these deficiencies with the pursuit of a 'harmonious society'. However, the weakness of the political system, that is foremost the weakness of the rule of law, as well as the continuing priority of policies to promote 'scientific development', that is, technical progress over the change in social and political practices, result in problems remaining largely unresolved and increasing in salience (Murphy, 2008; Lam, 2009). Moreover, the characteristics of the top-down policy-making process inherently induce low efficiency and effectiveness of governance at the grassroots level. Beijing is therefore in search of social and political 'stability' and sensitive to internal and external pressure. This

4 Nautilus Institute, *NAPSNet Daily Reports*, keyword 'PRC Unrest'; available at http://www.nautilus.org/napsnet/dr/index.html (last date accessed on 9 May 2009).

sense of vulnerability, together with the influential and independent role of the PLA, loyal to the CPC rather than the state, creates potential for securitization. Thus, in order to deflect pressure from the government, strong but often inadequate measures to counter domestic and regional problems may be applied.

However, worries about how to secure economic growth, increasing income disparities and concerns about the availability of social insurances are not limited to China. Albeit on a different level, the Japanese public is deeply worried about the future direction of the country in this regard. The changing East Asian environment does not only challenge the understanding of history, but also the political elite's views on society, nation, state, and the region. One important reason is the end of Japan's economic growth phase after the bubble economy burst in 1991 and the Asian financial crisis hit in 1997. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the country needs to adjust its vision of the future and shift the focus from economic growth to a comprehensive model for society. The end of the economic miracle causes anxieties about economic security and declining social cohesion (Kotler *et al.*, 2007; Tamamoto, 2005). Moreover, waves of political scandals led to constantly low approval rates of the ruling elites and to introspection into the present state of the political system, and increased uncertainty about the future of Japanese society.[5] The answer of the political elite has been fragmented at best. Some individuals like Ozawa Ichiro, Ishihara Shintaro, and Abe Shinzo have published their ideas. However, retrospective visions of a 'beautiful country' and the strategy to instill more patriotism have not led to a common vision about the country's future, not to mention the restoration of public trust in the leadership.[6] Adding a regional perspective, Tamamoto (2005) contends that China's rise has robbed Japan of its identity as the world's economic miracle. He suggests that Japan's search for a post-economic identity and the claim for leadership status in Asia is just one outcome of this process. Another major left-over of the Cold

5 Moriyama, H., '91% dissatisfied with political state', *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 March 2009; available at http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/TKY200903190069.html (last date accessed on 19 March 2009).

6 'Fukuda Cabinet approval rate off to record 33.4%', *Japan Times*, 17 March 2008, available at http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20080317a3.html. Takenaka, H. (2009) 'The old LDP back in business', *Japan Echo*, 36, 2, available at http://www.japanecho.co.jp/sum/2009/360210.html (last date accessed on 11 May 2009).

War era which will be discussed later are the LDP's views on international politics in general (Drifte, 2003).

The changing socio-economic structures also led to declining birth rates, especially in Japan. The phenomenon is bound to pose serious problems to all Northeast Asian societies and their political leaderships (National Intelligence Council, 2004). The Japanese government has been unable to reach a consensus how to address the issue, despite the fact that in 2007, already 37.4% of fishery workers and 59% of farmers who are supposed to guarantee a reasonable amount of self-sufficiency in food were aged 65 and above.[7] The only decisions taken by 2008 are to temporarily import a small number of Indonesian and Philippine caretakers as part of the free-trade agreements while the proposals to increase the number of foreign university students to compensate the declining numbers of Japanese students and create a pool of potential future immigrants are still under debate (Nagy, 2009).[8] The consequence of this is heightened sense of insecurity which indirectly translates into the realm of bilateral relations between Japan and China by fuelling threat perceptions.

Strategic processes lead to the growing interdependence of states. As a consequence, actors need to establish norms and institutions to regulate and coordinate their policies. By participating in a mutually beneficial framework, actors have closer contact with and are able to better understand others' points of views. They internalize common norms and most importantly adapt their attitudes about causality and effect in the absence of material or mental coercion (Johnston, 2003). Subsequently, the 'other' is no longer seen as an object of politics but as an equal subject.

Having discussed dynamics which change the environment in which states conduct foreign and security policies, the next section returns to a more state-centered focus. Strategic practices constitute the second set of determinants which alter states' views of themselves and others as a result of deliberate state action.

7 Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry of Japan, *White Paper on Fisheries*, April 2008, *Annual Report on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas in Japan Fiscal Year 2007*, p. 66, available at http://www.maff.go.jp/e/index.html (last date accessed on 10 May 2009).

8 Reynolds, I. (2008) 'Japan opens its doors to immigrants: country on the brink of economic disaster amid labour crisis', *Reuters/Financial Post*, 14 August 2008; available at http://www.financialpost.com/story-printer.html?id=723404 (last date accessed on 9 May 2009).

6 Strategic practice

This set of factors consists of expressions of national interests through verbal communication or physical actions. Strategic practice is therefore the manifestation of a state's identity. Thus, it becomes discernible to what extent the two governments have adjusted their views and policies according to the necessities outlined in the previous section. At the same time, strategic practices influence how the acting state and the strategic environment are perceived by others. As a result of this interaction, the beliefs about the nature of the 'self' and the 'other' are constantly in flux. However, actors try to sustain their 'self' and therefore reproduce it in conjunction with their interactive partners.

The 1989 Tian An Men incident resulted in a reversion to a conservative policy line and the ensuing international reaction created a siege mentality in Beijing. This is the background against which strategic practices under the Jiang administration can partly be understood. With Taiwan as a main security concern in mind, the leadership in Beijing reconsidered its defense policies (Li, 2004; Wilson and Xue, 2006). In line with common practice of nuclear weapons states at that time, China tested its warheads in October 1994, May and August 1995, and July 1996. This move particularly affected Japanese views because it came only days after Prime Minister Murayama's visit to Beijing during which he had requested Jiang Zemin to refrain from nuclear testing. Also, the test in August came only days after the 50th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Another set of Chinese strategic practices are the large-scale military exercises of July, August, and November 1995, February and March 1996, and June 2001, which took place in Fujian Province adjacent to the Taiwan Straits. The March 1996 exercises included ballistic missile testing just 30 km off Taiwan and mobilized up to 150 000 troops (Drifte, 2003).

In February 1992, Beijing passed a law concerning territorial waters and contiguous areas in which it reiterated its claims over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, as well as the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. It legalized the use of force to secure such claims (Emmers, 2005). These policies culminated in the seizure of the Mischief Reef in the South China Sea by PLAN troops, discovered in February 1995. Given the economic importance of the shipping lines which run through the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea, this action negatively impacted the Japanese assessment of

regional security and the image of China (MOD, 2007). Of particular concern to Tokyo were increased activities of the PLAN in seas around Japan and within the EEZ claimed by Tokyo since 1997.

President Jiang Zemin repeatedly, and best known during his November 1998 state visit, criticized the Japanese government by raising questions related to war-crimes committed by the Japanese imperial army. He insisted on a written apology similar to the one issued to the Korean president who had visited Tokyo a month earlier. Jiang saw war-guilt as an issue to be raised in diplomatic relations with Japan as long as historical revisionism in the ranks of political leaders prevailed. However, after Jiang's visit, Chinese strategists began to realize that a more active and differentiated approach to foreign policy was necessary to advance China's interests (Mochizuki, 2005).

Although the Chinese government under Hu Jintao implemented a more balanced approach to regional security, the adoption of the Taiwan-Anti-Secession Law in March 2005 limited the trust in 'peacefully developing' China. This was accompanied by the continued emphasis of the central role of the PLA within the Chinese state. Defense budgets continued to grow with double-digit pace while little insight into the structure, capabilities, and leadership of the PLA was provided. The most important features of the PLA's modernization were programs related to the strategic (nuclear) forces and the Navy. The shooting down of an old weather satellite with a ballistic missile in January 2007 caused bewilderment among political observers. It is widely regarded as a test and demonstration of the ability to take action against the cornerstone of modern warfare: satellite-based communication, navigation, reconnaissance, and target acquisition. In particular, an upper-tier (BMD) system of the kind, the United States and Japan are about to deploy in the Western Pacific, relies on such technology.

Apart from these confrontational strategic practices which promoted the securitization of political issues and explicitly or implicitly defined particular states as 'the other', as rival, adversary, or even enemy, an increasing range of cooperative actions took place. Since 2003, Beijing has played a constructive role in coordinating the Six-Party Talks on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. China further reinforced its new-found role as a responsible power, as it supported UN sanctions in response to the August 2006 North Korean nuclear test. At the same time, in March 2008, the election of Ma Ying-jeou of the Guomindang as President of Taiwan heralded détente over the Taiwan Straits.

Japanese strategic practice relevant to bilateral relations with China since the 1990s mainly revolves around two issues: the approach of Japanese political figures to wartime history, and the transformation of national security policies. It is important to keep in mind that opinions about the wartime past declared by politicians matter because they inherently express ideas about contemporary Japan and its role in East Asia. Main issues were the visit to the Yasukuni-shrine by Prime Minister Hashimoto in July 1996 and the textbook controversies after June 1996 and April 2001. From 2001, annual visits to Yasukuni by Prime Minister Koizumi, in spite of Chinese and Korean protests, became a major controversy which influenced regional politics.

Changes in Japan's national security policy after 1989 are partly influenced by the impact of the 1991 Gulf War. At that time the fragility of Japan's post-Cold War security stance became clear as the United States expected more of its alliance partner than financing of military campaigns. The general trend to revise the Yoshida-doctrine was supported by the strategic practices of North Korea, China, and the United States as outlined above. In June 1992, the Diet passed the International Peace Cooperation Law which provided the legal framework to dispatch troops to the UN missions in Cambodia and Mozambique.

In February 1995, the US East Asian Strategic Review suggested an adjustment of the US strategy for the Asia-Pacific. It assigned Japan the central role of 'linchpin' of the post-Cold War regional security architecture. Tokyo, in November 1995, adopted a National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) which reoriented defense policies accordingly. The Joint Declaration on US–Japan Defense Cooperation of April 1996 and the signing of the US–Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation are highly significant. Instead of a delineated geographical area, the scope was now defined according to situational aspects of crises which threaten Japan's security (Soeya, 1998). In February 2005, the United States–Japan Security Consultative Committee issued a statement which announced the transformation and realignment of the US–Japan alliance for the future. It included an explicit comment on United States–Japan cooperation on the Taiwan question.[9]

9 US–Japan Security Consultative Committee, Joint Statement, 19 February 2005, Washington DC; available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/joint0502.html (last date accessed on 2 September 2008).

In December 2003, the Japanese government decided to introduce a BMD system in cooperation with the United States. Two aspects are of particular importance for China–Japan relations. First, in order to be effectively deployed, the BMD system requires extensive capabilities of integrated reconnaissance, surveillance as well as command and control systems. As a consequence, these technical requirements will lead to a significant integration of the Japanese and the US defense systems. Independent policy decisions by Japan will be complicated and the likelihood of entrapment will increase (Hughes, 2002). Second, the BMD system in the Western Pacific will be based on ships as platforms. The shield will therefore be mobile and could serve as a means of force protection in the event of a crisis. Despite the fact that North Korean actions strongly influenced Tokyo's decision to support and integrate into the US BMD system, it is now openly admitted that this project is directed towards 'rising' China and also reflects Tokyo's desire to make sure that the United States maintains its close relations with Japan (Hughes, 2007).

It was largely due to the collaboration of their armed forces in operations in the Middle East that Japan became a partner in security cooperation not only of the United States, but also Australia and other NATO members. This development also reflects the Japanese concept of 'value-oriented diplomacy' and the concept of an 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity'.[10] The discourse, conducted with reference to Asia and the emphasis on common values such as democracy and human rights, is an expression of views on China and not confined to the fight against terrorism.

Prime Minister Abe, soon after his election in October 2006, paid his first overseas state visit to Beijing and refrained from further visits to the Yasukuni shrine. The improvement in bilateral relations continued with the return visit by Premier Wen Jiabao to Japan in April 2007 and led to the highly symbolic port calls of a PLAN missile destroyer to Tokyo in November 2007 and a Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) missile destroyer to China in June 2008. Prime Minister Fukuda

10 Aso. T. 'Arc of freedom and prosperity: Japan's expanding diplomatic horizons', speech at the Japan Institute of International Affairs Semiar, Tokyo, 30 November 2006, available at http://www2.jiia.or.jp/pdf/kouenkai/061130_aso_speech_e.pdf. (last date accessed on 3 September 2008).

continued Abe's pragmatic policies when he visited Beijing in December 2007 and received Hu Jintao in Japan in May 2008. In June 2008, even a general agreement on the joint exploration of the Chunxiao (Shirakaba) natural gas field in the East China Sea was reached.

Highly integrated trade and financial flows, and geographical proximity in general, necessitate closer cooperation with China and South Korea. The need to coordinate monetary policies in the wake of the Asian financial crisis brought an opportunity for Tokyo and Beijing to demonstrate their responsible leadership in the region. The Japanese proposal of an Asian Monetary Fund failed, largely due to the opposition of the United States. Finally, the members of ASEAN + 3 established the Chiang Mai Initiative's currency swap agreements and implemented the Asian Bond Markets Initiative. Despite these new cooperative frameworks, the proceedings at the first East Asian Summit in December 2005 showed that Tokyo and Beijing did not share the same vision of a future regional architecture. They were not able to agree on a negotiating basis for a bilateral, let alone an East Asian, free trade agreement. The first trilateral Chinese–Japanese–South Korean summit meeting had to be postponed to December 2008 due to the lack of domestic political support and the subsequent rotation of LDP Prime Ministers.

Despite some positive trends which resulted in the settlement of all territorial disputes of China with Russia, and partly with Vietnam as well as India, its departure from using the history-card vis-à-vis Tokyo some flexibility to compromise on the exploitation of the Chunxiao gas field in the East China Sea, the dropping of the 'century of humiliation' discourse from public statements, the rapprochement with Taipei, and the constructive role on the Korean Peninsula, the identity crisis in domestic politics is set to continue for the time being. Ideas of '5000 years of glorious civilization' and the need to increase 'comprehensive national power' are still very much alive. The importance and sensitivity of the Tibet, Taiwan, South China, and East China Sea questions for national security continue to limit Beijing's flexibility in regional and international policy-making and may frustrate the goal of being seen as 'responsible great power'. In view of the immense load of domestic problems which threaten domestic stability and the CPC's legitimacy, the leadership is barely able to compromise on contentious issues with Japan without arousing public opinion, mainly through nationalist bloggers, and risking party internal rifts to exacerbate and become public. The agreement on

joint exploration of natural gas in the East China Sea has been stalled since summer 2008 as it is seen by many in China as a concession to Japan. Moreover, the weakness and frequent changes of Japanese Prime Ministers have meant that the prospects for a compromise to save face in Beijing and Tokyo further decreased. [11]

Japan has gone beyond its self-image as purely an economic power and is redefining the Yoshida doctrine. Tokyo is transforming its defense posture from a focus on territorial defense toward a comprehensive approach to regional and global security. However, Japan is struggling to define its new role in the region. Tokyo is adapting its national security strategy to new threat perceptions and is acquiring the corresponding capabilities. Despite the fact that it has been unable to forge a political consensus including a long-term strategy to engage China, to improve its relations with the Koreas, to define its regional interests independent from those of the United States, and to clarify Japan's global role. This suggests that in order to find its new role in East Asia, Tokyo had to normalize its relations with the United States and cultivate a multilateral orientation (Akaha, 1998). The alliance should be viewed as one of several pillars of Japanese foreign and security policies. The relations, especially with its Northeast Asian neighbors, needed to be addressed more pragmatically, actively, and directly. Only then could Japan become an East Asian political power and define itself according to the new realities as an important regional player and effectively promote regionalism in order to increase its national security. However, current political discourses almost solely concentrate on the alliance. An important feature of alliances is that they contribute to the general 'othering' of third parties. Some actors are singled out as main reason for why an alliance should be maintained. Thereby they privilege a nation's national security discourse in a way that alternative policy options are sidelined, if not completely ignored (Suh, 2004).[12] One consequence of alliance-related concerns on both sides is that despite an initial agreement to establish a military hotline in 1998, and despite its existence between China and the United States and China and South Korea, this basic confidence- and

11 Interviews by the author, Beijing, April 2009.

12 Ogawa, S. 'Japan, US out of step on DPRK/Ties a cornerstone of East Asian security, but cracks seen emerging', *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 8 May 2009, available at http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/20090508TDY04302.htm (last date accessed on 9 May 2009).

security-building measure has not yet been realized between China and Japan.[13]

As globalization is conductive to the emergence of East Asia as a region, the splitting forces of the Cold War era are weakening. China and Japan no longer exist next to each other, but with each other in East Asia. This increases the potential points of friction. Domestic challenges to the legitimacy of the ruling elites complicate pragmatic foreign policy-making. The two self-perpetuating de facto one-party governments in Beijing and Tokyo face challenges to their long-promoted official understandings of history and subsequently feel pressure to reinvent themselves (Tamamoto, 2005). Residual feelings of victimhood help to blame 'the other' and deflect pressures to change the existing structures and ways of thinking. As a result, old approaches to international relations prevail. It is in this context that Japan plays a significant role as the 'other' in Chinese policy discourses while China plays this role for Japan.

7 Conclusion

The way to overcome collective action problems lies in the formation of collective identities through the accurate redefinition of the representation of the 'self' and the 'other' by creating new understandings of 'self' according to the causal mechanisms discussed above (Wendt, 1994, p. 387). Wendt identifies self-restraint as a critical factor since actors need to overcome their fear of being engulfed, physically or psychologically, by those with whom they would identify. External constraints by a third party may facilitate or complicate the building of trust in this process (Wendt, 1999). Pye (1971), studying developing countries, as well as Habermas' (1975) analysis of political development in advanced industrialized countries, come to the conclusion that political leadership which enables social integration through functional governance is the necessary prerequisite to overcome political identity crises.

Recent strategic practice indicates that decision-makers in Beijing and Tokyo are restraining themselves in order to improve diplomatic relations. Over the last years, the awareness of the need to find, at least, a *modus vivendi*, in order to advance their respective national interest, has been rising. The limited willingness and ability to compromise,

13 Interviews by the author, Tokyo and Beijing, March, April 2009.

however, have not led to fundamental improvements as of today. Moreover, external factors, most importantly in the form of US policies toward the Asia-Pacific, seem to contribute to the drive to modernize the military in Japan and China as the political systems in Beijing and Tokyo appear to be struggling to adjust their views of their own and each other's roles in the changing domestic and regional conditions.[14] Therefore, they are unable to reduce the uncertainties that are a product of the rapid social and political changes which have occurred since the 1990s. These uncertainties subsequently constitute perceptions of new security threats which are perceived to have emerged since the 1990s.

Beijing is held hostage by its imperatives to maintain domestic stability by at least 8% GDP growth while preventing any split in the CPC's unity and quelling public protests, be they caused by domestic failures of government or foreign political compromises, especially with regard to Japan, Taiwan, and the United States. The narrow focus of security and foreign politics on the alliance make it difficult for Japan to properly assess its situation, and to identify its own strengths and weaknesses. Strategists are therefore caught in the trap to constantly worry about the state of Japan–United States and United States–China relations. Even pragmatic United States approaches to stabilize relations with China and North Korea are viewed with great scepticism by conservative Japanese politicians. In contrast to means of balancing, containment, and deterrence, bilateral and regional cooperation in East Asia would be able to contribute to the de-securitization of most of the contentious issues discussed. Threats to respective national security interests could be clarified when they are pragmatically addressed within a bilateral context and eventually become diluted within multilateral frameworks (Drifte, 2003).

The conclusion is that the current state of bilateral relations between Japan and China is not so much the result of contentions over history, a power shift or conflicting identities. Rather, it is the consequence of identity crises of the political systems in Beijing and Tokyo which seem to be unable to escape from the dilemmas produced by their own ways of thinking. The two political systems are 'deeply wedded to a particular place and time and cannot advance by merely denying their past (...)

14 AFP, 'US Ambassador urges Japan to boost defence spending' 20 May 2008; available at http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5h7u3-FqyL7wqN-RQFMFNFp5IxbZQ (last date accessed on 10 May 2009).

they must seek to come to terms with what they once represented even as they take on new forms and new contents' (Pye, 1971, p. 108). The rapid changes in the East Asian economic, security, and social environment often simplistically referred to as 'power shift', necessitate a 'paradigm shift' in Beijing and Tokyo, as well as in Washington, in order to allow the political systems to pragmatically address emerging challenges to their societies. The genuine will and the political consensus of Chinese and Japanese leaders to promote comprehensive East Asian regional cooperation is an unavoidable step.

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