CHINA’S BEHAVIOR IN MARITIME DISPUTE WITH ITS NEIGHBORS: 
THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD MODEL

A Thesis
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By

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This paper presents the “double-edged sword model” as a theoretical explanation for China’s puzzling behavior in maritime disputes with its neighbors. This paper argues that two factors are salient in determining a state’s strategy vis-a-vis its maritime neighbors: (i) increasing tensions with a third party and (ii) the perceived alignment behavior of the maritime neighbor. This paper argues that a state prefers a cooperation or escalation strategy rather than a delay strategy when there are rising tensions with a third party. Although, increasing tensions with a third party motivates the state to move from a delaying strategy, it would still be ambivalent between escalating or cooperating with its maritime neighbor. This necessitates the inclusion of a second variable. This paper argues that whether a state chooses cooperation or escalation depends on how a state perceives the alignment behavior of its rival claimants at the time. For China, this occurred with the United States’ pivot to Asia in 2009. Whether China escalated its maritime dispute or decided to cooperate depended on how it perceived the alignment behavior of its maritime neighbors, South Korea and Japan.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION: CHINA’S PUZZLING BEHAVIOR IN MARITIME DISPUTES

China’s recent behaviors in maritime disputes with its neighbors are puzzling for two reasons. Until early twenty-first century, China preferred to delay the maritime disputes and maintain the status quo\(^1\) following the Deng Xiaoping’s guideline to “shelve the dispute and leave it to the next generation.”\(^2\) Since 2009, however, China is proactively engaging in these maritime disputes. Recently, China has repeatedly dispatched Chinese Coast Guard ships and fighter airplanes near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and conducted extensive land reclamation projects in the South China Sea. In contrast, the level of tension in the Yellow Sea between South Korea and China over the jurisdiction of Ieodo/Suyan Rock (also known as Socotra Rock) and the maritime delimitation issues is kept low as China behaves more cooperatively. Also, while tensions were escalating in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, Seoul and Beijing agreed to start negotiations on maritime boundaries in the Yellow Sea at the bilateral summit in July 2014.\(^3\)

Why did China shift its strategy on maritime disputes from delay to more proactive approaches such as escalation and cooperation despite the fact that maintaining the status quo is more predictable and stable than risking cooperation or escalation? Why is China adopting two

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This paper presents the “double-edged sword model” as a theoretical explanation for China’s puzzling behavior in maritime disputes with its neighbors. This paper argues that two factors are salient in determining a state’s strategy vis-a-vis its maritime neighbors: (1) increasing tensions with a third party and (2) the alignment behavior of the maritime neighbor.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section analyzes the existing literature on China’s behavior in maritime disputes and discusses its limitations in explaining China’s recent behaviors. The second section presents the “double-edged sword model” and provides the theoretical explanation for a state’s adoption of cooperation, escalation, or delay strategies in maritime disputes. In this section, two variables of the model are also explained and four hypotheses of a state’s behavior in maritime dispute are introduced. The third section provides the case studies on China’s behavior in maritime disputes with South Korea and Japan from the mid-2000s to test the validity of the four hypotheses. The time frame is broken down into two time periods: 1) before the US pivot (2005-2009) and 2) after the US pivot to Asia (after 2009). The last section summarizes the findings and the implications of the research.

I. The Prevailing View: Assertive China, Defensive Strategic Culture

There is an extensive literature on China’s behavior in maritime dispute today. However, these existing explanations are often truncated. The most prominent view is the “China threat” school which attributes Beijing’s assertiveness in maritime disputes to the country’s growing
economic and military strength and the resulting changes in policy preferences. This explanation accounts for Beijing’s tension-escalatory behavior in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, because China’s recent assertiveness in these disputes correlates with its economic growth and military modernization. However, the China threat argument has limitations in explaining Beijing’s cooperative behavior in the Yellow Sea toward South Korea. Those who believe in the idea of a “defensive strategic culture” in China argue that the recent confrontational behaviors are defensive reactions to Japan and Southeast Asian countries’ attempts to change the status quo in their favor. However, the strategic culture argument does not explain why we did not observe similar reactions from China in the earlier periods when other maritime claimants made efforts to change the status quo in their favor. Some scholars attribute China’s recent proactive and discrepant behavior in maritime disputes to expanding bureaucratic agencies’ interests and the lack of policy coordination within the Chinese governmental system, and to Chinese leaders’ hypersensitivity to popular nationalism. However, these explanations only address China’s tension-escalatory behavior, not cooperative behavior. In other words, the increasing amount of the literature on China’s behavior in maritime disputes help us understand some part of Beijing’s strategic thinking, but not all. Although, China’s alarming behaviors draw more attention than its cooperative behaviors, analyzing the sources of cooperation holds no less importance, to have a systematic understanding of Beijing’s

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strategic thinking. Hence, this paper aims to analyze the source of cooperation in maritime disputes and present a model that provides a theoretical explanation for China’s tension-escalatory and cooperative behavior in these disputes.

II. The Source of Cooperation with Maritime Disputants

M.Taylor Fravel provides some theoretical explanations for the sources of cooperation in an interstate conflict in his book *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflicts in China’s Territorial Disputes*. According to Fravel, when there is a change in the external threat environment where a state maintains a territorial dispute, either a shift in the balance of power or balance of threat, a state has an incentive to cooperate in the dispute. This is because the relative value of improved ties with a rival claimant increases vis-a-vis the value of disputed land.\(^8\) This change towards cooperative behavior after the recognition of an external threat was instantiated at one point over an offshore island dispute. In 1957, China agreed to transfer White Dragon Tail Island to North Vietnam. Part of the reason for the transfer was to support North Vietnam in its conflict with the United States. As the US deepened its involvement in South Vietnam and reinforced US bilateral alliances in the region, China came to think that “strengthening an ally through a territorial concession was more important than holding out of whatever value the island might have in the future.”\(^9\) Fravel’s theory of cooperation was originally developed to explain how external threats affects China’s behavior in territorial disputes. However, his theory can be extended to explain China’s cooperative behaviors in an interstate conflict in more

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\(^9\) Ibid, 269.
general terms. This empirical evidence suggests that Beijing may compromise on smaller issues to achieve a favorable outcome on issues with more importance. Hence, this paper aims to expand Fravel’s logic of cooperation in territorial disputes to maritime disputes. Maritime disputes in this paper include island, fishery, and maritime boundaries delimitation disputes.

Based on the Fravel’s logic of cooperation, we should observe China cooperating with other maritime disputants in Asia, not only with South Korea. However, that is not the case in Asia today. These observations suggest that apart from changes in the external threat environment, there is another variable that affects China’s behavior in maritime disputes. What drives a state to adopt two extremely different approaches — cooperation or escalation — in response to rising external threat? Is it rational behavior? Is there a condition that makes cooperation more attractive than escalation? Or vice versa?

III. Theory: The Double-edged Sword Model

Here this paper presents the “double-edged sword model” to provide a theoretical explanation for China’s puzzling behaviors in maritime disputes in Asia today. In this paper, I argue that a state’s behavior in a maritime dispute with its neighbor is the product of (1) rising tension with a third party and (2) the alignment behavior of the neighboring state. In this model, there are three different actors: state A and B, which are neighboring states involved in a maritime dispute, and state C, which is a third party to the dispute. Hereafter, this paper addresses state A as a “receiver,” a state that adjusts its maritime strategy as a result of the two variables of the model: rising tension with a third party and alignment behavior of a neighboring state. State B is a “neighbor,” a neighboring state of a receiver state and a state that sends signals
of alignment to the receiver. State C refers to a “third party” that raises external threat in a
gerover’s peripheral environment. This paper argues that when there is a rising tension with a
third party (State C), the receiver (State A) will be more sensitive to the signals sent out by its
maritime neighbors (State B). It is because its neighbor (State B) can be its greatest enemy,
generating threats under its very nose, but also its best partner, assuaging its security concerns in
the near seas, if sufficiently assured. Thus, I name this model the double-edged sword model,
because a state’s neighbors can have either positive or negative effect on the state’s security, like
a double-edged sword.

**Elements: Three Strategies in Maritime Disputes**

This paper assumes that there are three strategies that a state can adopt in maritime
disputes: delay, cooperation, and escalation.\(^{10}\) *Delay strategy* indicates doing nothing. Under a
delay strategy, the government tries to shelve the dispute by not having any negotiations on
conflicting maritime claims such as maritime boundaries, and the ownership of or jurisdiction
right over islands, rocks, and reefs. *Cooperation* involves expressing the resolve to cooperate on
the issue, trying to coordinate the conflicting rights and interests through talks, and making
efforts to keep the level of tension in the dispute low. *Escalation* involves the threatened or
actual use of force to protect the state’s maritime rights and interests, making no effort to keep
tensions low and allowing nationalist sentiments regarding the maritime dispute to escalate.

\(^{10}\) Referred to Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, 16; Although, Fravel model is for China’s behavior
in territorial disputes, author thought that his logic of cooperation arising from external threat can be
applied to China’s behavior in maritime dispute. However, my definition of delay, delay, cooperation, and
escalation is different from that of Fravel.
Two Variables: Major Components of Strategic Calculation

Independent Variable 1. Rising Tension with Third Party

In general, delaying is the dominant strategy in maritime disputes, since maintaining the status quo is more stable than risking cooperation or escalation. However, when a state perceives an increasing external threat in its peripheral environment due to rising tension with a third party, a state’s strategic calculation of delaying the disputes changes. Robert Jervis’s “system effect” theory explains this type of strategic calculation on the part of a state. According to Jervis, due to the interconnectedness of systems, “the relations between two actors are often determined less by their common and conflicting bilateral interests than by their relations with other actors.”\(^{11}\) Delaying becomes a suboptimal strategy for a state to pursue under rising tensions with a third party. Contests over maritime issues with neighbors become costly in two different ways. On the one hand, maintaining the maritime disputes foster the aggressive reputation or hostile image of the state, which can (1) limit the state’s ability to form alignment with neighboring states and (2) induce neighbors to increase internal or external balancing efforts against the state.\(^{12}\) Hence, under rising tension with a third party, a state has incentives to shift its strategy from delay to cooperation to create a favorable peripheral environment. On the other hand, maintaining contention over the maritime periphery becomes costly due to the greater strategic importance of securing control over the area to the state. Such a strategic calculation is based on the Mahanian framework which advocates gaining “command of the sea to secure its use of oneself and to deny the use to the enemy.”\(^{13}\) Hence, under a rising tension with a third party, a state will shift its

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\(^{12}\) Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, 5.

strategy from delay to escalation either to put an end to the dispute by use of force or to intimidate its neighbors into compliance with its interests. So, ultimately, the increasing costs of a prolonged maritime dispute can lead to two different behaviors. However, under what conditions would a state to conclude that cooperation is a better strategy under rising tension with a third party than escalation? Or vice versa?

Independent Variable 2. Alignment Behavior of Maritime Neighbors

Third party external threats not only motivate a state to shift its strategy from delay to cooperation or escalation, but also its selection between cooperation and escalation. A state assesses whether cooperation or escalation is the more effective strategy for creating a favorable peripheral environment based on the signals sent out by its maritime neighboring state. In international relations, signals are exchanged between states intentionally and unintentionally through statements and behaviors. Here, I define alignment behavior as a form of signals sent by neighboring states. The spectrum of alignment behaviors discussed in this paper involves military, political, and economic policies. Alignment signals can be decomposed into two parts: alignment choices and the intensity of the signal. The alignment choice signals are: (1) a neighboring state’s signal for alignment with a third party and (2) a neighboring state’s signal for alignment with a receiver state. The intensity of the alignment signals are in the following

order: policies of military engagement > policies of diplomatic engagement ≥ policies of economic engagement. Alignment behaviors regarding security issues send the strongest signal to a state because a state’s ultimate goal is survival, and non-security goals such as economic prosperity are secondary to hard security threats. Diplomatic signals of alignment such as public statements of intent by state leaders or high-level official visits send a moderate signal, because it is a costly tying hands signal. Tying hands signal works by creating audience costs that state’s leaders will suffer ex post due to the actions of domestic and external political audiences if they do not follow through on their commitment. Policies of economic engagement send the weakest signal or at best equal the signal intensity of diplomatic engagement, because with the exception of a few states, economic interdependence between states is high and states constantly trade and engage with each other in the economic realm despite diplomatic frictions. Based on alignment signals, if a state perceives that the alignment behavior of a neighboring state is positive for their security, then the receiver state cooperates to put an end to maritime disputes or to reduce bilateral tension between them. On the other hand, if a state perceives that the alignment behavior of a neighboring state is negative for their security, then the receiver state uses force to put an end to the dispute or intimidates its neighbor into compliance with its interests. The theoretical basis of this logic is Thomas C. Schelling’s “strategic theory,” which argues that a state devises its strategies in a context where it can


anticipate a likely response of others whose reactions could facilitate its efforts. In sum, a state’s behaviors in maritime disputes with its neighbors are associated with its systematic efforts to secure stable peripheral environment.

FIGURE 1. The Double-edged Sword Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alignment Behavior of Neighbor</th>
<th>Rising Tension with Third Party HIGH</th>
<th>Rising Tension with Third Party LOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVE</td>
<td>COOPERATION (I)</td>
<td>DELAY (II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGATIVE</td>
<td>ESCALATION (III)</td>
<td>DELAY (IV)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: By author

Analysis of the Double-edged Sword Model

The analysis of the four quadrants (see Figure 1) is as follows:

Quadrant I. COOPERATION: If a state perceives rising tensions with a third party and the alignment behavior of a neighboring state is positive for its security, then the state perceives that cooperation strategy in maritime dispute is the optimal way to ensure its security. This is because a state perceives that the probability of balancing the threat from the third party by aligning with the neighbor or preventing the neighbor from joining the third party’s coalition is high. Hence, a state chooses to cooperate on maritime issues with its neighbor to avoid fostering an aggressive reputation or a hostile image, which might limit its ability to align with the neighbor or push the neighbors close to the third party. Especially, when the disputed maritime area is adjacent to its mainland, a state is more inclined to cooperate, because once the maritime disputant joins its rival’s coalition, the contested water could become a front line that endangers

the state’s security. The cooperation strategy will take the form of expressing the resolve to cooperate on the issue, trying to coordinate the conflicting rights and interests through talks, and making efforts to keep the level of tension of the dispute low. A state’s adoption of a cooperation strategy in maritime dispute is a type of charm offensive for preventing and disrupting any possible alignment against the state.

**Quadrant II. DELAY:** If a state does not perceive rising tensions with a third party, then the state prefers to delay maritime disputes, because maintaining the status quo is more predictable and stable than risking cooperation and escalation. Hence, although the alignment behavior of a neighbor is positive for its security, the state does not have the incentive to risk cooperation or escalation in the absence of a high external threat from a third party. Under a delay strategy, the state will try to shelve the dispute by not having any negotiations on conflicting maritime claims such as maritime boundaries, the ownership of or jurisdiction right over islands, rocks, and reefs, and resources.

**Quadrant III. ESCALATION:** If a state perceives rising tensions with a third party and the alignment behavior of a neighbor is negative for its security, then the receiver state concludes that escalation strategy is the optimal way to ensure its security. This is because the state perceives that the probability of improving ties with the neighbor or preventing it from forming a coalition with the rival is low. Hence, the receiver state chooses to use force to put an end to the dispute or intimidate its neighbor into compliance with its interests. Also, under an escalation

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strategy, the state will make no efforts to keep tension lows and will let nationalist sentiments regarding the maritime dispute escalate. A state’s adoption of an escalation strategy in a maritime dispute is an indicator of the state’s perception of the neighbor as a threat to its security.

**Quadrant IV. DELAY:** If a state does not perceive a rising tension with a third party and the alignment behavior of a neighbor is negative to its security, the state prefers to delay maritime disputes. It is because the state does not have any incentive to risk cooperation or escalation under such circumstances. Under these circumstances, maintaining the status quo by delaying the dispute is better than risking cooperation or escalation.

**IV. Case Studies: South Korea-China and Japan-China Maritime Disputes**

**Case Selections**

To test the validity of the Double-edged Sword Model, this paper analyzes China’s behavior toward South Korea and Japan in maritime disputes from 2005 to 2015. The time frame of analytical interest starts from the mid-2000s, because from this period Beijing increasingly approached maritime issues not only in the context of commercial value, but also geo-strategic interests, and Chinese navy ships started to conduct operations away from home waters.\(^{21}\)\(^{22}\) The

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\(^{22}\) According to Alfred Thayer Mahan, a state’s understanding of sea power develops in following order: recognizing the importance of securing access to sea for commercial, political, and military value. In other words, if a state recognizes the geo-strategic value of having control over sea, then it implies that the state’s comprehension of sea power has fully developed. Referred to: Alfred Thayer Mahan,
time frame is broken down into two time periods: 1) before the US pivot (2005-2009) and 2) after the US pivot (after 2009). These two time frames allow us to test the impact of rising tension between China and the US on Beijing’s behavior in maritime disputes with its neighbors. Although, the US officially announced "the US pivot to Asia" in 2011, I set 2009 as the inflection point of China’s changing threat perception in this paper. It is because Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s decision to make her first overseas trip to Asia in February 2009 clearly demonstrated Asia’s centrality to US interests and some key features of the US pivot to Asia emerged in 2009. China’s coastline extends approximately 145,000 kilometers, and it has maritime disputes with six out of its eight neighbors at sea. In this paper, the receiver state is “China,” the neighbors are “South Korea” and “Japan,” and the third party is “the US.”

Among six cases, I chose China’s maritime disputes with South Korea and Japan as case studies due to the strategic significance Beijing places on Northeast Asia in particular. South Korea and Japan are important security concerns for China not only because they are immediately adjacent countries, but also because two countries are the key allies of the US, and they form the northern arc of “the first island chain” that tightly hem in China. According a group of Chinese naval combat systems engineers, the first island chain serves as the inflection point of China’s threat perception, because many of China's wealthy coastal cities are within range of long-range, precision-strike weapons deployed along the chain, but major straits and

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23 Jeffrey A.Bader who was the senior director for Asian affairs on the National Security Council in the first Obama Administration said in his memoir that Hilary’s visit was a part of laying the foundation for the US pivot to Asia. Refer to Jeffrey A.Bader, *Obama and China’s Rise: An Insider’s Account of America’s Asia Strategy*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2012), 9.
channels in the region are under the control of other countries. Also, China’s strategic perception of the first island chain today is partly path dependent. Historically, Chinese defense analysts viewed the US presence near the first island chain as “the most concrete expression of American hostility toward the newly established People’s Republic of China…and a geographic barrier designed to thwart the expansion of communism from the Asian mainland” during the Cold War. Today, the Chinese government perceives the US’s military power and its allies along the first island chain as the evidence of the US’s intention to enforce a “C-shaped encirclement” of China. Furthermore, as China rises, Beijing is expanding its sphere of influence to the maritime sphere and increasingly views the first island chain as a maritime straitjacket that restricts its nautical activities and imposes challenges to its coastal defense forces by obstructing China’s path to the open seas.

Currently, China and South Korea have the problem of overlapping Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claims; the illegal fishery issue in the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea; and conflicting jurisdiction claims over Ieodo/Suyan Rock (also known as Socotra Rock internationally), because each side claim that the rock lies within its respective EEZ. The rock lies on one of the main shipping routes that connect the Yellow Sea and South China Sea. China and Japan have unresolved issues of overlapping EEZ claims and illegal fishing in the East China Sea, the dispute over the status of Okinotorishima, and the territorial dispute over the

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Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Currently, Japan maintains administrative control of the islands and the islands are situated closely to key international shipping routes. Some might question my selection of the cases, because South Korea and Japan are formal treaty-based alliances of the United States, which is the strongest alignment signal. I acknowledge the fact that these two countries are the key allies of the US in Asia. However, the US allies still send alignment signals to China through their decisions in alliance commitment to the US and decisions to cooperate with China in the political and economic realm. I believe that these alignment signals sent by the key allies are stronger than the signals sent by non-allies, because the cost of distancing from the US or aligning with China is higher for them. Hence, even the small changes in their alignment behavior should be given more weight.

China’s Expected Behavior in Maritime Disputes under the Model

Following figure 2 is the summary of China’s expected behavior in maritime disputes with South Korea and Japan under the Double-edged Sword model.

**FIGURE 2. China’s Expected Behavior in Maritime Disputes under the Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVE for China</td>
<td><strong>COOPERATION (I)</strong></td>
<td><strong>DELAY (II)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Park Geun-hye</td>
<td>Abe Shinzo - Fukuda Yasuo - Aso Taro - Yukio Hatoyama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGATIVE for China</td>
<td><strong>ESCALATION (III)</strong></td>
<td><strong>DELAY (IV)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Korea (2010-2012)</td>
<td>South Korea (2008-2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lee Myung-bak</td>
<td>Lee Myung-bak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan (2010-2015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kan Naoto - Noda Yoshihiko - Abe Shinzo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: By author

Under the Double-edged Sword model, this paper expects China to demonstrate all three behaviors — cooperation, delay, escalation — from mid-2000s to 2015. The first case study is the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008-2009). Although, South Korea increased its commitment to the US-South Korea alliance during this period, there was no rising tension between the US and China. So, the model predicts that China will adopt a delay strategy (Quadrant IV) toward the Lee administration. The second case study is Abe Shinzo, Fukuda Yasuo, Aso Taro, and Yukio Hatoyama administrations (2006-2009). During this period, regardless of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) or Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Japan made
efforts to strengthen its ties with China. However, there was no tension between the US and China, so the model predicts that China will adopt a delay strategy (Quadrant II) toward Japan.

After the US announcement of the pivot to Asia, there have been two South Korean administrations: the Lee Myung-bak administration and the Park Geun-hye administration. Under the Lee administration (2010-2013), the US-South Korea alliance was at the zenith and Sino-South Korea relations was at a nadir. In this case, the model predicts that China will adopt escalation strategy (Quadrant III). On the other hand, the Park administration (2013-Present) straddles between the US and China as these two great powers compete for the spheres of influence in the region. Hence, the model predicts that China will adopt a cooperation strategy (Quadrant I) toward the Park administration. The last case study is the Kan Naoto, Noda Yoshihiko, and Abe Shinzo administrations (2010-Present). All three administrations of Japan positively responded to the US rebalance to Asia and increased internal and external balancing efforts against China. Thus, the model predicts that China will escalate (Quadrant III) maritime disputes with Japan during this period.

**FIRST PHASE: Before the US Pivot to Asia (2005-2009)**

**Independent Variable 1. No Rising Tension with the US**

From 2005 to 2009, China had a relatively low external threat perception, because the US and China maintained cooperative relations during this period. Although, President George W. Bush labeled China as a “strategic competitor, not a strategic partner” and vowed to do "whatever it takes" to defend Taiwan in his first term (2001-2005), the level of tension between Beijing and Washington remained low during this period. Partly, it was because the Bush
administration prioritized the Middle East agendas after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. But also, President Jiang Zemin’s expression of sympathy for the United States and the families of the victims of the September 11 and decision to support Washington in the war on terror contributed to the thaw in the US-China relations.\textsuperscript{31} Hence, despite the “China threat” argument raised by the neoconservative in the US and the Chinese leadership transition from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao during this period, the cooperative US-China relations from the first term of Bush administration continued in his second term.\textsuperscript{32}

In 2005, with President Bush’s second term, the US government shaped its policy toward China based on the concept of “responsible stakeholder.” President Bush openly emphasized that the US must “engage China in a candid, constructive, and cooperative relationship” and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that “we want China as a global partner.”\textsuperscript{33} In this context, the Bush and Hu administration upgraded US-China bilateral relations by initiating the U.S.-China Strategic Dialogue in August 2005. In September 2005, then-Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick said at the National Committee on US-China Relations that China should become a “responsible stakeholder,” and this new term caused consternation among Chinese interpreters due to its ambiguity.\textsuperscript{34} Especially, when the concept was introduced in the 2006


National Security Strategic Report and Quadrennial Defense Review, it faced critical official and popular response. However, the controversy did not spoil the overall cooperative relations between the two countries, illustrated by Beijing and Washington’s cooperation on the North Korea issue at the Six-Party Talks.

**Independent Variable 2-1. Alignment Behavior of South Korea: Negative toward China**

The alignment behavior of South Korea in 2005-2009 was not favorable to China. Although, the Lee Myung-bak administration agreed to upgrade South Korea-China relations from a comprehensive cooperative partnership to a “strategic cooperative partnership” in 2008, Seoul’s relations with Beijing under Lee were closer to mutual distrust and diplomatic friction than cooperation. Partly, it was because the Lee administration consistently stressed strengthening the alliance with the US as South Korea’s top diplomatic priority. This was an expected result because President Lee Myung Bak emphasized reinforcement of the alliance as one of his presidential campaign promises. Although, South Korea-US and South Korea-China relations are not always perceived as a zero sum game by China, Beijing expressed discomfort about Lee administration’s active advancement of the US-ROK alliance into a more comprehensive, multidimensional "strategic alliance.” In 2008, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said that the US-ROK alliance is a historical relic and a vestige of the Cold War

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37 Ibid.
system. Also, improving relations between South Korea and Japan invited concerns in China that South Korea might join efforts to encircle China or strengthen trilateral coordination with the US and Japan in response to any potential cross-strait crisis. President Lee made a visit to Japan in April 2008, the first South Korean state leader to visit in four years, and resumed shuttle diplomacy between Seoul and Tokyo. The high-level diplomatic exchanges between South Korea and Japan recorded 15 times from 2008 to 2009. Furthermore, second North Korean nuclear test on May 25, 2009, had further consolidated the US-South Korea alliance.

**Delay (Quadrant IV): China’s Behavior in Maritime Disputes with South Korea in 2005-2009**

Under the double-edged sword model, the optimal strategy for China in maritime disputes with South Korea from 2005 to 2009 is to delay (Quadrant IV), because China lacked tension with the US, while South Korea’s alignment behavior was unfavorable to China’s security. Indeed, China demonstrated a behavior that can be understood as a delay during this period. Since 1996, South Korea and China had held annual talks on the delineation of maritime boundaries to resolve the issue of overlapping EEZs between the two countries in the Yellow

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Sea. However, the talks stopped in 2009, and the reason for the halting is still not clear. Some say that it was because maritime boundaries delineation tasks were transferred to the newly created maritime affairs branch under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China in 2009. Their logic is that since the branch was not only in charge of maritime boundaries delineation tasks, but also territorial and maritime disputes, it was preoccupied with other rising maritime disputes with other countries. It is a reasonable conjecture to make because China’s territorial disputes with its ASEAN neighbors in the South China Sea escalated rapidly in 2009. However, given that the two governments had almost regularized the meeting by having talks more than fourteen times, the halting of maritime boundaries talk between South Korea and China should be taken more seriously than the notion that Beijing just got “busier.” Also, considering the fact that China tends to slow down or expedite diplomatic relations strategically depending on its will and intent, the halting of maritime boundaries talk should be understood as China’s strategic decision to delay the dispute after a cost-benefit calculation regarding the situation. Based on the analysis, I argue that China’s behavior in the maritime dispute with South Korea from 2005-2009 supports the hypothesis in Quadrant IV (DELAY): If a state perceives a low external threat

44 Refer to Richard Javad Heydarian, “China Splits Philippines Politics,” Asia Times, 10 October 2012, accessed at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/NJ10Ae02.html 1 December 2015; For example, China strategically began slowing down inspections of papayas, mangoes, coconuts and pineapples from the Philippines to retaliate for the flare-up in the connected waters in the South China Sea. The economic stakes of falling afoul of China were high for the Philippines.
from the third party and the alignment behavior of a neighbor is not favorable to its security, then the state will delay the maritime dispute.

**Independent Variable 2-2. Alignment Behavior of Japan: Positive toward China**

After Koizumi Junichiro left the office in 2006, Japan and China exchanged signals to forge a “mutually beneficial strategic relationship.” In October 2006, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, who succeeded Koizumi, visited China on his first state visit. The Chinese leadership warmly greeted this trip, which came after years of frosty bilateral relations between the two countries. In April 2007, Premier Wen Jiabao also made a visit to Japan. Particularly, during the Fukuda Yasuo administration (September 2007-September 2008), China-Japan bilateral relations improved greatly, which was epitomized by Hu Jintao’s state visit to Japan in 2008. President Hu’s visit in May 2008 clearly signaled that Japan-China relations had improved, because he was the first Chinese President to visit Japan in over a decade. During the visit, President Hu and Prime Minister Fukuda produced a joint statement on comprehensive promotion of a “mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests.”

The Aso Taro administration (September 2008-September 2009) also continued the positive momentum in Japan-China relations from the previous administration. During his visit to Beijing in October 2008, for the 30th anniversary of the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China, Prime Minister Aso reiterated the

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importance of a “mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests.”\(^\text{47}\) The Hatoyama Yukio administration (September 2009-June 2010) stepped out even further and suggested a unified Asian currency and the creation of an “East Asian Community (EAC)” led by China, Japan, and South Korea in 2009.\(^\text{48}\) Hatoyama’s Foreign Minister, Okada Katsuya even indicated that the United States should be excluded from the EAC, which raised concerns about US-Japan alliance in the US.\(^\text{49}\) Moreover, while US-Japan bilateral relations soured due to the relocation of the Futenma Marine Air Station in Okinawa,\(^\text{50}\) a massive group of high-ranking Japanese headed by Ozawa Ichiro, the Secretary General of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), made a four-day visit to China in December 2009. The fact that the delegation included more than 600 participants drew much attention, because no Japanese delegation to China had ever numbered more than 100 people. Then-Secretary General Ozawa declared the "future Sino-Japanese relationship as the 21st-century partnership in human history” during the visit. China’s major state-owned media also said that the delegation’s visit heralded the beginning of good ties between Beijing and Tokyo.\(^\text{51}\) The Japanese government’s promotion of diplomatic engagement with the Chinese government during 2005-2009 indicated that Japan wanted to align with China.

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\(^{47}\) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “”My Personal Conviction regarding Japan-China Relations” Remarks by H.E. Mr. Taro Aso, Prime Minister of Japan at the Reception to Commemorate the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People’s Republic of China,” (Great Hall of the People, Beijing, China: 24 October 2008).

\(^{48}\) Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, “Address by H.E. Dr.Yukio Hatoyama Prime Minister of Japan, Japan's New Commitment to Asia: Toward the Realization of an East Asian Community,” (Singapore: 15 November 2009), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/hatoyama/statement/200911/15singapore_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/hatoyama/statement/200911/15singapore_e.html).


\(^{50}\) Ibid.

Delay (Quadrant II): China’s Behavior in Maritime Disputes with Japan in 2005-2009

Under the double-edged sword model, China’s optimal strategy in maritime disputes with Japan from 2005 to 2009 was to delay (Quadrant II). Although Japan signaled its receptiveness toward alignment with China from 2005 to 2009, China did not have incentives to risk cooperation or escalation because there was no rising tension with the US. In June 2008, reflecting the warm diplomatic relations between two countries, Beijing and Tokyo made an agreement to jointly develop the contested Chunxiao (in Chinese)/Shirakaba (in Japanese) gas field, which is located in the area where the two countries’ EEZ claims overlap. However, it is doubtful whether Beijing had a genuine will to cooperate with Japan over the Chunxiao/Shirakaba gas field. Even though breakthroughs were made on paper, joint development at the site never happened, and co-production has not been very successful. Moreover, the outbreak of contention over the Tianwaitian gas field, another gas field near Chunxiao, in 2009 further supports the inconclusive nature of the agreement made in 2008. In January 2009, the Japanese government lodged repeated protests against China for continuing exploration work at Tianwaitian. Japan claimed that the activities violated the 2008 agreement, however, the Chinese government’s official response was that “the Tianwaitian gas and oil field is located in China's exclusive economic zone and has nothing to do with the principled

consensus reached between China and Japan on the East China Sea issue.”\(^{54}\) In sum, although it appeared as if China was making compromises to Japan and moving away from its policy line of “no joint developments in China’s indisputable near sea area,” in effect, nothing changed. Hence, China's behavior in maritime disputes with Japan in 2005-2009 supports the hypothesis in Quadrant II (DELAY): If a state perceives a low external threat from a third party, then the state will delay its maritime dispute with a neighboring state, although the alignment behavior of the neighbor is favorable to the state. This is because, in the absence of a high external threat from a third party, the state does not have the incentive to risk cooperation or escalation.

**SECOND PHASE: After the US Pivot to Asia (2010-2015)**

**Independent Variable 1. Rising Tensions with the US**

After 2009, China started to perceive a greater external threat due to the rising tensions with the US in the region as a consequence of China’s continuous growth as a global power and the US’s rebalance to Asia. Hillary Clinton’s trip to Asia in 2009 revealed Asia’s centrality in US interests, because Clinton's first overseas trip as Secretary of State was to Asia and she was the first US Secretary of State to visit the ASEAN Secretariat.\(^{55}\) In addition, President Obama’s participation in the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2010 and the US’s membership into the EAS in


\(^{55}\) U.S. Department of State, “Beginning a New Era of Diplomacy in Asia: Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Secretary of State, Remarks With ASEAN Secretary General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan,” (Jakarta, Indonesia: 18 February 2009), accessed at http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2009a/02/119422.htm 1 December 2015.

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2011 also suggested the US’s pivot to Asia. In particular, President Obama’s speech at Australian Parliament in November 2011 raised China’s external threat perception, because during the speech he announced that the US will deploy 2,500 Marines in Australia to strengthen alliances in Asia. In response to President Obama’s announcement, Liu Weimin, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, said “it may not be quite appropriate to intensify and expand military alliances and may not be in the interest of countries within this region.”

Furthermore, the enunciation of the January 2012 US Defense Strategy Review Report played a seminal role in heightening the external threat perception of China. Under the new defense policy, the Obama administration made a strategic military decision to redeploy American air and sea power to Asia by 2020, to shore-up alliances (Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand), and to deepen partnerships with emerging powers (India and Indonesia) for “deep engagement” and “forward defense” in Asia. The Ministry of National Defense of China criticized that the US development of the Air-Sea Battle Concept (ASBC) for joint operation in Asia is a destabilizing idea based on a Cold War mentality that advocates confrontation and stresses the security of the US at the expense of the security of the

others. Moreover, some military analysts and People’s Liberation Army (PLA) scholars asserted that the ASBC implies that the US military is thinking of China as the new Soviet Union and warned that such a concept clearly directed at China could result in greater US-China military conflict. From China’s perspective, the US’s continued military rebalance to Asia despite President Xi Jinping’s suggestion of a “new type of great power relations” at the Sunnylands summit in June 2013 was perceived as the US’s rejection of Xi’s suggestion of cooperation under the security dilemma. In other words, whether it was intended or not, the US pivot had the effect of confirming China’s fear of containment or encirclement by the US and its allies. It increased China’s perception of threat in the peripheral environment and let a fear and sense of vulnerability drive China’s foreign policy.

Given rising tensions with the US and continuously growing Chinese power, the Chinese government felt the need to maintain the stability in its maritime periphery for its continuous rise during the period of strategic opportunity extending to 2020. This belief was based on the observation that only the power that constructed a strategic peripheral belt to support its rise grew to be a successful great power. In this context, the Chinese government announced two

63 Nathan and Scobell, China’s Search for Security, xiii.
65 Li Yonghui, “Constructing a Strategic Peripheral Belt to Support the Wings of China’s Rise,” CIR 23, no. 6; According to Li Yonghui, Professor and the Dean of the School of International Relations, Beijing
new goals: becoming a “strong maritime power” and reviving “peripheral diplomacy.” Under these new goals, the importance placed by the Chinese government on the maritime periphery has increased. Starting with then-President Hu Jintao’s speech to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party in 2012, China started to call for more efforts to enhance its capacity for exploiting marine resources, safeguarding maritime rights and interests, and building China into a maritime power. On October 2013, at a conference on diplomatic work held in Beijing, President Xi stressed that good diplomatic relations with neighboring countries are crucial for making China a prosperous, strong, culturally advanced, harmonious and modern socialist country. In June 2014, at a national meeting on frontier and coastal defense, President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of building a strong and solid frontier defense network for both territorial land and water.

Foreign Studies University, the United States is a hugely successful cases that has grown up as a superpower with the aid of its strategic surrounding belt, Canada to the north and Mexico to the South. On the other hand, Germany and Japan are the examples of great powers that faced endgame when they failed to construct strategic peripheral belt.


Independent Variable 2-1. Alignment Behavior of South Korea after the US Pivot to Asia

Lee Myung-bak Administration’s Alignment Behavior (2010-2013): Negative toward China

The US-South Korea relations and China-South Korea relations are not necessarily zero-sum relations, but the Lee Myung-bak administration’s consistent efforts to strengthen the US-South Korea alliance heightened China’s concern about encirclement by the US and its allies, especially when President Obama said the US-South Korea alliance is the “linchpin” of security not only for South Korea and the United States, but also for the Pacific as a whole. It sent a strong signal to China that Seoul and Washington became militarily closer than ever, because the term “linchpin” had been reserved for describing the US-Japan alliance. Also, China’s response to the Cheonan naval ship sinking on March 26, 2010, by North Korea further deepened the rift between the two countries. South Korea expected China to stay on the side of Seoul as a strategic partner in punishing Pyongyang by using the mechanisms of the UN. However, China refused to take a position and even blocked some of the international efforts to punish North Korea. China’s uncooperative behavior seriously disappointed Seoul, so the Lee administration continued to strengthen the US-South Korea alliance.70 In July 2010, in response to the sinking of the Cheonan, the US and South Korea planned to conduct a massive joint naval exercise called “Operation Invincible Spirit” in the Yellow Sea. However, due to the Chinese government’s strong objection, the exercise site was relocated to the East Sea/Sea of Japan. A Chinese spokesperson expressed Beijing’s displeasure by saying that “we firmly oppose foreign military vessels or planes entering the Yellow Sea and other waters adjacent to China to engage in

activities that would impact on its security and interests.”\textsuperscript{71} The exercise invited strong protest from China because the US Navy planned to send the aircraft carrier USS George Washington into the Yellow Sea, which is located between China and the Korean peninsula, for the exercise.\textsuperscript{72} However, after the Yeonpyeong Island shelling in November 2010, the US and South Korea carried out the joint military exercise in the Yellow Sea and the US aircraft carrier USS George Washington joined the exercise despite China’s strong opposition.\textsuperscript{73} In sum, during the Lee Myung-bak administration, South Korea sent increasing signals of alignment with the US, which made China perceive South Korea as a resolute ally of the US, who is unlikely to align with China.

**Escalation(Quadrant III): China’s Behavior in Maritime Disputes with Lee Administration**

Under the double-edged sword model, the optimal strategy for China would be escalation in maritime disputes with the Lee Myung-bak (2009-2012) administration. This is because China perceived a high external threat from the US and the Lee government sent a strong signal that South Korea is a resolute ally of the US (Quadrant III). Indeed, the Chinese government engaged in behaviors that raised tensions with South Korea over maritime disputes during the Lee administration. For instance, the Chinese government strengthened coastal and offshore security through intimidation or the use of force during this period. According to the 2012 report issued by the National Coast Guard of South Korea, only 7 Chinese government vessels and 3

\textsuperscript{71} Bonnie Glaser and Brittany Billingsley, “US-China Relations: Tensions Rise and Fall, Once Again,” *Comparative Connections*, (October 2010).
\textsuperscript{72} Mearsheimer, “The Tragedy,” 372.
government airplanes made an appearance near Ieodo in 2007, but the number increased to 36 vessels and 25 airplanes in 2012.74

Moreover, the Chinese government’s behavior after the illegal fishery trawler incident in 2010 also suggests that China adopted an escalation strategy toward the Lee government. In December 2010, a Chinese fishing vessel that intruded into the exclusive economic zone of South Korea to conduct illegal fishing and capsized while evading the South Korean Coast Guard. In the incident, one Chinese fisherman died, one disappeared, and four Korean Coast Guardsmen were seriously injured. Although, the fault of the incident lies with the Chinese vessel engaged in illegal fishery, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhang Yu strongly demanded that South Korean government should punish the responsible South Korean personnel for the incident and demanded Seoul to provide proper compensation to Beijing for the incident. Due to the audacious attitude of the Chinese government, the fishery trawler incident evolved into a diplomatic row between the two countries.75 Also, in December 2011, there was an incident in which a South Korean Coast Guard officer was stabbed to death at the hands of Chinese fishermen while conducting an operation to apprehend a Chinese vessel illegally fishing in the South Korean EEZ. Seoul lodged a strong protest against the Chinese government for failing to rein in illegal fishing by their nationals after the incident. However, despite the strong request for an apology from the South Korean government, the Chinese government maintained their audacious attitude. Rather than expressing sincere apology, Chinese Foreign Ministry

spokesman Liu Weimin stated that “we expect the South Korean government to protect the legitimate rights of Chinese fishermen and treat them in a humane way.” The Chinese government’s brazen and unapologetic behavior after the illegal fishery trawler incident in 2010 and 2011 illustrates that the Chinese government did not have an incentive to stop the incident from escalating further.

Furthermore, when the issue was about to be settled, Chinese media reported pictures of the Korean Coast Guard confronting with the fishing vessel, thus instigating nationalism among the Chinese public. Under an authoritarian system like China, if the government has a diplomatic incentive to repress nationalist activities, it can censor sensational media reports on contentious issues that might provoke nationalism, although such censorship can be costly. However, the fact that nationalist sentiment grew after the 2010 illegal fishery incident suggests that China made no efforts to keep tensions low and let nationalist sentiments regarding the maritime dispute escalate. On top of that, at the High-Level Strategic Talks held on December 2011, the South Korean government suggested the establishment of a ‘High-Level Permanent Consultative Body between China and South Korea’ to cooperate in the eradication of illegal

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78 Accord to Jessica Chen Weiss’s study of 92 protest attempts from 1985 to 2012 finds that Chinese authorities restrained or prevented more demonstrations for the purpose of diplomatic signaling. “For example, in 2001, the Chinese government repressed a nascent anti-American protest in order to indicate its willingness to negotiate a solution to the crisis generated by a collision between a Chinese fighter jet and a U.S. spy plane. In 2005, on the other hand, Beijing added muscle to its campaign against the proposal to grant Japan a permanent seat on the UN Security Council by allowing anti-Japanese protests.” Referred to Jessica Chen Weiss, Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China’s Foreign Relations, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
fishing in the Yellow Sea. However, the answer that came back from Zhang Zhijun, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs who participated in the talk as the representative of China, was very reserved and equivocal.79

Another case in point is Chinese government’s behavior regarding Ieodo, the rock located in contested waters between China and South Korea in the Yellow Sea. After a news report about President Lee Myung-bak’s comment on South Korea’s jurisdiction over Ieodo in March 2012, the Chinese government made no official comments, but neither made effort to restrain the media’s promotion of nationalist sentiments regarding Suyan rock (蘇巖礁, the Chinese name of Ieodo). For example, a renowned Chinese publicist appeared on a TV program and said: “we can protect China’s sovereignty over Suyan rock only by putting up the Chinese national flag (五星红旗) on the rock.” Articles with provocative language such as “South Korean facilities on Suyan Rock should be torn down” also appeared in newspapers and on the internet.80 Hence, based on the analysis above, I argue that China's behavior in maritime disputes with South Korea from 2009 to 2012 is in line with the hypothesis in Quadrant III (ESCALATION) of the double-edged sword model. As predicted by the model, China escalated tension with South Korea given the high external threat perception and unfavorable alignment behavior of South Korea.

Park Geun-hye Administration’s Alignment Behavior (2013-Present): Positive toward China

Under Park Geun-hye administration (2013-Present), South Korea straddles between the US and China as these two great powers compete for spheres of influence in the region. What distinguishes the Park administration from the previous administration is its interest in unification. On March 28, 2014, in Dresden, a city symbolizing the reunification of Germany, President Park announced the “Initiative for Peaceful Unification on the Korean Peninsula.” The Park administration believes that for a peaceful unification, cooperation with both the US and China is of great importance. Such interest in unification incentives for Seoul to employ a “straddling” strategy in the diplomatic, military, and economic realm.

President Park’s state visit in 2013 and a number of bilateral summits with the US and China reflect Seoul’s straddling behavior in the diplomatic realm. In May 2013, the year President Park came into office, she visited the US and produced a “Joint Declaration in Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America.” The joint declaration emphasized cooperation between Seoul and Washington over North Korea, regional and global security, and sustainable economic growth. In the following month, President Park visited China and reinforced the previously agreed strategic cooperative partnership, titled the “Enrichment of Strategic Cooperative Partnership” of 2008. President Park Geun-hye and President Xi Jinping publicly announced that the trip was a

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81 Yonhap, “President Park’s Speech on Initiative for Peaceful Unification on the Korean Peninsula” (Dresden: March 28, 2014).
“trip of heart and trust” (sim shin ji ryoe in Korean, or xin xin zhi ru in Chinese).83 As of today, President Park of South Korea has had four bilateral summits with President Obama of the US and six bilateral summits with President Xi of China. President Park’s straddling behavior in the diplomatic realm raised concerns among experts in Washington, but hailed as a positive signal of alignment behavior by Beijing. President Xi’s visit to South Korea in July 2013 illustrates well how the Xi administration perceives the Park administration. For the first time a Chinese leader, President Xi chose to visit South Korea before meeting with a North Korean leader,84 signaling a shift in Beijing’s strategic calculation on the Korean peninsula.

Moreover, even at the cost of making the US uneasy, President Park attended the Chinese military parade commemorating the 70th anniversary of victory in World War II. Before President Park made the decision to participate in the event, there was growing speculation about her decision. Japanese news agency Kyodo reported that the Obama administration expressed its concerns about President Park’s participation in the ceremony through the U.S. Embassy in Seoul and other diplomatic channels. However, both Washington and Seoul said that the report was erroneous,85 and after Park decided to attend the ceremony, the US officially announced “participation in [China’s 70th anniversary of the end of World War II] is the sovereign decision of each country. We respect the Republic of Korea's decision.”86 However, despite the official

86 Yonhap, “U.S. says respects S. Korea's decision to attend Chinese military parade,” 27 August 2015, accessed at
position of the both governments, experts on the US-ROK alliance said that the decision made the US uneasy and signaled South Korea’s intent to align with China. Chinese media Xinhua reported President Park’s decision to participate with the provocative title “S. Korean president to attend China's military parade in apparent snub to Washington.” Where President Park stood in the ceremony also reflected the growing ties between Seoul and Beijing, because Park stood alongside Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin on the reviewing stand at Tiananmen Square, in the same position where North Korean leader Kim Il Sung stood together with Mao Zedong 61 years ago.

Moreover, the Park administration’s straddling behavior is especially noticeable in the security realm. In October 2014, the Park administration agreed to delay the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) from the US to South Korea. In 2015, US high officials have repeatedly expressed interest in deploying Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in Korea. However, the Park administration expressed reluctance to introduce the THAAD missile system out of concern for its relations with Beijing. Seoul’s hesitance frustrates some US officials and experts who believe that a THAAD deployment is crucial to defending South Korea.

1 December 2015.


and 28,500 American troops stationed on the Korean peninsula from a North Korean ballistic missile and nuclear attack. On the other hand, Seoul’s reluctance to join a U.S. missile defense system reassures the Chinese government. Beijing perceives a THAAD deployment on Korean Peninsula as a threat to its military activities. This is because the THAAD system can neutralize China’s asymmetric Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy, which is designed to exclude forward-deployed U.S. forces from the first island chain, and it could further strengthen trilateral military coordination among the US, South Korea, and Japan. The Park administration’s pending decision on THAAD sends a strong signal for alignment to the Xi administration, which makes Beijing think Seoul is a good neighbor or friend with whom they can potentially cooperate. Yan Xuetong, Professor at Tsinghua University in China, even argues that China should reconsider its non-alignment policy and pursue alignment diplomacy with South Korea.

Furthermore, South Korea’s support of Chinese-led economic institutions sends signals to Beijing that Seoul can play a constructive role in China’s continuous rise. Not only is South Korea a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a trade arrangement led by China, but it is also a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) launched by China in 2015. South Korea's decision to join the

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93 Dong-A, “Yan Xuetong, Professor of Qinghua, NK-CHN Alliance are Practically Over, South Korea Needs Pragmatic Diplomacy Toward the US and China,” 1 January 2015, accessed at http://news.donga.com/3/03/20150101/68865194/1 1 December 2015.
institution signals a strong will for alignment with China, because the US strongly urged its allies not to join the AIIB. The Park Geun-hye administration’s straddling behavior in the security, economic, and diplomatic realm sent positive signals of alignment to the Xi Jinping administration and made China perceive South Korea as a partner that can play a constructive role in addressing its security concerns.

**Cooperation (Quadrant I): China’s Behavior in Maritime Disputes with Park Administration**

Given China’s perception of a high external threats due to rising tensions with the US and the Park administration’s positive alignment behavior toward China, I expect the Chinese government to adopt a cooperation strategy (Quadrant I) toward the Park Geun-hye administration (2013-present) under the double-edged model. Indeed, close analysis of China’s behavior in the fishery trawler incidents and its decisions on maritime boundary issues reveal that the prediction of the model holds. In 2014, there was another illegal fishing trawler incident, similar to the ones that happened in 2010 and 2011. On October 10, 2014, a Chinese fisherman died while confronting the South Korean Coast Guard during an illegal fishery regulation mission. However, the Chinese government’s behavior after the incident differed from its reactions to the previous two incidents. After the incident in 2014, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the South Korean Ambassador to China to discuss the issue and tried to keep the level of tension low and solve the issue on the governmental level, refraining from

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taking any action that might provoke nationalistic sentiment. The Chinese media also assumed a
more cautious and a wait-and-see attitude about the 2014 fishery trawler incident, in contrast to
nationalistic reports that followed the incidents in 2010 and 2011. Beijing News (新京報),
Jinghua Times (京華時報), and several other newspapers carried a report about the incident in
the international news or international and social news sections, but these newspapers did not
highlight the incident in its publications. Also, these newspapers introduced the South Korean
Coast Guard’s claim that “this incident took place while Chinese fishermen were vehemently
protesting against the South Korean Coast Guard.”

Furthermore, in direct contrast to Beijing’s reluctance to cooperate on illegal fishing
regulation with the Lee administration, Beijing agreed to jointly crack down on illegal fishing
with the Park administration. At the South Korea-China summit held in 2013 — the first bilateral
summit held between the two countries after President Park Geun-hye and Xi Jinping came into
office — the two leaders agreed to cooperate closely to maintain a peaceful maritime order in the
region, along with other issues of cooperation adopted in the South Korea-China Joint Statement
for Future Vision. Efforts adopted by Seoul and Beijing to promote order in the fisheries
included cracking down on illegal fishing, enhancing enforcement cooperation, the hosting of a
South Korea-China joint meeting attended by Chinese fishermen, increasing joint patrols by the
two countries’ guidance ships in their provisional measure zones (at least two to three times a
year), and allowing more officials of the two countries in charge of fisheries control to board

95 Yonhap, “China, Summons Kwon Young-se Ambassador regarding the death of its fisherman,” 12
October 2014, accessed at
http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2014/10/12/0200000000AKR20141012058651083.HTML 1
December 2015.
each other’s boats in their EEZ.\textsuperscript{96} The first joint crackdown on illegal fishing in the shared waters took place in December 2014, and both countries stepped up cooperation by agreeing to jointly set up and operate checkpoints, where the countries' fish carriers will be inspected for any illegal activities such as catching over the set quota, from 2015.\textsuperscript{97} In addition, President Xi Jinping pledged that China would continue to strengthen its supervision of Chinese illegal fishing vessels in the Yellow Sea during a meeting with Chung Ui-hwa, speaker of South Korea's National Assembly, at the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing. Xi’s comment signals China’s strong will and commitment to cooperation with South Korea, because the top Chinese leaders rarely talks about Chinese boats’ illegal fishing in South Korean waters.\textsuperscript{98}

Moreover, at the 2014 bilateral summit, President Xi Jinping and Park Geun-hye agreed to resume bilateral talks on maritime boundaries in the Yellow Sea and held two preparatory meetings as of 2015.\textsuperscript{99} President Xi’s decision to resume the maritime boundaries settlement talks with South Korea epitomizes the change in China’s maritime strategy toward South Korea, because Beijing had demonstrated reluctance to discuss maritime boundaries since 2009. Some officials in the South Korean government interpreted China’s decision to resume talks with South Korea as a clear signal that Beijing distinguishes its position on the Yellow Sea from its

position on the East China Sea and the South China Sea.\textsuperscript{100} Though coming to an agreement on maritime boundaries will not be easy and will take more than five years, a South Korean government official greeted the upcoming talks with optimism. The official said that the upcoming talks will be able to make more significant agreements and decisions since the two countries agreed to upgrade the level of the senior officials that conduct the bilateral negotiations to Deputy Secretary or Assistant Secretary-level from the director of a bureau level and made an agreement to regularize the meeting.\textsuperscript{101} Also, considering the fact that China did not make any maritime boundary delimitation agreements with other maritime neighbors (Japan, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia) — after its first and last maritime boundary delimitations agreement with Vietnam around the Gulf of Tonkin in December 2001 — President Xi’s decision to pursue talks on this issue with South Korea was a noteworthy sign of China’s will for cooperation.

Some might argue that cooperation strategy does not explain China’s unilateral announcement of the Air Defense Identification Zone including Ieodo. Initially, ADIZ might appear as offensive behavior toward South Korea; however, the details reveal something different. South Korea’s ADIZ today, so called KADIZ, includes Ieodo/Suyan rock; however, at the time when China announced the ADIZ, it was included in the Japan’s ADIZ.\textsuperscript{102} Given the high level of tension between Japan and China over Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and that Ieodo/Suyan rock should inevitably be included if China were to extend CADIZ to include

\textsuperscript{100} Yonhap, “ROK-China Host Preparatory Meeting for ‘Maritime Boundaries Negotiation’ Tomorrow,” 28 January 2015.
\textsuperscript{101} Kim Hyun Woo, “ROK-China, Hosts Director of Bureau Level Maritime Boundaries Limitation Meeting on 29th,” Hankook Ilbo, 15 January 2015.
Senkaku/Diaoyu. I argue that Beijing directed its announcement of ADIZ to Tokyo. In addition, the Chinese government’s relatively low-key response to South Korea’s expansion of the ADIZ to cover Ieodo suggests that China wants to maintain a low level of tension between South Korea and China. Based on the analysis above, I argue that China’s behavior in maritime disputes toward South Korea after 2013 is in line with the hypothesis in Quadrant I (COOPERATION) of my model, which expects the cooperative behavior of China given the high external threat perception and favorable alignment behavior of the neighboring state.

Independent Variable 2-2.

Alignment Behavior of Japan after the US Pivot (2010-Present): Negative toward China

There were three administrations in Japan after the US pivot to Asia: the Kan Naoto, Noda Yoshihiko, and Abe Shinzo administrations. All three administration warmly responded to the US pivot to Asia and adopted security policies that heightened China’s external threat perception. Although Prime Minister Kan Naoto (June 2010-September 2011) belonged to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the same party which under the Hatoyama administration attempted to align closely with China, he made big adjustments to the previous administration’s foreign policies. Abandoning Hatoyama’s electoral pledge to remove the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from Okinawa, PM Kan assured President Obama that Japan would implement the bilateral agreement on the relocation of the Futenma base. On August 29, 2010, despite strong local protest for the complete removal of the base from Okinawa, Kan administration officially announced the construction of a new air station in Henoko Bay, Nago City in northern Okinawa and reaffirmed Japan’s strong commitment to the US-Japan alliance. On September 10,
the Japanese government published the 2010 edition of the Japanese Defense White Paper. The 2010 White Paper included harsh commentary on the Chinese military: “The lack of transparency and the orientations of the military forces have generated anxiety on the part of the region including Japan and the international community.” Observers in China perceived that the statements in the paper were even harsher than the ones made by LDP administrations.

Also, amid growing tension between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2010, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared that the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are part of the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. The statement made by Clinton and the Japanese government’s acknowledgment of the statement signaled the resoluteness of the US-Japan alliance to China. Also, the Noda Yoshihiko administration’s (September 2011-December 2012) emphasis on the restoration of bilateral relations with the US and decision to purchase the disputed islands further aggravated the relations between Beijing and Tokyo.

Prime Minister Abe Shinzo pushed Japan’s military normalization more than any other Japanese government and Japanese policymakers expressed that normalization of Japan would allow Japan to contribute more to the US-Japan alliance, protect US forward bases, and forward-

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deployed forces in Asia. Along with Seoul, Beijing consistently expressed its concern over Japan’s military normalization to the Abe administration, but Prime Minister Abe boldly continued his efforts to normalize Japan. In July 2014, the Japanese government approved a reinterpretation of “Article 9” of the Constitution and removed the ban on “the right of collective self-defense.” This policy change heightened China’s fear because under the new constitution, Japan could come to the aid of allied forces under attack even if Japan itself is not a target. Furthermore, on April 27, 2015, for the first time in 18 years, the Japanese government announced a new defense guideline with the US. Under this new guideline, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) broadened their role to regional and global security and reinforced their cooperation with the US on maritime crises and conflicts. After the unveiling of the new guideline, Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng said at a monthly press briefing that "we are very concerned about the new U.S.-Japan defense cooperation guidelines and high-ranking officials' comments on China” and stressed that the US-Japan alliance “should not go beyond its bilateral scope or undermine third parties’ interests.”

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Escalation (Quadrant III): China’s Behavior in Maritime Disputes with Kan, Noda, and Abe Administration

Under the double-edged sword model, the optimal strategy for China in maritime disputes with Japan from 2010 to 2015 was escalation (Quadrant III), because China’s perception of an external threat increased due to the US pivot to Asia and Japanese government warmly embraced the pivot. On September 7, 2010, a Chinese fishing trawler, Minjinyu 5179, collided with Japanese Coast Guard vessels in the vicinity of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The collision and Japan's subsequent detention of the trawler captain rapidly escalated the tension into a major diplomatic dispute between Beijing and Tokyo. Demanding the release of the captain, Beijing adopted a series of tough measures. The Chinese government cancelled official meetings at the ministerial level and above with Japan, postponed negotiations on joint development of oil and natural gas in the East China Sea, and stopped talks on increasing the number of civilian flights between China and Japan.\textsuperscript{112} Although Japan contributed to the seed of escalation of the dispute by delaying the release of the captain, the measures taken by China were harsher than usual. In particular, blocking the exports of rare earth metals to Japan could have seriously harmed Japan’s economy by bringing its production of hybrid cars, turbines and guided missiles to a halt.\textsuperscript{113} Also, Chinese state-run media broadcasted small-scale anti-Japanese protests that had taken place in response to the trawler incident, and the report provoked nationalist sentiment among the Chinese public. Anti-Japanese protests took place in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Chongqing, Shenyang, Changsha, Xi'an, Zhengzhou, Wuhan, Fujian, Mianyang, and

\textsuperscript{112} Cheng, China’s Japan Policy, 409.
Deyang. However, the Chinese government did not actively prevent these protests and the protests eventually developed into the first large-scale demonstration over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in China. After the release of the captain, a prominent media outlets in China reported about right-wing protests in Japan, reigniting anti-Japan protests and boycotts in China, and encouraging nationalist protests until the end of October 2010.114

In September 2012, the Japanese government purchased three of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands from the right wing Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara, a private owner, claimed that state ownership would be less provocative to Beijing. This purchase provoked nationalist sentiment over the islands again in China. On August 15, 2012, a group of Hong Kong activists with two national flags of the People’s Republic of China and one flag of the Republic of China sailed to one of the disputed islands and landed on the island. Though, the Chinese government did not support this group of activists, it allowed its official media, CCTV, to provide live coverage of the whole landing process.115 The report incited nationalist sentiment nationwide and caused street protests in 85 cities that called for a boycott against Japanese products during the weekend of September 15-16.116 On December 13 2012, a Chinese aircraft belonging to the State Oceanic Administration (SOA) of China entered the airspace above the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands for the first time since records began in 1958. In response to the incident, the Abe administration immediately made a strong protest to the Xi Jinping administration via diplomatic channels and scrambled eight F-15 fighters of the Japanese air force and an airborne troops to give a warning

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114 Weiss, Powerful Patriots, 165-179.
115 Ibid., 200-201.
to the Chinese flight.\textsuperscript{117} Despite the heightened tension, the Chinese continued to dispatch the SOA’s aircraft near the airspace of the disputed islands. According to Japan’s Ministry of Defense, there were 13 confirmed cases of similar incidents like this one in the space of 3 years from 2012 to 2015; the most recent case was on March 23, 2014.\textsuperscript{118}

Furthermore, China rapidly intensified its activities not only in the nearby airspace of the disputed islands, but also in the nearby waters. In January 2013, the Japanese Destroyer JS Yudachi operating in the East China Sea found out that it was the target of the PLAN’s Jiangwei II class frigate Lianyungang’s fire control radar. The Japanese government lodged a strong protest against the Chinese government, but Beijing denied the accusation.\textsuperscript{119} In February 2013, the US intelligence officials detected that Chinese military shifted road-mobile ballistic missiles to the provinces of Zhejiang and Fujian, closer to the disputed islands.\textsuperscript{120} In April 2013, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced for the first time that China officially identifies the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as a “core interest.”\textsuperscript{121} Amid growing suspicion about China’s intention of moving the ballistic missiles and the meaning of core interest, the Chinese state-owned media, \textit{People’s Daily} published an article that said: “few powers rose peacefully in history. China's efforts in striving for peaceful rise have been successful but enhanced a misperception that China

\textsuperscript{118} Referred to Ministry of Defense of Japan: http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/ryouku/.
is fearful of war, fueling countries like Japan to use war to frighten China. If we don't have the luck to circumvent a war, we should deal with it with rationality a big power should have.”

The report suggested that the Chinese government has strong resolve to have control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu and showed that China will secure it even at the cost of war with Japan.

On November 23, 2013, China unilaterally introduced China’s ADIZ in the East China Sea, which includes the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and announced that it would require all aircraft entering the zone to report a flight plan and submit radio frequency or transponder information to the Chinese government. Along, with the US, the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs criticized the declaration of the ADIZ as "profundly dangerous acts that unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea, escalating the situation, and that may cause unintended consequences." Although, the Chinese government said the ADIZ was not aimed at a specific country, several Chinese media outlets, including Global Times, insinuated that Japan is the prime target.

The tension between Japan and China continues to escalate as the number of Chinese vessels entering the water near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands remains high, though the number decreased a bit, after it reached its apex in 2013. Based on the analysis above, I argue that China’s behavior in the maritime disputes with Japan after the US pivot to

Asia is in line with the prediction of **Quadrant III (ESCALATION)** of the model, because China escalated the disputes during this period given high external threat perception and unfavorable alignment behavior of the neighboring state.

**V. Conclusion**

According to M.Taylor Fravel, a state prefers a *cooperation* or *escalation* strategy rather than a *delay* strategy when there are rising tensions with a third party.\(^{127}\) Although, rising tensions with a third party motivates the state to move from a delaying strategy, it would still be ambivalent between escalating or cooperating with its maritime neighbor. This necessitates the inclusion of a second variable. This paper argues that whether a state chooses *cooperation* or *escalation* depends on how a state perceives the alignment behavior of its rival claimants at the time. It is because a state’s neighbors can have either positive or negative effect on the state’s security, like a double-edged sword. Its neighbor can be its greatest enemy, generating threats under its very nose, but also its best partner, assuaging its security concerns in the near seas, if sufficiently assured. Hence, when there is a rising tension with a third party, the state becomes more sensitive to the signals sent out by its maritime neighbors.

For China, this occurred with the US pivot to Asia in 2009. Whether China escalated its maritime dispute or decided to cooperate depended on how it perceived the alignment behavior of its maritime neighbors, South Korea and Japan. After the US announcement of the rebalance to Asia, China escalated maritime disputes with the Lee Myung-bak administration of South Korea (2010-2013) and Kan Naoto, Noda Yoshihiko, and Abe Shinzo administrations of Japan.

(2010-Present), which demonstrated alignment behavior negative to China’s security. On the other hand, China chose to cooperate with the Park Geun-hye administration of South Korea (2013-Present), which demonstrated straddling behavior between the US and China. The research suggests that China’s behaviors in maritime disputes are associated with its systematic efforts to maintain its rise in the period of strategic opportunity that extends to 2020.
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