

SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS AND THE SECURITY DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates Sino-Japanese security relations and evaluates the explanatory power of the security dilemma theory, which is often invoked in the argument concerning the bilateral relationship. Upon demonstrating that this theory is ill-fit to explain the recent downturn in Sino-Japanese security relations, the study rejects a number of alternative explanations within the constructivist vein of international relations thinking and argues that the deterioration of Sino-Japanese security relations can be better understood by employing the concept of “institutionalized greed.”

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INTRODUCTION

The progressing deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations in the recent years has been duly noted by scholars of international relations, as well as by major world media. Notably, this cooling in bilateral ties has been compounded by an increasingly tense security relationship between Tokyo and Beijing against the backdrop of China's rise. A careful examination of a number of important documents pertaining to Japan's security and defense policy that were adopted by the Abe cabinet in late 2013¹ would lead one to assume that Tokyo is very concerned over Beijing's allegedly assertive behavior. On the other hand, many in China argue that the security policy of Abe's cabinet heralds Japan's forthcoming remilitarization,² claiming that China's immense growth in military capabilities pursues strictly defensive and peaceful purposes.

A number of scholars have employed the defensive realist concept of security dilemma to explain the spiral of tension in Sino-Japanese relations.³ This concept postulates that given the condition of international anarchy, states whose security goals are compatible may nevertheless enter into an arms race or even a military conflict due to misperceptions. This phenomenon was fully explained by

¹ These documents include the National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Planning Guidelines (NDPG), and the Mid-Term Defense Plan

² See, for example, Yongtao Gui, "Abe's Push Toward Collective Self-Defense Is Alarming," *Global Asia* 8, no. 4 (2013): 50-52.

³ For a list of works applying the security dilemma concept to Sino-Japanese relations see Richard C. Bush, *The Perils of Proximity: China-Japan Security Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 324-325. More recent publications include, for example, Joseph Yu-shek Cheng, "China's Japan Policy: Seeking Stability and Improvement in Uncertainties," *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2011): 246-275, or Elena Atanassova-Cornelis, "The Political and Security Dimension of Japan-China Relations: Strategic Mistrust and Fragile Stability," *Pacific Focus* 26, no. 2 (2011): 165-187.

Robert Jervis, who famously noted that “[m]any of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others.”⁴

For the security dilemma explanation to hold, two key variables have to be operating: the inability of the actors to distinguish between offensive and defensive armaments (and policies in a broader sense) and the advantage of the offense.⁵ Upon examining the recent developments in the Sino-Japanese security relationship, I conclude that the former variable, while affecting Japan’s perceptions, is absent on the Chinese side and the latter does not affect the relationship at all. That is, given Japan’s perfectly transparent defense policies and posture along with domestic institutional constraints that impose severe limitations on its military capabilities, the security dilemma should not operate in Chinese security thinking vis-à-vis Japan.

The U.S.-Japan alliance is viewed by some as another factor generating a security dilemma in Beijing’s policy towards Japan,⁶ but I do not see it as a sufficient explanation due to the obvious defense advantage on both sides, as well as a number of other reasons. This means that the security dilemma theory fails to explain Beijing’s actions and policies toward Japan. Non-realist scholars present some alternative hypotheses in an attempt to shed light on the downturn in Sino-Japanese relations, with the most popular ones focusing either on the issue of history and perceptions or domestic nationalism and the related

⁴ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 169.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

⁶ See, for example, Xinbo Wu, “The End of the Silver Lining: A Chinese View of the U.S.-Japanese Alliance,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2005): 119-130.

problem of CCP legitimacy.⁷ These explanations may be viewed as non-realist modifications of the security dilemma theory where the two states' security goals are compatible but not attainable due to the domestic factors mentioned above.

On the other hand, I argue that while Tokyo has many reasons to doubt China's intentions, Beijing's alleged security dilemma is in fact spurious. Using the additional variable of greed proposed by Charles Glaser,⁸ I maintain that instead of a security dilemma, the Sino-Japanese relationship is plagued by a security problem stemming from China's dissatisfaction with the status quo.

In the following section I revisit Jervis's original theoretical framework and explain how it has been applied to the Sino-Japanese relationship. Next I proceed to reinforce the counterintuitive elements of the puzzle by arguing that the current security environment surrounding China does not justify the existence of a security dilemma due to the absence of a number of important variables. In the third section I present my explanation of the downturn in Sino-Japanese security relations. In the last section I briefly investigate two alternative explanations of the supposed dilemma and conclude that they do not hold as well.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The term *security dilemma* was coined by John Herz to describe "the argument that in arming for self-defense a state might decrease its security via the

⁷ Some of these arguments may be found in Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China's Search for Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), especially Introduction, pp. xv-xx.

⁸ Charles E. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1997): 189-194.

unintended effect of making others insecure, sparking them to arm in response.”⁹ The concept was picked up and developed by Robert Jervis in his seminal 1978 article *Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma*, with many influential scholars of international relations (i.e. Charles Glaser, Steven Van Evera, etc.) turning to it in their theoretical studies. The security dilemma theory, as propounded by Jervis, is a defensive realist argument that assumes that individual states interact with each other under the condition of anarchy. The states’ inability to know the intentions of others—the tendency to view states as “black boxes” is inherent in realist thinking of various kinds—drives them to maximize their security vis-à-vis other actors. Here defensive realism differs from offensive realism, with the latter postulating that states strive to maximize power, not security.

Jervis’s important contribution to the theory of international politics lies in relativizing the subjective notion of security under the conditions of international anarchy and lack of information. States may have perfectly compatible security requirements and would opt to pursue cooperative security policies were it not for their sheer inability to know each other’s intentions. Thus, a state’s effort to maximize its security may be viewed by another state as detrimental to its own, which may cause arms races, spirals of tension, hostility, and, ultimately, military conflicts.

Jervis identifies two key variables that affect the severity of the security dilemma. The first one is the offense-defense balance. Jervis explains that “[w]hen we say that the defense has the advantage, we simply mean that it is easier to destroy the other’s army and take its territory than it is to defend one’s

⁹ Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 145.

own. When the defense has the advantage, it is easier to protect and to hold than it is to move forward, destroy, and take.”¹⁰ Conversely, according to Jervis, the security dilemma is the more severe the more advantageous the offense becomes. The second important variable is the ability to differentiate between offensive and defensive arms and policies. If they do not provide sufficient offensive capabilities, “the basic postulate of the security dilemma no longer applies.”¹¹

This theoretical framework has been used by a large number of scholars studying Sino-Japanese relations. In China the security dilemma line of argument is one of the dominant ways the relationship is conceptualized and has been in active use for more than a decade.¹² Many in Beijing see Japan as inherently prone to war, with its strategic culture being described as warlike.¹³ In fact, for more than a decade Chinese analysts have been claiming that Japan is destined to remilitarize and return to its pre-war aggressive ways. The subtler policy pundits often point to the U.S.-Japan alliance as the major point of concern in Beijing, believing that the alliance’s potential can and will be used to deter China. The works of Wu Xinbo are a good example of the security dilemma thinking in Chinese scholarly literature. He often claims that Japan is improving its military capabilities to the detriment of China’s own security and attaches special

¹⁰ Jervis, 187.

¹¹ Ibid., 199.

¹² One may trace this kind of strategic thinking in China back to the first Taiwan Straits crisis of 1995 and the subsequent revision of the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines in 1997

¹³ Chinese views of Japan’s strategic culture are explored in detail in Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, D.C: National Defense University Press, 2010)

significance to the role of the U.S.-Japan alliance in, as he argues, “containing” China.¹⁴

Western scholars have also been partial to the security dilemma theory when attempting to shed light on Sino-Japanese security relations. For instance, in *Japan's Reluctant Realism* Michael Green argues that the bilateral relationship contains the necessary “ingredients for a classic defense dilemma, as each side perceives the other’s effort to protect itself from change as a new threat.”¹⁵ Thomas Christensen maintains that “[i]f security dilemma theory is applied to East Asia, the chance for spirals of tension in the area seems great,” turning to this concept in his analysis of the U.S.-Japan-China triangle.¹⁶ Similar approaches have been adopted by Mike Mochizuki,¹⁷ Kent Calder,¹⁸ and Denny Roy.¹⁹ The argument developed in these and other works is that both China and Japan genuinely fear each other’s growing capabilities, which is exacerbated by chronic mistrust and the existence of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

What is somewhat surprising about this vast body of literature is the fact that the security dilemma hypothesis is not duly tested against the key variables identified by Jervis. In the following sections I will examine whether this

¹⁴ Wu (2005), 124-126. Also see Xinbo Wu, “The Security Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations: Warily Watching One Another,” *Asian Survey* 40, no. 2 (2000): 296-310 for a more detailed account of Chinese concerns

¹⁵ Michael J. Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 93.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Christensen, “China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia,” *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): 49-80.

¹⁷ Mike M. Mochizuki, “Japan's shifting strategy toward the rise of China,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4-5 (2007): 739-776, especially p. 770

¹⁸ Kent E. Calder, “China and Japan's Simmering Rivalry,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 2 (2006): 129-139.

¹⁹ Denny Roy, “The sources and limits of Sino-Japanese tensions,” *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 47, no. 2 (2005): 191-214.

hypothesis actually holds if these variables are taken into consideration, treating it as my null hypothesis.

Certain scholars use non-realist variables in their analysis of the relationship while not eschewing the security dilemma framework completely. For one, Richard Bush adds constructivist elements to his analysis of the Sino-Japanese security relationship in *The Perils of Proximity*, stating that “each country’s views of general trends and specific cases are refracted through a lens ground by its memories of the wartime past.”²⁰ According to this logic, the two countries fail to achieve their security objectives, which are generally compatible, because of historical animosity, preconceived notions, and personal beliefs of their leaders. Another explanation centers on the issue of Chinese domestic nationalism, with the main argument being that the Chinese state wants to cooperate with Japan on security issues but is unable to do so due to increasing domestic pressure emanating from fervent nationalist activists.²¹ Both the constructivist and the nationalism arguments are often used to explain the existence of the security dilemma in Sino-Japanese relations by picking up non-realist variables, so I will treat these two approaches as my alternative hypotheses.

OFFENSE-DEFENSE DIFFERENTIATION: TRANSPARENCY AND DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS

As I have mentioned above, many in China argue that Japan is on the road to becoming a great military power. As early as 2005, Wu Xinbo noted that Japan “continues to expand its military capability” and “[s]ince 1992, it has enacted 21

²⁰ Bush, 29.

²¹ Suisheng Zhao, “Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the strident turn,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 82 (2013): 535-553.

major pieces of pieces of security-related legislation ... legitimizing and legalizing sending military forces abroad.”²² Now this claim has become even more popular in Chinese strategic thinking, with some describing Japan’s “remilitarization” as an inevitable process.²³

This widespread conviction, however, seems somewhat questionable when one takes a closer look at Japan’s defense policies. First, Japan’s defense policies are limited by extremely severe institutional constraints. The Japanese Constitution stipulates that Japan renounces war as a means of settling international disputes. According to Japan’s domestic legislation, the country also cannot be the first to launch an attack and even if attacked by a hostile power, it has to go through complicated administrative procedures in order to mount an adequate response, procedures that have never been initiated before.²⁴ In fact, historically Japan’s security policies have been “exclusively defensive” (*senshu bōei*), a principle reflected in almost every security document Japan has adopted—from the 1957 Basis of Defense Policy to the 2013 National Security Strategy.

More importantly, Japan’s military posture and procurement are extremely transparent. The Ministry of Defense annually publishes detailed accounts of its

²² Wu (2005), 125.

²³ Lilian Lin, “China Says Abe’s Military Plans Will Increase Tensions,” *The Wall Street Journal Japan*, Apr. 22, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2014/04/22/china-says-abes-military-plans-will-increase-tensions/>

²⁴ Article 76 of the SDF Law reads that such mobilization may be ordered only if Japan has either sustained an armed attack or anticipates such an attack. Defense mobilization has to be ordered by the Prime Minister and approved by the Diet, which may take a long time given the fact that this procedure has never been initiated before. Although the Prime Minister can order mobilization without the Diet’s assent under extraordinary circumstances, such an act will be considered unlawful if China does not use its military power first.

spending and allocation of resources while the Government of Japan specifies its vision of Japan's future defense in decennial National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPGs). In addition, every five years Japan issues a detailed Mid-Term Defense Program devoted specifically to future procurement.

Japan's defense spending is also transparent. It was steadily declining for more than 10 years until 2013 when it exhibited a modest growth of about 2 percent. Furthermore, in accordance with its domestic legislation and the principle of "exclusively defensive" defense, Japan has not and does not possess either significant power projection capabilities or offensive weapons capable of being used against Mainland China. The Self-Defense Forces do not maintain ballistic missiles, bombers, long-range fighters, nuclear submarines, or aircraft carriers, making it all but impossible for them to launch an offensive against anyone, let alone China. While it is difficult to place naval forces in either the "offensive" or the "defensive" category,²⁵ it is clear that the Maritime SDF is incapable of mounting an unassisted full-scale attack.

The same cannot be said about China. The People's Liberation Army has significantly modernized its weapons and improved the training of its personnel, with newer and more effective weapon systems such as the J-20 stealth fighter jet or the JIN-class submarines being developed. Its military spending has not been transparent and has grown exponentially in the last two decades. Of particular concern is the modernization and enlargement of China's naval forces. According to the Pentagon's Annual Report to Congress, "[t]he PLA Navy has the largest force of major combatants, submarines, and amphibious warfare ships in

²⁵ Jervis, 204.

Asia,”²⁶ a remark recognizing the PLA Navy’s transformation from a decrepit fleet of obsolete vessels into one of the strongest Navies in the whole region. The 2012 commissioning of the *Liaoning* – China’s first aircraft carrier – may very well be interpreted as a sign of Beijing’s ambitions to become a great maritime power. Such interpretation is consistent with the 2013 edition of “The Military Balance,” which emphasizes China’s desire to enhance its blue-water capabilities and “PLA’s steady development of offensive military capabilities.”²⁷

Beijing’s recent behavior has become as alarming as its military buildup. Since the notorious 2010 incident when a Chinese fishing trawler rammed a Japanese coastguard ship, the number of violations of Japan’s territorial waters by vessels flying the five-star red flag has increased significantly, and so has the number of ships involved in each violation. The same trend can be observed in the yearly number of scrambles ordered by the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF), which surged from 2 in 2003 to 306 in 2012.²⁸

The character of China’s behavior and the methods it employs have also become more belligerent. On January 19th, 2013 a Chinese military vessel reportedly locked a JSDF ship on its battle radar, causing a wave of protest by the Japanese authorities. The Japanese must have been following very closely the so-called “Scarborough Standoff” in 2012 when Chinese maritime surveillance ships *de facto* seized a petit shoal disputed by Beijing and Manila. Lastly, China’s decision to announce a new Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that overlaps

²⁶ *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2013), 76.

²⁷ *The Military Balance* (London: Routledge Publishing, 2013), 252.

²⁸ MOD data on scrambles is accessible at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2013/04_Digest_part3.pdf

with those of Japan and the ROK in late 2013 has caused a wave of outrage in Tokyo and Washington alike.

Although China has claimed on numerous occasions that its intentions are exclusively peaceful, the facts mentioned above give Japan good reasons to doubt the defensive nature of China's military build-up, policies, and actions. This means that Japan is liable to seeing China not as a security-seeker but as a non-status quo power, which generates security dilemma dynamics on the Japanese side. However, the offense-defense differentiation variable should not operate in China's perceptions of Japan since both its military posture and security policy are defensive in nature.

Two counterarguments may be adduced to refute this claim. The first concerns Prime Minister Abe's new steps to ratchet up Japan's defense posture. In late 2013 the Abe cabinet adopted a set of new documents including Japan's first National Security Strategy, a new NDPG and Mid-Term Defense Program. These documents include provisions to improve the mobility and, *inter alia*, the amphibious capabilities of the SDF. One may argue that in so doing Japan is developing offensive capabilities and preparing to challenge the status quo in the region. However, the innovations introduced in Abe's new defense documents are more conceptual than tangible, given the modest scope of the changes in procurement the new documents call for.²⁹ In addition, the new provisions regarding amphibious capabilities are situational and focus on the potential threat of an attack on Japan's offshore islands; they will still not be sufficient to project power outside Japan's territorial waters. Lastly and most importantly,

²⁹ For a detailed description of the procurement changes see Kyle Mizokami, "Inside Japan's New Defense Plan," *USNI News*, Dec. 20, 2013, <http://news.usni.org/2013/12/20/inside-japans-new-defense-plan>

Japan's defense policy still remains "exclusively defensive," with all the major institutional domestic constraints intact, leaving little to no room for alarmism.

The second potential counterargument is much more challenging than the previous one. While conceding that Japan's own armaments and defense policies may be purely defensive, skeptics may retort that the existence of the U.S.-Japan alliance is the main source of China's security dilemma. This claim, however, is not borne out by evidence when one examines it against the second key variable affecting the severity of the security dilemma—whether the offense or the defense has the advantage.

OFFENSE-DEFENSE ADVANTAGE AND INSTITUTIONALIZED GREED

According to Jervis, "[t]echnology and geography are the two main factors that determine whether the offense or the defense has the advantage."³⁰ He meticulously examines these factors in his discussion of the offense-defense balance variable, but he does not relativize this variable and seems to be talking about the compound balance within dyads. This flaw in Jervis's logic is eliminated by Glaser and Kaufmann, who have aptly observed that "within each dyad of states there are two offense-defense balances: one with state A as the attacker and state B as the defender, and one with B attacking A."³¹ They refer to these two balances as "directional." Van Evera has contributed to the theory by

³⁰ Jervis, 194.

³¹ Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, "What is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure it?" *International Security* 22, no. 4 (1998): 58.

arguing that defensive alliances are another important factor affecting the balance.³²

It is clear that the directional balances within the Japan-China dyad, as well as the compound balance, heavily favor defense. As far as the latter is concerned, the two countries are separated by a vast body of water, making the cost of the offense very high and tilting the compound balance towards the defense. Second, the directional balance for Japan is defensive by default because it does not possess significant power projection capabilities or offensive armaments and enjoys the security guarantees provided by the United States. Japan does not maintain a strategic deterrent in the form of nuclear weapons, while its closest neighbors do, and relies on U.S. nuclear umbrella for its own security. This has been a very beneficial arrangement so far, and since the decision to pursue offensive policies may cost Japan its security guarantees, it will remain Tokyo's last option.³³

In the case of China, the defense also has an overwhelming advantage mainly due to its geography and population. Even if an adversary were to mount an attack against the Chinese mainland, it would have to face the virtually insurmountable hurdle of militarily dominating China's vast territory and its gargantuan population—a lesson the Japanese Empire learned during the 1937-

³² Stephen Van Evera, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," *International Security* 22, no. 4 (1998): 6.

³³ Since actions with the potential to drag the U.S. into a war may cause Washington to consider abandonment options, Japan will refrain from them because the costs of giving up on the alliance are extremely high. It is wrong to argue that the fear of abandonment will cause Japan do become more assertive since in this case Japan would be the one alienating the U.S., not vice versa. For a detailed account of the abandonment vs. entrapment argument see Victor D. Cha, "Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in Asia: The United States, Japan, and Korea," *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2000): 261-291.

45 war. Moreover, China maintains formidable ballistic missile and nuclear capabilities, which should make the defense Beijing's preferred option in its relations with nuclear- and missile-free Japan. Curiously, the U.S.-Japan alliance should only reinforce China's defense advantage. Knowing that Tokyo and Washington are tied by security commitments, Beijing is expected to understand that, given the existing balance of military power in the region, an attempt to act offensively toward Japan would mean automatic involvement of the United States, multiplying the costs of the conflict.

The discussion above has shown that facts contradict the predictions of the security dilemma theory when applied to the Sino-Japanese relationship. Regardless of the fact that the two key structural variables affecting the severity of the dilemma do not have a heavy bearing on the bilateral relationship, we still observe rising tensions, a wary Japan, and an increasingly assertive China. I argue that this situation can be explained by examining an important non-structural variable of "greed" proposed by Glaser—that is, the state's desire to expand for reasons other than security³⁴.

Some may dismiss greed as too subjective a variable for an impartial analysis. With Glaser's definition this is a possibility, but it can be avoided by operationalizing this variable in a different way. I view greed as a function of the state's satisfaction with the status quo: the more satisfied it is, the less greedy it becomes. Since the extent of satisfaction with the status quo can be easily inferred by interpreting the state's actions, the subjectivity of assessment is decreased dramatically. With this in mind, we can now examine to what extent Japan (and the U.S. as its ally) and China can be described as greedy.

³⁴ Glaser, 178.

Greed is not a characteristic feature of Japan for a number of reasons. First, the country greatly benefits from the existing political and economic international order, which is a key factor affecting its stability and prosperity. Japan is a major maritime and trading power that requires freedom of navigation, adherence to the norms of international law, and free trade in order to be able to develop and grow economically. It has never challenged these principles and has pledged to uphold them on numerous occasions; they are also included in the 2013 National Security Strategy.³⁵ In the last six decades Japan has remained an exclusively status quo power, with its behavior in the international arena consistent with the tenets of the U.S.-led liberal international order. Japan's closest ally, the United States, has been the main guarantor of this international order and, similarly, has had few to no incentives to challenge it.

More importantly, Japan and the United States welcomed China's accession to the existing economic and political order. Since President Richard Nixon normalized relations with Beijing in 1972, the U.S. has consistently worked to deeper incorporate China into the international community. For instance, the United States and Japan assisted China in joining the WTO, which allowed it to have a say in the formation and development of the international trade regime. Another example is the recent Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations: Washington has indicated that "the TPP door is open to Beijing"³⁶ while China's Premier Li Keqian has recently stated that it has an open attitude toward the

³⁵ Office of the Prime Minister of Japan, *The National Security Strategy*, 2013, 2-4. The NSS is accessible at http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2013/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2013/12/17/NSS.pdf

³⁶ Bernard K. Gordon, "Bring China into TPP," *The National Interest*, Apr. 11, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/bring-china-tpp-10227>

proposed agreement.³⁷ Lastly, Japan and the U.S. both benefit from the status quo vis-à-vis China, which reinforces their general satisfaction with it and suggests that as long as China remains a “responsible stakeholder,” its rise will be welcomed “within a larger framework where the parties recognize a shared interest in sustaining political, economic, and security systems that provide common benefits”.³⁸

The analysis becomes less sanguine as we look at China. China has shown numerous signs of dissatisfaction with certain elements of the existing world order in the past ranging from its disregard of international law in the South China sea to its unwillingness to revalue the *yuan*. Here it will suffice to say that China seems to respect only those elements of the status quo that bring it direct benefits. China is not the only state that does this, so concluding that it is a greedy power based solely on this argument would be a gross exaggeration. However, certain instances of China’s dissatisfaction with the status quo are very different from others in that they are institutionalized as core principles of China’s foreign and domestic policy. These include the Taiwan issue, the territorial dispute in the South China Sea (the so-called nine-dash line claim), and the Senkaku/Diaoyutai island dispute.

The status quo regarding Taiwan is that the island is *de facto* independent with little to no *de jure* recognition. China is the only significant power openly opposed to the status quo since the reunification of the Chinese nation is one of

³⁷ Ningzhu Zhu, “China open to Trans-Pacific Partnership: [P]remier,” *Xinhua*, Apr. 10, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-04/10/c_133252014.htm

³⁸ Robert B. Zoellick, “Whither china: From membership to responsibility?” *DISAM Journal of International Security Assistance Management* 28, no. 2 (2006): 98.

the main objectives of the Communist Party. This stance is institutionalized in the 2005 Anti-Secession Law adopted by the Chinese government in the face of the threat of Taiwan declaring *de jure* independence from the mainland. While not recognizing Taiwan as an independent nation, the U.S. is obligated by the Taiwan Relations Act to assist Taipei in case of an armed attack by the PRC and the capabilities of the U.S.-Japan alliance may be used for that purpose. This makes China view even exclusively defensive capabilities (such as TMD/BMD systems) developed by Japan as a threat, a fact which Christensen mistakenly attributes to the workings of the security dilemma.³⁹ But it is a dangerous delusion: firstly, China is not aiming to maximize its objective security but fears that its long-term subjective goal of reunification may be hindered. Secondly, and more importantly, the security dilemma theory would predict peace even when there is an opportunity for China to seize Taiwan with relatively low costs. But in reality this may not be the case, and when the state's dissatisfaction with the status quo is institutionalized, it is likely to attempt to challenge the status quo at its first convenience. I call this dissatisfaction *institutionalized greed*; its dangers are well exemplified by the case of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea.

China's greed in the South China Sea is institutionalized by Beijing's official claims to almost all of its area and the islands within it. The security dilemma theory would predict the retention of status quo in this case since the traditional variables of offense-defense differentiation and offense-defense balance are favorable. However, China actually challenged the status quo by *de facto* seizing two small Filipino island: the Mischief Reef in 1994 and the Scarborough Shoal in

³⁹ Christensen, 64-69.

2012. This situation may be repeated with the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands, which China also claims but which are administered by Japan. Beijing reacts painfully to Japan's attempts to boost its exclusively defensive capabilities because this would hinder China in accomplishing its goal of changing the status quo surrounding the islands. By establishing an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that stretches over the disputed islands, China has further institutionalized its greed with regard to the rocks.

Since the main purpose of this paper is to showcase the inability of the security dilemma theory to explain the downturn in Sino-Japanese security relations rather than to present an in-depth analysis of the actual causality, I will stop at arguing that the greed variable, and particularly the institutionalized greed factor, seem to play an important role. This claim furthermore weakens the explanatory potential of the security dilemma theory since when one or more states are greedy, "the puzzle largely disappears: the incompatibility of states' goals provides a straightforward explanation for competition and conflict."⁴⁰ Before proceeding to conclusions, I will briefly discuss two alternative explanations that may be viewed as non-realist modifications of the security dilemma concept.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

As I mentioned in the introduction and the first section of this paper, certain scholars tend to explain the inability of Japan and China to successfully cooperate in the security domain by looking at non-realist variables. The first popular explanation centers on the issues of history. During the period between 1931

⁴⁰ Glaser, 190.

and 1945 Japan has infringed on China's sovereignty, started an aggressive war with China, and conducted numerous atrocities matching those of the Nazi Germany while fighting the war. It has been argued that the memories of this period have shaped China's policy toward Japan, affecting both the perceptions and values of its leaders⁴¹ and China's popular opinion of Japan.⁴² Another element of this explanation is the claim that Japan has failed to apologize to China "in a meaningful way," reinforcing Beijing's mistrust of Japan.⁴³ Such claims may be seen, in a way, as non-realist modifications of the security dilemma theory: the states have compatible security objective but fail to cooperate due to misperception resulting from non-realist variables.

In reality, however, the history/perceptions hypothesis is not borne out by evidence. If it were true, for example, China would have been preoccupied with Japan since the very beginning of the Cold War, but Beijing was obviously driven by assessments of Japan's power, capabilities, and the U.S.-Japan alliance dynamics in its policies towards Tokyo. Before the quasi-*rapprochement* with the U.S. it was most wary of the two hostile superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—while after the Nixon normalization China's attention tended to concentrate on the Soviet threat. Japan was not a serious concern as it was weak militarily, with the U.S.-Japan alliance playing the role of a "cork in the bottle" of Japan's rearmament. Curiously, Jennifer Lind finds no strong positive correlation between remembrance and threat perception,⁴⁴ so this element of the

⁴¹ Nathan and Scobell, xvii.

⁴² See, for example, Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Problem of Memory," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 6 (1998): 37-49.

⁴³ For a general discussion of the apologies argument see Jennifer Lind, "Apologies in International Politics," *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 517-556.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 551.

history/perceptions hypothesis seems questionable at best and most likely spurious.

Moreover, the existence of historical animosity did not hamper Sino-Japanese cooperation *when* and *where* the two countries' interests converged. For example, when China was still weak and needed good relations with Japan for economic purposes, the Senkaku/Diaoyutai dispute did not surface. Furthermore, in the 1978 Joint Communiqué, China officially renounced its demands for reparations from Japan. The Japanese emperor—one of the symbols of Japan's imperial and militaristic past—actually visited China in 1992 and made public a statement that “unambiguously placed the blame on Japan for its wartime aggression, marking the clearest acceptance ... by Tokyo of responsibility for its conduct in the 1931 seizure of Manchuria, the 1937 invasion of China and the brutal occupation that followed”⁴⁵ as of then.

The same can be said about economic cooperation: historical animosity has not stopped China and Japan from becoming greatest trade and investment partners. China also accepted Japan's generous official development assistance only to describe it as a substitute for reparations (which it officially waived) when the timing became convenient. In a nutshell, China's use of the history card in its diplomacy is instrumental because it is not constant and has been correlated positively with China's concrete policy goals.

Another popular argument centers on the issue of domestic nationalism in China. It states that since domestic nationalism is one of the pillars of the

⁴⁵ David E. Sanger, “Japan's Emperor Tells China Only of His 'Sadness' on War,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/24/world/japan-s-emperor-tells-china-only-of-his-sadness-on-war.html>

legitimacy of the CCP, the country's leadership cannot help but cave in to the demands of the virulently nationalistic populace. With Japan being a major trigger of China's nationalism, one may think that excessive cooperation with Japan could cause public unrest and therefore challenge the CCP's legitimacy, making it increasingly hard for Beijing to compromise with Tokyo on security-related issues in particular.

This claim is, however, effectively refuted by Suisheng Zhao, who has persuasively argued that public nationalism has been always used instrumentally by the CCP, boosted when needed and quelled when posing a threat to the party. Moreover, Zhao maintains that in the recent years the core interests of the state and the demands of China's nationalists have converged and now the Chinese state is "more willing to play the popular nationalist gallery in pursuing the core interests."⁴⁶ According to Zhao, this new nationalism is guided by pragmatism and is disciplined neither by a set of values nor established principles. This state-driven instrumental nationalism, in the context of Sino-Japanese security relations, takes us back to the discussion of institutionalized greed since it is used to propound China's core interests in its territorial disputes with Japan and to support China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, not to mention the Taiwan issue, which by definition is directly related to nationalism.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has established that the security dilemma theory is not a good explanatory tool when it comes to the downturn in Sino-Japanese security

⁴⁶ Zhao, 537.

relations. It has been used by a number of scholars, but when examined against the key variables of offense-defense differentiation and offense-defense balance, it fails to produce predictions consistent with reality. This is important because the classical security dilemma theory generates overly sanguine predictions when applied to the Sino-Japanese relationship. It makes us assume that both states are pure security seekers and that the only problem that stops them from achieving compatible security objectives is misperceptions. The same may be said about the non-realist alternative explanations discussed above, which use fallacious logic in blaming the downturn on the workings of unrelated variables.

I have argued that Sino-Japanese relations, while generally absolved from classical security dilemma dynamics, are afflicted by a security problem. This problem seems to stem from the fact that China is not a genuine status quo power and a security maximizer. This became clear when I examined China's behavior and policies against the non-structural variable of greed proposed by Glaser. He defined it as the state's desire to expand for reasons other than security, which is certain to cause aversion at least in some realist scholars. I attempted to redefine it in more concrete terms, as the extent to which the state is dissatisfied with the status quo. This can be inferred from the state's actions with a certain degree of precision, especially from those actions that become institutionalized in one way or another, thus making them observable and mitigating the problem of dearth of information.⁴⁷ When examined through the prism of institutionalized greed, the downturn in Sino-Japanese becomes

⁴⁷ Here we do not look at intentions *per se*, which are generally not observable, but at their manifestations. Institutionalization is a good criterion because if the state institutionalizes a certain element of its foreign policy, its previously unknowable intentions "crystallize" and can be taken into consideration.

explicable and so do the seemingly counterintuitive elements of Beijing's behavior: China is waiting for an opportunity to change the status quo and make it congruent with its own vision, therefore any potential impediments—including Japan's offensive weapons—are viewed in Beijing with chagrin. However, institutionalized greed alone does not mean the state will inevitably attempt to change the status quo because the costs of such an act may be too high, but it definitely dramatically increases the likelihood of such an event.

However, since the main purpose of this study was to showcase the inability of the security dilemma theory to explain Sino-Japanese tensions, my own hypothesis requires significant further research and testing. What is the potential of the institutionalized greed variable to explain other relationships? How can it be integrated into the broader body of realist literature without losing its explanatory power (for instance, Mearshiemer's regional hegemony theory)? These questions need to be addressed in future research.

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