

Neoclassical Realism's Perspective on China's Policy Toward the Senkaku/Diaoyu
Islands

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Abstract of Thesis

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For the first few decades since the dispute over the Senkaku Islands first became issue between Japan and China in the late 1960s, China had taken a moderate policy, emphasizing on shelving the dispute and focusing on joint development. After the end of the Cold War, however, China has taken more assertive measures over the Senkaku Islands, such as increasing its maritime activities around the islands. Meanwhile, China remains willing to maintain stability in its relationship with Japan, and has accordingly taken several measures to seek cooperation with Japan over the territorial dispute. The previous studies that focused on either systemic factors or domestic factors fail to explain China's growing assertiveness over the dispute combined with its attempts to maintain its stable relationship with Japan. This paper attempts to fill this gap by applying a Neoclassical Realism's framework, which synthesizes both systemic and domestic factors to explain China's Senkaku policy.

This thesis identifies systemic factors as polarity and material capabilities, and domestic factors as the Chinese Communist Party's performance legitimacy and nationalism. The systemic factors indicate that China has become more assertive over the

Senkaku Islands since the end of the Cold War because of the demise of the threat from the Soviet Union and of its growing capabilities. And the domestic factors explain China's attempts to maintain stable relationship with Japan. The necessity of sustaining economic growth for political legitimacy, for which Japan's economic market is indispensable, forces China to prevent tension with Japan from getting too high. And the necessity of answering growing nationalism which demands more assertive policy toward the Senkaku Islands at the same time as maintaining economic growth makes China prefer "reactive assertiveness", or using an action by another party as justification to push back hard and change the facts on the ground in its favor. In this way, China can placate nationalists' demand as being assertive, but China also can maintain relatively stable relationship because it is "reactive", rather than outright assertiveness, which would harm its relations with Japan more. The combination of these systemic and domestic factors result in China's growing assertive policy over the Senkaku Islands at the same time as attempting to maintain stable relationship with Japan.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For the past few years, China's assertive actions over the territorial disputes in the East and the South China Sea triggered a lot of discussions to explain China's strategy toward the territorial disputes. Particularly, the dispute over the Senkaku (which is called Diaoyu in Chinese) Islands attracted attention from a large number of scholars as this dispute involves the two largest Asian countries. For the first few decades since the dispute over the Senkaku Islands first became issue in the late 1960s, China had taken a moderate policy, emphasizing on "shelving" the dispute and focusing on joint development. After the end of the Cold War, however, a lot of scholars point out that China has taken more assertive measures over the Senkaku Islands, such as increasing its maritime activities around the islands.¹ Meanwhile, China remains willing to maintain stability in its relationship with Japan, and has accordingly taken several measures to seek cooperation with Japan over the territorial dispute.² A lot of research

¹ For general overview of China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands since the late 1960s, see Reinhard Drifte, "The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands territorial dispute between Japan and China: Between the materialization of the 'China Treat' and Japan 'reversing the outcome of World War II?'" *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, No. 32 (2013); Paul J. Smith, "The Senkaku/Diaoyu Controversy: A Crisis Postponed," *Naval War College Review*, Vol.66, No.2 (2013):27-44; William Choong, "The Ties That Divide: History, Honor, and Territory in Sino-Japanese Relations," *Adelphi Papers*, Vol.54, No. 445 (2014).

² For example, China and Japan concluded joint development over the Senkaku Islands in 2008, and recently reached an agreement on pursuing preventing the deterioration of the situation in the East China Sea through dialogue and consultation. See James Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Waters: China, Japan, and maritime order in the East China Sea*. (Washington, DC : Georgetown University Press, 2014); Shannon Tiezzi, "A China-Japan Breakthrough: A Primer on Their 4 Point Consensus," *the Diplomat*, November 7, 2014.

has been done on explaining China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands. The research can be categorized into two groups. The first group focuses on systemic-level analysis, such as material capabilities and international systems. They argue that the change of the balance of power in Sino-Japanese relations tilting in China's favor and China's confidence in its growing capabilities cause China's assertiveness in the territorial disputes.³ The central argument of this group is that systemic factors explain China's policy toward the territorial disputes, and they do not usually take China's domestic factors into account. Meanwhile, the other group bases their analysis on unit-level factors. Unit-level factors, also known as domestic factors, here means factors concerning domestic politics, such as decision-makers perceptions and the state-society relationship.⁴ Some scholars in this group emphasize China's perspectives on sovereignty. They use constructivist understanding of sovereignty, which is that sovereignty is a contested notion; they argue that the other disputant's actions that China perceived undermined China's sovereignty over the territories compelled Chinese elites to take forcible actions to strengthen their claim of sovereignty.⁵ Based on this

³ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics: Updated Edition*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014): 360-411; Yves-Heng Lim, *China's Naval Power : An Offensive Realist Approach*. (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Why Chinese Assertiveness is Here to Stay," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol.37, No.4 (2015): 151-170.

⁴ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics*, Vol. 51 (1998):152.

⁵ Paul O'Shea, "Sovereignty and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Territorial Dispute," *Working Paper 240*, EIJIS, Stockholm School of Economics, September 2012; Susumu Yabuki, "China-Japan Territorial Conflicts and the US-Japan-China Relations in Historical and Contemporary Perspective," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol 11, Issue 9, No. 2, March 4, 2013.

understanding, these scholars explain China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands in relation to Japan's Senkaku policy. Other analyses in this group examine the influence of growing nationalism and Chinese Communist Party's performance legitimacy. Growing nationalism in China since the 1990s is seen to push China to take harder stance toward the Senkaku issues and the CCP needs to answer such nationalism somehow to maintain its political legitimacy.⁶

Although each approach has its merits, these groups fail to explain China's growing assertiveness over the dispute combined with its attempts to maintain its stable relationship with Japan. The first group ignores Chinese domestic factors such as nationalism, which, as many scholars on Chinese politics point out, are increasingly influencing China's foreign policy making.⁷ Therefore, systemic factors may explain a large trend of Chinese policy toward the Senkaku Islands, meaning that China is becoming more assertive toward the Senkaku Islands as its capabilities grow, but it is difficult for them to explain more than that. The detail of China's Senkaku policy, such as why China continues to seek cooperation with Japan to de-escalate the territorial issues at the same time as it is taking more assertive actions, is hard to explain by using only systemic factors. At the same time, using only unit-level factors such as the

⁶ Chien-Peng Chung, *Domestic politics, international bargaining and China's territorial disputes*. (London, UK and New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip C. Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands," *International Security*, Vol.23, No.3 (1998/1999): 114-146.

⁷ For example, see: Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, "New Foreign Policy Actors in China," *SIPRI Policy Paper 26*, September 2010.

influence of nationalism can describe the dynamics of Chinese reaction to each incidents over the Senkaku Islands, but such an approach is too focused on explaining Chinese reactions to individual incidents and does not provide us with the overall trend of China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands.⁸

Some scholars already pointed out the necessity of utilizing both systemic and domestic factors to explain China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands.⁹ But these studies focus on explaining China's action to a specific incident such as China's reactions to Japan's nationalization of the Islands in 2012, and thus still do not provide us with an overall explanation of China's Senkaku policy since the 1970s by incorporating both systemic and domestic factors.

The problem is, therefore, that there have been few analyses incorporating both systemic and unit level factors in a theoretically coherent way and thus these analyses are unable to explain China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands. This paper attempts to fill this gap by applying a Neoclassical Realism's framework, which synthesizes both systemic and domestic factors to explain foreign policy, to China's Senkaku policy.

⁸ This is because these studies tend to focus on China's policy when nationalism flares up in reaction to specific actions taken by Japanese. For example, large anti-Japanese demonstrations occurred in Hong Kong and Taiwan when Japanese government was reported in 1990 to approve a lighthouse on the Senkaku Islands erected by Japanese nationalists. The studies in this group meticulously explain the PRC's policy toward the Senkaku issue and toward its domestic nationalists during such incidents. However, the studies focusing on unit-level factors tend to ignore China's Senkaku policy when nationalism is not flaring up. For instance, see Chung, Chung, *Domestic politic*; Han-yi Shaw, "The Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Dispute: Its History and an Analysis of the Ownership Claims of the P.R.C., R.O.C., and Japan," *Occasional Papers/ Reprints Series in Contemporary Asian Studies*, No.3 (1999).

⁹ Gregory J. Moore, "In Your Face": Domestic Politics, Nationalism, and 'Face' in the Sino-Japanese Islands Dispute," *Asian Perspective*, 38 (2014): 219–240.

Structure of the Paper

Chapter 2 explains the Neoclassical Realism's framework of analysis and identifies what systemic factors and domestic factors are analyzed in this thesis. Chapter 3 describes China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands since the 1970s. Chapter 4 then offers an explanation of China's Senkaku policy described in Chapter 3 by using the Neoclassical Realism's framework, discussing how the Neoclassical Realism's framework synthesizes systemic and domestic factors and provides a coherent explanation for China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands. Chapter 5 will in turn discuss more in detail why approaches that focus on either systemic or domestic factors are not sufficient to explain China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands. In conclusion, this paper argues that the Neoclassical Realism's framework can provide a coherent picture of China's Senkaku policy since the 1970s to present.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

To explain China's policy described above, this paper uses Neoclassical Realist framework. Although Neoclassical Realism has been around since the 1990s, this theory is still underappreciated in the discussions about China's Senkaku policy. There are some works that employ neoclassical realism's framework to explain China's foreign policy, but their analyses discuss China's foreign policy generally, or some specific issues, and do not pay particular attention to explaining China's Senkaku policy.¹⁰

The Neoclassical Realism framework, as Gideon Rose indicated, put priority on the international system and material capability, but it at the same time argues that unit level analysis is necessary to understand one country's foreign policy because "systemic pressure must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level."¹¹ For Neoclassical Realists, systemic pressure ultimately drives states' external behavior, meaning that as the balance of power tilts to its favor states will seek more ambitions and act accordingly to realize them.¹² However, Neoclassical Realists argues that there is no "direct link", as offensive realists would suggest, between systemic incentives and

¹⁰ See: Denny Roy, *Return of the Dragon: Rising China and Regional Security*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013):81-102; Camilla T.N. Sørensen, "Is China becoming more aggressive? A Neoclassical Realist Analysis," *Asian Perspective*, Vol.37 (2013): 363-385.

¹¹ Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,"146.

¹² Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, et al., "Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell et al.(New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 25; Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 152.

foreign policy. Systemic factors gives incentives, but they do not tell us what kind of policy a state will take in response to such incentives.¹³ Therefore, domestic factors will determine the state's foreign policy response. The remainder of this chapter will discuss what the systemic and domestic factors are that matter in considering China's Senkaku policy.

Systemic Factors

Systemic factors that this paper refers to are polarity and material capabilities.¹⁴

Polarity is defined as the number of blocs of states that exert power in the international system.¹⁵ Polarity is important as different polarities result in different dynamics in the international system and thus present different opportunities and constraints to states.¹⁶

For instance, when the Senkaku islands became a foreign policy subject in the late 1960s, China was under threat by both the superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, and the former posed a more severe threat to China.¹⁷ To deal with the Soviet Union, China had to cooperate with the U.S. and its allies, including Japan, and accordingly China had to keep the tension down over the territorial disputes to maintain

¹³ Norrin. M. Ripsman et al., "Conclusion: The state of neoclassical realism," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell et al.(New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009):284.

¹⁴ Sørensen, "Is China Becoming More Aggressive?" 369; Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 151.

¹⁵ The definition of the polarity is drawn from Karen A. Mingst and Ivan M. Arreguín-Toft, *Essentials of International Relations*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), available at <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/polisci/essentials-of-international-relations5/ch/04/summary.aspx>

¹⁶ Sørensen, "Is China Becoming More Aggressive?" 369.

¹⁷ Robert G. Sutter, *Foreign Relations of the PRC: The Legacies and Constraints of China's International Politics since 1949*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013): 59-61.

its cooperation with Japan.¹⁸ After the demise of the Soviet Union, China re-focused on the Senkaku dispute, without worrying about dealing with the Soviet Union.¹⁹

Therefore, the main focus on polarity in this paper is the effect of the Soviet Union on China's Senkaku policy. As for material capabilities, this paper refers to capabilities, including economic as well as military, with which states can influence each other.²⁰

China's military and economic capabilities have significantly increased since the 1970s, and this paper will discuss how these increased capabilities influence China's Senkaku Policy.

Domestic Factors

Although there are potentially numerous domestic factors that could intervene in the systemic factors, many Neoclassical Realists argue that one of the most important elements is the relationship between state leaders and the people. This is because state leaders need to safeguard their positions and ability to govern as well as to secure public support to mobilize resources necessary for their foreign policies.²¹ Therefore, this thesis follows Sørensen's study and focuses on two domestic factors concerning the state-society relationship: the performance legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party

¹⁸ Eric Hyer, *The Pragmatic Dragon: China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015): 189.

¹⁹ The influence of the Soviet Union on China's Senkaku policy will be discussed more in detail in the chapter 3.

²⁰ Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 151.

²¹ Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006): 12-14.

(CCP) and rising nationalism.²² Since the start of the economic reforms in the 1970s, the ideological legitimacy of the Chinese communist leadership started to be undermined. Especially after the end of the cold war and collapse of several communist countries, the CCP needed to find legitimacy to maintain its rule in China other than socialism ideology. The Chinese Communist Party tried to draw lessons from the collapse of other communist countries in order to maintain its rule in China, and the most important lesson that the CCP drew was to maintain economic development to stay on the top.²³ Therefore, the performance legitimacy has replaced the ideological legitimacy for the CCP rule in China.

To maintain economic development, one of the most important factors is to maintain international stability.²⁴ Jiang Zemin summarized in 1993 the necessity of maintaining peaceful external environment for economic development as following:

We must ... strengthen our foreign affairs work and foreign exchanges, expand our country's latitude in the international situation, and *increase our initiative in handling international affairs in order to create even better external conditions for domestic development* that are beneficial to our acceleration of the pace of reform, opening up, and the development of modernization, consolidating our energy in handling the national economy, and continuing to enhance our country's comprehensive national power. This is the essence of guaranteeing the

²² Sørensen, "Is China Becoming More Aggressive?" 376-378. Downs and Saunders also identify these two factors that constrains China's action toward the Senkaku Islands. See "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism," 120-124.

²³ David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*. (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008): 41-86.

²⁴ David C. Gompert and Phillip C. Saunders, *The Paradox of Power: Sino-American Strategic Restraint in an Era of Vulnerability*. (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011): 41.

nation's long-term peace and good governance ... [emphasis added]²⁵

Firstly, China's economic growth is largely dependent on stable supply from other countries, including Japan. Aggressive international behavior could affect the willingness of other states to trade with and invest in China. For example, Japan suspended some developmental aid after China conducted nuclear tests in 1995.²⁶ Similarly, taking a too aggressive stance on the Senkaku Islands could disrupt economic relations with Japan, which is important for China's economic growth.²⁷ Therefore, even if systemic factors push China to take more assertive actions to secure their territorial interests, this domestic factor would constrain China from taking too much assertive actions out of concern for undermining economic development, and the legitimacy of the CCP.

Nationalism is another domestic factor that influences China's foreign policy. Since the end of the cold war, China's government has promoted nationalism through 'patriotic education campaign' as another source for the CCP's legitimacy in addition to economic performance.²⁸ Several scholars point out the increasing importance of nationalism in Chinese foreign policymaking. China under Mao Zedong was ruled by

²⁵ Quoted in David M. Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines'," in *Right sizing the People's Liberation Army Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, ed. Andrew Scobell et al. (Carlisle, PA : Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007):100.

²⁶ Downs and Saunders, "legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism,"121.

²⁷ Downs and Saunders, "legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism,"138.

²⁸ Suisheng Zhao, "A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1998): 287–302.

his individual leadership. Although he often consulted other senior leaders and experts, he had the right to decide China's foreign policy, with sometimes little consideration of other professionals and leaders.²⁹ After the death of Mao, Deng Xiaoping became the leader of China. He was more open to the expertise of professionals and politicians dealing with foreign and national security matters, but he still kept strong control of decision making on foreign affairs. Around at the start of this century, however, Chinese policymaking became more influenced by more pluralistic range of Chinese decision makers, who represented a variety of government, party, non-government organizations, as well as public opinion of Chinese people.³⁰ One leading study on the Chinese foreign policymaking argues that the public opinion has "an indirect, and yet increasingly felt – or perceived – impact on foreign policy making," because, as one Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official puts it, the Chinese government does "not want dissatisfaction to escalate and lead into street protest."³¹ Therefore, nationalism and nationalistic public opinion became an important factor that could constrain Chinese foreign policy making.

China's nationalism plays an important part in the Senkaku issue as well, as can be seen in numerous public demonstrations and internet activities calling for

²⁹ Sutter, *Foreign Relations of the PRC*, 124.

³⁰ Sutter, *Foreign Relations of the PRC*, 125-127.

³¹ Jakobson and Knox, "Key Foreign Policy Actors in China," 44.

stronger Chinese actions regarding the Senkaku Islands.³² For example, when Japan nationalized the Senkaku Islands in 2012, several Internet users in China called for military intervention, and called the Foreign Ministry “Ministry of Traitors” for asking Japan to return to talks.³³ This nationalistic movement can easily turned to anti-CCP movement if the CCP does not satisfy the nationalist sentiment, thus nationalism pressures China to take harsher actions toward the Senkaku Islands to maintain its legitimacy.³⁴

These domestic factors, performance legitimacy and rising nationalism, put China in a difficult position. Maintaining economic growth requires an internationally friendly environment, but placating domestic nationalism may damage relations with other states. As one scholar puts it, China needs “to maintain stable relations with Japan to ensure China’s continued economic growth, but also fears appearing weak before nationalists at home.”³⁵ Domestic factors compel China to maintain this sensitive balance between promoting economic growth through good relations with other states, including Japan, and answering popular nationalism over the Senkaku Islands at the same time.

Although the main focus on domestic factors is performance legitimacy and

³² For general discussions on China’s nationalism regarding the Senkaku Islands, see International Crisis Group, “Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks,” *Asia Report* No. 245 (2013): 17-19; Downs and Saunders, “legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism,” 117-120.

³³ Choong, “The Ties That Divide,” 111.

³⁴ Moore, “In Your Face,” 230.

³⁵ Peter Hays Gries, “China’s “New Thinking” on Japan,” *The China Quarterly*, Vol.184, No.184 (2005): 848.

nationalism, there is another factor that is worth mentioning: bureaucratic politics. The government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is by no means a unified institution. Many institutions, such as the Communist Party, ministries, and the military, have often different views on foreign policy and the change of the power balance between each actor could influence the overall foreign policymaking of the PRC.³⁶ For example, one study argues that the declining influence of the Foreign Ministry, which prefers a moderate foreign policy, is facilitating assertive policy toward the Senkaku Islands.³⁷ To deeply analyze China's decision making on foreign policy is a rather complicated task because of China's opaque decision making system,³⁸ and thus it is beyond the scope of this thesis. This thesis deems that performance legitimacy and nationalism are enough as domestic factors to explain China's Senkaku policy, therefore only mentions a few comments on the element of bureaucratic politics when appropriate.

Before offering Neoclassical Realism's explanation on China's Senkaku policy by incorporating the systemic factors and the domestic factors described above, the next chapter will survey the history of China's Senkaku Policy since the 1970s. This is

³⁶ Jakobson and Knox, "Key Foreign Policy Actors in China," 1-2.

³⁷ International Crisis Group, "Dangerous Waters," 34-36

³⁸ David Shambaugh, a leading scholar on Chinese politics, points out that because of China's policy of maintain secrecy about its political system, it is "very difficult to pin down the actual process by which decision are made and implemented in the foreign affairs system." David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 61.

because the purpose of this paper is to offer a comprehensive explanation for China's Senkaku policy rather than to discuss specific China's actions to some incidents. Thus, grasping the overall trend of China's Senkaku policy first will facilitate the following discussions about the dynamics of China's Senkaku policy.

Chapter 3: Brief History of China's policy over territorial disputes in East Asia

China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands can be divided into three phases: the first phase is from 1972 to 1992, when China emphasized its "shelving dispute" policy and did not do much to advance its claim over the islands. The second phase is from 1992 to 2002, in which China started taking actions to strengthen its claim over the Senkaku Islands. In the third one which is from 2003 to present, China has been taking more outright assertive actions to strengthen its claim over the islands.

The first Phase: 1972 – 1991

In 1969, when an international organization's report found out that there are ample amounts of oil in the sea around the Senkaku Islands, China and Taiwan started to argue in favor of their sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands.³⁹ In September 1970, Taiwan's government formerly protested to the U.S. government that was about to return Okinawa to Japan, expressing its objection to Japanese sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands. Three months later the PRC also made a similar claim through Xinhua News agency.⁴⁰ In 1971, the PRC formerly claimed sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, and in 1972 the Chinese representative at a UN ocean conference called Japan's

³⁹ James Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Waters: China, Japan, and maritime order in the East China Sea*. (Washington, DC : Georgetown University Press, 2014): 43.

⁴⁰ Smith, "The Senkaku/Diaoyu Controversy: A Crisis Postponed," 31-32.

control of the islands “a glaring act of aggression.”⁴¹

Despite several official/unofficial expressions claiming its sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands by the PRC in the first few years of the 1970s, the PRC tried to avoid discussing the territorial issue with Japan at the negotiations for normalizing their relations. Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka visited China in 1972 and met Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai for the negotiation of normalizing their relations. In this meeting, Tanaka asked Zhou about the sovereignty issue of the Senkaku Islands, Zhou replied that “I don’t want to talk about it this time. It is not good to talk about it right now.” And Tanaka did not ask further and moved on to next topic.⁴² Zhou also tried to play down the Senkaku issue when he negotiated with Yoshikatsu Takeiri, the leader of the Komei Party, saying that “There is no need to touch on the question of the Senkaku Islands. I don’t think Mr. Takeiri, you were interested in the issue. I wasn’t, either, but because of oil, some historian started to raise the issue... There is no need to pay much attention to this issue.”⁴³ The next time Japan and China discussed the sovereignty issue of the Senkaku Islands was when the then Foreign Minister Sonoda met Deng Xiaoping for the negotiation of the Peace Treaty in 1978. When Sonoda expressed his

⁴¹ Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Water*, 44.

⁴² Akira Ishii et al., *Kiroku to Kosho: Nicchu Kokko Seijoka, Nicchu Heiwa Yuko Joyaku Teiketsu Kosho*[Record and Documents: Normalization of Sino-Japanese Relations and Sino Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty]. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003):68.

⁴³ Akio Takahara, “The Senkaku Trawler Collision Incident, September 2010,” in *The Okinawa Question: Futenma, the US-Japan Alliance & Regional Security*, ed. Akikazu Hashimoto et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Sigur Center for Asian Studies, George Washington University, 2013): 93.

concern about an incident that approximately 200 Chinese fishing boats violated the territorial water surrounding the Senkaku Islands during the negotiation, Deng replied as following: “We should shelve this issue (the Senkaku issue). Our generation has not found any solution yet, but our next generation or later will find a way to solve the issue.”⁴⁴ After the meeting, Deng visited Japan, and declared at a press conference on 25 October 1978 that the issue should be left to future generations who may be wiser.⁴⁵ Some Japanese politicians also agreed with Deng’s proposal. For example, the then ruling Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Ohira Masayoshi and Foreign Minister Sonoda Sunao stated in Diet discussions that it was in Japan’s national interest to go along with shelving the Senkaku issue for the next 20 or 30 years.⁴⁶ Recently, the Japanese government has repeatedly denied the existence of an agreement where Japanese officials agreed to Deng’s proposal, and it is not the scope of this paper to delve into the controversy as to whether there was an “agreement” between China and Japan. Suffice it to say here that there were some Japanese politicians who expressed that there was an agreement, and that the Chinese side recognized that they agreed with Japan on shelving the dispute.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ishii et al., *Kiroku to Kosho*: 321.

⁴⁵ Reinhard Drifte, “The Japan-China Confrontation Over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands – Between ‘shelving’ and ‘dispute escalation’,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, Issue 30, No. 3, accessed in March 18, 2015,

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-japan-china-confrontation-over-the-senkakudiaoyu-islands-between-shelving-and-dispute-escalation/5393760>

⁴⁶ Reinhard Drifte, “The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands territorial dispute between Japan and China,” 20.

⁴⁷ In 2012 the then Chinese Foreign Minister Zhang Zhijun officially stated that in the negotiation

Following the normalization of the relations in 1972, Japan and China had maintained good relationship during the 1970s, the 1980s, and onto the 1990s. Although some nationalists in both countries caused some troubles for the governments over the Senkaku Islands, the Chinese government did not take any actions toward the Senkaku Islands, except for some verbal protests against the actions by Japanese nationalists. For example, in 1990 a Japanese nationalist organization called Nihon Seinensha (Japanese Youth Federation) submitted an application to have the lighthouse built by them in 1978 recognized by the Japanese Coast Guard. In response to this application, nationalists from Taiwan made demonstrations in Taiwan and tried to land on the Senkaku Islands to protest, but Beijing's government merely reiterated its sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands and tried to keep tension down. The CCP issued a circular to local party committees, stressing that tension over "these economically and strategically insignificant islands should not affect friendly relations between China and Japan." Accordingly, Beijing banned student demonstrations and imposed a blackout on coverage of the protests occurring overseas.⁴⁸ These Beijing's attempts in 1990 to keep tension with Japan down were criticized by overseas Chinese nationalists for being

for the Peace Treaty "the two sides agreed not to touch the issue for the time being, and reached the understanding and consensus of 'putting aside the Diaoyu Dao issue to be resolved later.'" Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views Regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute, *China Leadership Monitor*, No.41: 20.

⁴⁸ Downs and Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism," 130.

unpatriotic and not being more forceful in its objections to Japan.⁴⁹

The Second Phase: 1992 – 2002

The situation began to change since 1992. China began to assert its sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands by actions, but not in a particularly inflammatory way. In 1992, China passed the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone [Territorial Law], declaring the Senkaku Islands as Chinese territory and authorizing the use of military force to repel foreign vessels from its territory.⁵⁰

Japan protested through diplomatic channels to remove the name of the Senkaku Islands from the Law to no avail. The Article one of the Territorial Law stipulates that the PRC is willing to safeguard its national security and its maritime rights and interests of its territorial sea and its contiguous zone. And the Senkaku Islands was specifically written as China's territory in this law, which means China's willingness to safeguard its interests around the Senkaku Island as well.⁵¹ Starting from 1994, China heightened activities of Chinese survey vessels and aircraft in the East China Sea, including around the Senkaku Islands.⁵² On 16 August 1995, ASDF F-4 intercepted two Chinese Su-27s

⁴⁹ Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Water*, 47.

⁵⁰ Shigeo Hiramatsu, *Chūgokuno Kaiyō Senryaku* [Chinese Maritime Strategy]. (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1993): 5-6.

⁵¹ Hiramatsu, *Chūgokuno Kaiyō Senryaku*, 6.

⁵² Euan Graham, *Japan's Sea Lane Security, 1940-2004: A matter of life and death?* (New York : Routledge, 2006):211; Tatsuo Urano, *Senkaku Shotō, Ryūkyū Chūgoku – Nichū Kankei Shi: Bunseki, Shiryō, Bunken*. [Senkaku Islands, Ryukyu, and China – the History of Sino-Japanese Relations: Analysis, Document, Literature.] (Tokyo: Sanwa Shoseki, 2002): 179.

approaching the Senkaku Islands, before turning short of the islands.⁵³ Also, two Chinese submarines came close to the Senkaku Islands in August 1996. Furthermore, Chinese maritime survey ships repeatedly violated the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands. According to one Japanese news report, Chinese maritime research vessels violated the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands eight times between 1996 and 1998⁵⁴, and they also violated the territorial waters three times in 1999.⁵⁵ The East Asia Strategic Review, published by National Defense Institute of Japan, wrote that these maritime activities “aroused the fears of Japan”.⁵⁶ These activities by China were seen by Japan as China’s attempts to develop marine resources around the Senkaku Islands.⁵⁷ In fact, in a Budget Committee hearing in the Diet in 1996, a Japanese politician Taichiro Ogawara expressed his concern about China’s repeated encroachment in the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands, saying that “it can be seen that China is trying to strengthen its claim over the Senkaku Islands.”⁵⁸, and Seiji Nakamura, one of the chief members of the Security Committee of the Diet’s House of Representative also argued that these activities of Chinese maritime research ships are “clearly attempts by Chinese government to violate our sovereignty, and are also

⁵³ Graham, *Japan’s Sea Lane Security*, 213.

⁵⁴ *Sankei Shimbun*, June 17, 1998.

⁵⁵ Urano, *Senkaku Shotō*, 185.

⁵⁶ Graham, *Japan’s Sea Lane Security*, 213

⁵⁷ The National Institute for Defense Studies, *East Asian Strategic Review 2000*. (Tokyo: The National Institute for Defense Studies, 2000): 104-105.

⁵⁸ Testimony by Taichiro Ogawara, in the Budget Committee, the House of Councillors, April 15, 1996.

provocative actions.”⁵⁹ In fact, on 8 September 1996, when two Chinese maritime research ships entered the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands and were warned by Japanese Coast Guard ships, those ships replied that “we are Chinese ships, in the middle of marine research, and this is Chinese water.”⁶⁰ These activities were seen by Japan that China was advancing into the East China Sea without considering Japan’s concern.⁶¹

In order to regulate China’s maritime activities in the East China Sea, and also to prevent Chinese ships from encroaching on Japan’s territorial water, Japan proposed a notification scheme, which was agreed between China and Japan and came into effect in 2001.⁶² This mechanism said that if China or Japan conducts maritime research in the adjunct waters of the other country, it needs to notify the other country about the contents of the survey. However, this notification scheme failed to curtail Chinese maritime activities in the East China Sea. After the effectuation of the mechanism, China routinely violated the notification agreement.⁶³ According to James Manicom, Chinese vessels typically violate the agreement by not offering prior notification, by conducting a different type of operation than that specified, by operating in a different

⁵⁹ Testimony by Seiji Nakamura in the Security Committee, the House of Representative, August 3, 1999.

⁶⁰ Testimony by Shingo Nishimura in the Cabinet Committee, the House of Representative, March 21, 1997.

⁶¹ The National Institute for Defense Studies, *East Asian Strategic Review 2000*, 97.

⁶² Manicom, *Bridging the Troubled Water*, 92.

⁶³ Denny Roy, *Return of the Dragon*, 93.

area of the sea than originally stated, or by conducting several activities which were either not notified to Japan or were different from notifications. And some of these operations violating the mechanism were conducted within the EEZ of the Senkaku Islands.⁶⁴

As described above, China began to take more assertive actions to strengthen its claim over the Senkaku Islands and also over the East China Sea generally. Meanwhile, in this phase, the PRC still tried to prevent conflicts with Japan over the Islands from escalating too much. It is evident in the PRC's response to Japanese nationalists erecting a five-meter, solar powered, aluminum lighthouse on one of the Senkaku Islands in 1996 and a subsequent statement by the Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda that the territorial issue over the Senkaku Islands does not exist.⁶⁵ In response to this incident, as in 1990, the PRC government tried to de-escalate the tension between China and Japan. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen met with Japanese Foreign Minister Ikeda after the incident, and they agreed that the dispute should not overshadow bilateral relations.⁶⁶ Beijing again banned student demonstrations and prevented PRC controlled newspapers from writing about the demonstrations in Hong Kong and Taiwan, but throughout the dispute in 1996, Beijing was criticized by Chinese nationalists in the

⁶⁴ Manicom, *Bridging the Troubled Water*, 110-111.

⁶⁵ Shaw, "The Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Dispute," 19.

⁶⁶ Manicom, *Bridging the Troubled Water*, 51.

PRC for being soft toward Japanese government.⁶⁷ Besides, in 1997 China and Japan concluded the new fisheries treaty, which stipulated that the two countries will establish jointly controlled sea boundaries while leaving the waters around the disputed islands untouched.⁶⁸

The Third Phase: 2003 – Present

The balance between China's assertiveness and its desire to dampen tension began tilting further to the former in 2003. In this third phase, China escalated its activities around the Senkaku Islands. The activities started involving Chinese military. Chinese officials openly stated China's intention to strengthen its claim over the Islands by increasing its presence around the area. First of all, China has established several governmental and non-governmental organizations to facilitate maritime activities regarding the Senkaku Islands. The China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands, a mainland-based private organization for promoting PRC's claim over the Senkaku Islands, was established in December 2003.⁶⁹ Then, seven activists sent by this

⁶⁷ One example of such criticism is that during the dispute, Chinese citizens in the PRC sent over 37,000 letters and petitions with more than 150,000 signatures to the People's Daily and the People's Liberation Army Daily, calling for more aggressive action against Japan. See Downs and Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism," 131-138.

⁶⁸ Shaw, "The Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Dispute," 21. Under this fishery treaty, both countries need to obtain permission from the other country to do fishery activities within the other country's EEZ. But within the EEZ around the Senkaku Islands, both countries can operate without permission from each other and each country can exercise legal authority to its own fishery boats. Full text of the treaty in Japanese is available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/treaty/pdfs/A-H12-343.pdf#search=%27%E6%BC%81%E6%A5%AD%E3%81%AB%E9%96%A2%E3%81%99%E3%82%8B%E6%97%A5%E6%9C%AC%E3%81%A8%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%27>

⁶⁹ For more information about this organization, see <http://www.cfdd.org.cn>

Federation landed on one of the Senkaku Islands in March 2004, which was the first time private activists landed on the islands since 1996.⁷⁰ In the same year, a Chinese submarine entered the territorial waters of several Okinawa Islands, including the Senkaku Islands, while operating undersea. To deal with the submarine, Japanese government invoked Maritime Security Operation⁷¹, which is the second time that Japan enacted it since the establishment of the SDF.⁷² Also in 2004, the PLA established the Territorial Sea Basepoint Squadron under the East Sea Fleet Survey Battalion. The mission for this squadron is to throw stone markers into the waters around uninhabited islands or reefs to display China's sovereignty over them.⁷³ One study reports that the squadron threw 20 stone markers into the waters just about 12 miles away from the Senkaku Islands by 2006.⁷⁴ In 2006, the China Marine Surveillance of the State Oceanic Administration (CMS) established the Regular Patrol System to protect

⁷⁰ The last time private activists landed on the islands was when Chinese activists from Taiwan and Hong Kong landed on the islands and planted the flags of both the PRC and ROC in 1996 as a protest to the report that Japanese government would approve a lighthouse erected by Japanese nationalists on the Senkaku Islands as an official lighthouse. See Shaw, "The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands Dispute," 19.

⁷¹ Maritime Security Operation is an SDF's operation ordered by the Minister of Defense to deal with maritime situations that are beyond the capability of the Japanese Coast Guard, such as handling suspicious vessels with potent weapons.

⁷² For more discussions on the 2004 incident, see Peter Dutton, "Scouting, Signaling, and Gatekeeping: Chinese Naval Operations in Japanese Waters and the International Law Implications," *China Maritime Studies*, No.2 (2009).

⁷³ These stone markers write "Chinese Territorial Water" on the surface. See "Donghai shizuo linghai jidian shipai jiancheng: zhanlue yu xianshi yiyi juda," [Ten territorial sea basepoint stone markers for the East China Sea were completed: their strategic and actual importance are significant], *Xinhua Net*, September 14, 2006, accessed May 3, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2006-09/13/content_5084664.htm

⁷⁴ Kōichi Yamamoto, *Nihon no Kokkyō wo Chokushi Suru 1 : Senkaku Shotō, Minamitori shima, Okinotori shima, Yonagunijima*. [Facing Japan's Borders 1: Senkaku Islands, Minamitori Island, Okinotori Island, and Yonaguni Island]. (Tokyo: KK Besuto serāzu, 2012): 176-178.

interests in East China Sea.⁷⁵ According to the State Oceanic Administration, this system is to increase and regularize its patrol in the East China Sea in order to show Chinese government's "ability and determination to control over the sea area and to protect the state's maritime interests."⁷⁶ In February 2007, a Chinese maritime research vessel entered and operated in the territorial water of the Senkaku Islands without prior notification. The Japanese Coast Guard warned it to stop operations on the grounds that under UNCLOS, foreign survey or research activities were not permitted without Tokyo's permission. Beijing replied that notification was not needed since the Diaoyu Islands were part of Chinese territory.⁷⁷ In December 2008, two Chinese patrol vessels of the CMS, which was thought to be operating according to the Regular Patrol System mentioned above, entered the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands in an apparent move to strengthen China's claim to the islands. This was seen by Japan as a major escalation of China's activities because it was the first time that China's patrol vessels, not research ships, entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands, and also because the vessels stayed in the water for over nine hours.⁷⁸ The day after this incident, an official representative of China's coast guard stated at a press conference

⁷⁵ Akio Takahara, "The Rise of China and Its Neighborhood Diplomacy: Implications for Japanese Foreign Policy," *The Journal of Contemporary China Studies*, Vol.1, No.1 (2014) : 65.

⁷⁶ State Oceanic Administration People's Republic of China, 2. Haiyang Xingzheng zhifa" [2. Oceanic Administration Law Enforcement] in *2006 Nian Zhongguo Haiyang Xingzheng Zhifa Gongbao* [China Offshore Administration Law Enforcement Bulletin] (6 July 2007), accessed in April 17, 2015,

http://www.soa.gov.cn/zwgk/hygb/zghyxzzfzb/2006nzghyxzzfzb/201212/t20121217_22974.html

⁷⁷ Choong, "The Ties that Divide," 76

⁷⁸ Driete, "The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands territorial dispute," 26, 30.

that China “should accumulate concrete evidence” of implementing “actual control.”⁷⁹

According to Professor Kazuhiko Togo, this official statement made by a responsible official meant that territorial claims henceforward would be made “not through peaceful negotiations but by virtue of a physical presence.”⁸⁰ These moves were a clear departure from the more subtle policy that China took during the second phase, not to mention from the policy during first phase.

China’s assertiveness has continued to rise in the 2010s. In 2010, a China’s fishing trawler operating in the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands rammed Japanese Coast Guard’s ships. Japanese authorities arrested and prosecuted the captain of the trawler according to the domestic law and detained him in Japan. In response, China suspended exports of rare earths to Japan, advised its citizen to refrain from sightseeing in Japan, and cancelled a second round of talks about a 2008 understanding on energy cooperation in the East China Sea. Also, apparently in retaliation, Chinese government detained four staff members of a Japanese firm for allegedly entering a military zone without permission.⁸¹ Furthermore, after Japan released the captain, instead of de-escalating the tension as China used to do in the past, China demanded that Tokyo apologize for detaining him and pay compensation.⁸² Many observers regard

⁷⁹ Kazuhiko Togo, “Japan-China-US Relations and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute: Perspectives from International Relations Theory,” *Asian Perspective*, Vol.38 (2014): 242

⁸⁰ Togo, “Japan-China-US Relations and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute,” 242.

⁸¹ Takahara, “The Senkaku Trawler Collision Incident, September 2010,” 92

⁸² M. Tayler Fravel and Michael D. Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior – Part Two: The Maritime

China's these actions to protest Japan's decision to arrest and prosecute the captain under Japan's domestic law as "as clearly more assertive than in the past, and even aggressive."⁸³

Since September 2012, after the 'nationalization' of the Senkaku Islands by Japanese government, China has drastically increased its maritime patrols around the Senkaku Islands, and has regularized the encroachment on the territorial water.

According to the Japanese government, Chinese government vessels repeatedly intrude into Japan's territorial sea "at a frequency of about five intrusions per month."⁸⁴ By

May 2013, CMS and China's Fisheries Law Enforcement Command vessels had entered the territorial waters of the disputed islands for the 45th time since the nationalization announcement the previous September.⁸⁵ As of April 2015, this trend has not changed.

In March 2015, Chinese government vessels entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands nine times.⁸⁶ Also, China's aircraft for the first time entered the

airspace above the Senkaku Islands. On 13 December 2012, a small Y-12 turboprop aircraft of the CMS entered airspace over the Senkaku Islands, which Chief Cabinet

Secretary Osamu Fujimura called "another bid by China to claim control over the

Periphery," *China Leadership Monitor*, Vol. 35 (2011): 8.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 8

⁸⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response," [accessed in April 5' 2015], http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html

⁸⁵ Choong, "The Ties that Divide," 79-80.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands."

islands.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, in November 2013, a little more than a year after the nationalization of the Senkaku Islands, China further strengthened its claim over the Senkaku Islands by establishing, without consulting any neighboring countries, the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), covering the air above disputed area including the Senkaku Islands.⁸⁸ These China’s assertive actions since 2010 are labeled by the International Crisis Group as “reactive assertiveness,” which means that China uses an action by another party as justification to push back hard and change the facts on the ground in its favor.⁸⁹

Although a general tendency is that China has become more assertive and in some cases rather aggressive toward the Senkaku issue, China also has taken some measures to ease the tension. Since 2004, China has tried to prevent Mainland-based activists from traveling to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.⁹⁰ In 2008, Japanese and Chinese governments established a framework for joint exploration and production activities by oil companies from each side. In this framework, they both agreed that the resources around the Senkaku Islands should be jointly developed and that Japanese corporations would participate in China’s project of developing Chunxiao oil and gas

⁸⁷ Choong, “The Ties that Divide,” 80.

⁸⁸ Zachery Keck, “China Imposes Restrictions on Air Space Over Senkaku Islands,” *the Diplomat*, November 23, 2013.

⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, “Dangerous Waters,” 12.

⁹⁰ Swain and Favel, “China’s Assertive Behavior,” 10.

field.⁹¹ Also, after the September 2010 incident, China and Japan agreed to resume high-level bilateral contacts on a regular basis and reaffirmed the need for cooperation.⁹² Furthermore, in 2014 China and Japan published a memorandum of understanding concerning the situation about the Senkaku Islands. To be sure, there is still a gap between Japan and China over their view toward the territorial dispute. Japan did not acknowledge the existence of the territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands by carefully terming in its English version of the statement, but China's English version phrases as if Japan did.⁹³ Nevertheless, there is a clear expression of their willingness of promoting cooperation between them in this statement. Both countries declared that they "shared the view that, through dialogue and consultation, they would prevent the deterioration of the situation, establish a crisis management mechanism and avert the rise of unforeseen circumstances."⁹⁴ In fact, Japanese and Chinese defense officials met in January 2015 to talk about the details of a hotline that will allow Japanese and Chinese defense authorities to directly contact each other in case of an emergency in the East China Sea. Such maritime consultative mechanism is "a crucial step in managing tensions arising from the Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial dispute."⁹⁵

⁹¹ Takahara, "The Rise of China and Its Neighborhood Diplomacy," 64.

⁹² Swain and Fravel, "China's Assertive Behavior," 10.

⁹³ For more discussion of each country's phrasing in English, see Zachery Keck, "Japan Has Not Recognized Senkaku Island Dispute," *the Diplomat*, November 11, 2014.

⁹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Regarding Discussions toward Improving Japan-China Relations," accessed in April 16, 2015, http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page4e_000150.html

⁹⁵ Shannon Tiezzi, "China, Japan Try to Tamp Down Maritime Tensions," *the Diplomat*, January 12, 2015.

In sum, China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands can be divided into three stages. During the first stage from 1972 to 1991, China's policy was overall emphasizing on shelving the dispute and China did not initiate any actions to strengthen its claim. During the second stage, which is from 1992 till 2002, China started taking assertive actions to strengthen its claim over the Senkaku Islands, while still striving to control and de-escalate conflict. The third stage, from 2003 to present, China has increased its assertiveness over the Senkaku Islands both quantitatively and qualitatively, tilting the balance between assertiveness and de-escalation toward the former.

Chapter 4: Explanation of China's Senkaku Policy through Neoclassical Realism's

Framework

The systemic factors combined with the domestic factors noted in chapter 1 provide us with a coherent explanation of China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands. This chapter explains China's Senkaku policy by using Neoclassical Realism's framework. As in the previous chapter, this chapter analyzes China's Senkaku policy phase by phase.

The First Phase: 1972-1991

In this phase, the biggest systemic factor is the threat of the Soviet Union. During the 1970s, when China initiated its "shelving dispute" policy toward the Senkaku Islands, China was under threat by the Soviet Union. Since the Sino-Soviet split started in the late 1950s, their relations were steadily deteriorating. In 1969, the split culminated in military conflicts over the border disputes. With the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and its announcement of "Brezhnev Doctrine," which meant the Soviet Union reserved the right to take similar actions in other deviant Communist states, China felt it necessary to ally with the U.S. and other Western countries to counter the Soviet threat.⁹⁶ In this situation, China could not afford to

⁹⁶ For more discussion on the Sino-Soviet split, see: Robert G. Sutter, *US-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present Second Edition*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing

antagonize Japan over the territorial dispute. According to Eric Hyer, a specialist on China's territorial disputes, to press Chinese sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands too much during the negotiations for normalizations "would have risked delaying or giving up a higher foreign policy objective – counterbalancing the growing Soviet threat."⁹⁷

This Chinese attempt of allying with Japan to counter the Soviet Union can be seen later in China's insistence of including an anti-hegemonism clause in the 1978 Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty.⁹⁸ The word 'hegemony' for China was clearly meant the Soviet Union, and thus China's insistence of including this clause in the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty clearly indicated China's desire to cooperate with Japan to counter the Soviet threat.⁹⁹ Moreover, in 1980, a Deputy Chief of General Staff, Wu Xiuqian, even told the then Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro that Japan should increase its defense budget to 2% of its GDP to counter the Soviet threat.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the international system in which the Soviet Union was a predominant threat for China, to shelve the dispute over the Senkaku Islands and thereby secure a good relationship with Japan was a better deal than pushing the sovereignty issue too hard.

In terms of material capability, China was not powerful enough to counter the

Group, Inc., 2013): 69-72.

⁹⁷ Eric Hyer, *The Pragmatic Dragon*, 189.

⁹⁸ Akio Takahara, "Forty Years of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations since Normalization," 2015, forthcoming.

⁹⁹ For more discussion on the 'anti-hegemony' clause, see Yung H. Park, "The "Anti-Hegemony" Controversy in Sino-Japanese Relations," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.49, No.3 (1976): 476-490.

¹⁰⁰ Takahara, "Forty Years of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations since Normalization."

Soviet Union alone, or to compete with Japan for control of disputed territory in the 1970s and the 1980s. In the 1960s and the early 1970s, the PLA was engaged in domestic peacekeeping and governance because of the political turmoil created by the Cultural Revolution. Also, they had followed Maoist Doctrine under the leadership of Lin Biao and eschewed professional training in favor of ideological training and popular warfare in China.¹⁰¹ Simply put, the PLA was not prepared for dealing with conventional military threat from the Soviet Union alone. Similarly, Japan's maritime defense force possessed the most capable maritime forces during those times in East Asia,¹⁰² and it was not optimal time for China to take actions. According to one naval specialist, until the second half of the 1980s, the East China Sea was outside the scope of Chinese naval strategy and way beyond the reach of the PLA Navy. PLAN's main focus during the Cold War was 'near-coast defense', which was to prevent Soviet forces from conducting amphibious landings to seize key straits, islands and strategic assets.¹⁰³ In fact, according to a report, in 1979 the PLA conducted a military simulation of a conflict between Japan and China in the East China Sea, and concluded that the PLA could not win the conflict because of the inferiority of air operational capabilities and submarine capabilities.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, these two systemic factors inclined China to

¹⁰¹ Sutter, *US-Chinese Relations*, 69.

¹⁰² Choong, "The Ties that Divide", 111.

¹⁰³ Alessio Patalano, "Sea power and Sino-Japanese Relations in the East China Sea," *Asian Affairs*, Vol.45, No.1 (2014):41-42

¹⁰⁴ Sankei Shimbun, December 25, 1998.

initiate and maintain its “shelving dispute” policy toward the Senkaku Islands, thereby maintaining a good relationship with Japan for countering the Soviet threats and for China’s economic growth.

As for domestic factors, the importance of Japanese economy for China’s economic growth during this period was significant, and thus the CCP was inclined to maintain good relationship with Japan. For China, Japan was by far the largest donor and the leading economic partner, and China was interested in not only Japan’s investment, but also Japan’s advanced technology, management systems, and its knowledge and experience of modernization.¹⁰⁵ China’s modernization plan required massive amounts of capital investments, and by 1984, Japan became the largest supplier of foreign capital to China.¹⁰⁶ During this time, to quell nationalism and anti-Japanese feeling was not as difficult as it is now. The patriotic education campaign, which generates anti-Japanese feeling as well as nationalism among Chinese, was not initiated yet. Chinese people’s perception to Japan was generally warm and positive, partly because of the influence of Japanese TV animation and dramas, and also Japan’s contribution to the Chinese economy that was highly appreciated by the Chinese.¹⁰⁷

Also, since the Internet was not around during this period, the CCP was able to restrict

¹⁰⁵ Takahara, “Forty Years of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations since Normalization.”

¹⁰⁶ Hong, N. Kim, “Sino-Japanese Economic Relations since 1978,” *Asian Perspective*, Vol.9, No.2 (1985): 158-159.

¹⁰⁷ Takahara, “Forty Years of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations since Normalization.”

to some extent information about incidents concerning the Senkaku Islands and information from overseas in order to quell anti-Japanese sentiment.¹⁰⁸

Both systemic factors inclined China to take moderate policy on the Senkaku Islands, and domestic factors also prioritized maintaining good relationship with Japan, which resulted in China's "shelving dispute" policy. China needed to deal with the Soviet Union, and China's material capabilities were not strong enough to coerce Japan regarding the Senkaku Islands. Economic needs also pushed the CCP to the same direction, and nationalism was not intense enough to compel the CCP to take harsher actions. Thus, the CCP's overall policy toward the Senkaku resulted in maintaining the status quo.

The Second Phase: 1992- 2002

The systemic factors began to change in the beginning of the 1990s. The demise and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union released China from the biggest security threat. China no longer had to cooperate with the Western states, including Japan, to jointly cope with the Soviet Union. Rather, the Japanese military and its alliance with the U.S. became an impediment for China's national security.¹⁰⁹ This paved the way for China to take more assertive actions over the Senkaku Islands. Akio Takahara, Professor of the University of Tokyo, explains China's shift of strategy toward the Senkaku

¹⁰⁸ Downs and Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism," 130.

¹⁰⁹ Michihiko Saito, *Senkaku Mondai: Sōron* [Senkaku Issue: An Introduction] (Tokyo: Sanshōdō Shoten, 2014): 83.

Islands as following: “With the demise of the Soviet Threat, China’s security concerns turned to maritime issues. Its Senkaku policy made a sea change from not touching the issue to asserting sovereignty through action.”¹¹⁰

China’s military capabilities also improved a lot compared to those in the previous few decades. Since the threat from the Soviet Union was gone, China for the first time was able to pay serious attention to improve China’s sea and air capabilities to the east and south.¹¹¹ The PLAN commissioned its second-generation Luhui-class (Type 052) and Luhai-class (Type 051B) guided missile destroyers (DDGs) in the mid-1990s. Also, second-generation Jiangwei-class (Types 055 and 057) guided missile frigates (FFGs) had also begun to enter into service since the early 1990s. These new naval vessels were much larger than the old types, which meant that they had better endurance and could operate in sea areas farther away from home waters.¹¹² China also deployed several Su-27 fighters in a military base in Fujian, which is near the Senkaku Islands. Shigeo Hiramatsu, a Japanese specialist on Chinese military strategy, assessed that the deployment of such advanced fighters in Fujian could erode the air superiority of Japanese ASDF over the Senkaku Islands.¹¹³ In sum, although China’s capabilities were

¹¹⁰ Takahara, “Forty Years of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations since Normalization”.

¹¹¹ Richard C. Bush, *The Perils of Proximity: China-Japan Security Relations*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010): 49.

¹¹² Nan Li, “The Evolution of China’s Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From “Near Coast” and “Near Seas” to ‘Far Seas’,” in *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, ed. Phillip C. Saunders et al. (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2011): 120.

¹¹³ Shigeo Hiramatsu, *Zoku Chūgoku no Kaiyō Senryaku*. [China’s Maritime Strategy 2] (Tokyo:

still behind those of Japan, the gap between the two was narrowing. Therefore, systemic factors, unlike the previous decades, started to incline China to take actions over the Senkaku Islands.

Domestic factors also started to change. China's remarkable economic growth in the 1990s not only increased China's self-confidence but also decreased Japan's economic importance for China. The end of the cold war and the acceleration of China's economic and political reform changed the perception of the world, which led to the increase of foreign investment in China. As a result, Japan's relative economic importance for China was on a gradual decline.¹¹⁴ Also, Japan's economic downturn and the following stagnation which started in the early 1990s further decreased the importance of Japanese economy to China. Meanwhile, since the implementation of the "patriotic education," Chinese nationalism and, accordingly, anti-Japanese feeling was steadily rising and started pushing Chinese government toward tougher actions toward the Senkaku issue.¹¹⁵ At the same time, however, although Japan's economic importance was on decline for China, it was still indispensable source for continuing China's economic growth. Actually, economic ties between Japan and China continued to grow during this period. The trade between them grew from \$18.2 billion in 1990 to

Keisō Shobō, 1997):182, 187-188.

¹¹⁴ Takahara, "Forty Years of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations since Normalization."

¹¹⁵ Ming Wan, "Causes and Prospects for Sino-Japanese Tensions: A Political Analysis," in *Clash of National Identities: China, Japan, and the East China Sea Territorial Dispute*, ed. Arai Tatsushi, et al. (Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, 2013): 32; Choong, "The Ties that Divide," 111.

\$57.9 billion in 1995 and \$85.5 billion in 2000. Japan's cumulative foreign direct investment grew from \$1.8 billion in 1990 to 8.3 billion in 1995 and \$15.1 billion in 2000.¹¹⁶ As Downs and Saunders argue, "China's economic position had improved considerably, but Chinese leaders were still eager to attract Japanese investment, [and] to obtain new loans..."¹¹⁷ Thus, the domestic factor still inclined China to keep the dispute from disrupting the economic relations with Japan.¹¹⁸

The combination of these systemic and domestic factors explains well China's policy toward the Senkaku Islands during this period. The demise of the Soviet Union and increasing capabilities resulted in assertive actions to strengthen its claim over the Senkaku Islands, including the inclusion of the Senkaku Islands in the Territorial Law in 1992, and China's beginning of maritime activities around, and sometimes within, the waters around the Senkaku Islands since 1994. The domestic factors explain China's de-escalating effort over incidents such as Beijing's suppression of demonstrations in the PRC in 1996 over Japan's recognition of the lighthouse erected by Japanese nationalists. China's capabilities were not strong enough to meet nationalistic demand

¹¹⁶ Bush, *The Perils of Proximity*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Downs and Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism," 132.

¹¹⁸ That was at least the main goal of the Foreign Ministry of China. However, there was a difference among China's government over the policy toward Japan. For example, the PLA was a more hard-liner on the Senkaku issue than the Foreign Ministry. According to some scholarly works, in 1992, the Foreign Ministry did not want to include the Senkaku Islands in the Territorial Law because that would jeopardize China's relationship with Japan. But then military members of the National People's Congress were adamant and eventually included the Senkaku Islands overriding resistance from the Foreign Ministry. For further discussion, see Greg Austin, *China's Ocean Frontier: International Law, Military Force and National Development*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998): 313.

for stronger actions, and continuing economic importance of Japan also inclined the CCP to curtail nationalistic movement in China and kept the CCP from taking obviously inflammatory actions that can be seen in the third phase.

The Third Phase: 2003 to Present

Since the early 2000s, the trend of China increasing its capabilities vis-à-vis Japan has been accelerated, and the balance of military capabilities over the Senkaku Islands have tilted toward China's favor. As for air capabilities, the PLA possesses estimated 230-280 J-11 fighters and 100-140 J-10 multi-role fighters, compared to Japan possessing 200 F-15Js and F-2s. Because of its quantitative superiority and missile capabilities that could nullify Japan's military bases on Okinawa, Japan today will have little chance to counter the PLA's air operations even if Japan's aircraft survive PLA's missile attacks.¹¹⁹ Also, for maritime capabilities China has become strong enough to compete with the JMSDF. Between 2000 and 2010, China's fleet of modern attack submarines increased more than sixfold, while the number of newly commissioned destroyers and frigates tripled and doubled, respectively.¹²⁰ Given this situation, Ikuo Kayahara, a retired GSDF major general admits that "Japan (alone) would never be able

¹¹⁹ Oriana Skylar Mastro and Mark Stokes, "Air Power Trends in Northeast Asia: Implications for Japan and the U.S.-Japan Alliance," *Project 2049 Institute*, 28-29; Stokes also assesses that PLA capabilities relative to the JSDF could "enable the PLA to attain local air superiority over competing territorial claims". See: Mark A. Stokes, "The Second Artillery Force and the Future of Long-Range Precision Strike," in *China's Military Challenge: Strategic Asia 2012-2013*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Travis Tanner, (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012):153.

¹²⁰ Toshi Yoshihara, "Troubled Waters: China and Japan Face Off at Sea," *World Affairs*, January 29, 2014, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/troubled-waters-china-and-japan-face-sea>

to defend the Senkakus.”¹²¹

However, the balance of power cannot be calculated just between Japan and China. Since the U.S. pledges to come to aid to Japan if conflicts break out under Article 5 of Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. Also, the U.S. officials have repeatedly made clear that the Senkaku Islands are included in the scope of Article 5.¹²² With the U.S. military included, China’s capabilities are still behind those of U.S.-Japan alliance.

To be sure, China has been developing Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities in order to prevent US involvement in local conflicts in East Asia. China’s counter-C4ISR capabilities have been improved rapidly. According to one report, China is ready to use its Computer Networking Operation (CNO) capabilities to attack “select nodes on the military’s Non-classified Internet Protocol Router Network (NIPRNET) and unclassified DoD and civilian contractor logistics networks in the US (CONUS) and allied countries in the Asia-Pacific region,” and these operations could “delay US deployments and impact combat effectiveness of troops already in theater.”¹²³ Cliff et

¹²¹ Reiji Yoshida, “Best thing for Senkakus: Never let push come to shove,” the Japan Times, January 19, 2014, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/01/19/national/best-thing-for-senkakus-never-let-push-come-to-shove/#.VUI31JPzCUx>

¹²² For example, President Obama stated at a joint press conference with Abe in April 2014 as following: “Let me reiterate that our treaty commitment to Japan’s security is absolute. And Article 5 (of the treaty) covers all territories under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku Islands.” Mizuho Aoki, “Obama assures Abe on Senkakus,” the Japan Times, April 24, 2014, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/04/24/national/obama-tells-abe-security-treaty-covers-senkakus/#.VUI8YJPzCUx>

¹²³ Brian Krekel, “Capability of the People’s Republic of China to Conduct Cyber Warfare and Computer Network Exploitation,” *The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Report*, October 9, 2009: 8.

al. also assess that such computer attacks by the PLA could render key computer systems or communications links “inoperable”, and thus could affect US command and control operation in the East Asia¹²⁴. Furthermore, China could mobilize a large number of patriotic civilian hackers to disrupt US computer systems. As Pollpeter indicates, such large scale attack toward US computer system, though it may not be able to “paralyze” US operation system, could slow US operations significantly¹²⁵. Moreover, China’s has developed maritime capabilities significantly to gain sea control in the East and South China Seas, including the Senkaku Islands. Houbei (type 022) Fast Attack crafts are partially stealthy, and thus the US Navy will have difficulties locating Houbei crafts and thus make it difficult for the US and Japanese MSDF to obtain sea control.¹²⁶ As *Jane’s* assesses, China may be “on the verge of obtaining a credible sea denial capability against the U.S. Navy.”¹²⁷

However, although China has developed its A2/AD capabilities considerably, it is still difficult for China to match the combined capabilities of U.S.-Japan militaries in

¹²⁴ Roget Cliff et al, *Entering the Dragon’s Lair: Chinese Antiaccess Strategies and Their Implications for the United States*, RAND Project Air Force, 2007: 86.

¹²⁵ Kevin Pollpeter, “Controlling the Information Domain: Space, Cyber and Electronic Warfare,” in *China’s Military Challenge: Strategic Asia 2012-2013*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Travis Tanner, (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012): 186.

¹²⁶ John Patch assesses that even if US Navy located the crafts, it would be still difficult to deal with Houbei. Houbei is so fast that it could put it outside sea-launched Harpoon engagement envelopes. For further discussions, see: John Patch, “China’s Houbei Fast Attack Craft: Beyond Sea Denial,” in *China’s Near Seas Combat Capabilities, U.S. Naval War College China Maritime Studies*, Number 11, eds. Peter Dutton, et al. (2014):11-12.

¹²⁷ *Jane’s World Navies*, August 6, 2012, quoted in :Andrew S. Erickson, “China’s Modernization of Its Naval and Air Power Capabilities,” in *China’s Military Challenge: Strategic Asia 2012-2013*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Travis Tanner, (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012): 80.

the East China Sea. Firstly, there is still not enough surveillance capability in the East China Sea to support precision attacks against U.S. and Japanese ships. Tetsuo Kotani points out that “the East China Sea remains something of a blind spot for the PLA due to its lack of sufficient radar networks and surveillance aircraft.”¹²⁸ Secondly, the PLA will have difficulties countering submarine operation conducted by the U.S. and Japan. Roger Cliff in a Congressional testimony points out that the PLA’s ability “to find and sink U.S. submarines will be extremely limited,” and he goes on to argue that U.S. submarines will thus be able to “intercept and sink Chinese amphibious transports.”¹²⁹ Also, the PLA not only has difficulty detecting submarines, most of PLA’s submarines, especially nuclear ones, remain relatively noisy compared to those of the U.S.¹³⁰ Therefore, the PLA will have a disadvantage for submarine-to-submarine combat operations against U.S. and Japan. Moreover, the PLA’s own counter-mine capabilities are still primitive, thus their sea operation will also be easily disturbed by U.S. and Japanese mine operation¹³¹. Additionally, similar to air superiority operations, China lacks experience and training of joint-operation, which could hinder their sea superiority operation. For example, targeting enemy ships requires tremendously complex process,

¹²⁸ Tetsuo Kotani, “The Senkaku Islands and the U.S.-Japan Alliance: Future Implications for the Asia Pacific,” *Project 2049 Institute Futuragram 13-002*, March 2013: 7.

¹²⁹ Roger Cliff, *Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission: Hearing on Chin’s Military Modernization and its Implication for the United States*, January 30, 2014: 5.

¹³⁰ Erickson, “China’s Modernization of Its Naval and Air Power Capabilities,” 68.

¹³¹ Cliff, *Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*: 5.

coordinating various ISR sensor and ground station architectures and authorizing the prioritization of the data within the chain of command.¹³² Thus, the U.S. Department of Defense concludes that the PLA will still “need to overcome deficiencies in system integration and interservice coordination.”¹³³ Therefore, although China’s military capabilities have improved rapidly, its capabilities are still not strong enough to match both the U.S. and Japanese militaries.

As for economic capabilities, China became the second largest economy in the world, following the U.S. in 2010. Also, after the financial crisis in 2007-2008, which put the global economy into recession, China managed to get out of recession faster than other developed countries, which increased China’s confidence further. The newly gained economic capabilities, Takahara argues, give China a growing sense that Japan is not important anymore, and that Japan has become more dependent on China economically than the other way around.¹³⁴ Also, its relative economic success compared to the Western countries including the U.S. “has made Chinese leaders less willing to make adaptations and more ready to challenge the U.S.”¹³⁵ Other analysts also indicate that the increased military and economic capabilities make China less

¹³² Andrew S. Erickson, “Chinese Air- and Space-Based ISR: Integrating Aerospace Combat Capabilities over the Near Seas,” in *China’s Near Seas Combat Capabilities, U.S. Naval War College China Maritime Studies, Number 11*, eds. Peter Dutton, et al. (2014):109-110.

¹³³ Office of Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2012*: Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense: 8.

¹³⁴ Takahara, “Forty Years of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations since Normalization” ; “The Senkaku Trawler Collision Incident,” 77-78

¹³⁵ Suisheng Zhao, “Chinese Foreign Policy as a Rising Power to find its Rightful Place,” *Perceptions*, Vol.18, No.1 (2013): 104.

inclined to take moderate policies over the Senkaku Islands and more willing to use these capabilities to advance their interests.¹³⁶

These systemic factors explain China's growing assertiveness since the early 2000s, but short of an attempt of more forcible actions such as outright invading the Islands because China's military capabilities are still behind of the U.S.-Japan militaries. And domestic factors help us understand China's attempts to cooperate with Japan in the East China Sea and its "reactive" rather than "active" assertiveness. Although China's economy developed into the second largest one in the world, China's economy at the same time became highly interdependent with international market, thus raising economic cost of antagonizing other countries.¹³⁷ Aggressive foreign policy might discourage international investors and traders from doing business with China, which could harm China's economic development, and thus endanger the very legitimacy of the CCP's rule in China. Chinese elites perceived these growing economic costs in taking aggressive foreign policy, thus since the early 2000s China has adopted a 'peaceful development' policy, which emphasizes reassuring other countries. According to M. Taylor Fravel, a professor of Chinese foreign policy, the concept of 'peaceful development' is a clear recognition that aggressive foreign policy could impose

¹³⁶ Roy, *Return of the Dragon*, 93, 95; Lowell Dittmer, "China's New Asia Policy," *China: An International Journal*, Vol.12, No.2 (2014):116; Lim, *China's Naval Power*,121-122

¹³⁷ Trade accounts for more than half of China's GDP growth in 2013. See World Bank (2015), World Development Indicators, available at <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx>

“negative impact on China’s economic development as well as the political legitimacy of the ruling party.”¹³⁸ Therefore, although China has become more assertive by its increasing economic confidence, but the necessity of maintaining good relationships with other countries to facilitate trade with and investment in China also inclines China to take measures not to jeopardize its relations with other countries. Especially, the economic relations between Japan and China have steadily been growing since 2002, and Japan is still the second largest trading partner of China as of today. The amount of trade between Japan and China in 2013 is \$312.0 billion.¹³⁹ Although China maintains a strong trade surplus with Japan, China has a strong “stealth dependence” on Japan.¹⁴⁰ For instance, China imports from Japan mainly semiconductors, electronic products, and precision machinery, all of which offer indispensable materials for China as a “world factory”. In addition, Japan exports to China intermediate products and production equipment with high added value, which are hard to replace.

As for nationalism, the advent of Internet and social media over the past decade eroded Beijing’s control over popular sentiment and thus begun to influence

¹³⁸ Taylor M. Fravel, “International Relations Theory and China’s Rise: China’s Potential for Territorial Expansion,” *International Studies Review*, Vol.12 (2010): 511.

¹³⁹ Japan External Trade Organization, “JETRO survey: Analysis of Japan-China Trade in 2013 and outlook for 2014,” February 28, 2014, accessed May 10, 2015, <http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/news/releases/2014/20140228009-news.html>

¹⁴⁰ The following description of China’s dependency on Japan is taken from Juan Du, Jing Xiao and Zhijun Sheng, “Development Trend of Sino-Japanese Economic and Trade Relations,” *Business and Management Research*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2014): 121.

policymaking.¹⁴¹ Since the CCP is no longer able to shut down the information about incidents regarding territorial disputes, it has become necessary for the CCP to answer its nationalistic sentiment to avoid an anti-CCP backlash that could happen if it did not take a firm stand toward the Senkaku issue.¹⁴² This means that the CCP has to maintain economic development at the same time as answering nationalists' demand for taking tougher actions. Therefore, the domestic factors that maintain the legitimacy of the CCP and answer nationalism make China's Senkaku policy during this phase a more nuanced one than the systemic factor alone would suggest.¹⁴³

China's Senkaku policy such as establishment of the China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands and the Regular Patrol System to protect interests in East China Sea, and the statement by official representative of China's coast guard to accumulate evidence of implementing actual control of the islands clearly reflects, as discussed above, the confidence of the Chinese side backed by its military/economic capabilities. At the same time, the necessity of maintaining the CCP's legitimacy and thus necessity of a good international image of China, explains China's occasional

¹⁴¹ International Crisis Group, "Dangerous Waters," 17.

¹⁴² Moore, "In Your Face," 230.

¹⁴³ Another possible domestic factor that is worth mentioning here is the declining influence of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which is the official, and sometimes only, channel open to Tokyo. Because other formerly domestically oriented agencies such as the Public Security Bureau have acquired foreign policy responsibilities, the Foreign Ministry's influence has been diluted. According to an International Crisis Group report, after Japan's 'nationalization' of the Senkaku Islands in September 2012, diplomats of both sides met several times, but they spent entire meetings "without any real dialogue, simply reciting their official stance." This decreased influence of the Foreign Ministry, the International Crisis Group argues, could be another factor that prevented China from maintaining a more stable relationship with Japan over the Senkaku Islands. See International Crisis Group, "Dangerous Waters," 34-36.

cooperation with Japan over joint development or issuing memorandum regarding the situation around the Senkaku Island. Also, China's preference of "reactive assertiveness," which means that China deliberately escalated the situation to create a new status quo in its favor, rather than "active assertiveness" is motivated by China's desire to avoid appearing expansionist while attempting to answer the domestic nationalist sentiment. This tactic allows Beijing to use perceived provocations as a chance to change the status-quo in its favor all the while insisting the other party started the trouble.¹⁴⁴ For instance, in response of Japan's nationalization in 2012, China released the territorial baselines that include the Senkaku Islands and submitted to the United Nations on September 13, 2012. This gives China a legal basis for the islands and the waters around the islands and a rationale for an increased China's presence around the islands.¹⁴⁵ However, Chinese analysts confirmed that the territorial baselines "had been drawn long before but had been withheld from public release as Beijing had been concerned about appearing expansionist."¹⁴⁶ Thus, this "reactive assertiveness" tactics enables China to avoid being labeled as expansionist while answering nationalism's demand in taking tougher actions.

One possible counter against this "reactive assertiveness" notion is that China has

¹⁴⁴ Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, "Why China won't turn the other cheek over foreign policy," CNN, November 15, 2012, accessed April 11, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/13/opinion/china-naval-disputes/index.html>

¹⁴⁵ M. Taylor Fravel, "Drawing Lines in the Water," *the Diplomat*, September 14, 2012.

¹⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, "Dangerous Waters," 13.

been taking “active” assertiveness in the South China Sea recently. For example, in May 2014, China’s Maritime Safety Administration announced that China National Offshore Oil Corporation would set up a drilling rig at 120 nautical miles from the Vietnamese coast, within Vietnam’s EEZ. Regardless of strong opposition from Vietnam, China went ahead with the plan, which caused anti-Chinese demonstrations all over Vietnam.¹⁴⁷ This could mean that China does not care about maintaining stable relationship with its neighbors for its own economic growth, and China’s behavior is relatively moderate in the East China Sea just because Japan’s military is much stronger than those of Southeast Asian countries. One counterargument for this is that Japan’s economy is larger than those of Southeast Asian countries, and thus Japan is more important for China’s economic growth thus China needs to be cautious not to jeopardize China’s relationship with Japan. Moreover, even in the Vietnam’s case, China has recently made effort to improve its relationship with Vietnam for deepening its economic cooperation.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, although the degree of assertiveness is different, China’s policy of maintaining the balance between assertiveness and economic development is consistent both in the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

To sum up, consistent with neoclassical realism’s predictions, the increase of

¹⁴⁷ Kate Hodal and Jonathan Kaiman, “At least 21 dead in Vietnam anti-China protests over oil rig,” *the guardian*, may 15, 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Shannon Tiezzi, “China, Vietnam Pledge to Control Maritime Disputes,” *the Diplomat*, April 8, 2015.

economic and military capabilities filtered by the rising nationalism and the necessity of maintaining the CCP's legitimacy resulted in the overall increases assertiveness in the Senkaku policy, and in more preference to "reactive" fashion so that their assertiveness will not make China look an expansionist and thereby hinder China's economic development.

Chapter 5: Other Explanations

So far, this paper discussed how the Neoclassical Realism's framework can offer a coherent explanation on China's Senkaku policy since the 1970s. This chapter, in turn, discusses why other theoretical explanations, using either systemic level or unit level factors, do not provide sufficient explanation.

Offensive Realism

Offensive realist predicts that as China's power grows, China will take more forcible actions. John Mearsheimer, a leading offensive realist scholar, argues that "a China that is much more powerful than any of its neighbors will be in a good position to use military threats to force the other side to accept a deal largely on China's terms."¹⁴⁹ This paper's analysis largely agrees with the prediction of the offensive realism in terms of the general tendency of Chinese Senkaku policy. As discussed in the previous chapter, China's policy is becoming more assertive and aggressive as its military and economic capabilities grow. This paper shares the argument of offensive realists that as material capabilities of a state grows the state will take more aggressive policy, such as coercion, to secure their interests. Therefore, the analysis of offensive realist on China's policy and that of Neoclassical Realist such as this paper agree on the point that China's

¹⁴⁹ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 376.

growing material capabilities enables and inclines China to take assertive actions over the Senkaku Islands.

This paper, however, parts with the offensive realism when we discuss the policy more in detail. While China has taken several assertive actions since the 1990s, China also has taken several measures to keep down its nationalists' movement and also has sought some deals with Japan to restore a good relationship with Japan. As discussed in the previous chapter, China has suppressed its nationalistic movement over the lighthouse incident, and pursued fishery cooperation between 1997 and 2000; it agreed on a Joint Development of the East China Sea in 2008, and recently published a memorandum of understanding over the situation around the Senkaku Islands. It is difficult for the offensive realists' framework to explain why China has taken these restrained policies while taking assertive actions at the same time. These restrained policies are difficult to explain. Also, offensive realists do not have a tool to explain why China's assertiveness is often "reactive" rather than "active," as in 2010 trawler incident and its several assertive actions after Japan's nationalization in 2012. In other words, offensive realism can tell us that China becomes more assertive in the Senkaku policy as its capabilities grows, but it does not tell us how China shows its assertiveness. Therefore, although offensive realism provide us with a good overview of China's Senkaku policy, the explanation from systemic factors only is not enough to explain the

detail of the policy.

Constructivism

There are mainly two schools of Constructivists explanations. The first one is “Sovereignty game” explanation, proposed by Paul O’Shea. He argues that China and Japan are in the “sovereignty game” whose premise is that “the primary goal of a state is to gain or maintain sovereignty over the disputed territory.” This goal is achieved through the direct exercise of sovereignty over the disputed territory and by preventing the other state from doing the same.¹⁵⁰ According to O’Shea, how far China will go to strengthen or prevent Japan from strengthening sovereignty over the Senkaku islands will depend on the relative value of the territory and how much economic/political/military capabilities are available for China.¹⁵¹ The problem of this approach is that without systemic factors such as balance of power or international system, it is difficult to explain how much capability is enough to warrant China to take actions to strengthen its claim. For example, China passed the Territorial Law and started its maritime activities around the Senkaku Islands since 1994. But why in the early 1990s did China start taking such actions? Did China’s capabilities go through qualitative or quantitative transformation at that time? Without considering systemic factors such as the demise of the Soviet Union, it is hard to explain China’s change from

¹⁵⁰ O’Shea, “Sovereignty and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Territorial Dispute,” 3.

¹⁵¹ O’Shea, “Sovereignty and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Territorial Dispute,” 9-10.

“shelving dispute” to assertive policy in the 1990s. Besides, if China and Japan are in the sovereignty game in competing for the right of possession of the Senkaku Islands, China’s conciliatory moves in 2008 and 2014 do not make sense, especially considering China’s now in the better position to advance its claim with superior capabilities.

In a similar fashion, the other constructivists’ argument is that ‘Japan is to blame’ explanation for China’s growing assertiveness. This school contends that Japan’s actions made China suspicious about Japan’s intention. These actions include Japanese nationalists’ landing and establishing lighthouses on the islands in 1990 and in 1996, Japanese government’s attempt to recognize the lighthouse established by Japanese nationalists in 1996, Japanese government’s leasing of some of the Senkaku islands from the private owner in 2002 for preventing both Japanese and Chinese activists from landing on these islands¹⁵², and Japan’s arrest of Chinese sailors and put them under Japan’s jurisdiction in 2010. Thus, it became difficult for China to maintain the policy of shelving disputes because Chinese came to believe that Japan was trying to consolidate its hold over the islands “as a violation of the agreement.”¹⁵³ Also, Susumu Yabuki sees the origin of China’s assertive action in Japan’s behavior that ignored the shelving agreement reached in the 1970s. He concludes that Japan is responsible for

¹⁵² These islands were Kita Kojima, Minami Kojima, and Uotsurijima. Japanese government’s intention was to maintain peaceful situation over the Senkaku Islands by preventing both Japanese and Chinese activists from landing, but this leasing was criticized by Chinese government as Japan’s attempt to strengthen its claim. For more discussion, see Tsuyoshi Sunohara, *Antō Senkaku Kokuyūka* [Secret Strife: Nationalization of the Senkaku Islands]. (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2013): 95-99.

¹⁵³ Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Water*, 60-61.

Japan-China conflict “because its origin is the MOFA and Japanese government’s one-sided denial of the historical fact that the Senkaku Islands issue was shelved 40 years ago.”¹⁵⁴ However, this school’s argument seems incongruous with the fact that China’s assertiveness toward the Senkaku Islands has been growing despite Japan’s several actions to maintain the status quo. For example, Beijing started its maritime activities around the Senkaku Islands in 1994, and continued to increase it toward the early 2000s, despite the agreement between Japan and China for not letting activities of nationalists in both countries disrupt their relations in 1996. Also, Chinese government started expressing their intention to increase the presence around the Senkaku Islands since the latter half of the 2000s, as can be seen in the establishment of the China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu and the Regular Patrol System, and the statement by an official representative of China’s coast guard to increase the presence of China around the Senkaku Islands. But since 2005, the Japanese government has not allowed any civilians to land on the Senkaku Islands, by passing a law banning anyone, regardless of nationality, from landing on the Islands¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the fact that China submit territorial baseline that includes the Senkaku Islands only a few days after Japan’s nationalization indicates that China had been waiting for an optimal timing to

¹⁵⁴ Yabuki, “China-Japan Territorial Conflicts and the US-Japan-China Relations.”

¹⁵⁵ Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Water*, 58.

submit it rather than a dismayed reaction by Japan's 'provocative' action.¹⁵⁶ It seems, therefore, not convincing to argue that the China changed its policy from a moderate "shelving disputes" policy to assertive actions as a result of Japan's provocative actions.

Innenpolitik

Other scholars focus on the role of domestic politics on China's Senkaku policy. This group argues that the rising nationalism in China made it difficult for China to maintain its previous moderate policy. Because such nationalistic sentiment can easily become anti-government sentiment, the Chinese government has to take harsher actions to satisfy Chinese citizens.¹⁵⁷ Also, Downs and Saunders adds performance legitimacy of the CCP to nationalism, arguing that China has to maintain the right balance between CCP's political legitimacy and nationalism. Although this thesis adopts nationalism and performance legitimacy as important domestic factors that contribute to a coherent explanation, domestic factors alone will not be sufficient to explain China's Senkaku policy. Domestic factors explain Chinese behavior and dilemmas well in each incident that flared nationalistic sentiment, such as 1990 and 1996 incidents, and more recently 2010 and 2012 incidents. However, it is difficult to explain China's rising assertiveness since the 1990s by domestic factors alone. For instance, the establishment of the Territorial Law in 1992 and the start of maritime activities were not pushed by Chinese

¹⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, "Dangerous Waters," 13.

¹⁵⁷ Chung, *Domestic Politics*, 26-60.

nationalists, and also there is no evidence that China's establishment of several organizations for increasing its presence around the Senkaku was to placate nationalists. These moves were not provoked by Japanese actions, as discussed above, and no nationalists were demonstrating to push Chinese government to include the Senkaku Islands in the Territorial Law or to make Chinese research ships enter the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.

Therefore, although domestic factors are an important factor to explain China's Senkaku policy, domestic factors alone are not enough to offer a comprehensive picture of the policy.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Theoretical approaches which focus on either systemic factors or unit-level factors are insufficient for explaining China policy toward the Senkaku Islands since the 1970s, and this thesis is to remedy the deficiency of a theoretical explanation of China's Senkaku policy by utilizing both systemic and unit-level factors within the Neoclassical Realism's framework. The main argument of this thesis is that Neoclassical Realism's framework which combines systemic factors with domestic factors can offer a consistent explanation on China's Senkaku policy since the 1970s. As China's material capabilities grow and the international system turns in favor of China, China has been more inclined to take assertive actions toward the Senkaku Islands. The rise of nationalism and the necessity of maintaining legitimacy of the CCP modified such systemic pressure, resulting in taking assertive actions mixed with occasional cooperative measures not to escalate the tension between Japan and China too much, and also in preferring "reactive" rather than "active" assertiveness for changing the status quo to avoid being seen as an expansionist.

Neoclassical Realism is still an underappreciated theory in the study of Chinese foreign policy, including its policy toward the Senkaku Islands. This thesis only focused on China's Senkaku policy, but Neoclassical Realism's framework could be used to

discuss other areas, such as China's policy toward the South China Sea, or China's more general policy toward Japan. Neoclassical Realism contains both systemic clarity and in depth explanatory power and it will be a useful addition to the tools for understanding China's foreign policy.

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