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An Analysis of Chinese Assertive Behaviors in the East China Sea under the Xi Administration

習近平時代的中國在東海的強硬行為分析

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Abstract

This thesis uses neoclassical realism to analyze how China's domestic politics and perceptions of its leaders drive Chinese assertive behaviors toward Japan.

With the Democratic Party of Japan nationalizing the Senkaku Islands in 2012, China-Japan relations fell into the worst phase. Even after the inauguration of Shinzo Abe of the Liberal Democratic Party as prime minister, relations between the two countries remained highly tense because Abe's initial China policy was to contain China's rise economically and militarily. However, as Abe shifted his China policy to a more cooperative approach around 2016, Japan-China relations showed signs of improvement. Nevertheless, the economic and diplomatic improvements in Sino-Japanese relations during the 2017-2019 period did not necessarily ease the tension over the territorial sovereignty issue in the East China Sea.

This thesis assumes how China's perception of its growing strength and the concentration of power in Xi's hands have encouraged China's aggressive foreign policy stance, resulting in contradictions in China's foreign policy. Therefore, as long as China retains its economic influence and Xi continues to be in power, it is unlikely that China's provocative actions in the Senkaku Islands will ease up.

Keywords: Neoclassical realism, Sino-Japan relations, Chinese core interests



中文摘要

本論文使用新古典現實主義來分析中國的國內政治和其領導人的想法，是如何驅動中國對日本的強硬行為。隨著 2012 年日本民主黨將尖閣群島國有化，中日關係陷入了最糟糕的階段。由於前首相安倍晉三最初的政策是在經濟和軍事上遏制中國的崛起，所以即使在自民黨的安倍上任後，兩國之間的關係仍然處於高度緊張的狀態。但隨著安倍晉三在 2016 年前後將其對中國政策轉變為有意合作的政策，中日關係出現了改善的跡象。然而 2017-2019 年期間，中日關係在經濟和外交上的改善，並不一定能緩解兩國在東海領土主權問題上的緊張。本論文假設，中國對自身實力不斷增強的看法以及權力集中在習近平手中，推動了中國咄咄逼人的外交政策立場，導致中國的外交政策出現矛盾。因此，只要中國保持其經濟影響力且習近平繼續執政之下，中國在尖閣群島的挑釁行為即不可能會有緩和之可能性。

關鍵字：新古典現實主義 中日關係，核心利益



Acronyms

CCP: Chinese Communist Party

PSC: Political Standing Committee

LSG: Leading Small Group





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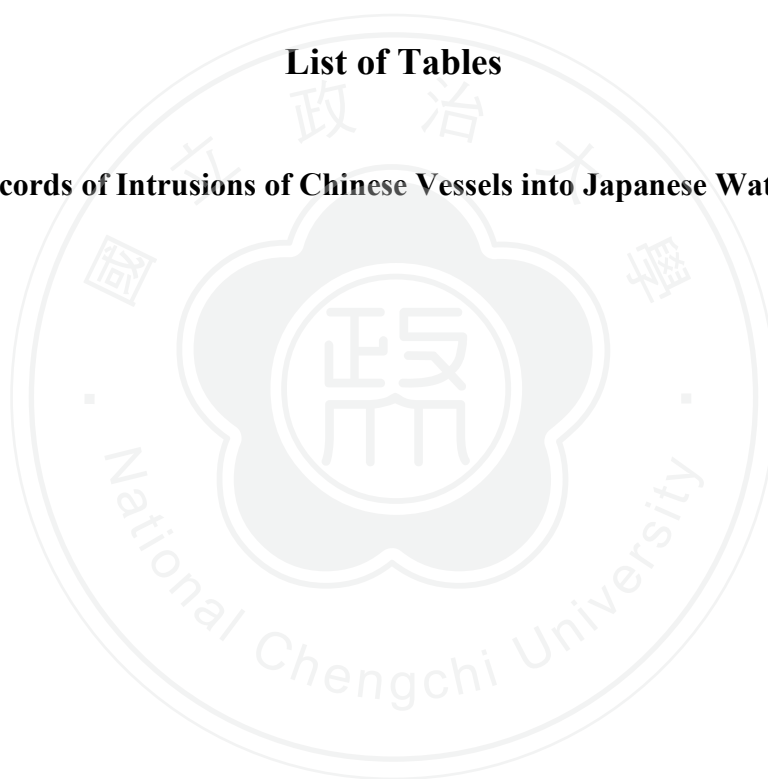


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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

When Shinzo Abe took office in December 2012, Sino-Japan relations were the worst in their history since their normalization of diplomatic relations. The cause of these worsened relations can be traced back to the nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands by the Democratic Party of Japan in early 2012.

The issue of sovereignty over the Islands has always existed between Japan and China since the normalization of diplomatic relations. According to the Chinese side, leaders of Japan and China agreed to "shelving" the resolution of the territorial issue, since it was apparent that negotiations would run into difficulties if the problem was mentioned during the Japan-China normalization talks in 1972 and the Japan-China Peace and Friendship Treaty in 1978, even though Japan has not officially acknowledged the existence of the territorial issue.¹ In keeping with this tacit understanding, China has acquiesced in Japan's effective control of the Islands, although it insists on its sovereignty over the islands. Therefore, the purchase of the Islands was a betrayal, which shook the status quo that had continued for about 40 years since the normalization of diplomatic relations.

¹ Kawamura Noriyuki 川村範行, "Senkakusyoto ryoyumondai to nichukankei no kozohenka ni kansuru kosatsu" 尖閣諸島領有問題と日中関係の構造的変化に関する考察 [A Study on the Senkaku Islands and Structural Changes in Japan-China Relations], *Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Journal of School of Foreign Language* (46):27-51.

In response to this, China took retaliatory measures such as economic sanctions, and large-scale anti-Japan protests were held in various places, causing severe economic damage to Japanese companies in China. This incident left a painful scar on Sino-Japan relations. In fact, in 2013, the following year, the pace of economic integration in bilateral trade between Japan and China decreased by 6.5% compared to previous years.²

When Shinzo Abe took office as prime minister in 2012, he pursued a balancing policy towards China, both economically and politically. However, Abe shifted his policy toward China around 2015 and 2016 and expressed a willingness to improve relations with China.³ According to Akio Takahara, professor of contemporary Chinese politics at the graduate school of law and politics, the University of Tokyo, four major factors influence Sino-Japan relations: domestic politics, national sentiment, the international environment, and economic interests.⁴ The presence of a strong leader in China determines whether China can take a friendly, cooperative, and harmonious diplomatic stance towards Japan.⁵ This is because strong leaders are less likely to receive backlash from the public. The power of Xi Jinping has become more robust, which makes it easier

² Graham Euan, “Divining the Fluid Element: From Cooperation to Conflict in Japan-China Maritime Relations,” *Security Challenges* 11, no. 1 (2015): 49-72. Accessed May 7, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26465429>.

³ Takahara Akio, Nakanishi Hiroshi & Yoshioka Keiko 高原明生, 中西寛 & 吉岡桂子, “Beichu tairitsuka no jiyuu de hirakareta indo taiheiyou” 米中対立下の「自由で開かれたインド太平洋」 [A “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” under U.S.-China confrontation], *Diplomacy* Vol. 64 (2020): 18-20.

⁴ Takahara Akio 高原明生, “Chugoku no naisei gaikou no genjyou” 中国の内政外交の現状 [Current Status of China’s Domestic Affairs and Diplomacy], *Financial review* 証券レビュー-11(59): 39-41.

⁵ Ibid.

for him to take a friendly policy towards Japan. Also, the national sentiment of Chinese people towards Japan influences Chinese strategy against Japan.⁶ According to the Genron NPO's survey on Chinese sentiment toward Japan, the number of Chinese people who have a positive feeling toward Japan has increased in recent years.⁷ In the 2019 survey, 45.9% say they have a "favorable" impression towards Japan, which is the highest percentage since the survey began in 2005.⁸ Such a decrease in nationalism and increase in favorability toward Japan in China contribute to Chinese leaders adopting a more pro-Japanese attitude. Moreover, the international environment surrounding China and Japan, especially their relationships with the U.S., play a significant role in Sino-Japan relations.⁹ In the 2010s, China started a confrontation with the U.S., which has become more intense in recent years. China has been moving closer to Japan, hoping to mitigate the effects of the U.S.-China conflict by taking advantage of its diplomatic tie with Japan, an American ally with relatively good relations. It is not the first time that China has taken such a move. When China became isolated from the international community due to the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, China approached Japan, and Japan was the first country to lift economic sanctions against China. Thus, China tends to use its diplomacy with Japan as a way to ease its international isolation. Finally, the economic exchange also contributes to strengthening Sino-Japan relations. The trades between them continue to increase and

⁶ Takahara, "Current Status of China's Domestic Affairs and Diplomacy," 39-41.

⁷ The Japan-China joint opinion survey 2019, 言論 NPO [The Genron NPO], October 24th, 2019, https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5505.html. (accessed October 9th, 2020)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Takahara, "Current Status of China's Domestic Affairs and Diplomacy," 39-41.

deepen again.¹⁰ Thus, Japan-China relations in the latter half of the Abe administration had all four of these elements for the stability of Japan-China relations.

Around 2017, Japan-China relations began to show signs of improvement, and it was in 2018 that they got back on a normal track. High-level talks between the two countries, which did not exist in late 2012 and 2013, happened several times a year in 2014 and 2015 and then gradually increased. On May 4, 2018, Xi Jinping and Abe had a phone conversation.¹¹ This was the first phone conversation between a Japanese prime minister and a Chinese president, although there have been phone conversations between Japanese and Chinese prime ministers. Four days later, on May 8, Li Keqiang visited Tokyo. In the meeting with Abe, Li said that with his visit to Japan, Japan-China relations returned to a normal course and that both sides would continue to make efforts to maintain stable Japan-China relations.¹² These events showed that Japan-China relations have moved toward a significant improvement. High-level exchanges continued between the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Nichu shunou denwa kaidan” 日中首脳電話会談 [Japan-China Summit Teleconference], May 30, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/c_m1/cn/page1_000523.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Xi Jinping yingyuetong riben shuoxiang anbei jinsan” 习近平应约同日本首相安倍晋三通电话 [Xi Jinping Had a Phone Call with Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo], May 4, 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_676836/xgwx_676842/t1556764.shtml.

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Li Qiang tong riben shouxiang anbeijinsan juxinghuitan shi qiangdiao nuli shixian zhongriguanxi changqi jiankang wending fazhan” 李克强同日本首相安倍晋三举行会谈时强调努力实现中日关系长期健康稳定发展 [Li Keqiang and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Stressed Efforts to Achieve Long-Term Healthy and Stable Development of Sino-Japanese Relations during the Meeting], May 10, 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_676836/xgwx_676842/t1558182.shtml.

two countries afterward. In Japan's diplomatic blue papers and high-level talks in this period, the phrases "Japan-China relations have improved" were often seen, which had not been used before. Furthermore, Abe visited Xi Jinping in Beijing in December 2019. Xi was also planning to visit Japan in the spring of 2020. His visit ended up postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it would have been the first visit to Japan by a Chinese leader in 12 years.

However, the deepened Japan-China diplomatic relations didn't seem to decrease the possibility of a military confrontation around the disputed islands. Chinese ships continued to intrude into Japanese waters around the Senkaku Islands. In 2018, when there was a significant improvement in Japan-China relations, the number of Chinese vessels intruding decreased compared to the previous years. However, in the following year, 2019, the number increased again.¹³

Also, Chinese vessels entered Japanese territorial waters even on the day of such high-level talks. For example, the former Defense Minister Kono visited his Chinese counterpart in December 2019, the first visit to China by a Japanese defense minister in 10 years.¹⁴ In the interview after he went back to Japan, he left a comment that he didn't understand what kind of message China was trying to send to Japan by sending its ships

¹³ Japan Coast Guard, *Trends in Chinese government and other vessels in the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands and Japan's Response -Records of intrusions of Chinese government and other vessels into Japan's territorial sea*, Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.kaiho.milt.go.jp/mission/senkaku/senkaku.html>

¹⁴ Kono to leave for China on Wednesday for the First Visit by Japan Defense Chief in 10 years, (2019), *Japan Times*.

to the troubled waters.¹⁵ Despite improved bilateral relations and deepening economic cooperation, why do Chinese ships not seem to stop intruding into Japanese territorial waters around the disputed islands?

Thus, there is a contradiction in China's attitude toward Japan. While Chinese leaders embrace improved relations with Japan positively and hope for further cooperation, they continue to take a coercive approach on the territorial issue. This thesis seeks to explain more assertive Chinese behaviors around the disputed Islands at domestic and individual levels. Many previous studies have examined the Chinese interests that drive them to act more assertively in the relationship with Japan at the international political level. However, these studies do not explain why Chinese behaviors remained assertive or got even more assertive even after Japan-China relations went back to a normal track. This thesis aims to solve the puzzle by analyzing China's growing self-confidence and ambitions as a superpower and Xi's leadership. This thesis contributes to a better understanding of Chinese behaviors in the East China Sea.

¹⁵ Ibid.

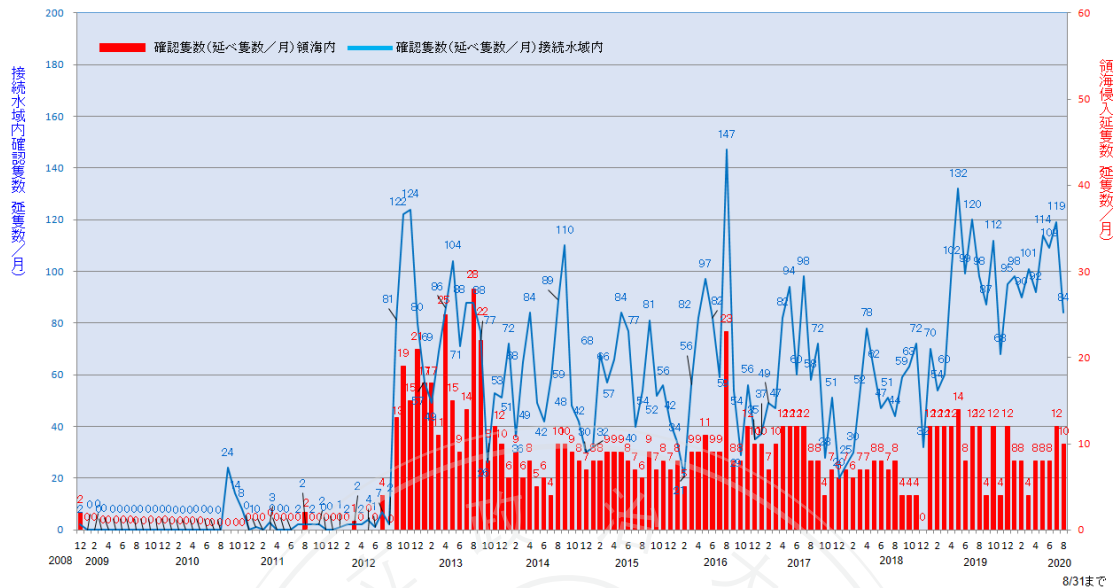


Figure 1.1 The Number of Chinese Government and Other Vessels that Entered Japan's Contiguous Zone or Intruded into Territorial Sea surrounding the Senkaku Islands

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Accessed September 17, 2020.

https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis tries to answer this research question: while economic interdependence deepened and their bilateral relations improved between 2017 and 2019, why did China keep taking an assertive approach near the Islands?

- A. Why didn't deepened economic interdependence and improved diplomatic relations eased the tension in the East China Sea?

To answer this question, chapter 3 analyzes how China perceives Abe's China policy and the territorial dispute. Abe administration made significant changes in the Japanese grand strategy, such as establishing NSC and Legislation for Peace and Security. This thesis proposes to find whether Abe's grand strategy prevents Sino-Japan security and political relations from improving by analyzing Chinese perspectives of it.

- B. How do China's perception of its national power and Xi Jinping's leadership affect more aggressive Chinese behavior in the East China Sea?

Many studies about Chinese strategy and behavior have been done. However, many tend to focus on how international relations shape its strategy and behavior, and few consider the Chinese worldview. This thesis focuses on how the Chinese worldview determines its strategy and behavior.

Also, Xi has been concentrating power and authority in himself since he took office. Therefore, this thesis assume his aggressive nature is reflected in Chinese behavior. This thesis examines Chinese strategy by analyzing China's perception of its national power and Xi's leadership.

1.3 Research Methods

This study uses neoclassical realism theory. Many previous studies about Chinese behaviors in the East China Sea tend to be analyzed at the international system level, which is the third image of three analysis levels of Kenneth Waltz's theory of international relations.¹⁶ They use the balance of power within the international system as an independent variable and tend to ignore how domestic politics and individuals, which are the first and second images, influence the dependent variables.¹⁷ Since the third image analysis cannot completely explain the Chinese assertive behaviors in the latter half of the Abe administration regarding the Senkaku/Dioyu Islands as mentioned in the research background, this thesis analyzes it using the theory of neoclassical realism. According to Rose, in neoclassical realism, the international system, especially the relative material capacity, determines the state's foreign policy.¹⁸ In neoclassical realism, however, the influence of the international system on national foreign policy is considered indirect and complex. This is because the variables of the international system are always translated through the parameters at the unit level (domestic politics and individuals). In the theory of neoclassical realism, the international system is an independent variable, and unit-level variables such as domestic politics or individual perception are parameters.¹⁹ Thus, neoclassical realists argue that although relative material power

¹⁶ Kenneth N Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1979.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144-72, Accessed November 19, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054068>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

constitutes a fundamental element of a state's foreign policy, it is not directly or entirely converted into foreign policy. Taking domestic factors and leader's images into consideration fills the gaps in understanding China's strategy towards Japan in the East China Sea.

The third image analysis

Systematic stimuli → policy response

Neo-classical realism

Systematic stimuli ± (Leader's perceptions) ± (Domestic factors) = Foreign policy

In this scheme of neoclassical realism, the systematic stimuli are the changes in the balance of economic and military power between Japan and China in the 2010s. Leader's perceptions, which are structural factors, focus on China's perceptions of Abe's China policy, the territorial issue and its national strength, and domestic factors focus on Xi's consolidation of power. This paper uses the theory of neoclassical realism to analyze how structure factors and domestic factors stimulate China's hard-line foreign policy and argues that they drive China to take hard-line foreign actions and accelerate contradictions in Chinese foreign policy.

The limitations of this paper are that it is not possible to measure the extent to which these two factors are affecting China's foreign policy. Also, since Xi Jinping is in power

at this point during the writing of this paper, there is limited material and information available due to non-political transparency in China.

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 examines the contradictions in Chinese core interests. It analyzes definitions and usage of the Chinese core interests and then discusses how they apply to the Senkaku Islands issue. Then, the following three chapters explain how the structural factors drive Chinese assertive behaviors. Chapter 3 introduces how China perceives Abe's China policy and chapter 4 reviews China's perceptions of the territorial sovereignty issues. Then, chapter 5 analyzes Xi's perceptions of the growing national power of China. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 claim that China's suspicions about Japan's remilitarization, China's perception of the territorial sovereignty issues, and its rapidly growing confidence in its international influence accelerate its more assertive stance towards Japan. Then, chapter 6 examines Xi Jinping's unified leadership. It analyzes how Xi's concentration of authority influences the Chinese foreign policy decision-making process and argues that as a result of Xi's successful centralization of power in his own hands, his perceptions and characteristics are reflected in China's foreign policy. Finally, chapter 7 summarizes the discussions in the previous chapters and offers some final remarks.



Chapter Two: Contradictions in Chinese Core Interests

This chapter examines the contradictions in China's core interests. It begins by defining Chinese core interests and explaining how the term has been used. Then it analyzes how the issue of Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands has been applied to China's core interests and how China claims territorial sovereignty over the Islands and creates a new status quo.

2.1 Definitions of Chinese Core Interests and the Contradictions

China has contradictions in its core interests. While China tries to maintain good relations with its neighbors for its economic development, it also claims its territorial sovereignty, creating fissures in its relations with its neighbors. Although every state has its national interests, China's tough negotiating stance on issues related to its core interests and the way it applies its core interests to specific issues have destabilized relations between China and other states and threatened the international community.²⁰ The contradictions in China's core interests have led China to take two contradictory approaches to other countries: cooperation and coercion.

²⁰ Michael Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior: Part One: On 'Core Interests,'" *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 34 (February 2011):11,
<http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67966>

In 2010, a year after the CCP's use of the term "core interests" came to the international community's attention, a practical definition of core interests was made by the CCP. In December 2010, a paper entitled "China Adheres to the Path of Peaceful Development" was published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the name of State Councilor Dai Bingguo, and a summary of the paper was published in the People's Daily, in which a definition of core interests was given.²¹ The core interests of China are as follows.²²

(1) China's national identity, political system, and political stability, i.e., the leadership of the Communist Party, the socialist system and socialism with Chinese characteristics.

(2) China's sovereign security, territorial integrity, and national unity.

(3) The basic guarantee of sustainable development of China's economy and society.

²¹ Maeda Hiroko 前田宏子, "Chugoku ni okeru kokueki ronsou to kakushin teki riei" 中国における国益論争と核心的利益 [Debates on National Interests and Core Interests in China], *PHP Policy Review* Vol. 6-No. 48: 6-7.

²² China, The central people's government of the people's republic of China, , "Zhongguo guowuwei yuan dai bing guo : jianchi zou heping fazhandaolu" 中国国务委员戴秉国：坚持走和平发展道路 [Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo: Adhere to the Road of Peaceful Development], December 6th, 2010. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/gxh/tyb/zyxw/t774662.htm>; "Dai bing guo : jianchi zou heping fazhandaolu bingfei pai naodai de chanwu" 戴秉国：中国坚持走和平发展道路 并非拍脑袋的产物 [Dai Bingguo: China's Adherence to the Road of Peaceful Development is not the Product of a Pat on the Head] 人民日报 People's Daily, December 13th, 2010.

Following these definitions, the Chinese government's definition of "core interests" was reiterated in the White Paper on China's Peaceful Development released in September 2011.

What is important to note here, however, is that even within China, there is a wide range of debate about what specific issues should be considered core interests, what criteria should be used to determine the primacy of national interests, and whether or not newly emerging interests and issues should be called core interests.²³

Therefore, this paper analyzes China's core interests based on the definition by Dai Bingguo's paper and the definitions and views of China's core interests by three scholars, Jakobson, Nathan, and Saunders.

Jakobson, Nathan, and Saunders define the core interests of China as follows. The CCP's number one interest is the political stability, that is, the CCP and the socialist system's continued leadership.²⁴ China has the largest population and the fourth largest territory in the world. China is also home to a large number of ethnic minorities. In addition to the Han Chinese, who make up the majority of China's population, there are other ethnic minorities such as the Tibetans and Uighurs living in various parts of China, and the CCP has been making significant efforts to control them. Moreover, there are

²³ Maeda, "Kokueki ronsou to kakushinteki reiki," 9.

²⁴ Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China's Search for Security*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 7; Linda Jakobson, "China's Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors," *Lowy Institute*, (December 2014):9; Phillip C. Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive?" in *International Relations of Asia*, ed. David Shambaugh and Michael Yahuda (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 148-150.

territories in China's maritime regions, such as Hongkong and Taiwan, over which China has no actual control or sovereignty but claims to have sovereignty. Thus, the CCP's first interest is to unify all of China, including Taiwan, and stably govern them under the rule of the CCP.

The second most crucial core interest is to protect its territorial sovereignty.²⁵ Chinese leaders such as Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang have defined China's territorial sovereignty as its core interests and have often emphasized that there will never be any sacrifice or compromise.²⁶ Indeed, China has continued to expand its military power, and its provocative actions around the region where it has territorial sovereignty issues with other countries have become more prominent in recent years.²⁷

According to Nathan and Phillip, Geography and history determine these Chinese core interests.²⁸ First of all, China shares borders with 14 countries. China has the most neighboring countries in the world except Russia. (Russia shares borders with 14 countries as well.) Also, China belongs to six regional systems. (Northeast Asia, Oceania, continental Southeast Asia, maritime Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia). The number of states in the six systems is fifty-five. China is the only country that belongs to such a large number of regional systems. In addition to a large number of neighboring

²⁵ Jakobson, "China's Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors", 9; Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, 7; Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive", 148-150.

²⁶ Robert Sutter and Chin-hao Huang, "China's Growing Resolve in the South China Sea," *Comparative Connections* 15, no. 1 (2013)

²⁷ Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive," 164.

²⁸ Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, 33-36; Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive", 149-151.

countries China has, China's relations and histories with its neighbors are very complicated and unstable. Most of the 14 neighboring countries' regimes are politically very unstable. (North Korea, Afghanistan, Myanmar, etc.)

Moreover, China has been at war with five of the 14 countries in the past seventy years (Russia, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and India) and has had border disputes with all of them, though most of them were settled by now. Because of these war histories with the neighboring countries, they remain potential military rivals for China. China's leaders also fear that its neighbors will try to contain China militarily, possibly with the cooperation of the U.S.. Many U.S. troops are stationed in China's neighboring countries, including Japan. China is concerned that its neighbors may develop good relations with the U.S. and work with the U.S. to contain China's rise. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that China has the most unstable and challenging neighborhood environment in the world. The neighborhood makes China very vulnerable, and the vulnerability sets China's foreign policy.²⁹ Japan has fought two major wars with China in the past, and Japan and China have many overlapping strategic interests in Northeast Asia. Besides, Japan is one of America's most important allies, and U.S. military bases in Japan are America's most strategically critical bases in the Asia-Pacific. Hence, China is always wary of Japan's military rise.

²⁹ Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, 1-7.

Also, Chinese leaders need economic development for the sake of Communist Party rule and domestic stability.³⁰ By improving the living standards of the people, the CCP has sought to stabilize the country.³¹ Since the reform era, China has been seeking a stable environment in the region and multinational economic cooperation for its economic development, and the rapid economic growth has helped China expand its influence.³² Therefore, maintaining stable relations with its neighboring countries is essential for the stability and survival of the CCP, which is their highest priority.

Thus, there are contradictions in the core interests of the CCP. While it insists on cooperation with neighboring countries, it puts forward a stance that it will never compromise on the sovereignty of territorial issues. These two contradictory approaches threaten not only stable relations with neighboring countries but also destabilize regional security.

2.2 Changes in the Usage of Chinese Core Interests

³⁰ Jakobson, “China’s Unpredictable Maritime Security Actors,” 9; Nathan and Scobell, *China’s Search for Security*, 34.

³¹ Saunders, “China’s Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive,” 148-150.

³² Matsuda Hiroyasu 松田 康博, “Ko Kin Tou seiken no kaiko to Chugoku 18 zentaikai no chumoku ten- gaikou•kokubou no ryoiki ni kanshite” 胡錦濤政權の回顧と中国 18 全大会の注目点 —外交・国防の領域に関して [A Retrospective of the Hu Jintao Regime and Highlights of China’s 18th Plenum - On the Domains of Diplomacy and National Defense], 東京財団政策研究所 *The Tokyo foundation for policy research*, September 6, 2012.
<https://www.tkfd.or.jp/research/detail.php?id=890>

Next, this section examines when the CCP started using the term "core interests" and how its meaning has changed over time. It mainly refer to Michael Swaine's paper "China's Assertive Behavior: Part One: On 'Core Interests'" and Maeda Hiroko's paper "Debates on national interests and core interests in China".³³ Initially, the term itself began to be used by Chinese officials in the 1980s and 1990s, yet it was used in a different sense from its current meaning, that of other countries' core interests. It was not until 2003-2004 that the term "core interests" appeared in its current meaning of China's core interests, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The term "core interests" was first used about the Taiwan issue, which seemed to be the CCP's response to the Taiwan issue's growing concern. Then, the official use of the term "core interests" began to increase dramatically around 2008, and the definition of core interests has become more precise than before. These indicate that core interests have become a vital element of the CCP's foreign policy, and such a trend represents China's more assertive stance in international relations in recent years.³⁴

Swine points out that the term "core interests" began to gain more attention when used in Hu Jintao and Barack Obama's joint declaration in 2009.³⁵ On the other hand, Maeda argues that the term began to attract international attention after the CCP's "South

³³ Swaine, Michael. "China's Assertive Behavior: Part One: On 'Core Interests.'" *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 34 (February 2011):1-25. <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67966>; Maeda, "Kokueki ronsou to kakushinteki reiki".

³⁴ Swine, "China's Assertive Behavior," 1-11.

³⁵ Swine, "China's Assertive Behavior," 2.

China Sea is China's core interest" report in March 2010.³⁶ Over the past years, the concept of core interests has been included in official documents and statements of the CCP more frequently. Furthermore, there is a growing number of controversial international issues other than Taiwan that the CCP has identified as core interests. China's core interests are fundamentally non-negotiable. To ascribe an issue to China's core interests implies China's firm intention to resolve the issue in the Chinese way, without discussion or negotiation. Also, by presenting a particular issue as China's core interests to the international community, Beijing puts pressure on other concerned countries to recognize the concept of the CCP's core interests, the existence of the issue, and its value to the CCP. The CCP's tough stance on the core interests could create friction in neighboring countries with territorial sovereignty issues with the CCP and disturb the international order.³⁷

2.3 The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as a Chinese Core Interest

Then, is the sovereignty of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands a core interest of the CCP? The term "core interests" was used for the Diaoyu Islands for the first time in People's Daily article titled "Japan need not explore China's sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands" published on January 17th, 2012. However, although the People's Daily is the official newspaper of the CCP, it is difficult to assume that the CCP officially regarded the

³⁶ Maeda, "Kokueki ronsou to kakushinteki reiki," 6-7.

³⁷ Swine, "China's Assertive Behavior," 1-11.

Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as China's core interest with this article. According to Takagi, the CCP likely intended to use the unofficial channel to convey how serious territorial sovereignty over the Islands is for both the CCP and Sino-Japanese relations.³⁸ It also aimed to resolve the territorial dispute with Japan in a flexible and China-friendly manner by ambiguously deciding whether the Islands were a core interest of the CCP.³⁹ Thus, as of this stage in 2012, the territorial sovereignty issue of the Islands seems to have been a lower priority for China than Taiwan and the South China Sea, which the CCP had officially acknowledged as a core interest at the time.

It was not until April 2013 that the Chinese government announced the Diaoyu Islands territorial dispute was a core interest of China. At a press conference on April 26th, Hua Chunying, director of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Department, said "the issue of the Diaoyu Islands involves the issue of China's territorial sovereignty, certainly belongs to the core interests of China" [釣魚島問涉及到中國的領土主權問題，當然是屬於中國的核心利益]. This is the first time that China has officially positioned the Islands as a "core interest" of the CCP, although in the minutes of the press conference published on the website of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, they avoided directly stating that the Diaoyu Islands are China's core interests and instead only

³⁸ Takagi Seiichiro 高木誠一郎, "Chugoku gaikou ni okeru kakushin teki reiki ron no tenkai" 中国外交における「核心利益」論の展開 [The Evolution of the Discourse on the "Core (National) Interest" in Chinese Diplomacy], *Issues and studies* 42(2): 77.

³⁹ Takagi, "The Evolution of the Discourse on the "Core (National) Interest,"" 78.

stated that "the issue of the Diaoyu Islands concerns China's territorial sovereignty."⁴⁰ The remark by Hua Chunying is proof that the Xi administration, which has been seeking to become a "strong sea power," has placed the issue of territorial sovereignty over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as one of its top priorities.⁴¹ Thus, while Beijing had already considered the South China Sea part of its core interests in 2010, the Diaoyu Islands only became a core interest in 2013. This is because Japan's nationalization of the islands in 2012 sparked anti-Japanese nationalism in China. In addition, as detailed in Chapter 4, China began to gain confidence in its national power during this period. Therefore, the recognition of the Senkaku Islands as a core Chinese interest in 2013 was perfect for China to use Japan's nationalization as a reason to turn the issue in China's favor.

Next, China has been threatening Japanese security to protect its territorial sovereignty over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands since 2012 while deepening its economic interdependence with Japan and stressing the need to improve Sino-Japanese relations. In recent years, China's most remarkable behavior about territorial sovereignty issues is the

⁴⁰ "Chugoku gaimusyo ga hajimete senkaku ha kakushinteki rieki" 中国外務省が初めて「尖閣は核心的利益」 [China's Foreign Ministry Says for the First Time that the Senkakus are a Core Interest], *テレ朝 news TV Asahi news*, April 2013.

https://news.tv-asahi.co.jp/news_international/articles/000004397.html

⁴¹ Shimada Manabu 島田学, "Chugoku, senkaku ha kakushinteki reiki to hajimete meigen" 中国、尖閣は「核心的利益」と初めて明言 [China Says Senkaku Islands are 'Core Interests' for the First Time], *日本経済新聞 Nihon Keizai shinbun*. April, 2013.

use of other countries' actions as an excuse to change the status quo in its favor.⁴² China has taken more assertive actions to protect its self-claimed maritime sovereignty in the South China Sea since around 2009. Subsequently, China's assertive actions have also become more prominent in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands area since 2012.

Before Japan's then-ruling Democratic Party of Japan nationalized the Senkaku Islands in 2012, Chinese ships rarely entered Japan's territorial waters or contiguous zone around the Islands.⁴³ Also, China had in effect accepted that Japan would have de facto control over the Senkaku Islands and surrounding waters.⁴⁴ However, after Japan nationalized the disputed Islands in 2012, China dropped the above approach and created a new status quo. China claims that it has territorial sovereignty over the Islands and has made patrols by Chinese ships around the Islands a routine. Accordingly, in 2013, China set up an ADIZ in Japan's airspace. In September 2012, after Japan nationalized the Senkaku Islands, Chinese ships began intruding into the area around the Islands, and during the year 2013, the total number of Chinese ships intruding into the contiguous territory and territorial waters exceeded 1,000. (Table 3.1) In the following four years, there were around 800 Chinese ship intrusions per year. With both governments

⁴² Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive," 165-166; Taylor Frael, "China's Island Strategy: 'Redefine the Status Quo,'" *The Diplomat*, November 1, 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/11/chinas-island-strategy-redefine-the-status-quo/>

⁴³ Japan Coast Guard, *Trends in Chinese government and other vessels in the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands and Japan's Response -Records of intrusions of Chinese government and other vessels into Japan's territorial sea*, Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.kaiho.milt.go.jp/mission/senkaku/senkaku.html>

⁴⁴ Frael, "China's Island Strategy."

acknowledging that Japan-China relations were on a normal track following Li Keqiang's visit to Japan in May 2018, however, the number of Chinese ships dropped to 685. Nevertheless, as many as 1,223 Chinese ships intruded around the Senkaku Islands in 2019, which was the highest number since 2012. China's provocative actions around the Senkaku Islands have heightened tensions between Japan and China and have hindered efforts to build stable Sino-Japan relations. These actions represent a firm intention on the part of China that its territorial sovereignty will never be compromised.⁴⁵

China argues that Japan's actions in the 2012 dispute changed the status quo on the territorial sovereignty of the Islands and compelled China to begin air and sea patrols around the Islands to protect its territorial sovereignty and to challenge Japan's position that there is no territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands.⁴⁶ According to Fravel, the patrol of Chinese ships in Japanese waters has two implications: one is that the purchase of the Islands by the Japanese Democratic Party does not affect China's claim of territorial sovereignty in the Islands, and the other is a challenge to Japan's consistent assertion that the territorial sovereignty issue does not exist.⁴⁷

China thus claims that its actions are defensive in response to a challenge to its sovereignty from the other side. Asserting that others threaten its sovereignty and positioning its actions as a defensive act make it easier for China to gain domestic

⁴⁵ Phillip C. Saunders, "China's Juggling Act: Balancing Stability and Territorial Claims," *CSIS Pac Net*, No. 33, 29 (April 2014):1-2.

⁴⁶ Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive," 165-166.

⁴⁷ Fravel, "China's Island Strategy."

incentives to take a more rigid diplomatic stance.⁴⁸ However, China's actions appear to be assertive to other countries, remaking the new status quo to suit its own needs, which causes friction. This trend of China's hard-line attitude toward territorial sovereignty issues in recent years has the potential to escalate in the future.

Table 2.1 Records of Intrusions of Chinese Vessels into Japanese Waters

	The contiguous zone		The territorial sea		Total
	Days	No. of vessels	Days	No. of vessels	No. of vessels
2012 (Sep-Dec)	79	407	20	68	475
2013	232	819	54	188	1007
2014	243	729	32	88	817
2015	240	709	35	95	804
2016	211	752	36	121	873
2017	171	696	29	108	804
2018	159	615	19	70	685
2019	282	1097	32	126	1223

Source: Japan Coast Guard, *Trends in Chinese government and other vessels in the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands and Japan's Response -Records of intrusions of Chinese government and other vessels into Japan's territorial sea*, Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.kaiho.milt.go.jp/mission/senkaku/senkaku.html>.

⁴⁸ Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive," 167-168.



Chapter Three: China's Perceptions of Abe's China policy

While China desires good relations with neighboring countries and peaceful security in the surrounding region for economic development, which is essential for domestic stability for the Party's survival, it has taken a tougher stance on territorial and sovereignty issues in recent years. This harsh attitude of China toward territorial sovereignty threatens and disrupts the security of neighboring countries, making it difficult for them to maintain stable relations with China. Why is China creating an unfavorable environment for itself by taking such a tough stand on territorial sovereignty? Does China concern itself with the backlash and criticism from other countries and the international community? The following three chapters explain why such a contradiction occurs in Chinese diplomacy. This paper assumes that the Chinese more assertive stance on territorial sovereignty in recent years is related to Beijing's changing perception of its national power under the Xi administration and his aggressive nature being more reflected in its foreign policy through Xi's consolidation of power.

As mentioned in the introduction, the following four chapters use neoclassical realism to explain the drivers of Beijing's more assertive external behaviors. According to Rose's definition of neoclassical realism, an international system is translated into foreign policy, with individual perception and domestic politics as parameters.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 144-172.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 examine how the perceptions of the CCP and Xi influence China's external behavior. Chapter 6 analyzes how Xi's consolidation of power has affected Chinese foreign policy. Chapter 6 corresponds to domestic politics in neoclassical realism.

This chapter analyzes China's perception of the Abe administration. This chapter is divided into three major parts: China's perception of the Abe administration's policy toward China in the first half of the Abe administration, China's perception of the Abe administration's policy toward China in the second half of the Abe administration, and China's perception of the role of the United States in Japan-China relations.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Abe administration adopted different policies toward China in the first half and the second half. In the first half of the Abe administration, Abe strengthened the alliance with the U.S. and adopted a counter policy toward China. In the second half, however, he adopted a comparatively more cooperative attitude toward China and worked to improve Japan-China relations. This chapter analyzes how China perceived these Abe China policies and how they influenced China's policy toward Japan. In addition, since the Japan-U.S. alliance is the core of Japan's security policy, Japan's policy toward China and Japan-China relations are greatly influenced by the U.S. Therefore, this chapter also analyzes how China perceives the role of the U.S. in Japan-China relations.

3.1 Japan's Rightward Shift and the Balancing Policy against China in the First

Half of the Abe Administration

Meng states that the changes in Japanese society in the 21st century are related to Japan's rightwardization and the basis of Japan's changes lies in its stagnated economy.⁵⁰ The long-term economic recession has had a severe impact on Japanese society and the sentiment of Japanese people. Japan has lost its confidence and has become unwilling to face globalization. Most people have become domestic (anti-globalization) and have started holding a very pessimistic attitude. In addition to this internal pressure of economic contraction, the external pressure of China's rise has brought pressure to Japan.⁵¹ China's rise is in sharp contrast with Japan's relative decline in power. Under the dual pressures of economic difficulties and the rise of China, the mentality of the Japanese nationals has become difficult to ease. These pressures have led Japan to show a deteriorating mentality, political toughness, and continuous expansion of military power.⁵²

Abe's second administration accelerated the process of rightwardization.⁵³ According to Wang, the Abe administration took advantage of Japan's shift to the right and set its strategic goal to "recapture strong Japan." Japan transformed the security system to enhance military operations and strategic diplomatic activities to expand

⁵⁰ Men Honghua 门洪华, "Ribei bianju yu Zhongri guanxi de zouxiang" 日本变局与中日关系的走向[Transformation of Japan and Orientations of Sino-Japanese Relationship], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* 世界经济与政治 4 (2016): 76-77.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 78-79.

external influence.⁵⁴ Ideologically, the dominant position of pacifism has been replaced by political right-leaning thoughts. For Abe, the constitutional amendment was a means to normalize Japan and the basis for Japan's expansion of political and military means. The reason why Abe pursued right-wing policy so hard is closely related to the rapid increase in right-wing ideas after the Cold War and the active incitement of the "China threat theory" by the Japanese political elites. Abe soon started using the "China threat theory" as an excuse to change its security strategies.

Thus, Chinese scholars analyze that Japan's prolonged economic recession and the rise of China have caused Japan to turn to the right. This trend has been accelerated by the Abe administration's efforts to rearm Japan. As discussed below, all of the Chinese scholars' analyses of the Abe administration during this period were quite critical.

According to Men, Abe's China strategy is based on its national political reshaping, underpinned by the consolidation of the U.S.- Japan alliance and supplemented by the containment of China.⁵⁵ He argues that Japan, which has been in a prominent position in East Asia for a long time, cannot adapt or accept the rise of China and has tried to contain China's development, making Sino-Japan strategic competition deepened. Japan is trying

⁵⁴ Wang Pengquan 王鹏权, "Lun Anbei dazhanlue diaozheng de mubiao yu shouduan" 论安倍大战略调整的目标与手段 [On the Goals and Means of Abe's Strategic Adjustment], *Riben yanjiu* 日本研究 4 (2014):12-13 .

⁵⁵ Men, "Transformation of Japan and Orientations of Sino-Japanese Relationship", 76-77.

to take advantage of the gap with China, which still exists, to profit from it and prevent China's peaceful development.⁵⁶

Liu also says that Japan's stance in the East China Sea has hardened due to the U.S. rebalancing strategy and China's overtaking GDP. A new feature of Japan's new security strategy aims to co-initiate against China.⁵⁷

Wang also claims that Abe showed strong nationalism, and it played a significant role in his China's policy. Abe's nationalism is influenced by the political genes of his family, in addition to Japan's domestic and international situations, and was continuously implemented by domestic and foreign policies.⁵⁸

Zhu also argues that Abe was trying to build a strong Japan by using the U.S. rebalancing strategy and the "China threat theory" as an excuse. Due to its domestic and international restrictions, he claims it is difficult for Japan to amend its constitution or become less dependent on the Japan-US security alliances. Accordingly, Japan cannot become an active leader in the region or the international society. Therefore, Abe increased tensions in order to achieve his goals.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Men, "Transformation of Japan and orientations of Sino-Japanese relationship", 78-79.

⁵⁷ Liu Fei 刘霏, "Lun Riben de donghai zhengce ji qi dui Zhongguo de yingxiang" 论日本的东海政策及其对中国的影响 [On Japan's East China Sea Policy and Its Influence on China] *Riben yanjiu* 日本研究 4(2015):27.

⁵⁸ Wang Shan 王珊, "Anbei de guojia zhuyi ji qi zhengce shijian" 安倍的国家主义及其政策实践 [Abe's Nationalism and its Policy Practice], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 12 (2016): 40.

⁵⁹ Zhu Haiyan 朱海燕, "Anbei zhengfu de anbao zhanlue: mubiao、lujing ji qianjing" 安倍政府的安保战略: 目标、路径及前景 [Security Strategy of the Abe Administration: Goals, Paths and Prospects], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 4(2016):22-24.

According to Wang and Liu, Abe claimed the purpose of advocating proactive pacifism was to contribute to world peace. However, it aimed to gain the support of other countries to create strong Japan, seek a partner to counter China, and promote economic development.⁶⁰

Huang also argues that with proactive pacifism, Japan exaggerated the “China’s threat theory,” thus aiming for military normalization while distracting the attention of the international community.⁶¹

According to Meng and Wang, the security legal system is one of the key reform areas promoted by the Abe cabinet.⁶² They claimed the new security bill has fundamentally subverted the security policy that Japan has adhered to since the war. It shows that Japan is no longer willing to act as a military vassal of the United States but strives to highlight its military influence globally and eventually become a world military power.⁶³

⁶⁰ Liu, “On Japan’s East China Sea Policy and Its Influence on China,” 27; Wang, “On the Goals and Means of Abe’s Strategic Adjustment,” 14-15.

⁶¹ Huang Dahui 黄大慧, Zhao Luoxi 赵罗希, “Rimei qianghua tongmeng guanxi dui Zhongguo zhou anquan de yingxiang” 日美强化同盟关系对中国周边安全的影响 [A Strengthened Japan – US Alliance and Its Impact on China’s Peripheral Security], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 6 (2015):27-29.

⁶² Meng Xiaoxu 孟晓旭, Wang Shan 王珊, “Xin anbao faan yu Riben anquan zhanlüe kunjing” 新安保法案与日本安全战略困境 [Japan’s New Security Bills and Strategic Dilemma], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 8 (2015): 18-19.

⁶³ Ibid.

In summary, China was deeply concerned that Japanese society sharply leaned to the right after Abe took office and his administration established new security systems expanding its military power. Chinese scholars attributes this tendency of Japanese society to its long-term economic recession, the rise of China, and Abe's political ideology. They argues that the Abe administration was using the "China threat theory" as an excuse to rearm Japan. They also claims that the Abe administration strengthened relations with the United States and other countries and advocated proactive pacifism to gain domestic and international support for militarization and contain the rise of China.

3.2 The Soft Policy towards China in the Second Half of the Abe Administration

Chinese scholars analyze that Japan-China relations improved around 2017 after Abe adjusted his tough China policy. Liu attributes this improvement to the failures of Abe's diplomacy.⁶⁴ For example, Japan could not stop the Trump administration's withdrawal from the TTP and the Paris Treaty, and deteriorated its relations with South Korea and Russia. Wang and Meng also argue that one of Abe's reasons for changing his China policy is that Abe's years of strict policy toward China were ineffective. Abe intervened in the dispute over the sovereignty of the South China Sea and tried to cooperate with other countries to contain China. However, Japan was not able to stop

⁶⁴ Liu Jiangyong 刘江永, "Anbei Jinsan shouxiang fanghua hou de Zhongri guanxi" 安倍晋三首相访华后的中日关系 [China-Japan Relations after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Visit to China], *Dangdai shijie* 当代世界 12 (2018):29.

China's development in the South China Sea and ended up deepening cooperation between China and other countries.⁶⁵

They also claim that Abe's long-term and stable position allowed Japan to adopt a more friendly policy against China.⁶⁶ The results of the 2017 elections brought about changes in Japan's political landscape. The opposition parties have weakened, and the LDP's power has strengthened. There was also changes within the LDP, with the anti-Abe faction becoming less influential.⁶⁷

In addition, the Japanese business community and pro-China politicians inside the LDP voiced support for improving relations with China.⁶⁸ They criticized Abe's tough China policy as a "diplomatic dilemma." They were worried the Japanese economy and security would have become unstable and insecure if the conflict with China had continued.

⁶⁵ Wang Shan 王珊, Meng Xiaoxu 孟晓旭, "Anbei zhizheng houqi Riben zhengzhi zoushi yu Zhongri guanxi" 安倍执政后期日本政治走势与中日关系 [Japan's Political Trends and Sino-Japanese Relations in the Late Abe Administration], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 2(2019):40-41.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Fan Xiaojie 樊小菊, "Ribei de zhanlue dongxiang ji dui Zhongguo de yingxiang" 日本的战略动向及对中国的影响 [Japan's Strategic Trends and its Influence on China], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 12 (2017):17-18.

⁶⁸ Liu, China-Japan relations after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to China, 29; Lü Yaodong 吕耀东, "Anbei zhengfu dui hua zhengce de diaozheng ji qi xiandu" 安倍政府对华政策的调整及其限度 [Abe Administration's China Policy], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 10 (2018): 7-9.

Lastly, US free trade restrictions since March 2018 have strengthened Japan-China cooperation on free trade.⁶⁹ How the U.S. free trade regulations under the Trump administration have affected Sino-Japanese relations is discussed later.

Prime Minister Abe's visit to China in 2018 showed that Abe's attitude toward China at home and abroad changed significantly, and he was willing to improve relations. With this shift in policy toward China in the latter half of the Abe administration, it seemed that Japan-China relations would develop further. However, some Chinese scholars analyze that the improvement in Japan-China relations is still limited and leaves concerns. One of the concerns is Abe's ambiguous attitude about cooperation regarding One Belt and One Road.⁷⁰ Tang and Tao argue that Japan and China should have cooperated under the Trump administration, pushing for protectionism. The One Belt and One Road project is a win-win for Japan and China, and China welcomes Japan's participation. Furthermore, there were increasing calls for involvement in Japan as well. However, Japan and China eventually agreed to limit their cooperation to the third-country market and not cooperate in One Belt, One Road initiative. After all, Japan was concerned about its relations with the United States, which has a deteriorating relations

⁶⁹ Liu, China-Japan relations after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to China, 29; Lü, Abe Administration's China Policy, 7-9; Wangshan 王珊, Mengxiaoxu 孟晓旭, "Anbei zhizheng houqi Riben zhengzhi zoushi yu Zhongri guanxi" 安倍执政后期日本政治走势与中日关系 [Japan's Political Trends and Sino-Japanese Relations in the Late Abe Administration], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 2(2019):40-41.

⁷⁰ Liu, "China-Japan relations after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Visit to China," 30-31.

with China.⁷¹ China finds it disappointing that Abe continuously pursue the U.S.-Japan security alliance while strengthening trade ties with China.⁷²

Moreover, they claim the policy toward China by pro-Chinese politicians is strategically limited. After all, they aim to promote trade and tourism, not to improve "comprehensive" Sino-Japanese relations. The easing policy toward China by the economic community and the promotion of free trade are also limited to economic interests and do not fully influence Abe's foreign policy. Like these, Abe's adjusted policy towards China takes a "two-sided" approach, which creates distrust between Japan and China. Improving and deepening economic Japan-China relations does not necessarily have a positive influence on political and security Japan-China relations.⁷³

Furthermore, Japan is still trying to become a normal country by revising its constitution. Immediately after he visited China, Prime Minister Abe submitted the Outline of the National Defense Program to the Diet. In order to achieve the constitutional revision, Japan may start spreading the "China threat theory" again. In addition, Japan's containment policy toward China continues. Japan continues to strengthen its security

⁷¹ Tang Yanlin 唐彦林, Tao Keqing 陶克清, "Xi Jinping waijiao sixiang zhixiang xia Zhongri guanxi fazhan de xin dingwei" 习近平外交思想指向下中日关系发展的新定位 [A New Orientation for the Development of Sino-Japan Relations following Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy] *Riben yanjiu* 日本研究 1 (2020):1-3.

⁷² Lü, "Abe Administration's China Policy," 7-9.

⁷³ Lü, "Abe Administration's China Policy," 7-9.

diplomacy, intervening in the Diaoyu Islands and the South China Sea disputes. In this regard, China sees Prime Minister Abe's views on history and war as problematic.⁷⁴

According to Meng, the dilemma of "one mountain with two tigers" is still very present between China and Japan.⁷⁵ Although economic exchanges between Japan and China have deepened in the 21st century, there is still distrust between the two countries regarding politics and security.

3.3 The Influences of the U.S. in China-Japan Relations

According to Fan, the U.S. is Japan's "base axis" and an important variable in Japan-China relations.⁷⁶ Historically, the relations between Japan and other countries are easily influenced by the relations between the United States and them. Japan-China relations are not an exception to this rule. Japan tends to change its strategy in line with the shift in the US foreign strategy, which was also seen when the US transitioned from the Obama administration to the Trump administration. China distrusts Japan to let the

⁷⁴ Meng Xiaoxu 孟晓旭, "Zhongri anquan guanxi fazhan taishi ji Zhongguo de yingdui" 中日安全关系发展态势及中国的应对 [The Dilemma of Sino-Japanese Security Relations and China's Response], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 3 (2017): 28-29.

⁷⁵ Men, "Transformation of Japan and Orientations of Sino-Japanese Relationship," 76-77.

⁷⁶ Fan Xiaojun 樊小菊, "Yingdui Zhongri guanxi de xin xingshi yu lao wenti ——shixian Zhongri guanxi "wanquan zhengchang hua"de sikao" 应对中日关系的新形势与老问题——实现中日关系"完全正常化"的思考 [Coping with Old Issues in a New Era:" Complete Normalization" of Sino-Japanese Relations], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 10 (2018): 2-5.

US dictate its foreign policy and prioritize its alliance with the US over its relationship with China.⁷⁷

Around the second term of the Obama administration, as US-China relations started deteriorating, the United States increasingly demanded Japan's military cooperation. Abe found strategic value in Obama's Asia rebalancing strategy and used it to re-arm Japan in order to achieve his goals of breaking out of the postwar regime and a strong revival of Japan.⁷⁸ He also aimed to roll back U.S. influence in Asia in return for Japan using its Self-Defense Forces to support the U.S. military on multiple fronts.⁷⁹ Since the late Obama administration, Japan and the United States have shared similar national interests in containing China, which China considers a threat to its national interests.

Fan analyzes the Abe administration's shift in policy toward China after the establishment of the Trump administration. The Trump administration emphasized bilateral rather than multilateral frameworks and sought more practical interests. Trump

⁷⁷ Fan, "Coping with Old Issues in a New Era, 2-5."

⁷⁸ Liu, "On Japan's East China Sea Policy and Its Influence on China," 27; Zhang Ruiting 张瑞婷, Wu Huaizhong 吴怀中, Lun Riben dui Meiguo yatai zai pingheng de zhanlue liyong 论日本对美国亚太再平衡的战略利用 [Japan's Strategic Use of America's Asia-Pacific Rebalance], *Riben yanjiu* 日本研究 4(2015):30.

⁷⁹ Fan Xiaojie 樊小菊, "Xin 《Rimei fangwei hezuo zhizhen》 de jiegou tezhen yu lishi luoji" 新《日美防卫合作指针》的结构特征与历史逻辑 [On the Revised Japan - U.S. Defense Cooperation Guideline: Its Structural Features and Evolving Logic], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 6 (2015):37; Huang Dahui 黄大慧, Zhao Luoxi 赵罗希, "Rimei qianghua tongmeng guanxi dui Zhongguo zhou anquan de yingxiang" 日美强化同盟关系对中国周安全的影响 [A Strengthened Japan - US Alliance and Its Impact on China's Peripheral Security], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* 现代国际关系 6 (2015):29-30.

did not inherit the rebalancing strategy and withdrew from TTP. Therefore, the Abe administration's policies under Trump focused on minimizing the impact of US policies. As the Trump administration began to promote protectionist trade, Japan shifted its policy toward China to a more pro-China one to strengthen economic cooperation with China. As mentioned above, this was received favorably by China. However, China still finds it difficult to ultimately improve Japan-China relations unless US-China relations improve due to the enormous influence the US has on Japan's defense policy.

3.4 Summary

Chinese scholars had criticized Japan's strategy and foreign policy in the first half of the Abe administration as a threat to China's national interests. However, around 2017, there was a significant change in Chinese scholars' perceptions of the Abe administration: Abe's shift in policy toward China since 2017 seems to have been received favorably. They analyzed that the Abe administration initially adopted a tough policy toward China because Japanese society was leaning to the right due to Japan's relative decline in economic power. However, since around 2017, the Abe administration has adopted a more China-friendly attitude, focusing on strengthening economic cooperation. The stability of a long-term government, requests from pro-China factions within the LDP and the business community, the protectionism of the Trump administration, and the diplomatic failures of the Abe administration were perceived to have led Abe to take a less harsh stance toward China.

Nevertheless, even as they acknowledged that Sino-Japanese relations had improved, they argued that the Abe administration maintained a "two-sided strategy. They questioned whether the strengthening of trade relations had affected Japan's comprehensive China policy. In addition, several unresolved issues remain between Japan and China, including the Diaoyu Islands issue. As long as Abe maintains his view of history and Japan tries to normalize and contain China's rise, there is always the fear that Japan will once again spread the "China threat theory," and China's distrust of Japan cannot be wiped out. In addition, Japan-China relations are susceptible to the influence of the United States. Therefore, they argue that unless China-U.S. relations improve, Japan-China relations, as an ally of the U.S., will not improve sufficiently.

Chapter Four: Beijing's Perceptions of Territorial Issues

Chapter 4 analyzes China's perceptions of the territorial sovereignty issues. Despite growing tensions between China and neighboring countries due to a more assertive Chinese stance on its territorial sovereignty, China does not seem to be entirely convinced that their actions are causing friction. This chapter explains how China's perception of its territorial sovereignty differs from that of Japan and other concerned countries.

While Sino-Japanese relations were on track to improve between 2017 and 2019, China overreached in asserting its sovereignty around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, raising tensions and causing distrust on the part of Japan. As the confrontation with the U.S. has intensified, it would be in China's interest to establish good trade and diplomatic relations with Japan, an important ally of the U.S. Furthermore, while the Chinese government expresses its willingness to build better Sino-Japanese relations and further cooperation with Japan amid the complexity and instability of the world order due to the "changes unseen in a century," it has taken a contradictory tough stance by intruding around the Islands.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Xi Jinping hui jian Riben shouxiang Anbei Jinsan" 习近平会见日本首相安倍晋三 [Xi Jinping Meets with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe], Beijing: China, June 27, 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_676836/xgxw_676842/t1676386.shtml; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Xi Jinping

Nevertheless, although this Chinese stance toward Japan, cooperative on the one hand and coercive on the other, contradicts the Japanese government and scholars, China may not consider this contradiction as a contradiction. Instead, China may think that the contradiction is somehow manageable.⁸¹ From the Chinese point of view, “a contradiction (*maodun*) is a tension to be managed, not an imperative to choose between conflicting goals.”⁸² Kamo, a professor of Chinese politics at the faculty of policy management at Keio University, says the emphasis on cooperation and the emphasis on coercion are playing out according to each issue, and it seems to be working fine for the Chinese leadership to emphasize cooperation on some issues and coercion on others.⁸³

hui jian riben shouxiang Anbei Jinsan” 习近平会见日本首相安倍晋三 [Xi Jinping Meets with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe], Beijing: China, December 23, 2019, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_676836/xgxw_676842/t1727165.shtml.

⁸¹ Takahara Akio 高原明夫, Ohara Bonji 小原凡司, “Chugoku taigai shisei no haikai to kokusai chitsujo he no eikyo -coronapandemic ha nani wo kaetano ka?-" 中国对外姿勢の背景と国際秩序への影響 [“Background of China”'s Aggressive External Posture and its Impact on the International Order -What Has Changed after the Coronavirus Pandemic Occurred?-], (1st Open forum, SPF China observer from Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Tokyo, August 4th, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6lmc-AnWdg>.

⁸² Saunders, “China’s Juggling Act,” 1-2.

⁸³ Takahara Akio 高原明夫, Kamo Tomoki 加茂具樹, Ohara Bonji 小原凡司, ““Background of China”'s Aggressive External Posture and its Impact on the International Order -What Has Changed after the Coronavirus Pandemic Occurred?-,”(2nd Open forum, SPF China observer from Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Tokyo, September 7, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XY8PZO3t_XI&t=2787s.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, China believes that its posture of defending its core interests, which may seem assertive to other countries, is a defensive act against challenges from other countries.⁸⁴ China is likely to consider the frequent incursions into Japanese territorial waters around the Islands and the establishment of the ADIZ to be reactive rather than proactive actions. China believes that Japan is entirely at fault for having caused China to take proactive actions. When asked by a Japanese journalist at a press conference in 2013 if the two countries can negotiate some rules to avoid the occurrence of contingencies in the airs and waters of the Islands, Wang Yi stated that the source of the Islands issue was Japan's illegal theft and occupation of Chinese territory and that Japan was responsible for the worsening of the problem.⁸⁵

Moreover, China perceives that it is not an expansionist and is only trying to regain its lost territorial sovereignty.⁸⁶ Besides the territorial sovereignty issue of the Senkaku Islands with Japan, China also has territorial sovereignty issues in Taiwan, India, and the South China Sea. China's claims in these territories are based on the Chinese proffered evidence that these territories had belonged to or been explored by China in its long

⁸⁴ Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive," 165-166.

⁸⁵ China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Waijiaobu buzhang Yang JieChi jiu Zhongguo waijiaozhengce he duiwaiguanxi da zhongwai jizhe wen" 外交部部長楊潔篪就中國外交政策和對外關係答中外記者問 [Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi Answers Questions from Chinese and Foreign Journalists on China's Foreign Policy and Foreign Relations], (Beijing: China, 2013),

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zyjh_674906/t1019938.shtml.

⁸⁶ Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, 21.

history. The range of China's territorial sovereignty claims does not go beyond these so far, and it seems that China has only been attempting to reclaim lands that had once been part of China's territory. Regardless of the legitimacy of such Chinese claims, China is asserting its territorial sovereignty based on this perception, which differs from the perceptions of Japan and other countries. In addition, China still maintains a sense of victimization, which it repeatedly conveys to the world. This narrative of Chinese victimhood reflects the determination of China to never compromise on its core interests.⁸⁷

For these reasons, China may not perceive that its coercive approach to protecting its territorial sovereignty is inconsistent with its cooperative approach to maintaining stable relations with its neighbors as Japan and other countries think. China believes that its actions in territorial sovereignty issues are only reactive and that China can use both cooperation (weiwen) and coercion (weiquan) in its foreign policy. These differences in perceptions with China make it difficult for Japan to engage in dialogue and negotiations with China to resolve the issue.

⁸⁷ Kawashima Shin, "Xi Jinping's Diplomatic Philosophy and Vision for International Order: Continuity and Change from the Hu Jintao Era," *Asia-Pacific review* 26, no. 1 (2019): 136.

Chapter Five: Changes in Beijing's Perception of its National Power

China's rapid growth over the past two decades is further highlighted by the relative decline of neighboring countries such as the US and Japan.⁸⁸ Sanders says that China's aggressive external behavior is based on China's perception that the balance of power in the region is shifting in China's favor and that other countries will eventually have to compromise with China.⁸⁹ As its economy has developed and expanded, China has also expanded its military spending and modernized its military. With China's growing international influence in recent years, China has gained more confidence as a great power than ever before.

This chapter discusses how the shift in China's perception of its own capabilities has occurred and how this change has been affecting China's foreign posture. This paper assumes that the shift in perception of China's growing national power is manifested in a change in its foreign policy and analyzes how the basics of Chinese foreign policy have changed from Deng Xiaoping's regime to Xi's, with a particular focus on the changes during Xi's administration. The discussion is mainly based on Xi's remarks at the 19th Party Congresses and the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference in 2014 and 2018. By reviewing how Xi's statements have changed, this chapter examines how his perceptions have changed.

⁸⁸ Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, 5.

⁸⁹ Saunders, "China's Juggling Act," 2.

5.1 Changes in Chinese Foreign Policy

Until recently, China's diplomatic policy was based on Deng Xiaoping's 1989 principle of "hiding one's capabilities and bide one's time" [tao guang yang hui], a policy of low-key diplomacy that hides capabilities until they are built up. With the political upheavals in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union's decline in 1989, China was aware that it was part of the "The Sino-Russia-US Triangle" that would determine how international affairs would unfold. However, after China witnessed the overwhelming military and technological strength of the U.S. in the 1990 Gulf War and realized how weak China's national power was, it prioritized economic development. It set a fundamental policy of ensuring a peaceful international environment. Since then, China has adopted a relatively cooperative diplomatic stance, with "economic construction" as its top diplomatic priority and the need for a peaceful international environment.⁹⁰

Jiang Zemin, Xiaoping's successor, adopted a similar foreign policy, "enhance trust, reduce trouble, develop cooperation, avoid confrontation" [Zengjia xinren jianshao mafan fazhan hezuo bugao duikang]. In the early 2000s, the next Hu Jintao administration introduced a new slogan, "China's peaceful rise" [Zhongguo heping jueqi]. This policy

⁹⁰ Mifune Emi 三船恵美, "Shu Kinpei taiseika no Chugoku no gaikou • anzen hoshou senryaku" 習近平体制下の中国の外交・安全保障戦略 [Chinese Diplomacy and National Security Strategy under Xi Jinping Administration], *Komazawa hougaku* 駒澤法学 16-4(62) (2017): 31-32.

was to assure the international community that China's growing political, economic, and military influence would not harm the peace and security of the international community. All of China's foreign policies to this stage promoted China's long-term pragmatic interests in preventing other countries from uniting to hinder China's rise.⁹¹

However, later in the Hu Jintao administration, there was a change in China's diplomatic path, followed by Deng Xiaoping. At the Diplomatic Conference in 2009, with the prospect of a more multipolar international system, the Hu Jintao administration announced a policy of "uphold keeping a low profile and bide its time, while actively getting something accomplished" [Jianchi taoguang yanghui jiji].⁹² The new policy means that China will still adhere to hiding its capabilities and accumulating power but will be more proactive in its foreign policy. Despite his commitment to "peaceful development," Hu said that the top priority of diplomacy is to "defend the nation's sovereignty, security and development interests," breaking with Deng's line of making "economic construction" the top priority. This was the beginning of a shift from Deng Xiaoping's keeping a low profile policy.

The shift in the Chinese diplomatic track has become more marked under Xi's administration. At the 2014 CPC Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference after Xi took office, he said that under the new international situation, China must have "great power

⁹¹ Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, 29.

⁹² Mifune, "Chinese Diplomacy and National Security Strategy," 31-32.

diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" and that China's most significant opportunity is to continue to develop and become stronger.⁹³ He stated that interdependence in international relations has been growing, and China's growing strength and influence in the China-world interdependent relations must be incorporated into China's upcoming foreign policy.⁹⁴ He also said that the balance of power has been realigning. The world order is moving toward multipolarity, and economic globalization will continue.⁹⁵ In other words, he recognizes that the international situation has begun to turn in China's favor.⁹⁶ It seems his perception that the world order is changing in China's favor is driving China's more aggressive foreign policy. Similar statements by Xi that international relations have been rearranged in China's favor were seen in his speech in Moscow in 2013 and at the 27th conference of the CPC Central Committee's study group in 2015.⁹⁷

Xi also emphasized, far more explicitly than previous leaders, the need for China to protect its legitimate rights and interests while pursuing peaceful development. For the first time as a Communist Party leader, Xi said that development and security are the twin goals of Chinese foreign policy. By linking them to the double centenary goals and the

⁹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was Held in Beijing," (Beijing: China, November 29, 2014), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Kawashima, "Xi Jinping's Diplomatic Philosophy and Vision," 127.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Chinese dream, he gave them a definite strategic purpose.⁹⁸ The security goal includes the issue of defending territorial sovereignty. This emphasis on Xi's two goals of development and security accelerates the contradictions in Chinese diplomacy.

If the latter half of the Hu administration and the early days of Xi's administration are defined as the formative stage of the submission of such statements and the new concept of great power diplomacy, then the 19th Party Congress can be considered to have solidified this new perception of China. The main feature of the 19th Party Congress was the complete replacement of keeping a low profile with striving for achievements and the declaration that socialism with Chinese characteristics had entered a new era.⁹⁹ The phrase "new era" expresses the confidence and pride that China's efforts to raise its international status to an unprecedented level have borne fruit and that China has reached a point where it can set a new era.¹⁰⁰ He also emphasized that the future direction of China's development in the new era is to grow into a strong country [Qiang guo].¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Michael Swaine, "Xi Jinping's Address to the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs: Assessing and Advancing Major- Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," *China Leadership Monitor*, No 46, (March 2015): 14, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/clm46ms.pdf>

⁹⁹ "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress," *Xinhua news agency*, November 3, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/201711/03/c_136725942.htm.

¹⁰⁰ "Shu Soshoki ga egaku 「kyoukoku」 he no michi dai 19 kai toutaikai houkoku ni miru Chugoku 「Xin zidai」 no houkousei" 習総書記が描く「強国」化への道 第19回党大会報告にみる中国「新時代」の方向性 [The Road to Becoming a "Strong Nation" Drawn by General Secretary Xi: The Direction of China's "New Era" in the Report of the 19th Party Congress], *Mizuho sogo kenkyujo みずほ総合研究所* (2017): 2-3.

¹⁰¹ "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress," *Xinhua news agency*.

Without hesitation, Xi positioned China as a great power, and with more confidence than ever before, he showed his willingness to more actively pursuing the international order that Beijing seeks and has revealed his ambitious vision.¹⁰² China has consistently recognized unfair and unreasonable aspects of the existing international order that need to be corrected. However, China had rarely expressed its dissatisfaction through any action, nor was it influential enough to make any changes in the international order. It is only as China's power has increased that such claims have come to have significance.¹⁰³ From the end of the Hu Jintao regime to the beginning of the Xi regime, China has increasingly sought to participate in the international order and expand its influence further and modify it to serve its interests or create a new framework. The Xi administration now recognizes that this is both possible and necessary for China.

He also reasserted the long-held characteristics of China's defense policy as essentially defensive, non-threatening, non-expansionist, and counter-hegemonic, while at the same time reiterating its commitment to safeguarding China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹⁰⁴ He highlighted that he would not allow anyone, any organization, or any political party to separate any part of Chinese territory from China at any time, in any form.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Yamaguchi Shinji 山口信治, "Chugoku no kokusai chitsujo ninshiki no kiso to henka" 中国の国際秩序認識の基礎と変化 [Basics and Changes in Chinese Perception of International Order], *Bouei kenkyujo kiyou* 18 (2) 防衛研究所紀要第 18 巻第 2 号 (2016): 56-58.

¹⁰⁴ "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress," *Xinhua news agency*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

As mentioned above, Chinese foreign policy under Xi's administration has been characterized by the departure with the "hide and bride," statements and actions that seek to transform the international order, and a more assertive stance on protecting territorial sovereignty than ever before. Although many of the ideas and policies were inherited from previous leaders, Xi has considerably toughened them up and added new ideas.¹⁰⁶ These significant shifts in China's foreign policy reflect the change in China's perception of its national strength. As Xi said at the 19th Party Congress, China rose in Mao's era, began to grow rich in Deng's era, and began to grow strong in his era, he is full of pride and confidence that China has become a great power, and this is what drives his assertive foreign policies. To achieve his goals, Xi has been trying to centralize massive power in his hands, and his appointments at the 19th Party Congress have been somewhat successful.¹⁰⁷ Xi's consolidation of power is further discussed in the next chapter.

5.2 Changes Unseen in a century

Besides, the Xi's perception of opportunity and crisis leads it to assertive external behaviors.¹⁰⁸ China recognizes that the current international order is changing in its favor,

¹⁰⁶ Kawashima, "Xi Jinping's Diplomatic Philosophy and Vision," 122-123.

¹⁰⁷ Yamagushi Shinji 山口信治, "Chugoku kyosantou dai 19 kai zenkoku daihyo taikai no kiso bunseki" 中国共産党第19回全国代表大会 [Basic Analysis of the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party], *NIDS Commentary NIDS コメンタリー* No.62:1-4.

¹⁰⁸ Yamaguchi Shinji 山口信治, "Kokusaichitsujo wo meguru kyousou wo gekika saseru chugoku: kyokouka wo motarasu jikoninshiki" 国際秩序をめぐる競争を激化させる中国：強硬化をもたらすその自己認識（先鋭化する米中対立）[China Intensifying the Competition over International Order: Self-perception that Leads to a Further Hardline Stance], *外交 Diplomacy* 62, 114-119, July 2020.

but it also perceives that the world is facing crises. This idea existed in the Hu Jintao administration and was mentioned by Xi in 2013, but it only became concrete in 2017.

There have been discussions in China since 2017 the world is moving toward multi-polarization with the relative declining power of the United States.¹⁰⁹ Xi has described these structural changes in international politics as "changes unseen in a century" [Bainian weiyou zhi da bianju].¹¹⁰ Changes unseen in a century are the significant changes the international community faces as the balance of power in the world shifts and, consequently, the rules of the game of international order change.

For example, the main changes include economic globalization and political multi-polarization."¹¹¹ As seen in the sentence "The East rises, and the West falls," in recent years, developing and emerging countries have been growing their economies rapidly, which has had a significant impact on the traditional global system.¹¹² Asia is now becoming the center of the world. The rapid growth of these countries, which had been

¹⁰⁹ Pu Ping 蒲伟, "Guojiguanxi yanbianzhongde "bainianweiyouzhi dabanju"" 国际关系演变中的"百年未有之大变局" [The "Changes Unseen in a Century" in the Evolution of International Relations], *人民网 People's Daily Online*, January 3, 2020, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0103/c40531-31533109.html>; He Cheng 何成, "Quanmian renshi he lijie "bainian weiyou zhi dabanju"" 全面认识和理解"百年未有之大变局" [Comprehensive Knowledge and Understanding of the "Changes Unseen in a Century"], *人民网 People's Daily Online*, January 3, 2020.

¹¹⁰ "Xi Jinping: fangyan shijie, women miandui de shi bainian weiyou zhi da bianju" 习近平：放眼世界，我們面對的是百年未有之大變局 [Xi Jinping: Look at the World, We Are Facing Changes Unseen in a Century], *中国新闻网 China News Service*, December 29, 2017, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2017/12-29/8412268.shtml>.

¹¹¹ Yuan Peng, "My Personal View on the Great Changes Unseen in a Century," *Contemporary international relations* 2020 No.2, 1.

¹¹² "Changes, Challenges and Choices—China is Driven by the Path It Takes," Xinhua net, accessed June 13, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/28/c_138345879.htm.

marginalized from the traditional global system, boosts economic globalization and political multi-polarization.¹¹³ At the same time, however, the Western nations that have long dominated the world have not been able to keep up with these new trends. As a result, Western countries are leaning toward unilateralism, protectionism, nationalism, and populism, as seen in the Trump administration's America First policy.¹¹⁴ Thus, the traditional international system is now in crisis. Therefore, as the world's largest developing country, China should exert its influence in this period of chaos and opportunity and actively work to build a new international order and system as a world leader.¹¹⁵

At the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference in June 2018, Xi said that China is in an advantageous long-term position because these "changes unseen in a century" coincide with the best period of development for China since modern times.¹¹⁶ This Chinese perception that the current international situation is in their favor is a driver for China to take more aggressive external behavior. However, Xi also understands that while this period of significant change will work in China's favor in the long run, China is also

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Changes, Challenges and Choices, Xinhua net,

¹¹⁶ "Xi Jinping zai zhongyang waishi gonzuo huiyi shang qiangdiao jianchiyi xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi waijiao sixiang weizhidao nuli kaichuang Zhongguo tese daguo waijiao xin jumian" 习近平在中央外事工作会议上强调坚持以新时代中国特色社会主义外交思想为指导努力开创中国特色大国外交 [Stick to the Guidance of Thought on Diplomacy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and Break New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics-Xi Urges at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs], 中国共产党新闻网 cpcnews.cn, June 24th, 2018, <http://jhsjk.people.cn/article/30079017>.

facing instability and crisis.¹¹⁷ In particular, as seen in the confrontation between the United States and China, other countries feel threatened by China's rise and try to contain it. However, for China, these are only short-term crises and might be tolerable given China's long-term gains and development opportunities. The opportunities for China's development over the long term are more important than the backlash against and containment of China's rise by other countries. China is eager to accomplish the dream of Chinese rejuvenation at any cost by combining these unseen in a century changes with Chinese rejuvenation policy.¹¹⁸

In addition, strong leadership generally works best in times of crisis.¹¹⁹ China justifies Xi's strong leadership by creating its critical situation and inciting a sense of crisis at home.¹²⁰ Also, since this is based on Xi's perception, it will not be easy for China to make a major policy change that would allow him to admit his mistakes.¹²¹ Beijing's aggressive foreign policy is likely to continue in the future.

5.3 Changes in dynamics between China and Japan

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Yuan, "My Personal View on the Great Changes Unseen in a Century," 3.

¹¹⁹ Ohara, "'Background of China's Aggressive External Posture and its Impact on the International Order,'" SPF China observer.

¹²⁰ Kamo, "'Background of China's Aggressive External Posture and its Impact on the International Order,'" SPF China observer.

¹²¹ Yamaguchi, "China Intensifying the Competition over International Order," 118.

One of the major incidents that made China take pride in its growing national power was the Lehman Shock in 2008.¹²² While the U.S. and other developed countries were suffering from recession, China's economy continued to grow steadily. China even served to protect other Asian countries from the recessionary waves and helped to save the Japanese economy from prolonged stagnation.¹²³ Furthermore, China's GDP surpassed that of Japan to become the second-largest in the world in 2010. These events undoubtedly gave China a confidence boost. Accordingly, the balance of economic interdependence between China and Japan has also shifted. As the Chinese economy has developed, China has been gaining more economic leverage against other countries, including Japan.

The shift in economic interdependence between China and Japan can be measured based on the change in the percentage of each country's trade value in the total trade value of imports and exports over the past 30 years. The data refers to the Trade White Paper published by the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and trade data between Japan and China available at JETRO (The Japan External Trade Organization).

In 2000, China's third-largest export partner was Japan (after the U.S. and Hong Kong), with Japan accounting for 16.7% of China's total exports; by 2017, Japan was in fourth place, with its share dropping to 6.0%. In addition, Japan was China's number one

¹²² Yamaguchi, "Basics and Changes in Chinese Perception," 52-53.

¹²³ Saunders, "China's Role in Asia: Attractive or Assertive," 159.

import partner, accounting for 18.4% of China's total imports in 2000, but by 2017, Japan had dropped to third place, accounting for 9.0% of China's total imports.¹²⁴

Conversely, China was Japan's fourth-largest export partner in 2000, accounting for only 6.3% of the value of imports, but in 2009 it overtook the United States to become Japan's largest export partner. The share of exports to China in the total value of Japan's exports increased to 18.9%. In 2015 and 2016, it fell to 17%, but in 2017, 2018, and 2019, it exceeded 19% again.¹²⁵ China has become a major export market for Japan along with the United States. On the other hand, China's share of Japan's total exports in 1990 was only 5.1%. By 2000, however, its share had grown to 14.5%, and in 2002, with a share of 18.3%, China surpassed the United States, Japan's long-time number one import partner, and has remained Japan's number one import partner ever since. In 2016, China's share was the highest ever, at 25.8 percent.¹²⁶

In the 2010s, the position of trade relations between China and Japan was reversed. While Japan has been stuck in an economic recession since the early 1990s, China has achieved rapid economic development. Although China and Japan's economic relationship remain interdependent, now the Japanese economy is more dependent on China. Japan does not have the economic leverage over China that it once did. This change in the economic relationship between Japan and China would give China

¹²⁴ Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Trade white paper 2018, Tokyo: Japan, 2018, <https://www.meti.go.jp/report/tsuhaku2018/pdf/02-03-03.pdf>

¹²⁵ JETRO (The Japan External Trade Organization), Japan's Top 10 Trading Partners, Tokyo: Japan, 2020, <https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/japan/stats/trade/>

¹²⁶ Ibid.

confidence as a great power and grow the perception that China is in a favorable position regarding the territorial sovereignty issue with Japan. This perception has also allowed China to take a more harsh stance around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.

As analyzed so far, the Xi administration's tough diplomatic stance on China's territorial sovereignty has been fueled by the Chinese leader's growing confidence in his country's national strength. This trend of increasing confidence had been seen since the latter years of the previous Hu Jintao administration. Yet, it has accelerated since Xi became chairman and was solidified at the 19th Party Congress. This change in the perception of Chinese leaders makes it easier for them to take a hard-line stance against Japan, which has lost its economic leverage over China in recent years. China perceives itself to be in a more favorable position on the territorial issue and will continue to prioritize its interests and take assertive actions, with little or no regard for criticism from Japan or the international community.

5.4 Summary

China has become more aware of its growing national power since the beginning of the Xi Jinping era. China's rapid economic growth has expanded China's influence in the international community, which has made China more confident and proud of its power than ever before. This increased confidence has led China to adopt a tougher diplomatic stance. In Japan-China relations, China surpassed Japan's GDP in 2010,

making Japan more dependent on trade with China. Because of its growing security and economic influence in the region, China expects other countries to compromise on territorial sovereignty issues.

China is also aware that the world is currently facing unprecedented changes. China recognizes that the balance of power in international relations is shifting, and thus the traditional rules of the international order are changing. China understands that there are not only opportunities but also crises in this stage of significant change, but believes that the current international situation is in China's favor. Even if there are some conflicts and frictions with the countries trying to suppress China's rise, China is eager to seize this opportunity and achieve its dream of rejuvenation. The restoration of territorial sovereignty is a top priority for China's revival, and therefore China will continue to adopt an aggressive stance on territorial sovereignty, recognizing its advantageous position.

Chapter Six: Xi Jinping's Consolidation of Power

As briefly mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 3, Chapter 6 reviews how Xi's consolidation of power has influenced the direction of Chinese foreign policy. Since Xi took over as chairman in 2012, the contradictions regarding core interests have accelerated. This paper assumes that Xi's aggressive nature and perceptions are more strongly reflected in Chinese foreign policy than in past Chinese leaders after Deng Xiaoping, which has made Chinese foreign policy more assertive in recent years.

Xi's centralization of power has allowed him to personalize China's foreign policy to some extent. In order to prove this claim, this chapter examines how Xi's consolidation of power influences the decision-making process of Chinese foreign policy. First, it briefly reviews how Chinese foreign policy decision-making generally takes place. Then, it examines how Xi has increased his power over the five years from November 2012 to October 2017 and how this has affected the foreign policy decision-making. Lastly, it concludes with how Xi's centralization of authority has changed Chinese foreign policy, noting that while his power is stronger than past leaders, it is still constrained to some extent.

6.1 The Chinese Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process

First of all, this section briefly reviews the Chinese foreign policy decision-making process, referring to "How are foreign policy decisions made in China" by Linda

Jakobson and Ryan Manuel. First, the basic premise is that in China, the power of the Communist Party is far greater than that of the Chinese government under the Xi administration.¹²⁷ In effect, it is the Communist Party that rules China. Final decisions on critical foreign affairs are made by the Executive Committee of the Central Committee, called the Politburo Standing Committee.¹²⁸ Policy shifts and changes, and decisions that require much discussion over a long time, are sometimes addressed by the Politburo.¹²⁹ Then, the Central Committee must formally approve all significant changes in strategic policy direction.¹³⁰ However, the Central Committee meets only once a year. Therefore, issues are more likely to be brought up in the PSC or the Politburo.¹³¹ Thus, the PSC and Politburo play a relatively significant role in foreign policy decision-making in China. The Standing Committee of the Central Politburo is currently composed of seven members, and in principle, these seven members exercise collective leadership. Each committee member supervises a policy area of the Party government called "tongxi" from the central to the local level, thus ensuring the collective leadership system.¹³²

¹²⁷ Linda Jakobson and Ryan Manuel, "How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?" *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 99-101, doi: 10.1002/app5.121.

¹²⁸ Yamaguchi Shinji 山口信治, "Shu Kinpei no kokunai seiji to taigai seisaku" 習近平の国内政治と対外政策 [Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy], *中国の国内情勢と対外政策 China's Domestic Situation and Foreign Policy*, (March 2017):96.

¹²⁹ Jakobson and Manuel, "How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?," 99-101.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 96-97.

Besides these coordination bodies of the Communist Party, the "Leading Small Groups" (zhongyang lingdao xiaozu) also have a crucial role in Chinese policy-making.¹³³ The LSGs advise leaders on approaching each problem they are given and are responsible for coordination in policy-making. Although the LSGs are not the final policy-making body, they are considered an essential forum for consultation in the policy-making process. Within the LSGs, three organizations deal with foreign affairs and security issues: the Central Foreign Affairs LSG, the Central Taiwan Affairs LSG, and the Central National Security LSG.¹³⁴

Last but not least, the existence of a general secretary is also an essential factor in Chinese foreign policy decisions.¹³⁵ China's supreme leader, who is also the general secretary of the party, president of the country, and chairman of the Central Military Commission, has the strongest institutional authority. Although the system now guarantees collective leadership, the role of the supreme leader in Chinese politics is still significant, and top-down policy decisions are often taken on important issues. In particular, the authority to make final decisions on foreign and security policy rests with the supreme leader.¹³⁶

Policy-making in China has become more fragmented and complex than in Mao's time, and as a result, the problem of policy coordination has become more outstanding.

¹³³ Jakobson and Manuel, "How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?," 100; Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 97-98.

¹³⁴ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 97-98.

¹³⁵ Jakobson and Manuel, "How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?," 105.

¹³⁶ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 97.

However, it should be noted that the authority of the supreme leader and the PSC is still considerable when it comes to important issues and major strategic policy decisions.¹³⁷

6.2 Xi's Centralization of Power and Personalization of Foreign Policy-Making

Next, this section examines how Xi has carried out centralization of his power and how this relates to his personalization of Chinese foreign policy. Kadozaki, an assistant professor at Waseda University, described the five years since November 2012 as a "concentration of power on Xi."¹³⁸ Joseph Fewsmith, Professor of International Relations and Political Science at the Boston University Pardee School, likewise noted that Xi's concentration of power began before the 18th Party Congress in November 2012.¹³⁹ Then the 19th Party Congress marked a significant milestone in that five-year concentration of power.

Unlike previous leaders, Xi did not have a strong network or organizational base in the central government because he had spent much of his career working in provinces far away from Beijing.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, he was considered to be a relatively weak leader at the

¹³⁷ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 98.

¹³⁸ Kadozaki Shinya 角崎信也, "Shuken no dilemma" 集権のジレンマ 上 習近平の権力の現状と背景 [Xi Jinping's Power Struggles Vol.1 the Current Situation and Backgrounds of Xi Jinping's Power], *China Report Vol.8*: 1.

¹³⁹ Joseph Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress: Ringing in Xi Jinping's New Age," *China Leadership Monitor*, No 55, (January 2018): 8.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid; Takahara Akio 高原明生, "Daiikki shu kinpei seiken ka ni okeru 「ikkyo taisei」 seiritsu no keii" 第1期習近平政権下における「一強体制」成立の経緯 [Backgrounds of

time of his appointment, and not much attention or expectation was paid to him. No one thought that he would dominate the politics of the Communist Party after five years.

Since taking office, Xi has sought to ensure that the party is in control of China as a whole by centralizing power in a wide range of areas, including government, military, economy, and society.¹⁴¹ Among Xi's efforts to consolidate his authority, the anti-corruption campaign and institutional reforms have led to expanding his power in the foreign policy-making process.

6.2.1 Xi's Anti-Corruption Campaign

In the anti-corruption campaign, Xi has increased his influence in personnel matters.¹⁴² Not only did Xi correct political corruption, but he also enhanced his power by eliminating his political enemies and placing people close to him in critical positions throughout the campaign.¹⁴³ Controlling personnel power is one of the factors that guarantee a leader's strong power. In a country with a well-developed bureaucracy, it is

the Establishment of one Strong Regime System under the First Phase of Xi Jinping Regime], *China Report Vol. 16*: 1.

¹⁴¹ Kojima Kazuko 小嶋華津子, "Shu Kinpei Seiken ka no seiji: Shuken to sono imi" 習近平政権下の政治：集権化とその意味 [Politics under Xi Administration: Consolidation of Power and its Meaning], *Financial review*, 2019 (3): 146.

¹⁴² Kadozaki Shinya 角崎信也, "Shuken no dilemma" 集権のジレンマ 下 習近平の権力の現状と背景 [Xi Jinping's Power Struggles Vol.2 the Current Situation and Backgrounds of Xi Jinping's Power], *China Report Vol.9*: 1-2.

¹⁴³ Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress," 18.

usually difficult for the individual in power to control the cadres as he pleases, which is also true of the CCP.¹⁴⁴ However, under Xi's regime, the anti-corruption campaign has created a situation in which such a system does not function strictly, allowing Xi to seize personnel power to some extent as he wants.¹⁴⁵

The characteristic feature of the anti-corruption campaign conducted by Xi is that not only bribery but also violations of Party discipline were targeted for detection.¹⁴⁶ Since he was appointed general secretary, Xi has strictly supervised compliance with Party regulations and discipline through the quasi-rule of law.¹⁴⁷ Wang Qishan, a close associate of Xi and former secretary of the Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, once stated that the CCP is a political organization with a sacred mission, and given its nature as the Party's vanguard and its status as the ruling Party, Party regulations and discipline should be stricter than state laws.¹⁴⁸ This emphasis on internal Party regulations is intended to strengthen internal monitoring to ensure that policies are implemented as intended by the Party Central Committee and prevent the emergence of potential rivals. In other words, the objectives of Xi's anti-corruption campaign include

¹⁴⁴ Kadozaki, "Xi Jinping's Power Struggles," 1.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 100-101.

¹⁴⁸ Wang Qishan 王岐山, "Jianchi gao biao zhun shou zhu dixian tuijin quanmian cong yan zhidang zhiu chuangxin" 坚持高标准 守住底线 推进全面从严治党制度创新 [Adhere to High Standards, Keep the Bottom Line and Promote the Overall Strict Governance System Innovation], 人民日报 The People's Diary, October 2015. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2015/1023/c64094-27730656.html>.

loyalty to the Party center and the strengthening of the Party's overall one-party system. It means that Xi can pick out and dispose of those who deviate from the party center or Xi's policies and policies. Since this anti-corruption campaign with a vast scope of detection was being carried out simultaneously as the massive personnel shakeout ahead of the 19th Party Congress, many cadres actively showed their admiration for Xi and their willingness to follow his policies. This may have played a role in the concentration of power on Xi.¹⁴⁹

Finally, after a period of struggle, Xi earned the title of 'Core of the Party Central' at the 2016 Central Committee meeting. After that, his subordinates have begun to occupy critical positions in the party.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, in his appointments at the 19th Party Congress, Xi established power stability by consolidating key positions in the policy-making process with individuals close to him.

In the personnel appointments at the 19th Party Congress, Xi selected many of his former subordinates and succeeded in expanding his faction.¹⁵¹ In the PSC, the most important foreign policy-making mechanism, five of the seven members were replaced. Most of them have a close relationship with Xi or had worked with him before.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 100-101.

¹⁵⁰ Takahara, "Backgrounds of the Establishment of one Strong Regime System under the First Phase of Xi Jinping Regime," 1.

¹⁵¹ Li Ha 李昊, "Kenryoku tousou no shiten kara mita Shu Kinpei Seiken no anteisei" 権力闘争の視点から見た習近平政権の安定性 [Stability of Xi Jinping Administration in terms of the Power Struggle], *China Report* Vol. 28: 1-2.

¹⁵² Kato Harunobu 加藤青延, "Nikime wo mukaeta Shu Kimpei taisei no yukue" 2期目を迎えた習近平体制の行方 [Outlook for Xi Jinping's Regime in His Second Term], Annual report

Politburo's appointments similarly resulted in the promotion of a large number of pro-Xi leaders.¹⁵³ The Xi faction accounts for 16 of the 25 members of the PSC and Politburo combined, an overwhelming majority. In addition, Xi promoted six Politburo members without following the usual step-by-step promotion process, and all six of them are considered to be close associates of Xi.¹⁵⁴ Most PSC and Politburo leaders have a close or cooperative relationship with Xi. Not all PSC leaders are loyal to Xi, but none are explicitly hostile.¹⁵⁵ This has contributed to Xi's powerful leadership in foreign policy.

Moreover, Politburo members are usually given the four municipalities' posts directly under their jurisdiction: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing. These posts are also seized by the Xi faction, which indicates the concentration of power in Xi's hands.¹⁵⁶ In addition, as the Xi faction has grown in power, the decline of the Jiang Zemin faction and the Hu Jintao faction has also contributed to Xi's rise to power.¹⁵⁷

6.2.2 Xi Jinping's Monopoly of Leading Small Group

of the Institute of Political Science & Economics, Musashino University (16): 76-78; Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress", 2-5.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress," 18; Kato, "Outlook for Xi Jinping's Regime in His Second Term," 78.

¹⁵⁵ Kadozaki, "Xi Jinping's power struggles," 3; Li, "Stability of Xi Jinping administration," 1.

¹⁵⁶ Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress," 4-6; Kato, "Outlook for Xi Jinping's Regime in His Second Term," 78.

¹⁵⁷ Kato, "Outlook for Xi Jinping's Regime in His Second Term," 79.

Secondly, Xi reformed the system of leading small groups. During the Hu Jintao administration, the PSC members were in charge of the LSGs. Xi changed this and created a system in which Xi is in charge of almost all areas.¹⁵⁸ Xi heads the Central National Security Commission, the Central Foreign Affairs Work Committee, and the Taiwan Relations Commission, all of which are influential in foreign and security policymaking within the LSGs.¹⁵⁹

6.2.3 Military under Xi Jinping's leadership

Next, Xi has brought the military under his control. Former General Secretary Hu Jintao, not following the precedent set by Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping, stepped down from the post of Chairman of the Central Military Commission simultaneously as he was replaced as General Secretary. This allowed Xi to assume the post of Chairman of the Central Military Commission at the same time as he assumed the position of General Secretary and seize control of leadership over the military.¹⁶⁰

Since 2013, Xi has pledged to promote national defense and military reform. The series of reforms aimed to overcome the slackness in the command chain and the lack of discipline within the military and transform the military into a more obedient military to

¹⁵⁸ Timothy R. Heath, "The Consolidation of Political Power in China Under Xi Jinping: Implications for the PLA and Domestic Security Forces," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), 2, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT503.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Jakobson and Manuel, "How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?," 105.

¹⁶⁰ Kojima, "Politics under Xi Administration: Consolidation of Power and its Meaning," 136.

the Party Central.¹⁶¹ The reforms caught and eliminated the big-name cadres who had built up an extensive network of interests within the military.¹⁶² In March 2014, Xi established the Central Military Commission's Deepening National Defense and Military Reform LSG to promote and further announced a large-scale national defense and military reform program.¹⁶³ Through a series of reforms, the authority of the Central Military Commission, also headed by Xi, has been dramatically strengthened.

Xi proceeded to consolidate power as described above. Through his anti-corruption campaign, Xi has succeeded in removing his political opponents and consolidating the PSC and the politburo, which are important actors in the foreign policy-making process, with individuals close to him. He also became the head of the LSGs, which are responsible for coordinating important foreign policies. These allowed Xi to bring his ideas and perceptions more easily to bear on Chinese foreign policy. In addition, by bringing the military under his control, he has prevented the military from acting independently of the Party's intentions.

6.3 Fruits of Xi's Consolidation of Power at the 19th Party Congress

¹⁶¹ Kojima, "Politics under Xi Administration: Consolidation of Power and its Meaning," 143.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 99.

As previously mentioned, Xi's power was firmly established at the 19th Party Congress. Three main factors have helped consolidate Xi's power at the 19th Party Congress, such as the personnel changes in his favor, breaking with the conventions of power succession, and inclusion of an ideology with his name in the constitution.

First of all, as mentioned above, Xi has been able to stabilize his power and exert stronger leadership over policy-making by turning the personnel situation in his favor.

Secondly, Xi has effectively eliminated his term of office by not naming a successor. At the Party congress, held once every five years, a general secretary usually nominates the next successor. However, Xi did not nominate a successor.¹⁶⁴ Also, among the new members of the PSC, no one could be a potential successor in terms of age restrictions. Unlike many authoritarian regimes, the CCP has had a relatively smooth transition of power to the next generation since its establishment, so it was quite unusual that Xi did not choose a successor at the 19th Party Congress.¹⁶⁵ (The constitution was later amended in 2018 to remove the limit of two terms of five years for the president.) It means that Xi will remain in power for an indefinite period.

Finally, Xi succeeded in having a thought with his name on it, "Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for the new age," inserted into the constitution, declaring a new era had arrived.¹⁶⁶ Previously, only Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping

¹⁶⁴ Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress," 2.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Takahara, "Backgrounds of the Establishment of one Strong Regime System under the First Phase of Xi Jinping Regime," 1.

were Chinese leaders whose names were written into the constitution, making Xi the third.¹⁶⁷ (Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao are also listed in the constitution for their respective ideologies, but not by name.) It shows that Xi has more influence than any of the previous leaders except Mao. In addition, Xi's slogan of "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" was added in two sections, and the world view of "building a community of human destiny" was also inserted into the constitution, so that "Xi Jinping Thought" was strongly reflected in the entire constitution.¹⁶⁸ By including Xi's name in the constitution, he enhanced his dignity as the leader who led the country into a new era and legitimized the rule of the Party.¹⁶⁹

Thus, at the Party Congress, Xi reshaped the Party's internal personnel and norms, demonstrating that his power is unchallenged. The congress can be seen as the culmination of Xi's five-year struggle for power.

6.4 Influence of Xi's Unified Leadership on Beijing's Foreign Policy

Then, what has changed in China by concentrating enormous power in the hands of Xi all by himself? This section examines the impact of Xi's consolidation of power on

¹⁶⁷ Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress," 7-8.

¹⁶⁸ Kato Harunobu 加藤青延, "Kenpou kaisei to kouzou kaikaku de okiku kawatta Chugoku no touji kozo" 憲法改正と構造改革で大きく変わった中国の統治構造 [China's Prominent Ruling Shift Reinforced by Constitutional Amendments and Structural Reform], Annual report of the Institute of Political Science & Economics, Musashino University (17), 22-25.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid; Kadozaki, "Xi Jinping's Power Struggles," 1.

China, noting at the same time the constraints on his power. As mentioned in Chapter 5, China has abandoned its low-profile diplomatic stance in foreign policy and has shifted to a more proactive diplomatic stance as a strong major power. Chinese domestic politics has also seen a change from Deng's era. If the separation of Party and state characterized the domestic politics of Deng's era, the Chinese politics of Xi's era has been heading in the exact opposite direction.¹⁷⁰ Because of the Cultural Revolution failures, Deng Xiaoping avoided concentrating power in the hands of a single individual, preferring to have the Party and government work separately on their respective tasks.¹⁷¹ As a result, collective leadership has been well developed in China.¹⁷² However, Xi has concentrated power in his hands and minimized the divisions between the Party and the government.¹⁷³ He has tightened the control of government agencies and made it clear that the government is merely the executor of the Party's policies.¹⁷⁴

In foreign policy, Xi has appointed most Xi faction leaders to the PSC and Politburo, the policy-making bodies, and has monopolized involvement in the LSGs, the policy coordination bodies. It has given Xi a great deal of control over the direction of foreign affairs, and Chinese foreign policy has come to reflect his perceptions and ideas to a greater extent than those of previous leaders. It explains why Beijing's foreign policy

¹⁷⁰ Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress," 15-17.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 96-97.

¹⁷³ Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress," 16.

¹⁷⁴ Kato, "China's Prominent Ruling Shift," 27.

stance has become more assertive in recent years as Xi's perception that China is getting stronger and that the international situation favors China's development has increased.

Also, the presence of a strong leader also makes policy-making and execution smoother than in the past. With the government and the military under the control of the Party and Xi's overwhelming power, it has become easier to form a consensus in the policy-making process.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, it prevents government agencies and the military from taking independent actions that go against the intentions of the Party and allows for a more consistent foreign policy.¹⁷⁶

On the other hand, Xi's almost monopoly on foreign policy has made China's foreign policy less flexible.¹⁷⁷ He has taken a top-down approach and has surrounded himself with too many of his allies, which means fewer opportunities than ever for Xi to modify his policies.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, he carries as much risk and responsibility as he does decision-making power, making it more difficult for him to change or adjust its foreign policy.¹⁷⁹

In addition, Xi has adopted "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" as his signature slogan. The "strong China" slogan has been a major asset for Xi to demonstrate

¹⁷⁵ Jakobson and Manuel, "How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?" 106.

¹⁷⁶ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 108-112.

¹⁷⁷ Ohara, "Background of China's Aggressive External Posture and its Impact on the International Order."

¹⁷⁸ Jakobson and Manuel, "How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?", 105-106.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

his legitimacy to the public.¹⁸⁰ It has influenced the Chinese challenging diplomatic posture in recent years. For these reasons, the Xi administration might find it difficult to alter its rigid foreign approach, despite the growing fissures in its relations with Japan and other countries, after once embarking on a tough move with a broad statement that no compromises will be made to protect China's core interest of territorial sovereignty. It also explains why there was no change in China's hard-line attitude toward the Islands territorial dispute around 2017-2019 when Japan-China relations improved amid the accelerating confrontation between the US and China. Given the loss of flexibility in China's foreign policy due to the concentration of power in Xi's hands, it is unlikely that we will see much of a change in China's attitude toward Japan on the issue of the Islands as long as Xi remains in power.

Finally, it needs to be noted that although Xi's power is more potent than that of past leaders, it is still constrained, unlike the dictatorship of Mao Zedong.¹⁸¹ First, Xi is not a charismatic leader who won a revolution like Mao or Deng.¹⁸² Xi's success in centralizing power can be attributed to the internal situation when there was a demand for the emergence of a leader with strong leadership.¹⁸³ During the Hu Jintao administration, the collective leadership and division of leadership in the Politburo progressed, as did the division of power by the PSC. However, due to this division of power, consensus-building

¹⁸⁰ Kato, "China's Prominent Ruling Shift," 46.

¹⁸¹ Kadozaki, "Xi Jinping's Power Struggles," 1-4.

¹⁸² Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 110.

¹⁸³ Kadozaki, "Xi Jinping's Power Struggles," 2-3.

took longer and became less efficient.¹⁸⁴ This division of power has also created political corruption and jeopardized the integrity of the Party.¹⁸⁵ At this point, it is not known whether Xi has had ambitions to become a strong leader, yet such ambitions are not necessarily the reason for his rise to power. The demands from cadres who wanted strong leadership have driven Xi's consolidation of power, which intended to ensure the unity of the Party and smooth policy making and execution.¹⁸⁶ Second, Xi dominates the Party, government, and military, yet he is not a dictator. The democratic centralization system and the collective leadership system are still crucial in the Party. These have been steadily institutionalized since the Cultural Revolution, and therefore will not be easily shaken.¹⁸⁷ The lessons learned from the Cultural Revolution are still deeply rooted in the Party, and Xi is unlikely to become a dictator like Mao Zedong. Xi's unified power should be regarded as being in the range of "the core under collective leadership."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 96-97.

¹⁸⁵ Kadozaki, "Xi Jinping's Power Struggles," 2-3.

¹⁸⁶ Yamaguchi, "Xi Jinping's Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy," 105.

¹⁸⁷ Kadozaki, "Xi Jinping's Power Struggles," 2-4.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This thesis uses neoclassical realism to analyze the assertive behaviors of Xi Jinping administration in the East China Sea. China-Japan relations fell into the worst phase with the nationalization of the Senkaku Islands by the Japanese Democratic Party in 2012. Even after the inauguration of Shinzo Abe of the Liberal Democratic Party as prime minister, tensions remained between the two countries because of Abe's initial policy of containing China's rise both economically and militarily.

However, as Abe shifted his China policy to a more cooperative approach around 2016, Japan-China relations showed signs of improvement. Then, a phone call between Abe and Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang's visit to Japan put Japan-China relations back on a normal track in 2018, and the two countries showed their willingness to explore further paths of cooperation amid the unstable international circumstances. The Abe administration's shift in China policy and his positive attitude toward improving Japan-China relations were received positively in China. For China, which places great importance on peace in the neighboring environment for its economic development, a stable relationship with Japan is desirable. Also, when the confrontation between the U.S. and China was beginning to escalate, stable relations with Japan, which is a good ally of the U.S., would be helpful for China.

However, the economic and diplomatic improvements in Sino-Japanese relations during the 2017-2019 period did not necessarily ease tensions over the territorial sovereignty issue between the two countries in the East China Sea. This thesis uses

neoclassical realism to analyze how China's domestic politics and perceptions of its leaders drive this assertive behavior of China toward Japan around the disputed Islands.

Chapter 2 explored the contradictions in Chinese core interests. While China prioritizes maintaining good relations with its neighbors for economic development, which is essential for the survival of the Communist Party, it also worsens its relations with its neighbors through its coercive foreign policy to protect its interest, territorial sovereignty. This chapter analyzes how the importance of China's core interest in territorial sovereignty has changed in recent years and how this has affected the Chinese tough diplomatic stance.

Chapter 3 analyzes how China perceives Abe's policy toward China. Although China has favorably accepted Japan's pro-China policies in the latter half of the Abe administration, China still cannot entirely dispel its distrust of Japan due to its concerns about Japan's rearmament and Japan's tight security tie with the U.S.

Chapter 4 reviews China's perceptions of its territorial sovereignty issues and how this affects China's policy toward Japan in the Senkaku Islands. China believes that Japan is trying to change the status quo. Therefore, China's actions around the Senkaku Islands are defensive rather than proactive. China also understands that it can successfully use both cooperative and coercive approaches depending on the issue. These differences in perceptions of territorial issues between Japan and China make negotiations between the two countries difficult.

Chapter 5 analyzes how China's growing perceptions of its national power influence its coercive foreign policy. China under the Xi administration is more filled than

ever with pride and confidence that it has become a strong country, shielded by its expanding economic influence. This perception has led China to believe that the course of international relations is working in its favor and is encouraging it to take more assertive external behaviors.

Chapter 6 analyzes how Xi's consolidation of power has affected China's foreign policy decision-making process and made foreign policy more assertive. Xi has succeeded in seizing personnel power through anti-corruption political campaigns and institutional reforms and gaining relatively significant decision-making power over foreign policy. More than in previous administrations, China's foreign policy reflects the aggressive nature of Xi as the current head of the party. The concentration of power in Xi's hands has also made China's foreign policy inflexible.

With the Abe administration's changes in policy toward China around 2015-6, Japan-China relations appeared to improve and be back on track. However, there are still doubts in China about Japan's remilitarization. In addition, as China's economic influence has grown over the past decade, the balance of power between Japan and China has also shifted, which has increased China's self-perception as a great power. Furthermore, with Xi Jinping's centralization of power and monopolization of foreign policy, his aggressive perceptions and ideas have come to be reflected in China's foreign policy.

Xi's recognition of China as a strong power and centralization of power became solidified around 2017 when the 19th Party Congress took place. The strengthening of these two simultaneously prompted China to act assertively around the Senkaku Islands,

even in the rare period from 2017 to 2019 when further improvement in relations with Japan could be expected. As long as China retains its economic influence and Xi remains in power, it is unlikely that China's provocative actions in the Senkaku Islands will ease up.



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