

JAPAN REVIEW

Vol.8 No.2

2025

ISSN 2433-4456

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Publisher : Kenichiro Sasae, President, JIIA

Editor in Chief : Kotaro Tsukahara, Research Fellow, Center for Territory and History, JIIA

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Japan Review, the Japan Institute of International Affairs,
3rd Floor, Toranomon Daibiru-East Building, 3-8-1 Kasumigaseki Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo Japan 100-0013

ISSN 2433-4456

Published by the Japan Institute of International Affairs
Designed and Printed in Japan by Taiheisha.Ltd

JAPAN REVIEW

Vol.8 No.2
2025

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James Kraska is Charles H. Stockton Chair of International Maritime Law at the US Naval War College and John Harvey Gregory Lecturer on World Organization at Harvard Law School. The research for this article benefited from my participation in the seminar on the protection of merchant vessels, “The Increasingly Severe Securities Environment in the Indo-Pacific Region and the Legal Framework for the Protection of Maritime Transport,” hosted by the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) in Tokyo on November 6, 2025, <https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/eventreport/2025/11/20251106-01.html>. I thank Mr. Shinji Hirao, Director of the Japan Shipowner’s Association, Hideshi Tokuchi, President, Research Institute for Peace and Security, and CAPT Yusuke Saito and CDR Koki Sato of the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force, for their insightful dialogue and comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I also thank Professors Makoto Seta and Namhee Kwon for their thoughtful peer review that helped to improve the analysis. The views presented are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of any of these collaborators or the U.S. Naval War College, U.S. Navy or the Department of Defense.

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Legal Protection of Japanese Merchant Vessels in Regional Conflicts

James Kraska

Abstract

This article explores potential threats to Japanese shipping from regional conflicts on the Korean Peninsula, across the Taiwan Strait, and in the South China Sea, as well as the rights and duties of Japanese shipping in the law of maritime neutrality. Regional conflicts would directly impact Japanese merchant ships and seafarers, imposing stress on Japan's trade relationships and economy. In each of these scenarios, if Japan is not a party to the conflict, it acquires specified rights and duties under the law of maritime neutrality, prize law, and the law of naval warfare. One of the world's leading maritime powers, nearly 99 percent of Japan's foreign trade volume is transported by sea. Japan views the sea lanes as the "common property of the world." Protecting freedom of navigation and neutral rights within an international framework of ocean governance is a "lifeline" for Japan and is beneficial to all countries and regions. As a flag state, Japan should assert and fulfill its rights and obligations during armed conflict at sea in any regional contingency. This article reviews three regional contingencies, assesses the potential impact of each on the Japanese economy, and analyzes the applicable international maritime law that protects Japanese shipping.

Introduction

A war in East Asia would be detrimental to Japan's shipping industry, weaken Japan's economy, and potentially endanger its security. Japanese shipping is essential to the country's economic prosperity and military security and is an essential element of the global trading system. This article focuses on the rights and duties of Japanese ships and seafarers in international conflict at sea when Japan is a neutral state. International maritime law in war confers rights on Japan's ships and seafarers as well as corresponding duties.

Part 1 explores Japan's reliance on maritime trade and its role as a major maritime power.¹ Part 2 examines three regional contingencies that could threaten Japanese shipping and, by extension, Japan's security. These are a war on the Korean Peninsula, a war across the Taiwan Strait, and a conflict in the South China Sea. The latter two conflicts directly involve China, adding geopolitical complexity. Part 3 turns toward the role of international maritime law in ensuring the safety of Japanese ships and seafarers. This article presumes that Japan would be a neutral state in these conflict scenarios and would acquire rights and duties under the law of maritime neutrality. Part 4 concludes with some measures to reduce risks to Japanese ships and seafarers.

¹ James Kraska, Using UNCLOS as a Force Multiplier for American Power, *Opinio Juris*, June 14, 2012, <https://opiniojuris.org/2012/06/14/using-unclos-as-a-force-multiplier-for-american-power/>.

1. Japan's Reliance on Maritime Trade

Comprised of some 14,000 islands, Japan is one of the world's leading maritime nations. This geography means Japan's economy relies on international shipping, and it is a global leader in this industry. Nearly 99 percent of Japan's trade is transported by sea, including essential resources like oil, natural gas, and raw materials, as well as advanced manufacturing imports and exports. Japan ranks among the top 10 in the Liner Shipping Connectivity Index, a measure of physical connectivity with the world economy through maritime trade.² Japan has 5,200 ships flying its flag, although all but 300 are engaged in coastal trade. This makes Japan the tenth largest flag registry in the world.³ Greece, China, and Japan account for over 40 percent ownership of the world fleet by deadweight tonnage and nearly one-third by vessel count.⁴ Likewise, Japan ranks third behind China and Greece in total fleet value by ownership and eleventh by registration.⁵ Japan's largest shipping company, NYK Line (Nippon Yusen Kaisha), operates over 820 ships, including container ships, bulk shipping carriers, and tankers. The LNG fleet will expand to more than 130 vessels by early 2029, from 89 today, reflecting the huge demand by China, Japan, and Korea for new energy sources.⁶ NYK is also the world's largest roll-on/roll-off (RO/RO) carrier, with a capacity of 660,000 vehicles, or over 17 percent of the global car transportation fleet.⁷ Mitsui OSK Lines (MOL) operates a fleet of 935 vessels, including dry cargo ships, LNG carriers, RO/RO car carriers, oil tankers, and container ships.⁸ Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha (K Line) operates a fleet of more than 500 dry cargo ships, container ships, LNG carriers, and RO/RO ships.⁹ In April 2018, MOL's container shipping operations merged with NYK Line and K Line, and the combined operations were rebranded as Ocean Network Express, with NYK holding a 38 percent stake, and MOL holding a 31 percent stake in the joint venture.¹⁰

Japanese shipyards build 13 per cent of global shipping.¹¹ In ship construction, with 11

² UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), p. 102.

³ UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), p. 51. The top states in order are Liberia, Panama, Marshall Islands, Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Malta, the Bahamas, Greece, and Japan.

⁴ UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), p. 52.

⁵ UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), p. 53.

⁶ Shery Ahn and Tsuyoshi Inajima, Japan's Nippon Yusen to Expand LNG Fleet as Global Demand Climbs, Bloomberg, September 18, 2025, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-09-18/nippon-yusen-plans-50-lng-tanker-fleet-growth-by-2029>; UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), p. 20.

⁷ Ken Belson, Around the World With 5,500 Cars, New York Times, July 13, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/automobiles/around-the-world-with-5500-cars.html>.

⁸ Mitsui OSK Lines (MOL), Corporate Profile, <https://www.mol.co.jp/en/corporate/profile/>.

⁹ "K" Line Summary of Business Briefing on June 3, 2025, https://www.kline.co.jp/en/ir/library/event/bb_s_2025.html.

¹⁰ UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), p. 45.

¹¹ UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), p. 57.

percent of tonnage, Japan ranks third globally, after South Korea and China.¹² Chinese shipyards produce 54.6 per cent of global shipping tonnage while Korean shipyards produce 28 per cent. Japan also plays a significant role in shaping the law of the sea. As a Category “A” member of the Council of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) since its establishment, Japan is one of only 10 such states elected by the IMO Assembly. These states have the greatest interest in providing international shipping services. Category A members form part of the Council’s leadership structure and serve as the executive organ for supervising IMO work between Assembly sessions. The member States of the IMO adopt generally accepted international rules and standards for the safe, secure, and environmentally sound operation of ships. For example, Japan proposed close cooperation within the IMO to respond to the threat of Houthi attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.¹³

Ensuring neutral rights of navigation is a core Japanese national interest. The security of key sea lanes along Japan’s Western periphery of the First Island Chain is a significant element of the country’s national security. Japan has promoted a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) (自由で開かれたインド太平洋 or *jiyū de hirakareta Indotaiheiyo*) to promote peace, stability, and prosperity across the region by making the oceans free and open as “international public goods.” Regional stability is a product of a “rules-based international order, including the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful settlement of disputes, and promotion of free trade.”¹⁴ Shipping routes facilitate the delivery of energy from the Middle East, basic materials from Australia and North America, and enable trade with Southeast Asia and Europe. As an island nation with few domestic energy resources, Japan imports nearly all its crude oil and a significant portion of its LNG. A conflict could lead to higher energy prices, disrupted industrial supply chains, and plummeting exports.

Japan’s economic security relies heavily on the smooth flow of maritime trade, primarily through the disputed waters of East Asia. In 2023, over 99 percent of the country’s total trade by volume and about 70 percent by value was transported by ship.¹⁵ Maritime trade is essential to Japan’s export industries and the importation of basic materials. For example, Japan is the world’s top importer of raw copper and, just behind China, second in cobalt imports.¹⁶ This trade flow enters or departs ports in Japan from three main sea lines of communication (SLOCs): the East China Sea (ECS) route, the South China Sea (SCS) route, and the narrower passages through the Tsushima East Channel between Tsushima and Kyūshū; and the Tsushima West Channel (Korea Strait) and Osumi Strait. Japan is also dependent on routes passing through the Bashi Channel, then proceeding along the southern side of the First Island Chain to reach ports on the Pacific coast such as Osaka, Kobe, Tokyo and Yokohama. These narrow passageways are astride or near potential conflict zones in the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and the South China Sea.

Japan can harness its shipping fleet to meet the needs of the nation and address critical vulnerabilities, including supply chain disruptions, technological dependencies, and threats to national infrastructure amid geopolitical tensions. The 2022 Economic Security Promotion Act

¹² UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), p. 50.

¹³ S/RES/2722 (2024) (10 January 2024).

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, A New Plan for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Dec. 3, 2025, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e_000278.html.

¹⁵ Maritime Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism 2024, <https://www.mlit.go.jp/en/maritime/index.html>.

¹⁶ UN Doc. UNCTAD/RMT/2025, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025 Review of Maritime Transport: Staying the Course in Turbulent Waters (2025), pp. 26–27, <https://unctad.org/publication/review-maritime-transport-2025>.

created the System for Ensuring Stable Provision of Specified Essential Infrastructure Services.¹⁷ The law is designed to use the shipping sector to respond to natural disasters or to help maintain public safety. It is unclear whether the law can be applied in an armed conflict. Nonetheless, the law includes international maritime cargo as a designated sector, allowing the government to screen prior notifications from service providers regarding critical port or transshipment facilities. The government may issue recommendations or binding orders for preventive measures if risks of external interference arise that could disrupt stable shipping services. For emergencies involving supply shortages of essential goods, the Act enables the government to issue direct instructions to transporters for shipping specified quantities of goods to designated locations, providing another mechanism for controlling distribution and transportation.¹⁸ During armed conflict, it would be a new application of the law for the Government of Japan to direct shipping to avoid areas of danger, mandate re-routing of vessels, and ensure critical supply chains are resilient.

A major armed conflict in any of these maritime areas could cause immediate and possibly existential disruptions to Japanese shipping, even if Japan is not directly involved in the fighting. Moreover, Japan has minimal strategic depth, unlike the United States, Australia, or Canada. Section 2 explores how armed conflict at sea in each scenario could threaten Japan's merchant fleet, energy imports, industrial capacity, and food security. In these scenarios, Japanese ships and seafarers have protections and corresponding rights and duties under the law of the sea during peacetime, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and under the law of naval warfare during armed conflict.¹⁹

2. Regional Conflict Scenarios and Japanese Shipping

Amid rising regional tensions, three primary conflict scenarios pose existential threats to SLOCs vital to Japan's security and economic stability. These are: (1) a renewed war on the Korean Peninsula between North Korea and South Korea; (2) a Chinese military operation against Taiwan involving blockade or invasion; and (3) an escalation of disputes in the SCS between China and neighboring states like Vietnam or the Philippines. Each scenario presents distinct but overlapping risks to Japanese shipping as a neutral state: hostile attacks and collateral damage; the risk of interdiction or obstructed transit; and increased insurance and operating costs due to

¹⁷ The System for Ensuring Stable Provision of Specified Essential Infrastructure Services described in Chapter III of the Act on the Promotion of Ensuring National Security through Integrated Implementation of Economic Measures (Act No. 43 of 2022), https://www.cao.go.jp/keizai_anzen_hosho/suishinhou/infra/doc/infra_setsumeikai_eng.pdf.

¹⁸ Act on Emergency Measures for Stabilizing Living Conditions of the Public Act No. 121 of 1973), <https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/2802/en>. See also Anderson Mori & Tomotsune, Updates of the Economic Security Promotion Act, Mar. 13, 2024, https://www.amt-law.com/en/insights/trending-news/publication_0028359_en_001/.

¹⁹ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Dec. 10, 1982, 1833 U.N.T.S. 397 (hereafter "UNCLOS"), https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/UNCLOS-TOC.htm. The law of naval warfare is reflected in numerous sources, including the 1907 Hague Conventions and the 1949 Geneva Conventions. See Dietrich Schindler and Jiri Toman, *The Laws of Armed Conflicts*, 4th ed., Leiden/Boston, M. Nijhoff, 2004, pp. 1055-1178 and 1409-1430. See also *The Newport Manual on the Law of Naval Warfare* (Second Edition), 105 *International Law Studies* 1 (2025) (hereafter, "Newport Manual"), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ils/vol105/iss1/1/>; *San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea* (Louise Doswald-Beck ed., 1995) (hereafter "San Remo Manual"), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/san-remo-manual-1994>; and *Institute of International Law, The Laws of Naval Warfare Governing the Relations between Belligerents* (1913) (*Oxford Manual of Naval Warfare*), reprinted in *The Laws of Armed Conflicts* 1123 (Dietrich Schindler & Jiri Toman eds., 4th ed. 2004), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/oxford-manual-1913>.

re-routing and prolonged instability. The experiences of World War II and the Korea War indicate the threat of drifting mines significantly impacts the navigation of vessels. These scenarios also carry additional risks of involving the United States and other regional allies in the conflict. In international law any Chinese attack against Japanese merchant ships likely constitutes an armed attack, triggering Japan's right of self-defense and commensurate U.S. treaty obligations to aid in collective self-defense.²⁰ However, the Japanese government's recognition of an armed attack in terms of domestic law is "organized and premeditated use of force against Japan," which suggests a narrower standard.²¹

Any of these conflicts could also draw in Russia, as it increasingly cooperates with China in naval exercises.²² Russia has longstanding territorial disputes with Japan over the Northern Territories. Moscow has an incentive to pull the United States into a broader regional conflict with China to distract Washington from the war in Ukraine, just as China has an incentive to keep the United States bogged down in Ukraine, supporting a war against Russia to distract from its power play in East Asia.²³ China, Russia, and North Korea could support each other in unpredictable ways. It is noteworthy that China and North Korea have a Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance.²⁴

Regional maritime conflicts can have devastating consequences for international shipping. The experience of the Iran-Iraq "Tanker War" from 1980 to 1988 suggests that merchant ships operating in a region during armed conflict are in grave danger.²⁵ Iraq conducted most of the attacks during the war, about 61 percent, primarily using anti-ship missiles like Exocets fired from aircraft. Iran relied more on sea mines and speedboat attacks with rockets. Approximately 411 merchant ships, including 239 oil tankers, were struck by mines, missiles, or suffered other attacks during the Tanker War.²⁶ Of these ships, around 81 were sunk or declared constructive total losses, including 55 oil tankers. Four hundred civilian mariners were killed, 167 wounded, and 37 missing at sea.

²⁰ Article 5, U.S.–Japan Security Treaty and Charter of the United Nations, Article 51.

²¹ James Kraska and Yusuke Saito, *The Law of Military Operations and Self-Defense in the U.S.-Japan Alliance*, 73 *Naval War College Review* (2020), pp. 90–91, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8129&context=nwc-review>.

²² Seth G. Jones, *China and Russia Bolster Their 'No Limits' Alliance*, *Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2025, https://www.wsj.com/opinion/china-and-russia-bolster-their-no-limits-alliance-c6bc6e49?mod=hp_opin_pos_3; Michael Peck, *China and Russia Conduct Joint Sub Patrols – Should America Worry?*, *Defense News* (October 25, 2025), pp. 28–29.

²³ Emma Burrows, *Russia is Helping China Prepare to Attack Taiwan, RUSI Report Says*, *Defense News* (November/December 2025), pp. 42–43.

²⁴ *Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea 1961*. See *China – DPRK Relations*, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea, April 3, 2007, <https://kp.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zcgx/zcgxgk/#:~:text=they%20signed%20the-,Treaty%20on%20Friendship,%20Cooperation%20and%20Mutual%20Assistance%20between%20China%20and%20the%20DPRK>; Lee Seong Hyon, *China-N. Korea defense treaty*, *The Korea times*, July 26, 2016, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/opinion/20160726/china-n-korea-defense-treaty>. For Russian – North Korean relations, see Kim Tong Hyung and Aniruddha, Ghosal, *Russia and North Korea sign partnership deal that appears to be the strongest since the Cold War*, *Associated Press News*, June 19, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/vladimir-putin-kim-jong-un-russia-north-korea-summit-ukraine-a6b8d2c12de7ee2ab6716d4747c9850e>.

²⁵ George K. Walker, *The Tanker War, 1980-1988: Law and Policy*, 74 *International Law Studies* (2000), 36–39.

²⁶ Martin S. Navias and E. R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars: The Assault on Merchant Shipping During the Iran-Iraq Crisis, 1980-1988*; Ronald O'Rourke, *The Tanker War*, *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* (May 1988) Vol. 114/5/1,023, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1988/may/tanker-war>.

Any future conflict in East Asia poses even more risks for merchant ships operating in the region. The amount of firepower in the Western Pacific is staggering, and belligerents may accidentally or intentionally attack merchant ships. China has built the world's most sophisticated and redundant anti-ship missile complex on the planet. Beijing has approximately 2,700 ballistic missiles.²⁷ It also possesses 2,000–3,000 anti-ship cruise missiles,²⁸ for a total of at least 4,700 advanced sea-attack munitions. To shield against this threat, the U.S. Navy has approximately 13,000 to 15,000 defensive interceptors deployed worldwide, spread across about 8,000 vertical launch system (VLS) cells.²⁹ In a real combat scenario, the United States could likely deploy only a fraction of its VLS capability to the Western Pacific.

Meanwhile, the JMSDF adds around 2,000 to 2,500 interceptors in about 700 to 800 VLS cells.³⁰ Together, the United States and Japan have about 15,000 to 17,500 defensive interceptor missiles. At least two, and as many as four, interceptors are needed to guarantee the kill of just one ballistic or cruise missile, with redundancy providing a margin of error. China possesses a clear saturation advantage. Two to four interceptors are required per incoming missile due to hypersonic maneuvering, decoys, and salvo density, so China could likely deplete U.S. and Japanese defenses in a single large-scale strike wave, leaving Allied warships and merchant vessels critically vulnerable within hours. Furthermore, the U.S. inventory is diminished by recent conflicts, including the use of approximately 300 defensive interceptor missiles to thwart Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.³¹ The slow production rates of defensive interceptor missiles further shift the advantage to China, which may be poised to overpower sea-based defenses in any regional conflict.³² In such a case, merchant ships in the region will have to rely on China's good intentions and affirmative compliance with neutral rights under international law. Yet, as China does not comply with maritime law in peacetime, it is unclear whether it would do so during armed conflict.³³

²⁷ This figure includes about 900 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), 1,300 medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs), 500 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), such as the DF-26 "Guam Killer," and 150–300 hypersonic DF-17/27s.

²⁸ Mainly the YJ-12 and YJ-18 (Yingji [Eagle Strike]-18) cruise missiles. See *Missiles of China*, CSIS, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/china/> and <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/yj-18/>.

²⁹ These are comprised of 350 to 400 SM-3s, 1,200 to 1,300 SM-6s, 7 to 8,000 SM-2s, and 4 to 5,000 Evolved Sea Sparrow Missiles (ESSMs).

³⁰ These are comprised of 250 to 300 SM-3s, 100 to 200 SM-6s, 800 to 1,200 SM-2s, and 500 to 800 ESSM. Rupert Schulenburg, *Japan set to enhance its anti-ship missile inventory*, IISS, Jan. 17, 2025, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/missile-dialogue-initiative/2025/01/japan-set-to-enhance-its-anti-ship-missile-inventory/>.

³¹ Geoff Ziezulewicz, *Navy Just Revealed Tally Of Surface-To-Air Missiles Fired In Ongoing Red Sea Fight*, TWZ, Jan. 14 2025, <https://www.twz.com/news-features/navy-just-disclosed-how-many-of-each-of-its-surface-to-air-missiles-it-fired-during-red-sea-fight>; Mike Fredenberg, *US missile depletion from Houthi, Israel conflicts may shock you*, Responsible Statecraft, Aug. 7, 2025, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/missile-depletion-us-navy/>.

³² The United States produces about 125 to 180 SM-6 interceptors annually, plans to increase yearly production to 300 per year by 2028. John R. Roby, *Huntsville will gain from Navy's missile needs as \$333M contract awarded*, Alabama.com (AL.com), Jan. 12, 2025, <https://www.al.com/news/huntsville/2025/01/huntsville-will-gain-from-navys-missile-needs-as-333m-contract-awarded.html>.

³³ Liu Zhen and Dewey Sim, *China, for example, has notoriously rejected the South China Sea Arbitration*. Wang Yi underlines Beijing's rejection of 2016 South China Sea ruling, *South China Morning Post*, July 12, 2025, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3317953/wang-yi-reiterates-chinas-rejection-south-china-sea-ruling>.

2.1 Protecting Japan in the Constitutional Order

Japanese shipping holds a vulnerable position: Japan is close to all major flashpoints, reliant on uninterrupted SLOCs, and politically limited by Article 9 of the Constitution and a culture of anti-militarism that precludes building an extensive force of offensive weapons.³⁴ The original interpretation is not that Japan “cannot build” military forces, but that the Constitution limits the degree of force to the “minimum necessary level.” In Article 9 the phrase means “minimum necessary capability” (必要最小限度の実力 or hitsuyo saisho gendo no jitsuryoku). Another phrase prohibits “war potential” (戦力 or senryoku). The cabinet legislation bureau defines this term as force exceeding the minimum necessary level, disallowing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The article acknowledges the “right of self-defense” (自衛権 or jieiken). Japan possesses this right as a sovereign state and Article 9 does not renounce it. The constitutional limitation is only on offensive capability, not a strong or extensive defensive complex. In short, Japan cannot possess “offensive weapons,” (攻撃的兵器 or kougetiteki heiki), but can field high-technology defensive assets under the “exclusively defense oriented policy” framework (専守防衛 or senshu bouei).³⁵ One should bear in mind that the 2014/2015 “Reinterpretation” modified this second view to allow for “limited” collective self-defense in survival-threatening situations, but using “minimum necessary” force. (必要最小限度). Until 2014 the government adhered to the “1981 View” that collective self-defense was unconstitutional. Prime Minister Abe’s Cabinet overrode this interpretation by issuing a decision stating that Article 9 does not prohibit “measures for self-preservation.” The Cabinet argued that if an attack on a foreign country (like the United States) threatens Japan’s own survival, it is effectively defending itself by helping that ally. This approach bridged the gap between “individual” and “collective” defense. In 2015, the legislation package was passed by the Diet to operationalize the 2014 decision. It officially created a new category of emergency: the survival threatening situation (存立危機事態 or sonritsu kiki jitai). To remain consistent with the “minimum necessary” logic of 1972, the government established three new conditions (武力行使の新3要件): threat to survival, last resort, and minimum necessary

³⁴ The Constitution of Japan, promulgated on November 3, 1946; came into effect on May 3, 1947, Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html; James Kraska and Yusuke Saito, The Law of Military Operations and Self-Defense in the U.S.-Japan Alliance, 73 *Naval War College Review* (2020), pp. 90–91, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol73/iss3/8/>

³⁵ Government of Japan (House of Representatives), Points on the Interpretation of Article 9 (憲法9条解釈のポイント), <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/llgldr/2016295698/2016295698.pdf>. (pls see point 3); Government View on Article 9 (1972/Showa 47 View): 「憲法第9条は、同条第2項において『戦力』の保持を禁止しているが、これは、自衛のための『必要最小限度の実力』を保持することまでも禁止する趣旨のものではなく、この限度を超える実力を保持することを禁止するものである。」 and Government View on Collective Self-Defense (1981/Showa 56 View): 「国際法上、国家は、集団的自衛権、すなわち、自国と密接な関係にある外国に対する武力攻撃を、自国が直接攻撃されていないにもかかわらず、実力をもって阻止する権利を有しているものとされている。…しかしながら、憲法第9条の下において許容されている自衛権の行使は、あくまでも我が国を防衛するため必要最小限度の範囲にとどまるべきものであると解しており、集団的自衛権を行使することは、その範囲を超えるものであって、憲法上許されないと考えている。」

force.³⁶

The new approach confronts strategic reality. The intersection of these structural vulnerabilities with rapidly modernizing adversarial capabilities in Pyongyang and Beijing represents the single most significant strategic risk to Japan's prosperity in the coming decade. These scenarios illustrate Japan's vulnerability in an increasingly lethal maritime space. While efforts like boosting LNG imports from North America or building overland pipelines may provide some resiliency, Japan's geography makes security especially challenging. A layered conflict, with increased tension on the Korean Peninsula overlapping with cross-strait crises or SCS disruptions, could cut multiple SLOCs at once. Tokyo's gradual strengthening of the Self-Defense Forces, deepening engagement with the Quad, and closer cooperation with Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines, exhibit growing awareness of the danger. Yet the interconnected nature of the East Asian trading system and regional security means Japanese shipping safety requires resilience, active diplomacy to strengthen compliance with maritime law, and coordinated international efforts to deter aggression and protect the FOIP.

2.2 Korean Peninsula

A conflict on the Korean Peninsula presents a direct threat to Japanese shipping, though with initially more localized impacts compared to Taiwan or SCS scenarios. The DPRK has a long history of unpredictable and provocative maritime actions, such as the capture of the USS Pueblo in 1968 and the 2010 submarine attack on the ROKN corvette Cheonan in the Yellow Sea near the Northern Limit Line.³⁷ North Korean missile launches over Japanese airspace and in Japan's EEZ have caused temporary delays in shipping and increased war risk premiums.³⁸ The nation's advancing ballistic missile and anti-ship cruise missile capabilities, including submarine-launched systems and hypersonic weapons, threaten regional shipping. North Korea is also believed to possess 80 to 90 nuclear warheads and could threaten (or attempt) nuclear strikes on South Korea, Japan, or even the United States, which would cause global markets to plummet.³⁹

³⁶ Cabinet Legislation Bureau, Relationship between the Right of Collective Self-Defense and the Constitution [Shūdan-teki Jieiken to Kenpō to no Kankei] (内閣法制局『集団的自衛権と憲法との関係』), Submission to the House of Councillors Audit Committee, 70th Diet Session, 14 October 1972, https://www.sangiin.go.jp/japanese/annai/chousa/rippou_chousa/backnumber/2015pdf/20151214059.pdf; Cabinet of Japan, Reply to the Question regarding "Constitution, International Law and Collective Self-Defense" submitted by Representative Seiichi Inaba [Shūgiin Giin Inaba Seiichi-kun Teishutsu 'Kenpō, Kokusaihō to Shūdan-teki Jieiken' ni Kansuru Shitsumon ni Tai-suru Tōbensho] (内閣『衆議院議員稲葉誠一君提出「憲法、国際法と集団的自衛権」に関する質問に対する答弁書』), Cabinet Decision No. 1800531, 29 May 1981, https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_shitsumona.nsf/html/shitsumon/b094032.htm; Cabinet of Japan, Cabinet Decision on Development of Seamless Security Legislation to Ensure Japan's Survival and Protect its People [Kuni no Sonritsu o Mattoshi, Kokumin o Mamoru tame no Kireme no nai Anzen Hoshō Hōsei no Seibi ni Tsuite] (内閣『国の存立を全うし、国民を守るための切れ目のない安全保障法制の整備について』), 1 July 2014, <https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/kakugikettei/2014/0701anpo.pdf>; Diet of Japan, Legislation for Peace and Security [Heiwa Anzen Hōsei] (『平和安全法制』), comprising Law to Amend Part of the Self-Defense Forces Law and Other Laws (Law No. 76 of 2015), <https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=427AC0000000076>, and International Peace Support Law (Law No. 77 of 2015), <https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=427AC0000000077>, enacted 19 September 2015.

³⁷ Deadly sinking of Navy ship in 2010 marks worst postwar military disaster, Korea Herald, December 6, 2023, <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3274843>.

³⁸ Jennifer Welch, Jenny Leonard, Maeva Cousin, Gerard DiPippo, and Tom Orlik, Xi, Biden and the \$10 Trillion Cost of War Over Taiwan, Bloomberg, Jan. 9, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-01-09/if-china-invades-taiwan-it-would-cost-world-economy-10-trillion>.

³⁹ Putin, Kim and the \$4 Trillion Threat on Cold War's Last Frontier, Bloomberg, July 28, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2024-korea-war-threatens-trillions-for-global-economy/>.

In the early stages of a conflict, North Korea has repeatedly stated its intention to target commercial shipping, which Pyongyang views as supporting South Korea or the United States. North Korea could employ anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) operations that do not effectively distinguish between military targets and civilian objects, such as merchant ships. The large but antiquated DPRK submarine force could attack merchant ships in the Sea of Japan. Pyongyang's stock of submarine-launched and land-based anti-ship cruise missiles (e.g., Kumsong-3/KN-19), ballistic missiles with maneuverable re-entry vehicles, and a growing fleet of submarines, offer credible options to disrupt traffic as far east as the Oki Islands.⁴⁰ The Tsushima and Korean Strait, which separate Japan from South Korea, is a busy route for Japanese exports to Europe and imports from Southeast Asia. About 40 percent of Japan's container traffic with Europe and 25 percent of its crude oil imports from the Middle East pass through the Tsushima Strait and the western Sea of Japan. Hampering trade on Japan's western side could lead to winter energy shortages. The Sea of Japan also has routes linking Japan's western ports to Russia and northern markets.

The threat of sea mining to Japanese shipping is even more insidious. North Korea is estimated to have as many as 50,000 contact and influence mines, many of Soviet or Chinese origin.⁴¹ The ongoing deployment of drift mines in the Yellow Sea demonstrates both capability and intent.⁴² A campaign of random or "nuisance" mining in the Tsushima Strait or near Hakata and Shimonoseki would not need precise targeting to cause strategic damage. Insurance providers would likely declare the Sea of Japan a war-risk zone, boosting Lloyd's war-risk premiums to levels that make commercial shipping economically unfeasible. Japanese-flagged vessels, or those owned or operated by Japan, would face immediate additional war-risk surcharges of 5–10 percent of hull value per voyage, effectively halting most non-military traffic within 72 hours.

Japan's fleet of mine-countermeasure vessels consists of Mogami-class frigates capable of mine countermeasures (MCM) roles and five Awaji-class Mine Sweeper Ocean (MSOs) ships designed for shallow-water MCM operations near the home islands.⁴³ One new Awaji-class ship was commissioned in December 2025. In addition, the JMSDF possesses two Mine Sweeper Tenders (MSTs), 14 Mine Sweeper Coastals (MSCs) and an undisclosed number of MCH-101 helicopters. These assets may be quickly overwhelmed by a large-scale mining campaign. U.S. Seventh Fleet MCM assets are forward-deployed to Sasebo but consist of only four Avenger-class ships in the Western Pacific. Airborne assets like the MH-53E/MH-60S are set for retirement, with no complete replacement until the late 2020s.⁴⁴

The proximity of Japan to the conflict zone raises the risk of refugees fleeing Korea by sea, radioactive fallout from nuclear strikes, or opportunistic North Korean incursions into Japanese waters. Additionally, any U.S.-led naval blockade of North Korea would require control over the surrounding seas, further complicating commercial navigation. While less devastating to global

⁴⁰ Defense Intelligence Agency, 2025 Worldwide Threat Assessment (11 May 2025), p. 20, https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025_dia_statement_for_the_record.pdf.

⁴¹ Ryan Whalen, Northrup Grumman Equips South Korea with New Helicopter-Mounted Mine Detectors, Northrup Grumman Intelligence Brief, Feb. 26, 2025, <https://thedebrief.org/northrup-grumman-equips-south-korea-with-new-helicopter-mounted-mine-detectors/>.

⁴² Scott C. Truver, An Act of War? The Law of Naval Mining, War on the Rocks, Oct. 22, 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/10/an-act-of-war-the-law-of-naval-mining/>.

⁴³ Kosuke Takahashi, Japan Marine United launches fifth Awaji-class minesweeper for JMSDF, Naval News, Dec.18, 2025, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2025/12/japan-marine-united-launches-fifth-awaji-class-minesweeper-for-jmsdf/>.

⁴⁴ Chase Stephens, U.S. Navy, JMSDF Conclude Joint Mine Warfare Exercise, Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, <https://www.surfpac.navy.mil/comcmron7/>.

SLOCs than southern scenarios, an inter-Korean war would still isolate Japan's western coast and could threaten Japan's homeland security. If the United States utilizes its bases in Japan in this scenario, it becomes challenging for Japan to maintain its claim of neutrality.

A conflict on the Korean Peninsula would cost the global economy \$4 trillion in its first year alone, or 3.9 percent of global GDP.⁴⁵ War would devastate international trade, slashing U.S.–China trade by half, reducing China's trade by 27 percent, and Japan's global trade by 14 percent.⁴⁶ When the Korean War occurred, the Korean Peninsula accounted for just 0.04 percent of global GDP.⁴⁷ Today, South Korea alone accounts for more than 1.5 percent, but a war on the Peninsula could shrink its economy by 37.5 percent.⁴⁸ Japan-specific losses would likely be in the 5–10 percent range due to proximity, refugee flows, and regional trade collapse, even if Japan avoids becoming a party to the conflict.

There is a reasonable probability of energy rationing in Japan because of such a war. Japan has no domestic energy production and receives 80 to 90 percent of its oil from the Middle East.⁴⁹ The Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC) maintains 90 days of public stocks under the Oil Stockpiling Act, while refineries, specified distributors, and importers hold another 70 days of stocks. The ~160–200 days of total oil stocks held by the government and the private sector could help Japan to overcome a temporary disruption without severe rationing.

2.3 Taiwan Strait

Far more systemic risks stem from a potential cross-strait conflict involving China and Taiwan. The Taiwan Strait, through which a large portion of northeast Asian trade passes, acts as a crucial shortcut for ships moving between the East China Sea and the South China Sea. A Chinese blockade, widely seen as the most likely initial coercion tactic, would effectively cut off this route, forcing ships to reroute via the eastern Philippine Sea or farther around Luzon and the Bashi Channel. These detours add thousands of nautical miles, increase transit times by 10–15 days, raise fuel costs by as much as 30 percent, and subject vessels to the hazards of typhoon-prone open waters.

A People's Liberation Army (PLA) campaign against Taiwan poses an even more serious risk to Japanese shipping. A war could cause up to \$10 trillion in global economic damage, more than twice the impact of COVID-19.⁵⁰ Since at least 2015, PLA doctrine has focused on "maritime

⁴⁵ Putin, Kim and the \$4 Trillion Threat on Cold War's Last Frontier, Bloomberg, July 28, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2024-korea-war-threatens-trillions-for-global-economy/>.

⁴⁶ Putin, Kim and the \$4 Trillion Threat on Cold War's Last Frontier, Bloomberg, July 28, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2024-korea-war-threatens-trillions-for-global-economy/>.

⁴⁷ Seoul, the vulnerable capital of South Korea, is within artillery range of North Korea. Half of the South Korean population lives in and around Seoul, which produces 81 percent of South Korea's computer chip production and more than one-third of its manufacturing output. Putin, Kim and the \$4 Trillion Threat on Cold War's Last Frontier, Bloomberg, July 28, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2024-korea-war-threatens-trillions-for-global-economy/>.

⁴⁸ Putin, Kim and the \$4 Trillion Threat on Cold War's Last Frontier, Bloomberg, July 28, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2024-korea-war-threatens-trillions-for-global-economy/>.

⁴⁹ International Energy Agency, Japan Oil Security Policy (18 August 2022), <https://www.iea.org/articles/japan-oil-security-policy>.

⁵⁰ These are USS Patriot (MCM-7); USS Pioneer (MCM-9); USS Warrior (MCM-10); and USS Chief (MCM-14). Jennifer Welch, Jenny Leonard, Maeva Cousin, Gerard DiPippo, and Tom Orlik, Xi, Biden and the \$10 Trillion Cost of War Over Taiwan, Bloomberg, Jan. 9, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-01-09/if-china-invades-taiwan-it-would-cost-world-economy-10-trillion>.

blockade” and A2/AD as key elements of any Taiwan contingency.⁵¹ Chinese destroyers and submarines, and H-6K bombers capable of launching YJ-12/YJ-18 supersonic cruise missiles, could enforce a 200- to 400-nautical-mile exclusion zone. The DF-21D/DF-26 and YJ-21 anti-ship ballistic missiles have extended ranges to threaten the entire theater.⁵² These systems would effectively make the ECS and the western approaches to the Miyako Strait impassable to commercial shipping.

In a kinetic invasion scenario, amphibious operations, missile barrages, and ASBM deployments would turn the strait into an hellscape combat zone, with high chances of collateral damage to neutral shipping. Submarine warfare and mine-laying in nearby waters would endanger commercial traffic, reminiscent of World War II disruptions but intensified by modern precision munitions. China could use merchant ships to deploy mines. China operates more than 10,000 merchant ships and public vessels that can be mobilized under the country’s National Defense Mobilization Law.⁵³ At the high end of capabilities, China’s carrier-killer missiles and hypersonic weapons present a fearsome threat to surface vessels, including tankers and container ships. Conflict spillover into the ECS, especially around Japan’s Senkaku Islands, could bring Tokyo (and the United States) into the war, turning a regional crisis into a theater conflict.

A full-scale war would slash Taiwanese trade by 100 percent and cut US-China trade by nearly 100 percent.⁵⁴ Taiwanese commercial shipping would be effectively halted within days of a Chinese blockade, with a >90 percent reduction persisting for months.⁵⁵ Beyond Taiwan, South Korea, China, and Japan are the most vulnerable.⁵⁶ These states would likely experience more than a 10 percent drop in their GDP. A conflict is likely to cut trade with Japan, Korea, and East Asia by 80 percent. This amounts to a 40 percent reduction in Taiwan’s GDP, a 16.7 percent reduction in China’s GDP, and a 6.7 percent reduction in US GDP. South Korea, Japan, and other East Asian economies would be severely impacted. Other figures suggest a blockade of Taiwan short of a shooting war could cut Taipei’s trade by 100 percent, reduce its GDP by 12.2 percent, reduce China’s GDP by 8.9 percent, and reduce the U.S. GDP by 3.3 percent.⁵⁷ World GDP could

⁵¹ Department of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2015 (8 May 2015), pp. 33–36, <https://news.usni.org/2015/05/08/document-pentagon-2015-report-to-congress-on-chinas-military-power>.

⁵² Thomas Newdick, China’s KD-21 Air-Launched Ballistic Missile Appears To Be Operational, TWZ, April 21, 2025, <https://www.twz.com/air/chinas-kd-21-air-launched-ballistic-missile-appears-to-be-operational>.

⁵³ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Maritime Profile: China, UNCTAD, <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/CountryProfile/MaritimeProfile/en-GB/156/index.html>. The “National Flag” figure of 10,305 ships refers to vessels registered in China. The “Ownership” figure of 325,371 DWT refers to the total capacity beneficially owned by Chinese entities regardless of the flag the ships fly (e.g., Panama, Liberia).

⁵⁴ Jennifer Welch, Jenny Leonard, Maeva Cousin, Gerard DiPippo, and Tom Orlik, Xi, Biden and the \$10 Trillion Cost of War Over Taiwan, Bloomberg, January 9, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-01-09/if-china-invades-taiwan-it-would-cost-world-economy-10-trillion>.

⁵⁵ Cancian, Mark F., Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, Lights Out? Wargaming a Chinese Blockade of Taiwan (Center for Strategic and International Studies) (July 2025).

⁵⁶ Jennifer Welch, Jenny Leonard, Maeva Cousin, Gerard DiPippo, and Tom Orlik, Xi, Biden and the \$10 Trillion Cost of War Over Taiwan, Bloomberg, January 9, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-01-09/if-china-invades-taiwan-it-would-cost-world-economy-10-trillion>.

⁵⁷ Jennifer Welch, Jenny Leonard, Maeva Cousin, Gerard DiPippo, and Tom Orlik, Xi, Biden and the \$10 Trillion Cost of War Over Taiwan, Bloomberg, January 9, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-01-09/if-china-invades-taiwan-it-would-cost-world-economy-10-trillion>.

decline by 5 percent.⁵⁸

The economic impact on Japan would be significant. With Taiwan's role as a chokepoint in semiconductor supply chains, a blockade could halt marine and air freight routes across the Taiwan Strait, the ECS, and the northern SCS. Energy imports and manufactured goods would rise in price. Shipping disruptions would exacerbate supply chain vulnerabilities, potentially halting 20 to 25 percent of global container traffic that depends on northeast Asian routes. If US forces became involved in a conflict, the routes from Guam, the Philippines, and Japan used by US forces flowing into the region would be at risk of missile fire from Chinese forces. Current shipping routes would suddenly become economically unviable.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) 2023 wargame, "The First Battle of the Next War," showed that in 22 of 24 hypothetical cases, PLA forces imposed a blockade that cut commercial traffic through the Luzon and Miyako Straits by more than 90 percent within the first week.⁵⁹ Japanese shipping would be especially vulnerable to this action because about 60 percent of Japan's oil imports from the Persian Gulf and 45 percent of its LNG imports from Qatar and Australia pass through the waters east of Taiwan before heading north through the Tokara or Miyako passages.⁶⁰

Even in a purportedly peacetime but gray zone quarantine scenario short of invasion, Beijing could declare "military exercise zones" or "warning areas" of indefinite duration, as demonstrated in August 2022 and April 2023. China prohibited any vessels and aircraft to enter the zones in violation of law of the sea. In August 2022, for example, China announced six (later expanded to seven) military exercise zones around Taiwan, effective from August 4–7 (with one extending to August 8), after U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. These zones included live-fire areas within Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) and its territorial waters. The exercises simulated elements of a blockade, such as joint air-sea operations and missile testing. In April 2023, after Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen met with U.S. officials, China launched the "Joint Sword" exercises from April 8–10, involving combat readiness patrols and operations in designated sea and airspace zones surrounding Taiwan, including a warning zone north of Taiwan where vessels were advised not to enter due to potential rocket debris. The Fujian Maritime Safety Administration (MSA) also announced vessel inspections, though none were confirmed. Such zones do not legally bind third-party shipping as a matter of international law. Still, we may anticipate that shipping companies would comply with exclusion zones. Charters would likely terminate due to war risks, and insurance would be prohibitively costly, leading to a near-total cessation of traffic. These actions pose a threat of force against Taiwan and approach a violation of Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations. The credible threat of kinetic enforcement, coupled with most classification societies refusing to certify vessels entering declared PLA exercise areas, would effectively re-route most Japan-bound tonnage south of Australia. This diversion adds 12–18 days to a voyage and approximately \$1.2–1.8 million in extra

⁵⁸ Jennifer Welch, Jenny Leonard, Maeva Cousin, Gerard DiPippo, and Tom Orlik, Xi, Biden and the \$10 Trillion Cost of War Over Taiwan, Bloomberg, January 9, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-01-09/if-china-invades-taiwan-it-would-cost-world-economy-10-trillion>.

⁵⁹ Cancian, Mark F., Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, *The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan* (January 2023).

⁶⁰ Cancian, Mark F., Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, *Lights Out? Wargaming a Chinese Blockade of Taiwan* (Center for Strategic and International Studies) (July 2025).

fuel and charter costs per VLCC voyage.⁶¹

The Taiwan Strait is a key chokepoint for about \$2.45 trillion in annual trade, or roughly 20 percent of worldwide maritime traffic. A naval conflict in the Strait involving a peacetime quarantine, blockade in a low-level conflict, or a full-scale invasion would disrupt global merchant shipping. Merchant ships could face direct threats, such as collateral damage from fighting, intentional seizures, or attacks if determined to be military objects, as well as indirect impacts, including rerouting, soaring insurance costs, port closures, and supply chain disruptions.

Japan depends on the Taiwan Strait for about 32 percent of its total seaborne imports and roughly 25 percent of its exports by value, including over 95 percent of its Middle East oil and LNG and essential semiconductor inputs. Even a minor conflict could cause cascading economic shocks, with Japan's GDP dropping by 1.5–3.0 percent in the first year alone. A 3-month conflict in the Taiwan Strait could cost Japan \$150–250 billion in trade and lead to a recession. An extended year-long war might push losses beyond \$500 billion and create risks of energy rationing and industrial shutdowns. Japan's only safeguard is its oil reserve. Since no alternative Asian route can fully replace the Taiwan Strait, Japan should consider diversifying its oil and gas sources eastward to North America.

2.4 South China Sea

The most widespread regional threat comes from rising disputes in the South China Sea, where China's vast claims conflict with those of Vietnam, the Philippines, and others. Any conflict between China and a state in the South China Sea would have a devastating effect on the global economy. In terms of total value and total weight, more traffic goes through the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait than any maritime chokepoint in the world.⁶² Each year, about one-third of global trade and 40 percent of oil passes through the South China Sea.⁶³ The SCS serves as the main route for Japan's Middle Eastern oil imports and its trade with ASEAN countries and Europe. A kinetic war would create de facto exclusion zones and reduce maritime traffic by 80 percent. China has militarized seven features in the SCS, aiding frequent coast guard aggression and water cannon incidents at Second Thomas Shoal and Scarborough Shoal. Even without full-scale war, ongoing tensions have led insurers to classify parts of the SCS as high-risk, raising premiums and discouraging transits. A Philippine resupply mission to the BRP Sierra Madre at Second Thomas Shoal or Vietnamese offshore drilling activities could trigger a conflict. China may also seek to "teach a lesson" to one of the littoral states or simply use force to reset the status quo through an invasion of a feature occupied by another state. These moves could escalate into wider hostilities and bring the United States and other states into a conflict. For example, although Iran thought that widening the Tanker War during the 1980s through attacks on merchant ships would deter the United States from entering the Persian Gulf, it had the opposite

⁶¹ The figures are derived from standard very large crude carrier (VLCC) tanker voyage calculations for Middle East-to-Japan routes. A ship is normally on a voyage ~15–20 days traveling ~5,000–6,000 nautical miles. A diversion to southern Australia adds ~2,500–4,000 miles, which extends the voyage by 12–18 days at typical VLCC speeds of ~14 knots. The costs are based on average fuel consumption of ~100 tons/day at ~\$600/ton = or ~\$60,000/day, plus charter rates, which run ~\$50,000–\$60,000/day. This totals ~\$110,000–\$120,000/day extra, or \$1.32 to \$2.16 million for 12–18 days. See Drewry, *Ship Operating Costs Annual Review and Forecast 2024/25*, Annual Report, https://www.drewry.co.uk/AcuCustom/Sitename/DAM/026/Drewry_Ship_Operating_Costs_2024-25_-_Use_Cases_and_Contents1.pdf.

⁶² Lincoln F. Pratson, *Assessing impacts to maritime shipping from marine chokepoint closures*, *Communications in Transportation Research* 3 (2023), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2772424722000336>.

⁶³ Nik Martin, *How South China Sea tensions threaten global trade*, *Deutsche Welle*, August 25, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/south-china-sea-tensions-pose-threat-to-international-trade/a-69926497>.

effect.

China also could impose a maritime exclusion zone (MEZ) around disputed features, as Russia has done in the Black Sea.⁶⁴ There is no precise definition of a MEZ.⁶⁵ The JMSDF and the U.S. Navy have defined a lawful MEZ as a declared area of limited size, scope, and duration, required by military necessity and governed by proportionality.⁶⁶ Furthermore, belligerent activities within a MEZ must give due regard to the navigational rights of neutral nations, including legitimate neutral commerce. Neutral ships and aircraft operating within a MEZ retain their rights as neutrals and may not be targeted unless they become military objectives. The same law governing the use of force applies within the zone as outside it; it is not a “free fire” zone. This means attacks within the MEZ must still meet the criteria of the law of naval warfare: the principle of military distinction means that only enemy military objects may be targeted.

There is speculation that China is biding its time to establish a MEZ or an ADIZ in the South China Sea.⁶⁷ These moves could effectively block key passages near the Paracel or Spratly Islands, turning a sea into a series of straits. China’s artificial island bases can enforce exclusion zones. Combat aircraft and anti-ship missiles on outposts such as Mischief Reef threaten foreign warships and tankers along these routes. At the same time, PLA Navy submarine or surface fleet operations could stop suspected hostile vessels and conduct the belligerent right of visit and search. In a situation short of war, China also might impose a “No Sail Zone,” as it declared in the Yellow Sea.⁶⁸ Such a declaration violates the obligation to respect Japanese navigation rights in the EEZ and interferes with high seas freedoms. China would suggest that its EEZ is under its exclusive military use and that Japan has no right to transit through a “No Sail

⁶⁴ Shortly after the invasion began, Russia prohibited navigation in the northwest portion of the Black Sea (north of 45° 21') due to “counterterrorist operations” by its navy. Ships and vessels in this area were explicitly stated to be “regarded as terrorist threats.” The Federal Agency for Sea and Inland Water Transport (Rosmorrechflot) declared the zone on February 24, 2022. Fatima Bahtić, Russian Navy’s operations restrict shipping in Sea of Azov amid conflict with Ukraine, *Naval Today*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.navaltoday.com/2022/02/24/russian-navys-operations-restrict-shipping-in-sea-of-azov-amid-conflict-with-ukraine/>. See Raul Pedrozo, Russia-Ukraine War at Sea: Naval Blockades, Visit and Search, and Targeting War-Sustaining Objects, *Articles of War*, August 25, 2023, <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/russia-ukraine-war-naval-blockades-visit-search-targeting-war-sustaining-objects/>.

⁶⁵ A MEZ is a method of warfare aimed at achieving effect at the tactical, operational, or even strategic level of war through water space deconfliction and management. Newport Manual Expert Group, *The Newport Manual on the Law of Naval Warfare* 105 International Law Studies § 7.2.1 (2025) (The Newport Manual), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ils/vol105/iss1/1/>.

⁶⁶ Staff Judge Advocate, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and Japan Joint Staff, Bi-Lateral Memorandum on Warning Zones (16 December 2022), <https://www.pacom.mil/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=rLyh-1-M1hE%3d&portalid=55>. The requirement for “proportionality” is debatable, however, as proportionality is generally ascribed to govern attacks against the enemy. An attack is prohibited if it “may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.” Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, art. 51(5)(b), June 8, 1977, 1125 U.N.T.S. 3) (AP I) A MEZ (like a blockade or sea mining) is not an attack.

⁶⁷ Alex Vuving, How Vietnam can stop the South China Sea ADIZ, Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, June 7, 2016, <https://dkiapcss.edu/how-vietnam-can-stop-the-south-china-sea-adiz/>; Edmund J. Burke and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *In Line or Out of Order? China’s Approach to ADIZ in Theory and Practice*, Rand Corporation (2017), pp. 15–19, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2055.html.

⁶⁸ James Kraska, China’s Activities in the Provisional Measures Zone and the Law of the Sea, Issue Focus: Korea Institute of Maritime Strategy (2025), p. 3, <https://en.kims.or.kr/publication/issue-focus/if-2504/>.

Zone.” Yet UNCLOS guarantees high-seas freedoms within EEZs.⁶⁹ During peace time, mining in international waters is normally unlawful, even if the state notifies other nations, but missile firing is lawful without notice, if naval forces confirm the navigational safety of surface vessels and aircraft in the area. China might also implement and enforce a peacetime “quarantine” under its domestic law to carry out administrative detention of Japanese ships, bypassing legal proceedings. This action would violate the principle of exclusive flag state jurisdiction as well as the right of high seas freedoms, challenging the normative goal of a FOIP.⁷⁰

Rerouting traffic through the Lombok or Sunda Straits causes significant delays and increased costs and heightens Indonesia’s concern that Jakarta might be dragged into a conflict. This dynamic would raise energy costs in Japan and prompt a search for alternative suppliers, such as Russia or the United States.

Conflict in the Spratly Islands or within the Vietnamese or Philippine EEZ would impact the longest yet one of the most vital shipping arteries: the South China Sea. Ships transiting through the Malacca Strait carry about one-third of global maritime trade and nearly all of Japan’s seaborne trade with Southeast Asia, India, and Europe.⁷¹ A military clash between China and either the Philippines or Vietnam would likely start with increased use of gray-zone tactics, such as ramming, water-cannon use, or militia harassment.⁷² These non-kinetic operations may escalate to missile and air strikes on disputed features against opposing naval forces.

The PLA Navy’s Southern Theater Command has prioritized quick control of sea routes through the Spratly Islands.⁷³ Satellite images from 2024 confirm the deployment of HQ-9B surface-to-air missile batteries, YJ-12 anti-ship cruise missile launchers, and possible intermediate-range ballistic missile sites on Subi, Mischief, and Fiery Cross Reefs.⁷⁴ In a conflict, these would be supported by carrier strike groups and by land-based H-6N bombers carrying air-launched ballistic missiles such as the CH-AS-X-13, which is similar to the DF-21.⁷⁵

Trade analysis models of counter-factual conflict scenarios suggest a war in the SCS would

⁶⁹ UNCLOS, art. 56 and 58(1)–(2).

⁷⁰ UNCLOS, arts. 87 and 92.

⁷¹ Thomas Dent, *The Strait of Malacca’s Global Supply Chain Implications*, Institute for Supply Management, November 21, 2023, <https://www.ismworld.org/supply-management-news-and-reports/news-publications/inside-supply-management-magazine/blog/2023/2023-11/the-strait-of-malaccas-global-supply-chain-implications/>.

⁷² The “gray zone” may be defined as: “A realm of international relations between peaceful interstate diplomacy, economic activity, and people-to-people contact at one end of the spectrum and armed conflict on the other, in which states and non-state actors use coercive or subversive means that can be violent or nonviolent to achieve their objectives at the expense of others, in contravention or the absence of international norms.” National Intelligence Council, Director of National Intelligence, NIC-SG-2024-20319-A, *Updated IC Gray Zone Lexicon: Key Terms and Definitions* (July 2024), p. 4, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/NIC-Unclassified-Updated-IC-Gray-Zone-Lexicon-July2024.pdf>.

⁷³ Nan Li, *The Southern Theater Command and China’s Maritime Strategy*, Jamestown Foundation, June 9, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/southern-theater-command-chinas-maritime-strategy/>.

⁷⁴ Arpan Rai, *Satellite images reveal alarming scale of China’s military build-up in disputed South China Sea*, *Independent*, August 4, 2025, <https://www.the-independent.com/asia/china/south-china-sea-satellite-images-military-bases-mischief-reef-b2798634.html>.

⁷⁵ Parth Satam, *China’s H-6N Bomber Spotted with Air-Launched Ballistic Missile in Clearest Image Yet*, *The Aviationist*, April 6, 2025, <https://theaviationist.com/2025/04/06/h-6n-albm-clearest-image/>; Joseph Trevithick, *China’s JL-1 Air Launched Ballistic Missile’s Official Debut Is A Big Deal*, *TWZ*, September 4, 2025, <https://www.twz.com/air/chinas-jl-1-air-launched-ballistic-missiles-official-debut-is-a-big-deal>.

cause a 6 to 12 percent decline in welfare losses, with Japan likely to suffer disproportionately.⁷⁶ The effect of a war on Japan's maritime trade would be similar to or slightly less than during a Taiwan blockade, since about 85–90 percent of its oil passes through the South China Sea. The duration and likelihood of fuel rationing in Japan are compatible with a limited but intense conflict. Although Japan is not a direct claimant over features in the region, vessels flying the Japanese flag or operated by Japan face significant risks. Nearly 2,000 Japanese-owned or -operated ships travel through the South China Sea each year. A PLA declaration of “maritime control zones” or “identification zones for foreign military vessels” under the February 2021 China Coast Guard Law and the Revised Maritime Traffic Safety Law could enforce mandatory reporting, routing, or inspection procedures.⁷⁷ Refusal to comply with orders of the China Coast Guard in the SCS has already resulted in ramming Philippine supply boats. Escalation to lethal force against a Japanese-flag merchant vessel remains a possibility, especially if Tokyo supports U.S. forces with rear-area logistics under the 2015 Legislation for Peace and Security.⁷⁸

War-risk insurance exclusions for the “South China Sea north of 10° N” would immediately cancel coverage for most Japan P&I Club members. Alternative routes around Indonesia and through the Lombok–Makassar–Sunda passageways are possible but limited by capacity. The congestion and the resulting demurrage costs would ripple through global supply chains, with Japan especially vulnerable due to its just-in-time manufacturing system.

3. The Law of Maritime Neutrality

3.1 Law of Naval Warfare

Merchant ships generally are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of their flag state.⁷⁹ Foreign port authorities may prescribe and enforce security and environmental rules as a condition of port entry.⁸⁰ Coastal state authorities may approach and visit foreign-flagged merchant ships for violations of the laws of the coastal state in the territorial sea and EEZ that reflect international standards. Coastal states may also enforce exclusive sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the EEZ for the exploration or exploitation of living and non-living resources.⁸¹

The rules on the peacetime law of the sea continue for the most part during periods of naval warfare, with some amendments. The law of naval warfare is a specialized regime (*lex specialis*) that trumps the peacetime law of the sea when the two conflict.⁸² For example, in the law of naval warfare, rules of maritime neutrality apply, providing additional protections and corresponding duties to merchant ships of states not party to the conflict.

The law of maritime neutrality seeks to preserve friendly relations between belligerent and neutral states. The law reciprocally imposes duties and confers rights on states not party to an

⁷⁶ Kerem Coşar and Benjamin Thomas, *The Geopolitics of International Trade in Southeast Asia* (National Bureau of Economic Research) (November 2020), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w28048>.

⁷⁷ Raul (Pete) Pedrozo, *China Coast Guard Law*, Ministry of Defence, Government of Japan, February 2021, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_act/sec_env/ch_ocn/index.html; Raul (“Pete”) Pedrozo, 97 *International Law Studies* 956 (2021), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ils/vol97/iss1/39/>.

⁷⁸ Government of Japan, *Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security* (March 2016), <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000143304.pdf>.

⁷⁹ UNCLOS, Art. 92(1). George K. Walker, *The Tanker War, 1980-1988: Law and Policy*, 74 *International Law Studies* (2000), 291–295.

⁸⁰ UNCLOS, Arts. 2(1), 25, and 218.

⁸¹ UNCLOS, arts. 56 and 73.

⁸² James Kraska, *The Obligation of “Due Regard” in the EEZ During Armed Conflict at Sea*, 106 *International Law Studies* 116, 132 (2025), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ils/vol106/iss1/6/>.

armed conflict.⁸³ This arrangement permits states to avoid taking sides in a war and protects them from being drawn into hostilities by establishing a clear distinction between belligerent and neutral states. The law also seeks to reduce the effects of a conflict on neutral commerce at sea.⁸⁴ The rights and duties of neutral states are based on the relationship between belligerent and neutral vessels, aircraft, and persons.⁸⁵ A belligerent state is one that is engaged in armed conflict. The three conflict scenarios in this article assume that China is a belligerent state while Japan remains neutral.

If Japan is not a party to a conflict, its merchant ships and crews have neutral status and are inviolable.⁸⁶ This right applies automatically, so Japan is not required to issue a declaration of neutrality. Neutral merchant vessels are entitled to protections and freedoms, while also having the obligation to remain impartial. A merchant ship flying a neutral flag, free from enemy ties and devoid of enemy character, is *prima facie* a neutral ship.⁸⁷ For example, enemy ownership, control, or unauthorized flag transfer to a belligerent may establish enemy character. Approximately 14 percent of the vessels operated by Japan's three largest shipping lines are flagged in Japan.⁸⁸ In comparison, the remaining 86 percent are flagged in open registries, primarily Panama, Liberia, the Marshall Islands, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Bahamas. Whether flagged in Japan or another state and Japan is the beneficial owner, these ships qualify as neutral vessels if they are not under the orders or control of an agent placed on board by a party to the conflict, not in the exclusive employment of an enemy government, not owned by enemy nationals or enemy corporations, or have not been transferred from an enemy flag to a neutral flag to evade the consequences to which an enemy vessel is exposed.⁸⁹

As neutral ships, Japanese merchant ships in such a case would be subject to the belligerent right of visit and search during a regional armed conflict.⁹⁰ Neutral shipping has a legal duty to submit to visit and search by belligerents.⁹¹ If a neutral ship is acting on behalf of the enemy or carrying contraband, it may be captured and adjudicated as a prize in a belligerent port.⁹²

⁸³ NWP 1-14M, § 7.2 and Newport Manual § 11.1

⁸⁴ See Convention No. XIII Concerning the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War, Oct. 18, 1907, 36 Stat. 2415, T.S. No. 545 (Hague XIII) and Convention on Maritime Neutrality, Feb. 20, 1928, 135 L.N.T.S. 187 (Havana Convention).

⁸⁵ Office of the General Counsel, U.S. Department of Defense, Law of War Manual § 15.1.2.1 (updated ed. July 2023), <https://ogc.osd.mil/Law-of-War/Practice-Documents/>.

⁸⁶ Hague XIII, art. 1. "Belligerents are bound to respect the sovereign rights of neutral Powers..." Hague XI, art. 1 states: "The postal correspondence of neutrals or belligerents, whatever its official or private character may be, found on the high seas on board a neutral or enemy ship, is inviolable." However, this does not say about ships nor crews." Convention No. XI Relative to Certain Restrictions with Regard to the Exercise of the Right of Capture in Naval War, Oct 18, 1907, 36 Stat. 2396, T.S. No. 544.

⁸⁷ U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps & U.S. Coast Guard, NWP 1-14M/MCTP 11-10B/COMDTPUB P5800.7A, The Commander's Handbook on the Law of Naval Operations ¶ 7.5 (2022) (NWP 1-14M).

⁸⁸ These are the NYK Line, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines, and Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha.

⁸⁹ Declaration Concerning the Laws of Maritime War, arts. 55–56, Feb. 26, 1909, 208 Consol. T.S. 338, *reprinted in* THE DECLARATION OF LONDON, FEBRUARY 26, 1909, at 112 (James B. Scott ed., 1919) ("London Declaration"); Robert W. Tucker, The Law of War and Neutrality at Sea, 50 INTERNATIONAL LAW STUDIES 1, 80 (1955) (hereafter "Tucker").

⁹⁰ Chief of Naval Operations, Law of Naval Warfare, Naval Warfare Information Publication, NWIP 10-2 § 502 (1955); For the example of the Tanker War, see George K. Walker, The Tanker War, 1980-1988: Law and Policy, 74 International Law Studies 357–362 (2000).

⁹¹ The Newport Manual § 9.9.

⁹² C. John Colombos, International Law of the Sea § 801 (6th ed. 1967); James Wilford Garner, Prize Law During the World War § 247 et seq. (1927); The Newport Manual § 9.6.

Contraband is armaments and ammunition of all types and other equipment and supplies associated with providing military support. The Newport Manual defines contraband as “any item that may be of use to the enemy in waging war and which is ultimately destined for the enemy. In principle, any goods can amount to contraband, unless they are goods serving a purely humanitarian function for victims of armed conflict.”⁹³ Contraband is destined for enemy territory or a place under enemy control. “Articles used exclusively for war” may be declared “absolute contraband.”⁹⁴ Dual use articles “susceptible for use in war as for purposes of peace,” like fuel, vehicles, or foodstuffs, “may, without notice also be seized as conditional contraband.”⁹⁵ Belligerents that seek to interdict conditional contraband destined for the enemy must issue a declaration to notify the international community of neutral states.⁹⁶

Neutral merchant ships have the right to self-defense against terrorism but not to initiate offensive actions or resist visit and search. (In principle, self-defense is possible even against illegal attacks by belligerent warships, although this is impractical). Since neutral ships have a duty to submit to visit and search, resistance of visit and search, such as fleeing or firing, may justify the capture of a merchant ship or even an attack against it as a military objective. Furthermore, crew members may have considerable anxiety over whether the approaching vessel is actually a warship or a terrorist or a piracy deception operation, complicating visit and search.

Merchant ships are exempt from all interference, including visit and search, if they sail under a neutral convoy.⁹⁷ For example, in the Gulf of Aden, U.S. forces have protected international shipping with anti-air warfare defenses against incoming ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drone attacks. Japanese merchant ships under a U.S. Navy or JMSDF warship convoy are protected from such threats. Neutral states may desire to escort merchant vessels flying the flag of a neutral state other than their own, including flags of convenience, as has occurred in the Gulf of Aden. It is not entirely clear whether neutral merchant ships under convoy escort from the warships of another neutral state are also exempt from the belligerent right of visit and search. It may be practical to register them under the nationality of a neutral state warship. In 1987, during the Iran-Iraq War, for example, the United States registered eleven Kuwaiti oil tankers under the US flag and provided them protection.⁹⁸

Blockades restrict access to enemy-controlled ports or coastlines, affecting the navigation rights of neutral ships. Merchant ships must respect blockades. A blockade must be declared, communicated via notice to mariners (NOTMAR), enforced impartially, and in a manner that is non-discriminatory among flag states. Neutral ships attempting to breach a blockade are subject to capture. On the other hand, neutral Japanese merchant ships are entitled to access to their own neutral coasts and ports.⁹⁹ If Japanese ships are in a blockaded port at the time of the initiation of conflict, they are entitled to depart.¹⁰⁰ The applicability of the law of economic warfare to non-international armed conflicts is debatable, so it may be uncertain whether it would apply to a China – Taiwan conflict.

⁹³ London Declaration, art. 22. The Newport Manual § 9.6.2.1.

⁹⁴ London Declaration, art. 23.

⁹⁵ London Declaration, art. 24.

⁹⁶ London Declaration, art. 25.

⁹⁷ The Newport Manual § 9.7.1.

⁹⁸ C. Weinberger, A Report to the Congress on Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf, at ii (June 15, 1987); Note, Margaret G. Wachenfeld, Reflagging Kuwaiti Tankers: A U.S. Response in the Persian Gulf, 37 *Duke Law Journal* 174 (1988).

⁹⁹ London Declaration, art. 7.

¹⁰⁰ London Declaration, art. 9.

3.2 Visit and Search

On the high seas and EEZs, naval and coast guard forces of all states may approach foreign-flagged merchant ships and under some conditions visit them.¹⁰¹ The right of approach by warships to merchant ships is virtually unlimited, although there is no requirement on the part of the suspect foreign-flagged vessel to respond. Warships and other government vessels may approach foreign-flagged ships and make inquiries to determine whether the merchant ship is stateless, engaged in maritime piracy or the slave trade, or unauthorized broadcasting, or is in fact of the same nationality as the warship.¹⁰² If there is reasonable suspicion by the warship that the merchant ship meets any of these criteria, belligerent forces may board the merchant ship. Coastal states may also board and inspect a foreign-flagged ship in the EEZ to protect the marine environment if there is “clear objective evidence of a threat or cause of major damage.”¹⁰³ Likewise, if there is reasonable suspicion that a merchant ship intentionally damaged a submarine communication cable, a coastal state may dispatch maritime law enforcement or naval forces to conduct an on-scene investigation, including boarding the ship.¹⁰⁴

Neutral ships are most likely to interact with belligerent forces during a visit and search. Belligerent naval forces are entitled to conduct visit and search of neutral merchant ships to determine the enemy character of the vessel or its cargo. Ships are exempt from search if under a neutral convoy and have warrants certifying that no contraband is on board.¹⁰⁵

Visit and search should be exercised with tact and consideration.¹⁰⁶ Before summoning a vessel to lie to, the warship should raise its national flag. The firing of a blank charge round by the warships signals a visit and search. The neutral ship must stop, lie to, and display its colors. A belligerent merchant ship is entitled to resist visit and search, but a neutral ship may not. If the belligerent resists a visit and search, it assumes all risk resulting in damage or destruction. If the summoned vessel takes flight, it may be pursued and brought to by forcible measures. Once the summoned ship has been brought to, the warship will send a boat with an officer to conduct the visit and search. The boarding officer will examine the ship’s papers to ascertain the enemy character of the vessel or its cargo, review ports of departure and destination, and the manner of employment. The visit will also review the certificate of national registry, crew list and passenger list, logbook, bill of health and clearances, charter party, invoices and manifests of cargo, bills of lading, and other certificates certifying or demonstrating the cargo’s innocence.

Neutral ships are protected through their neutral character, but are liable to capture, or even attack and destruction if they persist after prior warning, to intentionally and clearly refuse to stop, or resist while:¹⁰⁷

- (1) operating under enemy control, flag, or charter;

¹⁰¹ UNCLOS, art. 110.

¹⁰² UNCLOS, art. 110.

¹⁰³ UNCLOS, art. 56(2), 211, 220.

¹⁰⁴ 1884 Convention, art. X. This position assumes that the 1884 Convention reflects customary international law. Even if it does not, however, coastal states may exercise such enforcement jurisdiction under the theory of constructive presence. See James Kraska and Elizabeth Hutton, *The Doctrine of Constructive Presence and Damage to Submarine Cables and Other Critical Underwater Infrastructure*, 106 *International Law Studies* 779 (2025).

¹⁰⁵ *The Newport Manual* § 9.7.1.

¹⁰⁶ Tucker, pp. 338–44; U.S. State Department, *U.S. Acts to Avoid Delays for Ships Transiting Waters in Vicinity of Cuba*, 47 *State Department Bulletin* 747 (1962).

¹⁰⁷ Chief of Naval Operations, *Law of Naval Warfare*, *Naval Warfare Information Publication*, NWIP 10-2) § 503(d)–(e) (1955); *London Declaration*, arts. 45–46, 55–56.

- (2) avoiding an attempt to establish their identity, including attempt to avoid visit and search;
- (3) acting on behalf of the enemy or operating directly under enemy control, orders, charter, employment, or direction;¹⁰⁸
- (4) carrying contraband for the enemy;¹⁰⁹
- (5) attempting to breach a blockade;¹¹⁰
- (6) presenting irregular or fraudulent ship's papers or lacking appropriate papers;¹¹¹
- (7) violating rules established by the belligerent for the control of the immediate vicinity of naval operations. Neutral ships can be compelled to divert only for valid reasons, such as to prevent unneutral acts, maintain a maritime exclusion zone, or a war zone.¹¹²

Merchant ships are protected as civilian objects from outright attack unless, by their nature, location, purpose, or use, they make an effective contribution to military action, rendering them military objectives.¹¹³ In the law of naval warfare, military objectives may be targeted, and neutral merchant ships on rare occasion may become lawful targets, such as if they:

- (1) sail under enemy convoy;¹¹⁴
- (2) carry personnel in the enemy's armed forces or public service; or
- (3) communicate information in the enemy's interest, such as belligerent warship movements;¹¹⁵
- (4) Become integrated into the enemy order of battle, such as by acting as a naval auxiliary for enemy's armed forces or incorporated into the enemy's intelligence system;
- (5) Take a direct part in hostilities or contributing to enemy "military action" or enemy "war-fighting or war-sustaining capability." Neutral merchant ships have a duty to refrain from taking a direct part in hostilities or serving as enemy auxiliaries.¹¹⁶ Under the broader U.S.,

¹⁰⁸ The Newport Manual § 9.6.

¹⁰⁹ Belligerents often declare lists of absolute or conditional contraband. A ship is not liable if the carriage of contraband is unwitting or minimal, although it is still subject to visit and search. The Newport Manual § 9.6.2; Chief of Naval Operations, Law of Naval Warfare, Naval Warfare Information Publication, NWIP 10-2 § 631d (1955)

¹¹⁰ The Newport Manual § 7.4.7; Chief of Naval Operations, Law of Naval Warfare, Naval Warfare Information Publication (NWIP) 10-2 § 632g (1955).

¹¹¹ The Newport Manual § 9.6. The papers which are generally found on board a merchant vessel are:

- a. Certificate of registry of nationality
- b. Crew list
- c. Passenger list
- d. Logbook
- e. Bill of health
- f. Clearance
- g. Charter party, if chartered
- h. Invoices or manifests of cargo
- i. Bills of lading
- j. A consular declaration certifying the innocence of the cargo may be included.

Chief of Naval Operations, Law of Naval Warfare, Naval Warfare Information Publication, NWIP 10-2 § 502 and App. G (1955).

¹¹² The Newport Manual § 7.2.2; Chief of Naval Operations, Law of Naval Warfare, Naval Warfare Information Publication, NWIP 10-2 § 430b (1955).

¹¹³ API, art. 52(2).

¹¹⁴ The Newport Manual § 8.6.3.

¹¹⁵ The Newport Manual § 9.6; Tucker, pp. 321–338.

¹¹⁶ Chief of Naval Operations, Law of Naval Warfare, Naval Warfare Information Publication, NWIP 10-2 § 501 (1955); Tucker, pp. 77, 115, 320.

Russian, and Ukrainian interpretations, merchant ships can be attacked if they contribute to the enemy's war-fighting or war-sustaining capability.¹¹⁷ For example, during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia has attacked Ukrainian vessels carrying grain, while Ukraine has attacked merchant ships carrying war material for the Russian armed forces.¹¹⁸

Even attacks against merchant ships that have lost their protected status cannot be indiscriminate, however.¹¹⁹

Merchant ships in the service of the enemy or that have acquired enemy character are liable to be captured as prize.¹²⁰ Belligerents may seize merchant ships and adjudicate them as prize, including enemy ships as well as neutral-flagged ships with enemy beneficial ownership or support to the enemy. Prize captures are usually brought into port for adjudication in an admiralty court. Still, they may be destroyed at sea if it is unsafe to bring them into port, provided the crews are safely removed. Prize captures may occur anywhere outside neutral waters. If a neutral merchant ship is lawfully captured as a prize, the crew on board shall be treated as civilians and protected and cannot be made prisoners of war.¹²¹ If they are captured while engaging in hostile acts, however, they may be treated as prisoners of war. "If a neutral merchant vessel takes a direct part in the hostilities on the side of the enemy, serves in any way as a naval or military auxiliary for the enemy, or otherwise becomes a lawful target, upon capture, its officers may be held as prisoners of war."¹²² Enemy nationals found on board a neutral merchant ship may also be made prisoners of war if they are part of a belligerent's armed forces.¹²³ If a vessel is captured without a valid reason, it must be released.

Seafarers, including masters, pilots, and merchant marine, and the crews of ships and civil aircraft of Parties to a conflict are entitled to the protections of the Geneva Convention II.¹²⁴ Neutral ships may provide impartial assistance to distressed persons at sea without losing their status of neutrality.¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ The Newport Manual § 8.5.1.2; 10 USC § 950p(a)(1) states: "(1) The term 'military objective' means combatants and those objects during hostilities which, by their nature, location, purpose, or use, effectively contribute to the war-fighting or war-sustaining capability of an opposing force and whose total or partial destruction, capture, or neutralization would constitute a definite military advantage to the attacker under the circumstances at the time of an attack."

¹¹⁸ Federica Marsi, Why is Russia bombing ships carrying Ukrainian grain?, Al Jazeera, October 10, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/10/why-is-russia-bombing-ships-carrying-ukrainian-grain>; Ukraine special forces target Russian vessels in Caspian Sea, Reuters, December 12, 2025, <https://www.jpost.com/international/internationalrussia-ukraine-war/article-880169>; Samya Kullab, Ukraine says it has hit a major Russian oil refinery with long-range drones, Associated Press, November 6, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-oil-refinery-energy-infrastructure-5bc5c5753cb9fa64f45c276223c1d8c8>.

¹¹⁹ AP I, art. 51(4).

¹²⁰ The Newport Manual § 3.10.2.

¹²¹ Chief of Naval Operations, Law of Naval Warfare, Naval Warfare Information Publication, NWIP 10-2 § 513 (1955). "[t]he officers and crews of neutral merchant vessels captured as prize who are nationals of a neutral State may not be made POWs and must be repatriated as soon as circumstances reasonably permit." The Newport Manual § 3.10.3.1.

¹²² Hague XIII, arts. 5–8; Convention (III) Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War art. 4(A)(5), Aug. 12, 1949, 6 U.S.T. 3316, 75 U.N.T.S. 135 (GC II).

¹²³ Chief of Naval Operations, Law of Naval Warfare, Naval Warfare Information Publication (NWIP) 10-2 § 513 (1955) and The Newport Manual § 3.10.3.1.

¹²⁴ GC II, art. 13(5).

¹²⁵ UNCLOS, art. 98; GCII, art. 21.

3.3 Risk of Foreign Registry

Japanese-owned ships registered to a belligerent state involved in an international armed conflict may be subject to prize capture by the opposing belligerent. There are no Japanese ships registered in South Korea since that nation's Ship Act and Ship Registry Act impose strict nationality requirements. South Korean citizens or companies must own vessels with a principal office in South Korea, and all representatives must be South Korean citizens. There are no Japanese ships registered in Vietnam or the Philippines.

If China is involved in an armed conflict at sea, Japanese ships registered in China or Hong Kong could be at risk of prize capture by the naval forces of the opposing belligerent. Hong Kong ship registry explicitly allows foreign-owned ships to be flagged there, provided the owner registers as a non-Hong Kong company with a place of business in Hong Kong.¹²⁶ This privilege applies to Japanese-owned vessels, including those operated by subsidiaries of Japanese leasing companies. For example, Hong Kong's Merchant Shipping (Registration) Ordinance permits demise charter registration for foreign entities, and Japanese companies have used it for vessels engaged in international trade. A subsidiary of a Japanese leasing company can own a Hong Kong-registered ship outright under a demise charter, with the vessel registered in the foreign (Japanese) company's name as owner and a qualified Hong Kong person or entity listed as the demise charterer. This structure allows the Japanese entity to retain ownership while benefiting from Hong Kong's flag. Japanese firms use this as a standard mechanism for tax and operational advantages, as Hong Kong offers exemptions on profits from ocean-going ships and aligns with international conventions such as those of the IMO and ILO.

Exeno Yamamizu Corporation, a Tokyo-based Japanese shipping services company, actively provides ship registration services under the Hong Kong flag for foreign-flag vessels.¹²⁷ Japanese companies not only utilize but also promote Hong Kong registrations for their clients or owned fleets. Their services include handling documentation, surveys, and compliance, making it easier for Japanese owners to flag ships in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Marine Department maintains a regional desk in Tokyo specifically to support Hong Kong-registered ships calling at Japanese ports and to assist shipping companies in the region (including Japan) with flag state quality controls, registrations, and related services. The presence in Japan underscores Hong Kong's registry is marketed regionally for its efficiency, low fees, and preferential treatment, such as reduced port dues in mainland Chinese ports.¹²⁸

4. Conclusion

Merchant vessels seeking to mitigate the perils of attacks during periods of armed conflict must adhere to prudent navigational and behavioral strategies, as set out in treatises such as those by Robert W. Tucker and C. John Colombos, and in national guidance, including the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations' Law of Naval Warfare 10-2. More recent restatements of the law of naval warfare are also helpful, including the San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Conflicts at Sea and the more recent Newport Manual on the Law of Naval Warfare (Second Edition). Foremost among these is the imperative to avoid perilous maritime domains, where belligerent parties may establish warning zones, maritime exclusion zones, or outright war zones, thereby imposing stringent restrictions on ingress and egress. Such proclamations are

¹²⁶ Mayer Brown, Guide to Shipping Register and Shipping Tax Regime in Hong Kong (2024), <https://www.mayerbrown.com/-/media/files/perspectives-events/publications/brochures/asia/guide-to-shipping-register-and-shipping-tax-regime-in-hong-kong.pdf?rev=-1>.

¹²⁷ Exeno Yamamizu Corporation, Ship Registration Services for Foreign Flag vessels, <https://www.exeno.co.jp/en/business/maritimeservice/>.

¹²⁸ Regional Desk (Tokyo), Hong Kong Shipping Registry, <https://www.mardep.gov.hk/en/hksr/about-hksr/regional-desks-of-the-hksr/tokyo/index.html>.

customarily released through formal maritime advisories, including Notices to Airmen (NOTAM) or Notices to Mariners (NOTMAR), which serve as critical instruments for disseminating navigational hazards and ensuring compliance with the principles of neutrality and self-preservation.

Furthermore, merchant ships ought to carefully abstain from any conduct that could be misunderstood as partial or antagonistic or supportive of belligerent operations, including the conveyance of adversarial military personnel, the provisioning of combatant warships, or the carriage of contraband materiel, irrespective of whether such activities are explicitly proscribed under the codified norms of naval warfare. These actions invariably heighten vulnerability to interception, seizure, or outright hostility by belligerents, undermining the protections afforded to neutral commerce under customary international law. Finally, in encounters with belligerent warships, strict compliance with maritime neutrality is paramount to ensure safety. Precedents, such as those observed in Black Sea incidents, underscore that submission to visit and search orders typically averts escalation. Non-belligerent vessels engaged in legitimate trade are often expeditiously released after verification, thereby preserving the delicate balance between the rights of neutrals and the rights of military necessity in the exigency of warfare.

The Pro-American Intellectuals and the Pacific War: Focusing on Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih

MUTO Shutaro

Abstract

The process culminating in the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States in 1941 necessitates a consideration of the roles played by pro-American intellectuals in both Japan and China. Notably, Asakawa Kan'ichi (1873–1948) of Japan and Hu Shih (1891–1962) of China exhibited particularly significant activities and pronouncements. This paper investigates the actions undertaken by Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih concerning the Japan-U.S. conflict, with a specific focus on the intellectual exchange and personal relationship that existed between them.

Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih were prominent pro-American intellectuals, representing Japan and China, respectively. Both individuals shared a common background, having studied classical Chinese literature in their youth and pursued history as their major at American universities. While initially driven by an ascetic inclination to abstain from political engagement, both ultimately took action during their respective national crises: they advocated for domestic introspection and simultaneously presented international arguments to justify their nation's stance.

Both figures recognized that the decisive factor determining the outcome of the Second Sino-Japanese War resided in the actions of the United States. Ironically, they found themselves in opposing positions, each maneuvering to secure an advantage for their respective nation concerning President Franklin Roosevelt's policy.

Furthermore, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih consistently promoted the principles of democracy within their own countries. The intellectual exchange between these two individuals constitutes a crucial chapter in the history of Sino-Japanese relations. This study aims to elucidate the nature of this relationship, which has previously received minimal scholarly attention.

Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih

The roles played by pro-American intellectuals in both Japan and China warrant close examination when analyzing the processes that culminated in the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. Notably, significant contributions were made by Asakawa Kan'ichi (1873–1948) of Japan and Hu Shih (1891–1962) of China.

Asakawa Kan'ichi, the first Japanese professor appointed to Yale University, was a legal historian whose career focused on the comparative analysis of Japanese and European feudal systems. His 1929 publication *The Documents of Iriki*, which compiled historical materials from the Iriki-in families in the Satsuma domain, received high commendation from the distinguished French historian Marc Bloch. Bloch, whose foundational work *La Société féodale (Feudal Society)* would be published a decade subsequent to Asakawa's work, lauded Asakawa's compilation as an indispensable resource for Western scholars engaged in the study of Japanese feudalism. This scholarly exchange was further evidenced in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1931), for which Asakawa, at Bloch's invitation, co-authored the entry on feudalism. It is widely recognized

that Bloch's comprehension of Japan, as reflected in the bibliography of *Feudal Society*, was substantially informed by Asakawa's research.¹

Hu Shih, a philosopher who studied under John Dewey at Columbia University, emerged as a central figure in China's New Culture Movement while serving as a professor at Peking University. His essay, "Proposals for Literary Reform," published in the journal *Xin Qingnian* (*New Youth*) in January 1917, is widely recognized as a pivotal catalyst for the advent of a new literature composed in the vernacular Chinese language (*bai hua*). Hu Shih's intellectual contributions also extended to the field of philosophy, notably with his 1919 publication *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 1. In this influential treatise, he applied a positivist framework to the study of ancient Chinese thought.

Furthermore, Hu Shih's scholarly rigor is manifested in his systematic efforts to unearth and catalogue various historical texts, including those pertaining to Confucianism, classical literature, and Zen Buddhism. His 1930 compilation *The Collected Works of Shenhui* resulted from his discovery and subsequent organization of Dunhuang manuscripts located in collections in Britain and France. The meticulousness of this endeavor was formally commended by the Buddhist scholar Suzuki Daisetz, who observed that the work was "organized with an extremely meticulous critical eye."²

As this overview illustrates, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih achieved foundational academic results within their respective disciplinary domains. Notwithstanding their personal reservations regarding political engagement as scholars, they responded to national crises by advocating for the interests of their nations on the international stage. Concurrently, they provided incisive critiques of the challenges confronting their own countries. The reevaluation of their contributions and statements has constituted a key scholarly trend in both Japan and China since the 1980s, a period also characterized by the systematic organization and archival processing of their personal papers and published works.

In the summer of 1917, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih traversed the Pacific aboard the same steamship from Vancouver, Canada, as they returned to their respective home countries. While this shared voyage has been anecdotally documented in biographical accounts of Hu Shih,³ a cross-examination of their personal and professional correspondence substantiates that they established a scholarly rapport during this journey and maintained communication thereafter.

Furthermore, a discernible influence on Asakawa Kan'ichi's historical methodology can be traced to Hu Shih's advocacy for "systematizing the national past" (*zhengli guogu*, 整理国故) and his emphasis on conceptual precision. Other interconnections between them also existed within their respective social and academic networks. Ironically, these two individuals, whose initial encounter was a matter of coincidence, found themselves positioned on opposing sides during the diplomatic and political processes preceding the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941.

The intellectual exchange between pro-American circles in Japan and China during the first half of the twentieth century constitutes a crucial area of inquiry, with the relationship between Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih representing a particularly salient case study. To elucidate this relationship, this paper will commence by examining the circumstances surrounding their initial encounter.

¹ Horigome Yozō, "A Preliminary Essay toward a Reassessment of Feudalism: A Reconsideration of Modernization Theory" (封建制再評価への試論 近代化論の再検討), *Tenbō*, no. 87 (March 1966): 30.

² Suzuki Daisetz, "Mr. Hu Shih" (胡適先生), *Bungeishunjū*, vol. 26, no. 7 (July 1948): 33.

³ Zhu Hong, *Hu Shih: A Great Biography* (胡適大伝), vol. 1, Hefei: Anhui People's Publishing House, 2001, pp. 189–191; Zheng Yanguo, *The Square and Round of Translation* (翻譯方圓), Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2009, pp. 233–234.

Expectations and anxieties regarding Japan-China relations

In November 1904, during the ongoing Russo-Japanese War and the siege of Port Arthur, Asakawa Kan'ichi published *The Russo-Japanese Conflict* in the United States. Following his graduation at the top of his class from Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō (now Waseda University), Asakawa had completed his doctoral studies at Yale University in June 1902 with his dissertation *The Early Institutional Life of Japan* and subsequently commenced his career as a history lecturer at Dartmouth College. The objective of *The Russo-Japanese Conflict* was to explicate the historical antecedents of the conflict and to assert that, in contrast to Russia, Japan was not seeking a monopoly of interests in Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula but was rather upholding the principle of equal opportunity for all nations.

According to Asakawa Kan'ichi, the resolution of conflicts between the great powers in Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula necessitated adherence to two key principles: regional integration and equal opportunity.⁴ He contended that Russia had violated these principles, in stark contrast to Japan's efforts to uphold them. Asakawa characterized the Russo-Japanese War as a clash between the "new civilization" of Japan and the "old civilization" of Russia. *The Russo-Japanese Conflict*, which advocated for the justness of Japan's stance, received a positive reception, including a review published in *The New York Times*. During the period of the war, Asakawa has delivered over forty lectures across various regions to disseminate his perspectives.⁵

At the onset of the Russo-Japanese War in February 1904, the adolescent Hu Shih, accompanied by his elder brother-in-law Hu Zhenzhi, relocated from Jixi in Anhui Province to Shanghai. He matriculated at Meixi Academy, which represented an early instance of modern primary schooling in China. For a writing assignment concerning "The Reasons for Japan's Strength," Hu Shih, whose knowledge regarding Japan was highly circumscribed, utilized such sources as Luo Pu's translation of a special issue of the Japanese journal *Taiyō (Sun)* titled *Thirty-Year History of the Meiji Restoration* (1902), and the *Ren-Yin New Citizen's Miscellany Compilation* (1902).⁶ Following the development of a sense of solidarity with Japan based on contemporary news accounts of the conflict, Hu Shih withdrew from the academy in an act of protest against the injustice surrounding the death of a Chinese carpenter at the hands of a Russian sailor.

Hu Shih subsequently transferred to Chengzhong Academy. In the summer of 1906, he again transferred to the newly established Zhongguo Gongxue Academy in Shanghai, an institution founded by Chinese students who had repatriated from Japan. Their return was a direct consequence of the "Regulations Regarding Public and Private Schools for Admitting Qing Students" issued by Japan's Ministry of Education in November 1905. These regulations, colloquially termed the "Regulations for Regulating Qing Students," stipulated new provisions concerning the accommodation and admission qualifications of Chinese students. In response to this policy, a substantial number of Chinese students protested and returned to their home country, which subsequently led some of them to establish the Zhongguo Gongxue Academy with the explicit objective of independently cultivating new talent.

Subsequent to the Russo-Japanese War, Asakawa Kan'ichi reached the conviction that Japan's foreign policy was in direct conflict with the principles he had articulated in *The Russo-*

⁴ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Russo-Japanese Conflict: Its Causes and Issues*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1904, pp. 305–310.

⁵ Yamauchi Haruko, *A Study of Kan'ichi Asakawa: The Formation and Practice of His Scholarship* (朝河貫一論 その学問形成と実践), Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 2010, pp. 197–203.

⁶ Hu Shih, "My Autobiography at Forty" (四十自述). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih* (胡適全集), vol. 18, pp. 54–56. The original source of *Thirty-Year History of the Meiji Restoration* is a special issue of *Taiyō* (published in May 1898) commemorating the 30th anniversary of the transfer of the capital to Tokyo. This translated work exerted ideological influence not only in China but also in Korea and Vietnam.

Japanese Conflict. Following his repatriation to the United States after an approximately eighteen-month temporary sojourn in Japan and the commencement of his new role as a lecturer at Yale University, Asakawa corresponded with Ōkuma Shigenobu, the founder of Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō in May 1908, conveying a significant deterioration in American perceptions of Japan. He described a pervasive sentiment that “Japan is oppressing Korea and, replacing Russia in Manchuria, is trending toward undermining China’s sovereignty and the rights and interests of other nations.”⁷ He underscored the gravity of the situation by warning that “a crisis is at hand that necessitates profound national reflection.”

To amplify his message, Asakawa Kan'ichi published his Japanese-language work *The Crisis of Japan* in June 1909, a volume in which he condemned the Japanese government for abandoning its core principles, violating Korean independence, and pursuing aggressive Manchurian interests at the expense of China. He asserted that “the majority of our nation’s future destiny will be determined by our relationship with China, which is posited to be the greatest problem in the future of the East, and with the United States, which is anticipated to be the most powerful nation in the world.”⁸ Ultimately, he called for a fundamental reorientation of Japan’s policies vis-à-vis China and the United States.

Hu Shih expressed his concern regarding Japan’s expanding ambitions in October 1908, articulating in the “Current Affairs” section of the Shanghai journal *Jingye Xunbao* that “since Japan’s victory over Russia, the region of South Manchuria has become their possession.”⁹ It is noteworthy that while Hu Shih was enrolled at Chengzhong Academy, a Chinese translation of Thomas Henry Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* was published. The translator of this influential work, entitled *Tianyan Lun*, was Yan Fu, who subsequently became the inaugural president of Peking University.

The publication of *Tianyan Lun* exerted a profound ideological impact on Chinese society, which was then reeling from the defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War. This work, which introduced the tenets of Social Darwinism, significantly influenced Hu Shih. The central concept of “survival of the fittest” resonated so strongly with him that he adopted it for his own name.¹⁰ For Hu Shih, who perceived the international environment through the lens of might makes right, Japan’s ascendancy must have been construed as an existential threat to China.¹¹

On August 16, 1910, Hu Shih embarked on a vessel from Shanghai to the United States, having successfully qualified for the U.S. government-sponsored Boxer Indemnity Scholarship. During a stopover in Yokohama on August 29, he observed a public celebration marking the annexation of Korea, which transpired on the same day.¹² This event included a “Lantern Parade Celebrating the Annexation of Korea” that drew 5,000 participants. The newspaper *Yokohama Bōeki Shinpō* described it as “a magnificent spectacle throughout the streets, surpassing a victory

⁷ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa* (朝河貫一書簡集), Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 1990, pp. 174–175.

⁸ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Crisis for Japan* (日本之禍機), Tokyo: Jitsugyō no Nihon Sha, 1909, pp. 257–258.

⁹ Hu Shih, “Current News” (時聞). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, p. 90.

¹⁰ Hu Songping, *First Draft of the Long Chronological Biography of Mr. Hu Shizhi* (胡適之先生年譜長編初稿), vol. 1, Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co., 1990, p. 60.

¹¹ Hu Shih, “An Attempt to Explain the Meaning of ‘Competition of Things, Selection by Heaven, Survival of the Fittest’” (物競天拙適者生存試申其義). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, p. 2.

¹² Hu Songping, *Records of Mr. Hu Shizhi’s Conversations in His Later Years* (胡適之先生晚年談話錄), Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co., 1984, p. 180.

celebration, with the brilliant light making it as bright as day.”¹³ Following his arrival in the United States, Hu Shih received correspondence from his brother-in-law Hu Jue, who informed him of Japan’s expanding control over the Three Northeastern Provinces (Manchuria). This intelligence evoked considerable distress in Hu Shih.¹⁴

The overthrow of the Qing Dynasty, initiated by the Wuchang Uprising in October 1911, culminated in the establishment of the Republic of China. Hu Shih, who was then a student in the United States, experienced considerable frustration at his inability to participate in this pivotal historical event.¹⁵ During World War I, while a significant number of his Chinese peers were incensed by Japan’s Twenty-One Demands and advocated for immediate military intervention, Hu Shih adopted a more measured approach. He contended that students should prioritize their academic pursuits as preparation for China’s future. Influenced by his engagement with Christianity, Hu Shih promoted a policy of “non-contention”. He maintained a degree of optimism, expressing hope that Japan’s occupation of the German-leased territory of Jiaozhou Bay would be temporary and that the territory would be restored to Chinese sovereignty. Although this expectation was ultimately unfulfilled, Hu Shih fundamentally maintained his non-contention stance, while simultaneously arriving at a key realization: “the grave threat to China is Japan.”¹⁶

The occupation of Jiaozhou Bay elicited concern from Asakawa Kan’ichi regarding the deterioration of American public opinion toward Japan, prompting him to address a letter to Prime Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu.¹⁷ In this correspondence, Asakawa emphasized the necessity of publicly announcing a date for the restitution of the territory to China. He further cautioned Ōkuma that Japan’s inept handling of the Twenty-One Demands presented to the Yuan Shikai government was a primary source of American distrust. He specifically drew attention to the unpublished fifth group of demands, which sought to establish Japanese military advisors within the Chinese central government, thereby challenging the nation’s fundamental sovereignty. Asakawa asserted that “cooperation between Japan and the United States regarding China is of paramount importance for the future progress of the world” and that such cooperation was contingent upon Japan’s restitution of Jiaozhou Bay. His counsel, however, was disregarded. This outcome led Asakawa to articulate his profound disappointment, observing, “Viewing Count Ōkuma in charge, he does not appear to be a statesman of significant caliber after all.”¹⁸

The preceding discussion establishes that both Asakawa Kan’ichi and Hu Shih devoted considerable intellectual energy to the future of their respective nations and the complexities of Japan-China relations during the period spanning the Russo-Japanese War to World War I. In June 1917, their trajectories converged on a return voyage from the United States. Asakawa was en route to Japan to conduct research that would subsequently form the basis for his work on *The Documents of Iriki*, while Hu Shih was returning to commence his new appointment at Peking University.

¹³ Jiang Yongzhen estimates that Hu Shih arrived in Yokohama on August 22, 1910, not the 29th, citing the date the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was signed (Jiang Yongzhen, *Who Else but Me: Hu Shih [Part 1]: From Unpolished Jade to Perfect Disk 1891–1917* (舍我其誰：胡適【第一部】璞玉成璧 1891–1917), Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co., 2011, p. 197). However, the treaty was promulgated one week after its signing, on the 29th. Given that celebratory events were held on the 29th, Hu Shih’s recollection should be regarded as correct.

¹⁴ Luo Zhitian, *An Attempt to Re-Create Civilization: A Biography of Hu Shih* (再造文明的嘗試 胡適傳), Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006, pp. 88–89.

¹⁵ Hu Shih, “To Hu Shaoting” (致胡紹庭). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 23, p. 38.

¹⁶ Hu Shih, “Study Abroad Diary” (留學日記). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, p. 26.

¹⁷ Asakawa Kan’ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan’ichi Asakawa*, pp. 220–230.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

According to Hu Shih's diary, on June 17, as his train traveled from Chicago to Vancouver, he transferred to a first-class car in St. Paul and encountered Asakawa.¹⁹ Asakawa's own diary corroborates this meeting, noting his departure from New Haven and including the entry: "S. Hu is on the train."²⁰ The two individuals arrived in Vancouver on June 20 and, the following day, they boarded the RMS *Empress of Japan*, a regular passenger liner operating on the North Pacific route.

While aboard the RMS *Empress of Japan*, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih met and engaged in daily conversations in the ship's smoking room, notwithstanding their differential accommodations—Asakawa in a first-class cabin and Hu Shih in a second-class cabin. During one of these discussions, Asakawa disclosed to Hu Shih his plan to produce a five-volume series of classic Chinese and Japanese works for the Everyman's Library published by J.M. Dent & Sons.²¹

Asakawa Kan'ichi solicited Hu Shih's counsel regarding the editorial approach for the two volumes dedicated to Chinese works. Hu Shih proposed a two-part schema: one volume would feature Confucian classics, including the *Book of Odes*, the *Four Books*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety*; the other would contain selections from non-Confucian classics, such as *Laozi*, along with excerpts from *Zhuangzi*, *Liezi*, *Mozi*, and *Han Feizi*. Asakawa was duly impressed with this proposal and extended an invitation to Hu Shih to assume the role of editor and translator for the two Chinese volumes. Hu Shih readily accepted the offer, perceiving it as an excellent educational endeavor.

Although Hu Shih was dissatisfied with the proposed allocation of volumes—three dedicated to Japan and two to China—Asakawa's offer remained compelling. While aboard the vessel, Hu Shih articulated his perspective on the project in a letter to his friend E.C. Williams:

Most interesting man I have met here is a Prof. K. Asakawa, a Japanese who has for many years been Professor of Institutional History of Japan at Yale University. He is in the first-class cabin, but we met every day in the smoking room which occupies the highest storey of the ship and which commands the best view of the ocean. We had met before in the train between St. Paul and Vancouver. He is a good scholar of the research type and had done some very scholarly research in his own line.

One interesting outcome of our talks may interest you to hear. He had been approached by the publisher of the "Everyman's Library" to select and edit several volumes of Japanese material for inclusion in that Library. In reply he persuaded him to enlarge the scope to include some volumes of Chinese classical literature as well as Japanese. The negotiation is now almost completed, and it was decided upon to devote 2 volumes to Chinese material. Prof. Asakawa asked my opinion about the selection and distribution of the material for these volumes. I told him what I thought ought to be included therein and the method of selection. He was so much satisfied with my suggestions that he immediately asked me to undertake the translating and editing of these volumes. I accepted the offer without hesitation because I know the value of the "Everyman's Library" and I believe I can do a service both to China and to the English-speaking world in this undertaking. It is not a very good proposition financially. But I do not mind that very much.²²

Hu Shih's enthusiasm for Asakawa's proposal can be inferred from this correspondence.

¹⁹ Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, p. 567.

²⁰ *Asakawa Kan'ichi papers*, Series 2, Box 5, Folder 51, p. 50019, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

²¹ Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, pp. 577–578.

²² Hu Shih, "To E. C. Williams." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 40, pp. 195–196.

Evidence of their discussions concerning the Everyman's Library project is additionally documented in a letter from Asakawa to the businessman Shirai Shintarō:

I was commissioned by Dent & Co. in London to produce five volumes within three years: one volume consisting of abridged translations of the fundamental classics of Confucianism and another of non-Confucian works from China, and three volumes consisting of carefully selected texts that are representative of the development and transformation of Japanese religion and thought (Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism), translated and annotated as I had done previously. Of these, the section on China has been entrusted to Prof. Hu Shih of Peking University, while the section on Japan will be carried out under my own responsibility.²³

On July 5, the *Empress of Japan* docked at Yokohama Port, where Hu Shih learned of the Zhang Xun Restoration, an event that had occurred only four days prior on July 1. This political upheaval in China, in which Zhang Xun attempted to reinstate Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, constituted a source of deep concern for Hu Shih.²⁴ After parting ways with Asakawa in Yokohama, Hu Shih remained aboard the vessel, which continued its voyage through Kobe and Nagasaki before ultimately arriving in Shanghai on the 10th.

Following their voyage, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih maintained correspondence to finalize the practical details of the Everyman's Library publication. Their discussions addressed various pragmatic matters, including volume length, associated costs, and the specific policies for editing and translation. In late 1917, at his mother's insistence, Hu Shih married his fiancée Jiang Dongxiu, to whom he had been betrothed prior to his departure for the United States. Upon receiving news of the marriage, Asakawa promptly dispatched his congratulations. In March 1918, Hu Shih composed the following letter to his mother:

Yesterday, a Japanese friend sent me two books as a congratulatory gift for my recent marriage. This friend, now a professor at Yale University in the United States, is a well-known scholar. Last year, when I returned to China, I first met him on the train, and later we traveled by ship together, engaging in frequent and delightful conversations. We found each other very congenial, and thus became friends. Upon hearing about my marriage, he sent these two books to extend his congratulations. Naturally, I was very pleased.²⁵

The reference to a Japanese friend teaching at Yale University within the letter can be confidently identified as Asakawa Kan'ichi. Although the specific titles of the two books he sent are not explicitly stated, it is highly probable that they were his two major works: *The Early Institutional Life of Japan* and *The Russo-Japanese Conflict*.

The Everyman's Library project ultimately failed to reach publication. In September 1934, Hu Shih appended an annotation to his diary stating, "This matter ultimately did not come to fruition. I feel deeply ashamed toward Professor Asakawa."²⁶ While the precise reason for the project's non-realization remains unclear, this annotation suggests that the responsibility may have been attributed to Hu Shih. It is plausible that upon his return to China, his expanding influence and demanding schedule precluded him from dedicating the requisite time to the translation work. Notwithstanding the project's outcome, the two scholars, who initially met by chance, developed a significant scholarly rapport.

²³ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa*, p. 254.

²⁴ Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, p. 581.

²⁵ Hu Shih, "To Mother" (致母親). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 23, p. 163.

²⁶ Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, p. 578.

Scientific methodology and feudalism

In an article entitled “The Mission of Sinology Researchers,” the Oriental history scholar Kuwabara Jitsuzō proposed the following methodological approach: “Overall, the corpus of Chinese classics is currently in a disorganized state. Prior to their utilization, we must first organize them thoroughly using a scientific methodology, and subsequently, we must research the organized materials using a scientific methodology.”²⁷ Kuwabara posed the question of why Western researchers, despite their circumscribed proficiency in reading Chinese documents, were able to produce notable research. He attributed their success to their rigorous application of “scientific methodology.”

For instance, they could estimate the length of a *li* (Chinese mile) during the Han Dynasty to be approximately 400 meters by comparing historical descriptions with the actual distances between verified locations. However, Kuwabara Jitsuzō contended that such analysis necessitated, as a prerequisite, historical criticism and the “systematic organization” (*seiri*, 整理) of these materials into a unified classification and order. Originally intended for Japanese scholars, this article was subsequently translated and published in the Chinese journal *Xin Qingnian*, Vol. 3, No. 3, in May 1917.

The third volume, third issue of *Xin Qingnian* contained Hu Shih’s essay “On a Historical View of Literature” as well as his letter to Chen Duxiu detailing the responses to his earlier “Tentative Plan for Literary Reform.” While returning by vessel from Yokohama, Hu Shih procured and perused this issue, which also featured Kuwabara Jitsuzō’s article “The Mission of Sinology Researchers.”

In his diary, Hu Shih recorded his positive impressions of Kuwabara Jitsuzō’s essay, observing that “it advocates for the adoption of scientific methodology in the study of Sinology, which constitutes an extremely sound opinion.” He specifically lauded the estimation of a *li* as 400 meters, designating it “a great invention of historical research.”²⁸ Regarding Kuwabara’s contention that Chinese classics were disorganized and thus unsuitable for utilization, Hu Shih’s diary noted, “*zhengli* (整理) is equivalent to the English term ‘systematize.’” This entry suggests that the Japanese term *seiri* (整理) was unfamiliar to Hu Shih at the time.

In December 1919, Hu Shih published an essay entitled “The Meaning of the New Tide of Thought” in *Xin Qingnian*. In this work, he contended that the fundamental significance of China’s “New Tide of Thought” was a “critical attitude.” Hu Shih equated this critical stance with the concept of the “transvaluation of all values,” a term derived from the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.²⁹ He asserted that this same critical approach should be applied to China’s traditional academic and intellectual traditions.

According to Hu Shih, attitudes toward traditional academic thought can be categorized into three types: (1) opposition to blind obedience, (2) opposition to harmony, and (3) advocacy for “systematizing the national past” (*zhengli guogu*, 整理国故). In this context, the term “*zhengli guogu*” refers to the systematic, logical organization and rigorous, evidential research of Chinese classics, executed through the application of “scientific methodology” as advocated by Kuwabara Jitsuzō. This concept likely originated from Hu Shih’s diverse intellectual background, which encompassed Qing Dynasty evidential scholarship and Western philosophical traditions.³⁰ The

²⁷ Kuwabara Jitsuzō, “The Mission of Sinology Researchers” (支那学研究者の任務), *Taiyō*, vol. 23, no. 3 (March 1917): 100.

²⁸ Hu Shih, “Study Abroad Diary”. In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, pp. 581–582.

²⁹ Hu Shih, “The Meaning of the New Tide of Thought” (新思潮的意義). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 1, pp. 691–700.

³⁰ Grieder, Jerome B, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917–1937*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970, pp. 103–111.

influence of Kuwabara is particularly notable, given Hu Shih's explicit adoption of the term "zhengli" (*seiri*).³¹

In the development of Hu Shih's intellectual framework, the concept of "systematizing the national past" served as a pivotal keyword. It is posited that Asakawa Kan'ichi also provided important insights into the formation of this idea. While on his return voyage home, Hu Shih perused Asakawa's paper. He recorded the following in his diary:

I recently read Mr. Asakawa Kan'ichi's paper "The Origin of the Feudal Land Tenure in Japan," which contains many thought-provoking facts worth noting.

Note: The term "fengjian zhidu" (封建制度) is a translation of the Western term "feudalism," though it is not entirely accurate. This system differs from what is historically referred to as "fengjian" (封建) in China. Due to the lack of a more appropriate term, it is temporarily used here. I once asked Mr. Asakawa what term Japanese scholars use. He mentioned that, in addition to "fengjian zhidu," some use "chigyō seido" (知行制度). The term "chigyō" appears in official documents of the time, particularly in the contracts signed by tenants who pledged allegiance to landlords, though it does not really constitute a proper term. Today, it occurred to me that terms such as "fenju zhidu" (division-based system, 分据制度) or "geju zhidu" (fragmentation system, 割据制度) might be more appropriate than "fengjian zhidu."³²

The paper "The Origin of the Feudal Land Tenure in Japan" (1914), which was published in *The American Historical Review*, was likely provided by Asakawa to Hu Shih during their return voyage. In this work, Asakawa identified historical parallels between Western and Japanese feudalism and analyzed the developmental process of feudal land ownership in Japan. A review of Hu Shih's earlier corpus confirms his lack of prior engagement with the feudal system; it was Asakawa's work that appears to have catalyzed his initial interest in the subject.

In February 1920, a letter from Hu Shih to Liao Zhongkai, the founder of the journal *Jianshe* (*Construction*), was published in that periodical. The correspondence challenged the historical authenticity of the well-field system (*jingtian zhidu*, 井田制度), a land-holding arrangement believed to have been operational during China's Zhou Dynasty. This system, conceptually structured on the Chinese character for "well" (*jing*, 井), divided a one-square-li plot into nine sections. The central plot was designated as "public land," while the surrounding eight plots were distributed to eight families as "private land." The eight families were obligated to cooperatively cultivate the public land and render its harvest to the state as a form of taxation. The system was historically idealized by figures such as Mencius as a model of equitable land distribution.

In response to Hu Hanmin's paper asserting the historical reality of the well-field system, Hu Shih contested this claim. He referenced Asakawa Kan'ichi's research to advance the following argument:

The ancient feudal system was by no means as simplistic as described in texts such as the *Mencius*, the *Rites of Zhou*, or the Royal Regulations. In antiquity, tribes evolved into numerous small states, with countless semi-civilized ethnic groups both within and beyond their borders. The royal house was merely the strongest among these states, enabling it to hold a nominal, religious, and political leader. In any case, it is impossible that a neatly partitioned "tofu block"-

³¹ Sang Bing, *Guoxue and Hanxue: Records of Academic Exchange between China and the World in Modern Times* (国学与汉学 近代中外学界交往录), Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 1999, p. 182.

³² Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, pp. 582–583.

like feudal system existed over those millennia. To study China's feudal era, we should draw comparisons with European medieval feudalism and Japan's early modern feudal system (封建制度). We must break away from the "tofu block" concept of feudalism and instead adopt a scientific approach, complemented by historical imagination, to rediscover what the so-called feudal system of ancient times truly entailed (Japanese scholars such as Asakawa Kan'ichi have conducted highly scientific research on Japan's feudal system).³³

Hu Shih's critique of the well-field system was premised upon a fundamental point: the absence of historical evidence to substantiate the existence of a land tenure system partitioned into plots resembling a *doufugan* (a firm, rectangular type of tofu utilized in Chinese cuisine). He maintained that such a system would have been politically unfeasible for its historical period, asserting that the well-field system, as idealized by figures such as Mencius, should be regarded as a utopian construct. Furthermore, Hu Shih proposed that the term for the feudal system, "*fengjian zhidu*" (封建制度), was susceptible to misinterpretation and that the alternative nomenclature "*geju zhidu*" (割据制度) would be more accurate. Hu Shih's views, articulated in this correspondence, can be interpreted as a concrete application of the ideas he began to formulate after perusing Asakawa Kan'ichi's paper, as documented in his diary.

In January 1923, the Institute of National Studies (*Guoxuemen*) at Peking University inaugurated its journal *Guoxue Jikan*. As chairman of the editorial board, Hu Shih published his "Declaration on the Launch of *Guoxue Jikan*" in the inaugural issue, in which he provided his working definition of "national studies" (*guoxue*, 国学). According to Hu Shih, "*guoxue*" was an abbreviation for "*guogu xue*" (国故学), with "*guogu*" being defined as "all past culture and history in China."³⁴

As key tenets for future engagement with "national studies," Hu Shih listed the following three recommendations:

- (1) Broaden the scope of national studies research through a historical lens.
- (2) Categorize the materials for national studies research through systematic organization.
- (3) Supplement the organization and interpretation of national studies materials through comparative research.³⁵

Regarding the third recommendation, Hu Shih utilized the example of "*fengjian zhidu*" (封建制度), stating, "We have long been misled by the square-shaped enfeoffment theory, which has subsequently impeded a clear conceptual understanding. Now, if we compare it with the feudal systems of medieval Europe and Japan, we can readily comprehend it." Here, too, he employed the example of "*fengjian zhidu*" to advocate for the efficacy of comparative research in the process of "systematizing the national past."

This analysis suggests that Hu Shih's engagement with feudalism, which is manifested in his theories on "systematizing the national past" and "national studies," was substantially influenced by his intellectual interactions with Asakawa Kan'ichi.

Prior to this, Chen Duxiu had already advanced an argument in the journal *Xin Qingnian*

³³ Hu Shih, "A Critique of the Well-Field System" (井田弁). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 1, p. 392.

³⁴ Hu Shih, "Declaration on the Launch of *Guoxue Jikan*" (『国学季刊』 發刊宣言). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 2, p. 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

that attributed various societal pathologies in China to the persistence of a feudal system.³⁶ This broader conceptualization of feudalism gained widespread intellectual acceptance in the 1920s, influenced by Marxist thought, including the theses of Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and the Comintern. Within this intellectual milieu, two major scholarly controversies emerged within the Chinese academic community. The first, the so-called “Debate on the Nature of Chinese Society,” unfolded from the late 1920s to the early 1930s and focused on whether Chinese society should be characterized as “feudal” or “semi-feudal,” a determination that had direct ramifications for revolutionary strategy. The second, the “Debate on Chinese Social History,” revolved around the interpretation and application of the concept of feudalism, and further encompassed discussions concerning the existence of the Asiatic Mode of Production and the institution of slavery in Chinese history.

Although Hu Shih was not directly engaged in these debates, he functioned as a vigorous critic of the ambiguous application of the concept of “feudalism.” His essay “Where We Are Headed,” published in the journal *Xinyue* (*New Moon*) in December 1930, serves as a primary illustrative example. This piece was composed subsequent to Hu Shih’s proposal that his colleagues at the journal each contribute an article on the thematic inquiry of “how we should solve China’s problems.” He authored this essay in response to the counter-suggestion that they should first clarify their fundamental attitudes on the matter.³⁷

In this essay, Hu Shih identified five primary impediments China was obligated to surmount: poverty, disease, ignorance, corruption, and disorder. He defined the ultimate objective as the establishment of a “peaceful, prosperous, civilized, modern, and unified nation.”³⁸ Hu Shih rejected the necessity of a violent revolution to achieve these objectives, advocating instead for gradual change. He contended that those who resorted to violent revolution were merely utilizing abstract slogans such as “the target of the Chinese revolution is the feudal class” or “the target of the Chinese revolution is feudal forces.” Hu Shih asserted that neither a feudal class nor feudal forces were extant in contemporary China. Consequently, he maintained that, to address the core systemic problems, one must directly confront empirical reality rather than be misled by vacuous slogans.

As a successor to the journal *Xinyue*, *Duli Pinglun* (*Independent Review*) was established in May 1932. A scholarly debate concerning the form of government in China was conducted within its pages. Hu Shih, the editor-in-chief of this journal, countered the historian Jiang Tingfu, who supported the establishment of an “autocratic” government, citing the Tudor Dynasty in England, the Bourbon Dynasty in France, and the Romanov Dynasty in Russia as necessary precursors to “revolution.” Hu Shih asserted that Jiang was conflating political unification with autocracy.³⁹

Hu Shih asserted that autocracy was not only an unnecessary prerequisite for nation-building but was fundamentally incompatible with China’s unique historical trajectory. He highlighted a key structural divergence between European and Chinese history: while former feudal classes in Europe evolved to lead a new bourgeois society, China’s feudal period had concluded more than two millennia prior. Specifically, with the establishment of the civil service examination

³⁶ Feng Tianyu, *A Study of “Fengjian” (Feudalism)*, Revised Edition (『封建』考論 修訂版), Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2010, pp. 192–215.

³⁷ Zhang Qing, *The “Hu Shih School of Scholars” and Modern Chinese Liberalism* (“胡適派学人群”与現代中国自由主義), Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2004, pp. 160–162.

³⁸ Hu Shih, “Which Road Should We Take” (我們走那條路). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 4, pp. 455–470.

³⁹ Hu Shih, “Nation-Building and Despotism” (建国与專制). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, pp. 671–677; Hu Shih, “Revisiting Nation-Building and Despotism” (再論建国与專制). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, pp. 680–686; Jiang Tingfu, “Revolution and Despotism” (革命与專制), *Duli Pinglun*, no. 80 (December 1933): 2–5.

system, a fixed ruling class ceased to be extant. Consequently, it was infeasible for an “autocratic” monarch to constitute the core of a new government. Owing to these historical distinctions, Hu Shih contended that democracy, rather than autocracy, constituted the appropriate trajectory for China.

The path to war between Japan and the United States

During his student tenure in the United States, Hu Shih articulated distrust of Japan's diplomatic posture, particularly its presentation of the Twenty-One Demands to China. Concurrently, his diary reveals a critical perspective on his own nation, observing: “Our nation's scholars frequently express disdain for Japan, neglecting to explore its civilization and, furthermore, failing to seek avenues for fostering sincere communication between the two nations. This constitutes a grave error.”⁴⁰ This position, which advocated for learning from Japan, represented a consistent thread in Hu Shih's thought and can also be confirmed after his return to China.

In May 1921, during a visit to Beijing, Uchigasaki Sakusaburō, a Japanese scholar of English literature, proposed a concept of “Sino-Japanese mutual assistance.” In response, Hu Shih argued that anti-Japanese sentiment in China originated from the fact that only a select minority of the numerous Chinese individuals who had pursued studies in Japan, such as Zhou Zuoren, possessed a genuine comprehension of Japanese culture.⁴¹

Furthermore, following his approximately ten-month trip from July 1926, which included sojourns in the Soviet Union, Europe, and the United States, Hu Shih concluded that Japan had presented the most favorable impression.⁴² He observed that the Japanese populace, in contrast to their Chinese counterparts, worked diligently to construct a material foundation that emulated Western society. He likened the relationship between China and Japan to the fable of the tortoise and the hare, contending that the Chinese people must relinquish their self-conceit and pursue steady, sustained progress.

Reflecting his intellectual posture and internationalist perspective on “non-contention” dating from his tenure in the United States, Hu Shih initially advocated for a peaceful resolution with Japan during the 1931 Manchurian Incident, thereby seeking to avert military conflict. He established organizations such as the “Self-Conscious National Salvation Society” to promote this objective.⁴³ This stance, however, should not be interpreted as one of unqualified acquiescence to Japanese aggression. His involvement in the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) offers a counterexample, illustrating the complexity that characterized his diplomatic position.

The IPR was a non-governmental organization formally established in July 1925 in the wake of an international conference convened in Honolulu, Hawaii. Initiated by the Young Men's Christian Association, it is regarded as a precursor to contemporary non-governmental organizations. Its formation was particularly opportune, coinciding with escalating tensions in the Pacific region, as evidenced by the U.S. enactment of the Japanese Exclusion Act in July 1924.

The IPR established its mission to foster scholarly research and inquiry into issues concerning the Pacific region. It convened international conferences on an approximately biennial schedule. Following previous meetings in Honolulu and Kyoto, the fourth conference was scheduled to be

⁴⁰ Hu Shih, “Study Abroad Diary.” In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, pp. 26–27.

⁴¹ Hu Shih, “Diary.” In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 29, p. 238.

⁴² Ren Qian, “Impressions of Mr. Hu Shizhi on His Return from His Travels” (胡適之先生漫遊回來的感想), *Shenghuo Zhoukan*, vol. 3, no. 14 (February 1928): 155.

⁴³ Chou Min-Chih, *Hu Shih and Intellectual Choice in Modern China*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984, pp. 101–103.

held in Hangzhou, a decision made at the recommendation of the Chinese branch.⁴⁴

In July 1931, in preparation for the fourth international conference of the IPR, Hu Shih assumed the chairmanship, succeeding Yu Rizhang, who had resigned due to illness.⁴⁵ Following the Manchurian Incident, Hu Shih and his colleagues initially proposed the postponement of the conference, operating under the belief that a shared forum for a proper discussion of Sino-Japanese relations had been compromised. However, they soon re-evaluated their position, viewing the conference as a crucial opportunity to present “China’s case” to the international community.⁴⁶ They subsequently relocated the venue from Hangzhou to Shanghai and proceeded with the conference as originally scheduled.

The conference was formally convened from October 21 to November 2, 1931, with delegates in attendance from Japan, China, the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Philippines. Observers from the Dutch East Indies, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the League of Nations were additionally present.⁴⁷ Although the “Manchurian Problem” was not formally inscribed on the agenda, it swiftly became the central focus of deliberation.⁴⁸ Chinese representatives denounced the actions of the Japanese military as illegitimate, while the Japanese delegation rejected these assertions.

One of the scholars engaged in the research and activities of the Japan IPR from its inception in 1925 was Takagi Yasaka, a professor at the Imperial University of Tokyo. In December 1931, shortly after the Shanghai conference, Takagi, a specialist in American studies, expressed profound concern about the future following the Manchurian Incident in a letter addressed to his friend Asakawa Kan’ichi.⁴⁹ In the correspondence, he also conveyed his steadfast resolve in the face of this “serious trial,” stating: “It’s time for us to shed the overly grand facade of a victorious, first-class nation. My sincere hope is to truly re-evaluate ourselves and rebuild the lives of our people from the ground up.”

In September of the following year, Takagi Yasaka published a paper entitled “Reflections on the Manchurian Problem and the History of American Expansion” in the journal *Kaizō* (*Reconstruction*).⁵⁰ In this work, he contended that Japan, in instigating the Manchurian Incident, was motivated by beliefs analogous to America’s “Manifest Destiny” during its period of westward expansion. He further criticized politicians and commentators who, by disregarding the principles of post-World War I internationalism, advocated for an “Asian Monroe Doctrine.”

In February of the same year, Asakawa Kan’ichi also corresponded with Ōkubo Toshitake, a member of the House of Peers, to condemn Japan’s military activities in the Manchurian Incident

⁴⁴ Zhang Jing, *A Study of the China Institute of Pacific Relations* (中国太平洋国際学会研究), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2012, pp. 62–64.

⁴⁵ Ouyang Junxi, “Hu Shih and the Institute of Pacific Relations: Also on the Dilemma of Modern Chinese Liberalism” (胡適与太平洋国際学会 兼論現代中国自由主義的兩難处境), *Anhui Shixue*, 2006, no. 1 (January 2006): 93.

⁴⁶ Hu Shih, “Diary.” In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 32, pp. 145–146.

⁴⁷ Green, Elizabeth, “Conference trends in China: a general indication of round table discussion,” *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1932): 1.

⁴⁸ Katagiri Nobuo, *A Study of the Institute of Pacific Relations: Focusing on the Activities of the Japanese IPR during the Interwar Period* (太平洋問題調査会の研究 戦間期日本IPRの活動を中心として), Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2003, pp. 206–221.

⁴⁹ *Collection of Asakawa Kan’ichi’s Correspondence Materials* (朝河貫一書簡資料集), Archival Call Number B95–2, Manuscripts and Archives, Fukushima Prefectural Library.

⁵⁰ Takagi Yasaka, “The Manchurian Problem and a Review of the History of American Expansion: A Liberal Viewpoint on Independent Diplomacy” (満洲問題と米国膨張史の回顧 自主外交に対する自由主義的見解), *Kaizō*, vol. 14, no. 9 (September 1932): 87–93.

and the First Shanghai Incident.⁵¹ He asserted that these actions constituted a grave error that severely damaged America's perception of Japan and violated the Covenant of the League of Nations. Having cultivated a deepened scholarly rapport since their initial meeting in 1919, both Asakawa and Takagi shared a pervasive sense of crisis regarding Japan's increasing international isolation in the wake of the Manchurian Incident and were actively issuing warnings concerning the situation.

The Fifth International Conference of the IPR was convened in Banff, Canada, from August 14 to 28, 1933. Prior to the conference, Hu Shih undertook a stopover in Japan in June, where he met with delegates of the Japanese IPR.⁵² On that occasion, Takagi Yasaka was among the individuals who escorted Hu Shih from Yokohama Port to Tokyo.

Prior to departing Shanghai, Hu Shih had been informed by the journalist Matsumoto Shigeharu, a close acquaintance of Takagi Yasaka, that Takagi was advocating for a four-nation Pacific conference (Japan, China, the U.S., and the U.K.) to resolve the Sino-Japanese issue. In alignment with Takagi's proposal, Hu Shih argued at the conference for the imperative of directly addressing the problem. He proposed two viable approaches: (1) the formation of a special conference with a select few members from the Japanese and Chinese IPR, or (2) the establishment by the IPR of a "Special Committee on Sino-Japanese Problems" comprising impartial scholars from various countries.

During his sojourn in Japan, Hu Shih countered the assertion made by Satō Yasunosuke, a former army major general and member of the House of Representatives, who had stated that the status of Manchukuo was immutable. Hu Shih contended that the issue ought to be approached not from the perspective of any particular nation, but from the standpoint of membership within the IPR. That evening, Takagi Yasaka paid a visit to Hu Shih at his lodgings and lauded his remarks as highly significant, commending him specifically for having accurately identified the flaws in the Japanese side's posture.

During the series of events surrounding the establishment of Manchukuo on March 1, 1932, Hu Shih persisted in seeking a rapprochement with Japan. For instance, he acclaimed the report published that October by the Lytton Commission—a fact-finding mission dispatched by the League of Nations—as a "fair judgment."⁵³ Hu Shih adopted a position of accepting the establishment of an autonomous government in Manchuria, a stance that encountered vigorous opposition within China.

Furthermore, despite vigorous calls for full-scale military engagement, Hu Shih expressed support for the Tanggu Truce, signed between China and Japan in May 1933, asserting that it constituted a necessary measure to preserve the North China region.⁵⁴ He advocated for a long-term strategic policy of "pro-Japanese for function, and self-strengthening for substance" for the subsequent two to three decades, contending that China ought to cultivate its national strength through strategic patience and self-restraint. A shift in this conciliatory approach began to become apparent around the time of his intellectual exchange with Murobuse Kōshin, the chief editor of the magazine *Nihon Hyōron* (*Japan Review*).⁵⁵

In October 1935, at the request of Murobuse Kōshin, Hu Shih authored an article entitled

⁵¹ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa*, pp. 446–459.

⁵² Hu Shih, "Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 32, pp. 209–217.

⁵³ Hu Shih, "A Report Representing World Public Opinion" (一個代表世界公論的報告). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, pp. 502–510.

⁵⁴ Hu Shih, "The Importance of Preserving North China" (保全華北的重要). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, pp. 628–634.

⁵⁵ Hu Shih et al, *Selected Correspondence of Hu Shih* (胡適來往書信選), vol. 2, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1980, p. 575.

“A Respectful Message to the Japanese People.”⁵⁶ In this piece, he contended that, rather than focusing on an unsubstantiated “Sino-Japanese friendship,” the fundamental issue was dismantling the prevailing “Sino-Japanese animosity.” He warned that the collective animosity of 400 million Chinese citizens had reached a critical threshold, with the potential to erupt into widespread rebellion imminently.

Hu Shih urged Japan, drawing upon its legacy from the Meiji Restoration, not to allow its accumulated glory to be vitiated in a manner analogous to the reversal of Germany’s international standing following World War I. The article was subsequently translated and published in the November 1935 issue of the *Nihon Hyōron*, although sections containing criticisms of the Japanese military were intentionally subjected to censorship.

In response, Murobuse Kōshin acknowledged Hu Shih’s preceding arguments but countered with a critical inquiry: “Have the political leaders of your nation undertaken efforts to placate and convince the populace for the sake of a genuine rapprochement with Japan?”⁵⁷ In his rejoinder, Hu Shih clarified that his criticism was not directed indiscriminately at the Japanese people. He provided a personal example to illustrate his distinction, stating, “For instance, while I may resent certain Japanese militarists, I can simultaneously hold deep respect and affection for my friend Professor Takagi Yasaka.”⁵⁸

Hu Shih’s subsequent meeting with Takagi Yasaka transpired in July 1936, during a stopover in Japan on his route to the Sixth International Conference of the IPR. When Takagi engaged in a conversation with Hu Shih over a meal with delegates of the Japanese IPR, he reportedly felt profound regret at their parting.

The Sixth International Conference of the IPR was convened from August 15 to 29, 1936, at a hotel situated in Yosemite National Park (U.S.). In a significant departure from his preceding appearances, Hu Shih delivered a speech that directly criticized Japan for impeding China’s initiatives toward self-reliance. This precipitated a heated verbal exchange with the Japanese delegation, including former Foreign Minister Yoshizawa Kenkichi, who rebutted Hu Shih’s assertions.⁵⁹

Concurrently, Takagi Yasaka, who was absent from the conference, articulated his distress concerning the situation in a letter addressed to Asakawa Kan’ichi. He discussed Japan’s intensifying inclination toward fascism and revealed his personal intellectual struggle, stating: “Is it not because there are no strong people who can bravely say ‘no’ anywhere? Why can we not find such people in our country? These kinds of questions go through my mind day and night as a student of history.”⁶⁰

On September 8, 1937, Hu Shih, having been appointed by Chiang Kai-shek as an unofficial diplomatic envoy to the United States, issued a statement to Gao Zongjia as he departed Nanjing. Reflecting upon the initial attempts at a peaceful resolution, he remarked, “Our efforts in early August to pursue the ‘greatest endeavor for peace before the outbreak of war’ were indeed worthwhile. However, we must acknowledge that the past month of fighting has proven that our concerns at the time were perhaps excessive.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ Hu Shih, “A Respectful Message to the Japanese People” (敬告日本国民). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 22, pp. 380–385.

⁵⁷ Murobuse Kōshin, “A Letter in Reply to Hu Shizhi” (胡適之に答ふる書), *Nihon Hyōron*, vol. 10, no. 12 (December 1935): 236.

⁵⁸ Hu Shih, “Letter” (書信). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 24, p. 245.

⁵⁹ Hu Songping, *First Draft of the Long Chronological Biography of Mr. Hu Shizhi*, vol. 4, p. 245.

⁶⁰ *Collection of Asakawa Kan’ichi’s Correspondence Materials*, Archival Call Number B95–3, Manuscripts and Archives, Fukushima Prefectural Library.

⁶¹ Hu Shih, “Diary.” In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 32, p. 668.

Hu Shih's conviction in China's capacity for military resistance was bolstered by the military engagements of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and the Second Shanghai Incident. During his initial stopover in San Francisco on September 29, he delivered a speech entitled "Can China Win?" at the Commonwealth Club. In his address, he delineated the requisite conditions that determine the outcome of a war.⁶² Regarding one of these conditions—cooperation from overseas—he subtly appealed for material and diplomatic assistance to China. While respecting the neutral stance of the United States, he contended that neutrality alone was insufficient for the preservation of peace.

On October 1, Hu Shih delivered a similar address on CBS Radio. On October 20, he and Ambassador Wang Zhengting held their inaugural meeting with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a fellow alumnus of Columbia University. During his nine-month sojourn, Hu Shih continued to travel extensively across the United States, presenting nearly 100 public addresses.⁶³

While Hu Shih was delivering his public addresses, Asakawa Kan'ichi corresponded with his acquaintances in Japan, warning them of the accelerating deterioration of public opinion toward Japan in the United States. In a letter dated March 6, 1938, addressed to his former junior high school classmate and current Waseda University professor Nakagiri Kakutarō, Asakawa observed that while Japan appeared to appreciate America's neutral stance, "public opinion in the U.S., from top to bottom, has taken a completely anti-Japanese stance."⁶⁴ He further noted that the Japanese military's explanations regarding the reported atrocities in Nanjing were losing credibility among the international community.

Perceiving a significant discrepancy between the official narrative articulated in Japan and the information reported by foreign media concerning Sino-Japanese relations, Asakawa Kan'ichi transmitted newspaper clippings from sources such as *The New York Times* to his colleagues and acquaintances. Through this extant network, he sought to raise awareness among leading political and journalistic figures, including Hatoyama Ichirō, Saitō Takao, and Ogata Taketora, regarding the divergent international perceptions of the conflict.⁶⁵

On September 17, 1938, Hu Shih was formally appointed by Chiang Kai-shek as Ambassador to the United States, succeeding Wang Zhengting. The September 20th edition of *The New York Times* featured an article on Hu Shih under the headline "A Welcome Ambassador," which characterized him as an indispensable figure for cultivating mutual understanding between China and the United States. The article expressed the anticipation that he would substantially reinforce the bonds of sympathy connecting the two nations. Given his regular perusal of *The New York Times*, it is highly probable that Asakawa Kan'ichi was cognizant of this article.

Upon his formal appointment as ambassador, Hu Shih continued his public relations campaign through speeches and publications, framing the Second Sino-Japanese War as a conflict between "autocracy" and "democracy." He contended that Japan, owing to its prolonged "feudal" era, retained pronounced militaristic elements, a situation he posited as analogous to Germany. Conversely, he argued that China had successfully abrogated feudalism more than two millennia prior and had cultivated a form of democracy more consonant with Western ideals.

According to Hu Shih, Japan's rapid Westernization was merely a superficial process, whereas China's constituted a more deliberate and fundamental trajectory. In this manner, Hu Shih

⁶² Hu Shih, "Can China Win?" In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 37, pp. 403–417.

⁶³ Hu Huijun, *Hu Shih During the Sino-Japanese War: The Evolution of His War View and His Lecture Activities in the United States* (抗日戰爭時期的胡適 其戰爭觀的變化及在美國的演講活動), Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2013, p. 82.

⁶⁴ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa*, p. 512.

⁶⁵ Abe Yoshio, *The Last "Japanese": The Life of Asakawa Kan'ichi* (最後の「日本人」朝河貫一の生涯), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1983, pp. 167–173.

underscored China's perceived superiority by highlighting the contrast in their respective "feudal" histories.⁶⁶ His argument represents a reinterpretation of Japan's once-lauded historical past as an impediment to its modernization.⁶⁷

The outcome of the Second Sino-Japanese War was contingent upon the diplomatic and military posture of the United States. In an effort to persuade the U.S. to formally enter the conflict against Japan, Hu Shih engaged in an active lobbying campaign. It has been contended that Hu Shih played a significant role in the breakdown of U.S.-Japan diplomatic negotiations, as China's sustained opposition to a settlement ultimately contributed to the failure of these deliberations.⁶⁸

In contrast to Hu Shih's lobbying efforts to persuade the United States to enter the conflict, Asakawa Kan'ichi sought to avert a full-scale war by orchestrating a high-level diplomatic appeal. His proposed initiative involved having President Franklin D. Roosevelt dispatch a personal letter to the Japanese emperor, advocating for peace and bilateral amity. Asakawa's concept was communicated to U.S. officials through the intermediary Langdon Warner, which resulted in the dispatch of the presidential letter on December 6.

However, that same evening, President Roosevelt privately articulated his reservations to Hu Shih, stating that the letter might prove to be ineffectual. As Roosevelt had indeed predicted, the epistle was delivered to the Emperor only moments prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, ultimately demonstrating its insufficiency in averting the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Japan.

Expectations of, and disappointment over, democratization

Upon receiving news of Japan's surrender on August 14, 1945, Hu Shih dispatched a telegram to Wang Shijie on August 24 with a message intended for Mao Zedong.⁶⁹ In the telegram, Hu Shih proposed that, in light of the prevailing domestic and international circumstances, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party ought to abandon the utilization of military force and prepare to constitute the second-largest political party in China.

Citing the example of the British Labour Party, Hu Shih noted that the party, notwithstanding its limited initial vote count, had evolved into a major political force with 12 million votes through peaceful and patient development. He contended that if the Chinese Communist Party were to adopt a similar strategy of incremental growth, its future potential would be boundless. The telegram containing this counsel was subsequently transmitted from Wang Shijie, who was present at the Chongqing negotiations, to Mao Zedong.

In June 1946, Hu Shih's aspirations for a peaceful outcome were fundamentally undermined with the resumption of the Chinese Civil War between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. Returning from the United States around the same time, Hu Shih assumed the presidency of Peking University in September and commenced the undertaking of institutional reconstruction.

On August 1, 1947, Hu Shih delivered an address on the Kuomintang Central Radio Station in Peking, in which he discussed the ideal set of values shared by a global culture. He identified three key components of this ideal: (1) scientific achievements, (2) a "socialized" economic

⁶⁶ Ouyang Zhesheng, *Exploring Hu Shih's Spiritual World* (探尋胡適的精神世界), Beijing: Peking University Press, 2012, pp. 257–258.

⁶⁷ Ogata Yasushi, "The Destiny of Philosophy: Hu Shih and Dewey" (哲学の運命 胡適とデューイ), *Chūgoku*, no. 19 (June 2004): 264–266.

⁶⁸ Hyer, Paul, "Hu Shih: the Diplomacy of Gentle Persuasion," In Richard Dean Burns and Edward M. Bennett ed., *Diplomats in Crisis: United States-Chinese-Japanese relations, 1919–1941*, Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1974, pp. 153–170.

⁶⁹ Hu Shih et al, *Selected Correspondence of Hu Shih*, vol. 2, pp. 26–27.

system, and (3) a democratic political system. He substantiated the third component, a democratic political system, with the following rationale:

In my view as a student of history, the trajectory of world culture has been on a clear path toward democracy and freedom for the past three to four hundred years. The recent three-decade surge of collective authoritarianism, which opposes freedom and democracy, is merely a minor setback or a small counter-current. We shouldn't let this thirty-year reversal erase the grand, three-hundred-year-long trend toward democracy and freedom.⁷⁰

Hu Shih consistently emphasized the significance of “democracy,” which he posited as the optimal choice for China in preference to “autocracy.” He contended that this political framework was deeply embedded in China's historical trajectory.

Similarly, as Japan intensified its national control in the period preceding the conflict with the United States, Asakawa Kan'ichi consistently underscored the historical significance of “democracy” in his correspondence with his academic and political acquaintances. His repeated emphasis on this concept stood in stark opposition to the prevailing nationalistic and authoritarian currents in Japan:

A liberal political system is the highest and most naturally rational form of government humanity has achieved to date, but it is also the most difficult. It carries the greatest risk of internal failure, as the sense of individual responsibility, which is the foundational basis of this system, is the most prone to slackening. For this reason, it is a form of government that requires constant self-reflection and self-exertion more than any other. ... Authoritarian states like Germany, Italy, and Japan have fallen into a defeatism that sees only the flaws of democracy, and have taken a shortcut focused solely on efficiency. This is not only a deviant path straying from the course of great history, but also a cowardly act of weak will, succumbing to difficulties.⁷¹

Asakawa Kan'ichi anticipated that Japan's national crisis would compel its populace to recognize their errors. As he defined the concept, “democracy was the most difficult form of government, one that made constant self-reflection, reform, and unceasing trials or experiments its lifeblood.”⁷² Ultimately, Asakawa's aspirations were not realized, and Japan irrevocably committed to the Pacific War. Although he constituted a notable exception who retained his academic freedom in the United States even after the war, he was nonetheless pervaded by a profound sense of sorrow and disillusionment.

In the People's Republic of China, established by the victorious Communist Party, the concept of “democracy” advocated by Hu Shih was superseded by a conceptually similar yet fundamentally distinct notion: Mao Zedong's “New Democracy.” Furthermore, a large-scale campaign dedicated to the critique of Hu Shih's thought was launched in the 1950s, thereby effectively repudiating the very actions that had invoked the discourse of “democracy.” Concurrently, in Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek maintained a martial law regime that functioned, in essence, as an autocracy.

In 1917, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih—both scholars educated in the United States—encountered one another fortuitously while transiting by vessel to their respective home countries. Both were specialists in historical studies, and both shared the conviction that

⁷⁰ Hu Shih, “The Current Trend of World Culture” (眼前世界文化的趨向). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 22, p. 693.

⁷¹ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa*, p. 553.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 553.

democracy constituted a universal human institution with profound historical antecedents. This fortuitous meeting marked the commencement of a sustained intellectual rapport.

In moments of national crisis, both individuals found themselves compelled to transcend the confines of purely academic engagement. They not only articulated candid critiques of domestic affairs but also assumed roles on the international stage in defense of their nations' interests. Yet, as global tensions escalated toward open conflict between Japan and the United States, historical circumstance positioned them on opposing sides.

Ultimately, these pro-American intellectuals became, in an ironic sense, casualties of their respective nations' historical trajectories. Asakawa Kan'ichi's admonitions against Japan's increasingly militaristic course were systematically disregarded as the country descended into conflict, leaving him in profound despair throughout the duration of the war. Hu Shih's aspirations for a peaceful and democratic China, meanwhile, were thwarted by the resumption of the Chinese Civil War and the ascendancy of the Communist Party, whose articulation of "New Democracy" diverged fundamentally from his personal vision.

Military Alliances and Terrorism

Leo Tamamizu*

Abstract

This article examines whether and how military alliance commitments shape terrorism within member states. Moving beyond binary alliance membership, it disaggregates alliance obligations into defense, neutrality, nonaggression, and consultation pacts and theorizes why their effects should differ across domestic and transnational terrorism. Using a state-year dataset that merges ATOP (1970–2007) with the calibrated GTD-based measures that distinguish domestic from transnational incidents, I estimate negative binomial models and conduct causal mediation analyses with military personnel, military spending, and police militarization as potential channels. The results show little evidence that defense pacts affect transnational terrorism, directly or indirectly. By contrast, once mediators are accounted for, defense pacts are associated with a substantively meaningful reduction in domestic terrorism, driven primarily by direct (non-mediated) pathways. These results highlight the need to tailor alliance-based counterterrorism strategies to the type of terrorist threat.

Introduction¹

The War on Terror is still ongoing. The 9/11 attacks triggered a surge of worldwide panic and xenophobia and prompted Washington and its allies to perceive threats as emanating not only from sovereign states but also from nonstate actors. On the one hand, this transformation in threat perceptions among the United States and its allies led to a shift in the role of long-standing alliances—such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and bilateral alliances in Asia—from instruments primarily designed for interstate deterrence toward broader functions oriented around counterterrorism and expeditionary operations. On the other hand, this expanded role generated concerns among citizens and policy elites in the United States and its allies that deeper alliance involvement in counterterrorism campaigns could increase their exposure to terrorist retaliation.² Against this backdrop, this article investigates whether membership of a military alliance causes terrorist attacks against allied states and if so, why.

Although the literature on terrorism expanded rapidly after the September 11, 2001 attacks, relatively fewer studies have examined the consequences of alliance formation/maintenance on

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¹ This article draws on a portion of my doctoral dissertation submitted to the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Please email tamamizu@jia.or.jp if you are interested in further analyses and the replication data.

² John E. Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

terrorism.³ Thomas Plümper and Eric Neumayer provide a pioneering empirical analysis of how military alliances shape transnational terrorism. Their analysis shows that when the host state of a terrorist organization enters an alliance with another state, the number of terrorist attacks against civilians of the allied state increases—especially when the alliance involves a significant power asymmetry.⁴ David Cunningham also provides an empirical finding that US military bases and alliances tend to increase terrorist attacks in allied states hosting US bases.⁵ These findings indicate that alliances can unintentionally generate negative security externalities among member states.

However, these studies have two drawbacks. First, although they suggest that alliance commitments may sometimes generate deterrent effects against terrorism—or, at minimum, that certain types of commitments should not increase terrorist violence—they do not systematically conceptualize or theorize the heterogeneous effects of *alliance obligations*. As a result, alliances are typically treated as undifferentiated institutional arrangements rather than as bundles of distinct commitments that may shape terrorist incentives in qualitatively different ways. Second, this theoretical under-specification carries over into empirical research designs. Most existing studies rely on a binary indicator of alliance membership, thereby obscuring potentially important variation across alliance types and obligation structures. Consequently, both theoretically and empirically, the literature has yet to capture the full diversity of ways in which military alliances may influence terrorism.

The Effects of Military Alliances on Terrorism

Military alliances are considered a signaling device for a state to send to the source of threat its firm resolve to address military contingencies with allies (Walt 1987; Snyder 1997).⁶ Forming and maintaining alliances is costly for the state because doing so forces the state to lose diplomatic and military flexibility, increase economic dependency on allies, and face alliance dilemma—entrapment and abandonment.⁷ Because of these risks, however, alliances should not be formed lightly. Rather, states are expected to enter and sustain alliance commitments only when the anticipated security benefits outweigh the substantial political, military, and economic costs associated with alliance membership. Precisely because alliances entail credible costs and constrain future policy autonomy, they function as a powerful signaling device, conveying a state's

³ Alberto Abadie, "Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism," *American Economic Review*, vol. 96, no. 2, 2006, pp. 50–56; Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Erica Chenoweth, "Democratic Competition and Terrorist Activity," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2010, pp. 16–30; James A. Piazza, "Rooted in Poverty? Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2006, pp. 159–177; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 1, 2003, pp. 75–90; Khusrav Gaibulloev, James A. Piazza, and Todd Sandler, "Regime Types and Terrorism," *International Organization*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2017, pp. 491–522; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 4th ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State* (New York: John Wiley, 1986); Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2006).

⁴ Thomas Plümper and Eric Neumayer, "The Friend of My Enemy Is My Enemy: International Alliances and International Terrorism," *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2010, pp. 75–96.

⁵ David E. Cunningham, "Preventing Civil War: How the Potential for International Intervention Can Deter Conflict Onset," *World Politics*, vol. 68, no. 2, 2016, pp. 307–340.

⁶ Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁷ James D. Morrow, "Alliances: Why Write Them Down?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 3, 2000, pp. 63–83.

resolve and commitment not only to adversaries but also to domestic and international audiences. In this sense, alliance formation represents a costly signal that is difficult to fake, enhancing the credibility of deterrence against military threats.

Military alliances, however, are not uniform institutions; rather, they differ systematically in the *types of obligations* they impose on member states. Existing alliance scholarship distinguishes among several major categories of alliance commitments, most notably defense pacts, nonaggression pacts, neutrality pacts, and consultation agreements.⁸ Defense pacts commit allies to provide military assistance in the event of an external attack, representing the strongest and most costly form of alliance obligation. Nonaggression pacts bind members to refrain from the use of force against one another but do not entail commitments to fight on each other's behalf. Neutrality pacts require states to remain neutral if an ally becomes involved in a conflict with a third party, thereby limiting escalation while avoiding direct military involvement. Consultation pacts, the weakest form of alliance commitment, merely obligate members to consult or exchange information in response to security threats without mandating military action. These alliance types vary markedly in their credibility, costs, and strategic implications, suggesting that they are likely to generate distinct security effects rather than a uniform impact on state behavior or conflict outcomes.

Yet, regardless of these types, the signaling effect becomes ambiguous when it comes to terrorism. Terrorism is fundamentally a tactic aimed at achieving short-term objectives—most notably generating fear among civilians—rather than a strategy designed to replace or directly challenge the incumbent regime.⁹ Although terrorist groups may pursue diverse long-term political goals, their use of violence typically targets soft civilian populations to influence a broader audience.¹⁰ Terrorism does not aim to seize territory, gain control over the state, or directly alter the distribution of political power through war. Instead, terrorism is used as a low-cost, indirect means of imposing psychological and political pressure, and therefore the expected payoff from terrorism is relatively insensitive to shifts in the broader distribution of coercive power between the government and external allies. When a member state experiences terrorism alone, allies may view such incidents as falling below the threshold for meaningful joint action. In turn, terrorist groups therefore do not revise their expectations about the likely response of allied states, and their decision to employ terrorism remains largely unaffected by the presence of alliances.

H1: *Military Alliances have no effects on terrorist activities within member states.*

However, a certain type of military alliance may influence the risk of terrorism within member states through other channels. One important mechanism through which defense pacts can shape this risk is by enhancing a state's military capacity. As discussed, although defense pacts are not typically designed to address terrorism directly, they obligate member states to cooperate militarily in response to broader security contingencies. Such cooperation often involves the provision of

⁸ Brett Ashley Leeds, Jeffrey M. Ritter, Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, and Andrew G. Long, "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815–1944," *International Interactions*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2002, pp. 237–260; Jesse C. Johnson and Brett Ashley Leeds, "Defense Pacts: A Prescription for Peace?" *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, pp. 45–65.

⁹ Jessica A. Stanton, "Terrorism in the Context of Civil War," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2013, pp. 1009–1022; Virginia Page Fortna, "Do Terrorists Win? Rebels' Use of Terrorism and Civil War Outcomes," *International Organization*, vol. 69, no. 3, 2015, pp. 519–556.

¹⁰ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2006, pp. 49–80.

economic assistance, weaponry, and advanced technologies,¹¹ which can significantly strengthen a state's overall military capabilities that can be utilized for counterterrorism activities. As Cullen Hendrix and Joseph Young point out, however, this process of military enhancement can have unintended and counterproductive consequences by reshaping the strategic options available to internal dissidents.¹² In a bargaining framework, the government's military enhancement—often facilitated through defense—raises the expected costs that dissidents would face in conventional or irregular warfare. When the state's military capability increases, the terrorism group's cost of engaging in confrontation becomes substantially higher, while their probability of prevailing in such confrontations declines. Faced with a deteriorating outside option in the conventional bargaining space, dissidents may strategically shift toward terrorism, a tactic that is less affected by the state's strengthened military posture.

Moreover, states that expand and modernize their military capabilities—particularly through alliance-driven cooperation—may simultaneously become less effective at countering terrorism. Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson claim that mechanized or technology-intensive militaries often rely heavily on mobility and firepower, while lacking the local, granular information necessary to identify and disrupt terrorist networks.¹³ From a bargaining perspective, this reduces the government's ability to raise the expected costs of terrorism for dissidents. The government's enhanced capabilities thus do not translate into an increased probability of defeating terrorist threats, creating an incentive for dissidents to exploit this mismatch.

H2a (Mediator effect through military reinforcement): *Defense pacts increase terrorism activities in member states due to military capacities (defense budget and military personnel) enhanced by the cooperation with member states.*

Some scholars argue that counterterrorism primarily falls under the jurisdiction of the police and law enforcement agencies rather than the military.¹⁴ While the military is typically tasked with responding to external threats and safeguarding national sovereignty, it is generally not the first responder to terrorism occurring within a state's borders. Compared to the military, police forces tend to possess more localized knowledge of the social and political environments in which terrorist groups operate and are better positioned to maintain communication with local communities.¹⁵ From this perspective, terrorism is understood as an internal security problem best addressed through policing and judicial institutions. At the same time, military alliances—particularly defense and offense pacts—may indirectly shape counterterrorism outcomes by enhancing police capabilities through militarization, defined as the material, cultural,

¹¹ Paul F. Diehl, "Substitutes or Complements? The Effects of Alliances on Military Spending in Major Power Rivalries," *International Interactions*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1994, pp. 159–176; Michael C. Horowitz, Paul Poast, and Allan C. Stam, "Domestic Signaling of Commitment Credibility: Military Recruitment and Alliance Formation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 61, no. 8, 2017, pp. 1682–1710; T. Clifton Morgan and Glenn Palmer, "A Model of Foreign Policy Substitutability: Selecting the Right Tools for the Job(s)," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2000, pp. 11–32.

¹² Cullen S. Hendrix and Joseph K. Young, "State Capacity and Terrorism: A Two-Dimensional Approach," *Security Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2014, pp. 329–363.

¹³ Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, "Rage against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars," *International Organization* vol. 63, no. 1, 2009, pp. 67–106.

¹⁴ Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1981, pp. 379–399.

¹⁵ Walter C. Ladwig III, "Supporting Allies in Counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2008 pp. 62–88.

organizational, and operational emulation of the military by the police.¹⁶ Although police forces are fundamentally responsible for protecting public spaces and enforcing state authority through the legitimate use of violence,¹⁷ alliance-driven military assistance and training may extend beyond the armed forces to national police organizations. As a result, police forces may adopt a more militarized structure characterized by command-and-control centers, elite squadrons, special operations units, barracked housing, and long-range deployment capabilities.¹⁸

However, similar to the effects of military expansion, this type of external support aimed at enhancing police capacity may generate unintended and counterproductive consequences. De Bruin identifies three major risks associated with police militarization.¹⁹ First, militarized police forces often become less integrated with civilian communities and are more likely to be perceived as threatening or intimidating, reducing opportunities for trust-building and intelligence gathering—both of which are crucial for effective counterterrorism. Second, police units equipped with heavy weaponry and trained for specialized operations may be more prone to the excessive use of force, undermining public support and potentially pushing civilians toward actors employing terrorism. Unlike the military, which operates within established norms, discipline, and rules of engagement, rapidly militarized police forces may lack the professionalization necessary to manage coercive power responsibly, increasing the risk of abuse and eroding public trust. Third, militarized police forces may become overly focused on the prospect of armed confrontation while remaining ill-prepared for sustained combat, creating a mismatch between perceived and actual capabilities. This gap may signal weak resolve to terrorist actors and embolden further attacks. Taken together, these dynamics suggest that defense pacts—by facilitating arms transfers, training, and economic assistance—may inadvertently increase the risk of terrorism through the militarization of police forces, leading to the following hypothesis.

H2b (Mediator effect by police reinforcement): *Defense pacts increase terrorism activities in member states through the militarization of the police of the member states.*

The effects of defense pacts, when mediated through military enhancement, may differ sharply between domestic and transnational terrorism. Alliances often lead to the strengthening of a state's military and police forces, which can serve as a credible deterrent to domestic actors but a potential provocation for transnational groups. Transnational groups often pursue broader ideological or international objectives and are more likely to retaliate against militarization—particularly when it is visibly supported by foreign allies.²⁰ These actors can frame state security enhancements assisted by allies as evidence of foreign oppression, using it to justify escalatory attacks. Furthermore, their operational reach is supported by global networks, international

¹⁶ Peter B. Kraska, "Militarization and Policing—Its Relevance to 21st Century Police," *Policing*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2007, pp. 501–513.

¹⁷ Travis Curtice and Brandon Behlendorf, "Street-level Repression: Protest, Policing, and Dissent in Uganda," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 65, no.1, 2021, pp.166–194.

¹⁸ Erica De Bruin, "Mapping Coercive Institutions: The State Security Forces Dataset, 1960–2010," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 58, no.2, 2021, pp.315–325.

¹⁹ Erica De Bruin, "Police Insurgency: Are More Militarized Police More Effective?" *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol.33, no. 4-5, 2022, pp.742–766.

²⁰ Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 3 (2003), pp.343–361; Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2006).

funding, and safe havens abroad.²¹ For example, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State leveraged extensive infrastructures, from safe havens in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq to networks of operatives and sympathizers across Europe, North Africa, and Southeast Asia, enabling attacks far beyond their home bases, including the 2001 attacks in the United States and the 2015 Paris attacks.²²

In contrast, domestic groups typically aim to influence domestic policies rather than pursuing broader international or ideological goals. Because their aims are limited to national politics, they are less likely to be provoked by the presence of external allies. Rather, when the government is visibly backed by allies and its military and police are reinforced, the rising cost and declining likelihood of success perceived by domestic actors make them more likely to be deterred. Furthermore, domestic actors generally lack access to international resources. Groups like Aum Shinrikyo in Japan or lone actors such as Timothy McVeigh in the United States operated under severe logistical constraints and constant domestic law enforcement monitoring, leaving them vulnerable to disruption (Kaplan and Marshall 1996; Michel and Herbeck 2001; Hamm 1997). This asymmetry in objectives and capabilities implies that alliance-driven military and police enhancements are likely to deter domestic terrorism more effectively than transnational terrorism, which may instead escalate in response.²³

H3 (Transnational vs Domestic Terrorism): *Mediated effects of defense pacts on domestic terrorism are larger than the effects on transnational terrorism.*

This study does not consider offense pacts in its analysis of terrorism. Although alliances oriented toward joint offensive operations could, in theory, alter domestic security environments by reshaping military organization and strategic priorities, as reported, such agreements are entirely absent from the post-Cold War period. As a result, post-1990 data offer no empirical variation with which to identify the effect of offense pacts on terrorist activity. Even extending the analysis backward in time would provide little analytical traction, as offense pacts are exceedingly rare and clustered in earlier historical eras. A meaningful examination of how offense-oriented alliances relate to terrorism would therefore require a broader historical horizon and a separate theoretical treatment tailored to their distinct strategic logic—tasks that lie beyond the scope of this article and are reserved for future research.

Model Specification

Dataset

The analysis of this article employs a state-year dataset that mainly combines two different datasets. The first dataset is the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) dataset (ver

²¹ Martha Crenshaw, “The Subjective Reality of the Terrorist,” in *Current Perspectives on International Terrorism*, ed. Robert O. Slater and Michael Stohl (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), pp. 12–46; Nazli Avdan and Clayton Webb, “The Big, the Bad, and the Dangerous: Explaining Terrorism Targeting Patterns,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2018), pp.3–25; Seung-Whan Choi, “Transnational Terrorist Attacks,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

²² Michael Jensen, Neil Ferguson, and Gary LaFree, “Choosing Where to Fight: Do Social Networks Distinguish American ISIS Foreign Fighters from ISIS-Inspired Terrorists?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 68, no. 1 (2023), online first; Shandon Harris-Hogan, Amarnath Amarasingam, and Lorne L. Dawson, “A Comparative Analysis of Australian and Canadian Foreign Fighters Traveling to Syria and Iraq,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 47, no. 10 (2022), pp. 1230–1260.

²³ David E. Kaplan and Andrew Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World: The Incredible Story of Aum* (London: Hutchinson, 1996); Mark S. Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma: Waco and Ruby Ridge Revenged* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997).

5.0), which covers all military alliances formed between 1815 and 2018.²⁴ The ATOP dataset is particularly well-suited, as it provides detailed information on the formal provisions of military alliances, including whether they entail defense commitments, consultation clauses, or neutrality agreements. This granularity allows for a more precise classification of alliance types and facilitates the disaggregation of their potential deterrent effects on the activities of terrorism.

For terrorism, this study relies on the dataset constructed by Walter Enders, Todd Sandler, and Khusrav Gaibulloev, which is based on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) but explicitly distinguishes between domestic and transnational terrorism.²⁵ While the GTD offers the most comprehensive temporal and spatial coverage of terrorism incidents since 1970, it does not itself provide a clear separation between domestic and transnational attacks. To address this limitation, Enders, Sandler, and Gaibulloev apply a systematic, five-step filtering procedure to identify transnational incidents and calibrate the data to correct for temporal inconsistencies in GTD reporting. By employing their calibrated dataset covering between 1970 and 2007, this study leverages the extensive coverage of the GTD while ensuring a theoretically consistent and replicable classification of terrorism types. Thus, the main dataset combining the ATOP dataset and the GTD dataset ranges from 1970 to 2007.

Independent Variables

I use four separate variables to code alliance obligations: *Defense Pact*, *Neutrality Pact*, *Nonaggression Pact*, and *Consultation Pact*. Following the coding criteria provided by the ATOP dataset, for *Defense Pact*, I assign a value of 1 if a state is a member of a military alliance that obligates member states to defend other members from military contingencies in a given year, and 0 otherwise. For *Neutrality Pact*, I code the variable as 1 if a state is a member of a military alliance that requires member states not to support the enemies of other members in the event of military conflict, and 0 otherwise. For *Nonaggression Pact*, the variable equals 1 if a state is a member of an alliance in which members pledge not to use military force against one another, and 0 otherwise. For *Consultation Pact*, I assign a value of 1 if a state is a member of an alliance that obligates members to consult or exchange information in the event of security concerns or potential conflicts, without requiring military assistance, and 0 otherwise. To consider potential endogeneity, each pact variable is lagged by one year.

Dependent Variables

The GTD dataset is an event-based dataset, differing fundamentally from state-year datasets such as the ATOP. Because terrorism attacks occur far more frequently than civil wars or coups, analyzing them at the event-based level can obscure important variation. To address this, I convert the GTD dataset structure to count data. Furthermore, drawing on the dataset provided by Enders, Sandler, and Gaibulloev, I create two disaggregated count variables: *Domestic Terrorism*, which captures the number of incidents perpetrated by non-state actors who have no transnational support and links, and *Transnational Terrorism*, which counts incidents carried out by non-state actors who are supported by other overseas actors as identified by the authors. Figure I plots the temporal tendency of terrorism during 1970–2007. Domestic terrorism vastly exceeds transnational terrorism each year. Domestic incidents rise steeply from the mid-1970s, peak in the early 1990s, then drop sharply in the late 1990s before a modest mid-2000s rebound. Transnational incidents increase more gradually, reach a much lower crest in the early-mid 1990s, and decline to comparatively low levels thereafter with a small uptick in the mid-2000s. Figure

²⁴ Leeds, Ritter, Mitchell, and Long, op.cit.

²⁵ Enders, Walter, Todd Sandler, and Khusrav Gaibulloev, "Domestic versus Transnational Terrorism: Data, Decomposition, and Dynamics," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol.48, no.3, pp. 319–337.

Figure I: Temporal Tendency of Terrorism during 1970 – 2007

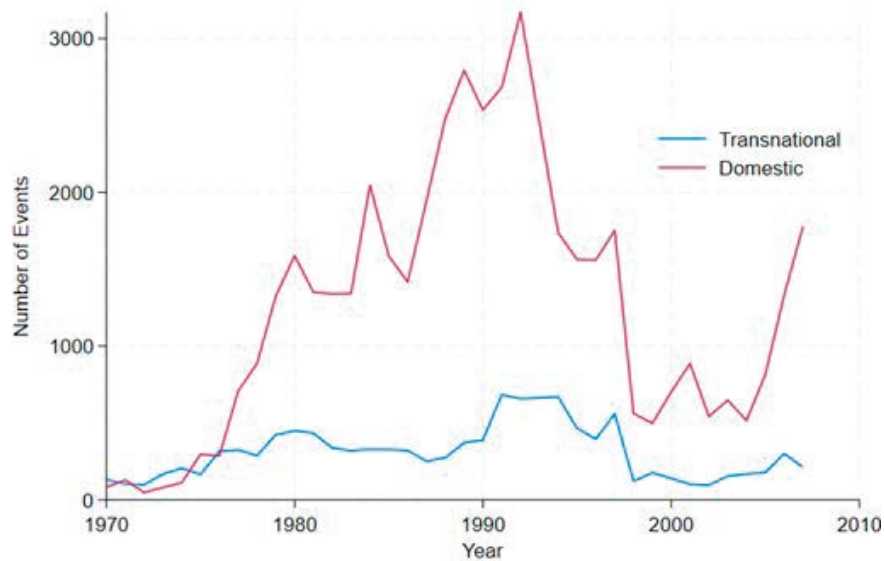
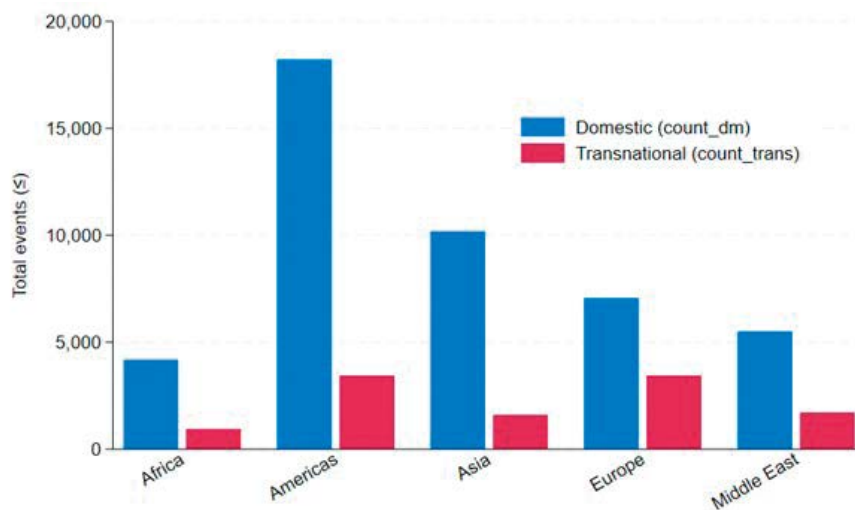


Figure II: The Regional Tendency of Terrorism during 1970 – 2007



II depicts the regional trends of terrorist attacks during the same period. The Americas record by far the largest volume of domestic incidents, followed by Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. For transnational incidents, totals are smaller across all regions, with the largest shares in Europe and the Americas and the fewest in Africa. Overall, domestic terrorism dominates both temporally and geographically, with the early 1990s marking the global high point.

Mediating Variables

The enhancement of a member state’s military and police capacities constitutes two key mechanisms through which alliances may influence the incidence of domestic terrorism. To capture military capacity, I include two variables. *Military Personnel* measures the size of a state’s armed forces, and *Military Expenditure/GDP* reflects total defense spending as a share of current (nominal) GDP. Both indicators are drawn from the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC),²⁶ and annual GDP of each country derives from Kristian Gleditsch’s work.²⁷ Both mediators are log-transformed to address skewness and facilitate interpretation in the statistical

models. These variables are also included as controls to isolate the direct effect of alliances on terrorism outcomes.

Again, police militarization refers to the material, cultural, organizational and operational emulation of the military by the police.²⁸ To assess the presence of militarized police, I draw on De Bruin's State Security Forces (SSF) dataset, which covers the period from 1960 to 2010.²⁹ According to the dataset's codebook, 1 is assigned if national police possess at least two of the following characteristics: command and control centers, elite squadrons modeled after the military, special operations units, barracked housing, or long-range deployment capability, and 0 otherwise. I name this variable, *Police Militarization*, and use it to operationalize police militarization. This operationalization is consistent with the conceptual definition of police militarization presented.

Control Variables

My models include a set of control variables that are theoretically relevant to both alliance membership and the incidence of terrorism. First, total population is included to capture state size and capacity, as population constitutes a core component of national power.³⁰ More populous states are generally more attractive alliance partners, while simultaneously facing greater governance burdens and social heterogeneity that may increase the risk of terrorism.³¹ Second, regime type is controlled for because it shapes both alliance behavior and vulnerability to terrorism. Democracies are more likely to form alliances based on shared norms and institutional compatibility,³² yet may also face heightened exposure to terrorism due to political openness.³³ Regime type is measured using *Polyarchy*, derived from the V-Dem *v2x_polyarchy* index (v12), which captures the institutionalization of electoral democracy.³⁴ Third, external threat is included, as states facing hostile neighbors or international disputes are more likely to form defense pacts for deterrence,³⁵ while elevated external threats may divert attention and resources away from internal security, potentially emboldening terrorist groups.³⁶ External threat is operationalized using the latent threat perception measure developed by Eugenia Artabe, Samantha Chapa, Leah

²⁶ Michael J. Greig and Andrew J. Enterline, *Correlates of War Project: National Material Capabilities (NMC) Data Documentation, Version 5.0* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas, 2017).

²⁷ Kristian S. Gleditsch. Expanded Trade and GDP Data, <http://ksgleditsch.com/exptradegdp.html>. See the article regarding the first-version dataset. Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Expanded Trade and GDP Data," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol.46, no. 5 (2002), pp. 712–724.

²⁸ Kraska, op.cit.

²⁹ De Bruin, op.cit.

³⁰ Greig and Enterline, op.cit.

³¹ James A. Piazza, "Rooted in Poverty? Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2006), pp. 159–177.

³² Douglas M. Gibler and Scott Wolford, "Alliances, Then Democracy: An Examination of the Relationship between Regime Type and Alliance Formation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2006), pp. 129–153.

³³ Alberto Abadie, "Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism," *American Economic Review*, vol. 96, no. 2 (2006), pp. 50–56,

³⁴ Michael Coppedge et al., "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v15," *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds25>.

³⁵ Morrow, op.cit.

³⁶ Seden Akçınaroğlu, and Yusuf Evirgen, "Ripe Moments for Terror Attacks: Opportunity Benefits–Reputation Tradeoff," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, online first.

Table I: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Domestic Terrorism	6229	7.242	33.33	0	673
Transnational Terrorism	6229	1.782	6.667	0	135
Defense Pact	8566	.591	.492	0	1
Neutrality Pact	8566	.117	.321	0	1
Nonaggression Pact	8566	.74	.439	0	1
Consultation Pact	8566	.58	.494	0	1
Polyarchy	7806	.446	.288	.009	.924
Total Population (Log)	6802	8.782	1.843	4.111	14.135
External Threat	7652	-.042	.812	-2.317	1.702
Civil War	8749	.127	.333	0	1
Post-Cold War	8749	.634	.482	0	1
Past Transnational Terrorism in three years	5860	1.819	5.871	0	86
Past Domestic Terrorism in three years	5860	7.395	30.493	0	484
Military Personnel (Log)	6205	3.583	1.803	0	8.466
Military Expenditure / GDP (Log)	6336	-4.908	2.592	-20.176	.14
Militarized Police	3979	.494	.5	0	1

Table II: Variance Inflation Factor

Variable	VIF	SQRT VIF	Tolerance	R-Squared
Defense Pact	1.79	1.34	0.5596	0.4404
Neutrality Pact	1.2	1.1	0.8318	0.1682
Nonaggression Pact	1.45	1.2	0.6909	0.3091
Consultation Pact	1.9	1.38	0.5254	0.4746
Polyarchy	1.39	1.18	0.7199	0.2801
Total Population (Log)	3.14	1.77	0.3187	0.6813
External Threat	1.54	1.24	0.6478	0.3522
Civil War	1.27	1.13	0.7876	0.2124
Cold War	1.21	1.1	0.8278	0.1722
Past Transnational Terrorism in three years	2.09	1.44	0.4808	0.5192
Past Domestic Terrorism in three years	2.1	1.45	0.477	0.523
Military Personnel (Log)	1.52	1.23	0.6586	0.3414
Military Expenditure /GDP(Log)	1.1	1.05	0.9116	0.0884
Militarized Police	1.09	1.04	0.9208	0.0792

Sparkman and Patrick Shea.³⁷ Fourth, ongoing civil war is controlled for because internal conflict can simultaneously increase incentives for alliance formation³⁸ and shape terrorism dynamics, as rebel organizations often employ terrorism as a tactic during civil wars.³⁹ Using the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, I code *Civil War* as 1 when a state is experiencing an active civil conflict. Fifth, to capture systemic temporal variation, I include a *Post-Cold War* indicator coded 1

³⁷ Eugenia Artabe, Samantha Chapa, Leah Sparkman, and Patrick E. Shea, "External Threats, Capacity, and Repression: How the Threat of War Affects Political Development and Physical Integrity Rights," *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 53, issue 4 (2023), pp. 1311–1327.

³⁸ Jessica Edry, Jesse C. Johnson, and Brett Ashley Leeds, "Threats at Home and Abroad: Interstate War, Civil War, and Alliance Formation," *International Organization*, vol.75, no. 3 (2021), pp. 837–857.

³⁹ Fortna, op.cit.; Stanton, op.cit.

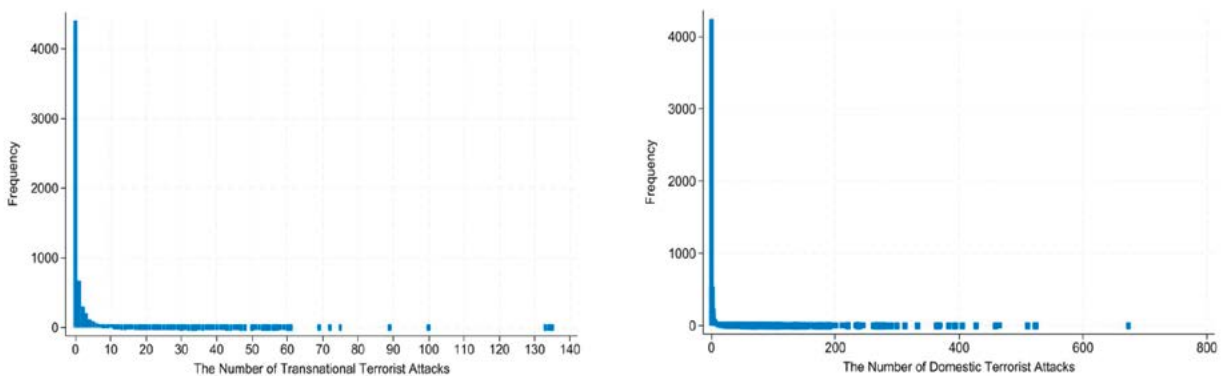
for observations after 1989, reflecting shifts in alliance strategies⁴⁰ and global terrorism patterns following the decline of state-sponsored terrorism.⁴¹ Finally, to account for temporal dependence in terrorism, I control for *Past Terrorism*, measured as the average number of terrorist attacks in the preceding three years.

The summary statistics of these variables are shown in Table I. The collinearity check reported in Table II demonstrates no serious collinearity problem in the sample. Given the characteristics of the dependent variables, negative binomial regression is employed as the baseline model. The calculation of mean and variance for each dependent variable indicates each variable exhibits strong evidence of overdispersion. For *Transnational Terrorism*, the mean is 1.78 while the variance is 44.45, resulting in a variance-to-mean ratio of approximately 25. Similarly, *Domestic Terrorism* has a mean of 7.24 and a variance of 1,110.90, yielding a variance-to-mean ratio of about 153. This distributional pattern indicates that the variance of the dependent variable exceeds its mean (overdispersion), which means that while most countries experience no attacks, a small number of countries suffer from disproportionately high levels of terrorism. Figure III visualizes this tendency, reinforcing the sparsity of events in the data. This excessive variation violates the assumption of equal mean and variance required by the Poisson model. As a result, neither ordinary least squares (OLS) regression nor standard Poisson models are appropriate, thereby justifying the use of negative binomial regression. The specification of the baseline regression model is as follows.

$$\begin{aligned} \log(\mu_{it}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Defense Pact}_{it-1} + \beta_2 \text{Nonaggression Pact}_{it-1} \\ & + \beta_3 \text{Neutrality Pact}_{it-1} + \beta_4 \text{Consultation Pact}_{it-1} + \beta_5 \text{Polyarchy}_{it-1} \\ & + \beta_6 \text{Population}_{it-1} + \beta_7 \text{External Threat}_{it-1} + \beta_8 \text{Civil War}_{it-1} \\ & + \beta_9 \text{Post - Cold War}_{it} + \beta_{10} \text{Past Terrorism}_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \end{aligned}$$

Here, μ_{it} is the expected number of terrorism attacks in country i at time t . I lag all explanatory variables by one year except for *Past Terrorism* because these variables must temporally precede the outcome in order to preserve causal direction and avoid simultaneity bias. The log of the expected count is modeled as a linear function of independent variables. ε denotes the error term. The variance is modeled as $\text{Var}(Y_{it}) = \mu_{it} + a\mu_{it}^2$, where $a > 0$ indicates overdispersion.

Figure III: Frequency of Terrorism Attacks



⁴⁰ Brett Ashley Leeds and Michaela Mattes, “Alliance Politics during the Cold War: Aberration, New World Order, or Continuation of History?” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, vol.24, no.3 (2007), pp. 183–199.

⁴¹ Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, “Patterns of Transnational Terrorism, 1970–1999: Alternative Time-Series Estimates,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.46, issue 2 (2002), pp. 145–165,

To examine whether the effect of defense pacts on terrorism operates through changes in state capacity, I apply the causal mediation analysis framework.⁴² Specifically, I estimate natural indirect effects through military personnel, military expenditure, and police militarization, alongside the natural direct effect of alliance commitments. Mediator models and terrorism outcome models (negative binomial regressions) are estimated separately, and bootstrap confidence intervals are calculated. This design allows me to assess whether Hypotheses H2a and H2b are supported by evidence that defense pacts influence terrorism indirectly via military and police capacity, or whether the effect is primarily direct.

As discussed, however, the mediation analysis requires several stringent assumptions. The most critical is sequential ignorability, which I address by incorporating a comprehensive set of confounders that influence the independent variable, mediators, and dependent variables. I use the same confounders employed in the main regression models, as each is plausibly related to defense pact membership, military personnel size, military expenditure, and police militarization. Specifically, I include *Polyarchy* (lagged two years), *Total Population* (lagged two years), *External Threat* (lagged three years, to mitigate post-treatment bias), *Civil War*, *Post-Cold War*, and three-year averages of both transnational terrorism and domestic terrorism. Prior scholarship suggests that these covariates influence not only alliance formation and terrorism risk but also the mediators themselves.⁴³ Incorporating this battery of controls helps approximate the sequential ignorability assumption by reducing the risk of omitted variable bias across each stage of the mediation process.

Second, the mediation analysis rests on establishing an appropriate causal ordering between the treatment and the mediator. To ensure that changes in the independent variables alter the mediators rather than the reverse, I lag *Defense Pact* and other controls by two year relative to the mediators. Also, the mediators are lagged by one year to make them precedent to terrorism counts. This temporal structure ensures that causal ordering (defense pact presence → military capacity/police militarization → the number of terrorist attacks) and helps rule out simultaneity or reverse causation.

Third, the mediation analysis assumes no treatment–mediator interactions. The effect of defense pacts is moderated—not conditioned—by military personnel levels, military expenditure as a share of GDP, and police militarization. In other words, these variables shape the magnitude of the alliance’s overall effect rather than altering the functional form of the causal pathway between the treatment and the outcome. This distinction is crucial: while defense pacts may enhance state capacity in ways that influence terrorism dynamics, the mediators do not interact with the treatment in a way that would violate the assumption of additive decomposition required for mediation analysis.⁴⁴

Fourth, all covariates other than the mediators are treated purely as controls rather than as potential mediating channels, thereby preventing post-treatment bias.⁴⁵

Results and Discussion

The results in Table III indicate that among alliance types nonaggression pacts and consultation

⁴² Kosuke Imai, Luke Keele, and Dustin Tingley, “A General Approach to Causal Mediation Analysis,” *Psychological Methods*, vol.15, no.4 (2010), pp.309–334.

⁴³ De Bruin, op.cit.

⁴⁴ *Paramed* analyses further demonstrate that all interaction terms (*Defense Pact * Military Personnel*, *Military Expenditure/GDP*, and *Police Militarization*) are not statistically significant.

⁴⁵ Kosuke Imai and Teppei Yamamoto, “Identification and Sensitivity Analysis for Multiple Causal Mechanisms: Revisiting Evidence from Framing Experiments,” *Political Analysis*, vol.21, issue 2, pp.141–171.

pacts are positively and significantly associated with transnational terrorism ($p < 0.05$), whereas defense pacts and neutrality pacts exhibit no statistically significant effects. Among the control variables, democracy, population size, external threat, civil war, and lagged terrorism all show strong positive and significant relationships with transnational terrorism, while Post-Cold War dummy has no effect. Substantively, the results suggest that nonaggression pacts are linked to about a 65 percent increase in transnational terrorist incidents, and consultation pacts to a 46 percent increase. The effect of democracy is even more pronounced, with more democratic regimes experiencing nearly double the level of terrorism, while civil war more than doubles the risk compared to non-conflict contexts. Population and external threat each raise terrorism by roughly 25–45 percent, and past terrorism predicts an additional 17 percent increase in future attacks.

Turning to domestic terrorism, consultation pacts emerge as the only alliance type with a

Table III: Negative Binomial Regressions

Variable	Transnational Terrorism	Domestic Terrorism
Defense Pact	-0.016 (0.144)	-0.229 (0.185)
Neutrality Pact	-0.262 (0.189)	-0.299 (0.240)
Nonaggression Pact	0.499** (0.209)	0.310 (0.257)
Consultation Pact	0.376** (0.184)	0.743*** (0.207)
Polyarchy	0.614*** (0.230)	0.394 (0.280)
Total Population (Log)	0.220*** (0.049)	0.364*** (0.058)
External Threat (t-2)	0.362*** (0.093)	0.399*** (0.131)
Civil War	0.941*** (0.153)	1.194*** (0.197)
Post-Cold War	-0.089 (0.109)	0.063 (0.135)
Past TR Terrorism (three years)	0.157*** (0.024)	
Past Dm Terrorism (three years)		0.041*** (0.009)
Constant	-3.592*** (0.440)	-3.927*** (0.479)
alpha	2.794	4.466
Observation	5076	5076
Pseudo R-squared	0.132	0.107

Notes:

Robust standard errors clustered by country.

Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Two-tailed tests.

All covariates are one-year lagged except Post-Cold War (post-1990 dummy) and Past Terrorism, while External Threat is two-year lagged.

statistically significant effect, being strongly and positively associated with terrorism ($p < 0.01$). Defense pacts and neutrality pacts are negatively signed but insignificant, while nonaggression pacts show a positive but insignificant coefficient. Among the controls, population size, external threat, civil war, and lagged terrorism all exert significant positive effects. In substantive terms, consultation pacts more than double the level of domestic terrorism, while civil war is associated with more than a threefold increase. Population size and external threat each contribute to an increase of roughly 45–50 percent, and prior terrorism produces a modest but significant 4 percent increase in subsequent domestic terrorism. Taken together, H1 is partially supported in the sense that while the membership of defense pacts or neutrality pacts proves ineffective on terrorism while nonaggression pacts and consultation pacts are impactful.

Despite the lack of statistically significant results, defense pacts may still exert indirect effects on terrorism through the proposed mediators, as hypothesized in H2a and H2b. To evaluate these mechanisms, I conducted causal mediation analyses. Table IV reports the results of the

Table IV: Mediation Analysis: Defense Pacts, Mediators, and Transnational Terrorism

Variable	M1 Military Personnel (Mediator)	M2 Transnational Terrorism (DV, with Mediator)	M3 Military Expenditure/ GDP (Mediator)	M4 Transnational Terrorism (DV, with Mediator)	M5 Police Militarization (Mediator)	M6 Transnational Terrorism (DV, with Mediator)
Mediator	–	0.211*** (0.049)	–	0.031 (0.022)	–	-0.130 (0.130)
Defense Pact	-0.080** (0.037)	0.201 (0.200)	-0.275** (0.083)	0.346** (0.163)	-0.240** (0.105)	-0.121 (0.126)
Observation	4,795	4,642	4,755	4,599	3,289	3,184
R-squared	0.736	–	0.116	–	–	–

Notes:

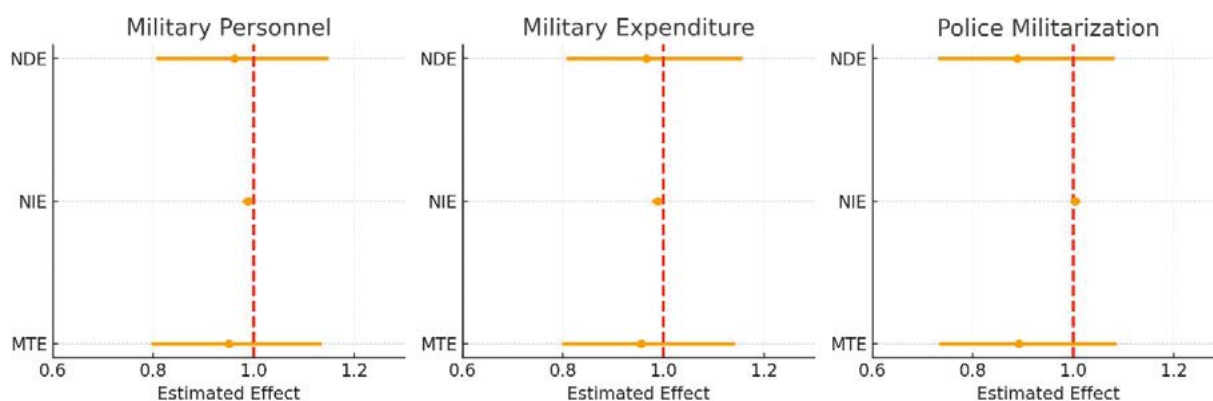
Robust standard errors clustered by country.

Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Two-tailed tests.

Controls: Neutrality Pact, Nonaggression Pact, Consultation Pact, Polyarchy, Logged Population, External Threat, Conflict, Post-Cold War dummy, average transnational terrorism counts.

Lag structure: Mediator models use 2-year lagged Defense Pact and controls. Outcome models include 1-year lagged mediator, 2-year lagged Defense Pact and 2-year controls.

Figure IV: Coefficient Plot of Natural Direct Effect (NDE), Natural Indirect Effect (NIE) and Marginal Total Effect (MTE) for Transnational Terrorism



preliminary negative binomial regression focusing on transnational terrorism. Across the three models—military personnel, military expenditure, and police militarization—there is no evidence that defense pacts exert a meaningful indirect effect on transnational terrorism through any of these state-capacity channels. In each model, defense pacts significantly affect the mediators in some directions (reducing military personnel, $p = 0.028$; increasing military expenditure, $p = 0.003$; and reducing police militarization, $p = 0.030$), but these changes do not propagate into transnational terrorism.

Furthermore, Figure IV demonstrates the causal mediation analysis. The military personnel model yields a marginally significant NIE ($p = 0.055$), but the implied effect size is exceedingly small—only about a 1.2% reduction in transnational terrorism—rendering the mediated pathway substantively negligible. In the military expenditure model, neither the NDE nor the NIE provides any evidence of mediation, as both estimates are statistically indistinguishable from unity and imply no meaningful change in terrorism risk. Finally, the police militarization model shows no notable effects: the NDE, NIE, and MTE all cluster tightly around 1.0, indicating changes of less than $\pm 10\%$, none of which reach statistical significance. Taken together, despite

Table V: Mediation Analysis: Defense Pacts, Mediators, and Domestic Terrorism

Variable	M1 Military Personnel (Mediator)	M2 Domestic Terrorism (DV, with Mediator)	M3 Military Expenditure/ GDP (Mediator)	M4 Domestic Terrorism (DV, with Mediator)	M5 Police Militarization (Mediator)	M6 Domestic Terrorism (DV, with Mediator)
Mediator	–	0.166*** (0.055)	–	0.035 (0.022)	–	-0.068 (0.151)
Defense Pact	-0.072* (0.037)	-0.039 (0.215)	0.257** (0.063)	-0.614** (0.485)	-0.245** (0.105)	-0.457*** (0.152)
Observation	4,795	4,642	4,736	4,555	3,289	3,184
R-squared	0.735	–	0.112	–	–	–

Notes:

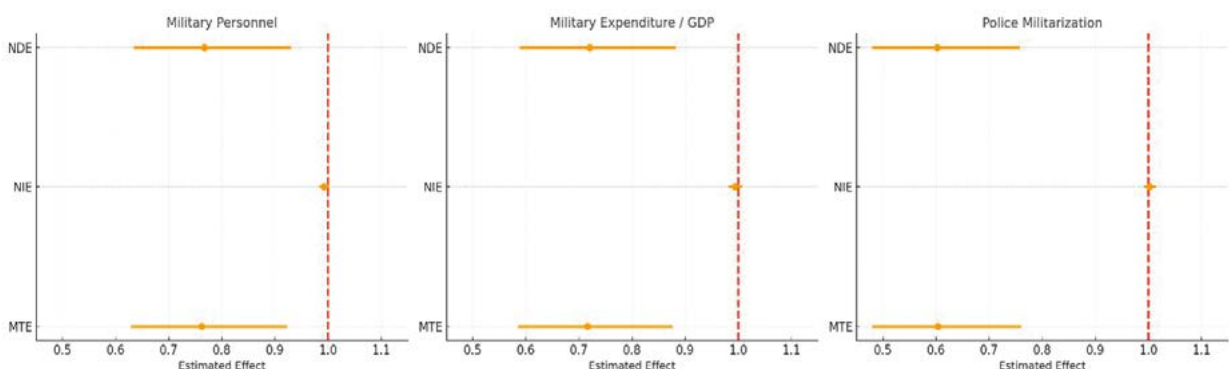
Robust standard errors clustered by country.

Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Two-tailed tests.

Controls: Neutrality Pact, Nonaggression Pact, Consultation Pact, Polyarchy, Logged Population, External Threat, Conflict, Post-Cold War dummy, average transnational terrorism counts.

Lag structure: Mediator models use 2-year lagged Defense Pact and controls. Outcome models include 1-year lagged mediator, 2-year lagged Defense Pact and 2-year controls.

Figure V: Coefficient Plot of Natural Direct Effect (NDE), Natural Indirect Effect (NIE) and Marginal Total Effect (MTE) for Domestic Terrorism



isolated statistical hints, defense pacts appear to exert no credible or substantively meaningful influence on transnational terrorism, whether direct or indirect.

Table V reports the results of the preliminary negative binomial regressions. Across the three negative binomial specifications, the estimated effect of defense pacts on domestic terrorism exhibits notable heterogeneity depending on the mediator included in the model. When military personnel is incorporated, the coefficient on defense pacts is statistically insignificant ($p = 0.854$), indicating no detectable relationship between alliance commitments and changes in domestic terrorism under this specification. By contrast, the military expenditure model shows a sizable and statistically significant negative coefficient ($-0.614, p = 0.001$), suggesting that defense pacts are associated with substantially lower levels of domestic terrorism when accounting for defense spending. A similar pattern emerges in the police militarization model, where the coefficient is also negative and highly significant ($-0.546, p < 0.001$). Taken together, these results indicate that defense pacts may reduce domestic terrorism, but the strength and detectability of this association depend on the institutional and security variables included in the model, particularly those related to state capacity and security-sector characteristics.

Figure V visualizes the results of the causal mediation analysis. The analyses reveal a consistent pattern across all three models: defense pacts exert their influence on domestic terrorism almost entirely through direct pathways. In each specification, the natural indirect effect (NIE) is extremely close to one and statistically insignificant ($NIE \approx 1.00, p > 0.10$), demonstrating that changes in military personnel, military expenditure, or police militarization do not mediate the relationship between defense pacts and terrorism. By contrast, the natural direct effects (NDEs) are consistently below one and statistically significant—ranging from 0.60 to 0.77—indicating that defense pacts directly reduce terrorism risk by roughly 23% to 40%, depending on the model. The marginal total effects (MTEs) closely track the NDEs, confirming that the overall impact of defense pacts is almost entirely attributable to direct mechanisms rather than mediated pathways. By isolating the direct effect of and the indirect effect of a defense pact from the total effect, these analyses reject H2a and H2b, but tangibly demonstrate that *defense pacts appear to reduce domestic terrorism through mechanisms that operate independently of observable changes in military manpower, spending, or police militarization*.

One possible explanation for the effect of a defense pact on domestic terrorism is that defense pacts promote counterterrorism cooperation and enhance member states' non-military capacities to address low-intensity threats. Enhanced intelligence fusion, improved operational coordination, and the development of specialized rapid-response forces enable governments to detect plots earlier, neutralize leadership targets, and disrupt logistical networks, thereby lowering terrorists' expected probability of success. At the same time, more effective surveillance and faster response capabilities raise the anticipated costs of engaging in violent action, as the likelihood of arrest, interdiction, or organizational decapitation increases. These are not military. Rather, these mechanisms should operate primarily through policing, intelligence, and legal-institutional channels rather than through conventional military force.

A clear empirical illustration can be found in the US–Philippines alliance after 2001. Under Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines, US special operations forces provided intelligence support, special-forces training, and operational advising to Philippine security forces without engaging in direct combat. According to a comprehensive RAND evaluation, enemy-initiated attacks in the core areas of Abu Sayyaf operations declined by more than 50 percent between 2000 and 2012, accompanied by a sharp reduction in militant strength and growing public support for government security forces. Notably, these outcomes were achieved primarily through improvements in intelligence fusion, special operations capability, and police–

military coordination rather than through simple increases in troop size or military spending.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, it remains difficult to demonstrate this mechanism statistically because systematic cross-national data on international counterterrorism cooperation are largely unavailable. Thus, conducting a more detailed examination of this counterterrorism capacity-building channel must be left to future research using fine-grained qualitative evidence or newly developed datasets on intelligence and counterterrorism cooperation.

There are two additional findings. First, Table III shows that membership in a nonaggression pact is associated with an increase in transnational terrorism in the subsequent year. Second, membership in a consultation pact is associated with higher levels of both transnational and domestic terrorism. These results are unexpected, as I hypothesized that these pact types would have no systematic effect on terrorist behavior. Although these associations merit closer theoretical and empirical scrutiny, a detailed investigation of the underlying mechanisms is beyond the scope of this article, given space constraints.⁴⁷

Conclusion

This article conducts empirical tests of the hypotheses concerning the relationship between military alliances and terrorism incidents within member states. The analyses indicate that although defense pacts do not exert a statistically significant direct effect on terrorism overall, they demonstrate a clear and substantively meaningful deterrent effect on domestic terrorism once potential mediators are accounted for. This finding is preliminary and warrants further investigation, particularly with respect to the underlying mechanisms and the conditions under which such deterrent effects are most likely to emerge.

Still, the current finding can provide policy implications. First, although policy-oriented literature has paid little attention to the domestic implications of military alliances, this paper suggests that defense pacts may be useful to stabilize the internal security environments of allied states. Indeed, US allies such as the Philippines, Turkey, and Colombia have continued counterterrorism operations through US-led alliance frameworks. My finding provides evidence that such intra-allies cooperation is effective for deterring domestic terrorism in allied states.

Second, however, it should be noted that defense pacts do not alter transnational terrorism within allied states. Considering Plümper and Neumayer's finding that alliances increase attacks by terrorists in an allied state against citizens of other member states, having defense pacts will be counterproductive for combating transnational terrorism. This does not mean that states should abandon alliance commitments; rather, it suggests that defense pacts are ill-suited as instruments for addressing transnational terrorist threats and should be complemented by alternative forms of international cooperation specifically tailored to cross-border terrorism.

Finally, these findings caution policymakers against adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to counterterrorism through military alliances. Defense pacts appear to be effective for addressing domestically rooted terrorist threats by strengthening allied states' internal security environments, but they do not mitigate—and may even exacerbate—risks associated with transnational terrorism. Policymakers should therefore differentiate between domestic and transnational terrorist threats when leveraging alliance frameworks, relying on defense pacts primarily to enhance internal stability while pursuing broader multilateral, intelligence-driven, and law-enforcement-based cooperation to combat transnational terrorist networks.

⁴⁶ Linda Robinson, Patrick B. Johnston, and Gillian S. Oak, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001–2014* (RAND Corporation, 2016).

⁴⁷ Chapter 3 in my dissertation conducts further empirical analyses and robustness checks on the results indicated in this paper.

Russia-China Partnership: Without Limits, but with Lingering Territorial Issues

Valérie Niquet

Abstract

The article critically evaluates the structural constraints underlying the ostensibly “no limits” partnership between China and Russia. Despite increasing strategic coordination and a shared opposition to the United States and its allies, the bilateral relationship remains deeply conditioned by historical experience, territorial narratives, and the legitimacy frameworks of both regimes. In China and Russia alike, political authority is closely tied to the control and interpretation of “historical” space. This dynamic—rooted in territorial nationalism—endows borders with symbolic meaning that contemporary cooperation cannot fully neutralize.

China’s loss of Outer Manchuria in the nineteenth century, including the area surrounding present-day Vladivostok, occupies a central place in the state-sponsored narrative of the “*Century of Humiliation*.” These episodes are continuously reproduced through education, museum culture, and digital discourse, thereby perpetuating an implicit sense of grievance. Similar historical tensions resurfaced during the Sino-Soviet Split and the 1969 Ussuri River clashes, embedding mutual suspicion within both countries’ strategic cultures. Although post-1991 agreements formally demarcated the border, demographic decline in the Russian Far East and asymmetric economic interdependence sustain long-term anxieties on both sides.

Since 2014, and especially after 2022, geopolitical pressure has accelerated Sino-Russian alignment, yet the partnership remains fundamentally instrumental. China’s insistence on sovereignty and territorial integrity—rooted in its own internal and external territorial claims—precludes any endorsement of Russia’s revisions to Ukraine’s borders. Meanwhile, widening economic asymmetry reinforces Chinese leverage while preserving strategic caution.

The article concludes that these territorial narratives impose a durable ceiling on bilateral alignment. For Japan, this constitutes a strategic warning: if even China’s closest partner cannot transcend historically embedded territorial conceptions, the prospects for stable accommodation in East Asian territorial disputes—such as the Senkaku issue—remain structurally limited.

Introduction

When Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin announced in February 2022 that the partnership between their nations had “no limits,” it appeared to consecrate a new Eurasian order. The timing—just weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine—gave the phrase special weight: a declaration that Moscow and Beijing now formed the core of a post-Western world, sharing the same anti-Western “values.” However, behind the rhetoric lay a more complicated truth. The partnership rests on the pragmatic management of asymmetry, history, and geography. China and Russia converge tactically in opposing the United States and NATO and their allies, but their mutual perceptions are also influenced by layers of mistrust

created by territory and memory.

In both political systems, control of “historical” space legitimises power. For the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), territorial integrity and the recovery of “national dignity” form the moral justification of its rule and legitimacy. In official narratives, every humiliation suffered since the Opium Wars—foreign concessions, colonial partition, and territorial loss—culminated in the promise that the Party alone could prevent repetition, whatever the historical veracity. For the Kremlin, sovereignty and control over a vast landmass sustain Russia’s identity as a great power. In both cases, historical geography is transformed into ideology.

This dynamic fits what scholars of nationalism call territorial legitimacy—the fusion between physical borders and political right to rule.¹ States that emerged from imperial collapse often construct identity around the recovery or defense of idealized space. In China’s case, the “*Century of Humiliation*” narrative links supposed territorial contraction to moral decay; in Russia’s, imperial over-extension followed by retreat justifies authoritarian centralization and invasion. The result is a mutual obsession with borders that makes true alliance structurally impossible.

Beijing’s official white papers speak of a “comprehensive strategic coordination,”² while Russia emphasizes mutual respect for sovereignty.³ The insistence on sovereignty and territorial integrity, repeated in every communiqué, reveals a lack of trust.⁴

The central argument of this research note is therefore that the territorial question—its historical memory, contemporary management, and symbolic meaning—remains the most durable constraint on Sino-Russian full alignment. Strategic cooperation has deepened since 2014, but the same historical narratives that legitimise both regimes prevent complete trust. The PRC (People’s Republic of China) legitimacy depends on controlling lands once lost—including Russia; Russia’s depends on projecting control over the very territories once taken from China.

For Japan, this dynamic is not abstract. The territorial rigidity driving the Sino-Russian relationship is the same that underpins Beijing’s approach to the Senkaku Islands—and, in times of crisis, could extend to Okinawa. The inability of even Moscow and Beijing to overcome the territorial memories that define them is a warning to Tokyo: no durable accommodation with the current Chinese regime is possible when territory functions as ideology.

From Imperial Frontier to Border between “Revolutionary Brothers”

The frontier between the Qing Empire (1644–1912) and Tsarist Russia was never merely a line, it was also a zone of encounters. The *Treaty of Nerchinsk* (1689), negotiated in Latin through Jesuit intermediaries, fixed the Amur frontier on roughly equal terms. For nearly 170 years, it held, maintained by limited trade and contacts and pragmatic diplomacy. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, the balance of power had shifted dramatically. Russia’s expansion across Siberia coincided with the Qing dynasty’s internal crisis and foreign incursion.⁵

Between 1858 and 1860, under the shadow of the Second Opium War, the *Treaty of Aigun* and the *Convention of Peking* transferred more than 600,000 square kilometers—today’s Outer

¹ Alexander B. Murphy, “National Claims to Territory in the Modern State System: Geographical Considerations,” *Geopolitics*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2002).

² China’s National Security in the New Era (白皮书《新时代的中国国家安全》), State Council Information Office, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/202505/content_7023405.htm, 12-05-2025.

³ Moshes Arkady and Matti Nojonen, eds., 2011, *Russia–China Relations: Current State, Alternative Futures, and Implications for the West*, FIIA Report 30, Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/132874/FIIA_Report_30_web.pdf.

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 3 Oct 2024, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1973750/.

⁵ Philip Snow, *China and Russia: Four Centuries of Conflict and Concord*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2023.

Manchuria—to Russia. China lost the left bank of the Amur River, the Ussuri Basin, and access to the Pacific through the future port of Vladivostok (Haishenwai 海参崴). These events entered Chinese historiography as part of the “unequal treaties” (不平等条约) imposed by predatory powers during the “*Century of Humiliation*.”⁶ The spatial loss became moral proof of a fallen empire’s weakness.

Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* helps to explain the endurance of this geography in Chinese consciousness.⁷ Maps of “lost territories” displayed in museums and textbooks function as sites of memory. Even after the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949, Party rhetoric continued to connect sovereignty with recovery. Mao Zedong’s proclamation that “the Chinese people have stood up” on Tiananmen in 1949 carried an implicit spatial dimension: the revolution had restored China’s borders and China’s dignity.

At the same time, the Soviet Union—the revolution’s senior partner—was historically one of the “aggressors.” In the People’s Republic of China’s official cartography, Vladivostok is frequently labeled as “Vladivostok (Haishenwai 海参崴)”, a practice which, since 1949, has helped sustain a cartographic memory of the loss of “Outer Manchuria.”

This inherited ambivalence explains the resilience of anti-Russian undertones in modern Chinese nationalism. Even when bilateral diplomacy celebrates cooperation, cultural products—from historical novels to online documentaries—revisit the nineteenth-century border as moral drama. Examples range from popular historical novels to documentary series on Bilibili revisiting the 1858 and 1860 treaties as national trauma, and mainstream TV dramas like *Towards the Republic*, which frame the nineteenth-century border as a stage for moral decline and imperial humiliation.⁸ The CCP cannot absolutely erase these images without potentially weakening its own legitimacy narrative in the future. Thus, the Amur frontier, though legally settled after a very long process that ended only in 2008 with the transfer of border islets, remains ideologically active: a reminder that China’s modern identity was forged through spatial loss at Russia’s expense.

The legacy also shapes Russian perceptions. For Moscow, the acquisition of the Amur and Primorye regions represented the culmination of its eastward destiny. The founding of Vladivostok in 1860 embodied Russia’s claim to be both European and Pacific. Losing that historical narrative would undermine the idea of Russia as a transcontinental civilisation. Hence, while the treaties of the nineteenth century are denounced in Chinese memory, the presentation is less hostile—for a reason—in Russian textbooks. Two nations thus tell incompatible stories about the same space.

That contradiction is not merely historical. It is structural, embedded in the way both regimes produce legitimacy through space. The issue is less pressing now, as Russia is focused on its war

⁶ Wu Songdi, Yang Jingmin, “近代中国开埠通商的时空考察 [A Spatio-Temporal Study of Treaty-Port Opening in Modern China],” *Shilin* 3 (2013), http://jds.cssn.cn/xscg/xslw/201605/t20160506_5253257.shtml; Igor Denisov, *Aigun, Russia and China’s “Century of Humiliation,”* <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/60357>, 2023.

⁷ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, n° 26, Spring 1989, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i347292>.

⁸ For cultural representations of nineteenth-century Sino-Russian border history in contemporary China, see the state-produced historical drama *Towards the Republic* (Zouxiang gonghe 走向共和, CCTV, 2003), which embeds the Treaty of Aigun (1858) and the Convention of Peking (1860) within a broader narrative of late-Qing decline and the emergence of the “unequal treaties” discourse. See also documentary content such as *China’s Borderlands History* (Zhongguo bianjiang shi 《中国边疆史》), widely circulated on platforms including Bilibili, whose episodes on the Amur-Ussuri frontier routinely present the cession of Haishenwai/Vladivostok as a didactic episode illustrating the fragility of Qing authority vis-à-vis imperial Russia.

against Ukraine in the West, but it does not disappear as China never abandoned the concept of lost territories. It resurfaced under communism, when ideological fraternity gave way to a split that structured China's foreign strategy for three decades .

The Origin of Territorial Grievance

The transformation of the Sino-Russian border from frontier to grievance began with Russia's nineteenth-century march to the Pacific. The expansion that produced today's Primorsky Krai and Amur Oblast was not simply conquest; it was an imperial project wrapped in civilisational language.⁹ St Petersburg portrayed the Amur region as *terra nullius*. In reality, the region already hosted Qing garrisons, Manchu bannermen, and mixed local populations.

For the Qing, the shock of 1858–1860 and the Opium Wars intensified existing trauma. After losing Hong Kong to Britain and treaty ports to Western powers, Beijing now faced a land-based humiliation on its Northern border with Russian gunboats on the Amur. The dynasty capitulated. The *Treaty of Aigun* ceded the left bank of the Amur; the *Convention of Peking* granted the Ussuri Basin and the coastal strip where Vladivostok would be built.¹⁰

Chinese intellectuals soon linked territorial dispossession to national decline. Late-Qing reformers such as Feng Guifen and Wei Yuan used cartography and new atlases to map the shrinking empire and signal the loss of territory.¹¹ They concluded that the empire's weakness stemmed from ignorance of geography. The "*Century of Humiliation*" thus fused moral and spatial degradation. Losing land became evidence of a loss of virtue or the Mandate of the Heaven for the dynasty.

In Russian narratives, as for other Western colonial powers, geography became an argument for empire, and empire a proof of Russian modernity. This asymmetry of memory—glory for one side, shame for the other— has not disappeared today.

After 1860, the newly founded Vladivostok embodied dual symbolism: Russia's gateway to the Pacific and China's reminder of exclusion. The city's very name, "Rule the East," encapsulated the hierarchy. For Chinese historians, it remains a site of memory of defeat. In 2020, when the Russian embassy's Weibo account celebrated Vladivostok's 160th anniversary, the comment section flooded with reminders that "Haishenwai once belonged to China." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs allowed discussion for a few hours before censorship intervened—an illustration of how digital nationalism reproduces historical pain that diplomacy cannot erase.¹²

The late-imperial experience also shaped the CCP's later conception of sovereignty. When Sun Yat-sen's 1911 "Han" revolution overthrew the "Foreign" Qing dynasty, the new republic inherited borders drawn by humiliation but lacked the power to alter them. Sun's *Outline of National Reconstruction* (1919) already listed the recovery of lost territory as a moral duty.¹³ Marxist revolutionaries adopted this vocabulary of restitution. Mao's speeches in the 1930s invoked land

⁹ Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

¹⁰ Alexander Gabuev, "Aigun, Russia, and China's 'Century of Humiliation,'" Carnegie Moscow Center, 2014

¹¹ Sung, Hee Ru, "The State Formation of Late Qing China within Global Geopolitical Dynamics," *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (2022), <https://read.dukeupress.edu/sungkyun-journal-of-east-asian-studies/article/22/1/87/299044/The-State-Formation-of-Late-Qing-China-within>.

¹² Neha Banka, "Explained: Why 160-year-old Vladivostok has a Chinese connection," *The Indian Express*, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-why-160-year-old-vladivostok-has-a-chinese-connection-6493278/>, 7 July 2020.

¹³ Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China and an Outline of National Reconstruction*, London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1922.

lost through the bayonets of imperialism.¹⁴ Thus, the Communist revolution, though couched in class terms, carried a strong spatial charge.

From the Russian perspective, the imperial frontier was consolidated through settlement and militarisation. Between 1880 and 1910, the population of the Amur region multiplied tenfold, while the Chinese presence dwindled under restrictive migration laws. The Trans-Siberian Railway, completed in 1904, bound the Far East to European Russia and marginalised Chinese trade routes. When the Russo-Japanese War erupted the same year, two foreign powers were fighting on what had once been Qing Empire soil.

After the 1917 revolution, Lenin's government briefly promised to revise the "unequal treaties." In 1924, the Soviet foreign commissar Chicherin reaffirmed that earlier imperial agreements were "incompatible with socialist principles." Nevertheless, realpolitik soon prevailed. By the 1930s, the USSR had reasserted complete control over the Far Eastern frontier. The hope of restitution evaporated. Instead, China's Communists internalised the lesson that only state power, not ideology, could guarantee territorial integrity.

Official Chinese white papers on foreign relations rarely mention Russia's nineteenth-century role, yet phrases such as "mutual respect for territorial integrity" function as implicit reminders. Russian diplomats, conversely, insist that the border question is "fully closed," signalling anxiety that it might someday reopen. The asymmetry of silence is itself political communication.

Cartographically, the legacy persists in the very tools of governance. Satellite imagery and online maps use international standards, but Chinese atlases often include historical overlays captioned "former boundaries of the Qing dynasty." These annotations, though technical, reproduce collective awareness of loss.¹⁵

The moral geography of humiliation thus bridges past and present. Every subsequent episode of tension—from the 1969 border clashes that made more than hundred dead to online nationalism today—draws legitimacy from the memory of 1860. The boundary between Russia and China is not only a frontier of states; it is a frontier of narratives. Each side tells a story in which the other once trespassed, and neither can entirely disavow that story without undermining its own identity despite their new Partnership without limits.

Understanding this is crucial to interpreting the paradox of this modern partnership. The *no-limits* formula conceals a relationship structured by historical limits. Beneath declarations of friendship lie two political mythologies that meet—and collide—on the same map. The following section explores how these latent antagonisms resurfaced during the Cold War, when ideological brotherhood succumbed once more to the gravitational pull of territory.

The Sino-Soviet Split and the Geography of Suspicion (1950s–1980s)

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 initially transformed Russia from imperial adversary into socialist ally. The *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance* (1950) appeared to seal ideological solidarity. Moscow supplied loans, blueprints, and engineers for China's First Five-Year Plan; Soviet experts designed more than 150 industrial projects, from Anshan's steel mills to Changchun's automobile plant. For a brief moment, history seemed to overcome by fraternity. However, beneath the rhetoric of "everlasting friendship" lay enduring asymmetry and mutual resentment, particularly on the part of "little brother" China.

Stalin treated Mao's regime as a junior partner, imposing onerous repayment terms for aid and

¹⁴ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961.

¹⁵ Iacopo Adda and Yuexin Rachel Lin, "Geopolitics in Glass Cases: Nationalist Narratives on Sino-Russian Relations in Chinese Border Museums," *Problems of Post-Communism*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/09668136.2022.2083586>, 2022.

maintaining control over strategic infrastructure such as the Chinese Eastern Railway. Chinese leaders, despite the fact that they chose to “fall on the right side” i.e. the Soviet Union, perceived this as imperial arrogance disguised as socialism. After Stalin died in 1953, Khrushchev’s de-Stalinisation and his doctrine of “peaceful coexistence” with the West deepened the rift. Beijing saw détente as betrayal; Moscow viewed Mao’s militancy—and nuclear reckless ambitions—as adventurism.

Territorial issues, though officially dormant, became symbolic of these ideological divides. In 1954, Chinese and Soviet cartographers quietly debated river boundaries along the Amur and Ussuri. Moscow insisted that the main navigable channel defined the frontier; Beijing cited historical demarcations from the *Treaty of Nerchinsk*. The dispute, unresolved, became a proxy for leadership in the socialist world.¹⁶

By 1969, ideological rivalry erupted into open violence. In March of that year, Chinese and Soviet troops clashed on Zhenbao (Damansky) Island, a tiny sandbar in the Ussuri River. Dozens died; both sides claimed victory. The confrontation triggered massive militarisation. Soviet forces along the border increased to more than 600,000 troops, supported by new airbases in Chita and Khabarovsk. Beijing, convinced of an impending invasion, evacuated industries inland under the *Third Front* program—one of the most significant relocations of productive capacity in modern history.¹⁷

The psychological impact was immense. Mao described the USSR as “worse than the Americans.”¹⁸ The notion that the greatest threat came from the north became part of the doctrinal core of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Chinese propaganda posters of the early 1970s depicted heroic soldiers guarding the Amur against “Soviet social-imperialism.”

For Moscow, the split was equally traumatic. The Kremlin’s loss of its most significant ally exposed the fragility of the communist camp. Soviet planners re-routed industrial resources eastward and doubled defence spending in the Far East. The “China problem” consumed the Politburo’s attention until the late 1980s. As Bobo Lo notes, “Moscow’s obsession with control of its Asian marches reflected less confidence than fear—fear of both the neighbour and of its own imperial overstretch.”¹⁹

The two sides gradually recognised the unsustainability of perpetual hostility. By the late 1970s, after the death of Mao and the elimination of the Gang of Four, Deng Xiaoping’s reform agenda required external stability to attract Western investment. China re-evaluated its threat environment. Gorbachev, confronting Soviet economic stagnation, sought détente with Beijing. His 1989 visit to China, the first by a Soviet leader in thirty years, symbolised reconciliation. Nevertheless, even this rapprochement retained a territorial subtext. Negotiations over demarcation continued in parallel for decades afterward.

Post-Soviet Settlement and the Politics of Closure (1991–2008)

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 radically altered China’s strategic calculus. For the first time in modern history, the northern neighbour was weaker than China. Beijing moved quickly to secure stability and formal recognition of equality. The *Sino-Russian Border*

¹⁶ Lüthi, Lorenz M., *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

¹⁷ Naughton, Barry, *The Third Front: Defence Industrialization in the Chinese Interior*, Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 1988.

¹⁸ Radchenko, Sergey, “The Sino-Soviet Split,” *Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 49*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2009.

¹⁹ Lo, Bobo, *A Wary Embrace: What the China-Russia Relationship Means for the World*, Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2017.

Agreement of 1991, followed by the 1994 supplementary accord, settled most of the 4,300-kilometer frontier along river thalwegs and using shared coordinates. Subsequent agreements in 1997 and 2001 codified cooperation mechanisms, culminating in the 2001 Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation and the 2004 final Border agreement to settle the last portions in the Far East.

The post-Soviet decade revealed both pragmatic partnership and asymmetrical psychology. Russia, facing internal disarray, needed peace on its eastern flank; China, entering the World Trade Organization in 2001 and experiencing double-digit growth, sought a stable environment to secure resource flows and focus on the development of its naval capabilities with trade and Taiwan in mind. The new treaty declared that “the border question between China and Russia has been completely settled,” echoing diplomatic formulas of finality.²⁰ However, closure at the official level did not dissolve questions on the ground.

The remaining disputes concerned a few river islands near Khabarovsk—Bolshoi Ussuriysky (Heixiazi) and Tarabarov (Yinlong). After protracted talks, the 2004 Complementary Agreement divided the territory roughly in half. Implementation in 2008 allowed both governments to proclaim the “full and peaceful settlement” of their frontier. Chinese state media hailed the outcome as the peaceful resolution of a century-old humiliation; Russian outlets, by contrast, framed it as a minor “territorial concession” to preserve a strategic partnership. The disparity of tone exposed contrasting emotional economies: triumphal closure for Beijing, reluctant acceptance for Moscow.²¹

Demography intensified this unease. The Russian Far East’s population shrank from 8 million in 1991 to barely 6 million by 2008, while China’s Heilongjiang alone housed over 38 million.²² Local politicians and media in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk voiced fears of a creeping Chinese expansion. Though the actual number of Chinese permanent residents remained below 300,000, the perception of an invasion served domestic political interests.²³

Economically, interdependence deepened. Chinese demand for timber, seafood, and hydrocarbons revitalized the Far East.²⁴ Projects such as the Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline, begun in 2005, and the later Power of Siberia gas line reanchored Russia’s energy exports toward Asia. By 2010, China had become Russia’s single largest trading partner, though on unequal terms: Russia exported raw materials and imported manufactured goods. Analysts describe this as “asymmetrical interdependence,” wherein economic complementarity masks strategic hierarchy.²⁵

Despite mutual gains, psychological asymmetry persisted. For Russia, the Far East symbolised both pride and fragility—proof of continental expanse but also of demographic emptiness. For China, it remained a landscape of historic loss, now economically penetrable but politically closed. This ambivalence explains the recurring nationalist rhetoric that flares online

²⁰ *Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation*, July 16, 2001.

²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “China and Russia Issue a Joint Statement,” https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367146.html, October 14, 2004.

²² Niquet, Valérie, « Les relations russo-chinoises : rivalités et solidarités, » *Questions internationales* n° 101, 2019.

²³ Niquet, Valérie, « China, Mongolia, Central Asia: China on the Edges of the ex-USSR, » *China News Analysis* No. 1532, April 1, 1995.

²⁴ Niquet, Valérie, « L’évolution récente des relations économiques entre la Chine et l’U.R.S.S. (1982-1987), » *Revue d’études comparatives Est-Ouest* 19, no. 2, 1988.

²⁵ Lo, Bobo, *A Wary Embrace: What the China–Russia Relationship Means for the World*, Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2017.

whenever local Russian authorities restrict Chinese investment.²⁶ In 2009, for example, when Primorsky Krai cancelled a land-leasing agreement with a Chinese agribusiness firm, nationalist bloggers in Beijing lamented “the fear of a neighbour who once took what was ours.”²⁷

Diplomatic choreography tried to contain such sentiments. Joint border patrols, cross-river bridges, and sister-city programs proliferated after 2005. The Heihe–Blagoveshchensk Bridge, though completed only in 2022, originated in this period as a symbol of “friendship and connectivity.”

In 2008, the frontier was legally sealed yet not fully internalised. Chinese official discourse celebrated “settlement through dialogue,” reinforcing the image of a patient, peaceful China. Russian commentators, however, often described the process as a tactical necessity born of weakness.

The politics of closure also reflected broader ideological shifts. For the CCP, the resolution demonstrated diplomatic sophistication, proving that a strong China could right historical wrongs without force. For the Kremlin under Vladimir Putin, elected in 2000, it marked the reassertion of control after the chaos of the Yeltsin years. Nevertheless, behind the official ceremony lay enduring anxiety that demographic and economic realities might reopen the question in practice if not in text.

The period 1991–2008 thus closed one chapter but opened another. The line on the map was fixed, yet the symbolic frontier remained fluid. The following sections examine how that fluidity continued to shape national identity, from patriotic education and online cartography to the geopolitical friction points of the Tumen River and the Arctic.

Mapping the Past: Education, Cartography, and Territorial Legitimacy

Since the 1990s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has institutionalised patriotic education as a central pillar of political legitimacy. The campaign, launched in 1994 by the Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Education, linked citizenship to historical awareness of humiliation. Textbooks across all levels of schooling devote special chapters to the “Unequal Treaties,” including the *Treaty of Aigun* and the *Convention of Peking*. Students learn that these treaties “forced the motherland to lose territory in the northeast.”²⁸

Museums reinforce this pedagogy. The National Museum of China’s permanent exhibition “The Road to Rejuvenation” presents a spatial chronology of decline and recovery. One panel contrasts Qing borders before and after the “Unequal Treaties,” displaying a map shaded in dark red for imperial reach and pale grey for ceded zones—Outer Manchuria, Hong Kong, Taiwan. Visitors exit through a hall celebrating the PRC’s modern achievements, thereby experiencing redemption through spatial narrative.²⁹ Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* aptly applies: maps themselves function as memorials, embodying continuity between loss and revival.

This Pedagogy of space³⁰ also pervades digital culture. Online platforms such as Weibo, Zhihu, and Bilibili host thousands of amateur historians debating whether *Haishenwai*—Vladivostok—

²⁶ Alexeeva, Olga, and Frédéric Lasserre, “The Chinese Migration into the Russian Far East: A Geopolitical Time Bomb?” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 27, no. 1, 2012.

²⁷ Iwashita, Akihiro, “The Far Eastern Question: Russia’s Policy towards China,” *Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia: Russia and Its Eastern Edge*, edited by Akihiro Iwashita, Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007.

²⁸ Wang, Dong, *China’s Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History*, AsiaWorld, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008.

²⁹ “The Road to Rejuvenation, the Full Text of China’s Party Approved History,” <https://chinachange.org/2012/05/11/the-road-to-rejuvenation-the-full-text-of-chinas-party-approved-history/>, May 11, 2012.

³⁰ Callahan, William A., “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism,” *Alternatives* 29, no. 2, 2004, <https://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/CallahanChina.pdf>.

should be considered “former Chinese land.” Viral posts circulate annotated nineteenth-century maps or satellite images captioned what once was ours. When the Russian embassy in Beijing posted celebratory images for Vladivostok’s 160th anniversary in June 2020, it triggered hundreds of thousands of comments reminding followers that “this city was founded on Chinese soil.”³¹ The episode was brief—censors deleted the thread within hours—but revealing. It demonstrated that even within a tightly controlled information space, historical memory maintains subversive potential.

For the CCP, managing this nationalism is a delicate balancing act. Outrage directed against Japan or the West supports regime legitimacy even though it can be difficult to control as demonstrated during the violent anti-Japanese demonstrations in 2012; outrage against Russia threatens diplomatic strategy. The Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) suppresses anti-Russian narratives while amplifying pro-partnership messages.³² However, censorship cannot extinguish lack of trust and latent sentiment at the people’s level. The CCP’s legitimacy depends on remembering humiliation, and asserting China’s “historical rights,” but diplomacy requires selective forgetting.

Moscow observes this with some unease despite the necessary close partnership that must be preserved.³³ Russian analysts point to Chinese school maps that label Vladivostok with its historical name in brackets or that display the Amur’s former course. While Beijing insists these are historical references only, Russian commentators can read them as cultural revisionism. Thus, even without official claims, geography continues to communicate irredentist aspirations. Both states instrumentalise geography to legitimise rule, but for China, the exercise carries the moral weight of revenge.

The Tumen River: Geography of Frustration

At the tri-junction of China, Russia, and North Korea, the Tumen River encapsulates the paradox of Chinese resurgence: a continental power hemmed in by history. The river’s mouth, fifteen kilometers from open sea, marks the point where the 1860 *Convention of Peking* sealed China’s loss of access to the Sea of Japan. To this day, maps show the border stopping abruptly before the coast, a constant reminder of past humiliation.³⁴

In 1991, Beijing attempted to convert this symbol of loss into a laboratory of cooperation through the Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP), supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The initiative envisioned a free-trade and transport corridor linking China’s Jilin Province to Russian and North Korean ports.³⁵ Three decades later, the plan remains largely unrealised. Political mistrust, environmental degradation, and sanctions on Pyongyang have reduced the TRADP to a bureaucratic shell despite periodic resurgence of the project.³⁶

Local Chinese officials still tend to describe the Tumen as the river that cannot reach the sea.

³¹ Nuo, Chen, “National Humiliation and Selective Mobilization: Popular Nationalism in China’s Foreign Policy.” MA thesis, University of Chicago, 2024.

³² U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Censorship Practices of the People’s Republic of China*, Staff Research Report, Washington, D.C.: USCC, February 2024.

³³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/07/world/europe/china-russia-spies-documents-putin-war.html>

³⁴ Song, Nianshen, *Making Borders in Modern East Asia: The Tumen River Demarcation, 1881–1919*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

³⁵ Tsuji, Hisako, *Tumen River Area Development Programme: Its History and Current Status as of 2004*, Niigata: ERINA Research & Development, 2004.

³⁶ Sébastien Falletti, “Un nid d’espions et de transfuges: sur la rivière Tumen, la Chine prise en tenailles entre Kim Jong-un et Poutine,” *Le Figaro*, August 6, 2025.

Infrastructure built in the 1990s—the Hunchun–Rason highway and customs facilities—serves domestic trade rather than international transit.³⁷

Recent geopolitical developments have revived a sense of exclusion. In June 2024, Moscow and Pyongyang signed an inter-governmental agreement to build a road bridge across the Tumen River—described by both sides as a “symbol of independent cooperation.”³⁸ The project does not mention Chinese participation, reinforcing the sense in Beijing that it is being sidelined. In Beijing, some experts see the move as a warning: Russia’s strategic autonomy extends to denying China logistical outlets.

China’s difficulties on the Tumen also intersect with its Arctic ambitions. Since releasing its 2018 White Paper on the “Polar Silk Road,” Beijing has sought secure and diversified maritime routes to the Northern Sea Route (NSR), presenting itself as a “near-Arctic state” with legitimate interests in Arctic governance and shipping.³⁹ Yet the absence of direct Pacific access via the Tumen River forces Chinese Arctic-bound cargo to rely on Russian Pacific and Arctic ports—above all Vladivostok and Murmansk.⁴⁰ While Moscow welcomes Chinese investment in Arctic infrastructure, it limits Chinese stakes in strategic terminals and logistics assets. The resulting geography reinforces an asymmetrical interdependence where Russia controls the maritime choke points and China provides capital and demand.

The Russian Far East: Empty Land, Full Memories

If the Tumen symbolizes China’s frustration, the Russian Far East epitomizes Russia’s insecurity. Covering more than six million square kilometers yet home to barely six million people, the region embodies demographic imbalance on a continental scale. Across the Amur River, China’s three northeastern provinces count more than 100 million inhabitants. The asymmetry fuels uneasiness despite the strong strategic convergence between Beijing and Moscow since 2022.

Population decline has strategic consequences. Between 1991 and 2020, the Russian Far East lost nearly 20 percent of its residents. Many settlements survive only through federal subsidies. Chinese traders dominate local markets, supplying everything from vegetables to electronics. The Heihe–Blagoveshchensk Bridge, inaugurated in 2022, symbolises this economic gravity: mainly financed by Chinese capital, it connects a bustling Chinese city of 1.5 million with a Russian town of 220,000. Cross-border trade exceeded \$10 billion in 2023, but public perception remains ambivalent.⁴¹

Public perceptions in the Russian Far East also constrain regional integration. Recent surveys by the Levada Center indicate that concerns about China’s growing economic influence and Russia’s increasing dependence on its southern neighbour are widespread across the country, including in the Far Eastern regions. These anxieties persist despite rising cross-border trade and federal support for deeper cooperation with China. In local debates, economic integration is often framed through the lens of vulnerability rather than opportunity, reflecting the fear that

³⁷ Hachiya, Maximilien, “China’s Ambition for the Sea of Japan: A Distant Dream?” *Modern Diplomacy*, October 8 2025.

³⁸ *Korea Times*, “North Korea, Russia Launch Construction of Road Bridge Across Tumen River,” April 30, 2025, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/foreignaffairs/northkorea/20250430/north-korea-russia-launch-construction-of-road-bridge-across-tumen-river-seoul?latest-page=3&prnewsidx=73360172-ffaf-11ef-b492-02eed468a967>.

³⁹ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Arctic Policy*, Beijing: SCIO, January 2018.

⁴⁰ Sun, Yun, “China and the Northern Sea Route: Prospects and Limits,” Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2020.

⁴¹ Garibova, F. M., “Demographic Development of the Russian Far East,” *RUDN Journal of Economics*, Vol. 32, no. 4, 2024.

intensified connectivity could erode regional autonomy.⁴²

From Beijing's standpoint, the region represents a paradox. Economically adjacent but politically unreachable, it recalls the Qing territories lost in 1860. Chinese officials rarely mention this explicitly, yet academic articles in provincial journals frame cooperation as a restoration of connectivity interrupted by History.⁴³

The demographic and economic imbalance also affects security thinking. Russian military planners maintain large formations in the Eastern Military District, officially for deterrence against the US but implicitly to reassure domestic audiences that sovereignty is intact.⁴⁴ The border, though demarcated and officially not an issue anymore, remains securitized.

Ultimately, the Far East encapsulates the asymmetry of dependence: China's trade sustains the region's survival, but Russia's sovereignty sustains its identity. Each fears the loss of what the other provides—China fears access denied; Russia fears control diluted. The resulting equilibrium is stable yet uneasy, a coexistence of necessity glued by pragmatism.

Strategic Convergence under Constraint

After the 2008 border settlement, Sino-Russian relations entered a new phase of pragmatic alignment. The 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine accelerated this trajectory, driving Moscow toward Beijing's markets and diplomacy. However, despite the slogan of a "*no-limits partnership*," the relationship remains defined by territorial caution and asymmetrical dependence.

China has refrained from endorsing Russia's territorial revisions in Ukraine, repeatedly invoking "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity." This stance is not altruistic but self-protective: the CCP's legitimacy narrative rests on the inviolability of borders. Supporting secession elsewhere would undermine Beijing's claims over Taiwan and its internal frontiers, such as Xinjiang and Tibet. Hence, official neutrality conceals structural anxiety. Russia's open challenge to the post-1945 territorial order is precisely the scenario China fears domestically.

Military cooperation mirrors this ambivalence. Joint exercises such as *Vostok 2018*, *Caucasus 2020*, and *Peace Mission 2023* demonstrate tactical coordination while preserving operational autonomy. Command integration remains taboo; neither army allows the other near sensitive border zones. Even within the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), anti-terrorism drills avoid scenarios implying mutual defence. The cooperation thus resembles a duet in which both performers play the same melody from separate stages.

Economic asymmetry has meanwhile widened. China's GDP now exceeds Russia's by roughly tenfold; its technology and industrial base dwarf Russia's in every sector except nuclear energy and heavy weaponry. Since Western sanctions tightened, Russia has become increasingly dependent on Chinese payment systems, vehicles, and telecommunications equipment. In 2024, more than 95 percent of trade between the two countries was denominated in yuan and ruble.⁴⁵ While Moscow portrays this "de-dollarisation" as a matter of sovereignty, it effectively cements China's financial leverage.

⁴² Levada Analytical Center, *Obraz Kitaya v rossiiskom obshchestvennom mnenii* [The Image of China in Russian Public Opinion], Moscow: Levada Center, December 12, 2024, <https://www.levada.ru/2024/12/12/obraz-kitaya-v-rossijskom-obshhestvennom-mnenii/>

⁴³ Billé, Franck, *On Ideas of the Border in the Russian and Chinese Social Imaginaries*, Open Book Publishers, 2012.

⁴⁴ "Russia in the Asia-Pacific: Less Than Meets the Eye," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 3, 2020.

⁴⁵ Xu, Liu, "Monetary Cooperation Promotes China Russia Trade Cooperation," *CGTN*, June 19, 2025, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2025-06-19/Monetary-cooperation-promotes-China-Russia-trade-relations-1Ekua0V2hjj/index.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

However, Beijing exercises its advantage with calculated restraint. Publicly, it stresses “mutual respect”; privately, it dictates oil and gas import pricing. China pays roughly 30 percent below European market levels for Siberian crude—an arrangement Russian analysts justify as “strategic discounting.” Such pragmatism coexists with deep mistrust. Russian elites worry about over-dependence; Chinese strategists fear being dragged into confrontation with the West. The partnership endures because neither side can afford rupture, not because either trusts the other.

For China, every foreign alliance is filtered through the memory of encroachment. For Russia, every asymmetric alliance raises the specter of lost autonomy. Their cooperation thus reproduces the paradox of the nineteenth-century treaties in inverse form: where China once feared Russian expansion, Russia now fears Chinese dominance.

The limits of alignment are visible in multilateral diplomacy. Within the United Nations, both oppose Western interventionism, yet their voting patterns diverge on regional conflicts. Even in rhetoric, contrasts persist: Putin invokes *sovereign equality*; Xi speaks of *shared destiny*. The former defends boundaries, the latter dissolves them in connectivity and infrastructure where Chinese companies excel to increase global reach and influence.

Conclusion

The limits of the Sino-Russian partnership reveal a deeper truth: in China’s political geography, territory is never negotiable. Beijing’s narratives of past loss and national recovery impose rigid territorial claims that no political relationship can soften—not even with a partner as strategically aligned as Moscow. The disputes symbolised by the Amur or Zhenbao islet show that, for the Chinese regime, historical geography outlives contemporary diplomacy.

For Tokyo, the implication is clear. If such territorial rigidity resurfaces even in China’s closest partnerships, it can only constrain relations with Japan. The Senkaku issue already reflects this immutable vision, and in a crisis, questions surrounding Okinawa re-emerge from the same ideological matrix. No durable accommodation is possible when one side treats territory as a continuity of sovereignty and a legitimacy tool.

The lesson of the Sino-Russian case is therefore sobering: if geography ultimately sets the limits of China’s friendships, it will also define the structural ceiling of stability in Northeast Asia. Japan must navigate a regional order in which the Chinese regime’s understanding of space—historical and political—remains a permanent source of tension that no agreement can decisively resolve.

Japan-India Cultural Exchanges in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century: A Defining Touchstone of Asian Renaissance, Soft Power, and Cultural Diplomacy

Monika Chansoria*

Abstract

It is often said that art unites, and politics divides. Countries, states, or regions, amalgamate around art, for it is interpreted as a driver of social evolution. Art wields incredible power to connect people, lands, and cultures. In the context of international relations, this is often referred to as cultural diplomacy or soft power, as they remain deeply intertwined with cultural relations and public diplomacy. This essay explores a range of artistic and cultural activities and interactions between Japan and India in the late 19th and early 20th century and underlines the immense impact of the role that cultural diplomacy played in accentuating the greater objectives of soft power. While Japan enjoyed independence during the first half of that century, India was enduring colonial rule under the British empire. However, the difference between politics did not prevent intellectuals, thinkers, and artists of the two distinct cultural spheres from engaging in intensive interactions. This essay seeks to focus and decipher from the travels and interactions of pioneering Japanese artists, thinkers, adventurers, and writers, on how their journeys to British-India acted as mutual cultural emissaries. The paper demonstrates how Indo-Japanese cultural exchanges and diplomacy during the late 19th and early 20th century went on to inspiringly contribute to the greater Asian renaissance movement.

It is often said that art unites, and politics divides. Be it countries, states, regions, or cultures, they all amalgamate around art, for is interpreted as a driver of social evolution. Having the ability to link people, and create cross-cultural bridges, transcending borders and cultures, art forms may vary depending on geographical specifics, however they remain consistent when it comes to creative instincts and human expressions.¹ Art wields unimaginable power to connect people, lands, and cultures. Art and culture can markedly change the way people think, feel and behave. When set in the context of international relations, this is often referred to as cultural diplomacy or soft power.²

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¹ Monika Chansoria, "The Nihonga Master Inspired by India," *Japan Forward*, January 30, 2025, available at <https://japan-forward.com/the-nihonga-master-inspired-by-india/>

² James Doeser and Melissa Nisbett, *The Art of Soft Power: A Study of Cultural Diplomacy at the UN Office in Geneva*, A report by King's College London, 2017, p. 7.

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Alternative routes to further foreign policy objectives

Culture can illuminate and diversify the soft power of a country. Employment of art and a variety of cultural forms can influence thoughts and behaviors in the service of soft power.³ Soft power and cultural diplomacy remain deeply intertwined with cultural relations and public diplomacy. That arts and culture contribute towards shaping a nation's soft power has been outlined aptly by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. wherein he argued that one of the three key parts to a nation's soft power is "its culture" and how it presents itself in terms of its attractiveness to other nations.⁴ This can include its heritage and the story told through its history, as well as newer and fluid elements of its culture.

In contrast to the somewhat depoliticized view of soft power and cultural diplomacy offered by academic literature, it has been observed how the use of art and culture is intensely political.⁵ Although there is no consensus on the precise meanings of the terms, cultural diplomacy and soft power, Milton C. Cummings provides a strikingly "apolitical" definition of cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding."⁶ In contrast, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. defines soft power, more so in political terms, as the "ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants."⁷ It is the ability of a country to shape the preferences of another, and to do so through attraction and influence, rather than coercion.⁸ Further, Nye formulated three pillars of soft power: a) political values; b) foreign policy; and c) culture.

Placing cultural forms at the very heart of international relations as the embodiment of national values through multiple mediums of art, literature, publishing, traditional dance forms, music, and cinema constitute the conventional cultural levers of soft power. Although it sometimes remains difficult to separate art from politics, it can be argued that soft power is "standing out" while cultural diplomacy is "reaching out."⁹ The pursuit of strict semantic boundaries around soft power or cultural diplomacy at times is misplaced. Both help in creating an atmosphere that is conducive to dialogue. Reaching out is about displaying unity with others, building political solidarity, bringing countries closer together and sometimes acting as a bridge between parties—which, almost is the shorthand for cultural diplomacy.¹⁰

This essay explores a range of artistic and cultural activity and interactions between Japan and India in the late 19th and early 20th century and underlines the immense impact of the role that cultural diplomacy played in accentuating the greater objectives of soft power. The literature on 20th century art history in India and Japan has been elaborated within the framework of nation-building. Japan enjoyed independence during the first half of that century, while India endured colonial rule under the British. However, the difference between politics did not prevent intellectuals, thinkers, and artists from the two cultural spheres from engaging in intensive interactions. This essay focuses on the travels and interactions of pioneering Japanese artists, thinkers, adventurers and writers, and how their journeys acted as cultural emissaries of Japan to

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Doeser et al., n. 2, p. 7.

⁶ Milton C. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, (Washington DC: Center for Arts and Culture, 2003).

⁷ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. 2.

⁸ For more on this see, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

⁹ Doeser et al., n. 2, p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

India and vice versa.

**Tokubei Tenjiku's 17th Century Journey to India:
Tenjiku Tokai Monogatari (The story of a journey to India by sea, 1626)**

From the 16th century and even earlier, waters of the Indian Ocean find itself at the heart of the world map connecting distant nations, and narrating countless memorable stories between India and Japan. The history of the 19th and 20th centuries will be remembered for many things, including primacy of the vast and seemingly endless seas and oceans and the unlimited maritime stories that they carried. Discovery of the sea-route to India, which linked India with Europe and Asia, became a defining and transformational factor in encouraging a new culture (*namban bunka*) that radically shifted the focus of India-Japan relations, from historically remaining centered around Buddhism, to becoming a greater trade-oriented, and strategically-significant Indo-Pacific in the contemporary context.¹¹

Indo-Japanese cultural bridges have been founded upon many commonalities—including a very significant religious-cultural connection, with its origins rooted in ancient history. Indo-Japanese cooperation in Southeast Asia drew heavily on its cultural connect. For Japan, India remained the birthplace of Lord Buddha and Buddhism. As a source of inspiration for centuries of artistic, literary, and philosophical expression, India attracted devout Buddhist and literary figures from across the entire world, including Japan. Tracing Japan's ancient historical roots with ancient India, and the Indian Ocean, it is found that Indo-Japanese linkages go far back to the eighth century A.D. when Bodhisena (704-60), an Indian monk was invited in the year 736 CE by Emperor Shōmu to perform the eye-opening ceremony of the largest bronze statue of Lord Buddha at Tōdai-ji in Nara.¹²

Bodhisena was born in the southern India, and as a young man while traversing the South China Sea, he suffered a shipwreck and was rescued by another Indian trader. This trader later became a monk and served as Bodhisena's travel companion to China and eventually, Japan.¹³ While in China, Bodhisena met an official group from Japan, and was invited to accompany them back to Japan. After landing on Japanese shores in 736, Bodhisena encountered a Japanese monk named Gyoki, who took him to the capital of Heijō-kyo at Nara, and introduced him to the emperor. Bodhisena's arrival in Japan and officiating at the Tōdai-ji dedication was not just a historical oddity, it, in fact, had an immense cultural impact.¹⁴

By the 16th century, with the expansion of Indian Ocean routes to Southeast and East Asia, the scope of links between India and Japan began to diversify. In this reference dating back to the 17th century, comes the story of prominent Japanese adventurer, writer and merchant, Tokubei Tenjiku (1612–1692). The son of a salt wholesaler, Tokubei was just 15 years old, when in 1626, he was hired by a trading company in Kyoto to pursue commercial activities aboard Japanese *Red Seal* ships.¹⁵ As part of this vocation, Tokubei sailed to Siam (Thailand) and subsequently to India in 1626 aboard a *Red Seal* ship via China, Vietnam, and Malacca. Often referred to as the “Marco

¹¹ For further details see, “Finding the Indo-Pacific Through the Tales of Tokubei Tenjiku,” *Japan Forward*, December 30, 2020, available at <https://japan-forward.com/finding-the-indo-pacific-through-the-theses-of-tokubei-tenjiku/>

¹² Situated in the Kansai region of south-central Honshu, which is the largest of Japan's four main islands. Nara hosts significant temples and artwork dating back to the eighth century when it was Japan's capital.

¹³ John Carroll, “[Bookmark] Bodhisena: The Indian Monk Who Opened Eyes in Nara,” *Japan Forward*, September 26, 2020 available at <https://japan-forward.com/bookmark-bodhisena-the-indian-monk-who-opened-eyes-in-nara/>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “... Tales of Tokubei Tenjiku,” n. 11.

Polo of Japan” Tokubei’s adventurous journey and account of his India travel gained distinction also because he was, perhaps, the first Japanese to visit *Magadh* (which was an Indian kingdom during the ancient Indian era).¹⁶

Following his return to Japan, Tokubei wrote an essay on his adventurous journey in foreign countries titled “*Tenjiku Tokai Monogatari*” (Relations of Travels to India). The essay gained substantial popularity and acclaim. *Tenjiku* is a Japanese term for pre-modern India. And it was for this reason precisely, that Tokubei became widely known as Tokubei Tenjiku.¹⁷ In his essay, Tokubei provided a detailed account of people’s lives, customs, and scenery of the countries where he had travelled and lived – thus becoming a symbol of pioneering foreign adventure for Japan, as has been noted in *Foreigners in Japan: A Historical Perspective*.¹⁸

Ekai Kawaguchi’s Expedition to Tibet, 1900

Following Tokubei, the adventures and travels of Ekai Kawaguchi to South Asia and Tibet perhaps remain the most well-renowned and admired. Kawaguchi (1866-1945) was a Buddhist monk, who became the first Japanese explorer to embark upon a journey to Tibet in 1897.¹⁹ A journey fraught with danger and uncertainty, with archival accounts of 19th century Tibet describing it to be the most forbidden, inaccessible, daunting, and almost unreachable geographical territory of the Himalayas. Notwithstanding all the travails, Kawaguchi succeeded in touching the frontier of Tibet by foot. He stepped on Tibetan soil—the roof of the world, for the first time on July 4, 1900.²⁰ Struggling initially with the option of whether to enter Tibet via Bhutan or Nepal, Kawaguchi eventually chose the British India-Nepal-Tibet route, whilst diligently maintaining a diary through his entire voyage. His experiences were eventually published in the form of a memoir in Japanese in two volumes by 1904. This was followed by the English version titled *Three Years in Tibet*²¹ published in 1909 by the Theosophist Office, Vasanta Press, Adyar (Madras), British India.

The History of Cultural Renaissance between Japan and India

The timing of the cultural exchanges between Japan and India happened at an interesting turn in history—when British India was undergoing the *Bengal Renaissance*—a significant 19th- and early 20th-century movement driving in cultural, artistic, intellectual, and social reforms by means of adopting liberal ideas, and challenging the traditional feudal norms and social practices. The movement staunchly advocated for education, gender equality, and societal change, thereby profoundly shaping Indian modernity.

The ancient cultural dimensions of the Japan-India relationship revealed many fascinating features and figures. India gained freedom from colonial British rule following a long, protracted independence struggle in 1947. In the run-up to 1947, the role of the Indian National Army (INA) under Subhash Chandra Bose shall always be remembered, more so for the crucial assistance and aid received from Imperial Japan. Bose, popularly known as *Netaji* (Respected Leader) among Indians the world over, became the undisputed leader of the armed-militant wing of India’s

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ For further details see, Gopal Kshetry, *Foreigners in Japan: A Historical Perspective*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Publishers, 2008).

¹⁹ Monika Chansoria, “Reaching Tibet in July 1900 via British India and Nepal: Journey of the First Japanese, Ekai Kawaguchi,” *Policy Brief*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, Tokyo, July 30, 2019, available at https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/policybrief/pdf/PolicyBrief_Chansoria_190730.pdf

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ For further reading and references see, Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet*, (Bibliotheca Himalayica; Orchid Publishers, 2005).

nationalist movement.²² However, it remains little known that Bose was highly inspired by the writings of Japanese scholar and art critic during the Meiji restoration era, Okakura Kakuzō—also known by the name, Okakura Tenshin.²³ He remains known for the cardinal role he played in shaping artistic trends in contemporary Japan. Moreover, the Indian and Japanese interactions in the field of art and culture are more than 100 years old, famously rooted in the late 19th century legacy of Swami Vivekananda’s visit to Japan in 1893. This trend continued well into the early 20th century, as shall be discussed in the subsequent sections of this paper.

Okakura Kakuzō’s Introduction to Swami Vivekananda

At the turn of the 20th century, Western nations had come to control much of the globe. It was also the time when non-Western traditions were beginning to spread the world over, teaching spiritual lessons to a West that was increasingly unbalanced by its own geographically-expanding successes.²⁴ Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) of British colonial India and Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913) of Meiji Era Japan, were two pioneering revolutionary thinkers who enthusiastically promoted this approach. Swami Vivekananda (birth name, Narendranath Datta) was an Indian monk, philosopher, author, religious teacher, and the most famous chief disciple of Indian mystic, Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Vivekananda was the key figure in the introduction of *Yoga* and *Vedanta* to the entire Western world.

Writing in eloquent English, both Vivekananda and Okakura declared that a few Asian traditions contained wisdom that the West sorely needed.²⁵ Vivekananda and Okakura developed their ideas in a plethora of speeches and essays, a select few of which received the maximum publicity outside Asia. In the case of Vivekananda, it was a series of six addresses he made to the 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago wherein he pitched the India-centered religion of universal love and peace.²⁶ The speech made such a profound impression in the US that an American newspaper described him as “...an orator by divine right and undoubtedly the greatest figure at the Parliament.” Thirteen years later, author and art curator Okakura Kakuzō published *The Book of Tea*, a short book that introduced *Teaism* to the world.

Kakuzō was raised by an ex-samurai who went into business in Yokohama, Japan, after it had become that nation’s main treaty port. In his professional years, Okakura served as the director of the Tokyo Fine Arts Academy, with famous displays at the *Hōōden* (Phoenix Hall).²⁷ Okakura wrote the English explanatory pamphlets presenting the *Hōōden* as the quintessence of Japanese

²² For details see, Monika Chansoria, “Japan, *Hikari Kikan*, and Subhash Chandra Bose’s Indian National Army: The Defining, Yet Unfinished 1940s Connect,” *Policy Brief*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, Tokyo, February 5, 2021, available at https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/policybrief/pdf/PolicyBrief_Chansoria_210205.pdf

²³ “The Japanese Art Critic and Indian Nobel Laureate Who Shared a Great Dream for Asia,” *Japan Forward*, July 25, 2024, available at <https://japan-forward.com/okakura-tenshin-indian-rabindranath-tagore-shared-a-great-dream-for-asia-monika-chansoria/>

²⁴ David B. Gordon, “Vivekananda and Okakura: On What East Offers West,” (Asia: Biographies and Personal Stories, Part I) *Association for Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3, Winter 2014, p. 48; and also see, Inaga Shigemi, “Okakura Kakuzō’s Nostalgic Journey to India and the Invention of Asia,” in Susan Fisher, ed., *Nostalgic Journeys: Literary Pilgrimages between Japan and the West*, CJR Japan Research Series, 2001, pp.119-132.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

elegance and sophistication.²⁸ While, Vivekananda's and Okakura's paths did not cross directly at the exposition, they were to meet in India within a decade. In 1901, Okakura became acquainted with Josephine MacLeod, an American follower of the increasingly famous Vivekananda, in Japan. As a result, Okakura firmed up the idea of holding an Asian equivalent of the Parliament of World Religions in his country and invited Vivekananda (via MacLeod) to come to Japan for this purpose.²⁹ However, Vivekananda, by then had fallen too ill to travel abroad, and Okakura himself arrived in India the following year. He left Japan on December 5, 1901, disembarked at Colombo (Ceylon/Sri Lanka), and after a brief stay in Madras, arrived in Calcutta (India) on January 6, 1902. He visited sites associated with the life of the Buddha together with Vivekananda. After spending several months in India, Okakura returned to Japan in October 1902³⁰, only to move to the United States thereafter.³¹ Vivekananda, meanwhile, passed away and resultantly, Okakura's Asian edition of the world religions conference could never take place.

Despite the brevity of their friendship, there was a clear intellectual and emotional affinity between Vivekananda, and Okakura, visible in their most famous works. Vivekananda's speeches before the Parliament of World Religions contain holistic, vitalist, and nationalist themes that parallel those of Okakura's *The Book of Tea*.³² Further, Okakura in his *The Ideals of the East*, approvingly writes of Japan's "...spirit of living *Advaitism* which welcomes the new without losing the old." Indeed, Okakura sums up the entire ceremony as "essentially a worship of the imperfect."³³

Okakura Kakuzō's Stay with Rabindranath Tagore

Further to Okakura's Bengal connect was when celebrated Indian poet and Nobel-laureate Rabindranath Tagore opened his Calcutta home to many Japanese and Asian monks, poets, artists, performers, and all those connected in fostering Asia's cultural renaissance. It was a time when there was a wave of fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas and inspiration.³⁴ Okakura Kakuzō was among the most notable Japanese visitors to stay at Tagore's home. Okakura published the celebrated *The Book of Tea*³⁵ following his visit to India. *The Book of Tea*, a volume that introduced the philosophy behind the Japanese tea ceremony, remains of research interest to generations internationally who are eager to learn about minimalist aesthetics as a centerpiece of Japanese life.³⁶

In fact, Okakura Kakuzō and Tagore celebrated Asian spirituality as a heritage which was distinctively Asian.³⁷ Tagore visited East Asia to strengthen the sense of its cultural identity and

²⁸ A discussion of the *Hōōden* appears in Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 29-41.

²⁹ Gordon, n. 24, p. 49.

³⁰ For details see, "The Japanese Art Critic and Indian Nobel Laureate..." n. 23.

³¹ Gordon, n. 24, p. 49.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ For details see, "The Japanese Art Critic and Indian Nobel Laureate..." n. 23.

³⁵ Okakura Kakuzō, *The Book of Tea*, (Benjamin Press Publishers, June 2011); for related reading also see, Emiko Shimizu, [Shapers of Japanese History] *Beyond East and West: Okakura Kakuzō and "The Book of Tea,"* Aug 30, 2018, available at <https://www.nippon.com/en/views/b07207/>

³⁶ Gordon, n. 24.

³⁷ For further details and reading see, Joyce Chapman Lebra, *The Indian National Army and Japan*, (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press Pte. Ltd., 1971).

expand the Pan-Asian cultural dimension.³⁸ Tagore was eloquent in his admiration of Japan's achievement and its impact on the rest of Asia while stating:

It was said of Asia that it could never move in the path of progress, its face was inevitably turned backwards... When things stood still like this ... Japan rose from her dreams, and in giant strides left centuries of inaction behind... Japan has proved conclusively that this sudden revealment of her power is not a short-lived wonder...³⁹

While he recognized Japan's achievement unequivocally, Tagore concurrently retained the great Indian dream of Asian spirituality and its ultimate superiority over Western material power.⁴⁰ He prophesied the day when this confrontation would be apparent to the entire world.⁴¹ On similar lines, although Okakura's famous quote "Asia is One" became a watchword for Japan, perhaps he was not lauded in Japan as much as Tagore was acclaimed in India, and across the world. That notwithstanding, the publication of hundreds of editions of *The Book of Tea* in foreign languages are a testament of Okakura Kakuzō's enduring legacy. From the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the sixth century, to Okakura's bonding with Vivekananda and Tagore, the trajectory of Indo-Japanese cultural and political proximity had aged like fine wine.

Yokoyama Taikan:

The India connect of Japan's *nihonga mōrōtai* artist

Another Japanese flagbearer of the Asian cultural renaissance period was the fascinating *nihonga* artist, Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958). When Okakura Kakuzō returned to Japan from Calcutta in October 1902, he sent two distinguished Japanese artists, Yokoyama Taikan, and Hishida Shunso to Calcutta to meet Tagore.⁴² They sought to exchange artistic ideas and discuss Indian and Japanese views on art with Tagore. In fact, India and Japan's interactions on art and aesthetics underlined distinct elements such as use of colors, patterns, imperfections, and transience. The exchanges also brought out how dissimilar art forms provide diverse and wide-ranging perspectives on culture, traditions, values, beliefs, social systems and standards.⁴³

Born in the Ibaraki Prefecture, Taikan looked up to Okakura as his mentor and lived through the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa eras. He enrolled in a private Tokyo English School for four years, and the language skills he learned at this school aided greatly in his later years as a professional artist traveling to distant lands, including India. In 1898, Taikan joined Okakura in establishing the Japan Fine Arts Academy (*Nihon Bijutsuin*) in Yanaka. In 1903, Taikan held exhibitions in Calcutta, and in 1905 in New York, Boston, London, Berlin, and Paris where his painting style was highly acclaimed. This style was the Japanese traditional school art, *nihonga* (日本画). The style primarily used mineral pigments, and occasionally ink, together with other organic pigments on silk or paper.⁴⁴ The term was coined during the Meiji period (1868–1912) wherein the *nihonga* technique departed from the traditional use of the line drawing. Taikan introduced and promoted the advanced Japanese-style paintings with an original technique called *mōrōtai* (painting without outlines).⁴⁵

³⁸ For details see, "The Japanese Art Critic and Indian Nobel Laureate..." n. 23.

³⁹ For details see, Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, (India Penguin Modern Classics, 2017).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "The Japanese Art Critic and Indian Nobel Laureate..." n. 23.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

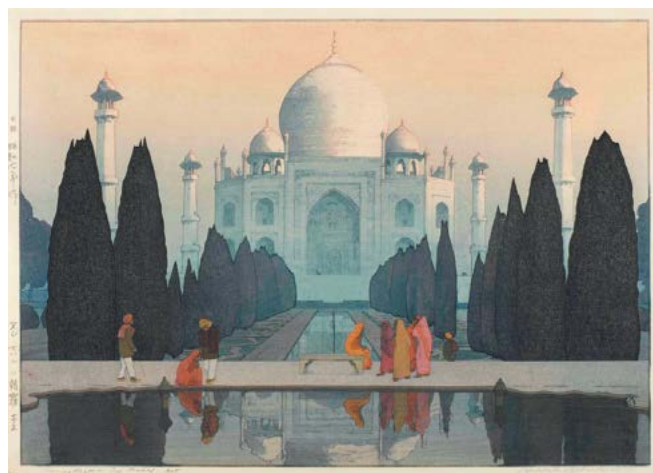
⁴⁴ *About Yokoyama Taikan*, Yokoyama Taikan Memorial Museum, Ikenohata, Tokyo, available at <https://taikan.tokyo/en/taikan/>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Taikan became renowned in the field of art globally following his visit to India. Through his art, Taikan established himself as a leader in the Japanese art world, and became a *teishitsu gigeiin* (imperial artist) in 1931.⁴⁶ He was one of the first persons to be awarded the *Order of Culture* in 1937. Taikan's long-standing contributions to the development of Japanese art earned him the *Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun*, the *First Order of Merit*.

Hiroshi Yoshida's India Visit 1930-1931: Capturing India's *Taj Mahal* and the river banks of *Benaras*

Art, in all of its forms, remains the most essential component of diverse cultures, given its centrality in communicating ideas, political viewpoints, socio-philosophical renaissance, and the very revival of expressions.⁴⁷ When it comes to deciphering key gradations and cross-cultural identities that define the essence of global civilizations, perhaps appreciating the diversity of respective art forms is the foremost prerequisite.⁴⁸ In this contextual reference, Hiroshi Yoshida, one of Japan's greatest 20th century artists, traveled to India and created iconic works capturing the majestic wonder of the world, *Taj Mahal* at various times of the day. Yoshida (1876–1950) became a member of the Meiji Bijutsukai (Meiji Art Society, 明治美術会) – the first Western-style art organization in Japan.⁴⁹ As a master painter and woodblock printmaker, Yoshida's *shin-hanga* art style remains widely respected.⁵⁰



Morning Mist in Taj Mahal, 1932
Hiroshi Yoshida

Perhaps what added to Yoshida's exclusivity were his distant travels to untouched lands across the globe, aiming to gather distinct artistic expressions and landscapes that existed.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "The Nihonga Master Inspired by India," n. 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Hiroshi Yoshida*, Ronin Gallery, The Largest Collection of Japanese Prints in the USA; Japanese & East Asian Contemporary Art, Bryant Park Place, New York, available at <https://www.roningallery.com/artists/yoshida-hiroshi>

⁵⁰ *Shin-hanga* (新版画) was an art movement in early 20th century Japan, during the Taishō and Shōwa periods.

⁵¹ For details see, Monika Chansoria, "Hiroshi Yoshida: Discovering India through the Eyes of a Master Painter," *Japan Forward*, August 29, 2024, available at <https://japan-forward.com/hiroshi-yoshida-india-through-the-eyes-of-master-painter-ukiyo-e-monika-chansoria/>

Following the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923, Yoshida embarked on a tour of the United States and Europe, painting and selling his works. Upon returning to Japan in 1925, he started his own workshop, specializing in landscapes, which drew inspiration from Japan as well as his travels abroad.⁵² Although widely traveled and well-versed with Western aesthetics, Yoshida yet maintained an allegiance to traditional Japanese techniques and traditions. He studied Western-style painting, making several trips to the United States, Europe and North Africa, wherein he sold his watercolors and oil paintings.⁵³ While highly successful as an oil painter and watercolor artist, Hiroshi Yoshida turned to woodblock printmaking upon learning of the Western world's infatuation with *ukiyo-e* (浮世絵)—the traditional genre of Japanese art that flourished from the 17th through 19th centuries.⁵⁴

Yoshida's travels to India, and parts of Southeast Asia added an entire new dimension to his already famous art work. Although he primarily was known as a mountain painter (山岳画家) in Japan, Yoshida subsequently garnered praise for his landscape prints, spending about half his time sketching on travels.⁵⁵ He was particularly regarded for his images of non-Japanese subjects done in traditional Japanese woodblock style, including the iconic Taj Mahal in north-central India. Taj Mahal—an immaculate mausoleum of white marble, built between 1631 and 1648 by Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, in the memory of his beloved wife is considered a jewel of medieval Indian art and architecture, and remains one of the most universally-admired masterpieces of world heritage.⁵⁶

From November 1930 to February 1931, Yoshida accompanied by his eldest son, Tōshi, embarked upon a journey to India and many parts of Southeast Asia.⁵⁷ During this stint, Yoshida ensured to capture the sunrise at Mount Kanchenjunga under clear skies, in addition to absorbing the different phases and positions of the moon, in order to sketch the perfect version of the Taj Mahal on a full moon night. In his six prints of the Taj Mahal published in 1932, the fifth and sixth were done in the *betsuzuri* method—each depicting the morning and night scene. Yoshida's *India and Southeast Asia* series resulted in 32 paintings.⁵⁸ Besides his famed paintings of the Taj Mahal, perhaps what stood out rather underrated was his awe-inspiring work depicting the *ghats* (river banks) of Varanasi [ancient name, *Benaras*]. It is one of the oldest living cities in the world.⁵⁹ Enthralled by the legend and sanctity of *Benaras*, celebrated author and novelist Mark Twain once wrote, "*Benaras* is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together."

⁵² "A Century of Yoshida Hiroshi's Woodblock Printing," An Exhibition at the MOA Museum of Art, Atami City, Shizuoka Prefecture, 16 Dec 2023–30 Jan 2024, available at <https://www.moaart.or.jp/en/events/hiroshiyoshidawoodblockprint2023/>

⁵³ *Hiroshi Yoshida*, Ronin Gallery, n. 49.

⁵⁴ "Hiroshi Yoshida: Discovering India..." n. 51.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Yoshida Village* (from the Series, *Ten Views of Mount Fuji*) Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, Hachioji City, Tokyo, available at <https://www.fujibi.or.jp/collection/artwork/06854/>

⁵⁸ "Hiroshi Yoshida: Discovering India..." n. 51.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*



Ghat in Benares, 1931

Hiroshi Yoshida

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/hiroshi-yoshida/ghat-in-benares-1931>

Japan–India 19th Century Gender Connect: Indian and Japanese women as the first licensed female doctors

There is a famous adage in multiple languages across the world—*a picture speaks more than a thousand words*. This holds suitably in case of the inset photograph dated 1885. The three incredible and pioneering women captured in this image (starting from the left) are Anandibai Joshi (India), Keiko Okami (Japan), and Sabat Islambouli (Ottoman Syria). Though they came from very diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds, perhaps the most significant binding commonality was their education.⁶⁰ Joshi, Okami, and Islambouli successfully obtained a degree in Western medicine in 1889, thereby becoming the first female licensed-medical practitioners in their respective countries.



From left: Anandibai Joshi, Keiko Okami, and Sabat Islambouli

Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania [October 1885]

Photo courtesy: Public domain via Wikimedia Commons

Okami, Joshi, and Islambouli were students at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania (WMCP), which was only the second women's medical program in the world in the 19th century—

⁶⁰ For details see, Monika Chansoria, "The Pioneering Women Who Became the First Licensed Female Doctors in Their Countries," *Japan Forward*, November 7, 2023, available at <https://japan-forward.com/the-pioneering-women-who-became-the-first-licensed-female-doctors-in-their-countries/>

and one of the very few globally where women could study medicine. The credit for this, as per Christopher Woolf cited in PRI's *The World*, went to the Quakers who "believed in women's rights enough to set up the WMCP way back in 1850 in Germantown."⁶¹ While women from North America and Europe were the initial admission seekers to the WMCP, candidates from distant parts of the world such as India, Japan, and Syria challenged their respective patriarchy, and societies, to travel independently to a foreign land to pursue education.⁶²

Keiko Okami became the first Japanese woman to obtain a medical degree from a Western university. Born in 1859 in the Aomori Prefecture of Minato City, Okami's childhood witnessed a Japan that was going through a period of intense transition from feudalism to a modern, industrialized society. She moved to the US in 1880, and eventually graduated with a medical degree in Western medicine.⁶³ Following her return to Japan from Pennsylvania, Okami became Japan's first female doctor of medicine and opened a clinic in her own home in Akasaka-Tameike. She also worked at the Jikei Hospital (now the Tokyo Jikei University School of Medicine). During that time, a plan for a rest home *Eisei-en* for sick women had arisen, and she opened the Akasaka Hospital branch's *Eisei-en* in 1897, located in Toyotama, Tokyo.⁶⁴ The journey of countless women, be it Anandibai Joshi from India, or Keiko Okami from Japan remains similar in a way. It is a story of grit, perseverance, and determination that has paved the way for future generations of women to pursue their dreams and create a legacy of trailblazers for gender equality and women's rights.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Through the scope and findings of this paper it is amply evident that Indo-Japanese cultural exchanges and diplomacy during the late 19th and early 20th century contributed inspiringly to the greater Asian renaissance. The mutual socio-cultural influences between Japan and India, particularly featuring Calcutta (Bengal) within the larger context of Asian intellectual history⁶⁶ during that period has carved a special historical place for itself.⁶⁷ In a sense, it revisits the concept of soft power and its ability to influence the behavior of others in order to obtain desired outcomes through attraction and co-option.⁶⁸ The key quality of soft power is its primary location in civil society⁶⁹ with socio-cultural activities at its center. Japan and India's rich cultural history and legacy and the ensuing exchanges of many centuries that this essay has elaborated, manifestly underline the relevance and relativity of soft power assets in the face of power shifts and renaissance movements that were sweeping a predominantly colonial Asia during that era.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Remembering Keiko Okami: The Trailblazing Japanese Woman Who Became a Doctor in a Western World*, A report by the Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute PA, available at <https://ppimhs.org/newspost/remembering-keiko-okami-the-trailblazing-japanese-woman-who-became-a-doctor-in-a-western-world/>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "The Pioneering Women..." n. 60.

⁶⁶ For more on the Bengal renaissance movement and its influences, see, David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835*, (Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, India, 1969).

⁶⁷ For further reading and references see, Inaga Shigemi, "The Interaction of Bengali and Japanese Artistic Milieus in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1901-1945): Rabindranath Tagore, Arai Kanpō, and Nandalal Bose," *Japan Review*, no. 21, 2009, pp. 149-181.

⁶⁸ Christopher Hill and Sarah Beadle, *The Art of Attraction: Soft Power and the UK's Role in the World*, a report published by the British Academy, London, March 2014.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

U.S. Reactions to the 1978 Chinese Armed Fishing Vessels Incursion near the Senkaku Islands

Robert D. Eldridge

Abstract

In April 1978, numerous armed Chinese fishing vessels amassed near the Senkaku Islands, resulting in several hundred violations of Japan's territorial waters. The reason for this unprecedented large-scale incursion remains unclear but it occurred as Japan was about to restart negotiations with China on a Peace and Friendship Treaty. As a country preparing to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China, the United States monitored the incident with great interest. In addition to reporting on the incident, it also double downed on its neutrality policy with regard to the question of ownership of the Senkaku Islands, and adopted some new policies based on the desire to not get drawn into the Sino-Japanese dispute. One of those self-defeating ones was the imposition of a moratorium on the use of U.S. target ranges in the Senkaku Islands, which continues today. The purpose of this article is to examine for the first time ever the U.S. reactions to this incident and highlight the problems with the responses it adopted. It is based on declassified U.S. documents, memoirs of U.S. and Japanese officials, and interviews the author has conducted over the years with some of the key players.

Introduction

Beginning on April 12, 1978, dozens and then hundreds of Chinese fishing vessels, many of them armed, gathered near Japan's Senkaku Islands from various ports along the coast of China. Due to the lack of transparency in the one-party state known as the People's Republic of China, we may never know the actual reason for this incursion, but it was clearly planned at some level due to the large number of ships involved and the geographical distances of the ports from which they sailed. The slogans used and resistance shown when Japanese authorities demanded the ships leave Japan's territorial waters also suggest a certain level of political backing in Peking or Shanghai.¹

We are, fortunately, able to know precisely how Japan responded, thanks to its having a free press, an orderly declassification process for its official documents and the existence of a number of memoirs from that time.² The same is true for the United States, a formal ally of Japan that was in the process of officially recognizing the PRC at the time. As the records show, both Japan and the United States were at a loss to explain China's behavior, other than educated guesses based in part on information relayed to them by their Chinese and foreign sources.

¹ In this study, Peking, the former name for Beijing, will be used as was common at the time.

² As this study shows, the Japanese side, too, was greatly confused about the actions of the People's Republic of China. For example, Tajima Takashi, Chief of the China Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, wrote "we were greatly surprised at what happened." See Tajima Takashi, *Gaikō Shōgenroku: Nicchū Heiwa Yūkō Jōyaku Kōshō to Tōshōhei Rainichi* (Diplomatic Testimony: Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty Negotiations and Deng Xiaoping's Visit to Japan), (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2018, p. 40). His boss, Nakae Yōsuke, suggested, "It was probably ordered from above." See Nakae Yōsuke, *Nicchū Gaikō no Shōgen* (Testimony on Japan-China Diplomacy), (Tokyo: Sotensha, 2008), pp. 163-164.

The purpose of this article is to examine the reaction of the U.S. government to the incursion by Chinese ships into the area near the Senkakus. This uninhabited island group (that President Richard M. Nixon called “those damned islands” as the Okinawa reversion talks were being finalized) falls under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Two of the islands—Taishō Jima and Kuba Jima—also possess air-to-ground target ranges dedicated for U.S. military use as per the bilateral Status of Forces Agreement.³

Interestingly, while there is some scholarship on the incident itself, there is nothing on the American reaction to it in English or Japanese despite the importance of the islands geostrategically and as a litmus test of the U.S. commitment “to defend Japan.” This article was written to fill the large gap in the academic literature.

The article is divided into eight parts and utilizes declassified U.S. diplomatic documents, memoirs, and interviews. Following this Introduction, the article briefly introduces the incident itself, U.S. diplomatic reporting of the incident from Tokyo and Peking, as well as Taipei, U.S. interactions with Chinese and Japanese counterparts, and then looks at U.S. policy resulting from the incident, before ending with a conclusion.

Unfortunately, U.S. policy that began as a result of the incident continues today—the moratorium on the use of the training ranges by the U.S. military in Japan—and the continuance of the incoherent U.S. stance to not get involved in the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Senkakus. This stance has placed both Japan and the United States at a huge disadvantage vis-à-vis the PRC and has also weakened the U.S.-Japan alliance in the process at political and operational levels.

The Incident and Background

On the morning of April 12, 1978, the Japanese Coast Guard detected a large number of foreign vessels near Uotsuri Island and approached them to instruct them to depart the area but was ignored. Subsequently, the 11th Regional Coast Guard Headquarters dispatched two other patrol vessels and a patrol plane to the scene. Nevertheless, the number of Chinese fishing vessels increased leading to a tense standoff in which some of Chinese vessels displayed machine guns and took aim at the Japanese Coast Guard. In just the first week alone, a record 357 Chinese fishing boats trespassed into Japan’s territorial waters. This tension continued for a couple of weeks, and it was not until June 24 before the Coast Guard’s special incident response headquarters could be disbanded.

During that time, the Fukuda Takeo administration (1976-1978), about to restart talks with China on the bilateral Peace and Friendship Treaty, was at a loss what to do. As readers know, Japan had normalized relations with China in September 1972 and established an Embassy there in January 1973. (The PRC subsequently opened its Embassy in Tokyo in February that year.) In doing so, it severed its official ties with the Republic of China (Taiwan) despite its long connection to the island, having administered it from 1895-1945 and signing a peace treaty with the Republic of China—set up on Taiwan in 1949—in April 1952. Following the normalization of relations between Japan and the People’s Republic of China, the two countries had sought for several years to negotiate a Peace and Friendship Treaty but were unsuccessful when the Senkaku incident happened.

This was the first incident of this kind. Since the reversion of Okinawa, including the Senkaku Islands, to Japan on May 15, 1972, there had been a number of small cases of Taiwanese fishing boats and government vessels near the Senkaku Islands as the Republic of China was also a

³ The two islands are called Sekibi Sho and Kōbi Sho in the SOFA. For more on them, see Robert D. Eldridge, “(Un)targeting the Senkaku Islands: Bombing Ranges in the Senkakus, the Decision by the United States to Suspend Their Use, and the Current Implications of that Moratorium, 1948-1978,” *Japan Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2024), pp. 37-53 (https://www.jiia.or.jp/eng/upload/eng/04JapanReview_Vol7_No2_Robert%20D%20Eldridge.pdf).

claimant to the area, but nothing of this scale and duration. Indeed, those boats would leave after a Japanese Coast Guard vessel appeared on the scene. Otherwise, they simply fished peacefully. This time was vastly different. It was done by China, in large numbers, and for different, political purposes.

Early U.S. Diplomatic Reporting about the Incident and Japan's Initial Response (April 12-April 14)

U.S. officials in Tokyo likely first heard about the incident from news stories that day and may have also been informed via the U.S. Consul General in Okinawa, John F. Knowles.⁴ By the morning of April 13, they were reporting the issue to Washington and other locations, such as the U.S. military at Yokota Air Base (Headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan and the Air Force), Camp Butler in Okinawa (Okinawa Area Field Office and commanding general of III Marine Expeditionary Forces), and Honolulu (Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command), as well as the U.S. Embassy in Taipei, U.S. Liaison Office in Peking, and U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong.

A telegram sent by U.S. Ambassador to Japan Michael J. Mansfield said the incursion by the Chinese fishing fleet into waters off the Senkaku Islands “has provoked consternation as well as confusion as to PRC motives” and that “one likely effect will be further to complicate prospects” for a peace treaty between China and Japan.⁵ The ambassador explained that the presence of the Chinese boats caught the Japanese government “by surprise” and that Fukuda thought “it strange that they should be there.”⁶ Foreign Minister Sonoda Sunao, who had been enthusiastic about a peace treaty with China, stated in the Diet earlier that day (April 13) that he had instructed the Japanese Embassy in Peking to make an official inquiry and that the government was watching the situation “with grave concern.”⁷ Mansfield reported as well that the Japanese government had sent additional patrol boats to the area, including one with an interpreter aboard, as well as maintaining aerial reconnaissance.

Mansfield's telegram also included reports from the American Consul General in Naha, who said (correctly) that the incident had received “major attention” in the Okinawa press and political circles, but that there had not been any editorial comment “probably because [the] leftist Okinawa press cannot decide what to make of this assertive action on part of country thought to be friendly to Japan.”⁸ Knowles, who had previously served in Okinawa as the political advisor to the High Commissioner from December 1968 until Okinawa's reversion in 1972, also reported (correctly) the “rumor that at least half of [the] Chinese vessels were armed with machine guns” and shared that “observers reportedly believe the Chinese boats were not configured for serious fishing, reinforcing suspicion that [the] fleet's purpose was to make [a] political point.”⁹

According to Mansfield, the China Division of MOFA was also unsure what to make of the incident. Its deputy director, Sugiyama Yōji, had told Embassy officials that the incident “provided ammunition for pro-Taipei members” in the Diet who have asked why the Japanese government

⁴ Author's interview with John F. Knowles, March 26, 2001, Alexandria, Virginia.

⁵ “Telegram 06393, Sino-Japanese Relations—Fishing in Troubled Waters, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 13, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. For more on Knowles, see Robert D. Eldridge, *The Origins of U.S. Policy in the East China Sea Islands Dispute: Okinawa's Reversion and the Senkaku Islands* (London: Routledge, 2014).

has not seized the vessels.¹⁰

Mansfield informed the State Department that his staff “shared GOJ puzzlement as to Chinese motive” but that it may have been an attempt by the PRC to clarify where Japan stood on the peace treaty being that opinion was divided in the ruling party: “while Sonoda and [ruling Liberal Democratic Party, or LDP, Secretary General] Ōhira [Masayoshi] reportedly have argued that [the] incident underscores [the] need for [a peace treaty], Chinese action is likely to strengthen [the] hand of [treaty] opponents, further dimming prospects for [an] early resumption of talks.”¹¹

These views were reported the next day in newspaper stories that the Embassy shared with Washington, after confirming their veracity. Specifically, a “top-ranking LDP official” was quoted in Japanese newspapers as saying that the presence of the Chinese vessels off the Senkakus “had raised [the] territorial issue between China and Japan, thus making it difficult for Japan even to begin negotiations with China on [a] Peace and Friendship Treaty. [The] official [also] said his statement reflected unanimous view of LDP leadership.”¹²

The Embassy checked with a Japanese source close to Ōhira who confirmed that the official quoted in the story was indeed Ōhira, someone who planned to challenge Fukuda again for the party presidency in the future.¹³ The fishing fleet was “rapidly becoming [a] major political/diplomatic issue” for the government.¹⁴ Ōhira went so far as to say, understandably, that the continued presence of the vessels off the Senkakus had made the “conclusion of [the treaty] impossible, not just for [the] present Fukuda cabinet but for an Ōhira cabinet as well.”¹⁵

This comment was significant as Ōhira was a treaty “advocate,” having been foreign minister when Japan normalized relations in 1972.¹⁶ He was particularly upset by the response of the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo to Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ request on April 13 to withdraw the ships. The Chinese Embassy representative instead said that the Senkaku Islands belonged to China and referenced the December 30, 1971 statement by China to that effect. To Ōhira, this reference to the 1971 statement was a “deliberate abrogation [by China] of [the] tacit agreement, made during normalization talks of 1972, to put aside [the] question of the Senkakus.”¹⁷ Ōhira,

¹⁰ “Telegram 06393.” Sugiyama had an expansive diplomatic career, later serving as Japan’s Ambassador to Panama and Sri Lanka. A member of the Church of Latter-day Saints, he became a pastor after retiring in 1990. Sugihara later told the author that he did not feel that Chinese officials actually believed what they were saying about the Senkakus. They did not, in other words, fully believe the islands were theirs. See Eldridge interview with Sugiyama Yōji, February 18, 2026, Yokohama, Japan.

¹¹ “Telegram 06393.” In another message earlier that day, the U.S. Embassy reported that “it now appears unlikely that [the foreign minister] will travel to Peking for [treaty] talks in [the] near future” and that the prime minister “in turn has not personally participated in current debate within LDP, leading treaty supporters to question again his resolve.” See “Telegram 06361, Sino-Japanese PFT—Momentum Slackens, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 13, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

¹² “Telegram 06516, Chinese Fishing Boats Still Off Senkakus, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 14, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

¹³ Fukuda and Ōhira had been rivals in the past, most recently leading up to the 1976 contest to replace Miki Takeo. At that time, they reportedly agreed that Fukuda would serve first and then turn it over to Ōhira. When Fukuda didn’t, Ōhira challenged him. For details on the rivalry, see Masumi Junnosuke (translated by Lonny E. Carlile), *Contemporary Politics in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Chapter 5, Seizaburō Satō, Kenichi Kōyama, and Shunpei Kumon, *Postwar Politician: The Life of Former Prime Minister Masayoshi Ōhira* (New York: Kōdansha, 1990), Part 6, and Ryūji Hattori, *Japan and the Origins of the Asia-Pacific Order: Masayoshi Ōhira’s Diplomacy and Philosophy* (Singapore: Springer, 2022), pp. 104-109.

¹⁴ “Telegram 06516.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

therefore, was doubtful that treaty talks “could be resumed without directly addressing [the] sticky territorial issue.”¹⁸

Mansfield’s Embassy felt that the “dilemma” for the Japanese government would “become increasingly acute as time passes...and will become a major political headache for Fukuda” particularly as actions against the fleet by the GOJ have been seen as ineffective although two Taiwanese boats had been chased away.¹⁹ The Embassy was also concerned that Chinese actions, which had “aroused considerable nationalist sentiment” in Japan were also helping to deflect public attention, “at least for [the] moment” from the Northern Territories issue and criticism of the Soviet Union.²⁰ Indeed the latter was “indignantly accus[ing] Chinese of pursuing [a] ‘Maoist policy which supports territorial claims against neighboring countries’.”²¹ Moscow was secretly “pleased” to see talks over a peace treaty between Japan and China ruptured.²²

The same day that the above information was being reported and confirmed, Mansfield dined with Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo at a luncheon the latter gave for Charles L. Schultze, the Chairman of President James E. Carter’s Council of Economic Advisors, who was visiting Japan at that time. In addition to Mansfield, a former Marine and soldier as well as a Senate Majority Leader, he was joined by his Deputy Chief of Mission and Japan hand William C. Sherman, among others. Both Mansfield and Sherman had been in Japan since the previous year.²³ In nominating Mansfield for the post, President Carter saw the elder statesman as America’s “Ambassador to Asia.”²⁴ He would stay in Japan until 1988, the longest serving U.S. Ambassador to Japan in history.

After the luncheon, Fukuda asked the two men to stay behind to discuss the Senkakus and the “long-stalled” Treaty of Peace and Friendship with China.²⁵ They were joined by Fukuda’s private secretary, Owada Hisashi, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Miyazawa Kiichi, who was then serving as the Director General of the Economic Planning Agency, having recently been foreign minister and a well known expert on relations with the United States.²⁶

Fukuda told his guests about the recent history of the Senkaku Islands and “the gathering there of a large number of PRC fishing boats” two days before “and the stalemate which has

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Sherman spoke of his selection as DCM in an oral history he conducted approximately 15 years later. “I was of course hoping that I would be selected by Mansfield to be his DCM and I was very glad that he did so. Before he made his selection, I escorted him around in all of his meetings around Washington. I arranged all the meetings and went with him. So I got to know Mansfield relatively well during his indoctrination period.” See “Interview with Ambassador William C. Sherman, October 27, 1993,” Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project (<https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Sherman,%20William%20C.toc.pdf>), p. 99.

²⁴ Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great American Statesman and Diplomat* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003), p. 459. See author’s interview with Michael J. Mansfield, March 27, 2000, Washington, D.C.

²⁵ “Telegram 06507, Conversation with Prime Minister Fukuda, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 14, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

²⁶ For more on Miyazawa’s life and career, see Robert D. Eldridge, *Secret Talks between Tokyo and Washington: The Memoirs of Miyazawa Kiichi, 1949-1954* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), and Robert D. Eldridge, “Miyazawa Kiichi: His Life and Times,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Fourth Series, Vol. 21 (2007), pp. 127-147.

been in effect since.”²⁷ According to Mansfield’s secret telegram of the conversation, Japanese “Self-Defense (sic) boats” were “patrolling the area but the Chinese fishing boats are refusing to leave.”²⁸ He was informed that Japan’s ambassador to China, Satō Shōji, a career diplomat with expertise in treaties and who had served as Japan’s ambassador to France and Spain, had been instructed to make representations against the intrusion of the fishing vessels into Japan’s territorial waters and was scheduled to meet that day at noon.

The brief history that Fukuda explained about the Senkakus was that the islands had been administrated as part of Okinawa Prefecture since 1895 when they were first incorporated into Japan. “At the time,” Fukuda stated, “no voices were raised against their incorporation, nor were any other claims made until after the war. As part of the Nansei Shotō they were administered by the United States during the occupation and after the peace treaty went into effect. They were finally returned to Japanese control at the time of [Okinawa’s] reversion in 1972.”²⁹

He continued by explaining that a 1969 report by the United Nations had indicated the possibility of oil deposits in the vicinity of the Senkakus and at that point, in 1971, the PRC made its claim to sovereignty over the islands.³⁰

Fukuda was serving as foreign minister at this time and had been responsible for explaining the Okinawa reversion agreement in the parliament. As the author explains in his 2014 book about the Senkaku Islands, he had been very upset with the United States at the time, stating in the Upper House in March 1972 that he was very “dissatisfied” with America’s “evasive attitude” on the Senkakus.³¹ In his conversation with Mansfield, Fukuda noted that during the negotiations for the reversion of Okinawa, the sovereignty question had been discussed with the United States. Although the U.S. government did not commit to recognizing Japan’s sovereignty over the Senkakus, Fukuda said that the United States had “indicated that if a problem arose in the future the United States would be willing to ‘show understanding’ Japan’s position.”³² He added that he had not originally intended to raise the matter with Mansfield and “was making no request as yet, but he felt it important to bring [the ambassador] fully up to date.”³³

Fukuda further told Mansfield that “no representations were made [by the PRC] at the signing of the Japan-PRC joint communique in 1972” and that “Japanese vessels have continued to patrol the area regularly. The Chinese fishing fleet incident is the first of this sort and has come as a surprise.”³⁴ He added that he did not know what his next step would be, and that it would depend on the success of Ambassador’s Satō’s protest in China.

Mansfield, who had played a key role in the passing of the Okinawa Reversion Agreement in the Senate in 1971 as well as being an advocate for the unconditional and immediate recognition of the PRC by the United States, expressed his appreciation and promised to report the conversation to Washington.³⁵ He did, which saw some comments come in from officials familiar with the Okinawa reversion agreement.

²⁷ “Telegram 06507.”

²⁸ Ibid. Here, Mansfield likely meant Coast Guard vessels.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ This history is covered in detail in the author’s *The Origins of U.S. Policy in the East China Sea Islands Dispute*.

³¹ Eldridge, *The Origins of U.S. Policy in the East China Sea Islands Dispute*, p. 278.

³² “Telegram 06507.”

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield*, pp. 458-461. Also see Eldridge interview with Michael J. Mansfield, March 27, 2000, Washington, D.C.

The first was from Deputy Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher, who sent a telegram to the Tokyo Embassy to provide guidance on the position of the United States government on the Senkakus. The telegram was drafted by Edward M. Featherstone, who had served in pre-reversion Okinawa and later as the Consul General there, and approved by Nicholas Platt, who would shortly afterwards join the National Security Council.³⁶

The guidance was written primarily to address the issue of the training ranges, which had come up in a separate telegram regarding them as a potential reason for the presence of the Chinese boats. The same day as Mansfield's discussion with Fukuda after the luncheon, an unidentified Embassy officer spoke with a Japanese reporter close to LDP Secretary General Ōhira. The latter, according to the reporter, allegedly believed that one reason for the presence of the Chinese fishing vessels near the Senkakus had to do with the fact that the Japanese government allowed two of the islands to be used by the U.S. military for target practice.³⁷

The Embassy officer had confirmed with an official from the China Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the head of the division (Tajima) had sent a personal memorandum to the LDP's General Affairs Division explaining GOJ policy regarding the Senkakus.³⁸ The Embassy officer then spoke with Tamba Minoru, the chief of the Security Division, who "agreed...that, puzzling as the PRC motives where, it was hard to believe U.S. facilities had much to do with the dispatch of [the] fishing fleet—after all, why did they wait almost six years after reversion [?]."³⁹

The immediate concern for the Embassy was that the local correspondent from the *Washington Post*, Bill Chapman, had become aware of the story about the perception that U.S. facilities in the Senkakus were "a" or "the" reason for the Chinese fishing fleet being in the area and had asked the Embassy for confirmation. Embassy officials requested to Washington that they be authorized to comment along the lines that the "longstanding U.S. forces' utilization of [the] range[s] in question has grown out of fact of Japan's exercise of facto (sic) sovereignty over islands and that United States has not taken formal position as to sovereignty."⁴⁰ It was this pressing need for guidance that most likely triggered a response from the State Department.

It was the aforementioned draft prepared by Featherstone that became the response from Washington. First, it authorized to use the following guidance on the role of U.S. military facilities in the Senkakus on an "if asked basis only": "the longstanding U.S. forces' utilization of two bombing ranges in the Senkaku Islands has grown out of the period of U.S. administration of these islands and from the fact of Japan's exercise of de facto authority over them. The [United States] uses these facilities in accordance with the Mutual Security Treaty and its related

³⁶ See Eldridge interview with Edward M. Featherstone, October 18, 2000, Washington, D.C., and "Interview with Edward M. Featherstone, September 20, 1999," The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project (<https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Featherstone,%20Edward.toc.pdf>). Also see Eldridge interview with Nicholas Platt, November 4, 2024, New York City, and "Interview with Nicholas Platt, March 7, 2005," The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project (<https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Platt-Nick.pdf>)

³⁷ As explained in detail in the aforementioned article (Eldridge, "(Un)Targeting the Senkaku Islands"), the use of both ranges began in the 1940s and 1950s respectively and continued through the application of the Status of Forces Agreement to U.S. facilities in Okinawa after reversion in 1972.

³⁸ The fact that the memorandum was sent from the China Division of MOFA is odd and inconsistent with the official stance of the Japanese government that "a territorial dispute over the Senkakus does not exist."

³⁹ "Telegram 06519, Senkaku Islands: U.S. Forces Facilities, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 14, 1978," RG 59 Department of State.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

arrangements.”⁴¹

The telegram, signed by Christopher, continued, stating, “if pressed as to [U.S. government] position on Senkaku territorial disputes,” the Embassy should use the following statement:

As you may know, under Article 3 of the Treaty of Peace with Japan, the United States acquired administrative rights over “Nansei Shotō” including the Ryukyu Islands south of 29 degrees north latitude. The term “Nansei Shotō” was understood to include the Senkaku Islands, which were under Japanese administration at the end of the Second World War and which were not otherwise specifically referred to in the treaty. On May 15, 1972, the United States relinquished to Japan, all of the rights and interest over the territories, including the Senkaku Islands, which we had been administering under Article 3 of the Treaty of Peace. The [United States] has consistently maintained that by returning administrative of authority over these islands to Japan, the United States has not added to or subtracted from legal rights to the Senkakus, which, of course, predate the United States’ connection with the Ryukyus.⁴²

Richard L. Sneider, who was serving as U.S. Ambassador to South Korea and had previously served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Japan from 1969 to 1972 was another official who chimed in having seen the exchanges between the Embassy in Tokyo and Washington. Sneider explained that he did not have the full files available to him at the moment, but “my recollection confirms [the] Depart[ment]’s views.”⁴³ Writing to William H. Gleysteen, Jr., Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, a position he had previously held, Sneider challenged Fukuda’s interpretation of events. “I can recall no specific commitment,” Sneider wrote from Seoul, “made with respect to showing understanding of Japan’s position in the future. On the other hand, this could very well be [a] semantic problem, since we made clear that we did not wish to prejudice specifically Japan’s claim to the Senkakus.”⁴⁴

U.S. Diplomatic Reporting about Sino-Japanese Interactions during the Incident (April 14-April 20)

In the meantime, the Chinese side was unwilling to listen to Japan’s demands for the PRC to withdraw the fishing boats. According to the top-secret National Intelligence Daily briefing of April 14, President Carter was informed under a subject heading of “China-Japan: Conflicting Claims” that “Japan has officially protested the continuing presence of Chinese fishing vessels in Japanese-claimed waters around the Senkaku Islands. The Chinese have rejected the protest and reiterated their own claim to the Senkakus.”⁴⁵

This was confirmed by newspaper reporting from Tokyo and Peking, with additional information that Japan had sent more patrol boats to the area. Fukuda, according to one of the stories, had called on his cabinet ministers to “remain cool” at a Cabinet meeting on the 14th.⁴⁶

⁴¹ “Telegram 096877, Senkaku Islands, from Secretary of State to Embassy Tokyo, April 15, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ “Telegram 03902, Senkakus, from Sneider to Gleysteen, April 17, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State. Sneider referenced two State Department communications in his telegram, but only one of the two has been declassified.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ “National Intelligence Daily Cable, Friday, April 14, 1978, CG NIDC 78/087C.” This document was approved for release in 2005.

⁴⁶ “Telegram 096447, April 14 EA Press Summary, from State to all East Asian and Pacific Diplomatic Posts, April 14, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

On the 17th, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the U.S. Embassy that all Chinese boats had departed the territorial waters claimed by Japan. “Chinese action,” the Embassy wrote to Washington afterwards, “ends [the] immediate crisis for [the] Japanese government and, presumably, saturation media coverage, which has upstaged all other news over past few days.”⁴⁷ However, the Embassy noted, more than 140 boats still remained in the area as of 4 p.m. that day.

The Embassy observed in a telegram that day that the departure of the Chinese vessels came after denials by PRC officials that the incident was deliberate. The telegram noted comments by three different Chinese officials which sought to downplay the incident. The first one was by the Deputy Director of the Chinese Foreign Ministry’s Asian Affairs Bureau, Wang Hsiao-yun, who told Japanese Minister Dōnowaki Mitsurō in Peking on April 14 that China did not want the development of friendly relations between the two countries to be impeded by the Senkaku Islands issue. The second one was a statement on April 15 by Vice Premier Keng Piao who told a group of visiting Social Democratic Federation (*Shakai Minshu Rengō*) members from Japan, led by Den Hideo, that the Senkakus incident was “totally accidental” and that it would be “wiser to let the matter drop for the time being rather than renew discussion of the issue.”⁴⁸ The third interaction was when Hsiao Hsiang-t sien, Counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo, reiterated on April 16 to Director General Nakae Yōsuke of the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s Asian Affairs Bureau that the vessels’ entry had been accidental and suggested that the two countries should try to prevent the Senkakus issue from obstructing efforts to conclude a peace treaty.

Nevertheless, the U.S. Embassy felt that the “impact on [treaty] prospects has been immediate and adverse” and “Peking’s action as viewed from Tokyo seems both inexplicable and ill-advised” because the Japanese government will be more “wary of PRC in future.”⁴⁹ Indeed, Fukuda expressed “surprise and dismay” at the incident, at both the Cabinet meeting on the 14th and during a political rally in Kyoto on the 15th. He stated that the incident had occurred after more than five years of sensitive discussions on the peace treaty, but that his intention to conclude the treaty had not changed and therefore care would be taken not to damage Sino-Japanese relations.⁵⁰

Objectively speaking, the Embassy saw the incident causing the treaty to be shelved for the “foreseeable future” as the Japanese government “could not now proceed with treaty discussions without addressing [the] territorial issue on which mutual agreement seems most unlikely. Whether it will be possible—or even considered desirable—to try to pick up [the] pieces will depend on PRC attitude, how quickly Japanese emotions calm down, and extent of [Prime Minister] Fukuda’s determination, always less than wholehearted.”⁵¹

According to an intelligence source, Fukuda in fact “could not conceal his delight at the incursion by the fishing fleet.”⁵² Fukuda had long been concerned about the status of the

⁴⁷ “Telegram 06687, Impact of Senkaku Incident, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 17, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Another report said Chinese officials told the visiting Japanese delegation and Foreign Ministry counterparts that they would investigate the incident. See “National Intelligence Daily Cable, Monday, April 17, 1978, CG NIDC 78/089C.” This document was approved for release in 2005. The SDF, which existed from 1978-1994, included members of the Japan Socialist Party and was the predecessor to the *Nihon Shintō* (Japan New Party) and *Shintō Sakigake* (New Party Sakigake or Harbinger) that was involved in the non-LDP coalition governments in the early 1990s.

⁴⁹ “Telegram 06687.”

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

Senkakus, as mentioned earlier, and led a faction that was strongly pro-Taiwan and very unhappy about the idea of Peace and Friendship Treaty with China. For these reasons, he may have been reluctant to move forward.

Another more generous interpretation is that he was taking his time to build a consensus within the ruling party. “The Prime Minister may very well have been slowly, carefully but determinedly trying to bring about an LDP consensus in favor of the treaty,” one scholar wrote about this time, “before actually moving to negotiate, let alone sign. He was probably stalling and wooing supporters, activities which are not mutually exclusive.”⁵³

Overall, according to Mansfield’s staff, Japanese “reaction to [the] incident has been relatively restrained” but “it has been firm and insistent that the [government] retain Japanese control over the islands.”⁵⁴ The Embassy noted that within the LDP and Cabinet, there were discussions on April 14 about building a lighthouse, heliport, and other facilities in the Senkakus as well as expediting construction of large high-speed patrol boats to monitor the situation.⁵⁵ On the 15th, the National Defense Division of the LDP Research Council criticized the government for its “weak attitude” on the Senkakus and called on it to do everything necessary to protect Japanese sovereignty. Executive Council Chairman Nakasone Yasuhiro even stated that the incident showed Japan needed to revise its postwar constitution to eliminate restrictions on its defense forces, something for which he had long been a proponent.

In the final analysis, the Embassy felt it was still too early to “gauge [the] nature and full extent” of the Senkaku incident on the political scene in Japan, it “clearly came as something of [a] shock...rais[ing] serious questions about PRC intentions which continue to mystify [the Japanese and]...forcefully reminded [them] of vulnerability of Senkakus.”⁵⁶ (This vulnerability was particularly felt from both military pressure from China as well as diplomatic pressure—i.e., lack of support—from the United States.)

No sooner had this report gone out, however, when new information came in that the number of Chinese vessels had actually increased, although they were generally outside of Japan’s territorial waters. In light of this, MOFA told the U.S. Embassy on April 18 that Minister Dōnowaki in Peking had been instructed to lodge a protest with the Chinese government and to find out the results of the investigation Deputy Director Wang had promised Japanese officials on the 14th.⁵⁷ (Privately, Japanese Embassy officials in Peking told representatives of the U.S. Liaison Office there that they “doubted whether PRC would ever pass on results of an investigation (if

⁵³ Daniel Tretiak, “The Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1978: The Senkaku Incident Prelude,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 12 (December 1978), p. 1240.

⁵⁴ “Telegram 06687.”

⁵⁵ For more on this, see Robert D. Eldridge, “Developing the Islands or Demonstrating Effective Control? The Japanese Government and the Construction of a Heliport in the Senkaku Islands in the Late 1970s,” *Japan Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2025), pp. 20-38.

⁵⁶ “Telegram 06687.”

⁵⁷ “Telegram 06868, Chinese Boats Remain in Senkakus Area—PRC First Secretary Comments, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 18, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State. In what was the main purpose of this telegram, the Embassy reported that a Western diplomat had spoken with 1st Secretary Sung Wen on the afternoon of April 18, who said that the incident was accidental and a “minor problem to be solved by diplomatic means.” He stated the Chinese aim was to put the problem “aside temporarily,” and blamed the Japanese side for “making it [a] major issue in order to delay signing [the] PFT.” Sung also tried to make the case why under international law the islands belonged to China.

there was one).⁵⁸⁾

Further insights into the incursion of the Chinese fishing vessels were provided by the U.S. Liaison Office in Peking, which had been established in May 1973 to facilitate interactions between the United States and PRC prior to normalization and the re-opening of the Embassy in March 1979 (which had closed in February 1950, after the Chinese Communist Party had come to power). Headed at the time by Leonard F. Woodcock, the recently retired president of the United Auto Workers union which had helped get Carter elected in 1976, the USLO was monitoring the situation as things were going on in China as well as getting ready to host Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor to President Carter.

Woodcock informed Washington that the Japanese Embassy officials in Peking “believed that [the] definitive PRC line on [the] Senkakus incident” was provided by Vice Premier Keng Piao in the latter’s meeting with Den from Japan and that they “do not expect the PRC to keep the issue alive and remain perplexed as to the Chinese motivation in precipitating this minor crisis.”⁵⁹

Importantly, the Japanese official told the (unidentified) USLO representative that he found it “interesting” that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted the position that “in principle recognized Japanese sovereignty over the islands.”⁶⁰ He explained that he had delivered notification to the Chinese foreign ministry of the 12-mile extension of fishing limits around the Senkakus. According to him, the Chinese side had assured him that the “authorities concerned ‘would be notified’” in response to a Chinese explanation that the fishing boats in question were small ones “without sophisticated distance measuring equipment aboard...[and] perhaps they did not realize they were inside Japanese limits [or] ...had never received word about the extension of Japanese fishing limits.”⁶¹

Woodcock relayed that the Japanese officials his team spoke with were “generally puzzled” as to what the Chinese motivation was in creating or permitting the incident, doubting “because of the close timing” the PRC “reacted simply to the raising of the Senkakus question by right wing LDP members.”⁶² Two other theories offered by the Japanese side, including one by the agricultural and fisheries officer, were that the recent reorganization of the Chinese fisheries administration may have led to the incident, and the other was that the Chinese government had simply miscalculated the Japanese reaction, thinking that “a little pressure might actually hasten the conclusion of the PFT and underline PRC constancy on the basic territorial issue” of the Senkaku Islands.⁶³

Whether the USLO officers accepted these two explanations is unclear, but in their eyes it was

⁵⁸ “Telegram 01063, Chinese Fishing Boats Off Senkakus, from Woodcock to Secretary of State, April 18, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State. Dōnowaki went to meet with Deputy Director Wang on the afternoon of April 21 to obtain the results of the investigation. See “Telegram 07081, Senkaku Incident—April 21, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 21, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

⁵⁹ “Telegram 01063.”

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. The Japanese press reported on April 21 the comments of a Japanese fisherman from Nagasaki, who claimed to have recently fished alongside Chinese ships in waters near the Senkakus. He stated that the Chinese entry into the Senkaku territorial waters were indeed “accidental” and that they had fished there for filefish the year before as well. The U.S. Embassy noted in its report to Washington that the “latter assertion contradicts all official GOJ statements to date, which have maintained this was first appearance of PRC fishermen in Senkaku waters,” and that the political officer of the China Division of MOFA actually “hoped [the] assertion was true” probably because it would help diffuse the situation. See “Telegram 07081.”

⁶² “Telegram 01063.”

⁶³ Ibid.

only “remotely possible” that the fleet’s commander “acted mistakenly.”⁶⁴ Moreover, regarding the “miscalculation” theory, Woodcock wrote that the incident would not have been the “only recent Chinese miscalculation in their handling of relations with Japan,” explaining, “[China’s] approach to the PFT negotiations in recent months, which has included some rather insulting references to PM Fukuda, has been heavy-handed and generally counterproductive. If one assumes that [the Chinese] actually want rapid conclusion of a treaty.”⁶⁵

Immediately after that telegram went out, the Chinese compounded the situation by insulting the Japanese prime minister the next day, in Tokyo and Peking. At a banquet in Peking for Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien, Foreign Minister Huang told the then-deputy chief of mission from the Philippines that the incident had been “blown out of all proportion by right wing elements in Tokyo opposed to the [treaty]” and made “derogatory comment about PM Fukuda’s indecisiveness.”⁶⁶

This comment was repeated the same day in Tokyo, which suggests it was orchestrated. PRC Ambassador to Japan Hao Fu, at a dinner on April 19 for former Upper House president Kōno Kenzō, who was seen as a proponent of the treaty, said that the Senkakus incident was accidental, implying that the Japanese side was deliberately highlighting the issue. Furthermore, Hao reportedly asserted that Prime Minister Fukuda had “no intention of promoting the conclusion” of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship.⁶⁷ The following day, after the remarks were reported in the press, Fukuda criticized them saying that it was “inconceivable for an ambassador to make such an imprudent remark” with other government officials saying Fu’s remarks were “unpardonable and constituted interference in Japan’s internal affairs.”⁶⁸ Both the Chinese side and Kōno, the younger brother of a former faction leader and deputy prime minister, later denied the ambassador made such a comment.⁶⁹

Before we look further at Sino-Japanese interactions over the incident and U.S. reporting of those outcomes, it is necessary to introduce briefly how the U.S. government interpreted what was going on inside the Chinese leadership.

An American Interpretation of Chinese Actions: The Oksenberg Memo to Brzezinski

Approximately a week after the start of the incident, Dr. Michel C. Oksenberg, a senior member of the National Security Council responsible for China affairs, prepared a confidential memo for National Security Advisor Brzezinski on the incident. Entitled “Chinese Activities Around the Senkaku Islands,” the two-page memo sought to answer what exactly China was thinking when it launched, or at least allowed, its fishing vessels to gather in large numbers near the Senkakus.

Oksenberg, like Brzezinski, was born in Europe and later naturalized as a U.S. citizen. Also, like his boss “Zbig,” he studied and taught at Columbia, among other institutions. Oksenberg specialized in China, while Brzezinski, ten years his senior, in Soviet and International Affairs.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Telegram 01089, PRC Fishing Boats in Senkakus, from Woodcock to Secretary of State, April 20, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State. The USLO noted at the end of the telegram that “Philippine interest in cases of disputed sovereignty over uninhabited islands is obvious. Neither Philippine or (sic) Chinese side, however, has mentioned Spratley (sic) group since Senkaku flap began.”

⁶⁷ “Telegram 06996, Senkaku Incident and PFT: Prime Minister Takes Umbrage at PRC Ambassador’s Remarks, from Mansfield to Secretary of State, April 20, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

⁶⁸ Ibid. This wasn’t the only comment of this kind. Several more had been made prior to that by Teng Hsiao-p’ing (Deng Xiaoping). See Tretiak, “The Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1978,” pp. 1240-1241.

⁶⁹ “Telegram 07081.”

Oksenberg had particularly good access to Chinese officials, such as Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, whom he had met on previous occasions. In one biography of Brzezinski, Oksenberg was described as “not only a brilliant analyst but also a superb bureaucratic infighter, having honed his skills in the academy.”⁷⁰

Oksenberg began the memo by explaining that the presence of the boats could not be attributed to a “local decision by lower level military or party officials” because the boats came from six different Chinese ports, which presumably would have required much coordination, fuel, and supplies.⁷¹ The Chinese action, therefore, was “perplexing, particularly because it departs from moderate and unprovocative Chinese policies toward Japan over the past year and more.”⁷²

Oksenberg first attempted to explain it as China’s way to “express its displeasure over Japan’s footdragging” on the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, but he said that “hypothesis seems implausible.”⁷³ The reason was, he wrote, that the Chinese “probably would not link” progress on the treaty with a settlement of the Senkaku issue as the Chinese had agreed in 1972 to “set aside the Senkakus as they worked to improve Sino-Japanese relations” and because according to Japanese reports, “all Chinese statements about the current incident have attempted to decouple the Senkaku[s] and the [treaty].”⁷⁴

Instead, Oksenberg argued the Chinese might be reacting to other developments including the following three:

[1] Nakasone [the aforementioned Chair of the LDP Executive Council and conservative faction leader] has been attempting to link the [treaty] to the settlement of the Senkaku issue. Rather than attempting to link the issues, the Chinese effort may be a miscalculated effort to deter the Japanese from linking the two issues.⁷⁵

[2] The Japanese Self-Defense Forces, according to Japanese press reports [dates unidentified in the memo] early this month, have talked about sending patrol boats and helicopters to improve the Japanese position in the Senkakus. The Chinese may be attempting to deter such moves. They may fear an erosion of the Japanese commitment to the earlier agreement to sustain a status quo in the region.

[3] The Lower House of the Diet early this month passed the enabling legislation for the Japanese-ROK agreement on sharing the resources of the Continental Shelf. This agreement has implications for use of the resources around the Senkakus. The Chinese may well be willing to risk immediate Japanese displeasure in order to underscore the seriousness of their

⁷⁰ Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “Beijing’s Friend, Moscow’s Foe,” in Charles Gati, *Zbig: The Strategy and Statecraft of Zbigniew Brzezinski* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 89. A colleague of Oksenberg wrote with a slightly different appraisal, “Mike had never worked in a big bureaucracy and had little time for the consultative process. A marvelous lecturer and lucid writer, his interpersonal skills were less developed.” See Nicholas Platt, *China Boys: How U.S. Relations with the PRC Began and Grew* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing/Vellum, 2009), p. 249.

⁷¹ “Memorandum from Michel Oksenberg to Zbigniew Brzezinski on Chinese Activities Around the Senkaku Islands, April 18, 1978,” Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁷² “Memorandum from Oksenberg to Brzezinski on Chinese Activities.” This view was shared by Tretiak in his aforementioned article, “The Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1978,” pp. 1245-1246: “The Senkaku incident didn’t ‘fit’ the recent pattern of Chinese foreign policy, yet it occurred and caused concern.”

⁷³ “Memorandum from Oksenberg to Brzezinski on Chinese Activities.”

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Brzezinski was well aware of who Nakasone was, having devoted many pages to him in his book earlier that decade, *The Fragile Blossom: Crisis and Change in Japan* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). In fact, Nakasone interestingly received more coverage than the prime minister at the time, Satō Eisaku, or the latter’s successor, Tanaka Kakuei.

claims to these potentially oil-rich waters.⁷⁶

Oksenberg, a protégé of A. Doak Barnett, a former journalist and Columbia scholar of contemporary Chinese affairs who had been born in Shanghai in 1921, continued by writing that the “unknown aspect of this intriguing situation” concerned who made the decision.⁷⁷ He provided two possible explanations, “neither of them particularly attractive.”⁷⁸

The first is that it was a decision by Deng Xiaoping, who was serving as Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and Vice Chairman of Chinese Communist Party, with the evidence being that the

maneuver has all the angularity, bluntness, and ill-considered decisiveness of a [Deng] decision. [He] frequently moves rapidly and assertively before carefully calculating the likely reaction to his move—a fault which helps explain his frequent trouble within China. The conventional wisdom around town today in the Intelligence Community is that it is a [Deng] decision, although there may be some differences among the Chinese leadership which helps explain some of the waivering (sic) and mixed signals the Chinese have been emitting. If it is a [Deng] decision, then we are reminded of his tough and acerbic qualities which do not speak well for our possible prospects in dealing with [him] in the months ahead.⁷⁹

The second explanation, according to Oksenberg, was that it was a decision by Foreign Minister Huang Hua, who had been serving as China’s permanent representative to the United Nations and had submitted in that capacity a letter on May 20, 1972 to the Security Council critical of the inclusion of the Senkaku Islands in the area to be reverted to Japan at the time of the reversion of Okinawa. Oksenberg suggests that the use of the Chinese fishing vessels was “more Hua’s decision and has been undertaken with the knowledge that it would undercut [Deng]’s recent move toward Japan. This interpretation would suggest that [Deng] is not totally in control and his policies are subject to the same kind of blockage which the ‘Gang of Four’ were earlier able to erect. If this is the case; then the Chinese leadership may not be sufficiently unified to deal with some very tough foreign policy issues, including their relations with us.”⁸⁰

Regardless of the explanation, Oksenberg felt that the Chinese “may have miscalculated.”⁸¹ This is because, he says, the Chinese have

eroded the good will that they have generated in Japan in comparison to Moscow’s heavy-handed treatment of Tokyo. They have delayed the [treaty]. They probably have altered what Fukuda will say to the President [Carter] about China. They may have even provided some stimulus for rethinking about Japan’s defense requirements in the years ahead, for this Chinese pressure joins current Soviet and American pressure on Japan and causes many Japanese to feel somewhat isolated in world affairs...It is too early to draw definite conclusions about this incident nor to hazard a guess as to how long the affair is likely to last. But Mike Armacost [the Japan specialist on the NSC and future ambassador to Japan] agrees with

⁷⁶ “Memorandum from Oksenberg to Brzezinski on Chinese Activities.” For details on this issue, see Kameda Akihisa, *Senkaku Shotō no Sekiyū Shigen to Nicchū Kankei* (Oil Reserves in the Senkaku Islands and Japan-China Relations), (Tokyo: Sanwa Shoseki, 2021), particularly Chapters 3-5.

⁷⁷ “Memorandum from Oksenberg to Brzezinski on Chinese Activities.”

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

me that this is a significant development in East Asia and certainly one well worth closely monitoring.⁸²

As the PRC does not generally make documents available to the public or researchers (especially in endeavors it has little leg to stand on), we may never know the real reason for the use of the hundreds of armed fishing vessels in the vicinity of the Senkakus in the spring of 1978, but unfortunately, the United States adopted some policies (introducing a moratorium on the use of training ranges in the Senkaku Islands) and doubled down on others (U.S. neutrality in the territorial dispute) as a result of it that have yet to change in the near five decades since.

U.S. Reporting on the Resolution of the Incident (April 20-)

On April 21, Political Counselor Dōnowaki met with Wang Hsiao-yun to obtain the results of the investigation Chinese officials promised a week earlier. Deputy Director Wang first stated for the record the Chinese position that the Senkakus belonged to the PRC and then reiterated that the incident was due to fishermen who followed the migration of fish which went near the Senkakus, as was usual practice.⁸³ Wang then went on to say that the Chinese felt, in any case, that the Senkakus issue “should not be allowed to interfere with the development of friendship between the PRC and Japan.”⁸⁴

It is unclear how Dōnowaki responded, but he shared with his counterpart at the U.S. Liaison Office the view that the Chinese foreign ministry was making “a sincere effort to play down [the] issue...[as] Wang made no effort to argue case for Chinese sovereignty other than [the] initial pro forma statement...and [instead] concentrated on trying to provide a plausible explanation for [the] presence of Chinese boats independent of the sovereignty question.”⁸⁵ As such, the Japanese Embassy was planning to recommend to Tokyo that the Japanese government accept the Chinese explanation and “not pursue the matter further.”⁸⁶

Dōnowaki said that while they did not intend to ask the Chinese side for further explanations or assurances, and Japanese officials hoped the issue would die down over the next few weeks, he admitted that Wang’s statement did not adequately explain the incident since the Japanese side had no evidence of Chinese fishing in the waters off the Senkakus in recent years. Dōnowaki sensed, rather, officials from the Chinese foreign ministry had been unaware of the dispatch of the fishing vessels as there was much confusion among lower-level officials after the incident came to light. In any case, he felt that the damage to treaty talks was significant and did not think

⁸² Ibid. The last sentence was underlined, presumably by Brzezinski.

⁸³ “Telegram 01114, Chinese Response on Senkakus Incident, from Woodcock to Secretary of State, April 22, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

⁸⁴ Ibid. A similar explanation was provided a few days later in Moscow by a Chinese diplomat speaking with an American official. The former “generally followed PRC line” reported in previous telegrams describing Chinese incursions into the Senkakus waters as “accidental.” The diplomat, identified as “Li,” indicated that these incursions were made by “local” fishermen “without the knowledge of the Chinese central authorities” and that “no political significance should be attached to them.” He stressed that the incident would “not impede the positive trend in Sino-Japanese relations” despite what one reads, he “joked, in the Soviet press.” The Chinese diplomat lamented, however, that the incident “gave ammunition” to the critics in Japan of the treaty even though the treaty would be eventually signed as “both sides had agreed” at the time of the establishment of diplomatic relations [in September 1972] that a solution to the Senkaku problem should be postponed. Finally, he said, Sino-Japanese goodwill has been reflected in the lack of activity by either side to exploit the oil resources in the Senkaku area. “Telegram 08967, Sino-Soviet Relations, Toon to Secretary of State, April 25, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State.

⁸⁵ “Telegram 01114.”

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Foreign Minister Sonoda would be able to visit China until the end of the year. When the U.S. Embassy official asked Dōnowaki if he thought the Chinese would accept this delay in treaty negotiations, he said he believed they would as they “must be aware of the effect the Senkakus affair has had on Japanese opinion.”⁸⁷

As it turned out, Sonoda would end up visiting much earlier, as talks on the Sino-Japanese peace treaty began that summer and the treaty itself was signed in August. The incident did not, in the end, greatly delay the treaty, thanks in large part to Japan’s willingness to accept Chinese explanations no matter how banal and nonsensical they were. There are some arguments (to which the author does not subscribe) that the incident actually helped “clear the air” and moved things forward.⁸⁸

In the meantime, Fukuda invited Mansfield to the official residence on the morning of April 25, knowing that the ambassador was leaving for the United States the next day ahead of the prime minister’s planned visit to Washington. The purpose of the meeting was for an informal exchange of views concerning the trip and was attended by Sonoda as well. Sino-Japanese relations in general, and the Senkakus in particular, were some of the topics that came up early on.

Fukuda recalled their last meeting ten days earlier at which he had noted how unfortunate it was that the Chinese incursions into the Senkaku waters occurred just as Japan was about to move into a more active phase of negotiating the PFT with China. He then asked his foreign minister to provide an update on the situation.

Sonoda, with whom Mansfield had developed an especially close relationship, began by saying that the Senkaku incident had “caused confusion in China as well as in Japan” and that it had taken some time before the Chinese were ready to deal with the issue officially.⁸⁹ When the Chinese side “finally responded to Japanese protests and inquiries,” their reply was that the incursions had not been planned and were essentially “an accident,” implying that the recent extension by Japan of territorial waters from the three- to twelve- mile limit may have been part of the problem.⁹⁰ In any case, Sonoda continued, Japan would proceed with the negotiations on the treaty “only after the Senkaku issue had been settled in one way or another.”⁹¹

It is unclear if the “Senkaku issue” here meant the blame for the incident or the question of sovereignty question itself. Imprecision—in part caused by language barriers—in meetings plus incomplete record keeping—in part caused by ignorance of the issues—regularly haunts bilateral meetings, especially between Japan and the United States. This is an example of one of those times.

Fukuda followed Mansfield, traveling to the United States on April 30. He and Carter were scheduled to meet on the morning of May 3. In preparation for that meeting, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, whom President Carter had said was “philosophically closest to me” out of all his cabinet officers, prepared the schedule and talking points for the president.⁹² Fukuda, whom Carter had met previously, was described as “wily and resilient” but a “firm friend of the United

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Tretiak, “The Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1978,” pp. 1248-1249.

⁸⁹ “Message from Ambassador Mansfield to the President on Prime Minister’s Views Re Meeting with President, April 25, 1978,” RG 59 Department of State. Regarding Mansfield’s close relationship with Sonoda, see Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield*, p. 472.

⁹⁰ “Message from Ambassador Mansfield to the President.”

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), p. 302b.

States” who was concerned about the “state of our relationship.”⁹³

Symbolic of the importance of the issue, the State Department prepared a two-page, four-part briefing paper on the Senkakus.⁹⁴ It is reproduced in full here.

Senkaku Islands Territorial Dispute

US Objectives: To avoid becoming involved in a territorial dispute between Japan and China (PRC and ROC) over ownership of the Senkaku Islands.

Japanese Objectives: Ultimately, to obtain US support for the Japanese claim to the Senkakus, but in the meantime to avoid raising the issue and prompting the United States to reiterate its position.

Essential Factors:

The long-dormant dispute between Japan and the People’s Republic of China over ownership of the Senkaku Islands, nine uninhabited islets between Taiwan and Okinawa, flared up in mid-April. Upwards of 140 PRC fishing vessels (some armed) entered the 12-mile territorial waters claimed by the Japanese around the islands and displayed signs asserting the PRC claim. The Japanese quickly demanded an explanation from Peking and the PRC equally quickly termed the incursion an “accident.” The Chinese fleet withdrew four days later, largely defusing the crisis, although vessels remained in the vicinity for some time, occasionally straying into the Japanese-claimed waters again. Motives for Peking’s action are not clear. The Chinese may have been dissatisfied with what they view as Fukuda’s foot-dragging on negotiations for a Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty or with Japanese Upper House consideration of the Japan-ROK continental shelf agreement in the face of PRC protests. In any case, the incident has set back prospects for a peace treaty while demonstrating Chinese and Japanese sensitivities about their respective territorial claims. (Both sides had agreed to shelve their conflicting claims in 1972 when Sino-Japanese relations were normalized.) The tiny, barren Senkakus, claimed by the ROC in addition to Japan and the PRC, are significant chiefly for their relation to regional fisheries and possible submarine oil deposits.

The United States exercised administrative control over the Senkakus from 1945 until 1972 when such control reverted to Japan along with Okinawa and the Ryukyus. The US still uses two of the islets as bombing ranges under the Mutual Security Treaty with Japan. We recognized in 1971 that, despite substantial historical evidence supporting Japan’s claim, we would not serve our long-term interests in the region by taking sides in the Senkakus dispute. Accordingly, we announced in June 1971 our view that by returning the islands to Japan, the US had not added to or subtracted from legal rights to the Senkakus. The development of US relations with the PRC in the meantime has strengthened the rationale against our involvement in the dispute.

Points to be Made:

- The US recognized Japanese authority over the islands until the end of World War II. The US exercise of administrative authority from 1945 to 1972 stemmed from Article 3 of the Peace Treaty.
- The US will not become involved in the Senkakus dispute. As we stated at the time of Okinawa reversion: “The US has consistently maintained that by returning administrative

⁹³ “Undated Memorandum to the President from Cyrus Vance on Your Meeting with Takeo Fukuda, Prime Minister of Japan, May 3, 1978—10:30 AM,” Carter Presidential Library.

⁹⁴ Department of State Briefing Paper, “Senkaku Islands Territorial Dispute,” in “Visit of Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda, April 30-May 6,” Carter Presidential Library.

authority over these islands to Japan, the United States has not added to or subtracted from legal rights to the Senkakus which, of course, predate the United States' connection with the Ryukyus.”
(end)

Carter hosted Fukuda for three back-to-back meetings on May 3, starting at 11:20 a.m. and finishing in the early afternoon.⁹⁵ The first meeting, called a tête-à-tête, was with just a few people. The second meeting, which began at 11:30, included fuller participation, such as Vance and Mansfield. It was at the second meeting that Fukuda broached the Senkakus issue in the context of China. Fukuda stated,

On China, five years ago, after the Shanghai Communique and after you began to normalize relations with China, we normalized our relations with Peking. We are now negotiating a Peace and Friendship Treaty with Peking, but our progress toward that Treaty has been marked by fits and starts, by convening meetings and moving forward and then having the momentum interrupted. The reason behind this is the Hegemony Clause. The wording is aimed at a third country. We were about to reconvene to make progress on the Treaty again when the Senkaku incident occurred. A reconvening of the negotiations has once again been interrupted, but we hope they can resume.⁹⁶

Although Carter had been briefed on the issue (as seen in the above memo as well as a presentation by the Central Intelligence Agency⁹⁷), he seems to have chosen not to respond here referencing the Senkakus. Neither the incident nor any reference to sovereignty matters appeared in any of the declassified U.S. documentation on the Fukuda visit itself.

However, reference to the Senkakus did appear again shortly after this on two occasions during Brzezinski's trip to China and Japan in late May. While not the subject of this article, his trip was controversial within the U.S. government—was it proper for the National Security Advisor to go abroad on his own and jump into diplomacy (the domain of the State Department) and was it an effort by Brzezinski at one-upmanship vis-à-vis his rival, Vance—but he received

⁹⁵ According to documents in the Carter Presidential Library, the Japanese side requested at least three meetings with the president to demonstrate the importance of the bilateral relationship and that which Fukuda had with Carter. Due to the president's schedule, namely an impending trip to Los Angeles during the mid-term election year, they arranged them back-to-back.

⁹⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation, Summary of the President's Meeting with Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, Wednesday, May 3, 1978, 11:30-12:15 p.m., Cabinet Room, White House,” in Memcons: President, 5/78, National Security Affairs—Brzezinski Material, Carter Presidential Papers—Staff Offices, Carter Presidential Library.

⁹⁷ The CIA prepared a memo whose contents were to be shared with Carter that included the section, “Chinese Leadership Differences—Possible Foreign Policy Implications.” The relevant part read: “Implementation of foreign policy clearly remains a sensitive area in China. Media treatment of such key issues as the severity of the Soviet threat and the state of US-USSR relations has been inconsistent. Moves to improve relations with the US and to increase military contacts with the west have been cautious and circumscribed. Finally—as noted in our analysis of Sino-Japanese relations on April 25—Peking's handling of the Senkaku incident seemed confused and indicative of internal division.” See “Memorandum on China for National Intelligence Officer, China, from Director of Central Intelligence, May 2, 1978,” Carter Presidential Library.

Carter's permission to go ahead with it.⁹⁸

Prior to the trip and his meetings, Brzezinski received updates and talking points on the Senkakus from his staff, which included both China and Japan watchers.⁹⁹ Papers addressing Chinese matters were prepared ahead of time, and those for Japan were finalized after his earlier meetings with Chinese officials.

In one undated paper prior to departing for China, his staff informed Brzezinski that "negotiations for the Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty are stalled, concrete negotiations to fulfill terms of the long-term trade agreement are proving arduous, and the recent Senkaku incident has marred the atmosphere of Sino-Japanese relations."¹⁰⁰

Brzezinski used a layover in Tokyo on May 19 to meet quietly with Mansfield and Woodcock, who had flown over from Peking to discuss trilateral issues (and then returned to Peking with Brzezinski). The National Security Advisor was thus presumably well rested and well briefed before he landed in China for what would be his first visit there.

In Brzezinski's three and a half-hour meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua on May 21, the latter sought to get the United States to take China's side in the dispute:

Prime Minister Fukuda does not seem to have made up his mind on this issue. So it depends on the Japanese side as to whether and when we can conclude this Treaty. Recently, some Japanese are making use of the incident in which Chinese fishing boats went fishing off the coast of the Tiao-yu-tai, the Senkaku Islands. They are making a big cry to the effect that the Chinese have infringed on the territorial sovereignty of Japan and raised the issue that the two sides should first settle the territorial disputes. Their purpose is to obstruct the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship and Peace between the two countries. Behind them we can also see the maneuvers of the Soviet Union. I would like to brief you on the background of the issue of the Tiao-yu-tai. In 1972 Prime Minister Tanaka and Foreign Minister Ōhira visited China and normalized relations between the two sides and issued a joint statement. During the negotiations Prime Minister Tanaka raised the issue of the Islands. Chou En-lai told them that the two sides had a dispute and on this issue we may as well refrain from discussion and leave it for settlement in the future. This does not mean that the issue is not important. It means that discussion of this issue would not be of any good to the negotiations on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. At that time the two sides agreed to put

⁹⁸ This controversy and the tense relationship between Secretary Vance and Brzezinski are covered in both men's memoirs, and a number of books about the administration. For their memoirs, see Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983) and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1983). China skillfully used this rivalry to its advantage as well as that between Brzezinski and his academic and policy rival, Kissinger.

⁹⁹ Earlier in his career, when he was still in academia and had just returned from a six-month research trip to Japan when he worked on his book, *The Fragile Blossom*, Brzezinski had correctly sided more with Japan on the issue of the Senkakus. In April 1972, on the eve of Okinawa's reversion to Japan, Brzezinski wrote to then National Security Advisor Henry A. Kissinger about the latter's forthcoming trip to Japan, adding, "The Japanese will press you very hard on the Senkaku Islands, and you should not underestimate the potential here for an emotionally anti-U.S. reaction unless we somehow indicate that Japan has a legitimate claim. What if the Chinese (either ones) send their forces to plant the flag there after May 15!?" This quote, Brzezinski's views on the Senkakus, and the author's correspondence with him in 2012 (prior to his passing in 2017) are found in Eldridge, *The Origins of U.S. Policy in the East China Sea Islands Dispute*, pp. 300-301 fn171.

¹⁰⁰ "Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, Scope Paper for May, 1978 Brzezinski China Trip, undated," Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Trip File, Box 38, Brzezinski, Asia, 5/18-25/78, China, Volume I (II).

this issue aside. They also agreed that they would try to seek a settlement of this through negotiations in the future. As for Chinese fishing boats in the neighborhood of the Senkaku Islands, they have been doing so for many years. It is not just this year that they have begun to do so. It appears that certain people within Japan harbor hegemonistic desires, but the Chinese side sets store by the friendship between the Chinese and Japanese peoples while upholding its principles at the same time. So the Chinese side took appropriate measures to handle this problem. The friendship between China and Japan is strong and conforms to the trend of the time, and the troublemaking of a few pro-Soviet people and militarists in Japan would be of no avail.¹⁰¹

This appears to have been the only time the Senkakus were mentioned in Brzezinski's meetings with Chinese officials, although the need for a peace treaty between China and Japan were emphasized by his interlocutors in all three meetings, including Deng Xiaoping (on the 21st) and Chairman Hua Kuo-feng on the 22nd.

On the 23rd, after arriving back in Japan, Brzezinski met with Prime Minister Fukuda. That day, the Japan specialist on his staff, Michael H. Armacost, who was traveling with him, provided the national security advisor with a three-page memo for his meeting with the Japanese leader. "With respect to the Senkakus," Armacost wrote, "you should tell Fukuda that the Chinese repeated their view that they had relinquished no claims at the time of Sino-Japanese normalization; they had merely agreed to set the issue aside in hopes of resolving it through future negotiation. Mention also the fact that Huang Hua played down the recent fishing boat incident."¹⁰²

Brzezinski took some of the advice, stating after a discussion of the need for a peace treaty, that "the Chinese mentioned in passing that they had not relinquished their claim to the Senkakus."¹⁰³ Fukuda appreciated the update and told Brzezinski that he was preparing to reach out to the Chinese side the following week to begin discussions again on the peace treaty. This was probably music to Brzezinski's ears, removing another uncertainty from the Carter administration's agenda for Asia.

U.S. Policy Resulting from the Incident

Despite Brzezinski the academic originally having sided with Japan, and despite Japan being an ally, the Carter administration incredulously adopted three policies that were self-defeating over the short-, mid-, and long-term on a number of levels.

The first one was that it cancelled a naval exercise that was being held around the time of the Senkaku Incident.¹⁰⁴ This created an unfortunate precedent that if there were an issue in the area,

¹⁰¹ "Memorandum of Conversation, Summary of Dr. Brzezinski's Meeting with Foreign Minister Huang Hua, May 21, 1978, Beijing, 9:52-1:20 p.m.," National Security Affairs, Staff Material, Far East, Oksenberg Subject File, Box 56, Policy Process: 5/16-31/78.

¹⁰² "Memorandum on Your Meeting with Fukuda from Mike Armacost for Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 23, 1978," Carter Presidential Library. Armacost succeeded Mansfield as Ambassador to Japan following the latter's unusually long 11 and a half-year tenure and published his memoirs in 1996. Unfortunately, the memoirs (*Friends or Rivals? The Insider's Account of U.S.-Japan Relations*), published by Columbia University Press, did not include a discussion of his work in the 1970s. See author's interviews with Michael H. Armacost, Washington, D.C., June 11, 2001 and Stanford, California (by e-mail), March 19, 2012.

¹⁰³ "Memorandum of Conversation [with Prime Minister Fukuda], May 23, 1978, Tokyo," in Memcons: Brzezinski, 10/77-8/78, National Security Affairs—Brzezinski Material, Carter Presidential Papers—Staff Offices, Carter Presidential Library.

¹⁰⁴ Training Cancellation Notice, Carter Presidential Library.

the United States would cancel a planned exercise or other activity rather than demonstrating a stabilizing presence or a warning to potential adversaries.

The second, unfortunate, policy adopted was placing a moratorium on the use of training ranges. This decision is covered in detail in the author's article "(Un)targeting the Senkaku Islands: Bombing Ranges in the Senkakus, the Decision by the United States to Suspend Their Use, and the Current Implications of that Moratorium, 1948-1978," previously published in this journal, *Japan Review*. While the decision is attributed to the State Department, it is unclear who made the actual decision. But it appears to have been a decision based on the next policy to be discussed—the desire to not get involved in the Senkakus issue.

The third result from the Chinese fishing boats incursion was affirmation of an existing policy to not get involved in the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Senkakus. This was particularly clear in a memo prepared by the State Department on the eve of Fukuda's visit to Washington in the spring. Cited in full earlier in this article, the operative phrase read: "US Objectives: To avoid becoming involved in a territorial dispute between Japan and China (PRC and ROC) over ownership of the Senkaku Islands."

This stance, however, was clear from years earlier. It was the subject of my 2014 book about the handling of the Senkakus at the time of Okinawa's reversion in 1972 and was also mentioned in a 1974 study by the CIA once marked "secret" but approved for release in 2004. It re-stated existing policy: "The United States' position is one of neutrality on the legal ownership of the Senkakus."¹⁰⁵

This inconsistent policy invites the unanswerable question that many Americans have—"why would our sons and daughters fight for a territory in which we do not even recognize our ally's sovereignty over?"¹⁰⁶ Because of this inherent contradiction, it is vital that the U.S. government change its policy on the Senkakus to one of re-recognizing Japan's sovereignty over the Senkakus (and not just acknowledging its administration over them).¹⁰⁷

The above were acts of commission. Unfortunately, there were things the United States did not do as a result of the armed Chinese fishing boats incursion. These were acts of omission, so to speak. The United States did not re-examine its incoherent policy on the Senkakus, despite the tensions and possible escalation that might have occurred then. This was an opportune time for the U.S. government to officially side with Japan (as Brzezinski had called for in his 1972 letter to Kissinger), not only publicly but through a change in its policy back to the original position of recognizing Japanese sovereignty as discussed in the author's book.

Another thing the United States did not do at this time was to seek to convince China to lay off its unfounded claims to the Senkaku Islands. U.S. officials hinted to their Chinese counterparts that the latter had made a mistake in their handling of the incursion, but the U.S. diplomats do not seem to have gone beyond that to pressure China to drop its claims.

Finally, the United States did not tell its ally Japan that it would be there for it if China escalated with military force, which would put its political leaders and thus public at ease (and also be a deterrent against the PRC). Of course, there are potential risks about getting too far out ahead of an ally, especially when the main burden for national defense should come from the

¹⁰⁵ Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, "East Asian Contested Islands, BGI RP 74-12, February 1974," p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ Robert D. Eldridge, *The Origins of U.S. Policy in the East China Sea Islands Dispute*, pp. 4-5, and Robert D. Eldridge, "U.S. Senkakus Policy and Its Contradictions," *The Japan Institute of International Affairs/Resource Library*, September 2023 (https://www.jiia-jic.jp/en/resourcelibrary/pdf/ResourceLibrary_Territory_Eldridge_230906_r.pdf).

¹⁰⁷ Robert D. Eldridge, "It's Time for the U.S. to Re-Recognize Japan's Sovereignty Over the Senkaku Islands," *Japan Forward*, July 23, 2020 (<https://japan-forward.com/its-time-for-the-u-s-to-re-recognize-japans-sovereignty-over-the-senkaku-islands/>).

country affected. However, this incident did expose cracks in the alliance over the Senkakus that have not really been filled and in fact got wider at one point in the mid-1990s.

Conclusion

This article examined the U.S. reactions and response to the sudden—but previously planned—incursion by hundreds of armed Chinese fishing vessels into the waters near the Senkaku Islands in April 1978. Ironically, as this article was being prepared in early 2026, thousands of Chinese vessels have amassed in the vicinity of the Senkakus beginning in December of the year before.¹⁰⁸ As with the 1978 incursion, the reason for the amassing of these vessels is unknown.¹⁰⁹ However, it is clearly not only for fishing. Often it is for surveys and intelligence-gathering, as well as creating micro (and sometimes) macro *fait accompli* by normalizing the activities.

During the past 50+ years since Okinawa's reversion, China has sought to undermine Japan's administration and sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands with the fishing vessels' incursion in the 1970s and regular aerial and maritime violations today. It seeks to normalize its actions and create doubt in the minds of not only the international community but in Japan itself as to who actually owns the Senkakus, inviting comments like who would want these barren islands anyway and are they even worth fighting over? Japan is partly at fault due to its failure over the years to more strongly address the issue. However, the United States also a large share of the blame because of its inconsistent stance on the Senkakus at the time of Okinawa's reversion and its neutrality policy since then. Instead of laying down the law, the United States essentially allowed China to dictate the debate through its untruthful assertions and dangerously arrogant actions.

The failure of the United States to take a stance in favor of its ally Japan on the sovereignty question ends up strengthening China's claims by giving them the appearance of legitimacy. So much so that the United States now hesitates to use its own ranges in the Senkakus out of a misplaced fear of getting drawn into the so-called Senkakus dispute.¹¹⁰ This weakens U.S. military readiness in the region. And so, despite the United States having rights to use the ranges, we see China having won concessions from the United States to stop utilizing the ranges by using its fishing fleet illegally against the Senkakus.

It wasn't that China miscalculated but that the United States did. The United States was outmaneuvered, and the region is paying the price.

¹⁰⁸ Chūgoku Furontia Senryaku Kenkyūkai and Masuo Chisako, "Chūgoku ga Higashi Shina Kai ni Gyosen 2000 Seki o Dōin Shite 470 km no U-jisen o Keisei Shite Ita! Gijutsu to Dōin Taisei no Kakuritsu de Susumu Gunmin Yūgō, Haru Kara Kaijō Minpei no Katsudō ga Jōtaika ka (China Mobilized 2,000 Fishing Vessels in the East China Sea to Form a 470-Kilometer U-Shaped Line! With the Establishment of Technology and Mobilization Systems Advancing Military–Civil Fusion, Maritime Militia Activities May Become Routine from This Spring), *Tōyō Keizai*, January 20, 2026 (<https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/930461?display=b>).

¹⁰⁹ *The Nikkei Asia* reported, February that the formation was possibly related, to nontime militia training. See "Formation of thousands of Chinese fishing boats stir worries in Japan," *Nikkei Asia*, February 20, 2026.

¹¹⁰ See Eldridge, (Un) Targeting the Senkaku Islands; and Robert D. Eldridge, "A Restart of Senkaku Firing Ranges is Long Overdue," *The Japan Times*, December 10, 2024.

Structural Dependencies among States in Advanced Technological Infrastructure: Technology as a Variable in Interstate Relations

Kimitake NAKAMURA

Abstract

This paper analyzes how the procurement of advanced technological infrastructure can generate structural dependencies between procuring states and supplying states. It conceptualizes such infrastructure not as discrete equipment, but as a multi-layered socio-technical system encompassing technological configurations, operations and maintenance, software and data, legal frameworks, and administrative practices. Drawing on insights from international political economy and science and technology studies, the paper identifies four sources of dependencies—technical and economic constraints, operational lock-in, information dependence, and institutional embedding—and examines the mechanisms through which they arise across multiple layers. Using cases such as data centers and satellite positioning systems, it demonstrates that these dependencies accumulate gradually through routine operation and institutional embedding even in the absence of overt coercion.

Introduction

The evolution of geoeconomics in Japan has progressed hand in hand with experiences of economic coercion and the rapid development of economic security policies. In recent years, extensive empirical research and conceptual refinement have accumulated,¹ clarifying the scope of geoeconomics, the international circumstances addressed by economic security policies, and the content and challenges of relevant policy instruments. Going forward, building on this intellectual foundation, it will become increasingly important to advance theoretical refinement while also determining how to translate academic insights into concrete policy-making practices.

Regarding the weaponization of the economy—one of the central themes within the field of geoeconomics—a wide range of empirical cases have been observed. Strategic resources and materials, such as rare earth elements, as well as the flow of international tourists, may be employed as instruments of quantitative coercion through the imposition of supply or access restrictions between states. These measures are characterized by their ability to exert visible pressure on the target country within a relatively short period of time.

In contrast, the vulnerability risk stemming from dependency on foreign advanced technological infrastructure is of a different nature. In this paper, *advanced technological*

¹ For example, see Yoichi Funabashi, *What Is Geoeconomics?* [地経学とは何か] (Bungeishunju, 2020); Institute of Geoeconomics (ed.), *What Is Economic Security?* [経済安全保障とは何か] (Toyo Keizai, 2024); Kazuto Suzuki, *What Is Geoeconomics?: Strategic Thinking in an Era of Weaponized Economics* [地経学とは何か：経済が武器化する時代の戦略思考] (Shinchosha, 2025).*

* English translations of the titles of literature published in Japanese are not necessarily confirmed by the authors. Therefore, the original titles are also mentioned.

infrastructure refers not to a single product or piece of equipment, but to the entire system that forms the foundation of socio-economic structures and governance mechanisms. This encompasses not only technological configurations, but also their operation and maintenance, software and data, and even the legal systems and administrative practices that govern the entire system. Once introduced, such infrastructure can exert a long-term influence on the institutional and operational frameworks of the procuring state, potentially diminishing policy options in its relationship with the supplying state. Crucially, this influence does not necessarily manifest as immediate pressure; rather, it accumulates through routine operations and integration into institutional systems.

Advanced countries, including Japan, are highly aware of these risks and have implemented measures such as restricting foreign investment in specific industries and regulating government procurement. In contrast, some developing countries do not adopt similar measures due to institutional and personnel constraints among others. As a result, emerging markets tend to account for a relatively large share of interstate competition over securing markets for advanced technologies.

This paper undertakes a foundational analysis of how the procurement of advanced technological infrastructure in developing countries may affect their relationships with supplying states. Specifically, it examines the process through which such infrastructure becomes embedded within the procuring state's socio-economic structures and governance mechanisms, with the aim of clarifying how dependency relationships arise and are reinforced.

1. Procurement of Advanced Technological Infrastructure in Developing Countries: Scope and Prior Research

(1) Types and Characteristics of Advanced Technological Infrastructure

First, the advanced technological infrastructure addressed in this paper broadly includes the following:

- 1) Communications infrastructure such as submarine cables, terrestrial mobile communication networks [4G/5G/future 6G], and satellite communication.
- 2) Satellite positioning and remote sensing infrastructure.
- 3) Computing and data processing infrastructure such as data centers, cloud infrastructure, and AI foundation models.
- 4) Integrated cyber-physical infrastructure such as smart cities, safe city systems, and autonomous vehicle networks.
- 5) Energy infrastructure such as nuclear power generation, offshore wind power generation, and nuclear fusion power generation.
- 6) Quantum information infrastructure that includes quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum key distribution, and quantum clocks.

This classification is provided for convenience and contains overlapping elements. However, all types share the common feature of representing systems that comprise multiple components—such as hardware and software—rather than single pieces of equipment or standalone products. Moreover, because of their systemic nature, such infrastructure tends to create lasting structural linkages with the procuring state's socio-economic structures and governance mechanisms, unlike the procurement of one-off goods.²

Next, the characteristics of each type are examined from the perspective of the relationship between the procuring states and the supplying states.

To begin with, for communications infrastructure, the importance of the operational

² Such phenomena have long been recognized in relation to national defense (e.g., C. Catrina, *Arms Transfers and Dependence* (Routledge, 2023)). The analysis in this article does not exclude the defense sector from its scope.

and monitoring framework is significant, in addition to the physical equipment. Continuous maintenance and troubleshooting are required even after installation, and operational know-how tends to be concentrated on the supplier's side. This makes it easy for dependency relationships to arise through technical specifications and operational practices.

Satellite positioning and remote sensing infrastructure provides foundational information such as positioning, timing, and situational awareness, serving as the basis for diverse activities including transportation, communications, finance, public safety, and disaster response. A key characteristic is that, in addition to hardware and operational frameworks, the supplying state's policies governing data processing and algorithms also determine the utility and effectiveness of the infrastructure in the procuring state.

Computing and data processing infrastructure underpins the information-handling capabilities of the procuring state. Even when equipment is installed in the procuring state, substantive control may remain with the supplying state due to factors such as the nationality of the operating entity, cryptographic key management, software updates, and the extraterritorial reach of the supplying state's legal authority. These factors can shape and reinforce dependency relationships.

Integrated cyber-physical infrastructure often reshapes administrative practices themselves—such as law enforcement and urban management—through the adoption of new technologies. As the technical specifications and design philosophies of the supplying state become embedded in institutional operations, they can gradually extend their influence over the procuring state's administrative systems.

Energy infrastructure requires a long-term operational framework encompassing not only power generation facilities *per se* but also fuel supply, operational management, maintenance, and decommissioning. Consequently, if post-deployment options are limited and these elements become dependent on foreign sources, relationships with supplying states tend to become entrenched.

Quantum information infrastructure has the potential to serve as the foundation for future computing, communications, and timekeeping systems. However, its implementation and usage patterns will depend heavily on the standardization trends of supplying states, as well as on the human resources and research capabilities available in procuring states.

As described above, although advanced technological infrastructure may take various concrete forms, it is invariably integrated into the procuring state as a multilayered system. Once the system is implemented, the procuring state's dependence on the supplying state begins.

(2) Prior Research on Advanced Technological Infrastructure and Dependency Relationships

The dependency relationships between developing procuring states and supplying states that arise from the procurement of advanced technological infrastructure have already been examined in multiple prior studies. Many of these studies focus on the relationship between China and countries along the Belt and Road in the context of China's Digital Silk Road (DSR).

For example, Dai Mochinaga points out that the purpose of the DSR initiative is to increase countries' dependence on China, secure its economic benefits, and enhance China's international influence by creating a community that shares common values. He argues that this goal is pursued through methods such as strategic support from the Chinese Communist Party and the government, technological development, overseas expansion and profit generation by private enterprises, and the shaping of international norms and rules under the “dual circulation” policy.³

Furthermore, Mochinaga analyzes the DSR through the lens of the concepts of power defined

³ Dai Mochinaga, *The Digital Silk Road: The Geopolitics of Information and Communications* [デジタルシルクロード：情報通信の地政学] (Nikkei Publications, 2022).

by Nye and Strange. He identifies the development of communication lines as an example of hard power and China's efforts to disseminate its model of social control through information and communication technology to other countries as an example of soft power.⁴

In addition, with regard to structural power, Mochinaga examines DSR initiatives by categorizing them into the security, production, finance, and knowledge structures. In the security structure, the initiatives include providing safety through smart-city systems, promoting technological development via military-civil fusion, and advancing AI capabilities. In the production structure, they involve securing influence over global production systems by controlling multinational corporations. In the financial structure, they focus on expanding influence through the internationalization of the renminbi and the development of cross-border settlement networks. Finally, in the knowledge structure, they emphasize promoting standardization and strengthening data security.⁵

Wakako Ito points out that through DSR, China seeks to exert influence on Belt and Road countries in two ways: first, by locking in their digital infrastructure through the export and provision of Chinese-made telecommunications equipment and systems; and second, by resolving bottlenecks in its own telecommunications infrastructure through the development of information and communications networks, while simultaneously gaining control over data flows and strengthening economic connectivity with the recipient countries.⁶

Ito further notes that China is providing various countries not only with information and communications networks but also with digitalization projects such as smart cities and online education, along with related technical cooperation and human resource development. She suggests that China appears to be offering these economic and social digitalization assistance efforts as a package—one that combines the diffusion of Chinese values into the legal systems and social management practices of procuring states with efforts to secure their alignment in the formation of international rules based on those values.⁷

Cheney argues that the DSR is a comprehensive strategy through which China seeks to reshape the international order leveraging technological advancement to challenge the United States' global power without creating direct confrontation. He notes that China seeks to maintain the liberal economic order that has permitted its economic rise and export its form of digital authoritarianism to create an illiberal political international order.⁸

2. Representative Examples: Data Centers and Satellite Positioning Systems

Building on the prior research discussed in Section 1. (2) above, this section examines the relationship between procuring states and supplying states more concretely, using data centers and satellite positions systems as examples.

(1) Data Centers

A data center is the core of a *computing and data processing infrastructure* that provides power, cooling, network connectivity, physical security, operational staff, and other components and

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Wakako Ito, "The Expansion and Entrenchment of China's Influence along Belt and Road Countries through Scientific and Technological Capabilities," [中国の科学技術力を用いた『一帯一路』沿線国への影響力の拡大・浸透] in Takashi Terada (ed.), *Indo-Pacific Geoeconomics and U.S.–China Hegemonic Competition: The Deployment of Economic Power in International Politics* [インド太平洋地経学と米中覇権競争——国際政治における経済パワーの展開] (Sairyusha, 2023), pp. 180–183.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 183–185.

⁸ C. Cheney, "China's Digital Silk Road: Strategic Technological Competition and Exporting Political Illiberalism," *Pacific Forum Issues and Insights Working Paper*, Vol. 19 (2019).

services as an integrated whole. In colocation-type data centers, it is common for the facility provider to supply bandwidth, cooling, power, and security, while the tenant operates servers and storage systems on top of these services.⁹ Consequently, the procuring state's interest extends beyond securing the building and equipment to determining which operator will manage the facility and what level of operational and maintenance framework—staffing, procedures, incident response, business continuity plans, and more—will be established.

In data center operations, it has been noted that human factors can significantly influence the occurrence of failures, and that the maturity of operations and maintenance—including organizational structure, planning, and procedures—directly contributes to reducing overall facility risk.¹⁰ In addition, because data centers continuously consume large amounts of electricity, it is reasonable to develop business plans in coordination with relevant factors such as power supply, communication networks (including international connectivity), and operational staff. Furthermore, even when a data center is located within the territory of the procuring state, if the main operating entity is a foreign company—particularly a cloud service provider—data accessibility and disclosure obligations may be affected by the legal requirements of the supplying state.

Thus, data center procurement extends beyond mere equipment acquisition. It affects the systems and laws of the procuring state, through operations and data management, potentially forming long-term relationships between procuring states and supplying states.

(2) Satellite Positioning Systems

Satellite positioning serves as a fundamental infrastructure that provides essential information on position, time, and velocity. It supports a wide range of activities, including military operations, civilian transportation, logistics and communications, finance, as well as disaster response. In recent years, it has increasingly assumed the character of advanced technological infrastructure that is indispensable to smartphones and vehicle navigation systems, the synchronization of power grids and communication networks, and the timing authentication of financial transactions.

A satellite positioning system consists of multiple elements, including satellite constellations, ground control stations, receivers, positioning algorithms, time management, and operational and maintenance systems. When a procuring state relies on a positioning system from a specific supplying state, it becomes subject to the supplying state's technological framework not only in signal reception but also in the specifications of related equipment, operational procedures, and the direction of future development of services.

Under such a structure, long-term and structural dependencies can arise between procuring states and supplying states. For example, improvements in positioning accuracy and service continuity depend on the supplying state's satellite-operation policies and signal design. Furthermore, when receivers and related systems are engineered around specific signal specifications and encryption methods, switching to alternative positioning systems will not be easy.

For many developing countries, building and maintaining their own satellite positioning systems is challenging, forcing them to rely on foreign services. Consequently, as satellite positioning systems become increasingly embedded in a procuring state's traffic management, public services, financial systems, and other critical infrastructures, the relationship with the supplying state inevitably extends beyond mere technological utilization. This dependence can

⁹ See, e.g., *Fortinet*, "Data Center: Key Components and Their Role in Cybersecurity," at <https://www.fortinet.com/uk/resources/cyberglossary/data-center>.

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Uptime Institute*, "Tier Certification Operational Sustainability," at <https://uptimeinstitute.com/tier-certification/operations>.

potentially influence the procuring state's policy choices and constrain its autonomy.

3. Sources of Dependencies and Mechanisms through Which They Arise

Examples such as data centers and satellite positioning systems demonstrate that procuring advanced technological infrastructure can create enduring relationships between procuring states and supplying states—relationships that extend well beyond the mere acquisition of equipment or services. Prior research similarly shows that such infrastructure, beyond its technical configurations, becomes embedded within the procuring state's socio-economic structures and governance mechanisms, thereby offering insights into how the supplying state's influence may be amplified.

Hirschman observed in 1945, in essence, that when trade relations have an asymmetric structure—characterized by dependency or limited substitutability—trade can serve as a source of power for one party over another.¹¹ Keohane and Nye argued in 1977 that under conditions of unequal interdependence, power tends to emerge through two mechanisms: sensitivity and vulnerability.¹² Other studies further illuminate these dynamics. For example, Hughes demonstrates, in essence, that power systems evolve not only through technical elements but also through institutional and social dimensions, ultimately becoming sociotechnical systems that function as “evolving cultural artifacts.”¹³ Similarly, Farrell and Newman show how asymmetric structures within global economic networks, combined with domestic institutional capacity, allow coercive power to become concentrated in states that control key network hubs.¹⁴

Below, drawing on prior research and the case analysis presented in the previous chapter, the author organizes the “sources” and “mechanisms” through which advanced technological infrastructure creates dependencies between states into an analytical framework.

This article does not inquire into the legal nature of supplying actor; rather, it takes as its unit of analysis the structural constraints that arise at the state level as technological systems become embedded in the institutions and practices of the procuring state. In this sense, whether the supplier is a state or a private firm is not in itself a decisive factor for the formation of dependency mechanisms.

(1) Sources of Dependency Arising from Advanced Technological Infrastructure

To begin with, the following four sources of dependency may be observed:

First, dependency may arise from technical and economic constraints embedded in procured systems (technical and economic constraints). These include technological architecture and compatibility requirements, capital intensity and sunk costs, and supply-side concentration, all of which may make switching to alternative suppliers technically or economically difficult. This resonates with Hughes' observation that in sociotechnical systems such as power-supply systems, high inertia arises through structured characteristics, massive capital investment, among others.¹⁵

Second, dependency arises from the necessity of supplier involvement to sustain operations and maintenance (operational lock-in). When the supplying state is in a position to halt or restrict

¹¹ A. O. Hirschman, *National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade* (University of California Press, 1945).

¹² R. O. Keohane & J. S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Longman, 2011).

¹³ T. P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880–1930* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

¹⁴ H. Farrell & A.L. Newman, “Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion,” *International Security*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2019).

¹⁵ *Supra* note 13.

updates, maintenance, or operational support, this dependency can impose substantial constraints on the procuring state. In this sense, it can produce an effect analogous to the “chokepoint effect”¹⁶ noted by Farrell and Newman—that is, the ability to control access to specific functions or nodes within a network or system can itself become a potential source of influence.

Third, dependency arises from asymmetric control over data and system behavior (information dependence). This information asymmetry enables the supplying state to observe and obtain extensive information through the network, aligning with what Farrell and Newman describe as the “panopticon effect,”¹⁷ in which power emerges from informational superiority. Even without direct disruptive measures against the procuring state, the supplying state’s position to oversee the entire flow itself can carry political significance in interstate relations.

Fourth, dependency relationships become entrenched over the long term through contracts and institutional arrangements (institutional embedding). This form of dependency also aligns with Hughes’ perspective on system inertia and evolution,¹⁸ in which sociotechnical systems stabilize by incorporating not only technical elements but also institutions, organizations, and practices, making external change difficult.

(2) Multilayered Structure as a Mechanism for Dependency Formation

Next, the mechanisms through which these dependencies arise can be categorized into several layers.

The First layer is that of standards and specifications (including technical specifications). As the example of satellite positioning systems illustrates, when standards or specifications based on the technological system of a specific supplying state are adopted, interoperability with systems from other states may be limited, making future switching difficult. In this layer, the technical and economic constraints are particularly likely to become apparent.

The second layer is that of operations and maintenance. Advanced technological infrastructures often require continuous operation, monitoring, and updates even after deployment. When the necessary knowledge and technical expertise are concentrated on the supplier’s side, the procuring state tends to become increasingly dependent on that supplier. Fault response in data centers and operational support for satellite positioning systems are typical examples. At this layer, operational lock-in is particularly pronounced.

The third layer is that of data and algorithm. Infrastructure such as communications and positioning systems continuously generates and processes traffic information, operational data, positioning-correction data, and related forms of data. If this data—and the algorithms that process it—remain under the supplier’s control, the procuring state may struggle to fully understand or verify the system’s behavior and safety, potentially limiting its ability to exercise effective oversight. This layer is particularly vulnerable to both information dependence and operational lock-in.

The fourth layer is that of laws, regulations, and contracts. Long-term supply contracts, maintenance agreements, intellectual property rights arrangements, and the choice of governing law can all act as constraints when the procuring state seeks to change its operator or supplier in the future. In advanced technological infrastructures, these institutional elements are closely intertwined with the technical architecture, creating strong tendency toward institutional lock-in. At this layer, institutional embedding as well as technical and economic constraints are particularly likely to arise.

The fifth layer is that of administrative practice. As advanced technological infrastructure

¹⁶ *Supra* note 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Supra* note 13.

becomes integrated into national administrative functions—such as communications, positioning, public services, public safety, and finance—the business procedures and safety concepts built upon that infrastructure become entrenched. Consequently, the very nature of administration may be affected by the regulatory philosophy and design principles of the supplying state. These dependencies develop gradually over time through repeated use of the infrastructure in routine administrative operations. At this layer, operational lock-in, institutional embedding, and technical and economic constraints are particularly likely to occur.

Traditional infrastructure—such as roads, bridges, railways, and ports—may also create forms of dependency between procuring states and supplying states. However, compared with advanced technological infrastructure, traditional infrastructure generally allows for greater supplier substitutability and presents a lower likelihood of lock-in. Overall, dependencies arising from advanced technological infrastructure can be understood as having a more structural character.

Furthermore, it goes without saying that whether such dependencies are “weaponized” depends on the intentions of the supplying state.

Conclusion

This paper does not aim to derive specific policy conclusions regarding interstate relations arising from advanced technological infrastructure. Instead, it attempts to organize and visualize the nature of dependencies that may arise between procuring states and supplying states by analyzing diverse phenomena noted in prior research within a common framework: the sources of dependency and the mechanisms or layers, through which such dependency arises. While this analytical framework should be refined through future empirical research, the author briefly outlines its current academic contribution.

The procurement of advanced technological infrastructure in a given country can create incentives for the supplying state to deliberately cultivate economic and political dependencies and, in some cases, to weaponize them. This makes such procurement a subject of geoeconomic analysis¹⁹—indeed, the research motivation for this paper, as stated in the Introduction, is also grounded in geoeconomics. At the same time, the forms of state practice examined in this paper demonstrate that advanced technologies have increasingly come to function as variables shaping interstate relations and, by extension, the international order. For this reason, they also fall within the scope of international relations theory.²⁰

From the perspective of how developing countries engage with supplying states in their development planning, these interactions also fall within the scope of development economics. Furthermore, because they involve choices made by procuring states among competing technological systems, they should also be considered within the purview of Science and Technology Studies (STS).²¹ From an STS standpoint, issues such as the need to conduct

¹⁹ The term “geoeconomics” is polysemous. In this article it is used in the sense defined by Funabashi as “the use of the economy as a means by states for geopolitical purposes” (author’s translation) (Funabashi, *supra* note 1, p. 9).

²⁰ In addition to the prior studies discussed in this article, see generally G. L. Herrera, *Technology and International Transformation* (State University of New York Press, 2006). While Herrera examines the broader relationship between technological change and transformations in the international system, the present article focuses more narrowly on dependency mechanisms arising from the procurement of advanced technological infrastructure.

²¹ It may be understood as one element of what Hideaki Shiroyama calls “science and technology governance.” Hideaki Shiroyama (ed.), *Science and Technology Governance* [科学技術ガバナンス] (Toshindo Publishing, 2007), p. 44.

technological assessments²² to optimize each country's selection of technological systems naturally arise.

Thus, the multi-layered nature of advanced technological infrastructure cannot be fully captured by a single theoretical framework. This paper therefore adopts an approach that bridges insights from both international relations theory and STS. At the same time, given this multi-layered complexity, an approach that draws on Hecht's argument²³—analyzing technology as a variable in interstate relations through concepts such as *technopolitics* while also examining its implications across multiple academic disciplines—may also prove effective.

Addressing the impact of technology on international order has increasingly become a critical policy challenge,²⁴ making academic research of this kind both necessary and timely. Accordingly, this paper undertakes an academic analysis of one aspect of this broader impact.

²² Hideaki Shiroyama, *Science, Technology, and Politics* [科学技術と政治] (Minerva-shobo Publishing, 2018), pp. 140–157.

²³ G. Hecht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II* (The MIT Press, 2009), pp. 55–90.

²⁴ Japan Institute of International Affairs, *Strategic Annual Report 2019*, pp. 41–45.

Published by the Japan Institute of International Affairs

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