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The Influence of Chinese and Japanese Nationalism on Foreign Policy:

**A Comparative Study on the Chinese and Japanese
Nationalist Sentiments and Their Repercussions on Foreign
Policy through the Senkaku Islands Dispute**

Trabajo Fin de Máster



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INTRODUCTION¹

This paper addresses how nationalism influences Sino-Japanese relations and their foreign policy. Remaining disputes, security tension, and economic competition shape the dynamics of China and Japan, the second and third largest economies in the world respectively. Deng Xiaoping told the Japanese authorities in 1987 that "in regard to China-Japan relations, reactions among youths, especially students, are strong. If difficult problems were to appear still further, it will become impossible to explain them to the people. It will become impossible to control them [the people]. I want you to understand this position which we are in"². Currently, China's new rising world order, coupled with economic interdependence and problems unsolved, has destabilized the Asia Pacific region. In this contested region, the politics of nationalism holds a certain weight to foreign policy planning, creating unstable power dynamics instead of cooperation. These hostilities the countries share are a matter of concern for foreign policy makers, because they can be both a destabilizing and legitimizing element—a double-edged sword.

In order to approach nationalism in international relations, this work analyzes a case study that is both current and pertinent: the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute. In the past decade, there have been a number of tense encounters that had economic, diplomatic and security consequences. This dispute is relevant to the study of nationalism because it triggers the collective historical memory of both China and Japan, which is also closely related to the growth of nationalism in both countries. These islands, beyond economic and security reasons, are a matter of national pride, so foreign policy planners must outline and understand the growing nationalist sentiment when making decisions. Nationalism can be a reactive part of a nation, especially if it is gaining strength.

The purpose of this paper is to pinpoint the key elements in Chinese and Japanese nationalism regarding Sino-Japanese relations, understand how they function and analyze in depth another dimension of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute. This is an ongoing issue that hasn't been resolved, as well as other problematic points in Sino-Japanese relations. This work argues that nationalism can be very influenced by foreign policy, and

¹ This paper includes parts of my own research for the II Conference on HUME research on April 2020, and the final papers for the subjects of Cambio Social, Relaciones Internacionales en Asia Oriental and Política de Asia Oriental of the MA in East Asian Studies at the University of Salamanca.

² As quoted in Chen Weiss: 2013, p. 1.

vice versa, so thorough research on this topic might provide some insights for problem-solving and working with Sino-Japanese relations.

In the first place, this paper determines the concept of “nationalism” and how it can be interpreted in the context of international relations. Following this, there is an overview of Chinese popular nationalism, Japanese neo-nationalism and their respective historical backgrounds. Finally, this paper carries out a thorough analysis of nationalism in Sino-Japanese relations and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute. Multiple sources have been checked from renowned experts, as well as articles in Chinese and Japanese to verify the information.

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Firstly, the concept of nationalism is a highly contested notion among sociologists, nuanced depending on the object of study and the branch. Due to the multiplicity of perspectives, this paper focuses on the definition given in *Nations and Nationalism*³ by Ernst Gellner which states that nationalism is "a political principle [of an industrial society] which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent". What we call the nationalist sentiment is the anger that is aroused by the violation of this principle of congruence, or the satisfaction of it being fulfilled. The debate over this theory lies partly in the question of whether the nation can be understood as an individual modern reality, and it can certainly be a big question in the case of China because of what some call *culturalism*. However, this initial definition provides the basis for understanding nationalism.

In the field of international relations, the definition given by Ernst Hass⁴ approaches the purpose given to nationalism in terms of foreign policy. He states that nationalist ideologies “make assertions about the nation’s claim to historical uniqueness, about the territory that the nation-state ought to occupy, and about the kinds of relation that should prevail between one’s nation and others”. While we can consider patriotism as national pride with an inclusive tone, nationalism focuses more on the perception and performance of one's nation with respect to another⁵.

³ Gellner: 1983, p. 1

⁴ Hass: 2000, p. 15

⁵ Center for Strategic & International Studies: 2020.

The key to the problem lays in the following question: what role does nationalism play in the development of a nation's foreign policy? Is it an ally or an enemy to the goals of the state? Nationalism is not a direct driver of foreign policy, but it is an element that must be handled by governments carefully. As Xi Jinping noted in a 2013 campaign, "winning or losing the people's support is an issue that concerns CPC's survival or extinction"⁶. It is the nationalist sentiment that justifies demands for self-determination, perpetuating the system of the sovereign state and damaging it at the same time. Although nationalism is potentially destabilizing for maintaining the status quo in a territory, it is also a factor in territorial sovereignty⁷.

The information suggests that nationalism has a geopolitical dimension, and this paper argues that there is a correlation between a nation's nationalist course and its foreign policy. As seen in Nazi Germany or imperialist Japan in the 20th century, their expansionist drive was partly justified by a nationalist discourse advocating the superiority of the nation.

Looking back at East Asia in the 21st century, there is a growing trend of popular nationalism in China, and Shinzo Abe's policies have aroused interest in what is defined as the Japanese neo-nationalism. To determine how the nationalism of the two Asian tigers has developed, this paper analyzes the features of nationalism in each country and how they resemble or differ from each other in terms of their foreign policy, focusing on one case study: the Senkaku Island dispute. In this sense, it follows Gellner's reading of the nation as a modern reality and the principles mentioned to apply a theoretical framework.

OVERVIEW: APPROACHING CHINESE AND JAPANESE NATIONALISM

CHINESE POPULAR NATIONALISM

At the end of the Qing dynasty and in the beginning of the republic, after the defeat against Japan and the May Fourth Movement, a strong nationalist sentiment with anti-imperialist and xenophobic motives appeared due to the Manchu government. This incipient nationalism peaked with the rise to power of the Communist Party of China in

⁶ Economy: 2018, p. 36

⁷ Griffiths and Sullivan: 1997, pp. 55-56

1949, coupled with a great unifying power. Throughout the 20th century, it was fed by the state discourse, but the economic situation in the early People's Republic of China mitigated it to some extent. Nevertheless, in terms of foreign policy, issues such as the Korean War, the Taiwan Strait crises of the 1950s, the Sino-Indian Border War of 1952, or China's efforts to recover Hong Kong and Macao were connected to a general resentment of certain foreign forces⁸.

In the 1990s, the situation for nationalism changed. The government tried to control the flow of popular nationalism and promote patriotic education campaigns, seeking to align the interests of the nation with those of the state on a large scale. It could be argued that the economic development and the growth of Chinese popular nationalism are interconnected. Even so, the state sought to maintain a reactive and pragmatic position, with flexible tactics and avoiding seeking direct confrontation with other powers. During this decade, the people began to express more firmly their desire to defend the territorial integrity and historical justice of their nation. Certain sectors felt that the time had come for China to recover the position it deserved on the international scene. This became more visible with the advent of the Internet, which allowed the masses to participate in an interconnected community⁹.

In 1996, the book *China Can Say No* (中国可以说不) was published, a best-seller in China for its nationalist discourse that advocated strengthening the country on the international context. This book is a collection of essays with a critical anti-Japanese and anti-American sentiment, who are accused of conspiring against China. We can find in it some of the most recurrent elements of China's current foreign policy: competitiveness with the U.S.A. and Japan, standing up to foreign pressure (*say no*), reaffirming China's position in terms of economic, military and technological strength, etc.¹⁰. On the last page of this book, it says:

“As a nation of manners, China's tradition of patience and tolerance shows its other side when treated rudely: ‘just as Xingtian¹¹ wielded his shield, the fierce will prevails.’ Since the Opium War, the forces of justice have stood by China.”

⁸ Townsend: 1992, pp. 121-122

⁹ Zhao: 2013, pp. 2, 3, 4

¹⁰ Tiezzi: 2014

¹¹ Term: 刑天, Chinese deity who fought and lost against the Supreme Deity. It symbolizes the indomitable spirit.

Following this trend, the nationalist sectors gained strength at the beginning of the 21st century. The main difference with the 1990s is the abandonment of a reactive and pragmatic position, with flexible tactics and avoiding seeking direct confrontation with other powers, for a more proactive and somewhat more demanding one¹². Xi Jinping's thought (*xijiping sixiang* - 习近平思想) includes objectives such as creating a powerful army, since China is on a "historical mission" for development¹³.

"The young generation is not happy, and the consequences are serious," says Song Xiaojun in his essay for the 2009 book *Unhappy China* (中国不高兴), which renews concepts that could be seen in the previous decade with *China Can Say No*. In this sense, 2008 becomes a turning point, with the conflicts of the Olympics and increased international tension. Thus, in the last decade, one can appreciate a Chinese youth more involved in foreign policy issues.

On the other hand, in an authoritarian state, social networks, the media, and other Internet tools become a means for the population to express its opinion. Despite the extensive control, the Chinese government cannot ignore the wishes of the population, who also wants to reaffirm China's position as a world power. The government has accepted this popular nationalist sentiment to legitimize the actions of the state and has received the population's support, who criticizes the West for demonizing China and imposing sanctions on human rights issues, the Taiwan problem, etc.¹⁴. For example, in April 2020, Chinese writer Fang Fang from Wuhan wrote a diary about her experience during the pandemic on her Weibo page. The Chinese public severely criticized her for allowing this diary to be published in the West and make China subject of criticism.

However, Chinese popular nationalism is a "double-edged sword". In the past there was an incipient pragmatic nationalism which connected the nation during hard times, but now, as China rises to become one of the most powerful countries in the world, there is a widening gap between their foreign image and confidence, and the social struggles of an increasingly complex society. There are internal complications and a national identity crisis rooted in the rapid growth of the past decades, which poses the question of how the future looks like for the Chinese system. After the decline of Marxism

¹² Zhao: 2013, pp. 5-6; Hughes: 2011

¹³ Holbig: 2019, pp. 3-4

¹⁴ Zhao: 2013, pp. 6-7

and Maoism, there was a need to have a legitimizing ideology for the CPC, and this need was filled by nationalism. However, due to its unpredictable nature, it can be potentially destabilizing and, although national planners do consider it a beneficial factor, it has not been let loose¹⁵.

In this case, for example, certain sectors have sometimes shown their discontent with what has been considered a passive attitude in foreign policy. On the other hand, although anti-Japanese protests have been allowed on social networks to criticize Japan's historical revisionism, in some cases the government has had to ban anti-Japanese protests that could endanger social order. In other words, nationalism could become a destabilizing factor¹⁶. For this same reason, the Xi administration does not promote the protests as such, although it does allow some expressions of this popular nationalism as long as they do not involve a major confrontation¹⁷.

Hence, to what extent can nationalism affect foreign policy? In the case of China, state discourse and nationalist propaganda play a very important role in obtaining the legitimacy of the population. That is, the ideology of the population is clearly influenced by this discourse, but there are also bottom-up movements. Despite being a non-democratic state, nationalist expressions can become destabilizing and critical factors. The Chinese population has increasingly higher expectations of what the government should do to reassert China's position as a world leader. There is no doubt that there are multiple opinions and branches of Chinese nationalism¹⁸, however, due to the censorship of certain topics it is difficult to make an in-depth study in this aspect.

JAPANESE NEO-NATIONALISM

The emergence of a national consciousness in Japan takes form in the Meiji Restoration, although it had already been developing since the Edo period¹⁹. The arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853 led to a series of crises and internal reforms that resulted in a modern national entity. It is when a nation acquires a certain level of development that

¹⁵ Kim: 2018, p. 37.

¹⁶ Zhao: 2013, p. 8

¹⁷ Center for Strategic & International Studies: 2020

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ Doak: 2006, p. 40.

the nationalist sentiment flourishes, with ideas like *Nihonjinron* (日本人論)²⁰. During Japanese expansionism, propaganda increased with emphasis on the *tenno* ideology of emperor worship and Japanese ethnic purity (*minzoku*). The education system, along with economic development and foreign influence, fed the idea that Japan had to regain its position in the world as a leader²¹. This information suggests that this is a recurrent concept, similar in some aspects to Chinese nationalism²², with a strong sense of moralism and rectitude towards foreign policy as the nation has been "victimized" by imperialist forces.

After losing the war, Japan was in ruins. This does not mean that nationalism disappeared—on the contrary, the nation felt victimized by the imposition of foreign forces—but it changed its course²³. During the early post-war period, there was a sense of cultural nihilism spread in the population, who connected the Japanese traditional values and the emperor to the downfall of the Japanese. In other words, nationalism was depoliticized. Later, there was a considerable economic improvement and the Japanese started to regain their national pride, that had been greatly damaged due to Japan's role as a war perpetrator²⁴. Education was used to revive the Japanese identity, promoting Shintoism, the Yasukuni Shrine, and control of public opinion on war crimes. In this sense, the Liberal Democratic Party, the current majority government party, played an important role in keeping Japanese nationalist sentiment alive during the post-war period. With economic development, Japan began to regain control and, despite wanting to maintain good relations with the West, they took up the idea that this did not mean giving up or losing their national identity²⁵. The sociologist Ikutarou Shimizu stated in his book *日本よ国家たれ* (*nippon yo kokka tare*²⁶): "On the one hand, Japan has to promote good relations with America, the Soviet Union and all other countries, but at the same time, we should not forget for a moment that Japan is alone. In the end, we can only count on Japan and the Japanese."

²⁰ Sugimoto: 2002, p. 33.

²¹ Going: 1986, p. 24.

²² Sutter: 2012.

²³ Doak: 2006.

²⁴ Kim: 2018, p. 39.

²⁵ Going, D., 1986, p. 54-55.

²⁶ 1980, taken from Going.

Since the 90s, this emerging neo-nationalism turned into a “revisionist trend”. With the Gulf War, the death of Hirohito and the fiftieth anniversary of defeat in 1945²⁷, the liberal elite tried to promote a positive view of the nation. This is coupled with the fact that they might be losing the economic hegemony in the East Asian region, creating a power parity that threatens Japan’s national identity²⁸.

Japanese nationalism is often associated with the notion of the nation as one, homogeneous, especially during the 20th century, but these data suggest that Abe's current nationalist discourse does not focus on racial purity. Nationalism must be understood as a dynamic reality that erodes depending on its historical context. Other authors also agree with the idea that Japan has entered a new phase with post-war nationalism, characterized by a lack of harmony between the state and the population. In other words, there is a latent desire in modern Japan for national respect and autonomy, but the very concept of "nationalism" (with its different names in Japanese²⁹) can cause discomfort. Doak³⁰ states that the most important expressions of this neo-nationalism come from politicians and journalists, who advocate restoring a healthy nationalism. He suggests that the Japanese and the state are alienated, but that democratic practice should also be supported by civic bottom-up movements, and not only reflected in the discourse of the political elite. This is what Kayama calls *petit nationalism*, with a youth unconcerned with the affairs of state and the history of the nation³¹. Therefore, the current Japanese political elite with Shinzo

²⁷ Kersten: 1999, p. 195.

²⁸ Kim: 2018, p. 40.

²⁹ When researching the Western concepts of “nationalism” and “nation” in Asian languages, there are great semantic differences and connotations that cannot be taken lightly.

In the case of Japanese, the Western idea of “nationalism” can be best translated as ナショナリズム (*nashyonarizumu*), clearly a loanword from English. However, one can also find translations such as 民族主義 (*minzokushugi*), which refers to the idea of ethnic superiority, or 国家主義 (*kokkashugi*), which is certainly closer to the idea of statism, or 国粹主義 (*kokusuishugi*), with a strong negative connotation that could be translated as “extreme nationalism” or “ultranationalism”, or even 愛国主義 (*aikokushugi*), which is closer to the idea of “patriotism”. The concept of “nation” can also be complicated to translate into Japanese, with terms such as words 民族 (*minzoku*) or 国民 (*kokumin*) that came into the Japanese conceptual map during the Meiji era. These are rough translations and perhaps don’t embody the idea precisely. The point is that the studies of nationalism in Japan don’t follow the same semantic patterns as in the West, so it is important to address nationalism in Asia as a multidimensional idea.

Regarding its translations into Chinese, the situation is even more complicated. There is the word 国家主义 (*guojiazhuyi*) that is, again, better translated as “statism”, or 爱国主义 (*aiguozhuyi*) with the meaning of “patriotism”. One could also translate it as 民族主义 (*minzuzhuyi*) and it is the preferred term, yet I cannot help but feel that it carries an ethnic connotation that does not represent the full idea, especially since the rising Chinese nationalist sentiment is not “ethnic”.

³⁰ Doak: 2006, pp. 278-286

³¹ Penney and Wakefield: 2008, p. 2

Abe, from its multiple positions regarding nationalism and the success of the nation, seeks to awaken a civic nationalism in this "carefree" population and to leave behind the ethnic nationalism of certain intellectual sectors³².

To quote the words of Doak, "How will the pieces of Japanese nationalism be reassembled?"³³ The information suggests that the LDP will continue with its nationalist discourse and policy, as seen with the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, or the proposals to modify the constitution, but it still does not seem to have been conclusive. On the other hand, the nuances and true form of this "healthy nationalism" that Abe advocates remain to be seen, especially on issues like historical revisionism. It can also be argued that anti-militarism or "pacific nationalism" is no less nationalist than the liberal discourse of the LDP. In fact, according to a survey in Yomiuri, the young population is more opposed to the revision of Article 9 of the constitution than the older population³⁴. In other words, it could be said that there is a liberal-nationalist political sector, associated with what we see in the newspapers as Japanese neo-nationalism, but perhaps it does not represent the reality of the heterogeneous population. Nationalism is not usually presented in a single form, but is complex and associated with multiple factors, and Japan is no exception in this regard. Of course, as far as foreign policy is concerned, the ideology of the party in power is very relevant in practice.

As the historian Masayasu Hosaka said³⁵: "We have been fleeing from nationalism since the war until now. We hate the word 'nationalism' [ナシヨナリズム]. However, we should not run away. We should think about what our nationalism is."

INFLUENCE OF NATIONALISM IN SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS

According to a study of nationalism in 2012³⁶, which included responses from participants from multiple countries, China was reported as the country with the strongest nationalist sentiment, ahead of countries such as the U.S., Taiwan and Canada. Japan was eighth on the list, and Spain was number 25. These data suggest that the countries studied

³² Doak: 2006, pp. 278-286

³³ *Ibid*, p. 286

³⁴ Penney and Wakefield: 2008, p. 4-5

³⁵ Eisuke: 2019

³⁶ Tang and Darr: 2012.

in this paper have high levels of nationalism, each with their own characteristics, but how has this been reflected in the practice of international politics?

It is argued that China and Japan have kept a “negative peace”, created due to a lack of mutual understanding in overcoming the sense of past injustices through open and comprehensive communication. This tense international context could seem concerning as power dynamics change in East Asia with China’s rise, also threatening the United States’ hegemony, its close ally, Japan, and other leading countries in Asia. A very current example of China’s proactive position in foreign policy would be the recent conflict with India. An opinion article on The Japan Times’ website claimed on June 2020 that “India’s appeasement of China has indeed failed and so will the West’s and Japan’s” since “appeasements always embolden the adversary”. The article urges the liberal and democratic countries to act upon this and counter Chinese aggression³⁷. According to some theoretical assumptions, an armed conflict is more likely to occur when a rising country poses a threat to the status quo, especially those in which there are deep-seated grievances. This is to say that due to the deeply rooted hostilities and collective historical memory of mutual antagonism, connected to their nationalist sentiment, if the existing order is to change, the odds of an explosive conflict are higher³⁸.

During the Cold War, Japan and China shared the common interest in keeping regional stability, as neither was fit to assume a leadership role in East Asia. However, the 21st century hostilities and power shifts brought to light the lingering nationalism of both countries, further complicating Sino-Japanese relations. Nationalism has been identified as one of the most potent forces that could deteriorate their relations. However, it is hard to pinpoint to what extent and how due to its vulnerability to being controlled by the government, political forces, or even the public³⁹.

In the case of Sino-Japanese relations, the nationalist sentiment is especially relevant. There has been an effort in China to keep collective memory alive regarding Japan’s war crimes and other unsolved issues, such as the Nanjing Massacre, or territorial disputes, which ends up triggering an anti-Japanese sentiment. This sentiment, as seen in the previous section, has developed from “an essentially state-led ideology to an

³⁷ The Japan Times: 2020.

³⁸ Kim: 2018, p. 33.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 34.

increasingly society-driven phenomenon”⁴⁰. However, this is not to say that popular Chinese nationalism is the only factor, but rather an increasing point of influence, in its relations with Japan. For example, when it comes to dealing with sensitive Japan-related issues like those mentioned above, the Chinese government has less flexibility since a lack of action could be perceived as weak, and it could cause a turn against the government and political instability. In addition, the Chinese government’s efforts to keep a harmonious relationship with Japan are constrained by that same idea of becoming the regional political architect, which has some contradictions. Nonetheless, Beijing wishes to maintain peace, but to achieve this, it will have to deal with unresolved historical issues, territorial disputes and national pride⁴¹.

Regarding the Japanese side, the rise of China poses a threat in terms of security and hegemony in Asia, so through the promotion of a “healthy nationalism” discourse, the government wishes to defend itself against external forces and boost its military strength. When there was the normalization of Chinese-Japanese relations in 1972, Japan had the upper hand both economically and militarily, partially thanks to its security agreement with the United States. Since the regional order favored Japan, most of the anti-Chinese discourse revolved around these same sensitive issues and disputes, such as the Senkaku Islands, but the focus of nationalist discourse was rather domestic and not reflected in Japan’s cordial foreign policy approach. However, this changed in the late 20th century, with the rise of China’s economy and power. The Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 raised alerts among the Japanese elites, who saw the events as an act of brutality and felt less comfortable engaging with China. Other issues that deteriorated the public opinion of China were its claim over the Diaoyu Islands, the Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-1996), or the nuclear testing it undertook in 1995. As China’s military power grew, so did the Japanese concern to strengthen its military strength and defend itself, which paved the way for a nationalist discourse that would have been unthinkable decades ago: supporting the amendment of the Constitution. Since China is perceived as a threat in the last decades, politicians who have presented a “tough” stand against China were praised by the public, and those who didn’t were seen as diplomatically weak. This means that Japanese foreign

⁴⁰ Kim: 2018, p. 37.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 38-39.

policy planners also have to adopt a strict posture with China to obtain a favorable public opinion⁴².

Nationalism plays an important role in territorial disputes for both countries, especially due to their complicated history with their neighboring countries. The Japanese-Korean dispute over the Dokdo/Takeshima Islands is an example of a similar volatile situation, but there are plenty of unsolved territorial controversies in the East China Sea. The main reason why the Senkaku Island dispute is so relevant is because firstly, it involves the strongest military and economic powers in East Asia. Secondly, the Chinese nationalist discourse is based on the assertion that China was subject to imperialist attacks from Japan and Western powers and China will regain what they took from them, which means that their foreign policy decisions should be congruent. Lastly, China's military and economic strength poses a threat to Japan (and by extension, the United States), who has acted accordingly reinforcing its military power. One could argue that the Senkaku dispute is seemingly calmer than other territorial disputes, but a confrontation could be more damaging in the long term⁴³.

There was an interesting survey done in 2016 by the Pew Research Center⁴⁴ that analyzed in depth the mutual negative feelings between the two countries. The study showed that only 11 % of the Japanese viewed China favorably, and only 14 % of the Chinese had a good opinion of the Japanese, which are the lowest levels they respectively have when compared with other neighboring countries. The study goes further and investigates what causes this distrust, which is seemingly rooted in negative stereotypes. 81 % of the Japanese see the Chinese as arrogant, and 70 % of the Chinese share this opinion about Japan. Almost three out of four Japanese consider the Chinese nationalistic, but only 41 % of Chinese view them in the same light. Roughly seven out of ten in each country consider the other country's citizens violent. Neither of the countries see the other as honest. The study shows that the older generations are more likely to share these stereotypes.

When approaching on the main triggers of nationalism, Japan's war crimes during World War II, in 2016 53 % of the Japanese "believed they had apologized enough for it"—and the figure is on the rise—but only 10 % of the Chinese agree with this statement.

⁴² Kim: 2018, p. 41.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 45.

⁴⁴ Stokes: 2016.

In addition, 80 % of the Japanese and nearly 60 % of the Chinese think that “territorial disputes between China and its neighbors could lead to a military conflict”. This extremely negative mutual perception of these two powerful countries is the reason why, even though other territorial disputes seem less under-control in the South China Sea, the Senkaku Island dispute could be a more volatile issue. Perhaps, a similar issue would be the Takeshima/Dokdo dispute, as only 27 % of the Japanese expressed in 2016 a favorable opinion of Koreans, showing a decrease in the last decade⁴⁵. Considering the Korean-Japanese political tensions in 2019, it is likely public opinion has dropped even more and thus poses a problem when dealing with territorial disputes.

It goes without saying that in China there is still some hostility against the Japanese, a feeling that has come to light in the last 20 years with demonstrations over the Senkaku Islands dispute, the visits of Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Junichiro Koizumi to the Yasukuni Shrine, or the Japanese history textbook that almost ignored the war crimes committed by Japan during World War II. Similarly, many Japanese are concerned about China’s growth as a world leader and its increasingly assertive East China Sea policy, coupled with Japan’s economic decline. According to a 2005 survey⁴⁶, more than 70% of Japanese people claimed to have negative feelings about China or not to trust it. In conclusion, it could be said that the past hinders a good relationship between Japan and some Asian countries, but this same past and the discourse of historical legitimacy of China in terms of sovereignty are today a reason for complications in foreign policy⁴⁷.

In both countries, the correlation of nationalism and foreign policy is seen with issues such as the Comfort Women, the Nanjing massacre, or the disputed territories in the South China Sea such as the Spradley Islands or the Paracel Islands. In line with this idea, the case study for this paper, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute, is a matter that greatly concerns both countries and remains unsolved, acting as a frequent trigger of political tension in recent years as mentioned. Thus, for a dual application, this section aims to analyze more in depth the anti-Japanese sentiment in China and the anti-Chinese sentiment in Japan, both of which are interconnected with nationalism, and the consequences on territorial disputes in the East China Sea. The goal is to reflect their

⁴⁵ Strokes: 2016.

⁴⁶ Reuters: 2005, taken from Metraux.

⁴⁷ Metraux: 2013, p. 9.

shifting power relations and the politics of nationalism, bottom-up and top-down, intertwined with collective memory of history through the analysis of the Senkaku⁴⁸ Island dispute.

CASE STUDY: THE SENKAKU/DIAOYU ISLAND DISPUTE

Brief Introduction to Sino-Japanese Relations

The shared and contested region of the East China Sea shapes the interactions of China and Japan with their other Asian neighbors. Because of this, this paper presents Sino-Japanese Relations in a three-dimensional context: from the perspective of security (or military) policies, economic connections, and cultural ties⁴⁹. These three elements are interconnected, shaping the diplomatic practice of these countries.

In the first place, as mentioned in terms of security, after tensions during the Cold War, through the U.S.-Chinese rapprochement, Japan incorporated China in the “developing conception of national security”, a move which China reciprocated. This was the steppingstone to building a region where neither could seek hegemony in what is now considered the Asia Pacific region. Until today, the region’s security and balance are dependent on the People’s Republic of China, Japan and the United States, who is also closely involved due to the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan signed in 1951⁵⁰. Currently, China has expanded its naval fleet and its defense perimeter farther from the coast⁵¹, which means it is on its way to becoming a major maritime power in the contested region of East Asia. Hence the great interest in gaining the sovereignty of key locations in the East and South China Sea. As for Japan, it views these advances with alarm and reemphasized the protection of its territory⁵². It is also a key element in Abe’s campaign to amend Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, and a record defense budget of 5.31 trillion yen (€43.3 billion) was approved for the year 2020⁵³.

⁴⁸ The use of “Senkaku” or “Diaoyu” in this text to refer to the islands is arbitrary, and it not connected to a political standpoint.

⁴⁹ This is inspired in Iriye’s paper *Chinese-Japanese Relations, 1945-90*.

⁵⁰ Iriye: 1990, pp. 1-6.

⁵¹ Metraux: 2013, pp. 5-6.

⁵² Smith: 2013, p. 13.

⁵³ Yamaguchi: 2019.

Secondly, regarding their economic ties, China and Japan have moved in a consistent direction, with growing ties and interdependence. Since they began trading after 1949, China and Japan have grown to become large trade partners⁵⁴. These “two countries [have enjoyed] a parallel economic relationship that features extensive and growing interdependence and cross-investment.” In 2009, China was the largest destination for Japanese exports. At the moment, the trend seems to favor China and in 2011, they surpassed Japan’s earnings and became the world’s second largest economy⁵⁵. China is among Japan’s main trading partners and sources of inbound tourism, and Japan has been vital to China in the transfer of technology. Regardless of political tensions, their economic ties are strong, a situation to which some refer as “hot economics, cold politics”⁵⁶.

Thirdly, it is important to highlight the strong cultural bonds between the neighboring countries. By “cultural”, this work refers to the areas that go beyond economic or security affairs⁵⁷. China was a reference of cultural, religious and technological development for the Japanese for centuries, which deeply impacted Japanese thinking and the Japanese perception of the world until today. On the other side, however, the brutal wars of the 20th century have scarred their international relations and are a key factor as to the cultural ties between China and Japan. The emotional and psychological consequences remain relevant to foreign policy decisions—closely connected to the growing nationalist sentiment in both countries—even if they do well diplomatically and economically.

Thus, conflicts between these two countries can be approached through the three-dimensional framework of security, economy and culture. In addition, although clearly not solely dependent on it, nationalism is a part of the multilayered international relations between China and Japan and needs to be understood in such context.

The Senkaku Island Dispute

⁵⁴ Iriye: 1990, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁵ Smith: 2013, p. 11.

⁵⁶ West: 2020.

⁵⁷ Iriye: 1990, p. 12.

To analyze and explain the territorial Senkaku Island dispute, this paper uses the three-dimensional framework mentioned above. But in the first place, what are the Senkaku Islands⁵⁸? They are “a small group of islands⁵⁹ at the southwestern edge of the East China Sea. [...] They are located 120 nautical miles (nm) northeast of Taiwan, 200 nm east of China, and 200 nm southwest of the Japanese island of Okinawa”. The Senkaku Islands are *probably* inhabitable, as they are presently inhabited and administered by Japan, but both China and Japan have expressed their territorial claims over the islands since the 70s. But what is it that makes them so special? It is not the islands’ economic value per se, but rather their strategic location near offshore areas that are said to be rich in oil and gas, as well as rich fishing grounds. Furthermore, owning these islands “could potentially generate extensive areas of maritime jurisdiction”⁶⁰.

In terms of security, the Senkaku islands are very interesting due to their strategic location. As stated, both China and Japan have significantly strengthened their navies and maritime defenses, so having the islands, in the middle of the East China Sea, connecting Japan, Taiwan and the PRC, would allow to strengthen control of the area and ensure sea routes. The Japanese government is concerned because China has allocated more resources to its defenses and has expressed its wishes to build a submarine military base in the Senkaku Islands’ region, which could endanger Japanese national security. However, Japan is not the only one concerned about the Senkaku becoming a Chinese sovereign territory. China’s assertion of its sovereignty over the islands affects the security pact Japan has with the United States, so it’s not merely a bilateral affair. Especially due to the proximity of the Senkaku Islands to Okinawa, where U.S. military forces are located⁶¹.

Concerning the economic benefits, the islands are near offshore areas that are said to be rich in oil and gas, as well as rich fishing grounds⁶². After World War II, Japan was forced to return all territories seized from China, but the fate of the Senkaku remained unclear, probably because it was empty. This issue would have remained on standby if it hadn’t been for the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East’s survey in 1968

⁵⁸ 尖閣諸島 *senkaku hotō*, or in Chinese 钓鱼台 *diaoyutai*

⁵⁹ Due to size and characteristics of the islands, some scholars have even doubted whether they can be considered islands at all. The area is 6.3 km² in total.

⁶⁰ Yiallourides: 2017, pp. 1-2.

⁶¹ Metraux: 2013, pp. 5-6.

⁶² Yiallourides: 2017, pp. 2.

that revealed that there was probably a large deposit of hydrocarbon resources “on or near the continental shelf that stretches off the China coast”⁶³. Some efforts of joint exploration for hydrocarbon resources were made in 2008, but the 2010 boat collision scuttled this⁶⁴.

Lastly, there is the “cultural” dimension to the dispute. Security and economic reasons are a part of it, indeed, but Japan and China have a complicated past. The Chinese still harbor grievance about the Japanese invasion in the 20th century and accuse them of denying war crimes. The Chinese have a sense of entitlement of regional hegemony, which is fueled by the state, and inevitably puts these two countries at odds. In fact, the Chinese claim that the United States is helping Japan in depriving China from what they consider their rightful ownership of these islands. On the other hand, Japan claims that the islands had always been *terra nullius*. In a way, the Senkaku Island dispute⁶⁵ could be perceived as a way for both countries to “vent their nationalist frustrations”⁶⁶.

Recent Development of the Dispute

In 2010, the Chinese fishing boat *Minjinyu 5179* collided⁶⁷ with two Japan coast guard vessels, which led to Japan’s decision to arrest the Chinese fishing boat’s captain. After this, China demanded compensation and an apology from Japan, but Prime Minister Naoto Kan defended Japan’s sovereignty over the islands and rejected this. In the months that followed, plenty of cultural and political exchanges were canceled. In the end, Japan released the captain and took a step back, but both nations reinforced their surveillance of the area⁶⁸.

On September 2012, the international tension concerning the Diaoyu Islands peaked. This was caused by the signing of a contract by the Japanese government that

⁶³ Metraux: 2013, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Smith: 2013, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁵ It is worth mentioning that Taiwan’s role in this dispute is unique too and a further study of the nationalism in Taiwan would be relevant in this dispute. After all, the Taiwanese have shown their discomfort regarding Japanese patrol vessels and consider the island theirs. In fact, Beijing claims that the Diaoyu Island is Taiwan’s and, following the One China Policy, this would mean that they are part of the PRC too. Although Taiwan plays a minor role in the dispute due to a lack of international recognition, they were the first representatives of the Chinese part of the dispute in the 70s and still lay their claim over the island. In 2015, President Tsai Ing Wen reconfirmed Taiwan’s claim over the islands.

⁶⁶ Metraux: 2013, p. 9.

⁶⁷ In 1978 China and Japan were in another diplomatic issue when an Armada of Chinese ships and smaller vessels entered the Senkaku’s territorial waters. The Chinese authorities explained this as an “accident.”

⁶⁸ Valencia: 2011, pp. 79-80; Smith: 2013, p. 2.

purchased for 2.05 billion yen (€23.2 million) three of the five main islands that constitute the Senkaku Island group in order to nationalize them. Since Japan was already administrating them, this was largely symbolic but, naturally, the Chinese perceived this as a provocation. In the months that followed, Japanese citizens and businesses were subject to violence and boycotted in sectors such as airlines or automobile manufacturers⁶⁹. The impact of these protests was so large that IMF Chief Christine Lagarde expressed her concerns and stated that they should not be “distracted by territorial division”. Since “the global economy needs both Japan and China fully engaged”, the international market felt the consequences of political tension in East Asia.

As for the United States, Washington’s stance on this dispute is officially neutral, but their security agreement with Japan, their close relations and the political tension with China suggest that it is in the United States’ best interest that Japan maintains the administration of the islands. The United States encouraged both parties to stay cool-headed concerning the diplomatic issue⁷⁰, but the United States’ position on the matter has increasingly become one of more involvement. In the 1970s, the United States kept a neutral discourse, and it wasn’t clear whether the Security Treaty would also cover the Senkaku Islands⁷¹. However, because of China’s bid for regaining regional hegemony, the U.S. Government has stated more clearly the scope of their military agreement with Japan. For example, in 2014 at a joint press conference in Tokyo with Prime Minister Abe, former President Obama stated that “Article 5 covers all territories under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku Islands”, but he emphasized cooperation rather than the situation escalating⁷². In 2017 at the first meeting of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee under the Trump Administration, the authorities involved reconfirmed that “the United States and Japan oppose any unilateral action that seeks to undermine Japan’s administration of [The Senkaku] islands”⁷³.

Diplomatic tensions were somewhat relieved with the signing of an agreement in 2014. As stated on this four-point agreement, both parties would follow “the spirit of squarely facing history and advancing toward the future”. They did recognize for the first time ever that they “had different views” concerning the Senkaku Island dispute and that

⁶⁹ Smith: 2013, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Chan: 2012.

⁷¹ Kim: 2018, p. 48.

⁷² The White House: 2014.

⁷³ U.S. Department of Defense: 2017.

they “would prevent the deterioration of the situation, establish a crisis management mechanism and avert the rise of unforeseen circumstances”⁷⁴. This provided a breath of fresh air after the conflict in 2012, but no further comments on the sovereignty were made, maintaining the same status quo as before⁷⁵.

This was clearly a vague proposal, and it did not offer an actual solution to the dispute. Recently, the media were announcing that they had sighted Chinese Coast Guards’ boats very often since mid-April 2020⁷⁶—they stayed in territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands at least three days and different media outlets reported that Chinese boats had entered, some said even every day, beating a record, but the official figure doesn’t seem clear. This is nothing out of the ordinary since Chinese Coast Guards have been surveilling the area and entering it since 2008. However, the frequency does seem to be rising and Chinese authorities are getting bolder⁷⁷. Meanwhile in June 2020, Chinese media expressed their anger about the decision of the city government of Ishigaki (Okinawa Prefecture) to change the administrative designation of the Senkaku Islands’ area⁷⁸. Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhao Lijian claimed that these actions are “a serious provocation of China’s territorial sovereignty, it is illegal and invalid” and that they “resolutely oppose”⁷⁹. Maintaining the status quo seems to be the preferred option by both countries, and by the United States. Even though things are seemingly back to normal, the above information suggests that as long as a definite solution isn’t found, problems will keep arising.

Nationalism in the Dispute

As early as 1972, Henry Kissinger’s State Department warned him to avoid the “volatile and nationalistic Senkaku Islands issue”⁸⁰. And this was precisely what both involved parties chose to do. China and Japan had several unresolved issues but during the post-war era, they chose to put them aside for the sake of their economic ties and cordial diplomatic relations. Nationalism had a domestic outlet, China held a pragmatic

⁷⁴ [Japanese] Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 2014.

⁷⁵ Perlez: 2014.

⁷⁶ Lendon: 2020.

⁷⁷ Kotani: 2020.

⁷⁸ SINA News: 2020.

⁷⁹ [Chinese] Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 2020.

⁸⁰ Smith: 2013, p. 10.

stance, and both accepted the status quo. However nowadays, the shift in power dynamics have made the East China Sea (and South China Sea) points of diplomatic tension due to territorial disputes⁸¹.

The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute, recent and still complicating Sino-Japanese relations, serves as an example of the importance of nationalism both in top-down and bottom-up movements in international politics. China is involved in several territorial disputes in the surrounding seas, but the dispute over these islands touches on a nationalist vein because of the resentment that the history of Japanese imperialism arouses, which was already very much present in the famous protest of the May 4th Movement in 1919. Despite the strategic and economic advantages that the sovereignty of these islands could bring, the conflicts over their sovereignty date back to the First Sino-Japanese War and trigger a sense of injustice among the Chinese people. The goal to restore China's pride is closely connected to the humiliation they felt after their defeat against Japan, which also explains why the Chinese government seems to have a stronger nationalist discourse about this dispute, compared to other disputes it has with Vietnam or the Philippines⁸².

Therefore, Japan's claim to the islands and especially the nationalization of three of them in 2012 was a turning point in the dispute⁸³. This was not the first time there was diplomatic tension over the islands, as was the case in 2010, but it was possibly the most important one so far. In China, there was a boycott of Japanese companies and businesses on a large scale, looting, violent attacks, mass protests on social networks and in public, extensive media coverage of the conflict, etc.⁸⁴. Despite the Chinese government's favorable view of expressions of popular nationalism and the fact that these protests supported its position, it is not clear to what extent the government allowed them⁸⁵. Ambassador Li Baodong, during the General Debate of the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly in 2012, made the following statement:

Japan's so-called "nationalization" of the Diaoyu Dao is based purely on the logic of robbers. At the end of the 19th century, Japan stole from China large chunks of territory, including the Diaoyu

⁸¹ Kim: 2018, p. 44.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Greenfeld: 2012.

⁸⁴ Zhao: 2013, p. 19.

⁸⁵ Chen Weiss: 2013, p. 6

Dao, through a colonial war of aggression. Now we are in the 21st century. Japan still adopts the obsolete colonial mentality [..]⁸⁶.

For Beijing, the fact that Japan, the United States and other countries in the region have strengthened their military power seems to be because they feel China is challenging their hegemony. Hence, China will not stand still either.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that this feeling is not exclusive to China. The Japanese government nationalized the islands because the governor of Tokyo and nationalist Shintaro Ishihara intended to buy the islands himself to add them to the metropolitan region through a fundraising campaign. His intention was “to do whatever was necessary to protect [their] own territory”⁸⁷. Indeed, Beijing saw this as a conspiracy between the governor Shintaro Ishihara and the Japanese government to make their move and assert their sovereignty over the islands⁸⁸. From Japan’s perspective, the islands are *terra nullius* and China is trying to take over a territory it never had. In Tokyo, a few thousand people participated in anti-Chinese protests and criticized the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) for a weak attitude towards China, which benefited the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the following elections⁸⁹. Although anti-Japanese protests in China were stronger, the information suggests that large-scale anti-Chinese sentiment in Japan is an important issue, as was also seen with the hashtag that trended on Twitter recently due to COVID-19: *#ChineseDon’tComeToJapan*⁹⁰.

According to the same study by the Pew Research Center⁹¹, LDP voters are more critical of China, more likely to say China is nationalistic and less likely to think Japan hasn’t apologized enough about war crimes than those of the DPJ. Similarly, LDP voters are more critical of South Korea. Hence, the Senkaku Islands’ controversy in 2012 benefited the nationalist and ultra-conservative Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s victory in the 2012 general elections with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), along with “the emergence in the political scene of a populist and nationalist party (the Japan Restoration Party)”. Both groups have been vocal about their nationalism and historical revisionist standpoint, which has been associated with a growing neo-nationalism in Japan⁹². When

⁸⁶ The World and Japan Database: 2012.

⁸⁷ Smith: 2013, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Kim: 2018, p. 47.

⁸⁹ Chen Weiss: 2013, p. 5-6

⁹⁰ Rich: 2020.

⁹¹ Stokes: 2016.

⁹² Ekman & Pajon: 2015, p. 9.

they first arrested the Chinese boat's captain, former Prime Minister Naoto Kan from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) reacted defiantly. "Senkaku is an integral part of Japanese territory. [...] I have no intention of accepting [the demand] at all," he told the reporters⁹³. However, China's coercive tactics did succeed and, as mentioned, eventually the captain was released. The DPJ paid a costly price for this in terms of public opinion, especially due to Chinese captain signing "V" for victory on television. Their administration was heavily criticized by the LPD and it was perceived as a failure⁹⁴. The influential Nippon Kaigi conservative organization, in which Shinzo Abe serves as a special advisor, stated in its website that, "The Senkaku Islands are an inherent part of our country's territory, both historically and according to international law. We categorically protest to the Chinese side's unlawful and repeated actions on our territory. We can't help but feel outrage at the weak response our government has given to defend out territorial waters"⁹⁵.

This nationalism is reflected on the media and, at the same time, it is the media that can also shape the nationalist sentiment. For a recent example, the renaming of the administrative Senkaku area was reported in June 2020 in the Japanese news outlet Asahi Shinbun with the following statement: "Ishigaki City to change the name of the Senkaku Islands to 'Senkaku' for efficiency purposes"⁹⁶. The Chinese SINA News' headline said that "The day Japan 'renamed' the Diaoyu Islands; China responded directly with action"⁹⁷. Another recent example would be the Chinese Coast Guards' surveilling the islands' territorial waters, since each country has had a different take on it. The Okinawa Times, a local Japanese newspaper, headline on May 27 for this issue was "Chinese Government Ship ignores protests and threatens Okinawa fishing boat. The following day, they invaded territorial waters again"⁹⁸. On May 17, Chinese newspaper Global Times released an article with the headline "Japanese politician brags about going to Diaoyu Island to scare off Chinese coastguard ship, ends up being chased by Chinese coastguard ship for an hour". They also claim that China has been entering Senkaku territorial waters since April⁹⁹ and, up until the 29th of June 2020, Chinese media have reported that

⁹³ As quoted in Smith: 2013, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Chen Weiss: 2013, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Nippon Kaigi: 2012.

⁹⁶ Okada: 2020.

⁹⁷ SINA News: 2020.

⁹⁸ Okinawa Times: 2020.

⁹⁹ Global Times: 2020.

Chinese coastguards have done so for 77 consecutive days. This is interesting to keep in mind, as top-down driven nationalism is greatly influenced by what the media announce. In addition, the media also want to write things that will sell and match public opinion, confirming the anti-Japanese or anti-Chinese mindset deeply rooted in the East Asian landscape.

On October 1978, Deng Xiaoping reportedly said that “it would be wise for our two governments to avoid talking about this issue [the Diaoyu Islands]. Our generation is not wise enough to find a common ground, but our next generation will be wiser”¹⁰⁰. Almost half a century later, it seems like this generation might not have changed as much as he thought.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine a connection between nationalism and foreign policy in China and Japan by analyzing the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island dispute. Since there is a growing nationalistic trend in these countries, it is relevant to study how this can affect their international relations and territorial disputes—especially since their nationalism is rooted in the historical collective memory that triggers anti-Japanese/anti-Chinese sentiments.

In the case of China, the growing popular nationalist sector advocates for regaining China’s hegemony and position as a world leader. After the painful 20th century, there is a seeping resentment towards imperialism, the West and Japan. Since China has managed to rise economically and militarily in the past decade, the government has adopted a more proactive attitude with foreign policy planning, which satisfied the demands of the nationalist sector. Still, the expectations for Chinese leaders are high and, with China being a very nationalist country, they must be handled carefully.

As for Japan, their post-war relationship with nationalism might have even seemed antagonistic for a period. However, the current ruling elite and other influential groups in Japan represent a liberal neonationalism. Their interest is to move past the historic issues of the 20th century, establish a strong army as there is a concern about China’s growing power, and awaken a strong sentiment of “healthy” national pride. In the 21st century,

¹⁰⁰ Yabuki: 2016.

these two countries, who both suffered poverty and humiliation in the last century, have moved away from post-war nationalism.

This suggests that nationalism is a dynamic political principal heavily influenced by its historical context. The nationalist state discourse in both countries does not depict the same ideas that it had 100 years ago, or even 50 years ago. National interests can change, and so can the nationalist sentiment. Determining the roots of nationalism, however, whether it is a bottom-up or top-down movement, is not an easy task.

The information found also suggests that the ability of domestic politics and nationalist sentiment to restrict a government's scope of action should not be underestimated¹⁰¹. In terms of Sino-Japanese relations, hostilities born from unsolved issues and the collective memory of the 20th century's wars are a heavy weight. There is a clear anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiment respectively, mutual distrust, and a nationalist discourse. The two countries perceive the other as deceitful, biased and arrogant. These aspects are reflected in the portrayal of the information on the media, public opinion, and state discourse. Not to say that this dislike is unfounded, but rather that it is often fed unnecessarily. This means that these same tools can be used to create a favorable mutual opinion, at least to a certain degree.

The Senkaku Islands case study in this paper serves to put this animosity into context. It is a dispute that concerns the First Sino-Japanese War, a matter of national pride, which places the two countries at odds. It is an issue that has triggered very large protest in China against Japan, and the Japanese have also been vocal about their dislike of this issue. National planners are put on the spot when making decisions, since the population demands a tough stance that might not be the most adequate for peaceful cooperation. This mutually hostile sentiment, which is not unique to the Senkaku Islands dispute, can even mean a risk for the economic partnership between China and Japan. Good economic relations don't necessarily signify stable relations¹⁰².

The governments in Beijing and Tokyo seem to accept expressions of nationalism, but these have not always turned out well for them, as was the case for the DPJ in the 2012 elections or the protests in China that became too violent. In order to avoid large discrepancies, all parties involved have accepted to maintain the status quo, but this is not

¹⁰¹ Chen Weiss: 2013, p. 1.

¹⁰² Kim: 2018, p. 41.

really a solution for the Senkaku dispute. In fact, the key to the solution could be to first address the nationalist issues in the background. The perspectives aren't really promising in this sense, as the situation has stagnated. Economic cooperation will follow, cordial but lukewarm political relations, and a complicated past. However, it is true that China has become bolder with time as it gained power, and this could be the case in the future.

With the geopoliticization of nationalism, research on the political influence of nationalist sentiment could be very useful in East Asian international relations and territorial disputes. In Sino-Japanese bilateral relations, this is clearly not the only factor in the economic, security-related and cultural framework. The question then would be: is nationalism in China and Japan alarming? It would certainly be best if they worked as partners, and not as threats to each other. Of course, this is easier said than done. Still, the hindering of their bilateral relations would have to be motivated by forces beyond nationalism and the "cultural" dimension.

Regarding the prospects of nationalism, there is a growing nationalist trend in both countries, but this might no longer be the case in the long term. A study in 2012 reported that as literacy levels in China rise, nationalism will decrease¹⁰³. This could be true and, perhaps, other factors such as globalization and multicultural exchanges can serve as a pivot for less intense nationalism. China's lightning growth into a developed nation is still in process, so it can be hard to estimate the sociological impact. In addition, there is also a lack of information about public opinion in China due to censorship. As for Japan, the most anti-Chinese population groups seem to be older than 30, perhaps this sentiment could also decrease in the long-term. On the other side, it could also be argued that the public can get more conservative with age but, again, the number of Chinese students in Japan and vice versa has greatly increased in the past 50 years. If only slightly, the interconnected world we live in can serve as a bridge to connect these nations. Unless there is an event that might hinder their relations even more, these hostilities could loosen up with time. It would be interesting to study the development of a "healthy nationalism" in Japan beyond the political elite. Further research is also encouraged including Taiwanese nationalism in the Senkaku dispute, or broadening the study to the Japanese-Korean hostilities in territorial disputes to provide comparison.

¹⁰³ Wenfang and Darr: 2012, p. 823.

At an interview in 2015, former head of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and former President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency Sadako Ogata explained that “Japan cannot do without coexistence with Asian countries”. She said that the Japanese “thought we could survive if we just protected ourselves,” but this is not really the case. She explained that Japan has developed through international exchange, as it has with China in recent years¹⁰⁴. East Asia still carries a heavy burden from the past, but rather than animosity, cooperation and dialogue could strengthen the region and become a first step towards mutual understanding, beyond nationalism.

¹⁰⁴ JICA Research Institute: 2015.

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