

Rocky Relations

Protests, Nationalism, and Possible Conflict

Amid the Diaoyu Islands Dispute

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When faced with the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu Islands, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping decided to set the issue aside, proclaiming that the “next generation will be wiser” and “will certainly find a solution”(Koo 211). Yet when surveying the current burst of tensions between China and Japan over the islands, one may doubt the wisdom of Deng’s prediction. The September anti-Japan protests in numerous Chinese cities aroused the concern of onlookers. Since the PRC has prevented protests in the past, many are curious why protests were allowed. It is plausible that demonstrations provided a convenient distraction for an apprehensive Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as it prepared for the 18th Party Congress. Ultimately though, recent developments make it difficult to discern China’s intentions. Can Chinese nationalism increase the likelihood of a conflict with Japan? While in past decades China was willing to restrain its nationalist behavior in order to protect its economic ties with Japan, in recent years the PRC has displayed its readiness to take action in response to insults from Japan. Preventive war arguments reveal that if China perceives negative long-term trends, for example that growing Japanese nationalism will lead Tokyo to consolidate control over the islands, Beijing could see the use of force in the short-term as an advantageous way to halt such trends. However, this outcome is not inevitable. It is not self-evident that long-term trends in regard to Japanese nationalism will be unfavorable to China. Also, trends in the military balance of power are arguably in China’s favor, strongly decreasing the likelihood that Beijing will employ force in the short-term.

Since the early 1970s, there have been several flare ups in the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute, all of which followed a general pattern of escalation and then de-escalation (Koo 206). The most recent conundrum began in April when nationalist Tokyo Mayor Shintaro Ishihara began a campaign to buy the islands from its private owners. Wary of having the islands in the hands of Ishihara and the Tokyo metropolitan government, the Japanese government then purchased the

islands, a transaction which was confirmed on September 11 (Whiteman). Ultimately China viewed Japan's nationalization of the islands as a violation of a tacit agreement to maintain the status quo, as Deng had suggested when he proposed that the dispute be set aside until a future time. Japan however argues that such an agreement was never reached, and that no dispute exists over the islands' sovereignty. Yet the government of Yoshihiko Noda appears to not have anticipated China's ardent response to Japan's purchase of the offshore islands (Weis "Nationalism"). The PRC promptly dispatched six surveillance ships to waters surrounding the islands on September 14, despite warnings from the Japanese coast guard to stay out of the area (Whiteman). Raising the stakes of the dispute, China would continue to conduct similar patrols as weeks passed. It was reported on November 23 that Chinese surveillance vessels sailed in an area outside Japanese territorial waters for the 35th day in a row ("Chinese Vessels").

In addition to highlighting the complexity of the issue, the competing claims to the islands reveal how difficult forging a resolution may be. The Diaoyu, or Senkaku Islands, the Chinese and Japanese given names, respectively, are a set of five uninhabited islets and three barren rocks located in the East China Sea between Taiwan and Okinawa (Downs and Saunders 124). China, Taiwan and Japan all claim that the islands are rightfully theirs. China's claims, concurred by Taiwan, are based on records dating back to the Ming Dynasty. Japan however maintains that it acquired the islands in 1879 upon gaining control of Okinawa (Gries, "Nationalism" 121). As established in the Treaty of Shimonoseki following China's defeat in the 1895 Sino-Japanese War, the Qing dynasty transferred control of Taiwan "and its surrounding islands" to Japan, a transfer which China argues included the Diaoyu islands. After Japan's defeat in World War II, the United States received control of the islands. Then in 1972, the US returned "administrative rights" over the islands to Japan along with Okinawa. However,

recognizing that both sides had some justification for their claims, and hoping to avoid upsetting China or Japan, the US “refused to take a position on the sovereignty dispute” (Downs and Saunders 125). The PRC holds that the reversion of the Diaoyu Islands to Japanese rule violated the 1943 Cairo Declaration and the 1945 Potsdam Proclamation. Cairo established that “Japan must return all the Chinese territories it had annexed”, while Potsdam “called for the execution of the terms of the Cairo Declaration”, the latter of which Japan had accepted after its surrender. China therefore argues that the Diaoyu islands should have been returned to Chinese rule. Japan however contends that the islands “were not specifically mentioned in any of the treaties except the 1972 Okinawa reversion treaty” (Downs and Saunders 125).

Given that the islands are ostensibly a group of uninhabitable and worthless rocks, one might wonder why they have created such a sore spot in relations between China and Japan. China, Japan and Taiwan began to pay more attention to the islands following an announcement in 1969 that the East China Sea might contain oil. Custody over the islands could provide sovereignty over about 11,700 square nautical miles of a continental shelf thought to have fair amounts of natural resources (Downs and Saunders 124). In recent years China has begun drilling in the area, and the Japanese have granted approval to a company to drill for oil and gas as well (Shirk 147). Additionally, China reports that the waters around the islands are common fishing ground for Chinese trawlers, with more than 1,000 fishing vessels working in the area every year (Oguru and Mullen). However the islands have remained a critical issue in Sino-Japanese relations largely because of their symbolic value, as the dispute is quite representative of the two nations’ often conflicting views, and has been used by politicians to evoke feelings of national pride.

Also in September, in response to Japan's move, anti-Japanese protests erupted in as many as 120 cities throughout China. Some protests became violent, as demonstrators trashed Japanese stores and overturned Japanese cars (Link "Dangerous"). Though not representative of the majority, it is frightening how vitriolic some of the rhetoric used by protestors became. Some went as far as calling for the extermination of Japan (Weis "Nationalism"). To study the nature of these protests, it is worth delving into why Chinese emotions about Japan are so raw. Also, since the CCP has halted nationalist protests in the past, it is important to investigate why China's leaders allowed protestors to take to the streets over the Diaoyu dispute. To answer these questions, one must first look to the tense history that exists between the Asian nations.

Tied inextricably to the island dispute and broader Sino-Japanese relations are the historical animosities that exist between the two nations. As explained by Susan Shirk, "people in China see every Japanese act through the lens of history", and when considering the details of their history one might better understand why Japan's nationalization of the islands elicited such a vocal response from China (146). Prior to the 1890s, China had been the dominant nation in Asia for more than a thousand years, "respected by its neighbors for being superior culturally, as well as economically and militarily." In the 1895 Sino-Japanese War however, China was defeated by Japan. A defeat at the hands of what it thought to be an inferior power was humiliating for China (Shirk 153). Even more important in Chinese history is Japan's ruthless occupation of China in the 1930s and 1940s, which the PRC estimates cost the lives of thirty-five million Chinese, most of whom were civilians (Shirk 154). The focal point of the traumatic Japanese occupation is the event known as the "Nanjing Massacre", when in 1937 "approximately twenty thousand women were raped, and many of them killed; twelve thousand civilians were murdered; and thirty thousand Chinese soldiers were killed" (Shirk 155). Within

the anti-Japanese protests around China, references to this tumultuous history were visible. For example, the state run news agency Xinhua distributed photographs of protestors carrying banners which read “Don’t Forget the National Humiliation” (Oguru and Mullen).

History alone however does not fully account for why Chinese emotions regarding Japan continue to be so raw today. Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square crisis which almost caused the demise of the CCP regime, the party was forced to find new sources of legitimacy. No longer able to use communist ideology as a driving source of support, the CCP began to stress nationalist themes as a way of bolstering its legitimacy (Shirk 62). With the rough history between the two as a backdrop, Japan has played a pivotal role in the rise of Chinese nationalism. As Susan Shirk explains, “Chinese politicians use Japan-related issues to mobilize support for themselves as strong leaders or to divert attention from difficult domestic problems”(144). Though not solely a product of the state’s actions, anti-Japanese sentiments have been strongly reinforced by China’s “patriotic education campaigns.” School curricula, museums and historical sites have only nurtured popular resentments against Japan. Compounding the problem is the fact that stories about Japan attract large audiences, leading the Chinese media to report a multitude of stories which reinforce nationalist myths and perpetuate anti-Japan sentiments (Shirk 85).

What conclusions then can be drawn when observing the recent conflagration of protests? Quite paradoxically, the protests illustrate how in some cases popular nationalism can be beneficial to CCP, while also displaying how nationalism can act as a constraint on the party’s behavior. In a blog contribution to the New York Review of Books entitled “Beijing’s Dangerous Game”, Perry Link put forth the position that the anti-Japanese uproar had everything to do with the interests of China’s leadership, whose situation required public attention to be

directed elsewhere (“Dangerous”). In November, the 18th Communist Party National Congress convened to appoint a new generation of Chinese leaders. The once-in-a-decade leadership transition was marked by the introduction of new members in China’s top ruling group, the Politburo Standing Committee, as well as the appointing of Xi Jinping as party chief, replacing the outgoing Hu Jintao (“China’s Leadership”). However, preparing for the transition was unexpectedly turbulent for party leaders, who faced several significant problems leading up to the Congress. Given the tremendous amounts of power and wealth that were at stake in the process, it is no wonder Chinese leaders had such anxieties about the leadership handover (Link, “Dangerous”).

One of the biggest sources of trouble for China’s ruling elite over the past year has been the story of Bo Xialia. A onetime rising star in the CCP, Bo accumulated massive amounts of wealth through questionable means as mayor of Chongqing. In July 2012, Bo’s wife was charged with the murder of British national Neil Heywood, a case which brought about “far-ranging questions about China’s governing system” (Link, “Bo”). Bo was subsequently expelled from the party in late September 2012. The ordeal of the murder trial and Bo’s removal not only revealed a startling degree of widespread corruption and abuse of power among high-ranking leaders, but also brought to light the struggle among CCP elite (Link, “Bo”). The unraveling of Bo’s story occurred simultaneously with the reemergence of the Diaoyu issue, so themes of corruption and special privilege were fresh in the minds of the Chinese public around the time of Japan’s move to nationalize the islands. Link therefore argues that the anti-Japanese protests acted as a useful distraction for China’s leaders, because with the public’s attention glued to the Diaoyu Islands, the CCP was given a freer hand in its efforts to resolve the power struggle and ensure a smooth transition for the party (Link, “Dangerous”). As Link details, some evidence

even suggests that authorities actively encouraged the protests. Blogging accounts in China posted photos of what appear to be regularly dressed policemen inciting and even leading protest activity. Also important is the fact that demonstrations in two dozen cities arose “with near simultaneity”, and many protestors touted mass-produced banners and Mao-portraits, making it possible to infer that official help has been offered (Link, “Dangerous”).

However, Beijing took on serious risks in allowing protests to materialize to the multitude that they did. When protestors take to the streets in China there is always the possibility that demonstrators could turn their grievances against the PRC regime, and it is not uncommon for some in the public to use foreign policy topics as an avenue to air their dissatisfaction with China’s domestic situation (Shirk 64). Though as Link explains, China’s top echelon of leaders are well aware of the dangers of the game. When weighing its options, the CCP saw the “potential damage to the regime that could come from letting the public concentrate on their power transition” or corruption among the political elite as much more dangerous, and were therefore willing to bare the risks associated with “stirring up” nationalism (Link, “Dangerous”).

Taking into account recent opinion polls which reveal growing concerns in China about corruption and inequality, it becomes clearer why the CCP had such significant anxieties about the leadership transition. In a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, 50 percent of Chinese respondents said that they see corruption among public officials as being a very big problem. In 2008, only 39 percent had given the same response (“Growing Concerns”). Although nine-in-ten Chinese said their standard of living is better than standards enjoyed by their parents at a similar age, and 70 percent said they and their families are better off than they were five years ago, a significant amount of respondents expressed unease about growing economic

inequality in China. In fact, when responding to the statement that “today, it is really true that the rich just get richer while the poor get poorer”, 81 percent said that they agree. Of the 81 percent that agreed, 45 percent said they “completely agree” (“Growing Concerns”).

While it is a viable argument that the protests have provided a convenient distraction for the CCP, it is important to understand that nationalism highly constrains Chinese leaders in their relations with Japan. As Shirk explains, the Chinese Communist Party’s legitimacy is connected to its 1945 victory in the war against Japan. The origin of the People’s Republic is remembered through the story that the Chinese people, led by Mao Zedong, were able to triumph against the aggressions of Japan (Shirk 144). As put by Peter Hays Gries, at the heart of the party’s claims to nationalist legitimacy is the legacy of “defeating the Japanese and saving the nation” (“Nationalism” 69). Indeed, it was through the mobilization of peasants in resistance against the invading Japanese that the Communist Party acquired the massive following integral to its victory against the Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War (Gries, “Nationalism” 69). It is therefore extremely difficult for Chinese leaders to pursue the improvement of political relations with Japan, because doing so would contradict one of the staples of Chinese nationalism.

Regardless of the clear benefits that would come from an improved Sino-Japanese relationship, those within the Chinese leadership who would prefer ameliorating ties with Japan do not dare advocate doing so because of the backlash that would come from the public and CCP conservatives. The firing of CCP general secretary Hu Yaobang in 1987 is particularly revealing of this conflict. Known for his approval of discussions about reform, Hu was also an overt supporter of a strong China-Japan relationship, apparent in his efforts to court Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone (Shirk 163). After the public demonstrations in 1986-87, conservatives blamed the protests on Hu, an accusation which even received the backing of the

reform-minded Deng Xiaoping. As Shirk notes, Hu's political demise provides a clear lesson to present and future Chinese leaders, and since his ouster, "no leader has attempted to soften their attitudes toward Japan" (163).

The constraints of nationalism provide another plausible explanation for why China's leaders allowed protests to occur. Shirk explains that whenever anti-Japanese feelings erupt into large-scale protests, "it takes a delicate touch to halt the protests without having them turn against the CCP instead" (145). It is possible that in the sensitive situation leading up to the leadership transition, Chinese leaders were fearful of prohibiting protests because of the possible backlash that could occur. Had they prohibited protests, the CCP could have faced waves of accusations that the government was unpatriotic in not allowing the public to vent their frustrations with Japan. With opinions about corruption already stewing, more disgruntled feelings about the government would only have exacerbated the party's dilemma in preparing for the 18th Party Congress. Despite the instability that comes with unbridled protests, the CCP may have allowed them because of the fear that public responses could have been even more detrimental had demonstrations been banned.

Yet it may be possible to argue that the constraining power of nationalism could actually assist the PRC in its dispute with Japan. In "Autocratic Signaling, Mass Audiences and Nationalist Protest in China", Jessica Weiss explains that by deciding to either suppress or allow anti-foreign demonstrations, autocratic leaders are able to signal to foreign governments how willing they are to "go to the brink"(3). By allowing protests, autocrats send a costly signal of resolve, whereas by preventing protests, authoritarian leaders send a signal of reassurance. In the former situation, by tolerating the protests and taking on the accompanying risks of instability, the government "demonstrates the importance it places on the issue", and in revealing its

vulnerability to popular nationalism thus enhances the credibility of its firm diplomatic stance (Weis, “Autocratic” 4). For the latter, by displaying that they are willing to stifle protests to preserve bilateral relations, and willing to incur the costs of “appearing unpatriotic before their domestic public” autocrats show the value they place on international cooperation (Weis, “Autocratic” 4). In the past, China has displayed its willingness to follow both avenues. For example, after the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, the CCP allowed protests to convey China’s resolve and stand firm “in the face of perceived US bullying” (Weis, “Autocratic” 26). Following the collision of the American spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet in 2001 however, Chinese leaders prevented anti-US protests to reassure the new Bush administration and to protect US-China relations (Weis, “Autocratic” 34).

Following Weis’s framework, it is possible to argue that by allowing anti-Japan protests to foment, the CCP displayed its vulnerability to popular sentiments, and therefore its firm stance with Japan in the Diaoyu dispute could appear more credible. Weis however explains that visible efforts by police to prevent the protests from spiraling out of control, and the fact that protests in Beijing and Shanghai appeared “more orchestrated” than those in smaller cities, may in fact “undermine the perceived sincerity and spontaneity of popular demonstrations.” Nevertheless, despite efforts to limit the dangers of the protests, Weis admits that the demonstrations still can convey “that domestic nationalism constrains China’s foreign policy.” Ultimately though, while all the offered explanations about the protests remain plausible, an indisputable point by Weis is that “recent developments make it increasingly difficult to discern China’s intentions.” Namely, the Chinese public’s use of social media websites and other technology to assemble demonstrations makes it increasingly difficult for the government to prevent large scale protests

(Weis, "Nationalism"). Under such unpredictable circumstances, it is hard to make concrete judgments about China's decisions and political objectives as it handled the protests.

What then are the implications of the virulent public attitudes for China's foreign policy regarding Japan? A question commonly considered by international relations scholars is whether nationalism increases the chances of international conflict. Since the Senkaku/Diaoyu issue is one with strong nationalist underpinnings, such a question can shed light on the prospects of an escalated dispute between China and Japan. In the case of Chinese popular nationalism, there may be reason to be pessimistic about the future when considering the intensity of anti-Japanese opinions and the effects such opinions could have on Chinese foreign policy. Shirk aptly explains that during a crisis, if the PRC were unable to "cool down popular passions against Japan", public fervor may make it impossible for China to "duck an outright military clash with Japan" (145). Peter Hays Gries expressed similar concern when stating that the "deep-rooted and popular anti-Japanese enmity in China today does not bode well for 21st century Sino-Japanese relations" ("New Thinking" 849).

Some scholars have adopted a less pessimistic outlook when it comes to Chinese nationalism. In the 1998 article "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism", Erika Strecker Downs and Philip C. Saunders argued that "concerns about aggressive Chinese nationalism are overstated, or at least premature" (114). Citing the disputes over the Diaoyu Islands in 1990 and 1996, the authors explained that in both cases the Chinese government was "willing to incur significant damage to its nationalist credentials by following restrained policies and cooperating with the Japanese government" in order to prevent the dispute from damaging bilateral relations. Put more succinctly, "when forced to choose, Chinese leaders pursued economic development at the expense of nationalist goals" (Downs and Saunders 117). Since the article was written some

time ago, does such logic still apply today? Should it be expected that the CCP will follow a similar route in determining its course of action in the Diaoyu issue?

While the CCP may have downplayed its nationalist commitments in the 1990s to avoid a disruption in Sino-Japanese relations, in recent years the Chinese leadership has become more willing to take a firm stance against Japan in matters with nationalistic implications. Some notable examples can be seen through China's reactions to Japanese textbooks, to visits by Japanese dignitaries to the Yasukuni Shrine, and to the fishing vessel collision in 2010. In April 2005, after the Japanese government approved a new textbook which excluded the Nanjing Massacre and failed to acknowledge Japanese atrocities in World War II, anti-Japanese protests arose in cities all around China. Protestors were also responding to Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's refusal to stop visiting the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, a memorial which honors Japanese war dead, including war criminals (Shirk 140). Although the CCP would eventually quell the protests, they would also send their own message of dissatisfaction to the Japanese government by blocking Japan's request to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. While in India, Premier Wen Jiabao announced that unless Japan reevaluates its history, China would continue to block Japan's bid for a permanent seat ("Morally Justifiable?"). What is particularly important is that the impetus for China's decision came largely from an internet petition which in March received around thirty million names, demanding that the government block Japan's bid (Shirk 102). The effectiveness of the petition reveals the extent to which public opinions about Japan can impact China's foreign policy.

The PRC would again display its readiness to stand up to Japan following the incident near the Diaoyu Islands in 2010. After a Chinese fishing trawler intentionally collided with two Japanese coast guard vessels in the East China Sea, Japanese authorities detained the captain of

the trawler for sixteen days (Harlan and Wan). Eager to send a clear response, Chinese customs halted the exports of rare-earth minerals to Japan. Crucial in the making of engines for hybrid cars like the Toyota Prius, these rare-earth minerals come mainly from China, who mines 93 percent of the world's supply (Bradsher). China's action can thus be understood as an explicit effort to punish Japan economically in retaliation for its holding of the fishing captain. In concert with the decision to block Japan's UNSC seat, China's freezing of rare-earth exports reveals that the CCP is comfortable with taking concrete action against Japan when it feels challenged by its Asian neighbor. This assertion does not however say anything of the likelihood that China would use military force in the Diaoyu dispute. A detailed assessment of whether China is likely to do so will be offered later in this paper.

The extent to which the CCP has allowed the recent incident to jeopardize China and Japan's economic relationship is quite shocking. Amid the protests which included boycotts of Japanese products, Japanese car manufacturers Nissan, Mazda, Honda and Toyota were all forced to suspend operations at some of their Chinese automotive plants in mid-September ("Uniqlo"). The effects of these boycotts and closings were detailed by Fitch ratings agency, whose report revealed a decline in the ratings of several Japanese companies in the same month. Nissan for example, whose operations in China account for 26 percent of its total sales, experienced a 5 percent drop in the value of its shares ("China, Japan Island"). It was reported that a Panasonic plant in Shandong province's Qingdao city was damaged by fire, as was a Toyota dealership in the same city ("Uniqlo"). Ultimately, the theft, vandalism, and lost trade during the protests cost Japanese companies in China a total of 10 billion yen, the equivalent of \$124 million dollars ("China Protests"). Consequently there are worries that the recent events could scare off future Japanese investment in China, as investors become less willing to bear the

risk of having assets in such precarious conditions. These worries were confirmed in an October Reuters Corporate Survey, in which Japanese executives from a range of industries were interviewed. Almost a quarter of manufacturers explained that they are rethinking their investment plans in China, and some may shift future production elsewhere given the state of relations between the two nations (Topham and Nakagawa). Although both countries view Japan as more economically dependent on China than China is on Japan (Shirk 148), with bilateral trade between the two amounting to more than \$340 billion, there is still a lot at stake for China in the quandary (“Uniqlo”).

China’s economic performance remains fundamental to the livelihood of the Chinese Communist Party. In fact, economic growth is arguably the party’s only remaining viable source of legitimacy. It is only through increases in living standards that the CCP has been able to justify the public’s continued lack of political rights, under the argument that the CCP regime is a necessary mechanism in achieving prosperity. In combination with discussions of China’s economy cooling off in recent months, it would be logical to think that the PRC would seek to avoid any disruption in its growth. With this in mind, regardless of arguments that nationalism can be used to bolster the government’s support, it is puzzling why the CCP allowed protests and boycotts to threaten China’s economic relationship with Japan as much as they did. Again the soundest explanation is Weis’s point that nowadays it has become much harder for the CCP to limit protests due to increased use of the internet and other means to organize.

To assess the prospects of a Sino-Japanese conflict spawning from the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute, several theories will be discussed. By using rationalist theories of war, and also examining studies of Chinese strategic culture, multiple points will be offered for how the island dispute could escalate in the future. First to be discussed are the rationalist explanations for war,

as examined in the classic piece of the same name by James Fearon. One topic commonly discussed in rationalist arguments is the theory of preventive war. To use the wording of Thomas Christensen, preventive wars are “caused by leaders who fear that if they do not act militarily in the short term, their long-term security objectives will be even more threatened by an increasingly powerful enemy” (53). Though the circumstances are slightly different, preventive logic could certainly appeal to Chinese leaders in determining how to handle the Diaoyu issue. Surveying its current position in the dispute, Beijing may see trends as working against its interests. The PRC may fear that in the future, shifts in the balance of power will lead Japan to consolidate its control over the Diaoyu islands. Given the presence of nationalist groups within Japan, those who had actively pressured the Japanese government to take a stronger stand with the islands, PRC leaders may fear that as years pass these groups will only widen their scope. The CCP could therefore conclude that a display of force may be necessary in the short term in order to halt or reverse these negative trends, because if they were to remain inactive, China’s chances of achieving its goal with the Diaoyu Islands in the long term would be much smaller.

The reasoning above is consistent with the concept of “windows of opportunity” as discussed by Thomas Christensen in “Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing’s Use of Force.” In this article Christensen reveals that in several instances, the CCP has used force due to the fear that if they did not do so in the near term, China’s “window of opportunity” to accomplish a goal could close permanently (51). Also, in some of these cases the CCP decided that the use of force could “serve political purposes and reverse or halt perceived trends that were not in China’s favor” (Christensen 52). The Taiwan incidents in 1954-1955 illustrate the role of both of these ideas in PRC decision making. In summer 1954, Mao Zedong saw what he perceived to be international trends that could undermine his goal of achieving reunification with

Taiwan. Mao therefore decided to employ coercive diplomacy to affect these trends, hoping to create a security situation that would presumably be better than the one he envisioned if the PRC were to remain idle (Christensen 59). The PRC shelling of offshore islands, and the taking of the Yijiangshan island and the Dazhens were largely meant to convey to Taipei and Washington the message that Mao would not tolerate a strengthening of military ties between the two, and that supporting the KMT would be a costly endeavor for the US (Christensen 60).

China's use of force to seize the Paracel Islands in 1974 from the Republic of Vietnam also clearly illustrates the "windows" concept. As the Vietnamese communists began to lean more heavily on the USSR for support, China determined that acquiring the islands from the weaker Republic of Vietnam would be easier than taking them from Soviet-backed Vietnamese communists after they gained control of South Vietnam (Christensen 72). In short, the window was quickly closing, and had China not acted, gaining the islands by force would have been much harder in the future (Christensen 72). An example of Beijing's use of force in response to perceived trends can be seen through the 1995-1996 Taiwan crisis as well. Furious over Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's speech at Cornell University, the PRC was concerned about the "potential implications of Washington's granting Lee a visa to the United States", and worried about Taiwanese public opinion moving in the long-term toward support of legal independence (Christensen 75). The PLA missile launches in waters near Taiwan were therefore an unequivocal coercive tactic aimed at altering trends which were unfavorable to the PRC.

Keeping China's previous behavior in mind, it becomes evident why the applicability of preventive logic in the Diaoyu dispute warrants legitimate concern. However as Fearon explains, preventive war arguments commonly fail to account for why the two sides would not be able to construct a bargain that both would prefer to a costly war. Why then would China and Japan not

be able to reach an agreement that would prevent China from using some type of preventive force? The rationalist explanation presented by Fearon is that preventive wars can occur as a result of commitment problems (385). Specifically, preventive wars arise from the inability of states to trust each other to keep a bargain. This lack of trust comes from a situation in which opportunities and preferences gives one party “an incentive to renege” (Fearon 406). To elaborate, a dilemma could occur because “state A may not be able to commit itself to future foreign policy behavior that makes B prefer not to attack at some point” (Fearon 405).

Quite worryingly, upon examination one can see why commitment problems are inherent in the Diaoyu dispute. The main issue is that if the Japanese government were to commit to an agreement today, say for example to shelve the sovereignty dispute until a later time, it is not clear that such an agreement would extinguish the fears of China’s leaders. This is because the current Noda administration cannot credibly ensure that future Japanese leaders will respect the agreement, and will not wish to assert Japan’s claim over the Diaoyu dispute. Also, Beijing fears long term trends which could jeopardize China’s interests, like an increase in the amount of Japanese nationalists who will pressure the government to solidify Japan’s control of the islands. Being that these trends are caused by factors outside of the Japanese government’s control, the Noda administration cannot credibly commit to stop such trends. With Japan unable to make a credible commitment that would distinguish China’s anxieties, the PRC may view the use force of as a desirable way to alter perceived long-term trends.

Another rationalist explanation is that war can arise as a result of private information and the incentives to misrepresent such information. As two states bargain with each other, each state has certain information which is unknown by its opponent. This private information can include the value states place on the issue at hand, and how willing they are to fight over the issue. In this

information scarce environment, a state may misjudge its opponent's resolve, and make a move that inadvertently triggers a war (Fearon 390). To address the question of why states would not share such information in order to avoid a conflict, Fearon explains that there are often strategic incentives to withhold or misrepresent private information (395). Being that states wish to receive the end of the bargain most favorable to their interests, states may have a desire to overstate their willingness to fight, since doing so could possibly "deter future challenges or persuade the other side to make concessions" (Fearon 395). However in order for the deterrent to be successful, a state wishing to convince its opponent that it has genuine resolve is required to send strong, credible signals. To be credible, these signals must be costly, brinkmanship-like "actions that generate a real risk of war" (Fearon 397).

China of course has an incentive to exaggerate its willingness to fight over the Diaoyu, since a Japanese leadership convinced of PRC resolve should be wary of crossing China's "redline" and therefore less likely to test China's limits in the dispute. However following Japan's nationalization of the Diaoyu Islands, it is safe to say that there was a belief among China's leaders that Japan doubted China's resolve on the issue. It was therefore necessary for China to send more credible signals to Japan, indicative of the reasoning behind China's decision to repeatedly send surveillance vessels to Japanese waters around the islands. However if the PRC feels that Japan is continuing to underestimate China's commitment to the islands, China's leaders may feel obligated to send even more costly signals so as to deter future challenges. Under these circumstances, it is not impossible to imagine China using limited force, employing actions more risky than simply having ships patrol Japanese waters. There are obvious dangers inherent in the use of costly signals, with the possibility of escalation very apparent. Consistent

with Fearon's explanations, if China commits to using costlier signals, the risk of war as a result of miscalculation only increases.

Also illuminating in the study of China and the use of force is Alastair Iain Johnston's *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*. In his book, Johnston details that within Chinese strategic culture there exists a central assumption that the use of force can be effective. Johnston explains that strategic culture is defined by a state's central security paradigm, stemming from strategic preferences of how to deal with threats to security (61). Strategic culture and a corresponding paradigm are formed by perceptions about the role of war in human affairs, the nature of the adversary, and the efficacy of violence or military force (Johnston 106). In studying the *Seven Military Classics*, Johnston determines that Chinese strategic culture most dominantly follows a parabellum paradigm, or hard realpolitik outlook of security. Johnston's deciphers from the texts a view that war and conflict are a relatively common component of interstate relations, "that conflict with an enemy tends toward zero sum stakes", and consequently that "violence is a highly efficacious means for dealing with conflict"(61). Continuing, these assumptions "generally translate into a preference for offensive strategies" (Johnston 249). Also describable as offensive realism, all of the texts embrace the role of offensive and invasive uses of force, viewing "the invasion of an enemy state to be a legitimate step in the pursuit of state security" (Johnston 145).

Johnston explains that in terms of Chinese strategic culture there is a "long-term, deeply rooted, persistent, and consistent set of assumptions about the strategic environment and about the best means for dealing with it" (258). Discussing the continuing influence of the parabellum strategic culture on Chinese security policy, Johnston communicates that in the instances where the PRC used force in the post-Mao period through 1985, the uses of force tended to occur on

issues that PRC leaders perceived to be zero-sum (256). With the parabellum strategic culture in mind, given the zero-sum characteristics of territorial disputes it is not difficult to imagine PRC leaders seeing the use of force in the Diaoyu dispute as a suitable method for resolution. Overall, Johnston's findings lend credence to the statement that because of the strategic culture imbedded into Chinese military doctrine, China's military leaders could see an offensive use of force in the Diaoyu dispute as an efficacious course of action.

Although the rationalist explanations and the strategic culture discussion reveal that the use of force by China remains a significant possibility, there are strong factors that mitigate the chance of that happening. Specifically, certain factors reveal that it is not guaranteed that long-term trends will be unfavorable for China. Namely, it is not inevitable that in the future nationalists will be more intent on securing Japan's claims to the islands. Also, in terms of the military balance of power it can be said that in the long-term, trends are actually in China's favor.

As previously stated, if the dominant perception among the CCP leadership is that growing Japanese nationalism could lead Tokyo to consolidate control over the Diaoyu Islands, there is indeed a possibility that Beijing will see the use of preventive force as advantageous. Yet it is not self-evident that right-wing nationalists will only have more influence as years pass. If Chinese leaders are truly concerned about Japanese nationalism and its implications for the Diaoyu dispute, they will take into consideration the fact that Japanese nationalism is in part a consequence of China's behavior. As explained by Scott Kastner, rather than deterring nationalists, assertive behavior from China such as limited use of force, may make it more likely that the right-wing in Japan will be in a position to take a more robust stance in the island dispute.

This concept is particularly visible when examining China's use of threatening rhetoric before the 2000 presidential elections in Taiwan, and how the plan backfired for the PRC. Before the election, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji warned Taiwanese voters not to vote for the wrong candidate, exclaiming that if they did, Taiwan "won't have an opportunity to regret it" (Kastner 3/8/2012). However the elections ended with the victory of candidate Chen Shui-bian, member of the Democratic Progressive Party who includes Taiwanese independence as one of its planks. This result was clearly the opposite of what Zhu had desired. Some have interpreted this result as showing that China's blunt warnings were counterproductive, and may have provided Chen with more support. Since the 2000 elections, there has been more of a consensus among Chinese leaders that coercive tactics like the one used by Zhu are disadvantageous in cross-Strait relations, and the CCP has therefore taken a lower profile in its dealings with Taiwan (Kastner 3/8/2012). If the PRC continues to take into consideration the adverse effects which its threats had in 2000, it will be more hesitant to threaten to use force in the Diaoyu dispute, cognizant that such a move would only inspire Japanese nationalists to advocate their causes even more strongly.

There have been worries about what type of China policy will be pursued by Shinzo Abe, the president of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan who is favored to win back the central government in elections to be held in mid-December. Such worries may be warranted when considering that the LDP leadership has been more prone to take a strong stance toward the Diaoyu/Senkaku issue than Noda's Democratic Party of Japan. Not only has LDP Secretary-General Shigeru Ishiba said that the Japanese Coast Guard's ability to respond to China's actions in the dispute is not enough, but Abe himself has said he supports the idea of building port facilities on the islands ("Senkaku issue"). However it is not clear cut that if elected Abe will

threaten the stability of relations between China and Japan. In Tokyo on November 15, Abe boasted that during his time as prime minister from 2006 to 2007, he was able to improve Japan's relationship with China, stressing his achievements in repairing the damages that were done by his predecessor Junichiro Koizumi's administration ("Senkaku issue"). Abe also said that as prime minister he "visited China and helped foster a strategic relationship" based on China and Japan's close economic ties, which he argued are "essential to both countries and shouldn't be damaged" (White). Additionally, it is possible that Abe's position on the right could provide him with more maneuverability in seeking improved relations with China. The classic example is Richard Nixon, who was more able to pursue rapprochement with the PRC because his Republican credentials gave him more leeway in placating conservatives who opposed the opening to Beijing.

Arguably the factor which most strongly mitigates the chances of China using preventive force in the short-term is that trends in the military balance appear to be in China's favor. It is well understood among analysts that China has been able to translate its economic successes of recent decades into enhanced military capabilities. As Aaron Friedberg explains, "a fast-growing GNP has made it comparatively easy for the PRC to sustain a large and expanding military effort", and as a result "China's spending on arms and military equipment has grown at an impressive pace"(18) However, even with the recent display of take-off and landing tests on China's Ukraine bought aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, China's capabilities remain limited in certain areas (Cole). Nevertheless, with China's GDP growth in 2013 projected at 8.5 percent ("OECD"), albeit lower than the double-digit growth rates that characterized the last decade, the PRC will continue to be able to strengthen its military aptitude in the coming year.

If recent trends are any indication of what is to come, there is good reason to believe that “China will be able to build and deploy more increasingly capable military systems in the years ahead” (Friedberg 18). In regard to the Diaoyu dispute, it would therefore be illogical for the PRC to commit to the use of force against Japan now, since the PRC has a ways to go in modernizing its military. Since China’s capabilities are only going to increase as years pass, a better choice would be to delay action on the Diaoyu issue until the future, when China will be in a more auspicious position militarily. With this in mind, Chinese leaders may likely continue to embrace Deng Xiaoping’s instruction to “Hide our capacities and bide our time, but also get some things done”, a credo which Chinese officials often interpret to mean that “until China is strong, it should adopt a low-key foreign policy” (Shirk 105).

Though the United States has not yet been mentioned, its influence in China-Japan relations should not be overlooked. The United States’ commitments to Japan’s security are clearly factored into PRC decision making. There is a significant probability that the United States would come to the assistance of Japan in the event of Chinese aggression, which ultimately increases the costs of conflict for China. The US security relationship with Japan should at least then make the PRC more reluctant to initiate a conflict over the islands.

As it is doubtful that a compromise will emerge anytime soon, the sovereignty dispute over the Diaoyu Islands will likely remain a rocky aspect of Sino-Japanese relations for some time. The recent ordeal has certainly displayed the height of the stakes in the dispute. The protests for example showed what can result when volatile Chinese emotions about Japan are released. Though it is possible that protests were allowed so the public could focus on Japan and not the CCP, it is difficult to argue that the government had specific intentions. Internet, social media, and the ubiquity of cell phones have made it much easier for protestors to organize, and

much harder to the CCP to limit protests. It is worrying that if wide scale anti-Japan protests were to emerge again, public demands could leave Beijing with its hands tied, unable to avoid a clash with Tokyo. Nationalism has indeed led China to penalize Japan before, considering China's efforts to block Japan's bid for a UNSC seat, and the halting of rare-earth exports to Japan.

As far as the prospects for a military conflict, there are reasons why China could see the use of force as a necessary action. Since Japan cannot credibly declare that future Japanese leaders will not seek to consolidate control of the Diaoyu Islands, a China which perceives negative trends may use force in order to prevent a window of opportunity from closing. Also, since China has incentives to overstate its willingness to fight so as to deter future challenges from Japan, the accompanying costly signals of resolve could certainly lead to a spiraling of tensions and a subsequent conflict. Yet trends are not unequivocally working against China's interests. If China refrains from overtly threatening gestures, Japanese nationalists will not be given ammunition for their causes. Also, despite fears about the policies of likely future PM Shinzo Abe, his administration will not inevitably endanger Sino-Japanese relations.

Finally, the military balance shows that a use of force from the PRC in the near-term is unlikely. As China enhances its military capabilities, its leaders should see that China's bargaining power in regard to the island dispute will be greater in the future, making the use of force in the short-term illogical. However, this does leave open the possibility that in the future, a China which is more robust militarily will see itself as being able to take control of the islands at a lower cost. With the costs being lower for China, the PRC could be less willing to tolerate certain actions from Japan in the dispute, shifting the status quo to the left in the bargaining range. In this scenario, there is an increased probability of Japan inadvertently crossing a PRC

redline and causing a conflict. Only time will reveal the outcome of the Diaoyu dispute. While this analysis has highlighted several reasons to be pessimistic about the future of Sino-Japanese relations, it is unlikely that China will use force in the island dispute as of now. For the stability of Asia, one should hope that China will not wish to do so in the future.

