

How Does Japan Perceive China as an Adversary? The Dispute in Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands

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Abstract

A China-Japan grim relationship has been marked by conflicts, and other political security tensions for a long time. One of which is the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute occurring since 2012, it will become an issue for both countries that is difficult to be ironed out. The dispute has occurred since the Japanese government nationalized the islets, which China also claimed. It led to both countries' expansion of military power and a clash in East Asia. This essay aims to analyze how Japan perceives China by focusing on the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands dispute. This article argues Japan perceives China as a threat due to China's military penetration over Diaoyu/Senkaku islands leading to a strategic distrust of Japan and its uncertain behavior as an international relations actor led to a moral distrust of Japan. This phenomenon will likely raise the tension in the region and enhance the escalation possibility due to the security dilemma effect.

Keywords: China, Japan, Security, Dispute, East Asia.

Abstrak

Hubungan suram China-Jepang telah lama diwarnai dengan konflik, dan ketegangan politik keamanan lainnya. Salah satunya sengketa Kepulauan Diaoyu/Senkaku yang terjadi sejak 2012 yang akan menjadi persoalan bagi kedua negara. Perselisihan itu terjadi sejak pemerintah Jepang menasionalisasi pulau-pulau di Diaoyu/Senkaku yang juga diklaim oleh China. Ekspansi kekuatan militer kedua negara akan menimbulkan bentrokan di Asia Timur. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana Jepang memandang Cina dengan memfokuskan pada sengketa di kepulauan Diaoyu/Senkaku. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam riset ini adalah metode kualitatif untuk menganalisis kasus antara China dan Jepang ini. Untuk memperdalam analisis, teori Robert Jervis dan Brian C. Rathbun digunakan untuk memberikan argumentasi secara teoretis. Esai ini menemukan bahwa Jepang memandang China sebagai ancaman karena penetrasi militer China atas pulau Diaoyu/Senkaku menyebabkan ketidakpercayaan strategis oleh Jepang dan perilakunya yang tidak pasti sebagai aktor hubungan internasional menyebabkan ketidakpercayaan moral oleh Jepang. Fenomena ini kemungkinan akan meningkatkan ketegangan di kawasan dan meningkatkan kemungkinan eskalasi di masa depan karena efek dilema keamanan.

Kata Kunci: Cina, Jepang, Keamanan, Sengketa, Asia Timur.

INTRODUCTION

The government of Japan undoubtedly conceives China's rise as a threat to its interest in the region. However, it raises how Japan

perceives China as an adversary? As most scholars already know that fact, but few explanations spreading about it, this research aims to answer that question and give the simplest thought about what will be happening in the future if the tension between both states continues. By focusing on the Diaoyu/Senkaku issue, the analysis shall be sharpened and strengthened to hinder any bias or inconsistent argument. This essay finds that Japan ruthlessly perceives China. As it is clear that Japan sees China as an adversary, Japan will commit a rapid response when China expands its military power in Japan's territory; it is doubly dangerous for their future relationship.

The term 'Diaoyu' is from China language and 'Senkaku' in the Japanese language is a group of islets with a total area of 6.3 km² in the East China Sea. The islands consist of eight small islands. Only two islands that have measurement more than 1 km² (Diaoyu/Uotsuri island is the largest, with an area of 4.3 km²), the other five islands are completely barren and uninhabitable. The islands are located between Taiwan and Ryukyu Island of Japan, about 120 nautical miles northeast of Taiwan, 200 nautical miles southwest of Okinawa, and 230 nautical miles east of mainland China. Its location is strategically great for China's and

Japan's national defense. If China or Japan officially secures its sovereignty, it will give an advantage to the owners in military security and put the other side at an unfavorable one (Pan, 2007, pp. 1-3).

Before the dispute happened, Okinawa Prefecture's residents have been engaging in the waters surrounding those islands for fishing since 1884. The Japanese government was also convinced that China had never controlled and lived in those islands before. The surveys conducted in 1885 by the Japanese government through the agencies of Okinawa Prefecture confirmed there is no sign of the Qing Dynasty had ever controlled that group of islands. Even though it is a subjective claim, it is enough for Japan to raise a fleet of Japan Coast Guard (JCG) around those islands to protect it from any kinds of threats (Moore, 2014, pp. 220-221).

On the other hand, China had a contrary historical claim for delimitating the maritime activities of Japan around the waters surrounding the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. China claimed they had found the islands in the 1400s, and fused them into its coastal defense in 1556. China also says that the islands belong to it, but Japan seized it after winning over China in the first Sino-Japan War in 1895. Afterward, The United States

administered the islands after World War II until 1971. Due to that fact, China argues that the islands shall be reverted to them as the real owner (Moore, 2014, pp. 212-220).

Due to those conflicting historical arguments, both countries struggle to secure their position upon the islands until today. Even though a fierce escalation has never happened, the tension between those two Asian powers rose since 2012; after Japan nationalized the islands. The dispute also created a bad perception from the respective countries. However, this essay focuses on Japanese perceptions as an explanatory indicator since its perceptions greatly influence the possibility of escalation in the future. It is because Japan plays an important role in whether the dispute may escalate or not. Japan is capable to strike China due to its alliance with the US and its military technology. Nevertheless, even if Japan has a power to strike first, they may not do it as the gain of offensive way does not outweigh the defensive one (Jervis, 1978, pp. 186-188).

Despite that postulation, both countries have increased their military capability due to the hostility occurring. Their actions truly increase the insecurity instead of securing their territory as it raises the arms race and causes the boundary of the islands to be increasingly vulnerable to armed

conflict due to the security dilemma effect. One of the largest military budget growth countries, China seriously threatens Japan, especially around the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. Due to China's rise, Japan has begun focusing on increasing its military strength to anticipate China's offensive move (Chartrand, 2016; Xuanzun, 2020).

Since the re-election of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2012, the tension between Japan and China were increasing. The power of the PLA increased without transparency is considered irresponsible by Japan (Yoshihara, 2020, p. 92). Furthermore, many violations were committed by PLA troops against Japan sovereignty around Diaoyu / Senkaku islands, and undoubtedly increased distrust of Japan against China.

METHOD AND THEORY

This research conducted by a qualitative approach with interpretation analysis. It dismantled to find a precise view and answer behind it. Data resources used in this research cited from multicasts such as books, journals, and online articles. Creswell argued that qualitative research cannot rely on one specific data resource (Creswell, 2018, pp. 50-51).

A defensive realism theory by Robert Jervis was used as a grand theory to answer research question. In an anarchy situation the country will strive to maximize its security, maintain the distribution of its power, be defensive, and avoid relative losses due to shifts in relative positions and rankings (International Studies Association, 2017), or are more likely to maintain the quo status with a relative security level of each country. This theory focuses on the perceptions of threat which is an estimation of whether the other country will cooperate or not, if the other country is deemed not to cooperate then the country perceived as a threat or enemy. Perception is an important aspect in determining which country is a threat to a country and how a country reacts to this threat (Walt, 1987, p. 3). Japan took a stricter policy in responding to the border disputes issue with China as an enemy.

Jervis stated that a country considering another country as an enemy will react stronger and harder than usual (Jervis, 1978, p. 170). If Japan considers China an adversary, it will react more strongly with a firm military policy. Jervis further argues policymakers will always act according to the vulnerability they bear or how much threat they face (Jervis, 1978, p. 174). That statement made Japanese

leaders try to improve their defense because of the threats they faced which is China's increasingly aggressive attitude in mobilizing their military power around Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. It shall also exacerbate the way Japan perceives China and distrust.

Another Jervis's explanation is the security dilemma, which asserts that one's security increase will threaten others; thus, it will provoke other states to increase their security. Then, every state will continue correcting its security based on perceiving its security vulnerability. It eventually will increase the security requirements of each country (Jervis, 1978, p. 183). The effect of the security dilemma explains why the military strength increase of China and Japan did not make them even safer but on the contrary. Particularly for Japan, after acknowledging China as its adversary, it shall strengthen its military power to secure its territory. It happened not due to the misperception or hostility created but the international anarchy. Even if they believe in the current status-quo other countries' intentions are peaceful, they will not neglect the possibility in the future that the others might become aggressive (Tang, 2009, p. 592).

Analyzing Japan's perception of threat is inextricably linked to distrust. It must be taken into consideration

that distrust is not something that scholars can assure so that it is essential to utilize a kind of measurement. Brian C. Rathbun explains two distrusts: strategic distrust and moral distrust. Strategic distrust is how a rational state behaves, and a rational actor must grasp the existing political realm and formulate foreign policy to secure its national interest: national security. If others show no transparency or fierce rivalry behavior, it will distrust between states. On the other hand, Moral distrust is how the state behaves as a responsible actor in international relations following a normative value. It means every state's national interest may not be wounded by others following international norms assuming others are responsible actors in international relations (Rathbun, 2009, pp. 350-353; Shi Chen, 2005, pp. 3-7).

According to Jervis's theory, this essay argues the strategic distrust of Japan towards China revealed by the dispute in Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. Additionally, the moral distrust disclosed by the increasing power of China's military budget without transparency. This essay will expand the argument referring to strategic distrust and give an additional view of moral distrust.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Japanese Perceive towards China

China and Japan generally maintained good relations and cooperated a lot in several fields after normalization in 1972. The increasing cooperation between countries has indicated Japanese businesses' high enthusiasm for China. The conflict that previously made their relationship worse has changed to a more stable situation where Japanese public perceptions of China tend to be positive (see figure.1) (Kotler, 2007, pp. 93-96). The two countries also signed the China-Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1978. China's government supported the growth of military power towards Japan, even though China's military strength weakened after the Cultural Revolution in 1966. At that time, China's support greatly assisted Japan in rebuilding its military strength. Previously, the Federate had carried out disarmament against Japan after its defeat in World War II, which destroyed the Japanese military strength (Iriye, 1990, pp. 628-629).

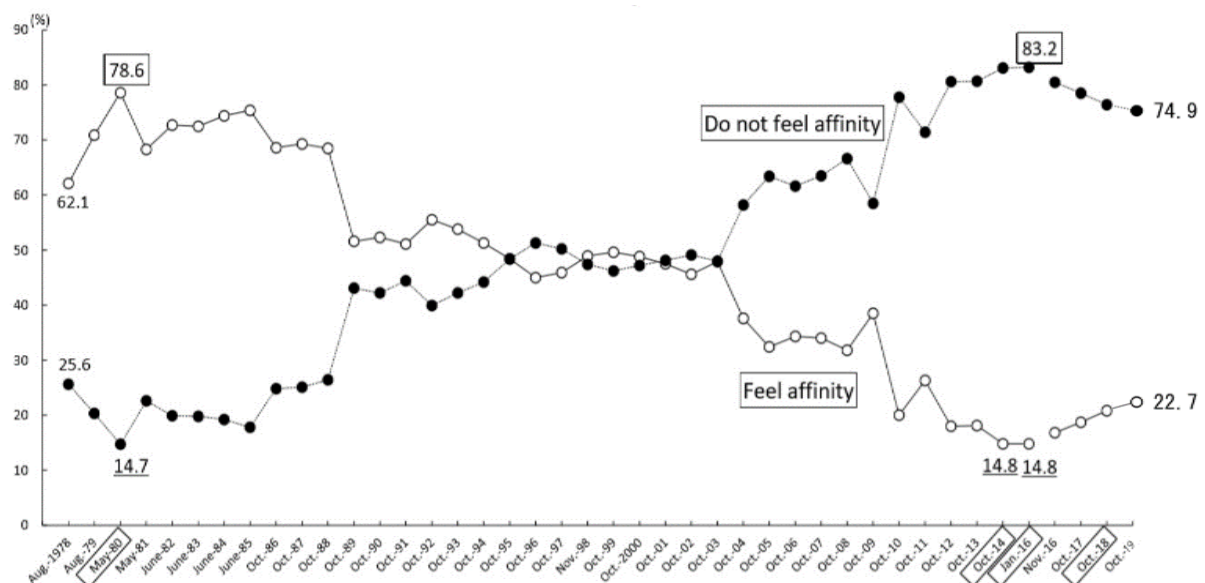
However, in the 1980s, China often expressed its concerns about the acceleration and scale of Japan's armament after Japan became too strong and became a destabilizing factor. In 1984, Japan's \$12 billion military defense budget was the

seventh-largest globally, almost twice China's, at \$ 6.4 billion expenditure. Besides, the number of China's military personnel was 10 times more than Japan and most of them assigned along the Soviet border. Meanwhile, the Japanese military personnel were much smaller yet equipped with more complete armament (He, 2013). Thus, it creates an imbalance of power.

The imbalance of power raised suspicion from China towards Japan which was considered too strong. It made the relationship between two countries previously improved after

normalization began declining since 1985 (see figure.1). It worsens after the Tiananmen Square Protests (1989) incident leading the Japanese public to declaim the actions of China's leader of utilizing military force against civilians. Thus, the Japanese public view of China started decreasing significantly from around 69% in 1988 to 51% in 1989 (see figure.1). In the following years, Japanese public opinion moved only at the level of 46% - 52%, until the early 2000s (Cabinet Office Survey, 2019).

Figure 1. Japanese Public Opinion towards China 1978-2019



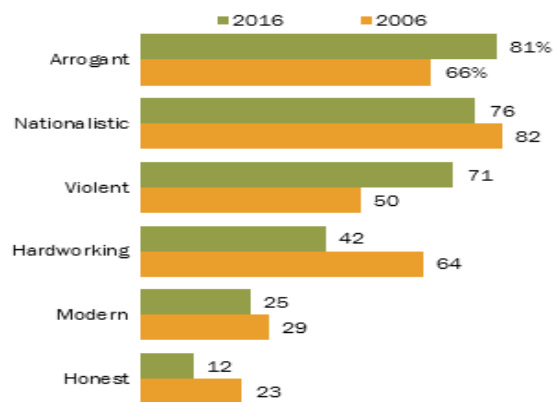
Source: Cabinet Office Survey, 2019.

The wartime experiences also left a ruthless legacy that affected the relationship between the two countries. As a result of wars occurring, such as the China-Japanese War I (1894 - 1895) and the China-

Japanese War II (1937 - 1945) (Stronach, 1995, pp. 43-45), led to stereotypes or negative sentiments by each country (see figure.2) (Stokes, 2016). Most Japanese public consider China as arrogant, nationalistic, and

violent stereotypes. Assuming 'Japanese public opinion reflects China-Japan relations' can be concluded that China and Japan are in quite good relations for several years after normalization, while deteriorating significantly since the 2000s. Considering those were caused by military expansion by each country, it confirmed distrust (strategic distrust) had built since the wartime history of two states. It ceded the bad perception of Japan towards China as it believed someday China shall probably strike it as China had a chance.

Figure 2. Japanese Public View towards China



Source: Pew Research Center

Perception of Japan's towards China

After the 9/11 incident, Japan began to review security policies to improve Japanese security (Tollefson, 2018, p. 44). It was conducted because international security issues were increasingly complex, so

improving national security was crucial. Japan increased Japanese nationalism based on the LDP and attempted to expand the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) role to participate in international operations (other than in the humanitarian aspect). Since then, Japan began sending JSDF troops abroad for military operations, such as when Japan assisted the US in Afghanistan and Iraq. Under Junichiro Koizumi's policy, that brought a new direction of Japan's military by taking a proactive role as a peaceful country (Kuroki, 2013, pp. 102-111).

Until the Shinzo Abe era, Japan continued rising its military power, especially since increased tensions with China. The capacity and capability increase of the PLA without transparency is considered irresponsible by Japan (Yoshihara, 2020, p. 92). It harmed the international norm, and Japan began addressing China as an irresponsible international actor. That action raised Japan's moral distrust towards China behaving immorally. Many violations also committed by PLA troops in Japanese territory have increased distrust of Japan against China. In 2012, the Japanese Coast Guard (JCG) reported that China's Coast Guard (CCG) ship had entered the Diaoyu/Senkaku water territorial 68 times since 11 September, it was the

largest number of disturbances in the history of this conflict at that time (Garcia, 2019, pp. 30-40). Japan not only deployed the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) as many as 12 JCG units in the islands but also the Japan Ground Self Defense Force (GSDF); alongside a full formation of 2,100 members of the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB) trained for islands defense in 2018.

China considered that Japan's wanting to reaffirm its position as a strong military state in the Asian region is genuinely aggressive, and Japan only concerned relative advantages for itself (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2018, 33). China also conceived the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) developed by United States-assisted was aimed to strike China even though Japan comprehended BMD is to deter missiles from North Korea. However, China assessed Japan's BMD capacity far exceeded the North Korean missiles. That raised suspicions on China's side that Japan had a great-power ambition and its real goal is to conquer China's PLA missile capabilities (Garcia, 2019, pp. 37- 38).

In discussing the establishment of an exclusive economic zone (EEZ), both Japan and China disagreed on their respective descriptions. The declaration of the Air Defense Identification Zone

(ADIZ) was conducted by China unilaterally in the East China Sea region also worsened the relations between both states. Both states claimed sovereignty by themselves; it was a grieving sign of its relationship. It exacerbated the East China Sea conflict at all (Ivy Lee and Fang Ming, 2012). The tension in the disputed area affected China-Japan relations in various sectors. The trading intensity relations between the two countries reduced, and Chinese tourists came to Japan declined. Boycotting some Japanese products caused by violent anti-Japanese protests in dozens of cities in China, and even Chinese damaged several shops and Japanese factories in China. In Japan, a detrimental ramification likewise the enthusiasm of Japanese businessmen traded with Chinese deteriorated, and it deteriorated of the majority of the public view (Taylor, 2012).

China-Japanese relations in the military aspect always associated by disputes and strife. A clear rivalry shown by China demonstrated that China is a danger for Japan. It could state that the security dilemma affected both states so that both countries tried to raise their military power to gain security. On the contrary, instead of obtaining security, both countries raised the possibility of future escalation because of the arms race. Nevertheless, the way Japan

raises its army to defend its territory from China shows its foreign policy is straightforward to evict China away from its territory; that fact is a clear indication of distrust.

Clash in the East China Sea

Since 2012, there was a dispute in the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands between Japan and China when Japan purchased the Islets on 10th September 2012. It led to China's reaction considered Japan committed serious violations of China's territorial sovereignty and was considered very offensive (Lee and Ming, 2012). China, therefore, began sending fishing vessels and patrol forces of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) around the islets. It asserted China's sovereignty in the region, but it drew criticism from the Japanese political elite (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 39). It can be seen in figure 1 (in the previous discussion) that the number of Japanese publics who feel affinity dropped substantially since 2012 as China began sending its military personnel.

In 2013, when China established ADIZ around Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, the islands were within the combat range of some 29 PLA air and sea bases. In contrast, there were only four US and Japanese military bases within the same distance. It gave an advantage to China while Japan

needed to maintain its level of security. Responding to China's expansive feat, Shinzo Abe's official statement uttered China's foreign policy attitude and its military expansions became issues concerning the international community (Heginbotham and Samuels, 2018). It indicates how Japan's leader perceives China's threat due to its aggressive actions. That also indicates that Japanese politicians distrust China as China showed a very clear expansion of its power to Japan's territory.

Shinzo Abe repeatedly called for negotiations to establish good bilateral relations with China and create stability in the region. On 22nd January 2013, Abe gave a letter to Yamaguchi Natsuo (chairman of the coalition partner, New Komeito) to send it to Xi Jinping as China's next leader. In the letter, Abe invited China's leaders to participate in the upcoming China - Japan Summit Meeting for tightening their relations (Japan Kantei, 2013). In the middle of a meeting, both states saw an opportunity to develop steady China-Japan relationship and expand their common interests to build stable and long-term bilateral relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

The exertion by Abe did not matter for China's leader. Referring to documents released by the Japan Ministry of Defense showed an

increase in violations around the space areas of Diaoyu/Senkaku islands mostly carried out by China's air force fighters (Japan Minister of Defense, 2019). Table 1 shows violations in Japan's territorial areas (especially around the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands) were mostly from China, from 2015 to 2019 increased from 571 to 675 although they decreased slightly in 2017.

Table 1. Japanese Territorial Violation

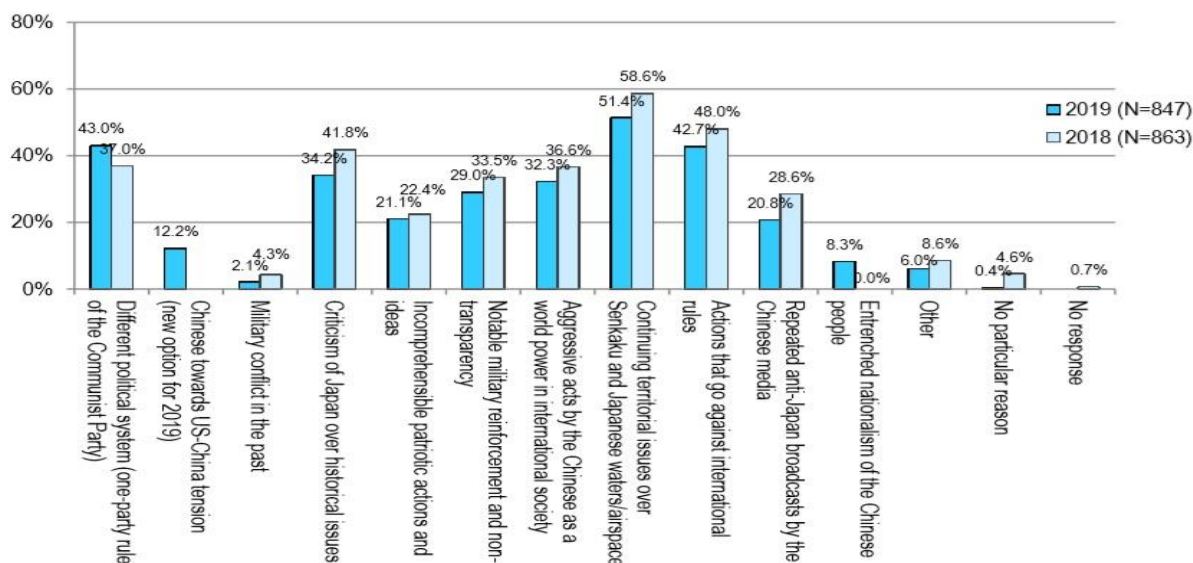
Country/ Region FY	Russia	China	Taiwan	North Korea	Other countries	Total
2015	288	571	2	0	12	873
2016	301	851	8	0	8	1168
2017	390	500	3	0	11	904
2018	343	638	0	0	18	999
2019	268	675	0	0	4	947

Source: Japan Ministry of Defense, 2019.

The increasing activity of the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) fighter aircraft in the Diaoyu/Senkaku island region (also near the Miyako Strait) triggered Japan to increase the deployment of Japan Air Self Defense Force (JASDF) troops in the region. It makes on patrol JASDF fighters will often fly close to PLAAF fighters so that it will increase miscalculations and crises potentially lead to conflict (Burke, 2018).

Japan's perception of China worsened due to the issues in the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands since 2012. According to the Cabinet Office survey (see figure.1 in the previous section), it shows that Japan's negative perception towards China stood at around 80% in 2012, and reached its highest point in 2016 with 83% (Cabinet Office, 2019). An increase in the number of violations around the islets caused by China's military expansion around and inside Japan's territory throughout 2012-2019. Most of the negative perceptions towards China driving factors are 'continuing territorial issues over Senkaku islands and Japanese waters/airspace' at 51.4% in 2018 and 58.6% in 2019, followed by excuses such as differences in political systems, actions against international rules, and Japanese historical problems with China (see figure 3). It means that the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands since 2012 is an important reason that worsened Japanese perception towards China and raise the distrust of Japan of China (Sato, 2019, p. 51). China's uncooperative attitude is increasingly opposing Japan's claim to the areas; this will likely exacerbate their relation in the future.

Figur 3. Reasons for the Poor Japanese Public Opinion towards China



Source: The Genron NPO

The survey conducted by the Cabinet Office about the public's response to the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands shows that in 2019, as many as 70.7% of the public responded, the China's government has repeatedly sent their ships to the waters around the Senkaku Island and repeatedly carried out actions such as invading these territorial waters' (Cabinet Office Survey, 2019). The statement clearly explains that the Japanese public felt attacked by China's military activities. It shows the Japanese public grasped China is dangerous. Most of the other public opinion, at 70.3%, stated that 'The Japanese government protests the China's side against actions such as an invasion of territorial waters by China'. That statement is indifferent from when the public also felt invaded by China.

Analyzing most of the Japanese public opinions and China's behavior proves that the dispute between China and Japan creates negative perceptions from the Japanese public and leader. All of those statements indicate the behavior of rational states perceiving a threat so that it needs to make a clear decision to counter a threat; Abe's speech shows it. It indicates that Japan has strategic distrust towards China.

CONCLUSION

China and Japan generally maintained a friendship and cooperated in many sectors after normalization their relationship in 1972. However, after Japan's military power began rising in the 1960s, China was suspicious that Japan would utilize its capability to

dominate Asia. Since then, both countries perceive each other as a threat and began a bleak period of their relations.

In 2012, after Japan nationalized the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, China responded the same way as it did in the past; it eventually led to a long-life dispute. The dispute between both states became a crucial matter for their relations. Respective countries tried to draw their military personnel into the islets for securing their sovereignty. It illustrates an effect of a security dilemma in which every state raised their military power without precise calculation whether it will make another problem or not. Hence, the dispute will be happening for a long time and will raise a probability of escalation in the future.

This essay finds that Japan perceives China as a threat due to China's expansion in Diaoyu/Senkaku islands claimed by Japan's official area and its foreign policy direction endangering Japan. Robert Jervis argued that when a state sees others as a threat, it will respond rapidly and offensively when there is an incentive to strike. Moreover, a clear rivalry shown by China and its penetration into the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands lead to Japan's distrust. As a rational actor, Japan scrutinized China's development surrounding its territory and finally made a fierce

foreign policy to restrain China. Consequently, strategic distrust operates in this case, therefore, the dispute between both states will likely be engaging for a long time. Additionally, an increase in the military budget of China comprehended as a violation of the international norms by Japan. The immoral behavior of China led to a moral distrust of Japan. Both moral and strategic distrust operate in this case so it will likely become doubly dangerous if the dispute continues in the long-time period.

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