

JAPAN AS A NORMAL STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY

By

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In international relations, states are considered normal if they have the military capability to defend their sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the ability to pursue their interests either through military power or diplomatic influence. However, states in a hierarchical international system are not equal in their power capabilities. Some may acquire or develop their power capabilities as a natural consequence of economic modernization and development, while others are forced to build their capabilities because of external threats. Meanwhile, a state with enormous political, economic, and military capabilities may dominate as a hegemon but could also be a benign one that provides stability and order in the international system.

Following the end of the Second World War, Japan was forced to adopt a peace constitution that prohibited it from having its own standing military forces and from deploying its troops overseas. After the end of the Cold War, however, new security challenges emerged that forced Japan to participate in a number of peacekeeping operations abroad, including assisting the United States in mine clearing operations in the Gulf region in the 1990s. Since the tragic event of September 11, 2001, Japan has also participated in UN peacekeeping missions as well as being part of the US-led coalition in Iraq since 2003. Indeed, the initial impetus for Japan to consider rethinking the prohibitions in Article 9 of its constitution is primarily to enable the country to play a peacekeeping role in the context of "burden sharing" with the U.S. as well as the United Nations the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security.

However, the desire of Japan to contribute to international peace and security primarily through diplomatic influence rather than military power has been eclipsed by several developments in Northeast Asia, namely, its strained relations with China and South Korea, and the nuclear issue in North Korea. To some extent, these factors have complicated the issue of revising Article 9 of the Japanese peace constitution and contributed to the growing "alarmist" perceptions in the region about Japan's desire to rearm itself. Peacekeeping is no longer the primary justification for revising Article 9 of the constitution, but more of Japan being able to respond to challenges immediately and effectively with the creation of a "military for self-defense." For instance, in December 2004, the new National Defense Program Outline, adopted by the Japanese government to replace the old one adopted in 1995, called for a "flexible" SDF to cope with various types of threats, including terrorism. It also upgraded overseas peacekeeping activities to

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one of the SDF's primary missions. The new document also expressed an alarm over China, noting its military's rapid modernization and increasing naval activities. It was the first time that a National Defense Program Outline had stipulated an alarm over China since the first one was compiled in 1976.² Complicating this matter even further is the enhanced security relations between the United States and Japan, which is perceived negatively by China. In 2005, Washington and Tokyo agreed to transform and realign their security alliance to address a number of challenges. In a document signed by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Japanese Foreign Minister Machimura and Defense Minister Ohno, the two countries defined the primary areas of bilateral security cooperation to be the “[d]efense of Japan and responses to issues in areas surrounding Japan, including responses to new threats and diverse contingencies” and “efforts to improve the international security environment, such as participation in international peacekeeping.”³

It is important to note that Japan's relations with China and South Korea remain at their lowest ebb in decades due to: 1) rekindled territorial disputes; 2) Tokyo's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, which was vetoed strongly by China; and 3) the controversy over Japanese school textbooks authored by rightwing scholars and former Prime Minister Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni shrine. Diplomatic tensions between Tokyo and Beijing have resulted from disagreements over a Chinese natural gas project in the disputed waters in the East China Sea near the so-called median line, which was drawn by Japan but has not been recognized by China. Of the various issues currently plaguing bilateral ties, this dispute is potentially the most volatile and could even lead to a military confrontation. Tensions were high in September 2005 when a Chinese destroyer aimed its guns at a Japanese Maritime Self- Defense Force P3-C surveillance plane near the disputed waters of the Chunxiao gas field.⁴

The strain in relations between Japan and its neighbors in Northeast Asia have spilled over into the public sphere, given the state of public opinion among the Chinese and Japanese societies. In a six-nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey in 2006, the Chinese and Japanese publics have mutual unfavorable perceptions about each other. Consider the following data from the survey:⁵

² Hisane Masaki, “Where is Japan Going?”, Asia Times Online, 26 October 2005, from <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/GJ26Dh03.html> accessed on 6 June 2007.

³ Security Consultative Committee Document, “U.S.-Japan Security Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future.” October 29, 2005. From <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/doc0510.html>, accessed on 6 June 2007.

⁴ Masaki, *ibid.*

⁵ Tables are from “China’s Neighbors Worry About Its Growing Strength (Publics of Asian Powers Hold Negative Views of Each Other). 6-Nation Pew Global Attitude Survey, The Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 21 September 2006. From www.pewglobal.org, accessed on 5 June 2006.

Table 1: Hostility Among Asian Neighbors

Hostility Among Asian Neighbors				
Favorability rating of...	China	Japan	India	Pakistan
	%	%	%	%
China				
Favorable	94	28	47	69
Unfavorable	5	71	39	7
Japan				
Favorable	21	77	60	43
Unfavorable	70	22	25	16
India				
Favorable	33	65	--	33
Unfavorable	43	28	--	50
Pakistan				
Favorable	33	33	23	--
Unfavorable	42	49	67	--
United States				
Favorable	47	63	56	27
Unfavorable	43	35	28	56

Table 2: Fears About China's Growing Military Power

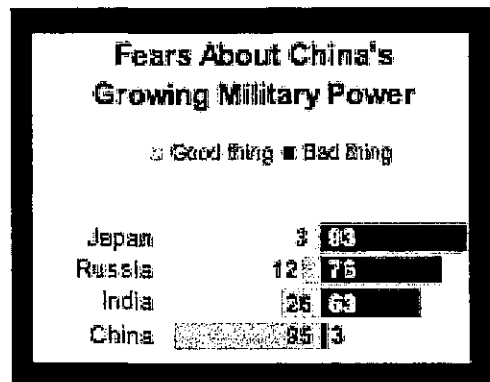


Table 3: Has Japan Apologized Sufficiently?

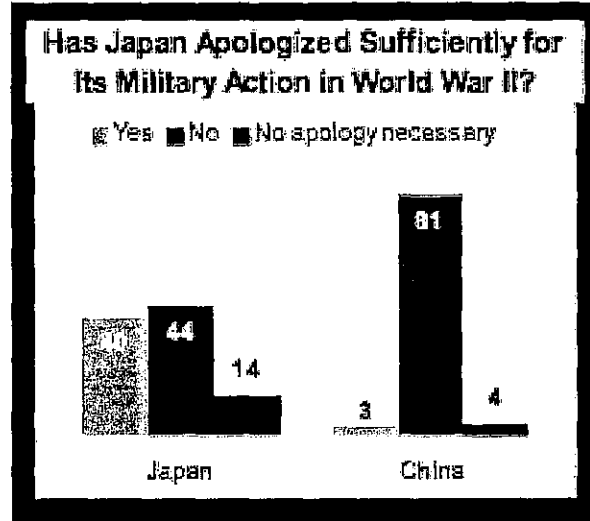


Table 4: How Chinese and Japanese Publics See Each Other

Chinese and Japanese See Negative Traits in One Another

	Chinese view of Japanese (%)	Japanese view of Chinese (%)
Competitive	74	84
Male-dominated	72	62
Arrogant	69	66
Greedy	68	69
Selfish	67	75
Nationalistic	66	82
Violent	65	50
Hardworking	61	64
Rude	57	52
Inventive	68	45
Modern	68	29
Sophisticated	42	20
Tolerant	22	27
Honest	16	23
Generous	9	20

Table 5: Chinese and Japanese Publics' Confidence in Each Other's Leader

Japanese and Chinese Have Little Confidence in Each Other's Leader		
	<u>Hu</u>	<u>Koizumi</u>
	%	%
Japan		
A lot/some confidence	25	61
Not too much/no confidence	71	36
Don't know	4	1
China		
A lot/some confidence	--	10
Not too much/no confidence	--	58
Don't know	--	32
Indonesia		
A lot/some confidence	37	46
Not too much/no confidence	33	26
Don't know	30	26
India		
A lot/some confidence	24	30
Not too much/no confidence	37	30
Don't know	39	40
Russia		
A lot/some confidence	39	--
Not too much/no confidence	25	--
Don't know	36	--

Table 6: View on Culture and the Economy

Views on Culture and the Economy			
	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>DK</u>
	%	%	%
<i>Our people are not perfect but our culture is superior to others.</i>			
China	75	21	4
Summer, 2002	66	29	5
Japan	63	17	*
Summer, 2002	73	25	2
<i>Our way of life needs to be protected against foreign influence.</i>			
China	69	25	6
Summer, 2002	64	31	5
Japan	78	21	1
Summer, 2002	63	35	2
<i>Most people have a better life now, even though some are rich and some are still poor.</i>			
China	77	22	2

It is clear from the foregoing that there is a lack of mutual trust and confidence between Chinese and Japanese publics, which is undoubtedly a reflection of their respective states' current state of relations.

Given the above context, what are the implications for the region of a "normalized" Japanese state? The answer to this question will depend on how one defines the "normalization" of Japan. If it is defined in a narrow military sense, the implications are serious most especially in Northeast Asia, where Japan is not perceived well. Specifically, in the case of China and the two Koreas, a "normal" Japanese state could mean a threat to their security given the unresolved territorial disputes and the low level of trust between Japanese and Chinese publics, as well as among their respective elites.

The situation could be exacerbated by the uncertainty about what would a "normalized" Japanese state mean, apart from the necessity of revising Article 9 of the Japanese constitution. Would this also mean lifting the 1% of GDP limit in Japanese military expenditures? Given the continuing increase in China's military expenditures – which is often questioned and doubted concerning its transparency and reliability – will Japan continue to abide by its self-imposed 1% limit? If not, what are the consequences for the region of an arms race between China and Japan in the context of their mutual suspicions and traditional rivalry. Would North Korea respond to Japan's "rearming" in the same way? Certainly, a military rivalry between China and Japan is a serious concern for Southeast Asia.

It could also be argued that a broader perspective about "normalizing" the Japanese state is more important: it should also develop as a "soft power" in order for its rise as a regional power be perceived more as benign. In this regard, just like China, Japan has to be a more responsible power and stakeholder. More specifically, it should be more sensitive to sentiments and sensitivities of its neighbors particularly about its "sins of the past." Continuing irresponsible actions and statements by Japanese leaders are examples of insensitivities, which have been perceived by many in the region as indicative of Japanese condescension towards its neighbors. A good starting point is for Japan and the rest of East Asia to begin undertaking a common history project, part of which is the creation of a "truth commission" to once and for all face the wrongs of the past and look ahead into the future. In a way, this would help Japanese leaders to become more responsible in their actions and statements, even as it would also help its neighbors not to overreact. Unless China-Japan relations are managed well and become more stable, the East Asia Community building project will be undermined by the continuing lack of trust and confidence between these two giants of the region.