

Confidence-Building Measures and China–Japan relations

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China and Japan are the two most important indigenous major powers in Northeast Asia. In large measure, the peace and security in the region for the 21st century rests upon the well-being of this relationship. As Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo pointed out during his visit to China in July 1999, “Japan–China ties are some of the most important state relations of the two countries. The international community has great expectations for these relations.”¹ China also recognizes that “a good Sino–Japanese relationship is of vital importance for stabilizing the surrounding situation and ensuring China’s comprehensive modern construction.”² In the post-Cold War era, the dynamics underlying this relationship have been experiencing some subtle but profound changes. For the first time in the history of Sino–Japanese relations, these two giant neighbors have emerged as major powers on the equal footing. According to Zhang Guocheng, a Chinese commentator, before 1949 Sino–Japanese relations were basically characterized by either a “strong (China)–weak (Japan)” or “weak (China)–strong (Japan)” typology. However, this relationship now has been moving towards a “strong-strong” typology.³ What does this “strong-strong” relationship mean to both sides as well as the security in the region at large? Will it bring more peace and stability or more competition and conflict? While history has shown that a “strong–weak” Sino–Japanese relationship often led to war, a “strong-strong” relationship does not necessarily ensure cooperation. How to deal with this “strong-strong” relationship is a challenge for both countries.

Mutual trust is a key element to establishing a viable and stable bilateral relation in the 21st century. This has never been an easy task in major power relations and is especially difficult for China and Japan, who carry the heavy baggage of history. Nurturing mutual trust would be easier if both sides shared significant common interests and values. Yet trust can also be enhanced by facilitating mutual understanding of each other’s interests, intentions, and concerns even though China and Japan may not see everything eye to eye. Confidence-building measures (CBMs) are instrumental for this purpose of promoting mutual trust. At the very least, CBMs can reduce the chance of misunderstanding; at most, they could become building blocks leading to more substantial and institutionalized cooperation. Given the paradoxical nature of Sino–Japanese relations due to their complex historical exchange, CBMs, however, should not be understood in a narrow and pure security-military sense. They should also include political

and cultural dimensions. Compared to their respective relations with other major powers in the world, security CBMs between China and Japan are underdeveloped. The main obstacles, it can be argued, are political and historical. This essay will explore China–Japan CBMs in various issue areas, their progress and problems, and prospects for their future development.

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING AND POLITICAL ISSUES

One unique characteristic of Sino–Japanese political relations is that history often looms larger than reality. Even since diplomatic normalization in 1972, the relationship has been haunted by the bitter war experience between the two countries during the 1930s and 1940s. This is very different from the dynamics of Sino–American relations in which the existing divergent political and value systems impose constant irritation to the relationship. For China and Japan, different political and social systems per se usually do not bring problems to the relationship. Although Japan is a Western democracy, it seldom directly confronts China on issues such as human rights. Sometimes Japan even implicitly sympathized with China in its debates with the West over democratization and human rights. Indeed, while China needs to hold human rights dialogues with most Western major powers, it does not feel compelled to do the same with Japan.

One of the reasons why the Japanese often take a low-key posture on human rights issues in China is their historical guilt resulting from Japan's aggression in the Second World War. In China's struggle with Western countries on human rights in the post-Cold War context, Western countries often take the moral high ground. In China's diplomatic fuss with Japan over its war history, China typically enjoys the moral high ground. This explains why history is a favorable topic in Chinese leaders' conversations with the Japanese, just like human rights is a favorable topic in Western leaders' conversations with Chinese leaders.

The controversy over Japan's attitude towards its conduct in World War II has not died down in the last twenty some years. The treatment of history in official Japanese textbooks, movies and other artwork, official visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and high-ranking Japanese officials' frequent attempts to whitewash the aggression and atrocities all have poisoned the atmosphere of the relationship repeatedly, although they have little to do with the realistic interests of both countries. The most recent example of history haunting bilateral ties in the present came during Chinese President Jiang Zemin's state visit to Japan in November 1998,

which was overshadowed by his disagreement with Japanese leaders on these issues. Jiang spent almost the whole trip lecturing the Japanese, from Diet leaders to students, on World War II history and China's suffering from Japanese aggression. The Chinese were also frustrated that Japan refused to give a written apology for its aggression.

China's seemingly endless grievances on the issue of history always sound louder than they really are. While both sides could be quite emotional and vocal, in practical policy Chinese and Japanese rarely let the animosity over history carry the day. Behind China's obsession with Japan's historical guilt, it is not difficult to find more utilitarian motivation such as squeezing more economic concessions from Japan. Nevertheless, China's complaints over Japan's attitude towards war history are more than just a symbolic gesture. They reflect genuine frustration and resentment among the Chinese people. This is a nationally held feeling that Chinese do not have toward any other foreigners, including Americans. Jiang Zemin expressed this sentiment by saying that in modern history, among the major imperialist powers, China suffered most from Japan.⁴ This is a subject upon which the Chinese government can build a national consensus. In fact, this might be the only foreign policy issue on which Chinese all over the world (probably except Lee Teng-hui in Taiwan) can agree upon. Few Chinese either within or outside China considered Jiang's demand for a written apology excessive. To the contrary, many thought it was not enough. Chinese foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan's appeal for the Chinese nationals not to demand war compensation from the Japanese government outraged many Chinese overseas. Pro-democracy activists accused him of "treason" and asked for his immediate resignation.⁵

The perceived Japanese reluctance to clear its dark history provides a psychological justification for the Chinese to suspect the future orientation of Japanese foreign policy. Jiang asserted in his visit to Japan that China keeps reminding the Japanese of history not because China wants revenge, but rather because China believes that Sino-Japanese relations can move forward only after Japan squarely faces its history.⁶ From the Chinese perspective, a Japan that is unable to satisfy its neighbors' concerns about history will also not be qualified to play a larger role in maintaining peace and stability in the region.⁷ As long as there are suspicions that Japan has not yet come to terms with its past, it will be difficult for Japan to seek an expanded regional role.

The understanding of history, therefore, remains a main psychological obstacle in China-Japan confidence-building, not just in political domain, but also in security and military domain. It has been raised repeatedly as a topic in Sino-Japanese high-level political dialogues.

Although it is far from being removed from the agenda due to respective domestic constraints, both sides have taken steps to minimize the negative impact historical issues have on the relationship.

In recent years, the Japanese side has made some progress to ease Chinese and other Asian countries' dissatisfaction on the war history issue. In his visit to China in 1995, Japanese Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi made the first verbal apology for Japan's war conduct in China on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the World War II. Murayama also for the first time visited Marco Polo Bridge, the scene of the incident in 1937 leading to Japan's launching a full invasion of China. In 1997, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro reiterated Murayama's apology and visited China's Northeast, where the Japanese army started its aggression in 1931. Even during President Jiang Zemin's November 1998 visit to Japan, progress was made when the term "aggression" was used for the first time in writing in the joint statement although China did not get everything it wanted.

Although rhetorically the Chinese are still not satisfied with Japanese expressions of remorse, in more private and scholarly assessment, they acknowledge the significance of these indications of good will. Originally the Chinese did not plan to make the war apology a dominant theme for Jiang's visit in November 1998. The visit of South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung to Japan in October 1998, however, changed the point of reference for China. During that visit, the Japanese agreed to offer a written apology in a joint statement signed by the South Korean President and Japanese Prime Minister. This forced Beijing to ask for at least the same treatment from Japan during Jiang's visit. China would have been satisfied if the same language had been used in the China–Japan joint statement, with only the name of the country changed. Initially the Japanese apparently reacted positively to the demand, but retreated upon strong opposition from the more conservative wing of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Chinese felt insulted by failing to win an agreement similar to that South Korea reached with the Japanese.

After this episode, apparently both sides realized that endless quibbling on the history issue did not get them anywhere. It was reported that before Obuchi's visit to China in July 1999, both sides decided not to let the question of history dominate the talks. The focus of the visit would be on more current issues such as the new U.S.–Japan Guidelines for defense cooperation, China's accession to the WTO, economic and trade cooperation, and so on.⁸ This switch from history to present in the relationship is a good sign, indicating a more pragmatic and constructive approach towards historical legacy. During Obuchi's visit to China, although

Chinese leaders had to mention the question of history publicly, obviously it did not become the main theme that characterized Jiang's visit to Japan in 1998. Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji even made a positive remark on the Japanese government's effort to address the issue. Zhu asked that Japan take more effective measures to stop the erroneous words and deeds on the war history by a small number of ultra-rightists, and educate the Japanese with a correct perspective on history.⁹

Indeed, from the Chinese perspective, more worrisome in recent years is the apparent resurgence of the right-wing forces in Japanese society. These right-wing elements deny that Japan committed atrocities during the Second World War, support the expansion of the Japanese military, sympathize with Taiwan, and advocate revision of Japan's peace constitution. On this issue, Chinese and Japanese analysts have very different assessments. While Japanese scholars tend to worry about the durability of pacifist sentiment in the Japanese public, Chinese scholars are often alarmed by the revival of "Japanese militarism." In the meantime, China has witnessed the decrease of traditional pro-China political forces in Japan. The generation of Japanese politicians, businessmen and social activists who had devoted themselves to Sino-Japanese relations have left the political stage. Several pro-China and leftist political parties disappeared from the political scene or became insignificant. The split of the LDP in 1993 resulted in the multiplication of conservative parties. The coalition government of the LDP and the conservative Liberal Party (LP) and the election of the rightist-cum-nationalist Ishihara Shintaro as governor of metropolitan Tokyo are just two recent examples indicating the rightward movement of Japanese politics. At the societal level, public opinion surveys in both countries show that the favorable feeling among the Chinese and Japanese people towards each other has been declining compared to the height of the Cold War during the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹⁰ While the Japanese young generation knows little about the Second World War and what Japan did to China and other Asian countries, the memory of Japanese war brutality has been transmitted to Chinese youth through various processes of socialization.¹¹

The leaders of both countries, therefore, realize that CBMS should also include the promotion of mutual understanding between the two societies and two peoples, not just between the two governments. Jiang Zemin's experience of being interrupted by protesting Japanese young students during his speech at Waseda University made him repeatedly emphasize the importance of educating the Japanese youth who have little knowledge of the war and the atrocities Japan committed in China.¹² During Jiang's visit in November 1998, the Chinese and Japanese governments signed an agreement on an exchange program which will allow 15,000 youths of the two countries to pay reciprocal visits during 1999–2003. The first group of one

hundred Chinese high school students visited Japan for a week during August 1999. The representatives of the delegation were received by the Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Nonaka Hiromu at the Japanese prime minister's official residence. During Prime Minister Obuchi's visit to China in July, the two sides also talked about training a new generation of leaders for bilateral friendship. Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen pointed out that many people of the older generation who worked for Sino–Japanese friendship have either passed away or become old. Thus it is important to train a new generation of leaders in this regard. Obuchi responded that Japan will create a favorable environment for training a younger generation of leaders that understand and love China.¹³

SECURITY AND MILITARY CONFIDENCE-BUILDING

During the late phase of the Cold War in the 1970s and 1980s, China and Japan shared a security concern, the expansion of the Soviet Union. Facing a common adversary, their concerns about mutual intentions were minimized. The end of the Cold War changed the landscape of geopolitics in the region. Bilateral security concerns rather than concerns towards a third party began to proliferate in the relationship, thus highlighting the necessity of security and military CBMs between the two countries.

At a more general level, mutual security concerns result from the fact that both countries have been emerging as major powers with considerable comprehensive national power. Japan became an economic powerhouse in the 1970s and has accelerated its pace of military modernization in the past decade. China has enjoyed high economic growth in the last fifteen years. The highly publicized 1993 World Bank report predicated that by the early 21st century, China may surpass not just Japan but also the United States to become the largest economy in the world. In the meantime, the modernization of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has also gained momentum with remarkable annual increases in Chinese military spending. Both countries have started questioning the other side's long-term foreign policy intentions, assessing military capabilities, and wondering how the other side would react to its own rise.

For China, since the 1980s, a basic judgement of Japan's foreign policy orientation has been that as an economic power, Japan will not be content to maintain the status quo as an unique nation-state. Instead Japan will sooner or later strive to become a full-fledged political and military power. Japan's increasing military capability seems to arouse Beijing's genuine

anxiety about its foreign policy intentions in the region. Chinese leaders have repeatedly warned Japanese officials who visit China that Japan should stick with the path of peaceful development. Beijing often wonders what kind of country Japan will become in the next century: a peaceful country or once again a militarily offensive country.¹⁴ In terms of capability, many Chinese analysts and commentators noted the fact that as far as the military spending is concerned, Japan is the second largest military power in the world already. Although modest in size, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) are the most modernized armed forces in the region, behind only the United States and Russia. Japan's conventional force is the first-class in the world.¹⁵ Related to its enhanced military capability, China perceived a subtle change in Japanese military strategy. All the evidence indicates, according to Beijing, that Japan's military strategy was changing from being pure defensive to somewhat offensive.¹⁶ Japan's active participation in the redefinition of the U.S.-Japan security alliance and the development of Theater Missile Defense (TMD) have reinforced Beijing's impression that Japan has been further moving in the direction of becoming a military power. Together with what was discussed earlier about China's apprehension about the "rightistization" of Japanese politics, Yang Bojiang summarized that China has four types of security concerns with regard to Japan: changes in Japan's domestic politics, security policies, military strength, and in the strengthened U.S.-Japan alliance.¹⁷

Japan has also been figuring out the intention and posture of China as a rising power. As Sato Hideo pointed out, the Japanese are wondering about the following questions: Will China develop into a peaceful, status-quo power, or will it continue expanding its military strength to establish a new hegemony in the region? Will it try to resolve the Taiwan question and its territorial issues in the South China Sea in peaceful or military ways? Will its economic growth lead to more pluralism and greater political liberalization in its society, or will its authoritarian leadership manage to keep a tight lid on such societal changes for years to come? Will China be able to distribute the benefits of its growing economic benefits more evenly across the nation, or will the income disparity between the rich coastal regions and poor interior widen further? What will happen if China cannot keep enlarging its economic pie?¹⁸ From these questions, Japan's security concerns focus on both external and domestic dimensions of China. With regard to China's external posture, according to Sato, until very recently, not many Japanese had thought of China as a potential security threat. But China's nuclear tests and military exercises across the Taiwan Strait in recent years seem to have increased the image in the general public of China as a potential security threat. Still among the Japanese elite, few are concerned either about Chinese military power in general or about China as a security threat in the narrow military-strategic sense of the term. Japan's China scholars did not buy the argument

of so-called China threat advocated by Americans such as Bernstein and Munro. There is near-consensus among them that the military and economic capabilities of China has been largely exaggerated in American estimates. Japanese government officials largely share this dominant view among China specialists in Japan. They worry not about the security threat posed by China's military and economic might, but rather its domestic development, namely the possibility of China's internal disintegration and the impact of its environmental degradation on Japan. They seem to believe that a strong China may be less threatening to Japan than a weak China.¹⁹

In sum, in the post-Cold War context, China and Japan do perceive each other as security threats, although such threats are potential rather than current, long-term rather than short-term. This does not mean that both sides do not share any common security interest in the region. Both sides prefer peace and stability in the region. They worked together to manage regional Cold War hot spots such as the Cambodia conflict. They do not want to see the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the breakout of turmoil and conflict on the Korean Peninsula. They also share common interests in controlling transnational crime and drug trafficking. Nevertheless in the context of macro suspicions and mistrust between two emerging major powers, a number of flash points of security concerns do exist between the two countries, including the territorial disputes over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands, the Taiwan issue, the U.S.-Japan security alliance, China's nuclear policy, and Japan's participation in TMD research and development. On most of these security issues CBMS have not been sufficiently established or substantiated.

Tension arises from time to time over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands. Both China and Japan claim sovereignty over this tiny territory. In October 1978 during his visit to Japan, Deng Xiaoping suggested that the sovereignty dispute over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands could be shelved for the time being. He said jokingly, "Maybe our present generation is not wise enough, but our next generation will be wiser and they will ultimately find a way acceptable by all to resolve the question."²⁰ The Chinese and Japanese governments agreed to put the issue on hold and not let it affect overall bilateral relations. Although no major conflict has occurred, so far no concrete CBMS have been taken to prevent isolated incidents from taking place. Since the 1990s, Japanese rightist groups and even some members of the Diet made numerous attempts to land on the islands and to assert Japan's sovereignty. Every time, the Chinese government lodged a strong protest, perceiving an implicit endorsement of the rightists' provocative actions by the Japanese government. In the meantime, China also sent scientific and naval vessels to the surrounding waters to indicate its existence, which also brought diplomatic protests from the

Japanese side. The spontaneous movement of defending the Diaoyu Islands in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the mainland has never died out, often leading to clashes with the Japanese naval forces. The most recent episode was the decision of the Security and Defense Committee of Japan's Lower House in August to formally inspect the islands. China asked the Japanese government to stop the planned action. Although the inspection was postponed, three members of a Japanese rightist group landed on the islands again on September 5, 1999. China expressed its "extreme dissatisfaction" and "strong indignation" to the Japanese government.²¹ Some Chinese scholars recently predicted that these tiny islands would increase in importance in the long-term strategic competition between the two countries due to the potential natural resources in the area and their strategic geographical location.²²

While the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu Islands remains a thorny issue in the relationship, in the short-term, China is much more concerned with Japan's intentions and policies towards Taiwan. Many Chinese believe, that Japan, perhaps even more than the United States, does not want to see a fully unified China. Japan prefers to see the separation of the mainland and Taiwan continue, and to use Taiwan to tie up China strategically. China regards the United States and Japan as the only two major powers which not only have the intention but also the capability to prevent China's unification. For China, therefore, whether the Taiwan issue can be resolved peacefully depends on the attitudes of the United States and Japan.²³ In this regard, China perceives its interactions with Japan a potentially conflictual rather than cooperative. China's suspicion and nervousness about the strengthened U.S.-Japan security alliance and the U.S.-proposed TMD concept are largely due to their implications for the Taiwan issue. China perceived Japan as more anxious than the United States to include Taiwan within the scope of the new Guidelines. High-ranking Japanese officials and politicians, one after another, repeatedly asserted that the Taiwan Strait would be covered by the concept of "surrounding area." Although the Japanese government officially insists that the alliance does not target any specific third country and the concept of "areas surrounding Japan" is defined as situational rather than geographic, its reluctance to explicitly exclude Taiwan from the U.S. security perimeters convinced the Chinese that Japan will be involved in a future conflict across the Taiwan Strait. For the same reason, China also strongly opposed any attempt from the United States and Japan to include Taiwan in the TMD program as it will inevitably encourage the pro-independent forces on the island. Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's pro-Japanese posture further reinforced Beijing's apprehension about the possible collusion between Japan and Taiwan.²⁴

China and Japan also clash over each other's nuclear and missile policies. Japan took an exceptionally tough position in regard to China's nuclear policy. After Beijing resumed nuclear tests in 1995, Japan suspended its official economic assistance to China. Japan has lodged protest or raised concern whenever China conducted nuclear (before 1996) or missile tests. Beijing perceived Tokyo's posture as particularly ill-willed. Chinese arms control officials declared that Japan knows very well that Beijing has a clear nuclear policy of no-first use and its limited nuclear arsenal has resulted from the nuclear threats from both the United States and the Soviet Union and by no means targets Japan. On the other hand, Japan has long enjoyed the benefits of nuclear protection from the United States. As the only country that experienced a nuclear attack, Japan should oppose the use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. Yet Japan has supported the U.S. policy of nuclear deterrence which basically means the first use of nuclear weapons. Japan does not support China's policy of no first use and not using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries under any circumstances. While itself protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella, Japan cried out at China's very limited nuclear tests. Such a policy, in words of a Chinese official, is "puzzling" if not entirely "insincere" to the Chinese.²⁵ Moreover, China suspects that Japan has its own nuclear ambitions. The recent remarks by a high-ranking Japanese defense official that Japan may be better off with nuclear weapons alarmed the Chinese.²⁶ Chinese scientists also discovered from the recent nuclear accident in Japan that the Japanese are actually accumulating enough enriched uranium for a possible nuclear option in the future.²⁷

China has seriously questioned Japan's motivation to join the U.S.-sponsored TMD system. First, Beijing did not buy the argument made by Americans and Japanese that the purpose of the TMD is to deal with the missile threats from the North Korea. Rather China believes that a large target of TMD is China with the objective of nullifying China's limited nuclear deterrence capability and integrating Taiwan into the system. Secondly, Beijing was disturbed by Japan's perceived overreaction toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s missile test in September 1998. Tokyo was seen as using the missile test as a pretext to justify its participation in TMD. It will, in a Chinese official's words, give Japan "both the spear and the shield"²⁸ and therefore bring instability to the regional balance of power.

China–Japan relations include many security concerns, but so far the CBMS in the security and military arenas to address the security needs of both sides have not been well developed. Compared to their respective CBMS with other major powers, CBMS between China and Japan have been primitive, sporadic, and insufficient. In recent years, China has been active establishing a series of bilateral confidence-building measures with many of its neighboring

countries such as Russia, Central Asian republics, India, Vietnam, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Yet China is more reluctant and slow in entering formal security arrangements, particularly military CBMS with Japan.²⁹ Several reasons can explain this hesitation. First, except for Diaoyu (Senkaku) Island, China and Japan do not share a common border that is in dispute and could cause direct military conflict. Therefore, CBMS between China and Japan lack the immediate urgency compared to China's relations with its other neighbors. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, Chinese leaders psychologically still do not want to treat Japan as a full-fledged nation state. Chinese officials argued that a formal military relationship with the Japanese Self-Defense Force implied the acceptance of Japanese forces as a legitimate national army. China does not want to acknowledge this.³⁰ Also given what the Japanese army did in China during the war, dealing with the Japanese military force is a politically sensitive matter in China. Thirdly, China is also held back by Japan's special military relations with the United States. Because of the U.S.–Japan security alliance, the Chinese feel uncomfortable dealing with Japan in strict bilateral terms since Japan still does not have full autonomy in security matters. On the other hand, China does not want to recognize Japan as an equal partner in the China–U.S.–Japan trilateral relationship. In other words, China has not been able to define Japan as a security and military counterpart for the purpose of CBMS.

The modest security and military CBMS between China and Japan are reflected in the following areas. First is the public security cooperation. This can be seen as a functionalist approach toward security cooperation. In other words, while it is still hard to have breakthroughs in conventional security cooperation, the leaders of both countries chose to start in a less sensitive but no less important area. During his visit to Japan in November 1998, President Jiang Zemin reached an agreement with Prime Minister Obuchi to enhance cooperation in public security to jointly deal with international crime groups. In August 1999, Chinese Public Security Minister Jia Chunwang visited Japan, the first in his position to do so. Jia and his Japanese counterpart, National Public Safety Commission Chairman Noda Takeshi, signed and exchanged a summary of talks aimed at boosting cooperation in police investigation and in combating transnational crimes.³¹ These crimes include trafficking in drugs and arms and smuggling of people. The document also outlines agreements between the two countries to exchange information on criminal records, investigating experiences and police systems, and to boost cooperation through the Interpol.³² Although these measures mainly deal with domestic security, they nevertheless indicate the enlargement of security concept shared by the two countries and the increase of mutual trust in fighting common security threats.

Second is the comprehensive security dialogues. The China–Japan leaders summit has been regularized in recent years. In Jiang Zemin’s visit to Japan in November 1998, both sides also agreed to establish a “hotline” telephone link between the two sides. Besides other economic and political items, security issues have been high on the agenda of the China–Japan summits particularly since 1996. For example, during Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi’s visit to China in July 1999, both sides touched upon various security issues such as the U.S.–Japan security alliance, the Taiwan issue, and the North Korean missile crisis. The Chinese side sought further clarification from the Japanese on the scope of the U.S.–Japan Defense Guidelines and the Taiwan issue, while the Japanese side solicited China’s help in influencing North Korea not to test fire a second Taepo dong long-range missile.³³

However, before the 1990s, no formal mechanism of security consultation existed between the two countries. At the Sino–Japanese foreign ministers’ meeting held in May 1993, an agreement was reached to hold dialogue on security.³⁴ Since then, bilateral security dialogue has been held six times. Each side is headed by bureau chief-level officials of the Japanese and Chinese foreign and defense ministries, with participation by uniformed defense officials from both sides. The consultation was suspended for a while after the United States and Japan strengthened their military alliance in 1996 and the publication of the new U.S.–Japan Defense Guidelines in 1997. During Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto’s visit in September 1997, Chinese officials expressed their strong displeasure with Japanese over the new Guidelines as they might cover Taiwan in military contingencies surrounding Japan. Not until Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi’s visit to China in July 1999 did both sides agreed to resume the security dialogue as soon as possible. Both countries also plan to upgrade the consultation from the bureau chief-level to the deputy ministerial level.³⁵ The sixth bilateral security consultation was held in Tokyo on October 7, 1999. According to the Chinese official news agency, two sides only reached partial consensus on security issues with differences still remaining. The Chinese were still concerned about Japan–U.S. security cooperation and the development of Japanese military force. On these issues, Chinese officials found that the Japanese explanations “are not convincing.”³⁶ It was reported that China once again asked the Japanese to explicitly exclude Taiwan from the scope of the U.S.–Japan Defense Guidelines and from any cooperation on TMD, but the Japanese declined this request. The Japanese officials, on the other hand, questioned China’s double-digit increase of military spending and the development of new CBMS and asked Beijing to increase defense transparency. It seems that only on the Korean issue, did both sides share common language.³⁷ Both sides agreed to continue their dialogue in various forms on security issues to promote mutual understanding and avoid unnecessary disturbances to the normal growth of bilateral relations.

Third, military transparency and exchanges between China and Japan remain weak. Each military establishment views the other with suspicion and apprehension. As mentioned earlier, some Chinese military and political leaders have been reluctant to move forward in military exchanges with JSDF. One persistent concern from the Japanese side is the lack of transparency on the Chinese military spending. To respond to Japanese and other neighboring countries' concern and to defuse the perception of "China threat," China has made effort to increase its defense transparency. In 1995, China issued its first white paper on arms control and disarmament. In July 1998, Beijing published its first defense white paper, *China's National Defense*. It has provided considerable information about the Chinese military that had not been available to the public before.

During the 1980s, there was not much formal military exchange between the two countries. In 1984, China's Defense Minister Zhang Aiping paid an unofficial visit to Japan. China's Chief of the General Staff Yang Dezhi visited Japan in 1986 and the Director of the Japan Defense Agency (JDA) visited China for the first time in 1987. Since then the development of military exchange between the two countries has been sporadic and often interrupted by the state of overall political relations. The military exchange was suspended for some years after the Tiananmen Incident in 1989. With the establishment of a regular security dialogue mechanism in 1993, the high-level military exchange was also partially restored. In 1995, the Japanese chairman of the Joint Staff Council visited China for the first time. Again China suspended military contact with Japan for a while in August 1995 after Japan froze its aid program to China because China's nuclear tests. Then in August 1996, the administrative vice minister of the Defense Agency visited China for the first time in eleven years and had talks with the defense minister of China and other officials. The main mission of his visit was to explain the "Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security" announced in April 1996 and a revision of the "Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation." During the visit, the Japanese administrative vice minister observed the Sixth Tank Division stationed in the suburbs of Beijing and the Shanghai Squadron of the East Sea Fleet.³⁸

The Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto's visit to China in 1997 paved the way for the resumption of mutual visits of senior military leaders. Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian visited Japan in February 1998 and JDA Director-General Kyuma Fumio paid a return visit to China in May 1998.³⁹ General Zhang Wannian, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, also made an unofficial visit to Japan in September.⁴⁰ During Chi and Kyuma's mutual visits, both sides agreed to discuss the mutual visit of navy warships, joint training of the PLA and JSDF forces, and accepting military academy students from the other side. The process

of implementing these CBMs, however, has slowed down in the most of 1998 and 1999 with the suspension of further defense talks between the two militaries. No progress has been reported on these issues. Recently there have been some signs that the ice might break again. The JDA Administrative Vice Minister Seiji Ema went to visit Beijing on November 22, 1999 for one week. In his meeting with Ema, Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian reiterated Beijing's hope that Japan will not choose the path of military expansionism again, but rather devote itself to world peace and stability.⁴¹ Ema was expected to discuss with the Chinese about the mutual visit of warships agreed upon by defense ministers of both countries in May 1998. Apparently it is much more difficult for the Japanese warships to visit China due the historical reasons as China has exchanged warship visits with many other countries including the United States and Russia.

MULTILATERAL CONFIDENCE-BUILDING

The dynamics of CBMs between China and Japan cannot be fully understood in the bilateral context. It must also be analyzed in multilateral settings. In other words, bilateral confidence building between China and Japan is often facilitated or constrained by their respective relations with third parties. For example, their relations with the exogenous superpower—the United States—often condition the bilateral CBMs between them. For the most time in the Cold War period, Sino–Japanese relations were subordinate to the two countries' respective relations with exogenous major powers, particularly the United States. For long time, Tokyo sacrificed its relations with China under the constraints of the U.S.–Japan security alliance until the “Nixon shock” caught the Japanese off the guard. In the 1970s and 80s, the Chinese tended to believe that so long as Sino–U.S. relations were in good shape, Japan would soon or late come to its terms on various issues. These legacies of the Cold War still have their impact on the current Sino-Japanese relations. Japan obviously is constrained by the renewed U.S.–Japan security alliance in developing security relations with China. China tends to views its security relations with Japan from a broad framework of U.S.–China strategic relations. The ups and downs in the political and security confidence building between China and Japan more or less followed the ups and downs in Sino–U.S. relations. Both sides have yet to view its relations with the other side from a more autonomous perspective.

China and Japan also have quite different approaches toward the formation of multilateral security regime in the Northeast Asia. For years, Japan has been a more enthusiastic

advocates for security multilateralism. As early as 1991, the Japanese foreign minister Nakayama Taro suggested at an ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference that a forum should be established to discuss regional security issues.⁴² This proposal eventually led to the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994. Japan also co-hosted with Indonesia the ARF's initial Inter-sessional Support Group (ISG) on Confidence-Building Measures in 1995. China, however, has been more cautious about security multilateralism in the region. China has been rather receptive to unofficial or so-called track II (i.e., unofficial or nongovernmental) security discussions, but more hesitant about establishing an official mechanism for multilateral security consultations. China's cautiousness about security multilateralism is related to its basic assessment of the security situation in Asia-Pacific region. First, China at least until 1995-96 viewed the region as relatively peaceful and stable. Since the 1990s, no new interstate military conflict has broken out. China sees no hurry to establish a multilateral security regime in East Asia. Secondly, China also noted that the Asia-Pacific region is characterized by diversity rather than uniformity. Countries in the region are still debating about what kind of regional security framework should be established. Under such conditions, a region-wide multilateral security arrangement such as the Council for Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (now Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe, OSCE) is premature or even counterproductive.⁴³ Thirdly, China does not see multilateralism as the most effective way to address its own main security concerns such as territorial disputes with neighboring countries, the Taiwan issue, and separatist movements in Tibet and Xinjiang. In fact, China realized that other countries in the region attempted to use multilateralism to constrain China's freedom of action on such issues as the South China Sea. Nonetheless, China understands that multilateral security is a trend reflecting legitimate concerns of small and medium-sized countries seeking a stable and predictable regional security order. Indeed, the drive for multilateral security has been partially stimulated by the growing Chinese military and economic might in the region. China has to be more sensitive to growing apprehension among Asia-Pacific countries. A refusal to be involved in multilateral security dialogue will be regarded as an ominous sign that China wants to act on its own. Therefore, China's mere endorsement and participation in multilateral security could be a more effective means to dispel the perception of the "China threat."

Out of these considerations, China has become more active in multilateral CBMS in recent years. China seldom advanced its own initiatives but preferred to be a part of the broader framework of multilateral security consultation centered on ASEAN—the only multilateral regional organization that deals with security issues. China has participated in the major mechanism of security consultation in the region, including the Council for Security Cooperation

in Asia–Pacific (CSCAP), ARF, and the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD). China and the Philippines also co-chaired the 1996-97 the meeting of the ISG on CBMS. This marked the first time China hosted an official multilateral conference on security.⁴⁴ Starting from 1997, the Chinese leaders have also been involved informal multilateral talks among ASEAN, China, Japan, and South Korea (the so-called 10+3) as well as those between ASEAN and China (10+1). This is the new form of multilateral consultation involving both the countries of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Since Japan has also been an active participant in these multilateral mechanisms, China and Japan are making parallel contributions to regional CBMS.

While China has been more responsive toward the ASEAN initiatives in regional CBMS, it is more cautious about the expanding role of Japan in regional security affairs and cheerless toward any initiatives of CBMS proposed by Japan. For example, during South Korean president Kim Dae-Jung's visit to Japan, Tokyo expressed its desire to join the four party talks on the Korean peninsula. But China's reaction was cool.⁴⁵ Japan has also been interested in setting up a multilateral security regime in Northeast Asia, but China remains noncommittal to any security initiatives spearheaded by Japan. China so far has not officially endorsed the idea of trilateral security consultation between China, the United States, and Japan. During Chinese Premier Li Peng's visit to Japan in November 1997, a former Japanese prime minister, Nakasone Yasuhiro, proposed "a new framework for political and security talks among leaders of four powers (Japan, China, the United States, and Russia) to promote stability and peace in the region." Li responded that it was an extremely important issue that deserved serious consideration.⁴⁶ But there has been no follow-up. China's reluctance to involve both Japan and the United States in security consultation simultaneously can be explained by its unhappiness with the U.S.–Japan security alliance and its concern that such a consultation may legitimize Japan's security role in the region and put Japan on par with others as a full-fledged major power. Japan's strengthened security alliance with the United States has become a main stumbling block for both bilateral China–Japan CBMS and trilateral China–Japan–U.S. CBMS. It has been an eternal subject for China–Japan high-level meetings. The passage of the laws implementing the new U.S.–Japan Defense Guidelines in the Japanese Diet in April 1999 further alarmed the Chinese. The three new bills will allow Japan to do more to back up U.S. military action by sending ships to evacuate civilians abroad, supplying fuel and spare parts, making airports and hospitals available to U.S. forces and conducting rear-area search-and-rescue operations for U.S. troops.⁴⁷ In Chinese eyes, these measures significantly changed the nature of the alliance and the Japanese role in the alliance. The Chinese leader Li Peng made it clear that China is very concerned with these laws because, first, they involve the Taiwan issue;

second, they involve the expansion of the role of Japanese military.⁴⁸ The bilateral confidence-building between China and Japan, therefore, is constrained by the lack of trilateral confidence-building between China, Japan, and the United States. Put it another way, there is a zero-sum tradeoff between the strengthening of U.S.–Japan security alliance and the advance of CBMs between China and Japan. However, this does not mean that China is opposed to working with Japan in any trilateral or multilateral setting. The recent ground-breaking trilateral summit among China, Japan and South Korea indicates a new pattern of CBM in the Northeast Asia. It is significant progress to move from the original bilateral summit between China and Japan and between China and South Korea during the annual ASEAN summit meeting to the trilateral consultation among the three countries. At present the talks remain focused on economic and trade issues, but security topics may not be excluded from future trilateral discussions.

CONCLUSION

In the post-Cold War era, Sino–Japanese relations have increasingly developed their own dynamics. As the two most important major powers in East Asia, how to manage this “strong-strong” relationship and to make it conducive to regional stability and security is a serious challenger to the leadership of both countries. While the overall relationship between the two countries is stable, it has been basically sustained by the economic exchanges in terms of trade and investment. Compared to economic relations, political and security relations between the two countries have been left behind. In recent years, the overall relationship has been strained by a host of political and security issues. To ease the tension resulting from these problems, CBMs are much needed for the two countries. Yet CBMs so far have remained insufficient and superficial. Compared to their respective relations with other major powers, CBMs between China and Japan are less developed and institutionalized. This situation has multiple causes. Due to historical reasons, mutual trust is much harder to establish between the two countries, particularly on the Chinese side. Both sides have a lot of question marks regarding the other side’s long-term foreign policy intention and goals. For both sides, enhancing security ties with the other side is a sensitive matter in domestic politics. Secondly, while sharing some common security concerns, the two countries tend to have different security agenda. For Japan, the more immediate security threat is from North Korea. For China, the more urgent security concern is Taiwan. Confidence-building between the two countries is also constrained by outside factors, particularly the United States. The existence of the U.S.–Japan security alliance in the region casts a shadow over the development of CBMs in China–Japan relations. Finally, too close security relations between the two countries may also raise the concerns of other countries in the region about the possibility of China–Japan condominium.

However, as argued at the beginning of this paper, the peace and security in East Asia in the twenty-first century will be shaped by the state of Sino–Japanese relations to the much greater extent than it was in the twentieth century. As indigenous major powers in the region, China and Japan have special responsibility to bring a viable new security order to the East Asia. CBMS between the two countries are a necessity rather than a luxury. While the current mechanism of CBMS leaves much to be desired, it serves useful purpose of increasing transparency, defining concerns, and clarifying policies. Some recommendations for further development of CBMS in Sino–Japanese relations are in order.

First, CBMS between the two countries should be pursued from a broader perspective, not just from the conventional security and military angles. The decision of the two countries to put the issue of history on the back burner, for example, is an important confidence-building measure. An improvement of overall political relations will provide a better environment for security and military dialogues.⁴⁹ In other words, political confidence building is very important in China–Japan relations. In doing so, both countries should view the other side as a normal major power rather than something else. China should realize it is just a matter of time that Japan soon or later will become a comprehensive major power including both political and military dimensions. Japan cannot remain a handicapped nation-state for too long. China should be ready to accept this inevitable historical development. Japan should also be more receptive to China's rise as a major power in the region. It is equally abnormal for China to remain weak and divided. Both sides should perceive the other side as a potential partner rather than inherent threat or adversary.

Second, confidence building between China and Japan probably should take a functionalist approach, moving from non-security areas to security, from the easier areas to more difficult areas, with the hope that CBMS in low politics will gradually spill over into high politics. The public security cooperation between China and Japan is a good example. The much-discussed idea of trilateral talk between China, Japan, and the United States could be resurrected by holding a trilateral economic summit first rather than immediately entering security consultations. Since China is willing to hold trilateral talks with Japan and South Korea, there is no reason why it should refuse to talk to Japan and the United States in the same framework.

Third, CBMS such as security and defense talks between the two countries at different levels should be further institutionalized. Both countries should make effort to minimize the influence of fluctuation in other areas of the relationship on security CBMS. China often argues

that bilateral economic relations should not be adversely affected by the troubles in political and security relations. It can also be argued that a regular security dialogue should not be interrupted by one or two isolated events or incidents. Indeed the more troublesome the relationship is, the more important it is to keep the communication lines open. Both sides should no longer regard security dialogue in various forms with the other side as a taboo or something less legitimate than other issues.

Fourth, China and Japan should move from more general security dialogues on various issues to take more concrete CBMS to deal with issues. For instance, so far there has been no attempt to develop CBMS in regard to the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands, which often causes irritations in the relationship. China and Japan could set up a joint working group not necessarily to discuss the sovereignty issue but to deal with various contingencies. In the meantime, both sides should refrain from taking any provocative actions. Military CBMS such as port visits by battleships, as symbolic as they may be, are important first steps to increase trust and transparency between the two militaries. They could be followed by more substantial CBMS such as exchange of military and defense related information (e.g. both countries' military cooperation with third countries, with the United States in case of Japan, with Russia in case of China), advanced notice about major military exercises or weapon testing, and even joint military training and exercises. These CBMS should be pursued step by step. As soon as the taboo is broken, military-to-military CBMS may find their own momentum.

ENDNOTES

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