



Senkaku Islands/East China Sea Disputes—A Japanese Perspective

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Introduction

The “Senkaku Islands” consists of five virtually uninhabitable islands (Uotsuri Jima, Kuba Jima, Taisho Jima, Minami Kojima, Kita Kojima) and three rocks (Okino Kitaiwa, Okino Minami-iwa, Tobise) that lay in close proximity to the Chinese mainland, Okinawa, and the Taiwanese coast. They sit on top of the East China Sea’s largest petroleum reserve.

From Japanese perspectives, the Senkaku Islands/East China Sea issue has two dimensions. First is the “territorial” dimension, which essentially is the disagreement with China over the sovereignty of these islands and rocks. Second is the economic dimension in which Japan and China disagrees over how to draw a demarcation line in the area where their claimed exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and continental shelves, as defined under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), overlap. However, as the profile of the issue rises in last several years after a couple of major incidents, the issue has begun to increasingly assume the political-military characteristic. This is obviously problematic for Japan. First, as long as the issue remains high profile, it continues to provoke Chinese sensitivity of Japan’s wartime aggression and atrocities committed in China between 1930-1945. This makes the issue a matter of national pride for China, making it difficult to start dialogue with the government in Beijing to explore pragmatic ways to diffuse tension. Moreover, China’s assertive behavior on this issue, particularly the activities by Chinese fishing boats, maritime law enforcement vessels, and maritime research ships—are fueling the negative image of China in Japan. It has also made the management of these issues politically difficult for the leaders in Tokyo.

This paper focuses on Japanese perspectives on the Senkaku issue. It first provides an overview of Japan’s basic claims on the issue, followed by description of the types of Chinese activities around the Senkaku Islands that Japan has been concerned about. The paper then identifies the challenges that the Senkaku Islands issue pres-



ents for Japan. The paper finishes with the assessment of how Japan's behavior can impact the US-Japan alliance, and what the United States can do to prevent the further escalation of the tensions.

Background: Japanese Claims

The territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands surfaced in 1971 after the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) issued a survey in 1968 that indicated the continental shelf between Taiwan and Japan was possibly one of the "most prolific oil reservoirs in the world."¹

Taiwan first made the claim over the Senkaku Islands in 1971, around the time of the US reversion of Okinawa to Japan. The reasons behind these claims made by Taipei are as follows:

- The Ryukyu Kingdom (integrated into Japanese territory as Okinawa prefecture in 1879) was in tributary relationship with China (then represented by Qing dynasty). Therefore, the Ryukyu Islands (today's Nansei Southwestern Islands that includes the Senkaku Islands) are considered part of Chinese territory.
- As such, the Ryukyu Islands were considered a part of the territory (Taiwan) that was handed over to Japan at the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895.

Based on these arguments, Taipei opposed the US reversion of Okinawa to Japan, and Beijing followed suit. Beijing argued that the Senkaku Islands had been incorporated into the territory of the Ming Dynasty in 1556, and asserted that the Ming Dynasty's ownership of the islands invalidated Japan's incorporation of them in 1895. Additionally, they argued that they ceded the Senkaku Islands as part of Taiwan to Japan according to the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, and that the islands should be returned to China.

The Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) articulates Japan's official position on the Senkaku Islands issue as follows²:

¹ UNECAFE 1968:39-40.

² Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), "The Basic View on the Sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands," http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/basic_view.html Accessed April 4, 2013; MOFA, "Fact Sheet on the Senkaku Islands" http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/fact_sheet.html Accessed April 4, 2013.



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- The Japanese government's decision to integrate the Senkaku Islands into Japanese territory is based on the Cabinet Decision on January 14, 1895. The decision was a result of a 10-year-long survey on the Senkaku Islands that the government conducted through Okinawa prefectural government, which confirmed that the Islands showed no trace of having been under the control of China.
- Since 1895, the Senkaku Islands have continuously remained an integral part of the Nansei Islands. As such, they were never a part of Taiwan nor a part of the Pescadores Islands Japan acquired from the Qing Dynasty of China in accordance with Article 2 of the Treaty of Shimonoseki that came into effect in May of 1895.
- Accordingly, the Senkaku Islands are not included in the territory that Japan renounced under Article 2 of the 1954 San Francisco Peace Treaty. The Senkaku Islands have been placed under the administration of the United States of America as part of the Nansei Islands, in accordance with Article 3 of said treaty. Therefore, they are included in the area that was reverted to Japan at the time of the Okinawa reversion in 1971.

To rebut the claims by Taiwan and China, Japan makes the following points:

- Prior to the discovery of petroleum resources in the Senkaku seabed, neither Beijing nor Taipei insisted that the Senkaku Islands were a part of their territory.
- Nor did they raise objection to the exclusion of the Senkaku Islands from Article III of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, which placed the Senkaku Islands under US administration as a part of Nansei Islands.³
- China did not object when the US Navy leased the Kuba and Taisho islands from then-owner Koga Zenji for \$11,000, and used the islands as firing ranges from 1951 onward.⁴ Prior to Taipei and Beijing's claims to the Senkaku Islands, several maps that supported the Japanese claims—in which China did not consider the Senkaku Islands as a part of its territory—were published in China.

³ MOFA. "Fact Sheet on the Senkaku Islands".

⁴ MOFA. "Q&A on the Senkaku Islands". http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/qa_1010.html Accessed April 4, 2013.



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For example, *the Republic of China New Atlas* published in China in 1933, or the *World Atlas* published in China in 1958 both clearly marked these islands as the “Senkaku Islands,” not Diaoyutai Islands.³ Additionally, a *World Map Atlas* published by the Taiwanese National Defense Studies Institute and the Chinese Institute for Geoscience in 1965 clearly delineated the maritime border between the Senkaku Islands and Taiwan. Lastly, a 1969 classified PRC map published in the *Washington Times* also depicted the Senkaku Islands as being part of Japanese territory. All three maps referred to the disputed islands by their Japanese names and made no mention of their Chinese names, indicating that the Chinese did not consider these islands to be part of their territory at the time the maps were published.

Today, the Japanese government's position remains that the Senkaku Islands are a part of the City of Ishigaki of Okinawa Prefecture. It also maintains the position that the Government of Japan does not acknowledge that the sovereignty of these islands are in dispute.

Japanese Concerns about Chinese behavior

Since the Senkaku Islands dispute surfaced between Japan and China in 1971, Tokyo and Beijing repeatedly have had diplomatic tense interaction on this issue. There are three types of Chinese actors that Japan has been concerned about.

1. Activists

From Japanese perspective, maritime dispute over the Senkaku Islands date back to the 1950s when Taiwanese boats began fishing off the coast of the islands. September 1970 marked the first skirmish regarding the Senkaku sovereignty issue, when the Okinawan police arrested a Taiwanese journalist attempting to plant a ROC national flag on Uotsuri Island. During the negotiation for the Japan-China Treaty of Peace and Friendship, China sent numerous Chinese trawlers equipped with the PRC flag to the waters of the Senkaku Islands in response to the assertion made by a group of conservative Japanese politician.

Since then, Chinese/Taiwanese/Hong Kong activists have regularly shown up to the waters around the Senkaku Islands (see Table 1 on next two pages).

³ MOFA. “Republic of China New Atlas” http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/fact_sheet_05.pdf Accessed April 5, 2013; “Map of World Atlas” http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/fact_sheet_06.pdf Accessed April 5, 2013.



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Table 1. Major incidents instigated by the Chinese/Hong Kong/Taiwanese to assert the territorial claims over Senkaku Islands

Date	Incident	Outcomes
9/1996	A ship with several Hong Kong activists entered the waters near the Senkaku Islands.	A few activists onboard dove into the water and drowned.
10/1996	49 vessels with Hong Kong and Taiwanese activists on board approached to Senkaku. 41 out of 49 vessels entered Japanese territorial water.	Voluntary departure from the area after conducting their protest activities.
5/1997	30 vessels with Hong Kong and Taiwanese activists on board approached the Senkaku Islands, 3 of which entered Japanese territorial water.	2 activists got onboard the Japanese Coast Guard's cruiser. Forced departure from the area.
7/1997	A vessel with a Taiwanese activist entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.	Departure following Coast Guard's warning.
6/1998	6 vessels with Hong Kong and Taiwanese activists approached the Senkaku Islands. 1 vessel and a rubber boat entered into territorial waters.	Departure following Coast Guard's warning.
6/2003	A vessel with a PRC activists entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.	Departure following Coast Guard's warning.
10/2003	A vessel with a PRC activists entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.	Departure following Coast Guard's warning.
1/2004	Two vessels with PRC activists entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.	Departure following Coast Guard's warning.

Source: Japan Coast Guard. *Kaijo Hoan Report 2012* (Maritime Safety Report 2012), http://www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/info/books/report2012/html/honpen/p066_02_01.html (Accessed April 8, 2013).



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Table 1. Major incidents instigated by the Chinese/Hong Kong/Taiwanese to assert the territorial claims over Senkaku Islands—cont.

Date	Incident	Outcomes
3/2004	A vessel with a PRC activist entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.	7 PRC activists landed on Uotsuri Island. Activists were arrested and deported.
8/2006	A vessel with a Taiwanese activist approached Senkaku Islands.	Departure after Coast Guard's warning.
10/2006	A vessel with Hong Kong and PRC activists entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.	Departure after Coast Guard's warning.
10/2007	A vessel with a PRC activist entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.	Departure after Coast Guard's warning.
6/2008	A vessel with Taiwanese activists entered the territorial water around the Senkaku Islands.	Departure after Coast Guard's warning, accompanied by Taiwanese Coast Guard Ship.
9/2010	A vessel with Taiwanese activists approached the Senkaku Islands.	Departure after Coast Guard's warning, accompanied by Taiwanese Coast Guard Ship.
9/2011	A vessel with Taiwanese activists approached the Senkaku Islands.	Departure after Coast Guard's warning while in the adjacent water. Accompanied by Taiwanese Coast Guard Ship.
6/2012	A vessel with Taiwanese activists approached the Senkaku Islands.	Departure after Coast Guard's warning while in the adjacent water. Accompanied by Taiwanese Coast Guard Ship.

Table 1 is a summary of the incursions by China/Taiwan/Hong Kong activists in the waters around the Senkaku Islands. However, the behavior by the activists, as frustrating as it may be, is relatively a minor concern for Japan. These activists usually voluntarily leave the area when Japan Coast Guard issues warning. They

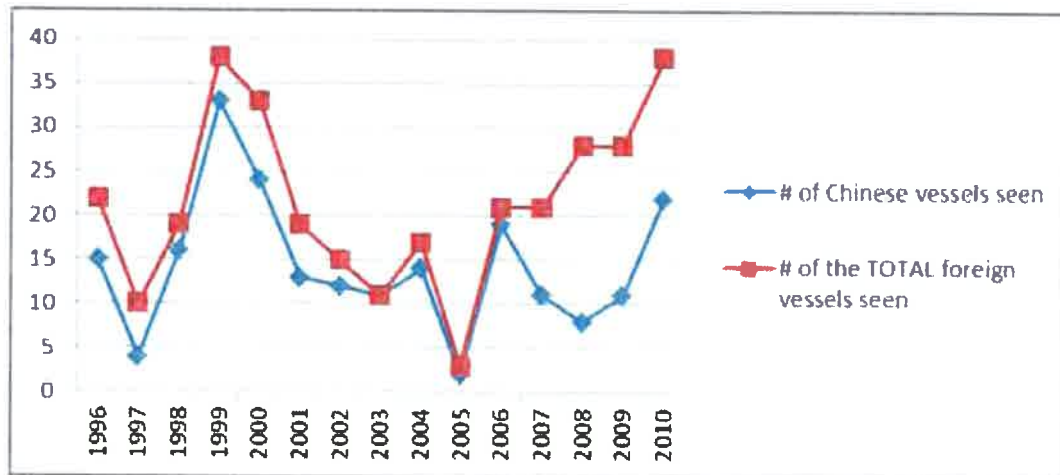


usually enter the adjacent water, but stop short of entering what Japan defines as its territorial water. Most of all, Japanese government also has been troubled by the activists in Japan. For instance, in the summer of 1996 when it was the construction of the second lighthouse by Nihon Seinen-sha (a right-wing activist group that constructed the first one in 1970s) and their request to the Japan Maritime Safety Agency (JMSA, today's Japan Coast Guard) to designate it as Japan's official lighthouse that triggered the tension with China. In other words, the activists in Japan are just as guilty for triggering diplomatic tension with China on the Senkaku Issue.

2. Maritime research vessels

In addition, a number of Chinese maritime research vessels (Kaiyo Chosa-sen) have appeared in the East China Sea with greater frequency in the last several years. To demonstrate the heightened concerns that the Japanese government has in Chinese maritime research vessels' activities, the JCG released the number of occasions it witnessed foreign maritime research vessels by country in Maritime Safety Report, its annual white paper, in 2000 (Chart 1):

Chart 1. Frequency of Chinese maritime research vessels in Japanese territorial water and EEZs, 1996-2010



Source: Japan Coast Guard, Kaijo Hoan Report (Maritime Safety Report), 2000-2011.

As Chart 1 demonstrates, Chinese maritime research vessels often consists more than 50% of all the foreign maritime research vessels found to be sailing in Japanese territorial water and EEZs. In addition, the most recent annual report by Japan



Coast Guard reports that an increasing number of Chinese maritime research vessels either enters these waters without prior notification, or their activities are considerably different from what they had said in their notification.⁶

3. Maritime surveillance/law enforcement vessels

The third, and what concerns Japanese most in recent years, is an increasing presence and activities of Chinese maritime law enforcement vessels. Until realigned recently, Chinese government had five maritime organizations—China Coast Guard (CCG), Maritime Safety Administration (MSA), China Marine Surveillance (CMS), Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) and Customs—each of which plays a role in maritime security and related issues. While belonging to different government agencies (CMS is a part of State Oceanic Administration and FLEC is an organization within Fisheries Management Bureau of Ministry of Agriculture), they are both mandated with law enforcement within Chinese territorial waters and EEZs.

Japan has been increasingly concerned with a heightening level of activities by CMS and FLEC vessels in the waters around the Senkaku Islands. Especially following Japanese government's purchase of three islands of the Senkakus in September 2012, CMS and FLEC vessels have been appearing in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands on almost a daily bases, frequently entering into Japanese territorial waters. (see Table 2 on page 9).

In many of these entries, when warned by Japan Coast Guard, CMS and FLEC vessels either ignore JCG's warning, or retort by saying "Senkaku is Chinese territory" and continue their maneuvers.

JCG has been at the forefront of responding to the incursion and incursion attempts by these vessels. As a result, their vessels that belong to the 11th District (headquartered in Naha, Okinawa) has been stretched thin, even with rotating in additional 50 vessels from other districts. The Abe administration has already announced the augmentation of the 11th District by FY2015 that includes the construction of six additional vessels and employment of additional personnel.⁷ With an increasing

⁶ Japan Coast Guard. *Kaijo Hoan Report 2012* (Maritime Safety Report 2012) http://www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/info/books/report2012/html/honpen/p066_02_01.html Accessed April 20, 2013.

⁷ "Kaiho Senkaku Keibi he Kaijo Hoan-cho no Taisei Kyoka (JCG augmenting the patrol around the Senkakus)" *Mainichi Shimbun*, February 15, 2013. <http://mainichi.jp/feature/news/20130206org00m010022000c.html> Accessed April 15 2013.



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Table 2. Entry into Japanese territorial water near Senkaku Islands by Chinese maritime law enforcement vessels since September 2011

Year	Month/Day	Vessels	Year	Month/Day	Vessels
2011	Aug. 24	2 FLEC vessels	2013	Feb. 14	4 MSA vessels
2012	Mar. 16	3 FLEC vessels		Feb. 18	3 MSA vessels
	Jul. 11	4 FLEC vessels		Feb. 21	1 FLEC vessel
	Sept. 14	6 MSA vessels		Feb. 23	1 FLEC vessel
	Sept. 18	3 MSA vessels		Feb. 24	1 FLEC vessel
	Sept. 24	2 MSA vessels, 2 FLEC vessels		Feb. 28	3 MSA vessels
	Oct. 2	4 MSA vessels		Mar. 6	3 MSA vessels, 2 FLEC vessels
	Oct. 3	3 MSA vessels		Mar. 12	3 MSA vessels
	Oct. 25	4 MSA vessels		Mar. 18	2 MSA vessels
	Nov. 20	4 MSA vessels		Apr. 1	2 MSA vessels
	Dec. 4	1 MSA vessel		Apr. 9	3 MSA vessels
2013	Jan. 21	3 MSA vessels		Apr. 16	3 MSA vessels
	Jan. 30	3 MSA vessels		April 20	2 MSA vessels
	Feb. 4	2 MSA vessels		April 23	8 MSA vessels

NOTE: the list may not be complete and cover all the entry attempt into Japanese territorial water). (Source: “*Kimpaku no Senkaku Shoto Shashin Tokushu* (Rising Tension over the Senkaku Islands: Photo Gallery)” *Jiji Press* http://www.jiji.com/jc/d4?d=d4_ter&p=kss816-jlp13398688 Accessed April 15, 2013; “*Chuugoku Kousen Yon-seki ga Nihon no Ryoukai ni Shinnyu* (Chinese government vessels entered Japanese territorial water)” *MSN Sankei News*. October 25, 2012. <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/affairs/news/121025/crm12102509160003-n1.htm>; “*Chuugoku Kousen ni yoru Senkaku Shotou heno Sekkinn* (Approach to the Senkaku Islands by Chinese official vessels)” Materials released from MOFA. Website of Honorable Yoshitaka Shindo, a member of the House of Representatives. <http://www.shindo.gr.jp/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/%EF%BC%8810%E6%9C%8816%E6%97%A5%E6%9B%B4%E6%96%B0%E6%9C%89E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%85%AC%E8%88%B9%E3%81%AB%E3%82%88%E3%82%8B%E5%B0%96%E9%96%A3%E8%AB%8%E5%B3%B6%E3%81%B8%E3%81%AE%E6%8E%A5%E8%BF%91.pdf> Accessed April 15, 2013; “*Chuugoku Kanshi-sen Yon-seki ga Ryoukai shinnyuu* (4 MSA vessels enters Japanese territorial water)” *MSN Sankei News* November 20, 2012. <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/affairs/news/121120/crm12112012560007-n1.htm> Accessed April 15, 2013.)



tempo and the rise in the number of CMS and FLEC vessels appearing in and around the Senkaku Islands, there is a growing anxiety in Japan that the JCG, despite its best efforts, may be overwhelmed by the influx of Chinese vessels, and may allow China to effectively disrupt the status quo of Japan's effective administrative control over the Senkakus.

Japan has protested twice to Chinese government at a senior level—once in September 2012 and the other on April 23 2013 after the most recent incursion attempt—to reduce the level of these vessels' activities to no avail.

Incidents that have contributed to the current tension

As noted earlier in the paper, Japan-China tension over the Senkaku Islands has been particularly aggravated in the last three years. Three events in particular can be identified as contributing to the current situation.

1. Collision of Chinese fishing trawler with Japan Coast Guard vessel (September 7, 2010)

On September 11, 2010, a Chinese fishing trawler entered the territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands and collided with a JCG cruiser that followed it while continuing to issue warnings and urging voluntary departure from the area.

This incident was markedly different from previous ones for both countries in several ways. First, the Chinese trawler was much more persistent, as well as the government's reaction that followed. In the past, Chinese (Taiwanese and Hong Kong) vessels that entered the waters near the Senkaku Islands merely ignored warnings issued by the JCG. Second, this was the first time a Chinese vessel collided with a JCG vessel. Finally, the retaliatory action from Chinese government—prohibition of rare earth exports to Japan, detention of Japanese businessmen in China—also was unprecedented.

Secondly, the Japanese government's management of the incident also broke with past precedent. As seen in Table 1 on pages 5 & 6, when Japanese law enforcement authorities previously made arrests of Chinese nationals because of their entry into Japanese territorial water around the Senkaku Islands, the individual was deported to China shortly afterwards. However, in this case, Japanese authorities not only



arrested but also detained the captain of the trawler in custody for nearly a month while the District Prosecutors Office in Naha, Okinawa, considered whether to prosecute him. Furthermore, the process through which the Naha District Prosecutor's Office reached its ultimate decision of not to press charges was not transparent. This left many to speculate that the leaders in then ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), fearing further aggravation of Japan-China relations, yielded to political pressure and intervened with the Prosecutor's Office's decision.

2. Japanese decision to purchase three islands in Senkaku (September 11, 2012)

On September 2012, the Japanese government under then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, announced that it reached an agreement to purchase three islands (Uotsuri-jima, Kita-kojima and Minami-kojima) in the Senkakus from the private landowner for over twenty billion yen. This triggered the most recent round of tension between Japan and China.

From Japan's perspective, the government's decision to purchase these islands was to prevent further tension in Japan-China relations. In April 2012, then Governor of Tokyo Shintaro Ishihara who has been known to have extremely conservative views and often is characterized as "nationalist" or "right-wing" had announced during his visit to Washington, DC that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government was planning to purchase these islands.⁸ Since then, Ishihara had indicated his plan to construct port facilities and other construction, and also requested the government to visit these islands to conduct land survey. Ishihara also announced that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government would fund its planned purchase of the islands through public donation and launched a fund drive, collecting 700 million yen in the first month.⁹ This had led then Noda government to believe that Ishihara gaining control over these islands would do an irreversible damage to Japan-China relations. Given the well-known conservative views held by Ishihara, they decided that, as

⁸ For his speech, see "The US-Japan Alliance and the Debate on Japan's Role in East Asia" *Heritage Foundation*, April 16, 2012. <http://www.heritage.org/events/2012/04/shintaro-ishihara> Accessed April 20, 2013.

⁹ As of January 31, 2013, approximately 1.4 billion yen has been donated to the special account set up by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. "Tokyo-to Senkaku Shoto Kifukin Uketsuke Joukyou (Current Status of Donation to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government for the Senkaku Islands)" Data as of January 31, 2013. <http://www.chijihon.metro.tokyo.jp/senkaku/kifu-jyokyo.html> Accessed April 20, 2013.



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controversial as they may be at the time of the announcement, the national government's purchase of these islands was the lesser evil of the two options. Furthermore, the communication between Tokyo and Beijing through diplomatic channel left Tokyo with the impression that China would "understand" the reason behind Noda administration's decision to purchase the three islands.¹⁰

Chinese reaction to Japanese government's announcement of islands' purchase was much stronger and far more furious than it had anticipated, however. Chinese foreign ministry immediately issued a statement that said Tokyo's purchase of the islands "cannot alter the fact that Japanese side stole the islands from China...If Japan insists on going its own way, it will bear all the serious consequences that follow."¹¹ Following the Japanese government's announcement of the purchase, the anti-Japanese protests—already spreading after Ishihara initially announced his intention to purchase the islands—have worsened.¹² Japanese government also argues that the activities by Chinese CMS and FLEC vessels have accelerated since Tokyo's announcement of the islands' purchase.¹³ Chinese State Oceanic Administration's aircraft also intruded into Japanese airspace over the Senkakus in December 2012 for the first time.¹⁴

¹⁰ "Senkaku kokuyu-ka Chuugoku no Kyoukou Shisei Nihon no Yosou Kosu (China's Reaction to Japanese government's purchase decision far beyond Tokyo's anticipation)" *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, September 14, 2012. http://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXNASDC1400I_U2A910C1EA2000/ Accessed April 19, 2013.

¹¹ "In Response to Japanese "Antagonism" Over Senkaku Islands, China Dispatches Two Patrol Ships" *The Prison Planet*, <http://www.prisonplanet.com/in-response-to-japanese-antagonism-over-senkaku-islands-china-dispatches-two-patrol-ships.html> Accessed April 3, 2013.

¹² See, for instance, "How a Remote Rock Split China and Japan." *CNN* January 30, 2013. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/17/world/asia/china-japan-islands-dispute-explained> Accessed April 20, 2013.

¹³ For example, MOFA argues that between September 11 2012 and February 6 2013, Chinese officials vessels have entered into Japanese territorial waters around the Senkakus 25 times. See MOFA. "Position Paper: Japan-China Relations Surrounding the Situation of Senkaku Islands—In Response to China's Weapon Radar Lock-on" February 7, 2013. http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/position_paper3_en.html Accessed April 13, 2013.

¹⁴ MOFA. "Position Paper: Japan-China Relations Surrounding the Situation of Senkaku Islands—In Response to China's Airspace incursion" December 18, 2013. http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/position_paper2_en.html Accessed April 20, 2013.



3. PLA Navy's weapon radar lock-on to JMSDF aircraft (January 30, 2013)

On February 5, 2013, Japanese defense minister Istunori Onodera convened an emergency press conference in which he announced that that PLA Navy (PLAN) frigate locked-on its fire control (FC) radar on Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF)'s destroyer Yudachi on January 30, 2013 in East China Sea. Referring to another incident on January 19 in which PLAN frigate was suspected to lock on its FC radar on JMSDF helicopters.¹⁵ Defense Minister's statement was followed by a strong statement by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who described the incident as a "dangerous action that could have brought about an unexpected situation."¹⁶

Chinese strongly denies Japan's charge. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman rebutted Japanese charge by insisting that "the top priority for now is for Japan to stop all provocative actions it has been doing as sending ships and flights into Diaoyu islands sea and air space."¹⁷ On the other hand, there are media reports that suggest that PLAN officers, based on the condition of anonymity, admitted the use of FC radar against JMSDF destroyer, and the decision was made by the commander of the frigate.¹⁸

Although the details remain unclear, this incident brought Japan-China tension over the Senkaku Islands to a new height. At the same time, the involvement of the militaries in the incidents also reminded many of a great risk that an incident of this kind can escalate into an actual clashes between the two militaries, and the absence of the mechanism between Tokyo and Beijing to manage such situation.

¹⁵ Japan Ministry of Defense. "Daijin Rinji Kaiken Gaiyou (Summary of Minister's Emergency Conference)" February 5, 2013. <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/kisha/2013/02/05a.html> Accessed April 20, 2013.

¹⁶ "Japanese prime minister accuses Chinese navy ship of 'dangerous' act" CNN. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/06/world/asia/china-japan-disputed-islands> Accessed April 18, 2013.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ "China military officials admit radar lock on Japanese ship, says report" *South China Morning Post*, March 19, 2013. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1193600/china-military-officials-admit-radar-lock-japanese-ship?page=all> Accessed April 19, 2013.



Impact of the Senkaku Islands/East China Sea issue on Japan's perception of China: challenge for Tokyo

The Japan–China tension, highlighted in the three incidents examined in the previous section, have enhanced the trends in Japan that were slowly building up in the last several years. First, among a large segment of Japanese political leadership, Japanese government officials as well as intellectuals, China's increasing assertiveness in the Senkaku Islands/East China Sea issues have made them question Beijing's intention in the future. China's capability to pursue its global policy goals has noticeably improved, thanks to its economic growth as well as its aggressive diplomacy that focuses on promoting economic partnership and securing energy sources. Furthermore, Tokyo government officials—especially those in the defense establishment—recognize China's seemingly endless military modernization efforts over the last decade. In the 2011 Defense White Paper, the Japan Ministry of Defense (MOD) acknowledges that China's published defense budget has grown 18 times over the last 20 years.¹⁹

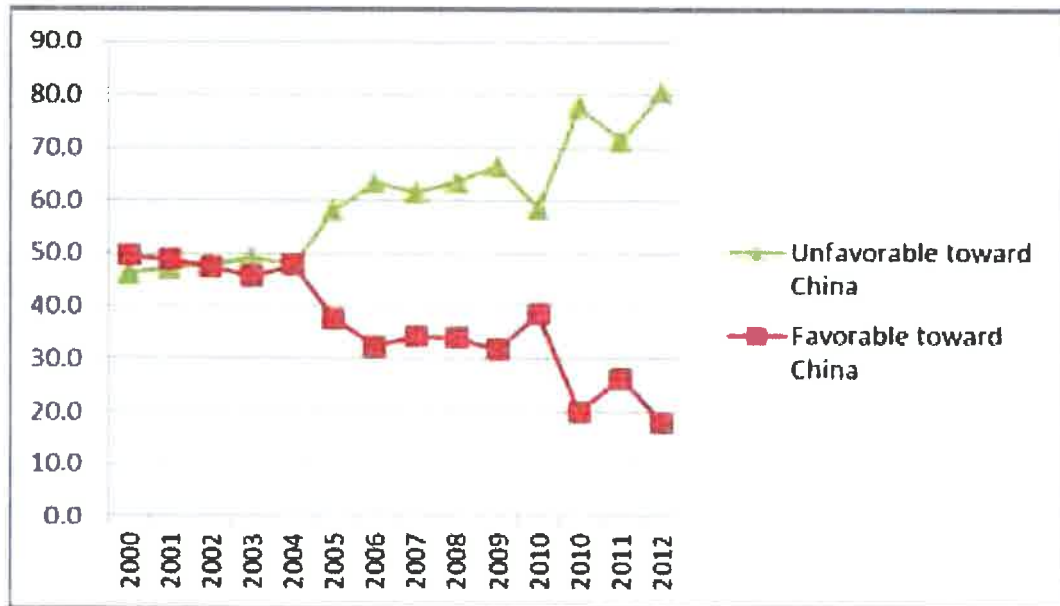
In the eyes of many Japanese, China's behavior in this issue has facilitated strong anti-China sentiment. Ever since Jiang Zemin demanded that Japan officially apologize for its wartime atrocities during his visit to Japan in 1998, there has been widespread sentiment among the Japanese that China uses Japan's wartime atrocities for political maneuvering and to extract more diplomatic concessions from Japan. China's recent behavior in the Senkaku Islands/East China Sea issue has only solidified the perception that Beijing optimizes its “history” card against Japan to assert its position, hardening public attitude toward China.

The public opinion poll taken by Japan's Cabinet Affairs Office on Japanese foreign policy demonstrates this change: there is a downturn in the number of survey respondents who held a favorable feeling toward China after its 2000 survey. This downward trend continued and took a decidedly negative turn in 2004. The number of those who held a favorable feeling toward China hit an all-time low in the 2012 survey, with over 80 percent of the respondents having a negative feeling toward China (see Chart 2 top of next page).

¹⁹ MOD, *Heisei 23-nendo ban Bouei Hakusho* (FY 2011 Defense White Paper), 78-79. http://www.clearing.mod.go.jp/hakusho_data/2011/2011/pdf/23010203.pdf. Accessed June 5, 2012.



Chart 2. Japanese public's feeling toward China, 2000-2012



Source: Cabinet Affairs Office, *Heisei 24-nendo Gaiko ni kansuru Yoron Chosa* (FY 2012 Public Opinion Poll on Foreign Policy), <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h24/h24-gaiko/zh/z10.html>. Accessed April 20, 2013.

The anti-China sentiment has been further aggravated by China's economic ascendance and the resulting influx of Chinese citizens in Japan as students, members of the workforce, and/or tourists. People complain of the increase in crime conducted by an increasing number of Chinese living and working in Japan; bad manners displayed by Chinese tourists has become a common grievance. In short, the average Japanese feels that their lifestyle and social norms have been "threatened" by the increasing presence of Chinese citizens in Japan.

In this context, Japanese government's response to the September 2010 fishing trawler's incident confirmed the public perception that the DPJ is pro-China, even if it is to the detriment to Japan's national interest. Prior to the trawler's incident, a 600-people delegation visit to China in December 2009 led by Ichiro Ozawa, one of DPJ's most influential politicians, was criticized by Japanese media as kowtowing to China. During Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping's visit in December 2009, Ozawa pushed to schedule an audience with Emperor Akihito despite the MOFA's objections. The Imperial Household Agency did not grant the audience, and the incident further attracted criticism for the DPJ government for going out of its way



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to please the Chinese and breaking long-held diplomatic protocol in order to do so. The leak of the video footage shot by a JCG officer of the Chinese trawler incident on YouTube in November 2011 further aggravated public criticism against DPJ government for being too soft on China in the face of an obvious hostile act.

To make matters more complicated, JSDF, Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) in particular, is increasingly concerned about the scenario in which the JSDF has to retake the Senkaku Islands in case of Chinese attempts to change a status quo with military (or para-military) force. The 2010 National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG) designates “southwestern defense” and “remote-island defense” as the priorities for which the JSDF equip itself and train.²⁰ The JSDF has been intensifying its consultation with US forces on the requirements for amphibious operations, and it also engages in bilateral exercises that focus on remote island defense.²¹

These developments within Japan present a formidable challenge for Japanese government as it explores ways to stabilize the situation and reduce tensions with China. In particular, the current hardened public attitude toward China can hamstring the government's policy options. Similar to being perceived as “soft” on North Korea and abduction issues as politically unacceptable in today's Japan, being perceived as “conciliatory” or “accommodating” toward China is now just as, or even more politically unacceptable. Such an environment makes it very difficult for any Japanese political leaders and government officials—even conservatives ones, such as Shinzo Abe—to pursue a pragmatic approach, or demonstrate any willingness to show flexibility in his/her approach with China.

A seeming “gap” in the thinking of the Japanese government in regards to its response to China on the Senkaku Islands issue presents another challenge. Today, the Japanese government seems to be prepared for two policy options. On one end, it prepares to bolster JCG's capacity to respond to the continuing influx of Chinese maritime law enforcement vessels into the waters around the Senkakus, thereby trying to maintain the status quo (Japan retains an effective administrative control over the Senkaku Islands). On the other end of the policy options, the JSDF is busy preparing for “remote island defense” that focuses more on retaking the islands—a fundamental change in status quo—than preventing the situation from escalating to

²⁰ JMOD. *National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and Beyond* December 17, 2010. http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/guidelinesFY2011.pdf Accessed April 20, 2013.

²¹ For instance, a part of *Keen Sword 2012*, an annual US-Japan joint field training exercise, was focused on remote-island defense operation.



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that point. Although Japan's realistic policy option will most likely revolve around the maintenance of status quo and additional bilateral political and/or diplomatic dialogue on how to reduce the risk of allowing minor incidents from escalating, there does not seem to be much thinking about it.

To be fair, there are some legitimate efforts made by the Japanese. When Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda visited Beijing in December 2011, he and Chinese president Hu Jintao agreed on six policy initiatives to improve and deepen Japan-China relations to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Japan-China diplomatic normalization. As part of the six initiatives, the two leaders agreed to launch Japan-China senior official-level maritime consultations to discuss broad maritime issues in the East China Sea that are of mutual concern for Tokyo and Beijing. In addition, an agreement on East China Sea resource development and the establishment of search-and-rescue (SAR) mechanisms to respond to maritime accidents were identified as high priority issues.²² The first maritime consultation took place in Beijing on May 16, 2012. The Japanese delegation was led by deputy director-general of the Asian Affairs Bureau, and included representatives from the Cabinet Secretariat, MOFA, MEXT, Resources and Energy Agency, Coast Guard, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation (MLIT), Japan Fisheries Agency, and Ministry of Environment. The delegation met with their Chinese counterparts.²³ While the consultation has been suspended since Japan's announcement of the purchase of three islands in the Senkakus, the resumption of this talk is one way for Japan and China to begin tension-reduction process. In this context, the agreement between Tokyo and Beijing to resume the bilateral defense talks on establishing the maritime emergency communication mechanism as a risk-reduction measure, if it can produce a concrete action plan, can be helpful.²⁴ Japan's recent successful conclusion of the fishery agreement with Taiwan is also important in this regard.

²² MOFA, "Nichuu Kokko Seijouka 40 shuunen ni saisuru Nicchu "Senryakuteki Gokei Kanke" no is-souno shinka ni muketa Muttsu no initiative (fact sheet) (Fact Sheet regarding the Six Initiatives toward deepening strategic mutually beneficial relationship at the 40th Anniversary of Japan-China Diplomatic Normalization)" http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/s_noda/china_1112/pdfs/jc40_factseet.pdf. Accessed May 31, 2012.

²³ MOFA, "Nicchu Kokyu Jimu Reberu Kaiyo Kyogi Dai-ikkai Kaigou (gaiyou) (Overview: the 1st Japan-China Senior Officials Consultation on Maritime Issues)". May 16, 2012. http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/china/jc_kk_1205.html. Accessed May 31st, 2012.

²⁴ "Nicchu hotline Saikyougi he...enkaku Shoutotsu kaihi de (Japan-China resuming bilateral talks on establishing a hotline: to prevent clashes in the Senkakus)" *Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 25, 2013. <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/news/20130424-OYT1T01625.htm?from=ylist> Accessed April 25, 2013.



Conclusion: implication for the United States

Today, the situation surrounding the Senkaku Islands issue has been constantly shifting. Until recently, Prime Minister Abe was considered an “adult” in the relationship. By making it clear that Japan would not take measures that might escalate the current tension but indicating that he considers Japan-China relations as one of the most important bilateral relationship for Japan²⁵, Abe successfully assuaged the concerns that some in Washington had held for Abe and his government taking a policy that is overly aggressive toward China. However, with the visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine by Vice Premier and Finance Minister Taro Aso and Minister of State in charge of abduction issue Keiji Furuya and the following statements by Abe himself that can be interpreted as him denying Japan's aggression in Asia in 1930s and 1940s, concerns for the potential negative impact of Abe's nationalistic behavior and his revisionist views on Japan's wartime past on Japan's ability to engage diplomatically with its Asian neighbors are quickly resurfacing in Washington DC.

In fact, the developments that follow Aso and Furuya's Yasukuni visit have a risk of emboldening China. Following their Yasukuni visit, some Asia specialists in Washington DC are calling for the Obama administration to distance itself from the Abe government. If not managed carefully, however, such a US response could be interpreted by China as the United States somehow less committed to its treaty obligation under Article Five of the Mutual Security Treaty to defend Japan and the areas that are under administrative control of Japan.

However, the escalation of Japan-China tension that could aggravate the already tenuous situation around the Senkaku Islands is not in US interest. The United States obviously needs Japan as its most important ally in East Asia, but it also needs China. It needs China not only for economic and trade reasons, but also for the global and regional security issues that Washington finds important for US national security, such as the nuclear programs in North Korea and Iran.

In its attempt to reduce the recent flare-ups over Prime Minister Abe's perception of Japan's wartime past, the United States must privately weigh in on the leadership

²⁵ Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet. “Japan is Back”: Policy Speech by Shinzo Abe at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 22, 2013. http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/96_abe/statement/201302/22speech_e.html Accessed April 20, 2013.



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in Tokyo, including Prime Minister Abe and his closest advisors, to not to further provoke China's nationalistic reaction by doing or saying more on the history issue. Washington can also help Tokyo to think through a range of policy options vis-à-vis China on the Senkaku Issues. It may, for instance, also encourage and support JCG efforts to engage not only Chinese Coast Guard but also CMS and FLEC—both of which are now under the State Oceanic Administration—regarding the risk-reduction measures that are comparable to the one that is being discussed between the defense ministries of the two countries. Or, the United States may serve as “an honest broker” and, while remaining neutral on the sovereignty question, provide the opportunity for Japanese and Chinese officials to resume their dialogue by giving it a cover of “trilateral” dialogue. “Pragmatism” and “sense of reason” are critical not only for the United States but also for Japan and China in order not to further destabilize the current situation. Whether the three governments can behave accordingly is, however, quite another matter, and thus requires US close monitoring.