

**SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS:
JAPANESE PERSPECTIVES**

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EAI Background Brief No. 1039

Date of Publication: 3 July 2015

Executive Summary

1. There are many ways to conceptualise Sino-Japanese relations through different schools of thought, including the realist view, the cautious optimistic view and the long-term pessimistic view.
2. In soft balancing against China, the idea is to provide China with constructive space to engage with Japan and the regional community, accommodate its rise, reassure it that the regional and international communities are not out to contain it but to ensure that its rise is peaceful.
3. Besides soft balancing, proponents of the hedging view argue that Japan is normalising as a defence establishment and adopting guidelines that could witness some weapons exports (to Australia, India, Vietnam and the Philippines) and co-training with the militaries of other liberal democracies in the region.
4. Besides old-school balancing and hedging, some new keywords have emerged to replace more classical concepts related to the international power structure. These include sustainable equilibrium—China becoming more assertive, Japan more confident about its military potential, and the United States restraining Chinese ambitions and expansionism while checking Japanese nationalism.
5. The cautious optimists consist of (1) old-school traditionalists who continue to see business ties cementing interdependence between Japan and China; (2) the realists who visualise the possibility of a new business-like working relationship between the two countries; and (3) the academic view of confrontation-averse quality in Sino-Japanese relations.
6. The realist view recognises that national interest trumps any economic, diplomatic or soft power instruments from an external power.
7. Consequently, some practitioners and observers of diplomacy have argued that relations with China, including Sino-Japanese relations, should be more businesslike

instead of relying on vague concepts of soft power, ‘friendship’ (*youhao* in Chinese or *yuukou* in Japanese) exchanges.

8. Another group of cautious optimists point out that, despite all reservations about the challenges between China and Japan, it is ultimately a confrontation-averse relationship.
9. Long-term pessimists about Sino-Japanese relations tend to cite differing views about historical memories as the main, and maybe even semi-permanent, obstacle to Sino-Japanese relations.
10. Another group of long-term pessimists are those who are concerned about realist evaluations of Sino-Japanese power equilibrium. They see the changing power balance between the two Asian giants as unsettling and potentially disruptive to the region.