

**JAPAN, CHINA AND THE AMERICAN
PIVOT: A TRIANGULAR ANALYSIS**

Lowell DITTMER

EAI Working Paper No. 163

ISSN 0219-1318
ISBN 978-981-09-0813-3

All rights reserved

Date of Publication: 26 May 2014

JAPAN, CHINA AND THE AMERICAN PIVOT: A TRIANGULAR ANALYSIS

Lowell DITTMER*

Japan, China, Russia and the US, four of the most powerful nations in the world with some of the world's most extensive trade and mutually interlocking investments binding them together, have long had "complicated" political relations. Formally two of the three have been bound by a security alliance, the Japan-US Security Alliance (JUSA), "the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none," (according to former ambassador Mike Mansfield), forms the northern tier of the American "hub-and-spokes" five-spoke Asian-Pacific alliance network. Yet it is a bilateral alliance of which China is not a part. The JUSA has never been explicitly directed against China but against Russia, at which time it had full Chinese support. Since the end of the Cold War eliminated the Soviet Union as a target of the alliance, and both Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations began for a number of reasons to fray, China's view of the alliance has grown increasingly critical. This tension was dramatized by the events of September-October 2010, when a Chinese fishing trawler in Japanese territorial waters being chased by Japanese coast guard patrol boats took evasive action and collided with its pursuers, leading to the arrest of the crew and captain. This in turn precipitated indignant Chinese diplomatic protests, unofficial trade sanctions, tit-for-tat personnel detentions, and mass demonstrations in the streets of both countries, ultimately resulting in the Chinese captain's release and repatriation. Because the underlying cause of the dispute was conflicting territorial claims to areas involving rich subsurface hydrocarbon deposits currently under Japanese control, and because the terms of the alliance commit the US to support Japan militarily if Japan itself (or territory it administers) comes under attack, the JUSA has suddenly acquired new strategic relevance.

This paper hopes to provide an explanation to the increasingly troubled Sino-Japanese relationship in terms of American pivotal involvement in polarizing bilateralism—Russia figures in the analysis only as a foil. The first part of the paper focuses on the role of divergent views of alliances in general and of the JUSA in particular. The second introduces a triangular framework, which I then use to bring the US into the picture. This is of course followed by a conclusion.

Asian Alliances

Though a staple of international politics since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, alliances are relatively new to East Asia, as indeed is the concept of the nation-state. But before getting into its distinctive Asian characteristics, what is an alliance in general? Alliances are, according to Snyder, "formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement of their members,

* Prof Lowell Dittmer was Visiting Professor of the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore. The paper was written during his stay at the institute.

against specific other states, whether or not these others are explicitly identified.”¹ There are at least two different interpretations of the logic of alliance formation. The first is realist, rooted in balance of power theory: When a nation comes under threat it is unable to deter based solely on its own resources; it has two choices, either attempt to appease or form an alliance with the source of the threat (“bandwagoning”), or try to resist the threat, either through self-strengthening (internal balancing), or by forming an *alliance* with another country (or countries) with a common interest in resisting the source of threat (external balancing).² “Power” and “threat” are conceived to be universal and the theory is thus readily applicable to any actor in the international system. The second is constructivist, according to which these and other relevant variables may be differently understood in different political cultural contexts, in that the perception of threat depends not only on the objective balance of forces but on the time, ideological perspective, domestic political situation, and other contextual variables.³ There may be an underlying affinity between constructivism and the older idealist tradition, according to which alliance construction (as well as the national interests on which it is based) is based on not threat perceptions alone but culturally or ideologically embedded values, expectations/hopes, and national identities. I adopt here a hybrid definition: The explicit logic is realist and based on the distribution of power and threat, with the caveat that what is perceived as real is real in its consequences.⁴ An alliance may be two dimensional, with both an explicit power-political logic and a subsurface of connotations that may shape how that logic is construed in a particular context.

The central political unit in pre-modern East Asia was the empire or kingdom, not the nation-state, and the international community was conceived to be hierarchical, not an anarchic jungle, in which lower-ranking units professed deference to their superiors via symbolic tribute.⁵ Ever since the new concept of an international community of sovereign nation-states was adopted in East Asia, alliances by these “new” nation-states have been formed with great parsimony, at least by Western standards. Whereas the US has more than 50 security alliances, the People’s Republic of China in its brief history has had only two formal alliances: the 30-year Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the Soviet Union, which (albeit chronically troubled) lasted from 1950 until its scheduled expiration in 1980; and the strategic alliance with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), which is still formally binding. China’s alliance with the DPRK dates back to the Korean War, and although the two countries have since diverged ideologically and disagreed tactically, China remains North Korea’s largest trade partner, foreign investor, and supplier of food and energy aid. Both of these

¹ Glenn H. Snyder, “Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut,” *Journal of International Affairs*; Spring/Summer 90, Vol. 44 Issue 1 (Spring/Summer 1990), pp 103-124.

² See Stephen Walt, “Alliances in a Unipolar World,” *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009).

³ E.g., see Takashi Inoguchi, “The Triangle of Japan, South Korea and the United States in Northeast Asia: A Japanese Quasi-Constructivist Perspective,” *Japan Spotlight*, Sep/Oct2005, Vol. 24 Issue 5 (Sep/Oct 2005), pp. 32-33; and Brian Frederking, “Constructing Post-Cold War Collective Security,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (August 2003), pp. 363-378.

⁴ Thomas, Wm. I. and Znaniecki, F. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1918-1920). 5 volumes.

⁵ See David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia*. Columbia University Press, 2007; and *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. Columbia University Press, 2010.

alliances are “fraternal,” i.e., they regulate relations among Marxist-Leninist or “communist” states, and are thus conceived to be ideologically privileged. China also signed a friendship treaty with Japan in 1978, its first with a non-communist country, but no commitments were entailed.

Japan has in its long history had only three formal alliances, all in the modern era: the Anglo-Japanese alliance (1902-1922), the so-called Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis (1940-1945), and finally the JUSA (1952-present). The Anglo-Japanese alliance was formed in London in January 1902 and was based essentially on common opposition to Russian expansion; it was renewed twice before being officially terminated, due to a number of dissatisfactions: Japanese disappointment with the lack of British support in its colonization of Korea, London’s chagrin with Japan’s meager contribution to World War I and its subsequent perceived encouragement of the Indian independence movement, and (most decisively) growing US opposition to Japan. Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Nazi Germany in 1936 and then the Tripartite Pact in September 1940 as a coalition of authoritarian “have-not” countries whose expansionist ambitions ran athwart (and were censured by) the League of Nations. Yet the Axis was a very loose alliance system (e.g., Japan was surprised by the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and again surprised when Hitler attacked the USSR in June 1941; Hitler was in turn taken aback when Japan launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor). The Axis of course ended in disaster with the destruction and unconditional surrender of all three signatories. The alliance between Japan and the United States was signed as soon as Japan regained sovereignty at the end of the Allied occupation in 1951 and renewed and expanded despite fierce domestic resistance in 1960.

If we look more closely at these alliances, although the logic of alliance formation in Northeast Asia cannot really be said to deviate sharply from the realist model (in the sense that the alliance in each case confronts a perceived adversary posing a national security threat to both), there are at least three distinctive cultural nuances. First, in each instance the alliance binds two sovereign but *unequal* partners, even when (as in the Sino-Soviet Alliance of 1950-1980) there is a strong ideological emphasis on fraternity and equality. In other words, these alliances typically conform to an East Asian hierarchical patron-client template (*shang-xia guanxi*, or *oyabun-kobun* relations). Second, they tend to be exclusive: to China the Sino-Soviet Alliance was central, and Japan as well has had only one alliance at a time. The implicit model for the alliance in these neo-Confucian cultures is the *wu lun*, or five primary kinship relations, especially the father-son relationship that is the most important of the five. Third, these alliances are typically cross-cultural, in each case with leading Western nation-states. This may be attributed to the important subsidiary features of such alliances, specifically the teleological path-dependency in which “Western” was virtually synonymous with a “modern” goal-culture. The cultural context of this type of asymmetrical, hierarchical relationship has at least two psychological implications: (1) The client state expects much more from the patron than support in the case of military attack, just as the patron expects more from the client than loyalty. These expectations are rarely explicitly stated, but they are important: The “senior” partner is expected to not only provide aid and support, but also function as a model for the client’s future development. In the case of the Anglo-Japanese alliance it seems clear why England, not only the world’s first modernizer but also a maritime island off the coast of a powerful continent, would be an attractive role model for Japan. China’s choice of the Soviet Union, the world’s first revolutionary socialist country and successful embodiment of the socialist ideals that had inspired the Chinese

revolution, is equally self-evident. (2) The intrinsically asymmetrical nature of the relationship, plus the implicit culturally based role model expectations freighted into it, inculcates a sense of arrogant entitlement in the patron and a corresponding sense of dependency and resentment in the client. In the Anglo-Japanese alliance, as in the Sino-Soviet alliance, the inflated early expectations of the client were soon dashed. The patron, on the other hand, often expresses bewilderment at the client's resentment, given the client's relatively minor contribution (from the patron's perspective) to the alliance. The Confucian origins of these notions help explain some of the discontent: in the kinship model, the ultimate payoff for the son's filial subordination to the father is that the father eventually passes away and the son grows up to take his place. Although the notions of national development or modernization are somewhat analogous in that they do offer an upside to the client, they are by no means a reliable model for an international alliance (e.g., nation-states do not necessarily pass away).

As Zhang Jingquan has pointed out, whereas the alliances of China and Japan have both been asymmetrical and culturally freighted, the two have responded quite differently.⁶ While both have been ambivalent, China has been much more impatient, even indignant about the asymmetry than Japan. The Western imperialist powers imposed harsh punitive treaties on Japan, Korea and China, for example, usually at the conclusion of victorious colonial wars, which all three countries resented and eventually succeeded in overturning. But it was China that coined the term, and only here did it become a cause célèbre and target of competitive nationalist mobilization by the Kuomintang (KMT) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP). To be sure, Chinese outrage is a matter of quantity rather than quality: the JUSA, too, aroused fierce anti-American demonstrations at the time of its revision in 1960 as well as smoldering nationalist discontent since then ("Japan Can Say No," complaints about Article 9, etc.) demanding a more equal, "normal nation-state" relationship, which has evolved over time into contentious negotiations over the location of American bases. But there are two qualifications in the Japanese case. First, the discontent has been more balanced: beginning in the 1980s, the US too has complained about Japan's inability to contribute in kind to the commitment to "mutual defense," inducing the latter to pay the most generous host nation support costs in the world and gradually to expand its ambit of responsibility for self-defense (much to Beijing's misgivings). Second, despite its complaints and occasional protests Japan has never abandoned the alliance—the previous Anglo-Japanese alliance, too, was rescinded not by Tokyo but by London. Japan seems to attach greatest significance not to equality but to alliance loyalty, expressing for example bitter resentment at the Soviet Union's "betrayal" in annulling the 1941 Neutrality Pact to invade Manchuria in April 1945 when Japan had already decided to surrender after the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima. For China, in contrast, the issue has always been one of equality. China complained bitterly and constantly about the Sino-Soviet Alliance within its first decade, which escalated to violent border skirmishes by 1969-1970, culminating in both internal and external balancing behavior by Beijing before ultimately abrogating the alliance in 1981.⁷ At the heart of the Sino-Soviet dispute,

⁶ Zhang Jingquan, "Zhan hou Zhong Ri jie meng guan bijiao yanjiu: yi Zhong Su tong meng, Ri Mei tong meng wei li," [A comparative study of the Chinese and Japanese concepts of alliance formation, taking the Sino-Russian and Japanese-US alliances as examples], unpublished paper, Jinan University, Changchun, China, 2010.

⁷ The internal balancing consisted of the acquisition of nuclear weapons and the external balance was the informal alliance with the US beginning with the 1972 Nixon visit.

according to Deng Xiaoping's retrospective analysis, was always the issue of "equality." Yet "ambivalent" would perhaps be a more accurate characterization, for the two countries were never equal during the entire tenure of the alliance, and indeed the alliance functioned most smoothly and amicably during the early period when it was most unequal.⁸ This inequality was tolerated at the outset, but after Stalin's demise Mao quickly grew impatient with it.

Why the impatience in the Chinese case but the relative tolerance on the part of Japan? This can be explained by both structural and cultural factors. Structurally, the asymmetry was proportionally greater in the case of Japan's alliances, and in asymmetrical alliances there is greater discretion for the patron and greater risk for the client to withdraw.⁹ Britain was far more advanced and powerful than Japan at the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in 1902 (though that ranking has since shifted) and the US has since Japan's defeat also been far more powerful, particularly in its immediate aftermath. Though initially less advanced than the USSR in both developmental and ideological terms, the Chinese always viewed their admittedly relatively backward status as a humiliating but temporary anomaly, so strong was the sense of historical cultural superiority. And even objectively considered, China's size and population were nearly equal to those of the Soviet Union from the outset, particularly after World War II when the USSR suffered more damage than any other country. The political cultural context is that whereas China was a revolutionary state throughout much of the 20th century and thus much more imbued with the value of sovereign equality, Japan was a modernizing economy grafted onto a neotraditional political cultural base, in which State Shintoism elevated the emperor to quasi-divine status and the state hierarchy was sanctified via the educational apparatus (see the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education). The context was also somewhat different: Whereas the Soviet Union provided the ideological blueprints for Chinese political economic development but proved a somewhat unreliable supporter of specific CCP policies thereafter (sc., the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution), Japan unconditionally surrendered to an America that had bombed its cities to rubble and then proceeded to occupy the country and even write its constitution (ironically including the famous "Article 9" that has since limited its alliance commitments). Thus while in both cases we find ambivalence about an asymmetrical alliance, only in the Chinese case did this result in its repudiation. And these different reactions have had a lasting impact on the subsequent attitudes of both sides about not only their alliances but bilateral relations and foreign policy more generally.

Without undertaking a detailed historical recapitulation, let us consider in brief and bold outline the essential differences as they arose in the course of implementing the two alliances. In the case of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, the early period was one of intimate and smooth cooperation, in which China adopted the Soviet Union root and branch as a path-dependent model for its own development and accepted Soviet leadership of the international communist movement, a sizable Soviet subsidized loan, and the advice of nearly 10,000 visiting Soviet technical experts. This Alliance disintegrated soon after the death of Stalin, for both surface and subsurface reasons. On the surface the most recent research indicates that the problem was essentially ideological: after all, ideology was fundamental in the formation of the alliance and formed the basis

⁸ On this early period, see for example Hua-yu Li, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948-1953* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁹ See Snyder, "Alliance Theory," also Walt, "Alliances."

for both domestic and foreign policies, so all policy choices had to be not only correct for one country but for both (and for the world communist revolution) and if one country took a separate path this was taken to be an implicit rebuke of the other.¹⁰ With ideology the *ultima ratio*, the two were equal before the Truth whatever the distribution of GDP (gross domestic product) growth or intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Yet if the pivotal crises that contributed to the alliance's abandonment are examined it seems clear that the subsurface reason was that the Soviet Union was failing in Mao's eyes to conform to the proper role of the patron, i.e., to protect and nurture the client and enable that client eventually to mature and stand on an equal footing with the patron. To Mao, the acquisition of nuclear weapons, which the Soviet Union had rashly promised to provide in the early 1950s, was not only a useful deterrent against the ability of the United States to check his revolutionary ambitions but also the ultimate symbol of national coming of age. But Khrushchev, at what seemed to Mao the cusp of world power and demonstrable superiority with the launching of Sputnik I and the world's first ICBMs in 1957, had abandoned the world revolution to make peace with the leadership of the bourgeois world at Camp David (forgetting that the CCP had also enshrined the same guidelines, as the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," in its 1956 State constitution and in every constitution thereafter). So when Khrushchev reneged on his commitment to provide China with nuclear weapons, Mao may have dismissed the bomb as a "paper tiger" but also launched a crash program for China to build one, meanwhile provoking the US into a confrontation over the Taiwan Strait which meant to display publicly the Soviet hesitancy to fulfill its alliance commitment and come to his support. He also took advantage of the Cuban Missile Crisis by timing a border attack on India to coincide with the crisis, later mocking Khrushchev as both adventurous and craven. After public polemics in the early 1960s culminated by the end of the decade in violent border clashes with dangerous escalatory potential between two nuclear weapon states, Mao embraced the implicit American promise of extended deterrence to forestall a threatened Soviet preemptive attack. The alliance was terminated upon its scheduled expiry even though its most outspoken critic had already expired.

In view of its bitter disappointment with the Sino-Soviet Alliance it is perhaps not surprising that the PRC has not entered into another new alliance since. While the formal alliance with the DPRK has been sustained, perhaps reluctantly, the CCP has frequently reiterated its refusal to extend nuclear deterrence to any state. Yet China, like any other nation, sometimes needs alliances (or their functional equivalent). Beijing has responded to this need with a number of tentative expedients:

1. With regard to the Soviet Union and its successor, the Russian Federation, the Chinese entered into protracted "normalization" talks, resulting in the normalization of party-to-party relations in 1989 and in border demarcation and demilitarization agreements in the late 1990s. In 2001, reportedly at Chinese behest, the PRC and the Russian Federation signed a 20-year "Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation," which both sides stress is not an alliance (no promise of mutual strategic support and no explicit target). In addition to its continuing alliance with the DPRK, China has also maintained since the early 1960s an informal "all-weather friendship"

¹⁰ See Jian Chen. *Mao's China and the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001; Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*. (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), and Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

with Pakistan, which has included a border settlement, military advice and weapon sales but no dispatch of troops or commitment of support in the event of hostilities.

2. One partial substitute for alliances that China has adopted is “partnership.” The first and still the strongest partnership is with the Russian Federation, but China has since undertaken partnership agreements with many different states and even with international governmental organizations. According to Ning Sao there are four different types of partnerships, each with its own attributes: the simple strategic partnership (*zhanlue huoban guanxi*), as with the US, which may contain competition as well as cooperation, has three main elements: the two are partners rather than rivals, based on strategic considerations, and “constructive” rather than aiming to counter other countries or seek hegemony. Second is the “strategic consultative partnership” (*zhanlue xiezuo huoban guanxi*), such as that established with Russia in April 1996, which is the most comprehensive. Third is the “good neighborly partnership” (*mulin huoban guanxi*) between China and ASEAN in 1997. The final type is a “basic partnership,” which is used to describe relations between China and developing countries, such as that between China and Mexico in 1997.¹¹ Su Hao ranks these partnerships at three levels: the lowest rank is “constructive” strategic partnerships, such as between China and the US, Japan, or India, which still contain serious disagreement. Next step up is “consultative” partnership, based on friendly cooperation between countries interested in deepening the relationship, such as between China and Britain, Germany, ASEAN or the EU. While these partners have many common interests the level of mutual trust remains to be improved. Highest is “strategic” partnership, such as that with the Soviet Union, between countries sharing strategic aims and common interests and no fundamental differences between them.¹²

3. Since the late 1990s China has shifted from its earlier endorsement of “multipolarity,” often envisaging a world consisting of five “poles” (China, the US, the EU, Russia, and Japan), to one of “multilateralism.” This was a basic policy departure for Beijing, previously limited to bilateral relations and suspicious of multilateral associations as a tool of the powers (perhaps a hangover from post-Tiananmen UN sanctions, or from their earlier involvement with the International Communist Movement).¹³ Thus China joined the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in 1991, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994, the ASEAN plus three (including Japan and Korea) in 1999. In 2001 Beijing initiated the founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with Russia and four former Soviet republics in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), later joined by four observers (Iran, India, Pakistan, and Mongolia). This is an anarchic “multilateral mutual security organization” (*hezuo zuzhi*)—not a military alliance—whose chief target has

¹¹ Ning Sao, “Xuanze huoban zhanlue, yingzao huoban guanxi” [Choosing partnership strategy, shaping partnership relations], *Xinshiye* [new horizon], 4: 10-13. Reprinted in *Zhongguo waijiao* (China’s Diplomacy), 6: 2-7.

¹² Su Hao, “*Zhongguo waijiao de “huoban guanxi” kuangjia*” [A framework for China’s diplomatic “partnerships”], *Shijie zhishi* (world knowledge), 5 (2000), 11-12.

¹³ The CCP stopped attending meetings of the International Communist Movement in the early 1960s and exited other trans-socialist institutions as well. It withdrew from its observer role in the Warsaw Pact in 1961 and stopped responding to invitations from the COMECON in 1966, viewing Soviet-backed organizations as little better than Western ones. See Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 68-69.

been the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism, but which has permitted China to make extensive economic inroads into Central Asia without infringing on Russian regional security interests. In 2003, fearful that G. W. Bush would intervene forcibly in North Korea as he had in Iraq to forestall the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), China organized and convened the six-party talks, which successfully managed the proliferation issue without however solving it. China has also become increasingly active in bilateral and multilateral preferential trade agreements, or FTAs, the largest of which is with the 10-nation ASEAN plus one agreement (ACFTA), which came into effect in January 2010. None of these is a multilateral alliance with any binding commitment to collective security.

4. None of these arrangements fits conventional definitions of an alliance. But China now disdains the concept of alliances and blocs as old, outmoded thinking that focuses exclusively on the military dimension.¹⁴ In its place Beijing advocates the “new security concept” (*xin anquanguan*), based on “comprehensive security,” first announced by Jiang Zemin in a UN address in October 1995 and elaborated in an ASEAN meeting the following year and in a good deal of subsequent promotional literature. This new concept, quite similar to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, emphasizes “mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation,” “dialogue, consultations and negotiations on an equal footing,” and a “win-win” “positive-sum” formula with no place for threats or even disagreement.¹⁵ Similar is the concept of “harmonious world” [*hexie shijie*], coined by Hu Jintao in Jakarta in April 2005 and further elaborated in a UN address that September.¹⁶ These are obviously normative models that conceptualize away the need for a conventional security alliance against mutual threat.

Japan’s experience with JUSA, after a stormy revision and renewal marred by street protests in 1960, has been generally positive. Like the Sino-Soviet Alliance during its heyday, it was initially quite comprehensive, tied to the post-war reconstruction of Japan with the multifaceted assistance of occupation forces (e.g., land reform, education reform, zaibatsu breakup, and democratic constitutional structures). Since then JUSA became more strictly strategic, serving as the insurance policy underpinning the Yoshida doctrine, which allowed Japan to focus on economic reconstruction while relying on US extended deterrence for security. While its East Asian neighbors were spending 2-6% of GDP on military armaments Japan could keep its military budget below one percent and never impose conscription. This was not only efficient budgetary policy but reassuring to neighboring countries like China and Korea which were sensitive to the prospect of Japan’s rearmament. The US accepted its hegemonic stabilizer role throughout the period of Japan’s rapid recovery but when Japan became the world’s second largest economy and a keen competitor in American markets while keeping its own market impenetrable, the US came to view JUSA as enabling Japan to “free ride” economically (particularly after Japan declined to participate in the first Gulf War in 2001, preferring “checkbook diplomacy” of a US\$13 billion contribution). At this point alliance obligations were

¹⁴ Cf. Gilbert Rozman, “Post Cold War Evolution of Chinese Thinking on Regional Institutions in Northeast Asia,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol 19, no. 66 (September 2010), pp. 605-620.

¹⁵ Kong Fanhe and Mao Qian, “Feichuantong anquan shijiaoxia de anquan limian” [Security conceptions from a non-traditional security perspective], *Taipingyang xuebao*, 57, no. 12 (2005), pp. 72-79.

¹⁶ Wang Yi and Zhang Linhong, “hexie shijie de goujian”.

readjusted at US insistence in order to download some of its defense responsibilities. As much of this burden displacement occurred after the Cold War, when the Soviet Union was no longer a target of the alliance and international communism seemed an endangered species, Beijing began to suspect that the strengthened alliance was now aimed at China. When in 1986 and 1987 Nakasone raised the defense budget above the tacit one percent limit, Deng Xiaoping criticized this as a sign of Japanese militarism (it has remained below one percent since, in contrast to the Chinese defense budget).¹⁷ But more than the size of the budget was the expanded geographic range of the JUSA, not only to permit the self-defense force (SDF) to participate in UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) but to participate in the US-led “Global War on Terror.”¹⁸ Then Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro welcomed these added responsibilities, apparently because he aspired to play a more prominent regional and global role for Japan, using the security partnership with the US in the War on Terror as a legitimate pretext.¹⁹ China has not yet expressly opposed the JUSA per se, no doubt bearing in mind that the logical alternative would require Japan to assume full responsibility for its own defense. But there is no question that the Chinese are wary of what they view as Japan’s growing ambitions to play an international role under the cover of the JUSA. This they decry with the support of a public nationalism whipped up since Tiananmen by a nation-wide “patriotic education campaign” which positions Japan as its most prominent *bête noir*, using not only the education system but memoir literature, popular culture, a translation of Iris Chang’s best-seller on the Nanjing massacre, and a proliferation of war memorials and museums.²⁰

So what do these parallel but diverging alliance experiences have to do with current Sino-Japanese relations? The post-Cold War period has been one in which China’s economic development has gone into overdrive while Japan’s economy has stalled. China’s 2010 passing Japan in GDP seems to have inspired more assertive Chinese claims regarding territorial disputes, with India and several Southeast Asian

¹⁷ According to the Yearbook of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China spends 2.2% of its GDP on defense. By 2010 China had the world’s second largest defense budget, while Japan had the sixth largest.

¹⁸ Japan responded whole-heartedly to the appeal of the G. W. Bush administration for greater security support in the “Global War on Terror” following the World Trade Center bombing. To wit, it joined the “coalition of the willing” to deal with terrorist groups through increased international police and intelligence cooperation, border movements, and domestic security enhancement. Following passage of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law in 2001, Japan deployed aircraft and destroyers to support refueling operations in the Indian Ocean region for the invasion of Afghanistan. In September 2003, Japan (along with 11 other countries) joined the Proliferation Security Initiative to detect and interdict the movement of illegal or suspect weapons and missile technologies, and in December dispatched 600 heavily armed Ground troops to the south of Iraq to support US occupation and reconstruction activities after the invasion. Japan also joined the-party talks, generally supporting US demands that Pyongyang completely dismantle its nuclear program. Richard Tanter, “With Eyes Wide Shut: Japan, Heisei militarization, and the Bush Doctrine,” in Mel Gurtov and Peter Van Ness, *Confronting the Bush Doctrine* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), pp. 153-180.

¹⁹ Zhang, “Zhan Hou.”

²⁰ Iris Chang [張純如], *Nanjing hao jie : bei yi wang de da tu sha* [The Nanjing massacre]. (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1998).

countries as well as Japan. Thus the realpolitik becomes one of “power transition.”²¹ This is probably more important than differing conceptualizations of alliances. The relevance of different alliance conceptions is that while the JUSA has been institutionalized and remains fully operational, China has divested itself of the Sino-Soviet Alliance and adopted a medley of interesting substitutes, none of which is entirely equivalent. This helps fuel Sino-Japanese tension by fostering the sense in China that two of the strongest countries in the world are combining forces to keep China down. And since China has no allies it can trust to protect the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) in case of hostilities (over, say, Taiwan), it faces a “Malacca dilemma” that it is strengthening the PLA Navy, fostering a security dilemma among other Asian countries dependent on the SLOCs. Meanwhile Japan, the US and other trade partners are rankled by trade imbalances and the sheer momentum of China’s growth. While these concerns bolster JUSA, Tokyo is not immune to anxiety about possible American abandonment in favor of Beijing. Thus, stunned in February 1972 by the “Nixon shock” visit to China, Tokyo quickly reversed course, dropping Taipei to recognize Beijing the same year; the 1998 Clinton visit to China occasioned similar anxiety because he did not (at Beijing’s specific insistence) make a Tokyo stopover. While the relationship among the three has many points in its favor—Japan and the US both have huge trade flows with China, China and Japan are geographical neighbors and share a Confucian cultural legacy—whenever tensions arise for whatever reasons, these tensions tend to reinforce JUSA solidarity and this in turn evokes China’s nightmare of being encircled by hostile forces [*baoweiquan*].

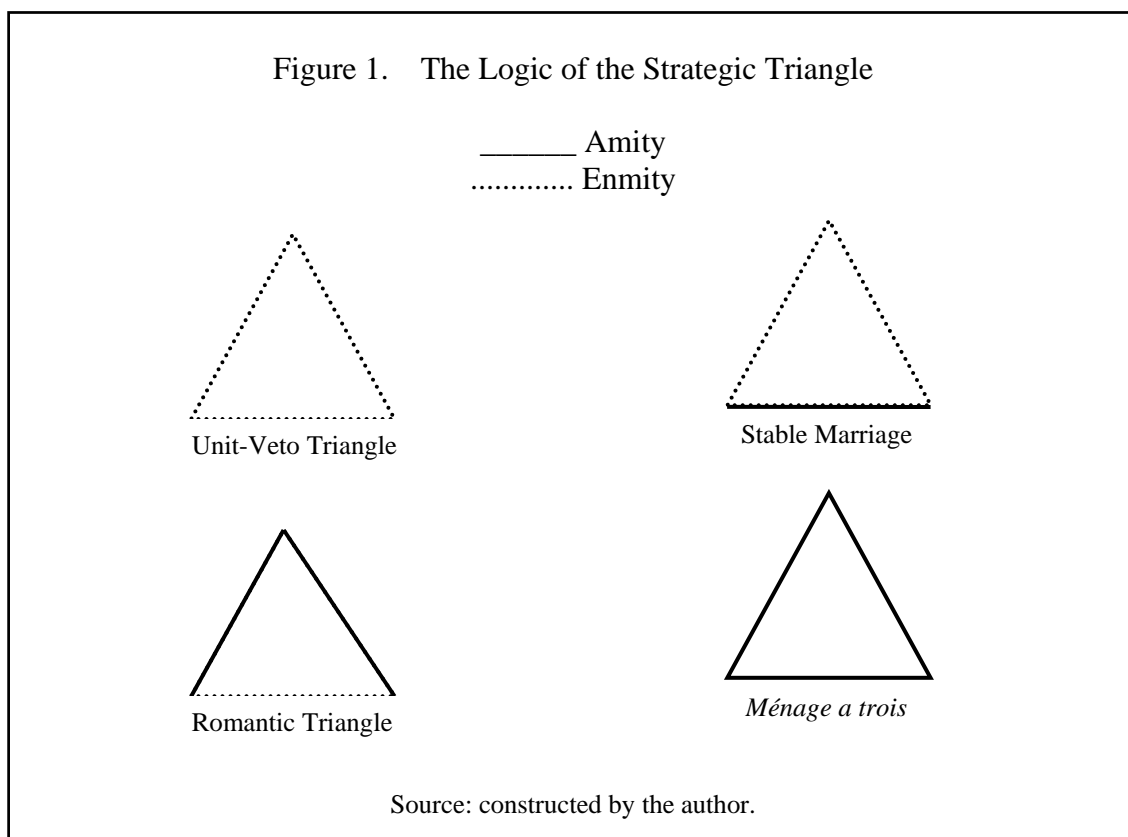
This brings us to the role of the US in this tense relationship, which has not been altogether helpful. The US, as *tertius gaudens*, makes the Sino-Japanese relationship triangular, as it had done with the Sino-Soviet alliance. The US has played a structurally analogous role in both alliances. We first turn to a brief discursus on the abstract logic of the strategic triangle before applying the framework to the three principals.

The Sino-Japanese-American Triangle

A strategic triangle, as an analytic construct, may be said to exist if three conditions prevail: (1) All three participants are sovereign (i.e., free to decide their foreign policies based on perceived national interests, rational (i.e., not overly inhibited from expedient maneuver by alliance commitments or ideological dogmatism) actors; and (2) each bilateral relationship is contingent upon the two participants’ relationship with a third; and (3) each participant is essential to the game at least insofar as a “defection” would critically shift the strategic balance. The most frequent previous application of the triangular logic has been to the relationship between China, the Soviet Union, and the US during the last two decades of the Cold War, when the Nixon administration succeeded in taking advantage of the growing alienation of China from the Sino-Soviet Alliance to form a triangular relationship in which Washington’s relationship with Beijing and Moscow was better than the latter two had with each other. This created a “romantic” triangle permitting Washington as “pivot” to forestall ongoing hostilities and possible further escalation and to extract more concessions from each “wing” than might have been feasible without the “jealousy” factor. But that is only one

²¹ Power transition theory views the point at which a growing power approaches and surpasses a hegemonic power as relatively likely to result in war, in contradistinction to classic balance-of-power theory, which views a balance of power as relatively stable. See A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958; and Ronald L. Tammen, *et al.*, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000).

of four possible configurations. If we assume that relations among players are classified as either “positive” or “negative” (a simplification, but a necessary one routinely made by national security planners, international risk insurance agencies, budget chiefs, banks, etc.), there are only four logically possible configurations of the triangle. These are the unit veto, consisting of mutually antagonistic relationships between all three actors: “stable marriage,” consisting of a positive relationship between the two spouses, each of whom has negative relationships with a third “pariah”; the “romantic triangle,” consisting of positive relationships between one “pivot” player and two “wing” players, who in turn have better relations with the pivot than they have with each other; and finally the *menage a trois*, consisting of positive relationships among all three players. Within this triangular context, an alliance is simply a stable marriage, consecrated via a formal document that will be more or less honored by the two spouses (from a realist perspective, probably less) depending on their values, strategic ambitions, interests and fears.



The rules of the game are to maximize one’s national interest by having as many positive and as few negative relationships as possible. The implication is that first, each player will prefer to have positive relations with both other players; second, failing that, each player will wish to have positive relations with at least one other player; and third, that in any event each player will try to avoid incurring negative relations with both other players. This would imply a simple rank order in triangular configurations, with a *ménage* being the optimal configuration, followed by a romantic triangle, followed by a marriage, with unit-veto least preferable. Yet the rank order of options for individual actors is not the same: the most advantageous role is that of *pivot* in a romantic triangle, second *spouse* in a marriage, the third *partner* in a *ménage*, and fourth *pariah* excluded from a

marriage. The two preference rankings differ because an actor's level of satisfaction is measured in part by the relative dissatisfaction of the other actors involved. Yet some configurations (and some roles) are more stable than others: a ménage is typically a relatively unstable and transient configuration. Given that the outcomes for each player vary based on one's position within the triangle, it is logical to assume that any nation finding itself in a triangular game will seek to "elevate" its role in the game, thus raising its payoff.²² But the attractiveness of other actors will vary not only based on positional advantage but according to such conventional indices of national power as GDP growth and military force projection capability. In either case positive relations with a strong nation will be worth more than positive relations with a weak nation. Given the fact that the "best" position in the triangle is that of pivot in a romantic triangle, the actor best qualified to play that role is the strongest one (i.e., with the greatest capabilities), provided it can fulfill the pivot's role requirements of mediating between the two "wings."

Given the game's assumptions that international relations are not anarchic but hierarchical, that the game is competitive and that some roles are better than others, differential change in the capabilities of the actors is one of the factors likely to change the configuration of the triangle. If one actor's capabilities grow faster than those of the other two it becomes a more attractive partner and a more formidable foe. Each of the other two actors will hence be tempted, provided their interests are reconcilable, to realign with the pivot while preventing the other from doing so, in order to bandwagon with superior power and avoid the budgetary burden of balancing against it. Thus the political implications of the triangular model differ from those of either classical realism or power transition theory. According to classical realism, if a weaker actor can overtake a stronger actor in capabilities it would comprise a balance of power, which is relatively stable. According to power transition theory, on the other hand, for a weaker power to overtake or surpass a stronger one it will excite great anxiety and an enhanced possibility of war. In the triangular model, a "catch-up" scenario would simply lead to a realignment of the triangle as one or both of the other actors realign with the "natural" pivot (or, if this proves nonnegotiable, forms a defensive coalition with the weaker power). Although the implications of the triangular model thus differ from those of classical realism or power transition theory, there is an elective affinity with the theory of hegemonic stability. The original conception of the role of "hegemonic stabilizer" was primarily economic—serving as lender of last resort, ensuring stable exchange rates, and so forth.²³ But the role of the pivot, though strictly political security rather than economic, analogously provides a "public good" by reconciling an otherwise dangerously polarizing antagonism. To be sure, the pivot's intervention is not necessarily eleemosynary and may be quite self-motivated, or self-serving, for by definition the pivot gains more from a romantic triangle than any other actor. But the premise that it provides a public good is supported by the fact that both wings are willing to sustain such a relationship as being preferable to the previous one.

²² I owe this seminal insight to Yu-Shan Wu; see his "Power Transition, Strategic Triangle, and Alliance Shift," unpublished paper presented at the 39th Taiwan-American Conference on Contemporary China, December 9-10, 2010, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan.

²³ See Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, revised and enlarged edition).

As hegemonic stabilizer or pivot, the US inserted itself into both the Sino-Soviet and the Sino-Japanese rivalries. The first US intervention was in the Sino-Soviet dispute, symbolized by Richard M. Nixon's famous February 1972 visit to Beijing, the "week that changed the world." The reasons for the long deterioration of the Sino-Soviet alliance, as noted earlier, are still a matter of scholarly debate, but seem to have had little to do with power transition, except perhaps as a future prospect in the eyes of the Soviet leadership. In any event the alliance had by 1969 escalated to violent border clashes, and although these were suspended following a meeting at the Beijing airport between Zhou Enlai and Aleksei Kosygin on 17 November 1970, Moscow was sufficiently concerned about the looming Chinese threat that it seriously considered a preemptive strike on Chinese nuclear weapons facilities and even solicited American active or passive collaboration. The chief US motivation for a deal was the apprehension that the US was losing the strategic arms race to the USSR.²⁴ The conceptual innovation in the American response was that rather than simply supporting the weaker side against the stronger (as indicated by classic balance-of-power realism), the Nixon administration opted to open relations with China while continuing to cultivate détente with the USSR, maintaining better relations with the USSR and PRC than the latter had with each other, i.e., a "triangular" configuration. The triangle provided advantages to all three participants, putting a lid on the escalating bilateral dispute while enabling the US to extract concessions from both sides, based on the "jealousy" each experienced lest its rival cultivate a better deal with Washington than it had. At the same time it facilitated an earlier end to the Cold War in Asia than in Europe, as the anti-communist animus against the PRC (and the anti-American animus in China) was sublimated by joint concern with the greater Soviet threat. The US assessment of the relative growth of threatening capabilities at the time eventually led it to share the Chinese obsession with the "Polar Bear" threat, giving rise to somewhat an unbalanced pivot tilting toward the PRC, particularly after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Even so, Washington remained sufficiently even-handed to conduct SALT I (culminating in the 1972 ABM treaty and the interim agreement on strategic weapons) and SALT II (left unsigned because of Afghanistan but mutually honored until 1986) with the Soviet Union, to sign a START treaty in 1991 and a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. The opening to China was more modest in terms of bilateral agreements but even more impressive if measured against the status quo. China's capabilities were less advanced than the Soviet Union's at the time but Chinese foreign policy was far more radical and uncompromising and its support of "wars of national liberation" leading to world revolution from the developing countries to overthrow the developed was taken quite seriously at the time by American strategic planners and by many in the Third World. The immediate impact of the opening was to facilitate US withdrawal from Vietnam, as China reduced its subsidization of the national liberation war there (thereby earning Hanoi's future enmity), indirectly also making possible the "Nixon Doctrine" of drawing down American forces in East Asia. It also laid the groundwork for the later "China rise" by facilitating PRC entry to the Security Council of the UN, removing US obstacles to widespread diplomatic recognition and opening Western markets to Chinese exports. All these developments coincided closely with American interests. But in triangular terms perhaps the most important result was to stabilize relations between the two actors whose antagonism had first facilitated the creation of the triangle. No longer intimidated by a Soviet strategic threat it could not deter, Beijing recovered confidence under the American nuclear umbrella to enter first into border talks with Moscow in 1973-1976 and then into semi-

²⁴ For a classic example, see Albert Wohlstetter, *The Delicate Balance of Terror*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp, 1958), Rand report number P-1472.

annual normalization talks in 1982, resulting in the eventual elimination of “three fundamental obstacles” and the full normalization of relations in May 1989. Thus the American pivot seminally contributed to one of both countries’ signal diplomatic achievements, the resolution of a 30-year bilateral antagonism and formation of a robust “strategic partnership” whose rumored utility as a counterbalance to American unipolarity is denied by both partners.

During the Cold War, the Sino-Japanese-American triangle was of course formally a marriage, consisting of the JUSA on one side facing an opposing Sino-Soviet alliance on the other. Yet even after the Korean War the level of tension was lower than one might have anticipated. There were crises in Korea, Vietnam, the Taiwan Strait, but none between Japan and China. China was relatively well treated by Japan—relations were better, that is, than either Sino-American relations or Japanese-Soviet relations—and Japan was also relatively well-treated by Beijing—Beijing lambasted “American imperialism” while awarding Japan the role of a hapless puppet. This was partly because of relative power: to China, Japan was not a threat (digging out of the ruins of American fire bombings and constrained by Article 9 of a superimposed constitution) while the US decidedly was; to Japan, China was less threatening than the USSR (which attacked Manchukuo despite their neutrality pact in the waning weeks of the war and proceeded to annex Sakhalin and the Kuriles) and a complementary trade partner to a recovering trading nation. Beijing tolerated the JUSA as preferable to Japanese rearmament, and after the Sino-Soviet split it was a useful deterrent to the USSR, which displaced the US as China’s main security threat. The heyday of Sino-Japanese relations was reached in the 1970s and 1980s, facilitated by US opening to China and strategic triangular collaboration against the USSR, in which Japan participated. Though US role is less tangible than the complex maritime territorial dispute that arose after a report by the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) indicated the possibility of large reserves of oil in the vicinity of the Diaoyutai Archipelago in 1969, Japan’s opening to China followed and has always been implicitly contingent on the attitude of the US. Whenever Sino-American relations improved Japan has promptly endeavored to improve relations with both the US and China for fear of being cut out of a Sino-American deal. Of course there were also other factors—geographical proximity and trade complementarity, the fraternal embrace of the Japanese socialist and communist parties, the electoral system that allowed the latter to survive, Japanese official development assistance (ODA), and the like.²⁵ But American approval has always been *sine qua non*. Thus the end of the Cold War, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union into 15 sovereign bourgeois democracies, was a challenge to both allies, because the former prime target of the alliance was no more (Japan was a bit slow to accept this because of its lingering border dispute over the Northern Islands). Since Deng Xiaoping’s “southern voyage” [*nanxun*] to stimulate reform and opening, Sino-Japanese trade has become the

²⁵ China has been the biggest single recipient of Japanese official developmental aid (ODA) since 1982, representing more than 50% of the total assistance China received from both bilateral and multilateral sources. Since 2000 Japan has publicly announced several times its intention to suspend ODA in the light of China’s rapid development, its own foreign aid to Africa and Southeast Asia, and its public ingratitude about Japanese aid, yet ODA continues to date at the rate of about US\$1.2 billion per year (indeed Japan remains the largest source of aid to China). Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, *kaigai keizai kyoroku binran*, 1987, p. 251; as cited in Ogata Sadako, “Regional and Political Security Issues: Sino-Japanese-United States Triangle,” unpublished paper, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley; also see Joshua Keating, “China sends Japan \$1.2 billion in aid every year,” *Foreign Policy*, December 2, 2010, (accessed December 2, 2010): http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/28/japan_sends_china_12_billion_in_aid_every_year

fastest growing bilateral trade in Asia. By 2004 China had replaced the US as Japan's leading trade partner and host of foreign direct investment, and since at least 1994 the trade balance has been in Japan's favor. But political relations have cooled—in close correlations with the cooling of Sino-American relations. Thus there was a perceptible drop in favorable Japanese impressions of China after June 4 and again after the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, mirroring the simultaneous fall in favorable American favorability ratings. Correlation does not prove causation, of course, and the issues have not always been the same. The rise in Chinese perceptions of Japanese war guilt reflecting nationalistic textbook selections in 1982, 1984, 1986, 1995 and 2005, stimulated by the state-led revival of Chinese nationalism in the wake of the post-Cold War recession of Marxism-Leninism, Koizumi's six visits to the Yasakuni Shrine, Chinese demands for Japanese apologies and "comfort women" — the whole politics of historical amnesia are all specific to Sino-Japanese relations. Equally specific is the maritime territorial dispute. Japan has altogether three territorial disputes in Asia: (1) it contests Korean occupation of the tiny uninhabited island TokDo/Dokto (Takeshima); (2) it claims the Northern Territories/Southern Kuriles occupied since 1945 by Russia (Etorofu, Kunashir, Shikotan, and the Habomais islets), (3) and it claims the Senkaku/Diaoyu (S/D) islets, southernmost in the Ryukyu chain. But the S/D dispute is the only one in which Japan is the current stakeholder, and it is the most sensitive and passionately contested of the three. There are at least four reasons for this: first, the S/D are part of the maritime glaxis that inhibits the blue-water strategic ambitions of the PLA Navy; second, the historical circumstances surrounding Japan's claim are controvertible, on historical if not legal grounds; and third, the islands lie athwart vast subsurface hydrocarbon deposits that both countries need, as second and third largest oil importers in the world. Fourth (and most important), this confrontation pits Japan against China, its strongest and most dangerous rival in the region. Japan staked legal claim to the islets in 1895 and occupied them until WWII and the US returned them along with Okinawa in 1972; China (and Taiwan) began seriously to contest the claim after a UN committee reported the prospect of sizable subsurface hydrocarbon deposits in 1969, and it has since served as a pretext for repeated Chinese intrusions into Japanese territorial waters, which Japan has invariably protested.

My contention here is that whereas the US played its pivotal role very well in moderating the Sino-Soviet dispute, its role in the increasingly volatile Sino-Japanese dispute has been much less successful. This is certainly not to say that Washington was somehow responsible for all of the issues that have arisen since 1989 to plague the relationship (many of them listed earlier). Yet all of these issues—including S/D, the currently hot flashpoint—were already present during the heyday of the relationship in the 1970s and 1980s, but were not then deemed so problematic.²⁶ What has changed is that the Sino-American relationship has become more wary and "hedged" as China's GDP and military capabilities have grown, and this apprehension has been subtly

²⁶ The Diaoyu/Senkaku issue first came up during normalization talks in 1972, with the powerful conservative anti-normalization group arguing that Japan should not agree to formal diplomatic relations until China conceded ownership of the islands. Zhou Enlai agreed to shelve the issue. It came up again in 1978 when the Chinese were pressing Japan to sign a Peace and Friendship Treaty with an anti-hegemony clause implicitly directed against the USSR. But Japan was at the time hoping for the return of the Northern Territories from the USSR and also negotiating various trade agreements with Moscow. Again Japanese conservatives argued that the Senkaku issue had to be settled before signing a treaty. In April, an armada of Chinese fishing boats suddenly appeared near the islands, arousing great uproar in Japan. The boats withdrew, with Beijing explaining that they had been pursuing a school of fish and gone off course. China agreed to insert a clause in the treaty stating that it was not directed against a third party, the Senkaku issue was shelved (but not conceded), and the treaty was signed.

conveyed to Japan. Most critical has been the mutual strengthening of the JUSA instigated by Washington since the 1980s, partly (from the American perspective) to download part of the East Asian defense burden to an alliance free rider, partly because Japan hungered for greater responsibility as a “normal nation.” Self-strengthening has not been reflected in arms spending (which has remained below one percent and is now less than China’s) or in personnel numbers, but in greater international flexibility in SDF troop deployment. But from a Chinese perspective it looked very much like deliberate strategic encirclement. The War on Terror, from this perspective, was also utilized by the US (and Japan) for the same purpose, establishing bases in South and Central Asia while blithely waving aside India’s violation of the nonproliferation treaty and while excoriating the DPRK’s analogous violation.²⁷ China was particularly critical of the 1996-1997 revision of the JUSA guidelines that authorized the use of SDF forces to maintain peace in the “region surrounding Japan,” accusing Japan of including Taiwan within its defense perimeter, an accusation Japanese spokespersons disputed but did not categorically deny. These suspicions were heightened by the issuance of a joint security statement in February 2005 including Taiwan as a shared security concern.²⁸ At around this time some 25 million Chinese signed an online petition against Japan’s inclusion as a permanent member of a reorganized UN Security Council, while others took to the streets in a brief but intense anti-Japanese protest movement. Japan’s support for UN Security Council reorganization was perceived in China as part of a concerted Japanese-American plot to grasp Asian leadership which is also discernible in disputes over membership in the East Asian summit (EAS) and other multinational organizations. China also criticized the cooperative development of high-tech weaponry in Theater Missile Defense (TMD), fearing that this might neutralize its small nuclear deterrent and perhaps even be extended via warships to the defense of Taiwan. This historically rooted Chinese fear of strategic encirclement proved in a sense to be self-fulfilling in 2010, when controversy over a fishing boat clash with Japanese coast guard patrol boats (after a series of such Chinese intrusions)²⁹ elicited an explicit American commitment to defend Japan’s territorial claims under the terms of the JUSA. Chinese apprehensions may well have been exaggerated or even utterly baseless, but what is striking is that neither the US nor Japan did anything to disabuse them of their misinterpretation. To many American strategists, the Chinese misplayed their hand in 2010 and are hence directly responsible for the consequent strengthening of the Sino-American partnership. This may be so. But as the self-appointed regional hegemon the US must take responsibility for the regional commons, and a more polarized East Asian triangle will make a negotiated solution to the S/D dispute, moderation of the Sino-Japanese security dilemma and nascent arms race, North Korean nuclear disarmament—any cooperative endeavor—more difficult to achieve.

²⁷ See Rex Li, *A Rising China and Security in East Asia: Identity Construction and Security Discourse* (NY: Routledge, 2009), pp. 215 ff. et passim.

²⁸ See Xinbo Wu, “The End of the Silver Lining: A Chinese View of the US-Japan Alliance,” *Washington Quarterly*, 29: 1 (Winter 2005-2006), pp. 119-130.

²⁹ Japan’s Air Self-Defense Force scrambled 83 times in the first half of 2011 to check out military aircraft from China buzzing Japan’s air space, according to the Defense Ministry’s Joint Staff Council, more than triple the amount compared to the same six-month period in 2010. *Wall Street Journal*, October 14, 2011.

Conclusion

This paper has had two central foci: the culturally distinct nature of the Asian alliance system, and the logic of the strategic triangle. The Asian alliance system stakes everything on a single security alliance, which is then freighted not only with national security commitments but informal expectations having to do with patron-client ties and path-dependent development. Yet this shared cultural pattern is certainly not inexorable. The Chinese revolution brought a charismatic leadership to power that rebelled against this (and many other) cultural pattern, giving rise to a bilateral antipathy that had destabilizing repercussions throughout the communist world and even beyond it. In the process of winding down the Cold War, American diplomatic intervention succeeded in “triangulating” and eventually neutralizing that antipathy, paving the way for the reintegration of revolutionary China into the international community. But the American pivot has been far less successful in resolving the Sino-Japanese political security rivalry that has arisen since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, we argue that US diplomacy has (perhaps inadvertently) contributed to its polarization.

How can we account for such divergent outcomes to a structurally analogous dilemma? In both cases, the US was threatened, but in the “great” strategic triangle between the US, China and the Soviet Union it was China that was most seriously threatened, and it was China that made concessions (winding down aid to North Vietnam, the opening to peaceful reunification with Taiwan, *inter alia*). The opening to the US was designed to resolve a dangerous antagonism. Moscow made the first offer, then Beijing, and the US ultimately opted for the latter. The threat to the US, in retrospect considerably overestimated, was a more long-term one of strategic imbalance in the ongoing arms race. As the least threatened of the three, Washington could take a somewhat more disinterested, “pivotal” stance. In the Sino-Japanese polarization, it is Japan and China that feel themselves threatened. China feels itself threatened by strategic encirclement while Japan feels itself most acutely threatened in not only the maritime territorial dispute, but also by the long-term “Japan passing”—the power transition symbolized by China’s 2010 overtaking of Japan in aggregate GDP. The US has not taken the balanced, pivotal stance in the Sino-Japanese confrontation that it took in the Sino-Soviet affray. Of course the situations are also different in the sense that in the latter case the US has an alliance with Japan, whereas in the former case it was China and the USSR that had the alliance. So for a combination of three reasons, the latter triangle has not become “romantic”: first; the existence of a robust alliance; second, the fact that in the latter case it is China that is perceived to be challenging the territorial status quo; and third, the fact that the US, too, perceives itself to be threatened by China’s disconcertingly swift economic and strategic “rise.” Statistical extrapolations abound projecting China to overtake the US in aggregate GDP by 2030, perhaps even by 2015, and though China’s military capabilities may lag its GDP, the PLA military budget has been growing apace and may not be too far behind. Thus the US, too, is haunted by the prospect of “power transition”—so haunted, perhaps, that it cannot think altogether objectively about the best strategy to respond to the challenge.