

China-Japan relations under the new leaderships
A Beijing-Tokyo comparative perspective

Alice Ekman, Research Fellow – China
Céline Pajon, Research Fellow – Japan
Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri)

10th Japan-Europe Conference, Paris, July 12, 2013



Outline

- ▶ Brief update on the latest tensions between China and Japan
- ▶ Perceptions of these tensions in Beijing and Tokyo
- ▶ Comparative analysis
- ▶ Prospective concluding remarks
- ▶ **Strictly strategic approach**, taking into account diplomatic and security issues, putting slightly aside economic ones.

China: perception of Japan's position

- ▶ “Nationalization” of Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (Sept. 2012) seen as the starting point
- ▶ Beijing: Tokyo is trying to strengthen its claim.
- ▶ Japan accused of revisionism => Need to « face history and reality »
- ▶ Large protests and boycotts of Japanese products in China.
- ▶ “*Japan unilaterally causing tension by playing up the China threat*”.
(Hua Chunying, MFA spokesperson, following Japan's defense white paper, July, 9th 2013)
- ▶ **« Up to Japan » to improve relations**

China: strategic axis in the regional context

- ▶ **Continuous dispatch of ships and occasional dispatch of aircraft**

 - ▶ **Assertive regional policy**
 - ▶ East & South-China Seas
 - ▶ Extension of the definition of “core interests” (including access to supplies of oil and gas) => “never sacrificing core interests”

 - ▶ **In this new context, Diaoyu islands matter :**
 - ▶ close to strategically important shipping lanes
 - ▶ offer rich fishing grounds
 - ▶ thought to contain oil deposits.
(construction of a drilling rig near a disputed gas field in the East China Sea)

 - ▶ **Assertive policy started at the end of Hu’s era, continuing under Xi**
 - ▶ E.g.: January 2013, Beijing announced that it would carry out a geological survey of the islands as part of its "programme to safeguard its maritime rights and interests".
-

China: strategic axis in the regional context

- ▶ **Assertive response to the US-Pivot in the Asia-Pacific**
 - ▶ **“New type of great power relationship”**
 - ▶ Mutual understanding and cooperation, but also mutual respect of core interests
 - ▶ “There is enough room for two great powers in the Asia-Pacific region”
 - ▶ **Growing US-China competition in the region**
 - ▶ Political (US support to Japan & latest tensions = seen as “a US plot?”)
 - ▶ Economic (TPP – RCEP = seen as “a US plot to isolate China?”)

China: strategic axis in the regional context

- ▶ **Assumption that time plays in favor of Beijing**
 - ▶ **Regional economic attraction**
 - ▶ Interdependency but increasingly in favour of Beijing?
 - ▶ More weight given to « economics-based diplomacy »
 - ▶ **Military capacity build-up**
 - ▶ 2013: Military spending this year will grow by 10.7%, to RMB 720bn (\$116bn) - CN gov. 03/ 2013 => China to become an « oceanic power »?

China: upcoming challenges for the new leadership

- ▶ **Counter-effect of assertive positioning?**
 - ▶ Smaller Asia-pacific countries getting closer to the US?

- ▶ **Effectiveness of economics-based diplomacy?**
 - ▶ In a context of domestic economic slow-down

- ▶ **Pressure of domestic nationalism**
 - ▶ A double-edged sword for the CPC
 - ▶ Harder to control in the web 2.0 era

- ▶ **Tense domestic socio-political context**
 - ▶ Foreign policy issues secondary

Japan: perception of China's position

- ▶ ***China is trying to change the status quo, not Japan***
- ▶ Japanese “nationalization” of the islands as an attempt to prevent nationalist provocations (No beefing-up of Japanese presence on the islands)
- ▶ China is using a bullying strategy in order to change the maritime boundaries in the South China Sea and East China Sea.
- ▶ This is part of a wider Chinese military strategy of maritime expansion and build-up

Japan: perception of China's position

- ▶ **Unprecedented high tensions**
 - ▶ Dense maritime presence around the islands may cause an accident.
 - ▶ Chinese intrusion in aerial territory provoke the scramble of Japanese F-35
 - ▶ Chinese navy locked a Japanese warship with weapons-targeting radar

- ▶ **Defense White paper (July 2013):** sharper criticism of what Tokyo sees as an increasingly belligerent effort by Beijing to assert territorial claims in disputed Asian waters.

“China has attempted to change the status quo by force based on its own assertion which is incompatible with the existing order of international law.”

Japan: strategic axis in the regional context

- ▶ **Shinzo Abe: both an hard-liner and a pragmatist**

 - ▶ **The three-pronged Japanese strategy towards China**
 - ▶ Engaging
 - ▶ Not a naïve “Sunshine Policy” *à la* Hatoyama...
 - ▶ Balancing
 - ▶ Construction of a “network of like-minded partners” (Security diamond and others)
 - ▶ Deterring
 - ▶ Building –up of Japan’s own defense capability: Shinzo Abe’s ambitious security agenda (first increase in Japan’s military budget in 11 years...)
 - ▶ The revision of the Article 9 of the Constitution
 - ▶ Strengthening the US-Japan alliance

 - ▶ **A public diplomacy based on the defense of liberal values and the rule of law**
-

Japan: upcoming challenges for the new leadership

- ▶ **Ensuring sustained economic recovery and political stability**
 - ▶ Abe's popularity hinges on the success of Abenomics

- ▶ **Controlling the nationalist elements**
 - ▶ After the election, will Abe will able to reign in the nationalist/revisionist elements?

- ▶ **Ensuring the continuous support of the United-States**
 - ▶ Washington would like a stabilized and calmer relation between Japan and China

Prospective remarks

- ▶ **Sino-Japanese political relations to stay in a deadlock**
 - ▶ Undermining prospect for regional economic integration (RCEP, China-Japan-South Korea agreement)

- ▶ **Unlikely decrease of tensions in the short-medium term.**
 - ▶ Incompatible political positions
 - ▶ Interdependent economies

- ▶ **China to maintain firm position.**
 - ▶ Including maritime patrols, exercises, explorations...
 - ▶ Including aircraft

Prospective remarks (II)

- ▶ **Japan to keep strong stance**
 - ▶ Implementation of Shinzo Abe security agenda

- ▶ **Upcoming challenges:**
 - ▶ Short term: rebuilt the communication canals between the 2 sides
 - ▶ Regional extension of tensions:
 - ▶ Taiwan also claiming the Diaoyu-Senkaku islands.
 - ▶ Ties between Tokyo and Seoul not warming up
 - ▶ Situation still tense in South China Sea despite Chinese' s will to reopen discussion on Code of Conduct