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**Nationalism in China and Japan**  
**and Implications for Bilateral Relations**

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# Summary

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Nationalism appears to be an important part of the growing frictions between China and Japan.

In Japan, the return to power of Shinzo Abe as prime minister, and the historic breakthrough of an extreme right-wing party onto the political scene reinforce the view that there has been a clear shift to the right. Public opinion is today also more realistic about direct security threats to Japan. However, this rise in neo-nationalism, which contains a clear anti-Chinese strain, should not be caricatured as aggressive militarism. Furthermore, it is strongly contained by democratic safeguards.

In China, the new leadership headed by Xi Jinping has promoted patriotic and nationalist ideas even more strongly than its predecessors, while still concentrating on the traditional aims of economic development and stability. Under these circumstances, the exploitation of anti-Japanese nationalism by the Party should not be overestimated: it is tolerated to a certain degree, but controlled and even repressed as soon as it risks getting out of hand.

Nationalism is thus one aspect, among others, of Chinese and Japanese foreign policy. Other key factors need to be taken into account, which may either moderate or exacerbate it. Measures controlling nationalism are in place, though they have shown themselves to be moderately effective in the face of the radicalization and sharpened sensitivity of public opinion. The acceleration of phases of nationalism along with provocations is coalescing with increasingly antagonistic views so as to reinforce security dilemmas. In fact, tensions today appear to be so strong that they have reached a point of no return. This makes it impossible to restore the *status quo ante* or to establish some form of reconciliation on new grounds.

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# Introduction

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Nearly two years after the nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands by the Japanese government, political dialogue between Tokyo and Beijing is at a standstill, despite the cold handshake between Shinzo Abe and Xi Jinping at the APEC summit last November.<sup>1</sup> The nationalist factor has emerged as an important component of the increasing friction between these two neighbors in the East China Sea. Violent anti-Japanese protests in Chinese cities have raised the question of the role of popular nationalist pressures in Beijing's foreign policy. As for Japan, the openly revisionist statements by some politicians and the return to power of neoconservative personalities raise concerns of a drift to nationalism. Finally, the inflexibility of the two administrations that has led to the current diplomatic impasse has been interpreted as a sign that the Sino-Japanese relationship is now determined by nationalist concerns that override the preservation of still very significant economic interests between the two countries.

The rise of nationalisms<sup>2</sup> in China and Japan is linked to the transformation of the economic and geopolitical environment, and the

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<sup>1</sup> The islands of Senkaku (in Japanese) or Diaoyu (in Chinese) are five small islands located in the East China Sea. They have been under Japanese control since 1895, but have been claimed by both Beijing and Taiwan since the early 1970s. The use of "Senkaku/Diaoyu" in this text is done for practical purposes, and in no way suggests any partiality by the authors.

<sup>2</sup> Japan's and China's nationalisms cover a set of ideas and practices that are both specific and diversified. They are closely linked to the history of the two countries, and we cannot examine them entirely in this study, which focuses on recent developments in anti-Japanese and anti-Chinese nationalisms. Nationalism is one of the most difficult social phenomena to define. For Japan, see the recent study by Yew Meng Lai: *Nationalism and Power Politics in Japan's relations with China. A Neoclassical Realist Interpretation*, Sheffield Centre for Japanese Studies, Routledge Series, 2014, and the seminal study by Masao Murayama, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, Oxford University Press, 1963. For China, publications include the work of Zhao Suisheng, *A Nation-State by Construction. Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*, Stanford University Press, 2004, and Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*, University of California Press, 2005, as well as Simon Shen and Shaun Breslin, *Online Chinese Nationalism and China's Bilateral Relations*, Lexington Books, 2010. The following succinct definition of nationalism applies in the present study: Nationalism is a state of mind that nourishes the feeling of belonging to a group, by mobilizing a set of common factors, including territory, values, languages, history, identity, and a national project. It is also a political instrument used by state elites to mobilize the

adjustments in identities and national strategies these have led to. Chinese nationalism thus reflects new self-confidence, which has encouraged the country to recoup the prerogatives stemming from the recovery of its status as a great power. Japan's nationalism is one of a declining power, grounded in the need to gather its strength in order to defend its interests, and regain a respectable place in a new Asian and world order.<sup>3</sup>

The confrontation between the Chinese and Japanese national identities is fed by conflicts over the memory of World War II, on the one hand, and on the other, the competition between the two national strategies. For these reasons, the territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands is a dangerous focal point, as it is related to both the historical legacy and the geostrategic settings of the two nations. Since 2012, the dispute has led to several skirmishes and tensions, which raised the fear of a military escalation.

To provide a balanced and nuanced analysis of the nationalist factor in Sino-Japanese relations, and offer some perspectives regarding its future evolution, it is important to assess the progression of popular and political nationalism in China and Japan, to identify its content, and to analyze its influence on the theorization and implementation of foreign policy in both countries.

The media tend to present Chinese and Japanese nationalisms as mirror images of each other, but they actually cover different realities and issues, linked mainly to the nature of the political regimes concerned. For this reason they are examined separately and with different approaches here, so that the specificities of each may be analyzed more adequately. Regarding nationalism in China, what stands out is the issue of manipulation, proven or not, of popular nationalism by government elites, along with the impact of public opinion in the political decision-making process. What stands out in Japan, on the other hand, is the concerns about a supposed rise of political nationalism, embodied by Shinzo Abe since December 2012, and its implications for foreign and defense policy. The second part of this study will assess the impact of these two nationalisms on the countries' bilateral relations.

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masses, and by nationalist groups to influence the political choices of the government.

<sup>3</sup> "All that, however, is indicative of the power lost, not gained, for the once mighty Japan that is now a waning and frustrated country." Tomohiko Taniguchi, "Ishihara and the Senkakus: The Japanese State of Mind", *Opinion, Brookings*, November 2012; <[www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/11/13-japan-taniguchi](http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/11/13-japan-taniguchi)>.

# Assessing the Characteristics of Different Types of Nationalism

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## ***Japan: Looking for emancipation from Post-War Normative Constraints***

Shinzo Abe's second election as prime minister and the historical emergence of an extreme rightwing political party both suggest that there has been a clear rightward shift in Japan. As well, public opinion is today more realistic about direct security threats to Japan. However, this rise in neo-nationalism, which includes a significant anti-Chinese dimension, should not be caricatured as aggressive militarism. It remains strongly contained by democratic safeguards.

### **The rise of “crisis nationalism”: typology and actors**

In the context of the transformation of its international economic environment and the slowdown of its economic, political and social model since 1990, Japan has been constrained to reform itself profoundly in order to adapt. The country has faced a succession of internal crises, culminating in the threefold catastrophe of 11 March 2011 (earthquakes, tsunami and nuclear mishaps) and the deterioration of the security environment in East Asia, marked by renewed territorial tensions with Russia, Korea and above all China. This context has favored the spread of reactionary and nationalist ideas<sup>4</sup> that are broadly shared by a wide political spectrum, beyond the traditional party divisions.<sup>5</sup> Paradoxically, Japanese conservatism (*hoshushugi*) is not calling for the *status quo* to be preserved. Instead it wants to transform it, uprooting the foundations of the post-war regime (*sengo regimu dakkyaku*), deemed “imposed” on Japan by the US occupation. Conservatives seek to revise the

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<sup>4</sup> Historically, Japanese nationalism meets two basic needs. Its first aim is to construct and assert a national identity on the world stage. From this perspective, Japanese nationalism is intimately linked to the definition of Japan's foreign policy strategy. Second, it aims to manage modernity and the economic, social and political transformations needed to adapt to the international context through a return to Japanese values. Both these goals are combined with the requirement to preserve the independence and autonomy of the country, while finding ways to participate in the concert of great powers and “catching up with the West”. Céline Pajon, « Le retour de l'idée nationale au Japon : tourner la page de l'après-guerre », *Politique Étrangère*, vol. 73, n° 2, June 2008, p. 401-412.

<sup>5</sup> Its supporters are found both within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a catch-all center-right party, and in the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the main opposition party in the 2000s, which held power from 2009 to 2012. See, for example, Yoshihide Soeya, “Japanese domestic politics and security cooperation in Northeast Asia”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, December 2009.

constitution and to return to traditional Japanese values (including the imperial system), promoting patriotism, especially through a positive reassessment of the history of the nation.

The general elections in November 2012 saw the return to power of Shinzo Abe,<sup>6</sup> an ultra-conservative personality in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), along with the emergence in the political scene of a populist and nationalist party (the Japan Restoration Party). These two developments have been identified as the symptoms of a nationalist revival in Japan.

Fringe groups have long advocated nationalism and historical revisionism. Since the 2000s, these ideas have also been voiced at the highest governmental level by a new generation of outspoken politicians. Heirs of the charismatic Junichiro Koizumi (prime minister from 2001 to 2006), they are calling for a return to a Japan that is proud (*hokori*) of its history and achievements, and strong (diplomatically and militarily, especially with respect to China). The means to these ends include: historical revisionism, the upgrading of military force, and the strengthening of the Japanese-American alliance, which is seen as the sole guarantor of Japan's strategic autonomy with respect to China. Shinzo Abe is a leading figure of this "nationalism of normalization",<sup>7</sup> which dominates the Japanese political scene today. This school of thought includes "realists" (Shigeru Ishiba, no. 2 in the LDP, and Ichiro Ozawa, a former leader of the Democratic Party), pragmatic partisans of reconciliation with China and Korea in the higher interests of the country, and "neoconservatives" (J. Koizumi, S. Abe, Vice-Prime Minister Taro Aso, and Yoshihide Suga, Secretary General of the National Security Secretariat, among others). The neoconservatives support a more ideological and more inflexible approach on historical issues.

These protagonists of a "normalization" of the Japanese nation are partly supported by the "autonomists", represented notably by Shintaro Ishihara. In 2012, this ultra-nationalist former governor of Tokyo associated himself with the ambitious mayor of Osaka, Toru Hashimoto – a popular and populist politician – to form the Japan Restoration Party (*Nippon Ishin no kai*).<sup>8</sup> For the first time since 1945, an ultra-conservative party won a significant number of seats in the lower house of the Japanese Diet (54). Compared to the "normalizers", this group takes a more "Gaullist" approach, supporting Japan's complete military autonomy and the ending of the Japanese-US alliance. They hold Japan's strategic subordination to Washington to be an affront to its national dignity.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Shinzo Abe has set out his nationalist thoughts in a book titled "*Utsukushii kuni he*" [Towards a Beautiful Country], Bungei Shunju, 2006. He is the grandson of Nobusuke Kishi, who was condemned as a war criminal by the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. After his release, Kishi became prime minister (1957 to 1960). He took a hard line in defense policy, establishing the principle that nuclear weapons are constitutional, and renewing the security treaty with Washington in 1960, for an unlimited duration.

<sup>7</sup> We draw here on the terminology established by Richard Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia*, Cornell University Press, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> The party split in June 2014. Ishihara created his own party *Jisedai no To* [Party of Future Generations], whose focus is on revising the constitution, whereas Hashimoto's priority is to reform local government.

<sup>9</sup> The extreme right- and left-wing movements (socialists, communists and far-left) share criticism of the Japan-US alliance. For the extreme right, the remilitarization of the country (including acquiring nuclear capacity) should lead to Japanese emancipation from the alliance. The pacifist and anti-militarist left groups support an

Lastly, far-right groups have recently gained in strength and influence. For example, the ultra-nationalist group *Gambare Nippon!* (“Be strong, Japan!”), founded in 2010, and led by a former general of Japan’s self-defence air force, Toshio Tamogami, has gained publicity through its repeated incursions around Senkaku/Diaoyu since 2012.<sup>10</sup> These groups appear to benefit from the relatively tolerant climate that Shinzo Abe’s conservative administration is providing to nationalist assertions.<sup>11</sup>

## “Ending the post-war era” by restoring Japan’s full sovereignty, rewriting history and strengthening defense

The context is, therefore, favorable to the expression of a nationalism whose aim is to “get rid of the post-war legacy”;<sup>12</sup> that is, the liberal reforms implemented under the US occupation (1945-52), which have shaped a significant part of Japan’s identity. The re-establishment of full (historical, legal and territorial) sovereignty is based on a positive reappraisal of Japanese history (especially the episode of the Pacific War) in order to nourish patriotism, and on the “normalization” of the country from a diplomatic and military standpoint.

The nationalist project draws on a revision of Japanese history, with the aim of constructing a national narrative capable of serving a new Japanese pride. The rise of such a revisionist trend can be explained by the poor management of the memory in Japan of World War II. Discussion of Japan’s responsibility in the war has not really taken place, being inhibited under US occupation and then during the Cold War. As a result, memories of the war have been appropriated ideologically by different pressure groups, and there is no strong consensus today. To some extent this explains the regular, provocative statements that raise doubt about the reality of the Nanjing massacre (Ishihara, February 2012, among others),<sup>13</sup> the nature of Japan’s aggressive invasion of several Asian countries before 1945 (Abe, April 2013),<sup>14</sup> or the role of the imperial army in the recruitment of countless sex slaves (Abe, 2007; Toru Hashimoto, May 2013).<sup>15</sup> For China and Korea,

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autonomous and disarmed Japan, in conformity with the constitution. In contrast, the neoconservatives remain realistic and consider that Japan cannot face current threats without its US ally. They nevertheless seek to rebalance the alliance by giving a greater role to Japan. That is why the Abe government wants to allow Japan to use its right of collective legitimate defense and come to the rescue of its ally if necessary.

<sup>10</sup> General Tamogami was dismissed in 2008 following publication of a revisionist essay in which he justified the Japanese aggression in East Asia in the 1930s and 1940s as a project of liberation of Asian countries from the Western powers.

<sup>11</sup> Though it is not formally linked to a party, *Gambare Nippon!* has organized demonstrations in support of Abe. “Over 80 Japanese nationalists approach disputed islands”, *Reuters*, 23 April 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Seizelet, « L’après-guerre comme paradigme politique », in Michael Lucken *et alii* ed., *Le Japon après la guerre*, Editions Philippe Picquier, 2007, pp. 19-46.

<sup>13</sup> “Tokyo governor backs Nanjing massacre denial”, *AFP*, 24 February 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Kazuo Yamagishi, “Abe stands firm on definition of ‘aggression’ amid international outcry”, *The Asahi Shimbun*, 10 May 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Colin Joyce, “Japanese PM denies wartime ‘comfort women’ were forced”, *The Telegraph*, 3 March 2007. “LDP joins international community in criticizing Hashimoto’s ‘comfort women’ remarks”, *The Asahi Shimbun*, 15 May 2013.

such declarations are evidence that the repeated apologies offered by Japanese leaders have not been sincere.<sup>16</sup>

Visits by Japanese prime ministers to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors the souls of soldiers, among whom are 14 A-class war criminals, are also interpreted as a sign of a rehabilitation of Japan's expansionist past by the political authorities. The annual pilgrimages by Junichiro Koizumi between 2001 and 2006 provoked ire among Chinese and Korean neighbors. Beijing, in fact, suspended diplomatic relations throughout Koizumi's whole term in office, and violent anti-Japanese demonstrations took place in Chinese cities in 2005, which shocked Japanese public opinion and leaders. Considered by Tokyo to be interference in Japan's internal affairs, criticisms of the visits to the shrine actually encouraged their continuation, by the prime minister. These were, therefore, less a manifestation of resurgent militarism than a diplomatic gesture of assertion, linked to "apology fatigue".<sup>17</sup> On 15 August 2013, the date commemorating Japan's defeat in 1945, Shinzo Abe thus broke the tradition of expressing regrets at the atrocities committed by the imperial army. Furthermore, instead of reiterating Japan's promise of never again waging a war, he committed to contributing to a sustainable peace by all means.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, the Japanese prime minister created a surprise by unexpectedly visiting the Yasukuni Shrine on 26 December 2013. Despite a communiqué that described this pilgrimage as an act of devotion and commitment to peace, the visit provoked strong reactions not only in China and Korea, but also (to a lesser extent) in the United States and even Europe. Readings and interviews with Japanese experts and officials indicate that the visit was primarily an expression of Shinzo Abe's personal convictions, along with his disillusion in relation to the ineffectiveness of his "open door" policy towards China.

The dissemination of patriotic history is also one of the priorities of Japanese neoconservatives.<sup>19</sup> The publication of a revisionist textbook in 2001

<sup>16</sup> These were, in particular, the apologies offered in 1993 by Prime Minister Hosokawa and, in a symbolically stronger way, Prime Minister Murayama in 1995, marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII ("In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology"). This expression of regret has since been presented as the official position of the Japanese government. In his first days on returning to office, Shinzo Abe indicated his desire to withdraw this declaration. In the face of Chinese, Korean and US criticism, he dropped the issue.

<sup>17</sup> This apology fatigue was expressed by Ichiro Ozawa in 1990, while head of the Prime Minister's Office. He publicly questioned the need and usefulness of presenting renewed apologies to Korea (Jane W. Yamasaki, *Japanese Apologies for World War II. A rhetorical study*, Routledge, 2006, p. 46). Wikipedia lists 30 declarations of apology by the Japanese government since 1950, addressed to all victims of Japan's imperial army or to a specific country or category of persons. This is not an official list, but it is a good indicator of the numerous occasions on which the Japanese authorities have expressed their regrets: "List of war apology statements issued by Japan", Wikipedia:

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_war\\_apology\\_statements\\_issued\\_by\\_Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_war_apology_statements_issued_by_Japan)>.

This list is corroborated by the work of Thomas Berger, "War, Guilt, and World Politics after World War II", Cambridge University Press, 2012, especially p. 123-175.

<sup>18</sup> Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the 68<sup>th</sup> memorial ceremony for the war dead, Tokyo, 15 August 2013,

<[www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/96\\_abe/statement/201308/15sikiji\\_e.html](http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/96_abe/statement/201308/15sikiji_e.html)>.

<sup>19</sup> At the end of 2006, the first Abe government revised the Fundamental Law on Education, drafted by US armed forces, to include patriotism (*aikokushin*) as one

was largely supported by the ultra-conservatives, who hold that the existing textbooks provide a “masochistic” vision of history, based on the narrative set up by the Tokyo War Crimes Trials and traditionally passed on by the socialist teachers’ labor union (*Nikkyoso*).<sup>20</sup> The highly publicized revisionist textbook, however, is used in less than 1% of Japanese schools. Contrary to what is often believed, the overwhelming majority of the history textbooks in Japan do not provide a patriotic vision of history, but, rather, a fairly balanced view of WWII.<sup>21</sup>

The second goal of the nationalists and the Abe government is to achieve military “normalization” of Japan, thus breaking free of the antimilitarist principles of the post-war era. This in fact means accelerating the gradual rearmament of the country that has occurred since the 1990s, and which has led Tokyo to diversify the missions of its self-defence forces, to build up an anti-missile defense system in collaboration with its US ally, and to develop increasingly sophisticated military hardware.<sup>22</sup> This move to remilitarization is backed by a broad political consensus; accordingly, it is the Democratic Party that broke one of the main post-war taboos by authorizing arms exports in December 2011. Shinzo Abe is seeking to accelerate the military build-up; symbolically, he increased defense spending for the first time in 11 years (+0.8% in 2013, and +5% by 2020), and drafted new strategic guidelines that further reinforce defensive lines vis-à-vis China, while also seeking to improve politico-military governance (establishing a National Security Council). The aim is to be able to act as a truly sovereign nation, and, more concretely, to be able to protect the country against any Chinese intimidation. The main investments will therefore serve to enhance surveillance of Chinese military activities in the East China Sea, and to respond if necessary. Tokyo is going to acquire patrol aircraft, radar and drones, as well as develop amphibious capacity in order to defend far-off islands.<sup>23</sup> Since 2010, Japanese troops have started to be redeployed from the north to the southwest part of the country, facing China, and the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

Shinzo Abe’s lead-project remains the revision of Article 9 of the Constitution. The aim is twofold: to legalize the “Self-Defense Forces” (*jieitai*) by transforming them into a “national army” (*kokubôgun*) and to allow Japan to use its legitimate right to collective defense, in order to be able to defend its

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goal of public education; “Japanese Lawmakers Pass Two Laws That Shift the Nation Away From Its Postwar Pacifism”, *New York Times*, December 16, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> The manual was written by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii kyokashô wo tsukurukai*), a group founded in 1996 to meet the revisionist ambitions of ultra-conservative politicians, including Shinzo Abe. See Sven Saaler, *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion; The History Textbook Controversy and Japanese Society*, Iudicium Verlag, Munich, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> The manuals often offer a factual presentation of history, with little analysis. They sometimes lack detailed information on war atrocities, and some do not refer to the “comfort women” (some 200,000 sexual slaves, mainly Korean, enrolled by the imperial army). Daniel Sneider, “Textbooks and patriotic education: Wartime memory formation in China and Japan”, *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 20, n°1, May 2013, p. 39-41.

<sup>22</sup> Céline Pajon, « Le réarmement contrôlé du Japon », *Politique Etrangère*, vol. 76, n°1, March 2011. Christopher Hughes, *Japan’s Remilitarization*, Routledge, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> See the Defense Programs and Budget of Japan – Overview of FY2013 Budget, website of the Ministry of Defense of Japan: <[www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_budget/pdf/250516.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_budget/pdf/250516.pdf)>.

US ally in case of attack.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the alliance with the US is more than ever considered as the linchpin of Japan's strategic posture and the only effective deterrence against Chinese aggression. The issue today concerns the transformation of Japanese defense strategy into a more offensive posture. The acquisition of dual-use military hardware (the recent helicopter-carrier, *Izumo*, in particular)<sup>25</sup> and discussions on authorizing pre-emptive strikes against enemy bases<sup>26</sup> both appear to indicate further developments that can only provoke strong concerns among Japan's neighbors. As for developing nuclear weapons capacity, only the autonomists group, currently in a minority, supports this. If doubts about the credibility of US nuclear deterrence protecting Japan were to be confirmed, it is likely that support for developing nuclear capacity would spread to the group of nationalist normalizers. But this would not necessarily lead to the acquisition of nuclear capacity, which remains a highly costly option from an economic, political and strategic point of view.

## The end of a deferential posture toward China

The growing animosity toward China follows primarily from the rise of theories about the Chinese threat, especially in strategic circles. Since the mid-1990s, Japanese white papers on defense have sounded the alarm concerning the rapid modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the opacity surrounding China's military strategy.<sup>27</sup> In recent years, repeated incursions into Japan's sea and air space have reinforced the idea of Chinese military expansion to the detriment of Japan, threatening the latter's territorial integrity.

Yet far from being a mere military threat, China is increasingly presented by ultra-conservatives as the archetypal "Other". Neoconservatives specifically seek to denounce the immorality of China's political regime and its political-military activities in the region.<sup>28</sup> This attitude, to a notable extent, is a reaction to the increasingly intensive communication campaigns regularly conducted by Beijing to weaken Japanese attempts to assert itself diplomatically (in particular, Japan's wishes to obtain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council), whereby China stresses Tokyo's inability to examine its aggressive past with contrition.<sup>29</sup> In reply, Japanese neoconservatives present Japan as a champion of liberal democracy, compared to an authoritarian

<sup>24</sup> The Prime Minister's Office published a decision on 1 July 2014 making official its wish to reinterpret Article 9 of the Constitution, in order to use the right to collective self-defense in a limited manner.

<sup>25</sup> Corey Wallace, "Does the *Izumo* Represent Japan Crossing the 'Offensive' Rubicon?", *Japan Security Watch*, 13 August 2013.

<sup>26</sup> "Japan looks to military guidelines with US to define strike ability", *The Japan Times*, 3 September 2013.

<sup>27</sup> See notably the report *Defense of Japan 2013*, Ministry of Defense, and especially the chapter dedicated to China (p. 38-64): <[www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2013.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2013.html)>.

<sup>28</sup> See in particular Shogo Suzuki, "The strange masochism of the Japanese right. Redrawing moral boundaries in Sino-Japanese relations", in Glenn D. Hook (ed.), *Decoding Boundaries in Contemporary Japan. The Koizumi Administration and Beyond*, Sheffield Centre for Japanese Studies/Routledge Series, Routledge, 2011, p. 35-58.

<sup>29</sup> See for example Jane Perlez, "China Exhibit, Part of an Anti-Japan Campaign, Reflects an Escalating Feud", *The New York Times*, 8 February 2014, and the "op-ed wars" in the *Washington Post* and other international media: Ali Weinberg, "Japan and China at War on the Op-Ed page", *ABC News*, 18 January 2014.

China that shows little respect for the rule of law. This approach manifests itself in Japan's foreign policy through the adoption of a "value-based diplomacy" that stresses implementing close partnerships with the democracies in the region, with the aim of constructing an "arc of freedom and prosperity", which implicitly seeks to isolate China.<sup>30</sup> Although this terminology, coined during the first mandate of Shinzo Abe from 2007-2008, is no longer used, the project itself remains one of the diplomatic priorities of the present government.<sup>31</sup> In referring to universal values in this way, Japan has found a strong lever for influencing its partners both in Asia and on the international stage. The cause pleaded by Prime Minister Abe in Singapore in spring 2014 fits in perfectly with this approach, drawing on his characteristic lyricism.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the promotion of such liberal values is being carried out through an unprecedented international public relations campaign, which is a new political priority and has been given a comfortable budget. This communication campaign, being piloted by the Prime Minister's Office, strives to present Japan's official position in a skillful way, thus strengthening understanding within the international community.<sup>33</sup> Such support for democracy, however, is largely dictated by geopolitical considerations that are implicitly aimed at Beijing, and may seem to lack coherence, as Tokyo is also seeking closer ties to governments that are sometimes far from democratic.<sup>34</sup>

From a strategic point of view, this approach is used to discredit Chinese claims on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The latest Japanese defense white paper thus underlines the dichotomy between Japan as the guardian and protector of international norms, and China as a revisionist and brutal power. The white paper claims that "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."<sup>35</sup> Lastly, for Japanese neoconservatives, China's immoral attitude makes irrelevant its attacks on Japan's aggressive past and its current behavior toward Japan. Accordingly, Japan should no longer display "a deferential attitude" (*dogeza gaikō*) toward China, which has been the norm since the end of the WWII.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, due to moral considerations, Japan has tended to keep a low profile toward its Chinese and Korean neighbors, so as to maintain relatively cordial relations. Today, however, Tokyo is adopting a more realistic and assertive posture, which coincides with

<sup>30</sup> See the page dedicated to this "pillar" of Japanese diplomacy on the web pages of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Value Oriented Diplomacy and Strive [*sic*] to Form the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity'", <[www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pillar](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pillar)>.

<sup>31</sup> "The forces of a new diplomacy by Mr Abe", An interview with Yachi Shōtarō, advisor to the Cabinet, Nippon.com, 2 September 2013. Interview by the author with A., an advisor to the Prime Minister's Office, Tokyo, April 2013.

<sup>32</sup> "Peace and prosperity in Asia, forevermore; Japan for the rule of law; Asia for the rule of law; And the rule of law for all of us", The 13<sup>th</sup> IISS Asian Security Summit – The Shangri-La Dialogue – Keynote Address by Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister, Japan, Singapore, 30 May 2014.

<sup>33</sup> NSS, p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> Maiko Ichihara, *Japan's strategic approach to democracy support*, Carnegie Endowment, 7 March 2014. <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/07/japan-s-strategic-approach-to-democracy-support/h2q1>>.

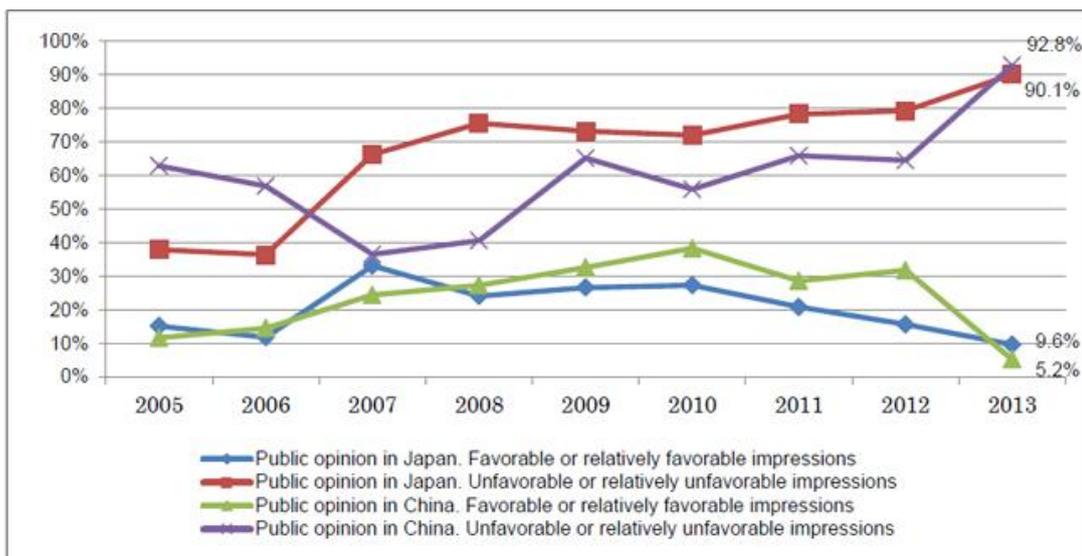
<sup>35</sup> Defense of Japan 2013, Ministry of Defense, p. 30, <[www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2013.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2013.html)>.

<sup>36</sup> Reinhard Drifte, *Japan's Security Relations with China: From Balancing to Bandwagoning?*, London and New York, Routledge Curzon, 2003.

a certain distancing of itself from its past and which seems hard for Beijing to accept.<sup>37</sup>

The anti-Chinese discourse is finding increasing favor in public opinion, which has been shocked by anti-Japanese outbursts and Beijing's "diplomatic assertiveness". In recent years, mutual animosity has reached new heights: according to a 2013 survey, more than 90% of Japanese and Chinese had a negative image of their neighbors.<sup>38</sup>

**Graph 1: Trends in Chinese/Japanese impressions of each other**



2005-2013

Source: The Genron NPO website

The intensification of bilateral friction seems to have made Japanese public opinion more radical, so that today it supports a stronger posture by the

<sup>37</sup> See the speech by Shinzo Abe in New York, September 2013: "Ladies and gentlemen, I am working hard to rebuild Japan's economy, while at the same time working hard to reinvent our national security structure. For the first time ever, Japan will establish its National Security Council. For the first time ever, we will publish a national security strategy in which we will state what Japan is committed to, and what our aims are. Also, for the first time in eleven years, my government has increased its defense budget this year. By how much, you may want to know. Before that, we have an immediate neighbor whose military expenditure is at least twice as large as Japan's and second only to the US defense budget. The country has increased its military expenditures, hardly transparent, by more than 10 percent, annually, for more than 20 years since 1989. And then, my government has increased its defense budget only by zero point eight per cent. So call me, if you want, a right-wing militarist." Remarks by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the occasion of accepting the Hudson Institute's 2013 Herman Kahn Award, The Pierre Hotel, New York City, 25 September 2013.

<sup>38</sup> The 9th Japan-China Public Opinion Poll, 13 August 2013, The Genron NPO, <[www.genron-npo.net/english/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=59:the-9th-japan-china-public-opinion-poll&catid=2:research&Itemid=4](http://www.genron-npo.net/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59:the-9th-japan-china-public-opinion-poll&catid=2:research&Itemid=4)>.

government, considering that the Japanese State has apologized enough,<sup>39</sup> and that visits to the Yasukuni Shrine are now legitimate.<sup>40</sup> That said, while the population has become more and more hostile to China, majority opinion does not favor the use of military force, and remains attached to a defensive rather than offensive military posture. From this point of view, Japanese public opinion acts more as a brake than as a spur to political nationalism.<sup>41</sup> The implementation of a nationalist agenda by the neoconservatives does indeed come up against the safeguards created by Japanese democracy.

## A nationalism strongly constrained by democratic safeguards

General elections are largely dominated by domestic considerations in Japan, but electoral campaigns may also favor an escalation of nationalist and populist rhetoric, as occurred in November and December 2012.<sup>42</sup> Usually, however, nationalist tendencies are constrained by the check-and-balance system of Japanese democracy. Shinzo Abe paid for this dearly during his first term in office as prime minister in 2006-2007. He obstinately insisted on applying a program based on patriotism and the army. This was far removed from the economic and social priorities of the population, and cost him his job. On returning to office, he put economic growth at the top of his agenda, in order to ensure the durability of his mandate. It is his determination regarding economic policy (Abenomics) and not his nationalist agenda that ensured his record popularity during the first months of his legislature.

Similarly, Shinzo Abe has to get along with a number of vital partners to stay in power. To begin with, inside his own party he has to take into account the advocates of a “realist” approach, who want to re-establish good relations with China and Korea. Then, he has to guarantee cooperation with the New Komeito, the coalition partner that ensures the LDP has a parliamentary majority in both houses of the Diet. This democratic-Buddhist party supports pacifist principles and is opposed to revising Article 9 of the

<sup>39</sup> See the poll conducted by the Pew Research Center: Andrew Kohut (Dir.), “Japanese public’s mood rebounding, Abe highly popular”, 11 July 2013, notably p. 4, <[www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/07/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-Japan-Report-FINAL-July-11-2013.pdf](http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/07/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-Japan-Report-FINAL-July-11-2013.pdf)>.

<sup>40</sup> A total of 46% of people polled see no problems with the visits; 27.5% tolerate them if they are conducted by the prime minister acting in a personal capacity. Masaru Kohno, “Looking at the Takeshima and Senkaku problems through successive public opinion surveys”, *Opinion, Waseda Online*, 26 November 2012, <[www.yomiuri.co.jp/adv/wol/dy/opinion/gover-eco\\_121126.htm](http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/adv/wol/dy/opinion/gover-eco_121126.htm)>.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Midford, *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security. From Pacifism to Realism?*, Stanford University Press, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> The campaign in November-December 2012 (as in July 2013) was especially violent for several reasons: a context of high tension and threats repeated by China and Korea; the presence of a populist party (Party of the Restoration of Japan) for the first time; and the high stakes for the LDP, which was gambling on its return to power after three years of a Democratic Party government, whose leadership had shown itself to be especially weak. These factors led to a more radical political discourse. See for example, Ishihara, in November 2012, declaring: “We need to say no to China when necessary because I don’t want Japan to be like Tibet, which has fallen under Chinese power”, and Abe stating: “We have absolutely no intention to retreat [from China], even by an inch”, July 2013. Natsuko Fukue, “Ishihara rattles saber against China”, *The Japan Times*, 21 November 2012; Yuka Hayashi, “Abe takes election campaign to frontlines, literally”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 July 2013.

Constitution. Opinion polls also show that Japanese public opinion remains attached to Article 9 (56% are opposed to its modification). Accordingly, the prime minister has put on the back-burner proposals for a formal revision of the Constitution.<sup>43</sup> Instead, he has opted for a political reinterpretation of Article 9, which avoids the particularly demanding process of revising the Constitution (requiring a two-thirds majority in the Diet and a favorable referendum result). But even in this case, Shinzo Abe has run into much criticism and many obstacles in politics and the media. On 1 July 2014, following arduous negotiations with New Komeito, the Prime Minister's Office published its project for reinterpreting the Constitution, which allows Japan to use its right of collective self-defense in a limited manner. This change is without doubt an important step in the normalization of Japan's defense posture. But it remains strongly constrained and its scope is far less than initial plans suggested.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the whole episode emphasizes to what extent the democratic process still places substantial obstacles to nationalist aspirations in Japan.

The LDP also gets significant support from Japanese business, especially the large employers' federation, Keidanren, which is exercising pressure to ensure that bilateral relations are managed as rationally as possible, with the aim of avoiding nationalist provocations and outbursts.<sup>45</sup> Economic interdependence with Japan's two neighbors is indeed very strong, and China is a key market for Japanese entrepreneurs.

Lastly, the neoconservatives' room for maneuver is also constrained by Japan's US ally. While the US supports reinforcement of Japan's military capacities, it takes a dim view of revisionist leanings that could damage regional stability, and which run counter to US interests (see "Factors in nationalism control" below). A report published by the Congressional Research Service in spring 2013 underlined the strong nationalist convictions of Shinzo Abe, and caused a stir within the Japanese government.<sup>46</sup> As well, the US, through its ambassador in Tokyo, expressed its "disappointment" following Shinzo Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013, "which exacerbated tensions with Japan's Asian neighbors".<sup>47</sup> Lastly, the revisionist declarations by Japanese leaders, which are mainly for domestic consumption,

<sup>43</sup> See the opinion poll by the Pew Research Center: Andrew Kohut (dir.), "Japanese public's mood rebounding, Abe highly popular", 11 July 2013, notably p. 4, <[www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/07/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-Japan-Report-FINAL-July-11-2013.pdf](http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/07/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-Japan-Report-FINAL-July-11-2013.pdf)>.

<sup>44</sup> Yuichi Hosoya underlined this point at a conference held by Ifri on 2 July 2014: *A New Cold War in East Asia? Japanese and French Perspectives on Strategic Evolutions in East Asia*, Ifri, Paris. Yuichi Hosoya is a member of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, appointed by Shinzo Abe, and also participated in drafting a report presented to the prime minister on 15 May 2014, titled "Report of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security".

<sup>45</sup> "Keidanren Chief blasts handling of Senkaku Islands issue", *Asahi Shimbun*, 29 September 2012.

<sup>46</sup> "Comments and actions on controversial historical issues by Prime Minister Abe and his cabinet have raised concern that Tokyo could upset regional relations in ways that hurt US interests", Emma Chanlett-Avery (coordinator), *Japan-US Relations: Issues for Congress*, Washington, Congressional Research Service, 2 August 2013 (first version of study published 4 May 2013), <[www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33436.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33436.pdf)>.

<sup>47</sup> "Statement on Prime Minister Abe's December 26 Visit to Yasukuni Shrine", press release, 26 December 2013, Embassy of United States in Tokyo, <<http://japan.usembassy.gov/e/p/tp-20131226-01.html>>.

are widely publicized by the international media, at a cost to Japan's image. Japan's public diplomacy is therefore being severely tested.

Generally speaking, there is thus a large gap between nationalist rhetoric, which is on occasion violent, and political practice. Shinzo Abe's mandate, which was heralded as being ultra-conservative, has not so far led to radical transformation of the post-war paradigms. The erosion of anti-militarist norms is taking place very slowly, though perhaps more quickly in the face of the rapid deterioration of the regional security environment. But it is in no way a return to the aggressive expansionism of the pre-war era. Concrete changes are for the moment largely constrained and limited, and it is the superstructure of the nationalist and revisionist discourse that contributes to projecting Japan's hawkish and ultra-conservative image. That said, perceptions play an essential role in international relations and are especially important in the case of Sino-Japanese relations.

## ***China: the “great rejuvenation” of the nation, while avoiding turmoil***

### **New patriotic and nationalist concepts**

The demonstrations that took place in China in September 2012 as a response to Japanese “nationalization” of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands put back on the agenda a hypothesis that has often been put forward by China-watchers, namely that the Chinese Communist Party plays with anti-Japanese feelings to enhance national unity and its own legitimacy and, more generally, that the Party uses nationalism to fill the ideological void that has emerged with the progressive erosion of Marxist-Leninist ideology during the last 35 years of reform and opening-up.

This hypothesis of a post-communist nationalism is to some extent compatible with the rhetorical changes that have taken place in the wake of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (Nov. 2012). The new leadership has used patriotic and nationalist declarations even more vigorously than the previous one. “The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”<sup>48</sup> (*zhonghua minzu fuxing*) and the “Chinese dream” (*zhongguo meng*) are among the new key concepts hammered away at in official speeches, television programs, stadiums, schools, etc.

The “Chinese dream” seems at first sight aimed at giving hope to the national population, which has benefited unequally from economic development, and in the context of a slight decrease in the country's growth rate in recent years. The “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” clearly indicates an overall strengthening of the nationalist posture of the new leadership. But it does not necessarily imply a major change of direction in foreign policy. Xi Jinping has explicitly linked the future of Chinese people individually with that of the nation, and has called on them to collectively<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Or “great renewal of the Chinese nation”, another official translation seen in state media.

<sup>49</sup> “Today we are closer than ever to the goal of achieving the Chinese nation's great rejuvenation and are more confident than ever that we have what it takes to succeed. History tells us that our personal future and fate are closely linked to the country's

raise the country to the level of development and the international position it deserves, in line with those of the “Western world”.<sup>50</sup> However, the stated goals of this rejuvenation are above all economic – and they have even been quantified. They entail building progressively – by 2020 and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, and above all by 2050, the centenary of the creation of the People’s Republic of China (1949) – a society of “average prosperity” or “moderate prosperity” (*xiaokang*), with a large, homogenous middle class that will have greater purchasing power and easier access to housing, education and social services in particular.

Whereas nationalism in Japan is rising in a context of crisis, nationalism in China draws on the economic development of the country. Feelings of national pride were reinforced among the Chinese population in the wake of the autumn 2008 global financial and economic crisis, which China’s economy resisted relatively well in comparison with many Western economies. The position of being the world’s second largest economy in 2010 enhanced this feeling among China’s leaders and the majority of the population. It has also strengthened ambitions to be the world’s largest economy. This economic competition echoes competition (*vis-à-vis* the US in particular) over recent years in a number of other fields, such as in sports during the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, or in culture and hosting of international events in broader terms, with the World Expo in Shanghai in 2010, etc. Such competition is often promoted by the Party and is understood by the population as leading to China taking its fully justified place in the world; it is seen especially as putting an end to the humiliations imposed by “Western powers” since the Opium Wars. Official nationalist rhetoric in China has, therefore, been primarily centered on opposition between China and the West, and has been reinforced in parallel by the promotion of Chinese culture, a process that has progressively emerged since the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The new leadership also asserts, not without ambiguity, that the rejuvenated Chinese nation requires building a “strong army”, “able to combat and win battles”, while at the same time recalling that China “will never seek hegemony”.<sup>51</sup> From a theoretical point of view, this “rejuvenation” seems once more to be aimed primarily at the “West” as broadly defined. Specific opposition to Japan stands out little in official communications, apart from during historical commemorations (see below: “The growing weight of history on the relationship”).

However, analysis of how the Party has managed recent demonstrations against the nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands will shed more light on Beijing’s general approach to anti-Japanese nationalism.

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and the nation’s. We are fine only when the country and the nation are. Empty talk costs the country a great deal and only hard work will make the nation prosperous. We must unite all members of the Chinese nation and build it into a great country and nation.” Extract from a speech by Xi Jinping, 29 December 2012, at the National Museum in Beijing, during his visit to the exhibition of the “Road toward Rejuvenation” (the official version in English).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the following commentary: “The nation fell behind the Western world only after the Qing emperors shut the country off from the outside world during their 200-odd years of reign that resulted in China missing the Industrial Revolution. That is why ‘realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ has been brought up with good reason and makes perfect sense.” Xi Jinping’s explanation of the Chinese people’s dream, Hao Tiechuan, *China Daily*, 16 January 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Stated by Xi Jinping, quoted by Xinhua news agency, 15 March 2013.

## The anti-Japanese demonstrations of September 2012

### *A new media landscape*

Anti-Japanese sentiment is widespread in China today. The main cause lies in the widely shared perception – and the popular resentment that follows from it – that Japan never fully recognized the crimes committed during World War II. This perception cuts across generations; resentment among young people, who did not experience Japanese imperialism, is nourished by school-books (very detailed and sometimes explicitly partisan), novels, films and TV series. For a majority of China's population, Japan remains associated with a feeling of humiliation and injustice, passed down from the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Anti-Japanese sentiment has strengthened in recent years.<sup>52</sup> Apart from the accumulated tensions in the 2000s, which stoked up existing resentment, the development of the Internet and social networks partly explains this reinforcement of negative sentiments. The number of nationalist websites and anti-Japanese messages has expanded with the rapid increase in Internet users in China (591 million in 2013),<sup>53</sup> and the popularity of some social networks such as SinaWeibo.<sup>54</sup> The Internet and social networks facilitate the coming-together of nationalists who were previously isolated (for example, the proliferation of nationalist discussion groups).

This new media landscape has considerably changed the nature of how anti-Japanese sentiment is expressed and how it is managed. The Chinese authorities obviously have the means to frame, control and even block anti-Japanese movements. However, such control is harder to implement today than in the past, as social networks can disseminate quickly and massively nationalist commentaries and calls to demonstrate. For example, censorship of keywords has been reinforced in response to the rapid proliferation of anti-Japanese commentaries on social media at the end of 2012.<sup>55</sup> Censorship of the most extreme nationalist commentaries is not new: in September 1996, an online forum of Peking University was shut down following a call by students to demonstrate against Japan. But at the time, China had fewer than 100,000 Internet-users in the entire country. In spring 2005, it was already hard for Beijing to contain anti-Japanese demonstrations, which were partly organized via the popular, instant chat-site QQ and discussion forums (BBS). Today, the popularity of social networks has made all the harder the task of managing online nationalism against Japan.

<sup>52</sup> According to a study conducted jointly by Genron NPO and China Daily (quoted above, see graph 1), 92.8% of Chinese people interviewed have an unfavorable view of Japan, i.e. 28 points more than in the previous year. The 9<sup>th</sup> Japan-China Public Opinion Poll, 13 August 2013, The Genron NPO, <[www.genron-npo.net/english/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=59:the-9th-japan-china-public-opinion-poll&catid=2:research&Itemid=4](http://www.genron-npo.net/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59:the-9th-japan-china-public-opinion-poll&catid=2:research&Itemid=4)>.

<sup>53</sup> In July 2013, according to the Chinese government agency Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC).

<sup>54</sup> A Twitter-like platform with more than 500 million accounts, and at least 50 million daily users in 2013.

<sup>55</sup> For example, censorship of the expression “anti-Japan” as of the week beginning 17 September: searches for the term would yield no results in the Chinese search engines.

### *Calls for “rational patriotism”*

The exact extent to which the authorities tolerated violent outbursts (Japanese-branded shops and cars ransacked and vandalized)<sup>56</sup> in September 2012 in Beijing, Shanghai, Xian or Qingdao remains unknown.<sup>57</sup> To be sure, the authorities must have been tolerant to some extent so that such demonstrations could take place, and continue for a week. It is even probable that demonstrations in some cities were encouraged by the government, as were the anti-Japanese demonstrations in spring 2005.<sup>58</sup> But such encouragement was not the only cause: spontaneous calls to protest and demonstrate emerged on social networks. Moreover, taking into account official communication campaigns, it seems that, at a certain stage following the first demonstrations, the Party sought more to contain than encourage nationalist sentiments.

Accordingly, in September and October 2012, after the first violent excesses during protests, the Chinese government called for “rational patriotism” (*lixing aiguo*) on the Internet, including in the social media.<sup>59</sup> This official exhortation was also voiced in op-ed articles in several state newspapers,<sup>60</sup> and by SMS (mobile-phone text messages). Such public appeals are not new; even in the early 2000s, the Party was calling for nationalist activists to remain “calm and reasonable” (*lengjing yu lizhi*), though at the time the message was aimed primarily at members of discussion groups and specialized Internet sites. The communication campaign carried out at the end of 2012 aimed at a far bigger Internet-user population, including those who express themselves more occasionally – but not necessarily less violently – against Japan on non-specialized websites and online platforms. This campaign was organized both by central and local institutions.<sup>61</sup> In parallel, several influential bloggers (Li Chengpeng, Han Han among others) published blog-posts criticizing anti-Japanese violence.<sup>62</sup>

The violent anti-Japanese acts were condemned by government representatives and official media; for example, a press conference by the

<sup>56</sup> Both small and large shops, such as Aeon, Ito Yokado, Uniqlo, 7-Eleven, and Lawson, had to close temporarily. Panasonic and Nissan also temporarily shut down certain factories in China, following vandalism.

<sup>57</sup> Some Chinese analysts interviewed in June 2013 in Beijing stated that the law-enforcement agencies had simply been “overwhelmed by events” in some cities and provinces, where resources and law-enforcement officers at public meetings are not as professional, organized or experienced as in Beijing or other high-risk areas (major cities like Shanghai, provinces subject to ethnic tensions such as Tibet or Xinjiang, etc). Interviews conducted in a think-tank specializing in security issues, Beijing, June 2013.

<sup>58</sup> See for example, “Les manifestations anti-japonaises du printemps 2005”, in Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “Les multiples facettes du nationalisme chinois”, *Perspectives chinoises*, No. 88, March-April 2005, published online 1 April 2008, retrieved 10 September 2013, at <<http://perspectiveschinoises.revues.org/739>>.

<sup>59</sup> Dedicated SinaWeibo account: <[www.weibo.com/z/lovechina2012/](http://www.weibo.com/z/lovechina2012/)>.

<sup>60</sup> For example, on 16 September 2012 in the *People’s Daily* as well as in stories by the Xinhua news agency, such as (in English) “Wisdom needed in the expression of patriotism”, or, in another press agency report on 20 September headed “Irrational, violent anti-Japanese protests should be avoided” (official English version).

<sup>61</sup> The Guangdong police, for example, called on its official SinaWeibo account for rational patriotism, showing an image of a heart with China’s colors, mid-September 2012, revealed first by François Bougon, *LeMonde.fr*, 21 September 2012.

<sup>62</sup> See the blog by Han Han, “My feelings about the recent anti-Japan protests”, 19 September 2012.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was widely broadcast in the national media, openly condemned an individual who had ripped off the flag on a car from the Japanese embassy in Beijing;<sup>63</sup> on popular TV programs focused on international issues, such as “Focus Today” (*Jinri Guanzhu*)<sup>64</sup> and “*Xinwen Pandian*”,<sup>65</sup> guests (experts in foreign policy and Japan specialists in Japanese military policy) tried to explain why China could not simply go to war with Japan, a demand that was being put forward by Chinese extremists and nationalists. It seems that, at the end of September 2012, guests on state channels were chosen with a certain degree of care.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, program managers often advised invited experts, orally and informally, to remain “moderate” in their declarations.<sup>67</sup>

Such signs and, more generally, the scale of the “rational patriotism” campaign deployed during the demonstrations reflect the Party’s desire to avoid outbursts of uncontrolled violence. At the end of 2012, the Party was using at least three types of channels to control excesses: the media, including social media; experts expressing themselves in the media; and government officials, including from local governments.<sup>68</sup>

After the demonstrations, heavy sentences were meted out to several perpetrators of violence, and the publicity surrounding their trials suggests that the Chinese authorities wanted to put across a clear message to the population.<sup>69</sup>

The violent anti-Japanese demonstrations in September 2012 seem to have marked a turning point in the way Beijing manages popular

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<sup>63</sup> It stated: “Relevant authorities are seriously investigating the report that the flag of the Japanese ambassador’s vehicle was ripped off in Beijing”, Xinhua, 27 August 2012, quoting the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. More generally, in the wake of demonstrations, the police regularly distributed photos of people responsible for acts of violence against shops, companies and Japanese cars, calling for witnesses to help with arrests.

<sup>64</sup> Broadcast daily from 9:30pm to 10pm on the national channel CCTV 4. Podcasts of programs: <<http://cctv.cntv.cn/lm/jinriguanzhu/video/index.shtml>>.

<sup>65</sup> Broadcast every Saturday from 7 P.M. to 8 P.M. on China Radio International.

<sup>66</sup> It seems that the most “hawkish” experts were slightly less visible at that time on China’s national public television channels, such as Luo Yan, a retired major-general of the PLA, blogger and popular commentator who called for the army to prepare a possible strike against Japan over the Diaoyu islands (his call to arms was published in the Chinese version of the *Global Times*, September 2012).

<sup>67</sup> According to a Chinese expert on Japan, who regularly participated in this type of TV program. Interview, Beijing, June 2013.

<sup>68</sup> For example, by formally forbidding government employees from participating in anti-Japanese demonstrations: in mid-September, as violent outbursts were proliferating during demonstrations, several central government departments (NDRC, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Public Security) jointly distributed a document ordering all civil servants not to participate in any anti-Japanese demonstration. Interview with a high-level civil servant, Beijing, June 2013.

<sup>69</sup> For example, on 5 July 2013, several courts in the city of Xian sentenced 12 people to up to several years in jail for having attacked Japanese-brand vehicles, and in some cases their drivers, during the anti-Japanese demonstrations in September 2012. The most serious case concerned Cai Yang, sentenced to 10 years in prison and fined RMB 258,000 (about €35,000) for having hit the driver of a Toyota Corolla several times in the face with an anti-theft device. The official press condemned this act, stressing that “protests by the public against such so-called ‘patriotic’ violence took place during a wave of demonstrations against the ‘nationalization’ of the Diaoyu Islands”, Xinhua, 5 July 2013.

expressions of nationalist sentiment. Since then, the Communist Party appears to consider such expressions to be more of a risk than a political asset, and does not tolerate them as much as previously. Thus, when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013, it was seen as a provocation by the Chinese leadership and the majority of its population, but no major anti-Japanese demonstrations erupted on Chinese territory. Nevertheless, the Chinese authorities rapidly and strongly condemned the visit, through the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who explained that it “profoundly hurt the feelings of Asian war victims”,<sup>70</sup> before announcing a few days later that Abe was not welcome in China, and that the “Chinese leaders would not meet him”.<sup>71</sup>

### *Anti-Japanese demonstrations: an “excuse”?*

Within the Party, many cadres actually feel that the nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands has in fact been taken up as an “excuse”<sup>72</sup> by protesters to criticize the government and certain injustices felt by part of the population, in second-tier cities in particular (such as Xian). These relate especially to corruption, rising income inequalities, limited social security coverage, and access to housing. This analysis appears to be shared not only by many Party cadres, researchers and China specialists in Beijing,<sup>73</sup> but also by Japanese diplomats and analysts who have followed the trends in anti-Japanese feelings and actions emerging on Chinese territory.<sup>74</sup>

Some of the placards brandished by protesters in September 2012 were also a problem for the Party: many portraits of Mao Zedong, at the heart of some anti-Japanese parades, were observed with surprise.<sup>75</sup> They may have symbolized dissatisfaction with both the foreign and the domestic policies conducted by the current leaders: a foreign policy not “hawkish” enough in comparison with that of Mao, seen by many Chinese as the heroic leader of the war against Japan in the 1930s and 1940s; and a domestic policy not “fair” enough in a context of increasing socio-economic disparities since the era of reform and the “opening-up” initiated by Deng – a criticism that is often highlighted by a minority of the population who are nostalgic for the Maoist era. Other placards, which were quietly removed from parades by plainclothes police,<sup>76</sup> alluded to Bo Xilai, as the scandal involving the former Communist

<sup>70</sup> Qin Gang, spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, 26 December 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Qin Gang, Beijing, press conference of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 December 2013. Full official text in English: [www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cedk/eng/fyrth/t1113242.htm](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cedk/eng/fyrth/t1113242.htm).

<sup>72</sup> Interviews with Chinese researchers at think-tanks specializing in foreign policy and security issues, Beijing, June 2013.

<sup>73</sup> They noted for example that acts of violence had not been committed in areas that are traditionally known for their strong anti-Japanese feelings (such as provinces in the north-east of the country, or around Nanjing, where war crimes had been committed by the Japanese). Instead they occurred elsewhere, as in Xian, for example, where several cars were destroyed – a city that was never occupied by the Japanese army.

<sup>74</sup> Interviews with Japanese diplomats, Paris and Tokyo, August 2013 and February 2014.

<sup>75</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 20 September 2012.

<sup>76</sup> New York Times, “China Alters Its Strategy in Diplomatic Crisis with Japan”, 29 September 2012: “Several protesters in Beijing carried signs saying ‘Diaoyu belongs to China, Bo belongs to the people’.”

Party Chief of Chongqing – who had many supporters – had broken out a few months before. As a matter of fact, the timing of the purchase of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands was particularly unfortunate for the Party, anxious to maintain order in the wake of the Bo scandal and on the eve of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

Another growing concern for the Chinese Communist Party has been to control “angry youth”, who make up a notable proportion of online nationalists and whose virulence may give rise to sudden outbursts on the Internet and in the street. Since the emergence of the Arab Spring, China’s leaders have been aware of and worried about the influence of social networks and their young users. These concerns are especially strong as social movements are constantly on the rise in China, with the increasing involvement of young and urban middle-class professionals, who have led demonstrations over environmental issues, for example.

### Nationalism: a double-edged political tool

In general, Chinese nationalists can be among those who are most critical of the Chinese government, which they accuse of weakness and cowardice. Sometimes they declare their readiness to say themselves what the Chinese government does not dare say, and conduct violent and/or illegal actions (go to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands,<sup>77</sup> add graffiti to or burn parts of the Yasukuni Shrine,<sup>78</sup> etc.). In this context, some ultra-nationalist individuals occasionally appear in the eyes of the Party as “dissidents” whose influence needs to be reduced. In fact, anti-Japanese nationalism is no longer considered by the Party as a simple route to national unity with no risk. It is considered a double-edged political tool, a potential source of instability, which may extend to challenging domestic policy and criticizing the Chinese government itself.

The argument linking the legitimacy of the Party and nationalism – especially when it is argued that nationalism is used to divert the attention of the domestic population away from domestic issues (economic, social, etc)<sup>79</sup> – is not acceptable to many Chinese official analysts.<sup>80</sup> According to them, the sense of national unity against the “common Japanese enemy” is insufficient to restore the legitimacy of the Party, because in recent years this legitimacy has mainly been eroded due to domestic issues (corruption among local and central government officials, expropriations, environmental crises, inflation, difficult access to housing and care, insufficient health and retirement insurance). Therefore, many among the Chinese political elites believe that the legitimacy of the Party can only be fully restored by dealing first of all with these internal problems.<sup>81</sup> This view tends to be confirmed by opinion surveys. The Chinese Communist Party increasingly polls Chinese public opinion in depth through the Internet and social networks, on issues of internal and

<sup>77</sup> For example, on 12 September 2012, the Japanese police of the prefecture of Okinawa arrested 14 Chinese activists, seven of whom had landed on the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands.

<sup>78</sup> For example, in 2005, a Chinese citizen wrote graffiti on the walls of the shrine and in 2011 another tried to burn a column of the entrance porch.

<sup>79</sup> Jack Snyder, “Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State”, in Michael Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 79-101

<sup>80</sup> Interviews with analysts in government-affiliated Chinese foreign policy and security think-tanks, Beijing, June 2013.

<sup>81</sup> Interviews with various analysts, diplomats and Party cadres, Beijing, 2013-2014.

external policy. It is clearly aware of the hierarchy of priorities in the eyes of the Chinese population, and of the primary criticisms to which it must respond in order to maintain political and social stability.

### Restraining current and future excesses...

In this context, anti-Japanese behavior carries significant risks for the Party because it conflicts with a number of key objectives and principles of the current government. Potentially violent anti-Japanese demonstrations contradict two basic principles that Beijing has been seeking to promote for more than a decade: that of a “civilized” (*wenming*) and “stable” (*weiwen*) society. The primary objective of the Chinese authorities remains political and social stability. In a tense situation (among other issues, the growing influence of social networks, increasing social movements, and the weaker legitimacy of the Party due to repeated corruption scandals), the expression of anti-Japanese sentiment in the population involves additional, unwelcome risks of instability.<sup>82</sup> While the Party tolerates the expression of a “rational patriotism” (see above: “calls for rational patriotism”), it fears more than ever any outbursts of violence.<sup>83</sup> These are difficult to predict: in the context of limited freedom of expression, long-contained convictions (including anti-Japanese feelings) tend to be given vent to with surprising virulence and force.

In addition, expressions of violence interfere with another major objective of the Party: the promotion of China’s image abroad. The Chinese authorities are fully aware that scenes of violent protesters were widely covered by the media in some Western countries (the USA and France, among many others) in September 2012, and that these images damage the image of China in the eyes of this foreign audience. This is taken seriously by Chinese diplomacy, which is increasingly concerned about the perception of the country abroad.<sup>84</sup>

In this context, a small number of new measures have been taken to restrict the scope of anti-Japanese sentiment among the Chinese population. Thus, in May 2013, the regulatory authority of Chinese television decided to impose regulations on the content of TV drama about resistance to Japanese aggression during the WWII, as such programs are considered to have adverse effects on the Chinese people.<sup>85</sup> In particular, GAPPRFT (General Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television) ordered

<sup>82</sup> In September 2012, the Chinese leadership used all the means at its disposal (censorship, communication, police, etc) to maintain law and order in the run-up to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, which was very tense (due to the Bo Xilai and Ling Jihua affairs, corruption scandals involving local and central officials, etc).

<sup>83</sup> For example, there were a number of spontaneous appeals for boycotts of Japanese goods in 2012-2013. The Chinese authorities did not encourage these, but nor did they discourage them. It should be noted that such appeals are not recent. In 2003, an online petition called for a boycott of Japanese beer (Asahi), to protest against the company’s supposed support for extreme right-wing Japanese groups. The petition garnered 1.28 million signatures in only two hours, according to James Reilly, “China’s Online Nationalism Toward Japan”, p. 50 in Simon Shen & Shaun Breslin (eds.), *Online Chinese Nationalism and China’s Bilateral Relations*, Lexington Books, 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Chinese diplomats, Paris, September 2013.

<sup>85</sup> On anti-Japanese nationalism in Chinese audiovisual fiction, see for example: “Anti-Japanese Nationalism in Chinese Cinema”, in Bhavna Singh, *China’s Discursive Nationalism – Contending in Softer Realms*, Pentagon Press, 2012.

provincial channels to send such programs to Beijing for checking before transmission. These measures follow calls by several influential academics, such as Zhu Feng, Professor of International Relations at Peking University, who warned against “patriotic infantilism”<sup>86</sup> and Ge Jianxiong, Professor of History at Fudan University in Shanghai and a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, which called for limiting the broadcasting of “Drawing Sword”,<sup>87</sup> a television series about Japanese aggression: its 30 episodes have already been aired for eight years, running on both national and provincial channels since its creation in 2006.

### ... without appearing weak in the face of Japan

At the same time, Beijing has to deal with domestic criticisms of being “too weak” over Japan. This may be a minority view, but it is often the loudest and most virulent. This pressure on foreign policy orientations has been expressed for several years through petitions,<sup>88</sup> and increasingly in polls and opinion surveys conducted by the online media, many of which are actually commissioned by the central government.<sup>89</sup> Surveys about the perception of Japan were conducted among the Chinese population during the height of the Senkaku/Diaoyu crisis. These criticisms apply a certain degree of pressure on the Chinese leadership, which logically seeks not to stir them up. It is difficult to measure how seriously the leadership takes such popular criticisms, and their impact on the decision-making process. In general, East Asian Politics expert James Reilly considers that the impact varies depending on the state of union or division of the Chinese leadership.<sup>90</sup> According to him, when the leaders are united, public opinion has a limited impact on foreign policy vis-à-vis Japan. By contrast, when the leadership is divided, public opinion is taken into account as an additional variable. In all cases, Reilly sees the Chinese government as a strategic actor, successfully applying its control over public opinion and aiming to stabilize China-Japan relations.<sup>91</sup> From time to time, the pressure of popular nationalism may affect the decision-making process. For example, according to Reilly, online nationalism had an impact on the decision of China to build a high-speed rail-line in 2003.<sup>92</sup> Today, public pressure is to

<sup>86</sup> “*Aiguozhuyi youzhi bing*”, Caijing, 9 September 2012.

<sup>87</sup> “liangjian” (亮剑)

<sup>88</sup> For example, in the autumn of 2005, more than 10 million people signed a petition against granting Japan a permanent seat on the UN Security Council; in July 2003, an online petition gathered 80,000 signatures in 10 days against a project in which Japanese firms were to participate in the construction of a high-speed train. On this, see James Reilly, “China’s Online Nationalism Toward Japan”, pp. 46-47, in Simon Shen & Shaun Breslin (eds.), *Online Chinese Nationalism and China’s Bilateral Relations*, Lexington Books, 2010.

<sup>89</sup> For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly provides “Public Sentiment Analysis” (*yuqing fenxi*), while Renminwang, the Internet portal of the *People’s Daily* has its own “Office of Online Public Sentiment” (*wangluo yuqing bangongshi*), which provides detailed analyses (mapping by provinces, districts, etc) of Internet commentaries, and has several government institutions as clients.

<sup>90</sup> James Reilly, *Strong Society, Smart State: The Rise of Public Opinion in China’s Japan Policy*, Columbia University Press, 2012.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> “Online nationalism broadened the scope of the decision-making process, delayed decisions, interjected the element of public emotion into officials’ calculations, and so affected the final decision”, James Reilly, “China’s Online Nationalism Toward

some extent forcing Beijing to stand firm – or at least to appear to do so in the eyes of the national population – not only on the issue of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea, but also on territorial disputes in the South China Sea. In November 2013, Beijing declared an air-defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea. More recently, in May 2014, China set up an oil rig<sup>93</sup> in the South China Sea in waters that Vietnam considers part of its exclusive economic zone. However, such unilateral actions, often perceived as provocations by neighboring countries, cannot be explained solely by the pressures of popular nationalism. Other factors need to be taken into account, including the personality of the new leaders (particularly Xi Jinping, who has rapidly consolidated his power, and appears determined to consolidate China's regional power status); the evolution of the balance of power in the region; the growing competition between China and the United States, etc. However, it is clear that these initiatives are generally well received by the population and tend to tone down criticism of a “weak” Communist Party in the face of Japan.

If the Chinese population and its elites share to some extent the same negative views of Japan and feel an obvious resentment against its interpretation of history,<sup>94</sup> policy-makers are nonetheless fully aware of the complexity of bilateral issues, and that a policy guided by feelings is not the best way to promote China's national interests, given that Japan remains a major economic partner. There are substantive differences between most Chinese scholars of Japan and international relations – who are often consulted during the decision-making process – and the most anti-Japanese part of the population. Calls by Chinese academics and journalists for a dispassionate approach to Sino-Japanese relations have multiplied in recent years.<sup>95</sup> Also, many diplomats are aware that populist diplomacy may disturb delicate economic negotiations. In fact, the very pragmatic approach that seems to have characterized most of China's foreign policy decisions for over 30 years has often tempered the emotional outbursts that may arise concerning decisions about Japan (see “Factors in nationalism control” below).

Thus, the logics of nationalism in China and Japan depend on the nature of the political systems in each country. In a democratic context, the expression of Japanese nationalism remains relatively free, and is represented by the parties of the right and extreme right. In China, the single Party is in theory able to guide or censor nationalist expressions, but the task is daunting for the leadership: it has to be both tolerant of popular nationalism in order not to appear weak, while avoiding excesses that could turn against the Party.

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Japan”, pp. 55-56, in Simon Shen & Shaun Breslin (eds.), *Online Chinese Nationalism and China's Bilateral Relations*, Lexington Books, 2010.

<sup>93</sup> The giant oil-rig HD-981, belonging to China's state-owned oil company (CNOOC), was unilaterally set up off the Paracels islands (whose ownership is claimed by China and Vietnam), with the protection of about sixty ships of the Chinese coast-guard.

<sup>94</sup> A majority of diplomats, researchers in international relations and informal advisors share these deep feelings about Japan. Interviews, Beijing, June 2013.

<sup>95</sup> On several occasions in the 2000s, liberal-leaning Chinese specialists on Japan and/or international relations – such as Shi Yinhong, Lu Zhongwei and Ma Licheng – have repeatedly called for improvements in relations with the neighbor, given that it is a key economic partner. See “Les manifestations anti-japonaises du printemps 2005”, in Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *op.cit.*

# Nationalisms and Sino-Japanese Relations

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## *China-Japan: Two nationalisms with conflicting “hotspots”*

### **The growing weight of history on bilateral relations**

The historical legacy has traditionally been an important part of the Sino-Japanese relationship. It has determined the deferential posture of Tokyo toward Beijing since 1945. At the same time, it has largely underpinned the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, as “the hero” that ended the Japanese occupation. In recent years, however, tensions over the memory of World War II have risen. Revisionist voices are stronger in Japan, while in China past Japanese atrocities are the subject of renewed attention.

Commemorations in China frequently give rise to discussions about research into and analysis of the Japanese occupation, especially in the hope of obtaining recognition by Japan of certain facts. For example, on 18 September 2013, on the occasion of the 82<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Mukden Incident, which led to the invasion of Manchuria in 1931,<sup>96</sup> a Chinese museum unveiled archives relating to forced labor in Japan during World War II.<sup>97</sup> According to the exhibition presentation, nearly 40,000 Chinese were forced to work in Japan. For Beijing, the exhibition provided the occasion to lodge a lawsuit against the Japanese government.<sup>98</sup> More recently, on 7 July 2014, the anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which in 1937 marked the beginning of the Second Japan-China War, a large-scale ceremony was held at the same museum. The ceremony was larger than in previous years and was held in the presence of Xi Jinping, alongside veterans of the Chinese army, party cadres and young children.<sup>99</sup> It was the first time a Chinese president had taken part in such a ceremony. For the last two years Beijing

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<sup>96</sup> On 18 September 1931, an explosion occurred on a railroad belonging to a Japanese firm in the north-east of China. This explosion was caused by Japanese soldiers but attributed to the Chinese, and was used by Tokyo as a pretext for taking control over Manchuria.

<sup>97</sup> The Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, in Beijing.

<sup>98</sup> On the basis of these documents, museum deputy-director Li Zongyuan declared to the AFP agency that, “we are going to lodge a lawsuit against the Japanese government, so that it admits what its country has done, presents apologies and provides compensation to the relatives of the victims”; « Chine : des preuves sur le travail forcé au Japon durant la guerre », 18 September 2013.

<sup>99</sup> “China marks 77th anniversary of start of anti-Japan war”, Xinhua, 7 July 2014.

has multiplied official denunciations of crimes committed by the Japanese army during the war.

The dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands is closely linked to the historical tensions between the two countries, and exacerbates them. Indeed, China directly links Japan's current policy, including on the East China Sea, to its aggressive past.<sup>100</sup> The increase in the military budget and the decision by Shinzo Abe to revise the interpretation of Japan's pacifist constitution are considered by Beijing as constituting a return to a militarist Japan. In official Chinese communications, frequent association is made between contemporary Japan and pre-war Japan, as well as direct comparison between Germany, which has apologized for its past, and Japan, which is reluctant to do so.

Both countries, therefore, accuse each other of trying to change the *status quo*: Japan sees China as seeking to modify international standards to its advantage; China sees Japan as seeking to challenge the settlement of World War II in 1945, and more broadly its status as a defeated nation.<sup>101</sup> In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2012, the Chinese Minister for of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi thus accused Japan of "stealing" the islands from China and trying to deny "the outcome of the war against fascism".<sup>102</sup> The gap in mutual perceptions and the asymmetry in expectations are thus widening: Japan is focusing on very contemporary attitudes of China, while China is still affected by the aggressive behavior of pre-war Japan. For China, the atrocities committed by the Japanese army during its occupation of Chinese territory are in effect the main source of contention between Beijing and Tokyo. Conversely, Japan believes it is time to move forward and recover the sovereignty that was partly lost at the end of World War II. While China calls on Japan to apologize sincerely and interpret more accurately its history,<sup>103</sup> in Tokyo, political leaders believe instead that the country revisited its past mistakes enough and that it is now time to reaffirm the full sovereignty of Japan, without any inferiority complex.

However, the new leaders of the two countries share the conviction that the time has come to regain national pride, hitherto tainted (mainly by the weak military capabilities of Japan, and by the weak economic capacity of China). These national projects appear to be in inevitable contradiction, and the differences are now such that they seem to have led to an impasse, making any prospect of reconciliation difficult. Differences also remain deep at

<sup>100</sup> For Beijing, Japan took possession of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands illegally, after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). Tokyo for its part claims that the islands were regularly integrated into Japanese territory as *terra nullius* (i.e. land belonging to no-one).

<sup>101</sup> "An important gesture from Japan to show its commitment to peace is to stick to the promises it made and treaties it signed on the occasion of the country's surrender at the end of WWII, including those about the territorial issues. However, the recent Diaoyu Islands "nationalization" plan by the Japanese government is a clear violation of what it had accepted in 1945." Fu Shuangqi, Meng Na, "Future for Japan-China relations rooted in history", 17 September 2012, <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2012-09/17/c\\_131855583.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2012-09/17/c_131855583.htm)>.

<sup>102</sup> Declaration of Yang Jiechi, 67<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, 27 September 2012.

<sup>103</sup> Official declarations are characterized by references to history. For example, "We hope that Japan will draw lessons from history (...)", Hong Lei, spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, press conference, 17 September 2013 (<[www.amb-chine.fr/fra/fyrth/t1078068.htm](http://www.amb-chine.fr/fra/fyrth/t1078068.htm)>); "The Japanese nation has looked history and reality in the face (...)", Hong Lei, press conference, 8 August 2013.

the academic level: the Japan-China Joint History Research Committee, set up in 2006 and bringing together historians from both countries, has still failed to agree on a common interpretation of the events of World War II.<sup>104</sup>

## Potential flashpoints in Chinese and Japanese nationalisms

In this context, the commemorations of past conflicts between the two countries are particularly sensitive moments for public opinion and for Chinese and Japanese leaders. They tend to exacerbate tensions, or be opportunities for sending nationalist signals to neighbors. They are numerous and unevenly distributed over the year. Certain times, primarily in the summer months, appear to be especially risky, and neither of the two countries are protected from possible national outbursts.<sup>105</sup> The specific date of the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine by Shinzo Abe on 26 December 2014 should be noted, it being the anniversary of his coming to power in 2013. This decision indicates how this pilgrimage was the result of a personal decision by the Japanese prime minister, rather than a consensus in his government.

In the medium to long term, several political and commemorative dates could fuel Sino-Japanese tensions. In Japan, major elections took place in 2012, and early general elections were held in December 2014. The situation is therefore stable for the LDP, in principle, until December 2018. Meanwhile, half of the Japanese upper house will be renewed during the summer of 2016. However, the political climate could start to change as of 2015, which will be a symbolic year for Tokyo and Beijing given the commemorations of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II and the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Sino-Japanese war. On 9 May 2015, China will cohost with Russia a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of its victory over Nazi Germany in Moscow. Shinzo Abe, for his part, is expected to deliver a statement on 15 August, reasserting Japan's remorse for

<sup>104</sup> The committee has reached an agreement to some extent on the period before the war, but it seems that its work has ground to a standstill in relation to the years 1931-45. Even though the historians still meet, they are unable to arrive at a common reading of history (disagreeing over facts, the assessment of the number of victims, etc). Interview with a Japanese member of the committee, Tokyo, February 2014.

<sup>105</sup> July 7 is the anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, while 12 August is the anniversary of the Sino-Japanese Friendship Treaty. On 15 August, Japan commemorates the end of the war in 1945, and its defeat. Traditionally, the prime minister makes a speech expressing Japanese regrets over the war. It is also the day on which politicians pay respect to soldiers who died for their country, by visiting the Yasukuni Shrine (as did J. Koizumi). The 3<sup>rd</sup> of September is celebrated in China to mark victory over the Japanese occupier; Japan signed its unconditional surrender to the Allies on 2 September. On 29 September 1972, Japan re-established diplomatic relations with Beijing. On 18 September, the Mukden Incident, which marked the advance of Japanese troops in north-eastern China in 1931, is commemorated. To this long list, the 11<sup>th</sup> of September is now added, the date of the anniversary of the purchase of the three Senkaku/Diaoyu islands by the Noda government. Lastly, traditionally the spring (April) and autumn (October) festivals at the Yasukuni Shrine are occasions for politicians to pay a visit.

its part in the war and highlighting Japan's peaceful commitments since 1945.<sup>106</sup>

The period 2016-2017 could also be particularly tense in China, ahead of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (autumn 2017), after which five of the seven members of the current Standing Committee would retire. The process of appointing their successors, though long-anticipated, could heighten existing tensions between factions within the party. However, it is not certain that these tensions will be publicly visible and thus draw on the nationalist expectations of part of the general public. In the longer term, the organization of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020 will be a particularly favorable time for demonstrations of Japanese nationalism. However, it is probable that this will be a cultural, popular and "naïve" form of nationalism rather than one of reactionary chauvinism.<sup>107</sup>

### ***Diverging perceptions of nationalisms reinforce the Sino-Japanese security dilemma***

Differences in perceptions of particular events are recurrent, beginning with the takeover by the Japanese government of three of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. According to the Japanese, this initiative was designed to counteract the plans of the ultra-nationalist mayor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, to acquire the islands, and thus was intended to reduce the risk of conflict with China spilling over. Moreover, the acquisition has not led to a strengthening of the Japanese logistical or military presence on the islands. On the Chinese side, this "nationalization" was seen as a provocative and unacceptable alteration of the *status quo*. Beijing indeed expected the Japanese government to prevent Ishihara's scheme without actually buying the islands, which were sold by their indebted owner.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the date selected by the Noda government to announce its intention to buy the islands – 7 July, the anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident – has been interpreted by the Chinese leadership as a deliberate provocation.<sup>109</sup> The timing of the "nationalization" on 11 September (only seven days before the anniversary of the Mukden Incident) also contributed to the strong reaction by Beijing and the popular mobilization in China.

<sup>106</sup> "70 years after WWII: Regional diplomacy / Abe's statement in August holds key to easing tensions", *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 19 January 2015.

<sup>107</sup> Such popular nationalism expresses itself notably in a new taste for traditional Japanese culture among young people, a new enthusiasm for sports victories (the women's national football team "Nadeshiko Japan" won the world cup in 2011), and a certain awareness of the qualities of resilience of the Japanese people after the triple catastrophe in March 2011. Most observers of Japan qualify this form of nationalism as cultural or "naïve", and as disconnected from political nationalism linked to the state. Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*, Routledge, 1992; Yuki Honda, "Focusing on Contemporary Japan's 'Youth' Nationalism", *Social Science Japan Journal*, 10-2, Nov. 2007, pp. 281-286.

<sup>108</sup> "Inside look: Japan tried but failed to avert disaster in China dispute", *The Asahi Shimbun*, 26 September 2012.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

In China, developments in Japan tend to be interpreted in an increasingly consistent and standardized way. Nuances regarding the source and the course of events as well as the parties involved have tended to become blurred, with the Japanese government often appearing as the main or sole agent responsible. These kinds of nuances disappear even more among the general public, which now reacts spontaneously online, passing from one event to another, according to the latest events and incidents between China and Japan, and in direct response to the communications and gestures of Japanese politicians. Whether an event involves an isolated nationalist leader or a member of Japanese government, the popular indignation is often unvaried, especially as the Chinese population is unfamiliar about modes of expression in a democratic context. It has thus little ability to differentiate between the government's position and that of the opposition, or even of minority parties whose voice is, nevertheless, audible in China.

Faced with domestic nationalist pressure, the Chinese government may be tempted to adopt uncompromising postures that mask its discreet efforts to ease or restore the bilateral relationship. This may then lead to a gap between the reality of relations with Japan – often viewed with pragmatism by Chinese leaders – and what is presented to the public. The rhetoric addressed to the Chinese population, however, is monitored and relayed back to Japan, which increases the risk of misinterpretation and inappropriate responses. From this perspective, while the bellicose terminology sometimes used by the Chinese government should not be taken at face value, it increases the “perception gap” by reinforcing the argument about a “China threat” and could lead to escalation. The same phenomenon exists concerning Japan's rearmament program, which coincides with the return of a revisionist discourse by politicians, and which is being interpreted in Beijing as the return of aggressive expansionism. In this sense, nationalism is exacerbating the security dilemma between the two countries and is leading to more forceful diplomacy and a more ambitious defense policy.

In addition, the respective nationalisms in the two countries are feeding each other at this time of high tension. The Sino-Japanese relationship has become increasingly unstable and its management all the more demanding. The leaders of both sides are unable today to tolerate nationalist acts or declarations (considered hostile) by their neighbors. In combination, the acceleration of the action-reaction cycle, linked to the extreme sensitivity of public opinion, and the political agenda pursued by both governments are pushing leaders to respond more quickly and strongly so as not to lose face, in turn raising fears of possible provocations and abuses.<sup>110</sup> In addition, the traditional channels of political communication based on strong interpersonal relationships seem no longer to work.<sup>111</sup> In Japan, the government of the

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<sup>110</sup> A serious situation was avoided at the beginning of 2013, when a Chinese ship locked its radar on a Japanese patrol boat. The Self-Defense Forces chose not to respond to this maneuver, which usually indicates the imminence of fire. “China's use of fire-control radar ramps up tension in East China Sea”, *The Asahi Shimbun*, 6 February 2013.

<sup>111</sup> For example, the New Japan-China Friendship Committee for the 21st Century, created in 1984 by the two countries, and made up of academics and members of civil society. One of its goals is precisely to maintain dialogue when bilateral relations no longer function. The group resumed meeting only in June 2014. Even though participants agreed on the importance of strengthening dialogue, talks remained especially tense (with Chinese criticisms of the prime minister's visit to the Yasukuni

Democratic Party from 2009 to 2012 contributed to the demise of the “shadow diplomacy” established by the LDP since 1955, which had previously helped to limit the political frictions and misunderstandings between the two countries.<sup>112</sup> The breakdown of these channels of communication can also be interpreted as a symptom, in China, of a new political inflexibility vis-à-vis Japan and the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute.<sup>113</sup> The succession of crises made a deep and lasting impression on public opinion. The tendency toward moral differentiation led by nationalists on both sides tends to discourage the possibilities of real cooperation, let alone sincere friendship. In this context, the leaders are seeing their room for maneuver being considerably reduced. Finally, the geopolitical situation in East Asia, which is dominated by power relations and Sino-American rivalry, does not provide the conditions for reconciliation between Tokyo and Beijing. The exacerbation of the issues inherited from World War II is another major constraint on an easing of tensions.

If the rise of nationalism is an important factor to consider, it alone cannot explain the state of the bilateral relationship or determine its evolution. Other factors that moderate or constrain nationalism need to be taken into account.

## ***Factors in nationalism control***

In Japan, the nationalist factor is strongly constrained by other key elements that influence the relationship with China. The geopolitical context, particularly the perception of the balance of power with China, as well as the closeness of the political and military relationship with the US ally, provide a basic framework for decision-making. Reassurance regarding US support is seen as a decisive advantage by Tokyo and encourages it to take a firm stance, while nevertheless monitoring its nationalist positions.<sup>114</sup> The United States indeed considers the revisionist affinities of Shinzo Abe as unnecessarily disruptive not only of Sino-Japanese relations, but also of Sino-Korean relations. For strategic reasons, Washington is seeking to bring together its two main allies in the region.<sup>115</sup>

On the domestic side, the room for maneuver of government in the face of nationalist demands determines its ability to balance the pragmatic and

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Shrine at the time of the June meeting, etc). See, for example, “Ex-China foreign minister says frayed Japan ties ‘temporary’”. AFP, 5 June 2014.

<sup>112</sup> In September 2009, the center-left Japanese Democratic Party (JDP) took power from the center-right Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had practically ruled Japan permanently since 1955.

<sup>113</sup> International Crisis Group, “Dangerous Waters: China-Japan relations on the rocks”, *Asia Report n°245*, 8 April 2013, p. 32-33.

<sup>114</sup> Washington has recalled on several occasions that the security treaty applies to the Senkaku/ Diaoyu islands, and is opposed to any unilateral action that challenges their control by Japan. “US warns China to steer clear of Senkakus”, *The Japan Times*, 20 January 2013.

<sup>115</sup> The White House thus called on Shinzo Abe to seek to calm regional anger linked to his statements on Japanese war crimes, especially concerning “comfort women”. Washington is seeking to set up an integrated ballistic missile defense system in Asia, which requires the cooperation of Japan and Korea. Josh Rogin, “White House: Japan should do more to address ‘Comfort women’ issue”, *The Cable, Foreign Policy Magazine*, 21 February 2013.

nationalistic goals.<sup>116</sup> A weakened government may be forced to make more concessions to nationalists. Shinzo Abe's administration is still relatively popular and may have a certain freedom in the tone it can give to policy. However, it is likely that it will try to apply its nationalist program as long as this does not harm its popularity. A failure of the Abenomics program, about which many doubts have been voiced,<sup>117</sup> would put it in a more difficult position.

Economic interdependence has also been a stabilizing factor in Sino-Japanese relations since the 1990s, a situation qualified as "economically hot and politically cold". But questions may now be asked about the continued application of this axiom, given that trade has begun to suffer from the latest tensions. The further deterioration of the business environment for Japanese companies (along with rising labor costs and problems with intellectual property rights) have led some firms to reduce their activities in China, while a large majority have accelerated the diversification of investment, particularly to countries in Southeast Asia, which have been strongly courted by Prime Minister Abe since he came to power.<sup>118</sup> As China's industrial output moves up-market, Beijing increasingly considers that this trading relationship with Japan is in its favor,<sup>119</sup> and shows no hesitation in using a wide range of economic sanctions to maintain pressure on Tokyo.<sup>120</sup> In this configuration, Japan appears to be more vulnerable economically, even if Beijing needs Japanese high technology to make its move up-market.

For the Chinese government, internal concerns related to political and social stability explain the maintenance of restrictions on – or at least the stabilization of – anti-Japanese sentiment. By encouraging the expression of nationalism, the Party might be caught in its own trap. And this trap would be twofold: on the domestic front, the anti-Japanese demonstrations and expressions could potentially degenerate into broader criticism (of foreign but also of domestic policy), which might turn against the Party itself. Externally, these nationalist pressures could lead the Party to adopt risky positions against Japan, both strategic and economic, which it had not initially chosen.

Apart from public opinion, other factors need to be taken into account in the policy of China toward Japan, and primarily the economic

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<sup>116</sup> Yew Meng Lai, *Nationalism and Power Politics in Japan's Relations with China. A Neoclassical Realist Interpretation*, Sheffield Centre for Japanese Studies, Routledge Series, 2014; especially, p. 35-44.

<sup>117</sup> Ben McLannahan, "Sluggish Japan Inc guidance raises doubts over Abenomics recovery", *Financial Times*, 28 April 2014.

<sup>118</sup> See Stephen Robert Nagy, "Territorial disputes, trade and diplomacy. Examining the repercussions of the Sino-Japanese territorial dispute for bilateral trade", *China Perspectives*, n°2013/4, p. 54-57.

<sup>119</sup> For example in an op-ed article in the *Global Times*, "Advantage China in Diaoyu Dispute" of 12 September 2013: "(...) China has set its biggest goal of development as realizing a peaceful rise. But this single goal has been countered and contained by other powers, such as Japan and the US. The Diaoyu Islands have already become the outlet where these powers voice their hostility and resentment against China. China has managed to control this outlet, and respond with effective action. China's increasing economic prosperity and the popular support to China's Japan policy have qualified China to continue this stalemate if it is needed. (...)", <[www.globaltimes.cn/content/810627.shtml](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/810627.shtml)>.

<sup>120</sup> Delays in obtaining business visas and customs clearance, cancelations of industrial orders, tourist visits to Japan, etc.

consequences of the deterioration in relations.<sup>121</sup> If China's diplomatic establishment believes that, in the medium and long term, the close trade relationship with Japan will play more in China's favor, it is fully aware that Japan is still a vital economic partner. Economic interdependence is such that in some sectors (electronic and automobiles, among others), the closure of production zones and Japanese companies based in China would result in many direct job losses in China. This is especially so in some provinces in the south, which have already been heavily affected by the decline in exports to Europe and the United States, in the wake of the economic and financial crisis in autumn 2008. This is probably what explains Beijing's attempts in spring 2014 to restore a parallel dialogue with think-tanks, personalities from the business world and even with Japanese locally elected officials and members of parliament. These efforts suggest that China continues to support ongoing links with Japan, especially within business communities. Beijing is seeking to prepare the "post-Shinzo Abe" period by separating its links with Japan's opinion-shapers, as well as its political and economic leaders, from its strained relationship with the current Japanese leader.<sup>122</sup> For example, when the Japanese Transport Minister Akihiro Ota visited Beijing in June 2014, Chinese Vice-Premier Liu Yandong said that China supported the promotion of exchanges between the political parties, companies and representatives of local authorities in the two countries.<sup>123</sup> Even if both countries recently agreed, in early November 2014 on the eve of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, to "gradually resume political, diplomatic and security dialogue through various multilateral and bilateral channels", it is likely that Beijing would like to continue to limit its contact with the current Japanese leadership, in particular with LDP-affiliated officials. The political victory of the LDP in the December 2014 general elections in Japan, however, means that Abe's party will remain the main interlocutor for the Chinese political leadership in the years to come.

Finally, China's policy toward Japan takes into account the weight of the United States in the region, reinforced by the strategic "pivot" adopted by the Obama administration. Officially, China is trying to develop a strategy of cooperation in a volatile region where Beijing itself remains – compared with Washington – relatively isolated.<sup>124</sup> In an expression of this relative isolation,

<sup>121</sup> The results may be immediate and significant. Thus, Japanese foreign direct investment in China in October 2012 fell by 32.4% compared to 2011. Ben McLannahan and Mure Dickie, "Japanese investment in China falls sharply", *Financial Times*, 20 November 2012, <[www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/31020a3e-330e-11e2-aa83-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2HWJaari6](http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/31020a3e-330e-11e2-aa83-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2HWJaari6)>.

<sup>122</sup> In early April 2014, a delegation of the Japanese Association for the Promotion of International Trade visited China. At the end of April, the governor of Tokyo, Masuzoe Yoichi, went to Beijing and met several Chinese officials who indicated to him that the entire Chinese government appreciated his visit. In early May, a delegation of nine members of the Japanese parliament visited Beijing and met Zhang Dejiang, the third highest-ranking member of the CCP, who declared himself favorable to renewed contacts between parliamentarians.

<sup>123</sup> "Japanese minister holds talk with Chinese vice premier", *The Mainichi Shimbun*, 28 June 2014.

<sup>124</sup> Chinese diplomacy speaks of "transpacific cooperation". See for example the declaration by Xi Jinping, 7 June 2013, at his meeting with Barack Obama in Sunnylands: "(...) As I said last year during my visit to the United States, the vast Pacific Ocean is sufficiently large to welcome two great powers, China and the United States. I still hold his view. Today, we are having a meeting here with the aim of developing 'transpacific cooperation' (...)". Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RPC.

at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2014, Lieutenant General Wang Guanzhong voiced strong criticisms of the American and Japanese speeches that “condemned China”, and which, he said, seemed to have been “coordinated in advance”.<sup>125</sup>

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“President Xi Jinping begins meetings with President Barak Obama” (translated here from the official Chinese translation), 8 June 2013, <[www.fmprc.gov.cn/fra/zxxx/t1051118.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/fra/zxxx/t1051118.shtml)>.

<sup>125</sup> “I feel that the speeches of Mr. Abe and Mr. Hagel have been pre-coordinated. They supported and encouraged each other in provoking and challenging China, taking advantage of being the first to speak at the Dialogue.” Shangri-La Dialogue 2014 Fourth Plenary Session, Lieutenant General Wang Guanzhong, Deputy Chief, General Staff Department, People’s Liberation Army, China, <[www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/2014-c20c/plenary-4-a239/wang-guanzhong-2e5e](http://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/2014-c20c/plenary-4-a239/wang-guanzhong-2e5e)>.

## Conclusion

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Sino-Japanese tensions are likely to remain strong in the short and medium term. The risk of incident, triggered by “adventurous” projects by nationalist activists around the disputed islands,<sup>126</sup> or possible “collision” between coast-guards, military or fishing ships in the area,<sup>127</sup> remains high. The latter risk has recently reduced after the signing by both sides in early November 2014 of the “4 points consensus”,<sup>128</sup> which included reference to establishing a “crisis management mechanism”, and in particular a “maritime communication mechanism” between defense officials of the two countries, which could be helpful in preventing an escalation of tensions.<sup>129</sup> Discussions at the working level started in January to set up a mechanism some time in 2015.

Overall, though, the bilateral relationship seems to be dominated by emotion rather than rational interests. The goal is now less one of historic reconciliation between the two neighbors<sup>130</sup> than the establishment of mechanisms to prevent and manage conflict and to restore adequate communication channels to facilitate a functional relationship that can curb nationalist impulses.<sup>131</sup>

China certainly remains inflexible over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, which it considers part of its “fundamental interests”. It feels that “the ball is in

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<sup>126</sup> Tokyo has forbidden its nationals from setting foot on the islands. In August 2012, militants from the Gambare Nippon! Group had to turn back when faced with 10 patrolling coast-guard vessels blocking their passage. Ruairidh Villar, “Japanese nationalists sail close to islands in dispute with China”, *Reuters*, 17 August 2013.

<sup>127</sup> In the year to May 2014, nearly 150 Chinese incursions into the territorial waters of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands have been identified; “Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan’s Response – Records of Intrusions of Chinese Government and Other Vessels into Japan’s Territorial Sea”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, 2 May 2014, <[www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e\\_000021.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html)>.

<sup>128</sup> This took the form of not one joint statement but two differentiated declarations, in order to allow some subtle differences in the terms used by the two parties. This was essential to ensure the issuing of statements in which Japan and China “agreed to disagree” on the status of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The Japanese version can be found at <[www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/cn/page4e\\_000150.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page4e_000150.html)> and the Chinese version at <[www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1208360.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1208360.shtml)>.

<sup>129</sup> Nonetheless, the establishment of such crisis management mechanisms may take some time given that, in both countries, foreign policy and security institutions are currently undergoing major restructuring.

<sup>130</sup> This goal was notably pursued by the Democratic government of Yukio Hatoyama in 2009-2012. According to the project, the Sino-Japanese reconciliation would allow for an “East Asian Community” to be constructed, on the model of the Franco-German coupling that has been the motor of European integration.

<sup>131</sup> See, notably, Sheila A. Smith, “Japan and the East China Sea Dispute”, *Orbis*, summer 2012, p. 370-390.

Japan's court" and that "it is for Japan to make the first move".<sup>132</sup> The country's economic rise strengthens its leaders in thinking that finally China has the means to deal with the country that imposed past humiliations, and avoid a position that could make it "lose face". In addition, given the very poor perceptions Chinese authorities have of the personality of Shinzo Abe, who is considered to be nationalist and revisionist, it is likely that political relations will remain limited for the remainder of his term. The handshake between Xi and Abe and the bilateral meeting at the APEC summit in early November have high symbolic value, and certainly mark the end of a two-year period of extremely high tensions (Sept. 2012 to Sept. 2014), but not necessarily the resumption of constructive dialogue between the two leaders. Also, although the "four-point consensus" represents a significant outcome in terms of avoiding conflict, the APEC exchanges were cold and limited in scope. The Chinese leadership remains upset by declarations and moves made by Abe over the last two years, while differences over interpretation of historical events continue to weigh heavily on the bilateral relations.

Japan, for its part, has reasserted that its position has not changed, admits no ambiguity concerning the sovereignty of the islands, and strongly resists Chinese demands,<sup>133</sup> although it has acknowledged the existence of different positions in the four-point consensus. Japan's political landscape, dominated by normalizer nationalists, favors the continuation of a pragmatic political agenda, tainted by nationalist ideology and prone to give in to pressure from radical groups.<sup>134</sup> Attempts to develop more normal relations with Beijing, without the traditional deference that resulted from guilt over war crimes, have met with strong opposition from China. For neo-nationalists, Japan thus has no other choice but to take a firmer stance as a "modern" nation and to enhance the role of military forces in Japan's external relations.<sup>135</sup> The decision by the Prime Minister's Office, published on 1 July 2014, thus indicates that a reinterpretation of Japan's constitution will make it easier to mobilize the Self-Defense Forces to intervene in the East China Sea, in so-called "grey area" situations; between war and peace, such "grey areas" refer to recurrent frictions that are sub- or paramilitary, but nevertheless hold the potential for armed escalation (although the risk has been reduced since the signing of the four-point consensus).<sup>136</sup>

Finally, it should be remembered that the United States remains a central actor in the Sino-Japanese relationship, and has had strong connections with the nationalist forces on both sides. Historically, the decisions taken by the US occupation forces in Japan, and then during the Cold War, have shaped much of the collective memory of World War II in

<sup>132</sup> Expressions used frequently by Chinese diplomats and researchers interviewed. Interviews, Beijing and Paris, June-September 2013.

<sup>133</sup> "Japan will not make a concession on our territorial sovereignty. [...] We do not intend to escalate this issue any further. We have been dealing with this issue calmly and resolutely and we shall continue to do so". Shinzo Abe quoted by Paul Eckert, Reuters: "Japan's Abe says no concessions, but no escalation in islet spat with China", *Reuters*, 27 September 2013.

<sup>134</sup> Yew Meng Lai, 2014, Op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>135</sup> Tomohiko Taniguchi, "Ishihara and the Senkakus: The Japanese State of Mind", *Brookings: Opinions*, November 2012.

<sup>136</sup> Cabinet Decision on Development of Seamless Security Legislation to Ensure Japan's Survival and Protect its People, 1 July 2014, Prime Minister's Office website, <[http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/decisions/2014/\\_\\_\\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2014/07/03/anp\\_ohosei\\_eng.pdf](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/decisions/2014/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2014/07/03/anp_ohosei_eng.pdf)>.

Japan, as well as the incomplete settlement of the war in Asia. The American view of the conflict, imposed by the Tokyo War Crimes Trials (1946-1948), contributed to the ignoring of certain Japanese atrocities in Asia, and explains why some episodes remain disputed between the parties to the conflict. From a geopolitical standpoint, the strategic domination of the United States in Asia is challenged by China's rising power. Beijing has many expectations in relation to Washington, which it considers as a rival, though it is seeking to be an equal. From this point of view, Beijing hopes to develop a "new type of relationship between the great powers". The strategic rivalry between the two countries is shaping the transformation of power relations and allegiances. In this context, the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands may also be seen as a locus of increased competition or indirect confrontation between the two powers. The crisis in the East China Sea is already a test for the strength of the US-Japan alliance. Washington has to reassure its ally, without encouraging nationalist elements. For all these reasons, the United States has a special responsibility and a role to play in the conflicts in Northeast Asia, where the issues at stake go beyond a confrontation between regional nationalisms.