

# **Sino-Japan Action Reaction: Towards Cooperation or Competition in Asia Pacific?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The China's rapid economic growth coupled with the weapon modernization has caused more concern in most countries, mainly in the Asia Pacific region. Even though the Chinese government has explained the reason for the development of their military and actively supports economic activities in other Pacific countries, it does not reduce the threats felt by certain countries in the region, particularly Japan. As a result, Japan had come to make a change in military strategy, supported by the United States power. This situation further aggravated the peace and security in the Asia Pacific region. Not only China and Japan relations will be even hotter, this situation also raises concerns of the countries in the region. The presence of the United States, unresolved political issues with Taiwan, the increasing tension of the seizure of the waters in the East China Sea and South China Sea, coupled with the suspicion related to the history of the past, making the action-reaction between China and Japan disturb stability in the region.*

**Keywords:** *threat perception, security dilemma, action-reaction, military strategy.*

*Pesatnya pertumbuhan ekonomi China yang dibarengi modernisasi senjata negara ini menimbulkan kekhawatiran negara-negara di kawasan Asia Pasifik. Meskipun China telah menjelaskan alasan pembangunan militer di negara mereka dan aktif mendukung aktivitas ekonomi negara-negara Pasifik lainnya, tetap saja itu tidak mengurangi rasa terancam yang dialami negara-negara tertentu di kawasan ini, terutama Jepang. Akibatnya, Jepang bereaksi dengan ikut melakukan perubahan strategi militer yang ternyata memperburuk perdamaian dan keamanan Asia Pasifik. Bukan saja hubungan China dan Jepang menjadi semakin panas, situasi ini juga menimbulkan kekhawatiran dari negara-negara di kawasan. Kehadiran Amerika Serikat, belum terselesaikannya masalah politik dengan Taiwan, meningkatnya ketegangan di Laut China Timur dan Laut China Selatan, dan sejarah masa lalu, membuat aksi-reaksi China dan Jepang semakin mengganggu stabilitas.*

**Kata-Kata Kunci:** *persepsi ancaman, dilema keamanan, aksi-reaksi, strategi militer.*

The rise of China, both in economic and military over the last decade, has drawn attention to international politics, especially in Asia Pacific. Its defense expenditure, increasing 11.7-20.3 per cent annually, (*China's National Defense White Paper 1998*), according to many observers has brought instability to the region. Although the Chinese government has acknowledged that its military expenses are reasonable and at appropriate level for its economic development, it inevitably leads neighbor states in the region to seek greater military capabilities. They may strengthen their forces both quantitatively and qualitatively, in order to counter-balance China.

Apparently, the security dilemma has occurred in the region. On the one hand, China has increased its military expenditure very drastically due to arms modernization and security dynamics. On the other hand, the rise of China's military power causes Pacific countries mainly those that continue to have political and territorial disputes with China, to feel vulnerable and less secure. This situation then forces them to put in more efforts to modernize their defense capabilities as a response. This is particularly true for Japan, which will be the focus of this paper. In response to China military –as well as in relation to North Korea's nuclear program-Japan has significantly changed its defense policy. Instead of Russia being a threat as in the case during the Cold War era, China and North Korea are now considered as a threat. This is clearly mentioned in 2010 Japan's Defense White Paper.

Accordingly, this paper will analyze the action-reaction between China and Japan with regards to their military strategy and whether their strategy will promote cooperation or on the contrary provoke competition in Asia Pacific. This article will particularly answer some questions such as how does Japan perceive China military strategy, mainly those in relation to Senkaku/Diayou dispute? What factors have triggered Japanese government to change its defense policy? And what is the impact of China and Japan's defense policy towards peace and stability in the region?

With regards to Sino-Japan relationship, this paper argues that threat perception is the main factor that triggers both countries to enter 'security dilemma'. This perception leads them to an action-reaction situation in terms of their military strategy. The action-reaction between two neighboring countries, involving the United States, not only promotes tensions for both parties but also provokes feeling of insecure for other Pacific states. Although these two major powers in the region have a strong economic cooperation, their defense policies may create instability in Pacific region. This is particularly true, as currently tensions coupled with some unresolved problems on territorial remains

existed. This situation seems less likely to support peace and stability in the region.

To elaborate the above mentioned argument, this paper will be divided into four sections. First section will describe China's defense strategy and its recent development. Second section will analyze Japan's responses towards China strategy and the change of their defense policy. This section will also briefly examine the involvement of United States in the region. Thirdly, this paper will explain the impact of Sino-Japan action reaction towards peace and stability in Asia Pacific. And eventually, this paper will deliver a conclusion.

### **China's Military Transformation**

Military power is obviously needed by states for certain goals and it can vary from one state to another. Buzan concludes that military capability is used to act intentionally and physically against an object or an unwilling person either defensively or offensively (Buzan & Herring 1998). On the other hand, Art (1980) in his article "To What Ends Military Power?", expands the purposes of deployment of military forces. He states that it serves at least four utilities, they are defense, deterrence, compellence, and swaggering (Schelling 1966). Although Art explained the differences of these purposes explicitly in his paper, in practice, these purposes can be confusing and overlapping. It may not be easy to distinguish each of these purposes when they are implemented. To some extent, it is difficult to ascertain whether a state's military power is used for defense, offence or both purposes -particularly for states who have disputes for certain period of time. In addition, it is difficult to determine whether a state's military force applied for deterrence or simply exercised swaggering strategy.

The idea of China military system has actually begun since 1930, which emphasizes on territorial defense over coastal defense. This strategy was part of Mao Zedong's concept, People's War, that established human power, operation of infantry, and guerilla war. Yet, in 1980s, Deng Xiaoping revised the People's War in a more sophisticated method. The strategy moved away from reliance on troops towards technology. When Jiang Zemin took office in 1992, China's defense modernization was directed to the doctrine of Limited War under High-Tech Condition and focused more on naval capabilities. This doctrine ultimately emphasized the importance role of high technology to prepare China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) in limited war (Sukma 1995; Tan En Bok 1984).

In 2011, the Chinese government issued its National Defense White Paper 2010 (*China's National Defense White Paper 2011*) with a new

perspective. They declared the implementation of its “Peaceful Development” coupled with the pursuit of defense military strategy. The spokesman of China’s Ministry of National Defense mentioned that for defensive purpose, the expenditure was mainly used for personnel, training, and maintenance, as well as equipment. He explained that the increase of China’s military budget in the last five years is to improve the PLA’s living standards. This applies to both active and reserve forces. The budget is also allocated for supporting the diversified military tasks in terms of military operations other than war (MOOTW), and encouraging the Revolution Military Affairs (RMA) in this country.

The above official explanation justifies China’s rise in military expenditure for at least three reasons. Firstly, the increase of China’s military budget is to provide better welfare for its military personnel. Along with the economic and social development and the improvement of people’s living standards, the PLA has adjusted servicemen’s salaries and allowances, increased funding for education and training, water and electricity supplies and heating, upgraded logistics support for grass-roots units in a comprehensive and coordinated way, and improved the on-duty, training and living conditions of border and coastal defense forces and units in remote areas and harsh environments.

Secondly, the Chinese government is willing to modernize their armaments to counter threats coming from non-state actors –which they have been doing for more than a decade. As mentioned in its 2010 defense paper, China has increased investment in improving MOOTW capabilities. This is significantly implemented in supporting earthquake rescue and disaster relief operations, in escort operations in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia, in flood control and emergency rescue operations, and in international rescue operations.

Thirdly, the expenditure is an attempt to maintain and modernize its weaponries. It is believed that China is emphasizing on domestic production of sophisticated military equipment and parts, which by now remains imported from Russia. China’s national defense industry sector is also actively doing research and making development, supported by its economic growth, to modernize its military technology particularly for its naval, missile, and space exploration (*The U.S. Defense Department’s Annual Report to Congress 2011*).

However, China’s defense strategy inevitably threatens both its potential adversaries and actual opponents, mainly those who remain managed unresolved problems with China. This is to mention Japan in Senkaku/Diayou sea territorial dispute, Taiwan with “One China Policy” and South East Asian countries with regards to South China Sea overlapping claims. They may perceive that China’s defensive strategy

can also be applied as an offensive one. China's military capabilities in fact have similar ability to force other states either to stop what they are doing at the moment or ask them to do something that the Chinese government wants.

In addition, some observers remain worried about China's military modernization efforts. Its defense strategy allows Chinese government to build its naval, air and missile forces by procuring nuclear-powered submarines, frigates, amphibious landing craft warships, fighter-bombers, and destroyers. These destroyers are also completed with supersonics and anti-ship cruise missiles. Chinese government has started these procurements since 2000 (Bitzinger 2007). In 2010, China also bought 15 S-300 anti-aircraft missiles from Russia, having a range of more than 150 km and travel at minimum 2 km per second. Moreover, China has just launched its first aircraft carrier and obviously China will continue its military procurement (*Reuters* 2011). The Chinese government may justify its military modernization is driven by three reasons. Firstly, as written in its White Paper, it is for non-conventional threats' anticipation. Secondly, China government intends to create peace and security in the East Asia region. Therefore eventually, as stated by Zhu Chenghu, in the Seminar on "Future East Asian Security-A Chinese Perspective," RSIS Singapore, 23 September 2011, is to make East Asia region independent from external power. Nevertheless, while anticipating non-traditional threats, China has to manage some traditional problems, as above mentioned.

Furthermore, China has a fragile relationship with US due to its perception towards US hegemonic behavior particularly in Pacific region, US security alliance with Japan and US support given to Taiwan and South Korea. China is also facing questions from neighboring states regarding its transparency in publishing its military expenses. Therefore, China's arms build-up could be perceived as a significant threat by other countries, particularly for Japan and states in Pacific region, which is the prime attention in this paper.

### **Japan's Perception and the US Involvement**

Military power can be used as threats as well as rewards (Rousseau 2007). For realist scholars, military power remains the most important aspect among other elements of national power. However, in this anarchical system the realist will argue that military power will make you feel more threatened than being rewarded. This perception is heightened when a neighbor state acquires more power than your state.

In this respect, Rousseau (2007) argues that the weak position of one's military power increases the perception of threat. This happens because nothing in this self-help international system can prevent one state from using force against others to resolve a conflict (Ka Po Ng 2005).

Accordingly, threat perception can be created when a state feels insecure or less secure due to other's arms dynamics. Although Cohen (1979) says a threat can be inferred either from a certain signal of intention or the adversary's capability, the perception itself is worsened when the motives and the reasons behind the other's military build-up are ambiguity. Moreover, it is not easy to figure out a state's military acquisition purpose by examining its motives and reasons stated in the government's documents or declared by its spokesmen. A state may explain its intention and justification to modernize its weapon through defense diplomacy as well as encourage confident building measure. Yet, it cannot stop others from having their own perception towards its strategy. Moreover, a less secure perception due to other states' military modernization most likely provokes security dilemma, as stated by Kegley and Wittkopf (2001). They conclude security dilemma as: "The central problem faced by all sovereign states in an anarchic global system in which a state's arming for ostensibly defensive purposes provokes other states to arm in response, with the result that the national security of all declines as their armaments increase." May Rudi (2002) also confirm security dilemma as a process where all parties feel insecure. This happens primarily when defensive military strategy of a state perceived as an offensive posture by others, which in turn requires others to rearm for the sake of their national security.

As far as Japan is concerned, North Korea's nuclear proliferation and China's military transformation impacted its defense strategy significantly. This is in addition to Sino-North Korea relationship and China support to North Korea's nuclear program (Ong 2007). Although Japan and China economic relations are strengthened, their political and security relations remain fragile (Horimoto 2005). The memory of Japan's invasion to China in World War II and their overlapping claims towards Senkaku/Diaoyu islands are still affecting their relations. Thus, Japan views China's effort to modernize its military power as an attempt that is not only aimed at dealing with non-traditional threats but also traditional threats.

Japanese government may perceive China military capability is used as a tool to expand its position in global politics. However, China may also use them to force Taiwan with regards to its independence and probably to repel Japan from Senkaku/Diaoyu islands imminently. This perception is in line with Japan's Defense White Paper 2010, stating:

In its military modernization China appears to give particular priority to the Taiwan issue as an issue of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and for the time being it will probably aim for the improvement of military capabilities to prevent Taiwan's independence and others, but in recent years, China has begun to work on acquiring capabilities for missions other than the Taiwan issue. The military trends of China draw attention from countries in the region, as the country has been steadily growing as a major political and economic power in the region.

Japan has viewed China's arms build-up particularly in navy capabilities as a threat since they have the East China Sea dispute to settle. Japan-China negotiation on the oil and gas deposits in this water has not come to end yet. Therefore, the escalation activities of Chinese naval near the gas and oil field in the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands have led to Japan's concern. Regarding this issue, a retired Lieutenant General and Corps Commander of Japan's Northern Army, who later became a professor at Teikyo University, says, "*We do not have any concern about their land forces, only maritime forces like the navy and missiles. A drastic expansion of that kind of capability could be a threat in the future.*" (BBC 2011).

In response to China's armed forces modernization and North Korea's nuclear proliferation program, Japan has revised its defense strategy over the last decade. Japanese government arranged a New Defense Program Outlines (NDPO), starting from 2001. The strategy mainly prepares JSDF (Japan Self-Defense Forces) to support the US campaign war on terrorism in Afghanistan and United Nations Peace Keeping Operation. Yet, for the first time, after its security agreement with US in 1951, Japan was approved its own power projection capabilities that made it procured UH-60JA multi role helicopters, Hawk surface-to-air missiles, landing ship tank for helicopters and destroyer-helicopter ships (IISS 2011).

The above strategy certainly applied with a stronger cooperation with US and an intention to play a greater role in both regional and global security. To support its global goals, Japan has also proposed "Dynamic Defense Force" strategy, which permits its Defense Minister to shift the land forces to mobile forces. Recently, Japan is acquiring six new submarines, equipped with two more warships with Aegis missile and building three additional ground-based missile defense units—systems (The Stripes 2011). Japan is benefited from its security agreement with US. The agreement allows the Japanese government to develop and deploy its missile defense systems, primarily with US technology.

At the same time, in November 2011, the US government has once again performed its intention to play a greater role in Asia Pacific. In front of the Asia Pacific leaders during East Asia summit in Indonesia, President

Obama specifically explained the vital role of Pacific Rim for the US interest. Ultimately, Obama urged the need to secure and protect the US' and her partners' interest in maritime Asia Pacific (*New York Times* 2011). The initiative to focus more on Asia Pacific has actually been proposed since 2001. The US Department of Defense published her defense strategy that demands her armed forces to provide flexible capabilities (*Quadrennial Defense Review Report* 2001; Kugler 2002). These capabilities ultimately are aimed for wider purposes and contingencies as they intended to expand their overseas presence from Middle East to Pacific Ocean. The 2001 defense strategy is then supported by the 2007 maritime strategy, which also justifies the shift of US naval focus to Pacific oceans (Holmes 2011).

The 2007 maritime strategy essentially allows the US sea services, namely the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, to cooperate and station a credible combat power in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates (2010), confirmed that as part of Pacific nations, the US intentionally addresses Asia Pacific region within its defense priorities. This priority demonstrates that maintaining a safe and secure sea lane as well as upholding the principle of freedom of navigation in Pacific waters have become the core of US' interest (John F. Bradford 2011; Gates 2008). This explains the US desires for an openness and common use of spaces, including the sea, ultimately for its mutual interests and its allies' in the region such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia.

In the sense of naval development, the US sea power confirms its post-modern navy attribute, whose strategy is essentially cooperative and forwards geographically (Till 2009). The US maritime strategy, as mentioned by the Commander Pacific Fleet, U.S. Navy, Admiral Robert Willard (2009), asks maritime power of friendly nations to work together with the US Navy to maintain the security of the global maritime. This is also to support what has been mentioned by Admiral Samuel Locklear, commander of the U.S Third Fleet, "... no one country can maintain the global security environment. It requires us working together." (*Starbulletin* 2011).

The US Global Maritime Strategy thus encourages US' allies in Asia Pacific, namely the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and Australia, to collaborate and have joint military exercise with the US Navy. The annual RIMPAC (Rim Pacific) naval exercise in 2008 reported the well conduct of this strategy. The exercise involved at least 10 navies, 35 warships, 6 submarines, 150 aircrafts and 20.000 marines, sailors, airmen, and coast guard. (*Starbulletin* 2011). This joint exercise positively strengthens the military ties between the US and her allies as well as promotes their capability. In RIMPAC, these ally states may also

have opportunity to share information, enhance the intelligence capacity, and transfer technology.

### **Instability in the Region**

However, the US maritime strategy in Asia Pacific might provoke the US-Sino relationship, which remains vulnerable in the last decade. Although their relations have been marked by an increased in strategic dialogue and partnership on several issues, such as the North Korea's nuclear proliferation and mutually foreign investment, they continue to have some problems. These problems mainly are resulted from China's perception on US hegemonic behavior in Pacific regions, mutual security cooperation between Japan and US, as well as US support to Taiwan. This situation, to some extent, has provoked China to modernize its naval capabilities, which in turn intensifies the US-Sino tension (Cole 2010).

On the other hand, US possess a negative perception on China's transparency, particularly in exercising its military progress. This is in addition to the economic competition coupled with US-China currency war, human rights problems in China, and the issue of Taiwan. (Scalapino 2004; Chang & Chao 2009). US also has a deep concern on China's strategy to approach several Southeast Asian countries that is predicted to replace US's role in the region, with a more positive image on China's side (Sutter 2010).

With regards to Sino-Japan relationships, both countries have shown dramatic power acquisitions. Yet, it is too early to evaluate if they are heading for war. The gap of military capability between China and Japan remains too wide, which prevents Japan to activate war first. In addition, to some observers, their interdependence in trade and investments restrains them from doing regrettable actions. Nevertheless, their action-reaction on arms dynamic causes an inevitable security dilemma in the region.

As confirmed by Jervis (1976), security dilemma provokes tensions. In this case, the action-reaction between China and Japan not only promote tensions for both parties, but also creates insecurity for other states in the region. Currently tensions coupled with some existing territorial problems with neighboring countries trigger instability in Asia Pacific. In the case of South China Sea, for example, China's military strategy has also led its neighbors to react in a similar strategy. As confirmed in its Defense Policy, Vietnam has developed its defense powers and closely coordinated defense-security and diplomatic activities in the last decade. The 2006 defense budget was increased 20.89% from USD 781.34

million to USD 987.70 million. It was then increased by 28.85% in 2007 and became USD 1,388.26 million. It was slightly decreased in 2008, but then dramatically increased to become USD 2,6 billion in 2011 and USD 3,3 billion in 2012 (*Vietnam National Defense Paper* 2012).

Like Vietnam, the Philippines have also established a transformation in its defense strategy since 2003. Under the Philippines Defense Reform, the government focuses on ten key areas, such as improvement of operational and training capacity, improvement of logistics capacity, personnel management systems, and level expertise, optimizing the defense budget and improving management controls, and also increasing the capability of the Armed Forces of Philippines to conduct civil military operations (*Philippines Defense Reform* 2012). Initially, along with the US, the defense reform is directed to respond the 9/11 terrorist's attack. Yet, the program is specifically containing the mission to protect the Philippines national territory and Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone from external aggression and transnational threats (*The Guardian* 2012).

Moreover, the Philippines government has performed an assertive stand towards China, with regard to Scarborough Shoal issue, since 1994. A recent stand-off has just ensued when a Philippine navy surveillance plane sighted eight Chinese fishing vessels anchored in a lagoon at Scarborough in April 2012. Based on a report from Filipino sailors, the Philippines navy then deployed its largest warship, the BRP Gregorio del Pilar to the region (*The Guardian* 2012). The Philippines later withdrew its warship, but China sent out two Fishery Law Enforcement Command vessels. China's act obviously provokes stand-off to escalate, with the Philippines requesting a diplomatic resolution to the crisis but refusing to retreat. Bilateral relations have quickly deteriorated, as China introduces restrictions on imports of Philippine bananas and calls on tour groups to leave, causing a severe blow to the Philippine economy. Moreover, the Chinese media is talking of war and provoking both citizens, although a fishing ban implemented by both sides may let tensions subside (*Telegraph* 2012).

Instability in the region, to some extent, is also filled by both Japan and China historical record. Japan was an invader during the World War II and created severe pains for many Pacific states. Thus, its military development and defense cooperation with US might be considered a threat. Similarly, China is assumed as a revisionist power in the way it dominates Pacific waters and approaches Taiwan. Although China government tries to manage some negotiations and arrange economic cooperation with Southeast Asian countries and Taiwan, they still use "carrot and stick" approaches. China combines its assistances with coercion and intimidation to support its goals. This can be clearly seen,

for example, in its “One China” policy, as President Hu Jintao ratified the “Anti-Secession Law” in March 2005 (Chang & Chao 2009).

### **Conclusion**

The reality of China and Japan as major powers in Pacific region is a truth. Economic developments in the two countries coupled with military modernization signalize their superiority. Their trade and investments interdependence certainly support their positive relationship. Nevertheless, a significant transformation in China’s defense power to a greater extent brings instability to the region. Although Chinese government has explained their peaceful development, neighboring states perceive oppositely. Japan, Taiwan and several Southeast Asian countries, which have traditional problems with China, consider the strategy as a threat.

As a response, Pacific states conduct military modernization. Japan in particular, who relishes mutual defense cooperation with United States, strongly utilizes their strategic partnership and promotes significantly its self-defense power. Yet, this counter-balance strategy leads both states to an unresolved tension. The tension also impacts to the stability in Asia Pacific region. Some political and territorial disputes coupled with historical suspiciousness fulfill the relationships of Pacific states. Although economic interdependence prevents their robust military activities, the tension should be sent down to maintain the peace and stability. This ultimately needs political willingness from all parties in Pacific region to self-restraint, build trust one to another and arrange comprehensive strategic partnerships.

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