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Asian Alliances: Chinese and Japanese Experiences Compared

Lowell Dittmer

In this article I view Asian alliances as a product of universal security needs and culturally constructed variables. While the alliance remains one of the fundamentals of contemporary international politics, I attempt to show through comparative analysis of the Sino-Soviet alliance and the Japan-US security alliance how subtle differences of national developmental experience can significantly affect political outcomes in East Asia. KEYWORDS: asymmetrical, alliance, unequal treaty, constructivism, realism, Westphalian system, bandwagoning, balancing, security.

MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR, THE Japan-US security alliance, the crown jewel of the pentagonal US security network in the Asia Pacific (which also includes South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand) remains in effect. Its continuing political relevance became clear in the events of September–October 2010, when a Chinese fishing trawler in territorial waters claimed by Japan as well as China collided with two pursuing Japanese coast guard patrol boats, leading to the arrest of crew and captain. This incident quickly precipitated demonstrations in Chinese cities, diplomatic protests, even an (unofficial) embargo on the export of rare earth elements, on which China has an effective monopoly. Again in the summer of 2012, Japan's purchase of three of the uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu islands unleashed passionate mass protests in some fifty Chinese cities along with a consumer boycott, stimulating protests in Japanese cities as well. Confronting Japan as the initiating claimant in this dispute was the People's Republic of China (PRC). But as Beijing soon learned, any thought of escalating the dispute from invective to action risked activating the Japan-US security alliance, a formidable combination that China would face alone.

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China's most important prior experience with alliances was the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, formalized after intensive negotiations in February 1950. Although the Sino-Soviet alliance remained formally in effect until it expired thirty years later, strains in the alliance began to emerge in the late 1950s over questions of ideology, security, and economic development, culminating in public polemics and ultimately in violent territorial strife by the end of the 1960s. The question posed here is, How have such varied alliance experiences in China and Japan affected their respective foreign policies, particularly their bilateral relations?

In view of the pivotal role of these alliances in the relationship among four powers with the largest economies in the world, three of which are nuclear-weapon states, a comparative analysis of alliance conceptualization and implementation in China and Japan may throw some light on at least one source of misunderstanding and tension in East Asia. I begin with a general review of the concept of alliance in the Asian context, focusing on recent Japanese and Chinese experiences. Though a staple of international politics in the West since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, alliances are relatively new to East Asia. In the second section I analyze how similar but divergent alliance conceptions have influenced subsequent political behavior among these countries.

Conceptualization

The Logic of Alliances

Alliances, according to Snyder, are "formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement of their members, against specific other states, whether or not these others are explicitly identified" (Snyder 1990, 104).¹ There are at least two interpretations of the logic of alliance formation. The first is "realist," rooted in balance-of-power theory: When a nation comes under threat and is unable to deter based solely on its own resources, it has two kinds of choices: attempt to appease or form an alliance with the source of

the threat (“bandwagoning”), or try to resist the threat, either through self-strengthening (internal balancing) or by forming an alliance with another country (or countries) with a common interest in deterring the source of threat (external balancing) (Walt 2009). An alliance is what comes into play in the case of external balancing. “Power” is conceived to be a universal value, so the theory is readily applicable to any actor in the international system.

The second logic is constructivist, according to which threat, power, and other relevant variables may be differently understood in different political cultural contexts, in that the perception of threat depends not only on the objective balance of forces but on the *Zeitgeist*, ideological perspective, domestic political situation, prior history of specific interstate relationships, national identity, out-group stereotypes, and other contextual variables (Frederking 2003; Inoguchi 2005). An underlying affinity exists between constructivism and the older idealist or liberal tradition, according to which alliance construction, as well as the national interests on which it is based, is based not on threat perceptions alone but on culturally or institutionally embedded values or ideals.

In this article I adopt a synthetic definition. The explicit logic is realist and based on the distribution of power and security, which applies to any pattern of international relations no matter what historical-cultural context. But based on the truism that what is defined as real is real in its consequences (Thomas and Thomas 1928), my working hypothesis is that the objective distribution of power is to some extent subject to political interpretation. In other words, my definition of an alliance is two-level: a formal surface, based on universal power-political logic, and a subsurface set of connotations that may shape the way that logic is interpreted in a specific context.²

Chinese and Japanese Patterns

Neither the interstate alliance, nor indeed the entire Westphalian conceptual framework of nation-states constituting an international system, is indigenous to Northeast Asian culture. This conceptual framework first made its appearance upon contact with the West and subsequent “modernization.” The central political

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unit in premodern East Asia was the empire, not the nation-state, which in the Asian context typically followed a mandala pattern. Power was defined by the center rather than by national boundaries, which tended to be vague and contingent on the center's power. The international community was conceived not as the international anarchy of contemporary realists but as a hierarchical order, in which lower-ranking units professed deference through tribute (Fairbank and Teng 1941; Fairbank 1953; Li 1967; Kang 2007; 2010).

Ever since the new concept of an international community of sovereign nation-states was adopted in East Asia, these “new” nation-states have formed alliances with great parsimony, at least by Western standards. Whereas the United States has more than fifty mutual security alliances, the PRC in its brief history has had only two: with the Soviet Union from 1950 to 1980, and the strategic alliance with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea)—first formulated in 1961, renewed twice without revision in 1981 and 2001, and valid through 2021. China's “blood alliance” with North Korea originated in China's military intercession in the Korean conflict, which saved the North from otherwise certain defeat and reunification with the South. Although China and the DPRK have since diverged ideologically and disagreed tactically, China remains North Korea's largest trade partner, foreign investor, and supplier of food and energy aid. The Chinese often express their frustration with North Korean nuclear and missile tests and Pyongyang's failure to implement Chinese-style economic reforms.³ But China has in practice sought to mediate between the West and the DPRK, shielding the North from crippling sanctions and helping ultimately to ensure its survival.

Both these alliances are “fraternal”—that is, they define relations among Marxist-Leninist or “communist” states and are thus conceived to be ideologically privileged. China also signed a friendship treaty with Japan in 1978, its first with a noncommunist country, and another friendship treaty with Russia in 2001, but no mutual security commitment was thereby undertaken in this or in any other Chinese friendship treaty.

Japan has in its long history had only three formal alliances, all in the modern era: the Anglo-Japanese alliance (1902–1922),

the so-called Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis (1940–1945), and finally the Japan-US alliance (1952–present). The Anglo-Japanese alliance was formed in London in January 1902 and was based essentially on shared opposition to Russian expansionism; it was renewed twice before officially ending in 1923.⁴ The Anglo-Japanese pact was abrogated due to a litany of grievances: Japanese disappointment with lack of British support for their colonization of Korea following the Russo-Japanese War, perceived anti-Japanese discrimination in the Washington Naval Conference of 1921, London’s suspicion that Japan favored the Indian independence movement, and—most decisively—growing opposition to Japan by Britain’s most important ally, the United States, which perceived Japan as a growing commercial, and ultimately security, rival in East Asia (Kennedy 1969).

Japan signed an Anti-Comintern Pact with Nazi Germany in 1936 and then the Tripartite Pact in September 1940, forming a coalition of authoritarian “have-not” countries whose expansionist ambitions ran athwart of and were censured by the League of Nations. Yet the Axis was a relatively loose alliance system, as evidenced by three surprises: the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov pact with the Soviet Union and Hitler’s attack on the USSR in June 1941, both of which surprised Japan, and Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, which took Hitler by surprise. The Axis, of course, ended in disaster, with the destruction and unconditional surrender of all three signatories. The alliance between Japan and the United States was signed as soon as Japan regained sovereignty at the end of the Allied occupation in 1951 and was renewed and expanded despite domestic resistance in Japan in 1960. Despite some basic squabbles, the alliance remains robust, anchoring the US defense commitment to the Northeast Asian region.

Cultural Nuances

Looking more closely at these cases, although the logic of alliance formation in Northeast Asia cannot be said to deviate fundamentally from the realist model (in the sense that the alliance in each case confronts an adversary posing a perceived national security threat to both allies), at least three distinctive cultural nuances emerge. First, in each instance the alliance binds two sovereign

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but unequal partners, even when, as in the Sino-Soviet case, a strong ideological emphasis on fraternity and equality is present. In other words, these alliances typically conform to an East Asian hierarchical patron-client template (*shang-xia guanxi*, or *oyabun-kobun* relations).⁵ Second, they tend to be exclusive: To China, the Sino-Soviet Alliance was central, and Japan as well has had only one alliance at a time. Third, these alliances are typically cross-cultural, in each case with leading Western nation-states. This fact may be attributed to the trans-security features of such alliances, specifically the teleological path-dependency in which “Western” was equated with “modernity.”

The cultural context of this type of asymmetrical, hierarchical relationship has at least two psychosocial implications. First, the client expects more from the patron than support in the case of military attack, and the patron expects correspondingly less from the client than full adherence to mutual alliance commitments. This discrepancy of expectations is never explicitly stated, remaining a vague source of dispute. The “senior” ally is expected not only to provide aid and support but also to function as a model and patron for the “junior” ally’s future development. The client is expected to be loyal to the patron, but the “mutual defense” obligation is implicitly waived. (Indeed, Mao was highly indignant in the 1960s when Khrushchev suggested cooperation in a “joint fleet.”) In the case of the Anglo-Japanese alliance it seems clear why England, not only the world’s first modernizer but also a maritime island off the coast of a powerful continent, would be an attractive role model for Japan. The British Royal Navy became the model for the Japanese Imperial Navy, just as Tokyo emulated (while criticizing) British colonialism in Korea and elsewhere. China’s choice of the Soviet Union, the world’s first revolutionary socialist country and successful embodiment of the socialist ideals that had inspired the Chinese revolution, is equally self-evident.

Second, the intrinsically asymmetrical nature of the relationship, plus the differential division of labor- and path-dependent role-model expectations, inculcates an implicit sense of condescension, even arrogant entitlement on the part of the patron, and a corresponding sense of dependency and resentment in the client. In the Anglo-Japanese alliance, as in the Sino-Soviet alliance, the inflated early expectations of the client were soon dashed by per-

ceived British arrogance, contributing to Japan's path to World War II. The patron, on the other hand, typically expresses bewilderment at the client's ingratitude, given the client's relatively minor contribution to the alliance.

As Zhang Jingquan has noted, whereas the alliances of China and Japan have been asymmetrical patron-client arrangements, the two have responded somewhat differently (Zhang 2012). Both clients were ambivalent, grateful for the assistance that only a powerful and prestigious ally could provide but quick to take umbrage at any sign of condescension. China has consistently been more sensitive, even indignant, about the asymmetry than Japan. The Western imperialist powers imposed harsh punitive treaties not only on China but on Japan (and Korea) as well, usually at the conclusion of victorious colonial wars, which all three countries duly resented and eventually succeeded in overturning. But China was the nation to coin the term *unequal treaty*, and only there did it become a cause célèbre and target of competitive nationalist mobilization by the Kuomintang (KMT, Nationalist Party) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

These treaties became a touchstone of China's "century of humiliation" (*bainian guochi*), which was then grafted onto its modern national identity. To be sure, China's relative outrage is a matter of quantity rather than quality: The Japan-US treaty, too, aroused fierce anti-US demonstrations at the time of its renewal in 1960 and again (albeit less so) in 1970, as well as smoldering nationalist discontent since then. The controversial essay, "The Japan That Can Say No," published in 1989 and perennial complaints about restrictions on Japan's military under Article 9 of the constitution illustrate Japanese demands for a more equal, "normal nation" relationship. These complaints have devolved over time into contentious negotiations over the location of US bases in Japan.

But Japanese indignation needs two qualifications. First, grievance has been more balanced: Beginning in the 1980s, the United States has also complained about Japan's failure to contribute in kind to the commitment to mutual defense, inducing the latter to pay the most generous host-nation support costs in the world and gradually to expand its ambit of responsibility for self-defense (to the misgivings of some of Japan's neighbors).⁶ Sec-

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ond, despite its complaints and occasional protests, Japan has never abandoned the alliance; the previous Anglo-Japanese alliance, too, was rescinded not by Tokyo but by London. Japan seems ultimately to attach the greatest significance not to equality but to alliance loyalty, expressing, for example, bitter resentment at the Soviet Union's "betrayal" in annulling the 1941 Neutrality Pact to invade Manchuria in April 1945.

For China, in contrast, the issue has always been one of sovereign equality. China complained bitterly about the Sino-Soviet alliance by the end of its first decade, initiating a dispute that escalated to violent border skirmishes by 1969–1970. The rift culminated in both internal and external balancing behavior by Beijing before disclosing in April 1979 its intention not to renew the alliance (Shen 2007).⁷ At the heart of the Sino-Soviet dispute, according to Deng Xiaoping's retrospective evaluation, was always the issue of "equality."⁸ Inequality was tolerated at the outset, but after Stalin's replacement by younger and less competent men, Mao found it intolerable.

Why the impatience in the Chinese case but the relative patience on the part of Japan? Explanations come from structural, political, and cultural factors. Structurally, the asymmetry has been proportionally greater in the case of Japan's alliances, and asymmetrical alliances present greater discretion for the patron and greater risk for the client to withdraw (Snyder 1990; Walt 2009). Britain was far more advanced and powerful than Japan in the early phase of post-Meiji modernization in 1902 (though that ranking has of course since shifted), and the United States has since Japan's defeat also been far more powerful, particularly in its immediate aftermath. Though less advanced than the USSR in both developmental and ideological terms, the Chinese always viewed their admittedly relatively backward status as an embarrassing but temporary anomaly, so strong was the sense of historical cultural superiority; after all, Moscow for some 200 years had paid tribute to the Golden Horde. Even objectively considered, China's size and population were more nearly equal to those of the Soviet Union from the outset, particularly after World War II, in which the USSR suffered more collateral damage than any other country.

In terms of political culture, whereas China was a revolutionary state throughout much of the twentieth century and thus much more imbued with the value of sovereign equality, Japan spurned revolution for “restoration.” Japan became in effect a modernizing economy grafted onto a neotraditional (“feudal”) political cultural base, in which state Shintoism elevated the emperor to quasi-divine status and the state hierarchy was sanctified in the media and educational apparatus; see the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education (Masao 1995).

In both alliances, the patron not only protected the client but also served as a model for the latter to emulate. The Soviet Union provided the ideological and structural blueprint for the Chinese party-state and centrally planned economy, and the United States, having forced Japan’s unconditional surrender after nuclear and fire-bombing its major cities, proceeded to occupy the country and write its new constitution (including the famous Article 9 that has subsequently limited Japan’s alliance obligations). Notwithstanding important cultural deviations, institutional path-dependency seems in both cases to have resulted in fundamental structural isomorphism: Japan remains a constitutional democracy, and the PRC, despite economic marketization and privatization, remains politically a Leninist (“communist”) party-state. Also in both cases, path-dependency has ironically coincided with deep resentment of the asymmetrical alliance that formed its basis. But for reasons already indicated, only in the Chinese case did this resentment culminate in decisive repudiation of that alliance and a dispute that brought the two neighbors to lethal conflict. These different reactions have had a lasting impact on the subsequent attitudes of both sides, not only about their security alliances, but about bilateral relations and foreign policy generally.

Implementation

Here I undertake a brief adumbration of the essential differences in implementing the two alliances. I consider first the Chinese experience, then that of Japan.

China

In the case of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, the early period was for the most part one of intimate and smooth cooperation, in which China adopted the Soviet Union root and branch as a model for its own development and accepted Soviet leadership of the international communist movement, a \$300 million Soviet loan, and the gratis advice of Soviet experts.⁹ But the alliance began to disintegrate soon after the death of Stalin, for both surface and subsurface reasons. On the surface the latest research indicates that the problem was ideological from the outset. With ideology as *ultima ratio*, the two countries were equal whatever the distribution of GDP growth or military might. Ideology was fundamental in the formation of the alliance and formed the basis for domestic as well as foreign policy; all policy choices had to be correct not only for one country but for both—and for the international communist movement. One country taking a separate path was viewed as an implicit rebuke of the other (Chen 2001; Luthi 2008; Shen and Li 2010).¹⁰

As part of an ideology-based alliance, the Soviet Union and the PRC each was responsible for the actions of the other, blurring the line between national and international decisionmaking. Every fundamental decision had to be mutually coordinated. Yet Moscow's self-concept as the center of world communism not only marginalized the Chinese revolutionary model but implicitly deprived Beijing of control of its foreign policy.¹¹ After initially subordinating itself to Moscow's leadership of world communism, China began to challenge it in the late 1950s—not by diplomatically suggesting incremental adjustments but with pointed public critiques of the ideological core of Soviet leadership. Because of Mao's tight control of Chinese Marxism he is by scholarly consensus assigned a leading role in initiating (and sustaining) the dispute.

Yet the cleavage was also to some extent based on diverging interpretations of the alliance, and on perceived failure to adhere to role expectations implicit in that relationship. Examination of the pivotal crises that contributed to the alliance's abandonment leads to the conclusion that the underlying reason had to do with

the Soviet Union's failure in Mao's eyes to conform to the proper role of the patron—that is, to protect and nurture the client and facilitate its growth and national development.¹² To Mao, the acquisition of nuclear weapons, which the Soviet Union had promised to provide in the early 1950s, was not only a useful deterrent against the ability of the United States to check his revolutionary ambitions but the ultimate symbol of national coming of age. But Nikita Khrushchev, at what seemed to Mao the pinnacle of Soviet power and demonstrable superiority with the launching of *Sputnik 1* and the world's first intercontinental ballistic missile in 1957, abandoned the world revolution to make peace with the leadership of the bourgeois world in September 1959 when Khrushchev met with President Dwight Eisenhower at Camp David.¹³

Thus, when Khrushchev reneged on his commitment to provide China with nuclear weapons, Mao, who had earlier dismissed the bomb as a “paper tiger,” launched a crash program for China to build its own. At the same time Mao also launched an artillery attack in the Taiwan Strait that was sure to provoke a US response, thereby publicly demonstrating Soviet reluctance to fulfill its alliance commitment and come to China's aid. Mao denied all this, but whatever his intentions, by precipitating a confrontation beyond China's capability to win without allied support, he in effect dramatized and aggravated his senior partner's role failure. Mao also took advantage of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 by initiating a border attack on India at the same time, later mocking Khrushchev for being both adventurous (for emplacing the missiles) and cowardly (for withdrawing them).¹⁴ But after public polemics in the early 1960s escalated by the end of the decade to border clashes, Mao embraced the implicit US doctrine of extended deterrence to forestall a threatened Soviet preemptive attack. The alliance was terminated upon its scheduled expiry in 1980, by which time its most vociferous critic had already died.

Thus, by the mid-1960s the thirty-year Sino-Soviet alliance had become decidedly unsatisfactory from both participants' standpoints. From Moscow's perspective the problem was one of capture by an irresponsible, recklessly war-mongering partner, whereas from China's perspective the problem was abandonment

by a “social-revisionist” power more interested in great-power diplomacy than international class struggle. These maladies corresponded to the asymmetric, patron-client configuration of the alliance. The USSR, a maturing superpower contending for world leadership, was obligated by crises involving the client to make pledges of support otherwise inconsistent with its national interests. China, on the other hand, fearing abandonment in the wake of the rescission of the nuclear sharing agreement, withdrawal of Soviet advisers, and signing with the United States of a nuclear test ban treaty (1963), resorted to the incitement of crises with its mutual adversary to force the patron to remain faithful.

The alliance, though mutually disregarded, still remained ironically potent, motivating each regime to assume a vexed responsibility for the other’s ideologically errant course. The polemics escalated by the end of the decade to lethal clashes over previously ignored overlapping territorial claims. The opening to the United States publicly inaugurated by a Chinese invitation to President Richard Nixon to visit Beijing in February 1972 in effect destroyed the ideological assumptions underpinning the alliance, leaving it an empty shell.

In view of China’s deep disappointment with the Sino-Soviet alliance, that the PRC has not entered into another mutual defense alliance since is perhaps not surprising. In fact, Beijing has launched a systematic critique of alliances per se for giving rise to the international insecurity they were designed to allay. While the formal alliance with the DPRK has been renewed, the CCP has several times reiterated its refusal to extend nuclear deterrence to any state. Yet China, like any other nation, sometimes needs alliances—or the assurance they are meant to provide. Beijing has responded to this need with a number of tentative expedients.

First, with regard to the Soviet Union and its successor, the Russian Federation (RF), the Chinese entered into protracted semiannual normalization talks, resulting in the normalization of party-to-party relations in May 1989 and in border demarcation and demilitarization agreements in 1996 and 1997. In 2001, reportedly at the instigation of President Jiang Zemin, the PRC and the RF signed a twenty-year Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. Both sides stress that the treaty is not

an alliance, since it contains no promise of mutual strategic support or explicit target. While the relationship has remained cordial, with some foreign policy coordination (for example, a high correlation of UN Security Council votes), no mutual security commitment is in place. Moscow, for example, supports Beijing's claim to Taiwan but is not committed to send troops in case of hostilities, and Beijing supports Moscow's opposition to the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, but only verbally. In addition to its burdensome but continuing alliance with the DPRK, China has also maintained since the early 1960s an informal "all-weather friendship" with Pakistan, which has included a border settlement, military advice, and weapon sales but no commitment of support in case of hostilities.¹⁵

Second, one partial substitute for alliances that China has adopted is the "partnership." The first and still the strongest partnership was with Russia, but China has since undertaken partnership agreements with many different states and even with international organizations. According to Ning Sao (2000), there are four different types of partnerships, each with its own attributes. The *strategic partnership* (*zhanlue huoban guanxi*), such as one with the United States, may embrace competition as well as cooperation, but also has three other elements: partnership rather than rivalry, a basis in strategic considerations, and "constructive" association rather than the aim to counter other countries or seek hegemony. The *strategic consultative partnership* (*zhanlue xiezuo huoban guanxi*), such as that established with Russia in April 1996, is the most comprehensive form. Then come the *good neighborly partnerships* (*mulin huoban guanxi*), which China established with the ten-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997, and a *basic partnership*, used to describe relations between China and developing countries, such as that between China and Mexico in 1997.

Su Hao (2000) ranks these partnerships on three levels. The lowest rank is *constructive* strategic partnerships, such as between China and the United States, Japan, or India, which may still contain serious disagreements. Next step up is the *consultative* partnership, based on friendly cooperation between countries interested in deepening the relationship, such as between China

and Britain, Germany, ASEAN, or the European Union (EU). While these partners have many common interests, the level of mutual trust remains to be improved. Highest is the *strategic* partnership, such as that with the Soviet Union—countries sharing strategic aims and common interests and having no fundamental differences between them.¹⁶

A third expedient is China's shift to multilateralism, which has evolved since the late 1990s. Previously, China had endorsed multipolarity, often envisaging a world consisting of five poles (China, the United States, the EU, Russia, and Japan). This was a basic policy departure for Beijing, which had previously limited itself to bilateral relations and been suspicious of multilateral associations as a tool of the great powers—perhaps a hangover from UN invocation of post-Tiananmen sanctions or from the PRC's earlier involvement with the international communist movement.¹⁷ China joined the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in 1991, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994, and the ASEAN+3 (including Japan and Korea) in 1999. In 1995 Beijing initiated the Group of 5 with Russia and the former Soviet republics of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan to negotiate border settlements. In 2001 Beijing transformed these five (plus Uzbekistan) into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), subsequently joined by four observers (Iran, India, Pakistan, and Mongolia). The SCO is a "multilateral mutual security organization" (*hezuo zuzhi*), not a military alliance; its chief target has been the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. But the grouping has permitted China to make extensive economic inroads into Central Asia without challenging Russian regional hegemony.

In 2003, apprehensive lest President George W. Bush would intervene forcibly in North Korea as he had in Iraq to forestall the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), China organized and convened the Six Party Talks, which successfully managed the proliferation issue without, however, solving it. In 2005 China also joined the East Asian Summit (EAS). China has become increasingly active in bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements (FTAs), the largest of which is with ASEAN (ACFTA); it came into effect in January 2010. None of these is a

multilateral alliance with any binding commitment to collective security.

Fourth, China now disdains the concept of alliances and blocs altogether, maintaining that they represent outmoded thinking that focuses exclusively on the military dimension.¹⁸ In its place Beijing advocates a “new security concept” (*xin anquanguan*) based on “comprehensive security.” It was first announced by Jiang Zemin in a UN address in October 1995 and elaborated upon at an ASEAN meeting the following year and in a good deal of subsequent literature. This concept, quite similar in content to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, emphasizes “mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and cooperation”; “dialogue, consultations, and negotiations on an equal footing”; and a “win-win,” “positive-sum” formula with no place for threats or even disagreement (Kong and Mao 2005). Similar is the concept of “harmonious world” (*hexie shijie*), coined by President Hu Jintao in Jakarta in April 2005 and further elaborated upon in a UN address that September (Wang and Zhang 2007). These obviously idealist vehicles conceptualize away the need for a conventional alliance against mutual threat.

Japan's Experience

The Security Treaty of 1951, signed shortly after the signing of the peace treaty with Japan that would be the basis for ending the US occupation, permitted US land, sea, and air forces to remain in Japan indefinitely. The treaty officially ended the state of war with Japan, but it also marked the end of the postwar preoccupation with ensuring Japan's renunciation of war and the beginning of Japan's incorporation into the US anticommunist containment network. Japan soon became a significant industrial trade partner of the United States as well as a staging point for US military personnel in the Korean War and later in Vietnam. Yet many in Japan were unhappy with the treaty, believing that it established a type of subordinate independence of the United States and created unnecessary enmities with some of Japan's neighbors and natural trade partners. The treaty was thus revised in 1959. The most important changes were the US commitment to defend Japan in

the event of attack, the provision that Japan would be consulted before the United States moved forces into or out of the country, and the clause allowing either side to end the treaty after 1970 with one year's notice.

When the revised treaty was submitted to the Japanese Diet for ratification on February 5, 1960, the leftist opposition fought vehemently to prevent its passage. Japan Socialist Party deputies boycotted the lower house session and tried to block deputies of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) from entering the chamber until forcibly removed by police. Massive demonstrations and rioting by students and trade unions followed. The pact was not approved by the lower house until May 20, when the LDP convened a special midnight session at which the minority Socialist members were not present. More wide-scale protests took place in Japan when the pact was renewed in 1970. By the beginning of the 1980s most opposition parties had come to support, or at least not actively oppose, the alliance.

The alliance has proved highly useful to both nations' security. As a mutual security alliance, both parties are pledged to cooperate in mutual defense in case either is attacked. Territory under Japanese administration, regardless of the validity of ownership claims—such as the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islets—is covered by the treaty. Yet it is tacitly understood that Japan cannot come to the defense of the United States due to constitutional constraints under Article 9. In compensation, the treaty contains a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that provides for Japan to subsidize the stationing of US forces in Japan—over \$6 billion a year in direct or indirect support. Japan has consistently maintained the largest US forward-basing facilities in the region, currently around 47,000 troops. While the 1960 draft no longer includes a military aid program, the treaty continues to provide for purchase and licensing agreements ensuring the interoperability of the two nations' weapon systems and for the release of classified intelligence data to Japan.

The treaty's political-economic function was to underwrite the so-called Yoshida Doctrine, which allowed Japan to focus on economic reconstruction while relying on US extended deterrence for security. While its East Asian neighbors were spending between

2 and 6 percent of GDP for military armaments, Japan was able to keep its military budget consistently below 1 percent and never impose conscription. This budgetary policy was not only efficient but also a reassurance to neighboring countries such as China and Korea that were nervous about the prospect of Japan's rearmament. The United States accepted its hegemonic guardianship role throughout the period of Japan's economic recovery, but when Japan became the world's second-largest economy and a keen competitor in US markets while keeping its own market impenetrable, the United States came to view the agreement as enabling Japan to free ride economically. At this point, alliance obligations were readjusted at US insistence in order to downsize some of its defense responsibilities.

Since much of this burden displacement occurred after the Cold War, when the Soviet Union was no longer a target of the alliance and international communism seemed an endangered species, Beijing began to suspect that the strengthened alliance was now aimed at the PRC. When in 1986 and 1987 Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro raised the defense budget above the tacit 1 percent limit, Deng Xiaoping criticized this move as a sign of Japanese militarism—even though China's defense budget is considerably larger, whereas Japan's has remained below 1 percent since.¹⁹ But more objectionable to Beijing than the size of the budget was the expanded geographic range of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), largely at the instigation of the United States.²⁰

Yet as Zhang points out, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro visibly welcomed the added defense burden. Not only was this out of sympathy in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, but also because Koizumi aspired to a more prominent regional and global role, utilizing the security partnership with the United States in the war on terror as a pretext (Zhang 2012). From the Chinese perspective, the war on terror was a US (and Japanese) pretext for the strategic encirclement of China: It enabled the United States to establish bases in Central Asia and blithely waived India's (and Pakistan's) violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) while excoriating the DPRK's violation (Li 2009). China was particularly critical of the 1996–1997 revision of the

US-Japan alliance guidelines that authorized the use of JSDF forces to maintain peace in the “areas surrounding Japan.” Beijing accused Tokyo of thereby including Taiwan within its defense perimeter, an accusation that Japanese spokespersons disputed but did not categorically deny.

These suspicions were heightened by the issuance of a joint US-Japan security statement in February 2005 that included Taiwan as a shared security concern (Wu 2005–2006). Around this time some 25 million Chinese signed an online petition against Japan’s inclusion as a permanent member of a reorganized UN Security Council, while others took to the streets in a brief but intense anti-Japanese protest movement. China also criticized the cooperative Japan-US development of high-tech weaponry in Theater Missile Defense (TMD), apprehending that this might neutralize their small nuclear deterrent and perhaps even be extended by ship to the defense of Taiwan.

This suspicion of being covertly targeted in a sense proved self-fulfilling in 2010, when controversy over a Chinese fishing boat clash with Japanese coast guard patrol boats—after a series of such Chinese intrusions²¹—elicited a US commitment to defend Japan under the terms of the security alliance but without taking a position in the territorial claims. China has not yet expressly opposed the alliance, no doubt bearing in mind that the logical alternative, as Nixon reminded them in 1972, would require Japan to assume full responsibility for its own defense (Kissinger 2012). But the Chinese are unquestionably wary of what they view as Japan’s growing ambitions to play an international role under cover of the alliance. The Chinese decry such ambitions with the support of a public nationalism whipped up since Tiananmen by a nationwide “patriotic education campaign” that positions Japan as China’s most prominent *bête noire*. Not only do the PRC authorities use the educational system for this campaign, they also exploit the media, memoir literature, popular culture, a translation of Iris Chang’s best seller (1998) on the Nanjing massacre, and a proliferation of war memorials and museums.

Chinese mass protests against Japan have taken place in 2005, 2010, and 2012. Although Beijing curbed these in a matter of weeks, no protesters or protest leaders were ever held account-

able. The latest of these came in response to the eightieth anniversary of the so-called Manchurian Incident (September 18, 1931) that marked the beginning of the Japanese invasion of China. The Japanese government had purchased the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands from its private owners, hoping to preempt their purchase by nationalist Tokyo mayor Ishihara Shintaro. In response, China accused Japan of “stealing” the islands, and anti-Japanese demonstrations and riots broke out in eighty Chinese cities. Such a simultaneous upsurge of rampant anti-Japanese demonstrations, coinciding with a wide range of economic sanctions and official threats, had never occurred before.²² Several major Japanese companies, including Toyota, Honda, and Panasonic, were forced to shut down temporarily.

Conclusion

Comparing the alliance behavior of China and Japan, broadly similar but ultimately quite different patterns emerge. Both countries, as relative newcomers to the Westphalian system, have had very few true alliances. Those alliances have been “thick,” freighted with culturally derived expectations, not only for national defense but as path-dependent developmental templates to map the way to a modern (that is, rich and powerful) future. This path-dependent function has operated surprisingly well for both countries, resulting in the wholesale transplantation of Western political and economic institutions that fostered rapid and stable economic development. There have also, however, been drawbacks. The asymmetric power distribution that made the alliance useful to the junior partner also fostered a sense of arrogant entitlement on the part of the patron and a sense of dependency and resentment on the part of the client. Asymmetry causes the junior partner in the alliance to fear abandonment by the patron and the patron to fear being dragged into disputes in which it has no interest.

In both cases, such anxiety tends to be phase-specific to the period of alliance maturation, as the developmental gap between patron and client diminishes. In the Japanese case, alliance anxiety led to protest demonstrations, threats to redraft the constitu-

tion, and finally to a refocus of the issue on the relocation of US bases. In the Chinese case it escalated to polemical invective against the Soviets, border clashes, and years of negotiations before relations were finally normalized. While normalization has been followed by gradual reconvergence, China's disavowal of the alliance idea seems to have been final, as China's subsequent alignments (strategic partnerships, friendship treaties) have all avoided any commitment to mutual defense. True, China has not abandoned the alliance with the DPRK, but as that alliance exhibited typical symptoms of asymmetry—the patron's fears of capture by the client's adventurism, and the client's fears of the patron's abandonment—China has been trying to unbind its commitment. Beijing, for instance, has refused to extend nuclear deterrence to North Korea and has unilaterally redefined the treaty to entail military support only in case of defensive war.

This "East Asian alliance syndrome" characterizes both cases, up to a point. In the Sino-Soviet case, the underlying animus was China's demand for equality in the relationship before it was actually equal. Asymmetric resentment led to escalating ideological polemics, culminating in mass demonstrations during the Cultural Revolution and finally in lethal border clashes. The conflict spiral was suspended only by Beijing's opening to the United States, previously the mutual adversary of the alliance. Rapprochement discredited the ideological premise of revolutionary solidarity on which the alliance with Moscow had been based. Although continuing to exist as a legal document until its abandonment in 1981, the alliance no longer made much sense strategically, as China's principal enemy had become a shield against its "ally," now deemed its leading national security threat. This shift of partners eliminated the pretext for either country to assume responsibility for the other's behavior or otherwise interfere in its internal affairs, paradoxically allowing the two sides to arrange mutually cordial relations on the basis of strategic convenience.

In the case of the Japan-US security alliance as well, the client's resentment of unequal treatment resulted in some of the largest and most passionate street demonstrations ever seen in modern Japan. Dissatisfaction has since become localized on the base issue, directed at the misbehavior of US soldiers rather than

opposition to the alliance *per se*, which has high public opinion ratings and the support of the major parties. The essential difference is that in China's case the "syndrome" of dissatisfaction led to discontinuation of the alliance and the repudiation of any future alliances, while in Japan's case the alliance survived initial protest and remains robust.

In theoretical terms the point is that while the fundamentals of the East Asian alliance pattern conform to theoretical expectations, they have distinct cultural nuances that critically affect foreign policy behavior. Asian alliances are relatively rare and seem to be heavily freighted with cultural baggage, not merely expedient ties to manipulate the balance of power, as in the Western pattern. The cultural component consists, I hypothesize, of a path-dependent Confucian cultural legacy, reinforced by subsequent critical junctures. The impact of the former is the East Asian pattern of deference to developmental seniority, extrapolated to the nation-state. The critical juncture is the subsequent occurrence of occasional international crises that then reinforce the original path selection. The PRC is the deviant case here; its espousal of revolutionary egalitarian values against hierarchical authority broke out of an asymmetric alliance to forge its own "proletarian revolutionary line." Since disavowing the Cultural Revolution and commencing reform, path dependency ironically seems to have reasserted itself, as China has rejoined Russia to make the world safe for their shared authoritarian political legacy—albeit without a shared ideological foundation and without a binding alliance. Disavowal of the alliance system has meanwhile acquired ideological backing.

Do these different experiences have anything to tell us about current Sino-Japanese relations? The bilateral relationship has deteriorated badly since the end of the Cold War, based on territorial disputes, the revival of historical grievances, and rising nationalism in both countries. The two have historically been rivals but rarely have both been strong at the same time. The post-Cold War period has been one in which China's economic development has gone into overdrive while Japan's economy has stalled. Thus, the *Realpolitik* becomes one of power slipping out of balance—of "power transition."²³ The relevance of different

alliance conceptions in this context is that while the Japan-US alliance has been institutionalized and remains fully operational, China has divested itself of the Sino-Soviet alliance and adopted a medley of interesting alliance substitutes, none of which is entirely equivalent. This helps fuel Sino-Japanese tension by fostering the sense in China that two of the strongest countries in the world are combining forces to keep China down, while China stands alone, trusting no one. Certainly both sides have reason to feel insecure, for while Japan in alliance with the United States can still outbalance China, the latter has the momentum of growth on its side.

The US-Japan alliance also suffers from the usual internal friction. Tokyo fears US abandonment in its dealings with Beijing, while the United States fears capture in a dispute in which it has no national interest. Thus, stunned in February 1972 by Nixon's visit to China, Tokyo quickly reversed course, dropping Taipei in favor of recognizing Beijing that same year. The 1998 visit of President Bill Clinton to China occasioned similar anxiety because he did not, at Beijing's request, make a Tokyo stopover. While the relationship among the three countries has many points in its favor—Japan and the United States both have huge trade flows with China, and China and Japan are close neighbors and share a Confucian cultural legacy—whenever tensions arise, they tend to reinforce alliance solidarity, which in turn evokes China's nightmare of being surrounded on all sides by hostile forces (*baoweiquan*). And the United States, haunted by its own insecurities about relative decline, power transition, and growing maritime territorial claims, has been unable to dispel these anxieties.

These East Asian alliance patterns set the menu of subsequent alignment options in the region. Why is there no Asian NATO (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002)? Because both the Sino-Soviet alliance and the Japan-US security alliance were established at the dawn of the Cold War and hence set the hub-and-spoke pattern for subsequent security alignments. Japan's former colonies preferred bilateral links to Washington to a chain gang that would give Tokyo primacy. The protracted, tortured dissolution of the Sino-Soviet alliance spelled the early end of the Asian cold war and prompted China to turn in a new direction, seeking friendship

from all useful trade partners without mutual security commitments. Such commitments, according to China's new security concept, presuppose a common opponent, hence leading to blocs ("cold war thinking") and to China's perennial nightmare, encirclement. Japan and other US allies also expressed some alliance fatigue, such as in Manila's eviction of the US Seventh Fleet from the Clark and Subic Bay bases, or Japan's occasional flirtation with collective regional arrangements that exclude the United States (e.g., the Asian Monetary Fund and Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio's East Asian Community proposal in 2009). But like NATO, the pentagonal US hub-and-spoke system endured. Recent events have conspired to reinforce that outcome, including China's more assertive approach to its maritime claims.

Asian alliances thus have Asian characteristics, and among them China's alliance behavior diverges from that of Japan. So what? The result is that the foreign policies of both countries, including their bilateral relations, are complicated without the reasons clearly emerging. The Japan-US security alliance has contributed to Japan's economic miracle and its painless reconciliation with its former victims. Yet the alliance has also contributed to a foreign policy in which Japanese strategic thinking as well as national defense tends to be outsourced, resulting in a rigid focus on relatively small territorial disputes. At the same time, base relocation issues and faltering independent initiatives toward regional integration all testify to the fact that Japan has not entirely overcome the Asian alliance syndrome.

As for China, the new security concept offers the advantage of far greater flexibility, including abrupt reversals such as the shift from Russia to the United States in the 1970s and the shift back again in the 1990s, or indeed the transformation of Sino-Japanese relations since negotiation of a friendship treaty in 1978 and a "partnership of friendship and cooperation" in 1998. China, with no security obligations to any other nation and free to focus solely on its own national interest and continuing growth, deems both stances a sufficient contribution to a harmonious world. Yet China's neighbors are uncertain of its ambitions. There is also some validity to the Chinese critique of alliances, blocs, and the resulting tendency to polarize relations. But China's vision of a

“harmonious world” without need for alliances came into focus only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its principal security threat. Should such a threat reappear, China stands alone.²⁴ Could this contribute to the Chinese paranoia about a Japanese threat even after a power transition surpasses Japan in GDP, trade, and arms budgets?

The methodological import of my analysis is that alliances, however realist in their essence, cannot be fully understood without deconstructing them to discern their specific national characteristics, and these special characteristics critically influence the pattern of relations and available options for change. The question is not whether alliance politics is the sole or even necessarily the main cause of Sino-Japanese antagonism. The question is whether the alliance option selected by each tends to complicate a relationship that is geographically inevitable.

Notes

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1. See also Russett (1968) and Chiu (2003).

2. The concept evokes but departs from Robert D. Putnam's coinage (1988).

3. For example, Beijing, particularly irked by the first North Korean nuclear test in 2006, publicly scolded Pyongyang for “flagrantly” (*hanran de*) violating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). China thereupon cast an affirmative vote for UN Security Council Resolution 1718, which imposed economic sanctions on its ally (though Beijing sought to alleviate their severity). In 2010, though Beijing declined to condemn Pyongyang for initiating two military incidents, Wikileaks published cables citing anonymous PRC foreign ministry officials who depicted their ally as a “spoiled child” and expressed willingness for the peninsula to be reunited under Seoul's auspices (as long as US forces would remain south of the demilitarized zone). See Sanger (2010). Despite Xi Jinping's public criticisms of Pyongyang in 2013, the issue of PRC-DPRK relations remains controversial.

4. While suspicious of Russian designs on China and Korea since the

Sino-Japanese War in 1905, Japan appreciated London's refusal to join the 1895 "triple intervention" (France, Germany, and Russia), obliging Japan to rescind its occupation of the Liaodong peninsula.

5. Brantly Womack (2010) points to the importance of asymmetry in Asia. The implicit cultural model for the alliance in these neo-Confucian orders is the *wulun*, or five primary kinship relations, especially the father-son relationship that is the core of the five.

6. The issue became salient during the 1991 Gulf War, to which Japan contributed \$13 billion (more than any other country) but no troops, only to be derided by some in the United States for "checkbook diplomacy."

7. The internal balancing consisted of the acquisition of nuclear weapons; the external balance was the informal alliance with the United States beginning with the 1972 visit of President Richard Nixon.

8. Though widely shared in China, Deng's verdict is open to question empirically. After all, the two countries were never equal during the entire tenure of the alliance, and indeed the alliance functioned most smoothly and amicably during the early period when it was most unequal. On this early period, see Li 2006.

9. See, for example, Kirby (2006). It should be noted, however, that Christensen, in his study of the origins of the Korean War, views the relationship as considerably more strained, even at this "honeymoon" stage (2011). See also Shen (2000).

10. Radchenko (2009) adopts a strictly Realpolitik interpretation, but his focus is on the most intense, later phase of the dispute, after its ideological *raison d'être* had already become institutionally embedded.

11. The concept of Moscow "Centre" is most clearly articulated in Jowitt (1992).

12. Shen Zhihua (2003) points out this asymmetrically based difference in expectations regarding, for example, the sending of Soviet experts to China. Khrushchev considered this an incentive to motivate compliance, while Mao seems to have believed this was simply part of the Soviet leadership's responsibility.

13. It seems to have slipped Mao's mind that the CCP has also enshrined identical values, namely the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," in its 1956 state constitution and in every PRC constitution thereafter.

14. The crisis started with discovery of the missiles on October 15, 1962. On October 22 Kennedy announced a naval "quarantine" of Cuba and demanded their withdrawal, which was agreed on October 28. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) struck along the Sino-Indian border on October 20.

15. For example, China stood by mutely as Pakistan was dismembered in 1971.

16. See also Goldstein (2005).

17. The CCP stopped attending meetings of the International Communist Movement in the early 1960s and exited other trans-socialist institutions as well. It withdrew from its observer role in the Warsaw Pact in 1961 and stopped responding to invitations from the COMECON in 1966, viewing

Soviet-backed organizations as little better than Western ones. See Lanteigne (2009).

18. Cf. Rozman (2010).

19. According to the *Yearbook* of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China spends 2.2 percent of its GDP on defense (SIPRI 2011). By 2010 China had the world's second-largest defense budget, while Japan had the sixth-largest.

20. Japan responded wholeheartedly to the appeal of the George W. Bush administration for greater security support in the global war on terror following the World Trade Center bombing. It joined the Coalition of the Willing to deal with terrorist groups through increased international police and intelligence cooperation, border movements, and domestic security enhancement. Following passage of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law in 2001 Japan deployed aircraft and destroyers to support refueling operations in the Indian Ocean region for the invasion of Afghanistan. In September 2003 Japan (along with eleven other countries) joined Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative to detect and interdict the movement of illegal or suspect weapons and missile technologies, and in December Tokyo dispatched 600 heavily armed ground troops to the south of Iraq to support US occupation and reconstruction activities after the invasion. Japan also joined the Six Party Talks, generally supporting US demands that Pyongyang completely dismantle its nuclear program (Tanter 2005).

21. Japan's Air Self-Defense Force scrambled eighty-three times in the first half of 2011 to check out military aircraft from China buzzing Japan's air space, according to the Defense Ministry's Joint Staff Council. This was more than triple the number in the same six-month period in 2010 (Koh 2011).

22. In contrast, popular stirrings emulating the Arab Spring (i.e., the Jasmine revolution) were snuffed out with extraordinary speed and efficiency. See Yu (2012).

23. Power transition theory views the point at which a growing power approaches and surpasses a hegemonic power as relatively likely to result in war, in contradistinction to classic balance-of-power theory, which views a balance of power as relatively stable. See Organski (1958) and Tammen, Kugler, Lemke, Stam, Abdollahian, Alsharabati, Efird, and Organski (2000).

24. Yan Xuetong, a leading Tsinghua University political scientist, has thus advocated a departure from China's "non-alliance principle" in the interest of achieving a power balance more favorable to Beijing (Yan and Qi 2012).

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