

Behind Japan's More Assertive Defense Policy in the 21st Century: Identity, China's Rise, and Alliance

Nutthathirataa Withitwinyuchon

Department of Politics, University of Otago; Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies, Rangsit University
Email: witnu613@student.otago.ac.nz

Abstract

This article analyzes the development of Japan's defense policy in the 21st century by examining the evolution of Japan's national identity (ideational factor) and the rise of China and the development of the U.S.-Japan security alliance (material factors), which are treated as the causal factors. It argues that the aforementioned factors have driven Japan, from Koizumi to Abe administrations, to increasingly adopt a more robust foreign policy and defense posture. Unlike constructivist scholars such as Thomas Berger and Bhubhindar Singh who analyze Japan's security policy by focusing on Japan's national identity, this article also takes into consideration material factors in order to provide a fuller explanation and understanding of the evolution of Japan's defense policy. It contends that Japan's national identity has undergone a significant change, due to various reasons, especially after the turn of the millennium, from a pure "pacifist" to a more "normal state". Coupled with continual China's rise and evolution of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, this change in Japan's identity has led Japan to adopt a more assertive defense policy, which has been manifested in Japan's growing defense budget and increasing military activities in the East and South China Seas.

Keywords: Japan's defense policy, national identity, the U.S.-Japan alliance, China's rise, The East China Sea, The South China Sea

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์พัฒนาการของนโยบายด้านความมั่นคงของญี่ปุ่นในศตวรรษที่ ๒๑ โดยตรวจสอบความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางอัตลักษณ์ของญี่ปุ่น (ปัจจัยทางด้านความคิด) และ การขึ้นมามีอำนาจของจีนและพัฒนาการของพันธมิตรระหว่างอเมริกาและญี่ปุ่น (ปัจจัยทางด้านทรัพยากร) ซึ่งถือเป็นเหตุปัจจัยที่ผลักดันนโยบายด้านความมั่นคงของญี่ปุ่น ข้อโต้แย้งของบทความนี้คือ ทั้งปัจจัยทางด้านความคิดและทรัพยากรได้ผลักดันให้รัฐบาลของญี่ปุ่นตั้งแต่สมัยของนายกรัฐมนตรี โคอิซุมิ และนายกรัฐมนตรีอาเบะปรับเปลี่ยนนโยบายการต่างประเทศและจุดยืนด้านความมั่นคงที่มีความแข็งแกร่งมากขึ้น บทความนี้ให้ความสำคัญกับปัจจัยทางด้านทรัพยากรมากเท่าๆ กับปัจจัยทางด้านความคิดเพื่อให้สามารถอธิบายและเข้าใจพัฒนาการของนโยบายด้านความมั่นคงของญี่ปุ่นอย่างครอบคลุมมากขึ้น ซึ่งต่างจากนักวิชาการที่เชื่อในทฤษฎี Constructivism อย่าง Thomas Berger และ Bhubhindar Singh ซึ่งให้ความสำคัญกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงด้านอัตลักษณ์ของญี่ปุ่นเป็นหลัก บทความนี้เสนอว่า อัตลักษณ์ของญี่ปุ่นได้มีการเปลี่ยนแปลงครั้งสำคัญจากประเทศ "สันตินิยม" สู่อำนาจ "ปกติ" (หมายถึง สามารถรวมรบได้) อันเนื่องจากสาเหตุหลายประการ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในศตวรรษที่ ๒๑ การเปลี่ยนแปลงทางอัตลักษณ์นี้ เมื่อรวมเข้ากับการขยายอำนาจอย่างต่อเนื่องของจีน และพัฒนาการของพันธมิตรระหว่างอเมริกาและญี่ปุ่น มีผลให้ญี่ปุ่นดำเนินนโยบายด้านความมั่นคงที่แข็งแกร่งมากขึ้น ซึ่งจะเห็นได้จากการที่ญี่ปุ่นเพิ่มงบประมาณป้องกันประเทศ และเพิ่มบทบาททางทหารในทะเลจีนตะวันออกและทะเลจีนใต้

คำสำคัญ: นโยบายความมั่นคงของประเทศญี่ปุ่น อัตลักษณ์ของญี่ปุ่น พันธมิตรระหว่างอเมริกาและญี่ปุ่น การผงาดขึ้นมามีอำนาจของจีน ทะเลจีนตะวันออก ทะเลจีนใต้

1. Introduction

Constructivists, such as Thomas U. Berger, holds that Japan, since the end of World War II, has not sought a greater defense and military role that is commensurate with its economic capabilities and that it is likely that Japan would continue to adhere to the pacifist post-war defense policy (Berger, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999). Berger has argued that the national identity of Japan has been defined by anti-militarism culture embedded in Japanese society since the end of World War II and this has been echoed in Japan's

defense policy, which has avoided direct involvement in fighting and limits the role of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to only noncombatant aspects (Berger, 1993, 1996). To Berger, Japan had continued to adhere to the foreign and defense policies that deemphasize the use of force despite dramatic changes in the security environments throughout the 1990s (Berger, 1996, p. 317). According to Berger, Japan had eschewed obtaining weapons systems that might be construed as being offensive in character, and, at the same time, Japanese forces had continued to adhere to a territorial defense role (Berger, 1996, p. 351).

Applying an identity-based perspective, Bhubhindar Singh contends that Japan's security identity has transformed from a peace-state security identity in the Cold War period to an international-security identity in the post-Cold War era (Singh, 2013). This transformation of Japan's security identity has led to a high degree of change in Japanese security in the post-Cold War period. However, despite its significant shift towards a more active security posture for the Japanese SDF, this shift has been restricted to non-combat and support areas in the missions that address global security challenges such as the SDF's participation in the United Nations-mandated peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs) and the U.S.-led "war on terror." As Singh argues, Japan's new security role has been carved out of its assumption of a new identity as a responsible member of international community, which does not fulfill the realists' expectations of Japan becoming a great power (Singh, 2013, p. 2-3).

Although this article agrees with Berger's and Singh's argument that Japan's security identity remains defined by anti-militarism culture that is still running deep in the Japanese society, it argues that Japan's anti-militarism culture has been tested repeatedly since the end of the Cold War and Japan's national identity has undergone a vital change as a new century unveiled. In contrast to Berger's argument, the article views that Japan policy making elites have not been able to deemphasize military instruments as a means of achieving national objectives in the post-Cold War era. Japan decided to acquire weapons that could also be used for offensive purpose by the late 1990s and revised the guidelines for the U.S.-Japan defense cooperation in 1997 to extend Japanese military role beyond a territorial defense. Clearly by the beginning of the 2000s, Japanese leaders have already pursued an identity of a more "normal state" and boosted its potential for great power leadership. And by stating this, the article disagrees with Singh that Japan has circumscribed its national objectives to the contribution to international peace and security. The change in Japan's identity coupled with China's increasing threat and the evolution of the U.S.-Japan alliance has persuaded Japan to pursue a growing assertive foreign and defense policies and to increase its military role beyond the constitutional limits and non-combatant task in the 21st century.

2. Objectives

The objective of this article is to shed light on the growing assertive defense posture of Japan in the 21st century by using both constructivism-based factors and realism-based factors as the explanations.

3. Materials and method

The article relies on news reports as the primary sources and on journal articles and books as the secondary sources. It adopts an eclectic approach in analyzing and explaining the shift in Japan's defense policy from its originally narrow focus on defending Japan to fighting overseas to defend its allies.

4. Results and discussions

National identity, U.S. role and Japan's defense policy in the Cold War

What is national identity? Montserrat Guibernau defines national identity as "the sentiment of belonging to a specific nation, endowed with its own symbols, traditions, sacred places, ceremonies, heroes, history, culture, and territory" (Guibernau, 2001, p. 243). It is a collective identity, whereby a group of people share mutual awareness and define individual self by both internal cohesion and external interactions with other groups.

During the Cold War, Japan's national identity had been closely defined by the anti-militarist clause (Article 9) of the so-called pacifist Constitution and the dependence on the U.S. guarantee for security protection. Article 9 of the post-war constitution drafted under the U.S. occupation and enacted in 1947 states that:

“Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized” (The Cabinet Public Relations Office).

Japanese post-war security policy was based on Yoshida’s vision of Japan as a merchant nation, while relying on the United States for its national security – a strategy that became known as the Yoshida Doctrine. This doctrine, which rested on three principles: the economic-first policy; Japan’s adherence to the peace Constitution; and reliance on the United States for security, had guided Japan’s defense and foreign policies throughout the Cold War era (Singh, 2013, p. 10; Yahuda, 2014, p. 19).

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the United States viewed that the top priority task was to prevent reemergence of Japan’s military power; therefore, the Washington concentrated on completely demilitarizing and democratizing Japan. (Kawashima, 2003). The army, navy, air force, and secret police organization were dissolved, while military installations and weapons were destroyed. Various democratization policies were carried out, including the reduction of the emperor to a purely symbolic role and the imposition of an entirely new constitution. Therefore, a new constitution was promulgated that included the famous Article 9. However, the outbreak of the Korean War, which signified the increasing communism threat in Asia, encouraged the Washington to reverse its policy to building of Japan as an American military, economic, and political stronghold in East Asia in order to create a buffer zone against the communism. On the same day (8 September) that the Treaty of San Francisco was signed, a separate Security Treaty between Japan and the United States was also concluded which granted the United States the right to station its land, air, and sea forces in and about Japan for the military protection of the disarmed country. (Fukui, 1988, p. 158) Finally, Japan’s Self-Defense Forces were established in June 1954. Shigeru Yoshida, the Japanese Prime Minister of the day, introduced what is called the Yoshida Doctrine, which heavily emphasized the nation’s economic reconstruction while leaving Japan’s defense to the United States. This strategy proved to be remarkably successful for Japan during the Cold War era. By the end of the 1960s, Japan became the world’s second biggest economy in the world after the United States (Krieger, 2001, p. 451).

Japan’s economic boom in the 1960s led to further institutionalization of Yoshida Doctrine. The Hayato Ikeda and Eisaku Sato administrations introduced a geographic limitation on the scope of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in order to avoid possible entrapment in the Vietnam conflict. In 1967, Sato established the Three Non-Nuclear Principles to outlaw possession, transit, or stationing of nuclear weapons in Japan. Throughout the 1970s constraints on Japanese defense policy had been institutionalized in the form of strict arms export control rules and a limit of 1 percent of gross domestic product on defense spending. When Yasuhiro Nakasone came into power in 1982, he adopted an approach that emphasized the strengthening of the security ties with the United States in the context of expanded Soviet threats (Green, 2001, p. 15-16). By the end of the 1980s, successful economic model and stable political system provided Japan a leadership role in East Asia. But the collapse of the Japanese economic bubble in 1991 and the unexpected end of the Cold War order called into question Japan’s security identity in the post-Cold War era.

Evolution of Japan’s identity in the post-Cold War era

The evolution of Japan’s new identity in the post-Cold War era did not happen in isolation of domestic and external stimulus. At the beginning of the 1990s, a number of changes occurred in both domestic and international environments – the burst of Japan’s bubble economy, the eruption of the Gulf War, and the rise of China’s economic and military power. These changes urged Japan to redefine its national identity and posed question to Japanese leaders and elites regarding how Japan would design its defense policy to properly response to those emerging challenges?

The Japanese economic power was in a great doubt in 1990 when the Nikkei index plunged by 40 percent between 16 July and 1 October, revealing that the expectations about the continuing strength of the Japanese economy had been artificially inflated by speculation in the stock and real estate markets caused

by the yen's rapid appreciation in 1985 (Green, 2001, p.17). Since then Japan entered into a "Lost Decade" that initially began in the early 1990s but has now persisted for more than two decades. Japan's economic decline coincided with China's emerging as an economic power. China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth per annum often reached a double-digit rate in the 1980s and the 1990s (1983-85, 1987-88, and 1992-96), and remained over or near 10 percent until 2011 (Morrison, 2015). Japan's prolonged economic stagnation coupled with the emergence of China's soaring economy in the 1990s send a cold blow to Japan's national identity as an economic superpower. This, as noted by Gilbert Rozman, in part drove Japan's right-wing politicians to seek for a redefinition of its national identity (Rozman, 2002).

The 1991 Gulf War raised widespread criticism against Japan for its "checkbook diplomacy". Tokyo contributed US\$13 billion to aid the U.S.-led coalition forces sent to repel Iraq's invasion of Kuwait but failed to dispatch its personnel to the conflict despite unprecedented international pressure. The United States demanded that Japan make both financial and physical contributions but due to the constitutional restrictions, Japan could only make a financial contribution. Learning from this experience, Japan passed the International Peace Cooperation Law in 1992 enabling Japan to send not only its civilian personnel but also its SDF personnel to join the UNPKOs. However, Japan's SDF personnel still faced difficulty in contributing significantly as the 1992 law imposed highly restrictive conditions on the SDF's roles and severe limit on the use of weapons by the SDF. The embarrassing experience was considered as one of the key factors leading to a shift in Japan's identity and defense policy in the post-Cold War.

Some right-wing Japanese politicians, such as Ichirō Ozawa, concluded that the failure of Japanese role during the Gulf War lays in the Constitution. With support of party elders, he led a commission within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1992 on Japan's Role in International Society, which he and others in the party thought would open the door to writing a new Constitution. Ozawa's vision that called for a "normal state" of Japan was a combination of the experiences of the Gulf War and the collapse of the economic bubble. (Green, 2001, p. 18-19). Ozawa once argued that it was time for Japan to become a normal nation that "would naturally fulfil its own responsibility to do what is considered natural by the international society" (He, 2009, p. 237). To Japan's nationalists, a "normal nation" simply means "a nation that can go to war" (Samuels, 2007, p. 111). This desire to become a "normal state" has become mainstreamed and its anti-militarist identity has faded (Wan, 2006, p. 161).

The LDP party has long advocated reassessing the war-renouncing Constitution. During his five years in office (2001-2006), Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and his two lieutenants – Shinzō Abe and Tarō Asō – failed to build on the momentum to revise the peace clause of the Constitution despite being able to win a massive electoral victory in 2006 before leaving the leadership (Yahuda, 2014, p. 40). His successor, Abe, had a strong desire to expand Japan's military role and to fortify its defense but his short-lived tenure failed his dream of preparing Japan to some day become a provocative military power. Despite having said so, Prime Minister Abe was able to push through a number of laws to allow greater security cooperation with Japan's allies in his first term in 2006 (Auslin, 2016).

The changing social tide in Japan has helped buttress support for Abe in parliament after his party won a landslide victory in the December 2012 general election. Abe has been able to dismantle various post-war restrictions and achieve the unfinished goals of his first term. In Abe's view, the restoration of Japan's "health" requires militarization, constitutional revision, and intensified nationalism (Bix, 2016). His first step was the lifting of the self-imposed arms export ban in April 2014, which also allows Japan to cooperate more closely with the United States and other allies on defense technology. The next step is to revise the Article 9. But as Abe acknowledged that revising Article 9 does not yet have popular support (Takenaka & Kubo, 2014), his administration opted to reinterpret the peace clause, rather than formally amend it. On 1 July 2014, Japan's cabinet approved a landmark reinterpretation of the constitution amidst protests outside the parliament. A year later, on 16 July 2015, the Lower House, where Abe's coalition commands a two-thirds majority, passed two controversial bills that allow the Japanese military to participate in collective self-defense. Japan's Upper House finally on 18 September 2015 enacted the two controversial security bills that will allow the military to, for the first time since World War II, assist allies whose forces or territory are under attack and provide logistical support to countries engaged in military operations that do not directly concern Japan's security but will threaten Japan's security if it fails to respond to them. This move marked a significant departure from the then current interpretation that only permitted Japanese troops to take part in combat for the purpose of pure self-defense and in the area near Japanese territory. Until this point, it becomes obvious that Japan's identity has become more and more

closely defined by a “normal state.”

China's rising power and its impacts in the post-Cold War

China's rapid and continual rise has deepened the sense of malaise in Japan as well as increased the country's anxiety of China. The tensions between the two regional powers in the mid- to late 1990s can be attributed to changes in the distribution of power between them that slowly had started from the mid-1980s. By the mid-1990s, with its increasing economic and military strength and influence, China was undoubtedly a major world power. China's rise coincided with a protracted period of economic stagnation in Japan. China's rapid economic expansion raised concerns about its threat to Japan because it was transformed into military power. China's defense budget had increased by double digits every year since 1988, amounting to some 200 percent over the 14-year period up to 2002 (Krauss & Pempel, 2004). From 2005 to 2014, China's official military budget grew an average of 9.5 percent annually, with the lowest increase of 7.6 percent in 2016 (US \$146 billion) (“China military budget to rise less than 8%,” 2016).

What Japanese observers were particularly concerned about was the link between China's military build-up and its increasing assertion of its territorial claims in the South China Sea and the East China Sea (Drifte, 2003). On 25 February 1992, China adopted the Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone at the 24th meeting of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. This law allowed China to use force to assert its claims to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands that were virtually controlled by Japan, as well as the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. The law was seen as a significant departure from China's previous stance that the issue should be shelved, prompting the Japanese to protest. China's credible military threat was manifested in a series of missile launching exercises and nuclear tests in the mid-1990s. Between July–August 1995 and March 1996, China had conducted a series of missile launching exercises over the Taiwan Strait. China's missile exercises were accompanied by nuclear tests in May, August, and September 1995, and July 1996. The missile firings had implications for Japan and the United States as well: the missiles that were targeted at Taiwan could easily reach Japan's main islands as well as Okinawa, where 70 percent of the U.S. defense facilities in Japan were located (Calder, 2006). Growing assertiveness in its policy towards Taiwan (the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-96) and disputed territory clearly signified China's new status in the world.

From the 1990s, it became obvious that the Chinese government had increased its physical presence in the areas around the disputed islands of Senkaku/Diaoyu by dispatching scientific research vessels and naval vessels to the islands. At the same time, China began test drilling for oil and gas in the East China Sea in the mid-1990s, including in areas beyond the median line claimed by Tokyo. This kind of activities continued into the 2000s and escalated sharply in the 2010s. Since the 2010 fishing boat incident and Japan's nationalization in 2012 of three islands in the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu chain, Beijing has stepped up its naval and aerial activities around the contested islands, which often included intrusions into Japanese waters and airspace. Finally, China unilaterally declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea in 2013. In response to the evolving security environment, Japan has recently increased its defense budget as part of the country's strategy to strengthen military capabilities in defending its waters and airspace. In addition, the initial plan to revise the guidelines for U.S.-Japan security cooperation, which began in late 2012, is another example that reflects Japan's nervousness about China's increasing naval and aerial power and activities, as well as China's aspirations for a blue-water navy.

The evolution of the U.S.-Japan security alliance and Japan's growing military role

Forged in the U.S. occupation of Japan after the end of World War II, the alliance provides a guideline for the U.S.-Japan security cooperation. The evolution of the U.S.-Japan security alliance is mainly reflected in the adaptation of the U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation. The guidelines were first agreed to in 1978 and operationally focused on the defense of Japan against a potential Soviet invasion of Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido. The guidelines, nonetheless, failed to meet the increasing expectations of the United States to shift the one-sided security guarantee toward more equal burden sharing, and, at the same time, failed to address newly emerging international challenges in the post-Cold War era, including the North Korea threats and the rise of China. The Gulf War revealed a fundamental disconnection between Washington and Tokyo in responding to the security challenges of the

post-Cold War world. The 1993-94 North Korean nuclear crisis and the 1995-96 Taiwan Straits crisis provoked by China convinced Japan that it was time to tighten up its alliance with the United States. President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto signed a joint declaration on security cooperation in April 1996, and in 1997 the United States and Japan agreed on a new set of defence guidelines for the implementation of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. The guidelines expanded the focus of the alliance from the defense of Japan to the maintenance of peace and stability in the region, introducing a new area of emphasis to include cooperation in areas surrounding Japan. In addition, the National Security Council of Japan then approved a scheme of joint research into Theatre Missile Defense (TMD) with the United States in December 1998. This missile defense system was to be deployed on four Japan's Aegis ships. From a technical point of view, TMD is not a purely defensive system because some components have offensive potential; theoretically TMD can be used as a shield for offensive purposes (Drifte, 2003, p. 100).

The terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 transformed the international security environment and reoriented the George W. Bush administration to the Middle East. Since then the United States had been involved in a decade of conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq. During this period, the United States further raised the expectations that Japan would move toward a more forward-leaning defense posture and shed the pacifist limitations that have at times frustrated the U.S. defense officials. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Koizumi, the Japanese lawmakers passed legislation that allowed Japan to dispatch refuelling tankers to the Indian Ocean to support the U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan. In February 2004, Japan sent over 600 military personnel to Iraq to assist in reconstruction activities—the first time since World War II that Japan dispatched soldiers to a country where conflict was ongoing (“The struggle for Iraq: reconstruction,” 2003).

A series of provocations by North Korea and increasingly aggressive maritime operations by China since 2010 ushered in a period of rejuvenated military ties between Washington and Tokyo. Besides, as the United States extracted itself from wars in the Middle East in 2011, its attention turned more toward the Asia-Pacific region as manifested in the Barack Obama administration's rebalance to Asia. Nevertheless, even with a broad understanding between Tokyo and Washington that there are their mutual interests to strengthen their security alliance, it has not been done without obstacle. The United States is attempting to transform its bilateral alliance relationships in Asia from the old hub-and-spokes model to a networked set of alliance relations, Japan could become a source of instability if it insisted on remaining in an unreciprocated military partnership with Washington (Smith, 2014). Thus, Japan is expected to play a proactive role in its security and to reform Japan's defense legislation to allow for a fuller SDF role in the U.S.-Japan alliance. Prime Minister Abe's commitment to defense reform has dovetailed with the Washington's drive to upgrade their security alliance.

Therefore, Japan sought to strengthen its defense cooperation with the United States by embarking on the revision of the 1997 U.S.-Japan defense guidelines, and by expanding its cooperation to develop defense technology. The United States warmly welcomed the Japanese moves. During his visit to Japan on 23-25 April 2014, President Obama said in an interview with the *Yomiuri Shimbun* published on 23 April 2014 that the United States “enthusiastically welcomed Japan's desire to play a greater role in upholding international security” and praised Prime Minister Abe for his efforts to strengthen Japan's defense forces (Dyer, 2014). In July 2014 Abe's cabinet gave the green light to the constitutional reinterpretation that would lead to the wider range of SDF operations and Japan's ability to become involved in collective self-defense. Accordingly, the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Ash Carter met on 27 April 2015 with their Japanese counterparts Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Defense Minister Gen Nakatani in New York, where they together announced the update of the defense guidelines that had last been updated in 1997. The new guidelines will remove any geographic limits on the Japanese forces, allowing the SDF — with the permission of its parliament — to participate in defense operations globally. The new guidelines are well designed to not only reflect the already expanded roles of the U.S.-Japan

military alliance in the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere but also the growing departure from the previous security posture of the Japanese forces.

Japan's more assertive defense policy in the 21st century

Especially in the 2010s Japan has unveiled a more assertive defense strategy that includes increased military spending and a build-up of naval forces to counter China. In January 2013 Abe's cabinet increased its defense budget for the first time in 11 years and boosted Coast Guard spending as it coped with mounting incursions by Chinese ships in waters near the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The defense budget for the fiscal year starting from April will rise 0.8 percent to 4.68 trillion yen (US \$51.7 billion). The Coast Guard budget will go up 1.9 percent to 176.5 billion yen (US \$1.4 billion), its first expansion in six years (Reynolds, 2013). Japan also looked set to expand its defense spending over the next five years so that it could acquire surveillance drones, fighter jets, naval destroyers, and amphibious vehicles to counteract China's growing military activities. This is truly a bold stride given that Japan's military budget has been shrunk annually since 2002. With eyes on China, in December 2016 Abe's cabinet approved a record budget of 5.17 trillion yen (around US \$48.42 billion) for the 2017 fiscal year, a 2.3 percent increase on the previous year, contrasting with a decades-old informal spending limit of 1 percent of its GDP. This was the fifth annual increase since Japan's Prime Minister Abe retook office in late 2012 ("Japan's defense ministry," 2016). The budget includes billions of yen for six new submarines equipped with improved sensor technology that could also prove useful against Chinese challenges ("Japan set record defense budget," 2016).

The increased budget marks a significant shift in Japan's defense and security strategies, which have recently focused on improving Japan's ability to defend the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands or even to retake islands captured by an enemy that is, China. Much of the military hardware appearing on the procurement list of Japan's Ministry of Defense is designed to counter potential threats in the East China Sea. The most recently important move by Japan is the establishment of a new mobile amphibious unit that will be able to respond to possible attacks on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Japan's SDF conducted its first joint drill overseas in a large amphibious assault exercise with the U.S. military in California in June 2013. Japan will invest more in amphibious capabilities to defend its remote islands.

In addition, Japan is set to increase coast guard resources in the East China Sea to help defend the disputed islands by raising overall coast guard spending to a record US \$1.8 billion for the 2017 fiscal year. Eight new ships will be added: five to conduct patrols and surveillance and three for research. In addition, more than 200 new law enforcement officials will be added to the coast guard. According to Prime Minister Abe, Japan had an "urgent" need to "substantially strengthen the structure and capabilities" of the coast guard because Chinese government vessels have sailed near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands almost daily since the fall of 2012, and have entered Japan's territorial waters around the islands a few times a month ("Japan plans to increase coast guard forces," 2016).

Japan's military activities have recently extended to the South China Sea. In September 2016, announced its plan to conduct joint training patrols with the United States, and bilateral and multilateral exercises with regional navies through the contested waters in the South China Sea, where Japan does not have territorial dispute with any country. Delivering a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a Washington think tank, on 16 September 2016, Japanese Defense Minister Tomomi Inada said if the world allowed "rule bending" to succeed, the "consequences could become global". Thus, "in this context, I strongly support the U.S. Navy's freedom-of-navigation operations, which go a long way to upholding the rules-based international maritime order". Inada is considered a defense hawk. In response to her comments, the U.S. Navy said: "The United States welcomes Japan's interest in expanding its maritime activities in the South China Sea. We continue to explore ways to enhance U.S.-Japan cooperative efforts to contribute to the security and stability of the region" ("Japan to boost South China Sea role," 2016). The revised 2015 guidelines for the U.S.-Japan defense cooperation also allow Japan to assist the U.S. military in hostile situations in the South China Sea.

Although Japan does not have territorial dispute in the South China Sea, it has various interests in the South China Sea region. Through trade and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Japan has established in Southeast Asia a so-called network economy. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, 85 percent to 90 percent of Japan's oil imports (roughly 75% of China's oil imports), and 33% of Japan's gas imports pass through the sea lanes of communication (SLOC) of the South China Sea. Therefore, it appreciates security cooperation with Washington to protect the freedom of navigation and flights over those lifeline sea lanes. Japan's 2016 Defense White Paper called for continuous attention to China's attempts to change the status quo in those waters, and reflected the concern it shares with the United States. To leverage the growing conflictual Sino-ASEAN territorial disputes for Japan's political and strategic gains, Prime Minister Abe told leaders from Southeast Asian nations at the Shangri-La Dialog, an annual forum for security officials and experts from the Asia-Pacific region, in July 2014 that "Japan will offer its utmost support for the efforts of the countries of ASEAN as they work to ensure the security of the seas and the skies, and thoroughly maintain freedom of navigation and freedom of overflight" (Fackler, 2014). In particular, Abe noted that Japan had decided to provide patrol ships to the Philippines and wanted to provide similar ships to Vietnam, as well as desiring to help train the coast guards of those two countries and other Asian nations. Abe made it very clear that Japan intended to challenge China's increasingly expansive influence in those disputed waters. The United States is also backing the Japanese stance.

5. Conclusion

The article has found that Japan's defense policy has especially since the beginning of the 21st century evolved into an apparently more aggressive approach. One of the reason behind that distinct departure is Japan's changing identity. Japan's national identity has incrementally but significantly entered into the transformation stage since the end of the Cold War, departing from a pure pacifist identity to a more "normal state." By the beginning of the new century, Japan already embarked on building a new national identity as a "normal state," which would allow Japan to more effectively cope with newly emerging challenges at both global and regional levels and to meet with the U.S. expectations of Japan becoming an equal ally. In contrast to Berger's argument that Japan has avoided obtaining weapons deemed as offensive, the article's findings reveal that Japan's participation in the joint research of TMD with the United States in the late 1990s demonstrated that Japan had crossed the threshold of pure self-defense. Apart from Japan's identity evolution, the change in defense policy of Japan is closely associated with China's rise and its consequent assertive policy as well as the revisions of the U.S.-Japan alliance. China's rise has thus far led to concomitant growing military activities in the East and South China Seas, especially since the 2012 when Japan nationalized three islets of the Senkaku island group. In addition, Japan's gradual departure from its original defense policy was also resulted from the revisions of the U.S.-Japan security guidelines. Both allies first revised the guidelines for the U.S.-Japan security cooperation in 1997 that expanded Japan's defense focus to areas surrounding the country (Assmann, 2007, p. 179). Recently revised in April 2015, the new guidelines removed geographical constraints and expanded the SDF's scope of activities to a global scale. As a result, Japan's evolving identity, pressure from China, and the change in the nature of the U.S.-Japan alliance has thus far encouraged Japan to adopt more assertive defense posture, which has well reflected in the increase in Japan's defense and assertive approach towards territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. Japan has since 2011 increased the country's defense budget and military spending on the SDF in view of China's increasing military activities around the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and in the Japanese waters and airspace. Japan's newly established amphibious unit is designed to defend and retake its remote islands from potential enemies. In the most recent development, Japan has extended its military activities in the South China Sea by declaring that it would join the United States joint training patrols in order to safeguard its national interests in the sea lanes of communication. Japan's promise to give military aid to the Southeast Asian claimants such as the Philippines and Vietnam, who have territorial disputes with China, goes beyond its traditional defense purpose. With the new interpretation of the peace clause of the Constitution that allows Japan to participate in the collective self-defense and fight overseas to

protect their allies, Japanese military role is no longer restricted to non-combatant tasks as argued by some constructivists.

6. References

- Assmann, L. (2007). *Theatre Missile Defense (TMD) in East Asia: Implications for Beijing and Tokyo*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Auslin, M. (Mar./Apr. 2016). Japan's New Realism: Abe Gets Tough. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/japans-new-realism>.
- Berger, T. U. (1993). From sword to chrysanthemum: Japan's culture of anti-militarism. *International Security*, 17(4), 119-50.
- Berger, T. U. (1996). Norms, identity and national security in Germany and Japan. In P.J. Katzenstein (ed.). *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (pp. 317-56). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Berger, T. U. (1998). *Cultures of Antimilitarism: Normal Security in Germany and Japan*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Berger, T. U. (1999). Alliance politics and Japan's postwar culture of antimilitarism. In M.J. Green & P.M. Cronin (Eds.). *The US-Japan Alliance: Past, Present, and Future* (pp. 189-207). New York: Council on Foreign Relations.
- Bix, H. P. (2016). *Hirohito and The Making of Modern Japan* [Kindle DX version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com
- Calder, K. E. (2006). China and Japan's Simmering Rivalry. *Foreign Affairs* 85(2), 129-39.
- China military budget to rise less than 8%, slower than usual. (2016, March 4). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/05/world/asia/china-military-spending.html>.
- Drifte, R. (2003). *Japan's Security Relations with China since 1989: From Balancing to Bandwagoning?* London; New York: Routledge Curzon.
- Dyer, G. (2014, April 24). Barack Obama says disputed islands covered by Japan pact. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/cf6f8304-cb2e-11e3-ba9d-00144feabdc0>
- Fackler, M. (2014, May 30). Japan offers support to nations in disputes with China. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/31/world/asia/japan-china-abe.html>
- Fukui, H. (1988). Postwar politics, 1945-1973. In P. Duus (Ed.). *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Vol. 6), *The Twentieth Century* (pp. 154-214). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Green, M. (2001). *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power*. New York: Palgrave.
- Guibernau, M. (2001). Globalization and the Nation-State. In M. Guibernau & J. Hutchinson (Eds.). *Understanding Nationalism* (pp. 242-68). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- He, Y. (2009). *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Japan's defense ministry eyes record budget for FY 2017, 5th annual rise under Abe. (2016, September 31). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-08/31/c_135648601.htm
- Japan plans to increase coast guard forces in East China Sea. (2016, December 24). VOA. Retrieved from <http://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/japan-plans-to-increase-coast-guard-forces-in-the-east-china-sea/3647218.html>
- Japan to boost South China Sea role with training patrols with U.S.: minister. (2016, September 16). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinesea-japan-patrols-idUSKCN11L2FE>
- Kawashima, Y. (2003). *Japanese Foreign Policy at the Crossroads: Challenges and Options for the Twenty-First Century*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- Krauss, E. S., & Pempel, T. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Beyond Bilateralism: U.S.-Japan Relations in the New Asia-Pacific*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Krieger, J. (Ed.). (2001). *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World* (2nd ed.). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morrison, W. M. (2015). *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States*. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf>

- Onishi, N. (2003, December 30). The struggle for Iraq: reconstruction. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/30/world/struggle-for-iraq-reconstruction-japan-says-it-will-forgive-most-debt-owed-iraq.html>
- Reynolds, I. (2013, January 30). Japan defense budget to increase for first time in 11 years. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-01-29/japan-s-defense-spending-to-increase-for-first-time-in-11-years>
- Rozman, G. (Winter 2002). Japan's quest for great power identity. *Orbis*, 46(1), 73-91.
- Samuels, R. J. (2007). *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia*. Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press.
- Singh, B. (2013). *Japan's Security Identity: From a Peace State to an International State*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Smith, S. A. (2014, July 2). Reinterpreting Japan's constitution. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2014/07/02/reinterpreting-japans-constitution/>
- Takenaka, K., & Kubo, N. (2014, April 1). Japan relaxes arms export regime to fortify defense. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-defense-idUSBREA2U1VF20140401>
- Wan, M. (2006). *Sino-Japanese Relations: Interaction, Logic, and Transformation*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press
- Yahuda, M. (2014). *Sino-Japanese Relations After the Cold War: Two Tigers Sharing a Mountain*. London; New York: Routledge.