

From Panda to Dragon: An Analysis of China's Maritime Actions and Reactions in the East China Sea and Their Implications since 2012

Alana Camoça Gonçalves de Oliveira*

Abstract: In the 21st century, China's rise has been shifting global and regional geopolitical scenarios. Faced with its growth and fears of being perceived as a threat, China sought to associate its economic and political emergence with the preservation of the current international system, emphasizing speeches about a peaceful development and harmonious world in which it would be an actor who wants to grow and accommodate the world order. However, changes in the balance of power and its continued rise have caused China's behaviour to change in its own region, especially regarding maritime disputes and affecting other countries' perceptions. By applying Neoclassical Realism, this paper analyses the Chinese foreign policy in the 21st century, elucidating its behaviour in terms of the country's action and reactions regarding the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and shows the perceptions of other countries to that behaviour. The article concludes that perceptions concerning the balance of power, Chinese capabilities, nationalism, regime legitimacy, and on leadership images affect the intensity of Beijing's responses and foreign policy about maritime territorial disputes. Also, the article shows that China's growing assertiveness in both the East China Sea and the South China Sea is pushing countries that have territorial disputes with China to grow closer.

Keywords: China; East China Sea; Neoclassical Realism; territorial disputes.

Introduction

The balance of power in East Asia has undergone major transformations over the years. In a context of constant changes in the architecture of the international system, East Asia has gained great importance from an economic and geopolitical point of view. Tensions in both the East China Sea (ECS) and the South China Sea (SCS) have rekindled the relevance of studying historical, political and economic relations between actors, alliances and territorial disputes at the regional level. China is often deemed by Western academia an

* Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brazil; alanacamoca@gmail.com. ORCID iD 0000-0003-0330-3368.

aggressive country that is only pushing forward its own interests in an otherwise 'stable' international system. Words of China's Rise and its threat to the international system are not new. Hence, given fears raised by various academics since 1990, especially in the West, changes in China's behaviour are always being closely watched.

Since 2009, tensions over maritime territories in the SCS and the ECS intensified feelings of insecurity in East Asia and spurred transformations in strategies of regional countries. Seemingly, by internal and external balancing, countries have responded to China's rise and to fears of US commitment to its alliances in the region. For example, Japan has been changing its security policies due to its perceptions on North Korea, China and growing fears of US abandonment. With the overextension of Chinese maritime territory in the SCS and the ECS and the need to act (or counteract) in grey-zone situations, Japan has promoted and is trying to promote not only an internal balancing aiming for constitutional changes, but also disseminating discourses about its need to act proactively in the Asia-Pacific (Hughes 2017; Abe 2013). Thus, Japan is trying to reach out to countries in the region in order to fortify alliances or balance Chinese power in the SCS and the ECS (Oliveira 2019).

In an attempt to understand the fears of China's actions in the international arena, this paper applies Neoclassical Realism to analyse transformations in Chinese foreign policy in the 21st century. Also, I analyse China's greater activism in territorial disputes in the ECS to see whether China is acting aggressively, representing a threat to regional stability and, if so, why. In order to do so, I analyse maritime tensions in Northeast Asia between Japan and China, using the case study of Senkaku/Diaoyu Island issue that emerged with the staggering tensions in the 21st century, especially after 2012 (Drifte 2016; Costa 2017; Oliveira 2019). To this end, this article is divided into five sections: Firstly, I begin explaining the Neoclassical Realist theory and the variables and methodology used in my analysis. Secondly, considering issues of relative power and balance of power, I analyse China's power *vis-à-vis* Japan and the USA; thirdly, I analyse China's foreign policy and behaviour transformations between Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. I then elucidate aspects of the growing Chinese assertiveness in the ECS following the 2012 incident and domestic variables that affected its behaviour. Finally, I demonstrate how countries in the region are reacting to China's maritime actions and how this relates to the Sino-Japanese territorial disputes.

Neoclassical Realism and Chinese behaviour in the 21st century

Neoclassical Realists combine aspects of parsimony and theoretical rigor of Structural Realism with the agency of the states studied by Classical Realism. Being a hybrid theory, it combines international system structure with domestic variables to explain foreign policy, security policies, major country strategies and, recently, as in Ripsman Taliaferro and Lobell's book *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (2016), to understand changes within and of the structure of the international system.

Neoclassical Realism emerged as a theory of foreign policy and, in contrast to arguments raised in Kenneth Waltz's 1996 article entitled *International Politics is Not Foreign*

Policy, it creates a theory capable of analysing countries' behaviour on a multilevel basis. In fact, neoclassical realism shares some of Waltz's considerations and visions about the international system and relative power but broadens the range of analysis by incorporating domestic variables and disregarding simple mechanical responses about changes in the balance of power. As such, it aims to increase the explanatory power of a given action of one country at a specific moment in time. In this sense, the states' black box is open, assuming that they vary in their skills, attitudes and perceptions about the international scenario due to the fact that some countries are more responsive and sensitive to transformations than others. After all, while some countries can carry out their national interest goals easily, others may be less actively so, indicating actions that are delimited, for instance, by domestic institutions (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016).

The starting point of Neoclassical analysis stems from a country's position in the international system; its relative capacities constitute the parameter of its foreign policy, its grand strategies and its own behaviour, that can be understood as *systemic stimuli* (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016). These factors represent an objective reality that influences states' ambitions in the international arena. However, systemic imperatives are rarely the only forces influencing decision-makers (Saltzman 2015; Sorensen 2013; Schweller 1998; Gideon 1998). After all, strategic decisions and states' foreign policies are made at the domestic level by individuals with beliefs, personalities and identities and with domestic constraints related to the structure of the state (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016).

In that sense, the structural conditions are the 'permissive' or 'profound' causes of specific actions: they allow certain things to happen by providing opportunities for, and constraints on, actors' behaviours (Schweller 1998: 3). For this reason, intervening variables act as 'transmission belts' between *systemic stimuli* and state behaviour (Saltzman 2015; Sorensen 2013). These variables reflect 'the various constraints on the central actors, the interactions within and between decision makers and society as a whole, and the processes and mechanisms by which foreign policy is formulated, each of which can affect the manner in which states respond to external *stimuli*' (Ripsman, Taliaferro e Lobell 2016: 61).

It is true that usually neoclassical realist's critics tend to argue that neoclassical realism chooses variables in an *ad hoc* manner, making it look more like a 'laundry list' theory than a proper theory (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016). However, to avoid this criticism and considering China and other works of Neoclassical Realists such as Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016), Sterling-folker (2009) and Sorensen (2013), this article uses three intervening variables to understand China's reactions and actions regarding territorial disputes, especially in the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute, such as: (i) perceptions and images of leaders (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016; Saltzman 2015), the regime's legitimacy (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro 2009; Sorensen 2013), and nationalism (Sterling-folker 2009; Lai 2008; Costa 2017; Sorensen 2013). From this point of view, it is also important to notice that those variables can interact with other variables that, in turn, can be affected by the outcomes of a government's actions towards one specific issue.

Regarding the perceptions and images of leaders, the article understands that if power influences international relations, it does so through the perceptions of those who act on behalf of the state (Wohlforth 1993). Individuals and leaders of decision-making processes are the Foreign Policy Executives (FPE) (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016) and include presidents, prime ministers or dictators for this article. This variable considers not only who the decision makers are, but also the values, beliefs and interests of each FPE at the time they make a decision.

After all, everyone eventually possesses a set of core values, images and beliefs that guide their interactions with others, as well as their understanding of this interaction. For this reason, depending on certain leaders' own characteristics, they may respond in a different way albeit facing the same situation; therefore, it becomes essential to understand, for instance, Hu Jintao's and especially Xi Jinping's figure and their role in China's foreign policy. Although Chinese FPEs are varied, the main focus of the analysis for this article is the President of China.

With regard to nationalism, we start from Lai's (2008) understanding that categorizes official/state nationalism as a psychological condition or a state of mind that cultivates feelings of belonging and unity to a group of people, a political or ideological principle that identifies the nation with the state, and a political instrument used by states and elites for the mobilization of masses and other domestic political groups; and popular nationalism as political pressure in the government's decision-making process by nationalist groups (Lai 2008: 13).

Nationalism emerged in China after the clash with foreign powers, China's defeat by British troops in the Opium War (1839-1842) and after a gradual disintegration of the Chinese Empire. Due to the way western powers used their own terms to gain/profit with China's disintegration and given Japan's conquests of Chinese territories from the late 19th century to the end of the Second World War, one of the elements of Chinese nationalism is criticism and mistrust of the West (Gries 2004).

The loss of China's traditional hegemony in Asia at the end of the 19th century due to imperialist pressures and the division of its territory into areas of influence of European, US and Japanese powers is constantly remembered by the government as a profound humiliation (xiurù 羞辱). Such propaganda is made through nationalist political discourses, aiming to promote traditional values and reinforce the feeling of aversion to foreign powers. According to Oliveira and Morais (2018) the external threat is an important factor to understand Chinese nationalism. For this reason, issues related to Japan amplifies the Chinese state capacity and even helps popular nationalism to promote or claim for more assertive or even aggressive actions to protect China's interests. Thus, in the case of maritime territorial disputes, this is no exception.

It is well-known that Chinese leaders have been using nationalism to ensure social cohesion and political stability and improve their legitimacy (Downs and Saunders 1999; Oliveira and Morais 2018). Through top-down nationalism, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has stimulated campaigns about the need for China to regain its rightful place in the international system and the need to ensure its territorial sovereignty (Gries

2004; Sorensen 2013; Costa 2017; Oliveira and Morais 2018). However, more forms of bottom-up nationalism and expressions of popular movements have emerged in society, pressuring 'Chinese leaders in international negotiations and conflicts, where the Chinese leaders cannot appear weak or be seen as giving in to external demands' (Sorensen 2013: 377). Since one of the cornerstones of Chinese nationalism is a strong criticism toward the West and Japan, disputes in ECS have an effect on, and are affected by, China's nationalism (Zhao 2015; Oliveira and Morais 2018). Both popular nationalists and the Party elite participate in nationalist politics, and both emotional and instrumental concerns drive their behaviour.

Finally, the last variable is the regime's legitimacy vis-à-vis the population, because as argued by Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2009) and Sorensen (2013), leaders are concerned about domestic expectations that may influence their policies and also that can affect the balance of power inside a given state. In fact, there is a degree of autonomy in the decision-making power of CCP leaders, based on the Party's most powerful political and decision-making entity, the Politburo and its Standing Committee. However, economic growth, military modernization and transformations that Chinese society has undergone over the years have implications for the relations between state and society, where the government's performance – economic, political etc. – is an essential element to maintain national cohesion and the CCP as the ruling party (Sorensen 2013; Oliveira 2019).

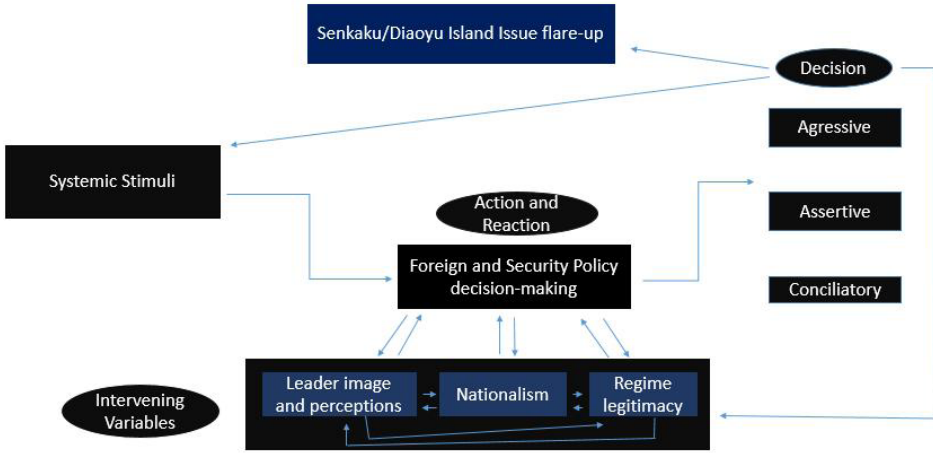
In sum, aiming to analyse Chinese actions and reactions to the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the 21st century, I argue that they are influenced by systemic and domestic variables that may affect China's behaviour with more or less intensity. Combined, these issues are essential for an understanding of what position China has adopted and whether the country has responded or acted in an aggressive, assertive, or conciliatory way.

By aggressive, I mean resorting to the use of force, whereas conciliatory would mean opting to only resolve issues through diplomatic means and promptly choosing to de-escalate a conflict or an issue. Finally, being assertive in this model means acting in a way in order to change the status quo or to respond actively and firmly in a robust way choosing to adopt measures, such as economic sanctions and military power demonstrations. It is interesting to note that a resolute or assertive action can have an initial effect similar to the idea of the 'game of chicken.' China's behaviour can influence the action of other countries with which it has disputes and create a spiral of tensions where each state tests (or even taunts) each other regarding the issue – the access, decisions regarding sovereignty, international propaganda and the passage through territorial waters in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island case.

As exposed, by using a Neoclassical Realist theory and thus highlighting variables borrowed from Neorealism and Classical Realism, this article analyses China's relative capabilities and its position in the international system, along with the sum of intervening variables that help us to understand more accurately the reactions of China in territorial disputes, precisely in ECS. By combining quantitative factors related to Chinese military and economic capabilities with domestic pressures and leadership perceptions, I sustain

that Neoclassical Realism is an important tool to analyse the case of China's behaviour regarding maritime territorial disputes.

Figure 1 – Chart to analyse China's behaviour regarding territorial disputes



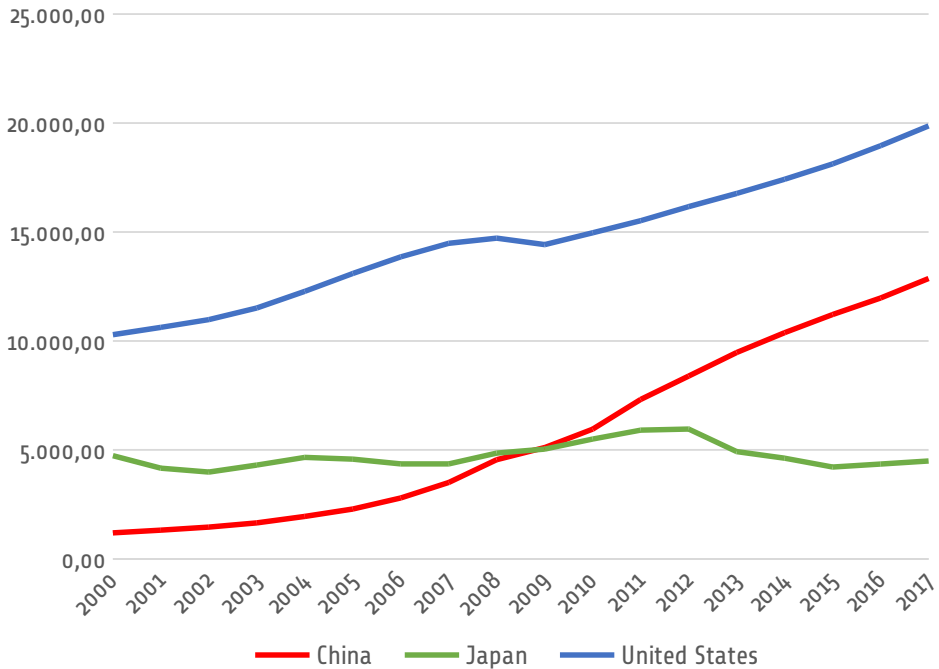
Source: Created by the author.

Growing capabilities in the 21st century: China's rise and its power vis-à-vis Japan and the USA

In order to take China's point of view and position in the international system as a starting point, it is important to understand China's capabilities and range of actions in the regional and international arenas. After all, its behaviour affects not only the perceptions of other countries and the balance of power in close security environments, but also the international system as a whole. In 2010, China became the second largest economy of the world and since then, differences between China and Japan have grown. Even though the Chinese economy today is about two thirds of the USA, according to Brooks and Wohlforth (2016), China is the only country able to compete with the country in the future in mid and long-term projections, and perhaps, the only able to change the polarity of the international system.

Brooks and Wohlforth (2016) argue that considering the material power China has in comparison to the USA and other major powers, China is the only country that can be considered in the foreseen future as a rival of US supremacy. In short, considering military power, innovation investments and economic power, China is an aspiring superpower, more precisely, the only one. For now, even with China's power growing, no foreseeable increase of power can undermine US superiority, especially with regard to US homeland security.

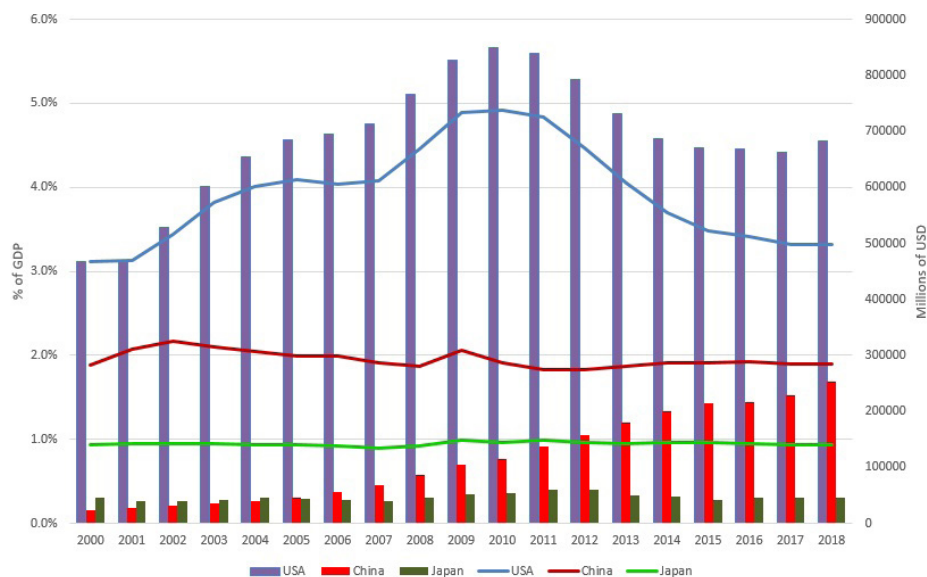
Figure 2 – Japan, China and US GDP in millions in USD (2000–2017)



Source: Created by the author, based on data from IMF (2019).

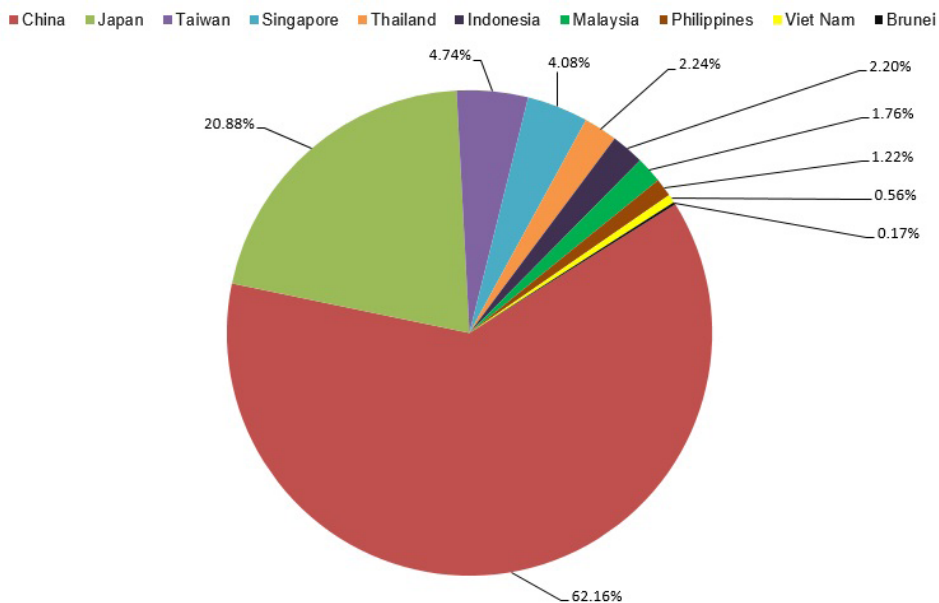
Concerning military spending, whereas in 2001 China spent about US\$ 45b on its defence budget, ranking below Japan, in 2013 it almost quadrupled that number, spending US\$ 171b, more than fivefold considering 2001, year in which it spent about US\$ 290b (SIPRI 2019). Compared to other countries in Asia, China continues to spend and invest more in military weapons and defence, generating asymmetries and disparities in contrast to other countries' power capabilities. Figure 3 shows the growth of China's military expenditure in comparison with that in the US and Japan from 2000 to 2018, despite the US supremacy in this area. In figure 4, it is possible to note the military expenditure asymmetry between China and the East Asian countries with which China is involved in territorial disputes. Considering the latter, if we look only at the total aggregate from 2000 to 2018, China accounts for 62.2% of the total military expenditure in comparison to the countries with which it disputes territory in East Asia.

Figure 3 – China, Japan and US military expenditure in millions in USD and % of GDP from 2000 to 2018



Source: SIPRI (2019).

Figure 4 – Total aggregate of military expenditure in China and countries involved in territorial disputes with China from 2000 to 2018



Source: SIPRI (2019).

Moreover, despite the notorious US superiority in terms of military capabilities and other factors, such as technology, growing China's investments in its own military capabilities may increasingly restrict US actions in East Asia (Heginbotham 2018). In fact, the strengthening of Chinese military capabilities may already pose contingencies for US presence in East Asia. A 2018 report published by Rand Corporation, which carried out an analysis of various conflict scenarios between the United States and China over Taiwan and the SCS, concluded that, despite US military superiority, China can impose obstacles for the country's action at its regional vicinity (Heginbotham 2018). According to the report, China possesses military capabilities that already constitute a cause of concern for the United States even though it is not close to reaching its full capabilities. After all, any conflict in regions close to the so-called Chinese 'heartland' impose geographical limitations on US capacity for action.

With regard to Japan, China poses several challenges for the archipelago, but as the Japanese fleets and their defence are structured with the US presence in East Asia and in its territory under the US protection umbrella, Japan's weakness diminishes. However, it does not disappear, especially considering the US pressure under Obama and specially under Trump administration to better share the burden of the US-Japan alliance and to increase its military expenditure and capabilities (Lind 2018).

It should also be taken into account that Japan has the most modern navy in Asia. This puts it in a relatively small, yet still advantageous position over China. According to Yoshihara (2014), Japan still has several defensive capabilities and has been developing A2/AD strategies to prevent an expansive Chinese action and as an alternative should deterrence fail to work. Japan's security policy transformations and Shinzo Abe's goals to revitalize the Japanese military power must be watched to understand the balance of power in East Asia in the future (Hughes 2017).

Even though the US still has more military capabilities than China (Christensen 2015), China's military modernization and the perceptions of other countries regarding the possible decline of the US power or commitment to East Asia are major systemic pressures that are affecting not only its behaviour itself, but also how other countries are behaving in East Asia. China's rise and growth in the past years are transforming the balance of power and increasing threat perceptions by the countries with which it is involved in territorial disputes.

China's transformations between Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping: from panda to dragon

China's rise is changing global and regional geo-economic and geopolitical scenarios. In the 21st century, as China grew, the system as a whole felt the effects of its rise and perceptions of it as a threat grew altogether (Christensen 2015). To dispel fears that a growing China would be a threat to the system, the 'Chinese doctrine of Peaceful Rise,' whose origins date from the 1990s, emerged in 2003. The following year, the term 'rise' was replaced by a less threatening one, being defined as 'Chinese Peaceful Development.' Moreover,

in 2003, the term 'harmonious world' emerged in Chinese politics, was introduced in official documents and was constantly repeated during Hu Jintao's rule. As Walt (1987: 26) argued, powerful and big states take care to avoid appearing aggressive, with fears of being perceived as a threat. China's behaviour in the beginning of the 21st century sought to accommodate itself to the international order and made every effort to establish and maintain a 'friendly and cooperative relationship,' as argued by Zhao (2015).

From 2001 to 2008, China sought to minimize its confrontations, which contributed to a more measured policy in relation to the maritime environments of both the SCS and the ECS. Nonetheless, there were tensions between China and Japan related to the exploitation of resources in the region in the latter case, especially between 2006-2008 (Drifte 2013, 2016; Costa 2017). China's accommodating posture and the growing concerns of the West or the USA towards terrorism and the Middle East enabled China to engage in international institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and strengthen its ties with countries around the world (Sorensen 2013; Zhao 2015).

However, the 2008 crisis and the Chinese growth stimulated the country's confidence, which, in turn, criticized the Western model (Zhao 2015). The Chinese government sought to promote its economic and political-party system and began to organize annual summits to present the Chinese system to the leaders of political parties in the world since 2014. Besides, China has been engaging in the international arena and strengthening ties with countries in Latin America, Africa, Central Asia and Southeast Asia through multilateral initiatives and engaging in the development of institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2014, the BRICS Bank (or New Development Bank) that same year, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013.

As China grew, the CCP sought to promote the Party's role in a more emphatic way in the reconstruction of the country, concerning its mission to promote protection from threats and to recover its international position. This can be seen in speeches of China's rightful place and growing role in international affairs and in state-media propaganda broadcasts. Thus, China's self-image and power have evolved over time from a developing country to a major power after 2008, which has been affecting its grand strategy and foreign policy (Zhao 2015). China has transformed its stance from '*taoguang yanghui*' – keeping a low profile – to '*yousuo zuowei*' – doing something actively (Masuda 2016). Regarding this issue, Masuda (2016) points out that during a speech by Hu Jintao at a National Party meeting in July 2009, the president referred to Deng Xiaoping's policy of keeping a low profile but emphasized the need for 'actively achieving something.'

In this regard, at the end of December 2011, the official book of the PLA (Jiefangjun Bao) contained a position on the principle of Chinese foreign policy with the description of the speech given by PLA General Ma Xiaotian to the China Institute for International Strategic Studies. Ma (cited in Fravel 2012) reviewed Deng Xiaoping's version of keeping the profile low and reformulated the speech in accordance with Hu Jintao's previous statement, sustaining that China should 'uphold (*jianchi*) keeping a low profile and actively (*jiji*) achieve something.' In that sense, during Hu Jintao's presidency, at an internal party conference, the language presented was that China needed to be firm in territorial

disputes with its neighbours (Doshi 2019). It is possible that this change is also related to Xi Jinping, who would become Hu Jintao's successor and who since 2007 had become a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, subsequently rising to the post of Chinese Vice-President and Vice-President of the Central Military Commission (CMC).

Despite Chinese discourses emphasizing the country's peaceful development, concerns about it are growing, especially following the advent of Xi Jinping and his ideas towards the 'Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,' presented as a desire to overcome the nation's 'history of humiliation' that began in the Opium War and ended with the Communist Party's rise to power. Likewise, since Xi Jinping's rule, China has been more active in other international environments, both with economic projects, in strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations, and through military actions. In 2013, China sent an infantry deployment to serve in the UN Peacekeeping Operations, making an exception to ancient Chinese policies of only sending officers to fulfil, mostly, logistical functions. In addition, in April 2015, the CCP sent a frigate to evacuate 225 foreign nationals of various nationalities in Yemen, marking the first time that a Chinese military ship evacuated foreigners from a conflict zone (Poh and Li 2017).

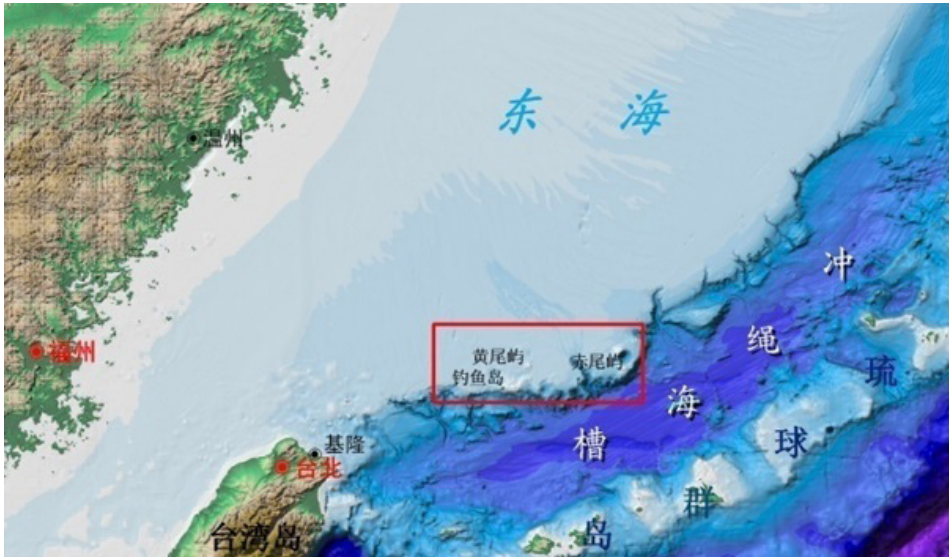
Applying operational code analysis, Huiyun Feng and Kai He (2013: 220) compared and contrasted the belief systems of Xi and his predecessor Hu and concluded that even though both leaders have similar belief systems, Xi seems less optimistic about the nature of the political universe, and his strategy to achieve goals tends to be more assertive than Hu's. As shall be seen in the following pages, the Chinese leaders' responses need to account not only for the status that China achieved in recent years, but also for the leaders' images (Xi Jinping), for regime legitimacy, and for nationalism.

The maritime responses and the dragon in the East China Sea since 2012: a Neoclassical Realist analysis

In the 21st century, Chinese leaders have been increasingly interested in pursuing policies to enforce China's actions in the oceans to protect it from possible threats. As an example, the 2015 White Paper stated the PLA Navy would gradually shift its focus from offshore waters defence to a combination of offshore waters and open seas protection, suggesting an effort to protect China's maritime claims in the SCS and the ECS. According to the 2011 White Paper, China's core interests are 'state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development' (The State Council [The People's Republic of China] 2011).

Currently, China has several maritime territorial disputes in East Asia scattered throughout the SCS and the ECS. In the SCS, its main disputes are over the Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Reef. In the ECS, China disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands with Japan, consisting of small uninhabited rock islets located in the Eastern part of the China Sea between Taiwan China and Okinawa's Southeast in Japan (Drifte 2013).

Figure 5 – Senkaku/Diaoyu map



Source: Diaoyudao.org (n.d.).

China, Japan and Taiwan claim sovereignty over the islands based on international treaties signed during the 19th and 20th centuries. Japan claims the islands were incorporated into its territory through the Okinawa Prefecture in 1895, after provincial authorities recognised that there had been no previous occupation of these territories by another country. In post-World War II, Japan considered the islands to be under US control due to the Treaty of San Francisco (1951), but soon after the end of the war, the islands returned to Japan in 1972 with the Reversion of Okinawa (Oliveira 2019).

However, Chinese documents indicate that the islands belonged to it since the Ming and Qing dynasties (1644-1911). The Chinese government argues that by the end of the 19th century, with the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), some Chinese territories were ceded to Japan due to the Shimonoseki Treaty (1895) – including the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in question. According to China, these should have been returned with the unconditional Japanese acceptance of the Cairo Declaration (1943), Potsdam Declaration (1945) and the San Francisco Treaty (1951), given that Japan was obliged to return Taiwan and the territories usurped during its imperialist past to Chinese sovereignty. Although the treaty explicitly mentioned the name ‘Taiwan’ and not the name ‘Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands,’ it stated that ‘Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed’ (San Francisco Treaty 1951).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the position of the United States. Even though it does not claim sovereignty over the islands, it nevertheless plays an important role, since the islands were under its administration between 1951 and 1972. In short, the position of the US government is one of neutrality and opposition to the use of force to resolve sovereignty issues regarding the islands. In the reversal of Okinawa in 1972, the USA returned the territories to Japanese administration and reiterated that this return did not impact

issues of sovereignty, since it would only be returning the territories' administrative rights (Eldridge 2013).

Historically, the islands gained economic value in late 1960s when the Committee for Cooperation in the Exploration of Mineral Resources in Asian Offshore Areas (CCOP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the East (ECAFE) jointly published a geological research report assessing a high probability of the continental shelf between Taiwan and Japan being one of the most prolific oil reservoirs in the world and an area extremely favourable to the existence of large natural gas reservoirs. Since then, the islands have been disputed by China, Japan and Taiwan, and some escalations have occurred in 1978, 1990, 1996 as well as in the beginning of the 21st century, between 2004-2005 and 2010 (Costa 2017; Lai 2008; Drifte 2013; Oliveira 2019). Despite the specific characteristics of those moments, this article aims to specifically analyse the tensions between China and Japan from 2012 onwards.

On 27 March 2012, Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations deteriorated when Japanese history books that presented the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as part of Japanese territory and denied the 300.000 victims of the Nanjing Massacre were approved (Drifte 2013). In addition, in March 2012, the Japanese government announced a list of 39 islands belonging to the Japanese territory to clarify questions about their EEZs, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands group. The Chinese government protested immediately on the same day and the Chinese state agency State Oceanic Administration (SOA), released standard names and descriptions of the Senkaku islands and its 70 affiliated islets on 3 March (Drifte 2013: 34).

The 2012 escalation of the dispute over the islands occurred when the Japanese government decided to nationalize three islands of the Senkaku/Diaoyu group. On 16 April 2012, Tokyo's Governor Ishihara Shintaro publicly stated his intentions to use government money to buy the Uotsuri, Kita-ko and the Minami-ko islands. The islands belonged to Kunioki Kurihara, who had a debt of 4b yen with the government and wanted to sell them before March 2013, when the islands' lease would expire (Drifte 2013).

The Chinese government was aware of Ishihara's initiatives and of Noda's decision and declared that if the Japanese government decided to buy the islands, this would cause irreversible damage to the bilateral relations between the two countries. Governmental pressures mounted when Ishihara succeeded in raising voluntary financial contributions from the public to buy the islands. In June 2012, the Tokyo government managed to collect 70 000 donations, totalling more than 1,1b yen by September (Drifte 2013; 2016). Negotiations in the Yoshihiko Noda office (2011-2012) began, and on 7 July Prime Minister Noda confirmed the planned purchase, attributing it to the governmental desire to block a more disruptive attempt by Tokyo's governor. The announcement was made close to the 75th anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which generated greater tensions within China and spurred popular demonstrations domestically during August.

The Japanese central government, however, decided to continue with the nationalization of the islands. This action took place on 10 September and the announcement caused an avalanche of demonstrations, political sanctions and an increase in Chinese maritime and air military forces around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The wave of protests included

violence. The destruction of shops, restaurants, cars and attacks on Japanese citizens were the result of violent protests in more than one hundred Chinese cities. In addition, there was a boycott of Japanese products that caused a 3.9% drop in sales of Japanese companies in 2012. On the same day, China dispatched four maritime police vessels into the waters claimed by the Japanese surrounding the disputed islands. China then implemented a routine of such patrols in the following few years to challenge Japan's territorial claim (see Figure 5). In this context, it is important to note that the United States dissuaded Japan from proceeding with the island nationalization project, as this could lead to a crisis between the two countries. In spite of the dissuasive attempt, Japan chose to nationalize them.

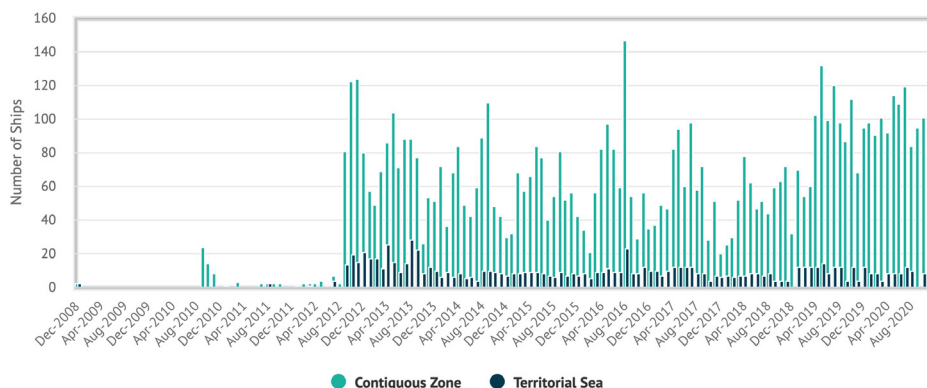
As a result of this tension, in 2012 China issued the defence White Paper entitled 'Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China,' reaffirming that the islands were part of Chinese territory and clarifying all of its stances on the issue of island sovereignty. On 13 December 2012, shortly after the rise of Xi Jinping, for the first time in history a Y-12 aircraft belonging to the SOA made the first unauthorized intrusion into the airspace claimed by Japan (Drifte 2016; Oliveira 2019). The date was chosen on purpose, as a reference to the Nanjing Massacre. 2012 marked the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, yet many celebratory activities expected to take place that year were cancelled or postponed.

In July 2013, China made its first military flight across the Miyako Strait, sending a Y-8 early warning aircraft through the strategically important waterway between Okinawa Main Island and Miyako Island. These waters are situated on one of the few international routes by which Chinese air and naval forces can cross the confines of the first island chain and enter the western Pacific (Burke et al 2018). Two months later, China made its first long-range bomber flights across the Miyako Strait, with two bombers flying beyond the channel before returning to the ECS.

In addition, naval trainings began to take place more conspicuously in 2013, to increase the combat effectiveness of the Chinese Navy. The White Paper 'The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces' (cited in Zhan 2014: 108) was published and explicitly mentioned Japan as a problem for China's core interests, stressing that 'on the issues concerning China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, some neighbouring countries are taking actions that complicate or exacerbate the situation, and Japan is making trouble over the issue of the Diaoyu Islands.'

In the following years, countries sought to resume talks, and in September 2014, Tokyo and Beijing created a mechanism for times of crisis that involved issues in the ECS (Drifte 2016; Costa 2017). The High-Level Consultation on Maritime Affairs persisted by 2020 and, by that year, ten rounds of negotiations have taken place between the two countries. Despite the quest to reestablish relations, Chinese ships and vessels continue to pose a threat to Japan, and Chinese maritime incursions, while shrinking in numerical terms, have not ceased to exist. Such a position allows us to infer that the transformations of China's balance of power have affected its most assertive reaction and following maritime behaviour.

Figure 6 – Number of Chinese vessels in the contiguous and territorial areas of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands



Source: CSIS (2019).

China's response to the incident is clear in shifts in the country's balance of power, in its relative capabilities internationally and also in relation to Japan, and in perceptions on its ability to act more resolutely in face of its growth by leaders. Nonetheless, this Chinese stridency is also a result of other variables that can explain why China chose to take on a more assertive behaviour in reaction to Japan's decision over the islands.

According to Sorensen (2013: 376), perceptions on the Chinese relative power growth 'have increased nationalist ambitions and expectations among people who believe China, after "100 years of humiliation" should then stand up and take its rightful position as a great power.' In that sense, Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' (中国梦) (cited in Xinhua 2013) policy strategy is an example of China's recovery speech when it states that 'the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the Chinese nation's greatest dream in modern times.'

Domestic variables impacted Chinese actions and their intensity and can better explain China's foreign policy and strategy during the event and afterwards. One crucial variable is the images and perceptions of the Chinese leaders and even Japanese leaders. It is noteworthy that the figure of Xi Jinping is key to understanding Chinese behaviour and its rampant maritime assertiveness after the 2012 incident, as he served the Chinese military in the 1970s, was a Minister of Defence and is the son of General Xi Zhongxun, who in turn served the Chinese army in the occupation campaign against Japan during World War II. The increase in the country's assertiveness involving territorial issues since the end of 2012 may be a result of this heritage (Zhan 2014).

Since the rise of Xi Jinping, leadership insights and images have been an important point in understanding maritime responses and later assertiveness in the ECS and SCS environment. In January 2013, Xi Jinping (cited in People's Daily 2013) expressed that 'we will stick to the road of peaceful development, but will never give up our legitimate rights and will never sacrifice our national core interests,' and that 'no country should presume that we will engage in trade involving our core interests or that we will swallow the "bitter fruit" of harming our sovereignty, security or development interests.' In addition to that, the regional setting became more unwelcoming since Obama authorized an

arms sales deal with Taiwan and decided to meet with Dalai Lama in the White House in 2009, the same year in which both countries signed a joint statement emphasizing the need to respect each other's core interests (He and Feng 2013; Zhao 2015). According to He and Feng (2013: 230), this 'political betrayal' has impacted the leaders' perceptions on the international environment and may have contributed to Xi's more assertive strategic orientation and responses.

The timing of the dispute was also problematic, as it coincided with Xi Jinping's power takeover as the CCP's Secretary General and Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), hence, a period during which a tougher stance was expected. After all, it is important to consider that a balance of power at the domestic level exists and that the government needs to respond to public expectations. Considering our intervening variables related with these dynamics, a central one was the Party's, and consequently, Xi Jinping's quest for internal legitimation, which Sorensen (2013) exemplified by analysing whether China had been aggressive internationally. After all, even in China the regime needs to be legitimate in the eyes of society's expectations and of the growing popular nationalism – another important variable manifested in the anti-Japan movement during the escalation of the island dispute in 2012.

At some point, the Chinese responses to Japan's actions were aligned between the Chinese leadership and popular expectations of the incident, especially given the growing nationalism driven by the CCP since 1990 and that later took on bottom-up forms (Gries 2004; Oliveira; Nogueira 2018). China – or, most specifically, the Chinese Communist Party – is uncertain about the future due to the increasing social, economic and political tensions at home, and changes in Chinese society have made it necessary and convenient for the government to be willing to pursue the core interests of the popular nationalist gallery (Sorensen 2013).

Hong Lei, the representative of the Chinese Foreign Minister, explicitly mentioned the anti-Japan demonstrations as advocates of national sovereignty. When asked about China's position on the demonstrations against Japan's nationalization of the islands, he responded:

Chinese citizens in various parts of China spontaneously took to the streets in protest the Japanese government's illegal 'purchase' of the Diaoyu Islands, denouncing the Japanese side's defiance of the victory of the Worlds Anti-Fascist War as well as the pots-war international order. They have demonstrated their just position and patriotism and built up a strong momentum to safeguard sovereignty, defend the territorial integrity and uphold justice [...] Long gone are the days when the Chinese nation was subject to bullying and humiliation (Hong 2012).

It is important to mention that the perceptions of the Chinese leaders regarding the balance of power and China's image in the world were considered in their decision not to act aggressively. If only domestic pressure were considered, China's behaviour could have

been aggressive, with an act such as occupying the territory. However, China's reactions to Japan's decision to nationalize the islands can be seen as more robust and assertive according to our model, and since then, China has been assertively acting in the ECS.

It is worth mentioning three other events involving the islands, one on 9 June 2016, when a Chinese warship entered the vicinity of the islands' adjacent waters and was met with criticism by Tokyo's government. The ship stayed within contiguous waters for only an hour and sailed into the Pacific Ocean. In addition, on 5 August 2016, between 200 and 300 Chinese fishing vessels abruptly passed the waters near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Over the next four days, 23 Chinese Coast Guard (GCC) vessels escorted fishing boats near the disputed territory. There was no staggering, but this undoubtedly warned Japan about Chinese actions and its gray-zone strategies, highlighting a growing Chinese confidence in its maritime activities (CSIS 2019).

Recently, in 2019, Chinese activities have also spurred assertive action by the Japanese government, which on 26 March 2019 sent troops to nearby Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands to contain them (Kojo 2019). On 8 May 2020, the tensions between both countries seemed to be rising, revealing that not even a pandemic such as the COVID-19 could promote cooperation between the two countries nor diminish territorial tensions in East Asia. In this event, two China Coast Guard (CCG) ships intruded the territorial disputed waters and pursued a Japanese fishing boat that was operating in the area. Japan Coast Guard (JCG) ships patrolling the vicinity of Senkaku/Diaoyu islands warned the CCG ships and took steps to protect the fishing boat that reportedly led to a tense confrontation. The CCG ships remained near the fishing boat within the territorial waters, leaving only on 10 May 2020. Even though the Japanese government immediately lodged a protest, Beijing replied 'that the CCG ships were simply regulating the illegal operations by the Japanese fishing boat in Chinese territorial waters and demanded that the JCG refrain from obstruction in the future' (Kotani 2020). This issue is to be considered with regards to CPP legitimacy, since the hardline stance on Japan can be seen as a diversion at a time of growing domestic dissatisfaction regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the slowing of the Chinese economy (Kotani 2020).

According to Kotani (2020), the latter show-off was related to the Chinese annual fishing ban in the ECS and the SCS and in the Yellow Sea from early May to mid-August 2020 with the intent to preserve fisheries resources and the marine environment. In recent years, 'the CCG only regulated the illegal operations of Chinese fishing boats, but in 2020 foreign fishing boats are also subject to 'suppression' in a campaign called *Liang Jian (Flashing Sword) 2020*' (Kotani 2020). This is impacting not only China's behaviour in East Asia, but also in Southeast Asia, where tensions seem to be rising (Browne 2020). Chinese leaders have expanded central interests, to include the SCS and the ECS, and even though the desire for sovereignty in these territories is not new, 'China has put more teeth behind its territorial claims' (Zhao 2015: 261).

Regional perceptions over China's growth and maritime actions

China's growing presence in the SCS and rising concerns over the US willingness and capabilities to act in diverse security environment all around the world is highly affecting the security dilemma in East Asia. Obama's Asia Pivot Strategy and the subsequent Trump Administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy are surrounded by initiatives, discourses, policies and actions that reinforce US presence in East Asia yet at the same time create doubts about US willingness and its capacity to act. It is no accident that when Obama promoted the Asia Pivot and the possible reorientation of US foreign policy, that 'in Europe, officials were afraid that the pivot was real, while, in Asia, they were afraid that it was not' (Green 2017: 522).

China's rise and the lack of consistency in US foreign policy towards it is affecting the behaviour of countries that have territorial disputes with China. Hughes (2017) argues that growing uncertainties about Japan's ability to rely on the USA as its security provider have grown. Shinzo Abe's rise to power in Japan in this regional security scenario has led the Japanese government to pursue stronger changes in its military capabilities as a way to both commit the USA to the alliance, proving that Japan is a more reliable country, and to protect the country in a conflict situation with one of its neighbours.¹ Some of the Japanese initiatives to counterbalance China and reassure the commitment with the US-Japan alliance were the creation of Japan's National Security Strategy in 2013, through which the Japanese foreign policy of 'Proactive Contributor to Peace' was developed. This policy is largely attributed to Japan's perception of the Asia-Pacific geopolitics since there were high concerns over China's maritime incursions in the SCS.

The government of Shinzo Abe has constantly sought to connect the disputes in the SCS and the ECS in order to fortify the political and normative ground that would reinforce Japanese conceptions of justice (Oliveira 2019). Japanese foreign policy is increasingly reaching additional countries with problems with China in the SCS and major players in the region such as Australia and India. As mentioned earlier, China is also acting assertively in the SCS, even more than in the ECS, which can be explained by the asymmetry of power between China and the Southeast Asian countries (Oliveira and Fernandes 2019). China's assertive instance in SCS disputes can be seen due to the constant military patrols and the artificially built islands capable of supporting high-tech devices and weapons in the SCS (Panda 2018).

Japan's relations with some countries in the region are growing closer. As an official of the SDF (cited in Midford 2015: 542) stated, 'ten or twenty years ago, the ASEAN countries did not want Japan to send military troops internationally, but now they are changing their position in order to counterbalance China.' For example, Japan's exchanges with Vietnam and the Philippines are growing; according to Gronning (2017), its security cooperation with these countries is being made through multiple initiatives, such as the regularization of strategic dialogues, diplomatic support in territorial disputes with China, aid-based maritime capacity building, and increasingly substantial military cooperation.

Between 2017 and 2018, for example, Japan gave five Beechcraft TC-90 King planes to the Philippines and in a 2015 joint statement the 'Strengthened Strategic Partnership'

between Japan and the Philippines was established (Gronning 2017; Parameswaran 2017). As for Vietnam, in the 2014 Japan-Vietnam 'Extensive Strategic Partnership,' the two countries declared their shared intention of strengthening defence and maritime cooperation; since then, the relations between them are growing and being enhanced (Gronning 2017; Parameswaran 2019).

Vietnam also seems to be emphasizing the strengthening of defence cooperation with the Quad – Japan, USA, India and Australia. The Quad is an example of cooperation between countries in the Indo-Pacific that could counterbalance China. The Quad is also known as Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and although its origin can be traced back to 2007, it only recently has become active with ministerial reunions. The dialogue takes place along joint military exercises, such as the India-Japan-US Malabar naval exercise and Japan and Australia's first Joint Air Combat exercise in 2019 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Japan] 2019; Parameswaran 2019).

It is also worth pointing out that Japan is trying to strengthen relations with Taiwan, given that even though the Asian nation also claims sovereignty over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, China is posing more of a 'threat' in the later years. After all, reunification is one of the main core interests of the CCP. This can be seen in Xi Jinping's (cited in Xinhua 2010) speech in a gathering of the 40th anniversary celebration, as he delivered a Message to Compatriots in Taiwan on 2019 in which he argued that 'China must be, will be reunified' and that even though Taiwanese and Chinese are from the same family 'we make no promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary means.'

Since 2003, after the election of the pro-China candidate Ma Ying-jeou as the President of Taiwan, the relations between Japan and Taiwan came to a deep freeze. Nonetheless, the relations between both countries are improving, especially after the victory of the Democratic Progressive Party in 2015 and the increase in the number of Chinese ships and planes navigating frequently along the Miyako Strait and Bashi Channel (Dreyer 2018). In 2019, for example, in an interview, the President of Taiwan Tsai Ing-wen pointed out that Taiwan wanted to pursue a dialogue on regional security directly with Tokyo (Deaeth 2019). In turn, this is affecting Japan-China relations, especially following the 2017 announcement of an SDF exercise to carry out a simulation on the premise that China and Taiwan engage in a military clash (Dreyer 2018).

Finally, China's growing influence and presence in territorial waters in the ECS and in the SCS are not negatively affecting the perceptions of all the countries in the region.² Even though countries that have disputes with China seem to be accepting Japan's military upsurge and strengthening ties with the USA, countries that do not have territorial disputes with China such as South Korea are more concerned with other threats, such as Japan's military upsurge and North Korea. According to Cho and Shin (2018), the militarization of Japan through constitutional changes are mostly seen as a potential threat to South Korea's security due to the lack of trust that can be attributed to unresolved historical conflicts between the country and Japan. It is also important to add that the current territorial dispute between the two countries over the Takeshima/Dokdo Islands still sparks some occasional friction between them.

Conclusion

Gradually, China has moved from a developing country to a country that has come to adopt a status of a great power. The increase in China's economic and military capabilities stimulated some reactions concerning territorial disputes in the ECS, as analysed. In fact, Neorealist predictions about how changes in relative capabilities of countries can stimulate certain actions – and even provoke more expansive behaviour – is an interesting way to analyse China's behaviour in the 21st century with regard to territorial disputes. However, as I claim in this article, arguing that the increase in China's relative capacities is the only significant factor affecting China is insufficient and can be misleading, given that China's initial actions in the ECS can be seen as a reaction to Japan's *status quo* changes since the 2012 incident.

Then, I argue that to understand China's behaviour, it is necessary to follow Sorensen's (2013) advice and look at some domestic variables that may help to deliver a more complex and useful explanation about China's actions and reactions. In that sense, this article has incorporated domestic variables such as the perception of leaders and their images, nationalism, and the legitimacy of the regime in order to explain China's responses to Japan's actions and its growing assertiveness regarding its maritime territories in the ECS that explained the reasons why the reactions and latest actions were not aggressive or conciliatory.

China has been acting more assertively and enhanced its presence through patrols and military exercise in the SCS or in its proximity, which is increasing the tensions between countries in the region. China is currently assuming and claiming its position and status as a great power and is willing to preserve its core interests without yielding. After all, any resolution regarding the status of disputes in the ECS can affect the disputes in the SCS and vice-versa. The tensions between China and the USA are also growing during the Trump administration, not only in the commercial and technological arena, but also in the East Asia security environment. Even though it is unlikely for a war to occur in traditional terms, the escalation of tensions in East Asia can tilt the balance of power in the region that is already shaken and come to affect the international system, especially if considering that the dragon's growing footprint has already reached places all over the world.

Notes

- 1 In 2014-2015, Shinzo Abe pushed forward security laws and the reinterpretation of the Constitution regarding collective defence. To sum up, the Peace and Security legislation implemented empowered Japan to exercise collective self-defence should an armed attack against an ally of Japan occur, hence representing a clear threat to Japan (Saltzman 2015).
- 2 This issue is also affecting ASEAN's cohesive and united responses with regard to China's presence in the SCS. Regional countries have been encountering problems presenting a united front against China, that prefers to deal with each capital bilaterally (Oliveira and Fernandes 2019).

References

- Abe, S. 2013. 'Japan Is Back: A Conversation with Shinzo Abe.' *Foreign Affairs* 92 (4): 2-8.
- Brooks, S and W Wohlforth. 2016. 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century. China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position.' *International Security* 40 (3): 7-53.
- Browne, R. 2020. 'US warship again challenges China's South China Sea claims.' CNN Editorial [online]. 29 May. At <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/28/politics/us-navy-south-china-sea/index.html> [Accessed on 10 April 2020].
- Burke, E J, T R Heath, J W Hornung, L Ma, L J Morris and M S Chase. 2018. *China's Military Activities in the East China Sea. Implications for Japan's Air Self-Defense Force*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
- Cho, E J R and Ki-young Shin. 2017. 'South Korean views on Japan's constitutional reform under the Abe government.' *The Pacific Review* 31 (2): 256-266.
- Christensen, T. 2015. *The China Challenge. Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power*. New York: W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Costa, A. 2017. *The China-Japan Conflict over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands: Useful Rivalry*. London: Routledge.
- Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). 2019. 'Playing chicken in the East China Sea.' 28 April. At <https://amti.csis.org/playing-chicken-east-china-sea/> [Accessed on 10 October 2019].
- Deaeth, D. 2019. 'Tsai calls for renewed Japan-Taiwan security dialogue in Japanese media interview.' Taiwan News [online]. 2 March. At <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3649141> [Accessed on 1 June 2020].
- Diaoyudao.org [online]. n.d. 'Zhong hua ren min gong he guo zheng fu guan yu ling hai de sheng ming.' At http://www.diaoyudao.org.cn/2014-12/11/content_34291770.htm [Accessed on 10 October 2017].
- Doshi, R. 2019. 'Hu's to blame for China's foreign assertiveness?' *Brookings* [online]. At <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hu-to-blame-for-chinas-foreign-assertiveness/> [Accessed on 10 August 2019].
- Downs, E S and P C Sanders. 1999. 'Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands.' *International Security* 23 (3): 114-146.
- Dreyer, J T. 2018. 'Security, Defense Cooperation Puts Japan-Taiwan Relations Back on Track.' *Japan Forward* [online]. 13 July. At <https://japan-forward.com/security-defense-cooperation-puts-japan-taiwan-relations-back-on-track/> [Accessed on 1 June 2020].
- Drifte, R. 2013. 'The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Territorial dispute between Japan and China: between the materialization of the China threat and Japan reversing the outcome of World War II.' *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 32.
- _____. 2016. 'Japan's Policy towards the South China Sea – Applying "Proactive Peace Diplomacy"?' *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt Report* 140.
- Eldridge, R D. 2013. *The Origins of U.S. Policy in the East China Sea Islands Dispute: Okinawa's Reversion and the Senkaku Islands*. New York: Routledge.
- Fravel, Taylor. 2012. 'Revising Deng's Foreign Policy.' *The Diplomat* [online]. 17 January. At <https://thediplomat.com/2012/01/revising-dengs-foreign-policy-2/> [Accessed on 10 March 2019].

- Green, M J. 2017. *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia – Pacific Since 1783*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gries, P H. 2004. *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics and Diplomacy*. California: University of California Press.
- Grønning, B E M. 2017. 'Japan's security cooperation with the Philippines and Vietnam.' *The Pacific Review* 31 (4): 533-552.
- He, K and F Huiyun. 2013. 'Xi Jinping's Operational Code Beliefs and China's Foreign Policy.' *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6 (3): 209-231.
- Heginbotham, E. 2018. *The China-US Military Scorecard: forces, geography, and the evolving balance of power, 1996-2017*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation.
- Hong, L. 2012. 'Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei Press Conference.' *China-Un* [online]. 21 June. At <https://www.china-un.org/eng/fyrth/t973264.html> [Accessed on 10 June 2014].
- Hughes, C. 2017. 'Japan's Grand Strategic Shift: from the Yoshida Doctrine to an Abe Doctrine?' *Strategic Asia. National Bureau of Asia Research* 10: 73-105.
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). 2019. Monetary Fund International Database. At <https://www.imf.org/en/data> [Accessed on 10 January 2019].
- Kojo, H. 2019. 'Japan deploys missile batteries, troops close to Senkaku Islands.' *Asahi Shimbun* [online]. 26 March. At <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201903260044.html> [Accessed on 15 May 2019].
- Kotani, T. 2020. 'China steps up its offensive against the Senkaku Islands.' *The Japan Times* [online]. 2 June. At <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/06/02/commentary/world-commentary/china-steps-offensive-senkaku-islands/#.XtZsGsB7nb1> [Accessed on 2 June 2020].
- Lai, Y M. 2008. *Nationalism and Power Politics in Japan's Relations with China. A Neoclassical Realist Interpretation*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, UK.
- Fisher, W. 2008. *The legacy of leadership - A Study of Leadership Influence within a Single Organisation*. PhD thesis. University of Sheffield, UK.
- Lind, J. 2018. 'The Art of the Bluff: The US-Japan Alliance Under the Trump Administration.' In R Jervis, F J Gavin, J Rovner and D N Labrosse (eds), *Chaos in the Liberal Order: The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lobell, S E, N M Ripsman and J W Taliaferro. 2009. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Masuda, M. 2016. 'Why has Chinese foreign policy become more assertive?' *East Asia Forum* [online]. 20 February. At <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/02/20/why-has-chinese-foreign-policy-become-more-assertive/> [Accessed on 10 June 2017].
- Midford, P. 2015. 'Japan's Approach to Maritime Security in the South China Sea.' *Asian Survey* 55 (3): 525-547.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Japan]. 2019. 'Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Ministerial. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.' At https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page3e_001112.html [Accessed on 10 December 2019].
- Oliveira, A. 2019. *Entre o Sol, a Águia e o Dragão: dinâmicas de poder e segurança entre Japão, EUA e China no Leste Asiático e o estudo de caso das ilhas Senkaku/Diaoyu no século XXI*. PhD thesis, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Brazil.

- Oliveira, A C G and I N Morais. 2018. 'Ameaça externa e o sistema de educação na construção do nacionalismo chinês.' *Estudos Internacionais* 6 (1): 107-126.
- Oliveira, A C G and F C Fernandes. 2019. 'O raiair do sol no sudeste asiático: a projeção japonesa no mar do sul da china e seus interesses estratégicos.' *Revista Escola de Guerra Naval* 25 (2): 449-491.
- Pan, Z. 2007. 'Sino-Japanese Dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands: The Pending Controversy from the Chinese Perspective.' *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 12 (1): 71-92.
- Panda, A. 2018. 'US Calls on China to Remove Missiles from South China Sea Artificial Islands.' *The Diplomat* [online]. 10 November. At <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/us-calls-on-china-to-remove-missiles-from-south-china-sea-artificial-islands/> [Accessed on 10 December 2018].
- Parameswaran, P. 2019. 'Japan-Vietnam Defense Cooperation in the Headlines With Naval Consultations.' *The Diplomat* [online]. 9 October. At <https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/japan-vietnam-defense-cooperation-in-the-headlines-with-naval-consultations/> [Accessed on 19 January 2020].
- People's Daily [online]. 2013. 'Xi vows peaceful development while not waiving legitimate rights.' 29 January. At <http://en.people.cn/90785/8113230.html> [Accessed on 17 July 2014].
- Poh, A and M Li. 2017. 'A China in Transition: The Rhetoric and Substance of Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping.' *Asian Security* 13 (2): 84-97.
- Ripsman, N M, J W Taliaferro and S E Lobell. 2016. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rose, Gideon. 1998. 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy.' *World Politics* 51 (1): 144-172.
- San Francisco Treaty [online]. 1951. At <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20136/volume-136-I-1832-English.pdf> [Accessed on 17 July 2013].
- Schweller, R L. 1998. *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- The State Council [The People's Republic of China]. 2011. 'China's Peaceful Development Road. China's White Paper.' 6 September. At http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284646.htm [Accessed on 1 June 2013].
- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). 2019. Defense Database Expenditure. At http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database/milex_database [Accessed on 3 December 2019].
- Saltzman, I. 2015. 'Growing Pains: Neoclassical Realism and Japan's Security Policy Emancipation' *Contemporary Security Policy* 36 (3): 498-527.
- Sorensen, C. 2013. 'Is China Becoming More Aggressive? A Neoclassical Realist Analysis.' *Asian Perspective* 37 (3): 363-385.
- Sterling-Folker, J. 2009. 'Neoclassical Realism and Identity: Peril Despite Profit Across the Taiwan Straits.' In S E Lobell, N M Ripsman and J W Taliaferro (eds), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 99-138.
- Walt, S. 1987. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Waltz, K N. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- _____. 1996. 'International politics is not foreign policy.' *Security Studies* 6 (1): 54-57.

Wohlforth, W. 1993. *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Xinhua [online]. 2013. 'Presidente chinês pede para se buscar com persistência Sonho Chinês de rejuvenescimento nacional.' 26 September. At http://portuguese.xinhuanet.com/2017-09/26/c_136638951.htm [Accessed on 10 October 2016].

_____. 2019. 'Xi says "China must be, will be reunified" as key anniversary marked.' 2 January. At http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/02/c_137714898_2.htm [Accessed on 1 June 2020].

Yoshihara, T. 2014. 'Going Anti-Access at Sea: How Japan Can Turn the Tables on China.' *Maritime Strategy Series*. Center of New American Security.

Zhan, Z. 2014. 'Fanning the Flames of Public Rage: Coverage of Diaoyu Islands Dispute in Chinese Legacy Media.' In T A Hollihan (eds), *The Dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. How Media Narratives Shape Public Opinion and Challenge the Global Order*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 81-118.

Zhao, S. 2015. 'China's Power from a Chinese Perspective (I): A Developing Country versus a Great Power.' In J Chung (eds), *Assessing China's Power*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 251-270.

About the author

Alana Camoça Gonçalves de Oliveira is a Postdoctoral fellow in Military Sciences at the School of High Command and General Staff of the Army (Brazil). She holds a Ph.D. and a Master's Degree in International Political Economy from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) in Brazil. During her doctoral studies, she was a visiting scholar at Columbia University (USA) and at Osaka University (Japan). She has published widely on China's rise in the 21st century, China's history, Sino-Japanese relations, Japan's foreign and security policies, and territorial disputes in the East and South China Sea. She is currently developing research regarding China's presence in Antarctica, China's soft power and East Asia geopolitics, with a focus on China, Japan and US relations.

Do Panda ao Dragão: Uma Análise das Ações e Reações Marítimas da China no Leste do Mar da China desde 2012 e Suas Implicações

Resumo: No século 21, a ascensão da China está mudando os cenários geopolíticos globais e regionais. Diante do seu crescimento e do medo de ser percebida como uma ameaça, a China buscou associar sua emergência econômica e política à preservação do atual sistema internacional, enfatizando em seus discursos o desenvolvimento pacífico e o mundo harmonioso como um ator que quer crescer e acomodar a ordem mundial. No entanto, com as mudanças no equilíbrio de poder e com sua contínua ascensão, o comportamento da China em sua região, especialmente em relação às disputas marítimas, vem mudando e afetando as percepções de outros países. Aplicando o Realismo Neoclássico, este artigo analisa a política externa chinesa no século 21, elucidando seu comportamento em relação à disputa pelas ilhas Senkaku/Diaoyu, suas ações e reações e mostrando, assim, as percepções de outros países. O artigo conclui que as percepções sobre o equilíbrio de poder, as capacidades chinesas, o nacionalismo, a legitimidade do regime e as imagens de liderança afetam a intensidade das respostas de Pequim e sua política externa em relação a suas disputas territoriais marítimas. Além disso, o artigo mostra que a crescente assertividade da China tanto no Mar da China Oriental quanto no Mar da China Meridional está empurrando os países mais próximos, com quem ela tem disputas territoriais.

Palavras-chave: China; Mar da China Oriental; Realismo Neoclássico; disputas territoriais.

Received on 22 October 2019, and approved for publication on 19 August 2020.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>