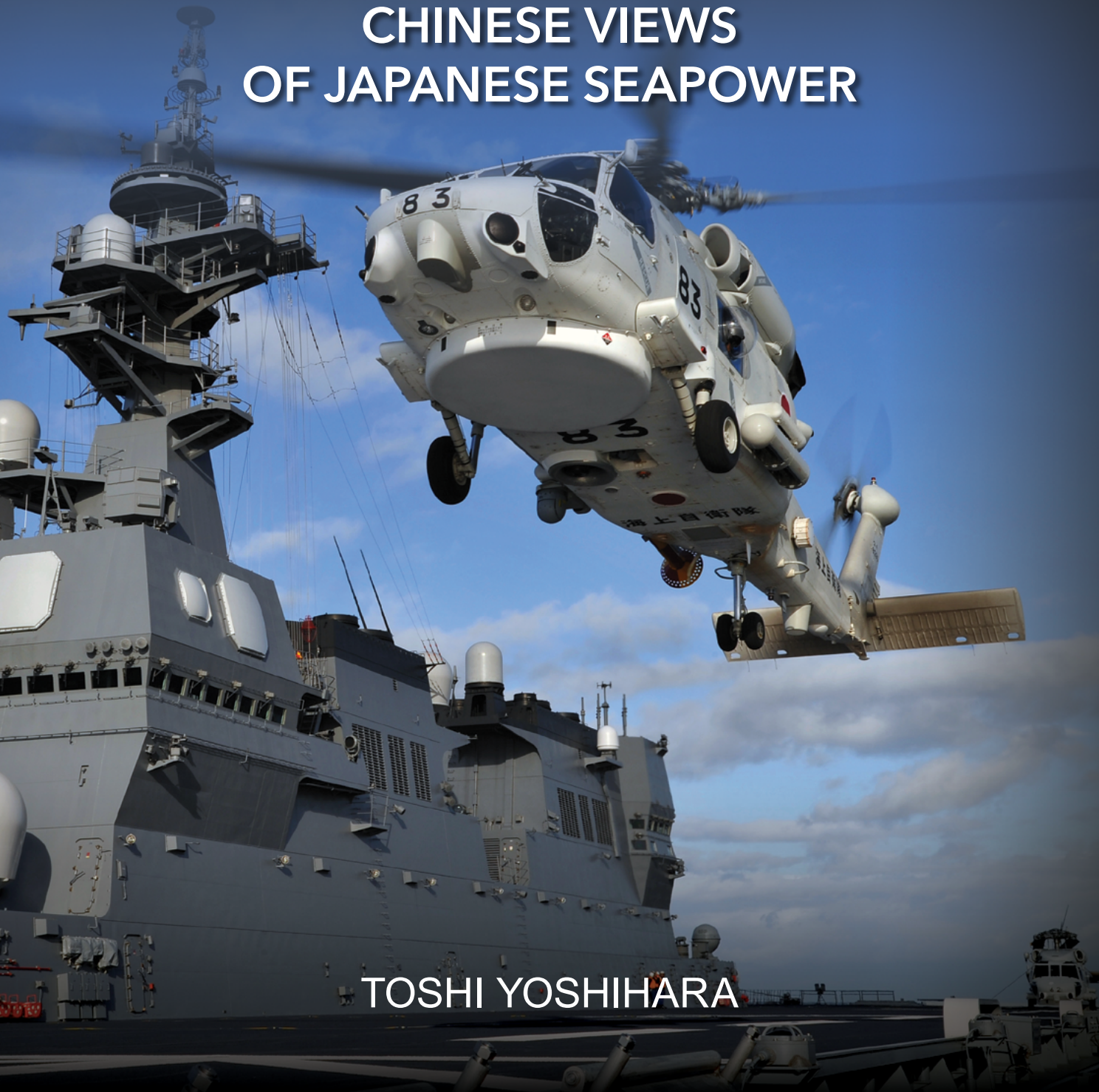


CSBA

Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

DRAGON AGAINST THE SUN: CHINESE VIEWS OF JAPANESE SEAPOWER



TOSHI YOSHIHARA

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2020

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank June Teufel Dreyer (University of Miami), Captain James Fanell, USN (ret.) (Geneva Centre for Security Policy), John Maurer (U.S. Naval War College), and Katsuya Tsukamoto (National Institute for Defense Studies) for their invaluable feedback on an earlier draft of the report. The author is grateful to Thomas Mahnken and Evan Montgomery for their thorough review of the manuscript. Special thanks go to Grace Kim and Adam Lemon for their diligent assistance on key aspects of the research and thanks to Grace Kim for overseeing the production of the report.

CSBA receives funding from a broad and diverse group of contributors, including private foundations, government agencies, and corporations. A complete list of these organizations can be found on our website at www.csbaonline.org/about/contributors.

Cover: JS *Izumo* (DDH-181) helicopter destroyer and SH-60J Seahawk antisubmarine warfare helicopter. Photo from the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force website. Composite cover design by Grace Kim.

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Executive Summary

The balance of naval power in Asia is shifting dramatically. Over the past decade, the Chinese navy overtook Japan's maritime service in critical measures of power, including fleet size, aggregate tonnage, and firepower. China's massive buildup that began in the 1990s continues to gather steam. Japanese seapower, by contrast, appears headed for an irreparable erosion in competitiveness. Indeed, if China's naval construction spree maintains its breakneck pace, the Chinese navy will likely leave behind permanently its Japanese rival within this decade.

Japan's swift displacement as a leading maritime power bodes ill for the Indo-Pacific. Japanese seapower remains a critical pillar of the postwar regional architecture. Japan's maritime service helps deter aggression and keep the seas open to all, an essential condition for free trade and global prosperity. Japan's naval prowess is a critical element of the U.S.-Japan alliance, an anchor of regional stability. It lends credibility to the security partnership's commitments and purpose. In short, Japan's relative decline at sea not only erodes its ability to defend the liberal international order, but it also weakens the deterrent posture of the alliance.

China eclipsing Japan in naval power could thus introduce unwelcome strategic trends. It could fuel an even more intense competition between Tokyo and Beijing, two seafaring rivals that regard each other with deep suspicion. It could increase the probability of deterrence failure in times of crisis. It could undercut U.S. confidence in Japan's capacity to fulfill its allied responsibilities, sowing acrimony within the alliance.

Yet, this extraordinary reversal of fortunes has gone largely unexamined. Few studies have explored China's surpassing of Japanese seapower and its possible strategic consequences for Asia. Fewer still have examined the deteriorating local balance from Beijing's perspective. To fill the analytical void, this study surveys Chinese-language literature to evaluate how analysts on the mainland perceive the Sino-Japanese naval balance. It samples a wide selection of open sources to understand how Chinese strategists are reappraising Beijing's options as China continues its rapid ascent at sea. This study is the first of its kind to use the

extensive Chinese publications on Japanese seapower to explore this critical but largely overlooked topic.

This study finds that Beijing anticipates an intensifying naval rivalry with Tokyo in the coming years. According to the Chinese narrative, a combination of competitive impulses, insecurity, ill will, and deeply ingrained cultural traits have inclined Japan to perceive China's naval ascent as a grave threat. Japan, so goes this logic, will do its utmost to frustrate Chinese maritime ambitions. In conjunction with its U.S. ally, Tokyo will organize a coalition of like-minded maritime powers to surround and counterbalance China at sea. In Chinese eyes, Sino-Japanese maritime competition and naval confrontation are virtually fated.

This study further finds that the prospects of naval superiority will persuade Chinese statesmen and commanders to adopt an offensive strategy in a local maritime conflict against Japan. The accumulation of naval power has furnished warfighting options hitherto unavailable to China. Advanced weaponry, along with improved seamanship, will allow the Chinese navy to launch offensive operations for localized sea control. Decisive engagements will constitute a core component of China's war-winning strategy. Equally worrisome, China's naval superiority could encourage Chinese leaders to take ever greater risks in peacetime and to view force as an increasingly viable option in the maritime domain.

Beijing's naval prowess has also buoyed its confidence, a mindset that had been absent in previous discourse. China is increasingly convinced that it possesses the means and skills at sea to bend Japan to its will. Such confidence will increase the likelihood that Beijing would act on its threat of violence. The convergence of China's hardening national will and growing naval power thus bodes ill for the future stability of the Indo-Pacific.

This study demonstrates that the underlying sources of the naval competition, as the Chinese see them, are likely to intensify the Sino-Japanese maritime rivalry. At the same time, many Chinese strategists believe that China's naval power will allow Beijing to make good on its commitments and ambitions in maritime Asia. This study shows that the local naval imbalance, if left unaddressed, will strain the U.S.-Japan alliance while destabilizing Asia. It urges the alliance to recognize the Chinese challenge and to act swiftly to restore the naval balance.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

An extraordinary reversal of fortunes in Asia has gone largely unnoticed. Over the past decade, the Chinese navy overtook Japan's maritime service in critical measures of power, including fleet size, aggregate tonnage, and firepower. Strikingly, China has embarked on a naval modernization plan of such ambition that, in the years ahead, its margin of superiority over Japan will widen at an accelerated pace. As China's massive buildup that began in the 1990s gathers steam, Japanese seapower appears headed for an irreparable erosion in competitiveness. Indeed, if China's naval construction spree maintains its breakneck speed, the Chinese navy will likely leave behind permanently its Japanese rival within this decade.

Yet, this power transition remains virtually unexamined. Whereas recent commentaries excitedly debated the significance of China's emergence as the largest navy in the world, with it eclipsing the U.S. Navy in size, near silence surrounded the crossover points in the Sino-Japanese naval balance.¹ This indifference is puzzling considering its strategic significance.

China and Japan are Asia's two economic powerhouses and they sit atop the regional pecking order. Their strategic heft ensures that their interactions at sea, for better or for worse, will be felt across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. As these two hyper competitive seafaring neighbors undergo rapid changes in relative power, regional disequilibrium and its attendant risks will invariably follow. There is strong evidence that the naval power shift has already emboldened Beijing while stoking fears among Japanese leaders. Owing to mutual suspicions that run deep, both sides have succumbed to competitive impulses, lending momentum to a maritime rivalry that has been taking shape for at least a decade. Japan's swift displacement as a seapower could also introduce doubts among local powers, including

1 For commentary about the Chinese navy's surpassing of the U.S. Navy in size, see Andrew S. Erickson, "Numbers Matter: China's Three 'Navies' Each Have the World's Most Ships," *The National Interest*, February 26, 2018; China Power Team, "How is China modernizing its navy?" *China Power CSIS*, December 17, 2018; Steven Lee Myers, "With Ships and Missiles, China Is Ready to Challenge U.S. Navy in Pacific," *The New York Times*, August 29, 2018; David Lague and Benjamin Kang Lim, "Ruling the Waves: China's vast fleet is tipping the balance in the Pacific," *Reuters*, April 30, 2019; and Kyle Mochizuki, "China Now Has More Warships Than the U.S.," *Popular Mechanics*, May 20, 2019.

China, about the credibility of the U.S.-Japan alliance, the anchor of regional stability. The postwar security architecture that has served Asia so well could thus come under increasing strain. It behooves policymakers and strategists to pay close attention to the Sino-Japanese naval balance and its potential influence upon Asia's future.

To better understand the implications of this dramatic power shift, this study surveys Chinese open sources to evaluate how strategists on the mainland perceive the Sino-Japanese naval balance. It examines the sources of the naval rivalry and the influence of Chinese seapower upon Japan's naval strategy, operations, and capabilities, as the Chinese see them. The study then discerns patterns in Chinese thinking about Japan's maritime position and draws out the strategic meaning of the naval rivalry for the U.S.-Japan alliance. It shows that the local naval imbalance, if left unaddressed, will strain the alliance and destabilize Asia. The study urges the alliance to recognize the danger and to act swiftly to restore the naval balance.

For over a century, Japan was the dominant local seapower in the Western Pacific. Its smashing naval victories against China and Russia in the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War and the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War respectively secured the island nation's preeminence in the Far East until the end of the Pacific War.² While the U.S. Navy ruled the Asian waves in the postwar era, the post-Imperial Japanese Navy, renamed the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), rapidly reconstituted itself. Japanese seapower recovered and reassumed its leading position even as its American ally, the naval hegemon, kept the seas safe throughout the Cold War rivalry and its aftermath. By the 1970s, the maritime service had reemerged as a respectable and formidable navy in Asia. As its overseas missions proliferated in the first decades of the twenty-first century, the very modern and highly skilled JMSDF became the envy of the region.

Japan's success in the late nineteenth century was China's misfortune. The Imperial Japanese Navy's lopsided victory over the Qing empire's Beiyang Fleet at the Battle of the Yalu River in 1894 proved decisive: China posed a negligible naval challenge to Japan for more than a hundred years after that encounter. Nationalist China's naval impotence allowed Imperial Japan to invade the mainland from the sea virtually unopposed in the 1930s.³ The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the first decades of Communist rule was a coastal defense force designed to support army operations on the continent.⁴ Its existence was of little consequence to Japan's wellbeing. Until the 1990s, the Chinese navy possessed limited means to project power. As the twentieth century ended, it still possessed

2 For the rise of the Imperial Japanese Navy, see David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy 1887-1941* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997).

3 For a sense of the Imperial Japanese Navy's dominance along China's coast, see Hattori Satoshi and Edward J. Drea, "Japanese Operations from July to December 1937," in Mark Peattie, Edward Drea, and Hans Van De Ven, eds., *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 160.

4 For a brief early history of the PLAN, see Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), pp. 7-18.

a bloated force composed largely of obsolescent vessels hailing from the Soviet era. The sharp quantitative and qualitative leaps in Chinese naval power of the past decade are thus as unfamiliar as they are impressive and alarming. In a sense, Japan is re-experiencing the dangers it faced from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century when a nearby naval rival, Imperial China and then Imperial Russia, threatened Japanese security. It has been over 125 years since the Beiyang Fleet stood a reasonable chance of defeating the Japanese navy. This historical context underscores the magnitude of the power transition between China and Japan in recent years.

An earlier crossover point in national power foreshadowed this disturbance at sea. In 2010, the Chinese economy pulled ahead of Japan's to emerge as the second-largest economic entity in the world. This feat was also historic: Japan had occupied second place after the United States since 1968. Over the past decade, China's economy has grown at an enviable pace even as Japan's economy kept stumbling along following decades of post-bubble stagnation. China's rapid accumulation of national wealth helped to sustain high rates of defense spending. Until 2016, China's defense budget enjoyed double-digit increases for two decades on a nearly uninterrupted basis.⁵ Japan's military expenditures largely stagnated over the same period. China's financial largesse and Japan's fiscal constraints were bound to have an impact on the regional military balance. The payoff from spending on the navy was most apparent over the past five years, during which the steepening climb in China's buildup shattered the Sino-Japanese naval balance.

Wealth creation and military might, the mutually reinforcing formula for national triumph and greatness, hold special resonance to modern Chinese and Japanese statesmen alike. After all, a common ideological imperative informed both nations' remarkable ascents, in the late nineteenth century for Japan and in the late 1970s for China. Meiji Japan exhorted the nation to catch up to and to compete with the West under the famous slogan "rich nation, strong army" (富国强兵 or *fukoku kyohei* in Japanese or *fuguo qiangbing* in Chinese).⁶ The concept, which originated from China's Warring States Period in antiquity, became the intellectual underpinning of Japan's rise.

Although their efforts were largely unsuccessful, Chinese reformers in the Qing and the Republican eras similarly called on their nation to pursue "wealth and power" (富强, *fuqiang*) and "rejuvenation" (复兴, *fluxing*). Decades later, the "reform and opening" process that Deng Xiaoping unleashed in late 1978 applied the same logic that propelled Japan's modernization a century before. The paramount leader understood that the path to national strength ran through economic wealth.⁷

5 See Richard A. Bitzinger, "China's Double-Digit Defense Growth: What It Means for a Peaceful Rise," *Foreign Affairs*, March 19, 2015.

6 See Richard J. Samuels, *Rich Nation, Strong Army: National Security and the Technological Transformation of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 34-42.

7 See Orville Schell and John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 2013).

Xi Jinping's own slogans for China's rise, such as "the China Dream," "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," and "the strong military dream," are clearer echoes of Meiji Japan's prescription for long-term national success.⁸ Xi's catchphrases encapsulate his vision of China's long-term purposes and aspirations. They convey his ambitions to make China prosperous and influential at home and abroad. The China Dream, which Xi seeks to fulfill on a timetable, would culminate on the centenary of the People's Republic's founding in 2049. The dream aims to vault China to the front ranks of the world's most powerful nations in economic, diplomatic, and military terms. By making itself prosperous and influential, moreover, China would banish painful memories of its "century of humiliation" at the hands of Western imperial powers. It would regain lost stature, and perhaps even resurrect the Sinocentric order that once prevailed in Asia. Honor and dignity would be satisfied. In essence, then, China aspires to national greatness.

This historical consciousness about power is integral to China's and Japan's perceptions of the rising and declining fortunes of great powers. Beijing and Tokyo have had intimate experiences with becoming rich and strong. They are all too aware that when a neighbor obtains wealth and power, danger follows. Japan's rise in the first half of the twentieth century came at China's great expense. Not surprisingly, the Japanese now worry that a similar fate could await them as the roles have reversed. The crossover point in 2010, when China displaced Japan economically, thus holds significant strategic meaning to both sides. A historical sensibility, then, is essential to understanding the power dynamics between Beijing and Tokyo.

But the unfolding power transition is more than just a historic phenomenon. This is a highly consequential transition. First, this power shift is inseparable from the struggle for Asia's mastery between China and the United States. Washington and Tokyo count on each other to keep the peace while the U.S.-Japan alliance is indispensable to thwarting Beijing's ambitions. Yet, Japan's relative naval decline is taking place at a moment when the United States will expect even more of its local allies to counterbalance China's ascent. Japan's decline in an increasingly competitive and unforgiving security environment thus has implications for regional security, alliance politics, and the larger Sino-U.S. strategic rivalry. At the same time, any conceivable maritime crisis or naval conflict between China and Japan is likely to draw in the United States, leading to a tripartite encounter involving the largest economies and navies in the world.

Second, Japan and China are at odds over a range of disputes and flashpoints that could lead to conflict at sea. Most prominent among them is the cross-strait stalemate, a quintessentially maritime problem. China worries about U.S. and Japanese intervention should deterrence fail in the strait. Japan hosts major American air and naval bases from which the United States would project power to the scene of action in the event of war over Taiwan. Geographically, it is virtually impossible to disentangle Japan's security from that of

8 See Xi Jinping's speech delivered at the 19th National Party Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 18, 2017, available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm.

Taiwan's. Yonaguni Island, the southern tip of Japan's Southwest Islands, is only 110 kilometers off the northeast coast of Taiwan.

Furthermore, Sino-Japanese ties have already frayed in recent years over the Senkakus, the demarcation over the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the East China Sea, China's establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in 2013, and resource exploitation. And, both economic giants sit astride each other's sea lanes, the commercial arteries essential to the prosperity of both nations. These lifelines are also potentially vulnerable to each other's malign intentions. Maritime commerce is one reason that Japan views China's island building campaign and militarization in the South China Sea with such concern. Tokyo's naval diplomacy in Southeast Asia in response to Beijing's inroads there has emerged as another source of contention.

Third, as noted above, ugly memories of the twentieth century animate contemporary Sino-Japanese ties. Beijing's century of humiliation narrative begins at sea when Western imperial powers employed superior seapower to encroach on the Qing empire's prerogatives. Japan, of course, plays a prominent role in this storyline. Imperial Japan's navy carried vast armies across the uncontested seas to invade the mainland. For Chinese leaders, the lesson for the twenty-first century is clear: China must be very strong at sea to preclude future bullying by outside powers. The imperative to wash away this stain in China's proud history remains a driving emotive force behind Beijing's quest for seapower. The idea of vengeance for past wrongs may seem anachronistic in modern international relations. But, an intense desire for retribution aptly describes the mentality of many in China.

Finally, although the naval balance is skewing toward China, Japan is no pushover. Japan may be a declining power, but it is by no means a weak power. Japan still possesses a formidable modern navy that could fight back and fight hard. Should deterrence fail, an all-out naval war would dwarf the scale and lethality of all maritime conflicts the world has witnessed in recent decades, including the 1982 Falklands campaign between Argentina and the United Kingdom. Hundreds of modern aircraft and ships and thousands of lethal missiles—launched by surface combatants, submarines, bombers, fighters, and trucks—could converge on the East China Sea, the most likely scene of action. An unconstrained Sino-Japanese naval war would almost certainly be a bloody affair resulting in hundreds, if not thousands, of casualties and in hundreds of ships and aircraft littering the seafloor.

Hence, there is a need to investigate this underappreciated shift in naval power. Indeed, China's rise as a seapower and Japan's relative decline raise important and troubling questions for Indo-Pacific security. How does China, the rising maritime power, view Japan, the declining seapower? How will the role reversal in power influence Sino-Japanese interactions at sea? How might Chinese and Japanese maritime and naval strategies adapt to such new strategic circumstances? What are the implications for Japan and the U.S.-Japan alliance?

This study examines these questions through Chinese eyes. It draws heavily from untapped Chinese-language sources to interpret how mainland strategists and analysts perceive the

naval imbalance and how they are reappraising China's strategy and options. This study is the first of its kind to employ such publicly available sources to explore this critical but largely overlooked topic.

This study advances a two-fold argument. First, Beijing anticipates an intensifying naval rivalry with Tokyo in the coming years. According to the Chinese narrative, a combination of realist impulses, insecurity, ill will, and deeply ingrained cultural traits have inclined Japan to perceive China's naval ascent as a grave threat. Japan, so goes this logic, will do its utmost to frustrate Chinese maritime ambitions. In conjunction with its U.S. ally, Tokyo will organize a coalition of like-minded maritime powers to surround and counterbalance China at sea. In Chinese eyes, Sino-Japanese maritime competition and naval confrontation are virtually fated.

Second, the prospects of naval superiority—driven by China's quest for rejuvenation by mid-century—will persuade Chinese statesmen and commanders to adopt an offensive strategy in a local maritime conflict against Japan. The accumulation of naval power has furnished warfighting options hitherto unavailable to Chinese leaders. In the past, China's navy had to settle for operations to deny the enemy fleet's operational and tactical objectives. Now, large numbers of advanced weaponry along with improved seamanship will allow the PLAN to launch offensive operations for localized sea control. Decisive engagements will constitute a core component of China's war-winning strategy.

Beijing's naval prowess has also buoyed its confidence, a mindset that had been absent in previous discourse. China is increasingly convinced that it possesses the means and skills at sea to bend Japan to its will. Such confidence will increase the likelihood that Beijing would act on its threat of violence. The convergence of China's hardening national will and growing naval power thus bodes ill for the future stability of Indo-Pacific maritime affairs.

Chapter 2 details the magnitude of China's naval buildup and the extent to which the Japanese have fallen behind in key measures of naval power. It also describes the sources and methods that inform the overall study. Chapter 3 identifies the underlying sources of naval rivalry between China and Japan. It shows that structural and ideational factors explain the Sino-Japanese competition at sea. Chapter 4 assesses the Chinese literature on Japanese strategy, capabilities, and operations. The writings demonstrate that observers in China detect a discernable decline in Japanese seapower and sense a larger turn of the tide. The commentaries reveal Chinese interpretations of the growing power gap that separates the PLAN from the JMSDF, including in warfighting areas that the latter once held considerable leads. The chapter recounts and analyzes eye-opening warfighting scenarios in the East China Sea hypothesized by Chinese writers. Chapter 5 synthesizes the open-source literature, drawing out patterns in Chinese thinking. It then examines the strategy implications for the U.S.-Japan alliance. Chapter 6 concludes with final observations about the importance of local military balances, the value of open sources, and potential areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2

The Imbalance of Naval Power

This chapter first identifies key areas where the growing naval imbalance between China and Japan are both severe and consequential. It shows that the Chinese navy's buildup began to gain speed in the early-2000s, allowing it to narrow Japan's various quantitative leads. The PLAN picked up its pace to a sprint in the mid-2010s in such areas as fleet size, aggregate tonnage, and firepower. The result has been an alarming power disparity that is expected to worsen in the coming years. The power gap has widened so radically over the past five years that Beijing now possesses a decisive and likely irreversible edge. Unless Tokyo embarks on a major counter buildup of its own, despite its straitened financial circumstances, Japan will struggle to close the distance that the Chinese have opened between themselves and their Japanese rivals.

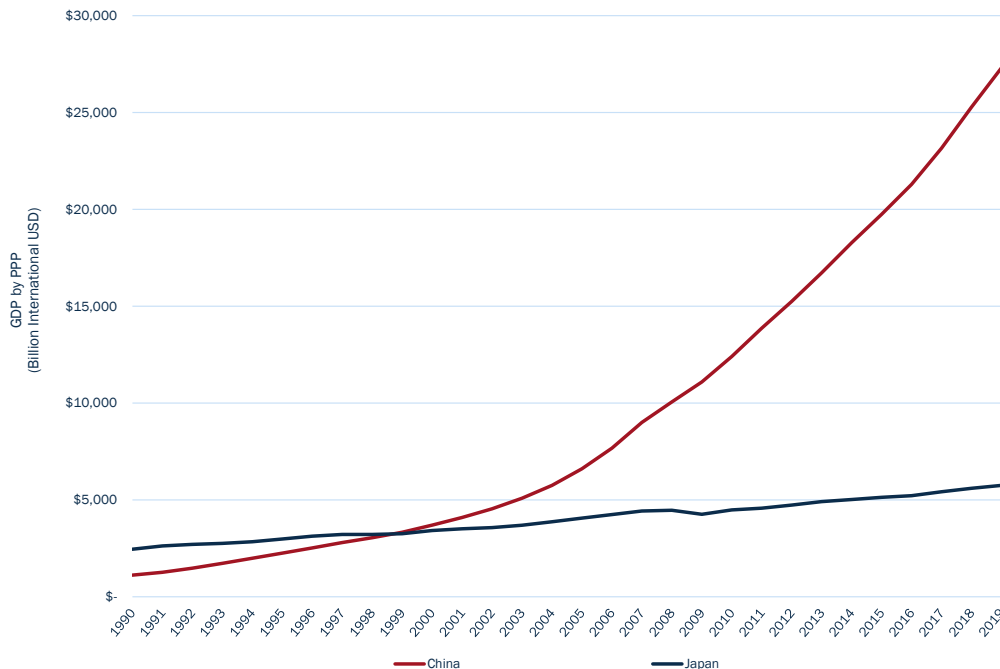
This chapter then explains the sources and methods that are the foundation of this study. It argues that Western scholarship, with a few outstanding exceptions, has paid insufficient attention to Japanese seapower. It further demonstrates how closely and seriously the Chinese strategic community, in contrast to its counterparts in the West, has followed Japanese maritime affairs. The resulting research and findings in Chinese-language sources are the products of deep study and offer insights unavailable in the West. China's intellectual energies devoted to Japanese seapower rival those spent on understanding American seapower, an object of Chinese obsession. Yet, this body of work on the mainland has not been translated, much less explored, in the United States and elsewhere. There is thus analytic value in subjecting the Chinese literature to scrutiny and in drawing insights from such a survey.

Trading Places

In recent years, much has been written about how China's rising seapower in all its manifestations could erode U.S. naval preeminence in Asian waters.⁹ Lost in this discourse is an equally troubling development: China's quiet displacement of Japan as a leading naval power in the region. Over the past decade, China surpassed Japan in critical areas of what Chinese strategists refer to as "comprehensive national power," an all-encompassing concept of a nation's ability to harness its resources. In 2010, China overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world, a position that the latter had occupied for over four decades. In terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), the Chinese economy surged past the Japanese economy even sooner in 1999 (see Figure 1).¹⁰ This economic crossover point has radically skewed the Sino-Japanese military balance. Three decades ago, Tokyo's defense budget was nearly double that of Beijing's. Since then, Japan's expenditures have stagnated while Chinese spending on the military has skyrocketed (see Figures 2a and 2b).

9 For scholarly works in chronological order, see Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010); Phillip C. Saunders, et. al., eds. *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles* (Washington, D.C.: NDU Press, 2012); David C. Gompert, *Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2013); Robert Haddick, *Fire on the Water: China, America, and the Future of the Pacific* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014); Michael McDevitt, *Becoming a Great "Maritime Power,": A China Dream* (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analysis, 2016); Michael Fabey, *Crashback: The Power Clash Between the U.S. and China in the Pacific* (New York: Scribner, 2017); Andrew S. Erickson, ed. *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017); Ryan D. Martinson, *Echelon Defense: The Role of Sea Power in Chinese Maritime Dispute Strategy* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2018); Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019). For media coverage in chronological order, see "Who rules the waves?" *Economist*, October 17, 2015; Seth Cropsey, "America can't afford to cede the seas," *Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 2018; Steven Lee Myers, "With Ships and Missiles, China is Ready to Challenge U.S. Navy in the Pacific," *New York Times*, August 29, 2018; and Robert Kaplan, "The coming era of U.S. security policy will be dominated by the Navy," *Washington Post*, March 3, 2019.

10 For GDP data, see International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook Database, available at <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2019/02/weodata/index.aspx>.

FIGURE 1: CHINESE AND JAPANESE GDP BY PPP (1990-2019)

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates that, in 1990, the Chinese and Japanese defense budgets, measured in constant 2017 dollars, stood at \$21 billion and nearly \$41 billion respectively. A decade later, China's military spending, which reached \$41 billion, had nearly caught up to that of Japan's \$44 billion on defense. In 2010, China's expenditures leapt to \$137 billion compared to Japan's \$44 billion. By 2018, Beijing spent \$250 billion, dwarfing Tokyo's \$47 billion budget.¹¹ This represents an extraordinary reversal in fortunes between two rival powers by any standard. Such growing asymmetries in national resources have in turn had a telling effect on the naval balance of power.

11 For military spending data, see SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, available at <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

FIGURE 2A: CHINESE AND JAPANESE MILITARY SPENDING (1989-2019)

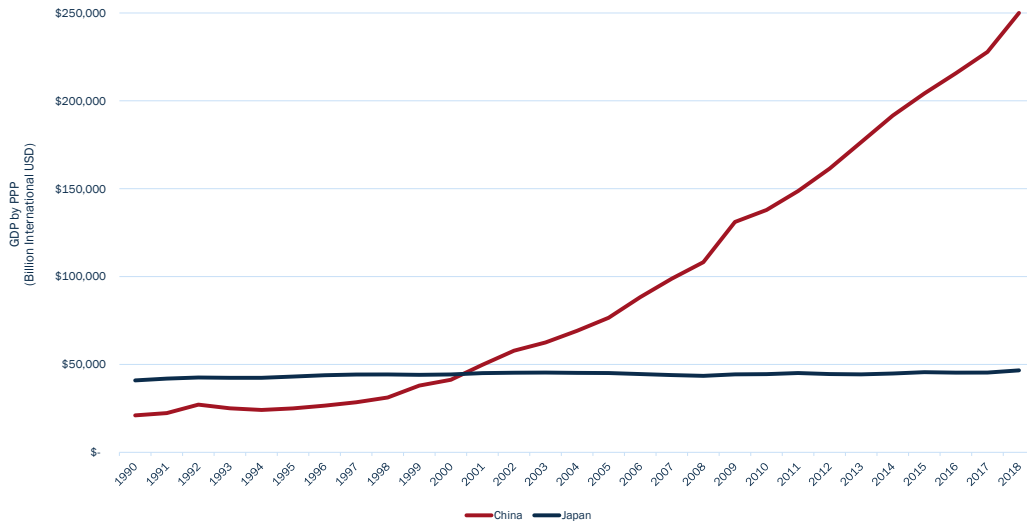
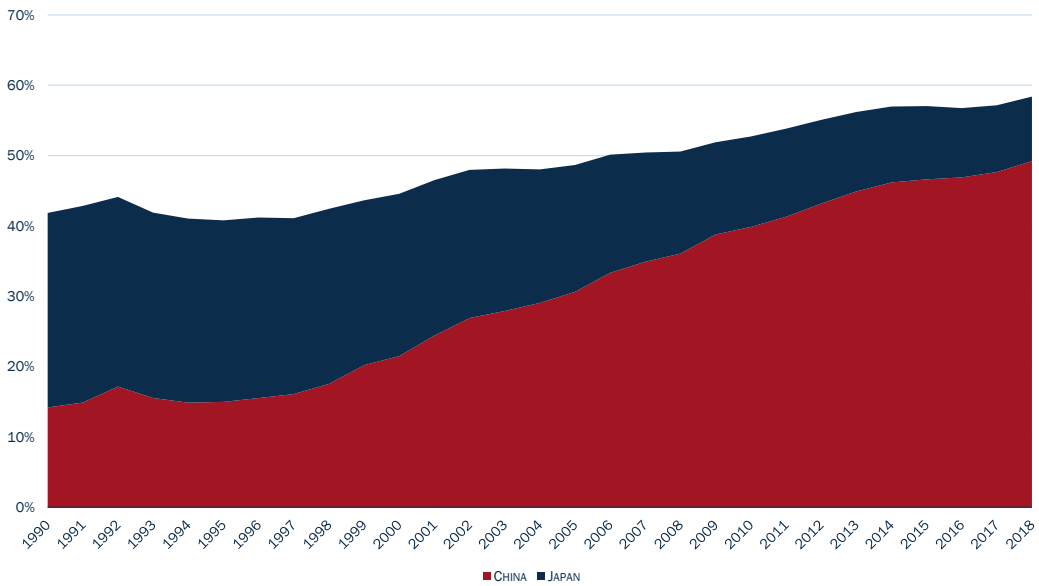


FIGURE 2B: PERCENT OF ASIA AND OCEANIA MILITARY SPENDING (1990-2018)



The Pentagon's 2019 annual report on Chinese military power states plainly that, "The PLAN is the region's largest navy, with more than 300 surface combatants, submarines, amphibious ships, patrol craft, and specialized types."¹² According to the Office of Naval Intelligence, the PLAN in 2015 boasted a fleet of 26 destroyers, 52 frigates, 20 corvettes, 85 fast-attack missile craft, 57 diesel-electric submarines, and 5 nuclear attack submarines.¹³ By one estimate, the Chinese navy's surface fleet is projected to leap from 331 combatants in 2015 to 432 in 2030, while its submarines would jump from 66 boats to 99 during the same period.¹⁴ Another study predicts that, by 2030, the PLAN's newest and most modern warships could grow to 16 to 20 cruisers, 36 to 40 destroyers, 40 to 50 frigates, at least 10 amphibious assault ships, and at least four aircraft carriers.¹⁵ It further speculates that about 60 diesel-electric boats, at least 16 nuclear-attack submarines, and at least eight ballistic missile submarines could be in service for the undersea force a decade hence. By comparison, the JMSDF's naval strength in 2019 included 4 light helicopter carriers, 2 cruisers, 34 destroyers, 11 frigates, 3 amphibious assault ships, 6 fast-attack missile boats, and 21 conventional submarines.¹⁶ Based on the current trajectory, Japan's surface and undersea fleets will not be substantially larger in 2030.

Beyond side-by-side comparisons of ship count, the trend lines in tonnage—a rough measure of latent warfighting capability and capacity—and in firepower for the PLAN since 1990 are astounding.¹⁷ The total tonnage of the Chinese surface combatant fleet doubled between 1990 and 2019. Crucially, the number of PLAN ships shrank by more than sixty percent even as tonnage climbed steeply during that period, translating into much higher average tonnage—and thus greater capability and capacity—per combatant. Indeed, the average tonnage of a Chinese surface combatant ballooned by nearly seven times between 1990 and 2019. This surge in average tonnage resulted from the mass retirement of smaller vessels in the 1990s along with the commissioning of ever larger cutting-edge warships at slower

12 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2019), p. 24, available at https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf.

13 Office of Naval Intelligence, *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015), pp. 15 and 19, available at http://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/China_Media/2015_PLA_NAVY_PUB_Print.pdf?ver=2015-12-02-081247-687.

14 See James E. Fanell and Scott Cheney-Peters, "The 'China Dream' and China's Naval Shipbuilding: The Case for Continued High-End Expansive Trajectory," in Andrew S. Erickson, ed. *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016).

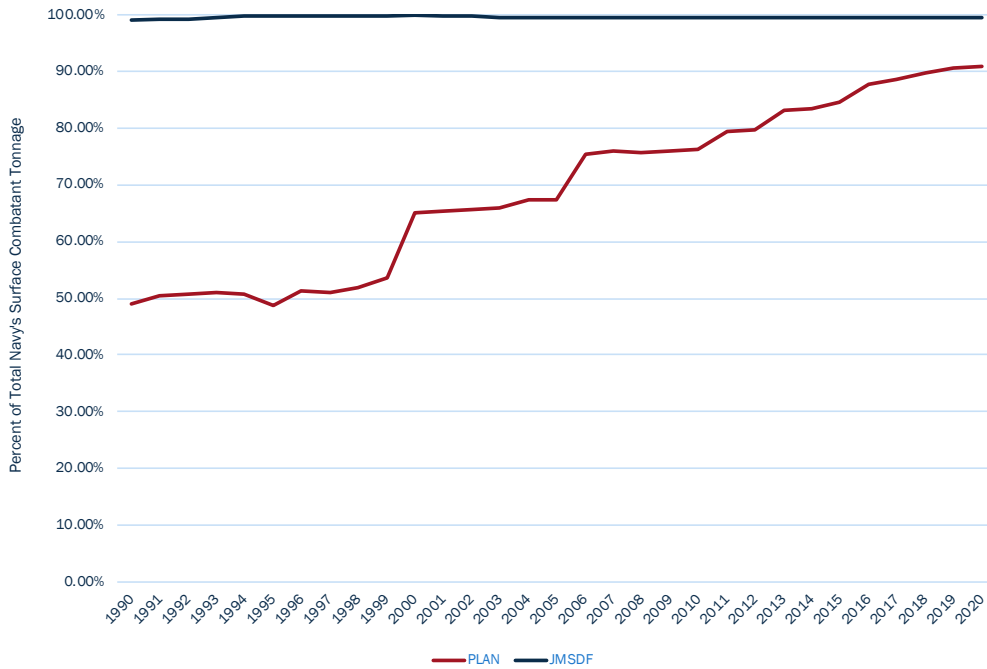
15 Rick Joe, "Predicting the Chinese Navy of 2030," *The Diplomat*, February 15, 2019.

16 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: The annual assessment of global military capabilities and defence economics* (London: IISS, February 2020), pp. 279-283.

17 Figures 3 to 8 in this chapter are based on a database compiled from various sources by CSBA of PLAN and JMSDF composition, tonnage, missile arsenals, and personnel by year. Data on Chinese and Japanese fleet composition by year is drawn from annual editions of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)'s report, *The Military Balance: The annual assessment of global military capabilities and defence economics*. Data on Japanese and Chinese naval vessel characteristics, including numbers and types of missiles, VLS cells, and tonnage, is taken from IHS Janes' *Fighting Ships and Weapons: Naval*.

production rates. As shown in Figure 3, in 1990, the less capable classes of patrol and coastal combatants comprised about 50% of the surface fleet’s total tonnage. By 2019, those classes constituted less than 10% of aggregate tonnage.

FIGURE 3: PRINCIPAL SURFACE COMBATANT TONNAGE AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL SURFACE COMBATANT TONNAGE (1990-2020)¹⁸



Firepower, which is a proxy for the fleet’s lethality, can be approximated by the number and types of missiles that can be carried onboard surface combatants. Modern warships use vertical launch systems (VLS) built within the vessels’ hulls to hold and fire missiles. The VLS comprises a grid of cells—akin to individual silos—that can house anti-air, anti-missile, anti-ship, and land-attack missiles. The total number of VLS cells in the surface force can thus be interpreted as the latent offensive and defensive firepower that could be unleashed against the enemy fleet. Throughout the 1990s, the PLAN did not possess a single VLS-equipped warship. The introduction of VLS to the fleet in the early 2000s opened the way for a massive increase in vertical launch cells that continues unabated. Within 15 years, the number of VLS cells exploded by nearly fifteenfold from 128 cells in 2005 to more than 2,000 cells in 2020.

18 “Principal surface combatants” include non-amphibious surface combatants ranging in tonnage from corvettes to cruisers as well as aircraft carriers. “Surface combatants” refers to principal surface combatants as well as patrol and coastal combatants.

FIGURE 4A: JMSDF OFFENSIVE MISSILES AND VLS CELLS ON SURFACE COMBATANTS¹⁹

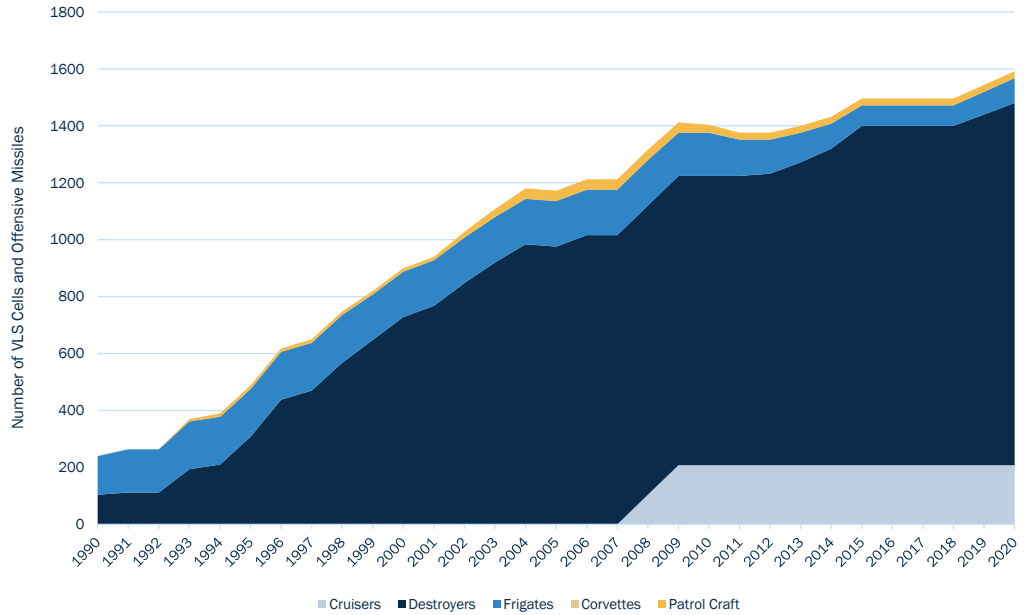
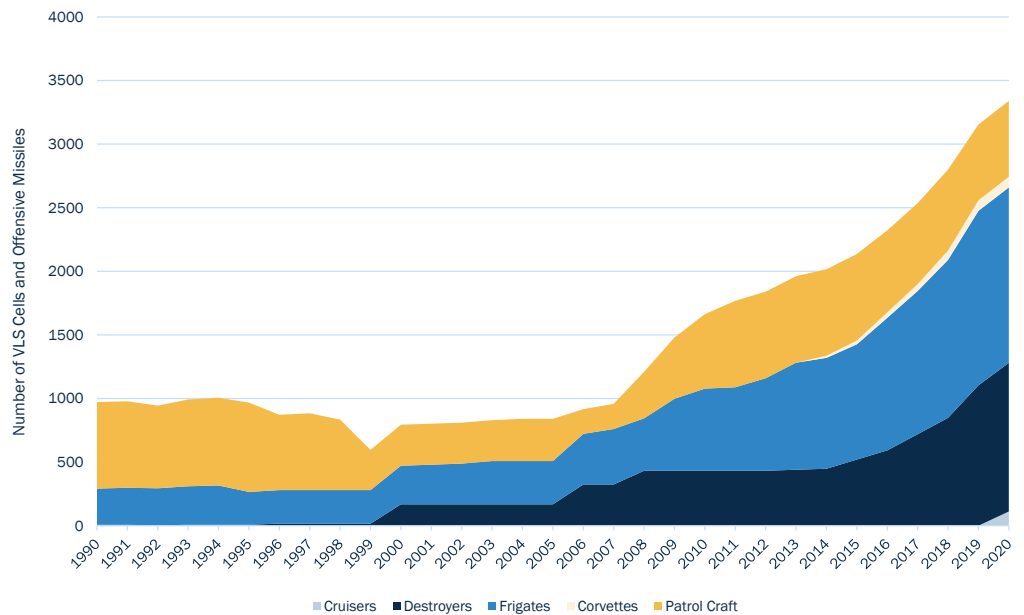


FIGURE 4B: PLAN OFFENSIVE MISSILES AND VLS CELLS ON SURFACE COMBATANTS



19 “Offensive missiles” in this case includes any ship-launched anti-ship cruise missiles, land-attack cruise missiles, and any future ship-launched ballistic missiles that are not in VLS cells.

Comparative trend lines in tonnage and firepower between the PLAN and the JMSDF since 1990 are equally telling. In the mid to late 2000s, as the naval buildup gathered steam, the Chinese navy closed in on—or reached parity with—the Japanese maritime service in key areas where the JMSDF did not already enjoy a substantial lead. The rapidity with which the Chinese closed the gap was particularly apparent in such categories as the size of large surface combatants and firepower. By the mid to late 2010s, the PLAN had either obtained a decisive advantage over the JMSDF or rivaled the Japanese in areas where they had previously led by favorable margins.

Although the PLAN always had more ships than the JMSDF, owing to the large inventory of smaller patrol craft, Japan held a comfortable lead over China in the number of principal surface combatants in the early 1990s. Moreover, Japanese warships during this period were far more modern than their Chinese counterparts. In the early 2000s, there was a rough parity between the PLAN and the JMSDF in principal surface combatants as the former brought into service more destroyers. By mid 2000s, however, the Chinese navy began to pull ahead of the Japanese in numbers. Beginning in the mid-2010s, a massive infusion of Chinese warships left Japan far behind. As of 2020, the PLAN had two-and-a-half times more principal surface combatants than the JMSDF (see Figures 5a and 5b).

FIGURE 5A: JMSDF PRINCIPAL SURFACE COMBATANTS (1990-2020)

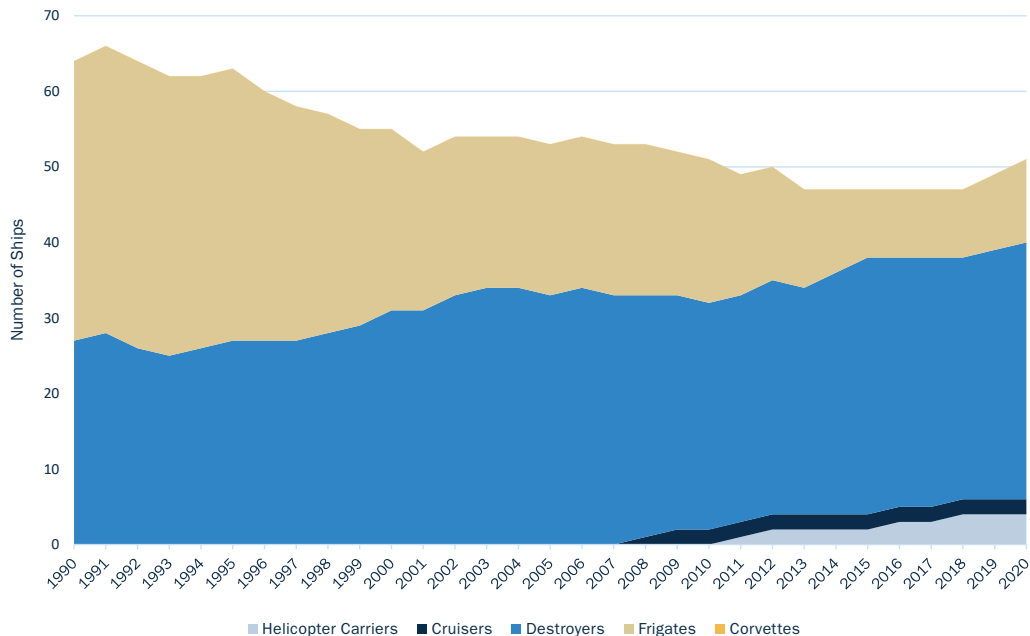
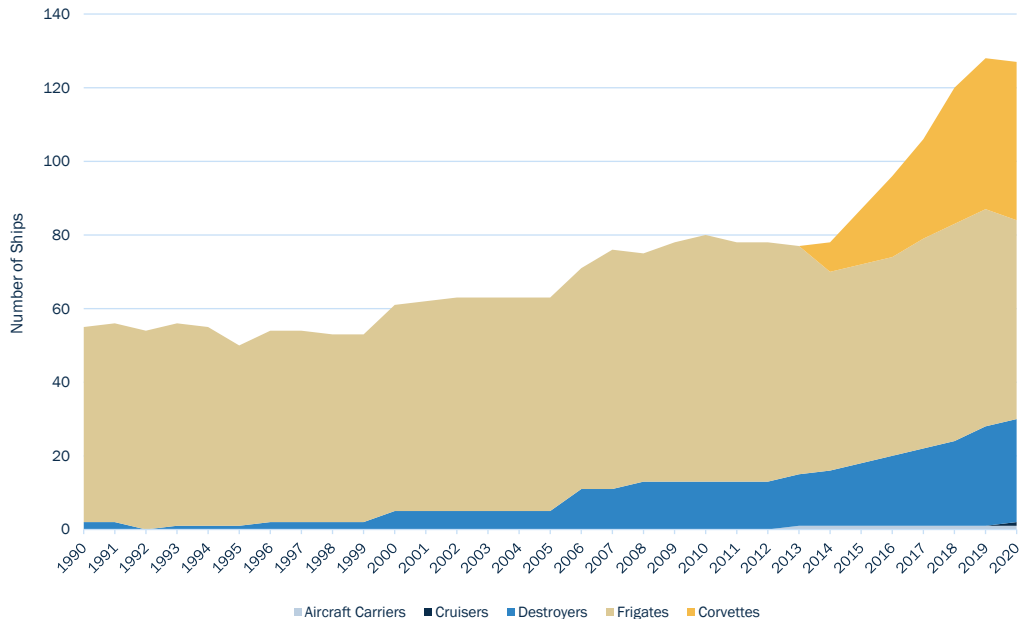
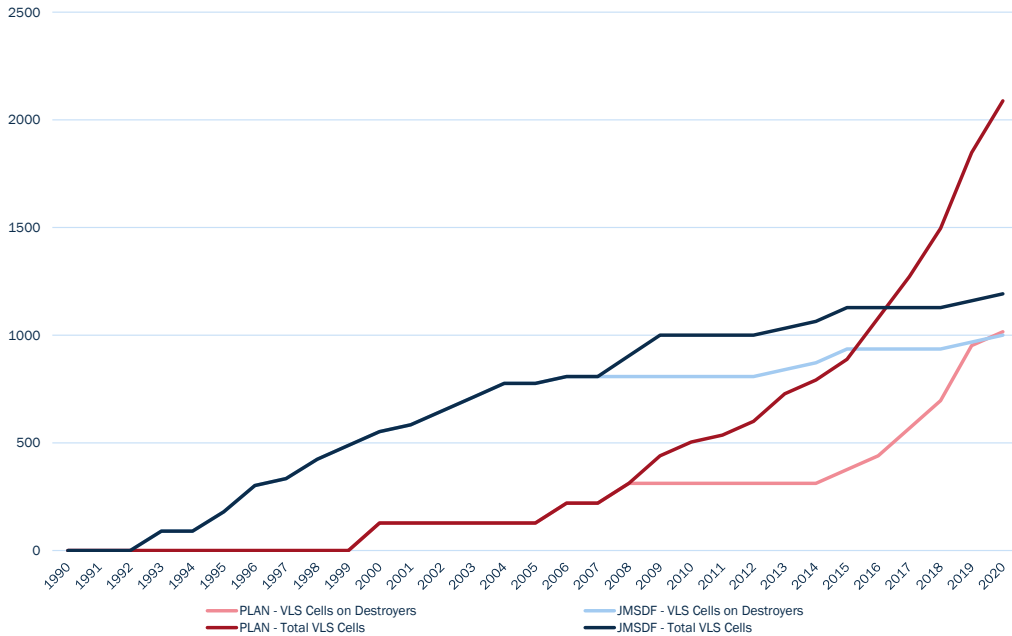


FIGURE 5B: PLAN PRINCIPAL SURFACE COMBATANTS (1990-2020)

In terms of firepower, China's catchup story is even more dramatic. The Japanese navy introduced VLS about a decade ahead of the Chinese. Yet, the rapid rate with which the PLAN has built VLS-capable ships quickly closed the gap beginning in the mid-2000s. The growth rate accelerated in the early 2010s and, by 2017, the PLAN overtook the JMSDF in the total number of VLS cells (see Figure 6). In 2019, the PLAN had 60 percent more VLS cells than Japan's maritime service. By 2020, the Chinese navy had 75 percent more VLS cells than the JMSDF, signifying a sizable widening of the missile gap in just one year. This ratio is expected to skew further in the PLAN's favor as its buildup proceeds apace. About half of the PLAN's VLS cells reside in destroyers while the other half are aboard frigates. By contrast, the JMSDF's VLS cells are entirely concentrated on its destroyers and cruisers. Yet, the number of cells on China's destroyer fleet has already matched, if not exceeded, those on Japanese destroyers, attesting to the enormous quantitative leap in Chinese missiles over the past decade.

FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF VLS CELLS ON JMSDF AND PLAN DESTROYERS AND IN TOTAL SURFACE FLEET



Equally worrisome, the PLAN's missiles outrange their Japanese counterparts.²⁰ The Chinese navy has armed its most modern surface combatants to the teeth with long-range anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs).²¹ Notably, the supersonic YJ-18 ASCM reportedly boasts a range of 290 nautical miles. The only comparable weapons in Japan's inventory are the sub-sonic, four-decade old Harpoon anti-ship missile and the sub-sonic, three-decade old Type 90 ship-to-ship missile (SSM-1B), whose advertised striking ranges are around 70 nautical miles and around 80 nautical miles, respectively (see Figure 7).²² These sharp asymmetries in range would allow major Chinese combatants to unleash volleys of ASCMs at the Japanese fleet from beyond the weapons' range of the JMSDF's warships. The PLAN would thus be able to hurl several rounds of missile salvos at its opposing fleet before Japan's flotilla

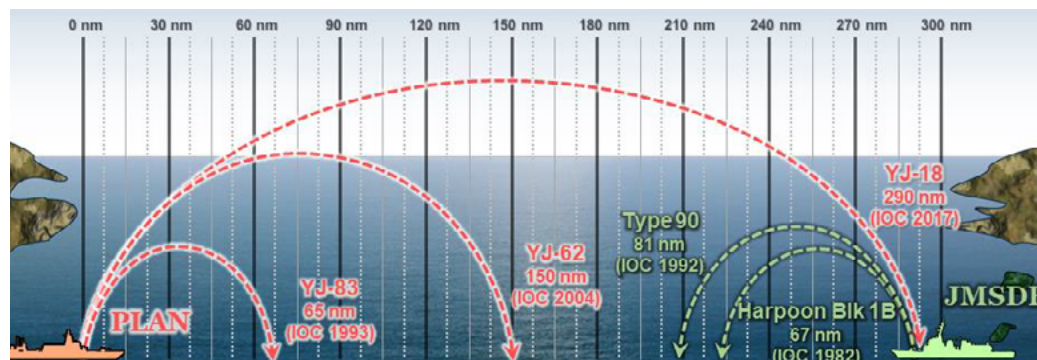
²⁰ I thank Katsuya Tsukamoto for this insight.

²¹ The Type-052D destroyers carry the YJ-18 missiles, the Type-052C destroyers carry the JY-62 missiles, the Type-054A frigates carry the YJ-83 missiles, and the Type-056 corvettes carry the YJ-83 missiles. The Type-055 cruiser will be fitted with YJ-18 missiles. The YJ-62 and the YJ-83 have ranges of 120 and 65 nautical miles respectively. See Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2019), p. 37.

²² To correct the range mismatch, Japan plans to procure and field the Standard Missile 6 (SM-6) air-defense interceptors. The missiles are destined for two improved *Atago*-class Aegis-equipped destroyers. The SM-6 has been repurposed for surface-warfare engagements and reportedly has a range of up to 200 nautical miles. To what extent the new missile will close the range gap and restore the JMSDF's offensive punch is unclear. Much depends on the true range of the SM-6—as opposed to the range given in unclassified settings—and on the number of missiles that Japan will acquire. See Kosuke Takahashi, "Japan's Improved *Atago*-class to field SM-6 air-defence missiles," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, September 3, 2018.

could close within range to return fire. Such tactical advantages would confer initiative to the Chinese navy and could more than make up for the PLAN's qualitative shortfalls in such areas as seamanship.

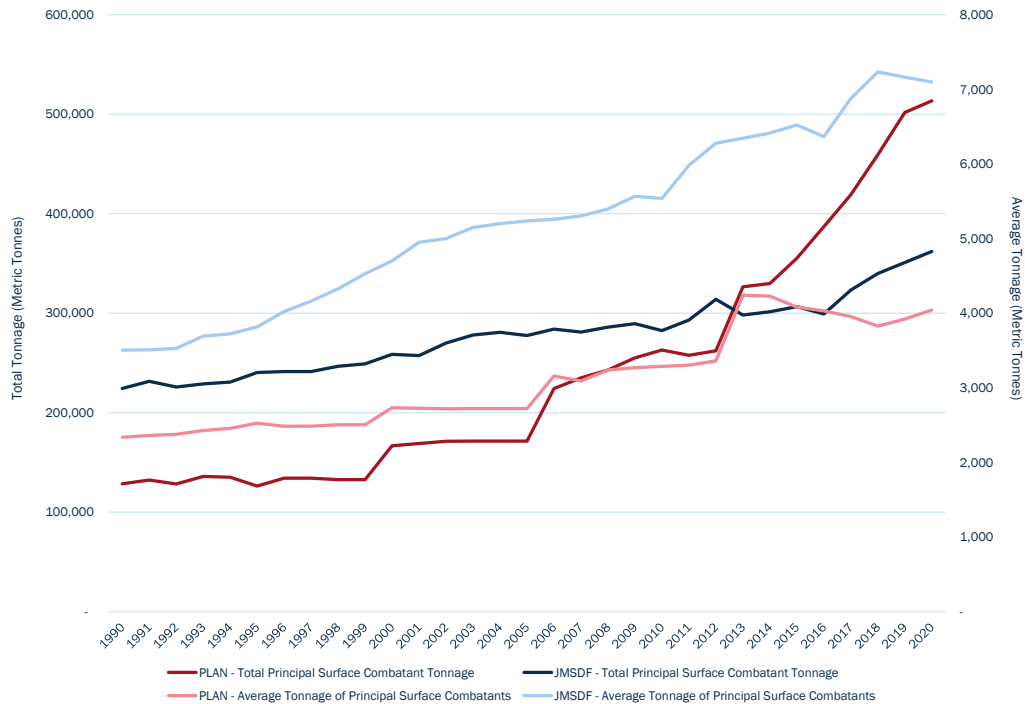
FIGURE 7: RANGES OF JMSDF AND PLAN SURFACE-LAUNCHED ANTI-SHIP CRUISE MISSILES



In tonnage terms, a comparison between the PLAN and the JMSDF yields mixed results. By total tonnage, China's principal surface combatants surpassed that of their Japanese counterparts in 2013. The gap has widened since. As of 2020, the Chinese have outstripped the Japanese in aggregate tonnage by about 40 percent. But, as shown in Figure 8, the JMSDF has kept pace in average tonnage, a more meaningful measure of per unit capability and capacity. Both the Japanese and Chinese fleets have doubled the average tonnage of principal surface combatants since 1990. In this category of naval power, Japan's maritime service has maintained its lead in average tonnage per warship over its Chinese counterpart by about 45 percent. However, as China brings into service its second carrier, the Renhai-class cruisers, and more Luyang III-class destroyers, Japan's advantage in this area may not hold for very long.²³

²³ For an in-depth survey of the Chinese-language literature on the Renhai-class cruiser, see Daniel Caldwell, Joseph Freda, and Lyle Goldstein, *China's Dreadnought?: The PLA Navy's Type 055 Cruiser and Its Implications for the Future Maritime Security Environment* (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, February 2020).

FIGURE 8: TONNAGE OF JMSDF AND PLAN PRINCIPAL SURFACE COMBATANTS (1990-2020)



Finally, lack of manpower imposes a structural constraint on Japan’s ability to expand its fleet, even if resources were available for a major buildup.²⁴ Personnel levels for the JMSDF have stayed stagnant since the end of the Cold War. From fiscal years 1997 to 2020, the authorized end strength of the maritime service fell slightly from 45,752 to 45,360. During the same period, the staffing rate—a measure of shorthandedness—declined from 95.4 percent to 93.8 percent.²⁵ As Japan constructed ever larger warships, such as the *Hyuga*-class and *Izumo*-class helicopter carriers, the maritime service has struggled to man its ships owing to the chronic shortage of personnel. To make matters worse, Japan’s long-term demographic decline has dramatically shrunk the age group eligible for military service.²⁶ To be sure, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) will similarly suffer problems of manpower shortages due to China’s own looming demographic crisis and will face recruitment and retention challenges in the coming years. But the PLA’s personnel crunch will only become

²⁴ I thank Katsuya Tsukamoto for this insight.

²⁵ For data on end strength and staffing rate, see Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2019* (Tokyo: Japan Ministry of Defense, 2019), p. 539. See also Pam Kennedy, “How Japan’s Aging Population Impacts National Defense,” *The Diplomat*, June 28, 2017.

²⁶ For media coverage of Japan’s demographic crisis, see Linda Seig and Ami Miyazaki, “The Japanese military is facing a serious recruitment crisis, and it’s a huge problem as the country takes on new threats from China, North Korea,” *Reuters*, September 19, 2018 and Michael Peck, “The Japanese Military’s Greatest Enemy Isn’t China: But a shrinking population...” *The National Interest*, October 13, 2018.

apparent over the next decade or more, whereas Japan has been feeling the effects of population decline for years.

By many indices of naval power, then, Japan is being—or has already been—displaced by China. Although numbers alone do not fully account for the naval balance, the figures above demonstrate how China’s overall national strength has translated into naval prowess, one that increasingly overshadows Japan’s once vaunted seapower.

Why This Imbalance Matters

Some of the implications of this power shift can already be glimpsed. China’s surpassing of Japan could unsettle the regional status quo that has prevailed for decades. If past is prologue, China’s rapid accumulation of naval power—and Japan’s inability to keep up—portend unwelcome great power dynamics. From antiquity to the modern era, profound shifts in the naval balance have stimulated great power realignments and arms races that, in some cases, produced diplomatic and technological revolutions. Britain’s all-out response to Imperial Germany’s challenge at sea in the early twentieth century is a classic example of such interactions. Naval competitions have compelled states to invest heavily in breakthrough technologies to stay ahead, and, under certain circumstances, to launch preventive military attacks. Fears of an irreversible tilt in the naval balance toward its rivals drove Japan to spring surprise attacks on Russia in 1904 and the United States in 1941. While direct Japanese military action to forestall unfavorable naval trends is unthinkable today, Tokyo will be under ever greater pressure to do something about China’s ascent at sea. To ensure that future Japanese maritime strategy is consonant with long-term U.S. interests, American policymakers must be prepared to strengthen Japan’s posture, reassure Japanese statesmen, and shape Tokyo’s future decisions in ways that enhance deterrence and stability.

The most striking historical parallel, one that best illustrates Japan’s predicament and its baleful influence on U.S. strategy, is Britain’s naval decline during the Cold War.²⁷ In the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union eclipsed Britain as the second largest naval power in the world. By 1960, the Soviet navy’s tonnage doubled that of the Royal Navy. In the late 1970s, the Soviets far outstripped the British across major measures of naval power, including a 3 to 1 ratio in major surface combatants, a nearly 9 to 1 ratio in non-strategic submarines, and a 6 to 1 ratio in personnel. By the early 1980s, it became increasingly doubtful whether Britain could defend the Narrow Seas or manage a limited contingency, such as Soviet coercive naval diplomacy against Norway, without the assistance of NATO allies. As James Cable observed at the time, “Never since the days of the Vikings had Britain suffered such a crushing naval inferiority to the country generally regarded as her most likely potential enemy.”²⁸

27 I thank John Maurer for pointing out this historical parallel.

28 James Cable, *Britain’s Naval Future* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1983), p. 19.

Britain's relative decline posed global dilemmas for the United States. If the U.S. Navy were tied down in a faraway regional emergency—similar to the tense standoff between the Sixth Fleet and the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War—there was concern that American naval forces would be stretched too thin to adequately cover other theaters. The Soviets might then seize the opportunity to probe in the North Atlantic, such as a menacing naval maneuver in Norway's offshore waters, to test European resolve. It was feared at the time that the Royal Navy's impotence in the face of such a Soviet naval challenge would have severe consequences for stability, deterrence, and allied cohesion while opening the way for Moscow to advance its regional ambitions against Europe.

In a similar fashion, China's rise as a seapower could undermine Japan's longstanding position in the Western Pacific and, in the process, undercut U.S. regional strategy in Asia. From the earliest days of the Cold War to the present, Japan has played an indispensable maritime role in helping the United States maintain a favorable balance of power in Asia. As the superpower rivalry heated up in the 1950s, Japan served as the northern anchor of the U.S.-led defense perimeter in the Pacific. For decades, the JMSDF and its sister services held up the shield to aid the American spear by ensuring the credible defense of Japan's territory and of the airspace and seas surrounding the Japanese archipelago. Should deterrence fail, Japan would keep U.S. forward bases accessible and buy time for American reinforcements to cover the vast distances of the Pacific to reach the frontlines. For its part, the JMSDF would sweep clear the major maritime approaches to the theater of operations along the Asian littorals and conduct operations to obtain and exercise sea control alongside the U.S. Navy. In short, Japanese forces enabled the United States to project power across the Western Pacific and beyond, and they continue to do so. Moreover, the sea service complemented U.S. naval strengths, including undersea warfare, while making up for American capability gaps in such areas as minesweeping.

More broadly, any assessment of the Sino-American naval balance would be incomplete without accounting for Japanese seapower. It is the combined power of the U.S. Navy's forward-deployed naval forces and the JMSDF that enables the allied maritime partnership to keep the peace in Asia. A revisionist China must carefully consider Japan's still-formidable capacity to contribute to the security and stability of Asia when calculating its relative position and options vis-à-vis the United States. Beijing would likely think twice about taking risks or engaging in aggression if it believed that the alliance possessed overwhelming military superiority. Conversely, if Beijing concluded that Tokyo was becoming a weak link in the allied deterrence posture, then it might be tempted to roll the iron dice. In short, the potential for China to eclipse Japanese naval power represents a direct challenge to U.S. strategy in Asia. It is thus imperative that U.S. policymakers perceive the relative decline of Japanese seapower as a proxy for the erosion of American power in the Western Pacific.

At the operational level, the JMSDF is as vulnerable to China's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) challenge at sea as the U.S. Navy, if not more so. The PLA's long-range precision strike

systems, including its large family of anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles, put at risk all major surface combatants. In a conflict, China's "carrier killers"—such as the Chinese Rocket Force's DF-21D and DF-26 anti-ship ballistic missiles—would threaten Japan's *Izumo*- and *Hyuga*-class helicopter carriers as much as they would endanger the U.S. *Nimitz*- and *Ford*-class carriers. As the former fleet commander of the JMSDF, Vice Admiral Makoto Yamazaki, acknowledged, "If the ASBMs [anti-ship ballistic missiles] are simply programmed to track large ships, then the large 22DDH [the *Izumo*-class carrier] would be an attractive target second only to the U.S. aircraft carrier in the Japan-U.S. fleet conducting joint operations."²⁹

Chinese doctrinal writings also suggest that the *Ticonderoga*-class cruisers and the *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyers, the workhorses of the U.S. Navy, would be in the PLA's crosshairs in a hypothetical war at sea.³⁰ If so, then the PLA's arsenal of anti-ship missiles would almost certainly be directed against the JMSDF's *Maya*-, *Atago*-, and *Kongo*-class destroyers in combat. Given that China's A2/AD systems pose an indiscriminate threat to both U.S. and Japanese naval forces, effective counters against such anti-access weaponry would be mutually beneficial for the alliance. Indeed, a concerted effort to mitigate and neutralize the most dangerous elements of Chinese naval power must be at the center of allied cooperation.

Another dilemma for Japan is that its entire home-ported naval force, excluding those operating out-of-area, are already well within the striking power of China's counter-intervention capabilities. The PLA's various ballistic and cruise missiles can reach all fixed targets along the Japanese archipelago, including major naval bases, facilities, and warships tied at pier-side.³¹ An effective Chinese first strike that caught the JMSDF flatfooted would likely deliver a debilitating blow against the sea service. The missile threat thus extends to the Japanese homeland.

The prospective naval imbalance, the ensuing competitive pressures, and worrisome military-technical trends have combined to create an increasingly inhospitable strategic environment for Japan and for the U.S.-Japan alliance. And, because of Japan's strategic and operational centrality to American strategy in Asia, a diminution of Japanese seapower would inevitably take a toll on U.S. power and purpose in the region. A weakening Japan could render Tokyo less effective in shaping China's rise. It may be less inclined to act in concert with the United States to thwart Beijing's regional designs. Worse, it might succumb to Chinese pressure and coercion. Japan's relative decline could in turn embolden China to accelerate its efforts to upend the power structures and the norms that have underwritten the postwar San Francisco System.

29 Vice Admiral Makoto Yamazaki (ret.), "Thoughts About Eye-Catching 22DDH," *Sekai no Kansen*, September 2009, p. 105.

30 Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific*, pp. 234-240.

31 See Thomas Shugart and Javier Gonzalez, *First Strike: China's Missile Threat to U.S. Bases in Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Center for New American Security, 2017).

Alternatively, Japan's deteriorating position and the accompanying sense of insecurity could draw it closer to options that were previously considered unthinkable. Tokyo's flagging confidence in its own capacity to resist China and its growing doubts about the credibility of American security commitments could compel it to consider an independent nuclear deterrent.³² A Japanese nuclear breakout—or even the threat to do so—could do as much harm to the existing regional order as Tokyo's quiet acquiescence to Chinese designs. In short, China's ascent and Japan's decline could force unpalatable choices, of which many promise systemic shocks, onto Japanese policymakers.

The rise of Chinese seapower and the tilting local naval balance in Beijing's favor represent a first-order challenge to the U.S.-led liberal architecture and the long peace that the United States has presided over Asia since the end of World War II. Understanding how Beijing evaluates its position relative to Japan is an urgent analytical task, one that has not been undertaken systematically and rigorously. This study seeks to fill this analytical gap.

Sources and Methods

To examine Chinese perspectives of Japanese seapower, this study employs sources and methods that have enjoyed a proven track record over the past decade. Scholars at the China Maritime Studies Institute at the U.S. Naval War College, in particular, have blazed a path in exploiting Chinese-language books and periodicals in the public domain to assess a wide range of maritime issues related to China. Their efforts have yielded critical insights that have directly influenced U.S. policy. For example, Andrew Erickson's deep study of China's maritime militia through open sources led him to conclude that the shadowy organization enjoyed official sanction. He drew attention to the militia's institutional affiliation with the PLA. His campaign paid off when the U.S. government formally identified the maritime militia as an official arm of Chinese authorities.³³

This study adopts a similar analytical approach by mining a broad selection of open sources available in China. It surveys the extensive Chinese-language writings on Japan's maritime strategy, naval operations and capabilities, and the JMSDF's modernization to gauge China's assessments of Japanese seapower. While the voluminous literature on Japanese nautical affairs have been published regularly on the mainland for years, it remains largely untapped in the West. By engaging this underexamined source, this study seeks to break new ground and, in the process, open a window onto Beijing's strategic thought and offer insights from a red-team perspective about Japan.

The depth and breadth of the Chinese writings on Japanese maritime and naval affairs contrast sharply with the Western literature. The scholarship in the West on Japanese

32 I thank Evan Montgomery for raising this important point.

33 Andrew Erickson, "Shining a Spotlight: Revealing China's Maritime Militia to Deter its Use," *The National Interest*, November 25, 2018.

seapower has been surprisingly underdeveloped, despite Japan's importance as a major maritime and naval power. Only a few researchers have dedicated their professions to the close study of Japanese seapower. Beginning with James Auer in the 1970s, only a handful of scholars have followed in his footsteps to track the development of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and other naval matters associated with Japan.³⁴ Among them, Peter Woolly and Euan Graham stand out.³⁵ The Japanese scholarship in English-language literature is similarly limited.³⁶ The best writings tend to be authored by Japanese senior naval officers, including Vice Admiral Yoji Koda.³⁷

The most prolific and relevant Western scholar in the field today is Alessio Patalano at King's College London. His book, *Post-war Japan as a Sea Power*, is among the most authoritative works on the JMSDF.³⁸ Drawing from primary sources and extensive contacts within the maritime service, Patalano examines the nexus of institutional identity, tradition, culture, and strategy in shaping Japanese seapower. Patalano's able application of classical strategy in his analysis adds value to this literature. His other writings have been similarly organized around strategy, setting them apart from studies that focus primarily on institutions and domestic politics.³⁹

In contrast to the relatively sparse and uneven English-language literature on Japanese seapower, Chinese writings on Japan's naval power and strategy are both abundant and detailed. Indeed, except for the U.S. Navy, no other sea service commands more attention in China than the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. These largely neglected writings furnish a wealth of information and insights. The open-source literature engages in eye-opening appraisals of its Japanese rival at sea. Scholars, researchers, and military officers have all weighed in on Japan's maritime future and its implications for Chinese security. It offers sophisticated assessments of the JMSDF's strengths and weaknesses and render clear judgments about the trajectory of the Sino-Japanese naval competition.

The proliferation of these sources reflects, in part, official sanction. For over a decade the Chinese leadership has permitted a relatively freewheeling discourse among strategists,

34 James Auer, *The Postwar Rearmament of Japanese Maritime Forces, 1945-71* (New York; London: Praeger, 1973).

35 Peter J. Woolley, *Japan's Navy: Politics and Paradox, 1971-2000* (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2000) and Euan Graham, *Japan's Sea Lane Security, 1940-2004: A Matter of Life and Death?* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

36 For an English-language study by Japanese scholars, see Naoko Sajima and Kyoichi Tachikawa, *Japanese Sea Power: A Maritime Nation's Struggle for Identity* (Canberra: Sea Power Centre, 2009).

37 Yoji Koda, "Strategy, Force Planning, and JS *Hyuga*," *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 3, Summer 2011, pg. 31-60 and Takuya Shimodaira, "The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in the Age of Multilateral Cooperation," *Naval War College Review* 67, no. 2, Spring 2014, pg. 52-68.

38 Alessio Patalano, *Post-war Japan as a Sea Power: Imperial Legacy, Wartime Experience and the Making of a Navy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

39 Alessio Patalano, "Japan as a Seapower: Strategy, Doctrine, and Capabilities under Three Defence Reviews, 1995-2010," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 3, 2014, pp. 403-441 and Alessio Patalano, "Seapower and Sino-Japanese Relations in the East China Sea," *Asian Affairs* 45, no. 1, 2014, pp. 34-54.

military officers, and scholars of various stripes, encouraging them to hold forth on the nation's seaborne future. Following this political cue, well-informed commentators hailing from China's various universities, think tanks, naval research institutions, shipbuilding industries, and publications affiliated with the naval-industrial complex have forcefully called on Chinese state and society to pursue seapower. President Xi Jinping's vow to transform China into a maritime power while rejuvenating the Chinese nation has further spurred these seapower advocates to justify the nation's seaward turn.

Official, technical, and general-interest writings on naval affairs—including assessments of the maritime environment, threats to Beijing's interests, and strategies for facilitating China's nautical ascent—have consequently flourished. They are frequently reliable indicators of debates within the policy community about naval policy, strategy, operations, and tactics. They also offer insights into the general direction of China's maritime strategy. In other words, these writings, if diligently exploited, can serve as an early warning to how Chinese statesmen and military commanders might seek to render China's nautical periphery and Beijing's potential opponents at sea more convivial to their aims. In the context of Sino-Japanese maritime relations, they reveal China's growing sense of confidence about its relative competitiveness compared to its neighboring island nation. An emerging belief that Beijing will eventually acquire the capacity to bend Tokyo to its will, should the circumstances warrant such coercion, has accompanied the self-assuredness exhibited in the literature.

As this study shows through its use of this sizeable literature, Chinese attitudes about Japanese seapower have shifted. Until recently, a complex mix of loathing and grudging admiration characterized Beijing's views of Japanese maritime power. The JMSDF has been the leading regional navy to which China has aspired for decades. Its technological prowess and skilled seamanship remain an envy of seafaring nations. The Chinese readily acknowledge that their rival still enjoys qualitative superiority in the maritime domain. They see Japan as a benchmark by which to measure the PLAN's own progress. Yet, many are increasingly confident that the Chinese navy will overtake the JMSDF in the not-so-distant future. To them, displacing Japan at sea is an important condition, if not a prerequisite, for China to reshape regional affairs more to its liking. Not surprisingly, Japanese seapower enjoys a substantial following within China's naval-intellectual complex.

To illustrate the seriousness with which Chinese researchers have devoted to the study of Japanese military, maritime, and naval affairs, consider the following samples. Since 2010, the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has published an annual *Blue Book of Japan*. The volume is a collection of essays written by some of the top researchers on Japan at China's most reputable think tanks and universities. Notably, the theme of the 2017 issue is titled *The Transformation of Japanese Maritime Strategy*

and *Sino-Japanese Relations*.⁴⁰ The book dedicates seven chapters on topics ranging from Japan's plans to emerge as a maritime power to crisis management mechanisms in the air and at sea to Tokyo's Arctic strategy. The chapter authors hail from the Institute of Japanese Studies, China Institute of International Studies, Renmin University, China University of Political Science and Law, and Ocean University of China. The annual report attests to the substantive academic interest in Japanese maritime affairs.

Colonel Wang Zhijian, a lecturer in the Strategy Department at the National Defense University, authored a major work on Japan's military strategy in the postwar era.⁴¹ The book traces the evolution of Japanese security strategy from the Cold War to the present, examines the future direction of Japan's armed forces, and assesses the U.S.-Japan alliance and its impact on regional affairs and on China's interests. The study is impressive for its comprehensiveness and its firm grasp of the institutions and capabilities that underwrite Japanese military power. In another book, Shi Hong dissects Japan's Self-Defense Force by service, providing a detailed picture of the ground, air, and maritime forces.⁴² It contains an encyclopedic wealth of data and information about the organizational structure, the basing infrastructure, the equipment, and the personnel of each service.

Hua Dan, a lecturer at the Army Engineering University and a longtime observer of Japanese military affairs, offers a thematic view of the Self-Defense Force.⁴³ The author highlights the armed services' complex relationships with state and society and shows how the Self-Defense Force struggled to adapt to post-Cold War circumstances. Hua is particularly perceptive about how the Japanese military has sought to normalize itself in the eyes of Japanese citizens and the international community. Perhaps most impressive, Major Cao Xiaoguang produced a book on the Maritime Self-Defense Force that runs more than 600 pages.⁴⁴ Organized around major naval bases dotting the Japanese islands, the study covers Yokosuka, Sasebo, Kure, Maizuru, and Ominato as well as the various air bases that are home to Japan's fleet air force. The book's level of detail, to include the location and size of ammunition and fuel depots, is impressive. This study consults these kinds of works to better understand China's perspective.

40 杨伯江 [Yang Bojiang], 日本蓝皮书: 日本研究报告 (2017): 日本海洋转型与中日关系 [*Blue Book of Japan: Annual Report on Research of Japan (2017): The Transformation of Japanese Maritime Strategy and Sino-Japanese Relations*] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2017).

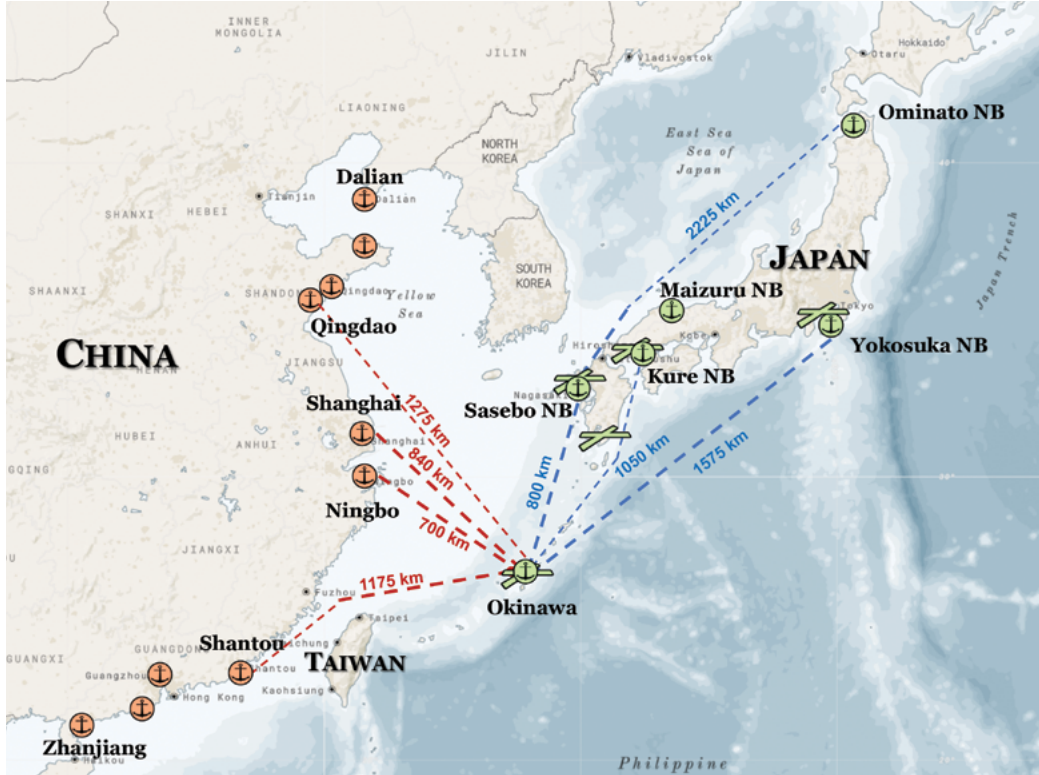
41 王志坚 [Wang Zhijian], 战后日本军事战略研究 [*A Study of Postwar Japanese Military Strategy*] (Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2014).

42 石宏 [Shi Hong], 日本军情 [*Japan's Military Situation*] (Beijing: China Financial and Economic Press, 2014).

43 华丹 [Hua Dan], 日本自卫队 [*Japan Self-Defense Force*] (Xian, Shanxi: Shanxi People's Press, 2014).

44 曹晓光 [Cao Xiaoguang], 深度解密: 日本海军 [*Decoded: The Japanese Navy*] (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2013).

FIGURE 9: JMSDF NAVAL BASES AND DISTANCES FROM OKINAWA



In addition to monograph-length studies, this report relies heavily on general-interest periodicals. The big four are *Navy Today* (formerly *Modern Navy*), *Modern Ships*, *Naval and Merchant Ships*, and *Shipborne Weapons*. *Navy Today* is managed by the PLAN Political Department. The former China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation put out *Modern Ships* and *Shipborne Weapons*, while the former China State Shipbuilding Corporation published *Naval and Merchant Ships*. These two state-owned enterprises, which were the two largest shipbuilding conglomerates in China, merged in November 2019 to become the China Shipbuilding Corporation. The new company is the largest shipbuilder in the world.⁴⁵ The government-subsidized publishing institutions are representatives of the naval-industrial complex if not advocates for it. They have a vested interest in advancing arguments on behalf of the navy and seapower. As official bodies with close ties to the navy and the shipbuilding industry, moreover, they enjoy access to the maritime sector.

The literature also demonstrates that the Chinese are avid consumers of Japanese writings. China's naval journals frequently carry full translations or summaries of articles written by Japan's best scholars and analysts and published by such specialized periodicals as *Ships*

45 Zhao Lei, "World's largest shipbuilder unveiled following merger," *China Daily*, November 27, 2019.

of the World [*Kekai no Kansen*] and *Military Research* [*Gunji Kenkyu*]. The Chinese pay special attention to commentaries by authoritative and well-informed Japanese naval officers, most of whom have held positions of high command in the JMSDF. They follow closely the many writings by Vice Admiral Yoji Koda, the former fleet commander of the Maritime Self-Defense Force.⁴⁶ The Chinese journals have translated articles by Vice Admiral Makoto Yamazaki, a former fleet commander, Vice Admiral Kazuki Yano, a former commander of the fleet submarine force, and Vice Admiral Masao Kobayashi, another former fleet submarine force commander.⁴⁷ They have also made available to Chinese readers analyses by reputable scholars in Japan's think tank community, such as Dr. Bonji Ohara of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.⁴⁸ Articles that reveal how the Japanese evaluate the Chinese navy or the JMSDF are of great interest to the editorial staffs of the Chinese journals.

Japan is not a passing fancy to Chinese observers of naval affairs. Like the United States, Japan is an object of near obsession. What the Chinese think and write about Japan, then, is not the product of casual curiosity or ephemeral interest. Rather, it is the result of years-long scrutiny. The Chinese literature thus holds value for the accumulated knowledge that China's scholars and analysts have obtained through patient, deep study.

Yet, a caveat about sources and methods is warranted.⁴⁹ By no means do these open sources speak for the Chinese government, the Chinese Communist Party, or the military. They should not be conflated with official policy or military guidance. Rather, they should be regarded as informed discourse taking place within the confines of what the authorities deem politically acceptable. Some analyses surveyed below are akin to those conducted in academia, think tanks, and professional military journals in the West. Such an analogy, however, is an imperfect one. Considerable debate and uncertainty surround the

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- 46 Translations of Vice Admiral Yoji Koda's articles include: 高树和 [Gao Shuhe, trans.], "中国海军将赶超美国海军? [Will the Chinese Navy Surpass the U.S. Navy?]," 现代舰船 [*Modern Ships*], no. 23, 2018, pp. 35-39; 宏飞 [Hong Fei, trans.], "来自日本的观点: 中国水面作战力量的发展 [From Japan's Perspective: The Development of China's Surface Combat Capabilities]," 舰载武器 [*Shipborne Weapons*], no. 12, 2018, pp. 44-52; and 陈娟 [Chen Juan, trans.], "海将谈日本防卫战略与护卫舰的发展 [Admiral Discusses Japan's Defense Strategy and the Development of Escort Combatants]," 现代舰船 [*Modern Ships*], no. 6B, 2015, pp. 44-48.
- 47 Translations of works by Admirals Yamazaki, Yano, and Kobayashi respectively include: 杨雪丽 [Yang Xueli, trans.], "日本海上自卫队发展新动向 [New Directions in the Development of Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force]," 现代兵器 [*Modern Weaponry*], no.2, 2019, pp. 68-73; 高树和 [Gao Shuhe, trans.], "中国海军反潜能力分析 [An Analysis of the Chinese Navy's Anti-Submarine Warfare Capabilities]," 现代舰船 [*Modern Ships*], no. 23, 2018, pp. 47-49; and 高树和 [Gao Shuhe, trans.], "日本潜艇推进锂电池缘何提前装艇 [Why Lithium Batteries Were Installed on Japanese Submarines Ahead of Schedule]," 现代舰船 [*Modern Ships*], no. 3A, 2015, pp. 64-67.
- 48 高树和 [Gao Shuhe, trans.], 惊人的造船速度—中国海军现状及发展趋势 [Astonishing Shipbuilding Speed—Current State and Development Trends of the Chinese Navy], 现代舰船 [*Modern Ships*], no. 23, 2018, pp. 28-34.
- 49 For a summary of the value and limits of open source research, see Joel Wuthnow, "Deciphering China's Intentions: What Can Open Sources Tell Us?" *Open Forum* 7, no. 4, July-August 2019, available at <http://www.theasanforum.org/deciphering-chinas-intentions-what-can-open-sources-tell-us/?dat=>. In reference to works by Chinese academics and think tank experts, Wuthnow notes, "Used carefully, however, books, articles, and other written materials, and conversations with those who compose them, can help to interpret official policies, and in some cases can shed light on issues where the CCP has yet to render a verdict or is reconsidering existing policies."

authoritativeness and the provenance of these writings.⁵⁰ Some studies may have been penned by less credentialed analysts, but still possess valuable and relevant insights. Others may be shoddy work that should be disregarded. Thus, a healthy measure of caution is warranted when employing these sources.

To what extent informed discussions among Chinese experts reflect or influence the Party's internal debates or policy is unclear and difficult to ascertain. However, certain institutions and affiliations likely carry more policy and reputational weight than others. For instance, the PLA's National Defense University (NDU) is held in high regard at home and abroad and has been the institutional home to influential senior leaders. Following a stint as NDU's president, General Ma Xiaotian was later promoted to command the Chinese air force and was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the leading political body of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁵¹ General Liu Yazhou, who served as the NDU's political commissar for almost a decade, was a close advisor to Xi Jinping.⁵² To be sure, an institution's importance and stature should not be confused with the authoritativeness of individual scholarship hailing from that institution. Nevertheless, a writer's affiliation offers useful clues about the likely credibility and influence of the writer's work. At a minimum, institutional affiliation is one measure by which outside observers can select, rank, and prioritize open sources.

In any event, Chinese secondary sources should not be taken at face value. Judgment and experience—based on years of immersion in the literature—is required to vet and ascertain the analytic value of the writings. Transparency is also one remedy to such ambiguities about sources. To the extent possible, this study will identify the background, expertise, and institutional affiliation of the authors cited below. There may be instances when such due diligence is not possible. For example, some contributors to the military periodicals write under pseudonyms, raising an insurmountable barrier to identification. This study will make a good faith effort at justifying the use of such sources.

The Broader Value of Following Open Sources

This study lets the Chinese speak for themselves. The following two chapters will engage directly with the writers on the mainland, quoting them at length. This approach is premised on the logic that an unfiltered view of native perspectives allows the reader to gain a better appreciation for China's worldview, which frequently diverges from—or is even

50 For an excellent debate between China scholars on the art of weighing the authoritativeness of unofficial Chinese sources, see Lyle Goldstein, "How China Sees America's Moves in Asia: Worse Than Containment," *The National Interest*, October 19, 2014; Michael S. Chase, Timothy R. Heath, and Ely Ratner, "Engagement and Assurance: Debating the U.S.-China Relationship," *The National Interest*, November 5, 2014; and Lyle Goldstein, "The Great Debate: U.S.-Chinese Relations and the Future of Asia," *The National Interest*, November 10, 2014.

51 The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace compiles the background of key Chinese leaders, available at <http://www.chinavitae.com/index.php>.

52 Katsuji Nakazawa, "Xi Jinping bids adieu to his fellow princelings," *Nikkei Asian Review*, November 27, 2017.

fundamentally at odds with—that of the West. This immersive experience in the literature also allows observers to step into the shoes of Chinese strategists and policymakers. It may help to identify such cognitive traps as mirror imaging, which assumes that the human subjects (in this case, the Chinese) being observed think and act like those who are observing those subjects. Such a red-team exercise could also help to uncover and challenge assumptions that Western observers may hold about Chinese strategy, operational proclivities, and tactical preferences.

CHAPTER 3

The Sources of Maritime Rivalry

The dramatic deterioration of Japan's naval position relative to Chinese seapower is occurring against the backdrop of a larger shift in Sino-Japanese relations. China's growing power and assuredness about its purpose on the world stage over the past two decades have coincided with Japan's stagnant economic performance, comparative decline, and diminished self-confidence. The crossover point in competitive positions between Beijing and Tokyo has led the former to pursue more assertive strategies at sea while compelling the latter to defend jealously and more vigorously its maritime prerogatives and interests. This rapid power transition has in turn intensified the animosities that have, in part, defined ties between China and Japan for decades.

To many Chinese analysts, the power shift and the resulting struggle for influence only partly explain the competitive naval dynamics between the two Asian nations. To them, Japan's insecurities arising from its "lost decades," its geostrategic position, its alliance with the United States, its regional and extra-regional strategies, and its strategic culture all bend the trajectory of Sino-Japanese nautical ties toward intense rivalry. Not surprisingly, a deep pessimism pervades Chinese assessments. Indeed, observers on the mainland appear convinced that Japan will stand in the way of China's maritime ambitions and will actively seek to balk Beijing's plans to emerge as a great seapower. To them, Japan and China are fated to compete, if not fight, at sea. The following surveys the Chinese literature on the underlying material and intangible sources of the naval competition.

Power Shift and Japanese Insecurity

To some strategists, China's rapid ascent and the anxiety this rise has caused in Japan have inclined Tokyo to exaggerate and fear Chinese seapower. This narrative dovetails with the "Thucydides trap"—which describes the risks, sources, and the road to conflict between a

rising power and a declining power—popularized in the West and China in recent years.⁵³ Echoing this theory, Colonel Wang Zhijian of China’s National Defense University states:

China’s rise has changed the asymmetric configuration of power in which Japan was strong and China was weak for many years running. For the first time, two great powers co-exist in East Asia. This situation of parity has aggravated Japan’s realist-driven anxieties about China’s strategic intentions and concerns about the revival of a “Sino-centric order” in East Asia. These fears are an important source of the “China threat theory” that is in vogue in Japan.⁵⁴

Gao Lan, the deputy director of Japan Studies at Fudan University, similarly argues, “The fundamental reason that Japan has promulgated the ‘China threat theory’ lies in the reversal of comparative superiority in Sino-Japanese comprehensive national power during the post-Cold War period.”⁵⁵ After China surpassed Japan in economic size and in military power, Tokyo felt compelled to reassess its policies and assumptions about its giant neighbor. According to Gao, beginning in 2011, Japan’s judgments about Chinese intentions became “very pessimistic (非常悲观),” hardening Japanese attitudes and responses to China’s rise. She observes, “The Japanese believe that Japan must show strength and must not back down when engaged in disputes with China. This is because signs of weakness toward China, a rising power, will only encourage the expansion of its power.”⁵⁶ The growing power imbalance has inclined Tokyo to guard its interests more jealously than in the past. Gao anticipates that Japan will act with greater alacrity to preserve its position, to slow its decline, and to do what it can to stop falling behind China. Such sensitivity to its relative power vis-à-vis China has conditioned Japanese policymakers to react and overreact to Chinese advances in the maritime domain, making contention a far more likely outcome.

Ding Yunbao and Xin Fangkun observe that Japanese concerns about China could be traced to the moment when the Chinese economy overtook that of Japan in 2010. In their view, although most Chinese downplayed the crossover point and instead played up the gap in per capita GDP, Japanese anxieties rose. The power shift, they insist, “caused enormous shock and alarm in Japan. It greatly jarred Japan, a country that possessed a sense of superiority in Asia for a century.”⁵⁷ The historic magnitude of Japan’s economic displacement weighed heavily on Japanese elites and public alike, accustomed as they were to their nation’s

53 See Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017) and Nicolas Berggruen and Nathan Gardels, “How the World’s Most Powerful Leader Thinks,” *Huffington Post*, January 21, 2014.

54 Wang Zhijian, *A Study of Postwar Japanese Military Strategy*, p. 195.

55 高兰 [Gao Lan], 冷战后美日海权同盟战略: 内涵, 特征, 影响 [*U.S.-Japan Allied Seapower Strategy in the Post-Cold War Era: Content, Characteristics, and Influence*] (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press, 2018), p. 82.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

57 丁云宝 辛方坤 [Ding Yunbao and Xin Fangkun], “日本海权战略及其对中国的影响 [Japanese Seapower Strategy and Its Influence Upon China],” in 倪乐雄 [Ni Lexiong, ed.], 周边国家海权战略态势研究 [*Research on Seapower Strategies and Postures of Peripheral Countries*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, 2015), p. 29.

leading position in Asia since the late nineteenth century. To make matters worse, the shift in the military balance and China's growing military activism near Japan and around the Western Pacific have "made it impossible for Japan to reduce its suspicions of China," despite repeated Chinese reassurances that Beijing is rising peacefully. "This sense of insecurity about its neighbors," they proclaim, "has created an intense desire to build maritime strength that can defend its own maritime rights and interests and protect oceanic areas of great importance."⁵⁸

To Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, the deteriorating economic and military balance of power drove Japan to reevaluate China's threat at sea and to make an enemy of China. They claim:

In recent years, as China has risen economically and militarily, Japan's maritime strategy has identified defense against China as a major objective. While the Japanese see China as a continental power, they believe that China has very clearly exhibited its intentions to go to sea. As a result, Japan concluded that confrontation between China and a maritime power such as itself was *inevitable* [emphasis added].⁵⁹

This narrative of changing Japanese perceptions is clearly premised on a realist understanding of great power politics. The authors presume that a zero-sum worldview animates Tokyo's policies, which seeks to preclude China's rise from undercutting Japan's position in maritime Asia. Chinese observers are thus inclined to view Japan's evolving posture at sea as a direct response to Beijing's growing maritime prowess. They are convinced that Tokyo will become increasingly hostile to Beijing's nautical interests. To Xiu Bin, a Japan expert at the Ocean University of China, it is abundantly clear that Tokyo's maritime strategy seeks to "check (牵制) and hold back (遏制) China's maritime development."⁶⁰ Indeed, Xiu asserts that, "Japan views China's development as a threat and its naval strategy has naturally treated China as the main adversary."⁶¹

The First Island Chain

Beyond the power shift and its impact on Japanese perceptions of China's prowess at sea, other structural factors are at work. When Chinese strategists take stock of their nation's oceanic future, they foresee struggle amid claustrophobic surroundings. To Chinese eyes the string of islands just offshore—the "first island chain" enclosing Eurasia's eastern crest—resembles a Great Wall in reverse where Americans and their Japanese allies guard the sentinel towers. The island chain imprisons China's freedom of oceangoing movement. To them the island chain constitutes not just a physical barrier but also a metaphor

58 Ibid., p. 30.

59 廉德瑰 金永明 [Lian Degui and Jin Yongming], 日本海洋战略研究 [Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy] (Beijing: Shishi Press, 2016), p. 45.

60 修斌 [Xiu Bin], 日本海洋战略研究 [Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy] (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2016), pp. 149.

61 Ibid., p. 47.

for the resistance they expect from the occupants of the first island chain, including such potent maritime competitors as Japan. Consequently, a fitting metaphor for the island chain is a barricade—a line of physical obstacles manned by active defenders to ward off an opposing force.

The term *first island chain* refers to the offshore archipelago that envelops Eurasia’s eastern seaboard in its entirety. The island chain centers primarily on the Japanese home islands, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and the Philippine Islands. The first island chain is a geographic construct peculiar to China’s worldview, which situates the Chinese mainland at the epicenter of maritime Asia. And indeed, a seaward-looking China cannot avoid facing the islands. The island chain roughly parallels the nation’s long coastline, and no Chinese harbor outflanks it. Worse, Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines constitute the “first” island chain only because a more distant, looser island group centered on Guam—dubbed the “second island chain”—forms an additional concentric ring around China. In short, China’s unique vantage point infuses the island-chain concept with tangible geospatial meaning.

This geographic conception is not merely the subject of academic discourse. It is integral to official lexicon. Notably, the PLA’s official dictionary on military terms defines the first island chain as “a chain-shaped island group formed along the outer oceanic perimeter of China’s sea zones beginning with the Japanese archipelago to the north, passing through the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan Island, the Philippine Islands, Palawan Islands, and ending with Kalimantan and other island groups.”⁶²

The dictionary also defines the second island chain as “an arc-shaped, chain-lined island group encompassing a larger oceanic area beyond the first island chain that starts from the Japanese archipelago in the north, passes through the Ogasawara Islands, the Iwo Jima Islands, the Mariana Islands, Yap Islands, and Palau Islands, and extends to the Maluku Islands and other island groups.”⁶³

A common feature of the first and second island chains is the prominence of Japan. To many Chinese observers, Japan comprises a fortified barrier to China’s access to the Western Pacific, and thence to Beijing’s larger maritime ambitions. Describing the Japanese islands as an “impassable maritime great wall,” Liu Baoyin and Yang Xiaomei observe that Japan controls most of the sea lanes connecting Northeast Asia with the Pacific Ocean. To them, Japan not only serves as a “great gateway” to the Pacific, but it can also function as a “tremendous constraint” on Asian countries’ ability to develop economically and act militarily in the oceanic direction.⁶⁴

62 全军军事学术管理委员会, 军事科学院 [Armed Forces Military Academic Management Committee, Academy of Military Science], 中国人民解放军军语 [*China People’s Liberation Army Military Terms*], (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2011), p. 952.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 952-953.

64 刘宝银 杨晓梅 [Liu Boying and Yang Xiaomei], 环中国岛链—海洋地理, 军事区位, 信息系统 [*Island Chains Surrounding China—Maritime Geography, Military Positioning, Information Systems*] (Beijing: Haiyang Press, 2003), p. 17.

Liu and Yang further contend that the archipelago's proximity to eastern Eurasia enables Japan-based forces to project power throughout the Yellow and East China Seas or deep into the Asian continent. They observe that “the combat radius of advanced fighters launched from bases on the Japanese home islands could reach the interior of East Asia. Warships that sortie from Japanese ports could conduct operations along the East Asian littoral without refueling enroute.”⁶⁵

Japan, then, forms a segment of a wall that commands offensive—not just defensive—potential for its holders. That being the case, the Japanese archipelago, home to the combined military power of the U.S.-Japan alliance, figures prominently in Chinese assessments of the American forward presence in Asia. As Feng Liang and Duan Tingzhi argue:

Japan's current oceanic security strategy relies on an oceanic alliance based on Japan-U.S. seapower cooperation as its backstop. Whether it is measured by oceanic comprehensive national power or by naval capabilities, both countries are superior to China. Moreover, both possess favorable geographic advantages arising from island chain encirclement, a posture that can easily pressure China from the oceanic direction.⁶⁶

These writers clearly see a strategic bloc possessed of the resolve, capability, and geographic position to frustrate Chinese maritime ambitions. In a subsequent study, Liu Baoyin and Yang Xiaomei forecast that struggle over access through the island chains will emerge as a prominent feature of competition between China and the United States, and, by implication, Japan. To them, the ability to obtain access to the seas for oneself necessarily confers the potential to deny the same access to others. They see the power to move freely through the island chains as a fundamentally zero-sum game. Liu and Yang state:

In international relations, a “barrier” and a “passageway” are relative concepts. Only when China possesses the means to command the seas in this sea area [bounded by the island chains], can China erect a barrier along or freely pass through [the island chains]. The United States, too, obtained its leading position over the seas surrounding China by controlling the island chain and the strait passages between those islands.⁶⁷

The Chinese navy's official handbook explicitly attributes American primacy in Asia to U.S. forward presence on the two island chains and control of the waters bounded by those island chains. As the handbook observes, “After the Second World War, the United States controlled the entire Philippines Sea area and exploited the two island arcs bounding that

65 Ibid., p. 17.

66 段廷志 冯梁 [Duan Tingzhi and Feng Liang], “日本海洋安全战略: 历史演变与现实影响 [Japan's Oceanic Security Strategy: Historical Evolution and Actual Influence],” *世界经济与政治论坛* [*Forum of World Economics and Politics*], no. 1, 2011, p. 78.

67 刘宝银 杨晓梅 [Liu Boying and Yang Xiaomei], *西太平洋海上通道—航天遥感 融合信息 战略区域* [*Maritime Passages in the Western Pacific—Space Remote Sensing, Information Fusion, and Strategic Positioning*] (Beijing: Haiyang Press, 2017), p. 15.

sea area to the west and to the east by establishing a two-layered ‘island chain area.’”⁶⁸ By implication, the Chinese believe that U.S. regional dominance rests in part on occupying favorable terrain along the two island chains.

The Japanese archipelago, moreover, forms a series of narrow seas and chokepoints through which Chinese mariners, both commercial and military in character, must pass to reach the open waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. As Shi Chunlin notes, “China’s oceangoing traffic must transit the strait passages formed primarily by Japan and Taiwan along the first island chain. For example, ships departing from China’s eastern and northern ports bound for the Pacific Ocean via the Sea of Japan must pass through such important international straits as the Soya, Tsugaru, or Korea Straits near Japan.”⁶⁹

Japan’s position, sitting astride as it does key sea lines of communication essential to China’s economic vitality, confers significant strategic leverage to Tokyo and its ally, the United States. As Shi sees it, “From the Cold War to the present, Japan has always actively coordinated with the United States to seal off and squeeze China by constructing a Western Pacific island chain blockade aimed at China.”⁷⁰ Japan serves as a “chain-type defensive front” from which the alliance can monitor Chinese movements through the Soya, Tsugaru, Tsushima, and Miyako Straits and apply pressure against China along those narrow seas.⁷¹

The Ryukyu Islands

Geopolitically minded commentators pay special attention to the Ryukyu Islands, also known as the Southwest Islands, a segment of the island chain that arcs insolently from the Japanese home islands toward Taiwan. Some fret that this crescent-shaped archipelago essentially closes off China from the Pacific. Describing Japan as “the watchdog of China’s access to the Pacific Ocean,” Lian and Jin claim:

From the perspective of containing China, *Japan occupies an innately superior geographical location* [emphasis added]. The Southwest Islands obstruct passage from the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean...In particular, the Ryukyu Islands form a perimeter that denies China’s access, giving Japan an advantageous strategic position. Sealing China behind this island chain [during conflict] would buy time for the United States to bring in reinforcements.⁷²

68 杜景臣 [Du Jingchen, ed.], 中国海军军人手册 [*Handbook for Officers and Enlisted of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy*] (Beijing: Haichao Press, 2012), p. 95.

69 史春林 [Shi Chunlin], “日本对中国太平洋航线安全的影响及中国对策 [Japan’s Influence Upon China’s Pacific Shipping Security and China’s Response],” 中国海事 [*China Maritime Safety*], no. 11, 2012, p. 20.

70 Ibid., p. 20.

71 Ibid., p. 21.

72 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan’s Maritime Strategy*, p. 216.

The Ryukyu island chain, furthermore, constitutes a major staging area for American military power in the Western Pacific. Professor Shen Weilie of the PLA's National Defense University regards Okinawa as the “forward position” of a U.S. “westward strategy” in Asia.⁷³ He notes that cities such as Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Xiamen lie within striking distance of the island, while U.S. forces could monitor or blockade the Osumi and Miyako straits from there.

The offensive potential of U.S. and Japanese positions on the Ryukyus and its threat to Chinese interests have in turn compelled China to develop the military means to puncture the barrier and to ensure access to the maritime commons. Naval and air power, in particular, have emerged as the instruments of choice. As Zhang Xiaowen notes, “The surrounding seas of Japan’s so-called ‘Southwest Islands’...is an important passageway constrained by the island chain that the Chinese navy must break through to enter the oceans.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Guo Yadong of the PLAN’s Naval Studies Institute justifies the Chinese navy’s frequent transits through the Miyako Strait on concrete military grounds. Rapid advances in precision-guided weaponry, the need to train realistically under complex meteorological and electromagnetic conditions, and the requirement to bolster logistics on the open ocean all demand access to the high seas. For these reasons, exclaims Guo, “The Chinese navy’s march to the deep blue must shatter the bottleneck of the first island chain.”⁷⁵ A major rationale for acquiring power projection forces, then, is to sever the island chain.

It is telling that China’s media—mouthpieces of the Chinese party-state—has depicted PLA naval transits and air sorties through the Miyako Strait as shows of force that demonstrate the nation’s ability to throw off the island chain’s shackles. For example, newspapers breathlessly detailed how a Chinese carrier task force—comprising the *Liaoning* carrier, three missile-guided destroyers, and two missile-guided frigates—“broke through [突破]” the first island chain for the first time in December 2016.⁷⁶ In an article extolling the combat readiness and operational reach of China’s most modern fighters and long-range transport aircraft, two journalists report that, “The Air Force has broken through the First Island Chain, and flown over several straits and into the Western Pacific.”⁷⁷

73 沈伟烈 [Shen Weilie], “琉球 岛链 大国战略 [Ryukyus, Island Chains, Great Power Strategy],” 领导文萃 [Leadership Literature], no. 5, 2006, p. 63.

74 张小稳 [Zhang Xiaowen], “近期美国升高西太平洋紧张局势的战略意图及其影响 [The Strategic Intentions Behind and Influence of Recent Heightening Tensions in the Western Pacific by the United States],” 东北亚论坛 [Northeast Asia Forum], no. 1, 2011, p. 55.

75 郭亚东 [Guo Yadong], “中国应抵制威胁论噪音 坚持打造深蓝海军 [China Must Resist the Noise of Threat Theory; Insist on Forging Blue-Water Navy],” 环球时报 [Global Times], May 5, 2010.

76 See, for example, 郭媛丹 高颖 任重 [Guo Yuandan, Gao Ying, and Ren Zhong], “中国航母编队突破第一岛链 日本战机紧急升空 [Chinese Carrier Task Force Breaks Through the First Island China; Japanese Warplanes Scramble],” 环球时报 [Global Times], December 26, 2016.

77 Zhang Hui and Guo Yuandan, “J-20, Y-20 aircraft train together, prove combat-readiness,” *Global Times*, November 10, 2017.

Although these peacetime activities have, at best, indirect bearing on how combat operations would unfold—and more importantly, how well the PLA would perform—in wartime, they have nevertheless raised Japanese concerns about the consequences of deterrence failure. As Lian and Jin argue:

Japan and the United States are increasingly uneasy about the constantly shifting Sino-Japanese and Sino-American military balance. They worry that they may lose command of the sea and of the air in the East China Sea. They fear that should the Diaoyu Islands and the entire Southwest Islands or the Yaeyama Islands fall under China's control in a conflict, then China would have unobstructed access to the Pacific Ocean.⁷⁸

To the two analysts, Japanese anxieties go well beyond China's peacetime maneuvers. They project onto Tokyo concerns that Japan's southern flank could be lost to Chinese forces in a war. That such a scenario is even imaginable speaks volumes about Chinese confidence in their nation's growing power.

Geography and History

Contentious history further informs Chinese strategists' views about Japan as the northern anchor of the first island chain. Think about what U.S. forces based in Japan have done in Asian seas and skies since 1950. In the early months of the Korean War, American reinforcements flowed through Japan to halt and roll back North Korean advances down the peninsula. Expeditionary forces delivered by sea denied the communists victory. China felt compelled to intervene at great sacrifice to stave off defeat. Perhaps most painful of all from China's standpoint, President Harry Truman interposed the Seventh Fleet between China and Taiwan—ending any communist hope of seizing Taiwan and virtually guaranteeing U.S.-China enmity during the first decades of the Cold War. During the Eisenhower administration, the U.S. Navy undertook escort and patrol missions in support of Nationalist forces in the 1954 and 1958 Taiwan Strait crises. The first island chain, in other words, administers a constant rebuke, signifying that China is neither whole nor complete nor the master of its fate without Taiwan. The island chain is an irritant transcribed onto the map.

Such encounters continued intermittently for decades. In the 1960s, B-52 bombers staged bombing runs from Okinawa against North Vietnam, waging an aerial offensive at China's doorstep. At the height of the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, President Bill Clinton dispatched two aircraft-carrier battle groups to waters near Taiwan to mount a show of force. Poignantly, the tellingly named USS *Independence*—the U.S. Navy's only permanently forward-deployed carrier, and a vessel homeported in Yokosuka—helped telegraph American

⁷⁸ Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 210.

resolve.⁷⁹ To many Chinese, then, the U.S. Navy and its basing arrangements in Japan have been a constant reminder of China's geographic predicament.

Over the past two decades, furthermore, Beijing has pushed back against American reconnaissance and surveillance missions—many launched from Japan—along the mainland coast. While China has long regarded such intelligence-gathering activities as unfriendly if not hostile, the PLA's impressive military modernization has enabled Beijing to back its rhetorical objections to U.S. naval and aviation operations with action.⁸⁰ Hazardous encounters have ensued in international airspace and waters. Noteworthy incidents include an April 2001 collision between a Chinese fighter and a U.S. Navy reconnaissance aircraft, harassment of a U.S. ocean-surveillance vessel by Chinese fishing trawlers and government ships in March 2009, a near-collision between a U.S. Navy cruiser and a PLAN amphibious transport in November 2013, another near-collision between a U.S. Navy destroyer and a Chinese destroyer in September 2018, and numerous dangerous Chinese aerial intercepts of U.S. reconnaissance aircraft. Given the basing arrangements in Japan that enable these peacetime operations, the Chinese invariably see Tokyo as a willing accomplice in what Beijing regards as intrusions and provocations by U.S. forces.

The U.S.-Japan Alliance

As the writings sampled above demonstrate, the United States is never far from Chinese minds. According to Beijing's narrative, it is Washington's early Cold War machinations that helped establish the offshore island barricade stretching from Japan to the Philippines. It is the U.S. 7th Fleet that looms so large in Chinese memories of the immediate postwar era, a period that saw the permanent separation of Taiwan from the mainland. And, it is the nexus of geographic positioning and American power projection that makes the first island chain seem so menacing to China. As such, the U.S.-Japan alliance is virtually inseparable from Chinese assessments of Japanese seapower and its challenge to Beijing's maritime prerogatives. Indeed, analysts see the security partnership as the principal vehicle for Tokyo and Washington to realize their respective goals and ambitions, many of which they perceive as inimical to Chinese interests.

When the Chinese look back to Japan's modern history, they see that close alignments with like-minded maritime powers have yielded security and strategic success for the island nation. The Anglo-Japanese alliance of the early twentieth century smoothed the way for dominance in the Far East, including victory in the Russo-Japanese War. The U.S.-Japan alliance in the postwar era provided a favorable security environment and the right economic climate for Japan to thrive. A maritime coalition has thus proved to be an essential

79 Edward J. Marolda, *Ready Seapower: A History of the U.S. Seventh Fleet* (Washington, D.C.: Naval History and Heritage Command, 2012), p. 115.

80 Toshi Yoshihara, "Chinese Views of the U.S.-led Maritime Order: Assessing the skeptics," in Joachim Krause and Sebastian Bruns, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Naval Strategy and Security* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 351-363.

ingredient for Japan to obtain its highest goals. Deviation from this formula, such as continental conquest in the 1930s, led to national disaster. This bitter lesson is deeply ingrained in the Japanese mindset. As Lian observes:

Japan, of course, cannot form an alliance with a continental country. It must instead ally with a maritime power. History has already proven that this is the correct strategic choice. History shows that Japan was safest, most prosperous, and freest during those periods when it was an ally of Britain for twenty years and when it allied with the United States for the past fifty years.⁸¹

There is thus ample reason for Chinese observers to believe that the U.S.-Japan alliance will remain the centerpiece of Tokyo's grand strategy. Indeed, they pay close attention to the alliance's role in shaping Japan's maritime strategy. Gao Lan, for example, describes in detail the rationales and the functions of a "seapower alliance" between the United States and Japan. Both nations depend on the seas for their wellbeing and they must exploit the seas for their security and prosperity. As Gao explains:

The ocean is the lifeblood of the American and Japanese economies...To them, maritime security is national security. The ocean provides a buffer against attack and it is the medium through which to rapidly and nimbly respond to faraway crises. Fundamentally, the U.S.-Japan alliance is a maritime defense alliance that exploits the seas to mutually protect the national interest.⁸²

Gao then applies her understanding of grand strategy to define the maritime partnership and its broad mandate. She states:

A seapower alliance is a formal agreement or treaty that binds nations into a union. It is composed of coastal or maritime nations that seek to obtain maritime rights and interests, balance against maritime threats, maintain maritime security, enhance seapower and comprehensive national power, and construct a maritime order.⁸³

A seapower alliance, in her view, is not strictly a defensive mechanism to deter and defeat external threats. Rather, it is a pact that facilitates economic growth and provides an institutional platform for underwriting the norms and rules of the global maritime order. To Gao, the alliance enables Japan and the United States to engage in "omnidirectional cooperation" to advance their interests in areas ranging from seaborne commerce to international maritime law to the environment. A seapower alliance, then, is a grand maritime alliance that applies its combined powers to make maximum use of the seas across all issues pertaining to the national interest. Such a union defines its writ very broadly and possesses outside influence over regional and global security.

81 廉德瑰 [Lian Degui], 日本的海洋国家意识 [*Japan's Seapower Consciousness*] (Beijing: Shishi Press, 2012), p. 33.

82 Gao Lan, *U.S.-Japan Allied Seapower Strategy in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 144

83 *Ibid.*, p. 149.

More worrying to Gao, the United States has relied on the alliance to achieve its long-term ambitions in Asia. First, the United States aims to strength the alliance to contain China. Second, Washington intends to strengthen Japan within the alliance framework in order to “sustain America’s traditional maritime hegemonic position [海上霸权地位] in Asia” and to “help ensure America’s absolute leadership position [绝对主导地位] over East Asian seapower.”⁸⁴ Third, the United States wants to leverage the alliance to smooth its return to Asia after years of wartime commitments in the Middle East.

Japan, too, uses the alliance for its own strategic purposes. According to Xiu, “From Japan’s perspective, the alliance with the United States has been the most successful and the most lasting element of its maritime strategy.”⁸⁵ American military power has served as a “back-stop (后盾)” to Japan’s defense and security since the end of the Pacific War. The salutary effects of U.S. naval power, including assured access to and use of sea lanes, guaranteed Japan’s survival and economic prosperity in the postwar era. Moreover, the strengthening of the alliance in the post-Cold War period provided a basis for Japan to extend its military reach and to enhance its capabilities. A globalizing alliance is globalizing the Japanese military. As such, Xiu predicts that, “Wherever the U.S. military goes in the future, so the Japanese military will likely go.”⁸⁶

Ding and Xin go even further, suggesting that Japan could use the alliance as a launchpad for its global ambitions. They assert that Japan’s “seapower strategy”—defined as “the established economic, diplomatic, and political guidance that informs the military’s defense of a nation’s maritime interests”⁸⁷—hinges on the vitality of the U.S.-Japan security treaty. They assert:

The U.S.-Japan alliance serves as the backdrop to Japan’s seapower strategy. Japan strives to construct a powerful and offensively oriented blue-water capability, join with like-minded maritime nations, establish a national security system, and forge a seapower strategy system under the U.S.-Japan alliance. In doing so, Japan seeks to protect its global maritime interests, extend its global influence, and realize its dream of becoming a maritime great power.⁸⁸

Using an evocative idiom to describe Japan’s plans to exploit the alliance, Shu Biquan avers:

This stratagem of “borrowing ships to go to sea [借船出海]” will enable Japan...to project its military power to all corners of the seas. It is designed to ensure the security of Japan’s most

84 Ibid., p. 151.

85 Xiu Bin, *Research on Japan’s Maritime Strategy*, p. 28.

86 Ibid., p. 51.

87 倪乐雄 [Ni Lexiong], “中国海权战略的当代转型与威慑 [The Contemporary Transformation and Deterrence of China’s Seapower Strategy],” in 倪乐雄 [Ni Lexiong, ed.], *周边国家海权战略态势研究 [Research on Seapower Strategies and Postures of Peripheral Countries]* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiatong University Press, 2015), p. 2.

88 Ding Yunbao and Xin Fangkun, “Japanese Seapower Strategy and Its Influence Upon China,” p. 25.

important maritime lifelines and the exclusive use of the ocean's resources. Through this stratagem, Japan can...become a genuine global maritime power.⁸⁹

The U.S.-Japan alliance, then, is not merely a security umbrella beneath which Tokyo can devote its attention to economic growth and other domestic matters. The partnership provides the rationale and the wherewithal for Japan to extend its influence far from home waters. To some, it is a steppingstone and a convenient political cover to fulfill Japan's global ambitions.

Regional and Extra-Regional Security

Japan is not only looking to the United States and the bilateral security treaty to advance its maritime interests. It is also forging new partnerships across Asia that appear suspiciously like an anti-China coalition. Xiu, for example, contends that Japan is seeking to form a confederation of maritime powers to contain China. According to Xiu, Tokyo is "attempting to establish a chain of island nations led by Japan that forms an encircling net along the rimlands, betraying a classic Cold War mentality."⁹⁰ He believes that Japan is seeking to reinforce the U.S.-led first island chain with its own set of diplomatic, political, economic, and cultural ties to various offshore powers in Asia. Just as many have cast the United States as the villain behind the island chain containment strategy, they now perceive Japan in much the same light.

In place of military power and security commitments, which Japan is in no position to offer, Tokyo has instead promoted intangible public goods, such as shared values and norms, as the glue to bind regional ties. More importantly, from China's perspective, Japan's emphasis on democratic values, freedom, and human rights is designed specifically to single out and isolate Beijing's authoritarian regime. Casting doubt on a regional initiative entitled "arc of freedom and prosperity" led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, Lian Degui and Jin Yongming assert:

Japan seeks a regional political and economic leadership position among all the maritime countries of the Western Pacific and the South Pacific. This is the geopolitical rationale behind Japan's promotion of values-based foreign policy and the arc of freedom and prosperity. Japan wants to lead an arc of maritime powers along the Chinese mainland's periphery. This goal is central to Japan's maritime strategy.⁹¹

To them, this appeal to values is not a positive-sum game that would benefit all as Japan has advertised it. Rather, it is part of a larger strategy to outbid and to counterbalance China's

89 束必铨 [Shu Biquan], "日本海洋战略与日美同盟发展趋势研究 [Development Trends of Japan's Maritime Strategy and the U.S.-Japan Alliance]," 太平洋学报 [*Pacific Journal*] 19, no. 1, January 2011, p. 96.

90 Xiu Bin, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 149

91 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 54.

growing influence in maritime Asia. In highlighting the competitive character of Tokyo's cynical ploy, the two scholars assert:

In this contest, Japan emphasizes shared values among other maritime nations as the basis for constructing mutual interests in maritime Asia. The goal of containing China's rise as a continental power is the hidden motive behind Japan's maritime strategy. Hemming in China is the fundamental reason why Japan actively safeguards its maritime resources and defends its maritime rights even as it deepens the U.S.-Japan alliance and draws in countries of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania.⁹²

In addition to Japan's attempts to rally regional powers around values, it has cultivated closer ties with China's rival claimants in the South China Sea to stymie Beijing's ambitions. To Liu Hua, Japan's regional strategy assumes indirect and direct forms of intervention.⁹³ Commonly termed "capacity building," the indirect approach involves the training of local personnel, the transfer of equipment, such as patrol vessels to Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia, and joint exercises with regional players. The direct method includes regular port visits by the JMSDF as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, such as Japan's deployment of ships and aircraft to the Philippines following the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Liu anticipates that Japan will actively engage in a "geopolitical division of labor [地缘分工]" with the United States in the South China Sea through regular joint naval patrols and exercises.

To Chinese eyes, Japan's activism in Southeast Asia, including the provision of maritime patrol craft and other capabilities to littoral states and regular exercises with foreign navies, goes beyond maintaining good order at sea. The capacity-building efforts aim at strengthening the power of resistance among local frontline states in order to slow, complicate, or preclude further Chinese advances in the South China Sea. By tying down China to its south, so goes this logic, Tokyo prevents Beijing from concentrating its attention and power on the territorial dispute over the Senkakus. As Lian and Jin claim:

Japan's concern about the South China Sea is closely related to the East China Sea situation. Japan believes that intervention in the South China Sea is an effective method for easing tension in the East China Sea by forcing China to struggle in both waters...By applying pressure against China in the South China Sea, Japan seeks relief from the strategic pressure it feels in the East China Sea.⁹⁴

92 Ibid., p. 334.

93 刘华 [Liu Hua], "日本海洋战略的政策特点及其制约因素: 以日本介入南海问题为例 [The Policy Characteristics and Constraints of Japanese Maritime Strategy: Japan's Intervention in the South China Sea as a Case Study]," in 杨伯江 [Yang Bojiang, ed.] 日本蓝皮书 日本研究报告 (2017) [*Blue Book of Japan: Annual Report on Research of Japan (2017)*] (Beijing: Social Science Academic Press, 2017), pp. 88-98.

94 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 154.

Zhang Ming concurs:

From Japan's perspective, complicating and internationalizing the South China Sea problem will create an interactive dynamic between the East China Sea and the South China Sea disputes. This linkage will help to diffuse the energy of China's rights protection [维权] efforts in the direction of the East China Sea, exhaust China's good-neighbor diplomacy, and confer more leverage to Japan in negotiations with China over the East China Sea.⁹⁵

These authors offer no judgments about the effectiveness of Japan's apparent diversionary tactic. But they clearly see the Japanese stratagem as a relatively low-cost method for diluting Beijing's attention across two maritime theaters. Moreover, they perceive Japan's relationships with its southern neighbors as entirely instrumental, based as they are on calculations of rivalry against China. The assessments summarized above can be best described as self-referential; Japan's regional strategy is understood narrowly as an exclusively hostile plan to contain and weaken China.

The Chinese view Japan's involvement in multinational naval exercises with equal suspicion. For example, Chinese observers follow closely the Malabar naval exercises, which began as a bilateral U.S.-Indian affair in 1992. The exercises have since expanded to include Japan as a permanent participant in 2015 and have occasionally brought together Australia and Singapore. The 2017 round of exercises in the Bay of Bengal between the U.S., Japanese, and Indian navies were of particular interest to the Chinese because they involved aircraft carriers from all three countries.⁹⁶ The 2018 Malabar exercises, held in the Philippine Sea off the coast of Guam, was notable for the involvement of Japan's highly-regarded *Soryu*-class diesel-electric submarine. An analyst speculates that the Japanese boat's likely role was to simulate the maneuvers of a Chinese conventional sub to practice anti-submarine warfare drills. The author, with apparent pride, reports the PLAN's dispatch of a Type 815A electronic surveillance vessel to observe the exercise.⁹⁷ In any event, these writings invariably conclude that the regional exercises are aimed at containing China.

Japanese and Chinese dependence on the same distant sea lanes for their prosperity has also emerged as a source of mutual hostility. According to Ding and Xin, Japan relies on three major lines of communications for the transport of raw materials, energy resources, and other commercial goods. The first line passes through the Malacca Strait and runs east or west of Taiwan to reach Japan's eastern seaboard. The second line runs through the Sunda or Lombok Straits, heads north through the Makassar Strait, and passes east of Luzon Island to terminate at Japanese ports. The third and longest route starts from the

95 章明 [Zhang Ming], “日本海上自卫队巡航南海行动评析 [An Analysis of Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's Patrol Operations in the South China Sea],” 现代兵器 [Modern Weaponry], no. 11, 2016, p. 18.

96 何劲松 [He Jinsong], “美印日演兵孟加拉湾剑指何方? [Who is the U.S.-India-Japan Military Exercises in the Bay of Bengal Directed At?],” 当代海军 [Navy Today], no. 8, 2017, pp. 58-59.

97 悬崖 [Xuan Ya], “中国海军镜头中的美日印“马拉巴尔-2018”海上联演 [The U.S.-Japan-India “Malabar-2018” Joint Maritime Exercises Through the Lens of the Chinese Navy],” 舰载武器 [Shipborne Weapons], no. 9, 2018, p. 12-13.

South Atlantic, rounds the Cape of Good Hope, crosses the Indian Ocean, passes south of Australia, runs through Bass Strait, turns north along Australia's east coast and then Papua New Guinea's east coast, and goes across the Philippine Sea to end at Japan.

Among the three sea lanes, Japan and China share the main route that passes through the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea.⁹⁸ To Ding and Xin, these overlapping "maritime lifelines" have created "*natural and structural conditions* [emphasis added] for conflict."⁹⁹ In peacetime, both seafaring nations mutually benefit from shared access to the global maritime commons, a quintessential international public good. However, the risk that either side could seek to hold hostage the other's use of the seas in times of crisis or war has injected fear into Japan's strategic calculus. They maintain, "Should a confrontation occur, a zero-sum relationship would emerge at sea. If one side were to seize control of the lifeline, then it would obtain control over the other's lifeblood, posing a fatal threat to that country."¹⁰⁰ To them, this structural, geo-economic feature of Sino-Japanese maritime relations is existential in nature. Indeed, a wartime scenario in which China cut off Japan's shipping lanes would be disastrous for Tokyo. As Zhang Jiye explains:

Nothing causes more Japanese anxiety than China's maritime power and its ability to disrupt sea lines of communications. Particularly worrisome, China could possess the means to disrupt shipping in the South China Sea and to threaten the security of sea lanes passing through the Lombok-Makassar Straits. In wartime, Japanese ships would be forced to circumnavigate Australia to the south, an added distance of 5,200 nautical miles, to reach the Western Pacific.¹⁰¹

Such deep-seated fears have in turn drawn Japan to the open oceans to mitigate its exposure to various threats located far from the home islands. Xiu, for example, argues that Japan's lack of resources, dependence on imported energy, and growing maritime competition with rival claimants, such as China, have compelled Tokyo to advance excessive territorial and jurisdictional claims at sea. At the same time, the nation's reliance on seaborne commerce for its economic well-being has pushed Japan's maritime service to project power far beyond the home islands to defend vulnerable sea lines of communications.¹⁰²

98 Underscoring the seriousness with which Beijing treats the security of the Malacca Strait, China's Ministry of Transport maintains and issues official alert levels for shipping passing through the strait. See Chu Daye, "China raises alert for Malacca Strait as regional tensions threaten global shipping lines," *Global Times*, July 4, 2019. I thank Jim Fanell for this insight.

99 Ding Yunbao and Xin Fangkun, "Japanese Seapower Strategy and Its Influence Upon China," p. 28. For a conceptual assessment of how China's dependence on sea lines of communication, America's military capacity to disrupt those sea lanes, and "an oil-driven security dilemma" could influence Sino-American competition, see Charles Glaser, "How Oil Influences U.S. National Security," *International Security* 38, no 2, Fall 2013, pp. 112-146. I thank Evan Montgomery for pointing out this article.

100 *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

101 张继业 [Zhang Jiye], "日本海上通道安保政策的强化及其影响 [The Strengthening and Impact of Japan's Sea Lane Security Policies]," *国际问题研究 [International Studies]*, no. 6, 2018, p. 3.

102 Xiu Bin, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 148-149.

Japan's increasingly broad definition of its security and associated responsibilities has in turn drawn Tokyo into distant waters where Japanese and Chinese interests converge and collide. Japan and China find themselves competing in areas well outside of Japanese home waters. In particular, the Indian Ocean has emerged as a new locus of maritime competition. Japan dispatched JMSDF units there following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, deployed naval escorts to the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy patrols in 2009, and ordered a destroyer and two maritime patrol aircraft to conduct intelligence-gathering missions covering the Gulf of Oman, northern Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden in early 2020.¹⁰³ These constabulary activities dramatically expanded the geographic scope of the maritime service's operations while underscoring the strategic importance of the wider oceans to Japan's security and Tokyo's growing willingness to intervene in those waters. At the same time, China's growing presence and influence across the subcontinent and its littorals have coincided with Japan's proliferating commitments to the same geographic space. Such overlapping zones of interests are sure to spur competition. According to Lian and Jin:

Japan believes that if China achieved hegemony in the Indian Ocean, Japan's economy and security would be severely impacted...Japan also worries about China's progressive ascent along the northern sea routes of the Indian Ocean. If China were to command the seas of the Indian Ocean, Japan's lifeline could be severed...To contain China, Japan has begun to play up the China threat theory and to convince India of this threat so as to draw in India to check China.¹⁰⁴

The quest for security has already drawn China and Japan into the Indian Ocean over the past decade. Given mutual suspicions and incongruence in interests over issues large and small across the region, the two powers will likely seek to outmaneuver each other. As they jockey for advantage, each side will strive to preserve and enhance its position. Japan, for its part, will develop partnerships designed to bolster its presence and isolate China. While the competition in the Indian Ocean will not likely be as intense as that taking place in the East China Sea, where close military encounters are far more frequent and where the stakes are far higher, the extra-regional rivalry will almost certainly add to the animus between the two powers.

Japan's National Character

Chinese analysts contend that intangible factors, such as national will, propel nations to the seas. They frequently refer to the concept of "maritime consciousness (海洋意识)" as a core constituent of seapower. Maritime consciousness is a broad term that encompasses assumptions, attitudes, and knowledge that statesmen and citizens alike hold about marine matters,

103 Ryuichi Yamashita and Yuichi Nobira, "JMSDF vessel sails for Middle East to ensure safety of Japanese ships," *Asahi Shimbun*, February 2, 2020.

104 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 174.

ranging from national security to law to science to history.¹⁰⁵ Nations imbued with such consciousness are far more likely to mold an effective strategy and to harness resources to achieve greatness at sea while those lacking in such consciousness are prone to failure in maritime affairs. Importantly, the unique historical experiences of a nation have an outsize influence on this nautical worldview.

Some observers have applied this cognitive dimension of seapower and its historical sources to explain the intensifying Sino-Japanese competition. For example, Lian Degui, a scholar at the Shanghai Institutes of International Studies, devotes an entire volume to the nexus of Japanese maritime consciousness and seapower. According to Lian, Japan's "seapower consciousness" refers to enduring ideas and preferences that have animated Tokyo's strategy at sea. Specifically, Lian believes that Tokyo is predisposed to view China's turn to the seas as a threat because of Japan's deeply embedded bias against China. This bias, according to Lian, stems from divergent historical paths, civilizational differences, and irrational Japanese fears.¹⁰⁶ He asserts:

Japan's seapower advocates have from the start held an essentially negative attitude about China. They view China critically or with disdain. At a minimum, they seek to keep China at a respectful distance. They insist that Japan should hold China at bay and avoid falling in with China.¹⁰⁷

The author attributes this anti-China sentiment to an intellectual tradition that traces its origins to the Meiji Restoration, the fitful period of Japan's opening to the West. To illustrate this point, Lian references a famous Japanese editorial published in 1885 that, to many Chinese, symbolized a major current in Japanese thought. Entitled "The Case for Leaving Asia," the article argued that the Confucian system of governance in China and Korea was irredeemably backward and incapable of resisting the onslaught of Western civilization.¹⁰⁸ The unsigned piece went on to warn that stubborn Chinese and Korean resistance to Western ways would condemn them to dismemberment by the West. It further contended that, Japan, the first to embrace the West, could not wait for China and Korea to come around. To survive, Japan must instead "leave the ranks of Asian nations and cast our lot with the civilized nations of the West." To Lian, this late nineteenth-century sense of superiority and condescension toward China continues to color Japanese perceptions and goes far to explain Tokyo's judgment about its relationship with Beijing in the maritime domain.

Chinese commentators point to an even deeper and older source of contention. They see cultural and even civilizational differences between China and Japan animating rivalry. Protected by the surrounding seas, Japan never fell to conquest by continental threats. More

105 Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific*, pp. 101-102.

106 Lian Degui, *Japan's Seapower Consciousness*, p. 9.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

108 While the provenance of the editorial remains in dispute, Fukuzawa Yukichi, a founder of modern Japan, is most commonly recognized as the author.

importantly, to Chinese eyes, Japan refused to acquiesce completely to dynastic China's tributary system and kept Sinic influence at arm's length even as it selectively adopted various Chinese ways. Indeed, Japan has frequently resisted and even challenged the tribute system. As a result, Japan was never fully assimilated by Chinese civilization, setting it apart from other Asian nations, such as Korea and Vietnam.¹⁰⁹ According to Lian, the seas served as a kind of “breakwater [防波堤]” that protected Japan from military and cultural invasion. This maritime barrier, he contends, “permitted Japan to avoid the fate of Chinese assimilation throughout its history.”¹¹⁰ To some observers, then, the Japanese proclivity to view China with suspicion and hostility is virtually encoded in Japan's national DNA.

Japanese exceptionalism is not the only factor that explains the maritime rivalry. Japan's offensive-mindedness at sea, informed by its historical experiences and long-held ideas derived from those experiences, is perhaps the most decisive ideational variable determining the future course of Sino-Japanese maritime relations. According to Ding and Xin:

The offensive and expansionist character of Japan's seapower strategy and the strategy's threat to China's national security have historical precedent. While Japan's seapower strategy has undergone various stages in history, the strategy's strongly offensive orientation has never changed. *National character determines this orientation* [emphasis added]. For China, which has had many historical and geopolitical interactions with Japan, this offensive orientation is very dangerous.¹¹¹

To Ma Qianli, Japan's precarious geographic position, in part, explains the offensive character of Japanese naval strategy. As Ma explains, the Japanese islands are located on the periphery of the Eurasian landmass and are squeezed between China, the United States, and Russia. The islands, furthermore, lack strategic depth and resources. Ma asserts that Japan's “geopolitical flaws” have “cultivated a near-extreme sense of crisis and insecurity” among the Japanese.¹¹² This deep sense of anxiety has in turn inclined Japan to embrace offensive means to fend off dangers in a hostile world. In other words, the Japanese, by temperament, accept the adage that the best defense is a good offense.

Meiji Restoration's Long Shadow

More than geography is at work. Chinese analysts contend that Japan's offensive mindedness draws from its seapower thought that emerged after the nation's nineteenth-century contact with the West. Many cite the works of Tokugawa- and Meiji-era strategists who sensed—and called for a proactive response to—the dangers of encroaching Western influence. They

109 Xiu Bin, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 60 and Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 40.

110 Lian Degui, *Japan's Seapower Consciousness*, p. 27.

111 Ding Yunbao and Xin Fangkun, “Japanese Seapower Strategy and Its Influence Upon China,” p. 36.

112 马千里 [Ma Qianli], “日本新海洋安全战略中的对台政策 [Taiwan Policy Within Japan's New Maritime Security Strategy],” *太平洋学报 [Pacific Journal]*, 20, no. 4, April 2012, p. 97.

credit Hayashi Shihei (1738-1793), Yokoi Shonan (1809-1869), and Sakuma Shozan (1811-1864) for contributing to the formation of a national consciousness about the seas. Hayashi, a military strategist and author of *Military Affairs of a Maritime Nation (Kaikoku heidan)*, was among the earliest to warn of Japan's weakness at sea and urged the development of seapower to fend off the West. Yokoi, a reformer of the late Tokugawa era, wrote *Three Major Issues of State Policy (Kokuze sanron)*, which called on Japan to build a strong navy. Sakuma, a scholar and educator, saw danger and lessons in China's defeat in the Opium Wars and penned *Eight Measures for Maritime Defense (Kaibo hassaku)*. To Gao Lan, these writings were "pioneering works" that provided the theoretical foundations for Japan's maritime defense.¹¹³

Chinese commentators have paid special attention to Alfred Thayer Mahan's intellectual influence on Japanese seapower advocates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Gao Lan asserts, "Mahan's theories and propositions have had a far-reaching influence on Japan's maritime consciousness, naval development, and even national strategy."¹¹⁴ Chinese observers frequently recite Kaneko Kentaro's (1853-1942) role in introducing Mahan's most famous book, *The Influence of Seapower Upon History*, to Japanese readers in 1896. They also summarize the influential works of Japan's Mahanian disciples, Akiyama Saneyuki (1868-1918) and Sato Tetsutaro (1866-1942), and their emphasis on seapower, command of the sea, military preparedness, and offensive strategy.¹¹⁵ To them, Kaneko, Akiyama, and Sato, were the progenitors of Japan's maritime strategy and their intellectual legacies remain visible in Tokyo's twenty-first century thinking about the seas. In other words, Japan's offensive orientation today can be traced back to the nation's embrace of Mahanian ideas more than a century ago.

In a remarkable two-part essay, Liu Yi appraises Sato's intellectual contributions to the development of Japanese seapower and their continuing relevance to contemporary Japan. Liu pays special attention to Sato's opus, *The History of Imperial Defense (Teikoku kokubo shiron)*, a tome running more than 900 pages. To Liu, the book "was undoubtedly the first great work on maritime power and naval strategy by an Oriental" and "laid the foundation for the Japanese navy's strategy for forty years until the end of the Pacific War."¹¹⁶ Liu is particularly drawn to Sato's emphasis on an offensive strategy in the service of defensive aims, such as homeland defense. Sato argued that, when faced with a superior opponent at sea, the defender must leave its home waters and proactively attack the enemy in its own home waters. The defender must deliver a series of offensive blows until the adversary loses its capacity to credibly threaten the defender. To Liu, "the underlying intent of

113 Gao Lan, *U.S.-Japan Allied Seapower Strategy in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 121.

114 *Ibid.*, p.120.

115 For a summary of the influence of these early seapower advocates, see Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, pp. 33-39.

116 刘怡 [Liu Yi], "佐藤铁太郎与日本海上战略的奠基 [Sato Tetsutaro and the Foundations of Japanese Maritime Strategy]," *现代舰船 [Modern Ships]*, 6B, 2008, p. 13.

this offensively-oriented thinking is to bring the nation's first line of defense to the enemy's front door."¹¹⁷

Liu then draws a straight line from Sato's writings to current Japanese maritime thought. After illustrating the progressively expanding defensive perimeter of the Maritime Self-Defense Force in the postwar period, particularly since the 1980s, Liu contends that this extension of maritime power is a legacy of Sato's offensive logic. Liu concludes:

Japan's maritime strategy possesses the characteristics of active defense. Its operational concepts focus on defeating the enemy in the open oceans and balking the adversary far beyond the homeland. This matches the offensively oriented thinking in *The History of Imperial Defense*. The goal is to expand Japan's strategic depth so as to safeguard national security. The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force increasingly strives for command of the sea and command of the air in blue-water areas and seeks annihilation of enemy forces in places as far away from Japan as possible. In terms of equipment, the development of Aegis destroyers and modern submarine forces is further proof [of this connection to Sato].¹¹⁸

It is noteworthy that Liu uses the term "active defense" to describe Japanese naval strategy. Active defense, a core PLA doctrinal concept that traces its origins to Mao Zedong, calls for the use of offensive operations and tactics in the service of strategically defensive aims, however they are defined by the Chinese Communist Party. In the naval context, the Chinese navy's near-seas defense strategy applies the logic of active defense in the seaward direction.¹¹⁹ To what extent he is projecting China's approach to warfare onto Japanese strategy is unclear. In any event, Liu's attempt to connect the past to the present may seem overly simplistic. But his analysis and his willingness to dust off an obscure and impenetrable book for historical insight reflect the value that the Chinese strategic community attaches to understanding Japanese seapower.

Others go even further than Liu, attributing contemporary Japanese strategy in the maritime domain to hardwired ambitions rooted in Japan's imperial past. To Feng Liang, a senior captain of the PLAN and a professor at the Naval Command College, Japan's apparent restraint in maritime affairs was largely a product of the Cold War and thus an anomalous and temporary phenomenon. The bipolar rivalry riveted Japanese attention to the Soviet threat in the Far East. The end of the superpower competition and fading memories of Japanese aggression in the first half of the twentieth century permitted the deeply ingrained Japanese expansionist ambitions to resurface. Tokyo began to cast its gaze further offshore.

Feng states, "As such, the expansionist character of Japan's maritime strategy cannot be viewed as 'detached from modern history.' Rather, we must pay attention to how the *modern*

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

¹¹⁸ 刘怡 [Liu Yi], "佐藤铁太郎与日本海上战略的奠基 [Sato Tetsutaro and the Foundations of Japanese Maritime Strategy]," 现代舰船 [*Modern Ships*], 7B, 2008, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific*, pp. 123-128.

expansionist genes [emphasis added] were continued and resurrected in the context of Japanese nationalism and rightwing revival.”¹²⁰ The captain goes on to explain that realities of the twenty-first century, including the rise of international institutions and of other great powers, would likely prevent Japan from replicating the past. But he clearly believes that unique Cold War circumstances had only temporarily repressed Japan’s built-in aggressiveness, likening it to the nation’s genetic makeup.

Ma Qianli concurs, “The global expansionist mentality *inherited and unchanged from the Meiji era* [emphasis added] has influenced the formulation of Japan’s maritime security strategy today. The strategy tries in vain to walk yesteryear’s old path of expansionism by relying on the U.S.-Japan seapower alliance.”¹²¹ Li Qianghua of Shanghai Ocean University advances a similarly deterministic argument about Japanese seapower. To Li, Japan’s bloody-minded national character explains the divergent paths and fates of Japan and China in the nineteenth century. He states bluntly:

Japan is an island nation. It is also a warlike nation. Japanese history, whether it concerns the transition of political power, factional struggles, or religious disputes, is filled with bloody wars. Japan’s self-cultivated “bushido spirit” instilled powerful expansionist ambitions that led it to cast a covetous eye toward China and to spare no effort to expand at sea and to command the oceans.¹²²

To Li, this congenital condition goes far to explain Japan’s success in adopting Western ways, developing a maritime consciousness, forging an offensive seapower strategy, and fighting at sea in the late-nineteenth century. Moreover, “the flaws in traditional Japanese seapower thought” developed during the Meiji era have left a deep imprint on contemporary strategy, introducing what he describes as an “oppositional dynamic” in Sino-Japanese maritime ties.¹²³ Li goes on to argue that Japan’s alliance with the United States, its promotion of a values-based foreign policy in advancing Tokyo’s maritime aims, and its hostility toward China’s rise at sea are inescapably rooted in Japan’s history and national character.

These writings show a troubling conviction among Chinese observers that a major source of contention between China and Japan is civilizational in nature. The notion that civilizational identity defines the interests of states echoes Samuel Huntington’s classic book, *The Clash*

120 冯梁 [Feng Liang], 亚太主要国家海洋安全战略研究 [*Research on Maritime Security Strategies of Main Countries in the Asia-Pacific*] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Press, 2011), p. 73.

121 马千里 [Ma Qianli], “日本新海洋安全战略中的对台政策 [Taiwan Policy Within Japan’s New Maritime Security Strategy],” 太平洋学报 [*Pacific Journal*] 20, no. 4, April 2012, p. 97.

122 李强华 [Li Qianghua], “历史与现实: 中日海权战略之比较 [History and Reality: A Comparison of Chinese and Japanese Seapower Strategies],” 太平洋学报 [*Pacific Journal*] 20, no. 5, May 2012, p. 92.

123 Ibid., p. 98.

of *Civilizations*.¹²⁴ To some Chinese analysts, the civilizational fault lines dividing China and Japan are far too wide to reconcile. They evince the belief that the Japanese, as a people, are somehow culturally preprogrammed to hold anti-Chinese views, to go on the offense, and to develop strategic designs harmful to China's interests. These predetermined proclivities have in turn influenced Tokyo's maritime strategy toward China, setting in motion competitive dynamics that may be difficult to forestall.

An Inevitable Rivalry?

The literature surveyed above shows that the Chinese see powerful structural forces animating the Sino-Japanese naval rivalry. The widening power gap between China and Japan has inclined an insecure Tokyo to counteract—and to overreact to—Beijing's advances at sea. Japan's geographic position is both a physical and metaphorical barrier to China's maritime ambitions. The Japanese archipelago is not only menacingly claustrophobic to China, but it also stirs up bad memories. Moreover, Japanese and American forces based on the northern island chain could directly threaten Chinese access to the seas. At the same time, the U.S.-Japan alliance forms a formidable strategic bloc that possesses both the means and the intent to balk China's plans while Tokyo's regional and extra-regional designs pose challenges to Beijing in the near and far seas. Finally, Japan's national character, rooted in ancient and modern history, predisposes Tokyo to adopt hostile and expansionist maritime policies harmful to Chinese interests at sea.

Collectively, these Chinese assessments project a stark, if not frightening, future for Sino-Japanese maritime relations. They offer a deeply negative estimate of how Japan will respond to China's ascent at sea. The writings clearly anticipate stiff resistance from Japan and a proactive Japanese maritime strategy to contain China. Many Chinese observers assume the worst of Japanese intentions. Some depictions of Japan's malign designs border on caricature. Others are downright racist. The civilizational arguments about Japan's strategic orientation are particularly worrisome because they reinforce the narrative that rivalry and conflict are inevitable. Moreover, they reduce Tokyo to a one-dimensional opponent that is determined to make an enemy out of China. Such fatalism and determinism form the analytical prism through which the Chinese have evaluated Japanese naval power and strategy.

124 Huntington believed that Japan developed a distinctive civilization that had descended in part from Chinese civilization. While the Chinese experts documented in this study contend that Japan's national character would drive Tokyo to counterbalance Beijing, Huntington argued that Japanese civilization would incline Japan to bandwagon with a rising China. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp. 236-237.

CHAPTER 4

Chinese Assessments of the Naval Balance

The conventional wisdom in China long held that Japan enjoyed a comfortable lead in naval power among seafaring nations in Asia. For decades, the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force boasted a sizable modern fleet that was qualitatively superior to most, if not all, other local navies. Its technological, operational, and tactical virtuosity were objects of envy to many Chinese observers. Yet, China's turn to the seas and its navy's significant achievements in recent years have led to a noticeable change in Chinese appraisals of Japanese naval prowess. While commentators continue to concede Japan's many strengths, they are no longer awed by the island nation's maritime service. They find that China is not only catching up rapidly in key capabilities, but they also detect structural weaknesses plaguing the Maritime Self-Defense Force. Significantly, some have begun to express confidence that the Chinese navy and its sister services would be more than a match against their Japanese counterparts in combat. Such a shift in attitude is a far cry from just a decade ago, when Chinese analysts still discussed Japan's naval service with grudging admiration.

The literature surveyed below shows that Chinese analysts have subjected Japanese naval strategy, doctrine, and capabilities to deep study. The writings demonstrate a firm grasp of the JMSDF's historical evolution, its distinctive advantages, and its enduring weaknesses. Moreover, observers on the mainland have offered forthright evaluations of the Japanese maritime service's relative competitiveness vis-à-vis the Chinese navy. They reveal a growing confidence that China is quickly closing in on Japan at sea. To them, major advances in offensive firepower have conferred decisive advantages to the Chinese navy. They believe that Japan would likely struggle to overcome the dangers of naval combat in the missile age. Their judgments offer important clues about how the Chinese perceive Japan's relative standing in the region, the shape and pace of the naval competition between Beijing and Tokyo, and the future of naval rivalry in maritime Asia.

Japanese Maritime Strategy

Chinese analysts take a broad view of seapower. They recognize that naval power is only one among many constituents of maritime power. Their writings thus evaluate Japanese naval strategy and capabilities within the context of Tokyo's highest goals and long-term purposes. Gao Lan, for example, views maritime strategy in grand-strategic terms and applies this understanding to Japan. "Maritime strategy," she declares, "is an important constituent of a nation's overall strategy." It serves national policy on issues as wide ranging as territorial integrity and sovereignty, maritime security, naval affairs, economics, and international law. Maritime strategy is in turn driven or constrained by a nation's geography, economic demands on the seas, security needs, and the degree to which policymakers pay attention to the seas. To Gao, contemporary Japanese maritime strategy meets this broad definition of marine affairs. She states, "[Japan's] maritime strategy reflects a comprehensive judgment and plan. It is intimately related to Japan's military, diplomatic, and economic affairs."¹²⁵

"As an element of Japan's overall national strategy," Gao elaborates, "Japanese maritime strategy has undergone an extensive development process in areas ranging from concepts to institutions and from organizations to laws, enabling it to unceasingly gain strength and improve."¹²⁶ Three areas stand out to her. First, Japan has sought to mold a maritime culture and a national identity that embrace Japan as a genuine maritime power. In other words, Tokyo has very deliberately cultivated the nation's maritime consciousness. Second, Japan has enacted legislation to provide a legal framework for using the seas, protecting its maritime interests, exploiting marine resources, and asserting its seafaring rights. Third, Japan has established and empowered national institutions to implement policies and manage the seas. Such steps have helped improve interagency coordination and decision making.¹²⁷

Xiu Bin conceives of maritime strategy in vertical and horizontal terms. The former describes a top-down construct that connects ends to means. Beginning with maritime thought at the highest (and most ethereal) level of analysis, strategy works its way down from guidelines to objectives and tactics. The latter depicts a wide range of functional areas to which strategy can be applied, including legal, security, economic, scientific, military, cultural, and educational affairs.¹²⁸ Based on this broad understanding of maritime strategy, Xiu sees a serious enterprise at work in Japan. To him, Japan's superior conception of maritime affairs and its well-developed laws, institutions, and plans have all kept up with rapidly changing circumstances in recent years. He thus contends that Japan possesses all the prerequisites for becoming a great maritime power.

125 Gao Lan, *U.S.-Japan Allied Seapower Strategy in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 119.

126 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

127 *Ibid.*, pp. 126-129.

128 Xiu Bin, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 147.

Lian Degui and Jin Yongming are similarly impressed with Japan's legal and institutional frameworks that underwrite the nation's maritime policies. They cite a variety of laws that facilitate the comprehensive governance of the oceans, ranging from energy exploration to good order at sea.¹²⁹ They observe:

Japan is a nation that accords great importance to maritime matters...Japan has not only formulated a series of laws and regulations to safeguard marine resources, but it has also made the goal of realizing a “new oceanic state” the nation's foundational policy...In order to enhance maritime security and to develop marine resources, Japan improved its domestic legal system while promulgating a series of policies and laws on maritime security and diplomatic affairs. These steps have ensured the sound implementation of Japan's maritime strategy.¹³⁰

It is clear to them that Japanese maritime strategy is an expression of Japanese grand strategy, employing as it does all the implements of national power in a coordinated fashion. Moreover, they recognize that seapower is as much about the intangibles, such as the rule of law, as it is about material well-being in the form of ships and infrastructure. To them, Tokyo's investment in these less visible pillars of maritime power makes Japan a formidable competitor. As Li Xiushi sees it:

For the foreseeable future, Japan will continue to push forward along the national strategic track of becoming a “new oceanic state.” This represents *an unprecedented challenge* [emphasis added] to our nation's institutions and power to manage the seas and to efforts toward developing reciprocal strategic relations between China and Japan. Japan will become the greatest obstacle to China's ability to realize its maritime strategy. China will become the greatest victim of Japan's push to implement its maritime strategy.¹³¹

Given this daunting challenge, Li believes that China has much to learn from Japan's recent developments in maritime affairs. To her, there are four gaps that Beijing must close if it is to compete effectively with Tokyo over the long run. First, China must reform and integrate its institutions and improve the interagency process to enhance policy coordination over issues as wide ranging as energy, minerals, fisheries, transportation, environment, natural disaster warning, and crime. Second, China must do more to expand and digitize data on maritime geography, meteorology, and oceanography and make such data widely available across relevant agencies.¹³² Third, Beijing must cultivate, attract, and retain human capital on maritime affairs through better funding, training, and education. Fourth, China must ensure that it

129 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, pp. 55-131.

130 *Ibid.*, p. 329.

131 李秀石 [Li Xiushi], “日本海洋战略对中国的影响与挑战 [Japan's Maritime Strategy and Its Influence on and Challenge to China],” *学术前沿* [*Academic Frontier*], no. 7, 2012, p. 60.

132 Keeping the accumulated data safe from hostile powers would also be an important requirement for China. I thank Jim Fanell for this observation.

balances the non-military and the defense-related elements of its maritime strategy to push back against Japan over territorial disputes and other security issues.¹³³

Xiu Bin discerns six areas where Tokyo is still superior to Beijing.¹³⁴ In the contemporary era, Japan enjoyed a head start in developing a coherent maritime strategy, accumulating more experience over a longer period than China. A larger proportion of the Japanese population has been exposed to maritime affairs, fostering a higher degree of maritime consciousness, education, and concepts than their Chinese counterparts. Japan's maritime geography—benefiting as it does from long coastlines, plentiful islands, numerous oceanic exits, fine harbors and ports, proximity to sea lanes, and large sea areas under Tokyo's jurisdiction—is more suited to marine affairs than China's.

To Xiu, well-developed legal regimes, institutions, and regulations underwrite Japan's maritime strategy. At the same time, ongoing maritime disputes combined with China's rapid ascent have inclined its neighbors to view it with suspicion, a sentiment that Tokyo has been able to exploit. Xiu also sees that Japan's maritime strategy is anchored in the larger U.S.-Japan alliance, providing Tokyo the added strategic weight to influence events at sea. Finally, in terms of hard power, the Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Japan Coast Guard boast superbly trained personnel, world-class equipment, including widespread use of information technologies, and expeditionary capabilities.

The writings sampled above suggest a comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of Japanese seapower. They recognize that the ingredients for success at sea go beyond the material implements of national power. Socio-cultural and institutional factors are just as important as physical capabilities. In this regard, the Chinese readily acknowledge that Japan has been exemplary in harnessing its national power to pursue and defend its maritime interests.

The Conventional Wisdom About Japanese Naval Power

Since the end of World War II, Japan has gone from strength to strength in naval power. Chinese observers note that Tokyo has methodically enhanced the capabilities and expanded the reach of the JMSDF over decades. This incremental approach progressively provided the maritime service the material wherewithal to confront challenges during the Cold War and in the decades following the Soviet Union's collapse.

Xiu Bin, for instance, sees the extension of Japanese naval power in six stages since the postwar era.¹³⁵ Intriguingly, the author employs Chinese military terminology to describe the

133 李秀石 [Li Xiushi], “日本海洋战略的内涵与推进体制—兼论中日钓鱼岛争端激化的深沉原因 [The Concept and Implementing System of Japan's Maritime Strategy—A Discussion of the Underlying Reasons for the Intensification of the Sino-Japanese Diaoyu Island Dispute],” *日本学刊* [*Japan Studies*], no. 3, 2013, pp. 67-68.

134 Xiu Bin, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, pp. 151-152.

135 *Ibid.*, pp. 42-46.

evolution of Tokyo's naval strategy. In the 1950s, Japan adopted "near coast defense" to deal with threats to the nation's harbors and ports, inland and territorial seas, the littorals, and territorial integrity while outsourcing all other defense obligations to the United States. The next decade witnessed a transition to "near seas defense" that called on Japanese forces to defend against and delay invasions along the coastal areas while buying time for the arrival of U.S. reinforcements. This period saw a shift from a complete reliance on the United States to a combined defense of the homeland. The JMSDF took concrete steps to develop forces capable of conducting anti-submarine warfare, fleet escort, straits blockade, coastal defense, and operations 500 nautical miles from shore.

In the 1970s, Japan expanded its defense perimeter far beyond the homeland to encompass broad areas of the Far East. The JMSDF was tasked to defend sea lanes 1,000 nautical miles southeast and southwest of the Japanese main islands. The following decades were a time of growth. Xiu describes Japan's naval strategy in the 1980s as "open ocean active defense," which was designed to engage hostile forces as far from the home islands as possible. The area of operations covered all sea areas west of Guam and north of the Philippines. By this juncture, the JMSDF had acquired large-displacement, multi-purpose combatants to fulfill these more demanding missions. In terms of force structure, the maritime service met the goal of establishing an "eight-eight formation" whereby each of the four escort flotillas comprised eight surface combatants capable of launching eight helicopters.

During the immediate post-Cold War years, Japan broke new ground by deploying forces overseas. Tokyo dispatched minesweepers to the Persian Gulf after Operation Desert Storm and began sending peacekeepers around the world. In the mid-1990s, the U.S.-Japan alliance began to revitalize itself, enhancing Japan's role in furnishing logistical and other rear-area support to American forces. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, Japan abandoned its longstanding posture of exclusive defense and embraced what Xiu calls "proactive attack and overseas intervention" to cope with a broad range of global threats. To meet these faraway challenges, the JMSDF has put to sea warships of ever larger size and greater technical sophistication designed to enhance the service's "blue-water combat capabilities." Xiu sees Japan's participation in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the establishment of a base in Djibouti as warning signals of a globally oriented Japanese military.

Until recently, Chinese commentators acknowledged the JMSDF's operational, tactical, technical, and technological virtuosity. To highlight the previous consensus about Japan's maritime service, the following draws largely from Chinese writings published some ten years ago. In 2009, one observer noted, "Of all China's neighbors, Japan has the most powerful navy. The minesweeping capability of its Maritime Self-Defense Force ranks number one in the world, superior to that of the United States, and its anti-submarine capability ranks number two in the world. Thus, all in all, the prowess of Japan's Maritime

Self-Defense Force comes third, right behind the United States and Russia.”¹³⁶ The author went on to praise Japan’s growing capacity to conduct “oceangoing operations” and its core strengths in fleet air defense, anti-submarine warfare, and undersea warfare.

He Ping observed that Russia’s naval collapse and major drawdowns in European seapower during the post-Cold War era contrasted with Japan’s sustained investment in its navy. As a result, the JSMDf’s relative competitiveness continued to increase against other Western navies.¹³⁷ One writer contended that the Japanese maritime service’s high technological standards and combat potential generated “overall capabilities that already rival, if not surpass, that of Britain and France, emerging as one of the few genuine naval powers in the world.”¹³⁸ Another went even further, asserting that, “Japan’s military power already matches or has exceeded Britain, becoming a major military power on the world stage. In particular, the JMSDF’s comprehensive combat capabilities may have even leapt ahead of the Russian navy’s Pacific Fleet.”¹³⁹

A decade ago, many Chinese were impressed with Japan’s disciplined acquisition and procurement process that ensured a cutting-edge force. For example, the JMSDF recapitalized and modernized its fleet at a rapid clip even as it kept pace with technological change in naval warfare. A steady flow of new combatants enabled the maritime service to retire its older vessels well before they reached the end of their service lives. One 2009 study noted with apparent astonishment that more than 80 percent of the Japanese surface fleet (26 out of 32 of the main battle force in 2009) had been in service for less than twenty years.¹⁴⁰ Even more impressive in this regard was Japan’s undersea fleet. In a 2008 article, Zhang Yao observed, “Compared to the submarines of other countries, the most prominent characteristic of Japanese subs is their newness. The average age is less than 12 years old. Even the oldest *Harushio*-class [in 2008] has only been in service for 17 years.”¹⁴¹

These decade-old judgments rendered above represented the prevailing views that have persisted until recent years. They serve as a useful baseline with which to compare against the new and emerging Chinese assessments of Japanese naval power. The more recent literature strongly suggests that mainland observers are less and less in awe of JMSDF. Indeed,

136 Tang Dongfeng, “Latest Trends in the Development of Weaponry and Equipment in the Navies of China’s Neighboring Countries,” *Modern Navy*, November 2009.

137 何萍 [He Ping], “日本海上自卫队反潜作战能力综述 [A General Survey of Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force’s Anti-Submarine Warfare Capabilities],” *现代军事* [*Contemporary Military*], no. 7, 2013, pp. 58-59.

138 刘江平 [Liu Jiangping], “日本：从未消失的‘航母梦’ [Japan: The “Carrier Dream” that Never Disappeared],” *海洋世界* [*Ocean World*], no. 10, 2009, pp. 65-66.

139 杜朝平 [Du Chaoping], “海上自卫队大整编及其对亚太安全的影响 [The Maritime Self-Defense Force’s Major Reorganization and Its Influence on Asia-Pacific Security],” *舰载武器* [*Shipborne Weapons*], no. 5, 2008, p. 16.

140 刘江平 [Liu Jiangping], “获准“随时出海”后的日本海上自卫队新动向 [New Directions of Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force After Gaining Permission to “Go to Sea Anytime,”],” *当代海军* [*Modern Navy*], no. 9, 2009, p. 31.

141 张跃 [Zhang Yue], “日本下水第一艘AIP潜艇 [Japan Launches Its First AIP Submarine],” *兵器知识* [*Ordnance Knowledge*], no. 2, 2008, p. 54.

many analysts find that the Japanese maritime service is far less intimidating than it once was. This slippage in perceived stature has as much to do with China's strides in naval power as it has to do with Japan's performance.

China Closes the Gap

Writings that deprecate Japanese seapower while praising Chinese naval prowess were rare a decade ago. Yet, they have surged in recent years. For example, Zhang Ming depicts in stark terms the shift in the Sino-Japanese naval balance and the changing pecking order in regional seapower over the past twenty years. Throughout the 1990s, Japan's naval modernization program kept it as a leading maritime power in Asia. The JMSDF was the first Asian navy to construct combatants equipped with the Aegis radar system in 1990. By 1998, Japan had put to sea four top-of-the-line *Kongo*-class Aegis destroyers that formed the core of its fleet. By contrast at the time, the Chinese navy possessed only two Type-052 Luhu-class destroyers that could be considered modern by Western standards. Zhang admits that, for many Chinese, Japan's naval power, which dwarfed that of the PLAN, was an object of envy. However, the immediate post-Cold War era deprived Japanese planners the rationales for—and the sense of urgency to—continuing the pace and scale of modernization that had prevailed in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the Russian navy had fallen into a state of severe disrepair while the Chinese navy remained far behind its Japanese and American counterparts. In this more relaxed security environment, Japan adopted a more leisurely approach to its naval buildup plans.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, circumstances began to change. During this time, the rapid growth of China's economy and its technological and industrial base, enabled the Chinese navy to advance considerably in the development of radar, long-range anti-air missiles, vertical launch systems, gas-turbine propulsion, and so forth. These breakthroughs in turn led to the commissioning of major surface combatants to include the Type-054A Jiangkai-II frigate, the Type-052C Luyang-II destroyer, the Type-052D Luyang-III destroyer, the Type-055 cruiser, and the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier. Through a quintessentially Chinese cooking metaphor, Zhang likened the construction spree and the deployment of new warships in quick succession to shoving a whole batch of dumplings into a boiling pot. At the same time, many older combatants were retired to make way for their modern successors. In the air domain, third-generation fighters, such as the J-10B/C, J-11B, J-15, and J-16, have been produced in ever greater numbers while the J-20 fourth-generation fighter has begun to enter service. And, long-range anti-ship cruise missiles, including the YJ-12, JY-18, and JY-83K, have steadily improved their ability to defeat the adversary's fleet defenses.

As a result, according to Zhang, "The Chinese navy's overall air-sea combat capabilities have rapidly caught up to the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. *In some areas, it has surpassed*

the JMSDF [emphasis added]. It is no longer the weakling of the past.”¹⁴² The speed with which China has closed the gap in seapower has had as much impact on Japan’s psychology as it has had on the material dimension of Japanese strategy. The PLAN not only undercut the JMSDF’s “sense of superiority and pride [优越感和自豪感],” but it also added “military pressure and mental stress [军事压力和精神压力]” on its rival navy. Moreover, China’s maritime prowess has led Japan to reevaluate its defense posture, particularly along the Southwest Islands. According to Lian Degui and Jin Yongming:

China’s growing capabilities at sea and in the air have compelled Japan to pay attention to island defense. From 2000 to 2010, China’s attack submarines increased from 5 to 31 boats while its new type destroyers also grew dramatically. The China Aegis, the Type 052D/Luyang-III destroyer, is already comparable to its Japanese counterpart. It is against this backdrop of changes in the power balance that China began to break through the first island chain to reach the Pacific Ocean in 2008.¹⁴³

Xiu further contends that the gap separating China from Japan is rapidly shrinking. If China continues to invest in its maritime capabilities, he estimates that it would take Beijing 10 to 20 years to achieve “strategic superiority” over Japan.¹⁴⁴ These findings stand in sharp contrast to the earlier consensus that Tokyo possessed nearly unassailable qualitative advantages over the Chinese navy.

Japan’s Unbalanced Naval Development

Going beyond how quickly China is catching up to Japan, Chinese assessments are paying more attention to structural weaknesses of the JMSDF. A key theme that emerges from this discourse is Tokyo’s “unhealthy” reliance on the United States and the resulting distortions to Japanese strategy and force structure. In a critique of the JMSDF, Hua Dan, hailing from the PLA Army Engineering University and a long-time observer of the Japanese military, believes that Japan “paid a grievous price” by allying so closely with the United States. The alliance made demands on—and forced trade-offs in—resources that proved harmful to the maritime service’s overall defense posture. The JMSDF’s massive investments in airborne anti-submarine warfare (ASW), offensive mine warfare, and mine countermeasures merely filled gaps in American capabilities while freeing up resources for the United States to go on the offensive. At the same, the JMSDF’s efforts to compensate for its senior partner’s shortfalls meant neglect for the rest of the service’s operational needs.

142 章明 [Zhang Ming], “日本海上自卫队27DD宙斯盾导弹驱逐舰详解 [A Detailed Look at Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force’s 27DD Aegis Destroyer],” 现代兵器 [Modern Weaponry], no. 6, 2018, pp. 44-45.

143 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan’s Maritime Strategy*, p. 211. While the authors trace China’s naval activism to 2008, the Chinese navy’s sorties beyond the first island chain to the Philippine Sea began as early as 2007. See Christopher H. Sharman, *China Moves Out: Stepping Stones Toward a New Maritime Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2015), pp. 13-17.

144 Xiu Bin, *Research on Japan’s Maritime Strategy*, p. 160.

To Hua, such “lopsided procurement” of narrowly confined capabilities led to a “highly skewed” force structure. In his judgment, the result is that Japanese forces would be hard pressed to defend the homeland without the assistance of forward-based U.S. military forces on Japan’s home islands. Hua maintains that, “The JMSDF has strived to maintain relative balance in the areas of anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, and fleet air defense, but these efforts are insufficient to view the JMSDF as an ‘independent navy’ complete with all the necessary formations and systems.”¹⁴⁵ He concludes, “Today, the JMSDF still treats coordination with U.S. military operations as its objective. It is just an appendage to America’s maritime strategy.”¹⁴⁶ In another study, Hua concludes that:

In the absence of the U.S. military, there is much room for improvement in the JMSDF’s ability to conduct independent and offensive operations. To be precise, the possession of world-class anti-submarine warfare and mine-sweeping capabilities does not demonstrate that the JMSDF is sufficiently equipped to fight surrounding countries.¹⁴⁷

Two critics argue that the JMSDF’s overspecialization in anti-submarine warfare, owing to what they perceive as Japan’s slavish adherence to American priorities and preferences, led to a severe imbalance in force structure. While Zhou Ming and Li Wei concede that Japanese ASW capabilities are rivaled only by the United States in the world, the demands for developing such specialized skills have diverted attention and resources away from other important warfare areas.¹⁴⁸ While American military preeminence in Asia helped to disguise those asymmetries in Japanese force design, the recent decline of U.S. hegemony, in the eyes of Zhou and Li, has begun to expose the JMSDF’s various weaknesses. The authors bluntly describe the maritime service as a “crippled giant [跛脚巨人].”

Other imbalances stand out to Chinese analysts. Hua Dan, for example, sees Japan’s inability to project forces ashore as a major weakness. The three *Osumi*-class amphibious transports suffer from inadequate lift. Under peacetime conditions, the three vessels could only put ashore about a battalion of ground forces. Hua speculates that the anticipated size of the Ground Self-Defense Force’s amphibious brigade will likely outstrip the maritime service’s independent carrying capacity. At the same time, Japan lacks the requisite numbers of landing craft that would bring assault forces from ship to shore. To Hua, the JMSDF’s two utility landing craft and the six air-cushion land craft are “unable to fulfill the needs of large-scale amphibious operations.”¹⁴⁹

145 华丹 [Hua Dan], 隐藏之刃: 日本自卫队 武器 [The Hidden Blade: Japan Self-Defense Force and Weapons] (Xian, Shanxi: Shanxi People’s Press, 2018), p. 136.

146 Ibid., p. 136.

147 华丹 [Hua Dan], 无刃之刃: 日本自卫队 [A Bladeless Sword: Japan Self-Defense Force] (Xian, Shanxi: Shanxi People’s Press, 2016), p. 119.

148 周明 李巍 [Zhou Ming and Li Wei], 日本自卫队: 东瀛之刀 [Japan Self-Defense Force: The Japanese Sword] (Shanghai Academy of Social Science Press, 2015), p. 123.

149 Hua Dan, A Bladeless Sword, p. 118.

Hua Dan identifies logistics as another weakness of the JMSDF. As he observes, logistics is the source of combat power and it dictates the scale and duration of a military operation. Logistics places an upper limit to how much firepower a fleet can unleash and to how long a fleet can steam. To Hua, Japan suffers from a longstanding bias for frontline combat capability at the expense of rear-area support, a preference that can be traced back to the Imperial Japanese Navy. He concedes that Japan's port facilities and the quality of shipyard workers are unrivaled in Asia. But, the pace of force modernization and equipment development have far outpaced the capacity of naval bases to support the infusion of combatants.¹⁵⁰ Based on the logistical limitations, he judges that the JMSDF may have the capacity to conduct some open-ocean operations and may have reached the preliminary stage for waging a "medium-scale war [中等规模战争]" at sea. While Hua does not spell out exactly what he considers "medium scale," he does not believe that Japan has the capacity to wage a sustained naval campaign against a major naval power such as China.

Vulnerabilities to Chinese Missiles

The Chinese navy is doing more than catching up to the JMSDF. The PLAN's focused investments in missiles have yielded outsize advantages over Japan's maritime service. Chinese writings exude confidence in China's ability to overwhelm Japanese fleet defenses in a missile duel. Zhou Ming and Li Wei, for example, assess that Japan's surface combatants lag in fleet air defenses. They are particularly skeptical about the naval service's long-range air defenses in an open-ocean operating environment. Once Japanese surface combatants slip beyond the protective umbrella of shore-based airpower or American support, they are likely to be very vulnerable to the firepower of capable adversaries.

Although the authors do not explicitly identify anti-ship missiles in China's arsenal, they obliquely refer to comparable Russian systems as the kinds of threats that Japan will likely face at sea. The Soviet-era SS-N-12 Sandbox, SS-N-19 Shipwreck, and SS-N-22 Sunburn anti-ship missiles would pose a grave danger to JMSDF warships. Given the supersonic speed, the low flight profile, and the evasive maneuvers of an incoming SS-N-27 Sizzler missile, Japanese defenders would find intercepting such a projectile a very challenging task.

To make matters worse, these missiles far outrange the subsonic Harpoon and SSM-1 anti-ship missiles aboard Japan's warships. "If the JMSDF's fleet encounters enemy surface combatants armed with supersonic long-range anti-ship missiles," they claim, "it would certainly find itself in a disadvantageous position during a missile engagement." The authors conclude, "Air defense is still the weakest point. In the future, the greatest threat [to the JMSDF] will inevitably come from the air domain." They describe the maritime service's vulnerabilities to air and missile threats as a "fatal defect [致命缺陷]."¹⁵¹ To them, the JMSDF

¹⁵⁰ Hua Dan, *The Hidden Blade*, p. 176.

¹⁵¹ Zhou Ming and Li Wei, *Japan Self-Defense Force: The Japanese Sword*, p. 98.

remains unsuited for modern sea combat, involving as it does massive exchanges of long-range supersonic anti-ship missiles.

Hua Dan concurs. China's shore-based firepower, such as the DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile, its submarine-launched missiles acquired from Russia, and various anti-ship missiles carried by the H-6 bomber, "pose a serious threat to the JMSDF and U.S. forces in Japan." Hua reinforces the outranging problems that the Japanese naval service faces. He maintains:

Because these anti-ship missiles have longer ranges than those of the JMSDF and they can engage in over-the-horizon saturation attacks while the DF-21D has the capacity to directly strike and sink an American carrier, the Self-Defense Force worries that they could severely impede U.S. and its own military operations in the direction of the East China Sea.¹⁵²

Moreover, Chinese missiles threaten major surface combatants that would be responsible for carrying out critical warfighting missions essential to the success of allied operations. Japan's highly prized helicopter carriers, which would serve as the centerpiece of any submarine hunting campaign, could fall in the crosshairs of Chinese missile forces. Yet, these vessels' sizes make them more visible to Chinese sensors and thus more vulnerable to China's missile force. Chinese missiles could thus severely harm a specialty that Japan has spent decades honing. As Lian Degui and Jin Yongming state:

Japan's anti-submarine warfare capability is considered the world's second best. But, Japan's anti-submarine warfare forces will not be able to escape China's missile attacks. While the *Hyuga*-class and *Izumo*-class quasi-carriers add to Japan's submarine-hunting prowess, these high-cost warships will become the targets of Chinese missiles. *They will be particularly superb targets for China's anti-ship ballistic missiles* [emphasis added]. In the Sino-Japanese military competition, time is on China's side.¹⁵³

Another analyst examines how the PLA would defeat a Japanese amphibious assault task force operating in the East China Sea. Wang Kai contends that China already boasts a powerful reconnaissance-strike complex to threaten its opponent at sea. A family of space-based systems would enable the PLA to search, locate, identify, and track moving targets on the vast oceans. These satellites, supported by aerial early warning, electronic warfare, and long-range unmanned reconnaissance aircraft, can gather, process, and transmit intelligence with a high degree of fidelity, including the precise coordinates, course, and speed of an enemy surface fleet as well as relevant information about the meteorological conditions and the hydrological environment. Such data would in turn be passed onto the PLA Rocket Force's tactical commanders, who would order their shore-based batteries to unleash anti-ship ballistic missile volleys, including the DF-21D and the DF-26. Wang questions whether

152 Hua Dan, *The Hidden Blade*, p. 183.

153 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 211.

the JMSDF's vaunted sea-based ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems would be optimized to defeat the incoming missiles.

At the same time, the PLA's anti-ship cruise missiles launched from the air and the sea would pose another severe threat to the JMSDF's flotillas. Bombers armed with YJ-12 and YJ-100 missiles and surface combatants carrying YJ-18 missiles could fire massive salvos against a Japanese task force. The volume, speed, and maneuverability of the missiles would saturate and overwhelm the enemy fleet's defenses. Wang also expresses doubts about the ability of Japanese airpower to contest and to obtain command of the air, without which the surface fleet would be highly vulnerable. The author claims that the PLA's aerial early warning and electronic warfare aircraft, including the KJ-2000, the KJ-500, and the Y-8EW, are a generation ahead of Japan's E-767 AWACS and the E-2C. Indeed, in conflict, the Japanese aircraft would be "powerless to save the desperate situation [回天乏术]" and would be unable to achieve air superiority over an airspace spanning 400 square kilometers.¹⁵⁴

Chinese missile strikes against bases along the Japanese archipelago would parallel the contests for sea control and air superiority. As Lian Degui and Jin Yongming speculate:

If a large-scale conventional military clash were to break out, China would certainly seek to attack Japanese and American naval and air bases. Among those bases, Kadena, Iwakuni, Sasebo, and Yokosuka would be the primary targets of a Chinese missile assault. The result of such a strike would be the U.S. loss of military strongholds in the Western Pacific.¹⁵⁵

The authors believe that severe damage to forward bases would force the U.S. military to fall back to Guam or Hawaii, eroding the staying power of frontline units. Such explicit discussions about attacks against American and allied forces have become a common and troubling feature of the Chinese literature.

Japan's Carrier Ambitions

For the past decade, Chinese commentators have paid special attention to Japan's deployment of light carriers that began with the two *Hyuga*-class helicopter destroyers, commissioned in 2009 and 2011, and continued with the two *Izumo*-class helicopter destroyers, commissioned in 2015 and 2017. After the JMSDF launched the *JS Hyuga* in August 2007, Chinese observers began to speculate intensively about the combatant's purpose. As early as February 2008, an article examines in great depth the history and evolution of the JMSDF's helicopter destroyers and the capabilities of the *Hyuga*. Describing the lead ship as a "pathfinder [探路石] to surmount Japan's arms limitations," the author

154 王凯 [Wang Kai], "评出云级直升机驱逐舰 [A Review of *Izumo*-Class Helicopter Destroyer]," 舰载武器 [Shipborne Weapons], no. 5B, 2016, p. 78. For a claim that Chinese aerial early warning aircraft boast superior processing power to those of their American counterparts, see Liu Xuanzun, "Chinese AEW aircraft 50 percent more efficient than those used by US: report," *Global Times*, July 7, 2019.

155 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 211.

concludes that the carrier is a prototype for “standard attack-type carriers that can embark conventional fixed-wing aircraft.”¹⁵⁶ Another observer concurs that Japan has methodically tested the limits of its postwar constitution by commissioning progressively ever larger carrier-like combatants.¹⁵⁷ To the author, this pattern of behavior “fully reflects Japan’s gradual probing to break through red lines.”¹⁵⁸

When news that Japan’s Defense Ministry had budgeted for the much larger *Izumo*-class combatant in 2009, Chinese outlets began to speculate about Tokyo’s intentions. Weighing in at nearly 20,000 tons and measuring nearly 250 meters in length, the *Izumo* is over 50 meters longer and displaces 50 percent more than the *Hyuga*. In appearance and in potential capability, the *Izumo* seemed, to many Chinese, comparable to that of Italy’s *Cavour* aircraft carrier. One article dismisses the Japanese government’s early statements that it had no plans to introduce carrier-based aircraft. It asserts, “The 22DDH [the *Izumo*] is the Maritime Self-Defense Force’s essential step toward a conventional carrier.”¹⁵⁹ After carefully examining the flight deck configuration and the location of the aircraft elevators, two analysts speculate that the *Izumo* would be able to accommodate short take-off vertical-landing fixed-wing aircraft in the future.¹⁶⁰ A far less circumspect observer confidently predicts that it would only be a matter of time for Japan to acquire the F-35B Lightning II fighter for the *Izumo*.¹⁶¹

In more recent coverage, Chinese analysts have debated the prospects for converting the *Izumo* into a carrier capable of launching fixed-wing aircraft. Fang Zheng, for example, expresses doubts about the wisdom of embarking F-35Bs on the *Izumo*. The author lists an array of problems associated with upgrading the carrier, including modifications to the flight deck and the hangar space. Fang pegs the maximum carrying capacity of the *Izumo* at 10 to 12 F-35Bs, about half that of an American amphibious assault ship. The article mockingly asks whether it was possible for “a crow to become a phoenix.”¹⁶²

156 阎路 [Yan Lu], “走马观花看日向 [A Superficial Investigation of the *Hyuga*],” 舰载武器 [Shipborne Weapons], no. 2, 2008, p. 59.

157 The JMSDF completed three 9,000-ton *Osumi*-class dock landing ships in the early 2000s, followed up with two 14,000-ton *Hyuga*-class carriers, and culminated with two 19,500-ton *Izumo*-class carriers.

158 问苍茫 [Wen Cangmang], “关于出云号与加贺号护卫舰 [On the *Izumo* and *Kaga* Escort Destroyers],” 舰载武器 [Shipborne Weapons], no. 11B, 2015, p. 37.

159 海华 [Hai Hua], “日本迈向新航母的关键一步 [Japan Takes Key Step Towards New Carrier],” 舰船知识 [Naval and Merchant Ships], no. 11, 2009, p. 45.

160 高海青 闻舞 [Wu Haiqing and Wen Wu], “引人注目的22DDH [The Striking 22DDH],” 环球军事 [Global Military], no. 223, June 2010, p. 51.

161 曹晓光 [Cao Xiaoguang], “日本22DDH直升机母舰 [Japan’s 22DDH Helicopter Carrier],” 兵器知识 [Ordnance Knowledge], no. 8A, 2010, p. 48.

162 方正 [Fang Zheng], “日本直升机航母如何变身 [How To Transform Japan’s Helicopter Carrier],” 舰载武器 [Shipborne Weapons], no. 6, 2018, pp. 48-51.

To some, Japan's carrier ambitions are inextricably tied to its threat perceptions of China. The Chinese military's growing capabilities, combined with Beijing's expanding maritime interests far beyond the mainland shores, have drawn China and Japan on a collision course a sea. Ying He asserts:

As China's overall capacity continues to strengthen, the Chinese navy has begun the transition from a near-seas defense capability to a far-seas protection posture. This shift [in geographic scope] will lead to a substantial overlap with the JMSDF's strategy of protecting sea lanes 1,000 nautical miles from the home islands. As such, the main objective of JMSDF's carrier development is very clear, that is, to deal with the increasingly capable Chinese navy.¹⁶³

As Yin sees it, Japan has already determined that China is its “main adversary of the future [未来的主要对手].” The JMSDF must therefore anticipate a capable Chinese foe that will likely possess “seapower that includes several large conventional carriers, shore-based heavy stealth fighters, and even carrier-based stealth fighters.”¹⁶⁴ In such a rivalry, the JMSDF must develop the means “to provide air defense at the outer perimeters of the escort flotilla” and “to seize command of the air at the theater level” when the fleet is operating beyond the range of shore-based air cover. To do so, carriers and carrier-based fighters are indispensable. To Yin, Japanese decisions surrounding the *Izumo* and the F-35B must be understood in this high-stakes context. Yet, for the same reasons that Fang Zheng identifies, Yin is skeptical about the plans to convert the *Izumo*. He concludes that Japan may have to procure an entirely new class of carriers, akin to Britain's HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, to fulfill its carrier ambitions.

Xiao Ying contends that carrier-based airpower would furnish the JMSDF unprecedented flexibility to operate in concert with U.S. forces. A Japanese flotilla—comprising an *Izumo*-class carrier with F-35Bs onboard, two Aegis-equipped *Kongo*- or *Atago*-class destroyers, and four general purpose *Murasame*-, *Takanami*-, *Akizuki*-, or *Asahi*-class destroyers—could join an American carrier strike group to conduct offensive operations. The writer speculates that such a task force could hunt submarines and defend the airspace within a 200- to 400-kilometer radius of the combined strike group. A somewhat smaller JMSDF formation could operate within a U.S. expeditionary strike group to help project power ashore. Rotary-wing aircraft could bring forces and materiel onto secured beachheads while F-35B fighters could deliver limited firepower against opposing forces along the coast.¹⁶⁵ To Xiao, there is clearly an allied dimension to Japan's proposed acquisition of fixed-wing aircraft for its carriers.

163 银河 [Yin He], “从日本直升机驱逐舰看起未来航母的发展 [The Future of Carrier Development Based on Japan's Helicopter Destroyer],” 舰载武器 [Shipborne Weapons], no. 9, 2015, p. 52.

164 Ibid., p. 49.

165 小鹰 [Xiao Ying], “日向/出云级作战方式想定和反制措施 [Operational Concepts for the *Hyuga*- and *Izumo*-Class Carrier and Countermeasures Against Them],” 舰船知识 [Naval and Merchant Ships], no. 9, 2018, p. 90.

Others have devoted attention to the F-35B fighter. Li Xiaobai, for example, believes that the carrier-based aircraft would substantially boost the JMSDF's offensive punch, particularly in anti-shipping and counter air operations. More important, the F-35B's role as a sensor platform would significantly enhance the fleet's "situational awareness [态势感知]." In Li's judgment, the fighter can "completely assume the responsibilities of the fleet's early warning and scouting functions," provide highly accurate targeting data to its rear, and guide ship-board weapons fired from standoff distances to their intended targets.¹⁶⁶ The F-35B's ability to take off and land vertically or on very short runways allows the fighter to operate from conventional airbases, austere airfields, and naval combatants that can accommodate aircraft. In times of hostilities, major airbases, such as Naha Airport, would likely be heavily damaged or rendered unusable by Chinese anti-runway weapons. Under such circumstances, F-35Bs could disperse and fall back to airstrips and flight decks that would otherwise be inaccessible to less flexible aircraft, such as the F-15Js, the mainstay of Japanese airpower.

In another speculative essay, a commentator pits China's J-15 carrier-based fighter against a Japanese F-35B launched from the *Izumo* in a hypothetical air-to-air combat. In such a tactical one-on-one contest, Liu Yu concedes that the F-35B is superior to the J-15 across the board, including in such areas as stealth, detection range, armaments, and propulsion. However, the article notes that a Sino-Japanese encounter in a localized conflict over the Senkakus would almost certainly involve all elements of seapower on both sides. In such a contest, Japan's tactical and technological superiority alone would not determine operational success. Chinese advantages, including proximity to the area of hostile contact and mass, could well tip the balance in Beijing's favor. Shore-based assets, including the J-20 fighter, long-range unmanned aerial systems, and DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missiles, would join the fray. Under such circumstances, especially in the absence of U.S. intervention, he asserts that, "Japan's own combat capacity would be unable to resist such offensive power."¹⁶⁷

War at Sea: Anti-Submarine Warfare

In addition to the more simplistic tactical comparisons above, Chinese commentators have assessed how the JMSDF would plan for a major campaign. Hua Dan, for example, provides perhaps the clearest picture of how Japan would conduct anti-submarine warfare operations in concert with the United States. As an "auxiliary service [辅助性军种]" to U.S. forces in Asia, the JMSDF's "first priorities" are anti-submarine warfare and mine warfare. Hua sees ASW as a prime directive. He categorizes allied ASW operations into four lines of effort. First, an "active offense [积极攻势]" would involve direct attacks against enemy submarine bases, shipyards, and torpedo manufacturing facilities. American forces would conduct strikes ashore while the Japanese maritime service would mine naval ports to close

166 李小白 [Li Xiaobai], "F-35B上舰带给我们那些威胁与启示? [What Kinds of Threats and Messages Does The F-35B Bring to Us?]," 现代舰船 [Modern Ships], no. 3, 2019, p. 30.

167 刘昱 [Liu Yu], "中国航母编队能弹压日本“出云”号么? [Can China's Carrier Fleet Suppress Japan's *Izumo*?]," 现代舰船 [Modern Ships], no. 6, 2017, pp. 43-47.

off points of egress or ingress for submarines or set up ambush areas near the ports with its undersea fleet. Given China's weaknesses in ASW, Japan would be confident enough to engage in such close-in operations along the Chinese coast. Second, a "passive offense [消极攻势]" would involve the control and blockade of key straits and channels along the first island chain. Hua anticipates that the JMSDF would lay mines and dispatch surface combatants and ASW aircraft to form a "tight anti-submarine blockade zone [严密的反潜封锁区]" that stretches north and south from Okinawa. He further observes that allied hydrophones laid on the seabed designed to detect the acoustic signals of enemy submarines would keep track of the undersea threat along the island chain.

Third, an "active defense [积极守势]" would involve what Hua calls "encirclement and annihilation combat [围歼战]." Allied forces would conduct submarine-hunting operations on the high seas akin to those that took place during the Battle of the Atlantic in World War II. It would involve broad area searches for enemy boats and direct attacks against individual submarines. In Hua's judgment, given the vast expanse of the Pacific and the increasing elusiveness of modern Chinese submarines, such ASW tactics are unlikely to yield payoffs.¹⁶⁸ Fourth, a "passive defense [消极守势]" would involve convoying allied naval and merchant shipping. Hua envisions the combined use of fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft and surface combatants to sweep areas and sea routes along which allied vessels would transit and to engage in deception tactics to keep enemy subs at bay.¹⁶⁹

Hua also discusses in considerable detail Japan's offensive mine warfare as an element of its anti-submarine warfare strategy. Due to the highly secretive nature of mine warfare, Japanese official sources have revealed very little about its procurement and storage of mines. However, based on Hua's survey of open sources, he identifies 14 types of mines, including two types of contact mines, four types of bottom mines, three types of influence mines, four types of rising mines, and one type of mobile mines. He rates Japan's mine development and production capabilities as "world class." Owing to a steady production and recapitalization of mines, a relatively low rate of mine consumption through tests and exercises, and the inherent storability of mines, Hua believes that Japan possesses a massive stockpile of mines. Hua's apparent close observation of the JMSDF's ammunition depot construction over the years, in part, explains how he reached such a conclusion.

Hua observes that Japan's development of mines, including eight indigenous designs, illustrates the high value that Tokyo's defense planners attach to offensive mine warfare. To him, such a prodigious investment points to "one core objective—ASW."¹⁷⁰ During the Cold War, Japan had planned to sow large numbers of rising mines (the Type 80 and the Type 91 rocket-propelled mines) in the Tsugaru Strait, the Soya Strait, and the Nemuro Strait, which

168 This judgement conforms to the historical record of ASW operations. Such search-and-destroy operations performed poorly when compared to convoy defense in both World War I and World War II. I thank John Maurer for this insight.

169 Hua Dan, *The Hidden Blade*, pp. 200-201.

170 *Ibid.*, p. 205.

separates Hokkaido from the Kuriles. The goal was to disrupt, if not obstruct, Soviet shipping to and from Vladivostok, the home to the Pacific Fleet, during wartime. The homing mines were aimed at the Soviet undersea fleet. Japan intended to act as a gatekeeper at key chokepoints through which Soviet nuclear-powered submarines would have to pass to reach the open waters of the Pacific Ocean.¹⁷¹ The rocket-propelled mines posed such a threat that they proved to be “the bane [克星]” of the Soviets’ prized undersea forces. The JMSDF’s family of mines thus emerged from the superpower rivalry as the “absolute mainstay [绝对主力]” of Japan’s ASW and blockade strategy.¹⁷²

To Hua, this Cold War legacy continues to influence Japanese operations. He anticipates that the JMSDF would apply similar types of tactics to seal off the southern portion of the Japanese archipelago. In times of hostilities, the maritime service would place rising mines at key chokepoints along the Southwest Islands. By maintaining a defensive line that blunts China’s power projection into the Pacific, Japan would squeeze the PLA’s operational space while keeping open avenues for U.S. offensive operations against close-in targets along the Chinese coast or targets ashore. This division of labor also largely replicates allied plans during the Cold War. The tactical advantages are numerous. Mines never rest. They are difficult for Chinese subs and surface combatants to detect. They are far more efficient than manned ASW operations, which are notoriously difficult to prosecute, capital intensive, and generally not very effective. They reduce, complement, and even replace manpower needs, which are very high for submarine hunting. They would free up resources that would otherwise be tied up in prosecuting ASW missions.

Yet, Hua is also skeptical about the degree to which an ASW-focused, island-blockade strategy is transferable from the Cold War context to a twenty-first century contest against China. For one thing, ASW operations along the Japanese islands have always required coverage of a wide geographic front, stressing Tokyo’s material wherewithal to defend all places simultaneously. According to Hua, the JMSDF must preclude enemy submarines from laying mines along Japan’s long coastlines and from disrupting coastal traffic through interdiction. In wartime, the maritime service would be responsible for defending not only the main straits and channels, but it would also need to keep watch of the various bays near major metropolitan centers where commercial shipping converges. From north to south, the potentially vulnerable areas include Soya Strait, Ishikari Bay, Tsugaru Strait, Sendai Bay, Tokyo Bay, Ise Bay, Wakasa Bay, Tsushima Strait, Kagoshima Bay, Osumi Strait, and Miyako Strait.¹⁷³ While it is unlikely that the JMSDF would have to defend these areas all at once under most circumstances, it is conceivable that a concerted undersea campaign along the

171 For an excellent study on Japanese thinking about defending the straits against the Soviet fleet, see Alessio Patalano, “Shielding the ‘Hot Gates’: Submarine Warfare and Japanese Naval Strategy in the Cold War and Beyond (1976-2006),” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 1, December 2008, pp. 859-895.

172 Hua Dan, *The Hidden Blade*, p. 207.

173 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Southwest Islands—an archipelagic arc spanning more than 1,000 kilometers—could stretch the maritime service’s undersea force to the breaking point.

Even in the undersea domain, an area where the JMSDF has long excelled, the Chinese have begun to see themselves evening the terms of the competition. In a 2016 article comparing Japan’s *Soryu*-class submarine with China’s Yuan-class submarine, Zhang Xinyi challenges the prevailing opinion that the JMSDF possesses an unrivaled diesel-electric boat. To her, the Type-039B Yuan-class submarine boasts a series of world-beating features—including its exterior hull design, sonar arrays, heavy torpedoes, air-independent propulsion, and noise-dampening measures—that put the boat at least on par with the *Soryu*. In terms of sensors, weaponry, and propulsion, she finds that the Chinese sub is superior to that of the Japanese boat. She warns readers not to be beguiled by mythologies surrounding Japanese undersea prowess while succumbing to the temptation to deprecate China’s own achievements. “After all,” Zhang maintains, “China’s technological prowess today is nothing like it was 20 years ago and is even hard to compare to 10 years ago.” She concludes that, “The Type-039B is a world-class conventional attack submarine that truly deserves its reputation as an undersea assassin’s mace.”¹⁷⁴ This is certainly not the tone and language issuing from a diffident analyst, bespeaking a level of confidence that is a far cry from the past.

Hua Dan is similarly unconvinced that offensive mine warfare and its associated operational concepts inherited from the Cold War would yield high payoffs for the JMSDF. The main challenge is scale. The geographic scope of the Sino-Japanese naval rivalry is vastly different from that of the superpower competition. The potential areas of operations have expanded substantially from the Sea of Japan to the East and South China Seas, the wider Western Pacific, and even the Indian Ocean. No longer can Japan devote its resources and attention to a relatively limited number of chokepoints to obstruct passage. According to the JMSDF’s own estimates, mining every strait formed by the 55 islands along the Ryukyus would require 5,000 to 10,000 mines. Hua claims that a close-in blockade of a Chinese naval port alone would demand 500 to 1,000 mines.¹⁷⁵ The need to reseed minefields owing to natural attrition would further add to the material strain on the JMSDF. Given the relatively high per unit cost of rising mines, Hua is doubtful that Japan possesses the stockpile—or the industrial capacity to produce adequate numbers—of rising mines to meet the needs of an island chain blockade.

At the same time, there may be growing allied demands for Japan to conduct close-in mining of Chinese naval ports and even upriver ports, including those located further inland along the Yangzi River. To what extent the JMSDF possesses the flexibility, doctrine, and adequate numbers of the right mines for such missions remain unclear. Moreover, the shallow waters of the Chinese littoral may be less suitable for the maritime service’s weapon of choice, the

174 张馨怡 [Zhang Xinyi], “中日水下战力比拼 [Comparison in Sino-Japanese Undersea Combat Power],” 舰载武器 [Shipborne Weapons], no. 5B, 2016, p. 67.

175 Hua Dan, *The Hidden Blade*, p. 212.

rising mine, which operates best in the deep. Finally, in Hua's judgment, China's increasingly quiet submarines have further eroded the effectiveness of mines.¹⁷⁶ The JMSDF, Hua contends, can no longer assume that the rising mines that had been such a menace to Soviet submarines would be equally efficacious against modern, super quiet Chinese boats. The changing character of the enemy and of naval warfare could severely undermine the premise that has long guided Japanese thinking about offensive mine warfare.

War at Sea: Scenarios

Some Chinese analysts have employed scenario planning tools to illustrate how combat between China and Japan would unfold at sea. Written in the style of Tom Clancy's Cold War-era thrillers, two regular contributors to *Modern Ships* developed an action-filled scenario that imagines a naval conflict between China and Japan. The narrative moves briskly from scene to scene as it describes military decisions and movements on both sides in the fictional crisis and war over the Senkakus. Each scene draws the reader into various tactical situations, including on the bridge of a Type-056 Jiangdao corvette, in the combat information center of a Type-052D Luyang-III destroyer, in the cockpit of a Japanese F-15 fighter, and so forth. The authors bring to life the Chinese or Japanese characters through believable dialogue and interactions with other personalities in each scene, which depicts turning points in the war at sea. From these various vignettes, the storyline prods the reader to piece together the sequence of events, the road to collision, the intense fighting, and the outcome of the conflict.¹⁷⁷

Although the plot is predictable (the Japanese come to grief in the scenario) and the nationalistic tone is clearly designed to appeal to Chinese audiences, the story contains important details about China's path to operational success. First, a Japanese act of aggression triggers the crisis. During a tense standoff around the Senkakus, a Japan Coast Guard ship fires several rounds from its deck gun on a 2,000-ton China Coast Guard cutter, injuring several personnel onboard. A Jiangdao corvette steaming nearby returns fire, damaging the flight deck of the Japanese law-enforcement vessel. Both rivals withdraw temporarily from the scene. But the incident starts a race by Beijing and Tokyo to land forces on the Senkakus.

Second, the *Liaoning* carrier battle group, then located in the Sulu Sea, is ordered to transit north immediately toward the Miyako Strait. The task force is to draw Japanese defenders away from landing operations planned for the Senkakus, relieving pressure on the Chinese amphibious assault force readying to depart its homeport.

Third, a contest for air superiority unfolds in the skies over the East China Sea. Japan's E-2C airborne early warning aircraft and their F-15 escort fighters begin combat air patrols inside

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 210.

¹⁷⁷ 亚尔古水手 国之雪风 [Yaergu Shuishou and Guozhi Fengxue (pseudonyms)], “信天翁望不见的海 [The Seas That Albatross Cannot See],” 现代舰船 [Modern Ships], no. 15, 2017, pp. 38-60.

a no-fly zone that China has declared over specified areas of the East China Sea, defying Beijing's will. Under heavy electronic jamming, the E-2Cs and F-15 fighters are shot down in succession, apparently by China's J-20 stealth fighters.

Fourth, the PLA Rocket Force and Air Force launch cruise missile strikes against Naha Airport, the home of Japanese airpower in Okinawa. A salvo of ballistic missiles follows the first wave of attacks, overwhelming Japan's Patriot missile defense batteries and rendering Naha unusable. China seizes control of the air in about 24 hours.

Fifth, the United States remains aloof, refusing to invoke the security treaty. Leaks to the media suggest that Washington does not see its vital interests at stake in this conflict. The White House issues perfunctory threats of economic sanctions against China, but it is apparent that the American president will do no more than impose non-military costs on Beijing.

Sixth, a brief but lethal war at sea breaks out. Japanese and Chinese naval and air forces clash in an intense exchange of firepower just west of the Miyako Strait. The Chinese lose a frigate, forcing a surface action group to withdraw from the scene. In the meantime, a PLA maritime-strike squadron, composed of JH-7A fighter-bombers and Su-30MKK multi-role fighters, interdicts a Japanese flotilla escorting amphibious assault forces heading toward the Senkakus. The anti-ship cruise missile salvo launched by the Chinese fighters sinks two destroyers, including a *Kongo*-class guided-missile destroyer, and heavily damages another destroyer, upending the Japanese landing operation.

Seventh, a U.S. Air Force reconnaissance aircraft observes the battles from afar and returns to Kadena Air Base, which remains unmolested by the Chinese. It is clear in this late stage of the conflict that the United States has stayed out of the fight. The story hints that the PLA had pledged to spare Kadena in return for American non-interference.

Finally, Japan fails to interdict China's landing forces. A *Soryu*-class diesel-electric submarine that had been quietly trailing the enemy fleet loses contact with its target. The boat is in turn hunted down and sunk by the PLA's anti-submarine warfare aircraft. Last-ditch attempts to foil the Chinese amphibious assault, including the sinking of a PLAN corvette by a P-1 ASW aircraft armed with anti-ship cruise missiles, are unable to make an appreciable difference to the course of events. Within four days of the war's opening shots, the Senkakus fall to the PLA.

One can certainly quibble with the details of the story as told by these Chinese analysts. For example, the ease with which the Japanese are defeated appears implausible. The collapse of Japan's air defense seems premised on very optimistic assumptions. The outcome, then, is over determined. But the scenario nevertheless holds some plausible insights about how a war over the Senkakus could be won or lost by either side and clues about some of the prerequisites for Chinese operational success. Indeed, some elements of China's preferred strategy may be inferred from this narrative.

The proximate cause of the war is Japan's initial use of force, which opens the door for Chinese hostilities. Although the scenario does not explain Japan's action, the China Coast Guard or the PLAN may have knowingly induced or provoked the Japanese tactical commander to fire the first shot. In other words, Japan could have been maneuvered into attacking the Chinese vessel. Alternatively, mounting pressure over the Senkakus standoff, miscalculation, or indiscipline may have led the Japan Coast Guard to use force. Whatever the explanation, Japan's move furnishes China the rationale to act. The opening scene of the scenario fits the pattern of Chinese behavior in past naval crises and conflicts.¹⁷⁸

In the scenario, diplomacy works in concert with Chinese military operations. Japan's apparent role in instigating the fighting gives Beijing leverage to persuade Washington to stay out of the escalating crisis. Or, perceptions, however misguided, that Tokyo is at fault for firing the first shot dissuade the White House from undertaking active measures to help its ally. Such a decision would be especially likely if the administration were disinclined to intervene for reasons unrelated to the crisis. In this scenario, China drives a wedge between the allies by attacking an exclusively Japanese base at Naha Airport while leaving Kadena Air Base unscathed. Such narrowly confined military strikes isolate Japan diplomatically even as they effectively erode Japanese control of the air along the Southwest Islands and over large segments of the East China Sea. Although left unstated in the scenario, Chinese party-state organs would presumably launch a parallel political warfare campaign against various Japanese and American audiences to sow further discord within the alliance.¹⁷⁹

At the operational level, the scenario anticipates an intense fight over the physical and the invisible dimensions of conflict. Owing to Chinese tactics in the electromagnetic domain, Japanese air units struggle to sense their surroundings, making them highly vulnerable, especially to Chinese stealth fighters. Combined with the loss of its major air hub in Okinawa, Japan quickly cedes command of the air, a critical precondition for follow-on Chinese operations. At the same time, consistent with Chinese doctrinal writings on the character of modern sea combat, the naval conflict proves lethal to both sides. Long-range, precision fires enable ships and aircraft to deliver devastating blows in short spasms of violence. The see-saw contest for local sea control continues into the final stages of the war.

In a more operationally-focused hypothetical scenario, a contributor to *Modern Ships* imagines an unspecified incident near the Senkakus that leads to a local war between China and Japan.¹⁸⁰ The article introduces the *JS Izumo*, which had been modified to embark F-35B fighters in this imagined future conflict. The JMSDF forms a task force centered on the *Izumo*, the flagship of Escort Flotilla One based in Yokosuka. In anticipation of

178 See, for example, Toshi Yoshihara, "The 1974 Paracels Sea Battle: A Campaign Appraisal," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 2, Spring 2016, pp. 41-65.

179 See Thomas G. Mahnken, Ross Babbage, and Toshi Yoshihara, *Comprehensive Coercion: Competitive Strategies Against Authoritarian Political Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2018).

180 亚尔古水手 [Yaergu Shuishou (pseudonym)], "辽宁VS出云推演 [Rehearsing Liaoning vs. Izumo]," *现代舰船 [Modern Ships]*, no. 3, 2019, pp. 44-53.

the various air and missile threats in the East China Sea, the flotilla is composed of the *Kongo*-class and the *Akizuki*-class destroyers. To further enhance the fleet's defenses, the *Asahi*-class destroyers of Escort Flotilla Two in Sasebo are ordered to join the *Izumo*. In this scenario, the Japanese flotilla faces a formidable opposition in the form of a nine-ship carrier task force organized around on the *Liaoning*. Given the risks of a head-on collision with the Chinese surface fleet and the threat of land-based missiles and airpower on the mainland, the JMSDF dispatches its forces on the Pacific side of the Southwest Islands to defend Okinawa.

Like the first scenario summarized above, Naha suffers severe damage following Chinese missile bombardment and air raids on the first day of the war. Japanese aircraft that had gotten off the ground and had survived the first rounds of air combat have all been diverted to air bases on Kyushu. The main missions of the *Izumo*'s airpower are to patrol the airspace, intercept incoming enemy fighters, escort aerial early warning aircraft, and contest command of the air. In other words, following the loss of Naha, the *Izumo* task force is reduced to an exclusively defensive role. However, the scenario writer concedes that the introduction of F-35Bs qualitatively tips the tactical military balance against China. The J-20 stealth fighters and the J-16 multi-role fighters are unable to dominate the skies while Chinese early warning, aerial refueling, and electronic warfare aircraft remain highly vulnerable to Japanese carrier-based fighters.

After arriving on station, the *Izumo*'s fighters beat back several waves of Chinese air offensives. But, after 48 hours, it is the last bulwark defending Okinawa. Once the PLA establishes and stabilizes combat air patrols near and over Miyako Island, due west of Okinawa, the *Izumo* has no choice but to withdraw and fall back to the home islands where it could obtain shore-based air cover. Otherwise, the Japanese task force would risk coming under the concentrated fire of Chinese naval and air forces. Unless the United States intervened, the most that the *Izumo* task group could do is to provide cover for retreating Japanese forces and to inflict some costs on PLA operations. The author concludes, "The *Izumo* has the potential to prop up the Self-Defense Force along the Southwest Islands at a critical juncture in the conflict. But this pillar is very fragile. Once it is toppled, the collapse of the defense would be akin to an avalanche."¹⁸¹

This second scenario reinforces the themes of the first. In both instances, the PLA launches a massive suppression campaign against Naha to knock out Japanese airpower. The air and missile strikes cripple the air base in one day and help China seize control of the air. Without command of the air, Japanese defenses crumble. The scenarios appear to assume an unhealthy degree of dependence on Naha and significant brittleness in Japan's air defense posture.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 52.

On a related point, the Chinese appear to lend substantial tactical weight to stealth fighters. In one case, China's stealth fighters are able to pick off Japanese air units struggling to detect threats in a heavily contested electromagnetic environment. In the other case, Japanese stealth fighters serve as a temporary equalizer, keeping Chinese J-20 and J-16 fighters at bay. The latter implicitly acknowledges the superiority of American-built fifth-generation aircraft.

Interestingly, neither scenario envisions an active warfighting role for the *Liaoning* carrier battle group. It serves as a lure, a screen, or as a deterrent. The mere presence of the carrier, however, has an appreciable impact on Japanese options and calculus in both stories. In one instance, the *Liaoning* compels the *Izumo* task force to operate well east of the first island chain. Whether such indirect uses of the *Liaoning* reflect a Chinese aversion to losing a major capital asset is unclear. Even so, creative uses of the carrier could impose costs and deprive Tokyo operational options.

The potential for U.S. military intervention on behalf of its ally is arguably the hinge that determines whether the campaign swings in China's favor or not. In both scenarios, the PLA confines its attacks to Naha and avoids striking U.S. bases in Japan, such as Kadena, Misawa, Sasebo, and Yokosuka. In the first scenario, Chinese constraint is a conscious stratagem to split the alliance. To what extent the authors of the two storylines believe that geographically confined strikes against Japanese forces would dissuade the United States from joining the fray is uncertain. At a minimum, the scripts they have developed suggests a clear recognition that American involvement would significantly complicate the Chinese war effort. To put it another way, the plot would likely be far different if the United States were to intervene. By implication, diplomatic isolation of Japan or an erosion of U.S. sympathy for Tokyo's position would go far to advance China's operational aims.

Chinese Resurgence and Confidence

The literature surveyed above demonstrates that the Chinese study very closely Japanese naval power. Arguably, only the U.S. Navy draws more attention than the JMSDF. Given that many analysts anticipate vigorous Japanese resistance against China's maritime ambitions, this intense interest in Japan's seapower is not surprising. One of the most striking themes to emerge from this review is the skeptical Chinese views of Japan's prowess at sea. The prevailing consensus about Tokyo's leading naval capabilities has given way to a more circumspect and nuanced perspective. Notably, mainland observers have begun to cast doubt on the efficacy of the JMSDF and its ability to prosecute warfighting missions that it has long excelled, including anti-submarine warfare and offensive mine warfare.

Another accompanying theme is the marked upswing in attitudes about China's competitiveness in the maritime domain. Various authors cited in this chapter apparently believe that China would prevail over Japan in a one-on-one contest either in a fleet engagement or in a larger local campaign in the East China Sea. In this context, Chinese writers appear to

have vested much faith in their nation's missile arsenal and its capacity to help naval and air forces seize control of the seas and air in a conflict with Japan. Two analysts contend that China's modern surface combatants have reached parity with their Japanese counterparts. Another even contests the apparent inferiority of Chinese diesel-electric submarines to Japanese boats.

These voices, even if unsanctioned by Chinese authorities, collectively reflect the profound shift in the balance of naval power between China and Japan illustrated in Chapter 2. They bespeak confidence of a great power on the move. A boast quoted above bears repeating: the Chinese navy today is incomparably more capable than it was a decade ago. It is a useful reminder that the many sanguine assumptions Western observers have held about the PLAN for years are no longer tenable. What these writings convey is a foretaste of things to come—and of the challenges Japan and the United States will confront—should China's military continue along this upward trajectory. They are a stark warning about the dangers of complacency among Japanese and American statesmen and commanders.

CHAPTER 5

Implications for Allied Strategy

The foregoing two chapters illustrate how the Chinese perceive the sources of naval competition with Japan and the rapid changes in relative power taking place at the operational level of war. The structural forces for rivalry are virtually irreversible while China's growing naval prowess has conferred warfighting options hitherto unavailable to PLA commanders. This chapter synthesizes the literature surveyed above. It shows how Chinese views of power, geography, national mood, culture, and the U.S.-Japan alliance could influence Beijing's calculus and strategy formulation. Based on this integrated understanding of the Chinese writings, this chapter draws out the implications and consequences for the U.S.-Japan alliance. It highlights how Washington and Tokyo must undergo changes in mindset, strategy, and capabilities to stay atop the naval competition with China.

An Assessment of the Chinese Literature

Chinese defense writers possess an impressive wealth of knowledge about Japanese seapower, ranging from high-level policy down to the tactical and technical details. These commentators have poured over a massive amount of data and have followed well-informed debates in the West and in Japan to provide a comprehensive picture of Japan's naval strategy and operational capabilities. They appear well versed in highly sensitive programs, such as Japan's mine inventory, and cutting-edge platforms, such as the F-35 fighter. To what extent the specialized knowledge exhibited by a few of the authors reflects access to privileged information is unclear. But the literature demonstrates unambiguously that researchers in China are inquisitive and resourceful. In any event, the following clusters Chinese writings around key themes that will have direct bearing on the Sino-Japanese naval rivalry.

Power Matters

Over the past decade, China has overtaken Japan across key measures of national power to include economic size, defense spending, and the quantity and, to some extent, the quality

of naval forces. This dramatic power shift in maritime Asia has had a tangible impact on Chinese perceptions of Japan and of China's relative competitiveness. Japan's once vaunted maritime prowess no longer inspires awe among Chinese commentators as it once did. Japan's naval modernization elicits little of the concerns that characterized mainland writings in the recent past. Bemusement rather than anxiety has greeted Tokyo's plans to embark fixed-wing fighters on its light carriers. Like some of their Japanese counterparts, Chinese observers doubt the prudence of back fitting such a complex platform for another purpose. The JMSDF, it appears, has lost its intimidation factor to Chinese eyes.

Chinese analysts are just as likely to evaluate Japanese weaknesses as they are to assess strengths. The critiques about Japan's unbalanced naval development, which prioritized anti-submarine warfare and mine countermeasures over other missions, are particularly telling. They convey the belief that Tokyo's defense strategy and modernization plans have been excessively subservient to U.S. operational imperatives. To them, such deference led to Japan's junior status to and dependence on the United States. Some believe that, in the absence of American military support, Tokyo lacks an independent capability to defend its full range of interests. Indeed, one analyst doubts whether Japan could protect the homeland against a determined and capable foe on its own—the reason for being of any military. By implication, some Chinese do not perceive Japan as a peer naval competitor.

As the writings shifted their focus to Japan's shortfalls, they have also begun to play up Chinese strengths. They view the PLA's large family of anti-ship missiles as an equalizer, if not a trump card, to Japan's modern navy. There appears to be a shared expectation that the large salvos of Chinese missiles fired at the JMSDF's surface forces in a fleet engagement would deliver a decisive blow. The writings foresee saturation strikes launched from multiple directions by various PLA combat arms overwhelming the defenders. The core of the Japanese flotilla would not survive such an onslaught. Chinese opinion has also changed about Japan's commanding lead in warfighting missions that it previously excelled. Some of the authors, for example, apparently believe that Japan's anti-submarine warfare capabilities may no longer be as potent as they once were. Still others see China not only catching up but also rivaling Japan in the undersea and air domains.

Perhaps most striking, the literature explicitly discusses the possibility of the PLA waging offensive campaigns to seize command of the air and the sea. Chinese naval forces would no longer crouch defensively in coastal waters to contest the adversary's use of the maritime approaches to the mainland. Instead, Chinese writers envision longer-range operations that would extend the PLA's combat radius far beyond China's shores to include the waters immediately west of—and well east of—the entire stretch of the Southwest Islands. Beyond contesting Japan's use of the air and seas, the illustrative scenarios in Chapter 4 imagine Chinese command of the East China Sea after a series of offensive blows against frontline Japanese combat units and bases. Some observers in China believe that Japan's position on the Ryukyus is far more tenuous than previously assumed. Such forecasts are a marked

departure from assessments of a decade or more ago. In short, the Chinese see a substantial erosion in Japan's competitive advantages at sea.

The Chinese recognize the limits to qualitative advantage in naval competitions. They anticipate that Japan will likely struggle to compete and to keep pace despite its longstanding focus on technical excellence. These observations reinforce the insight that competitive advantages are neither permanent nor preordained. Japan and the United States can no longer assume that the former holds an insurmountable lead in areas of competency. Looking ahead, Chinese assessments could shift further as China's naval modernization advances apace. Even if the buildup slows, owing to economic headwinds or bottlenecks in the modernization process, China's naval prowess will still pose a formidable, long-term challenge to Japan's maritime position.

Geography Matters

Japan's geographic position as the northern half of the first island chain looms large in Chinese thinking. The Japanese archipelago is a physical barrier to China's maritime ambitions. It is also the indispensable basis upon which U.S. power projection and the U.S.-Japan alliance rests. It represents the combined power and will of Washington and Tokyo. Japan occupies a commanding position over the approaches to the straits and channels formed by the Japanese islands. Tokyo therefore possesses the latent capacity to choke off Chinese shipping, whether commercial or military in character. The doctrinal and unofficial literature shows that Beijing still regards Japan's geophysical location with considerable trepidation.

The Ryukyus Islands stand out as the epicenter of the maritime competition. Okinawa's central position and its role as the hub of American and Japanese airpower worry the Chinese. The proximity of the Southwest Islands to Taiwan and Japan's ongoing plans to garrison the island chain are another source of concern. The Chinese take seriously Japan's ability to wage offensive mine warfare along the narrow seas and chokepoints.

Yet, Chinese perceptions of such immutable factors as geography have also begun to evolve. They see potential vulnerability in Japan's position along its southern flank. These far-flung islands are hundreds of kilometers from the Japanese main islands, the logistical and material foundation of Japan's defending forces. Should war break out, Japan would have to rush naval forces based in Yokosuka, Sasebo, and other bases to the scene of action. PLA forces could seek to interdict such reinforcements, which must flow across long and tenuous lines of communications.

As noted above, the writings suggest that Japan's wartime position, particularly on Okinawa, may be less secure than once presumed. This is especially true if the United States were to decline to intervene on Japan's behalf. It is not surprising, then, that Chinese analysts anticipate a struggle for command of the commons along this island chain should deterrence fail. Indeed, defeat of Japanese forces around the Ryukyus would likely give way to Chinese

command of the East China Sea and open operational corridors through which the PLA can more freely pass.

The Sino-Japanese naval competition is not only stiffening in the East China Sea, but it is also extending to faraway waters. China's maritime interests have proliferated to the Indian Ocean littorals and to the seas farther west to include the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Chinese anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, which have continued uninterrupted since 2009, and the establishment of a major base in Djibouti reflect China's extra-regional equities and its growing footprint far from home. Japan, too, has committed to a presence in Djibouti while contributing to constabulary missions in the Indian Ocean. Beijing and Tokyo depend on the same sea routes to sustain economic growth. Their dependence on an international public good ought to encourage the two sides to view good order at sea as a shared interest. Yet, some in China apparently see this common vulnerability as a source of competition. To preclude Japan from threatening China's free use of seas, so goes this logic, China must possess the capability to hold hostage, if not cut off, Japan's maritime communications.

Tokyo and Washington must increasingly think about the Chinese challenge at sea in geographically expansive terms. In the event of conflict, points of enemy contact could conceivably stretch from the seas surrounding the Japanese islands to waters off the Horn of Africa. In other words, the allies must consider simultaneous encounters with Chinese naval forces across multiple theaters. A contest for sea control, then, could horizontally escalate far beyond the near seas. Any plausible Sino-Japanese naval confrontation in the future could assume global characteristics.

National Mood Matters

The literature conveys very clearly China's sense of itself in the maritime domain. The writings reflect the confidence and the swagger of a great power on the move. In the past, the Chinese have been somewhat reticent about telegraphing their strengths. They have tended to emphasize their weaknesses and to show how backward they are relative to the West. By contrast, the more recent studies demonstrate that the Chinese are more inclined to reveal China's emerging strengths at sea. This shift runs parallel to Xi Jinping's broader efforts to move away from Deng Xiaoping's injunction that China should "hide its capabilities and bide its time."¹⁸²

This zeitgeist has accompanied China's growing material capabilities at sea. The literature frequently underscores the Chinese navy's dramatic break from the past. It commonly boasts that China is no longer the weakling it was decades ago. Some analysts assert that even the recent past is a poor, if not irrelevant, guide to evaluating China's position today, owing to the tremendous leaps in naval power over the past decade. This apparent

¹⁸² For an assessment of how Deng's formulation relates to Chinese strategy, see Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Master in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), pp. 142-155.

discontinuity implies that China now enjoys strategic options and operational vistas that were previously unavailable to it. Great confidence or overconfidence might predispose Chinese leaders to exercise those options or to exploit those operational opportunities. Such self-assuredness may incline Beijing to challenge Tokyo's prerogatives at sea. It may prod Chinese leaders to consider or to take greater risks than they would otherwise prefer.

National mood, of course, swings in both directions. While decades of economic success have buoyed Chinese confidence, post-bubble Japan has been in the doldrums for as long as China has been on the upswing. Chinese analysts detect not only pessimism, but also insecurity within Japanese society, a polity that has been a stranger to success for a generation. To observers on the mainland, this sense of insecurity has fed into an irrational fear of China, conditioning Tokyo to view every Chinese advance at sea with suspicion. In their eyes, Japan is desperate to preserve its position and to forestall further decline. To them, the Japanese are therefore prone to oppose Beijing's rise as a maritime power. The expected interactions between a confident China that feels entitled to press its claims and a diffident Japan determined not to lose more ground bode ill for Sino-Japanese maritime relations. There is a palpable expectation of competition, if not conflict, across the Chinese writings.

Culture Matters

The Chinese appear convinced that Japan's national character—deeply rooted in its history and culture—has virtually preprogrammed its maritime orientation in ways that are fundamentally inimical to China's interests. Japan is, to some Chinese eyes, irredeemable. As Captain Feng Liang memorably put it, the Japanese possess “expansionist genes.”¹⁸³ The propensity to assume the worst about the Japanese mindset has several implications. If Beijing believes that Japan is implacably opposed to China's turn to the seas, then such a conclusion could harden the prevailing narrative that competition is inevitable. This conviction, in turn, could lower expectations of compromise while cementing the belief that a trial of strength is a more efficacious means for bending Japan to China's will.

Such a deterministic worldview may strike Western observers as anachronistic or idiosyncratic. Some may even be inclined to discount such an outlook as a product of propaganda. But, outside observers should not mistake the cultural and civilizational argument for rhetorical flourish. The frequency with which authoritative and popular writings have expressed this viewpoint strongly suggests that deeply ingrained norms have conditioned the Chinese to think in ethno-nationalistic, cultural, and civilizational terms. The xenophobic attacks against Japan in the Chinese press and other writings are not merely literary devices to score cheap propaganda points or to stir up nationalist feelings.¹⁸⁴ They

183 Feng Liang, *Research on Maritime Security Strategies of Main Countries in the Asia-Pacific*, p. 73.

184 See Michelle FlorCruz, “China's Communist Party Newspaper Releases Video Game ‘Kill the Devils’ With Japanese War Criminals,” *International Business Times*, February 28, 2014. For a thoughtful reflection on China's massive parade in 2015 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Japan's surrender in WWII, see Alec Ash, “China's Military Parade Doesn't Speak the Language of its Youth,” *Foreign Policy*, September 2, 2015.

reflect genuine Chinese antipathy—at least partly rooted in race and ethnicity—toward the Japanese. Some in China clearly subscribe to Huntington’s thesis about the clash of civilizations even if their Western counterparts might recoil from such a cultural argument. It behooves policymakers not to wish away politically incorrect ideas that appear irrelevant or incongruent to the sensibilities of Western observers. They must take China’s worldview and the assumptions behind it, however problematic they may seem to Westerners, with utmost seriousness. Otherwise, they risk underestimating the competitive drivers animating Sino-Japanese relations.

The Alliance Matters

The writings uniformly recognize the centrality of the U.S.-Japan alliance to Japanese security. Whereas Beijing sees Tokyo as a declining competitor, it still views the alliance as a formidable strategic bloc. The Chinese continue to treat seriously the substantial combined military power and influence that the security partnership can bring to bear. The Japanese archipelago furnishes bases and access to U.S. forces that are the foundation of American power projection in the Western Pacific. Washington’s security commitment to Japan represents a powerful deterrent against provocation and aggression. The operational division of labor, tested and refined over decades, maximizes the strengths while mitigating the weaknesses of both allies.

The conflict scenarios imagined by Chinese analysts in Chapter 4 clearly demonstrate the deterrent value of the alliance. China’s hypothetical operational successes hinge on the absence of U.S. intervention. While the scenarios do not explain the causes of American inaction, they are quite clear about the consequences of U.S. noninterference for Japan: a lop-sided conflict in which the Self-Defense Force quickly loses command of the air and seas in the East China Sea to the PLA. Chinese observers implicitly acknowledge that if American forces were to come to Japan’s aid, then they would significantly complicate Beijing’s plans to seize command of the commons along the first island chain, the preconditions for campaign victory.

The literature suggests that China would seek to isolate Japan or split the alliance in any coercive campaign against Tokyo. Beijing could force a wedge between the allied partners in peacetime or in wartime. Such a stratagem would only work if China correctly identified and exploited the seams or weaknesses of the alliance. Ding Yunbao and Xin Fangkun offer some clues to Chinese thinking. They contend that the alliance is neither voluntary nor equal. To them, Washington seeks to control Tokyo via the alliance while Japan is using the alliance to normalize itself in a quest for strategic independence. Such “irreconcilable contradictions” provide an opportunity for China to “divide [分化]” the alliance.¹⁸⁵ While the authors do not spell out specific methods for splitting the alliance, they call for drawing the United States

185 Ding Baoyun and Xin Fangkun, “Japanese Seapower Strategy and Its Influence Upon China,” pp. 40–41.

closer to China through “comprehensive cooperation.” In other words, they believe that inducements to Washington might help to sow divisions within the alliance.

Yet, the writings cited in Chapters 3 and 4 are not always logically consistent about the U.S.-Japan alliance. Some authors express suspicions that Japan is exploiting its partnership with the United States to achieve self-interested aims. They see the alliance as a kind of political cover for Japan to strive for strategic independence and even global ambitions. Yet, others perceive Japanese operational dependencies on the U.S. military that would preclude a viable break with the status quo. The literature also betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of modern American alliances. Some observers appear to believe that the United States dominates the relationship with overwhelming authority and wields an absolute veto on Japanese decisions. They miss the complex, consensus-based rules, norms, and shared understandings that govern the highly institutionalized interactions between Washington and Tokyo. They simultaneously overestimate American leverage and underestimate Japanese autonomy and agency in allied decision making.

At the same time, Chinese analysts seem to adopt an overly sanguine, if not cavalier, attitude about the strength and resilience of the alliance in times of duress. The wartime scenarios in Chapter 4 forecasting U.S. non-intervention rest on a central, but flimsy, premise. They assume that a Chinese missile bombardment aimed exclusively at a Japanese base while sparing an American base would persuade the United States to stay out of a shooting war. They underrate Washington’s political commitment to Japan’s defense and the security treaty, which unambiguously affirms that armed aggression against either ally on Japanese-administered territories constitutes a “common danger” against which the alliance would act.¹⁸⁶ They seem persuaded that U.S. leaders would evaluate the costs and benefits of joining a fight on Japan’s side in narrow, self-interested terms. They overlook the sense of purpose and the operational readiness of U.S. forward-deployed forces based in Japan.

Most notably, they ignore the sizable U.S. military footprint spread across the Japanese archipelago and the degree to which American and Japanese forces are co-located and integrated at major bases and installations. This permanent forward presence, numbering 54,000 personnel, comprises the 7th Fleet, the III Marine Expeditionary Force, and the 5th Air Force, the primary military instruments of U.S. regional strategy in Asia.¹⁸⁷ As such, America’s political leaders and operational commanders are very unlikely to downplay, ignore, or split hairs over an attack on Japan, even if such an assault were confined to Japanese bases. In other words, the notion that China could easily disentangle the United States from Japan at the operational and tactical levels of war stretches credulity. A PLA campaign that aims to keep Washington on the sidelines may be far more problematic than

186 For language of the 1960 U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, see Article V, available at <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html>.

187 In addition to military personnel, 42,000 dependents, 8,000 Department of Defense civilian employees, and 25,000 Japanese workers are integral to the U.S. basing arrangements in Japan. See United States Forces Japan website, available at www.usfj.mil/About-USFJ/.

the scenarios in Chapter 4 presume. It could well backfire. How Chinese policymakers and planners evaluate the potential strategic liabilities of an operational plan designed to isolate Japan is unclear.

Chinese writings assume that Washington's initial decision to stay out of a shooting war between China and Japan would be irreversible. They ignore the possibility that the United States could change its mind and intervene only after it had become apparent that Japan was losing badly or was on the verge of getting knocked out of the war. History suggests that naval hegemons will act decisively to avert an irreparably damaging shift in the naval balance of power.¹⁸⁸ Athens' dispatch of naval forces to defend its ally, Corcyra, which became a proximate cause of the Peloponnesian War; Britain's attack on the Danish fleet during the Napoleonic Wars; and Winston Churchill's wrenching decision to strike the French fleet in North Africa in 1940 were all meant to prevent a major naval contingent from falling into the wrong hands. In a hypothesized Sino-Japanese naval war, Washington might similarly calculate that Japan's impending defeat and the possible neutralization of the JMSDF would bring about an unacceptable correlation of forces in maritime Asia. It might therefore intervene, even if belatedly, on behalf of Tokyo to forestall the emergence of an unfavorable balance of naval power. In short, the breezy Chinese assumptions about America's tottering resolve and the alliance's fragility may be misplaced. More importantly, the literature points to the danger that such misperceptions could lead Chinese leaders to misjudge allied resolve or to discern alliance seams where they do not exist. Hostile Sino-Japanese encounters at sea, then, could be ripe for miscalculations in times of crisis.

The apparent willingness among some Chinese analysts to accept flawed assumptions about the U.S.-Japan alliance suggests that the writings may be following political orthodoxy and cues largely invisible to outside observers.¹⁸⁹ It is conceivable that some experts and commentators are consciously or subconsciously tailoring their narratives and findings in ways that conform to the Party's policy agenda and that appeal to the Party's ideological sensibilities. They may be producing works that they believe are more likely to gain acceptance by the leadership and the public, a dysfunction common in authoritarian societies. This may in part explain the proclivity among Chinese pundits to demonize the Japanese; to play up China's growing naval prowess; to underscore Japan's decline; to exaggerate the lack of allied unity; to describe the alliance relationship as if it were based on a nineteenth-century unequal treaty; and to presume weak resolve on the part of Japan and the United States. Such depictions of China's adversaries may play well to domestic audiences. But the danger is that politically correct answers to complex problems could lead to terrible decisions or reinforce the worst impulses of the Chinese Communist Party and the PLA. These comforting narratives may convince political and military leaders that the Chinese navy was stronger than it really was or that the United States would back down or stand aside when

188 I thank John Maurer for encouraging me to consider historical analogies.

189 I thank June Teufel Dreyer for raising this important possibility.

confronted with a stark choice. Beijing could badly miscalculate and talk itself into a conflict that it otherwise should have stayed out of.

To be clear, the Chinese analysts are neither lying nor presenting false information. The strategic trend lines and the quantitative measures they identify correspond with verifiable data available in Western open sources. Rather, they may be falling prey to analytical fallacies. Owing in part to the political and ideological parameters within which Chinese experts must pursue their research, the inclination to cherry pick, overlook, ignore, or write off information that do not conform to the prevailing wisdom or the “party line” may be more pronounced in China than in the West. That they may be wrong about key judgments, such as the will of the allies, does not necessarily mean that they do not genuinely and deeply hold those views and beliefs. This admittedly speculative interpretation of the literature reinforces a key premise of the study: Western analysts must better understand the worldview, the analytical frame, and the lens through which Chinese analysts filter objective facts and evidence. Outside observers need to take what China’s experts write and say seriously and resist the temptation to wave away the open source literature as mere propaganda or uninformed chatter.

In sum, the material, geographical, ideational, and coalitional factors that Chinese writers have identified above and their possible interactions are likely to have a decisive influence on the Sino-Japanese naval rivalry. If the Chinese prognoses are correct, then Tokyo and Beijing may be headed for turbulence in the coming years. Should the power balance continue to shift unabated in China’s favor, then Chinese confidence or overconfidence could considerably alter Beijing’s risk calculus. In the worst case, hubris could overcome inhibitions, tipping the scales against caution and toward more belligerent action than would otherwise warrant.

Such confidence combined with China’s ethno-nationalistic interpretations of Japanese motives could have an even more distorting effect on Beijing’s decision-making. The belief that Japan’s implacable opposition to China’s maritime ascent stems from prolonged insecurity and a genetically encoded Sinophobia is particularly worrisome. Such perceptions could incline Chinese leaders to consider force as the only recourse to compel Tokyo’s will. For some factions within the Chinese leadership, the imperative to “teach Japan a lesson” might be too tempting to resist. The temptation might be particularly powerful if Chinese statesmen and commanders perceived opportunities to isolate Japan, sideline the United States, or otherwise split the alliance.

The Chinese leadership’s sense of timing could further encourage Beijing to act against Tokyo. As noted in Chapter 1, Xi Jinping has set forth a timeline along which China would progress toward rejuvenation. At some point, calculations of strategic momentum and the correlation of forces might lead the Chinese Communist Party to conclude that the time was ripe to crush Japan and to drive the United States out of Asia. Alternatively, the Party’s perception that it was falling behind schedule could convince Beijing to act more quickly to remove obstacles, such as Japan and its alliance with the United States, on its path toward

national greatness and renewal. China's judgments about whether time favors it or not could in turn interact with the various drivers behind the Sino-Japanese naval rivalry. The bottom line is that the ingredients for deterrence failure and their various combinations exist in abundance. It would be imprudent to write off the possibility that these two powers could come to blows at sea.

Implications for Allied Strategy

The preceding analysis carries important implications for the U.S.-Japan alliance. The capacity of the security partnership to deter aggression is likely to come under more strain as China continues its rapid ascent at sea. Equally worrisome, the PLA is already able to project power across and well beyond the first island chain, deliver ample firepower over long distances, and impose costs on U.S. and Japanese forces. These developments are likely to challenge, if not upend, allied assumptions about escalation dominance and warfighting. Should Washington and Tokyo fail to reexamine these assumptions and undertake corrective actions accordingly, the alliance will likely encounter strategic and operational surprises when deterrence fails. To avoid surprises and even defeat, the United States and Japan must undergo a change in mindset even as they adopt new operational concepts, force postures, and capabilities. The shift, in other words, will need to be as much an intellectual one as it will be a material one.

Allied policymakers must first recognize that a historic power shift has already taken place in maritime Asia. For too long, defense planners and the broader strategic community have focused exclusively on the bilateral Sino-U.S. naval balance while slighting the local dynamics between China and Japan. In the past, when allied superiority and the JMSDF's qualitative advances appeared insuperable, it was easy to take Japan's role for granted. Yet, today, as the balance tilts increasingly in China's favor, Japan's relative decline could emerge as a weak link in the alliance's deterrent posture. Understanding the extent to which Japan has fallen behind, to include how the Chinese perceive the local imbalance, should assume a far more prominent place in allied decision-making. Such a comprehensive estimate must be integral to the U.S. and Japanese calculus about strategy, posture, operations, and competitiveness.

The United States and Japan must renew their commitment to fight and win a war at sea, the *raison d'être* of the allied navies. If the Chinese literature is any indication of Beijing's intent, then China is readying itself for a trial of strength against modern navies in localized high-end combat. The PLAN's growing prowess in high-tech sea combat is not just a problem for the JMSDF. It will have dire consequences for the U.S. Navy as well. As noted in Chapter 2, China's long-range anti-ship missiles pose as much of a threat to American warships as they do to Japanese combatants. Moreover, the allied navies operate similar platforms and systems and share a common understanding of tactics, techniques and procedures. They thus possess comparable strengths and vulnerabilities, including their exposure to the PLA's reconnaissance-strike complex. As such, the many lessons the Chinese have drawn about

Japan are likely broadly applicable to the United States. Indeed, the literature's assessment of a possible clash against the Japanese maritime service could well be extrapolated to a hypothetical hostile encounter with the U.S. Navy and vice versa. To the extent that China's experts engage in such extrapolations, their understanding of the JMSDF could inform their appraisals of the U.S. Navy. In short, China's naval ascent is not only a military challenge to Japan, but it is also a warfighting dilemma for the alliance.

Should deterrence fail, the allies can no longer assume that they would maintain uninterrupted command of the commons. China would seek to contest allied control of the air and seas in the East China Sea. It would also attempt to obtain command of those domains for itself. The allies would not just be fighting to *preserve* command. They would likely be battling to *restore* access and use of the commons lost, however temporarily, to Chinese forces. This prospect represents a major turn of events for the alliance, accustomed as it has been to unrivaled military superiority for the past three decades. Adapting to such new realities will require a clear-eyed estimate of China's naval challenge to Japan and to U.S. forward-deployed forces.

The alliance must accept that it is losing its edge and that the deterioration in its position will accelerate absent changes in operations, doctrine, and capabilities. One source of allied slippage is that modern sea combat in the missile age favors the offense. China's missile-centric strategy poses a considerable threat to Japan's surface fleet and combined U.S.-Japan military bases. Missiles hold at risk fixed sites on bases, including buildings, port facilities, ammunition and fuel depots, radars, runways, and so forth. Major surface combatants with a large radar cross section, such as the *Izumo*- and *Hyuga*-class carriers, are likely more visible to Chinese sensors, allowing the PLA's missile forces to better track and target them. This perhaps explains why Chinese commentators appear indifferent to Japan's light carriers, the centerpiece of the JMSDF's surface forces. The more recent literature suggests that they are rather sanguine about Tokyo's plans to convert the carriers for launching fixed-wing fighters. An article's claim that the JMSDF's carriers would be a "superb target" for China's firepower is particularly troubling.¹⁹⁰

Missile defense only partially mitigates the risks to Japanese forces. Current missile defense systems can only intercept a relatively small number of incoming missiles.¹⁹¹ The massive salvos that the Chinese could unleash against Japanese bases and surface combatants would almost certainly overwhelm fleet and base defenses. The cost-exchange ratio—the cost of the defender's missile defenses compared against that of the attacker's missiles—leans heavily toward the attacker. To obtain a reasonable degree of confidence that the defender can shoot down the inbound missiles, it would need to fire multiple interceptors, tilting the

190 Lian Degui and Jin Yongming, *Research on Japan's Maritime Strategy*, p. 211.

191 See Mark Gunzinger and Bryan Clark, *Winning the Salvo Competition: Rebalancing America's Air and Missile Defenses* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2016).

cost-exchange ratio further in the attacker's favor. The Chinese missile threat thus poses operational, tactical, and resource dilemmas for the Japanese.

Chinese missiles will continue to depreciate the value of Japan's exquisite capabilities—complex and expensive systems designed to wage high-end warfare. Large, multi-purpose platforms, such as Japan's light carriers, will operate in an increasingly inhospitable operational environment as China's missile prowess magnifies their vulnerabilities. To make matters worse, Japanese naval power resides primarily in a relatively small number of capital ships. A concentrated blow against these high-value assets and their resulting losses could cripple the JMSDF. *The risk of Japan losing its fleet in a single afternoon is very real.* This is not mere hyperbole. The Russian navy's crushing defeat at the Battle of Tsushima in May 1905 is illustrative.¹⁹² The Tsar's Baltic reinforcement, dispatched to relieve the Pacific Squadron trapped in Port Arthur, suffered its most grievous losses on the afternoon of May 27. The fleet's near-total destruction, including all battleships, by the Imperial Japanese Navy demonstrated the lethality of naval warfare in the machine age.¹⁹³ The catastrophic loss handed Japan a strategic victory by compelling St. Petersburg to sue for peace. Under certain circumstances, the Japanese maritime service could well suffer a similar fate in the missile age of the twenty-first century.

To hedge against such a danger, Japan needs to rebalance its portfolio of capabilities. Smaller, cheaper, more numerous, and redundant systems, including heavily armed seagoing missile craft, will need to join the exquisite systems to ensure that the JMSDF can absorb a Chinese first strike. More importantly, Japan's maritime service must be able to recover from such a blow and retain its capacity to resist.

To compete effectively over the long haul, the alliance must acquire a better understanding of Chinese weaknesses and Beijing's risk calculus. The allies must then apply pressure against those vulnerabilities and sense of risk accordingly. China is neither invulnerable nor insensitive to risk. Indeed, as the Chinese navy grows in power and in numbers, Beijing will have more to lose in a war, a phenomenon that the allies should exploit. Consider, for example, China's increasingly capable and balanced surface fleet. As Chapter 2 shows, the PLAN has transitioned from a light, coastal force—composed largely of fast-attack craft, submarines, and shore-based aircraft—to an expeditionary navy over the past two decades. It now boasts the full complement of major surface combatants to include carriers, amphibious assault ships, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, and corvettes. In the course of forging this impressive seapower, Chinese leaders have had to expend scarce resources on their naval project in financial, industrial, technological, and intellectual terms. The value they attach to the Chinese navy has no doubt increased in step with the navy's growth

192 I thank Tom Mahnken for suggesting this historical example.

193 During the Battle of Tsushima, Russia lost thirty-one ships out of a fleet of thirty-eight ships and suffered significant casualties, including nearly 5,000 dead and 6,000 captured. See Ronald H. Spector, *At War at Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Viking, 2001), pp. 1-21.

while the leadership's tolerance for sustaining substantial losses to the fleet has likely correspondingly waned.

The PLAN's value to Beijing goes far beyond its material cost, however. Chinese statesmen consumed precious political capital to harness the nation's will to invest in a decades-long naval buildup. They have sought to persuade the public that seapower is an essential ingredient to national greatness. And, the society has embraced naval strength as a symbol of China's ascent. In other words, the navy is not only an instrument of force designed to compel the enemy's will, but it is also intimately tied up with national prestige.

Furthermore, their own bitter history has sensitized the Chinese to the risks of losing a fleet. They understand that a devastating loss at sea could set back a nation's seafaring ambitions by decades. The 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War arguably deprived China of a capable navy for over a century. The naval defeat also exposed the Qing government's incompetence and delivered a major psychological blow against the regime. It set in motion massive social turmoil, such as the Boxer Rebellion, that would grip China and eventually bring down Manchu rule. A naval loss of similar magnitude today could thus do unspeakable harm to the personal reputations of Chinese leaders and the Party's credibility. The voluminous contemporary literature about the First Sino-Japanese War, including reflections by Chinese leaders, suggests that the CCP is acutely aware of the possible consequences of losing a war at sea.¹⁹⁴

The experiences of past authoritarian powers show that regime stability and even survival could be at stake, should Beijing lose its fleet. Tsarist Russia's humiliating loss to Imperial Japan in 1905 triggered the guns of revolution, unleashing political and social turmoil, including naval mutinies, across the empire.¹⁹⁵ The unrest compelled Tsar Nicholas II, desperate to save his dynasty, to implement political reforms. In 1982, Argentina's disastrous loss to Britain in the Falklands War energized popular opposition to the military junta in Buenos Aires.¹⁹⁶ The defeat hastened the downfall of the regime, helping to restore democratic government. These history lessons are unlikely lost on the Chinese Communist Party, obsessed as it is with monopolizing political power.

The idea of risking the fleet is therefore politically consequential to Chinese leaders. Indeed, as capital ships occupy an ever-larger share of the Chinese navy's force structure, Beijing is likely to become more risk averse. To be sure, Chinese leaders may not possess the same sensitivity to risk as Western statesmen. After all, the army remains the ultimate backstop to

194 See, for example, 吴胜利 [Wu Shengli], “深刻吸取甲午战争历史教训坚定不移走经略海洋维护海权发展海军之路 [Learn Profound Historical Lessons from the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 and Unswervingly Take the Path of Planning and Managing Maritime Affairs, Safeguarding Maritime Rights and Interests, and Building a Powerful Navy],” *中国军事科学* [*China Military Science*], no. 4, August 2014, pp. 1-4. Admiral Wu Shengli was formerly the commander of the Chinese navy.

195 I thank Tom Mahnken for suggesting this historical example.

196 I thank John Maurer for suggesting this historical example.

defending China's existential interests. But Beijing is almost certainly *not* impervious to the potential loss of high-value assets in the fleet.

In this sense, opportunities beckon to the alliance. The strategy implication is that while Beijing holds the fleet dear, the allies ought to hold it hostage. The United States and Japan must possess the capacity and capability to inflict crippling losses on China's entire naval fleet in a war at sea. A credible posture that can deliver on the promise of fleet destruction—to reprise the fate that befell the Beiyang Fleet in 1894—could go far to influence Chinese calculations and to deter Beijing. In particular, the alliance's latent warfighting power should seek to dissuade China's leaders from exercising military options, including plans for a surprise attack to seize the battlefield initiative and to preserve the fleet, that have long beguiled PLA planners. The allies must persuade Beijing that there are no shortcuts to victory.

The allies must come to terms with the Chinese mindset about Japan in maritime affairs. If its worldview has hardwired China to assume the worst about Tokyo, as the literature strongly suggests, then no amount of Japanese reassurances or gestures of goodwill are likely to change Beijing's mind. If this hypothesis is valid, then confidence-building measures, including military-to-military exchanges, will only be relevant strictly to tactical affairs while proving marginally beneficial to overall maritime relations. They are likely to have a limited impact on how China perceives Japan and its motives. Suspicion, hostility, and even xenophobia will continue to characterize Chinese attitudes toward Japan. The allies must not only better understand China's belief system, but they must also accept it as a basis for competing in the larger naval rivalry.

On the other hand, some Chinese beliefs are ripe for exploitation. For example, Beijing appears convinced that the alliance is determined to trap China behind the first island chain. The allies should manipulate this sense of claustrophobia. They should leverage Beijing's psychological fears about its geospatial vulnerabilities while maximizing Japan's insular position. For example, an array of anti-access weaponry deployed on the Southwest Islands could tangibly impose costs on Chinese air and naval operations in wartime and potentially deny the PLA its campaign objectives in a conflict.¹⁹⁷ The prospects of such pain might deter Beijing from acting in the first place, thus shoring up deterrence. Although some Chinese judgments about Japan's national character are prejudiced generalizations, others point to valid continuities in Japanese thought and behavior. For example, the Chinese are right about the influence of history and traditions on the JMSDF's institutional identity and practices, the sources of the maritime service's strength and advantage. Japan ought not to be apologetic about its strategic traditions. Rather, Tokyo should embrace them to reinforce its competitive advantages. Japan and the United States must also revive the core warfighting

197 Thomas G. Mahnken, Travis Sharp, Billy Fabian, and Peter Kouretsos, *Tightening the Chain: Implementing a Strategy of Maritime Pressure in the Western Pacific* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019).

tenets that had defined the alliance during the Cold War but had since receded. They must restore a shared operational outlook, including the culture of offensive mindedness, that the U.S. Maritime Strategy of the 1980s had helped to inculcate between the allied partners.¹⁹⁸

Above all, the alliance's strategic and operational integrity is essential to deterring Chinese aggression. It appears that a bedrock assumption of Chinese assessments is that the U.S.-Japan alliance remains the greatest and most credible barrier to China's maritime ambitions. In peacetime, the Chinese see the alliance forming a network of relationships with like-minded maritime partners to encircle China. In wartime, they are convinced that the combined military prowess of American and Japanese forces could thwart the PLA's operational objectives. The allies must do all that they can to reinforce these judgments. To the extent that the alliance can telegraph its indivisibility, the security partnership still possesses substantial reservoirs of advantage to influence Beijing's calculations, limit its options, and introduce uncertainty in the minds of Chinese decision makers.

A Premium on Urgency

The U.S.-Japan alliance confronts a Chinese maritime challenge that is both intellectual and material in character. China is more confident and more capable at sea than it was just a decade ago. Deterrence and warfighting, two key missions of the alliance, will thus be more problematic and will become more so in the coming years. Nevertheless, the partnership remains in a strong position to influence Beijing's calculus and behavior. The Chinese navy's metamorphosis, including the serial production of capital ships, represents a significant liability to the extent that China now has something very valuable to lose that it did not possess before. The alliance must exploit this sense of vulnerability by heightening and sustaining Beijing's worries about losing a politically and materially expensive fleet that had not been in existence ten years ago. An offensively minded allied strategy could pose risks and impost costs that Chinese leaders have not had to contemplate in the past. The alliance would do well to apply unremitting pressure against this emerging fear of loss to dissuade and deter China from aggression and other destabilizing actions. The literature surveyed above also reveals analytical blind spots in Chinese assessments of the overall balance and of the alliance. Washington and Tokyo must do their utmost to disabuse Beijing of its misconceptions about allied weaknesses at the political and operational levels. Consistent, transparent, and regular demonstrations of resolve and purpose must be a prominent feature of the alliance's strategy. Ultimately, the alliance must possess the forces to fight and win a war at sea. Beijing must be persuaded that it cannot win a duel against the allied navies. The scale and speed of China's naval buildup require the alliance to act now on those potential leverage points to stay atop the competition.

198 See, for example, John Lehman, *Oceans Ventured: Winning the Cold War at Sea* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2018), pp. 187-194.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

This chapter concludes with some broad observations for policymakers and strategists alike as they prepare for a far more competitive security environment. First, it is worth reiterating a key theme of this study: the local military balance in maritime Asia matters. There has been an unhelpful tendency in the U.S. strategic community to focus exclusively on the bilateral naval balance between China and the United States at the exclusion of others. While the Sino-U.S. military competition is the most consequential one in the Indo-Pacific, it should not crowd out estimates of other local balances, which are critical to understanding regional security trends, China's relative position, and implications for allied strategy. It behooves Washington to be less self-referential.

A close study of local balances can help policymakers better gauge the intense pressures that U.S. allies face as China continues its rapid ascent as a seapower. It helps observers understand the strategic, operational, force structure, and resourcing choices that allies must make in an increasingly inhospitable nautical setting. It also takes a more accurate measure of latent U.S. power in the region. After all, it is the combined power of American and allied forces that constitutes the totality of the U.S. position relative to China's. Any assessment of the naval balance would be incomplete without aggregating the potential contributions of local navies to U.S. efforts in peacetime and wartime. The fortunes of local powers are thus an essential ingredient to American competitiveness. Indeed, coalition warfare, including its potential to tip the power balance and to isolate the adversary during conflict, is one of the few areas where the United States still enjoys an advantage over China.

Second, the literature surveyed above suggests that much can be learned from the Chinese themselves. Contrary to conventional wisdom, they are quite transparent, particularly if outside analysts know where to look for the debates taking place on the mainland. They communicate clear judgments about their relative strengths and weaknesses and those of their opponents, a sense of the trajectory and speed of China's rise at sea, confidence in Beijing's ability to bend events to its will, and operational details about potential naval engagements against capable foes. While open sources will not answer all questions or solve

all puzzles, the writings should be regarded as an informed debate about current and future developments of the Chinese navy. If consumers of the literature maintain reasonable expectations and a healthy dose of skepticism, then this body of work will not disappoint.

The U.S. strategic community can employ these sources to triangulate Chinese intentions and capabilities by comparing them against other observable empirical evidence, such as the PLAN's order of battle, shipyard facilities, operational deployments, exercises, and so forth. The literature review reconfirms many of the conclusions that the strategic communities in the West have already drawn about Chinese seapower. But it also provides an analytic baseline for measuring change in attitudes about Beijing's prospects at sea. The upswing in confidence over the past decade, for example, corresponds roughly with the growth in naval prowess. Keeping track of the Chinese discourse will help policymakers better estimate the future direction of Chinese naval power and its potential challenges to the United States and allies alike.

Finally, Chinese perspectives of Japanese seapower raise a host of follow-on questions that should be subjected to future research. Analysts can investigate how local experts in Japan and in the United States view the Sino-Japanese naval balance and compare their judgments against those surveyed in this study. Japanese and American assessments, including sharp disagreements with Chinese open sources, could yield fruitful policy-relevant insights. Misplaced conclusions or misjudgments by the Chinese, including underestimation or overestimation of Japanese naval prowess, could reveal intellectual blind spots susceptible to allied manipulation.

A more theoretical research effort could explore the reasons behind the field's apparent neglect of the naval imbalance between Japan and China. Why have changes in relative power of the magnitude demonstrated in Chapter 2 gone largely unreported or unstudied? Is this a function of a lag in perceptions about change? If so, what explains the lag? Did American post-Cold War hegemony, particularly its naval dominance in Asia, help to disguise the shift in power? Or, did common pathologies that plague alliances, including the tendency to take junior partners for granted, contribute to this oversight? Findings from such an inquiry might help alliance managers and researchers to anticipate the predisposition to pass over important tipping points in the regional balance of power.

This study has uncovered a profound reappraisal of China's position and military options as it caught up to and surpassed Japan at an extraordinary pace. Still more, perhaps radical, change could be in store in the years ahead. How much will the power gap between China and Japan widen five years or a decade hence? How might Chinese attitudes about their prospects change as a result? To what extent will Chinese writings provide an early warning to the U.S.-Japan alliance about Beijing's next steps and plans? Given the high stakes involved, policymakers must think ahead about the shape and course of the naval rivalry's next phase.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

A2/AD	anti-access/area-denial
ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
ASBM	anti-ship ballistic missile
ASCM	anti-ship cruise missile
ASW	anti-submarine warfare
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
BMD	ballistic missile defense
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
GDP	gross domestic product
JMSDF	Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force
JS	Japan Ship
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDU	National Defense University
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PPP	purchasing power parity
SSM	ship-to-ship missile
VLS	vertical launch system



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