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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

**CHINA, THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN IN
A CHANGING INTERNATIONAL ORDER:
HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS CHALLENGED
BY THE RISE OF CHINA**

Cem YILMAZ*

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Abstract

This study analyses bilateral relations between the People's Republic of China (China), the United States (US), and Japan by comparing the impacts of historical foundations on the one hand and a prominent contemporary factor, which is the rise of China. The study aims to compare basic historical data and the resilience of these data in the face of a rising China. The relationships among the three actors demonstrate that the historical legacy continues to hold prominence in the Chinese perspective of Japan, while the rise of the actor is prominent in the American perspective of China. Both historical legacy and a rising China factor are dominant in Japanese perceptions of China. The Japanese foreign policy towards China is characterised by a mutual reinforcement of both dimensions, resulting in an overall enhancement of their strength. The study, in this instance, demonstrated that historical parameters become less relevant when a contemporary parameter has the potential to have a major effect on history. The rise of China, which has resulted in a fundamental shift in the international

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order, and the decline in the importance of the historical dimension in the relationships between the actors under examination are viewed as two phenomena that reinforce one another.

Keywords: China, United States, Japan, Rise of China, History

Değişen Uluslararası Düzendeki Çin, ABD ve Japonya: Çin'in Yükselişi ile Aşınan Tarihsel Temeller

Öz

Bu çalışma, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti (Çin), Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Japonya arasındaki ikili ilişkileri, bir yandan tarihsel temellerin etkileri ile diğer yandan son dönemde öne çıkan bir faktör olan Çin'in yükselişini karşılaştırarak analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, temel tarihsel verileri ve bu verilerin yükselen Çin karşısında dayanıklılığını karşılaştırmayı amaçlıyor. Üç aktör arasındaki ikili ilişkiler, Çin'in Japonya'ya bakış açısında tarihi mirasın ön plana çıkmaya devam ettiğini, Amerika'nın Çin'e bakış açısında ise aktörün yükselişinin öne çıktığını gösteriyor. Japonya'nın Çin algısında ise hem tarihi miras hem de yükselen Çin faktörü hakimdir. Japonların Çin'e yönelik politikasında, her iki boyutun karşılıklı olarak birbirini desteklediği ve güçlendirdiği anlaşılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, aynı zamanda, güncel bir parametrenin tarihsel mirasa oranla baskın bir konum elde etmesi durumunda, tarihsel parametrelerin ikili ilişkileri açıklamadaki etkisinin azaldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çin'in yükselişinin uluslararası düzende dönüştürücü bir değişime yol açması ile çalışma konusu oyuncular arasındaki ilişkilerde tarihsel boyutun öneminin azalması birbirini destekleyen iki gelişme olarak ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Çin, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Japonya, Çin'in Yükselişi, Tarih

Introduction

One of the primary theoretical distinctions among the principal approaches within the field of International Relations (IR) is the significance attributed to history within the discipline. Postpositivist theories critique positivist theories for their ahistorical orientation, attributing this to the assertion that positivist theories are universally applicable, independent of

temporal and spatial contexts. In contrast, postpositivist theories centre their attention on the matter of actor subjectivity, investigating various factors that may influence subjectivity, including the historical context. In other words, they deal with how interests are formed in current parameters. Both proponents argue for the significance of interests while they acknowledge the potential for collaboration. However, within the postpositivist perspective, the construction of interests matters as well. In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of an actor's subjectivity and the construction of their interests, it is essential to delve into several aspects, such as the actor's culture, history, ideas, and the character of the decision-makers involved. This process of examination will facilitate a more nuanced comprehension of the subject matter.

Looking back into the historical context, it is typically necessary to analyse relationships between actors, both from the standpoint of academics and decision-makers. However, this does not always imply that today's relationships are solely based on historical legacies. Rather, it is the combination of historical legacy and contemporary parameters, in other words, more recent or current parameters, that matters in getting a comprehensive understanding of regional and world politics and relations between actors.

Examining the trilateral relations among the People's Republic of China (China), the United States (US) and Japan brings up a notable outcome pertaining to the historical foundations and contemporary parameters of relations. Firstly, the Sino-Japanese relationship is marked by a strong historical legacy, particularly from the Chinese perspective. Chinese decision-makers construct their stance against Japan by presenting themselves as recipients of historical victimisation, which can be traced back to the Japanese atrocities that occurred during the late 19th century and the era of World War II (WWII). Likewise, the historical legacy continues to hold significance in the context of US-Japan relations at present. The trajectory of Japan's post-war era was significantly influenced by what came out of WWII, in which Japan was defeated by the US. This defeat resulted in Japan assuming a more passive role in the post-war period. Japan's contemporary foreign policy is commonly characterised as 'dependent,' with efforts made to challenge this perception in response to changes in the regional and global landscape. The historical foundations of US-Japan ties are subject to scrutiny and questioning, albeit to a limited degree.

In contrast, US-China relations, as the most challenging relations of our time, appear to be shaped by a recent

phenomenon: the rise of China and its consequential impact on the security dynamics in Northeast Asia as well as the broader international order. The current state of Sino-US relations appears to be less influenced by the ideological struggle of the Cold War era. The involvement of China as a significant participant in the Vietnam War through its support of the Hanoi government does not currently serve as a prominent determinant in contemporary bilateral ties. Moreover, the two parties united before the end of the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Today's conflict between the two actors mostly stems from the rise of China and its impact on the international order. The rise of China, along with an increasingly assertive foreign policy, undeniably impacts the US' dominant position within the international order. Consequently, the US responds to China's actions. While it is not asserted that US policymakers completely disregard historical analysis, the article argues that contemporary circumstances hold greater significance in the policy-making process. This leads to the conclusion that the parameters that cause shifts in the international order, in our case, the rise of China, resulting in the abandonment of historical legacy. To be more concise, the rise of China generated a new meaning to historical circumstances. The identified conclusion holds relevance in the context of US foreign policy towards China, namely in instances where a shift in the order poses a threat to its own authority and leadership.

It is this outcome of the ahistorical roots of Sino-U.S. relations (at least for the time being) and historical foundations of Sino-Japanese relations that strengthen the US-Japan alliance established in the post-WWII era. Hence, thinking about China, the US, and Japan in the context of Northeast Asian politics and security today necessitates a multidimensional perspective on related history and contemporary parameters.

This study examines the relations among the US, China, and Japan, with a specific focus on comparing their historical legacies and contemporary parameters. This argument posits that historical legacies play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of China-Japan and US-Japan relationships but have had a diminished influence on the latter relationship in recent times. However, the same does not apply to US-China relations. Rather, the rise of China, a transformative phenomenon with foreign trade surpluses over a span of two decades, a high volume of outward foreign direct investments and the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has profound implications for the international order and the US role in the order. These developments have played a crucial role

in shaping the current positions of both China and the US on the global stage. The rise of China, coupled with its military expansion, has resulted in a reduced influence on the US in the global economy and politics. Hence, the study argues that both history and contemporary parameters affect foreign policy in this trilateral relationship. From a US standpoint, the present parameters hold greater significance compared to historical ones, particularly in relation to the perception of China's emergence as a threat. Moreover, the research illustrates that despite the focus on current aspects of US-China ties, US policymakers take advantage of the enduring hostility between China and Japan, together with Japan's historical loyalty to the US. In other words, history might be a legacy in a particular case and might be a useful means in another case. Finally, it is our main finding that structural shifts in the order might lead to the abandonment of historical legacies.

The essay commences by providing a clear elucidation of the role of history within the realms of IR and the process of formulating foreign policy decisions. The subsequent section delves into the dynamics of Sino-Japanese relations, followed by an examination of US-Japan relations, and ultimately concludes with an analysis of US-China relations.

Theory and Methodology

First and foremost, the place history holds in IR is partly about the debate between positivism and postpositivism. The postpositivist move in the early 1990s argued that perceptions and subjectivity matter. Postpositivists claim that history is a means to grasp and interpret the current situation and to make comparisons with today in contrast to positivists' ahistorical stance. Hence, history is a means to construct one's own point of view that leads to the construction of policy and strategy. It is to be noted that an earlier version of this debate occurred between traditionalism and behavioralism in the 1960s. Traditionalism and the English School advocated for the importance of historical context, while behavioralism emphasised the use of quantitative methodologies.

The relationship between history and policy is a complex and multifaceted one, often characterised by its diversity and potential for misinterpretation. There exists a disparity in the ability and intention of policymakers and decision-makers to interpret historical data uniformly. Historical data, by their nature, are subjective and open to interpretation. As a result, policymakers incorporate their own judgements when analysing and utilising such data (Brands and Suri, 2016). They do not

intend to take history in a scientific manner, but rather, they are practical. Historical data is simply an input in determining strategy (Vertzberger, 1986). Hence, history is a means that plays a role in determining today's foreign policy decisions, rather than history as an academic discipline.

Secondly, while we are studying to what extent history touches on the foreign policy-making process, we are not interested in every bit of historical data. Instead, we deal with the main historical data, such as the outcomes of WWII, the alliance structure of the Cold War, or the end of China's alignment with the Soviet Union.

Thirdly, we should stress that when we talk about contemporary developments, it is the outlook of the time this study is conducted. Therefore, we acknowledge that the contemporary parameters will serve as the future's historical records.

Finally, Figure 1 illustrates the basic motivations and strategies employed by the three actors in their interactions with one another. It encompasses both historical and ahistorical factors, the latter referring to recent motivations. One may observe the presence of historical animosity in Beijing's approach towards Japan, whereas recent factors play a predominant role in shaping its relations with the US. The figure concurrently presents a concise overview of the research outcomes discussed in the article. Briefly, it can be argued that the current dynamics between the three entities can be attributed to either a historical heritage or more contemporary factors, with the rise of China being the predominant factor. The figure depicts the extent to which historical legacy and the rise of China contend with one another in shaping today's relations among the three actors.

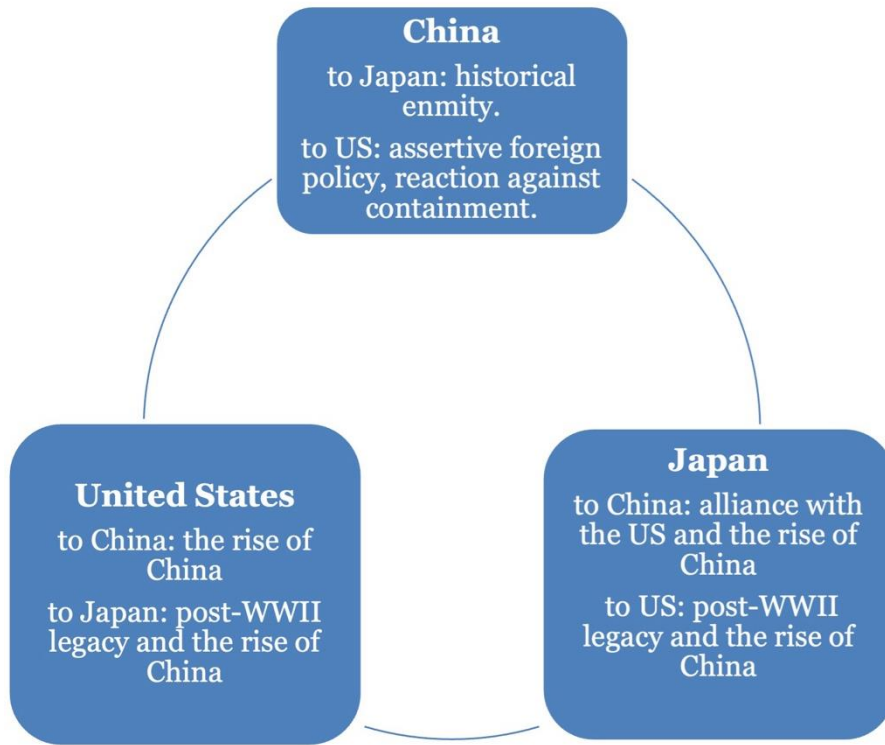


Figure 1. Basic motivations in bilateral relations of China, the US and Japan.

China and Japan

Blanchard and Lin (2013) highlight the utilisation of historical references by Chinese foreign policy makers as a strategy to legitimise their stance and policies. This is observed through the frequent incorporation of historical references in official announcements and documents. However, it is possible that both parallels and contrasts exist when comparing the present with the past. Hence, ‘... it may be most fruitful to understand the connection between Chinese foreign policy and history with a mix of approaches’ (Blanchard and Lin, 2013, p. 166).

The primary historical paradigm that underpins present Chinese foreign policy is commonly referred to as the ‘Century of Humiliation.’ The notion represents the highest level of developing consciousness to prevent a recurrence of subjugation by the Western nations and Japan. The establishment of the ‘National Day of Humiliation’ seeks to cultivate a deeper comprehension of the historical challenges that China has faced as a result of imperialistic invasions since the 19th century, with the ultimate goal of preventing their

recurrence. China's 19th century was dubbed the 'Century of Humiliation' due to the occupation process and humiliating treaties of Nanjing (1842) and Tianjin (1858) signed as the outcomes of the First and Second Opium Wars. The main motive of this definition is to raise awareness among the Chinese people and future generations about the significance of prosperity and empowerment. In other words, a tradition has been established in order to eradicate errors and deficiencies. Callahan (2010) argues that the National Day of Humiliation forms the basis of Chinese nationalism. As of 1927, when nationalists were given a voice in state sovereignty, national humiliation also assumed an official dimension. 26 distinct days, primarily in May, were designated as the day of humiliation.

'A long period of military conflict from the end of the nineteenth century is often used as a referent point for the emergence and subsequent persistence of China's Japan image' (Uemura, 2013, p. 106). Chinese policymakers believe that Japan may exhibit similar behaviour as it did throughout the period spanning from 1895 to 1945, despite notable disparities in both domestic and international contexts. Comparing historical data and present conditions, including Japan's limited but lately advancing military capacity in the post-WWII era, Chinese policy makers give more credit to history. From their point of view, Japan has neither shown real regret nor presented a real apology for its atrocities in the past. The apology delivered by Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995 is widely considered to be a highly substantial expression of remorse. Notably, this apology was of a generic nature and did not specifically target China. Furthermore, the tone employed in the apology was characterised by its ambiguity (Mosher, 2023). Consequently, the apologies proved ineffective in rectifying the harm inflicted by Japanese wrongdoing.

Eventually, an increasing sensitivity emerges around the issues of sovereignty and security both generally and in relations with Japan (Blanchard and Lin, 2013). Beijing may not necessarily be accurate in this analysis, but what matters is that this is the outcome of their analysis, which constitutes today's strategic culture towards Japan, which is based on the term 'victim mentality' (Uemura, 2013). This might be a result of the abstraction of past events or the construction of legitimacy for the current policy (Vertzberger, 1986).

This analysis should not lead to the dismissal of a more contemporary perspective. The strategic value of Japan as a key ally of the US, coupled with its active participation in the US

strategy of containing China, plays a pivotal role in shaping China's policy towards Japan. Therefore, it is possible to discuss the amalgamation of historical and contemporary elements in Beijing's strategy towards Tokyo. Moreover, when confronted with the challenges posed by modern elements, historical context can serve as a valuable resource or justification, as discussed in the theoretical framework section, rather than merely a repository of past events or genuine historical means.

During the Reform and Opening period in China, the Japanese government played a significant role by providing considerable financial loans for the purpose of fostering economic development. This support was particularly evident during the 1990s when Japan actively encouraged direct investment and offered assistance to critical industries such as energy and transportation. The goal has been to enhance interdependence and capitalise on the ascent of China. Johnstone (1998) labels this policy towards China as engagement. 'China's size and proximity limit Tokyo's options and give it strong incentives to seek accommodation rather than confrontation on issues of concern' (Johnstone, 1998, p. 1080).

From an economic perspective, the rise of China signifies a notable surge in profits for Japanese investors. It is worth noting that China has emerged as Japan's largest trading partner since 2007, so supplanting the US in this regard (Chiavacci, 2023). But security heads off the economy when security-related events occur. In this context, the August 1995 nuclear test of China marks a negative turn in bilateral relations. The military exercises conducted by China in close proximity to Taiwan during the month of March 1996 were perceived by the Japanese as a potential source of concern and apprehension. In the aforementioned year, individuals with right-wing affiliations from Japan undertook a landing operation on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, coinciding with the 65th commemoration of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (Johnstone, 1998).

Despite being major trade partners, the second and third-largest economies in the world stand on different sides in regional economic integration initiatives. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is an initiative that emerged as an extension of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC). It was conceived with the intention of serving as a counterbalance to the growing influence of China in the region, with the underlying objective of excluding this particular actor from the partnership (Ye, 2015). However, as an initiative pushed and led by the US, things changed rapidly with the withdrawal of the US from TPP in 2017. TPP has undergone a transformation and is

now known as the Comprehensive and Progressive TPP (CPTPP). In September 2021, China submitted its application for membership to the CPTPP; however, its acceptance of the agreement is still pending. It is worth noting that Japan is currently a member of both the TPP and the CPTPP. In addition, Japan turned out to be a proactive player in world trade in the absence of the US (Chiavacci, 2023).

Ye (2015) claims that ‘Asian regionalism has focused on economic cooperation but invariably implied political and strategic importance. Power alignment, the “China threat,” and the rise of China had been among the underlying drivers of regional initiatives in Asia’ (p. 209). The increasing assertiveness observed in the South China Sea and the Taiwan issue has resulted in the emergence of a discourse suggesting that China has become the foremost strategic challenge for Japan (Kyodo News, 2023). The 2014 legislation for eliminating the constitutional barrier and for a more active and advanced military identifies Beijing as a threat while indicating that if Japan or a close ally is assaulted, it is vital to the country’s survival (Al-Badawi, 2023). Additionally, China’s alliance with Russia, the aggressor against Ukraine, is regarded as a major variable from the Japanese perspective. It is the most recent and clear variable that China may act the way Russia did against Ukraine (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2022). The fact that Beijing abstained from condemning Moscow in the United Nations Security Council is regarded as an indirect endorsement of the invasion (Carlson, 2023). The National Security Strategy of Japan (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2022) emphasises the actions of China in close proximity to Japan, namely in relation to Taiwan and the East China Sea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2022). Finally, geography is a major data in Japan’s China relations, which Americans have the option to ignore. Japan finds itself in a precarious situation with regard to its engagement with China and the management of disagreements, while the US may adopt a more assertive stance (Johnstone, 1998).

As a result, considerations of historical legitimacy are the main factors guiding China’s policy toward Japan. History is simply an input in formulating policy. Additionally, there is the contemporary aspect of countering the joint containment policy pursued by Japan and the US. For Japan, there is a combination of a set of elements. US alliance depended on the outcome of WWII, strengthening the military infrastructure due to the rise of China, increasing importance given to regional alliances, and the search and debate for an independent foreign policy. The

subsequent section will delve into an examination of the Japanese perspective.

US and Japan

It is widely acknowledged that there exists a substantial historical foundation between the two actors, originating from the aftermath of WWII (Figure 1). In light of its role as both the aggressor and defeated party in the War, Japan was compelled to agree to treaties aimed at preventing future acts of aggression. The Security Treaty established in 1951 between the US and Japan, which was subsequently replaced by the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security in 1960, grants permission for the deployment of US armed forces within the Japanese archipelago. Additionally, this Treaty imposes upon the US the responsibility of defending Japan in the event of an attack. It is important to note that these treaties effectively abolished the Imperial Japanese Army (Al-Badawi, 2023). The Treaties promptly incorporated the strategic approach of forging alliances with the Western world during the Cold War and placing emphasis on economic advancement, widely recognised as the Yoshida Doctrine (Hoshiro, 2022). The staunch allegiance of Tokyo to Washington is reflected in its role as a supply depot throughout the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Arising from the US commitment to protect Japan from a possible attack, US forces have been deployed in the Japanese archipelago, enabled by the Status of Forces Agreement (1960) between the two. As of 2020, number of bases in Japan is 120 and number of troops is more than 53 thousand. Both figures are among the top globally (Hussein and Haddad, 2021), and the scrutiny of the magnitude of US military deployments by Japanese society and decision-makers has persisted for around a decade now.

Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, which was imposed by the US immediately following WWII, prohibits the State from engaging in war and sets limitations on the establishment and maintenance of armed forces. However, the end of the Cold War, the shifting security dynamics of Northeast Asia, with North Korea's nuclear activities, the rise of China and reflections on its assertive foreign policy and rapidly advancing military infrastructure, led Tokyo to reconsider the status quo. In the meantime, as previously mentioned, the rise of China entails a proportional diminishment of the US's influence, so impacting and reshaping the international order. Therefore, Tokyo finds itself in a position where it must reassess its status, notably in the realm of security, due to an ongoing structural transformation.

A set of meetings held with Washington regarding security matters led to the establishment of 'The Guidelines for Japan-U.S Defence Cooperation' in September 1997. These guidelines aimed to secure Tokyo's provision of logistical and rear-area support in the event of a conflict occurring in the vicinity of Japan. The Guidelines were met with dissatisfaction by Beijing due to their direct and novel implications for the Chinese government. The intensified discussions in Japan on the potential risks of abandonment and the establishment of a more autonomous security strategy have been prompted by various factors, including China's increasing assertiveness, the US withdrawal from the TPP, and the Trump administration's prioritisation of an 'America First' policy. Furthermore, the meeting between President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has further contributed to these debates (Liff, 2019). Nevertheless, as Liff (2019) argues, the relevant data indicates that 'Balancing and tightening security alignments with Washington and US security allies and partners while simultaneously bolstering its own indigenous capabilities have been, and continue to be, the dominant trends, in Japan's China strategy' (p. 457). Liff's (2019) research highlights the crucial aspect that Japan did not pursue the dilution of its alliance with the US without concurrently striving to bolster its own military might and establish regional security structures. Despite Tokyo's inclination towards maintaining a certain level of autonomy in the realm of security, the escalating danger posed by Beijing has resulted in mounting pressure from Washington to enhance its cooperation and obligations. Japan is currently in the process of adjusting its security structure in light of the perceived threat presented by China, independent of any influence imposed by the US. The 2017 Defence White Paper of Japan extensively examines the perceived danger posed by China, dedicating 34 pages to this topic. Additionally, the document emphasises the significance of the alliance between Japan and the US, allocating 50 pages to this subject matter (Liff, 2019). Johnstone (1998) highlights the enduring state of tension and entrenched mistrust characterising the bilateral relations between the US and Japan with China and emphasises the need to identify a resolution to address these challenges.

The government formed by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009, which succeeded the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), aimed to pursue a foreign and security policy that was more autonomous in nature. Nevertheless, the resignation of Prime Minister Hatoyama within a span of less than a year, as well as the subsequent prime ministers from the DPJ, resulted in a reversal of the aforementioned policy (Liff, 2019).

Despite efforts made during the period from 2009 to 2012, it would be inaccurate to classify this era as a realignment. Instead, it can be more accurately characterised as a period of reinforcing the alliance with the US (Liff, 2019). The succeeding government was a coalition between LDP and Komeito, with Shinzo Abe as the prime minister. Abe pursued a strategy of maintaining the alliance policy while simultaneously expanding regional security partnerships with countries such as Australia, India (via QUAD), the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia. This approach was undertaken as a means of promoting multilateralism in close coordination with Washington (Liff, 2019). The 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' policy, which was introduced in 2016, serves as an indicator of Japan's initiative to promote peace and security within the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2023). The loan agreement amounting to 18.7¥ billion with the Philippines in 2013, as well as the grant of 500¥ million provided to Vietnam in 2014, both nations being competitors of China in the South China Sea, can be seen as indicative of Tokyo's regional position (Baş, 2023).

The relocation efforts undertaken by Tokyo to transfer a portion of the US military forces stationed in the Japanese archipelago; specifically Okinawa, indicate a notable shift in Tokyo's foreign and security policy. The relocation endeavours do not obviate the policy of guaranteeing the continued presence of the US armed forces in the region. This emerging trajectory highlights the potential existence of converging challenges, notably from China, while also acknowledging the presence of divergent viewpoints. Japan, being situated at the forefront of a potential conflict, may find itself in a different position compared to the US, which could potentially choose to hold a distance in light of official obligations allowing for flexibility or due to Washington's preference to act contrary to its commitments. Furthermore, the US has undergone a significant shift in its alliance policy since the conclusion of the Cold War. The alliance policy in Washington exhibits a higher degree of flexibility, emphasising the need for risk sharing (Baş, 2023). Nevertheless, Chavacci (2023) argues that characterising Tokyo as a passive victim in the dispute between the US and China would be a mistaken perspective. Tokyo is exerting pressure on Washington to adopt a more confrontational stance against Beijing.

In 2012, Tokyo undertook a major move before the commencement of the second term of Prime Minister Abe. This action involved the nationalisation of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which were formerly under the ownership of a private Japanese landowner. The Islands are currently subject to

territorial claims by the Chinese government, leading to an increasing presence of Chinese Coast Guard vessels conducting patrols in the region of the Islands (Prabowo, 2023). Additionally, in 2013, Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates Japan's WWII death, though he was not the first prime minister to visit the Shrine. The visit elicited criticism both from Beijing and Washington (Chiavacci, 2023). The potential impact of this event on Chinese perceptions is that it may have reinforced the notion that there is a persistent possibility of a resurgence of Japan reminiscent of the WWII era. Moreover, it may further weaken the perceived value of apologies that are already considered inadequate.

Shinzo Abe held the belief that there was a necessity for a shift towards a more security-oriented approach to Japanese foreign policy. This perspective was influenced by the perceived decline of American hegemony, the weakening of the liberal international order, and the deteriorating balance of power in East Asia. Japan did not have the option of remaining passive in the face of these difficulties (Baş, 2023). Chiavacci (2023) takes a similar stance, claiming that Abe, with his revisionist leanings, sought a remilitarised Japan. It can be observed that military expenditure has been seeing a consistent upward trend since 2012, with the notable establishment of a Space Operations Squadron in the year 2020 (Launch of the Space Operations Squadron, 2020; Prabowo, 2023).

In 2014, article 9 of the Japanese constitution, which prohibits the state from engaging in war, was reinterpreted in response to opposition to its revision (Prabowo, 2023). The expansion of the tasks of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) and the facilitation of military enlargement were made feasible by the implementation of the 'International Peace Support Law' and the 'Legislation for Peace and Security' (Prabowo, 2023). The legislation granted the JSDF the authority to engage in collective self-defence measures in support of allied nations (Al-Badawi, 2023).

The revisionist policies implemented by Prime Minister Abe, such as the decision to increase the military budget in 2012, have been continued by the subsequent administration led by Fumiyo Kishida since 2021. This continuity is evident in the renewed National Security Strategy and the projected growth of Japan's military budget, which is expected to be ranked as the third largest globally by 2027 (Al-Badawi, 2023; Prabowo, 2023). The data presents a significant disparity wherein the constitution incorporates a provision that specifically forbids the state from participating in warfare and upholding a permanent military force. However, it is to be noted

that the process focuses on deterrence and contributing to the containment of Beijing. Despite the ongoing expansion of Japan's military capabilities, it remains significantly distant from attaining a competitive standing in relation to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Prabowo, 2023).

The aforementioned data serves to demonstrate that the Yoshida doctrine has reached its culmination in the realm of Japanese politics. It can be inferred that Tokyo was able to modify its security and military policy in response to China's growing influence and assertiveness without a constitutional amendment. The alignment of historical and contemporary characteristics is apparent in the context of US-Japan relations. The historical legacy of WWII has served as a catalyst for the convergence of the two actors, while the current trajectory of the rise of China is anticipated to further bolster the alliance between them. For Japan, history serves both as an opportunity and a burden. For the US, the post-WWII legacy serves as a means that guarantees the Japanese alliance against China. Meanwhile, there exists a pragmatic aspect wherein the US strategically leverages the longstanding animosity between China and Japan.

The US and China

Brands and Suri (2016) assert that policymakers in the US utilise historical data as a method to gain a deeper understanding of international politics and the challenges they entail. This method enables policymakers to employ well-established concepts to address novel and intricate challenges, leverage prior knowledge to reflect upon current issues, and proficiently articulate and advocate for their policies. One notable example of a significant factor in addressing contemporary challenges is the Vietnam War, which is commonly associated with the Vietnam syndrome. For those in particular, it serves as a reminder of the necessity to adhere to the constraints imposed by the limits of power (Brands and Suri, 2016). This parameter is critical within the actor's relative declining conditions. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge that history, particularly the enduring effects of the Cold War, is a fundamental component of US foreign policy. However, it is presently problematic to assert that it overwhelmingly dictates the formulation of foreign policy vis-à-vis China. Over the past four decades, China has experienced an immense expansion that has had a transformative impact on historical dynamics (Curtis, 2010). This poses a challenge to the US position within the international system, which constitutes the primary basis for its opposition to China.

Two primary historical data items hold significance in the context of US-China relations. The initial conflict pertains to the ideological animosity of the Cold War, which is evident in the military confrontations that occurred during that period, namely the Korean and Vietnam Wars. According to Iriye (1982), from a US perspective, the presence of communism in China was an essential barrier to the formation of an alliance during the post-WWII era. The second pattern pertains to the rapprochement between the two entities following the Sino-Soviet split. The perceived significance of reconciliation from the US' standpoint may have experienced a decline subsequent to the conclusion of the Cold War since many viewpoints contend that the Soviet Union's defeat has reduced its relevance. Moreover, it can be observed that the rise of China has diminished the phenomenon of convergence that was prominent during the 1970s. Primarily, the two actors exhibit contrasting political and ideological belief systems. This paves the way for China to become an outsider in the global security network (Boylan et al., 2021). Due to the systematic contrast and the rise of China,

... the United States is reinforcing alliance partnerships with several countries in the Asia-Pacific. The US maintains formal treaty commitments with Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, and it has informal but increasingly important security and defence partnerships with countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam (Maher, 2018, p. 505).

Maher examines the emergence of a bipolar world system subsequent to the conclusion of the Cold War, wherein China and the US engaged in a confrontational dynamic. He draws parallels between this contemporary confrontation and the historical antagonism between the US and the Soviet Union. One notable distinction lies in the fact that the Soviet Union posed a major and imminent security challenge to Europe, whereas China does not possess comparable characteristics in terms of proximity and level of risk (Maher, 2018). Given that Beijing did not establish and is unlikely to form a security organisation comparable to the Warsaw Pact and the intensity of regional and global economic interdependence, the characteristics of the confrontation differ substantially (Maher, 2018). However, according to Carlson (2023), these disparities do not prevent bilateral relations from being called 'superpower rivalry' (p. 53). The perception of risk is seen as an upward trend due to the declining relations between the two entities.

‘The Pacific basin now absorbs more American trade and investment than does the Atlantic’ (Weinstein, 1982, p. vii). The US represents the primary destination for China’s exports. When examining China’s substantial ownership of US Treasury bills, it becomes evident that a thorough interdependence exists between these two prominent powers. However, it is important to note that the current circumstances do not negate the fact that China is experiencing an immense and ongoing expansion of its military capabilities, both in terms of quantity and quality. As Kawashima (2017) notes ‘... from the end of 2013 through 2014, when China established the ADIZ [Air Defence Identification Zone] in the East China Sea and began to adopt a firm policy in South China, US posture towards China hardened...’ (p. 29). The phenomenon of ‘offshore expansion’ prompted certain neighbouring countries of China, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, to adopt a more cautious approach in their dealings with China and instead bolster their connections with the US.

According to Carlson (2023), the primary sources of contention encompass trade, technology, divergent perspectives on regional problems, and the evolving global order. The BRI and the newly established financial institutions by China, namely the Silk Road Fund and Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), appear to embody a corporate endeavour that poses a challenge to the international order. The challenge directly influences the risk perception of decision-makers in the US. The current state of bilateral ties appears to have deteriorated considerably with respect to risky military engagements in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, trade conflicts, and the unresolved Taiwan issue. These areas of concern are also the primary reason why Western circles characterise Chinese foreign policy as assertive. The US authorities exert considerable efforts to discourage their allies from associating with Huawei Technologies and its telecommunications counterpart, ZTE. This is primarily due to the accusation that these companies collaborate with Chinese security institutions in sharing sensitive data (Boylan et al., 2021).

Carlson (2023) claims that ‘both elite opinion and the public opinion have shifted toward the view that a more confrontational approach toward China than the engagement strategy of the past few decades is now necessary’ (p. 57). Therefore, the Trump administration characterised the relationship with China as ‘strategic competition,’ whereas Biden has characterised it as ‘extreme competition’ (Carlson, 2023). Simultaneously, it might be argued that the engagement

policy and the rebalancing strategy pursued by the Obama administration failed to yield favourable results for the US, therefore necessitating the adoption of more strict constraints (Carlson, 2023).

The year 2018 witnessed the initiation of a trade war by the Trump administration, primarily characterised by the imposition of tariffs on Chinese imports. This was accompanied by the implementation of further regulations targeting Chinese espionage activities, intellectual property infringement, and technology transfer. The 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy was officially adopted in the year 2020, encompassing the implementation of freedom of navigation operations (FONOP) (Carlson, 2023). FONOPs have been carried out in a unilateral manner, devoid of any involvement from regional allies.

In the meantime, the US aims to leverage the NATO alliance to incorporate European member states into its policy approach towards China. In the year 2021, a notable occurrence record was placed within a NATO communique, marking the first instance of China being explicitly referenced. This event coincided with the first summit in which President Biden participated. The aforementioned communique sent a collective call to action, urging member nations to unite in opposition to the escalating military capabilities exhibited by Beijing (Siebold et al., 2021). This orientation is critical since it reflects an intention to expand its original area of interest from the North Atlantic to Asia Pacific. Nevertheless, there has been a lack of specific actions taken to effectively address and meet this emerging trend.

The Biden administration has implemented a distinct policy of including NATO in the US-China confrontation, which marks a notable departure from the approach taken during the Trump period. It is important to acknowledge that the tariffs that were adopted during the Trump era have not been relinquished in the Biden era (Carlson, 2023). Consequently, a discernible divergence in approaches has been observed between the two presidents in their dealings with China. However, it remains difficult to discern a notable disparity in their respective policies towards China.

Furthermore, the attitudes of the US Congress towards China and Taiwan, regardless of the governing party, serve as significant indicators of foreign policy. This is exemplified by various events, such as the visit of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in August 2022, the visits of a US Congressional delegation in September 2022 and June 2023, and the meeting between House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen in California in April 2023.

The attitude of Congress is shaped by the ‘Taiwan Relations Act’ (TRA), which serves as the formal legislative instrument designed to maintain a delicate equilibrium in the trilateral relations involving the US, the Republic of China (ROC), and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). This equilibrium was established following the recognition of the PRC and the subsequent withdrawal of recognition for the ROC. The TRA pledges to adhere to the One China policy and support Taiwan in maintaining its self-defence capabilities. Additionally, it aims to facilitate the interoperability of the military forces of the US and Taiwan while also opposing any unilateral actions that may undermine the status quo in the region. ‘Statement of Policy and Sense of Congress on the Taiwan Relations Act’ (2021) represents a reaction to the implications arising from China’s increasing influence and its confrontational approach towards Taiwan. As China poses a greater threat to US power in the international system, the Taiwan issue becomes increasingly important for the US to address. It becomes a useful instrument for intimidating China by aligning with Taiwan via de facto recognition techniques. The existence of high-level meetings and intensive interactions between the administrations of the US and Taiwan serves as evidence of this assertion. Furthermore, the Biden administration has granted approval for a military sales agreement worth 1 billion US dollars to Taiwan, with a significant portion of the sales being towards the procurement of radar systems intended for air defence purposes (Lee, 2022).

The AUKUS Pact represents an important step forward in 2021, as it signifies a notable effort by the US and the United Kingdom to enhance their containment strategy vis-à-vis China. The inclusion of Australia in the equation is facilitated through submarine projects that encompass the utilisation of nuclear power. The objective is to enhance Australia’s submarine stockpiles with innovative technologies, enabling their participation in future missions within the South China Sea.

In light of Washington’s policies, Beijing asserts that Washington has historically engaged in the abuse of its hegemonic power, intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations, and participation in subversive activities (US hegemony and its perils, 2023). China expresses concern about the actor’s subversive intentions and their non-interference in Beijing’s domestic affairs since it is one of China’s core interests. Beijing expresses apprehension regarding the potential inclination of the US towards supporting a regime change and potentially taking action in pursuit of this objective, despite Washington’s denial of such intentions (Administration’s

approach to China, 2022). The ongoing trend of military expansion is intricately linked to the perception of this threat. The US has been accused of instigating and disseminating global conflicts, with critics highlighting the substantial presence of its overseas military facilities and troops. In addition to the Vietnam and Korean Wars, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are criticised by Beijing because of the casualties and displaced people. The Beijing government has reached the conclusion that there is a possibility of Washington becoming involved in a similar conflict with China. Consequently, Beijing has warned Washington, urging it to refrain from exerting pressure on regional entities in order to secure their alignment with its interests (US hegemony and its perils, 2023). Regarding the presented data, it can be tricky to determine whether the two can prevent slipping into Thucydides' trap (Allison, 2017). In addition to China's general policy inclination towards assertiveness in its neighbourhood, as Figure 1 illustrates, its response to the containment of the US and its allies generates a higher level of assertiveness. China's White Paper on the Taiwan issue stresses that 'China's complete reunification is a process that cannot be halted' (White Paper: The Taiwan question and China's reunification in the new era, 2022). Given the rhetoric employed and the US obligations outlined in the Taiwan Relations Act, it is reasonable to anticipate the possibility of a military confrontation, unless the rhetoric used by both parties are not deceptive.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of historical parameters and a key contemporary factor, specifically the rise of China, which has influenced the dynamics of relations between China, the US, and Japan. On the one hand, fundamental historical data is presented, and the effect of a multidimensional rising China is considered a major contemporary parameter.

The research demonstrates that history has a metamorphic dimension in which its weight and utility fluctuate in response to contemporary developments. The aforementioned triangular relationship among the three actors demonstrates that while history is a fundamental component, it is not the exclusive determinant in the formulation of foreign policy.

In the current setting, it is not possible to offer a singular response to the research question stated in the title for all the three bilateral relations concerned, whether in the affirmative

or negative. In this study, it is seen that each bilateral relationship possesses unique dynamics. Both the Chinese and American policies towards Japan are influenced by historical legacy. However, it appears that the influence of historical legacy on US foreign policy towards China has been modified due to China's emergence as a global power (Figure 1). The period spanning from the late 19th century to the end of WWII, characterised by Japanese offences committed against China, continues to have a profound impact on the Chinese perspective of Japanese statecraft. The data presented in this study illustrates the Chinese perspective that the Japanese government may potentially exhibit similar behaviour in the future, akin to their actions during the stated historical period. This circumstance may be attributed to the subjective interpretation of historical data in this particular regard. A scientific assessment may also facilitate the comparison of past circumstances with present-day circumstances, which may lead to an alternative conclusion.

US policy makers demonstrate a strong commitment to adhering to the post-war treaties in their relations with Japan. The inclination to adopt such a perspective is comprehensible, given that the US was the target of the attack in the Pearl Harbour incident. Nevertheless, it is evident that an observable adaptation is occurring in response to a rising China. Tokyo has an essential role as a participant in the US alliance system within the Asia Pacific region. In this respect, the US, to some degree, provides support rather than an objection to the militarisation of Japan despite the presence of a constitutional barrier that was imposed by the US immediately following WWII.

When it comes to Japan's China policy, its historical legacy is consistent with the rise of China. Historical legacy arises both from the alliance with the US stemming from the post-WWII era and the longstanding historical hatred between the actor and China. Actually, Japan plays a critical role in this tripartite relationship. On the one hand, the actor hosts debates on an independent foreign policy orientation and tends to transcend the foreign policy structure formed after WWII. Nevertheless, the rise of China compels it to enhance its partnership with the US. The section on US-Japan relations highlighted the enduring strength of their alliance, which has been further fortified in response to the evolving dynamics of a more assertive China. However, the alliance is undergoing a transformation in light of Japan's redefined security perspective. In this context, the historical heritage between the two players is reinforced due to the rise of China.

The study illustrated that the examined literature directly focuses on the outcomes of the rise of China and whether it becomes a threat to the US, regional actors, and other Western powers. They focus on what kind of policy the US, Japan and other Western powers implement or should implement regarding the rise of China (Carlson, 2023; Chiavacci, 2023; Curtis, 2010; Siebold et al., 2021). These include the debates, within a realist outlook, about the likelihood of a conflict between the two. In contrast, the goal of this study has been to provide a broader perspective on the relations by taking one step back. Which leg of this tripartite relationship has corroded its historical basis, and which remains strong? The process of determining answers to these questions revealed how decision-makers' mindsets develop and shift in response to changing conditions. Furthermore, it becomes clearer why an arduous procedure is required for relations to evolve to the point where the security threat is partially minimised. This is critical to avoiding a conflict in the short term and transforming the tripartite relationship into a more positive structure in the long run.

The study, in the meantime, provides an opportunity to claim that contemporary parameters that have the ability to eliminate historical parameters are history-changing ones. Put differently, a contemporary parameter that has the ability to eliminate historical parameters could potentially become a historical parameter in the future. As the preeminent contemporary parameter, the rise of China is most likely to end US hegemony. This creates manoeuvrability for numerous actors in the realm of world politics, which China is currently spearheading. The actor's continuously growing military and economic capabilities disturb a portion of regional actors and the US. The actor's foreign policy and economic performance have major transformative effects on global politics. Therefore, the rise of China has acquired the capability to disrupt certain established historical paradigms. In the three bilateral relations we examined, the fact that historical factors are out of play only in the US-China policy can be explained by the fact that the US is the party most affected by the rise of China. While this study provides insights into the matter, it would be erroneous to draw excessive generalisations about the potential factors that could terminate historical legacies in all foreign policy cases at present. This might potentially serve as the central focus for future research initiatives.

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