Post-War Sino-Japanese Relations: A Constructivist Reinterpretation

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Research on Sino-Japanese relations has been incapable of providing satisfactory security or economy-based explanations for the growing rift between the two countries. In face of this, the literature has increasingly sought to incorporate ideational factors, such as diplomacy, domestic political developments or identity. Still, this has mostly produced descriptive accounts or ad hoc explanations that, though valuable, have not taken the step of framing the relationship through a systematic scheme with both distinct variables and observational implications. This paper seeks to work upon previous insights in the constructivist and neoclassical realist paradigms to develop a theoretical framework based on Alexander Wendt’s account of structure and Richard Ned Lebow’s motives scheme. Three crucial factors are identified: Conflicting pursuits for self-esteem, availability of negative collective memories and lack of self-restraint, the latter being the behavioral trigger for an erosion of trust that, through repeated exchanges, eventually solidified adversarial identities. This is empirically assessed through polling population, leaders and IR specialists in order to assess levels of contestation. The negative outlook is shared by the three different groups and thus justifies the observable implication that China and Japan will not constitute a strategic partnership nor solve any fundamental identity-related rifts. Further work is needed to process-trace the gradual constitution of adversarial identities that this paper places in the 1990’s. Nonetheless, this scheme allows us a more systematic understanding of the development of the bilateral relation through a falsifiable and generalizable theoretical structure.
Introduction

Why have China and Japan failed to establish constructive political relations in the post-cold war era, despite arguably favorable material incentives to do so? This is a conundrum that is very important for IR to disentangle. Its paramount importance is apparent given the economic and political weight of the actors, not to mention the importance of East Asia for world affairs. Moreover, IR theory itself is undermined if it can’t account for important cases outside its Western cradle. Theoretical development can scarcely be divorced from anomalous cases if we want to open the door for both better theory and a better understanding of international affairs. Insufficiencies arguably derived from the preeminence of the neo-neo synthesis should not be disregarded.

Contemporary Sino-Japanese relations have often been described under the label “cold-politics hot-economics” or “separation of economics from politics” (政経分離). What is more, the current state of affairs, marked by incensed rhetoric and jet scrambles (Choong 2014: 81), might suggest this is a perennial situation. This, though, is certainly not the case. In the post-war era, despite the open wounds of Japanese aggression and contrasting political alignments, Japan and China slowly built limited and yet constructive political and economic ties over the years. In fact, the plunge into distrust and friction is quite recent. It has begun to slowly materialize in the 1990’s, subsequently becoming a relational routine (Wan 2006: 334-335). Incidentally, this did not affect commercial ties in any meaningful way. As political relations faltered economic interdependence continued to deepen (Wan 2006: 332). Both countries came to share global forums and institutions (APEC, WTO etc.) and no significant effect was felt in the growing tourism
and student bilateral flows (Wan 2006: 64-65). To add to the mystery, despite problems, eroding political ties did not mean the immediate preeminence of security either (Drifte 2006: 67-68). Negative bilateral security interactions taken to be serious came only later (Bush 2010: 24-28).

Unsurprisingly, disagreement among scholars is rife. The situation is hard to frame through either liberalism or realism. On the one hand, interdependence hasn’t been able to significantly spill over onto politics, on the other, a full-blown focus on relative gains is yet to happen. This article will argue that this has to do with theoretically inadequate assumptions about agency. Its materialistic diminishing to seeking relative or absolute gains obscures more than it reveals. Thus, any account of the case requires a more in depth understanding of motives, notably one that incorporates identity and other non-material factors. Lebow’s addition of the seeking of self-esteem (Lebow 2010a: 508) as fundamental to understanding political actors and Wendt’s conception of structures of interaction as framing relations between states (Wendt 2010: 147-150) provide us with our key theoretical basis. Our case analysis suggests this does away with most apparent contradictions, allowing us a more coherent and intelligible account of the relational decline.

1 In 1997 Japan’s defense white paper did mention China’s ballistic missile arsenal, nonetheless the constitution of a missile defense system was justified by citing North Korean (Nathan and Scobell 2012: 120). It was only in 2004 that Tokyo’s National Defense Program Guidelines identified China as a potential threat. (Nathan and Scobell 2012: 120). Despite the downward political trend, responses were slow and security interaction intermittent at best (Wan 2006: 44).

2 Italic will be used when mentioning Lebow’s key motivational drives spirit, appetite, reason and fear (Lebow 2010a: 61-72).

3 Or micro-structure (Wendt 2010: 147-150).
This article is divided in five main sections. First, we will provide brief overviews of explanatory attempts framed through realism and liberalism, then we present constructivism as an alternative. This will allow us to both pinpoint the insufficiencies of materialist accounts and acknowledge the insights of scholars that went beyond them. Thirdly, we will summarize the key theoretical elements that are used in our own explanation. Next, having accomplished this, we will explain in detail our framework. Finally, we will use it to analyze the bilateral relation in two steps, characterizing the proposed negative structure of interaction and then assessing its strength through poll data, closing with its implications.

The Neo-Neo synthesis’ explanatory insufficiencies

To justify self-esteem as important to analyze and understand the deterioration of Sino-Japanese ties it is paramount to point out the flaws in materialist paradigms. Security and interdependence are usually given the most attention and are thought to be the most obvious drivers of bilateral relationships. Thus we need to address them in order to validate our approach (Lebow 2010a: 518). The omission of ideational factors is expected to result in major explanatory problems which should become clear through critical scrutiny (Lebow 2010a: 518).

Expectedly, the debate around the strained relation between the two powers is characterized by many inter-theory fault lines. To cover all explanatory attempts is
unfeasible, therefore I focus on a limited array that allows me to highlight what seems most pertinent and relevant\(^4\), to this we now turn.

Realism

Naturally, due to China’s growth and expanding capacities many of the arguments concerning Sino-Japanese relations are coupled with considerations on China’s international affirmation and its systemic implications. This is particularly true for the realist tradition. Offensive Realism considers that the scale of the increases in China’s economic and military power simply preclude a peaceful *modus vivendi* with its neighbors. Mearsheimer, for instance, considers that the country’s sheer capacity and potential means that many, including Japan, are to increasingly align with the US. Power alone is emphasized (Mearsheimer 2006: 160). The necessary end goal of any rising power is regional hegemony. This alone can start to guarantee its safety, serving as a springing board to global hegemony. Consequently, growing tensions between China and Japan are both expected and inevitable (Mearsheimer 2013: 88-89)

Defensive realism shares the former’s exclusive focus on power but differs on how much power is enough. States ought to, above all, seek to keep their positions within the system. A pursuit of hegemony is deemed unfeasible. It faces unsurmountable barriers, namely balancing coalitions. Instead, national autonomy and defensive capabilities are the path towards security (Waltz 2010: 126).

\(^4\) Of course, to a degree, all tentative classification implies a certain level of reification, this is done for the sake of intelligibility and should not be seen as undue simplification. Some of the authors are arguable in between theoretical fault lines.
Notwithstanding the theoretical differences, both fall short when justifying the evolution of contemporary and post-cold Sino-Japanese war relations. Through Neo-Realism it is difficult to comprehend that an economically ascendant Japan in the 1980’s and early 1990’s not only did not let go of its American allegiance, despite U.S. hegemony but also, at the same time, actively sought to economically empower China, its most obvious potential rival. Japanese loans, politically encouraged trade and investment are testimony to precisely that (Smith 2014: 35). The yen loan program that lasted through decades has only come to an end in 2008, technical assistance and grant aid continue to this day (Smith 2014: 35-36).

Moreover, when China made the choice of cracking down on opposition in face of Soviet collapse in Tiananmen, thus facing international isolation, Japan actively sought to break the deadlock, lobbying for a mild reaction by other powers (Dreyer 2016: 184-189). As the relation soured after 1994, Japan did seek to acquire new military capabilities and reassert the American alliance but never crossed the 1% expenditure limit nor nuclearized. In Waltz’s view, this is an uneasy position, an anomaly for what power politics is regarded, uncertainty would advise armament (Waltz 2000: 33-36). The pursuit of a balance-of-power logic would have Japan seek relative, not absolute, gains and therefore the country would cut aid and investment, generally choosing policies that retard China’s economic growth (Green 2003: 79).

As for China, the Middle Kingdom had been at least moderately friendly towards Japan for decades. Including at the peak of the latter’s economic power in 1990 (Wan 2006, 207). This notwithstanding three decades of continued economic growth and rises in Japanese military expenditure (Wan 2006: 209-210) while China’s budget was static (Wan 2006: 212). The 1980’s were called the period of “friendship diplomacy” (Yahuda
2014, 20) or even a “golden age” (Dreyer 2016: 156). Ties developed despite the first ideational clashes, careful and tactful diplomacy avoided significant rifts (Dreyer 2016: 182; Wan 2006: 96). In contrast, in the 1990’s, when Japan was weakened, China growingly disregarded Japanese concerns over nuclear tests, missile launches or opaque military budgets (Dreyer 2016: 191). More recently, even as relative power continues shifting in favor of the Chinese, fighter intrusions near the Diaoyu/Senkaku5 and constant nationalist rhetoric are common. Occasionally, even the damage of Japanese property has been tacitly allowed by the government (Dreyer 2016: 211).

China’s relative weakness vis-as-vis Japan and the US would advise a restrained behavior, playing to its potential. As China is getting comparatively stronger, it is not in its interest to provoke powers that it still can’t face, thus it shouldn’t act in a way that opens the path for a balancing coalition.

It is clear then that a spiral of fear derived from concerns over relative power potentials or military capacities was not at the origin of the bilateral political problems. Elements of interdependence mix with elements of rivalry. Japan is concerned, but seems very reluctant to balance China or to point it out as a threat, it also does not seem to want to risk economic ties. China’s stance is equally puzzling, with still limited capabilities and deeply connected to the Japanese economy its asserting of claims in its periphery cannot but be seen by neo-realism as counter-productive (Mearsheimer 2014: 380).

5 In 2013 Japan scrambled more than 400 aircraft in response to Chinese activity (Choong 2014: 81)

6 When referring to the islands we use both Chinese and Japanese names, except when we are talking solely about one of the countries; we use then one or the other.
This brings us to the neoclassical realist alternative, to which “understanding international outcomes requires not merely identifying [...] [structural] constraints, but also how particular states respond to them” (Goldstein 2003: 60). Christensen (2003), Goldstein (2003) and Kirshner (2010) all agree that the distribution of power is not in itself sufficient to generate either stability or instability. “Therefore the future is largely unwritten” (Kirshner 2010: 54). The Sino-Japanese relationship developed “most of the characteristics of a strategic partnership - extensive economic ties, regular summit meetings, including reciprocal visits by top government officials, and even military-to-military exchanges.” (Goldstein 2003: 82) Accordingly, it is considered that if the “two sides are able to move beyond their differences about dealing with the historical legacy of Japan’s aggression in the mid-twentieth century” linkages would smooth the relation overall (Goldstein 2003: 82-83).

Non-structural factors diminish the effects of anarchy. Factors such as the existence of a moral consensus, homogeneity in domestic structures or recognized rules of international conduct are thought to have an important contribution (Friedberg 1993-1994: 10). Unfortunately, these being generally absent from Asia, disputes between the major regional players, China and Japan included, are to be expected. (Friedberg 1993-1994: 31). Neo-classical realism has clear advantages over the neo-neo synthesis, we agree and were inspired by its focus on agency, valuing restraint as a crucial component for international outcomes. This aspect is axiological to our analysis. Still, the approach has two crucial misgivings. First, it still emphasizes material structure as a blunt fact, second, while it recognizes non-material factors, it doesn’t tell us why they are so important for Sino-Japanese relations.
Beyond balance of power, there is yet another material structure which is very important to address, interdependence: the depth of economic and institutional integration. It is important to keep in mind that Japan was China’s largest trading partner between 1994-2003, in 2015, it was second only after the US. China, on the other hand, has been Japan’s number two partner since 1993 and its largest one from 2004 onwards (trade with Hong Kong included), a position solidified since then (Wan 2006: 223; Yahuda 2014: 76). Lately, China’s economic ascendency has come to contrast strikingly with Japanese stagnation, which has meant a relative decline of Japanese importance for China. Oppositely, the value of Japan’s trade with China exceeded that of its trade with the U.S by a staggering 40 percent ($304.4 billion to $203.9 191.5 billion). Notwithstanding, we must not be led to think that Japan is not fundamental for the Chinese economy. Trade aside, many of the goods that China exports have been manufactured in China by Japanese companies, these supplying high-tech designs and technology with great added-value. The sheer weight of Japanese multinationals in China cannot be understated (Yahuda 2014: 76). Despite the growing asymmetry, it is a fair assessment

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7 Japan is the 3rd biggest source for imports (116 billions) (after the US and South Korea; 10% to 9.1%) and second biggest export market (153 billions) (after the US; 19% to 6.2%).
8 In 2015 Japanese imports from China amounted to a peak 26% of all imports, a whopping 153 billion dollars (HK is only a negligible amount, 1.48 Billions). As for the exports, percentage-wise, they peaked in 2010 at 20% of all exports or 25% if we include Hong Kong (respectively 150 billion dollars and 187 billion dollars).
9 Trade with US (2015): 625.5 billion dollars; trade with Japan (2015): 304.38 billion dollars; both include Hong Kong.
10 Hong Kong included;
that economic ties are very strong, as they would naturally be because Japan and China “(...) are neighboring large trading nations with significant complementarities” (Wan 2006: 221).

Beyond bilateral trade, the countries share an interest in a stable East Asia and open sea lanes, this to uphold economic regional links. The same goes for regionalism, “accelerating commercial linkages put pressure on policy makers to regularize ties that link their economies and enable them to work together smoothly” (Rozman 2004: 351), nonetheless, the process is continuously marred by distrust (Rozman 2004: 352). At the global scale, China and Japan’s economic dependence on resource imports (Bush 2010: 67) (and markets) from all over the world advise cooperation in fighting piracy, terrorism and strengthening international trade norms. Both countries benefiting in a stable and open world economy. The Japanese leadership committed as it was to make trade and aid the basis of a successful partnership must have been as disappointed as liberal theorists about the 1990’s downturn (Wan 2006: 226). This though can only be argued to have achieved limited aims.

Heazle (2007) and Sutter (2002), aware of the fact economic interdependence not having translated into good political ties, rather focus their attention on the role economy plays in giving the actors stakes on stopping relations from crumbling altogether (Lai 2014: 19; Sutter 2002: 40). The reasons for the unsavory clashes are relegated to other factors such as security, territory, nationalism, history, and other causes, these though to be hampering the relation’s obvious potential. (Heazle 2007: 176; Sutter 2002, 37). Mochizuki (2009) suggests the current downturn as something temporary, positive incentives such as trade and human relationships leading thus to a new equilibrium (Mochizuki 2009: 140). There is a general agreement that economic ties have been more
and more normalized and depoliticized, especially with China`s entrance in the WTO. This said, as time passes, it also becomes more and more far-fetched that economic interdependence alone, no matter how strong, will come to signify a bettering of political relations. The remaining two pillars of neo-liberal analysis, international institutions and norms plus democratization (Haggard 2014: 45) are generally undervalued in Asia`s case and with good reason. “High levels of economic interdependence in Northeast Asia have not been coupled with new regional institutions” (Kahler 2012: 67). The region has also “failed to produce a security community in any part of the region” (Kahler 2012: 67). The existent bilateral problems concerning historical legacies and nationalism play the role of a stumbling stone to an institutional integration that could bring several advantages to the region`s countries. (Rozman 2004: 351).

**Constructivism: a starting point for a more intelligible narrative**

The failure of both material structures, power and interdependence, to serve as a foundation to comprehend bilateral strife can be seen as a determinate clue that immaterial realities are the culprits. This strengthens the case for a constructivist approach. Using narrative and interpretative forms (Leheny 2014: 68), constructivism`s focus on cultural-ideational variables enables it to shed light on aspects that traditional I.R theory cannot (Lai 2014: 33).

Due to constraints of space and the sheer diversity of constructivist accounts, we focus now on the four authors whose views and interpretations directly inform our own explanatory framework and narrative. These are Berger, Wan, Roy and He. The first gives us our general interpretation of the Northeast Asia context where Sino-Japanese ties play
out. The following three give us the foundations of the three starting variables we rely on: incommensurable identities, negative cognitive resources and lack of self-restraint.

_East Asia: Prosperity and Conflict_

Despite differences concerning ontology, methodology or theoretical language, constructivist authors focusing on Asia largely agree that identity is crucial to understand not only Sino-Japanese relations but East Asia itself (Berger 2003; He 2008; Roy 2005; Suzuki 2007; etc.). Among these, Berger gives a particularly clear view of the region, of why ideational factors are crucial: “(…) East Asian regional affairs have been characterized by less great power tension than a classic neo-realist account might suggest. At the same time, the potential for conflict and the obstacles to cooperation are greater than what a neo-liberal institutionalist or a more moderate ‘defensive realist’ might expect (Berger 2003: 388). The way nations in East Asia perceive threats and cooperation opportunities (the realm of respectively realism and liberalism) is strongly conditioned by the way these issues are defined in the context of their political cultures (Berger 2003: 388), therefore the explanatory problems we have seen rational-actor analytical frameworks face are largely expected (Berger 2003: 388).

The surprising peacefulness of East Asia despite generalized political rivalries and constant confrontation between neighbors can be attributed to the fact that economic growth is one of the primary basis of governmental legitimacy (Berger 2003: 389). Consequently, in East Asia, unlike Western Europe, the decision to shelve or not escalate disputes would rest not in a common identity or real commitment to peace, but in largely instrumental considerations (Berger 2003: 389). As a result, regional cooperation is fragile (Berger 2003: 389).
This can help us understand why China and Japan have managed a virtual separation between politics and economics. In spite of economic interconnectedness animosities are just “under the surface”. Japan affirmed itself in the post-war era as a “merchant nation” under the Yoshida doctrine (Berger 2003: 394) and China sought to replace fading Maoist ideology’s legitimacy and enable the nation’s political goals through the instrumental use of market mechanisms (Berger 2003: 396). Contrary to what neoliberal institutionalism might expect, the interdependence and sophistication of trade resulted from determinate ideational shifts in actor interests, it was not their cause (Berger 2003: 398).

**Incommensurable Identities**

Wan understands that the origin of “political and security tensions since the mid-1990’s lies in the competing Chinese and Japanese objectives” (Wan 2006: 139) though in his view this need not be so. He tells us that, from 1972 to 1989, “in the so-called 1972 system, there was a balance of China as a developing, socialist, political power versus Japan as a developed, capitalist, economic power” (Wan 2006: 336), the “distribution of identities allowed a balanced relationship between the two nations” (Wan 2006: 107), their national goals were largely compatible even if asymmetrical (Wan 2006: 107): Beijing had its strategic position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union strengthened, Taiwan further isolated and guaranteed support from Japan for its modernization. Tokyo, in turn, desired economic partnership and regional stability (Wan 2006: 334). Contrastingly, from the mid-1990’s “although [negative] emotions have not been a dominant factor in explaining the Sino-Japanese relationship (...) they explain why it has been difficult for both countries to adjust their strategic objectives to accommodate each other (Wan 2006: 167):
Both the Chinese and Japanese have been reimagining their national identities since the end of the Cold War, and there has been confusion in that process. On its side, China is developing an identity of a responsible, major power after two decades of capitalist reform and opening to the outside world. At the same time, the Chinese government’s patriotic campaign to instill nationalism in order to legitimize its political dominance has enhanced China’s identity as a country that continues to be victimized by Japan and the West. That explains why China continues to look at Japan with suspicion and needs to remind the Japanese of their past crimes. On its side, Japan is gradually embracing an identity of a normal, major power. That emerging identity explains why Japan wants to move away from its old ‘special’ relationship with china and why it no longer wants to apologize for the past (Wan 2006: 167). Japanese attitude change has also been catalyzed by China’s continuous growth, the Tiananmen massacre, atomic tests and Taiwan Straights crisis; this dispelled China’s image as an underdeveloped country and a victim, rather framing it as a fast developing potentially aggressive autocracy (Wan 2006: 162-165).

These disparate directions, according to the author’s estimates, have resulted in scarcer and scarcer positive interactions, the political relation since the mid-1990’s exhibiting a solid steady downward trend (Wan 2006: 44). Wan considers that there is a cyclical pattern of negative interactions marked by a “time-dependent process” (Wan 2006: 44): repeated interaction allows “the two countries to quarrel over things within safe limits” (Wan 2006: 44).
Thus, China’s nationalism aims at surpassing its victimization status, the “century of humiliation” (Wang 2014: 7), in light of that Japan’s past misdeeds demand constant atonement by the island nation. At the same time, China’s political affirmation, regime, strident nationalism and at times bellicose attitude clash with Japan’s growing wish to affirm itself as a responsible and civil “normal power” (Lai 2014: 80; Wan 2006: 161-163).

*Availability of negative cognitive resources*

As schema frame perception and interpretation belief systems are sticky and therefore, even if not adequate, are pressed upon new situations as to make them intelligible; these come to be expressed in emotions and intentions. Divergent historical interpretations between former enemy countries regarding not just what happened but also who had responsibility for the conflict thus are very relevant if not central (He 2008: 174). The availability of a negatively charged past ready for ideational mobilization as a cognitive resource plays a key role in the production of antagonism (Suzuki 2007). China’s level of concern towards Japan is not commensurate with Japan’s strategic capabilities or demographic and economic potency (Roy 2006: 207-210).
Agency’s lack of self-restraint

He (2008)’s appraisal points too in the same direction regarding the bilateral problems’ ultimate causes as Wan (2006) and Roy (2005), with the added advantage of bringing an added focus onto agency.

Incidentally, for He, threat perceptions deriving from political disputes are what can potentially fuel geo-political opposition, not the other way around, therefore “the future of Sino-Japanese cooperation heavily depends on their efforts to resolve the negative historical legacy” (He 2008, 162). Indeed, Japan is one of the few countries with which China’s relationship has worsened under its accommodating “New Diplomacy” (He 2008, 163). Conclusively denying materialism, the author considers that “threat” (and therefore “security” too) has to be seen as a cognitive construct (He 2008: 172).

This does not translate into loss of capability to handle bilateral disputes rationally. Nonetheless, there is a “blowback” effect where nationalism fostered or encouraged by the CCP is seen as increasingly harder to control therefore demanding “steering” from the government (He 2008: 180). Furthermore, the overall anti-Japanese public mood can promote hard-line elites while serving to isolate or weaken the domestic position of moderates, and therefore indirectly sway government policy” (He 2008: 181). Supporters of detente with Japan have visibly became targets of popular nationalism, CCP legitimacy itself being threatened by critiques (Hughes 2006: 146-151). In Japan too, mainly due to the negative change in China’s image and “apology fatigue”, standing up to China’s demands and pressure has become increasingly popular; it is thought to have bolstered both Koizumi’s and Abe’s credentials (He 2008: 182-183).
It is safe to conclude that concerns about relative gains and preferences are heightened by divergent memories” (He 2008: 177). Mutual skepticism “forces the intention-based perception of mutual threats and propel the tendency of worst-casing among elites. (He 2008: 188). It could be argued, and this agrees with both the constructivist and neo-classical realist accounts I have analyzed, that ideas and history have the influence they have exactly because the material strategic environment is indeterminate and therefore gives actors a large degree of freedom. Thus restraint or lack thereof is key.

A tripartite approach to relational deterioration

All in all, these three components are needed to understand the intersubjectivity and ideational aspects of Sino-Japanese relations. Identity change is imperative, but without memory and agency its actualization in negative intersubjective relational identities cannot be understood. Now that I have established materialism’s theoretical and practical insufficiency and reviewed the key insights I derive from constructivism, we are ready to expound the theoretical structures that underlie my own framework of interpretation.

Theoretical Background: Wendt’s Structure and Lebow’s Motives

Theoretically, this work draws heavily on both Richard Ned Lebow’s motive scheme and Alexander Wendt’s account of structure. Wendt is also important in supplying us with a threefold categorization of the international system11, which enables us to incorporate systemic conditions in our analysis. As for our understating of identity,

11 This refers to the three cultures of anarchy: Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian (Wendt 2010: 247-251).
we rely on its operationalization as a variable on Abdelal, Herrera, Johnson, and McDermott (2007).

**Structure in Wendt**

Wendt supplies us with a deeper understanding of international structure. He adds to the customary systemic macro-structure the concept of micro-structure, which amounts to “structures of interaction” (Wendt 2010: 147) in between unit and system levels (Wendt 2010, 147-150). In contrast to unit-level explanations, micro-structural theory relies on the relationship between a given system’s parts to explain outcomes (Wendt 2010: 148). “There are as many micro-structures in the states system as there are interaction complexes among states” (Wendt 2010: 147).

According to Wendt structure, be it macro or micro, will contain three elements: material conditions, interests and ideas; although related, these levels are to a degree distinct and have different explanatory roles (Wendt 2010: 139). Consequentially, even if structure is “in the singular” (Wendt 2010: 139), for analytical purposes “it may be useful (…) to treat the distributions of the three elements as separate ‘structures’ (Wendt 2010: 139). The ideational aspect is thought to take precedence (Wendt 2010: 140) for “without ideas there are no interests, without interests there are no meaningful material conditions, without material conditions there is no reality at all” (Wendt 2010: 139). Ideas, of course, include the actors’ beliefs about each other’s rationality, strategies, and preferences (Wendt 2010:159). These necessarily inform their every interaction, giving meaning to material conditions and shaping their perspectives at every turn.
Cultures of anarchy

Wendt recognizes three cultures of anarchy, based on what kind of roles dominate the system - enemy, rival and friend (Wendt 2010: 247), these are called respectively Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian (Wendt 2010: 247). If a pure self-help system, which happens in the Hobbesian culture only (Wendt 2010, 247), the balance of power defines relations per se. On the other extreme, a Kantian system is based on friendship (Wendt 2010: 298, which would preclude conflict and distrust (Wendt 2010, 299). The Lockean culture though, has countries generally recognize each other’s sovereignty as a right (Wendt 2010: 279), therefore borders change rarely and inter-state war and normally limited. “Rivals expect Others to use violence sometimes to settle disputes, but do so within ‘live and let live limits’” (Wendt 2010: 281). This leaves a natural space for ideational concerns to shape relations.

Lebow’s Motives Scheme

Lebow, in turn, gives us a more diverse picture of what actors pursue. He presents us with a four-fold understanding of agency, not only economic gain or security drive actors, but norms and the need for esteem do so too. Lebow identifies three fundamental motives and one emotion respectively. Appetite, spirit, reason and fear (Lebow 2010a: 61-72).

Appetite is rooted on material well-being (Lebow 2010a: 72-76), spirit on self-esteem (Lebow 2010a: 61-72)\(^\text{12}\) and reason on the sustenance and realization of a given

\(^{12}\)“Institutions and states have neither psyche nor emotions. However, the people who comprise and run them do. They often project their psychological needs on to their political units, and feel better about themselves when those units win victories or perform well... The active pursuit of honor and standing is
normative consensus. Seeking to be coherent with it and recognizing in others the pursuit of their own interests, therefore valuing cooperative behavior (Lebow 2010a: 76-82). If *reason* amounts to sustaining normative orders, *fear* stands as anathema to *reason* at the other end of the scale. It means the breakdown of order (*stasis*) caused by lack of restraint, “the unrestricted pursuit by actors - individuals, factions or political units - of their parochial goals” (Lebow 2010a: 89). Therefore, the dichotomy *reason*/fear frames the actor’s pursuits of *appetite* and *spirit*, self-restraint playing a key role in maintaining trust and, thus, an intelligible and viable order, be it at the system, subsystem or bilateral level (Lebow 2010a: 47).

In the real world all three motives are present to a larger or smaller extent in an actor’s motivation, *fear* as a conditionality too (Lebow 2010a: 510). Lebow theorizes that “multiple motives would reveal themselves as mixtures, not solutions; they would not blend but rather give rise to behavior associated with each of the motives present. Such behavior would present anomalies to existing [materialist] theories of international relations because they are all rooted in fear - or appetite - based worlds” (Lebow 2010a: 518) Being motives intertwined in state behavior (Lebow 2010a: 517), the first step in affirming the importance of ideational factors, the *spirit*, is to discard the first two as having *per se* insufficient explanatory power (Lebow 2010a: 518), which we already did.

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13 Reason as a fundamental motive is not to be understood instrumentally but as reflexive, in an Aristotelian fashion. Seeking the maintenance of normative orders, recognizing that short-term restraint enables actors to build meaningful relations and to pursue long-term goals more effectively, therefore being better placed to achieve material well-being and esteem (Lebow 2010a: 77)

14 Solutions as in the chemical sense (Lebow 2010: 517)
In accordance, the hypothesis’ starting point is the remainder motive of Lebow’s scheme, the *spirit*.

Lebow considers that motives are an important constituent of identity (Lebow 2010a: 563), even if the drives are universal different actors value *appetite, spirit* and *reason* differently, variance extending to their modes of expression as well (Lebow 2010a: 563). When related with Abdelal et. all (2006), to whom we will turn next, this correlates with the cognitive model part of identity (Abdelal et. all 2006: 696): a particular worldview through which actors or societal complexes “make sense of social, political and economic conditions” (Abdelal et. all 2006: 699).

It can therefore be deduced that changes in the cognitive model of actors results in changes concerning the valuation of motives and their modes of operationalization (Lebow 2010a: 563), which in turn can indirectly have constitutive effects in the relational content of identity. This is especially true in what regards the *spirit*. Self-esteem, which is its goal (Lebow 2010a: 122), is maintained through a quest for honor or standing (Lebow 2010a: 26). This is to a large degree relational and depends on the recognition of others (Lebow 2010a: 61). Consequently, if the pursuits of each countries’ esteem (*spirit*) are conflicting, this may present an equal or even greater danger than power unbalances or zero-sum economic competition, for it can trigger all the same a negative spiral in bilateral ties.

*Identity as a Variable*

According to Abdelal et all (2006), “the content of social identities may take the form of four, non-mutually exclusive types”:
Constitutive norms refer to the formal and informal rules that define group membership.

Social purposes refer to the goals that are shared by members of a group.

Relational comparisons refer to defining an identity group by what it is not, i.e., the way it views other identity groups, especially where those views about the other are a defining part of the identity.

Cognitive models refer to the worldviews or understanding of political and material conditions and interests that are shaped by a particular identity (Abdelal et. all 2007: 696).

The first and the third are the two that concern us, as they relate closely to our operationalization of Lebow’s motive structure. Moreover, as to bring order to the use of identity as a variable, Abdelal et al. (2006) tell us that it varies along two fundamental dimensions, content and contestation. Content describes its meaning and contestation the degree of agreement over it (Abdelal et. all 2006: 696); both of these aspects can be appropriately captured by an eclectic use of methods (Abdelal et. all 2006: 696). We mostly use analytical explanation (George and Bennet, 2005, 210-211)\(^\text{15}\) for the first, as for the appraisal of the strength of adversarial identities, survey data is considered to be particularly useful in exploring its relational aspects (Abdelal et. All 2006: 703), therefore we adopt it when possible.

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\(^{15}\) A variety of process tracing that “converts a historical narrative into an analytical causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms” (George and Bennet, 2005: 210-211)
**Hypothesis**

In the 1990’s identity change had China greatly emphasize national pride and recovery from past “humiliation” in expense of Marxism, this clashed with Japan’s efforts at “normalization” and a bigger international role. The actors’ seeking of esteem (*spirit*) became incommensurable. This, though, didn’t necessarily mean an inevitable conflict. Nonetheless, the availability of negative cognitive resources presented fertile ground for lack of self-restraint by agency to throw the relation into disarray. Fateful decisions by political leaderships quickly undid the frail bonds that had been built during the Cold War creating over time a negatively charged micro-structure. This resulting in the countries seeing each other as adversaries, potentially rivals.

Ultimately, this not only precludes the resolution of historical and territorial problems but also hinders the formation and pursuit of common interests by the two actors. China’s vilification of Japan makes the middle kingdom’s military build-up, territorial claims and assertiveness be interpreted as threatening. On the other hand, Japan’s wish for an extended national role, its “normalization”, implies the progressive removal of institutional barriers to foreign policy and less availability to apologize to China. This is seen as disrespectful to China’s past woes and a dangerous ignoring of history. As a constitutive product of the structure of interaction, identity’s relational content reinforces the impediment of a definite positive breakthrough and the creation of a strategic partnership. Because of the negative micro-structure, identity-related issues must be and remain irresoluble, sapping the relationship independently of economic or security conditions. Furthermore, the deterioration of trust and strengthening adversarial
relational identities lead as a sub-product to the securatization of the relation (fear). Under the current ideational framework, either the definitive solving of an identitarian issue or the creation of a strategic partnership would mean the falsification of this account. Due to the competing yet inferior importance of appetite the relationship portrays a pattern whereas it is at least cyclically plagued by identitarian concerns followed up by limited mending.

Culture being self-reproducing (Wendt 2010: 339), the displacement of this negative intersubjective micro-structure and related adversarial identity demands restraint from the actors and, above everything, a reflective reinterpretation of their cognitive models, relational identities or both. Nothing short of Gorbachev’s “new thinking” by the Chinese leadership and, for Japan, the political ostracism of the most vocal “right of the right “minorities in the LDP can bring respite.

*Generalized hypothesis and arrow diagram*

The availability of negative collective memories for China provides the cognitive resource for the spirit, seeking esteem, to fuel relational strife if not moderated by self-restraint. The result is the dilapidation of trust and the constitution of a negative ideational micro-structure (Wendt 2010: 139-190), which in turn constitutes negative relational identities. Securatization stands as a consequence (fear). Culture being a self-fulfilling prophecy, the relationship pattern is sticky (i.e structural); hard to change (Wendt 2010: 339). This means that no matter how secure the actors see themselves and no matter how interdependent they are (Wendt 2010: 375) conflicts that are relevant to the terms of the actor’s spirit are unsolvable (territory, historical interpretation). Additionally, a Lockean systemic macro-structure (Wendt 2010: 279-297) is needed as a condition, for if the
international macro-structure was Kantean the actor’s would not have reason to doubt or stigmatize each other, if it were Hobbesian security concerns would override identitarian ones.

Figure 1: Hypothesis arrow diagram
The flow of the arrow diagram is as follows:

A.1. The first step is to interpret China’s valuing of national strengthening and surpassing the “Hundred years of humiliation” as a manifestation of the spirit. The required analytical explanation (George and Bennet 2005: 210-211) will be accomplished through Lebow’s definition of the motive. Then, it will be argued that Japan is the focus of this narrative, necessarily putting demands upon the relation. This will be corroborated by the centrality of the country in China’s nationalist turn. Likewise, Japan’s “normalization” will be framed in the same manner. The pursuit of a prestigious international role leaving the country less available to kowtowing to a perceivably more assertive China.

A.2. To direct nationalist discourse towards the “Japanese other” a simple policy-decision to do it is not sufficient (Suzuki 2007), an already available or dormant negative collective memory available is needed, that is what constitutes a cognitive resource (Wendt 2010, 163). The unfortunate events from the end of the XIX to the end of the 2nd Sino-Japanese war serve this purpose.

A.3. Lack of self-restraint refers to the leadership’s policy options per se towards the other agent. Lebow states that to approach the “other” with empathy and openness to reasoning paves the way to cooperation, as a result individuals and social collectives would be more prone to recognizing the need for moderation and orderly competition
(Lebow 2010a: 514). That is, to have self-imposed limitations on our wants. An essential feature to “sustain the kinds of environment in which meaningful cooperation becomes possible” (Lebow 2010a: 514). From this stems that even if cognitive models are conflicting and the cognitive resources for confrontation are available, moderation from relevant agents upholds trust and can prevent a negative spiral.

B.1 The negative ideational micro-structure is characterized and then attested by its purported constitutive effects on relational identities: a generally negative view of China by the Japanese public, political leaderships and IR scholars and vice-versa. Accounts by secondary sources and surveys will be used to show a diminishing contestation (Abdelal et. all 2006: 696), i.e growing agreement, concerning this perception.

C.1 By continued negative interactions Japan and China are constituted as adversaries in their relational identities; this effect is constituted by the structure of interaction itself and thus its strength is directly correlated to it. The strongly negative relational content of identity makes it harder for actors to reflect and change their perspectives.

C.2 The continuance of the territorial dispute and conflicts over historical interpretation stand as the most noticeable observable implications, it derives directly from the ideational attributes of the micro-structure and are related to the adversarial
identities as a constitutive effect. The solving of any of these important ideational issues falsifies our analysis.

C.3 The negative nature of the micro-structure implies that joint regional leadership or long-term positioning in International Institutions are precluded. The creation of a partnership between Japan and China, for instance, by agreeing and keeping to an agreement to demilitarize the disputed area and peacefully develop its resources, or jointly spearheading meaningful regionalization in Northeast Asia would falsify our analysis.

D.1 A war between America and China concerning Taiwan would override identitarian concerns. On the other extreme, a Kantian system would preclude conflict as even conceivable. Consequently, a negative micro-structure would be very unlikely. The Lockean culture is prevalent in NEA, countries strongly see sovereignty as a right (Wendt 2010: 279), thus despite tensions being rife they do not endanger most state’s existence per se (Wendt 2010: 281). Armed conflict is conceivable but less likely and normally does not put at stake the existence of a state. This leaves substantial space for ideational factors to frame relations, nor enmity, nor friendship characterizing the system. Thus, it is a fundamental conditional variable.
The Constitution of Sino-Japanese Antagonism

(A.1) Conflicting pursuits for the spirit as a motive

Both China and Japan have assumed incommensurable operationalizations of the spirit in the transition out of the cold war. We advance this as the ultimate ideational foundation for the Sino-Japanese antagonism.

To understand the Chinese/CCP focus on the “century of humiliation” narrative we have to refer to Zhao (2004). In the ideological debate of the CCP, economic reform has been justified and pushed as a means to surpass national weakness and achieve unification, and though the superseding state-nationalism is fairly versatile, it demands two key conditions: to be uncompromising with foreign demands that involve China’s “vital interest” or “trigger historical sensitivities” (Zhao 2004: 32). With the fading of Marxism, the strengthening of nationalism and vindication of China’s historical suffering have become the end-purpose of both CCP power and the justification of economic reform, the spirit cannot and is not willfully neglected. It has moved from ideology to the nation. As a result, defense of the homeland justifies the elite’s claim to honor, standing and authority (Lebow 2010a: 85), thus legitimacy. Economy has been understood instrumentally (Hughes 2006: 14; Yahuda 2014: 15; Zhao 2004: 30), therefore the spirit surpasses the appetite in importance. The constant hyperbolized criticism of Japan and risking a clash in the East China Sea against all strategic common sense corroborates this, at least for the bilateral relations. The cyclical pattern of post-cold war crises reveals
though that China values greatly both motives. China does sacrifice at times nationalistic objectives to protect the relation with Japan from further deterioration (Zhao 2004: 273) but it never lets the matter rest. Presenting thus the mixed pattern Lebow (2010a) expects.

Contrastingly, for Japan, the seeking of esteem has grown onto an incompatible if related shape. It moved from economics to ‘normalization’ and international prestige (Lai 2014: 80; Wan 2006: 161-163). The context of the Yoshida Doctrine in the post-war years had the Japanese government focus on economic development. This produced a close association of the *spirit* with the country’s state developmentalism, where economic centered success fueled pride and identity (Lai 2014: 77). *Spirit* and *appetite* were virtually integrated. Confident economic nationalism, in turn, fueled ethno-cultural discourse, the latter focusing on a causal relation between Japan’s economic achievements and cultural/social uniqueness (Lai 2014: 78). Economic success was also connected with the hope of spearheading East Asia’s economic development and regionalism (Rozman 2002b: 79). This discourse as a source of esteem and pride could not survive in the context of Japan’s 1990’s protracted recession (Lai 2014: 78). Internationally Japan’s reputation was also suffering. The country being widely criticized for its passivity/checkbook diplomacy by allies and the international community at large (Lai 2014: 79). The way was thus opened to calls for national regeneration and for a new generation of leaders to reinvigorate Japanese self-image (Wan 2006: 144-145).

It just happens that this was not compatible with the relationship pattern Japan had established with China in 1972, where a geopolitically unambitious Japan compensated for its past misbehavior by recurrent apologies and economic support *ad perpetuum*. A degree of resistance from internal and foreign pressure to negative historical remembrance was a pre-requisite to restore national pride and embrace
‘normalization’ based on Japan’s positive post-war record (Lai 2014: 80; Wan 2006: 161-163). Koizumi’s resistance to the ‘selfish’ demands of a nondemocratic bickering China is paradigmatic. It was domestically considered bold and enjoyed great popularity (Rozman 2002b: 86). China’s (and for the matter South Korea’s) insistence on the history issue can be contrasted by Japan to ASEAN’s or Taiwan’s moving on to being openly thankful for Japanese economic assistance. This much to the tune of Japan’s spirit as a contributor to worldwide development. Chinese complaints about Japanese war-actions can also be seen as of questionable integrity given China’s own human rights record (Wan 2006: 166).

In the early XXI century the new discourse for ontological realization came to be clustered around two interrelated poles: Japan’s active role as a normative power and its ‘normalization’ (Michishita and Samuels 2008: 156). The second being largely a prerequisite of the first, Japan’s ‘full sovereignty’ is axiomatic. Japan’s leadership giving importance to the Senkaku islands or Koizumi insisting in the Yasukuni visits show this fact (Lai 2014: 180), the revival of the national anthem and the flag are also good examples. For Japan motives are also mixed as Lebow expects, the appetite benefits from trade and economic linkages, fear that is partially derived from China’s assertiveness in the maritime periphery got Japan closer to the United States. All in all, even Koizumi apologized when he found it appropriate (Dreyer 2016: 202). Nonetheless, Japan is apparently not available to give in to China’s demands of a lower demeanor and historical kowtowing, which attests for the strength of the spirit as a motive. Japan is now less available for apologies, giving way to China and looking back to its war past (Wan 2006: 161).
Japan and China have conflicting ordering *principia*, cognitive models, in affirming their *spirit* and this shows in the relation, China relies on the pillars of national unity and surpassing vulnerability to foreign misdeeds, Japan on its normative affirmation as a cooperative and engaging *status quo* power seeking the full restoration of its sovereignty. China wants a Japan conscious of the past, and Japan wants a forward-looking ‘normalized’ relation with China.

*(A.2) Available of a negative collective memory as a cognitive resource*

For China, historical memory and Japanese humility are important, not to mention the Diaoyu. It might seem difficult to understand at first. After all, China has been willing to compromise and reach resolution in most of its territorial disputes (Fravel 2008: 319), it also scarcely attacks European nations for past aggression. Contrastingly, Sino-Japanese history is unyieldingly central to the corroboration and recognition of the “century of humiliation” narrative (Hughes 2006: 146-151; Wang 2014: 102; Zhao 2004: 17) which gives it its central role in fulfilling China’s seeking of self-esteem.

Chinese nationalism in the 1990’s was strongly anti-Japanese (Zhao 2004: 273) This has been largely corroborated by the content of the state sponsored ‘Patriotic Education Campaigns’, which sought to cater at this underlying cultural nationalism. Half of the designated national-level historical sites about external conflicts, twenty, are about the ‘Anti-Japanese war’ (Wang 2014: 105). The CCP consistently mobilized pre-existent dormant nationalist sentiment (Suzuki 2007: 28). Let us not forget that these campaigns were domestically guided and did not aim at undermining Sino-Japanese relations, they
were manufactured to whip up support for the party (Zhao 2004: 29-31). Also, this should not lead us to think that somehow the elites are detached from the historical narrative. Jiang Zemin and his generation had a profound antagonism towards Japan, perhaps more than Deng Xiaping’s and Mao Zedong’s, which tempered their war-time experiences with the memory of a pre-war Japan as the first developed Asian nation. The former focused mostly on the destructive suffering inflicted during the war (Wan 2006: 144).

Japan has the centrality it has because of the paramount role it played in the identity of China as a victim for the last 100 years (Suzuki 2007: 38). China turning to nationalism had the effect of making anti-Japanese feeling the hyperbolized staple of Chinese identity politics (Hughes 2006: 146-151). Effectively, Chinese nationalism became meshed with anti-Japanese sentiment, making the assertiveness of Japan’s CCP policy a test of its patriotism and legitimacy.

(A.3) Lack of Self-Restraint

Lebow considers fear not to be inherent to the international system, following Wendt’s idea that anarchy is what the states make of it (Wendt 2010: 308-312). Rather, as we have seen, it is argued that fear results from lack of moderation when pursuing appetite or spirit, not taking into account the will of others and prevailing normative consensus. The repeated unrestrained pursuit of motives by agency progressively molds a given structure of interaction, depriving it of reason. It is this process, for structure is always in process, which resulted in the constitution of a negative ideational microstructure. In the 1990’s, by disregarding Japanese efforts of engagement, China’s nuclear
tests, approach to Taiwan and militant state-nationalism started the decade long process of framing a negatively charged structure of interaction, the country pursuing its *spirit* regardless of the interests of its partner. On the other hand, Japan was seeking to revitalize its own esteem through international affirmation, it did not take long for animosity to build as their expensive engagement policy was not paying dividends. Already in 1992, despite Prime Minister Murayama’s strong apology, cabinet members flocked to Yasukuni (Dreyer 2016: 192). Japan would continue sending mixed signals. The 1990’s were the lost opportunity that ended up turning the relation on its head. Curiously, it had started well, with an imperial visit and Japan silently supporting China post-Tiananmen.

Alas, in 1994-1995, Prime Minister Murayama Tomichi asked for a moratorium of Chinese nuclear tests, reminding the Chinese of Japanese sensitivity to the issue, a test was conducted that same month. This left Japan wondering about the effectiveness of its engagement policy (Green 2003: 81). There was dissatisfaction across the aisle, the right wanting to assert Japan’s national dignity on resisting China’s assertiveness and the left being moved by anti-nuclear sentiment (Green 2003: 81). Since 1991, Japan’s ODA charter had required taking into account the recipient’s military expenditures and policies concerning missiles and weapons of mass destruction (Green 2003: 81), this was not at the time applied to China, restraint prevailed and only a symbolic suspension of $75M occurred (Green 2003: 81). Unfortunately, the follow-up were more nuclear tests and Chinese missile launches in reaction to the build-up of Taiwanese elections. Furthermore, the Chinese response to the Japanese debate on the possible suspension of the yen loans was to point out the Japanese duty to continue paying reparations (Green 2003: 82). A clear expression of entitlement coherent with a victimization narrative (Gries 2004: 52-
53). The crisis was eventually defused but the result was the beginning of the long process of moving Japanese China policy from engagement towards hedging.

Correspondingly, by bringing up history and Japanese aggression constantly, Jiang Zemin’s 1998 visit being probably the most extreme case, China showed Japan that it does not acknowledge Japan’s peaceful post-war history nor its seeking of a prestigious international role, in turn denying Japan’s spirit. Chinese complaints about Japanese textbook revisionism and political gaffes are, of course, understandable, government approval of watered-down books constitutes lack of self-restraint. Notwithstanding, for China it seems no apology is ever considered sufficient (Wan 2006: 154). The supposed prevalence of Japanese “rightist” thought is always hyperbolized (Rozman 2002a: 108) and therefore it is gaffes, not apologies, that are highlighted.

The choice of having pre-war Japan figure preeminently in Chinese nationalist propaganda while toning down the contribution of Japanese ODA and investment for Chinese development is a poor one, it confounds pre-war Japan with post-war Japan and indulges popular nationalistic imagination. In the 1990’s, Chinese portrayals of Japanese culture were growingly resorting to stereotypes, depicting it as inherently threatening to regional and global order (Rozman 2002a: 104).

Also poor is Chinese management of anti-Japanese demonstrations and other domestic incidents. It is true that China in the 1990s often tried to restrain them, being afraid that these might spill off onto contestation of the CCP itself or hurt Chinese interests at an inconvenient time. Nonetheless, when they did occur, in the 1990s and later, violent behavior from demonstrators against Japanese property, goods or even the embassy was tolerated by the Chinese authorities, allowing protesters to “vent” before
acting. The 2005 demonstrations against Japan`s UN bid are a good example (Christensen 2005: 5-6).

China`s attitude has already weakened Japan`s pacifist consensus and accelerated the reforms the likes of Ozawa, Koizumi and Abe were pushing for, a result that is hardly wished by the Chinese leadership. Nowadays arguable both the Japanese left and right are mostly devoid of pro-CCP dispositions.

Japan on the other hand, if not as an extreme case of lack of self-restraint as China, does indulge in the apparent confirmation of Chinese paranoia, which in turn incentivizes China to forego restraint. It is indeed true, as mentioned, that Japan apologized and expressed remorse about its past many times. Nonetheless, instances of blatant revisionism continue to happen in LDP cabinets (Dreyer 2016: 208-209). Moreover, the ascent of political personas like the former governor of Tokyo, Ishihara, are a source of trouble for Japan`s international reputation. The insistence on the Yasukuni visits is another matter where spirit is unrestrained. Given that class A war criminals are enshrined there, the use of a different landmark for LDP politicians to praise Japan`s war dead would be advisable. Certain prime-ministers and cabinets value the visits more than others, some visit in official capacity, others do not. Still, the result is invariably the unnecessary feeding of Chinese anti-Japanese feelings. So does the approval of controversial textbooks or minute debates on the wording of formal apologies (Dreyer 2016: 192). As for the security front, Japan cannot be blamed for solidifying relations with America or procuring better defensive and naval capabilities, its unstable international surrounding and China`s double digit defense budget increases advise so. Also, to seek a broader international role given how much Japan contributes financially to international organizations or the UN is also surely not unreasonable; to equate
constitutional revision or even debate with militarism is excessive. Concerning the Senkaku though, something can be said though for admitting that there is an actual territorial dispute, solving an issue can hardly be done while denying its existence.

Despite the difficulties of conciliating both country’s different routes to seeking esteem, a clash was not inevitable. It was Chinese lack of restraint both in its mobilizing of bilateral history and dealing with its neighbors that opened the path to distrust, starting a spiral towards fear. Japan nonetheless was to blame too, it was unavailable or incapable of moderating its domestic politics, giving mixed signals concerning its admission of past guilt.

Throughout the years, the cyclical episodes of lack of restraint solidified and reinforced the erosion of trust, giving way to the constitution of a negative ideational micro-structure. In the 1980s, the first tensions produced by a growing Chinese focus on identitarian politics were already being felt, at the time though there were important actors fundamentally committed to a constructive relation. In contrast, by the 1990s, the political elites who coined the productive partnership of the 70s and 80s were being replaced in both countries (Wan 2006: 142), with them faded not only important informal channels (Wan 2006: 142) but also the empathy and will necessary to keep the other’s interests and concerns in mind. Perhaps Hu Yaobang’s removal, who had carved much of the 80s good ties with Nakasone, is symbolic of this. The post-Tiananmen CCP leadership (Jiang Zemin’s), has less autonomy, authority and prestige than Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping’s, who were revolutionary veterans, and therefore had more political capital (Wan 2006: 150). This makes demands by a nationalistic public harder to resist. As for Japan, as memory faded guilt did so too. Nowadays, Japanese elites feel that China
intentionally uses the ‘history card’, either for domestic political reasons, or to seize the high moral ground (He 2008: 188), thus making watering down history more acceptable.

Below the political leaders, despite the pluralization of policy-making institutions, diplomats try to pick up the slack (Wan 2006: 145). Wan (2006) argues from interviewing diplomats of both countries that there is a vested institutional interest in avoiding or defusing conflict and that it is fundamental to make the relation work (Wan 2006: 145-146). Having their nation’s interests in mind but also committed to ‘understanding’ the other, the highly specialized Foreign Ministries, and their respective “China” and “Japan” schools, would be well equipped to stabilize the relation. Unfortunately, both ministries lost influence in the late 1990s/early XXI century and have strong domestic critics (Wan 2006: 146). Agency more prone to self-restraint and empathy, then, having been progressively removed from the relationship’s management.

More recently, the deliberately multilateral security events of the mid-1990’s have been substituted by China’s risky and self-defeating aircraft incursions in the East China Sea. Why risk escalation despite American regional hegemony? It’s spirited lack of self-restraint by definition. The number of jets detected has peaked in 2016 (Johnson 2016).

**The ideational frame of Sino-Japanese relations**

Having assessed and confirmed the two constitutive components and the repeated acts of agency that resulted in the structure of interaction, I now attend to its characterization and constitutive and causal roles in respectively producing adversarial relational identities (constitutive effect) and framing the limits of Sino-Japanese interactions (causal effects). Additionally, the degree of contestation (Abdelal et. all 2006:
696) of the adversarial identity in elites and population serves as an assessment of the strength of the micro-structure, for it is constituted by it.

(B.1) Negative Micro-Structure

As we have seen, domestic change put China and Japan’s cognitive models and therefore motives at a standstill, negative cognitive resources were at hand, and lack of restraint from both sides progressively generated distrust i.e. fear. All of the three elements are essential: if the seeking of esteem were mutually compatible, chances for friction would be radically decreased. If there was no dormant memory to mobilize, it would be much harder for antagonism to surge. If the actors had shown restraint, as they did in the 1980s, any conflicts would have been dealt in an atmosphere of bilateral trust i.e reason. In short, the internalization of adversarial roles would have been much more limited and a downward spiral would have been unlikely to form.

Wan (2006) provides a timeline of major events since the 1972’s normalization which gives us a simplified version of intergovernmental exchanges (Wan 2006: 17) where the negative trend, which is interpreted as corresponding to a progressive deterioration of trust, is easily visible. A further extension of his timeline to 2015 would provide added insight to the argument here advanced. It is also important to note that “fighting together against others” and “alliance, genuine political partnership” have no cases, which is coherent with the observable implications of C.2 and C.3.
But to what point is the structure negative and therefore negatively constricting of future behavior? The stronger the negativity of the structure, the stronger the

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16 The 10 point scale amounts to the following:

5 = fighting together against others
4 = alliance, genuine political partnership
3 = major events to improve relations such as normalization, agreements, treaties
2 = successful official visits
1 = compromises over disputes

-1 = verbal criticisms
-2 = diplomatic pressure, disputes
-3 = economic, sanctions, major disputes
-4 = military threat, severance of
-5 = fighting with each other

Details here omitted about each one of the dots are available in Wan 2006 (17-31).
internalization of adversarial identities, and more undermined the capacity for cooperation and empathy. Repeated behavior informed and informs shared expectations transforming them through a dynamic of social learning (Wendt 2010: 168, 326-327), thus friction became and is a social fact. Both China and Japan insisted on forcefully pursuing their respective cognitive models, internalizing a shared knowledge that they are adversaries. If lack of restraint continues, a downward spiral towards a security dilemma and subsequent enmity is a distinct possibility. Friendship has already degraded to at least partial rivalry, and it can be further downgraded. As there is an intersubjective understanding by the actors that they are, at least in the ideational sense, in opposition, they tend to act upon this belief generating homeostatic tendencies (Wendt 2010: 187) that maintain the roles in place, therefore they tend to continue the degradation of trust and so move progressively from reason to fear.

(C.1) Adversarial Identities

Incidentally, the broad internalization of adversarial relational identities, which stands as a constitutive effect of the structure of interaction, can be empirically assessed. This gives us an understanding to what extent the ideational structure is negative, and therefore how much it prompts the tendency towards fear. Plus, the importance of spirit-related factors (Diaoyu/Senkaku, history etc.), which was already argued, if clearly seen across the board in the social bodies of the respective countries, reinforces our argument regarding the spirit’s importance in the actors’ respective cognitive models.

(C.1) Adversarial Identities: People

The Chinese public did hold negative war memories of Japan previous to the emergence of Sino-Japanese friction, though the playing out of these cognitive resources
was restricted, and tensions managed with care. Despite the intermittent friction over history, at the time Hu Yaobang and Nakasone were committed to detente mutual images were mostly positive (Rozman 2002a: 98). At the end of the 1980’s, on the eve of the Tiananmen demonstrations, a joint survey by the Yomiuri shimbun and the Riben wenti ziliao showed optimism in China, even if coupled with a good amount of popular distrust. This is consistent with a situation where the availability of a negative cognitive resource is accompanied by actor restraint, making possible the creation of trust (Rozman 2002a: 98).

More than 70% of Chinese respondents said that ties - political, economic or cultural - would develop very well or quite well over the next ten years. Nearly 90% said bilateral relations should become closer. Yet, when asked if they can trust each other, 35% of Chinese said they could not and another 9% made it emphatic that they could not at all, as opposed to just 13% and 1% of Japanese respondents asked the same question (Rozman 2002a: 98). Mirroring this, in Japan the general view was not only one of optimism, but even, as Rozman describes it, of ‘naive romanticism’ (Rozman 2001: 100), in June 198318 17% per cent of Japanese referred to China as Japan’s ‘greatest friend’, second only to America (Rozman 2001: 100). Altogether, 72% described China as ‘friendly’ (Rozman 2001: 100).

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17 From hereafter, we quote from Rozman and Wan for the following data because their compilations revealed itself particularly useful to easily characterize the 80’s and 90’s. As for more recent data we will quote from primary sources.

Unfortunately, by the 1990’s, as one might expect, the situation was drastically changed. The first shock in public opinion came just after the Tiananmen Square incident. Wan (2006) quotes data from the Japanese prime minister’s office that show a sudden drop of people who “feel affinity for China” from about 70% to 50% in a single year (Wan 2006: 68-69). This value was generally maintained from 1990 to 2003, rising to about 55% percent at the time of the imperial visit (1992) and reaching 45% mid-decade at the time of the Chinese nuclear tests (1995). Curiously, the 1998 controversial visit by Jiang Zemin seems to not have had a substantial impact in the Japanese public, the level of affinity kept steady at 50% (Wan 2006: 68-69). For the general Japanese population the greatest negative influence to China’s image were the Tiananmen events, not the mid-decade missile launches and nuclear tests, or Jiang’s visit in 1998. In 2004, affinity dropped sharply to 37.6% (Wan 2006: 68-69). As for China, by 1996 a China Youth Daily survey on the sentiments of Chinese youth show that only 14.5% had a good or very good impression of Japan while 41.5% said they had a poor or very poor impression (Wan 2006: 71). In its first opinion poll in September-October 2002, the Institute of Japanese studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences showed that only 5.9% of the interviewed felt close or very close to Japan, those who did not feel close were 43.3% (Wan 2006: 71). The second pole in September-October 2004 found the data changed little for the better, and some for the worst: close or very close 6.3%, did not feel close 53.6% (Wan 2006: 71).

Apparently, worsening Japanese images of China trailed the changes in Chinese views, not the other way around (Rozman 2002a: 106). While this can be interpreted in a variety of ways, it is a confirmation that negativity grew more slowly in Japanese society than in the Chinese. This in turn is consistent with the existence of dormant hostility
towards Japan and the growing preeminence of nationalistic discourse in the 1990’s. Constantly fed by identity politics, by the end of the first decade of the XXI century, mutual distrust (*fear*) was clearly installed in both social bodies and the importance of identity-related disputes (*spirit*) showed clearly. A trend that is maintained to this day, revealing its “stickiness”:

Figure 3 : Impression of each country (Copyright © 2015 The Genron NPO All Right Reserved): <http://www.genron-npo.net/pdf/2015forum_en.pdf>

The Genron NPO/China International Publishing Group started polling in 2005 in collaboration with the Public Opinion Research Institute Corporation (Japan) and the Horizon Research Consultation Group (China). From then on they have yearly released a considerable amount of survey data concerning mutual impressions by the civil population. As we can see in the graph above\(^{19}\), in 2005 Japanese who held an

‘unfavorable/relatively unfavorable’ impression of China were already a 37.9% while those who held a ‘favorable/relatively favorable’ impression were a minute 15.1%. For China the numbers are even worst, respectively 62.9% and 11.6%, which shows the pervasiveness of negativity towards Japan. Reilly (2012) tells that from 2002 to 2005, unsurprisingly during Koizumi’s tenure, was a time where the commercial press went even beyond the Party press to bash Japan in a sensationalist matter. Their motivation was likely commercial, riding anti-Koizumi discontent (Reilly 2012: 192).

Curiously, there is an exception to the growing animosity trend in China (2005-2007), apparently undermining our understanding. By 2005, the ideational history-related conflicts were especially intense, activists were calling for more demonstrations (Wan 2006: 30). Over growing international criticism the Chinese government tried to stem the tide and from April 2005, Koizumi and the Hu Jintao were trying to improve the relation (Wan 2006: 30). Devoid of external causes, Reilly attributes the improvement in 2005-2007 to a shift in government propaganda, this resulting on comparatively more positive inputs on Japan (Reilly 2012: 196-198). It is important to note that despite the governmental efforts at the time favorable impressions did not surpass negative ones, 36.5% was the minimum for negative impressions during the whole survey period. Arguably, this shows the limited and yet real impact of government policy on nationalist mobilization.

The undeniable net result of constant problems concerning identity was a built-up of negativity in both public opinions, which can be pared with the dilapidation of trust at the political level. The last few years show extremely strong negative impressions (2013-2015), the small improvement in 2015 is little reason for optimism. The lack of positive impressions is coherent with the general lack of trust (fear) and makes for the argument
of a strongly negative structure of interaction. Furthermore, the reasons presented for the unfavorable impressions mirror closely our interpretation of the importance of the *spirit* for the actor’s cognitive models:
Figure 4: Reason for Unfavorable impression: Japanese Public

Figure 5: on for Unfavorable impression: China Public

The two most prevalent reasons for the Chinese public’s unfavorable impression are respectively ‘Japan’s lack of a proper apology and remorse over the history of invasion of China’ (70.5%) and the ‘Japanese purchase of the Diaoyu Islands for the nation and fueling the confrontation’ (68.1%), they concern Chinese national dignity and territorial integrity plus the idea of an aggressive Japan, therefore relating to the victimization narrative. Japan’s reasons are more varied: ‘Criticism of Japan over historical issues’ (55.1%), ‘China’s actions to secure resource, energy and food look selfish’ (53%), ‘China’s action incompatible with international rules’ (47.9%) and ‘Confrontation continues over the Senkaku Islands’ (46.4%). ‘Apology fatigue’ and the perception of China as revisionist, contrasting with Japan’s normative status quo power, is very much discernable.

Fear-related worries, which we interpret as resultant of the constant spirit-related strife, are close behind for both countries. Respectively ‘China’s military buildup and non-transparency is evident’ (39.2%) and ‘Japan’s attempt to besiege China on military, economic and ideological fronts in cooperation with the United States’ (41.1%).

(C.1) Adversarial Identities: Elites

The current status quo in China and Japan concerning influence wielding elites\(^2\) does not look promising. In a broad analysis of the Chinese foreign policy debate conducted by Shambaugh and Xiao (2012), it is argued that in China the “center of gravity”

\(^2\) Shambaugh and Xiao base their data on “China’s IR experts primarily based in research institutes and universities, as well some foreign policy officials (...)” (Shambaugh and Xiao 2012: 37), Michishita and Samuels on “scholars, commentators politicians and bureaucrats” (Michishita and Samuels 2012: 151).
(Shambaug and Xiao 2012: 65) is anchored on the ‘realists’21 with a strong pull from the ‘nativists’22 (Shambaug and Xiao 2012: 65-67). Due to their suspicion of the outside world, distrust towards a country with such a negative historical charge as Japan is a given. It is safe to infer that distrust towards Japan is well internalized.

The situation in Japan too shows internalized adversarial impressions. Faced with a rising China and a belligerent North Korea has seen those whom Michishita and Samuels (2012) call ‘balancers’ or ‘military hedgers’ take the center stage in political leadership. Balancers are described as “attentive to direct military threats from China and less enamored with the economic benefits to be derived from closer relations with China” (Michishita and Samuels 2012: 170).

In what concerns academia specifically, adversarial attitudes are also apparent. Chinese IR academia largely shares the distrust of politicians and people but lacks a strong historical focus (Reilly 2012: 164). Despite a growing collective urging to more cooperation (Reilly 2012: 164), an overwhelming majority of academic articles (1997-2007) about Japan focused on Japanese actions being threatening to Chinese interests or security, and a whopping 74% emphasized ‘right-wing tendencies’ in Japanese domestic policies (Reilly 2012: 163-164). Japan those who are proponents of skepticism towards

21 Inspired on the Qing ‘self-strengtheners’, Deng Xiaoping and Defensive Realism; having as policy goals to strengthen China, resist external pressures, internal balancing and putting ‘China First’; their policy tactics are categorized as economic and military modernization, eschew foreign entanglements, protect China and suspicion of multilateral institutions (Shambaug and Xiao 2012: 66).

22 Ideational origins: Leftist/Maoist/Marxist, Hyper-Nationalist and Xenophobic; Policy goals: Withdraw from the world; Policy tactics: Criticize the West, limit engagement with the outside world (Shambaug and Xiao 2012, 66) “Balancers are attentive to direct military threats from China and less enamored with the economic benefits to be derived from closer relations with China” (Michishita and Samuels 2012: 170).
China outnumbered those favorable to engagement two to one: a 2011 survey on the views of about 50 Japanese international affairs scholars and diplomats found out that about half favored hedging towards China (‘balancer’), with about one quarter wanting closer ties with both China and the U.S (Michishita and Samuels 2012: 173).

(C.1) Adversarial Identities:

Strong adversarial relational identities, strongly negative micro-structure

Despite the comparatively positive signs by IR specialists, which most likely is testimony to their pragmatism, adversarial relational identities are well ingrained, at both the elite and popular level, which amounts to saying that there is a lack of trust i.e fear and as an implication the structure of interaction is very negative and should be highly constricting of agency. Additionally, both people and politicians reveal signs of the importance of the spirit for their cognitive models, which is coherent with our previous constitutive reasoning.

It is a bleak scenario, but let us not forget that states are managed and controlled by thinking beings. Reflexivity allows reconstruction of identity and social roles (Lebow 2010a: 562), therefore “ending one’s own contribution” (Wendt 2010: 362) to the sustenance of the micro-structure’s negativity is always possible. Regrettably, the current degree of internalization of adversarial identities makes this highly unlikely. According to Abdelal et. all (2006), “where there is little contestation, one might conclude that that
part of identity content is taken for granted or considered ‘natural’” (Abdelal et. all 2006: 701).

The result is a relationship pattern with a very particular structure of interaction or micro-structure. As we have seen, even if the negative ideational aspect (spirit) pressures the relationship down, in contrast economics (appetite) encourages a constructive relation. Therefore there is a double threshold for structure constraining Sino-Japanese interactions. Material conditions set a lower limit to bilateral friction, while ideational conflict sets an upper limit to how much diplomats and politicians can realistically achieve. This mixing of motives is what leads to the cyclical bilateral pattern, spirit-related issues are constantly “mended”, never settled, while economic ties are insulated, both actors being conciliatory to protect that status quo.

What about the dangers of the downtrend? Lebow considers in his work that having the spirit as the more important drive makes actors more risk accepting either concerning gains or losses (Lebow 2010a: 368), this is perfectly consistent with China’s behavior in the maritime periphery. We do not mean by this that there is a Chinese (or Japanese) desire for armed conflict, it simply means that risk acceptance inherently opens the possibility of escalation. Lebow’s study of the history of war tells us that not only imperfect information but also motivated bias explains that most initiators lose wars, “minimal or self-serving risk assessment” being typical of actors seeking honor or standing (Lebow 2010b: 121).
(C.2) Irresolution of Bilateral Issues concerning the Spirit

The sustenance of a strongly negative micro-structure results in the continued incapacity of settling permanently issues of history and territory. Therefore, the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute will remain in place, periodically erupting, as will controversies about historical interpretation and related declarations by politicians. This, of course, does not preclude China and Japan taking action to try to stem the problem by, for instance, creating bilateral history commissions or politically agreeing to tone down the issue, what is here implied as an observable implication is that these will be able to achieve at best only a temporary settlement.

(C.3) Inability to form a Strategic Partnership

The second causal effect of the structure of interaction is the precluding of the formation of a strategic partnership between Japan and China. Despite sharing obvious common interests, as already noted, in what concerns open trade, regionalization and security, the cyclical pattern of spirit-infused disputes, now added to by an increasing fear, will hinder the two actors from developing and realizing possible common objectives.

(D.1) Lockean Anarchic Macro-Structure

None of the two actor’s legitimacy or existence qua state is at stake. East Asia is a Lockean culture of anarchy, therefore material structure though important is not strictly deterministic. On the other hand, there are no security communities and the use of physical force in limited conflicts remains a possibility. Sovereignty is recognized as a
right, but “property”, as in borders, may still be violently disputed at times, rivalry being a common relational form (Wendt 2010: 279-283). The maintenance of this situation is needed as a pre-condition for this analysis to hold. If for instance, a war broke between America and China over the status of Taiwan, East Asia would devolve into a Hobbesian culture of anarchy, which would put identity firmly on the background and bring the unquestioned hegemony of fear.

Conclusion

As it could be imagined, the long-standing friction of Sino-Japanese political relations has deep roots, though arguably deeper than what the material facts would have us conceive. The end of the cold-war largely freed the Sino-Japanese interaction from systemic bonds, regardless, more strategic freedom meant a downward trend in political relations, which surprisingly did not drag trade or investment along. Security too has only been slowly molded by it. In fact, from Lebow’s Appetite, Spirit and Fear, two of three point towards a more stable cooperative relation. Nonetheless, the actor’s cognitive models shifted and operationalized the spirit in incommensurable ways. This served as the basis for lack of self-restraint to bring about of trust which constituted a negative structure of interaction that leaves them invariably at odds. This dilapidation continues and is constantly reinforced by cyclical crises, potentially leaving them close to a security dilemma.

The results of this research project affirm the explanatory power and utility of constructivism in face of material alternatives, an apparently sui generis case being made sense through a theoretical framework that gives us a richer account of agency, structure
and social reality. The problems of simplistic assumptions about human motives and interaction of realism and liberalism becoming apparent.

Many questions demand further scrutiny. Which particular diplomatic interactions were crucial? To what degree is this elite-driven, or are elites simply playing to public passions?

Actors make sense of the world through particular cognitive models, if we ignore them costly mistakes of analysis with real world implications will surely take place. A power ruled by *appetite* in its external relations would not surely risk its economic ties for the sake of “face”, contrarily, an actor that regarded as its utmost purpose to be recognized by others as it wishes, would likely do so. States are ultimately run by people, if we do not take these people into account and simply regard the state as a black box, ideational factors will be lost and with them, the analytical tools to make sense of social reality. After all, anarchy is what states make of it (Wendt, 1992).
References


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