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## **Formation of International Relations Theory in East Asia**

: Finding the Diplomatic Strategy of Sino-Japanese Relations in the Cold War Era

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### **Introduction**

Robert Cox argues that theory is always for someone or for some purpose (Cox, 1986). Even though theory was not designed for that intention, but often performs it. Most of the powerful International Relation theories (IR theories) are grounded on European and American experiences. And these theories are explaining and even supporting the power of the United States (US) today. Then how one can explain the international relations in non-western regions? Specifically, the western hegemony of theories makes it problematic to apply these theories to the other regions. In a word, it is a challenge for IR theory to apply in the East Asia.

Recognizing theories' regional bias, there has been the meta-theoretical discourse on East Asian IR theory. A volume edited by Ikenberry and Mastanduno, in particular, raised the question, "Why is there no non-Western international relations theory?" Specifically, the authors deal with following questions. Does a theory that can explain East Asian international relations exist? If there is,

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is it limited to explaining East Asian region or is it universally applied to other regions as well?

This paper addresses these issues. The paper focuses on the historical differences between Sino-Japanese relations from as distinguished from the international relations between the west and East Asia. It complements existing IR theories to find a theoretical nexus. In particular, the paper reviews the Sino-Japanese relations during the Cold War. The US-Soviet bilateral power system does not explain all the events in East Asia. There has been a tendency of overemphasize the influence of the US and the Soviet Union, thereby underestimating East Asian countries' autonomy. This results in East Asian countries' foreign activity being treated as being passive and reactive. Against the tendency, the objective of this research is to find the active and strategic aspects of Chinese and Japanese relationship. To verify the hypothesis, this paper reconstructs Sino-Japanese relations during the Cold War in a narrative of China and Japan, not that of the US and Soviet Union. And it will review the primary sources such as the record of Zhou Enlai-Danaka Summit in 1972, the record of Deng Xiaoping – Sonoda Meeting in 1978, the negotiation records of the Peace and Friendship Treaty (1<sup>st</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting in 1978), and the Diplomatic Blue Book of Japan (1949-1979). These analyses will make an effort to counteract the regional bias of IR theories in an effort to strengthen them.

## **Formation of International Relations in East Asia**

IR theories during the Cold War are explained in the context of the US and Soviet Union. Constructivism and critical theory point out that the theory has been determined by the position of powerful countries. China and Japan have typically been considered mere objects of the Great Powers in IR theories. With China and Japan as subjects, the analytical result will read the international relations as totally different. Then, what are the features of East Asian international relations in the Cold War era? There are primarily two peculiarities.

### **1. Post-War, Cold War, and Modernization**

The Cold War began in the Post-World War II which is longer time period than the Cold War.

In East Asia, there was one defeated nation, Japan, and many nations newly independent from the colonial rule. The most urgent task for these countries was reconstruction. At the same time, they needed to meet the demands for modernization. Putting these two tasks together, East Asian countries had to pursue their own national interest to reconstruct and modernize. This purpose was realized through economic development and status improvement.

## **2. History, Memory, and Identity**

The post-war reconstruction and modernization did not start as a blank slate. East Asian states have thousands-year long histories and have developed various stories and memories with neighbor countries. China's tributary system, Sinocentrism, and the Sino-Japanese war are transmitted and remembered as a form of history. And the history and memory are in continuity. History and memory are critical in East Asia, because they constitute national identity. National identity is constituted with various ideology reflecting nation's character and purpose and represent the nation's specific sovereignty (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein, 1996). An identity is formed both exogenously and endogenously(Suh, 2003), and it reflects the nation's past, present, and future. History, memory and identity cause conflicts and promote cooperation today.

Also, East Asian countries needed to secure legitimacy in the process of pursuit of reconstruction and modernization. China was competing to gain national identity over Taiwan. Japan was struggling for the status of an independent state and internationally responsible country. The status of legitimate state was a crucial issue for East Asian international relations in the Cold War era.

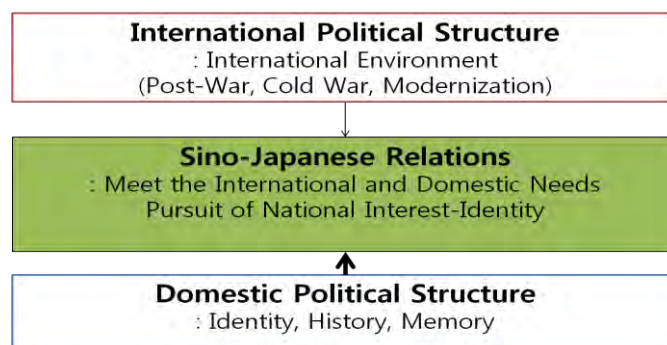
In sum, under the international environment of the Cold War, East Asian countries pursued reconstruction and modernization as a national interest. Each nation was forming identity based on the history and memory, and it was important to get recognition from the international society. It is necessary to focus more on the post-war and modernization as well as the Cold War. Also It is notable that national interest and national identity interact each other.

### 3. Analysis Framework: National interest and Identity in East Asia

National interest and identity are the two central concepts to understand international relations in East Asia. And these two key concepts indicate that it was necessary to focus more on domestic politics. Many researchers on East Asia had focused more on the international political structure, especially during this period, the Cold War. And the other international environment of the twentieth century post-war period and domestic politics of East Asian have been understudied.

From this perspective, it can be said that the influence of the US and the Soviet Union toward Japan and China was a background issue not a core reality. Under the US-Soviet constraints, how did China and Japan pursue national interests and build up their relations? This paper assesses both the international political structure and the domestic political structure of these two countries.

<Figure 1> A Framework of Sino-Japanese Relations



### National Interest-Identity in the Sino-Japanese Relations

#### 1. The Chinese Dimension

Since the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, two Chinese governments coexist -- in Beijing and in Taiwan, respectively. It was inevitable for the two governments to compete for legitimacy. Under this ideological confrontation, the PRC represents communism and the Republic of China (ROC) represents liberalism. At the same time, after the

independence from semi-colonial rule of Japan, the both governments sought to reconstruct and modernize China.

From its establishment, the PRC insisted that the international society recognize the Beijing government as the sole legitimate Chinese government. The PRC made this China issue a zero-sum game. It set the rule that the improvement of relations with PRC meant diplomatic cessation with Taiwan.

This “One China Policy” was finally realized when the PRC became a member of the United Nations from which Taiwan was expelled in 1971, normalized of relations between China and Japan in 1972, and Sino-American normalization in 1979. Although it had to tolerate relations with Taiwan in economic affairs, the PRC won the formal status of Chinese government.

Also, the rising status of the PRC resulted in the diversification of the Cold War ideology. In the early period of the Cold War, the PRC put forth a thoroughly pro-Soviet policy. However, after the death of Stalin in 1953, the PRC pursued an independent ideology in communist camp and adopted an anti-Soviet position.

The Cold War cannot be simplified into the Communism versus Liberal Democracy. China regarded the US as an imperialist enemy, but as the Sino-Soviet conflict intensified, China criticized the Soviet Union’s hegemony and regarded it a threat to China. Under these conditions, cooperation between China and the US were possible. The Sino-American détente in 1970s was based on an anti-Soviet coalition. For China, national interest was more important than Cold War ideology. China’s national interests were in protecting its border, economic development in the domestic economy, and acquiring international status. Also, it is remarkable that the perception of China’s leading role in Asia and the Third World, in part, came from its long history and memory of Sinocentricism.

Many scholars in Chinese Studies conclude that the diplomatic policy of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong was pragmatic. This pragmatism was a logical basis to maximize China’s national interest when there were conflicts internationally, and for China’s task of reconstruction and modernization. The PRC attempted to change the structure of power in East Asia, rising to become a

third major international player, after the US and the Soviet Union. Beijing chose to follow neither the Soviet Union nor the US, emphasizing instead, its alliance with the Third World. In addition to the US and the Soviet Union, China emerged as an independent actor in East Asian international relations during the Cold War. China challenged the bidispersed Cold War system. China sought the role of the independent third player and the dynamics in both East Asia and the world more dynamic. There were not only the ideologically-based South Triangle of the U.S-Japan-South Korea, and the North Triangle, of the Soviet Union-China-North Korea, but also the large triangle of the U.S-China-Soviet Union and the small triangle of the U.S-China-Japan (Soeya, 1996; Jeon, 2005). Unlike China's forceful anti-Soviet movement, Japan worried about deteriorating Soviet-Japanese relations. Because of the anti-hegemony clauses targeting the Soviet Union, the Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty proceeded only with difficulty in the 1970s.

In this period, China played an active role in designing the overall framework of Sino-Japanese relations and in agenda setting. Zhou Enlai suggested the two steps approach of normalization and then a Peace and Friendship Treaty. And China insisted on a One China policy and Anti-Hegemony policy.

## **2. The Japanese Dimension**

After being defeated in the WWII, Japan was under the control of the United States. It tried to be independent with the 1951 San Francisco Treaty, but under the constraint of the Peace Constitution and the U.S-Japan Security treaty, it could not exercise military power. Japan pursued the identity of being an independent, peaceful country in the process of the national reconstruction after WWII.

In addition to accepting the US influence in the spheres of security and foreign affairs, Japan identified itself as an economic power. For Japan, economic power has been its key identity and national interest. The Japanese economy threatened the US economy once, and Japan was treated as one of the most powerful countries in the world. Japan emerged as a main actor in an international

society on the strength of its economic power.

Japan is only subordinate to the US, and at a glance, it is passive in foreign affairs, but when we review this from the Japanese government's perspective and under the constraints of the international environment, it can be said that Japan tried to secure autonomous policy sphere to enlarge its national interest (Oh and Choi, 2011).

This is true, especially in Sino-Japanese relations. It was only in the 1970s that the reconciliation movement between the US and China was realized. However, the China and Japan had tried to develop ties from 1949. Mainland China was an enormous market for Japan. The Japanese government could not ignore China's ideological base in the international political sphere, but it emphasized that Japan and China were close historically, geographically, economically, and culturally (MOFA, 1957). So it was argued, Japan and China needed to establish contact with each other. And this was not simply a matter of diplomatic recognition between governments. Japan, also, sought trade with the communist camp and operated its commercial relations independent from political factors (MOFA, 1957).

In 1952, Japan had no choice but to establish Japan-ROC Peace Treaty in accordance with the US East Asian policy. To access the PRC, Japan designed the "Equidistant Policy" between Beijing and Taiwan and "Policy of the Separation of Politics and Economy." (MOFA, 1965).

As soon as US and China relations improved, Japan and China normalized their relations. Some might say that the surprise turning of the US policy toward China had the direct affect of the establishment of normalization between Japan and China. However, it is more important to note that Japan and China had made efforts to enhance their relationship since the 1950s. Under US constraint, Japan set the logical argument to access to Beijing and maximize its national interest. And when the US President Richard Nixon made his visit to China, it gave Japan a chance to realize their long-cherished desire of normal relations with the PRC. In 1950s and 1960s, Japan was reading the context of the international relations and tried not to engage in it. In 1970s, the international political structure surely changed, and Japan applied the changes to policy at a very rapid pace. The Nixon Shock was a

“critical juncture” for the road to the normalization. It, however, cannot fully explain the entire normalization process (Oh and Choi, 2012).

In sum, China and Japan were forming their identity and pursued their national interest. It is notable that national interest and identity constructed each other. Both developed their ideas and policies on the process of maximizing their own interests under environmental constraints. China argued the inseparability of economy and politics, while Japan insisted on the separation of economy and politics. Their ideas look paradoxical, but they were able to coexist because national interest was most important. The table 1 summarizes this process.

<Table 1> National Interest – Identity and Supporting Policies

	CHINA(PRC)		JAPAN	
	National Interest	Identity	National Interest	Identity
Modernization	Economic Development	Nation-State Building	Economic Development	Economic Advanced Country
Post-War	Reconstruction	Legitimate Chinese Government	Reconstruction	Independent Peace Country
Cold War	Sino-Soviet Alliance Nuclear Power	Communist Country	US-Japan Alliance	Liberal Democracy
Principle	Inseparability of Economy and Politics		Separation of Economy and Politics	
Policy	One China Policy Anti-Hegemony		Equidistant Policy Omni directional Diplomacy	

### **Diplomatic Strategy in Sino-Japanese Relations**

China played active role in Sino-Japanese relations and the international relations between them. First of all, it set the general structure of the bilateral relationship. The 1972 Joint Declaration and the 1978 Peace and Friendship Treaty are the two pillars of the basic structure of the Sino-



Japanese relations today (Son, 2004). The two pillar system of the bilateral relations was imposed by Zhou Enlai (Zhang, 1998). He suggested two steps for the rapid normalization between China and Japan. First and foremost, China and Japan would normalize their relations, and then details such as emerged from the Peace and Friendship Treaty were to be dealt with (Zhang, 1998). This suggestion concerned Japan's domestic political system. The joint declaration was based on the prime minister's will, but the Peace and Friendship Treaty required the deliberation and ratification of Japanese Diet. Therefore there was high probability that it would take a longer time if all issues were dealt with in one single event (Lin, 2003).

The 1978 treaty was the follow-up of the 1972 normalization. Zhou Enlai suggested the contents of the 1978 treaty and passed it to the Chinese Ministry of the Foreign Affairs in 1974 (Lin, 2003). Actually, the 1978 treaty reaffirms most of the ideas in 1972 declaration. And the contents follow the general suggestions raised in China.

Second, China led the Sino-Japanese and Sino-American relations by setting agendas for negotiation. Chinese foreign policy in 1970s can be summarized anti-Soviet. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Brezhnev Doctrine of 1969, and the Sino-Soviet border dispute in 1969 kept on worsening Sino-Soviet relations, and paved the way for cooperation with the US (Shambaugh, 1998). China claimed to be against Soviet hegemonism and stated such in the 1978 treaty with Japan. However, Japan could not easily include an anti-hegemony clause, because the clause might harm its relations with the Soviet Union.

Japan's reluctance to put an anti-hegemony clause in the treaty delayed the negotiations. Even though the clause was adopted in 1972 declaration, at that time the Taiwan issue was the more important focus for Japan. China required Japan--and the US also—to accept the One China and Anti-Hegemony policies. It caused friction with Taiwan and the Soviet Union.

These problems and frictions are why the China-Japan Peace and Friendship Treaty and US-China normalization took time to complete. At last, China won the promise of Japan and the US to agree with the China's principle and policy. This shows China's agenda setting ability and leading

negotiation strategy.

On the other hand, Japan also tried to secure its autonomy in foreign policy during the Cold War. Firstly, Japan was expected coordinate its foreign policy and domestic policy. Japan had to persuade the US and Taiwan to understand the need for the China market. And Japan could not ruin its relations with the Soviet Union by accepting China's anti-hegemony policy. Japan's strategy for settling the problem between international and domestic politics was to stress equidistant diplomacy (Feng, Gao, and Wang, 2006). Even though Japan could accept China's two conditions, Japan tried to compromise with the third nation clause.

Secondly, the Japanese government utilized US influence on the coordinating process. There are both pro-PRC and pro-ROC groups in Japan. Taiwanese and Soviet relations, therefore, made it difficult to persuade the pro-ROC group and establish the 1978 treaty (Oh and Choi, 2013).

In addition, the dispute over Diao-yu-dao/Senkaku Island worsened when the 1978 treaty was passed (Feng, et al. 2006). The Prime Minister Hukuda was willing to contract with the PRC, but it was not easy to persuade the opposition. To deal with this problem, Hukeda announced that the US President Gerald Ford and his successor Jimmy Carter supported the Peace and Friendship treaty. This made the domestic atmosphere favorable toward the 1978 treaty (Tanaka, 1996). With Hukuda's expressing his strong opinion and US support, finally, Japan was able to get domestic approval.

### **Conclusion: Still Ongoing Process**

The international history of East Asia operates in a different context from that of the West. The international relations in East Asia do not conform entirely to the western international relations theoretical explanation. This paper examined the Sino-Japanese relations during the Cold War and found that there were more complex dynamics than the can be explained by the Cold War ideological dichotomy.

Following World War II, the East Asian countries were faced with three tasks: post-war reconstruction, Cold War ideological confrontations, and modernization. Also they used history and

memory and to construct multiple identities. China found a different way in communism, joining with the Third World against the Soviet Union. And China was recognized as a sole legal Chinese government as it ousted Taiwan from the formal diplomatic relations. Japan put its effort into economic development and tried to return to the international community with an image of a peaceful country.

However, it is still possible to apply existing IR theories to East Asian international relations. First, East Asian nations became the member of the international society, rose as a principal actor, and used common language in the world community. After the WWII, East Asian countries including China and Japan adopted the international standard and norms. Second, they were rational actors. They tried to protect and promote national interest under international constraints. Therefore, the differences in East Asian international relations do not exclude the existing IR theories. This is an attempt to complement the regional bias of IR theory and strengthen the IR theories.

China and Japan strived to overcome the constraints of the Cold War powers. Having a positive relationship between the PRC and Japan was taboo during the Cold War. However, it was substantial for China and Japan to approach each other to protect and promote each other's national interest. The PRC pursued modern nation-building, insisting that other countries accept the One China policy and anti-hegemony, while Japan developed into a major economic power while it pursued the policy of equidistance and the policy of separating politics from the economy. The Sino-Japanese relations moved toward 1972 normalization and future relations with the 1978 Peace and Friendship Treaty, the two pivotal institutions regulating Sino-Japanese relations today. The two nations acted with a diplomatic strategy.

The process of institutionalization was not easy. Japan and China had paradoxical policies. However their paradoxical ideas coexisted. Japan's separation of politics and the economy, and China's inseparability of politics and economy were compatible with each of their economic development. Japan responded to China's One China Policy and Anti-Hegemony policy by developing the Equidistant Policy. China led the negotiations and played the role of agenda setter. And

through this experience China learned its leading role in this region.

The process of reconstructing and modernizing a nation is still ongoing. China and Japan's relations were normalized, but the history and memories between the two countries are the factors of both cooperation and conflicts. The Diao-yu-dao/Senkaku Island and the One China Policy are the long pending issues. China's Sinocentrism and ancient tributary system and victimization by the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese war cause anti-Japanese thinking and propensity in China. For the mutual interest, the paradoxical ideas have been able to coexist, but when it comes to zero-sum game, they can confront each other and the peaceful institution in 1970s does not work. It is time for China and Japan to be reminded of each other's commitment to anti-hegemony and peace.

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