

## Is China's Discursive Power Increasing? The "Power of the Past" in Sino-Japanese Relations

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*The idea that China's rise, and more specifically its increased material capabilities, are about to produce a power shift in East Asia raises the question whether the Chinese government's ability to produce effects through discursive power has also increased. The government's use of discourses about China's war against Japan is a conspicuous example of attempts to exercise discursive power. Has China's ability to use the past for political purposes increased as its material capabilities have grown? To answer this question, I theorize on the use of discourses about the past on three levels—domestic, bilateral, and international. My analysis demonstrates that notwithstanding its increased material capabilities, the Chinese government's discursive power has actually decreased. KEYWORDS: China, Japan, Sino-Japanese relations, power shift, discursive power, history issue.*

THE IDEA THAT CHINA'S RISE IS PRODUCING A POWER SHIFT IN EAST ASIA has become firmly established in academic and political discourse. The power shift is often understood as involving an increase in the power of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and a decrease in the power of Japan or the United States, or both. The Chinese economy has expanded tremendously, and the PRC's material capabilities (power as commonly understood by realists) have grown significantly. Increased material capabilities are commonly assumed to come with a greater ability to influence others, and not only through threats of military force (Hagström 2005; Schmidt 2005). This perspective suggests that China's *discursive* power would increase along with its material capabilities.

Studying discursive power is important for several reasons. First, the study of power in general is at the heart of political analysis. In addition, a state that is able to achieve its objectives

in various issue areas through the use of discourse might be less willing to resort to military force. Moreover, even though discursive power is an important form of power, it has been largely neglected. In contrast, much attention has been paid to Chinese hard power, in terms of material capabilities, as well as soft power. China's soft power is commonly understood in accordance with Joseph Nye's definition as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye 2004, x). Similar to the literature on hard power, research on China's soft power has tended to highlight capabilities or resources that China possesses (Blanchard and Lu 2012).

I depart from a general definition of power as the production of effects, as noted by Hagström and Jerdén in their introduction to this special issue and by Barnett and Duvall (2005). *Discursive power* is defined as the production of effects through the mobilization of particular discourses, that is, "specific communicative event(s), in general, and a written or oral form of verbal interaction or language use, in particular" (van Dijk 2008, 104).

The most conspicuous case of discursive power in Sino-Japanese relations is arguably the PRC government's use of discourses on war history, which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses to boost its legitimacy domestically. In addition, the PRC government may seek not only to influence Japanese interpretations of the past but also to attempt to extract various concessions from Japan by linking discourses about the past with issues conventionally regarded as having little to do with war history. Recently, such attempts have not only directly targeted Japan but have also been directed at the international community. For several reasons, this is a useful most-likely case for studying whether China's discursive power has increased (Eckstein 1975). The PRC government regards this tool as important and could therefore be expected to try to use discourses to produce effects. The fact that such attempts have taken place for several decades makes possible a comparison of the effectiveness of these attempts over time. If discursive power stems from material power it should be possible to detect effects in this case, because the material power balance between China and Japan has changed to the former's advantage in recent years. If the PRC govern-

ment's discursive power has not increased in this most-likely case, such a situation would imply that the PRC's general ability to produce discursive effects might also have not increased.

Have the PRC's increased material capabilities boosted the Chinese government's ability to produce effects through the use of discourses about the past? Answering this question requires theorizing on the use of the past for political purposes beyond the commonly expressed but rather poorly defined idea that "China plays the history card."

In the next section I develop a theoretical framework to analyze the use of the discursive power of the past. The analysis that follows focuses on the PRC government's use of discourses about the past for political purposes since the PRC's opening up in the late 1970s until 2013—that is, a period during which Chinese material capabilities have grown to the extent that observers speak of "China's rise." I divide the analysis into three sections, dealing with the domestic, bilateral, and international levels, respectively. In the final section, I synthesize the results of the analysis in order to draw conclusions on and discuss the implications of changes in China's discursive power in particular and the relationship between material capabilities and discursive power in general.

### **Theorizing the Discursive Power of the Past**

A frequent assertion is that the Chinese government uses history strategically for political purposes in its relations with Japan—in short, that China plays the history card. Some scholars have rightly criticized this instrumentalist argument for simplifying Chinese collective memory and presenting the PRC leadership as puppet masters controlling anti-Japanese sentiments as it pleases (Yang 2002; Gries 2004). This critique is important. However, such studies sometimes appear to reify Chinese collective memory by presenting it as a natural and objective representation of historical events rather than social constructions. The approach developed here recognizes the constructed nature of collective memory while allowing for the possibility that collective memory can be used for political purposes.

Exactly what “playing the history card” means and how it is played are often unclear, which makes rigorously theorizing on the power of discourses about the past important. If discourses have power, what kind of power do they have? We may identify at least two types of discursive power, one that *constrains* and the other that *enables* actors. The idea that Japanese (or German) foreign policy is restrained by the past is an example of the former, whereas the belief that the Chinese government plays the history card is a variant of the latter. Both are dependent on actors subscribing to a discourse about the past as part of their identity; “collective identity is a matter of identification on the part of the participating individuals. It does not exist ‘in itself,’ but only to the extent that specific individuals subscribe to it. It is as strong—or as weak—as it is alive in the thoughts and actions of the group members, and able to motivate their thoughts and actions” (Assmann, in Heer and Wodak 2008, 7). This fundamental insight is the key to understanding discursive power. Because an agent’s self-identity suggests that the agent does or does not do certain things, other actors could attempt to influence the agent’s behavior by appealing to this identity (Steele 2008).

In addition, it is useful to differentiate between the production of discursive power effects on the three levels mentioned earlier. Domestically, a government could, for example, use the past to boost its legitimacy, gain support for specific policies, or mobilize people (Banchoff 1997; Müller 2002). Crucially, such measures produce effects when citizens identify with the discourses used. At the bilateral level, references to the past may influence the actions that the other side takes. If such references are frequent, or strongly emphasize the importance of understanding bilateral relations against the background of certain representations of episodes in the past, they might even lead the other side to take the past into consideration without explicit mention ever being made of it (Berger 1997). In such cases, it might be said that a certain interpretation of the past becomes institutionalized as part of the collective memory and identity of the state in question. As Steele writes, “Discursive representations can be just as powerful as physical representations of force—because they can compel other international actors to ‘do what they otherwise would not

do.’ The possibility is that states not only know what actions will make other states *physically* insecure, but also *ontologically* insecure” (2005, 539). By representing events so that they appeal to or manipulate a state’s sense of ontological security, that is, security of self-identity—for example, by recalling a past failure—actors could attempt to “shame” or “lobby” other agents into behaving in certain ways and adopting specific policies (Steele 2008, 74). Discursive power, then, can be exercised by representing the behavior of another actor as incompatible with its identity. It then becomes a threat to the agent’s identity and might cause a behavioral change.

The analysis of the international level focuses on the effects of appeals made to third parties. Of course, such appeals could also have a bilateral impact and may in part be attempts to pressure a particular state. Nonetheless, they are not only directed at the other party, and they involve attempts to produce effects by invoking the identities of third parties. The globalization of collective memory is important in this context (Assmann and Conrad 2010). The campaign that civil society groups recently launched to persuade the United Nations to introduce a day to remember the wartime victimization of the so-called comfort women is one such attempt to firmly establish a specific memory as part of global collective memory (*Japan Times* 2013). If a group of states collectively share a particular memory or identity, a state might be able to appeal to such memory or identity in order to muster support in a bilateral dispute. If a bilateral dispute is understood as closely linked to a certain discursive representation of the past, third parties or even most of the international community might choose to support one party to the dispute.

To illustrate, adversaries *A* and *B* might both attempt to appeal to a third party (*C*) by mobilizing collective identities or memories that *C* subscribes to. *C* could identify both as a former colony and as a democracy. *A* might stress experiences and memories shared by former colonies, whereas *B* might appeal to *C*’s democratic identity. *C* might support *A* rather than *B*, if *C* identifies more strongly as a former colony than as a democracy. Again, such attempts are likely to produce effects only to the extent that they strike a chord.

Focusing on these three levels, I examine the Chinese government's attempts since the late 1970s to use discourses for political purposes about what in China is called the War of Resistance Against Japan. My purpose is to determine whether China's ability to produce effects has increased. At the domestic level, this determination involves analyzing how the Chinese government has attempted to increase its legitimacy through the use of discourses about the war and how Chinese activists have used similar discourses for other purposes. Bilaterally and internationally, the analysis focuses on how the PRC government has attempted to produce effects by linking discourses about the past with issues that, unlike the content of Japanese history textbooks and visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, are not generally seen as part of the "history problem" (Gustafsson 2011). Such issues include Official Development Aid (ODA), Japan's reaction to the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, and the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. The analysis of the bilateral level also involves examining how the Japanese government has responded to the Chinese government's discursive moves. I analyze similar reactions by actors at the international level.

## **The Domestic Use of the Discursive Power of the Past**

### *Patriotic Education*

The PRC's economic reforms and opening up involved a break with and contradicted past socialist principles. Market reforms amplified social cleavages. To deal with the legitimacy crisis caused by these social changes and the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, in the 1990s the CCP increasingly stressed China's wartime past through patriotic education. Numerous policy documents highlighted the importance of patriotism. Most notably, the 1994 Guidelines for Patriotic Education called for creating an atmosphere in which patriotic ideology was the leitmotif of society. The guidelines especially emphasized the role of the CCP in leading the whole nation in the patriotic struggle against foreign aggres-

sion, particularly in the War of Resistance Against Japan (Wang 2012; Gustafsson 2014).

The CCP's discourses about the past appear to have been well received within Chinese society and quite effective in boosting regime legitimacy (Zhao 2004; Callahan 2006). Following the launch of the patriotic education campaign, patriotism became increasingly central and increased support for the CCP in a situation where communist ideology could no longer provide the party with legitimacy (Zhao 2004). Nonetheless, the CCP's emphasis on its patriotic identity made it possible for Chinese activists to use such discourses to influence the CCP by questioning how patriotic its policies really are. Although these activists do not necessarily share a coherent agenda, they produce effects that limit the CCP's policy options, as I demonstrate below.

In 2002, Ma Licheng, a journalist at the official *People's Daily*, wrote an article titled "New Thinking on Sino-Japanese Relations" for the journal *Zhanlüe yu guanli* (Strategy and Management). The article argued that Japan had already apologized sufficiently for the war and was no longer a militaristic country. Ma suggested that China adopt a magnanimous attitude toward Japan. The reaction to the article was fierce. On the Internet, Ma was called a traitor and received death threats. He retired early from his position at the *People's Daily* and moved to Hong Kong. Because elite media initially supported Ma's views and many analysts believed he had ties to the new Chinese leader, Hu Jintao, the article was seen by some as a trial balloon for Hu's Japan policy. Regardless of whether this was actually the case, the leadership distanced itself from Ma's thoughts following the intense response to it (Gries 2005; Hughes 2006; Shirk 2007a).

This and similar episodes are significant because such criticism has influenced what officials and intellectuals are willing to say. A Chinese foreign ministry official reportedly commented on the low profile adopted by the PRC's senior leaders in relation to the episode: "They don't want to be labeled traitors themselves" (Shirk 2007a, 177). Because of the fierce criticism of the moderates who participated in the debate, and the labeling of them as traitors, "Members of the Chinese elites are reluctant to express moderate views on Japan" (He 2007b, 62). Chinese government

officials reportedly feel pressure from nationalist public opinion, especially when it comes to Japan-related issues. They gauge public opinion both by reading reports that are compiled for them and by reading online discussions themselves. Even though nationalist online public opinion might not be representative of Chinese society in general, such opinion is important as it can lead to offline protests (Shirk 2007b).

### *Incidents of Popular Nationalism*

While some scholars have argued that the CCP is still in control of its foreign-policy priorities despite popular nationalist mobilization (Reilly 2014), several incidents demonstrate that popular nationalism has produced effects. In 2003, when it became clear that Japanese *shinkansen* technology was the leading candidate for the Beijing-Shanghai bullet-train project, 90,000 Chinese citizens signed on to an online campaign against using the Japanese technology. The campaign logo read: “Heaven and Earth will not tolerate traitors. We *don't want* the Japanese *bullet train*” (Gries 2005, 844). Following this criticism, Japan's minister of transport was unable to meet with Chinese officials as planned, and a decision on the contract was postponed. Later, Chinese vice foreign minister Wu Dawei told a Japanese Diet delegation visiting China, “We are facing high anti-Japan sentiment in China. If our government adopts the shinkansen technique in the railway project, the people would have [negative] opinions” (He 2007a, 20). The “new thinking” and bullet-train episodes both exemplify how Chinese government officials and other elites have either been criticized or expressed a fear of being denounced by Internet activists as traitors for being soft on Japan. This criticism has become more powerful because the CCP stresses discourses about patriotism in its patriotic education.

In late July 2011 the local government in Fangzheng county, Heilongjiang province—with the approval of the State Council and the foreign ministry, and in the spirit of Sino-Japanese friendship—erected a stone monument to members of the Japanese Manchuria-Mongolia Pioneer Corps. These were people who died from starvation, hypothermia, and disease after they escaped to



Fangzheng county when the Soviet army advanced into Manchuria in 1945. The construction of the memorial was immediately criticized on the Internet. Fangzheng was even denounced as a county of traitors. On August 3, members of the China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands, who had traveled from several locations in China, vandalized the monument. Local police intervened, and, following a physical clash, the self-proclaimed patriots were arrested. After questioning, the activists were released on condition that they leave Fangzheng county. Shortly after the incident, members of the group averred that they would return to Fangzheng to continue what they had started unless the monument was removed. The local authorities removed the monument a few days later (Chen 2011; Nishimura 2011; Yang 2011). This episode exemplifies how Chinese activists can force Chinese authorities to abandon a conciliatory initiative supported by central government agencies through the use of discourses about the war that rely on ideas about what is patriotic and unpatriotic.

Against the background of these incidents, an observer can understand why Chinese government representatives and the Chinese state-run press have responded to recent violent demonstrations against Japan, such as those in the autumn of 2012, by emphasizing the need to “express patriotism rationally” (Guo 2010). In connection with such demonstrations, self-proclaimed patriots have again criticized those regarded as being soft on Japan as traitors. In response to such branding, a newspaper article in the *China Youth Daily* argued, “It is not possible to have only one understanding of patriotism” because there are “different ways of protecting the national interest.” The article explicitly stated that the term “‘patriotism’ must not be monopolized and forcibly occupied,” and that citizens may choose to be patriotic in different ways. For example, even those people who do not participate in demonstrations against Japan or advocate a tough policy toward the country may be patriotic by assisting or taking care of their compatriots or by “working hard” and “paying taxes” (Bao 2012).

What is understood as patriotic (and traitorous) behavior has implications for Chinese foreign policy. The above discussion

indicates exactly what is at stake: the Chinese government is under pressure to be tough and unyielding in its relations with Japan. If the CCP were to accept such an understanding of patriotism, its policy options on Sino-Japanese relations would be quite limited. In contrast, the understanding endorsed by the articles in state-run newspapers discussed above would make it possible not only for Chinese citizens to express patriotism in various ways, but also for the Chinese government to adopt a softer approach and go further in negotiating with its Japanese counterpart without running the risk of being labeled traitorous. As is apparent, how patriotism is understood is crucial to China's international relations and its domestic legitimacy. The meaning of patriotism has become an important issue with implications for foreign policy, largely because the government used discourses about the past that stressed patriotism to boost its legitimacy.

In sum, the Chinese government was certainly able to produce effects in the 1990s in the form of increased legitimacy by stressing patriotic discourses about the War of Resistance Against Japan. However, now that such discourses have become institutionalized, possibilities have opened up for other domestic actors to take advantage of their centrality. They can, therefore, produce effects that are against the government's interests by limiting its options. In other words, my analysis suggests that the discourses remain domestically powerful, but the Chinese government's ability to use them to produce effects has decreased.

### **The Bilateral Use of the Discursive Power of the Past**

Recent scholarship has argued that the Japanese government has accommodated the PRC and thereby contributed to its economic rise (Jerdén and Hagström 2012). The PRC government's power based on discourses about the past arguably contributed to this accommodation.

In the negotiations leading up to the 1978 Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the PRC government reminded Japan that China had been generous in not demanding war reparations at the time of normalization of bilateral relations, and that

Japan ought to respond in kind by accepting the antihegemony clause proposed by the PRC. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union expressed strong opposition to the clause, the Japanese government eventually agreed to its inclusion in the treaty (Johnson 1986). Thus, when Tokyo considered initiating an ODA program to the PRC in the late 1970s, it had already been reminded of the importance of war history and Chinese magnanimity.

Japanese aid to China has often been understood as a form of tacit war reparations, and Chinese leaders have at times made reference to the war when requesting aid (*Asahi Shimbun* 1987b; Isaka 1995). According to Tsukasa Takamine, “Although they never expressed such a view officially, at least in 1979, some senior Japanese officials, especially those with a strong sense of war guilt towards the Chinese people, felt obliged to assist Chinese economic development. Moreover, Chinese leaders clearly did regard Japanese ODA to China as a form of war reparations” (2006, 51).

Over the years, Chinese government representatives continued to remind Japan of its debt to China. Deng Xiaoping, for example, explicitly linked Japanese ODA and war reparations during a meeting in 1987 with the Komeito’s Yano Junya: “Frankly speaking, I think Japan is the country that owes the largest debt to China. At the time of the normalization of diplomatic relations, we did not request war reparations. . . . I think that Japan, in order to assist China’s development, ought to make many more contributions” (*Asahi Shimbun* 1987a).

The Japanese government’s reaction to the CCP’s handling of the 1989 student protests in Tiananmen Square is also related to ODA. Even though the Japanese government adopted limited sanctions by suspending aid to the PRC, this decision has been described as “reluctant and ambivalent” as well as “delayed and ambiguous” (Katada 2001, 39, 44), especially in comparison with the sharp Western criticism of the PRC government (Kesavan 1990). While Western countries strongly condemned the Chinese regime and imposed comprehensive sanctions, the Japanese reaction was considerably more restrained. In his immediate reaction on June 6, Japanese prime minister Uno Sōsuke stated in relation to sanctions that he was “considering none at all.” He added, “I

say clearly that Japan invaded China 40 [*sic*] years ago. Japan cannot do anything against a people who experienced such a war” (*Asahi Shimbun* 1989a). In addition, he said, “Sino-Japanese relations differ from Sino-American and Sino-British relations” (*Asahi Shimbun* 1989b). Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiokawa Masajūrō also noted that the government was not considering sanctions because Sino-Japanese relations were burdened by the past (*Asahi Shimbun* 1989b). The Japanese opposition parties, with the exception of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), also did not criticize the Chinese government (Ijiri 1990). Ijiri at the time argued that the Japanese response followed a familiar pattern in which China criticizes Japan with reference to the “Japanese revival of militarism,” to which the Japanese side, because of its sense of war guilt, responds by “adopting a ‘low profile’” (Ijiri 1990, 640).

Even after having suspended ODA in response to pressure from the US and Europe, Japanese officials stressed that the measure was only a temporary freeze that should not be understood as a “sanction” but merely as a “response.” At the July 1989 G7 meeting, both Prime Minister Uno and Foreign Minister Mitsuoka Hiroshi promoted a cautious approach in order not to isolate China. Japan also resumed aid discussions with China relatively quickly (Katada 2001; Kesavan 1990).

Chinese criticisms of Japanese aid suspensions have similarly referred to war history. For example, the *People's Daily* criticized the decision to suspend aid in response to China's nuclear weapons test in May 1995: “That China, as the country that suffered the most from Japanese aggression, receives Japanese grant aid, has a special historical background” (Gu 1995). In addition, during commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II in 1995, Chinese premier Li Peng linked economic aid and war reparations when conversing with a group of Japanese businessmen: “During the 1930s and 1940s, China suffered enormously from the invasion by Japan. The sum of aid given by Japan cannot compare with the amount of damage China suffered” (Eykholt 2000, 51). Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommended a resumption of aid in the fall of 1996. The suspension was lifted in March 1997 when Foreign Minister Ikeda

visited China following China's decision to stop testing nuclear weapons (Katada 2001). Given that domestic reaction in Japan to the nuclear test was so strong, the sanctions might be regarded as fairly moderate, suggesting that Chinese discursive power had not yet waned in 1995 (Katada 2001).

In 2005 Japan decided to end its ODA program to China by 2008. Such decisions are usually made on the basis of economic indicators, but not on this occasion, which made the decision exceptional (Drifte 2006). In late 2004, when the idea was being discussed in Japan, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue described the discussion as "irresponsible" and harmful to Sino-Japanese relations, commenting that "yen loans to China are a mutually beneficial economic cooperation that has a special political and historical background" (Li 2004). In March 2005, following Japan's decision to end ODA to China, a commentary in the *People's Daily* repeated the criticism, adding that even though the aid was mutually beneficial, Japan now believed China ought to feel grateful and forget the "history of victimization" (*shouhai lishi*) while Japan attempted to use aid as a political tool (Xu 2005). The Chinese side objected to the decision because, in the words of Reinhard Drifte, "if the Chinese had now begun to consider ODA as a Japanese obligation as a result of their past sufferings and their waiver of reparations, how can one come to an agreement on ending such an obligation?" (Drifte 2006, 98). However, Chinese attempts to remind the Japanese side did not alter the decision, indicating that Chinese discursive power over Japan had diminished.

In sum, even though inconclusive, the evidence nonetheless suggests that the PRC government's attempts to use war discourses in its relations with Japan have been able to produce effects in the past. Even if the Japanese decision to provide China with aid and its response to Tiananmen might in part have been influenced by factors other than war memory—for example, economic incentives—this would not explain why Japanese officials and even its prime minister referred to the war in connection with these decisions. Nor do such factors explain why Japanese officials did not similarly invoke war memory in the 2000s. During the 2000s, the Chinese govern-

ment's discursive power of the past appears no longer to have been able to produce effects bilaterally.

### **The International Use of Discursive Power**

Explicit Chinese attempts to use discourses about the War of Resistance to gain international support in bilateral disputes with Japan are a recent phenomenon. Thus, conducting an analysis over time of the Chinese government's ability to produce effects in the international arena is therefore not possible. Nonetheless, intrinsic to the idea of China's rise is the belief that China's international influence has increased. Whether this is indeed the case when it comes to discursive power can be determined through an analysis of whether the PRC government's recent attempts to use discourses about the past in the international arena have produced the desired effects.

During the 2012 bilateral spat over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, the Chinese government actively sought international support for its position in the territorial dispute. Beijing did so through references to war history that involved attempts to "shame" Japan by linking the issue in a way that questioned Japan's identity as a peaceful state in the postwar era.

In Chinese narratives about the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Chinese war effort is commonly described as a national contribution to the worldwide war against fascism fought by China and many allied nations (Gustafsson 2011). Such discourses construct a Chinese identity as a nation that belonged to the antifascist camp that fought fascist states such as Japan and Germany during the war. When the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands flared up again in the fall of 2012, PRC leaders and state-run media, in efforts directed largely at third parties, linked the territorial dispute to discourses about Japanese wartime aggression in an unprecedented way. For example, the *China Daily*, a newspaper closely connected to the government, published opinion pieces in a number of foreign newspapers, including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, that asserted the Chinese claim (Saba 2012).

Chinese vice premier Li Keqiang made a clear attempt to gain international support when he met with the prime minister of Papua New Guinea, Peter O'Neill, in September 2012. Li said, "Both China and Papua New Guinea were victims of the Japanese fascist invasion back in the Second World War. . . . Japan's position today on the issue of the Diaoyu Islands is an outright denial of the outcomes of victory in the war against fascism and constitutes a grave challenge to the postwar international order. No nation or people who are peace-loving and justice-upholding will tolerate Japan's stance." O'Neill replied, "Papua New Guinea understands China's position and that Japan's move cannot be accepted by the international community. The international community should work together to defend the postwar world order" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC 2012). Put differently, the dispute was depicted as more than a bilateral Sino-Japanese issue. Instead, Li drew a line between the international community and Japan, excluding the latter from the former. The assertion that nations that side with Japan are not "peace-loving and justice-upholding" not only means that Japan is seen to lack these qualities because of its position on the territorial dispute but also prescribes a certain stance on the dispute for members of the international community.

When visiting Germany in May 2013, Li Keqiang, now prime minister, again linked the dispute to war history in a speech at the Cecilienhof Palace, where the Potsdam Declaration was signed in 1945: "All peace-loving people should uphold the postwar peace which brooks no damage nor denial. . . . China would like to work with all peace-loving people to uphold the postwar order and safeguard world peace and prosperity." He emphasized implementation of paragraph 8 of the Potsdam Declaration, which states that under the Cairo Declaration, Japan should return all territories "stolen" from China. Such territories, according to Li's interpretation, include the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (People's Daily Online 2013). Again, Li's statement might be taken as an attempt to gain international support for China's territorial claim by appealing to the identities of former Allied nations and the international community, as well as a way of shaming Japan by denying its peaceful identity in front of this particular audience. Such attempts at



shaming might be particularly sensitive, as the Japanese government has repeatedly stressed that Japan has been a peaceful state throughout the postwar era (Gustafsson forthcoming).

Unlike the case of Prime Minister O'Neill, Li's statement in Germany failed to muster any official support. Nor did it appear to have influenced other countries or lead Japan to alter its fundamental position on the territorial dispute. Instead, the Chinese offensive prompted the Japanese government to launch a counter-attack, denying the Chinese allegations and fiercely criticizing China. For example, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed embassies and consulates around the world to publicize its position, and the Japanese foreign minister at the time, Gemba Kōichirō, stressed the "need to promote our country's position to the international community" (*Japan Times* 2012). Japan's ambassador to the United Nations argued that China's way of linking the dispute to war history was an effort "to evade from the essence of the issue" (Kodama 2012). In addition, Foreign Minister Gemba, in an apparent appeal to the international community, wrote an opinion piece for the *International Herald Tribune* denying China's charges and criticizing its actions (Gemba 2012). The ministry published documents in several languages to promote the Japanese side of the story and appealed to the international community by emphasizing that Japan, in contrast to China, adhered to international norms and did not resort to violence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2012; 2013). Japanese government representatives, including Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, have also appealed to the international community of democratic states by stressing Japan's identity as a democracy, while depicting China as undemocratic and "anti-Japanese." Abe also explained the first increase in Japan's defense budget in eleven years with reference to China (*Washington Post* 2013).

Whether members of the international community found these Japanese arguments convincing is unclear. Nonetheless, the arguments appear to have strengthened Japan's resolve not to yield to Chinese pressure. In addition, they might have contributed to Japanese fear of an "anti-Japanese" China, which could contribute to making it easier to gain support for Japanese defense policy reform (Gustafsson forthcoming). The PRC government's recent



attempts to use discourses to produce effects on the international level could thus be seen as costly. Baldwin's statement, "More power should be attributed an actor that can exercise influence cheaply than to one for whom it is costly" (Baldwin 2013, 275), further suggests that China's international discursive power of the past is rather limited.

In sum, recent Chinese attempts to gain support from the international community in the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands by linking the issue to war history have not produced any effects in the form of explicit support from states other than Papua New Guinea. In addition, these attempts have not altered Japan's basic position on the dispute. Instead, they have been costly, because they have led to a Japanese counterattack involving attempts to appeal to the international community by stressing Japan's democratic identity in contrast to China's.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have shown that despite its increased material capabilities, the PRC's ability to produce desired effects through the use of discourses about the War of Resistance Against Japan has actually decreased. Domestically, the Chinese government did produce effects in the 1990s as it increased its legitimacy through the promotion of discourses about the war against Japan that emphasized patriotism. Yet those same efforts have enabled domestic actors within China to use these discourses to constrain the Chinese government's foreign policy. Bilaterally, the PRC was arguably able to produce desired power effects by invoking discourses about the war in its relations with Japan from the late 1970s until at least the mid-1990s. Notable examples include Japanese ODA to China and the Japanese reaction to the Tiananmen crackdown. However, in the 2000s, this ability to produce effects has diminished. Internationally, China has so far largely failed in its high-profile attempt to muster international support in its territorial dispute with Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. Moreover, these attempts appear to have been costly, as the Japan-

ese government has challenged China internationally through a discursive counterattack. An intense discursive power struggle has ensued.

One implication of my findings concerns the relationship between the bilateral and international spheres. The fact that *bilateral* attempts to use discourses about war history no longer produce the desired effects might explain why the PRC government has recently attempted to use discourses about the past in the *international* arena. If direct bilateral appeals were still successful, appeals to third parties would not be necessary. The international use of discursive power could well be a measure resorted to when bilateral attempts no longer succeed.

The findings also raise questions about the relationship between discursive and hard power. Why has China's discursive power diminished despite its increased material capabilities? One reason might be that it has overused discourses about the past, thereby enabling the use of those discourses by other actors domestically while provoking Japanese antipathy bilaterally. More fundamentally, the relationship between material capabilities and discursive power is not necessarily positive. As other studies indicate, China's increased capabilities have been construed not only along the lines of the more neutral idea of "China's rise" but also in terms of the often alarmist "China threat" discourse. One important outcome of the 2010 Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute is that China came across as a "bully" to the international community, while Japan appeared more "reasonable" (Hagström 2012, 296). Moreover, many observers and policy-makers uncritically bought into the flawed idea that China became increasingly assertive around 2009–2010 (Jerdén 2014).

Both examples illustrate the PRC government's lack of success in recent discursive power struggles. The widespread acceptance of the discursive construction of China's increased material capabilities as signs of "assertiveness" or "aggressiveness" could even be taken as indicating the strength of Japanese and US discursive power and the limits of China's. Such acceptance also suggests that it would be difficult for China to legitimize the use of hard power through discursive power. More generally, actors ascribe meaning to material capabilities through

discursive struggles—an additional important reason for studying discursive power.

So, what does a state do when it is no longer able to produce effects through the use of discursive power? One possibility is resorting to hard-power measures instead. China's behavior in connection with the most recent flare-up of the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute suggests that this might indeed be the case. The increased Chinese patrolling activity around the islands and the 2013 locking of the radar of a Chinese ship on a Japanese vessel indicate that such an interpretation is perhaps correct. These escalations might be the result of diminished Chinese power rather than the opposite.

## Notes

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