Strategic Culture, a Medicine Against Nationalism?

A case study on the effects of nationalism and strategic culture on conflict in China and Japan

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Abstract

In 1994, Stephen van Evera described under which conditions nationalism can lead to conflict in and between states. Since the Tiananmen Square student protests in 1989, China has been increasingly engaged in nationalistic foreign policy, with its most important and powerful neighbour Japan responding with an equal discourse in response. Contentious issues such as the reunification with Taiwan, the re-emergence of China as a powerful actor in East Asia and territorial disputes in the South China Sea with Japan (and others) stand at the heart of nationalism in the region, which on the basis of Van Evera’s theory would lead us to suspect that conflict is highly likely, but so far this threat has been averted through logrolling, suasion and mediation. What can explain this relative calmness?

This paper aims to contribute to improving Van Evera’s theory by firstly, testing its causal assumptions, and secondly, by embedding a theory of strategic culture (as described by Alastair Johnston in 1995) and taking into account the mediating effects of strategic culture on the benign and malign effects of nationalism. This new model, which will be called Van Evera+, aims at a better understanding of current Sino-Japanese relations.

Keywords: nationalism, strategic culture, China, Japan, foreign policy, East Asia

THE PACIFIC has been relatively calm since the end of World War II. Yet, as the centenary of World War I coincides with rising tensions in the most important dyad of the region, many draw an uncomfortable parallel between Germany and France on the one hand and China and Japan on the other. With a growing economic and political clout in the Pacific, China is no longer hiding its capacities and biding its time, likely to have already taken over the US economically or doing so within the decade, while growing its military expenditure dramatically. Its main rival and most important regional economic and military counterweight, Japan, has responded to what it sees as an increasing threat by calling for a change in its ‘pacifist’ constitution, allowing its armed forces to be deployed abroad, while its prime minister Shinzo Abe has been making visits to the Yasukuni shrine, where Japanese World War II war criminals are being honoured. Feelings of unattained statehood and unity, visits to controversial war memorials, denial or white-washing of past war crimes and myth-making about a state’s own glory: all
factors that are present in Sino-Japanese relations and factors that increase the likelihood of conflict, according to a theory by Stephen Van Evera, who notes 21 hypotheses in “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War” (1994). Nationalism is seen as essentially war-causing (ibid.: 5), yet surprisingly enough, direct confrontation remains largely absent. How can we explain such absence? Observing a gap in the theory, this paper will aim to strengthen the theory by including the in Van Evera (1994) implicitly mentioned social constructivist element of strategic culture, which likely plays a substantial role in Chinese and Japanese foreign policy, constraining its policy options and goals and acting as a filter through which they perceive themselves, each other and the world.

The Economist recently noted that Xi Jinping abandoned Deng Xiaoping’s “post-Tiananmen dictum”1 of China hiding its capacities and biding its time (The Economist, 2014a). Bristling with nationalistic indignation, this new assertiveness has resulted in increasing tensions in East Asia, with leaders on both sides of the dyad playing a nationalist card, whipping up Japanophobia and Sinophobia. These nationalist tensions have often been linked to the possibility of conflict in the region, hereby taken the war-causing character of nationalism for granted (cf. Van Evera, 1994: 5). But what role does nationalism actually play in causing war? According to Van Evera (ibid.: 8), the primary causes of nationalism leading to war are unattained statehood, stateless nationalisms, the willingness of states to recover national diasporas trapped behind borders, whether or not through annexationist strategies, hegemonistic goals that nationalities pursue toward one another and the oppression of minorities in national states. These variables are on a scale of likelihood: the more variables present, the more likely conflict becomes.

For these proximate causes to operate, Van Evera describes three different groups of factors: structural, political-environmental and perceptual factors. The distribution of different nationalities across an area, the first structural factor, is less relevant for this case study.2 Of greater concern is the defensibility and legitimacy of borders: stateless or unattained statehood as a cause for war. Perceptual factors break down into past crimes, oppression of minorities now living in states and nationalist self-images and images of others. The latter is a strong source of nationalism: distorted understanding of shared history and the “self-glorifying myth, if it contains claims of cultural superiority, [which] can feed false faith in one’s capacity to defeat and subdue others, causing expansionist wars of optimistic miscalculation” (Van Evera, 1994: 28). In

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1 The Communist Party reasoned that the Soviet collapse was the result of the failure of the Soviet
2 This paper aims to look at the interstate effects of nationalism, not so much on intrastate nationalism. Likewise, the variable respect for national minority rights is also no subject of this study.
fact, mythmaking is described as the hallmark of nationalism, a phenomenon almost every nationalist movement is engaged in (ibid.: 27).

Current Sino-Japanese relations feature many of these proximate and remote variables, and the more variables on this so-called ‘nationalism danger-scale’ are present, the more likely conflict becomes, according to Van Evera. If bilateral ties between Japan and China show these nationalist features of which Van Evera would claim that they would lead to war, why haven’t we seen the eruption of conflict yet? There are tensions between both states beyond any doubt, but it has fallen short of direct confrontation: “The two Asian powers are locked in a struggle that both are careful not to escalate past the point of no return. Given such constraints, the relationship is never as fraught with danger as it seems when things are going poorly, but it is also not a dynamic that can be dramatically improved in any meaningful way” (Carlson, 2014). Given the presence of a large number of Van Evera’s independent variables in the relations between China and Japan, how can we explain the absence of war? This paper will adapt the model of Van Evera by the embedment of strategic culture as an intervening variable to his theory to see whether it can serve to explain why China and Japan have not engaged in violent conflict. Strategic culture acts in that case as a ‘filter’ through which states perceive their ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ (cf. Wendt, 1992). It implies that “security interests are defined by actors who respond to cultural factors” (Katzenstein, 1996b: 2).

What suggests that more explanatory power will be gained by adding strategic culture as a variable? Van Evera seems to be applying an awkward mix of theoretical assumptions: on the one hand, he holds that anarchy is a precondition for war; the acuteness of the security dilemma, and therefore the balance of power, determines whether an anarchic system is violent or peaceful (Van Evera, 1994: 21). At the same time, according to Van Evera, the war-causing variables in nationalism are almost all located at the unit-level (ibid.: 21), letting go of the notion of unitary, black boxed actors. Strategic culture is expected to contribute to a better understanding of Sino-Japanese relations, because different states tend to have different predominant strategic preferences, rooted in the early experiences of the state, but in time influenced by the philosophical, political, cultural and cognitive characters of both the state and its elites.

It will also be shown that Johnston’s approach to strategic preference construction at state-level will solve the apparent contradiction in Van Evera’s assumptions on nationalism and the causes of war, by arguing that state preferences for either realpolitik and idealpolitik (its ideational mirror image) are both constructed at the
state-level, rather than at the system-level. There is scope for rationality here: strategic culture simplifies reality, ranks preferences or narrows down options, and guides choice by invoking historical choices, analogies, metaphors and precedents. Strategic culture arguably constrains actors in terms of their behaviour, but it does not constitute them. The behaviour a strategic culture produces always lags behind the objective conditions, since the weight of historical experiences and historically rooted strategic preferences constrains responses (Johnston, 1995: 34).

If nationalism is viewed as a distorting factor that should be present in both China and Japan, then there must be a certain ‘filter’ through which China and Japan perceive themselves and the outer world that prevents them from entering into conflict. China’s culturalism (Johnston, 1996: 216-268; Feng, 2007) and Japan’s anti-militarism (Berger, 1996: 317-356) are examples of such strategic culture, which might explain why their policy preferences (constraint) lag behind the objective conditions (a more assertive neighbour). In fact, Berger argues “cultural beliefs and values act as a distinct national lens to shape perceptions of events and even channel possible societal responses. In this sense, ‘cultures enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and are not merely subjective reflections of concrete ‘objective’ reality’” (Berger, 1998: 9, as cited in Lantis, 2002: 99)

Cultural-ideational variables such as the role of historical memory in shaping perceptions and images, the foundations of the modern state, the conduct of relations with the outer world are salient variables in a strategic culture and in fact also in the bilateral relations of both countries today (Whiting, 1989). Katzenstein (1996a) and Berger (1996; 1998) have already explored the source and implications of the anti-militarism culture in post-World War II Japan, while Harrison (1969), Fairbank (1968), Johnston (1996) and especially Feng (2007) offer accounts of the culturalist strategic preference construction that China nurtured during its ‘civilisation era’, and its implications on how it perceives the outside world today. In fact, China exhibits “a tendency for the controlled, politically driven defensive and minimalist use of force that is deeply rooted in the statecraft of ancient strategists and a worldview of relatively complacent superiority” (Johnston, 1996: 1). These secondary sources will help to establish a proper definition of the prevailing strategic cultures. The likelihood of conflict between Japan and China thus depends both on the intervention of strategic culture, the kind of nationalism exists in both countries, as well as how strong that strategic culture constrains China’s and Japan’s elite, bringing us to the following research question:
Does strategic culture interact with the benign or malign effects of nationalism on the likelihood of conflict, through either a reinforcing or dampening effect?

Does it provide an explanation for the current Sino-Japanese relations?

Proximate and remote causes of nationalism leading to war (Van Evera, 1994)

Van Evera describes four primary attributes that determine whether the nationalist movement has a high potential for conflict or not (Van Evera, 1994: 10), out of which three are especially relevant for this paper. The fourth is of less importance to this paper. These variables create a so-called ‘danger-scale’ and are thus increasing the likelihood that conflict occurs. The more variables have a malign value, the more likely conflict becomes. They are as follows:

a. Has statehood been attained or not?

b. Stance towards the national diaspora: if the nation does have a state but some of its members are dispersed or trapped outside of the state’s borders, does it accept continued separation or seek to incorporate them? And does it do so through immigration or territorial expansion?

c. Stance towards other nations: does it respect the right of other nationalities to national independence?

First and foremost, nationalist movements that are stateless can cause wars of secession in their struggle for freedom. Statehood is to be viewed from two perspectives: not only international recognition is required, but the recognised state must also meet fulfilment or attainment of its internal statehood. Statehood is also closely related to the stance towards the national diaspora. Is the national ethnic community partially (diaspora-accepting) or entirely to be incorporated into the national state? And if the entire community must be integrated, will the movement accomplish this through immigrationist tactics or territorial expansion (Van Evera, 1994: 12)? Diaspora-accepting and immigrationist nationalisms are less potent for conflict than diaspora-annexing (expansionist), because they settle for partial union. Aside from the stance towards the

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3 The fourth proximate cause refers to the degree of national respect for minority rights: is nationalism minority-respecting or minority-oppressing (Van Evera, 1994: 10)? The aim and scope of this paper is however limited to interstate conflict, and does not look at the potential for civil war as a result of the oppression of domestic minority groups with nationalist aspirations.
national diaspora, the stance towards other nations determines whether a movement’s (or state’s, if attained) nationalism is symmetrical or not: do other nationalities also deserve statehood, or only theirs? The rejection of another’s right to statehood fuels conflict and vice versa.

When we cast these proximate causes into a model, we can draw a matrix on the basis of the score on each of these variables, with each variable having a score of either 0 or 1 (thus assigning equal weight to each). The more variables are present, the more likely conflict becomes. The resulting matrix can be seen in Table 1. The score in each box is the sum of the score in each of the columns and rows (A+B+C). For the purpose of assigning labels to a range of scores, and thus distinguishing between low, intermediate and high levels of conflict possibility, the following categorisation will be applied:

- 0 – 0.5: Low potential for conflict (marked in green)
- 1 – 2: Intermediate potential for conflict (marked in orange)
- 2.5 – 3: High potential for conflict (marked in red)

The remote factors that determine whether the preceding three attributes have benign or malign values (Van Evera, 1994: 15) are categorised into structural, political-environmental and perceptual factors. These are remote causes that in turn are required for the operation of the aforementioned primary attributes. On the basis of his theory, the relation between proximate and remote causes is mapped in Figure 1.

Structural factors break down in three subsets: geographic (the domestic balance of will), demographic (the pattern of ethnic intermingling, which is not relevant for this paper) and military factors (the defensibility, legitimacy and border correspondence with ethnic groups). The balance of power and will depends on the dynamics between the unattained nationalist movement and the central state, subject to two conditions: the movement must have the strength to reach for statehood, and the central state must have the will to resist such attempt. The stronger the movement’s reaching for statehood or the stronger the will to resist such reaching, the more likely conflict becomes.

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4 For the variable Stance towards national diaspora, the possible scores are trichotomous: 0, 0.5 and 1.
5 See footnote 4.
### Van Evera’s danger-scale on the effects of nationalism on conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A⁺: Statehood has been attained</th>
<th>A⁻: Statehood has not been attained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B⁰: Accepting stance towards diaspora</td>
<td>B⁰: Immigrationist stance towards diaspora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C⁰:</strong> Symmetrical nationalism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C¹:</strong> Asymmetrical nationalism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: graphic illustration of Van Evera’s danger-scale (see Van Evera, 1994). 0 = most benign effects of nationalism on conflict, 3 = most malign effects of nationalism on conflict.
The defensibility, legitimacy and border/ethnic correspondence is the second structural factor of relevance for this paper, and determines the potential for conflict through a primary focus on the extension of anarchy new nation-states create. The defensibility of borders (natural borders, e.g. a natural mountain range or a channel, have a higher defensibility, in the sense that they make a state more difficult to conquer) will make the net impact of nationalism either peaceful or more warlike (Van Evera, 1994: 21). The proneness to war is also determined by the legitimacy of borders: the more legitimacy borders of the new nation state enjoy, the less likely new demands for border changes will arise.

The second group of remote causes are related to the political-environmental factors, more specifically the behaviour of neighbouring nations. Past crimes by intermingling nationalities determine the degree of harmony or conflict, especially when they concern mass murder, land theft and population expulsions. They foster respectively diaspora-recovering ideologies, territorial definitions of statehood and diaspora-intolerance. The magnitude of such crimes and its effect on neighbour’s attitudes is a function of a number of factors (ibid.: 23-25), which can also be found in the operationalisation of Van Evera (section 3.3.1). The last category of remote causes is perhaps the most salient, with the effects of nationalism depending on the beliefs of the nationalist movements. Here myth making comes into play, according to Van Evera “the hallmark of nationalism, practiced by nearly all nationalist movements to some degree” (1994: 27). For nations to co-exist peacefully, a common understanding of their mutual history and current conduct and character is required. Myths and distortions of the truth rather tend to increase a nation’s ‘sense of its right’. In its most extreme forms, mythmaking can transform symmetrical into asymmetrical nationalism, from self-liberating to hegemonistic nationalism’. Mythmaking generally exists in three forms: self-glorifying (claims of special virtue, competence, false claims of past beneficence), self-whitewashing (false denial of past wrong-doing against others) and other-maligning (claims of others’ cultural inferiority, false blame of other for past crimes and tragedies, or false claims of malign intentions by the other against the nation) (ibid.: 27-28).

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6 For examples of myth making, see Shafer, 1972: 313-342. Van Evera remarks that “myth is not an essential ingredient of nationalism: nationalism can also rest on a group solidarity based on truth, and the effects of nationalism are largely governed by the degree of truthfulness of the beliefs that a given nationalism adopts; as truthfulness diminishes, the risks posed by the nationalism increase” (Van Evera, 1994: 27 [footnote 42])
7 See Van Evera (1990: 47-48) and Mearsheimer (1990: 21) for their discussion on so-called ‘hypermationalism’. 
The scope and character of mythmaking varies widely among nations and depends on a number of domestic factors (Van Evera, 1994: 30-33). These include the legitimacy of the regime, the scope of demands the state makes on its citizens, the economic conditions of the state and the strength of domestic ‘truth squads’, such as free media and scientists, who help debunk myths. The role of mythmaking allows us to draw an important conclusion on its effects: “the most dangerous regimes are those that depend on some measure of popular consent, but are narrowly governed by unrepresentative elites. Things are still worse if these governments are poorly institutionalised, are incompetent or corrupt for other reasons, or face overwhelming problems that exceed their governing capacities. Regimes that emerged from a violent struggle, or enjoy only precarious security, are also more likely to retain a struggle-born chauvinist belief-system” (Van Evera, 1994: 33).

REMOTE CAUSES    PROXIMATE CAUSES

R₁: Structural: balance of power and will    P₁: Attainment of statehood

R₂: Structural: legitimacy and defensibility of borders    P₂: Stance towards national diaspora

R₃: Political-environmental: past and present conduct of neighbours

R₄: Perceptual: self-image and image of others

P₃: Symmetry of nationalism

Conflict

Figure 1: Causal mechanism between remote and proximate causes

The basic model and hypotheses

On the basis of our discussion of the proximate and remote causes, Figure 1 is distilled. Both structural remote causes account for the attainment of statehood and the stance towards the national diaspora, while political-environmental and perceptual remote causes account for the symmetry of nationalism as a proximate cause. The structural factors R₁ and R₂ are related to proximate causes P₁ and P₂, because the balance of power and will is directly related to whether statehood has been attained or not; an aspiring nationalist movement that has not attained statehood poses a danger when it is confronted with a reluctant central state. Furthermore, borders that are illegitimate,
indefensible or those that bisect nationalities or ethnicities can be troublesome for conflict, which will determine whether statehood is felt to be completed or not (P₁) and will activate a certain stance towards the diaspora that is trapped behind those borders (P₂). Remote cause R³ also accounts for P₂, since past crimes foster either diaspora-recovering ideologies (in the case of mass murders) or diaspora-intolerance (when populations have been expelled) (Van Evera, 1994: 23). This last cause is also related to P³, because past crimes can fuel intolerance towards other nationalities to a level where nationalism is held in an asymmetrical regard towards other nations, especially those that have perpetrated a country or mass murdered a population.

The symmetry of nationalism is largely determined by the respect for the freedom of other nationalities. In the case of R³, “past suffering can also spur nations to oppress old tormentors who now live among them as minorities, sparking conflict with these minorities’ home countries” (Van Evera, 1994: 23). Especially mass murder, land theft and population expulsions are seen as severe crimes that can incentivise the victims to withhold rights (such as to its own nationalism) to the former oppressor. The perception of self and others (R⁴) can, in the case of myths and distortions, “expand [the] need to oppress its minorities or conquer its diaspora” (ibid.: 26), and is thus related to P². On the other hand, chauvinist mythmaking, an essential part of this perceptual factor, can lead to other-maligning, which incorporates “claims of others’ cultural inferiority, false blame of others for past crimes and tragedies” and through that, like remote cause R³, lead to the activation of proximate cause P³. In turn, the proximate causes increase the likelihood of conflict: the more proximate causes present, the more likely conflict becomes.

Figure 1 allows us to get a better understanding of the causal mechanisms in this complex model, and subsequently distil hypotheses from it. We have already seen that the potential of conflict for Van Evera’s basic model depends on the danger-scale, which was drawn in Table 1: the higher the score, the more potential for conflict. The first hypothesis of the basic model is therefore:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis 1, model Van Evera:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The higher the score on the danger-scale – the composition of scores on the proximate causes of Van Evera (1994) – the more likely international conflict becomes, and vice versa: the lower the score, the less likely conflict becomes.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategic culture is a theory based on the theoretical assumptions of social constructivism, which rose to prominence out of opposition to the rational assumptions of neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism (the neo’s). Johnston argues that strategic culture is the whole of what states deem appropriate and according to cognitive and normative rules. These rules find their origin in the philosophical, political, cultural and cognitive characteristics of the state, and under certain conditions, determine their behaviour in foreign policy. Preferences thus differ across geostrategic situations, resources, history, military experience and political beliefs (Ball, 1993: 45). It deems objective variables – technology, polarity, and relative material capabilities – of secondary importance. What makes this notion socially constructive is that the strategic culture gives meaning to these objective variables. Crucially, these preferences are constructed at the state rather than the system level. He defines culture as consisting of “shared assumptions and decision rules that impose a degree of order on individual and group conceptions of their relationship to their social, organisational and political environment” (Johnston, 1995: 45). Culture has a limiting effect on policy options, and affects the learning process from interaction with the environment of actors. Multiple cultures can exist in a social entity, but usually, there is one dominant culture. Strategic culture consists firstly of basic assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment: (a) what is the role of war in human affairs? (b) what is the nature of the adversary and the threat that it poses? and (c) what is the efficacy of the use of force? Despite the fact that the paradigm is a continuum, for the purpose of assigning a score (along the similar lines that have been adopted for determining the danger-scale), each of the basic assumptions can take a dichotomous value, 0 or 1. Since there are three variables, this leads to a 3-point scale, through which a continuum (that theoretically has an endless amount of values) is approximated, be it with the loss of some information (see a consideration on the methodological choices in the conclusion). The score table for Johnston’s model is as follows:
Johnston’s scale on the orderliness of the strategic environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable-sum nature of the adversary and threat (0)</th>
<th>Zero-sum nature of the adversary and threat (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War is an aberration (0)</td>
<td>War is inevitable (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force is inefficacious (0)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force is efficacious (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Score table on the orderliness of the strategic environment

The realpolitik end of the paradigm has a value of 3, while the soft idealpolitik end has a score of 0. Additionally, at the operational level, the behaviour, it consists of beliefs about which strategic choices are deemed most efficacious for dealing with the threat environment, defined as the answer to the three-abovementioned questions. The result is a so-called threat paradigm: it determines strategic preferences in a three-dimensional space. The central paradigm can be visualised like this:

**Hard realpolitik**

![Hard realpolitik diagram]

**Soft idealpolitik**

Figure 2: The central paradigm determining the orderliness of the strategic environment. Based on the model of Johnston (1995: 47), but now with scores on all ends of the spectrum.
From this central paradigm, Johnston distils three hypotheses: the higher the frequency of conflict in human affairs, the higher the zero-sum nature of conflict (security has only relative gains and losses) and the higher the efficacy of the use of force, the more strategic preferences will move towards hard realpolitik (see Table 2: a score of 3). The opposite is also true: the lower the score on these variables, the more strategic preferences will move towards a preference for soft idealpolitik (see Table 2: a score of 0).

Embedding of both theories in one model: Van Evera+

As stated earlier, it is this paper’s purpose to complement Van Evera’s theory with a theory of strategic culture, in an effort to increase its explanatory power. Exactly because nationalism is composed out of so many elements that are at the state level – ethnicity, (national) identity, shared history, myths and symbols – it is hard to discover the system-level mechanism, which Van Evera seems to assume, that ties nationalism to violent conflict. This is the primary reason why the constructivist, state-level variable of strategic culture will be incorporated into Van Evera (1994), leading to a new model, Van Evera+.

This solves the apparent contradiction between Van Evera’s necessary and sufficient conditions for international war. International war is then more likely when states are situated in the higher extremes of Johnston’s model, when they thus have a high belief in the efficacy of force, when the us-them division is maximised (producing a stark vision of a threatening external world) and when security is considered a zero-sum game (there are only relative gains: the security of one leads to the insecurity of others). Crucially, the structure of the system (anarchy) does not force states to the realpolitik side of Johnston’s model, but this is rather a result of the intensity of in-group identification. Realpolitik is thus ideationally created at the state-level, not objectively at the system-level.

When we combine these, the conditions when nationalism can drive international war are then as follows: states fulfil as many proximate (through remote) causes as possible, combined with a position in the higher extremes of Johnston’s model, which means that the state is exerting strong in-group identification. Both Van Evera’s and Johnston’s scale have a maximum score of 3: this will ensure that both indices get an equal weight – not implying that Johnston’s strategic culture should weigh more than Van Evera since this claim would not find any foundation in the literature. This leads to a maximum score on the composite index of 6, which is shown in Figure 3. When both
Japan and China fulfil the nationalist criteria and share a strategic preference for realpolitik, international war becomes very likely (a maximum score). Strategic culture in that case is then reinforcing rather than constraining actor’s behaviour: rather the world is seen as a threatening environment, and only relative gains are possible in security. On the basis of Table 1 and Table 2, we can create the composite score Table 3. The higher the score, the more likely conflict becomes, as a result of the danger-scale of nationalism, taking into account the mediating effects of strategic culture. Because the danger-scale of nationalism has seven possible values (0 – 3 with an interval of .5), and strategic preference has four possible values (0 – 3, with an interval of 1), there are in theory twenty-four possible combinations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic preference (score determined in Table 2)</th>
<th>Low potential (0 – 0.5)</th>
<th>Intermediate potential (1 – 2)</th>
<th>High potential (2.5 – 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idealpolitik (0)</td>
<td>0 – 0.5**</td>
<td>1 – 2</td>
<td>2.5 – 3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate idealpolitik (1)</td>
<td>1 – 1.5</td>
<td>2 – 3</td>
<td>3.5 – 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate realpolitik (2)</td>
<td>2 – 2.5</td>
<td>3 – 4</td>
<td>4.5 – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realpolitik (3)</td>
<td>3 – 3.5***</td>
<td>4 – 5</td>
<td>5.5 – 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Determination table for the effects of nationalism filtered through strategic culture.

Whereas in Table 1, we expected a strong likelihood of conflict at the scores of 2.5 to 3, this scale ranges from 0 – 6 (as the sum of both scales), thus taking into account the mediating effects of strategic culture: for example high conflict potential nationalism (2.5 – 3, marked with one asterisk) was at the upper end of the scale in Table 1, but in combination with idealpolitik (thus a 0 on strategic preferences), it is now an average score in the upper-right corner of Table 3. Realpolitik reinforces every form of nationalism more strongly than any other strategic preference, even very benign nationalism (0 – 0.5, marked with two asterisks) from a highly unlikely (0) to a less-than-average chance of conflict (3 – 3.5, marked with three asterisks). On the other hand, idealpolitik in combination with a high conflict potential of nationalism now only results in a score of 2.5 – 3 (marked with one asterisk) on a scale of 0 – 6, thus leading to a moderate chance of conflict. How scores on Van Evera’s danger-scale can ‘move’ along the composite index with strategic culture as a dampening or reinforcing filter can be visualised by the following two scales:
One can see here that e.g. somewhat malign nationalism (2) combined with moderate idealpolitik (1) leads to a score of 3, which is less bellicose than the initial expected effect of nationalism without strategic culture acting as a filter on the left-to-right orientation. We can also observe that the effects of strategic culture are more reinforcing to the lower ends than to the higher ends of the danger scale (see, e.g., the distance between 1 (danger scale) and 4 (composite index)) while the effects are more mediating to the higher ends of the danger scale than to the lower end (see, e.g., the distance between 2.5 (danger-scale) and 3 (composite index)). This is in line with our expectations: in the case of benign nationalism and hard realpolitik preferences, we expect a more strong transformation than when both are already in line with each other (malign nationalism with hard realpolitik). In the latter case, we cannot really speak of a ‘filter’ anymore, since there is basically nothing left to filter; the values that would be filtered are already more or less in line with the values that the filter would produce.

The least bellicose combination is idealpolitik in combination with very benign nationalism (upper-left corner in Table 3, score 0 – 0.5, marked in green), the most being realpolitik with very malign nationalism (lower-right corner in Table 3, score 5.5 – 6 marked in red). Even if the malign variables in Van Evera’s theory are present, a strategic culture in the lower ends of the paradigm (thus a low score on Johnston’s scale) is assumed to constrain the actor’s behaviour in acting upon those malign variables, as threats can be managed through trade-offs, logrolling and suasion. Conversely, states that position themselves at the higher (realpolitik) end of the paradigm, it is expected of strategic culture to have a reinforcing effect in the presence of the malign variables on nationalism. It is nevertheless difficult to analyse the exact contributing effect of strategic culture, as it is inherently troublesome to isolate specific effects in social sciences, especially when those effects are reinforcing each other (whether it is to the benign end or the malign end). Since we expect and thus want to test that strategic culture filters the score on the danger-scale (model Van Evera’), we should formulate a second hypothesis:
Hypothesis 2, model Van Evera\textsuperscript{*}:

The stronger the preference for realpolitik, the stronger the reinforcement of nationalism, therefore the higher the likelihood of conflict, and vice versa.

In order to test hypothesis 1, we need to look at the presence of the remote causes, as prescribed in Van Evera’s model. Of special empirical interest are the foreign policy crises in this period: the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, crises over the Senkaku\textsuperscript{8} islands in 1990 and 1996, the 1995 nuclear tests by the PRC, the 2010 trawler incident near the Senkaku islands and their subsequent September 2012 nationalisation by Japan. As these cases show, the thorniest question in Sino-Japanese relations is the sovereignty issue over Senkaku (see Appendix A for a map of the islands). To a lesser extent troubling bilateral relations is the issue of Taiwan, but with Taipei being aligned closely with the US and consequently Japan, the scope for confrontation in the case of a foreign policy crisis such as the 1995-1996 standoff is considerate, especially in the face of increased political contact between the ROC and Japan (Smith, 2010: 238).

\textsuperscript{8} The term Senkaku will be used as the (in Japan used) designation for the disputed islands, without prejudice about its ownership.
Figure 4: The adjusted model Van Evera+.
The balance of will and power, the first remote cause, is determined by the conduciveness of domestic politics for nationalism. Modern Chinese nationalism that has raised its profile since the 1990s is crystallised into three core narratives: the humiliation in remembrance of Japanese occupation, the re-emergence of China as the ‘Middle Kingdom’⁹, centre of all and civilization itself; and most saliently, the tragic separation of Taiwan from mainland China (Rosecrance, 2013: 148). Ever since Xi Jinping has taken over the top leadership from outgoing president Hu Jintao by the end of 2013, he has promoted “a mélangé of political convictions: old-school Marxism, a sentimental repackaging of Mao Zedong, patriotic appeals to a “China Dream” and a striking reverence for ancient tradition, seen as a bedrock of benign social order and loyalty to the state” (Buckley, 2014). The centrepiece of the national rejuvenation he calls the Chinese Dream has been the bolstering of the People’s Liberation Army. Visits to destroyer boats that patrol disputed waters in the South Chinese Sea, the exuberant media coverage in the aftermath of the visit on the build-up of the People’s Liberation Army and the insistence on battle-ready standards and combat preparations are only some of the clear signs that China is flexing its muscles and preparing for a more assertive role in the region (Wong, 2012). The main theme of Chinese nationalism, according to a Chinese scholar, is ‘anti-Japan’, and thanks to the rapid rise of social media and internet, Chinese citizens now go as far as to hold Beijing accountable “to act in line with statements made during times of high public pressure. [...] This in turn emboldens belligerent voices and constricts the space for diplomacy” (International Crisis Group, 2013: 17-18). It is therefore clear that the type of nationalism that is being promoted is state-led, and not just reflective of a handful of hardliners in the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the principal decision-making body in China. In fact, nationalism is seen as a key determinant of the legitimacy of the CCP, like its unifying anti-Japanese nationalist banner was seen as the ultimate weapon against the invasion of the Imperial Army of Japan during WWII (Rose, 2000: 171; Zhao, 2000: 24). The Chinese leadership uses nationalist fervour to compensate for a deficit in legitimacy, and to unite the party and the nation, and Japan is a familiar target, especially for the hawks in the military and the propaganda department” (Takahara, 2014). In other words, being beholden at home by nationalist voices, both are unable to do significant

⁹ Phonetically, the Mandarin word for China is Zhōngguó, with Zhōng meaning “central” or “middle” and guó “state” or “nation”. Combined, they are often translated as Middle Kingdom or Central Kingdom.
compromises on their conflicting claims. We can thus reasonably conclude from the state-led nature of Chinese nationalism, that the political environment in China is conducive to nationalist sentiment, with R\textsuperscript{1} therefore present.

For Japan, the picture is slightly different. There nationalism differs from its Chinese counterpart in many aspects, although it shares some similarities. World War II has had a profound impact on Japanese national thinking. Post-war nationalism, especially professed by the Japanese right-wing Liberal Democratic Party, which has been in power since 1955, save for a brief 11-month period in the ‘90s and between 2009 and 2012, is crystallised into five core narratives (Preston, 2010: 203):

- Resentment at the West for its mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century imperialism;
- Resentment at the US, as it allegedly destroyed the Japanese nation’s essence through the occupation from 1945 until 1952;
- The correctness of intention during the Asia-Pacific theatre of World War II;
- A denial of criticism of the behaviour of the Imperial Japanese Forces during this war;
- Racial insistence on the exceptionalism of the Japanese people, in ethnic and cultural sense.

However, in contrast to China, nationalism is much more the product of a certain political strand in the Japanese political landscape, namely the rightists, who are mostly in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Other than in China, the scattering of this ideology across the political landscape is largely the result of a more pluralistic political system, where multiple parties and thus political discourses compete for power, but not all discourses are inherently nationalistic. It is the rightists who generally have favourable views of patriotism and self-sacrifice being enshrined in the Yasukuni Shrine (where Class A war heroes are honoured), contrary to Japanese leftists (Shibuichi, 2005: 199). LDP’s efforts to instil a sense of patriotism in the 90s were met with fierce opposition, cynicism and indifference (Rose, 2000: 173). The rise of the neo-nationalists in that period, who advocated a ‘correct’ instead of ‘masochistic’ version of history, was “outfaced by a barrage of criticism which appeared in the popular monthly journals” (ibid.: 175). It can thus be argued that China scores positively on the first remote factor, while Japan scores negatively.
R2: The legitimacy and defensibility of borders

Particularly China has many disputes with its direct neighbours, but in bilateral aspects two issues stand out: the Senkaku islands, and the status of Taiwan. Three crises since 1989 have emerged with regards to the sovereignty of the Senkakus. In 1990 and 1996 right-wing groups in Japan reasserted claims to the islands by building and recognised two lighthouses as ‘official navigation marks’ (ibid.: 128; 134). In the run-up to both crises, the CCP aroused patriotism and anti-Japanese sentiments among its citizens that make a fierce response to this assertiveness required. When the Japanese government nationalised the Senkaku islands in September 2012, months of communication about its intentions to China failed to bridge the differences in the views on Japan’s rationale to purchase the islands. In an immediate response, China began to undertake “combination punches, that bore the hallmarks of a well-planned campaign with multi-agency coordination and high-level decision-making” (ibid.: 10), which consisted of efforts to create overlapping administration: Beijing announced territorial sea baselines around the islands, placing it under Chinese administration. Time was running out before Japan would cement its claims to the islands, causing China to show what the ICG calls ‘reactive assertiveness’: “Beijing uses an action by another party as justification to push back hard and change the facts on the ground in its favour” (International Crisis Group, 2013: 13). When it comes to competing claims in the East China Sea with neighbours Vietnam and the Philippines, it has employed similar tactics. On the one hand, it has a desire to defend its maritime claims, while on the other, it tries to maintain a policy of peaceful development (ibid.: 15).

The other territorial dispute that is of saliency is Taiwan. It is questionable whether Taiwan forms part of the historical homeland of China: “it was only at the time of the Cairo Conference [1943] that the CCP began to identify Taiwan as part of the Chinese nation” (Hughes, 1997: 13). Taiwan, being an island, also does not conform to the classification ‘natural border’. On international recognition of China’s claim to Taiwan, the story is complex: both the PRC and the ROC claim sovereignty over entire mainland China and Taiwan. When we look closer at the operationalisation of this variable – the congruence of national and natural borders, the origin of claims and the basis of the claims – we can conclude that all score relatively low in terms of defensibility and legitimacy in the case of the Senkakus (the islands are uninhabited and thus no part

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10 For matters of convenience, henceforth both designations Senkaku and Diaoyu will be used interchangeably, which does not reflect the author’s opinion on the sovereignty issue. Where one reads Senkaku, one could read Diaoyu, and vice versa.
of the historical homeland) and relatively high for Taiwan, providing a mixed score for the scope of conflict. They are furthermore islands and thus constitute no natural border, and the borders are disputed as a result of war expropriation. In all aspects, the legitimacy and defensibility of both China’s and Japan’s claims to the Senkakus are low. For Taiwan, the picture is slightly more mixed: it is not the historical homeland of China, national and natural borders are not congruent, but the PRC does enjoy – notwithstanding the earlier mentioned reservations in this regard – international recognition over Taiwan’s sovereignty to some extent. Overall, the legitimacy and defensibility remains weak. Both countries therefore have $R^2$ present in their nationalism.

$R^2$: Past and present conduct of neighbours

The third variable – past and present conduct of neighbours – is a prominent factor in Sino-Japanese relations. The past conduct that vexes bilateral relations mostly is the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, when China ceded vassalage over the Korean peninsula, as well as Penghu, the Liaodong Peninsula and crucially to understand today’s animosity, the Senkaku and Taiwan, and the Second Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45, when Japan occupied Manchuria (already in 1931) and launched a full-scale invasion on the mainland of China. An array of wartime atrocities stand out: (a) land theft: the seizure of Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands to Japan in 1895 (b) mass murder: the Nanking Massacre in 1937. Further adding to the potential of present reverberation of this conduct is the fact that powerful hereditary political families typically rule Japan. The Mori faction of the LDP, to which Shinzo Abe belongs, has strong connection to Japan’s wartime leadership: he is the grandson of Nobusuke Kishi, member of Hideki Tojo’s wartime cabinet (Calder, 2006: 133). Such links between past perpetrators and present leaders makes it easier for the victims – the Chinese – to attach inherited blame to present ruling groups. The rise of China’s political and economic clout in the past decade has prompted it to point Japan more clearly to its responsibilities to come to grips with its own wartime past and to respond to provocations – China is no longer biding its time to avoid appearing confrontational (cf. International Crisis Group, 2013: 18). In conclusion, current behaviour by both states has not brought harmony over past animosity. The graveness of the crimes adds to the frustration: mass murder (Nanking)

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and land theft (Manchuria, Taiwan and the Senkakus). Japan’s current elite has familial ties to wartime figures, and China is increasingly positioning itself in a combination of power and victimhood. Combined, these variables lead to the conclusion that both Japan and China have remote cause present in their nationalism.

R^3: Nationalist self-images and images of others

The last remote variable focuses on a perceptual factor: what are China’s and Japan’s images of themselves and each other? Do these images diverge into self-justifying directions, resulting in whitewashing and self-glorification? In Sino-Japanese relations, mythmaking is omnipresent and is largely the result of both the troubled history China and Japan share since roughly Japan’s Meiji Restoration in 1868, and the fact that this issue has been skirted for years. Atrocities committed 70 years ago continue to reverberate in Chinese society: “From a popular Chinese point of view, there are still numerous unsolved historical issues [...] there is a consensus that the Japanese government has failed to resolve historical issues with its neighbouring countries, which has become an excuse for the Chinese to display openly their antagonism against the Japanese” (Qiu, 2006: 29). The Chinese government has gone to lengths to influence Chinese perception of Japan’s aggression – exactly because the CCP derives its legitimacy from the heroic resistance against Japan (Rose, 2000: 171; Zhao, 2000: 24). A stunning 93 per cent of surveyed respondents in China in 1996 responded that Japan’s attitude over the past invasion constituted the biggest obstacle in the development of bilateral relations (Qiu, 2006: 41).

Even in a democratic country like Japan, where governmental control over education is far less strict, major history textbook revisions since 1945 have mired China in agitation, as the Japanese government was instrumental in changing various passages about the descriptions of wartime events, watering down atrocities or even omitting certain issues, such as the ‘comfort women’, crimes committed during the occupation of Korea between 1910 and 1945 and China between 1937 and 1945 (Nozaki, 2002: 605-610). Japan’s former prime ministers Nakasone, Hashimoto, Koizumi and current prime minister Shinzo Abe have all visited the Yasukuni Shrine during their tenure, where, among others, 14 “class A” Japanese war criminals are honoured (those convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression). China, Taiwan and South Korea all consider the visits, whether they private or official, a glorification of past Japanese militarism, and have consistently responded fiercely to each visit.
Backchannels in bilateral diplomacy, depending heavily on individuals and thus vulnerable to politics, have also eroded under recent leadership in both countries, which has effectively “deprived the two countries of a discreet means to avoid misunderstanding and foster trust” (International Crisis Group, 2013: 33). The system of mutual trust largely relied – in absence of multilateral institutions – on personality-driven efforts, such as those undertaken by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, when they established diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972, or Deng Xiaoping, who negotiated the ‘Treaty of Peace and Friendship’ in 1978. Any leader after Deng Xiaoping has proven less successful in maintaining good Sino-Japanese relations: advocating strong ties carries a great political risk, demanding strong and bold leadership (ibid: 25).

Receptiveness of mythmaking

Whether these myths are also receptive to the targeted audience depends on legitimacy, representativeness, the scope of demands and economic climate. Chinese leadership faces the staunch task of combating widespread corruption that drive attention from external threats to domestic unrest12, its highly meritocratic and authoritarian leadership lacks representativeness, its economy is slowing down from unsustainable levels13 (and its iron grip on media prevents it from functioning as an evaluative instrument against myths14, all of which are indicators that the Chinese public might be highly receptive to mythmaking. Japan has been suffering from economic stagnation for over 20 years now (World Bank, 2014), but its more democratic regime15 (than China) has helped to maintain a low public receptiveness to myths and to root out their persistence: “such regimes are usually more legitimate and are free-speech tolerant; hence they can develop evaluative instruments to weed out nationalist myth” (Van Evera, 1994: 33). A group of prominent Japanese historians recently called on the Abe government to face up to Japan’s wartime past (Japan Times, 2015). Indeed, calls for revision of a constitution that the political elite sees as unfair to Japan and unjustly constraining its armed forces are met with popular resistance. Its highly institutionalised politics and low level of corruption16 ensures competent governance. Japan boasts free media17, it should however

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12 China scored a 36 out of 100 points on the Corruption Perceptions Index 2014, ranked 100/175 globally (Transparency International, 2014).
13 GDP growth showed a decline from 10.6% in 2010 to 7.4% in 2014 (World Bank, 2014).
14 Media in China is classified as Not Free according to Freedom House (2015a).
15 Japan is classified as Free, whereas China is classified as Not Free (Freedom House, 2015a; 2015b).
16 Japan scored a 76 out of 100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index 2014, ranked 15/175 globally (Transparency International, 2014).
17 Media in Japan is classified as Free (Freedom House, 2015b).
be noted that its government-sponsored history textbook revisions in self-justifying and whitewashing directions, indicate an anomaly in Van Evera’s prediction that independent evaluative instruments help to refute myths (thus providing input for further research on this causal mechanism). While Japan thus shows self-justifying mythmaking, its public is expected to be far less receptive than their Chinese counterparts.

We can thus conclude that self-images diverge not so much into the most extreme end of the spectrum (self-glorification), but they do tend to diverge into self-denying and whitewashing directions. Japan denial of its wartime atrocities is rooted in its view of the Asian conquest by the Empire of Japan as a ‘liberation war’, that freed East Asian nations from enslavement of Western colonialism (Duara, 2001: 111). The absence of proper channels and multilateral institutions to create mutual trust and to avoid misunderstanding about each other’s behaviour and intentions precludes the emergence of a shared understanding of history. The nature of the crimes that are being denied, as described in the discussion on the previous variable, strengthens the contempt for the victims’ humanity (cf. Van Evera, 1994: 29). Nevertheless, we should differentiate in the receptiveness to myths in both societies: the Chinese public is far more likely to be affronted by Japan’s denial of wartime atrocities than the Japanese public is of its own politicians. R[^4] is therefore present in Chinese nationalism, but not in Japanese nationalism. In total, we therefore have in China and Japanese nationalism respectively four and two remote causes present. On the basis of our earlier model, we can therefore conclude that the following proximate causes are present:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remote causes</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>R[^1]: Balance between will and power</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R[^2]: Defensibility and legitimacy of borders</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R[^3]: Past and present conduct of neighbours</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R[^4]: Nationalist self-images and images of others</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of remote causes present</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proximate causes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>P[^1]: Attainment of statehood</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P[^2]: Stance towards national diaspora</strong></td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P[^3]: Symmetry of nationalism</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of proximate causes present (danger-scale)</strong></td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Overview of the presence of proximate and remote causes

Note: in an extended version of this paper, I have also tested for the presence of proximate causes, which lead to the results on the presence of the proximate causes above. However, this test and its corresponding hypothesis (more remote causes lead to more proximate causes) fall outside of the scope of this paper. The full version is available upon request.

Implications for hypothesis 1

All proximate and remote variables then considered, the danger-scale scores of China and Japan are respectively 2.5 and 2. According to our earlier categorisation, this has a high (Chinese nationalism) and moderate (Japanese nationalism) potential for conflict. Our initial expectation that Van Evera’s model could not explain the absence of conflict between the two countries looks herewith confirmed: the intermediate to high presence of proximate causes seems to suggest conflict is either foreseeable or already present, but the empirical analysis of current Sino-Japanese relations suggest other variables are at work explaining the relative calmness between the two states.

Test of the revised model: Van Evera+

In this second part of the analysis, the revised model Van Evera+ will be tested. Since it is not the primary aim in this paper to review earlier work on Chinese and Japanese strategic culture, this section will rely on secondary literature to determine the scores on each of the relevant variables. In the case of China, its strategic culture has been described by Johnston (1996) himself, Scobell (2002), Feng (2007) and (to a lesser extent) Jacques (2012). For Japan, important academic contributions have been made by Berger (1993; 1996; 1998), Katzenstein (1996a) and Morgan (2003). Ball (1993) has made important contributions to an empirical analysis of the strategic culture in a wider Asia-Pacific context. Some have based their methodology on Johnston (1995), so that the empirical findings fit the methodological framework. For others who have not, their data will be interpreted along the set methodology.

Chinese strategic culture has been a popular subject among academia, since it challenges claims made by mainstream realists who argue that cultural realpolitik is epiphenomenal, a product of the logic of anarchy (Johnston, 1996: 217). Various authors
have described the origins of Chinese strategic culture as *culturalism*\(^{18}\) with its roots in Confucianism, the most important philosophical discourse in Chinese thought for the last 2,000 years. Culturalism translated itself into a belief in Confucian values of *de* (virtue), *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness) as guiding norms for the ordering of both the domestic society and security strategy, and thus, foreign policy (Zhang, 2002: 73). Benevolence and another virtue, *li* (propriety), function as limitations and regulations of power, being put into practice through leading by moral example. The golden rule is therefore not to do unto others what you would not like them to do unto you, or, as an old Chinese saying goes, ‘sweep the snow from in front of your own house, don’t worry about the frost on your neighbour’s roof’. Expansion and conquest are as a result largely absent from the Confucian narrative, and it is here where China’s insistence on non-interference in internal affairs in bodies such as the UN finds its origin.

What does this say about the strategic culture that prevails in China? For a strategic culture to be present, its ranking of strategic preferences needs to be persistent across time and space. What do the aforementioned authors say about this? According to Zhang (2002: 78), Confucianism *under normal circumstances* prefers non-violent over violent courses of action when it concerns the relations with ‘barbarians’, which then, as it is now, refers to anything that is not considered to be culturally Chinese. In the horizontal nature of the anarchic Westphalian system, Chinese leaders advocate the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and sovereignty. There are, according to Zhang, two tendencies in China’s strategic culture:

On the one hand, there is a clear-cut tendency towards pursuit of the CNP\(^{21}\), driven by the calculation on the present domestic and international situations (mainly the relatively weak power endowment of China vis-à-vis major powers of the West), the memories of humiliating history in the early modern era, and the influences of ancient strategists’ emphasis on the CNP. On the other, in the course of pursuing the CNP, China has been exerting restraints on using force

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\(^{18}\) The term ‘culturalism’ should be understood as “the belief that China was a cultural community whose boundaries were determined by the knowledge and practices of principles expressed through China’s elite cultural tradition; that this community was unique and unrivalled because it was the world’s only true civilisation; that it was properly governed by an emperor who held absolute authority over his subjects, consisting of all those participating in the civilisation; and that the political authority of the emperor and his officials rested in principle on superior cultural attainments, especially learning and a capacity to govern by moral example” (Townsend, 1992: 109-110, emphasis added).

\(^{21}\) The Comprehensive National Power (CNP), referred to by Zhang as “the combined overall conditions and strengths in a country in various areas, including economic strength, scientific and technological level” (2002: 82).
and this restriction will certainly be continued so long as China is still weak compared with Western powers. (Zhang, 2002: 82)

That China is pursuing more technological, economical and military power, but abiding its time in insufficient presence of it, is not particularly pointing in the direction that this is an ideationally created preference – as such, the overlap with realists is substantial when one says that states try to maximise their material capabilities, when and wherever capable. Despite the professed values by Chinese elites, what happens at the operational level?

For Johnston and Scobell (2002), Chinese strategic culture is about two cultures: hard realpolitik preferences (to be found in the canon of Chinese military writing, the Seven Military Classics) which readily serves to explain factual behaviour, while the soft idealpolitik preferences (to be found in Confucian-Mencian writings) mainly serve as a legitimisation of leadership and to reduce cognitive dissonance (see also Dittmer, 1997: 193). Johnston refers to this as a parabellum strategic culture (1996: 217), which holds that China is prone to use force in foreign policy crises, that these crises were all territorial disputes and seen as “high-value conflicts, partly because of a historical sensitivity to threats to the territorial integrity of the state” (ibid.: 252), that even political/diplomatic crises are framed as high-level threats, and force seen as the legitimate response. Its elites are thus “more apt to view a wide range of disputes in zero-sum terms, thus establishing a low threshold for determining what conflicts constituted a clear threat to the security of the state” (ibid.).

In other words, what from the outside looks like a very accommodationist strategic culture, is in fact on an operational level much more antagonistic. The two sets stand on equal footing, with the latter being the idealised discourse. It underscores his theory that the Chinese elites use myths and symbols as an idealised picture of how their behaviour should look like, what Johnston referred to as autocommunicative use of symbols – it is exactly here Scobell and Johnston meet. For it is also Scobell who argues that Chinese leaders like to believe they adhere to Confucian values of strategic behaviour, but at the same time justify the use of force as defensive means to maintain China’s national security. He furthermore contends that with the use of these symbols, China’s elites seem to legitimise their actions, in order to reconcile the contradictions between professed values (Confucianism) and actual behaviour (the defensive use of force). Indeed, this is what Johnston describes as the third purpose of the elite’s use of symbols: a resolution of
cognitive dissonance and public justification for certain behavioural choices (Johnston, 1996: 59). In order to test for China’s views on the orderliness of the external environment, we need to look beyond symbolic behaviour and rather proceed in a more rigorous fashion by testing for the three variables of Johnston’s model, by looking at actual behaviour – we assume that there is a schism between both discourses.

Role of conflict in human affairs

Firstly, any war that China has fought is considered to be a just war by its elites; it views any of its wars necessarily as befitting the dictum of strict self-defence: the aggressor is always the oppressed fighting its oppressors, and inherently it has depleted all peaceful means before it resorts to force. Scobell argues that “sincerely held beliefs [in and of Confucian values] are essentially negated, or rather twisted by its assumptions that any war is just and any military action is defensive, even when it is offensive in nature” (2002: 4). It justifies for such behaviour mainly through linguistic devices, in order to reconcile contradictions between professed values and actual behaviour, both to resolve cognitive dissolution as well as to provide a public justification for these behavioural choices (cf. Johnston, 1995: 59). All violence is framed as self-defensive in that there is a preference for second strike, because to “strike the enemy [...] without specific provocation would be to give it the sympathy of world opinion and would tar the just side with the politically damaging label of aggressor” (ibid.: 250, emphasis in original). It will use these threats or attacks as pretexts to change an unfavourable status quo to its advantage. I disagree with Johnston that this would imply that China would see conflict necessarily as a inevitability: while preferring a diplomatic solution, it would defend itself, but not unnecessary provoke in an offensive manner – but it would change the status quo if it would be given the chance to do so without being labelled as the aggressor (a just war). What matters for this variable are China’s views, not so much its operational behaviour towards war. If a state views a self-defensive war as a just war, then it prefers diplomacy to war. Ergo, war in human affairs is an aberration (score 0 on the first variable).

Secondly, Chinese civilisation has been through turmoil, invasion, rupture and many revolutions and civil wars for the last 2,000 years, yet “the lines of continuity have remained resilient, persistent and ultimately predominant, superimposing themselves for the most part in the Chinese mind over the interruptions and breaks” (Jacques, 2012: 246). It is fierce to defend what it sees as attacks on its unity, which has become a core value, even if they are mere threats to its integrity. China perceives even crises as high-
level threats, in that it sees itself surrounded by threats to its integrity, both in the
domestic and foreign sphere: it has “a pathological fear of division and instability”
(Jacques, 2012: 260). Johnston (1996: 223) writes that “since the adversary was a threat to
the moral political order, the contest was explicitly zero-sum: the enemy could not be
won over but had to be destroyed”. The nature of its adversaries is thus in many cases
zero-sum (score 1 on the second variable).

Thirdly, China’s elites see threats everywhere in its neighbourhood, both domestic
and international. Contrary to the deeply held Confucian beliefs in the elite’s minds,
when confronted with crises, China’s leadership is predisposed to deploy force (Scobell,
2002: 4). The last strategic constant justifying external use of force is what is labelled by
the People’s Liberation Army as active defence, including pre-emptive strikes, or in the
words of Deng Xiaoping defensive offensives: “active defence is not merely defence per se,
but includes defensive offensives. Active defence includes our going out, so that if we are
attacked we will certainly counter attack” (Zhou, 1995: 46, as cited in Scobell, 2002: 13).
Johnston subscribes to this notion as part of the concept of ‘absolute flexibility’, a careful
approach to relative capabilities, seizing the opportunity to shift from defensive to
offensive strategy only when the relative balance of composite capabilities shifts in
China’s favour (Johnston, 1996: 239). China is for the aforementioned reason of self-
defence as pretext for change in the status quo confident about
the efficacy of the use of
force (score 1 on the third variable). All variables accumulated, Chinese strategic culture
is at the operational level a moderate realpolitik (2). Summarised, this leads to the
following score on the strategic culture of China:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of conflict in human affairs</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero-sum nature of conflict</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy of the use of force</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total score</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Overview of the assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment in China.

Japan had always refused, unlike China’s tributary neighbours, to be sucked into a
Sinocentric world order. Whereas Chinese exceptionalism consisted of being the only
ture civilisation, the Japanese saw themselves as having a uniquely racial and cultural
purity. China tried to ‘transform those that came to the Middle Kingdom’ to Confucian
values, while Japan declined to expand its benefits to those born outside of its sacred ancestral bonds (Van Wolferen, 1989: 13) and thus has a much more ethnical definition of its nation. Much of this is related to the insecurities that the island nation brought, fearful of neighbourly domination (Kissinger, 2012: 78). WWII had a profound impact on the development of mainstream ideologies in Japan. Contrary to Germany though, the Japanese elite was not purged, there was no clear break with the regime that was largely responsible for the outbreak of the war (including the crimes committed during them) and consequently, no systematic examination of the war events among the elite or the masses (Seraphim, 2006)\(^2\), which laid the foundations of modern Japanese nationalism.

Nevertheless, in the post-war years, Japan adopted an almost unique constitution, as it renounced war forever and reduced its armed forces to strictly self-defensive forces. Their pacifist turn shows that domestic politics can determine the security policy of states and create cultures of antimilitarism, as is the case in Japan (cf. Berger, 1998; see also Katzenstein, 1996a). In fact, Japan’s pacifist-oriented foreign policy is a salient source of “Japan’s inclination to deference and restraint in the bilateral relationship with China” (Drifte, 2003: 6). The security umbrella of the United States is a strong incentive to maintain a mere self-defensive force, yet judging on the popular backlash Prime Minister Abe, who enjoys widespread general support, recently faced when he announced plans to revise the constitution and remove the clause that prohibits Japan to deploy its forces abroad and to renounce war forever, indicates broad societal acceptance of the pacifist nature of Japanese foreign policy (The Economist, 2014b, see also Roy, 1994: 151).

Despite the fact that the public is generally much more now than in the 1950s in favour now of a reinterpretation of its pacifist Article 9 of the constitution, which forswears war as a sovereign right of the nation, foreign deployment of troops and does not recognise the right of belligerency, national security is still ranked very low as a priority for Japan’s citizens; there is no appetite for amending the constitution at this point (Katzenstein, 1993: 104). Roy (1994: 151) goes as far as saying that “rather than an ‘economic superpower’, Japan is really an incomplete major power”, lacking a true military of its own. That posture has changed little since the end of the Cold War, when the debate shifted towards the question whether and in what form Japan should

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\(^2\)Seraphim (2006) explicitly makes a comparison with Germany, which made the period of fascism ‘exceptional’, allowing it to be judged and disconnected from its pre-fascist polity. Japan kept its emperor, which made it more difficult to make comparisons with that pre-fascist polity.
participate in international peacekeeping missions\textsuperscript{23} (Berger, 1996: 344; Katzenstein, 1993: 102-103) – which is hitherto still limited to the supply of supportive, non-combatant staff. This therefore leads to the conclusion that Japan considers conflict to be an aberration in human affairs (score 0).

On the nature of threat in terms of zero-sum or variable sum, Japan is very much aware of its own economic vulnerability as a resource-poor, isolated island that is very much reliant on the imports of raw material, but not so militarily\textsuperscript{24}. “This historical insularity is alleged to have made the Japanese people inherently inept at power politics, while at the same time strengthening their inclination toward harmony and cooperation” (Berger, 1996: 343). Its military has some capacity for contribution to international peacekeeping missions, but most troops remain earmarked for territorial defence. Japan’s most potent threat, China, is one which it sees the need to engage with: “Japan’s diplomacy aims at a slow, steady and prolonged process of encouraging China to contribute more to regional stability and prosperity” (Katzenstein & Okawara, 2001: 178). One can broadly draw up three post-war movements, namely leftists, who emphasise that Japan was a victim of scientific-industrialised warfare, right-wing nationalists, who claim that Japan was unjustly punished unilaterally, and ordinary Japanese, who see the aftermath of WWII as a moral message for peace. This cleavage reappears in several issues, most prominently on Japan’s guilt, the views on the Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings and the significance of the Yasukuni Shrine. Nevertheless, what matters here is how Japan in general has viewed the issue of the nature of its threats, and that is one of benevolence. Despite a renewal of the debate of the SDF’s position and role in Japanese society, there is broad agreement that in the face of new threats, it needs above all engagement with them, as it has done by deepening economic ties with China and seeking more multilateralism in the promotion of prosperity and security in the wider region. Even when Shinzo Abe firstly became prime minister in 2006, his first foreign visit was to the PRC, which was considered a diplomatic success. “The character or personal views of political leaders do not necessarily translate into government policy, or the process of such translation is at least not entirely predictable” (Hagström & Jerdén, 2010: 722), which points to a deeper

\textsuperscript{23} Despite the on-going debate, it took Japan nine years to send its first troops to the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, a contingency that was limited to non-combatants: ten unarmed doctors and nurses (Mizokami, 2010).

\textsuperscript{24} The US occupation of Japan after WWII was in fact the first foreign occupation of Japan in its recorded history (Berger, 1996: 330).
discourse in strategic interests that exists independently of individual leaders. It is for the aforementioned reasons that Japan sees threats as a variable sum (score 0).

On the last variable, belief in force as an efficacious means to attain Japan’s ends is also limited. Its force structure “is designed to complement that of US forces in the region, with a heavy focus on defensive weaponry, and little independent capacity for power projection” (Berger, 1993: 127). Its industries are reluctant to commit themselves to arms manufacturing, as business leaders are afraid to create a military-industrial complex – their core business should be creating high-quality consumer goods for a demanding civilian market. Lastly, the “Japanese have been extraordinarily reluctant to allow their armed forces to engage in military planning for fear that, as in the 1930s, the military might try to engineer an international incident that could drag Japan into a war in Asia” (ibid.: 136). On the other hand, Japan does possess a formidable military, with expenditures of 54.53 billion US dollars in 2011 (SIPRI, 2012), which relatively low at 1.0 per cent of Japan’s GDP, but in absolute terms one of the highest in the world. Its structure, however, is designed to be a strictly defensive force. Therefore, it can be concluded that Japan does not see force as an efficacious means to attain its ends (score 0). This makes the composite score of Japan on the orderliness of the treat environment also 0. Cumulatively, this leads to the following score table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment in Japan</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of conflict in human affairs</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero-sum nature of conflict</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy of the use of force</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Overview of the assumptions about the orderliness of the strategic environment in Japan.

It should be noted that Japan’s strategic culture is less continuous than the Chinese, as its origins go back only to the 1950s under the aegis of a benevolent US hegemon, and as a result is less strong and rooted in the minds of elites and the people. The benevolence of both the US and China has allowed Japan to develop such anti-militarist culture, which would undergo a profound crisis when that benevolence would end (the former changing or ending the strategic alliance, the latter posing an ever larger threat to Japanese interests), in which case a new political elite could emerge that has a much more progressive view on security (Berger, 1993: 120). Each of the country’s scores will not be
weighted on their continuity, but it will be taken into account in the discussion of this paper, which deals with methodological choices that have been made in this regard.

Implications for hypothesis 2

Given that we now have determined the position on Van Evera’s danger-scale and the strategic culture of Johnston, we can test the second hypothesis: model Van Evera\(^+\), built on the premise that strategic culture affects the effects of nationalism. Combined with our earlier results, we can conclude that China has a score of 2 on strategic culture (moderate realpolitik) and 2.5 on the danger-scale (high potential for conflict). Japan, on the other hand, scores respectively 0 (idealpolitik) and 2 (intermediate potential for conflict). This then leads to the following scores on the composite index:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index scores</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Van Evera: score on the danger-scale of nationalism ((0 – 3))</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnston: score on the orderliness of the strategic environment ((0 – 3))</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Van Evera</strong>(^+): composite index ((0 – 6))</td>
<td><strong>4.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Score table on model Van Evera, the orderliness of the strategic environment and model Van Evera\(^+\).

The effects of strategic culture on the danger-scale can be made more clearly visible in case we compare both scores on the danger-scale as well as on the composite index, as shown in Figure 5 below.

![Figure 5: As Figure 3, now shown with the effects of strategic culture on nationalism in model Van Evera\(^+\).](image-url)

What we can observe here is that the initial score on the danger-scale of Van Evera (upper-scale) led to relatively moderate to high potentials of war \((2.5/3 \text{ and } 2/3)\), on the upper end of the spectrum. The composite index, which accumulates the scores on the danger-scale and on the orderliness of the strategic environment (the strategic culture),
shows a different picture: in both the case of Japan and China we observe that the likelihood of conflict has decreased in the face of a meliorating strategic culture (respectively from 2/3 to 2/6 and from 2.5/3 to 4.5/6). In the case of China, which was in the lower-right corner of the danger-scale (Table 1), the second-highest possible score, the effect is not as strong as it is in the case of Japan. Idealpolitik (score 0 on the orderliness of the strategic environment) dampens any nationalism, but even in the case of China’s moderate realpolitik (2.5), a dampening effect was visible: the composite score on the risk of conflict is 4.5 on a scale of 6. When both indexes are assigned equal weight as outlined in the methodology, that is about 8 per cent point lower than the initial 2.5 on a scale of 3 in Van Evera’s (which would, if measured on the same scale, correspond to a 5 on a scale of 6). For Japan, this effect is even stronger. As the scale shows, for Japan the effect is a wholly 33 per cent point lower. This dramatic decrease is largely owing to Japan’s strategic culture at the idealpolitik end of the spectrum (a score of 0 on a scale of 3). Its score on the danger-scale differs only 0.5 point from China’s score at 2, but the effects of strategic culture are far stronger, where the difference in the score on strategic culture between the two states is 2.
Conclusion
Hypothesis 1 has provided for a test of Van Evera’s basic model. Despite the relatively high scores of both China (2.5 out of 3) and Japan (2 out of 3) on Van Evera’s danger-scale, scores that have been classified as respectively highly conflict-potential and moderately potential, conflict has been largely absent from bilateral relations, notwithstanding occasional flare-ups, as such occurred in for example the Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial dispute. Yet by looking at these flare-ups, we can conclude that these do not constitute war in the way Van Evera understands it (as a civil or inter-state war that claims at least 5,000 victims). China and Japan show signs of animosity and tension that have led to a handful of victims, but they have not declared war on each other. It should however be noted that the chance of conflict increases as the danger-scale score increases, and that there is no clear score threshold on which war becomes inevitable. As for the hypothesis, signs point in the direction of rejection, in the sense that one would expect war on the basis of these scores that have been classified as highly or moderately conflict-potential, but not observe it. The hypothesis is thus rejected.

The results in Figure 5 could lead us to suspect that the current absence of conflict could find its origin in a mediating effect caused by strategic culture, meliorating the highly and moderately malign (of respectively China and Japan) effects of nationalism. In Japan, this mediation is considerate: in Van Evera+ the score has decreased by 33 per cent when compared to model Van Evera. In China, this effect is less great but still present. This owes to the fact that the larger the difference between the danger-scale and the strategic culture scores (China: 0.5; Japan: 2), the stronger the reinforcing or dampening effect on the prospects of war will be. In the case of China, we can thus still expect a moderate chance of conflict, for Japan the moderately malign effects of nationalism seem to have been largely dampened in the face of idealpolitik strategic preferences.

These cases represent our earlier scholarly interest: nationalism with malign effects on the prospects of war, but with strategic culture influencing the preferences of the elites, the in-group, towards accommodationist tactics, constraining behaviour towards the out-group. It could however be argued that the observed effect in the case of China is so low, that Van Evera+ does not offer a convincing alternative explanation.

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25 As violent conflict in a state or between two states that claims at least 5,000 victims.
for the relative calmness in Sino-Japanese relations (please see the section on various reflections below).

In conclusion, hypothesis 1 has been falsified: conflict has been absent despite relatively malign scores on both strands of nationalism; nevertheless one could argue that the classification of scores between 2.5 – 3 as highly potential was an arbitrary, subjective methodological choice, and the consequent expectations were false (thus the hypothesis should be accepted). It has nonetheless been argued that throughout the time period under scrutiny (1989 – 2015), threats and flare-ups have been consistently averted with little or no human losses, nor significant economic damage and thus far from warfare that claimed more than 5,000 victims. China and Japan have so far prevented themselves from entering one. It should however be noted that both Chinese and Japanese nationalism have been assessed independently. By itself, we should also have expected Chinese aggressiveness and fair Japanese aggressiveness in general towards their neighbours. This paper has focused on the bilateral relations, since its nationalisms are so strongly directed towards each other – largely owing to the troubled shared history during WWII and before. In order to make a better assessment of the fit of Van Evera’s theory, it would be wise to focus on additional dyads, in order to probe whether the rejection of the hypothesis would still hold.

When it comes to strategic culture as a theory, it has proven successful to provide a better explanation for Sino-Japanese relations, taking into account various reflections on methodological choices and limits of this research as outlined below. The magnitude of the mediating effects is varying, but present, more so in the case of China than in the case of Japan. It can be seen that the mediating effects are more profound when the discrepancy is larger between the scores on the danger-scale and the assumptions of the strategic environment, as is the case in Japan.
References


Appendix

A: Map of the East China Sea

Stratfor (2012), as cited in International Crisis Group (2013: 51)