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Resisting Change in Northeast Asia

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**China, Japan, South Korea and the United States: Resisting Change in
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Abstract:

Though it appears much has changed for the players in Northeast Asia, when considering actual shifts in military resources and alliance strategy, many things have stayed the same. When taking the role of the United States into account, there is much stability to be found. There has been little variance in the United States' alliance credibility or in the number of troops stationed in the region. Acting as a buffer to North Korean aggression and a preventative backstop to Japanese remilitarization, the United States allows the regional players, especially Japan and South Korea, to focus on economic growth while avoiding confronting the thorny issues of resolving historical animosity and territorial disputes. Even for China, the U.S.'s main competitor, the American military presence, both directly and indirectly, has allowed China's economy to flourish. While conflict is possible, it is not impendingly inevitable as realist scholars might claim. Japan, South Korea and China must be prepared for conflict as tensions do occasionally rise, but the high-risk scenarios painted by many realists are unlikely to break out in Northeast Asia anytime soon. Furthermore, the Northeast Asian states see value in the American presence. Japan and South Korea, despite being heavily economically interdependent with China, will likely resist Chinese overtures to abandon its American ally until the Chinese military threat can credibly challenge U.S. firepower. Relatedly, even though Beijing would like the U.S. gone eventually, for the foreseeable future it is content to focus its attention elsewhere because the U.S. presence has also been a boon to Chinese development. In many ways, the utility of the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK alliances has been helpful to all the regional players, and despite recurrent tension and conflict, the Northeast Asian states and the United States will be reluctant to solve animosity until the current status quo has drastically changed to upset the regional balance of power.

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Chapter One -- Introduction and Statement of the Problem

“China is a big country, and other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact.” (McGregor 2017: 248). These words, attributed to one of China’s top diplomats, Yang Jiechi,, seem glaringly obvious. With a population of 1.3 billion people and a total area of 9.6 million square kilometers, no one could dispute China’s size (CIA World Factbook 2018). Yet, Yang was not just referring to population and geography. In 2017, China captured 12.4% of the world’s total trade in goods (China Power Project 2019). With a GDP of over 23 trillion USD, China certainly has ample economic weight to make its presence felt and project power in the Northeast Asian region (World Bank 2019).

What does this mean for China’s neighbors, particularly Japan and South Korea? These two ‘small countries’ have their own interstate disputes and share a less-than-amicable past. Tempers frequently flare over the issue of how the histories of Japanese colonial rule and treatment of Korea (and of Korean women) during World War II are taught in Japanese schools. Moreover, the two countries have a chronic dispute over conflicting territorial claims to islets in the Sea of Japan that the Koreans call Dokdo and the Japanese Takeshima. Yet both share a common ally that also happens to be a ‘big country’. Tied to the United States by treaty, Japan and Korea depend on American firepower to meet their security needs, and the U.S. is the only country in the world with a military capable of checking Chinese ambitions. However, at the same time China represents the number one trading partner of both Japan and South Korea, a position once held by the United States. A rupture of relations with China because of a military confrontation would deal a massive blow to the economies and to the domestic political stability of Japan and South Korea.

It is a central fact of modern world history that China's rise increasingly challenges the hegemonic position of the United States. What effect does the rise of China have on the existing web of interstate relations that the United States has had a big hand in developing in the postwar era? Realist scholars treat the balance of power as a master variable in understanding world politics. The relative shift in capabilities that is now underway has significant implications for the alliance relationships that the United States has maintained for the past seven decades. Because the United States historically has been a reliable partner to its Northeast Asian allies and a stabilizing force in the region, I argue that Japan and South Korea and even China have been reluctant to change the status quo and that only when China becomes militarily dominant will it be capable of altering the status quo. Doomsday predictions notwithstanding, restraint is the most likely option on the part of all involved parties in the Northeast Asian arena.

It must be stressed that the term “status quo” is hardly synonymous with peace or at least with the resolution of tensions. As Robert Keohane (1984) has pointed out, interstate cooperation does not mean an *absence* of conflict. Instead, cooperation implies that states share inherent tensions but find ways to manage conflicts for the sake of mutual gain (Keohane 1984: 51-55). Thus, despite the long-standing strategic alignment between the United States, South Korea, and Japan, discord has been an inevitable element of this triangular alliance. Not only do the Koreans and Japanese struggle with the legacy of their shared past, but the significant American military presence in both countries serves as a recurrent source of friction, especially in the domestic politics of both countries. For their part, the United States and South Korea even disagree at times over the nature of the threat posed by North Korea. Yet, all parties accept at some fundamental level the premise that a heavy American presence has been the source of regional peace. Even China, whose rise promises to alter the global balance of power, has benefited from

a regional American hegemony that has kept the peace, and has accommodated China's growing influence in Northeast Asia. Maintaining a peaceful Northeast Asian status quo requires some level of cooperation. If a state's primary goal in the system is survival, it would follow that sometimes cooperation can be a form of self-help (Glaser 1994).

Taking the international order to be anarchic and the state to be the unit of analysis, the scholarly tradition of realism provides a rich set of angles with which to analyze relations between China, the United States, Japan and South Korea. Realism emphasizes a state's need for survival, which is dependent upon its strength and capabilities. There is an inherent focus on conflict in realism, though stability is obviously the preferred alternative. As such, realists have come to see international relations as tragic and cyclical with states bound to repeat the same processes of conflict (Jorgensen 2010: 78-29).

One of the most significant variants of the realist tradition is balance of power theory. Kenneth Waltz, the father of neoclassical realism, spent considerable energy describing balancing, and the concept has been further articulated by subsequent scholars in that tradition. There are a number of balancing methods available to 'small' states, including forming alliances or bandwagoning. When a rising power threatens stability or the status quo, smaller states will form alliances to restrain the growing state. Since the system is a self-help, anarchic one, states must also increase their own economic, territorial, military and political capabilities which can lead to a security dilemma (Jorgensen 2010: 84, 89-92). Stephen Walt offers a balance of threat theory, helpful in considering Northeast Asia, which contends that states only balance when a threat is perceived. In other words, just because a state is a 'big country' does not necessarily mean it will generate regional balancing. Only when the power of the big state is deemed to be menacing will small states seek to counter its power (Jorgensen 2010: 87).

When power capabilities shift, states may defect, realign, free-ride or find themselves chain-ganged or entrapped within an alliance (Jorgensen 2010: 91-93). As the polarity of Northeast Asia appears to be changing, China's rise presents an interesting case to analyze the shifting or maintenance of Northeast Asian alliances. Indeed, China's economic clout is significant, but its military capacities do not (yet) mirror its economic achievements. Thus, while China cannot credibly threaten the U.S. or its allies in a military sense, it could still seek to economically coerce Japan and South Korea into weakening or abandoning their relationships with the United States. So far, neither country reached its breaking point with either of its Great Power partners, nor have Japan and South Korea drawn any red line indicating what they will not tolerate.

China's rise indeed impacts its neighbors, but a significant change in the Sino-US relationship will have reverberations around the globe. In this scenario, one might look to power transition theory for guidance. The main intuition behind power transition theory is that when a rising power is no longer satisfied with the status quo, it will seek to overthrow the hegemon at the top of the hierarchy. Power transition theory differs from balance of power theory in that stability is derived from achieving satisfaction with the hierarchical ordering rather than through balancing. Power transition theory was first, officially, introduced by A.F.K. Organski in 1958 in his book *World Politics*, though its origins stem from a much, much earlier era (Jorgensen 2010: 93-94). The true father of realism, the Greek historian Thucydides, effectively described power transition theory in the opening pages of *the Peloponnesian War*: "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable." Graham Allison (2017) coined the phrase "Thucydides Trap" to describe the chaos ensuing from failed attempts to manage such power transitions. As a result of his historical analysis of past examples of such failures Allison

argues that the current Sino-American relationship must be managed with great delicacy lest its tensions break out into a hegemonic war of potentially catastrophic consequences.

Without doubt, the potential for conflict in Northeast Asia is not negligible. Japan and South Korea, two states with the greatest reasons to cooperate, have found common ground to be elusive. Both are democracies that have enjoyed rapid post-war economic growth and share common security threats. Despite the brutality of the Japanese colonial era, cooperation between Japan and South Korea has experienced a sustained upswing during the postwar era, albeit with some fluctuations. Trade, person-to-person exchanges, diplomatic relations and military cooperation have all increased in the past seven decades following World War II (Park 2009). Yet, conspicuously absent in their bilateral relationship is any formal security treaty, let alone any formal declaration of friendship comparable to the Élysée Treaty of 1963 between France and West Germany.

Since cooperation does not imply a lack of conflict, frictions in the Japan-South Korea relationship are significant and recurrent, centering around the Japanese colonial era, a period which saw rather egregious brutality exercised by Japanese soldiers. Korean culture was repressed, women were forced into sexual slavery (commonly known as the Comfort Women issue) and innocent civilians were brutally tortured and murdered. By all accounts, the Japanese Imperial Army committed a plethora of atrocious war crimes (Ogawa 2000).

South Korea's grievances primarily stem from Japan's belated acknowledgment of its responsibility for the circumstances of its colonial rule, and its perceived inadequate apology for the excesses of that rule. This dispute over historical legacy is colloquially referred to as The History Wars (Ogawa 2000: 45, 46). Fortifying South Korea's claims are Japanese textbooks which present the issue in a rather benign perspective and Japanese ministerial visits

to the Yasukuni Shrine, where convicted Japanese war criminals are buried. South Korea's argument regarding the textbook issue asserts that if Japanese students are inadequately aware of their country's violent past, a resurgent Japan is likely to emerge as students come of age and take leadership positions within the country. Flowing from this reasoning are South Korean objections to Yasukuni Shrine visits by Japanese politicians. Though Japan is largely atheistic, it does have a history of Shintoism (Boyne 2017). A shrine, in Shinto tradition, houses the spirits of the deceased; Yasukuni Shrine happens to house the spirits of 14 Class A War Criminals. As many of Japan's war crimes were committed at the direction of the military and political leaders housed here, one can easily see how official visits to Yasukuni rile the emotions of Japan's neighbors, also the victims of the country's imperial conquests (McGregor 2017: 91-92).

A second obstacle for Japan-ROK cooperation is the territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima. Located in the East Sea/Sea of Japan, the islands represent an issue of national pride and economic strategy. Both Japan and South Korea cite historical claims to the islets as evidence of possession, with claims dating back to the 512 CE (Ch'oe 2015). Occasionally military vessels are dispatched to the area, but there has yet to be any major breakout of major, relationship-ending hostilities (Palmer et al. 2015). Domestically, the issue roils public opinion. However, as pointed out by Park Cheol Hee, though the fervor is still intense, taken as a whole, domestic opinion in both South Korea and Japan has subsided to manageable levels (2009). Protests still erupt with gusto but are much shorter lived. Furthermore, the segment of the population mostly likely to be mobilized by this issue has gotten smaller. Instead, for the average Japanese or South Korean citizen, the issue matters, but it matters less than regional stability (Park 2009: 258-263). Dokdo/Takeshima should not be discounted as an irrational dispute, as there is always a possibility tensions could break out. Both Japanese and

South Korean leaders must manage this perennial conflict with care. This issue is capable of disrupting stability, especially in the area of trade. However, the likelihood of it destroying Japan-ROK relations is low.

It would be tempting to apply interpersonal rules of mediation to the Japan-ROK relationship and point out that it is unhealthy to let such a wound in the relationship fester for too long. However, states are not people and, instead, a complex amalgamation of varying interests. For less self-serving, and much more *realpolitik*, reasons, Japanese and South Korean elites have reason to leave these problems unaddressed. Indeed, were the two countries to actually reach some resolution of this historical dispute, any agreement between the two would actually upset the regional status quo, signaling a change in international strategy to the other states of Northeast Asia. Most likely, this would be interpreted as balancing by not only North Korea, but also China (Cha 2000: 271-272). It should not be implied that Tokyo and Seoul leave the conflict unresolved for entirely cynical reasons; certainly, the anger arising from perceptions of inadequate apology, the Yasukuni Shrine visits, and the Dokdo/Takeshima disputes is real. However, overcoming these historical animosities is not a top priority for Tokyo or Seoul, and leaving them unresolved can also serve a strategic purpose.

Not only must they manage their internal disputes, but Japan and South Korea must also be acutely aware of the threats surrounding them. If perceptions matter, Japan and South Korea may wish to avoid any formal hard commitments to one another to avoid sending signals of definitive balancing to both North Korea and China. Furthermore, the American military presence has mitigated the need to formally balance China or North Korea. Since the conclusion of WWII and the Korean War armistice, Japan and South Korea, respectively, have had U.S. troops stationed on their soil (Kane 2004). Article IX of the Japanese Constitution, a product of

American design, revokes its right to go to war and maintain a military. Instead, it must depend on the U.S. to meet its security needs as outlined by the San Francisco Treaty of 1952 (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014). South Korea, which not only has its own military but also mandatory conscription for males, still relies on American firepower to deter a nuclearized North Korea from provoking confrontation (CIA World Factbook 2018; U.S. Department of State 2018). Because of Japan's and South Korea's alliances with the United States, they must also evaluate the Sino-U.S. relationship, which has historically fluctuated between cooperation and discord.

It is, nonetheless, China's rise which potentially threatens the current status quo of American regional hegemony. For almost three decades following the 1949 communist victory and the subsequent establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), China was engulfed in domestic turmoil. With Mao at the helm from 1949 to 1978, China suffered through the famine of the paradoxically named Great Leap Forward only to be followed by the bizarre Cultural Revolution (Holcombe 2010: 314-319). Throughout this chaotic period, Mao purged fellow Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders, including Deng Xiaoping and Xi Zhongxun, father of the current president Xi Jinping (Graham 2017: 143; Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019). Following Mao's death, Deng rose to lead the CCP in a more pragmatic direction. Deng oversaw the Reform and Opening period, bringing China to the economic world stage by introducing a number of market liberalizations, also known as 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' (Heilmann 2017: 51). These market reforms have proven a boon to Chinese economic growth, which in turn has allowed for increased military investment and power projection by Beijing.

It is important to note that for millennia before the Century of Humiliation, China sat atop the Asian hierarchy; it was the Middle Kingdom. In ancient times, China was technologically

superior to the West (US-China Institute). Historically, China's surrounding neighbors would travel to kowtow to the Chinese emperor while China's trade routes spanned the entire Asian continent. As a result, Chinese culture permeates the cultures of surrounding states. Indeed, for most of history, China as the regional hegemon has been the status quo (Kang 2003: 169-173).

The current predominance of the United States is a double-edged sword for China, however. On the one hand, it has benefitted immensely from abiding by the norms of the status quo. Had it acted as belligerently as its neighbor to the East, North Korea, it would have never invited the foreign investment necessary to become the world's second largest economy. Furthermore, the American military presence prevents a rearmed and resurgent Japan, something which neither China nor South Korea would like. As China and Japan share their own territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, a remilitarized Japan would only invite further conflict surrounding the territory. On the other hand, the current status quo places China below what it perceives to be its rightful place at the top of the hierarchy.

For Japan and South Korea, the current status quo has given them access to the best of both worlds. That Japan and South Korea house the first and third highest numbers of American troops, respectively, gives each state leverage they would not have otherwise (Defense Manpower Data Center). Additionally, the American presence deters a major North Korean attack. Impoverished North Korea knows it is no match for American military strength and an attack on South Korea would spell the end of the Kim regime. Furthermore, a collapsed North Korea also puts American troops much closer to China's borders. At the same time, access to the Chinese market is vital for the economies of Japan and South Korea. While the Chinese economy could absorb the loss of Japanese and South Korean flows (though it would prefer not to), a loss of Chinese economic flows to the South Korean and Japanese

economies be domestically destabilizing. Though access to the American economy is also important, the economies of Japan and South Korea cannot simply afford to lose what has become their largest trading partner.

China is indeed a big country, but so is the United States. Japan and South Korea, in comparison, are small countries. That is, indeed, a fact. However, their small size does not mean they are powerless in determining their fate. Because these ‘big countries’ provide vital services for Japanese and South Korean survival, Japan and South Korea have resisted commitments that would alienate either of their Great Power partners, including commitments to one another. While the current status quo is not harmonious, it is relatively peaceful. Threat and conflict may persist but, for the time being, they are manageable. Japan and South Korea will continue to appease both their Great Power partners, accommodating both without alienating one or the other. Only a change to the status quo of the American military presence will generate a change in Japanese-South Korean strategic alignment, whether that means a change in numbers of American troops or a change relative to the power of American military might compared with Chinese military capabilities.

In the second chapter, I will look at alternative explanations other authors have put forth for East Asian alliance dynamics. While these authors present plausible scenarios for how a rising China might affect the regional balance, none provide a thorough empirical basis for the claims they make. Using data series from the Correlates of War project, then in the third chapter, I examine the claims made by each author to show that, while portions of each claim have some degree of validity, clear-cut outcomes and changes in alliance structure in Northeast Asia are unlikely. This leads me to my own interpretation of the data in the fourth chapter where I argue for the likelihood of the status quo persisting. Finally, in my conclusion found in chapter five, I

anticipate the circumstances that might spark action to upend the embedded alliances within Northeast Asia as well as the risks involved in venturing out into the unknown territory of reorganized regional power relations.

Chapter Two -- Literature Review

Recent scholarship has seen a surge in work focusing on the states of Northeast Asia. The growing wealth and clout of the Northeast Asian economies has improved both the living conditions and military capabilities of each state. In turn, this regional transformation has prompted scholars to consider how changes in relative capabilities might affect the alliance dynamics, particularly as China's rise challenges long-standing strategic partnerships between Japan, South Korea, and the United States.

In 1993, Aaron Friedberg published an oft-cited article describing Asia as 'ripe for rivalry'. Fortuitously predicting the shift of international focus from Europe to Asia at a time when the world was fixated on the collapse of the Soviet Union, Friedberg (1993) highlighted several key variables in developing a contrast between the strategic situations in Europe and Asia.

Citing regime differences, historical animosity, increased nationalism as a result of sharp economic growth, an absence of strong institutions and lingering territorial disputes, Friedberg (1993) sees conflict as inevitable for the Asian states. Northeast Asia alone hosts communist, totalitarian, authoritarian and democratic regimes. The accumulation of resentment stemming from the Japanese colonial era regularly resurfaces as Japan's neighbors retaliate as a result of 'The History Wars' or ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Certainly, the rise of the Asian development model has created profound economic achievements for the Northeast Asian states. Most recently, China has seen spectacular economic growth, but Japan and South Korea experienced their own economic miracles. Friedberg (1993) cites distrust of Japan as a hindrance to the formation of multilateral institutions after the Second World War. As a result, the region relies on bilateral agreements to conduct foreign affairs. The Association of South East Asian

Nations (ASEAN) has attempted to make up for the lack of institutions in Asia but lacks the negotiating power and solidarity of the EU or NATO. The diversity within ASEAN makes agreement difficult and that it was late to the start of relationship building presents inherent difficulties, though not impossibilities, in overcoming the hindrances in international cooperation (Glas 2017). Territorial disputes in Northeast Asia also encompass Japan, South Korea and China. For Japan and China, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island chain is contested, while South Korea and Japan claim Dokdo/Takeshima as their territory. To this day, neither of these disputes has been settled.

Considering these factors, one could be forgiven for taking a pessimistic stance. However, that is not to say the region has been bereft of stability. Friedberg's analysis (1993) describes the interstate relations of the East Asian states but downplays the importance of the United States' presence in the region. While he is not completely dismissive of the U.S. role, his focus is primarily on problems extant *within* the region of East Asia despite America's role in facilitating cooperation, particularly through bilateral alliance building. While these problems exist independently, the U.S. presence in the region has come to define the foreign policy of both Japan and South Korea. The role of the United States, historically, has been one of a stabilizer. As Japan depends on the United States for security, other states in the region have come to view the U.S. as the backstop preventing Japan from fully remilitarizing. Japan views the American naval presence as a check on Chinese naval aggression in the East China Sea while keeping the sea lanes open for trade. Since domestic production supplies only 10% of Japan's annual energy consumption, unimpeded shipping is vital for Japan's existence (U.S. Energy Information Administration). The U.S. has also acted as a deterrent to North Korean aggression, curbing

belligerent actions undertaken by the Kim regime. Therefore, it is impossible to consider the interconnectedness of Northeast Asia without factoring in the United States.

Victor Cha (2000), through his quasi-alliance model, incorporates the role of the United States in explaining the South Korea-Japan relationship. Cha (2000: 262) defines a quasi-alliance as “the relationship between two states that are un-allied but share a third great power patron as a common ally.” By introducing the American commitment to both Japan and South Korea as an explanatory variable in the dynamics of Northeast Asia, Cha’s model explains both Japanese-South Korean friction *and* cooperation. The quasi-alliance model is simple. When the security commitment of the United States is high, Japan-South Korea cooperation will be less likely; when the U.S. security commitment is low, Japan-South Korea cooperation will be more likely. In other words, when the U.S. threatens the status quo by showing signs of diminishing its alliance commitments in any way, Japan and South Korea will find ways to cooperate.

Cha’s model (2000) states that because both Japan and South Korea depend on the United States for security needs, any perception of a wavering United States threatens the status quo and will bring the two Northeast Asian democracies closer, as they will be forced to depend on one another for their security needs. Furthermore, when Japan and South Korea do not fear abandonment by their strategic patron, discord will persist. Cha (2000) does not disregard the importance of domestic attitudes, as realists often do, but rather considers their effect on long-term variations of the Japan-ROK relationship. Indeed, the identities of Japan and South Korea have come to depend on their security alliances with the United States as much as they do on one another for crafting historical narratives. Cha (2000) thus considers historical antagonism in the context of the U.S. security commitment rather than excluding it altogether.

Two important components of Cha's quasi-alliance model are abandonment and entrapment. According to Cha (2000), it is Japan that experiences fear of entrapment while South Korea is threatened by abandonment. At the time of Cha's writing, North Korea posed the greatest threat. Because of geographical considerations, it was South Korea that would bear the brunt of any DPRK aggression. The possibility of such aggression simultaneously invoked fear in Tokyo. Though Japan is a non-militarized state, reinterpretations of Article IX of the constitution have allowed for a more active role for Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF), though most reinterpretations were done at the urging of the United States (Basu 2016: 31-33; Itoh 2001: 312-314). Japan also worries about how the DPRK perceives ROK-Japan relations; too close of a relationship could leave the DPRK feeling encircled and more emboldened to act aggressively. Concerning the US, both Japan and South Korea fear abandonment. Not only does the US deter a North Korean attack, a substantial American naval presence ensures that shipping lanes remain open (Glaser 2015: 62-63). Therefore, Japan and South Korea must be acutely aware of how they are perceived by their neighbors while also calculating the status of the United States. Sending the wrong signals could yield undesirable consequences.

While Cha (2000) does not explicitly dismiss balance of threat theory, he elevates the importance of third-party commitment. He does, however, maintain that should South Korea and Japan experience exogenous asymmetric threats, friction will occur because of entrapment and abandonment fears. Nevertheless, since the United States' security capabilities are advanced enough to deter an attack from regional adversaries, the two countries would avoid the need for formal cooperation unless their main security guarantor's commitment was in question since "loss of a security guarantor is traumatic" (Cha 2000: 270). It is hard to understate the importance of the US for both Japan and South Korea, not only for foreign policy reasons but

also for the domestic stability of each state. Militaries are expensive, and by providing security, the US has allowed both Japan and South Korea to develop economically. As Cha (2000: 273) states, “In this sense the value of the U.S. alliance exceeds its utility as simply a deterrent against its immediate security threats.” Furthermore, the status quo of the American presence allows Japan and South Korea to ignore resolving their historical problems since their alliance is not necessary for the survival of either state.

Cha (2000) empirically tests the quasi-alliance model utilizing historical periods exhibiting a combination of the quasi-alliance scenarios. He examines the Nixon Doctrine, U.S.-China rapprochement, Vietnam, Carter, Reagan and post-Cold War eras. Through all of these, he analyzes the Japan-ROK relationship relative to both external threats and American commitment. An issue with Cha’s quasi-alliance model stems from the *credibility* of U.S. threats to abandon its East Asian allies. A threat to disengage absent of any change is an empty threat. Furthermore, U.S. threats to reduce its alliance commitments may actually be motivated by a desire to encourage a state to contribute more to the alliance, as the U.S. has done with Japan many times to encourage internal changes to Japan’s domestic limitations on military participation.

A second concern of Cha’s quasi-alliance model is that it discounts the effect of a rising China. While it doesn’t wholly eliminate Walt’s balance of threat theory, it elevates the role of the United States so that if a threat was to emerge, the threat would be secondary in explaining cooperation between Japan and Korea. At the time of Cha’s writing in 2000, China had yet to reach its highest levels of growth, and its military capabilities were correspondingly undeveloped. As a result, the quasi-alliance model excludes one of the most defining features of the Northeast Asian region, an emerging, powerful China.

While Cha's quasi-alliance model holds the U.S. commitment as the independent variable for Japanese and South Korean behavior, Robert Ross (2006) views Chinese military gains relative to the United States as a better determinant of the choices these countries make. For Ross, as for Cha, Japan-ROK cooperation is channeled through each state's alliance with the United States. However, for Ross, their choice is determined not by the U.S. alliance commitment, but rather on the ability of the U.S. to provide security against the backdrop of an increasingly powerful China. Thus, for Tokyo and Seoul, the decision is not necessarily to cooperate with each other, but rather to cooperate with China or the United States. Ross therefore takes the U.S. commitment to its allies as a given and assumes developments in China are better determinants of Japan-ROK behavior.

Defining secondary states like Japan and South Korea as those "which cannot independently provide for their security against any other state, including the great powers... [and] must therefore seek security through their relationship with the great powers" (Ross 2006: 357). Rising powers like China, on the other hand, are those which "possess an improving ability to wage war and inflict greater costs on a secondary state aligned with a status quo great power" (Ross 2006: 367). Four important empirical conclusions are elucidated by Ross. First, secondary states are sensitive to power shifts in their immediate vicinity. Second, only military threats are both necessary and sufficient to trigger balancing behavior. Third, states respond to capabilities, not threats, which leads him to disregard domestic politics. Finally, he finds no evidence for a regional battle for supremacy between the U.S. and China but instead sees all of Asia as becoming an area of bipolarity.

A finding of Ross's work that has important implications for this research is that secondary states in regions where the U.S. has maintained the military status quo have enhanced

cooperation with the Americans, though they have continued to deepen their economic cooperation with China. That China may at some point be able to credibly threaten its neighbors matters for the Northeast Asian power balance. However, he notes that “only in highly polarized systems... do secondary states formally ally with one great power while engaging in heightened belligerent conflict with another great power” (Ross 2006: 367). Despite classifying economic threats as insufficient to generate balancing behavior, Ross notes the importance of the Chinese economy for both Japan and South Korea while also acknowledging that economic growth can translate into military potential. South Korea and Japan must assess Chinese ambitions to determine their balancing behavior, but only the direst scenarios will trigger formal balancing or accommodation.

Ross states that China’s military strength is not commensurate with its economic dominance. That the U.S. maintains a heavy military presence in both Japan and South Korea counters Chinese adventurism. This reality, according to Ross, implies that China is not seeking to establish itself as a regional hegemon, but that the entire Asian region is becoming bipolar, with some areas dominated by the U.S. (North Asia) and others dominated by China (South China Sea or West Asia). As major American allies, the Northeast Asian states will remain dominated by the U.S. while China seeks to exert its influence towards the West and South. Because Ross believes the Asian region is becoming one of bipolarity, he concludes that a power transition has not taken place.

Ross’s analysis provides a starting point for understanding the current state of Northeast Asia, especially with respect to Chinese ambitions. It, however, assumes the U.S. and China continue to have an amicable, non-conflictual relationship, an assumption which is increasingly being tested by events. Though he finds no evidence of a power transition, his work

was published at a time when the U.S. was embroiled in Middle Eastern conflicts, and far before China embarked on ambitious foreign policy programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative (Brown 2017: 142-144). While many of Ross's points regarding Northeast Asia may still hold true, tensions in the region may have risen due to the expanding economic and military capabilities of a rising China that feels the United States is impinging upon what ought to be its rightful sphere of influence.

Whether the region is tending towards bipolarity or a power transition is in place, the role of secondary states is vital. David Kang (2009) considers how secondary states determine the balance of power while maintaining that balancing and bandwagoning behavior are notoriously difficult to measure. Instead, for Kang, balancing exists on a continuum, with most interactions classified as "accommodation". Kang essentially defines accommodation as resistance to major changes in foreign policy so as not to alienate Great Power partners in order to reap the benefits of economic relations with China and the security guarantee of the United States.

Decisions which lie on the far ends of the continuum are long-term and have extensive consequences. Furthermore, Kang (2009: 8) states that "not all negotiations end in conflict and not all conflicts end in war." Distinguishing between the severity of disputes matters. Like Ross, Kang distinguishes between economic and military realms when determining state behavior but notes that there can be spillover effects. An example Kang cites is the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute between Japan and South Korea, which is unlikely to end in military conflict but could have very real economic consequences. Since these polar ends require an obvious commitment, secondary states rely on accommodation. It is not so much that states exhibit differences in behavior when accommodating, but rather the levels to which they engage with an adversary or

ally are simply of a lesser degree. Indeed, accommodation may represent no change in state strategy at all. In other words, accommodation is classified as the status quo.

There are many similarities between Ross's and Kang's arguments, but one major distinction is that Kang (2009) does not assume Japan and South Korea will automatically align with the United States in the face of a rising China. Kang instead believes South Korea's policy agenda to be more congruent with China's. Both are inclined to control the North Korean threat and neither wants to see a remilitarized Japan. Additionally, at the time of Kang's writing, the PLA was capable of threatening South Korea, indicating that, for both Kang and Ross, military capabilities have much more explanatory power in determining strategic alignment choice. Thus, Kang (2009), unlike both Cha (2000) and Ross (2006), does not assume that South Korea and Japan indefinitely fall on the same side. However, China's naval capabilities have significantly increased, as outlined by the Department of Defense (2010). Therefore, a reexamination of the balance taking China's improved naval capabilities into account may lead to a different conclusion.

Friedberg, Cha, Ross and Kang assume major changes to the interstate relations of Northeast Asia. In assuming change, these authors fail to take into account not only the benefits received from maintaining the current order but also the consequences from venturing out into the unknown. For Japan and South Korea to abandon their alliance with the United States would indicate an extreme change in the regional balance of power. A change in the power diffusion throughout the region would be met with resistance, as it is unlikely the United States would leave Northeast Asia willingly or that Japan and South Korea would not also resist a U.S. exit. Furthermore, the benefits of cooperating, especially for the sake of economic growth, make conflict less attractive. Northeast Asia is not the Middle East and states are not keen to see

domestic financial investments in development go to waste. While economic interdependence alone may not be sufficient in preventing major disputes, it may be enough to deter escalation of minor disputes.

Economic investments aside, the cost in human capital and the relatively modest military capabilities of Japan and South Korea, as well as China's uncertainty prospects for unambiguous military victory, force cooler heads to prevail when international disputes occur. The likelihood of any major change in strategic alignment will be shaped by the ways in which states seek to maintain the status quo. While Kang is the only author to assume Japan and South Korea will exist somewhere in the middle between balancing and bandwagoning, he nonetheless predicts South Korea will realign with China eventually. Doing so discounts not only the North Korean threat and the perception of China's control of the Kim regime but also military cooperation between South Korea and Japan.

The literature on Northeast Asian relations has been predominantly qualitative, historical-comparative and empirical in methodology. Part of the reason for this is there are a limited number of datasets which allow for quantitative analysis. Fortunately, the Correlates of War (COW) dataset presents a wealth of high-quality quantitative data that allows for measurement of numerous political phenomena. COW data is incredibly comprehensive, and the dataset of Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) is extremely robust. It provides details regarding conflict participants, levels of hostility and action taken, dates, location, casualties and outcomes (Palmer et al. 2015). Despite this, there has been limited research done using COW data as it applies *specifically* to Northeast Asia. Recent research conducted utilizing COW data has also been almost exclusively focused on China but expanded to include all of China's sphere of influence, not just the area encompassing Japan and South Korea.

Alastair Johnson (1998), using COW data covering the years from 1949-1992, conducted a thorough analysis of China's militarized disputes, concluding that China post-WWII has been one of the most dispute-prone states, second only to the United States. Furthermore, the *type* of disputes China engages in has implications for the likelihood and level of escalation, with China most likely to engage in conflicts of a territorial nature.

An interesting finding of Johnson's (1998) relates to China's likelihood of increasing hostilities or engaging in force with a superpower. Johnson (1998) essentially tests China's balancing behavior by comparing its rate of engagement with the United States and Soviet Union, respectively, while holding its share of world power constant. Like Ross, Johnson finds little evidence of China engaging in balancing behavior. However, there is one caveat. Johnson considers China's share of world power and its relationship to increased MIDs. He finds a strong positive relationship between China's share of world power and its number of MIDs with the Soviet Union. This relationship is not significant when swapping the Soviets out for the Americans. That the identities of China and the Soviet Union are so closely intertwined indicates that the increasing hostilities between the two communist behemoths was either caused by an ideological disagreement or *realpolitik* geopolitical calculations.

Johnson (1998) considers other variables to explain Chinese international behavior but finds little significance. Diversionary war hypotheses and a militarized foreign policy offer little, if any, explanatory power. Indeed, Johnson finds the two most important considerations for Chinese military engagement are geopolitics and territorial integrity. These results are potentially worrying for the future of Northeast Asia as they indicate China may be more inclined to exert dominance in issues pertaining to the management of its own neighborhood.

Much academic attention has been given to China, deservedly so. However, when utilizing COW data, the focus of China's behavior has been expanded to include the entirety of the globe or has been considered relative to the power of the United States. While that perspective is highly valuable, especially as China's influence is expanding, its behavior in its own neighborhood is perhaps a better barometer of future Chinese ambitions. The expectations and explanations offered by Friedberg, Cha, Ross and Kang, when taken together, are helpful in navigating the web of Northeast Asian interstate relations, but on their own, each lacks an important piece of the puzzle to explain the behaviors of the players in Northeast Asia.

All four authors view the Japan-ROK relationship in a different light and consider the role of the Great Powers to be of varying importance for the strategic choices of Northeast Asia. All, aside from Kang, view change as inevitable, but when offering pessimistic predictions fail to consider the benefits gained by cooperating. Because of their pessimism and their assumption that each state *must* make a choice, all fail to consider the ways in which states resist change to avoid making decisions to balance or bandwagon. Though Kang (2003) is the only author to predict little to no change in state policy, he still assumes South Korea will be more likely to bandwagon with China at the expense of its alliance with the United States. Kang, like the other authors, considers historical animosity as something which will determine future relations rather than taking it as a part of the status quo.

As new versions of COW data have been published reflecting the current situation, this allows for an updated interpretation of Northeast Asian relations. It should be illuminating for China's interstate relations, as it is China that has seen the greatest changes in economy and military capabilities. Since the U.S. commitment is a particularly important variable, especially for Cha (2000), examining how China's behavior has changed towards U.S. regional allies at a

time of U.S. Middle East involvement and the financial meltdown of 2007-2008 is of interest in analyzing how China plays the game of international relations. Furthermore, how Japan and South Korea responded to a weakened U.S. relative to their Great Power neighbor should further articulate how each might respond to the prospect of a declining United States. Therefore, this research does not take the Japan-ROK relationship for granted or assume it to be inevitably doomed, but rather viewed in the light as something that simply exists, with both partners willing to put in only as much work as necessary to maintain stability, to survive but not thrive. Additionally, other variables, such as economic growth and U.S. military strength relative to China are included in the analysis rather than isolating a particular set of variables. Most importantly, this research does not make doomsday predictions and treat conflict as inevitable. Instead, little to no change is considered as the most likely outcome.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Friedberg (1998), Cha (2000), Ross (2006), and Kang (2003) all predict varying degrees of cooperation and conflict in Northeast Asia. Friedberg assumes discord to be inherent but mostly excludes the role of the U.S. as a stabilizer. Contrarily, for Cha, U.S. is the determining variable predicting the level of cooperation between Japan and South Korea. Ross maintains the importance of relative military capabilities of the U.S. and China in predicting the Japan-ROK relationship, contending that since the U.S. has maintained its military position in the region, China will be inclined to accept U.S. hegemony, moving Asia towards a more bipolar arrangement. Finally, Kang believes secondary states resist major changes to foreign policy until a military threat can credibly change the balance of power. However, he believes South Korea will be the first to abandon its U.S. ally in favor of a closer relationship with China. Applying COW data to each of these authors' conjectures will further articulate and clarify the degree to which change has occurred in Northeast Asia and how states have responded to change.

The COW Project is highly regarded, though by no means perfect, and provides a snapshot of interstate relations in various areas, especially in the realm of military and security. The MID dataset is derived from multiple, reputable news sources. The most pertinent sources of its content are *The New York Times*, CNN, Japan Economic Newswire and Xinhua (Ghosn et al. 2004; Palmer et al. 2015). The National Material Capabilities dataset, which incorporates variables used to determine a state's ability to project power and defend itself in wartime, sources information from multiple sources, including U.S. government agency reports, World Bank development indicators and various think tanks focused on military power (Singer 1987). Since it covers the entirety of the international arena, sources are exhaustive. Dyadic trade data is derived from the IMF, which is also a highly regarded institution which publishes dependable

data (Barbieri et al. 2016). In addition to COW data, supplemental sources are included to account for other relevant variables, such as the Heritage Foundation's Global U.S. Troop Deployment dataset and the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) which are used to track changes in U.S. troop levels in South Korea and Japan. In order to fill in the narratives, documents outlining national security strategies of the United States are helpful in putting the data into context.

It is first necessary to establish what the status quo is. What have the states of Northeast Asia come to expect from one another? When the status quo has changed, what have been states' reactions to the change? Establishing a baseline to measure how interstate behavior has changed also allows for the determination of why states are reacting.

First, it is necessary to determine the economic and military power status quo. The predominant economic indicator will be a measure of real GDP as reported by the World Bank. The Composite Indicator of National Capabilities (CINC) score, which is an aggregate measure of a state's military personnel, military expenditures, iron and steel production, energy consumption, total population and urban population will be used to measure a state's military power. Since each of these indicators can be disaggregated, the military expenditures variable can highlight any change in priorities of military investment should an abnormal change occur (Singer 1987).

While expectations of behavior can evolve, and subsequently so will the status quo, if these changes occur slowly, states are unlikely to oppose or react in a frantic manner. For example, if a sudden change to the U.S. ability to project power occurred, it is likely Japan and South Korea would scramble to fill the security void left by the U.S. departure. Similarly, it is also necessary to consider any changes relative to exogenous circumstances and in context of

long-term trends. For example, China's military spending as a percentage of GDP was much higher in the 1960's, but its rate has reached levels commensurate with its neighbors over the past decade (Singer 1987; World Bank 2019). However, if a state has a sudden, unexplained jump in spending or burst of militarized behavior, this will be treated as an anomaly and outside the parameters of the status quo. Once the economic and military power baselines have been established, it will be possible to compare these with any changes in a state's dispute proneness as well as trade interdependence.

To determine a state's propensity towards military disputes, the COW MID dataset at the individual dispute-participant level will be analyzed. This dataset is much more detailed and offers more granular data about interstate conflict behavior. Unfortunately, this dataset covers only the period of 1993-2010 (Ghosn et al. 2004; Palmer et al. 2015). However, as there are only four states' actions in one region being considered, the level of dispute detail is necessary. The dyadic MID dataset, which only considers disputes and not individual incidents within the disputes, does not offer enough detail to make any significant connection.

Because the only region included in the analysis is the East Asian region, it was necessary to code disputes by region to eliminate disputes outside the region. Disputes were coded using the following regions: East Asia, Southeast Asia, Middle East, Europe, North America, Africa and Russia. Only disputes occurring in East Asia are included in the analysis of the status quo, with one exception. The number of disputes outside East Asia in which the U.S. was involved was considered when determining the U.S. military priorities relative to its East Asian allies (Ghosn et al. 2004). While the U.S. simply being involved in another dispute outside of East Asia does not mean it is not committed to its East Asian allies, it does imply that U.S. resources are being utilized elsewhere. Since resources are not infinite, all things being equal the

more resources being used elsewhere, the less available those resources might be for the United States in East Asia.

The COW MID dataset describes the specific narrative attributed to each dispute. Fortunately, many of the disputes fall under similar narratives. For example, for China and South Korea, most of their disputes were related to Taiwan and North Korea, respectively. Due to the sensitivity of the issues, Senkaku/Diaoyu and Dokdo/Takeshima disputes are coded separately from disputes coded as Maritime Disputes (Ghosn et al. 2004). To determine the MID status quo, the average number of disputes a state was involved in over a given period, the reason for those disputes and the reoccurrence of certain narratives helps to establish why a state is most likely to engage in MID incidents and which country it is likely to consider as a hostile partner.

A second measure of the status quo revolves around the U.S. deployment numbers in South Korea and Japan. This dataset was taken from Heritage Foundation's Global U.S. Troop Deployment report, which was derived from the U.S. Department of Defense, Directorate for Information, Operations and Reports (DIOR). Because this dataset covers the years from 1950 until 2005, it was necessary to supplement the data. The DIOR has since become the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) but provides the same information. Unfortunately, only the years 2008 and on are available from DMDC. However, considering only two years are missing, it is still possible to determine an average, and, subsequently, the status quo of U.S. troop numbers.

To examine Cha's quasi-alliance model, it is also necessary to define third-party commitment. First and foremost, any significant change to U.S. troop levels for either South Korea or Japan will be considered a change in commitment. To supplement this variable, documents produced by various U.S. government agencies indicating changes in strategy will be

included. Though the U.S. may reduce troops, it may also change its strategy in providing security to either Japan or South Korea. Furthermore, geography makes each state valuable for different reasons; as an island nation, Japan provides a launching station for naval operations and power projection while Korea's location is more suitable for land-based troops (Japan Ministry of Defense 2009; Manyin et al. 2017: 21-23). As such, a change in number of troops can mitigate a reduction in commitment if the reasoning behind such a change does not alter the overall ability of the U.S. to provide military security.

A second component of the credibility of the U.S. commitment will be its CINC score as derived from the National Material Capabilities dataset (Singer 1987). As this is a measure of a state's hard power resources and ability to wage war, it can be inferred that as the U.S.'s CINC score decreases, its credibility as a military alliance partner also decreases. If there is a significant decrease in its CINC score, the U.S. may have taken a blow to some portion of its ability to project power making it difficult to provide security to its alliance partners.

CINC scores alone are not adequate. A decrease in capabilities does not necessarily indicate a decrease in commitment. The U.S. military has vast resources at its disposal, and while it may suffer a reduction in hard power assets, it may also allocate more resources to its East Asian alliance partners thus negating the effect of a decrease in power. To overcome this, I also consider the number of disputes the U.S. was involved in outside of East Asia compared with the disputes South Korea and Japan were involved in, and whether the U.S. came to the aid of its regional allies when embroiled in a conflict. If the U.S. was involved in a significant number of disputes outside of the East Asian region, while its East Asian allies were the victims of Chinese or North Korean aggression, how the U.S. responds to actions against its allies can indicate a shift in commitment or priorities.

Applying multiple indicators to measurement of a complex concept like cooperation is necessary to mitigate potential shortcomings. As defined by Kang (2003), economic interdependence will be a primary indicator of cooperation. To obtain this measure, I will utilize the COW Dyadic Trade dataset, which measures the bilateral trade volume between a set of countries (Barbieri et al. 2016). To determine how important a state is to its trading partner, I have divided the total dyadic trade volume by each relevant country's GDP. The higher the percentage, the more interdependent the economy of the state in question is with its trading partner. The second component I will employ in determining cooperation is dyadic MID incidents which occurred in a given year (Palmer et al. 2015). The more disputes which occurred between two countries, the less those two countries cooperated. While South Korea and Japan may have disagreements over The History Wars, without alteration in cooperation as indicated by trade or by increased military conflict the impact of these disagreements on foreign policy is limited.

To determine the validity of Cha's quasi-alliance model (2000), it is first necessary to determine if the U.S. commitment has changed at all. Then, years in which Japan and South Korea either had a reduction in trade or engaged in a MID will be compared with any measurable changes in the U.S. commitment. If the United States' commitment or military capabilities have not changed, but there has been variation in the behavior of Japan and South Korea, this gives little explanatory credence to the quasi-alliance model. Cha's argument rests on changes in the U.S. commitment, and while there have been times the U.S. has threatened to withdraw from or reduce its presence in East Asia, actual changes need to be considered. A threat to leave the region may be strategic on the United States' part to extract concessions from Japan or South Korea which would more than likely result in domestic changes rather than any change in

strategic alignment. These sorts of threats are the primary pieces of empirical evidence Cha uses to validate his quasi-alliance model, but absent any real changes in the U.S. commitment, whether that be in troop numbers or the ability to project power and credibly provide security, these threats become somewhat empty, incapable of triggering any real change in strategic alignment.

Moving on to China's rise and its position relative to the U.S., the behavior of these two great powers will be regarded with respect to its effects upon the behavior of secondary states. Ross (2006) states that regions where the United States has maintained its military supremacy will see less Chinese aggression. Additionally, Ross also maintains that states will only balance a military power while Kang (2003) asserts balancing and bandwagoning occur in only the most polarized environments. Therefore, if either of these hypotheses are correct, there should be little variance in indicators related to power projection and militarized disputes.

If balancing only occurs in the face of a military threat, then it must be determined how powerful China's military has become. First, China's military and economic growth using CINC scores and GDP will be determined, as well as military expenditures as a percentage of GDP (Palmer et al. 2015; Singer 1987; World Bank 2019). The more China has increased in these categories, the more able it is to credibly threaten its neighbors. Additionally, wars are simply not fought in the ways they once were. A large standing army with no degree of discipline or low technology is no match for a smaller army with tactical skills and better technology. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how the PLA has evolved as a professional military apparatus.

Second, China's growth will be compared with that of the United States. Since Ross (2006) suggests China will be less adventuristic in areas where the U.S. has retained its

dominance, it must be confirmed that the U.S. has indeed remained dominant in Northeast Asia. For this measurement, the same criteria to measure U.S. credibility of commitment when analyzing Cha's quasi-alliance model will be used, as well as national security documents from the Department of Defense outlining strategies for the East Asian region. If U.S. military expenditures, GDP and CINC scores are comparable to or exceed China's while U.S. troop levels remain stable with no significant change in military strategy that might otherwise imply the relinquishing of its alliance commitments, it can be assumed the U.S. has retained its dominance.

Third, examining how polarized East Asia has become is a necessary step in explaining variation, if any, in the strategic choices of Japan and South Korea. To do so, I will compare the number of disputes engaged in by China and the United States. If there is really a power transition occurring, and Ross finds no evidence of one, then it would be expected that the U.S. and China would increasingly engage in military conflict against one another. However, if there is a reduction in military disputes, it can be assumed the Great Powers are acting with restraint while maintaining stability in the region. The more peaceful the East Asian region is, the less likely Japan and South Korea will exhibit definitive balancing or bandwagoning behavior.

In order to determine the role economics plays in strategic alignment, the measure of economic interdependence as determined by bilateral trade volumes proportional to GDP will be applied to each country. If the Japanese and South Korean economies have become more dependent on the Chinese economy, but there has been little change in the status quo of the U.S. military presence, it can be assumed China's economic threat is not enough to trigger balancing or bandwagoning behavior, and that Chinese military capabilities are likewise not enough to spur change in Japan-South Korea strategic alignment. Behind the scenes, however, Japan and South

Korea may have resisted changes to U.S. policy aimed at countering China (Wong 2016). Taking this into account, I have incorporated U.S. national security documents and additional literature to gain insight into the politics behind negotiation of security strategies in order to determine any degree of accommodation.

Though both Taiwan and North Korea are technically located in Northeast Asia, they represent special cases. The issue of Taiwan is complicated, as China considers it still a part of the mainland PRC and a vital component of its national identity. As such, China's dealings with Taiwan are far different than those with Japan or South Korea. Any full-blown separatist movement on behalf of Taiwan would certainly trigger military action for the Chinese Communist Party (Kaplan 2014; 142-143). Therefore, Taiwan has not been considered in Northeast Asian interstate relations except when looking at China's MID behavior.

North Korea is a pariah state and its possible destruction threatens the stability of Northeast Asia. Furthermore, China is North Korea's only true friend in the area, making North Korea of little concern when predicting whether the country will choose to balance or bandwagon China; the choice it would make is very clear. Therefore, with regard to balancing or bandwagoning, Taiwan and North Korea do not hold the same level of autonomy in choice as do Japan and South Korea. However, perceptions within Japan and South Korea are that China is the controller of the strings behind North Korea (Kim 2018). This presents a challenge to the measurement of balancing behavior. If Japan and South Korea are engaging in balancing behavior, are they balancing China or North Korea? China and North Korea have certainly engaged in their share of disputes, yet they are also bound by treaty (Albert 2019). Furthermore, COW-coded incidents in which China has demonstrated its resolve to North Korea have occurred (Ghosn et al. 2004). Therefore, North Korea is taken into account since it accounts for

so much regional instability, but only in the context of threats and aggression directed towards Japan and South Korea and occasionally China.

An important discussion of the quality of data must be had. States strategically misrepresent their capabilities, but the CCP is notoriously opaque. As a result, Chinese data must be taken with a grain of salt. It is impossible to know the total military expenditures of the People's Liberation Army or the total number of personnel, and these are necessarily estimated. The COW Project's data on military expenditures is obtained from the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *Military Balance*, and though it is not perfect, it is a reliable source (Singer 1987). A further complication regarding China's military expenditures arises from the nature of its economy. Because of China's planned economy, currency conversions to USD may not always be representative (Bernanke and Olson 2016; Heilmann 2017: 197-200; Palmer et al. 2016). Unfortunately, though many have tried, there is very little workaround for these data limitations.

Though the data is by no means perfect, it is highly regarded and provides valuable information. Each of the datasets covers a given set of years. Trade data extends until 2014, MID Incident data from 1993 until 2010 and NMC until 2012. Because of these chronological limitations of the MID dataset, which is critical to my analysis, only the years 1993-2010 will be applied to the works of Cha, Ross and Kang. Secondly, Sino-ROK trade begins reporting in 1990. Diplomatic normalization did not occur until 1992, and as a result, the data provided by the COW Trade dataset, which is derived from the IMF, is also limited. Since trade is of a comparative nature, only years for which all states are available are considered. However, when establishing the status quo, all years available for NMC and GDP are used. This data paints an

important picture regarding what states have come to expect and what may be considered within normal parameters for the Northeast Asian region.

Chapter Four -- Findings

Establishing the status quo is the first step in determining how states react to change. Conversely, the status quo may have hardly changed or changed in such a gradual manner that no reaction was warranted. Either way, what states have come to expect must be defined before determining how their behavior is impacted by these altered realities. Modifications that occur over long periods of time are not considered changes to the status quo but are better indicators of long-term trends and accommodations to a state's foreign policy. For example, as will be shown, China's total military expenditures in USD have gradually increased. Furthermore, an increase in military expenditures parallels growth in other areas. Japan and South Korea are aware that growth in the Chinese economy equates with increased military expenditures but have continued to trade with China nonetheless. Therefore, any changes to the East Asian status quo must be short-term, extreme and independent of changes occurring within the period of several years, and not long-term predictable trends.

Economic and Power Capabilities

China

China's total share of world power as represented by its CINC score has steadily risen since 1960 (See Appendix A, Figure 1). There have been few variations from year to year. At its lowest in 1960, it had a CINC score of .119, or approximately 12%. Though there have been no extreme increases or decreases, beginning in 1991 China's CINC score increased almost consistently. China's 2012 score was its highest recorded, .218, or approximately a 22% share of total world power. China has steadily amassed a larger share of world power, but it has done so at a gradual rate, indicating that it has not attempted any rapid expansion of its capabilities or serious military buildups with a span of a few short years.

CINC score is an aggregate score, of which one of the aggregate variables is population. Since China has the world's largest population of 1.3 billion people (CIA World Factbook 2018), this component increases China's score while suppressing the importance of other military factors. However, there are incidents in China's past when CCP leaders made decisions taking China's large population into consideration. For example, as the Cold War heated up and nuclear conflict appeared to be a non-negligible possibility, Mao warned that if the United States was contemplating the use of atomic weapons against China, China's population could absorb the losses as international opinion turned against the United States (Kissinger 2012). While the means of warfare are changing so that high numbers of human casualties are no longer becoming the norm, having the population able to take a large hit does prove to be advantageous, however inhumane the reasoning may be.

China's GDP on the other hand has risen sharply (See Appendix A, Figures 2, 3 and 4). Since 1979, China's economy has experienced uninterrupted growth, with the exceptions of 1986 and 1987 when its GDP declined by three and nine percent, respectively. Since 1988, however, China's economy steadily grew every year. Both 2007 and 2008 were years of astounding growth, increasing by 29% from year-to-year. These years coincided with the Western financial crisis, from which China emerged unscathed. During this time, China invested heavily in its economy, injecting high amounts of domestic capital (Heilmann 2017: 404-406). Though the rate at which China's economy has grown has slowed slightly, it is, nonetheless, still growing.

China's ability to invest in its military does not immediately mean it will. It is therefore necessary to consider how Chinese GDP growth correlates to military expenditures. China in the 1960's lacked adequate capital but invested disproportionately in its military. While total military expenditures in USD have risen, the percentage of GDP which China spends on its

military has fallen dramatically (See Appendix A, Figures 4 and 5). There is a correlation between increased GDP and total military spending, but a richer China does not correlate with a more militarized China. In this way, China's military spending has not increased in proportion to its economic growth. However, all things considered, there is reason to believe that a richer China correlates with a more powerful China.

The United States

The United States CINC score has remained relatively stable since the early 1970's after it had been gradually trending downward (See Appendix B, Figure 1). Since 1974, the U.S. CINC score has hovered between .13 and .14, or between 13% and 14%. In 1960, its score was .22, or 22%, meaning it has since declined in its share of world power by about 8-9%. Since CINC score is a share of world power as a percentage, the declining score of the U.S. indicates that the world has become a multipolar one. As far as military capabilities go, the network of American military bases which spans the entire globe makes the United States a strategic, dominating player (Department of Defense 2018). Additionally, the soft power tools available to the United States provide it with mechanisms to indirectly influence foreign actors (Nye 2004: 33-72). While it may not occupy the highest percentage of world power (the top spot goes to China), the strategic location of military bases, network of alliances and soft power is a deep reservoir from which the United States can draw.

U.S. GDP growth has risen steadily with the exception of 2009, an effect of the Great Recession (See Appendix B, Figure 2). Its rate of GDP growth rate declined slightly each decade beginning in the 1980's (See Appendix B, Figure 3). In general, the already-developed U.S. economy since the 1960's has not experienced dynamic growth, but growth has been steady

nonetheless. U.S. military expenditures as a percentage of GDP have decreased gradually, though beginning in the mid 1990's, five year-average military spending as a percentage of GDP rose slightly (See Appendix B, Figure 3). In terms of total dollars spent, this amount has increased much more significantly as GDP has risen in value of USD. Even in years when economic growth slowed, military spending as a percentage of GDP remains consistent. Compared with most other countries, the U.S. very much prioritizes military spending.

Japan

With a dwindling population, it is no surprise that GDP growth in the later years has slowed. The post-war years and the mid-1980's saw astounding growth for the Japanese economy. The years coinciding with the Asian financial crisis caused annual economic losses between 9% and 11%. However, Japan's economy has since recovered and grown, though at a relatively low rate (See Appendix C, Figures 1 and 2).

Japan represents a special case as far as military expenditures are concerned. Because of its pacifist constitution, the country can only legally spend 1% of its GDP on its military. As a result, there is no variation in Japanese military expenditures as a percentage of GDP. Military expenditures in USD and GDP growth have changed at an almost-identical rate. It may be worth noting that every year since 1960, Japan has spent its entire legal allotment of military expenditure.

Japan's CINC score increased dynamically in the 1960's. Despite not having a normalized military, Japan's industrial production contributed to its rising score. Beginning in the early 2000's, Japan's score began to gradually decline. Its population is shrinking, which undoubtedly contributes to its declining score. As its military expenditures and force size are

limited, this hurts Japan's ability to project power. Since 2001, Japan's share of world power has declined almost every year, starting at .0471 in 2001 and falling to .0356 by 2012 (See Appendix C, Figure 3). However, it has always outranked South Korea's in terms of power projection.

South Korea

South Korea's CINC score has risen gradually with its most dynamic periods of power expansion being in the mid to late 1970's and early 1990's when its score increased at a rate of about 6% in each period. Between 2006-2010, its share of world power declined slightly but rebounded in 2011 and 2012. Since the 1990s, South Korea's CINC score has been between .0226 and .0233 (See Appendix D, Figure 1). Compared to its Great Power counterparts, South Korea is indeed a small state. However, though its score relative to Japan's is much lower, recent trends indicate that South Korea may soon surpass Japan in military power.

Economically, South Korea's story is similar to Japan's. In the post-Korean War years, the ROK economy grew rapidly and dynamically, particularly in the mid to late 1970's, with growth persisting until the Asian financial crisis. In 1998, the South Korean economy took a 33% hit, but quickly rebounded. Since 1998, South Korea's economy has grown annually, except for the years of 2001, 2009 and 2010. Its highest years of military spending as a percentage of GDP were in the early 1980's, at about 6% of GDP. Since the 1980's, that number has decreased steadily until flatlining at 2% of GDP in the year 2000. (See Appendix D, Figures 2, 3 and 4).

Summary of the Economic and Power Status Quo

A wealthy China is a relatively new development in the grand scheme of the post-war Northeast Asian order and it can be assumed that China's economic status is not representative

of the status quo. However, when expanding the timeframe to consider the economic development of South Korea and Japan, it becomes clear that China followed a similar process of economic development. When viewed in this light, China's wealth is less of a shock to the status quo. Instead, it is something that was to be expected following the economic development models of South Korea and Japan. Though not within the scope of this paper, the other Asian Tigers, including Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, have experienced similar levels of economic growth, meaning that it is unlikely any of China's other neighbors are shocked or threatened by a growing China (Restrepo-Echavarria and Arias 2017). Similar patterns of growth have characterized their economies and they are all fully aware of the results of increased trade and investment. Most importantly, China's military capabilities have not echoed its economic capacity. The only shock to the status quo is the rate at which the Chinese economy has grown in such a short time frame.

Secondly, the Northeast Asian states have reigned in military expenditures as a percentage of GDP. While total expenditures have increased, the proportion of GDP spent on the military has been between one and two percent for Japan, South Korea and China since 2005. This trend began long before 2005 though. China, in its early years, spent an unsustainable amount on military, sometimes up to 26% of GDP. However, beginning in 1984 its military expenditures as a percentage of GDP started to decline at a higher rate. Between 1985 and 2004, Chinese military expenditures were between six and two percent until reaching a flatline rate between one and two percent starting in 2005. Japan, because of constitutional constraints, spends one percent of its GDP on military. South Korea, since the late 1990's, has allocated two percent of GDP towards military expenditures. However, its military expenditures, like those of China, had been on a downward slope since the early 1980s.

Third, the United States has been a stable source of military and economic power.

Though it has not reached the growth rates of any of the Northeast Asian economies, the value of the U.S. economy as measured by real GDP has always been much higher. By 2012, China's economy had begun to catch up, but was nowhere near the level of U.S. economic might, even considering the impact of the 2007-2008 financial crisis. In addition to having a significantly higher GDP, the U.S. spends a higher percentage of GDP on its military. Even though its military expenditures to GDP ratio has declined from the 1960's, the U.S. still spends more on military as both a percentage of GDP and in U.S. dollar terms than its East Asian counterparts. A stable, not dynamic, U.S. economy that allocates a comparatively higher percentage to GDP on military has been the status quo since the 1960's. In general, economic growth for all of the Northeast Asian states and the United States has been consistent, though the rate of growth has varied annually.

Finally, it can be drawn from COW and World Bank data that change in Northeast Asia has been gradual and consistent, except for the rate of China's economic growth. As Friedberg pointed out in 1993, conflict may be inherent in Northeast Asia but states in the region must be aware of these threats, and as a result have altered their behavior. China, for example, has made an effort to reduce its military expenditures. While there may be domestic reasons for this, the effects of signaling to its neighbors should not be discounted. If the region is truly 'ripe for rivalry', Japan, South Korea and China seem to be aware of the risks in sending the wrong message. As Japan embarked upon the trajectory of the Asian development model, other states followed suit and prioritized economic growth over military buildups and conflictual instability. It also appears that when China's economic reforms and military expenditure reductions began, South Korea mimicked China by reducing military spending. It may also be that the presence of

the United States mitigated increased military expenditures for Japan and South Korea, which may have prevented, or at least delayed, a Northeast Asian security dilemma.

Militarized Interstate Disputes

Determining the patterns of militarized behavior is important in order to distinguish how states have socialized into the international order and what types of conflicts will push states towards acting antisocially. Inversely, what are the variables that prevent states from acting aggressively? Perhaps most significantly, what are the main threats interpreted by states in the Northeast Asian region?

China:

The pattern of China's of MID's located in East Asia exhibits some degree of variance, with an overall trend of declining (See Appendix F, Figure 1). Sixty-four of China's 114 MID's in the East Asian region are due to the dispute over Taiwan (See Appendix F, Figure 2). The history of the PRC and Taiwan is complex. Since this issue deals with China's sovereignty, China's identity is at stake in times when Taiwan seeks or threatens independence. Considering this, it should come as no surprise that the largest portion of China's disputes involve Taiwan (Kaplan 2014: 142-143). 1995, the year with the highest number of Chinese MID's correlates with the Third Taiwan Strait crisis. In fact, in most years, except 2010, most of Chinese MID's are attributed to Taiwan-related disputes.

Following Taiwan, Sino-Japanese MID's represent second highest portion. Of the 21 Sino-Japanese disputes, 15 revolve around claims to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Seven of the Senkaku/Diaoyu disputes occurred in 2010, the year Japan nationalized the islands. These numbers indicate that China is becoming less hostile but when it feels its claimed territory and identity are threatened, it is emboldened to act.

In 2001, China was involved in a total of 11 MIDs, five of which involved the United States. Known as the Hainan Island Incident, in the spring 2001 a U.S. Navy reconnaissance plane and PLA F8 Fighter collided, killing the Chinese pilot. The members of the crew were detained for several days while Washington and Beijing were unable to reach an agreement about their disposition. More importantly, the Hainan Island Incident signaled to South Korea and Japan a deterioration in the Sino-U.S. relationship (Kan 2001). Nonetheless, China is becoming less dispute-prone in the Northeast Asian arena, but there are still issues about which it is willing to escalate hostility. Interestingly, North Korea and China have been involved in a fair number of disputes. As China is the DPRK's only friend, this may point to friction in the relationship as China seeks to prevent its Communist neighbor from provoking a larger dispute.

U.S. MIDs

During the years for which incident-level data is available (1993-2010), the U.S. has been involved in a total of 423 disputes. Of these 423 disputes, 58 have occurred in East Asia. An overwhelming majority, 296, took place in the Middle East. Like China, the number of MIDs located in East Asia in which the United States has played a role has declined (See Appendix G, Figure 1). Between 2005 and 2008, the U.S. was involved in zero MIDs in East Asia. However, the U.S. was active in a lower number of MIDs outside the region during those years as well. The disputes of 1994, the year with the highest number of disputes, are predominantly attributed to North Korean aggression, with the exception of two disputes involving China. However, these disputes directly engaged North Korea, as they were a display of Chinese resolve to North Korea vis-à-vis a Chinese show of force during ROK-U.S. military exercises.

The majority of US disputes have involved North Korean aggression. As the United States is an ally of Taiwan, though because of the One China policy does not diplomatically recognize Taiwan, any dispute involving the ROC places the U.S. and Taiwan on the same side (U.S. Department of State 2018). However, because of the special nature of this issue, it is coded as its own unique narrative rather than as a US-China dispute. Nonetheless, during the years of 1995 and 1996, the U.S. did come to the aid of Taiwan during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis.

Japan MIDs

Japan was involved in a total of 83 MIDs in the East Asian region between 1993 and 2010 (See Appendix H, Figure 1). Japan's main dispute partner is China, followed by Russia. As Russia and Japan both lay claim to the Kuril Islands, it is not surprising that Russo-Japanese disputes rank second. North Korea, a constant among East Asian MIDs ranks third, followed by the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute (See Appendix H, Figure 2). While this dispute is pertinent to the Japan-ROK relationship, the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute may be overemphasized as a destabilizing factor in Northeast Asia. Not that the issue should be disregarded, but rather in comparison to other disputes, it plays less of a dominant role in Japan-ROK foreign policy.

Japan's engagement in MIDs, unlike its Great Power counterparts, has not been on the decline. In 2005-2006, a dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima arose which accounted for seven Japanese MID incidents. Almost half of Japan's MID incidents, between 2002 and 2006 were with China. In 2010, eight of Japan's MID incidents were with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu claim.

The number of U.S. troops stationed in Japan has remained relatively stable since the mid-1970's with the average number of troops stationed on Japanese soil being 44,826 (See

Appendix H, Figure 3). There was a slight decline between 2001 and 2005. However, that number has risen with the troop levels of 2011 and 2012 at or above 48,000. The highest level of U.S. troops in Japan occurred during the post-war years and the U.S. occupation of Japan, but these early years are therefore anomalous and certainly not the status quo.

ROK MIDs

An overwhelming proportion of South Korean MID incidents are attributed to North Korea (See Appendix I, Figure 2). Considering geopolitics, this is to be expected. Following far behind North Korea, maritime disputes with Japan account for 11 of the total Japanese-ROK disputes, 10 of which are products of the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute. China accounts for only four of South Korea's MID incidents between 1993 and 2010. However, an important note must be made regarding Sino-ROK disputes included in the dataset. Two of these disputes indirectly involve China's commitment to North Korea. In 1994, two years following Sino-ROK diplomatic normalization, South Korea and the U.S. were conducting military exercises, as is custom. Chinese military action in this dispute is largely regarded as a show of force to demonstrate its commitment to North Korea. A third incident deals with Chinese officials forcibly entering the South Korean consulate to return North Korean asylum seekers to the DPRK. A separate incident of the same nature involved Japan in the same year (Ghosn et al. 2004).

The incidence of South Korean MID incidents has remained relatively constant, averaging 9.11 incidents per year, the highest in the region (See Appendix I, Figure 1). There was a dramatic decline in North Korea-South Korea MIDs between 1999 and 2001, a timeframe which coincided with Kim Dae-Jung's 'Sunshine Policies' and the end of the North Korean

famine, which for the latter South Korea was a main contributor of foreign aid (Hoare 2017). However, it should be noted that, despite a reduction in the number of disputes, 13 of the 14 disputes in which South Korea was involved in between 1999 and 2001 were the result of North Korean provocations.

As with Japan, American troop levels in South Korea were at their highest in the post-war years, a result of the Korean War (See Appendix I, Figure 3). Troop levels stabilized in the mid-1970's, for an average of 37,330 troops stationed in South Korea each year. Since then, however, troop levels in South Korea have been on the decline. The 2011 and 2012 troop numbers were less than 28,500. Contrasted with Japan's troop numbers, South Korean troop levels were significantly higher during the years of 2001-2005 compared with the years of 2008-2012 (DMDC 2018; Kane 2004).

The Military Status Quo

Several things can be discerned from Correlates of War data on Militarized Interstate Disputes. First, the Great Powers in Northeast Asia are gradually becoming more peaceful. Both China's and the United States' disputes in the region are on a gradual decline. Economic interdependence may provide some explanation, but when applied to Japan and China, economic interdependence offers little explanation for militarized dispute behavior.

A second explanation could be that the Great Powers are successfully deterring one another. Both China and the U.S. are nuclear-capable states and any defection by one could be apocalyptic for the region. The nuclear option does not have to be the only deterrent though. In general, military capabilities are improving and becoming more deadly, possibly making developed states more apprehensive about resorting to force, regardless of ideological disagreements (Department of Defense 2010).

A third explanation is that the Great Powers shifted their attention elsewhere as their regional strategies evolved. Boggled down in the Middle East, the U.S. was involved in protracted disputes in Iraq and Afghanistan for most of the 2000's. However, there is reason to believe the U.S. has been shifting its focus back to East Asia. Chiefly, deployment increases in Japan indicate the U.S. may be refocusing its efforts back to Northeast Asia. Furthermore, an analysis by Robert Kaplan (2019) claims the priority given to Central Command (CENTCOM) will soon shift to Pacific Command (PACOM), as the U.S. military has been redeploying resources to PACOM, primarily to address maritime disputes in the region. Considering the increase of troops to Japan and the nature of Japanese disputes, this explanation has some viability (Kaplan 2019). Beijing may be acting more cautiously since the U.S. military has appeared to retain its dominance. China will not act aggressively and decisively when it knows victory is uncertain (Kissinger 2012). Beijing prefers a more subtle, long-term strategy. Following this logic, China may be delaying military action until it feels the time is most appropriate to strike (Brown 2017: 21-24).

The previous statement, at first glance, seems to contradict China's actions towards Taiwan. However, Taiwan represents a somewhat different case than its other dispute partners. Beijing considers Taiwan to be a part of China, and neither Japan, South Korea or the United States recognize Taiwan in diplomatic relations (Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). Since Chiang Kai-Shek fled the mainland in 1949, the Taiwanese have maintained their sovereignty. In a Western-dominated world where the Western powers push for democracy, it is easy to understand the insecurity China faces should Taiwan succeed in declaring independence. Taiwan is, of course, a thriving democracy, and arguably the most liberal country in East Asia (Kaplan 2014: 142-149). As China seeks to increase its influence, the Taiwan issue threatens not

only the international model it has built, but also has the potential to sow domestic upheaval. Since China also deals with Xinjiang, Tibetan and Hong Kong separatists, controlling Taiwan is a top priority for the CCP, which relies to a great extent upon repression and image for control (Heilmann 2017: 283-285; Tang 2017). Therefore, the Taiwan issue not only represents the status quo, but may also preoccupy China to the extent that it will refrain from venturing further out into its sphere of influence until the issue is resolved.

Second, unresolved territorial disputes, as predicted by Friedberg's 1993 article, are particularly inflammatory. However, these territorial disputes are long-running, and though they occasionally flare up, they have been resolved without any long-term military consequences. This may indicate that territorial disputes have become the norm and states are diplomatically equipped to manage these disputes. Any excessive attempt to claim territory may provoke a larger response, but that has also yet to happen. As Japan is a party to every major territorial dispute in Northeast Asia, Japan's non-militarized status may also play a part in reducing the threat signal sent by Japan to its dispute partners.

A separate incident, the most volatile one yet, occurred in 2012. While not included in the COW dataset since it is outside of the timeframe, McGregor details Beijing and Tokyo's diplomatic responses to the rogue, right-wing figure Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara. Behind the scenes though, Beijing was furious and accused Japan of changing the status quo, more moderate factions within Japan's Liberal Democratic Party sought to reassure their Chinese counterparts that this move, though provocative, was benign and not representative of Tokyo's official position (McGregor 2017: 267-282). That the more moderate factions within the LDP, including Prime Minister Noda, distanced themselves from the right-wing faction

shows that even within the Japanese government there are those who resist changes to the status quo, though they may not always be successful.

Another aspect of the Northeast Asian status quo is the norm of a non-militarized Japan. Japan's self-imposed regulations signal to its neighbors, who otherwise would respond at a more aggressive level, that Tokyo cares about these territories but not enough to amend the constitution to allow for the legal room to defend such claims. One can easily see Japan's incentive to refrain from remilitarizing in order to maintain the status quo, despite remilitarizing being in its best interest from a standpoint of a purely, anarchic, self-help system. Furthermore, there may also be domestic incentives to avoid remilitarization, as its image as a pacifist nation has indeed become important to the Japanese public (Berger 2003: 392-395; Tamamoto 2013: 200-209).

Relating to Japan's territorial disputes, the United States appears to be very averse towards engaging in military action on behalf of Japan over both Dokdo/Takeshima and the Diaoyu/Senkaku disputes. For obvious reasons, the United States does not take a position on Dokdo/Takeshima, as this would be strategic military blunder for the United States, as it would damage its relationship with whichever state it chose not to side with (Chanlett-Avery et al. 2017). On the backend, it appears the United States uses its diplomatic levers to calm tensions surrounding disputes between Japan and China (McGregor 2017: 276-285).

This underscores the pattern of restraint exercised by the Great Powers in militarized disputes.

Third, North Korea is a constant threat to stability, particularly for South Korea, but also for Japan and even China in some instances. In 1993, after China established diplomatic relations with South Korea, PRC-DPRK relations deteriorated. The 1993 dispute, which lasted four months, began as a result of North Korean border guards firing at Chinese border guards (Palmer

et al. 2015). While the 1993 dispute reached high levels of hostility, PRC-DPRK disputes also occurred during 1995, 2003, 2004 and 2010. In all of these disputes, North Korea has been the aggressor. As China is one of North Korea's only real friends in the international system, it can be hard to speculate why North Korea would act aggressively towards China and why China would tolerate such aggression. It is hard to imagine Japan or South Korea firing on American troops without serious consequences. The most plausible explanation is that, for China, controlling North Korea is much easier due to its weak economic position and dependency, and that the geopolitical value of North Korea as a buffer state is worth the occasional interruptions in the Sino-North Korean relationship. Nevertheless, North Korea as an aggressor is the status quo in Northeast Asia.

Finally, the American military presence has been an important component of the Northeast Asian power structure since the end of World War II (Kane 2004; DMDC 2018). High levels of American troops have not been present since the end of the Japanese occupation and Korean War and the few years following, with numbers stabilizing by the mid-1970's. The American presence, at first glance, thus appears to be a stabilizing force in Northeast Asia, possibly deterring not only a North Korean attack but also a remilitarized Japan. Relatedly, American naval supremacy could also serve to prevent China from maritime aggression related to the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute.

What this picture of the status quo illustrates is that what is absent from the data may be as important as what is there. Perhaps most important for determining Japan-South Korean cooperation is that a formal security alliance has always been absent in the Japan-ROK relationship (Wong 2016: 153-154). That the U.S. is formally aligned with and has consistently provided security for both Japan and South Korea is one explanation for the lack of formal

alignment between the two Northeast Asian states. An additional explanation is that through formal alignment, Japan and South Korea change the status quo. By formalizing an alliance, they risk signaling balancing behavior to their neighbors, particularly North Korea and China. A unified South Korea and Japan threaten North Korea while signaling to China that the military balance of power is changing. Upsetting China has economic consequences meaning South Korea and Japan may avoid aligning as long as the U.S. military status quo is maintained, an idea which will be examined when considering the elements of Cha's quasi-alliance model (2000).

Trade Dependency

The state of military tension and the level of trade relations between countries do not necessarily coincide. States can quarrel but find common economic ground. Within domestic institutions, there are often competing interests seeking to influence policy. As a state becomes further integrated into the networks of trade, this makes military conflict complex as domestic elites must also consider how the capitalist or merchant class will be affected by military disputes. Indeed, national security almost always wins when the stakes are high, but tensions do not always rise to the levels of hot conflict.

Japan, South Korea, and even the United States have become increasingly interdependent with China. South Korea, in particular, relies heavily on the Chinese economy (See Appendix J, Figure 3). The sheer size of the Chinese economy, the world's second largest, makes it impossible to ignore the abundant opportunities for engaging with China economically. At the same time, China has come less to rely on the economies of Japan and South Korea. Its economic foreign policy strategy in recent years has aimed to engage smaller economies throughout the globe (ChinaPower Project 2017). Considering these changes, coupled with

China's economic growth, it is not surprising that China's economic interdependence has diversified away from North Asia.

Looking to Japanese and South Korean interdependence with the U.S. and one another, the measure of bilateral trade volume shows that Japan's reliance on these economies has become proportionately less significant relative to the China. The U.S. is a stable partner to Japan, however; while Japan's economic interconnectedness with the U.S. is less than it is with China, it can be depended on at consistent levels (See Appendix J, Figure 2). Japan-ROK trade interdependence has also remained consistent with an overall increase. (See Appendix J, Figures 2 and 3). Both Japan and South Korea are mutually interdependent on one another. While the Japanese economy is important to the South Korean economy, South Korea's interdependency with Japan relative to its own GDP has declined. However, South Korea is still heavily reliant on the Japanese economy, indicating that though they may have become less interdependent, Japan is still a main trading partner of Korea. On the other hand, U.S.-ROK bilateral trade volumes as a percentage of Korea's GDP are much more cyclical (See Appendix J, Figure 3). The U.S. is also important to South Korea, but considerably less so than its other economic Great Power partner, China (Barbieri et al. 2016).

The U.S. economy has become gradually less interdependent with the South Korean and Japanese economies (See Appendix J, Figure 4). The interdependence measure of bilateral trade between the U.S. and South Korea has never occupied even one percent of American GDP. Japan's interdependence is somewhat higher, but still insignificant in terms of relative interdependence. In contrast, Sino-American interdependence has deepened substantially. By 2014, the U.S. and China were the world's first and second largest economies, respectively. For

two economies of this magnitude, avoiding trade interdependence in the modern globalized world would be next to impossible (Barbieri et al. 2016).

What the trade data shows is that economic interdependence may be beneficial to states but economic opportunities do not eliminate the potential for conflict. The United States could cease trade with South Korea with minimal impact on the American economy, while ending its relationship with China would have financial reverberations which would seriously damage the United States' economic well-being. Yet, it is the U.S. and China, and not the U.S. and South Korea, which are more prone to conflict. Inversely, Japan's economy has become increasingly interdependent with the Chinese economy, but Tokyo still aggravates Beijing over the Diaoyu/Senkakus. All in all, trade interdependence does not completely eliminate military conflict, but it may serve to reduce the number of MID incidents.

The Quasi-Alliance Model

Cha's quasi-alliance model attempts to explain Japanese-South Korean cooperation using the United States' commitment as a determining variable. An overarching problem with the quasi-alliance model based on the data is that there has been no significant change in the presence of U.S troops. There have been periods where the United States has threatened to withdraw or reduce troops from the East Asian Pacific theatre, but statistics reveal that the U.S. has never followed through with those threats, as evidenced by consistent troop levels (Cha 2000: 273-285; Kane 2004; DMDC 2018). Furthermore, U.S. military spending as a percentage of GDP has remained stable (Barbieri et al. 2016; Singer 1987). While there may have been variance in the communicated national security policies of the United States, actual changes 'on

the ground' have varied little. The United States maintains stable troop numbers in East Asia and spends on the military at uniform, significant levels.

As a weaker U.S. may signal a weaker commitment, examining the U.S. share of power provides insight into any major shifts in U.S. dominance that would have impacted its ability to credibly aid its allies. Following the long-term trends, the U.S. ability to project power, as well as reinforce its power projections, as measured by CINC score throughout 1993 and 2010 hardly varied, with the 17-year average being a score of .147. In the same time span, the U.S. score never changed more than .001 point of the average (Singer 1987). Therefore, the absence of any decline in American hard power capabilities gives Cha's variable of Great Power Commitment, as it applies to the U.S., little explanatory power for Japan-ROK cooperation or lack thereof.

Between 1993 and 2010, the average number of troops stationed in Japan has risen while declining in South Korea. From 2008-2012, troop numbers in Japan have been at or above average. For Korea, troop numbers were below average in the years of 2005 and 2008-2012 (Kane 2004; DMDC 2018). This data indicates that the United States is possibly repositioning itself in East Asia, as Robert Kagan would suggest, to refocus on naval supremacy, as Japan is home to several marine and naval bases while Korea houses mostly army troops. Furthermore, US military bases in Japan are intended to project U.S. power in the Pacific Theatre while U.S. bases in South Korea are used to counter the North Korean threat (Kaplan 2019; Japan Ministry of Defense 2014).

Another explanation for this trend is that the United States, as in accordance with the 'Korea Clause', which allows U.S. military stationed in Japan to be used in the event of a North Korean attack on South Korea, could be using Japanese bases more effectively to defend South Korea (Kyungwon 2017). However, because troop levels have had no dramatic increases or

decreases in either South Korea or Japan, both most likely feel secure in their alliance with the United States and thus any feelings of abandonment are minimal. Japan and South Korea may quarrel from time to time, but until Japan fully rescinds the Korea Clause in the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Friendship with the United States, there exists an implicit security agreement between the three that is non-threatening to Japan's and South Korea's neighbors while still providing adequate security to South Korea in the face of a North Korean threat.

Because the Dokdo/Takeshima issue is a constant, the disputed territory *is* the status quo. Though domestic segments of the population may fervently oppose territorial claims, domestic attitudes do not make international conflicts. Because most years did not feature a Dokdo/Takeshima dispute, it can be said that *eruptions* over Dokdo/Takeshima are a change in the status quo. When they do occur, it is likely the U.S. treats this dispute as a matter between South Korea and Japan themselves, but should hostilities reach an unsustainable level, the U.S. would probably intervene. Fortunately, this has not happened yet.

Looking at the broader picture of Dokdo/Takeshima disputes relative to U.S. commitment may shed light on the causes of cooperation and discord between South Korea. In 1996, 2005 and 2006, hostilities erupted over the islands. In 1996, South Korea had a total of 13 disputes, three attributed to Dokdo/Takeshima and 10 caused by North Korean aggression. Japan had a total of six, all related to the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute. The United States was involved in 16 total MIDs in 1996, three in East Asia and 13 elsewhere. Two of the U.S. MIDs dealt with the Third Taiwan Strait crisis, while the remaining MID were aimed at North Korea on behalf of South Korea (Ghosn et al. 2004; Palmer et al. 2015). The timeline of the U.S. involvement in the North Korean dispute relative to the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute is important to consider. Hostilities over Dokdo/Takeshima broke out on February 15, 1996, while the U.S. acted on the

North Korean dispute on February 9, indicating Seoul likely perceived the U.S. commitment to be high, while Japan may have felt asymmetrically abandoned. However, when examining the narrative of the dispute, it is apparent that South Korea was the first aggressor in the 1996 Dokdo/Takeshima dispute (Ghosn et al. 2004). There was no change to U.S. military spending as was evident in the U.S. power capabilities as measured by the CINC score or number of troops stationed in South Korea or Japan. The U.S. also continued to display its commitment to South Korea vis-à-vis MID involvement with North Korea. Thus, there is little evidence that a change in the U.S. commitment to its East Asian allies had any impact on Japan-ROK cooperation in 1996. (DMDC 2018; Kane 2004; Singer 1987).

Again in 2005-2006 a major dispute erupted over the island claims. As in all previous years, there was no significant change to U.S. military spending, power capabilities as measured by the CINC score or troop levels in Japan and South Korea. The U.S. engaged in zero East Asian MIDs in both 2005 and 2006, but in fewer MIDs worldwide as well. In 2005, South Korea had a total of 10 MIDs, a below-average number. Six were attributed to Dokdo/Takeshima, the remaining four the result of North Korean aggression. In 2006, South Korea's only MID incident was the result of Dokdo/Takeshima, with no MIDs attributed to North Korean aggression. Since North Korean behavior was not as threatening in these years and North Korea is the top cause of U.S. East Asian MIDs, the involvement of the United States in military matters would also be reduced during periods of a more docile North Korea. Japan, on the other hand, in 2005 and 2006, engaged with both China and Russia, respectively, as well as South Korea. In both incidents with Russia and China, Japan was the victim of aggression as opposed to the aggressor (Ghosn et al 2004; Palmer et al. 2015; Singer 1987). The events of 2005 and 2006 fit in with the narratives established as the status quo. Since the U.S. is apprehensive to get involved in

incidents involving territorial disputes or with other Great Powers, in 2005 and 2006 it is reasonable to assume the United States' alliance commitment was still credible and does little to explain the strategic choices of Japan and South Korea.

Examining Japan-ROK bilateral trade volumes relative to years in which Dokdo/Takeshima incidents took place also offers little support for the application of Cha's quasi-alliance model. In 1996, 2005 and 2006, the years in which Dokdo/Takeshima disputes occurred, bilateral trade interdependence between South Korea and Japan changed very little, and in some cases, even increased as a percentage of GDP. Incremental decreases in Japan's percentage of the South Korean economy can thus appear to be part of a larger trend in the South Korean economy rather than a reaction to Dokdo/Takeshima claims. When comparing trade interdependence with Dokdo/Takeshima conflicts, there appears to be little correlation. Economic cooperation is sustained in the face of a territorial dispute, and in some cases, even increases (Barbieri et al. 2016; Palmer et al. 2016; Singer 1987; World Bank 2019).

When examining the resolve of the U.S. commitment to its East Asian allies and the consistency of U.S. military spending, it becomes clear that the U.S. as a reliable military partner is the status quo. Because U.S. credibility and commitment has been constant while the behavior of South Korea and Japan has had some variance, it is difficult to claim that the variable of third-party patron commitment is meaningful for contributing to change in the Japan-ROK relationship. However, this does not imply that Japan or South Korea do not take the relationship for granted or do not act upon perceptions of changes to U.S. alliance commitments.

Certainly, there are examples of Japan capitulating to U.S. demands. Every time Japan has interpreted its constitution, for example, it has done so as a result of U.S. disapproval of Japan's lack of participation in global military operations (Chanlett-Avery and Konishi 2009: 1-

4). When Japan is threatened with the loss of its security guarantor, it is motivated to act. In this way, Washington's security guarantee is still credible but it sees Japan as a free rider in the alliance. For Japan, rather than looking to its neighbor for help, it seems more inclined to internally balance to meet the request of the United States.

Similarly, when South Korea has been threatened by North Korea, it does not seek Japan's assistance. Instead, it looks to its Great Power partner to curb North Korean aggression. South Korea, unlike Japan, is not limited in military size or expenditures (CIA World Factbook 2018; Department of State 2018). Yet, despite being more vulnerable to the North Korean threat, South Korea also spends a relatively small amount on its military. Even in years when U.S. troop levels declined, South Korean military expenditures as a percentage of GDP did not change (Kane 2004; Singer 1987). This indicates that South Korea feels secure in the ability of the U.S. to credibly provide security in the event of a North Korean threat, and that U.S. troops moving to Japan are still capable of stabilizing the Peninsula. According to Cha's quasi-alliance model, when states feel asymmetrically abandoned, there is likely to be friction. However, despite U.S. troops moving to Japan, there has been little to no change in trade interdependence, Dokdo/Takeshima disputes have been minimal and limited to a few years, and Japan has not resisted the protocol of allowing U.S. bases in Japan to be used for protection of South Korea, even extending military cooperation (Pan 2006; Manyin et al. 2017).

While there may be some validity in the quasi-alliance model, it is difficult to substantiate when considering the criteria here. Troop levels and the U.S. share of world power have remained at a stable level. When the North Korean threat is salient, the U.S. can be relied upon for aid. Therefore, since the U.S. commitment to Japan and South Korea has hardly varied, its consistency does not correlate with changes in Japan-ROK cooperation, which has varied.

Additionally, that it credibly, continually provides security to both Japan and South Korea means neither must look to the other as a balancing partner to ensure survival.

While the overall number of troops have stayed the same, there has been a trend of reducing troops in South Korea while increasing troops in Japan (Kane 2004). Cha's quasi-alliance model would predict discord in the event of asymmetrical commitment perception. Yet, Japan's and South Korea's relationship has changed relatively little. Though they may diplomatically spar over The History Wars or Dokdo/Takeshima, major eruptions are less frequent (Palmer et al. 2016). Despite this, Japan has not sought to revoke the Korea Clause in its security agreement with the U.S (Manyin et al. 2017). While a credible threat of the loss to U.S. security may indeed galvanize cooperation and formal alignment between South Korea and Japan, little has changed to the status quo in terms of U.S. security and the Japan-ROK relationship. Furthermore, Japan and South Korea still reap benefits of trade despite not being formally aligned in a security agreement, indicating that elites may see little motivation in changing a good thing.

Regional Sensitivities Due to a Rising China

One shortcoming in Cha's quasi-alliance model is its minimizing of the role played by China. However, a strong China does not necessarily represent a shock to the status quo. China, with its 2010 GDP of 6.1 trillion dollars, did not appear overnight. Instead, when looking at the long-term trends in Northeast Asia, China's rise has been an easily predicted phenomenon. As its reforms began in the 1980's, and followed similar development models of both Japan and South Korea, it is hard to imagine any other scenario (Restrepo-Echavarria and Arias 2017; World Bank 2019). The only thing really unexpected about China's rise is the rate at which it has

risen. Anyone who was shocked by China's entrance onto the world stage was simply ignoring obvious signs.

Ross's (2006) main argument rests on the notion that secondary states are most sensitive to power shifts in their regional environments and that only a military power is substantial enough to generate balancing or bandwagoning behavior. In regions where the United States has maintained dominance, China's military adventurism will be curbed. Therefore, for Ross, the independent variable is China's rise, not the U.S. commitment. Essentially, what Ross is indicating is that when the military status quo has changed, South Korea and Japan will strategically change their behavior. However, in only the most polarized of settings will they be motivated to balance or bandwagon. To resist changes, as Kang believes, Japan and South Korea seek to accommodate both of their Great Power partners, which often results in little to no change in interstate behavior.

By all accounts, the PLA has become a disciplined, professional organization (Department of Defense 2010). Further evidence of China's ability to project power can be demonstrated by its rising CINC score and increasing willingness to venture out into the South China Sea (Kaplan 2014: 11-28). Furthermore, as the Chinese economy has grown, so, too, have military expenditures (Singer 1987; World Bank 2019). In other words, by all measurements, Chinese military capabilities now represent a formidable force in the region, indicating that China may indeed possess the ability to alter the strategic choices of Japan and South Korea. Considering the interdependence of the Chinese economy and the economies of South Korea and Japan, it very much appears that China is capable of inflicting economic pain on the domestic economies of both countries. While it would hurt China's economy to lose its partnerships with Japan and South Korea, the Chinese economy would survive. Therefore, Ross's definition of a

rising power being one that can inflict damage on a secondary state aligned with a great power fits China perfectly.

Secondly, the United States has indeed maintained its presence in Northeast Asia. As shown by the third figures in Appendices H and I, U.S. troop levels have been relatively stable. Though there has been a reshuffling between Japan and South Korea, the overall American presence has remained the same. If any change in the U.S. military has occurred, it has been in the area of strategic execution, with the strategy of providing security to South Korea and Japan becoming more efficient. When considering the CINC scores, at first glance it appears China's power may have surpassed American power. However, as the CINC score is an aggregate composite of multiple variables, one variable which may skew results is that of population. Because China is home to 1.3 billion people, naturally, its CINC score may be higher than countries with lower populations, like the United States. As discussed earlier, there is some strategic value in having a large population. If a state faces an undisciplined military and can lure its opponent to strike with no significant impact on population totals, then public opinion will favor the victim. However, the U.S. military is a disciplined force and unlikely to be provoked. When actual military capabilities are considered, the U.S. appears to still very much be the dominant player (Global Firepower Index 2019). While China may be the dominant economic partner for Japan and South Korea, the United States remains their number one security ally. Furthermore, U.S. military spending still exceeds that of China (Singer 1987). By all measures, the U.S. has retained its dominance in the Northeast Asian region.

Ross (2006) also maintains that in only highly polarized settings do secondary powers balance or bandwagon. While it may seem at times that Northeast Asian tensions are high, especially as China and the United States appear to be competing for regional hegemony, the

decrease in MIDs by both the Great Powers in Northeast Asia indicates there is more stability than assumed. If, as power transition theory states, a rising power that feels insecure in its position will act aggressively in moves to overtake the power at the top of the hierarchy, China's behavior in Northeast Asia where the U.S. has the strongest regional presence indicates it is less inclined to challenge U.S. dominance in the region. Following their last dispute in 2001, China and the U.S. have only engaged in one dispute associated with a total of eight incidents in 2009 (Palmer et al. 2015). This dispute involved a U.S. oceanographic survey ship in the South China Sea being harassed by Chinese vessels. Hostilities in this dispute reached a relatively low level, with the U.S. sending a destroyer to escort the survey ship and China sending warships to patrol the nearby waters. That each side backed down before hostilities reached a higher level assumes restraint on both sides (Ghosn et al. 2004). Since 2002, these eight disputes are the only U.S.-China MIDs in the Northeast Asian region listed in the COW dataset. Indeed, it appears that China and the U.S. are not engaging in provocative behavior towards one another and the Northeast Asian region is not as polarized as one might believe it to be.

Finally, China's economic threat is not enough for Japan and South Korea to relinquish or reduce their security arrangement with the United States. Looking at Appendix J, Figures 2 and 3, clearly the Japanese and South Korean economics have become extremely intertwined with the Chinese economy. However, troop levels and U.S. military strategy have remained consistent in East Asia. While China may not like this, economic threats are, as Ross hypothesized, not enough to alter strategy or expel U.S. troops from South Korea and Japan. The U.S. commitment to Japan and South Korea is still credible and sufficient to deter Chinese military actions. In addition to maintaining their security alliance with the United States, neither Japan or South Korea have sought any change in their own relationship. The absence of any

definitive changes in the strategic alignments of South Korea and Japan, either with one another or with the United States, offers evidence for both Ross's and Kang's observations. In only the most polarized of settings will states change their strategic alignments, and since the U.S. has maintained its military dominance in Northeast Asia, there is little observable change in the strategic behavior of Japan and South Korea.

When examining the relationships between these four actors, there is further evidence of accommodation, and subsequent resistance to change. Diving into the details of the security agreements shared with the United States, one finds resistance by Japanese and South Korean officials to include stipulations in the agreements that might provoke China. Instead, Tokyo and Seoul prefer a more pointed approach rather than broad, abstract goals of 'countering a rising China'. At times, political leaders from both states openly resist U.S. wishes to explicitly specify a Chinese threat. South Korean resistance to unnecessarily agitate the Chinese dragon is to be expected, as they share no immediate disagreement with China. Instead, South Korea focuses on the North Korean threat; any animosity towards China is most often the result of perceptions that Beijing props up the Kim regime. Since a hostile North Korea buffers U.S. troops at China's door, this may very well be true. Either way, South Korea shares no major disagreement with China that explicitly irritates Beijing. Japan, which shares a territorial dispute with China, advocates against any direct confrontational language aimed at Chinese aggression. Instead, it has opted for a specific plan in the event of a Diaoyu/Senkaku conflict. Tokyo seemed to be aware of the risk of angering China and avoids unnecessary agitation. As Ross's definition of accommodation implies little to no change in a state's behavior, these subtle changes hint that South Korea and Japan are hyperaware of the signals they send to Beijing in navigating their relationship with the United States (Wong 2016: 144-148).

Kang's observance that balancing and bandwagoning behavior are notoriously hard to measure holds true to Northeast Asia. When examining shifts in international relations, researchers naturally look for changes to measure. In the case of South Korea and Japan, what *does not* change is perhaps a better barometer for future state strategy. When looking at China's growth trends, China may very well surpass U.S. military capabilities in the very near future. Until that day comes, there is unlikely to be any significant change in strategic behavior of Japan or South Korea. Even as their economies grow more interdependent with the Chinese economy, as long as Japan and South Korea can rely on American firepower for security, Northeast Asia is likely to remain relatively stable. That does not mean that conflict won't occur, but, rather, the cost of conflict outweighs the benefit of bandwagoning or balancing.

China and the Status Quo

Much has been said about Japan and South Korea's desire to maintain the status quo, but what China wants must also be considered. Articulating China's goals elucidates the reasons behind the strategic choices of Japan and South Korea. As China is a big country, small countries like Japan and South Korea ignore the interests of China at their own peril.

Deriving strategy from Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, Chinese foreign policy makers are patient and forward thinking. China will not wage a war it is not prepared to fight when victory is uncertain. Therefore, China may very well be content to wait out an inevitable American decline and seize the opportunity to expel U.S. troops with as little effort as possible. Sun Tzu, advocating for psychological warfare over traditional warfare, stated that whoever fires the first shot has already lost the battle (Allison 2017: 21). Indeed, it is highly likely that China is already

preparing for its next move to take back a bit more power in Northeast Asia without having to engage militarily.

It reasonably may be that China has been content with the U.S. presence in Northeast Asia for both economic and security reasons. The U.S. military presence in Japan and South Korea allowed each country to focus on economic growth in the years following WWII and the Korean War. Without investment and aid from Japan and South Korea, China's economy would not be where it is today. In this way, the shared relationships have been symbiotic, allowing each economy to flourish.

The U.S. military has been dual-serving for China. In addition to its indirect economic impact, it has also served to check growing Japanese nationalism. If a state's main concern is surviving the Hobbesian world of international relations, reality would have dictated that Japan remilitarize long ago absent U.S. military protection. Additionally, by serving as a check on an adventurist North Korea the U.S. stabilized the Korean Peninsula. There are some in the foreign policy community who believe U.S. presence in South Korea absent a North Korean threat would be hard to justify, though the absence of the U.S. on the Peninsula would certainly not be optimal (Livingston 2018). While China may not always like North Korea's actions, it sees it useful to maintain the status quo of a North Korean threat, but that utility only persists if the threat is kept at stable, manageable levels.

These things only explain Chinese behavior up to a certain point and in no way does this imply that China will be content with the current status quo in the long term. However, for now, it has served Chinese interests well. Just as it is unreasonable for the United States to think China will be perfectly okay with high numbers of U.S. troops dispersed throughout China's sphere of influence, it is unreasonable for China to think the U.S. presence will be completely disappear

from Northeast Asia. American interests, just like Chinese interests, are too intertwined in South Korea and Japan.

The reduction in Chinese MIDs should also be taken with a grain of salt. As stated earlier, China will not start a war it cannot certainly and decisively win. As China's military capabilities improve, it may feel more emboldened to act, especially over the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute with Japan. China must also think about how its military actions will be interpreted by others within the international order. To avoid becoming a revisionist state, China will have to abide by the rules set by the Western powers in the post-WWII era. If China chooses to fire on Japan first, that action would likely spark a backlash. China may want to lay claim to Diaoyu/Senkaku, but if it does so too aggressively, its chance will be gone forever. Therefore, a less-dispute prone China as measured by number of MIDs may not mean that China is content with the status quo, but rather that China is simply waiting until it can change the status quo while minimizing negative consequences.

Finally, a Great Power economic threat absent a credible military threat still appears insufficient to alter the strategic alignment of secondary states. Though outside of the years included in the COW dataset being analyzed, the deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD) in South Korea in 2017 pushed China to reciprocate by targeting South Korean industries through unofficial sanctions and banning South Korean tour groups from entering the country. The purpose of THAAD is to deter a North Korean attack but China sees THAAD as a sign of a long-term U.S. presence on the Peninsula and a solidification of the U.S.-ROK relationship. While Japan has its own THAAD system, South Korea's system is located 1,000 kilometers closer to China, making China more susceptible to U.S. monitoring. Despite China's protests, THAAD is still up and running (Manyin et al. 2017). What the 2017

THAAD dispute illustrates is that an economic threat in the absence of a credible military threat is indeed not enough to trigger change in strategic alignment, and that the security alliance with the United States is still more important than the economic relationship with China.

Chapter Five – The Conclusion

Like people, states can be averse to change. The unknown can be frightening and even dangerous. In the world of international relations where information is often miscommunicated between cultures through imperfect institutions, the risk of the unknown is incredibly high. For Japan, South Korea and China, this situation presents great difficulties in overcoming the hurdles of conflict. The period of *pax Americana* has provided stability that allowed Japan and South Korea to focus on developing their material welfares to an extent that has brought them, and later China, into the forefront of the global economy. Because the states of Northeast Asia have fared well in the current status quo, it may cause one to question why they would seek to upend the order that exists. But states must always be making cost-benefit analyses about the international order and sometimes a state perceives designing new status quo could have a greater payoff than playing by the rules of the current status quo.

For many observers, this is where China is today. Economically, South Korea and Japan are happily integrating China into the world order. China has become an economic juggernaut and supplies Japan and South Korea with copious amounts of trade. As China's economy becomes more service-oriented, those amounts will only increase. With China's economic success comes improved military capabilities though, and the question is to what extent Japan and South Korea will tolerate an increasingly-militarized China. In the same vein, how much longer will China tolerate a militarily-dominant United States in its own backyard? How important is trade to Japan and South Korea when that trade is at the expense of national security?

Japan and South Korea have been tolerant of an increasingly militarized China up to this point because China has not been able to challenge the United States militarily. Furthermore, the

United States' commitment to its Northeast Asian allies has remained steadfast, doing little to explain variation in the Japan-ROK alliance as suggested by Victor Cha. That the United States has provided security to both its Northeast Asian allies has arguably allowed them to prosper without achieving a genuine reconciliation of their historical differences and grievances. Should a militarily threatening China emerge, capable of overtaking U.S. regional hegemony, Japan and South Korea will likely be forced to go through the difficult process of self-reflection in order to determine where their future allegiances lie. Those allegiances may lie with one another, in which case it will be necessary to set aside past animosity for pragmatic survival, or it may lie with China. Should they choose the latter, South Korea and Japan will likely find themselves navigating an entirely new environment in which mistakes are bound to be made. Breaking their old habits of interstate relations will be difficult and will not happen without error.

On the other hand, as long as the United States retains its military dominance, the region is likely to remain static, though not without friction, a point made by Ross (2006) and further underscored by the argument developed here. There appears to be little incentive in the interim to see the status quo and day-to-day operations upended. Not only has the status quo been beneficial for Northeast Asia, but it has also been beneficial for the United States. The U.S. gains economically from the immense amounts of capital flowing throughout the region while the effort in maintaining security stability, at this point, is somewhat on auto-pilot. Institutions and regimes are equipped to handle conflict at manageable levels, and the diplomatic channels are established enough to solve problems before they reach the point of no return.

While the argument developed here sheds light on China's behavior in Northeast Asia, it is limited in explaining China's behavior outside the region. As the race for dominance in the South China Sea heats up, the United States and China may indeed come to blows, a reality

which could have spillover effects for Japan and South Korea. China's artificial island building especially encroaches upon the Philippines and Vietnam, both of which have turned to the U.S. for help in countering the Chinese threat. However, the U.S. is much less entrenched in Vietnam and the Philippines, so the American ability to defend this region is somewhat more limited (Kaplan 2014: 51-70, 117-138). In contrast to its restrained behavior in Northeast Asia, China's is much more open about its aspirations to dominate the South China Sea.

Another area in which this research is limited relates to China's movement towards the West through implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and what that means for international relations, writ large. The BRI is a multi-billion-dollar investment project that seeks to build infrastructure and expand Chinese influence in emerging economies throughout the Middle East, Africa and into Europe, and even into South America. Not only is China exporting its labor but also its model to these developing countries, and in this way directly counters American influence. The regions in which China implements BRI projects may also serve as arenas for Sino-U.S. competition. Certainly, Africa is an area ripe for Chinese power, as the United States is much less entrenched throughout the African continent (ChinaPower Project 2017). Furthermore, after multiple protracted conflicts, American presence is controversial throughout the Middle East (Kilman and Grace 2018). Because of this, China likely sees a void to be filled by investing heavily in the economies of conflict-ravaged Middle Eastern states desperate for economic development.

As developments in the Northeast Asian region are an ongoing process, there are ample opportunities for future research. China cares about its sphere of influence; it has clearly stated this much (Brown 2017: 68-71; Chin 2014). Similarly, the United States under Trump has become much more combative toward China while demonstrating a willingness to revive the old

Cold War strategy of containment. Somewhat inconsistently, at the same time Trump has threatened to reduce the American presence in Northeast Asia (Sang-hun and Rich 2018). Because of these seemingly conflicting strategies, the election of Trump has weakened America's leadership throughout much of the world, a void China could very much be poised to fill (Brown 2017: 7). If China conforms to the rules of the Western-dominated order and convinces America's old allies that it is a more reliable partner, the status quo of Northeast Asia could change virtually overnight. Just because the American commitment to its Northeast Asian partners has remained strong does not mean it will in the future, and it certainly does not mean that the threat posed by China will not be greater than the ability of the Americans to deter Chinese aggression. Additionally, the means of warfare are changing in a more tech-oriented direction. Incorporating technological innovation into the competition for dominance is a necessity, especially when China is involved in the analysis (Department of Defense 2018).

Leadership changes in Japan and South Korea should also be carefully observed. For Japan, the election of an even more right-wing prime minister could push China towards aggressive action in the East China Sea (McGregor 2017: 282-283). Likewise, as South Korea becomes more susceptible to its giant neighbor's military abilities, Seoul may decide to switch its allegiance. However, Beijing could overplay its hand, pushing Japan and South Korea closer together. Any number of moves by the players within the region will have long-term implications for the regional balance of power. Additionally, developments in North Korea related to its ability to threaten Japan and South Korea, and even the United States, may increase pressure on the Americans to act. As Trump and Kim, like Trump and Xi, seem to have a hot-and-cold relationship, developments in the DPRK-U.S. relationship will undoubtedly have spillover effects for all players in the region.

Finally, as new COW data becomes available, further analysis of regional interactions bring new insights into the changing dynamics of Northeast Asia. As can be seen from the data that is currently available, the composition of Northeast Asian power has altered dramatically in many ways. The territorial disputes of Northeast Asia seem particularly inflammatory; paying special attention to these issues provides significant insight into how far Japan and China may be willing to go. Using COW data to measure South Korea's growth relative to Japan's may also shed light on the region's balance of power. Japan, as shown by the data, has traditionally had the upper hand. However, COW data indicates this to be changing. Regional dynamics very likely may change if South Korea assumes the senior partner role in the Japan-ROK relationship.

Observers of international politics are often tempted by exciting or hyperbolic analyses. It is, after all, human nature to assume the worst. Inversely, disregarding the very real consequences of Great Power competition or strategic realignments may lead to the breakout of war. Instead, though it may be boring, states most often seek to retain their positions in the international order rather than upending that order. Defining the parameters of the status quo and narrowing the scope of expected behavior clarifies the significance of change in state behavior. If one is searching for dramatic changes where there is none to be found, that effort can be futile. However, examining the ways in which states resist change can elucidate what their true motivations are and what benefits they are already receiving. Furthermore, it is an error to assume that all states seek a harmonious existence. There are certain disputes that institutions can never resolve. Instead, states learn to live with their consequences and keep discord to a manageable level. It is not so much that they like the conflict, but rather that they like it better than the unknown.

For China, Japan, South Korea and the United States, there is plenty that is unknown about the future of the Northeast Asian order. Compounding the uncertainty is China's rise coupled with the inevitability of American decline. For Japan and South Korea, whose security has been defined by the United States, these changes have huge consequences. The security guarantee of the United States has allowed Japan and South Korea the opportunity to disregard, however temporarily, reconciliation of past animosities. There has never been a need to balance. If, and when, the day comes that China could decisively defeat the U.S. militarily, the strategic alignments, and subsequent balance of power, in Northeast Asia will most likely change. Until that day comes, the fact remains that Japan and South Korea are small states whose neighbor China is a big state, but whose best friend, the United States, is the biggest state.

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Appendix A

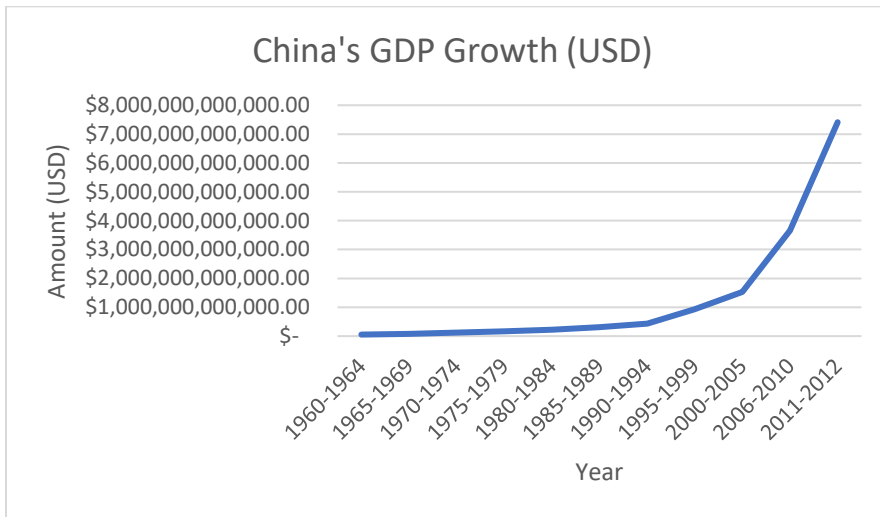
China's Economic and Military Power

Figure 1: China's CINC Score



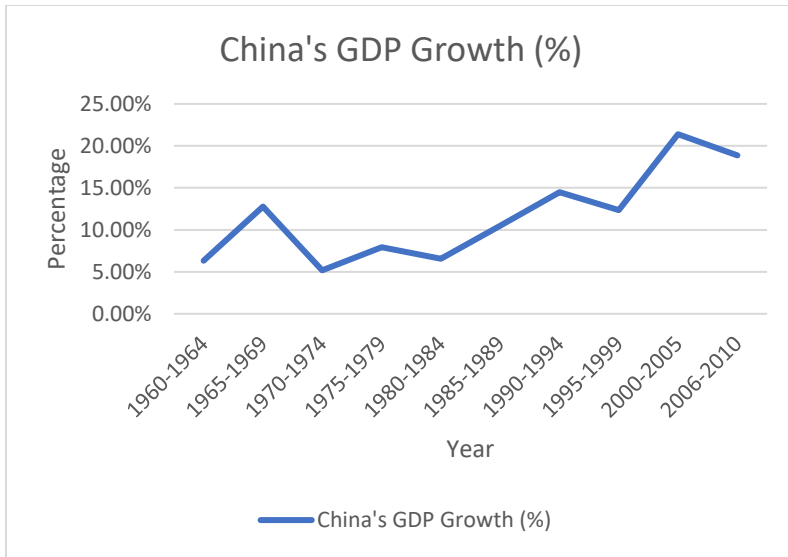
Source: Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Dataset Version 5.0.

Figure 2:



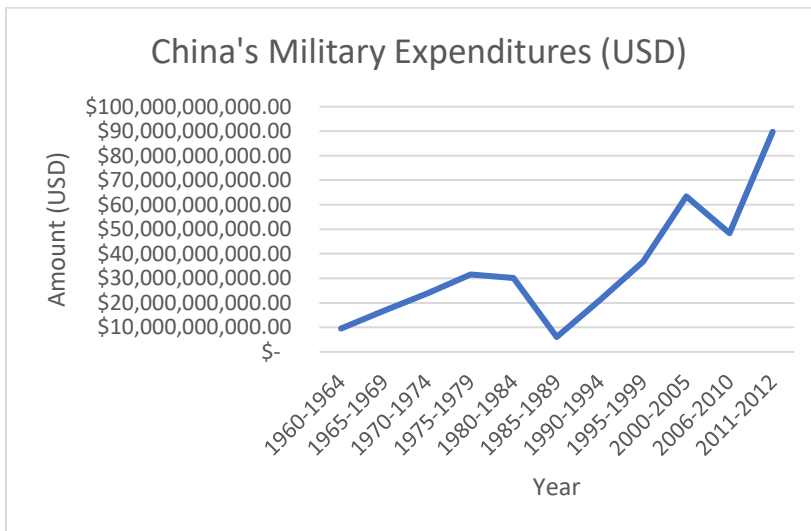
Source: World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019.)

Figure 3:



Source: World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019.)

Figure 4:



Source: Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Dataset Version 5.0.

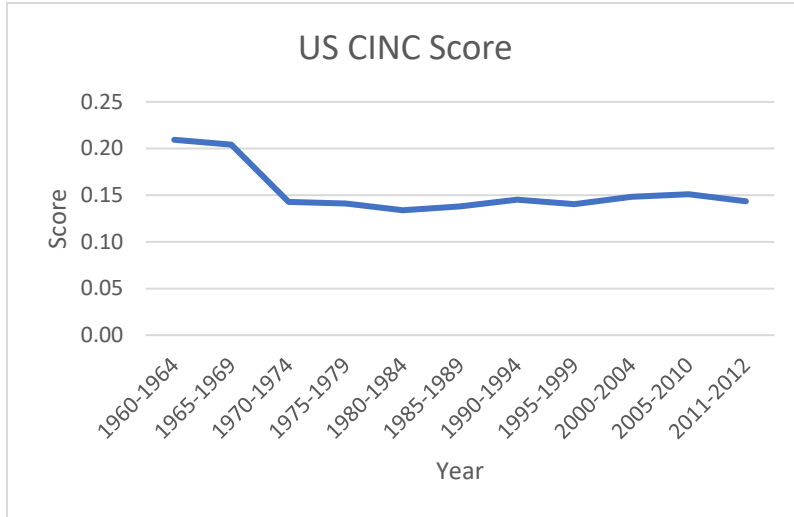
Figure 5:



Sources: *Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Dataset Version 5.0*; *World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019)*.

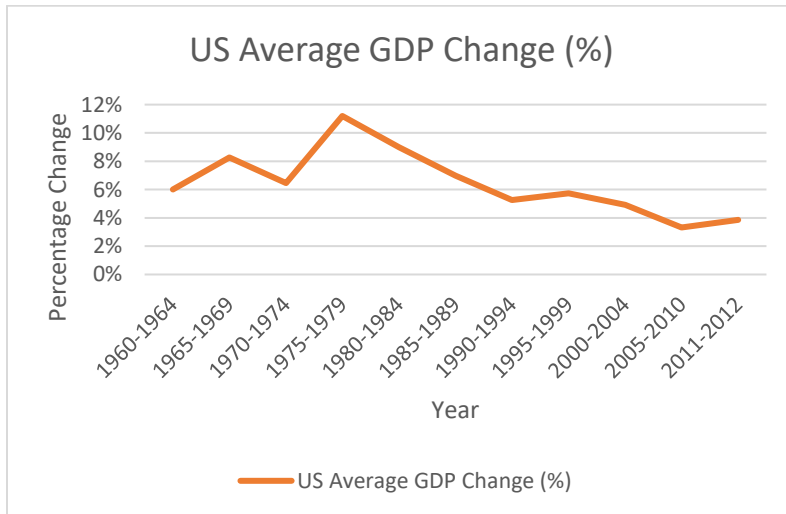
Appendix B: The United States Status Quo

Figure 1:



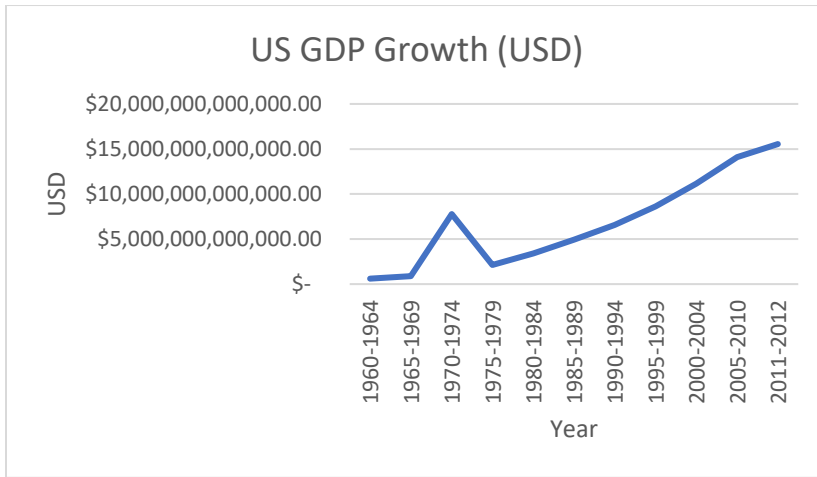
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Figure 2:



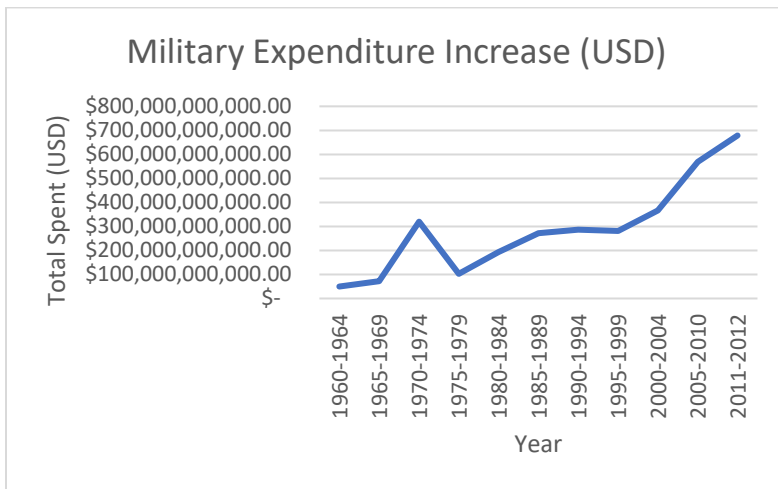
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Figure 3:



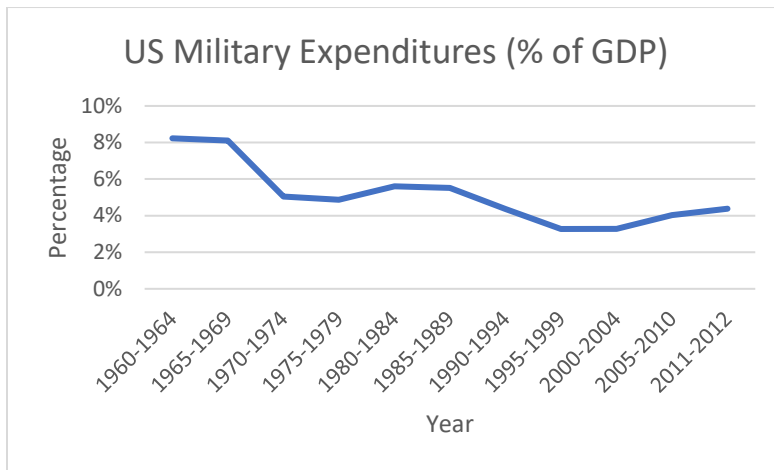
Source: World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019).

Figure 4:



Source: Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Dataset Version 5.0.

Figure 5:

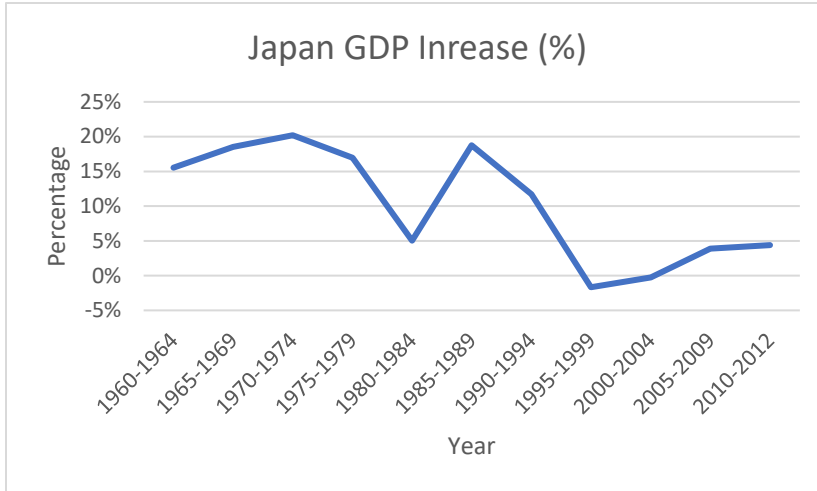


Sources: *Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Dataset Version 5.0*; *World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019)*.

Appendix C

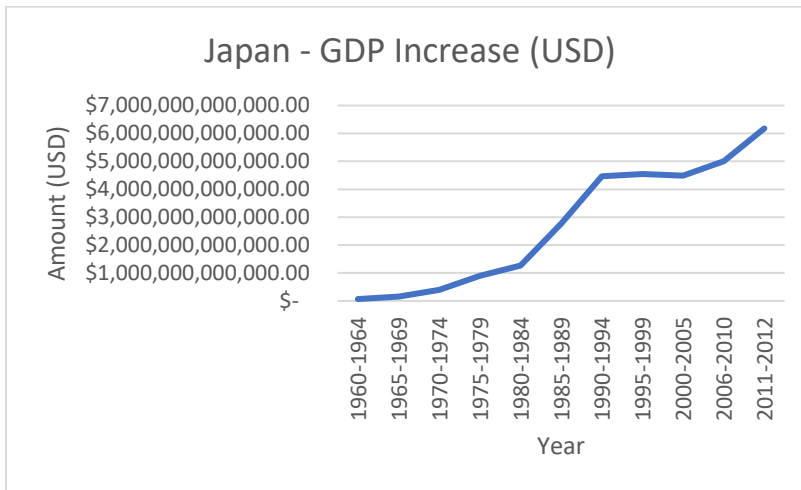
Japan

Figure 1:



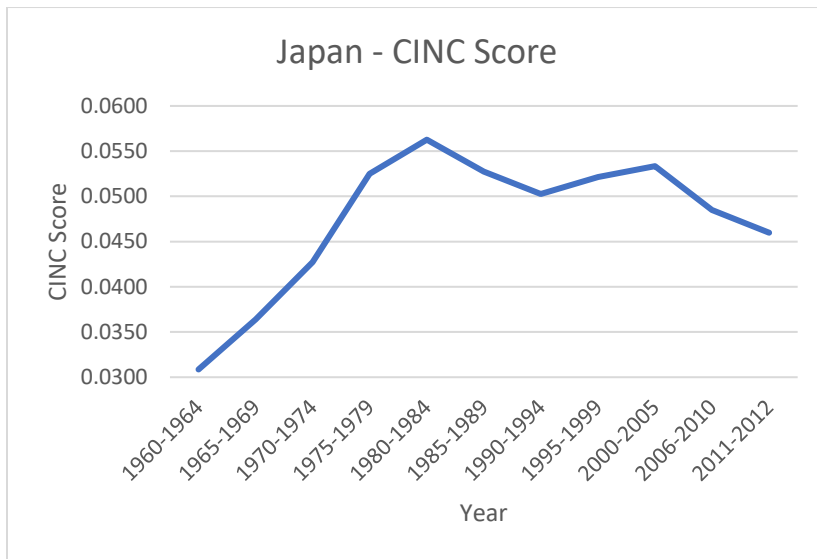
Source: World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019).

Figure 2:



Source: World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019).

Figure 3:

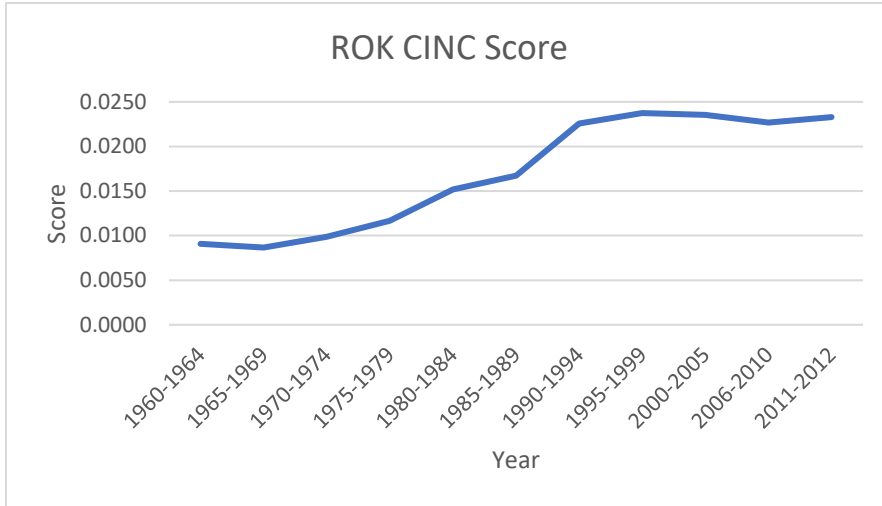


Source: *Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Dataset Version 5.0*

Appendix D

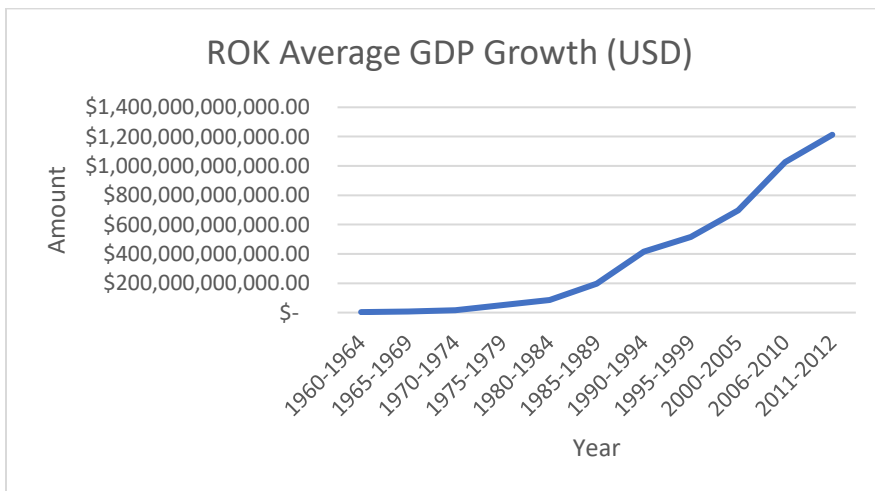
The South Korean Economic and Military Status Quo

Figure 1:



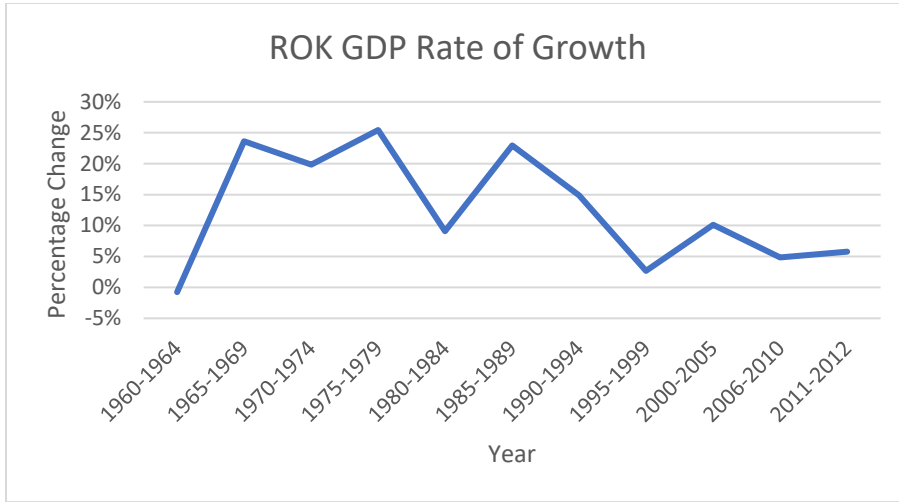
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Figure 2:



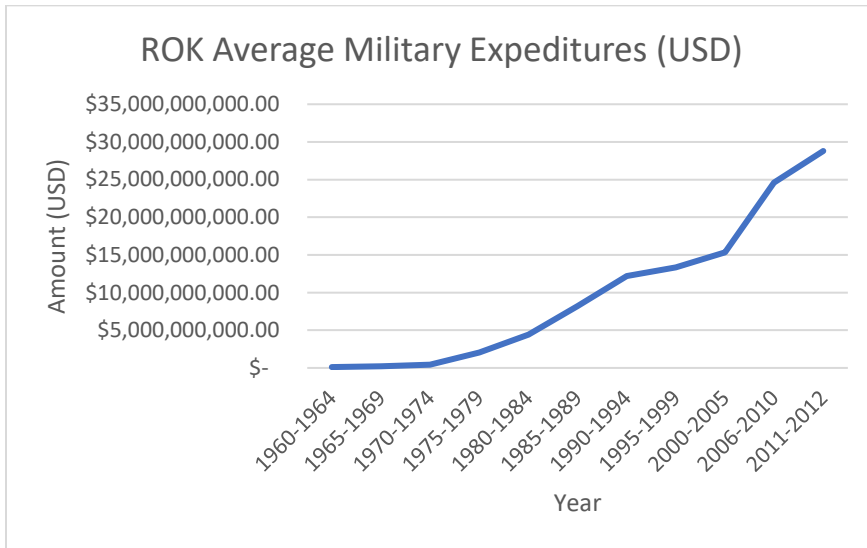
Source: *World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019).*

Figure 3:



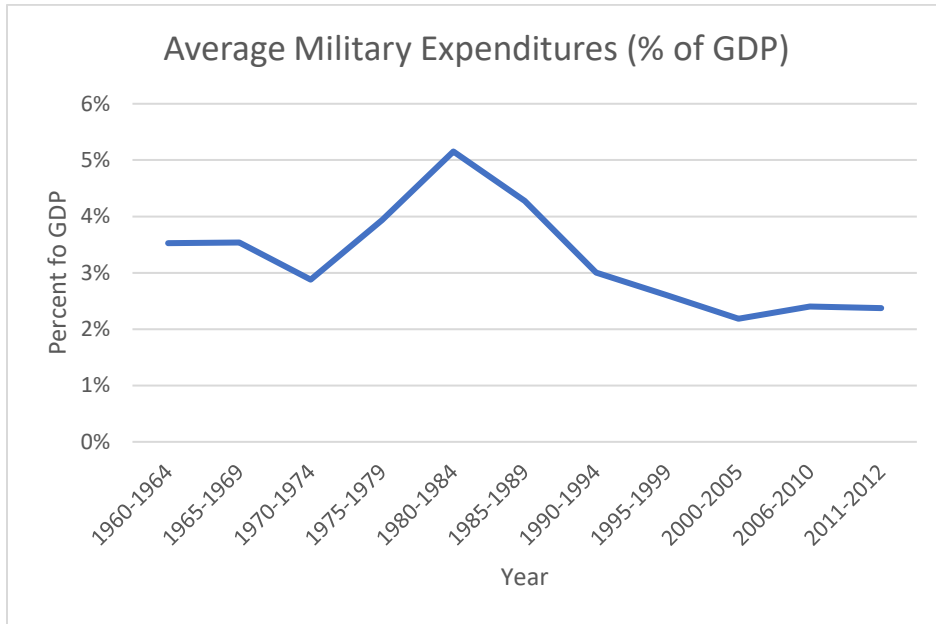
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Figure 4:



Source: Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Dataset Version 5.0.

Figure 5:

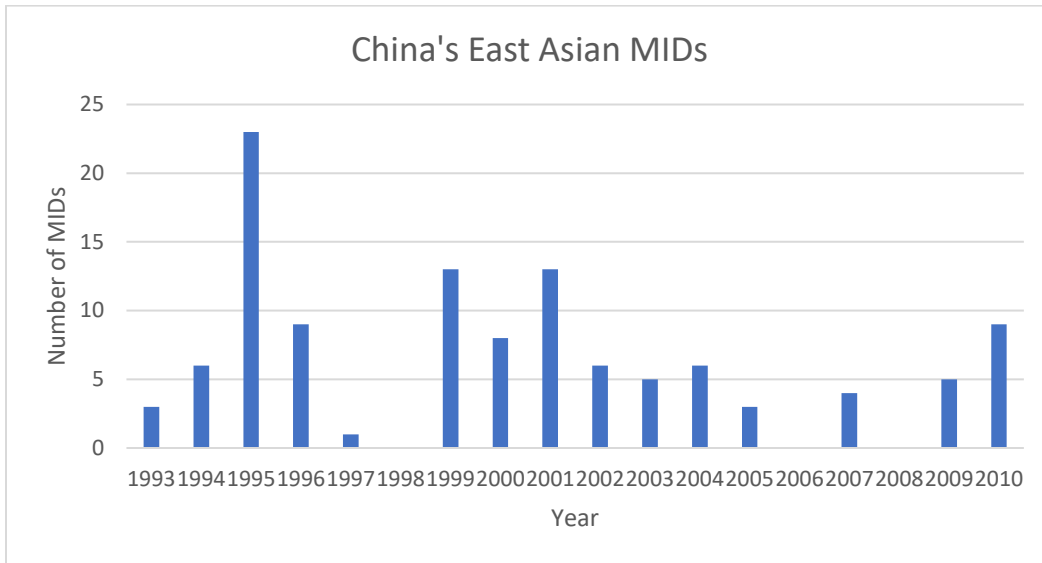


Sources: *Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Dataset Version 5.0*; *World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019)*.

Appendix E

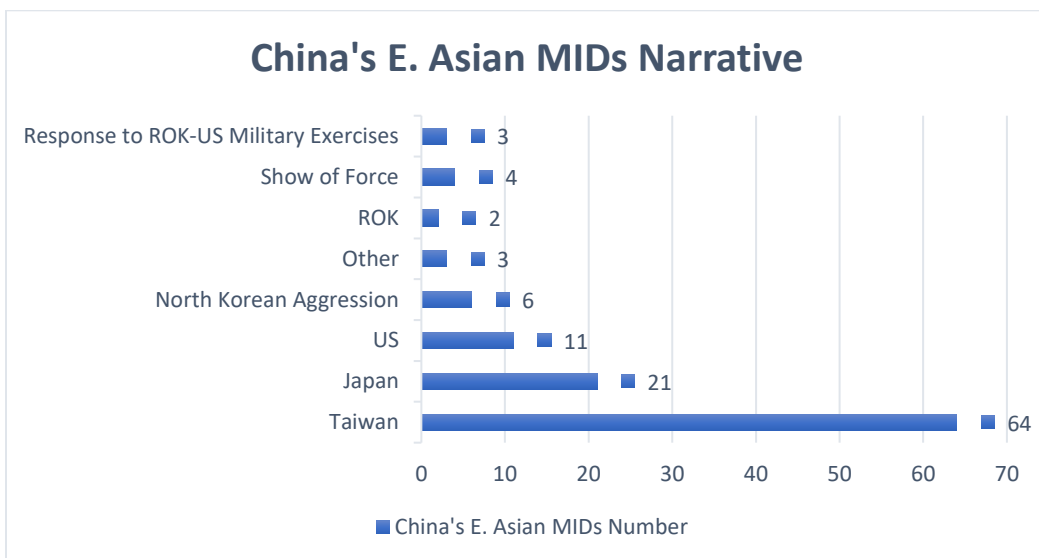
Chian's East Asian MIDs

Figure 1:



Source: *Correlates of War Militarized Interstate Dispute Dataset Version 4.2.*

Figure 2:

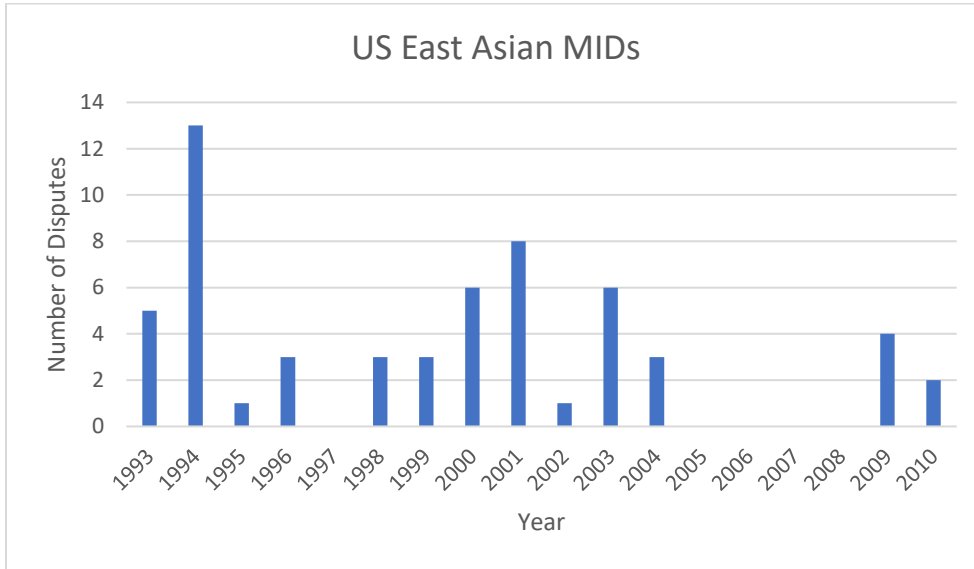


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Appendix F

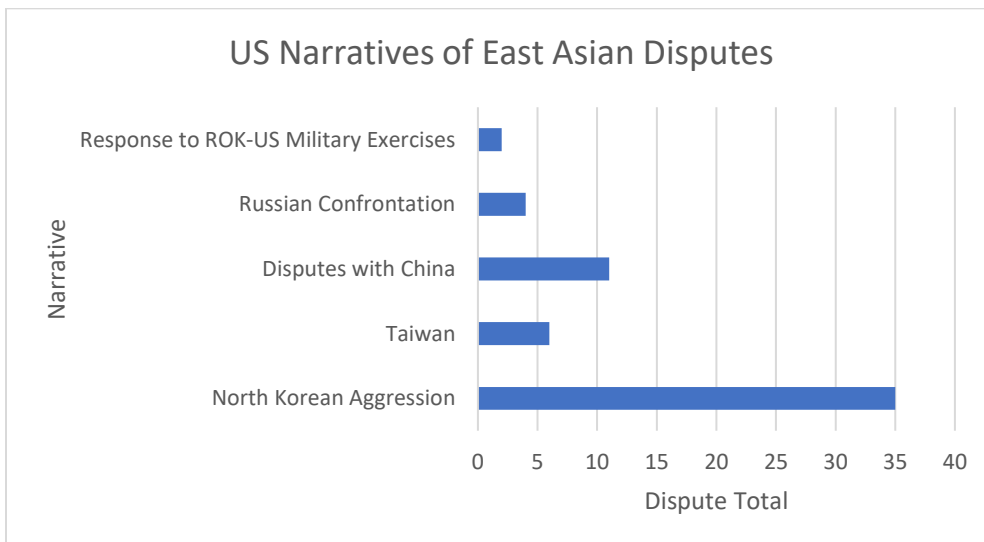
US East Asian MIDs

Figure 1:



Source: *Correlates of War Militarized Interstate Dispute Dataset Version 4.2.*

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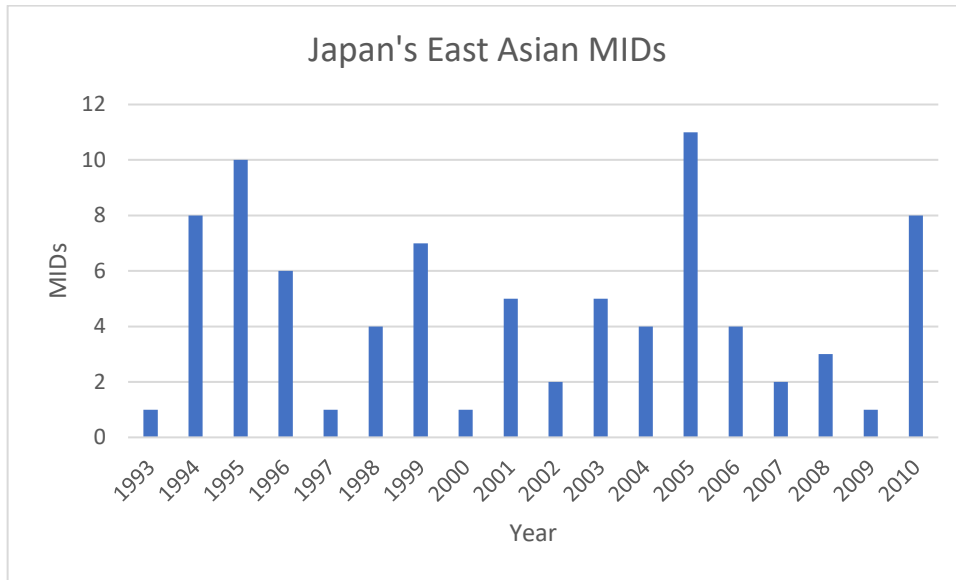


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Appendix G

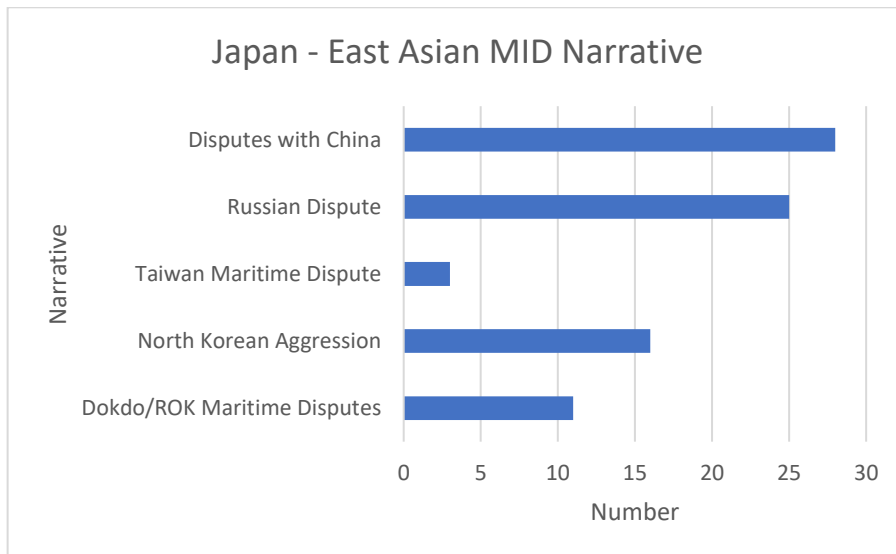
Japan's East Asian MIDs

Figure 1:



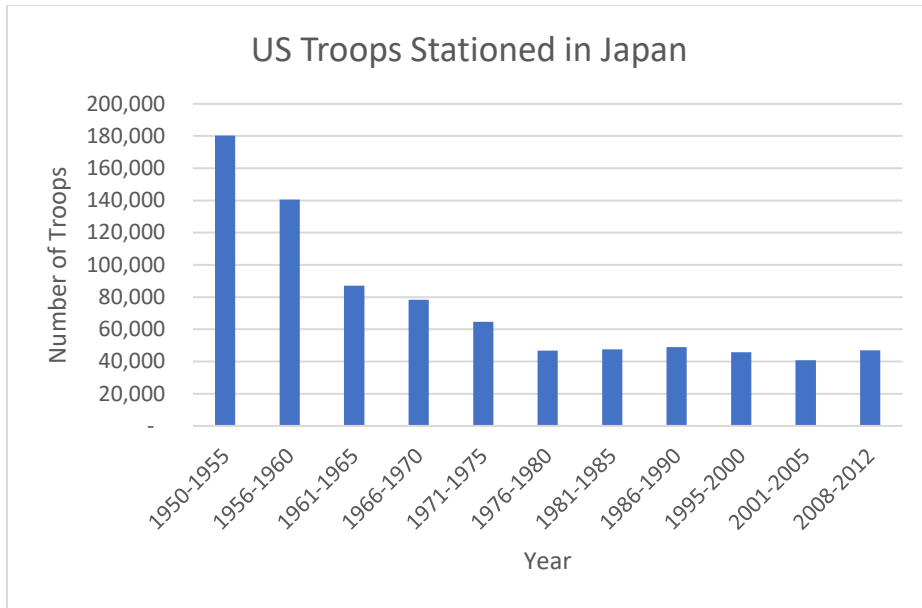
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Figure 2:



Source: *Correlates of War Militarized Interstate Dispute Dataset Version 4.2.*

Figure 3:



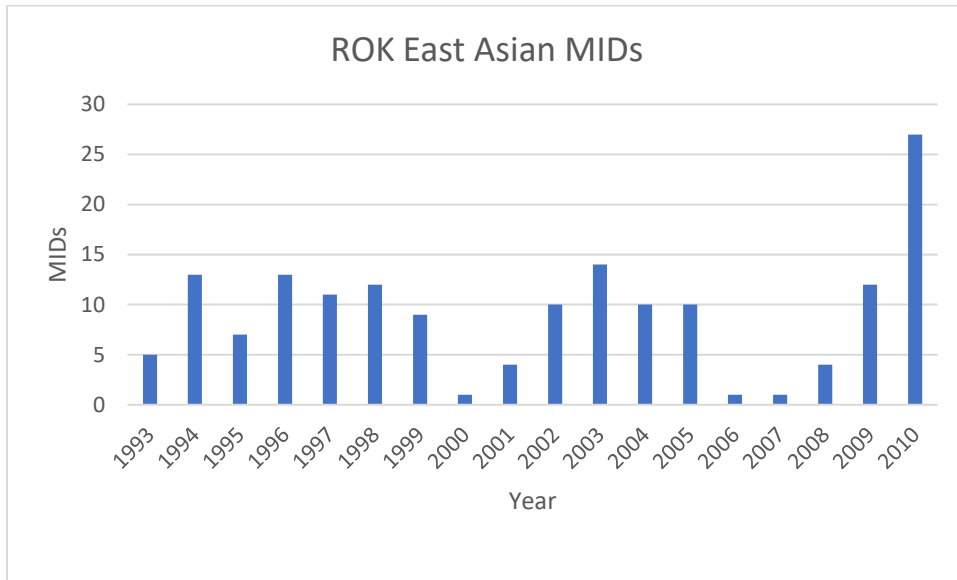
Sources: Defense Manpower Data Center (2018); The Heritage Foundation Global U.S. Troop Deployment.

Appendix H

ROK East Asian MIDs

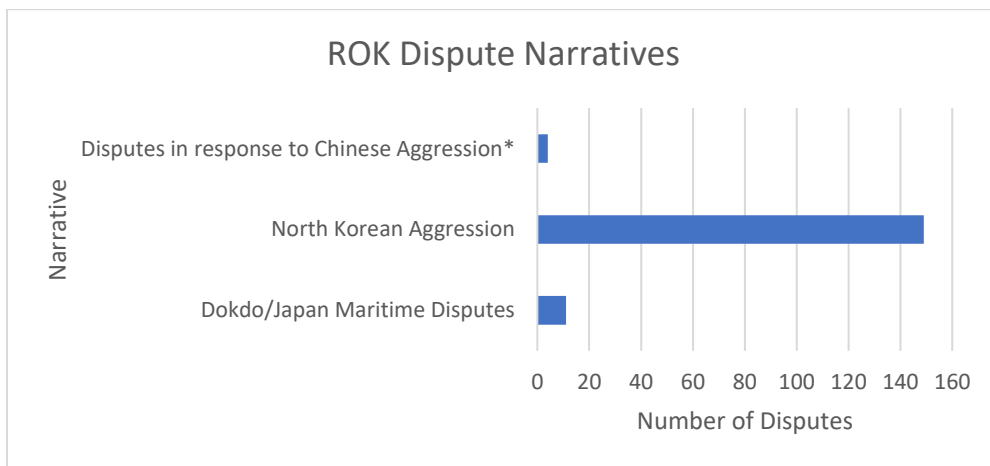
Figure 1:

ROK MIDs



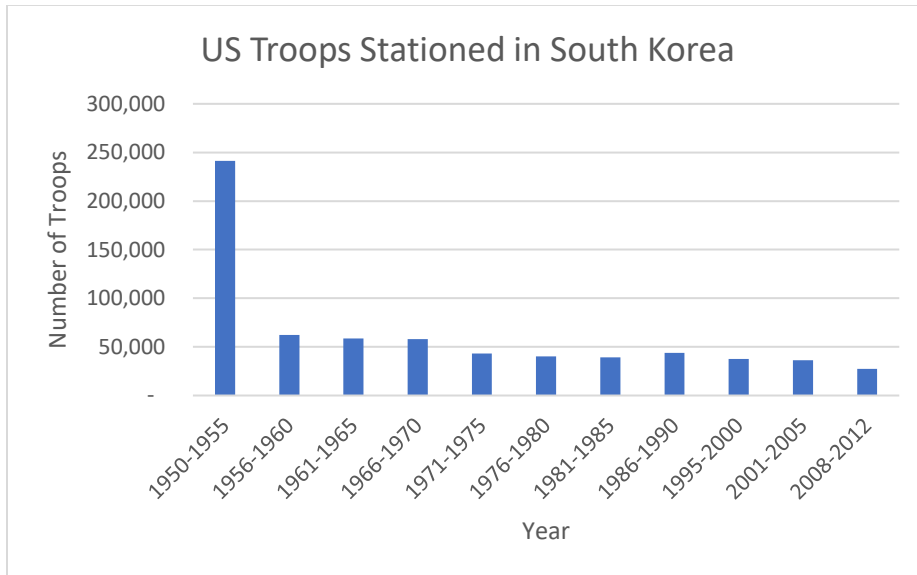
Source: *Correlates of War Militarized Interstate Dispute Dataset Version 4.2.*

Figure 2:



Source: *Correlates of War Militarized Interstate Dispute Dataset Version 4.2.*

Figure 3:

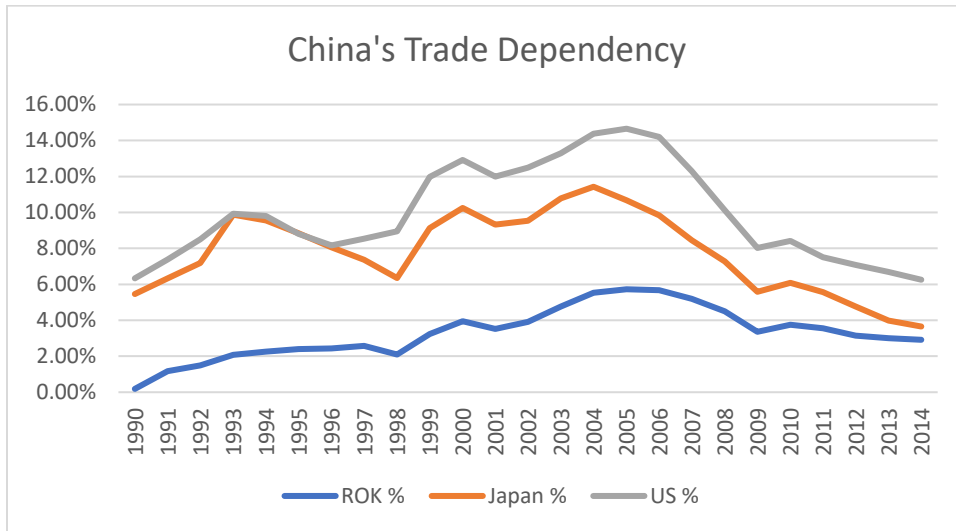


Sources: Defense Manpower Data Center (2018); The Heritage Foundation Global U.S. Troop Deployment.

Appendix I

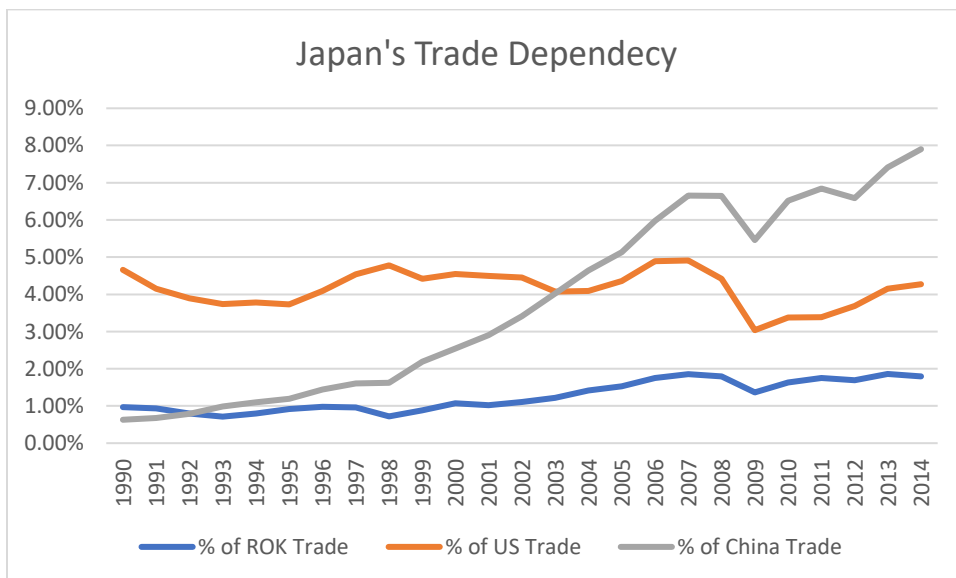
Trade Dependency of China, Japan, ROK and US

Figure 1:



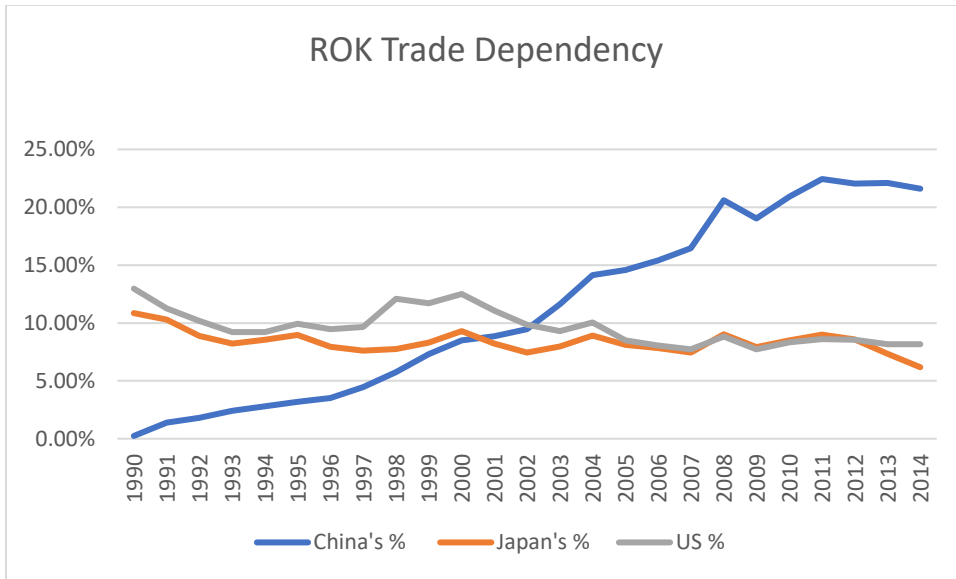
Sources: *Correlates of War Dyadic Trade Dataset Version 4.0; World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019.)*

Figure 2:



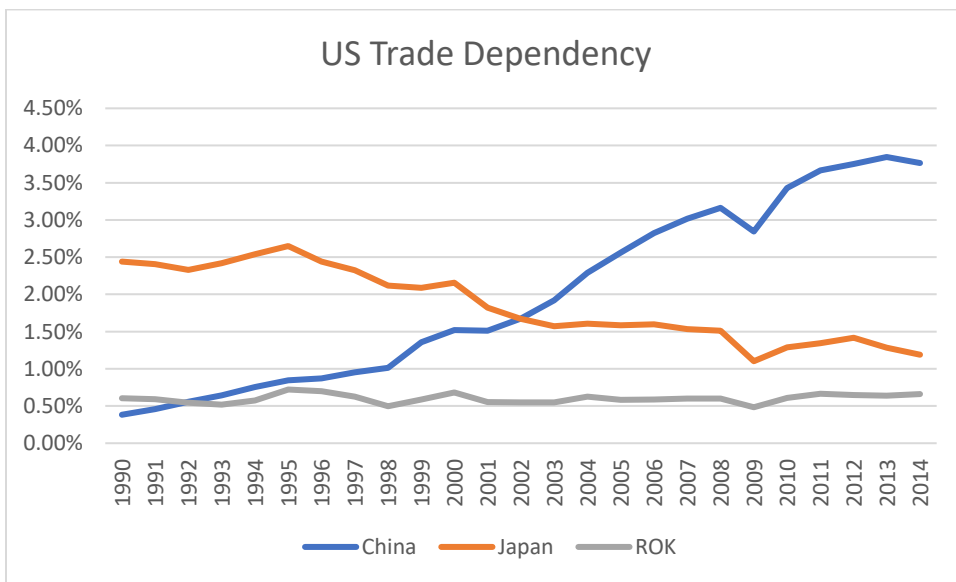
Sources: *Correlates of War Dyadic Trade Dataset Version 4.0; World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019.)*

Figure 3:



Sources: *Correlates of War Dyadic Trade Dataset Version 4.0; World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019).*

Figure 4:



Sources: *Correlates of War Dyadic Trade Dataset Version 4.0; World Bank Data International Comparison Program Database (2019).*