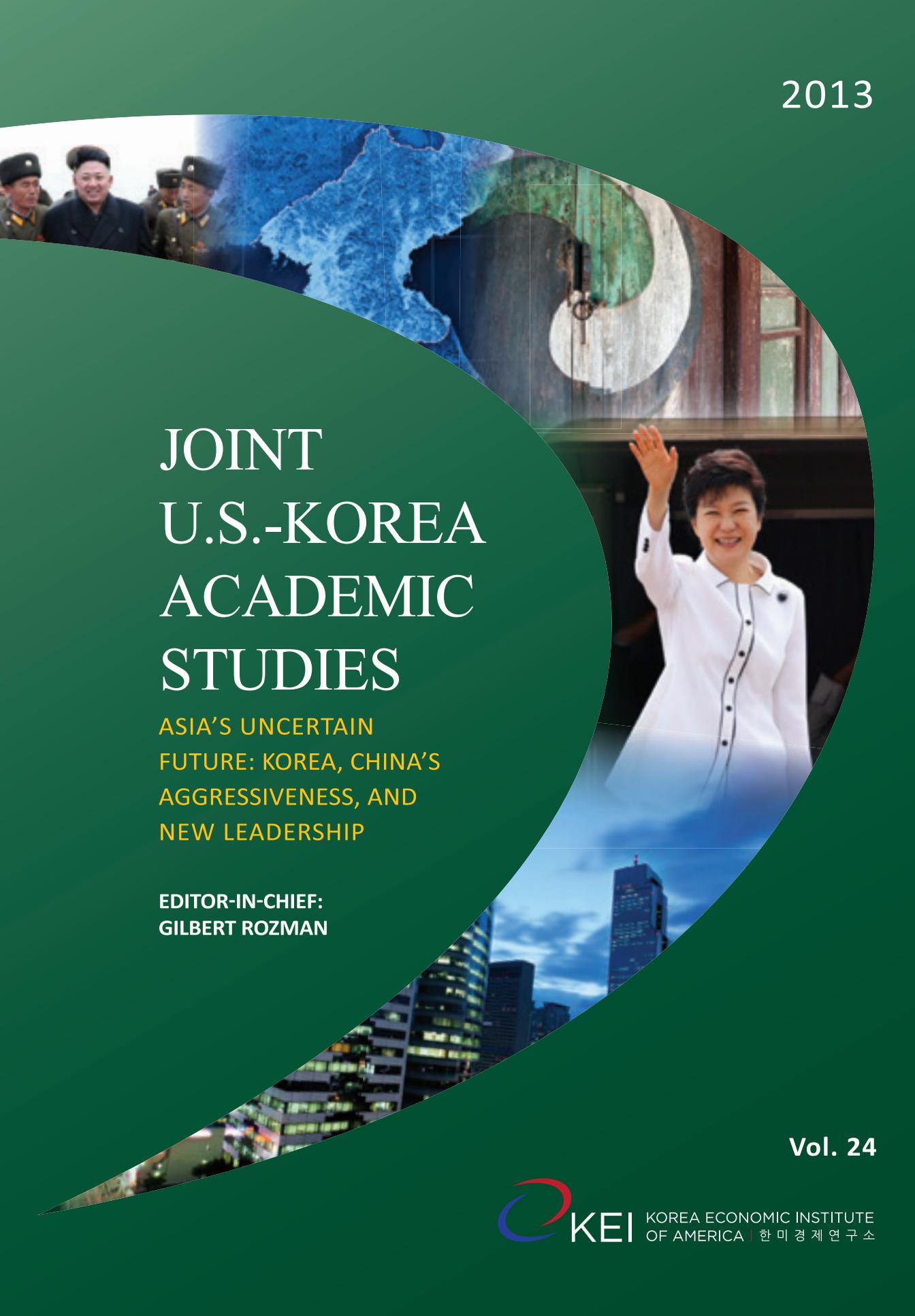


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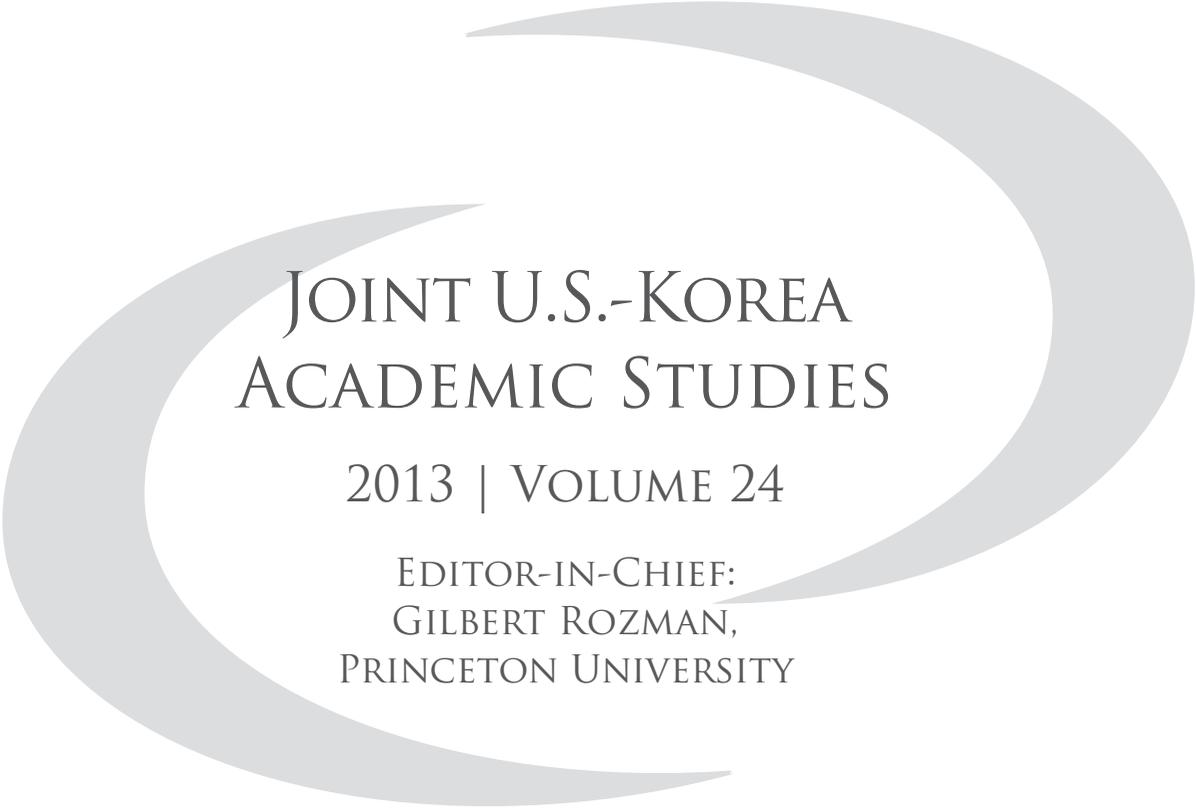


# JOINT U.S.-KOREA ACADEMIC STUDIES

ASIA'S UNCERTAIN  
FUTURE: KOREA, CHINA'S  
AGGRESSIVENESS, AND  
NEW LEADERSHIP

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:  
GILBERT ROZMAN

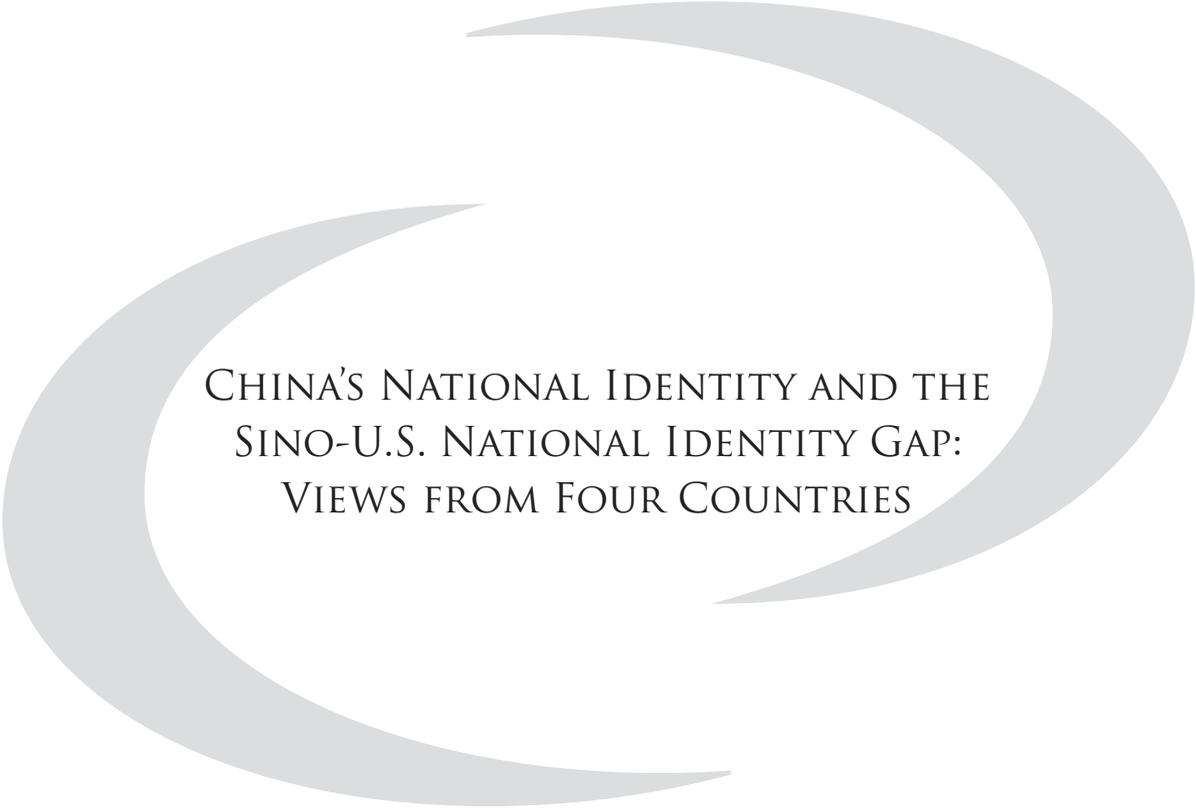
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CHINA'S NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE  
SINO-U.S. NATIONAL IDENTITY GAP:  
VIEWS FROM FOUR COUNTRIES



# The View from Japan

Ming Wan

How do the Japanese view the Sino-U.S. national identity gap? Their views are naturally informed by their own national identities and their national identity gaps with China and the United States, while also viewing the Sino-U.S. relationship through the lens of Japan's perceived national interests. They long regarded Japan as a natural bridge between the two countries, briefly feared that the two would have found an affinity at Japan's expense, and recently have found consolation in the notion that irreconcilable differences are driving China and the United States far apart. This progression is traced below before this paper concentrates on the recent Sino-U.S. gap, noting Japan's overlap with its ally, but also observing Japan's loss of interest in learning from the United States.

After the end of the Second World War, the Japanese imagined their country to be a natural bridge between China and the United States, a clear reflection of their national identity as a country both in Asia and the West. Yes, Japanese also took pride as an Asian country that modernized first and, by the 1970s, as the leader in bringing development to Asian countries, giving it a solid basis to think from both perspectives. But in assuming it is entitled to be a bridge between China and the United States, Japan necessarily regards its national identity gap with either China or the United States as much narrower than that between China and the United States. Thus, the Japanese often suggested, explicitly or subtly, that they could help the Americans understand China because they connect with fellow Asians in a deeper and more nuanced fashion than the latter. The Japanese also often lectured the Chinese, not always subtly, about the modern international rules, which they thought they understood better than late-modernizing, non-Japanese Asians.

Apart from that primary identity, there was also growing concern among some Japanese elites since around the 1990s that the Chinese and Americans might be similar to each other in personality traits, communications styles, and a habit for strategic thinking, leaving Japan as the odd man out. This identity anxiety coincided with a fear of "Japan passing" from the United States. But it went deeper to the Japanese insecurity about their place in the world or, more exactly, about Japan as a border culture caught between two universal civilizations that differ in substance but connect in universality.

Japan's relationship with China has worsened sharply since the Chinese fishing boat collision incident in September 2010. The relationship between the United States and China also became more tense around the same time. Not surprisingly, the Japanese closely follow the relationship between China and the United States, the two major "others" for Japan. Much of the Japanese analysis in this regard is based on geopolitical calculations,<sup>1</sup> but national identity has been an important part of the Japanese thought process. There is now a strong Japanese wish to see irreconcilable differences between China and the United States, focusing on political values and political regimes, the status quo power versus the challenger, and international rules and responsibilities.

Underlying that dominant trend in the Japanese view of China as a rising threat and of an enlarging Sino-U.S. national identity gap, there is also a less visible, basically unconscious, undercurrent of Japan adapting to the Chinese system (not as a conscious model to learn from), combining political control and market competition, decisive decision making and social mobility, which is drawn from long intertwined Japan-China exchanges entrenched in Japanese traditions. While Japan has moved closer to the United States strategically, it has ceased to

learn consciously from the United States. Japan's subconscious adaption to the Chinese system does not indicate China's growing influence in world affairs. In the short run at least, it results from competition with China and will lead to greater tensions with Beijing.

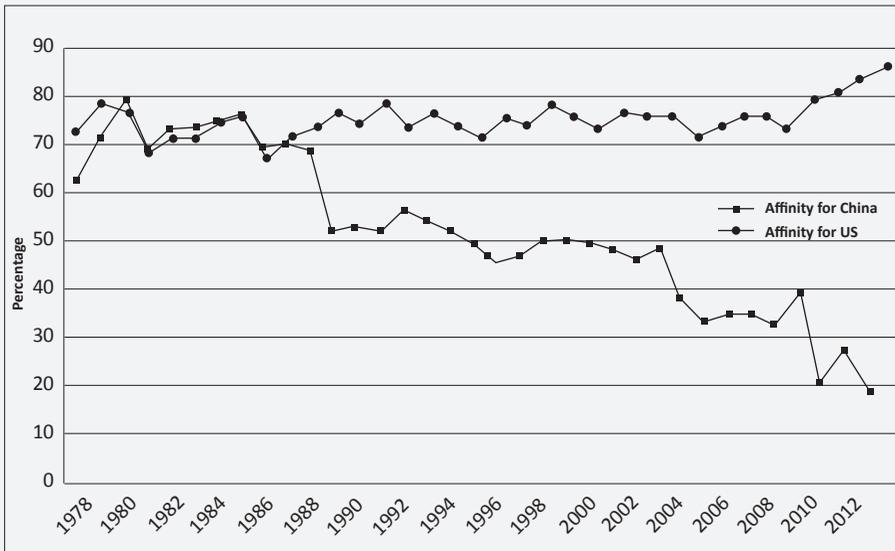
It is challenging methodologically to pinpoint the Japanese views of the Sino-U.S. national identity gap. The Japanese do not normally frame their analysis from the angle of national identity gaps. It is harder still to find the Japanese analysis of the Sino-U.S. national identity gap. Even if we find "perfect quotes" of some Japanese using that framework, it does not necessarily mean that mainstream Japanese see things that way. There is not much secondary academic analysis in Japan analyzing this issue. But this chapter builds on my previous research on the national identities in Sino-Japanese relations, particularly as a participant in several related research projects led by Gilbert Rozman, which has produced some of the best theoretical and empirical research in this research area. Furthermore, based on observation and research conducted as a visiting professor in Japan from August 2010 to August 2012, I discerned that national identities matter even more now than before in Japan. More than casual observation, I anchor my analysis in empirical research, drawing from reading newspapers and weeklies, viewing television programs, analyzing Japanese books and opinion polls, and partaking of conversations and interviews. The Internet is, arguably, the most fertile ground for an identity-based assessment of growing Japanese tensions with China. While I do think that the extreme views often found there are partly shared and largely tolerated by mainstream thinkers, this chapter does not focus on them. The aim is a more mainstream perspective.

This chapter follows in chronological order: 1) the Japanese view of the Sino-U.S. national identity gaps through the 2000s;<sup>2</sup> 2) diverse current Japanese views of the Sino-U.S. national identity gap; and 3) a deeper look at Japanese national identity and its historical trajectory, showing tension with conscious thinking about relations with the United States vis-à-vis China. A fourth section presents the conclusions from this analysis.

## THE JAPANESE VIEW OF THE SINO-U.S. IDENTITY GAP THROUGH THE 2000S

To gauge the Japanese views of the Sino-U.S. national identity gap, one wishes for tracking polls with a question such as: "Do you think China and the United States are similar or different and why?" One can also include control questions to ask about views of the degree of similarity of the Japanese to the Chinese or the Americans. No such data exist, as far as I know. However, we can make some inferences from existing polls. Since 1978, the prime minister's office has asked the public about its sense of affinity with some countries viewed as important for Japan. Figure 1 shows that the Japanese now feel much closer to the United States than to China, with 84.5 percent feeling close to the former and 18.0 percent to the latter in 2012.

One way to interpret the trends depicted is that the wider "sensitive difference" perceived with the Chinese indicates a growing national identity gap. Sensitive difference is not substantive difference. The Japanese assessment of China was simply too rosy in the late 1970s when that country had just emerged from the disastrous Cultural Revolution. It is actually striking that the Japanese felt the same way about China and the United States in the 1980s, leaving other countries in the dust. The Japanese perception of the sensitive difference with the Chinese adjusted to the substantive difference in the 1990s, but it is, arguably, overshooting in the

**Figure 1. Japanese Affinity for China Versus the United States (1978-2012)**

negative direction at present. It is not clear whether the Japanese affinity results from a sense of similarity with the Americans or a sense of finding the United States trustworthy even if it is different culturally. But we readily observe how conservatives (dominating in the Japanese system) and progressive forces (weakening in their appeal) both have something to like about the United States and plenty of things to dislike about China, national security for the former and human rights and democracy for the latter.

The prime minister's office polls do not ask the Japanese about their view of the Sino-U.S. national identity gap. National identities are deeper than simply a sense of like or dislike. One may dislike one's twin brother too. The Japanese national identities are complex, conflicting with each other and evolving due to the internal logic of these identities and to changes in the external environment.<sup>3</sup> To see through the fog, I discuss two prominent identity-driven orientations, namely Japan as a bridge between China and the United States and Japan as an outlier from both China and the United States.

For much of the postwar era, the Japanese felt strongly that Japan could serve as a bridge between China and the United States. This orientation was convenient in both international relations and domestic politics. Who does not want to be a bridge? Using network analysis in vogue at present, we can see why one wants to be a bridge or a hub, which gives a competitive advantage over those not situated as favorably. A bridge was a good compromise in Japan's contentious domestic context, with everyone seeing some merits in such an orientation. With the United States, the Japanese often suggested that they could help the Americans understand China, which resulted from a national identity that knew fellow Asians better. Such sentiment was ever present in the Japanese analysis of American policies in Asia. Sometimes, it came up in intergovernmental talks with U.S. officials. Citing just one example, at a bilateral trade and economic cooperation talk held in Kyoto in July 1966, Fujiyama Aiichiro, the director general of the Economic Planning Agency, criticized America's Vietnam policy, reasoning that political

instability results from thinking only about democratic ideals and suggesting that Asian history is different from that of the United States and Europe. U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk responded sarcastically that he could not understand why only Asians can understand Asians.<sup>4</sup>

The Americans rightly assumed that they could understand China on their own. In fact, the experience of the Second World War and what happened before shows that the Japanese understanding of China was seriously deficient while many Americans, at least, had a better grasp. The same may be true today. The Americans have extensive direct exchange with the Chinese leaders. There are also deep people-to-people exchanges. As an immigrant country, the United States has an expanding Asian American community that contributes to American understanding. When it comes to China, the United States has educated excellent China experts with language proficiency and extensive experience on the ground. And a large community of China-born scholars in the United States also contributes to the English language knowledge pool about China.

Another challenge for Japan to serve as a bridge was that Japan was not located in a “neutral” location in East Asian international relations. Japan was a close ally of the United States, the superpower that has military bases in Japan, and was used as a crucial location for supporting the American war efforts in Korea and Vietnam. Thus, there was much illusion in thinking of Japan as serving as a bridge. In foreign policy practice, other Asian countries and the United States did not use Japan as a bridge. The United States and China maintained some contact in Warsaw, and Rumania and Pakistan served as the messengers to 1972. Vietnam negotiated with the United States in Paris, not Tokyo. That Japan sustained a myth about its special role should not be seen as unusual, but it serves as a vital clue about how national identity has shaped Japan’s foreign policy orientation.

Imagining Japan serving as a bridge is a well-intentioned ideal for connecting the other two countries in a positive fashion. This national identity-driven orientation matters in diplomatic practice as well. While Japan’s opinion of China began to decline sharply after June 4, 1989, its self-consciousness about becoming a bridge between China and the United States reached a peak in the early 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Whether China was violating human rights was not a serious concern for many Japanese as long as China was viewed as on good terms with their country. In this period, awareness of a widening Sino-U.S. identity gap amid troubled relations also emboldened Japanese to foresee a rare opportunity.

With difficulties in their relationship with China and realization of the degree of economic problems the country faced, the Japanese felt increasingly insecure, which was reflected in a new assessment of the relationship between China and the United States. In the 1990s, there was overwhelming concern expressed in public or private conversations that the United States now viewed China as more important than Japan, thus bypassing Tokyo. Japan, in stages, became far more concerned about making sure the United States was on its side than about bridging the gap between China and the United States.

One Japanese concern that came up often, particularly in private conversations, was the observation that the Chinese are more similar to the Westerners in some key personality traits such as direct, forceful expression of opinions and a natural habit for thinking strategically. The Japanese were also concerned that the Chinese government was manipulating the Americans to

marginalize Japan. The fact that Chinese President Jiang Zemin paid tribute to the United States at Pearl Harbor during his state visit in October 1997 convinced many Japanese of the Chinese plot, which partly explained the difficulties Jiang would face during his later visit to Japan. Yet, as the visit showed, China bears much of the responsibility for shifting away from reassuring Japan to the sort of posture Jiang displayed in his 1998 visit, which served to reduce Japanese trust.

The Japanese sense of insecurity partly resulted from a period of intense American criticism of Japan as different from the Western democracies. That experience helps to explain why Japanese views of some Sino-U.S. disputes were not unsympathetic to China as late as the 2000s. For example, Japanese analysts often saw the U.S. critique of unfair Chinese trading practices as rejection of “*ishitsusei*” [heterogeneity], similar to American arguments against Japan in earlier years. Unlike the United States, Japan had mostly enjoyed trade surpluses with China if one views Japan’s exports to Hong Kong as largely transit trade to China. Japan’s trade surpluses against the United States decreased through its investment in China and the formation of East Asian production networks.

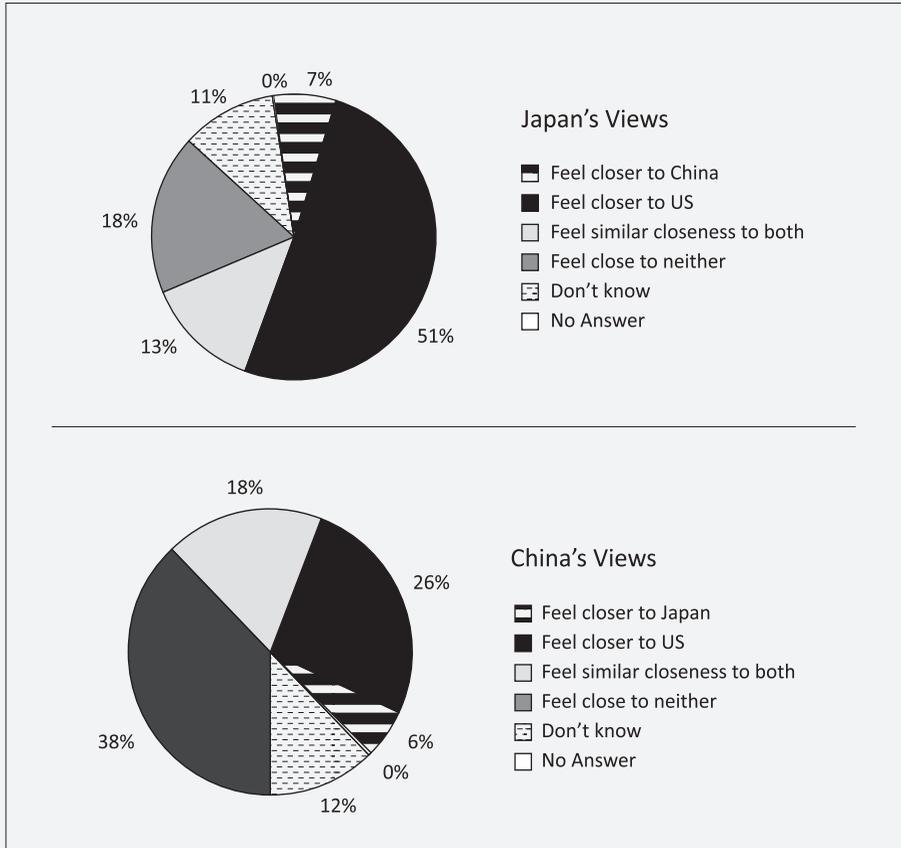
## CURRENT JAPANESE VIEWS OF THE SINO-U.S. IDENTITY GAP

Sino-Japanese relations experienced a sharp decline in late 2010, crucially in the aftermath of the September fishing boat collision, reflected in the opinion polls in Figure 1.<sup>6</sup> With another round of heightened tension after the Noda government purchased three disputed Senkaku islands (Diaoyudao for China or Tiaoyutai for Taiwan) from a Japanese landowner in early September 2012, Japanese views of China worsened still. Increasingly aware of the Chinese discourse on Japan with a widening identity gap, the Japanese public feels more and more alienated from China. By contrast, views of the United States improved further with America’s quick and massive disaster relief efforts in Operation Tomodachi. Figure 2 shows that contrast more clearly.

The Genron polls, which started only in 2005, offer a more direct comparison of Japanese views toward China versus the United States than the prime minister’s office polls used in Figure 1. They asked how close Japanese and Chinese feel toward the other country versus the United States for the first time in 2012, revealing that the Japanese overwhelmingly feel closer to the United States (51 percent) than to China (7 percent). By contrast, the Chinese polled also feel closer to the United States (26 percent) than to Japan (6 percent), but a larger share likes neither (38 percent). The United States is in a favorable position since both the Japanese and Chinese like it better than their neighbor.

The Genron polls do not ask the Japanese about their assessment of how close the Chinese and Americans feel toward each other relative to Japan. But they contain some interesting information to help us understand the Japanese view of the Sino-U.S. national identity gap. In particular, the polls ask why the polled feel close or not close to China. Not surprisingly, a main reason for the Japanese not to like China relates to the territorial dispute, which a majority of Japanese acknowledge exists, in contrast to the government position. The Japanese are also concerned about China competing for natural resources in a self-centered fashion and about China’s rising military power. These geopolitical and geoeconomic calculations are not divorced from national identity tension. In particular, as Japan’s recent territorial tension with all its neighbors shows, how one understands the

**Figure 2. Genron Polls**



Source: Genron, accessed on August 8, 2012, <http://www.genron-npo.net/world/genre/cat119/2012-a.html>

past has much to do with geopolitics in East Asia. The Genron polls show that 44 percent of the polled in 2012 view Chinese criticism of Japan's past as a key reason for not liking China while only 4.9 percent cite the past war itself as the reason. By contrast, the Chinese polled overwhelmingly (78.6 percent) cite Japan's past aggression as the main reason for not liking Japan. Thus, the Chinese view the dispute over Diaoyudao as a continuation of Japan's past aggression against China while the Japanese view China as showing interest in the Senkakus only with the news of rich oil deposits in the region in the 1970s. More directly, a significant portion of the polled cite more explicit identity reasons for disliking China, with 48.3 percent seeing China as not following the international rules and 26.5 percent citing China's different political system. To add to the identity gap with the political system at issue, 67.9 percent of the Japanese view China as a socialist, communist country. On the flip side, only 15.6 percent of the Chinese view Japan as a democratic country, while 46.2 percent assess it as militaristic.

Building on this relevant statistical information, I examine how the Japanese view the actual events and trends between China and the United States based on analysis of

Japanese television programs, newspapers, and magazines as well as talks with scholars and officials. There have been some major events in East Asian international relations such as the American “pivot” in the Pacific, high-profile American official visits to the region, and military exercises. A Sino-U.S. rivalry in the Pacific is intensifying, while the two countries continue to search for strategic cooperation over a broad range of issues.

The Japanese media analyses reflect Japan’s specific interests, mostly from either a geopolitical or geoeconomic angle. Similar to American coverage, *Asahi shimbun* focused on the Chinese yuan exchange issue when covering the meeting between Obama and Wen Jiabao in New York on September 23, 2010.<sup>7</sup> Unlike past coverage, there is less concern about Japan passing based on the assessment that the United States needs Japan more as it has declined relative to China and faces China’s growing challenge.

Japanese no longer worry much about Sino-U.S. tension being negative for Japan. Rather, they seem to prefer greater tension, consciously or unconsciously aiming to shape Sino-U.S. interaction, as in letting their own disputes with China drive the Sino-U.S. bilateral relationship, forcing the United States to take Japan’s side. The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), for example, urged the United States not to “assume a neutral stance regarding territorial rights” to the Senkakus.<sup>8</sup> The Japanese had a high regard for former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, particularly for her pro-active policy toward Asia. The Japanese media closely covered her attendance at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on July 12, 2012. The Japanese shared concerns with some ASEAN countries and appeared to be disappointed that, on this occasion, Clinton was restrained. *Asahi* was disappointed, as were many in the United States, that there was no direct confrontation and ASEAN could not agree on a declaration on China due to internal division and China’s influence.<sup>9</sup>

As Sino-Japanese disputes have gone multilateral, public exchanges to win support for one’s supposedly reasonable positions have intensified, while making the other side look bad. The Chinese government ran ads in mainstream Western media first. The Japanese also beefed up their campaigns after privately sounding the alarm to American officials and analysts about a rising China well before the fishing boat incident. It was in Japan’s interest to make sure that the United States regarded China with ample suspicion, and well-placed Japanese strove to reshape the American view of China.

With bilateral tension so much more intense and so much more open, there is a greater push to make the Americans aware of their differences from the Chinese. As an extreme example of some Japanese appealing directly to the Americans and seeking to frame U.S.-China relations in good versus evil terms, Okawa Ryuho, the founder of the Happy Science Group, purchased a one-page ad in *The Washington Post* to urge Obama and the United States to stand together with the Japanese and fight against “China’s desire for expansion and world domination.” He reasoned that god-loving America and Japan are natural allies against atheist China and North Korea.<sup>10</sup> However distorted this assessment, given the much larger number of Christians in China than in Japan and the shared Buddhist tradition in these two states,<sup>11</sup> national identity involves imagination that may have a weak factual basis. The imagination of the Japanese nation as continuously militaristic by many Chinese, as revealed in the above Genron polls, is a prime example.

If we look deeper, we find a complex Japanese identity of seeing the United States as maintaining the international rules while China is challenging them. However true this is, it is also a matter of national identity when a typical Japanese analyst talks about China not respecting the existing international rules but finds it difficult to define these rules or give concrete examples of violations, taking for granted that China is doing so.

The Japanese now focus more on differences in political regimes. A functioning democracy, Japan spawns a genuine value gap with China.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the Chinese government's anger over Liu Xiaobo's winning of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 also received much Japanese media attention. Similarly, blind Chinese activist Chen Guangcheng's dramatic escape from house arrest to the U.S. embassy in Beijing in April 2012 was covered in great detail in the Japanese media.

Since Japanese do not think they bear any responsibility for worsening relations, one way to explain them is to argue that an authoritarian regime in China is the problem. There is no question that lack of democracy has created huge problems for Chinese domestic politics and foreign policy, including its relations with Japan, but national identity distorts the discourse. For example, Vietnam, similar to China in political regime, is portrayed positively in the Japanese media because it is viewed as a natural ally against China. It is striking that Japanese media largely portrayed Abe's visit in January 2013 to Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia as showcasing his value diplomacy with countries that share the values of freedom and democracy to check communist China.<sup>13</sup>

Some Japanese also imagine a Japanese system more democratic and open than it actually is. Similar events are narrated differently. As an example, *Asahi shimbun* noted on July 30, 2012 that Japan's ongoing anti-nuclear demonstrations were orderly in contrast to the Taisho period in Japan's past and to the Chinese demonstrations against the Japanese firm Oji's waste processing plan, highlighting the difference between a mature democracy and a non-democratic China.<sup>14</sup> However, while *Asahi shimbun* put the latest anti-nuclear demonstration on the front page, it had earlier put a major anti-nuclear demonstration on the back page while making rising eel prices a feature story.<sup>15</sup> There was an even more violent anti-Japanese firm demonstration in India, with two Japanese nationals injured and one Indian employee killed, but the Japanese media chose not to highlight that story, unlike its extensive coverage of a Chinese demonstration against a Japanese firm in China. China is the other and India is not. Rivalry rather than democracy is driving Japanese thinking.

## TWISTS IN JAPANESE NATIONAL IDENTITY

While Japan's opinion of China has sunk ever lower and its affinity with the United States remains high, one should also note that Japanese identities are complex and evolve in a way not necessarily consistent with expressed views. This is evident in two twists in identity related to the United States and China. First, Japan has turned away from Americanization since around the mid 2000s due to a growing inward-looking tendency. Second, some reforming Japanese politicians seek, unconsciously, to adapt elements of the Chinese system as if they are more in keeping with Japan's aims.

Growing tension with China and closer security cooperation with the United States do not necessarily mean a narrower national identity gap with the United States. Politicians with such strong right wing views as Ishihara Shintaro are politically active and influential when they would remain on the fringe in other advanced democracies. Ishihara was a highly popular mayor of Japan's capital city from 1999. He stepped down at the end of October 2012 to form a new national political party, which then merged with the Japan Restoration Party founded by a conservative populist politician Hashimoto Toru, the mayor of the City of Osaka. Ishihara now leads the Japan Restoration Party, which emerged as a close third in the Lower House elections held on December 16, 2012. Provocateurs, who stir up disputes and force issues on the national government that exacerbate disputes with other countries, have had a notorious history in recent decades.

The Japanese ultranationalists continue to fight the Second World War by whitewashing history. They were initially more angry at the United States than any other country. It long has made them feel humiliated and agitated. Ishihara, who in 1989 co-authored the famous book *Japan that Can Say No*, views Japan as a "mistress" of the United States, the cause of an extreme sense of national shame.<sup>16</sup> Over time, though, Japanese nationalists have turned their anger against North Korea and China while quietly complaining about the United States with much less frequency. In the interview cited above, Ishihara mainly attacked China while observing that "our master is now on the decline—he is old and losing his physical strength."

The Japanese ultranationalists have now warmed up to the United States mainly due to their strong dislike of China. They have an exaggerated sense of national survival, now largely framed as coming from the China threat. Ishihara announced his plan to purchase the Senkakus while visiting the United States in April 2012. To make that connection even more explicit, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government purchased an ad in the *Wall Street Journal* on July 27, 2012 to appeal directly for American support for its plan to purchase the Senkakus. The ad warned darkly that "failure to support the Asian nations confronting China would result in the United States losing the entire Pacific Ocean."<sup>17</sup> Ishihara and those who share his worldview want the United States to back up Japan hundred percent over narrowly defined issues such as territorial disputes.

By picking history fights, Japanese conservatives enlarge the national identity gap with the United States. Due to the controversy over a comfort woman memorial in New Jersey in which Japanese diplomats reportedly protested to local officials, the movement is now spreading to the rest of the country. Glendale, California marked Korean Comfort Women Day in early August 2012.<sup>18</sup> American public opinion as reflected in mainstream media outlets generally views Japan as turning conservative and has reservations about its new prime minister. For example, the Abe cabinet launched on December 26, 2012 was assessed by *The Economist* as one of "radical nationalists."<sup>19</sup> Its editors opined that while the United States should support Japan when China is aggressive, that support "should not extend to rewriting history or provoking China (let alone South Korea)."<sup>20</sup>

As a more tolerant democracy, the United States has been more successful in handling national identity gaps. Thus, the developments discussed above will do little to dampen security cooperation, but they do show the limits of nationalist manipulation of messages in the United States. Moreover, if Japan worsens relations with neighboring countries due to

its leaders' revisionist views of history, that would complicate American national interests in the region. As Glen Fukushima noted, while Abe is a strong pro-American leader and intends to strengthen the alliance, "his revisionist views of history and controversial views of Asia could lead him to speak and act in ways that exacerbate tensions with neighboring countries, especially China and South Korea."<sup>21</sup>

More broadly, the Japanese, particularly the young, are becoming more inward-looking, which reflects a greater degree of psychological distancing with the outside world. It is noted both inside and outside Japan that Japanese young people are becoming less inclined to go abroad to study, compared to other Asian countries, particularly South Korea and China. There are no incentives for them to go abroad when competition for jobs at home is becoming so time consuming and network-dependent. But there is also an underlying identity shift. Many find it more comfortable staying at home than dealing with difficult foreign customs. This shift has an impact on the Japanese sense of identity and will become even more pronounced when the currently young take center stage.

On the elite level, there is much confusion about Japanese national identities. As Rozman noted, for Japanese, "the post-Cold War era offered tantalizing glimpses of breakthroughs in national identity, but these were increasingly submerged in bitter disappointments ... The search for new clarity about identity has led to dead ends, as those who favor revisionism centered on the war (*sensoron*) have won a following but no prospect of political consensus and those who favor the idealism of the East Asian community have found a region in turmoil under China's unwelcome quest for leadership."<sup>22</sup> Some Japanese still search for a unique Japanese identity that does not derive from anti-American or anti-Chinese feelings,<sup>23</sup> but growing nationalism is more based on fear than hope, particularly about a rising China.

Japan is not unique in facing identity confusion, particularly with globalization and modern communication technologies. But the Japanese sense of anxiety is arguably among the strongest in the world for the simple fact that it is the second or third largest economy in the world but feels culturally separate.<sup>24</sup> Japan is still torn between the East and the West. By contrast, the Chinese often simply assume that they are the East and have fewer qualms in competing or integrating with the West at the same time. South Koreans arguably are more emphatic of their identity uniqueness than the Japanese at present, but they are also charging outward to the West and East, carving out a large economic and cultural space in Asia and the world.

Mainstream Japanese politics have become increasingly conservative, as defined in the Japanese context. Some bravely seek a synthesis. As an example, the then-ruling DPJ came up with a draft of its party program, revealed to the leadership on August 7, 2012. It emphasized that "with the imperial system as foundation," Japan should further polish its unique features that have resulted from integration and development of cultures of "ancient and modern, the East and the West" [*kokon tōzai*].<sup>25</sup> But as the DPJ is formed of different ideological stocks, there was immediate dissent expressed against such a conservative view of history.<sup>26</sup> The December 2012 Lower House elections revealed a clear trend of parties moving to the right. Abe Shinzo, the party chief of the LDP, pushed a strong conservative agenda during the election campaign, mindful of an even more

conservative Japan Restoration Party. The three conservative parties won 405 seats in the 480-seat Lower House, with some other parties being conservative as well.

However difficult it is to draw a straight line between an expressed view and a policy outcome, we observe a continuous emphasis on Japan having unique features that are different from both the East and the West and on the centrality of those features to the way Japan must act. That partly explains a degree of uncompromising, fundamentalist thinking, particularly when it comes to Japan's disputes with other countries.

Japan is not looking at the United States or the West for inspiration right now except in the security arena.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, some of the earlier "Americanizing efforts" by reformers such as Koizumi Junichiro have been blamed for enlarging the wealth gap and threatening social stability in the country. The electoral reform and creation of a two-party system modeled after the United States and Great Britain is also viewed as only creating political paralysis. Japanese thinking in this regard partly reflects blaming others for reforms that were not carried out, but national identity plays a crucial role in these reflections that perceive Americanization as threatening Japan's unique qualities. Some remain critical of the United States as greedy capitalist in contrast to a harmonious Japan.

The Japanese who advocate reform to deal with Japan's supposed national crisis look up to the Meiji heroes. The American Occupation that has left a strong institutional legacy is something they would rather forget. It is striking how difficult it is to find any museums dedicated to the American Occupation in a country where everything seems to be memorialized. Moreover, as some Japanese thinkers note, the Meiji Restoration also represented partially a move towards the Chinese system.<sup>28</sup> Following the China study school founded by Naito Konan (1866-1934), they argued that Song China was the first true modernizing country with a secular state, a merit-based selection system for officials, and a competitive market economy. In their view, Tokugawa Japan took a different path than China, but Japan came to represent the Chinese system more through the Meiji Restoration, which is better translated as "rejuvenation" in English. They point out that rising political stars such as Hashimoto Toru represent an unconscious attempt to complete the transformation of the Japanese state begun in the Meiji era. While the "sinicization" argument is still a marginal academic view in a country that strongly dislikes China at present, it illustrates the possibilities in imagining national identity made possible because of the long Sino-Japanese interaction.

Watching Hashimoto almost daily on Japanese television suggested that while he is one of a few Japanese leaders capable of arousing the public, he also has the potential to be a Chinese style strong leader, which may be reason to be on guard. The seemingly invincible Hashimoto began to stumble in late 2012. The December 2012 Lower House election restored power to the LDP that had not really changed. Opinion polls now show the LDP as the most popular party, far ahead of Hashimoto's Japan Restoration Party. Abe's vision of "beautiful Japan" is winning the day. At the same time, one should watch an undercurrent of Japanese adapting to the Chinese system, which does not mean integration into the Chinese sphere of influence. In fact, those who are subconsciously adapting to the Chinese system are more likely to clash with the Chinese state.

## CONCLUSION

With growing concerns about a rising China's attitude toward Japan, the Japanese have an increasingly lower sense of affinity with China and a higher level of affinity with the United States. The United States has an almost insurmountable advantage over China at this point. Among other reasons, as a far more tolerant democracy, it has given the Japanese a significant space for national identity discussions. Even in historical memory, the United States respects the Japanese, with the American ambassador's attendance at the atomic bombing memorials in Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a case in point. The United States does not confront the Japanese historical narrative even though the United States has its own convictions about the "Good War." The American government also does not take on Japanese nationalists or fight history diplomatically. By contrast, China's national identity-based legitimation and how it handles the history issue on the diplomatic level clash head on with the Japanese national identity process.

The Japanese are viewing Sino-U.S. relations from a multi-level complex of national interests and identities. There is now a greater mismatch between the distribution of interests, superficial affinity, and deeper national identity anxieties. Japan has a strong symmetry of strategic interests with the United States and wants the United States to side more strongly with it to manage a rising China. It welcomes and thinks it sees an enlarging national identity gap between China and the United States. At the same time, Japan continues to have a strong economic interest to leverage a rising China's rapidly expanding market, and it is unconsciously adapting to the Chinese system rather than copying the American system at present. Rather than choosing sides in this perceived clash of national identities between China and the United States, it is widening the gap with the United States on matters at the core of its identity even if that seems inconsistent with closer security ties and may be overlooked as the gap with China widens further.

## ENDNOTES

1. See for example Noboru Yamaguchi, "A Japanese Perspective on U.S. Rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific Region," *Asia Policy*, No. 15 (January 2013), pp. 7-12.
2. For my analysis of Japanese views of the national identity gap with China, see Ming Wan, "National Identities and Sino-Japanese Relations," in Gilbert Rozman, ed., *National Identities and Bilateral Relations: Widening Gaps in East Asia and Chinese Demonization of the United States* (Washington, D.C. and Stanford CA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 65-93.
3. For analyses of Japanese national identities, see Gilbert Rozman, "Japanese National Identity: A Six-Dimensional Analysis," in Gilbert Rozman, ed., *East Asian National Identities: Common Roots and Chinese Exceptionalism* (Washington, D.C. and Stanford, CA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 17-45; Kazuhiko Togo, "Japanese National Identity: Evolution and Prospects," in Gilbert Rozman, ed., *East Asian National Identities*, pp. 147-168; Yuichi Hosoya, "Japan's National Identity in Postwar Diplomacy: The Three Basic Principles," in Gilbert Rozman, ed., *East Asian National Identities*, pp. 169-195.
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5. Ming Wan, *Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Relations: Defining and Defending National Interests* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 87-91.
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14. *Asahi shimbun*, July 30, 2012, p. 1.
15. *Asahi shimbun*, July 17, 2012.
16. He said so in a news conference at the Foreign Correspondents Club. Hiroshi Matsubara, “Tokyo Governor Ishihara Calls out his Enemies at FCCJ,” *The Asahi shimbun*, May 29, 2012, accessed on August 31, 2012, [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind\\_news/AJ201205290082](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/AJ201205290082).
17. “Ad in Wall Street Journal Seeks U.S. Support for Senkaku Purchase Plan,” *The Japan Times*, July 29, 2012, p. 1.
18. “California City Proclaims Korean Comfort Women Day,” *The Japan Times*, August 4, 2012, p. 3.
19. Fourteen in the 19-member cabinet belong to the “League for Going to Worship Together at Yasukuni.” Thirteen are members of a nationalist think tank that rejects “apology diplomacy” and wants to return to “traditional values.” Nine cabinet members participate in an association that wants to emphasize patriotism in textbooks and denies most war atrocities. Abe and some other cabinet members also want to revise the constitution imposed by the United States. “Japan’s New Cabinet: Back to the Future,” *The Economist*, January 5, 2013, p. 29.
20. “Japanese Foreign Policy: Down-turn Abe,” *The Economist*, January 5, 2013, p. 8.
21. Glen S. Fukushima, “Japan’s Role in America’s Asia Pivot,” *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2012, A27.
22. Rozman, “Japanese National Identity,” p. 24.
23. Togo, “Japanese National Identity,” pp. 165-66.
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