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*Containment without isolation:  
Tokyo-Beijing political relations during the Cold War*

**Abstract**

Despite the vast research existing on Japan-China diplomatic rapprochement, less has been investigated by taking into account the interaction between the two actors within the framework of intervening variables that influenced their historical path. The stages that have marked the development of Japan-China relations should be, indeed, included and interpreted in the broader context of the Cold War. This paper aims at exploring how the differences between the Western and Eastern blocs, as well as the structure of the international system, have influenced the evolution of their diplomatic relations.

Methodologically, the analysis focused on an interdisciplinary perspective which draws on diplomatic history, as well as on IR stances. Theoretically, Japan-China rapprochement has been considered as resulting from the international system's structure, as well as from the pressure exercised by Washington on Tokyo's foreign policy. This approach adds nuance to our understanding of how political interaction was hampered over decades by a series of external variables and contributing factors.

**Introduction**

During the 1950s, Peking and Tokyo were separated politically and economically because of structural limitations imposed by the bipolar system (Hook, Gilson, Hughes, Dobson 2001, 164). In those years, the positions of both the countries in the international system were well defined: Japan was a U.S. ally, totally dependent on the latter's foreign strategies; China was a trustworthy friend of the USSR. In attempting to understand Japan-China relations within the Cold War context, one may start with a reinterpretation - from an international perspective - of the history of relations between the two countries, as it has been investigated so far.

It is clear that the orientation towards the "Separation of Politics and Economics" (*seikei bunri*), inaugurated by Yoshida Shigeru (1948-1954) and continued by Ikeda's administration, is not simply the result of the constraints imposed by the bipolar system. Japan, embedded within the Western bloc, could never maintain official relations with a Communist country and old friend of the Kremlin. It is important to remember that a long trip undertaken by Yoshida in 1954 brought him to Europe earlier than the U.S. According to Ferretti (2001), after the San Francisco Peace Conference he continued to cultivate political alignments with Europe (in particular with the UK, as well as with Italy), by focusing on the issues of both RPC recognition and trade with China. Many Japanese said that "this was Yoshida's *hanamichi*, or 'great departure'" (Miyazawa, Eldridge 2007, 134).

Few years later, and after two new cabinets, during Kishi Nobusuke's term (1957-1960), international trade problems inevitably became intertwined with political and strategic issues. Kishi was the best figure the Americans could hope for to lead the Japanese government. The new Premier's economic vision, his hatred for the Soviets and (unlike Yoshida and Hatoyama) his fear of getting too close to the Chinese - not to mention his love for golf - made him most welcome in Washington to Eisenhower (LaFeber 1997). Because of his political history, Kishi did not deserve much sympathy in Japan, but this did not prevent him from having excellent

personal relations with the White House. He was convinced that the rapprochement with Peking was not a priority issue in Japan's foreign politics, which he felt should focus on (non Communist) Southeast Asia and commit to making its economy more competitive (Takahashi 2000, 178-179). In the late 1950s, therefore, a new international economic era began, characterized by the rapid growth of the Japanese and European poles. This phenomenon took shape in conjunction with the process of decolonization and revealed the emergence of a slow structural change in the previous political-economic dynamics.

The American containment strategy of the 1950s greatly weighed on the evolution of Japan-China relations; the small attempts at rapprochement between China and Japan during the 1950s and 1960s were designed to circumvent the restrictions imposed by the bipolar system by trying to encourage gradual, minor contact between the two countries. But unlike the strong and solid alliances between European countries and the two superpowers, the covenants of the Asian countries with the two blocs were more volatile. One of the countries that can demonstrate how the application of bipolarism changed in some respects in the Far East is China, which went from being an ally of the USSR (then fully inside the Communist bloc) to its antagonist. One can say that during the 1960s, China isolated itself by challenging both of the superpowers and almost creating a "third bloc." In this regard, it must be pointed out that the Soviets never hid their suspicion that Peking's real intentions were to induce a confrontation between Moscow and Washington, with the emergence of China as the only power that could benefit from it. China's changing role during the Cold War should be connected primarily to the deterioration of China-USSR relations. The 1962 Cuban crisis revealed that Peking and Moscow were already ideologically distant from one another.

Unlike China, Japan maintained a clear position within the Western bloc. From the end of WWII, it was able to benefit from enormous military, security, and economic advantages provided by the U.S. The security issues were used by Yoshida as a means to "pursue the economic recovery of Japan and maintain political stability."

Gaining great advantage in the trade sector, and having secured guarantees for its own security, Japan found itself inextricably wrapped up in the American blockade of the Cold War, which produced serious effects on relations with the PRC. Japan was forced to recognize Taiwan as the one Chinese government, while unofficial business contacts with Peking were suggesting that, as soon as possible, Japan would be willing to recognize the PRC. Ikeda's realist vision of the international system did not differentiate him much from Yoshida. He saw the world order as the opposition of the Democratic and Communist blocs, and believed that Japan had the two specific tasks of "stabilizing" and contributing to peace of "Asia and thus the world" (Edström 1999, 51).

### **1. The 1950s: Engendering first signs of a thaw in Japan-China relations?**

The Sixties marked a significant historical phase in Sino-Japanese relations. The new Japanese prime minister Ikeda Hayato (1960-1964) led Japan into a very delicate period in terms of both domestic and international politics. In particular, the question of revising the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, as well as the 1960 elections, became the focus of the whole country's political attention. The previous prime minister, Kishi Nobusuke, did not promote any kind of diplomatic dialogue between China and Japan. Ikeda put an end to a period that was marked by a series of social and political turbulences, the widespread popular protests that accompanied the ending of Kishi's mandate, and then the renewal of the Security Treaty with the U.S. (Iida 2001, 69). He was required to act as a "conciliator" and shift public attention onto ambitious economic objectives. His *Kokumin shotoku baizō keikaku* ("Plan for doubling the national

income”) marked the passage from an “age of politics” (dominated by the “community of repentance,” led by Maruyama Masao) to an “age of economy.” Ikeda’s term was notable for its successes in the national economy – the so-called “GNPism” - that soon overtook the disputes regarding the military alliance with Washington (Pyle 1995, 244).

The use of *zenrin gaikō* (“friendly diplomacy”) was the instrument with which he intended to inaugurate a more “extended” foreign policy than that of his predecessor: Japan now officially entered the three “in-groups,” such as the international community, the “free world” and Asia (Edström 1999). In fact, the U.S.-Japan alliance greatly exceeded the boundaries of political and military partnership. It created a mechanism for increasing economic interdependence that transformed the nature of the relations between the two countries. The new architecture of Japan-U.S. economic and commercial exchanges certainly helped to overcome the unpopularity of the military alliance in the country.

Japan began to play increasingly important role internationally, on diplomatic and economic levels, and its admission to the OECD in April 1964 confirmed this trend. Moreover, the economic policy promoted by the new government produced impressive results. By 1960, Japan “was already the fifth-largest economy in the world” (Miller, Wich 2011, 63). This new phase coincided – and, at the same time, produced - a new course in its political relations with the West. By now, Japan was, alongside the U.S. and Western Europe, one of the “three pillars of the free world” (Iokibe 2010, 116-117). Ikeda was aware that in order to stabilize the domestic political situation, by putting down the turmoil of the Leftist forces and reducing the country’s dependence on Washington, Tokyo must continue to pursue a line of close cooperation and friendly diplomacy with both the U.S. and Europe. However, at that time, this vision was not shared by either the White House or the European powers. It was an impossible project to achieve since, understandably, Washington would not favour a process that allowed Japan to break away from the exclusive U.S. strategic orbit. According to Ming Wan (2001, 23), Japan “would change its approach corresponding to changing U.S. priorities”.

Without underestimating the profound implications that caused the special relationship with Washington, it is undeniable that China perceived Japan as a “peril,” or as a threatening presence. Ikeda confined himself to continuing the political line of his predecessors, focusing exclusively on trade issues. He followed a policy of “low posture” (*teishi-sei*) in domestic politics and a “friendly diplomacy” (*zenrin gaikō*) with all other countries, including China and the USSR (Edström 1999, 54). In fact, he showed himself, at least initially, to be willing to support diplomatic relations with Communist countries, “despite the fact that they are ideological enemies.” However, as was the case with his predecessors, Ikeda also made clear from the outset that Japan would have “to pursue a China policy within constraints set by the United States” (Edström 1999, 54).

In July 1960, a Chinese delegation that included Liu Ningyi, chairman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, visited Japan to participate in the Sixth World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. This was the first official contact since 1958, when the so-called “Nagasaki incident” caused the interruption of all contact between the two countries. A month later, Zhou Enlai met with Suzuki Kazuo, senior director of Japan-China Trade Promotion Council, to whom he announced the so-called “Three Principles of Trade” (*bōeki sangensoku*) that should rule the commercial relations between the two, according to parameters such as: an agreement between the two governments; the conclusion of private contracts; and a case-by-case assessment. Both countries, despite their differences, were aware that extensive trade would bring enormous benefits, according to the known principle of the “Separation of Politics and Economics” (*seikei bunri*). In this respect, it should be noted that while China tried in every way to break down trade barriers and search for both commercial and diplomatic relations,

Japan claimed that the principle of *seikei bunri* was one of the main pillars of Japanese foreign trade policy on which relations with China would be based.

Faced with Ikeda's cautious attitude, Peking did not remain impassive and found in the issue of the renewal of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty an opportunity to exert influence, albeit indirectly, on Japanese domestic political life. China's goals were basically to undermine the alliance between Tokyo and Washington and encourage the possibility of normalizing China-Japan relations. Peking began a campaign of protests against Japan and the U.S., attempting to involve the Japanese people and create turmoil within the country.

A few days later, on May 14, 1960, Mao Zedong condemned the Japan-U.S. alliance and supported Japanese popular protests, ensuring the help of the Chinese people. But since Tokyo still considered its alliance with Washington essential while it continued to be pressured by the U.S. (*beiatu*) on its own foreign policy, China's "wait and see" policy abruptly ended by October 1960 (Lee 1976, 42). It is from this moment that Peking decided to take its most crucial steps. On October 3, eight Chinese popular organizations and twenty Japanese delegations composed of Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and Japanese Communist Party (JCP) members, issued a joint statement in which the two sides, extremely critical of Ikeda's government, pledged to fight against a government that they regarded as "reactionary." The most serious charges made by Peking consisted for Japan in having sent Matsuno Tsuruhei, speaker of the House of Councilors, to Taiwan in August, and Foreign Minister Kosaka Zentarō to Seoul in September, to create a further military alliance against the PRC; in having supported the moratorium proposed by the U.S. on the Chinese issue, as well as introduced discussion on the Tibetan question within the UN, thus interfering in China's internal affairs; and thus in having favored, under American influence, the revival of militarism.

By analyzing the actions taken by the Ikeda administration towards China, one cannot fail to notice the wavering and indecisive attitude of the prime minister, who switched from anti-Chinese positions to ones that were quite contrary. From this one can infer that Japan was interested in diplomatic rapprochement with China but at the same time, in order to avoid hostilities with the U.S. and problems within the UN, it acted using extreme caution. In a meeting with U.S. President John F. Kennedy held in the first half of 1961, the Japanese prime minister argued that Washington should reconsider its position towards Peking since it was "unnatural" to remove a country of 600 million inhabitants from the UN. But Japan soon realized that the U.S. would not have changed its position at all. Then, to align with U.S. policy, Tokyo acted in a manner that clearly went against China. He met with Kennedy at the White House again on June 20 and 21, 1961 to discuss additional initiatives to strengthen the U.S.-Japan security alliance.

The reaction of leaders in Peking was quite harsh. China interpreted the Ikeda-Kennedy meeting at the White House as aimed at increasing Japan's hard power, and as a design to preserve American influence in Asia. Moreover, Tokyo was about to normalize its diplomatic relations with South Korea, and Peking feared that its influence in Southeast Asia would be hampered by a kind of united front made up of Japan and the U.S. along with India, Thailand, Malaysia, and South Vietnam (all countries hostile to the PRC), as well as Burma, Laos, and Cambodia for the export of capital and technology.

Despite the critical status of Japan-China relations, in December 1961 the situation seemed to escalate. During the Sixteenth UN General Assembly, the main theme was the question of Chinese representation. Japan had supported the U.S. in imposing a moratorium on the Chinese problem at each session of the General Assembly. Since in 1960 only 43% of UN members voted in favor of this moratorium. Japan, together with the United States, Colombia, Italy, and Australia, presented a proposal that any decision on the representation of China - considered one of the "important issues" according to Article 18 of the Charter of the United Nations -

would require a two-thirds majority instead of a simple majority (Kajima 1965, 142). The purpose of this resolution was to prevent Peking from getting the necessary votes to replace Nationalist China at the UN. Japan, for its part, argued that, while agreeing with the other powers on the intent of preserving the seat of Nationalist China at the General Assembly, considered the proposal of the “Five-Power Resolution” (Kaufmann 1980) a transitional measure that would allow the PRC to acquire a permanent seat on the Security Council.

However, despite all the criticism following the adoption of the resolution, what caused a major uproar was the speech by Ambassador Okazaki Katsuo regarding the Japanese position against the PRC. By referring to the old history that joined the two countries, based on geographical proximity and racial and cultural affinities, he stated that official contacts were minimal because of the close and friendly relationship existing between Japan and Taiwan. However, Okazaki said Japan could not but recognize the importance of 600 million Chinese people. But the PRC could not, in any way, replace Taiwan in the UN General Assembly due to its aggressive policy adopted during the Korean War. Ultimately, Okazaki’s speech left no doubt about the intentions of Tokyo: If the PRC was not recognized by either the U.S. or the UN, Japan would not start any process of normalization between the two countries. The JSP found in Okazaki’s words a further demonstration of how Ikeda’s government totally depended on American decisions, while the Chinese defined the Japanese delegates as “active servants” of the American conspiracy (Lee 1976, 45).

During this period Japanese domestic politics were going through a critical phase, in part due to the 1960 general elections; this also affected the country’s relations with the PRC. First, one should take into account what was happening within the JSP, which had always encouraged rapprochement with Peking. Eda Saburō, general secretary of the JSP, rejected what was stated in Asanuma’s 1958 declaration, declaring instead that Japan would continue to pursue a policy of close collaboration with the U.S. His words garnered Chinese hostility, and Sasaki Kōzō (a member of the extremist wing) was preferred to Eda. In January 1962, Suzuki Mosaburō, former president of the JSP, visited China to reaffirm Asanuma’s declaration, stating that the underlying cause of the absence of Japan-China official diplomatic relations was due to American imperialism as well as Ikeda administration (Shinkichi 2005, 48). But criticism arising from Kawakami’s and Wada’s moderate factions, and from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led Suzuki to reassess his own position. In a confidential letter addressed to Kawakami Jōtarō (the leader of the party), he tried to exculpate himself from having reaffirmed Asanuma’s declaration by blaming the other party members (Lee 1976, 65). With the intention of weakening the extremist wing of the party and undermining the alliance between Suzuki and members of the Heiwa Dōshikai, the letter was read before the opening of the Central Committee Meeting in August 1962, causing much anger among the party ranks. Only a few days later, Eda clashed directly with China during the Eighth World Conference Against Nuclear Weapons in Tokyo. American sources revealed that a few days earlier the USSR succeeded in carrying out another nuclear test. The protests of the event by the faction led by Eda were promptly rejected by both the Chinese delegates and the JCP, which jointly claimed that nuclear tests conducted by Socialist countries were used exclusively to maintain peace and defend against U.S. imperialism. The conference was animated by mutual accusations and resulted in sharply contrasting opinions on the use of nuclear weapons. The extremist wing of the JSP, leveraging the strong support received from the Peking government and Xie Nanguang (director of the Association for China-Japan Friendship), was gradually isolating Eda and his followers. The latter gave up the post of general secretary, leaving the task to his colleague, Narita Tomomi. Precisely because of the growing power of Sasaki’s and Kuroda’s factions, Narita had to consent to sending a fourth official mission to Peking, warmly welcomed by Mao.

The Ikeda-led LDP, as observed above, silently refused any official diplomatic contact with China, but worked actively for a substantial increase in trade relations between the two countries. For this purpose, Matsumura Kenzō received and accepted an invitation to visit China in September of 1962. The delegation was composed of Ogawa Heiji (Ikeda faction), Furui Hoshimi (Matsumura faction), Seiichi Tagawa (Nakasone faction), and Katsushi Fujii (Miki faction). From the conversation between Zhou and Matsumura emerged the will of both leaders to increase trade relations between the two countries. The result was the five-year “L.-T. Trade Agreement” (1962-1967) to ensure business contact between the two countries for an average value of U.S.\$100 million (Sun 1968). This agreement represented an important turning point, as it inaugurated a new phase in Japan-China trade relations after the break that occurred in 1958. A system of deferred payments for Japanese industrial plants built in China was also introduced, while Liao Chengzhi (chief of the staff at the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council and vice chairman of the Chinese Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity) and Takasaki Tatsunosuke (president of All Nippon Airways) were appointed as guarantors of the agreement. The meeting between the two leaders, however, deserves further comment: During the talks, Zhou presented to Matsumura a draft for a possible joint statement in which he defended the principle of the inseparability of politics from economy. It was quite impossible for Japan, which had based its foreign policy towards China on the exact opposite principle, to sign such a declaration. Cautiously, Matsumura invited Zhou to wait in order to avoid provoking the anti-Chinese forces in Japan. In effect, other reasons kept Japan distant from the PRC at that time. In a written exchange with Indian prime minister Nehru, Ikeda condemned the military actions carried out in China along the China-India border, stigmatizing them as a threat to Asia’s stability. Among the supporters of a policy in favor of Peking, other figures emerged such as Yasuhiro Nakasone, a member of the Kono Ichirō’s faction, who declared that Japan should mitigate the antagonism between China and the U.S. (Nakasone 1961).

The Matsumura-Zhou agreement, however, elicited negative comments from the U.S. and Taiwan, which asked Japan to refrain from offering any kind of help to the PRC. Nevertheless, Ikeda wanted to respect the commitments made in the joint agreement with China and allowed the Kurashiki Company to use funds from the Export-Import Bank to make substantial investments in China. Taipei, even more than Washington, did not accept without trouble this attempt at cooperation between the two countries, and the diplomatic incident with Zhou Hongqing aggravated the situation.

On a mission in Japan as an interpreter for a delegation of the PRC, Zhou saw his request for political asylum from the USSR rejected, was handed over to Japanese authorities, and was repatriated only when, in 1964, the authorities issued an order to return. The incident led Chang Kai-shek to call home the Taiwanese ambassador in Tokyo, threatening economic retaliation against Japan. Peking thought that Japan was about to follow the example of French President Charles De Gaulle and officially recognize the PRC (Kajima 1965, 142). Ikeda, pressured by the U.S., Taiwan, and the pro-Taiwan faction within the LDP, had to change his position again towards Peking. He tried to renew ties with Taipei first by urging former prime minister Yoshida Shigeru to address a private letter to Chang Chun, secretary for Chang Kai-shek, and then by sending Foreign Minister Ōhira to Taipei. Japan had to specify that trade relations with China, which were valid only within specific limitations, would not represent any form of diplomatic dialogue between the two countries.

Although the efforts made by Ikeda administration did not produce long-term results, they represented an important first step. The next prime minister, Satō Eisaku, would inaugurate a new chapter in Japan-China relations.

## 2. The 1960s: External and internal variables hindering the diplomatic path.

When Satō ran for the LDP leadership, he understood that a new era in Japan-China relations was possible. He stressed urgency for Japan to pursue a policy independent from the U.S. and to reestablish contact with Peking. In April 1964 he met with Nan Hānchen, head of the Chinese Committee for Trade Promotion, and assumed an entirely positive and favorable attitude towards China, even daring to declare that the *seikei bunri* policy no longer fit the rule of trade relations between the two countries (Coox, Conroy 1978, 361). Nan was especially surprised by Satō's words, and believed that under his leadership Japan would favor the détente between Tokyo and Peking. This and many other good intentions allowed Satō (1964-1972) to succeed Ikeda as prime minister in November 1964.

But expectations vanished just a few days after the establishment of the new cabinet. On November 21, 1964, in fact, the Japanese government refused Peng Zhen, the mayor of Peking, entry into Japan to attend the Ninth General Conference of the JCP. Peking's reaction was immediate and, on November 25, *Renmin Ribao* published an article containing harsh criticism towards the new government, warning on the question of Japanese rearmament and on its opposition to PRC entry into the UN. Moreover, China suspended all negotiations and all scheduled visits to Japan (Jain 1977, 50).

It would seem appropriate to ask why Satō did not satisfy China's expectations, and why he allowed the incident with the diplomat Peng Zhen to occur. Matsumura and Satō, during their meeting, claimed that it was necessary to "freeze" any contact between the two countries (Matsumoto 1964, 146). The reasons that led to this decision are likely to point to Japan's concerns with the UN. In fact, Foreign Minister Shiina Etsusaburō admitted publicly that Japan would continue to support the formula of "relevant issues" referring to the Chinese problem. Tokyo's attitude towards the UN since Ikeda shows that Japanese policy was ambiguous on the China issue: Along with other Western countries, it supported Taiwan by counteracting the recognition of the PRC; but if the UN had voted in favor of the latter, Japan would not have hindered it. This shows that Tokyo, although it harbored an interest in officially recognizing Peking, was unwilling to take the risks and fight at the forefront for its own interests, instead preferring to bandwagon with Washington's decisions. In addition to the reasons discussed above, Japanese political relations with the USSR were making the PRC even more hostile towards Japan. They were developed at a time when relations between Moscow and Peking began to decline. China, in fact, looked with apprehension at Shiina's visit to the USSR in January 1966 to promote business ties between the two countries. Peking called this approach "a conspiracy against China" (Jain 1977, 52). Furthermore, Japan-South Korea rapprochement aroused additional concerns, as Peking considered it "a step towards the creation of a Northeast Asia settlement under the auspices of the U.S., aimed at extending U.S. military plans to both China and Korea." Moreover, the way Satō acted between 1964 and 1965 left no doubt in the Chinese leaders that Japan was going to solidify its ties with Taiwan and the U.S. instead of improving relations with the PRC. In December 1964, in fact, Ishii Mitsujirō and Kishi went to Taipei to attend a meeting of the Japan-Taiwan Committee for Cooperation, delivering to Chang Kai-shek an official letter from the Japanese cabinet to establish stronger relationships with Taipei. Then, in January 1965, Satō visited the U.S. for the first time as prime minister. What infuriated Chinese leaders were the words spoken at a meeting of the American-Japanese Society in New York. The Japanese prime minister, instead of following a more moderate tone, said that Japan was "even more concerned than the United States about the aggressive tendencies of Communist China." But that wasn't all: The secret Japanese military contingency plan, nicknamed "Three Arrow Study," was made known by intelligence services, and revealed that Japanese armed forces, in the event of another war in Asia, would

have an indirect role (such as reserve forces) against China and North Korea, led by the U.S., South Korea, and Taiwan.

Moreover, the 1965 Vietnam quagmire fueled a climate of contention between Peking and Tokyo. The pro-Communist insurgent forces, fighting against the pro-American government in South Vietnam, dragged Northeast Asia into a global conflict. The Gulf of Tonkin incident, in which a U.S. destroyer on a mission was torpedoed by North Vietnamese ships in August 1964, prompted U.S. President Lyndon Johnson to get America involved in the conflict definitively. Chinese and Japanese reactions, predictably, were different. Mao actually did not expect the U.S. to attack North Vietnam so suddenly. China's decision to help Hanoi was mainly due to two reasons: Mao's insecurity in the face of the U.S. threat, and his interest in the national liberation movements. Regarding the first, it must be observed that, between 1964 and 1965, the PRC was extremely concerned about the growing involvement of the U.S. in Vietnam, and considered it a threat to its own security. In Mao's opinion, U.S. involvement in Vietnam was nothing more than yet another hegemonic plan conceived for the Asian region. He believed the U.S. had dragged Taiwan, Korea, and South Vietnam, as well as militarily occupied Japan, into a "colonial empire." The intervention in Vietnam was simply the final step to close the circle around China, trapping it. It was precisely for this reason that Mao decided to intervene directly; if he managed to repel American troops using pro-Communist forces, the Chinese borders would remain inviolate. Mao's struggle against American imperialism did not save Japan. Although the latter was again accused of having supported U.S. imperialism and undermining the balance in the Far East, one cannot but underline the success of prime minister Satō during the Vietnam conflict. He had to face the unpopularity that was causing Japan to be in conflict with Indochina. Nevertheless, Satō could not hold back in supporting engagement in Vietnam, and Washington used the Security Treaty to justify Japanese assistance. The premier's tactic of "victimizing" Japan somehow managed to convince people who believed that, under these conditions, Japan had no choice but to cooperate. The anti-Peking stance pursued by Satō peaked in 1967, when he visited Taipei in order to consolidate political, economic and cultural relations between the two countries: The Chinese media spoke of his administration as "the worst government Japan has ever had." The new foreign minister Miki Takeo, who succeeded Shiina in December 1966, tried to assume a more conciliatory attitude towards the PRC. While extending his commitment to maintaining peace and ensuring security in Taiwan, which he considered "one of the major factors in the stability of Japan itself and throughout the Far East," Satō urged the Peking government to revise its hostile attitude and participate in international politics as a country "that is assuming its responsibilities for building a solid balance of peace in Asia." For this purpose it seemed necessary that both the U.S. and Japan should keep its doors open to Communist China. But shortly thereafter, the violent Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China would contribute to ruining the diplomatic image of the country from 1966, and China found itself completely isolated from the rest of the world.

The beginning of the 1970s was not very promising. By trying to pursue a hard-line policy on an international level, the PRC ended up being surrounded by its most hostile rivals (U.S., Japan, USSR, and India) and having an economy without real prospective of growth. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution weakened the country even more; Mao and Zhou Enlai worked to limit the damages, especially with regard to the country's relations with the outside world. The xenophobic attitudes that prevailed during the first phase of the Cultural Revolution were abandoned, and the minister of foreign affairs and Chinese ambassadors around the world resumed their functions. The easing of Chinese international relations raised many expectations, in particular with a view towards a possible new diplomatic rapprochement with Japan.

Despite Peking's hints of openness, Tokyo doubted about China's real intentions. It believed

that the Ninth National Conference of the Chinese Communist Party, held in April 1969, highlighted their growing military capabilities and, at the same time, Mao's strengthening power, elements that should not be underestimated since they would probably lead the country to pursue a harder diplomatic line towards Tokyo.

In contrast to this, the JSP, in officially recognizing the validity of the Ninth National Conference, did its utmost to persuade Satō to take the first steps towards the normalization of Japan-China diplomatic relations. In March 1969, he proposed a resolution addressed to the Diet aimed at restoring diplomatic and official trade relations with Peking. But this was not all: The delicate question of PRC recognition within the UN continued to be a key issue among Japanese political parties, and the JSP stated that the failure to recognize the legitimacy of China's Communist government was totally unacceptable. Furthermore, the impossibility of pursuing a common line of thinking on the Chinese issue, even within the LDP, highlighted how weak the government was on foreign policy. The reasons are certainly found in the influence that the U.S. continued to exert on Japan, and on the possible evolution of Japan-China diplomatic relations. Satō's foreign policy agenda continued to rotate around the alliance with Washington, and this was due not only to the U.S. commitment to favoring Japan's economic growth as well as ensuring security in East Asia, but also to the transfer of the administrative rights of the Ryūkyūs Islands to Tokyo (Narasimha Murthy 1972). In November 1969, during an official visit to the U.S., the return of the islands to Japan was officially announced. On that occasion, in a joint statement with President Richard Nixon, Satō stated that U.S. and Japan shared the hope that Communist China might adopt a more cooperative and constructive attitude in its foreign relations.

China's reaction was hostile. On welcoming the Albanian ambassador to China, on November 29, 1969, Zhou expressed his opinion on the Satō-Nixon meeting, observing that as an accomplice to U.S. imperialism, Satō's government was trying to enhance the growth of militarism, realizing its old dream of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.

### **3. The Nixon upheaval and the systemic changes enabled by the *beiatsu***

A totally unexpected disruption to the international geopolitical balance soon absorbed much of the Japanese diplomatic attention. In accordance with Gaddis's (2005, 329) wide-ranging work, while relations between Japan and the NATO countries "had been allowed to deteriorate, more from inattention than from deliberate design," Nixon administration inadvertently delivered two sharp blows to the country "by failing to warn Tokyo in advance." On 16 July, 1971 the U.S. suddenly announced that Henri Kissinger was in talks with the Chinese and that Richard Nixon would make a state visit to Peking by the end of May of the following year. The news struck like a thunderclap. The unilateral decision by the White House was a shock to the Japanese and the administration put Satō in a very difficult situation (Itō 2002). The nightmare of many Japanese diplomats of a secret U.S. demarche to Communist China (that was in fact destined to go down in history as the "Nixon shock") had become a reality. In the days immediately following the sensational announcement, the government, the press and the population fell silent. The panic created a sudden feeling of distrust toward its erstwhile powerful ally and reference model (Sörderberg 1996, 34). For years, Japan aspired towards normalizing its relations with China, but heavy pressure from Washington had stifled any attempt at rapprochement and now, unbelievably, the U.S. was to take the initiative without informing the ally (Hosoya 1989, 26). In June, Nixon and Secretary of State William Rogers tried to reassure Satō, who flew to Washington, of their willingness to cooperate to solve the problems regarding Tokyo-Peking relations. (LaFeber 1997, 354-355). For Japan this was good

news. Now the announcement of 16 July took the Japanese off guard and forced them to revise their policy from top to bottom.

During the preliminary talks held in Peking on July 29, 1971, Zhou told Kissinger the following:

*The revival of Japanese militarism is being encouraged and supported by 1969 statement issued between your two countries. You know of the present Fourth Defence Plan, which was drawn up according to the Joint Communiqué of President Nixon and Prime Minister Satō of Japan. You are rearming the Japanese militarists. They are bent on expanding; their economy has expanded to such an extent. Economic expansion will of necessity lead to military expansion (Memorandum for Henry A. Kissinger 1971, 29).*

Kissinger replied as follows:

*A strong Japan has the economic and social infrastructure which permits to create a strong military machine and use this for expansionist purpose if it so desires. But we are not encouraging any revival Japanese expansionism. The United States and the People's Republic of China interests coincide in trying to keep this growth under control. In fact, Mr. Prime Minister, from the point of view of the sort of theory which I used to teach in universities, it would make good sense for us to withdraw from Japan, allow Japan re-arm, and then let Japan and China balance each other off in the Pacific. This is not our policy. A heavily rearmed Japan could easily repeat the policies of the 1930's. Neither of us wants to see Japan heavily re-armed (Memorandum for Henry A. Kissinger 1971, 42).*

Kissinger's words could let us suppose that he tried to reassure the Chinese. In reality, he described the U.S.-Japan alliance as the best deterrent against any form of Japan's hard power development since its purpose was only to preserve U.S. military bases in the archipelago, which were essential to contain the Soviet threat. According to Mann (2000, 34), for years the Chinese Communists had vehemently opposed the American presence in Japan, and the U.S. were now paradoxically trying to get their acceptance.

The Sino-American reconciliation process continued with the second Kissinger diplomatic mission to Peking, which took place in October of that year and culminated with Nixon's trip in February 1972 (Hanhimäki, Westad 2004, 231-233). What the Americans called the "greatest threat" was transformed into a new friendship. The Japanese were not the only ones to be surprised and distressed. As pointed out by Mackerras, "the North Vietnamese were secretly furious to see one of their two main allies and supporters welcoming their worst enemy so warmly" (Mackerras 1998, 52). Similarly, for Kim Il-song's North Korea, the new regional political configuration, designed primarily to contain the Soviet Union, contravened the line of confrontation formed by U.S. imperialism and Japanese militarism and against which both the Kimilsungist ideology and the public consensus in the DPRK had been constructed. On the other hand, as Kissinger himself recognized – being fully aware of what American diplomacy was risking – the U.S. opening up to China might: "panic the Soviet Union into sharp hostility. It could shake Japan loose from its heavily American moorings. It will cause a violent upheaval in Taiwan... It will increase the already substantial hostility [to the U.S.] in India" (Dallek 2008, 293). However, in some ways, the situation was even more complicated for the Japanese. The Shanghai Communiqué, signed 28 February, revealed not only the extent of the Sino-American detente, but also the serious delays in Japanese diplomacy. That same day, in a parliamentary debate prompted by the opposition, the Japanese prime minister stated his

intention to recognize “One China.” Japan had no choice but to initiate the process of normalizing its political relations with Peking immediately (Furukawa 1981, 114-115).

In 1972, Satō came to the end of his third institutional term, leaving behind a long-lived Government and the satisfaction of having achieved diplomatic success with the reacquisition of Okinawa. On 7 July, Tanaka Kakuei was elected to lead the country (1972-1974). In his campaign for LDP leadership, Tanaka kept his distance from his unpopular predecessor, although, like Satō, he positioned maintaining peace at the top of the country’s political agenda. The new Premier seemed more aware than his predecessor about the need for Japan to assume greater responsibility in terms of its security, which meant increasing its military potential for defensive purposes. The country had to change the old role of “benefactor of peace” to “creator of peace,” transforming its alleged passivity in foreign policy into a new assertiveness. Tanaka was the first of the leaders of the industrial Western democracies to support Kissinger’s idea of a “new Atlantic Charter,” in which Japan would be placed within the pentagonal system dominated by world’s five greatest economic powers, a world that included Western Europe, China, and Japan in addition to the U.S. and the Soviet Union. As observed by Cleva (1989, 197), “such a pentagonal balance produces the maximum amount of diplomatic flexibility, because every issue does not involve the survival of the other powers.”

On 20 July, first contacts were broached with China and thirteen days later, in a toast to Tanaka at a state dinner, Nixon declared complacently: “We have spent our time and will spend our time in building a better world” (Dallek 2008, 501). Tanaka flew to Peking in September of that year. The outcome of the meetings with Zhou Enlai and Mao meant that Tokyo (aware that Taiwan had to be sacrificed for the sake of the “Sino-American honeymoon”) had to acknowledge that the Soviet hegemony was a threat. Japan also implied that, in view of the normalization of Japan-China relations, the treaty signed in 1952 between Tokyo and Taipei would henceforth be considered invalid, even if the rupture of diplomatic relations with Taiwan would not have figured in the document made public at the end of the talks (Ogata 1978, 88). The joint statement, consisting of nine articles, which was to constitute the framework of diplomatic relations between the two countries for the following six years (and with which China gave up its claims to the potential benefits of war), paved the way to a series of agreements over trade, fishing, maritime and air transport (Lee 1979). Japan and Taiwan closed the diplomatic missions in their respective capitals, while trade relations remained virtually unchanged.

As expected, Japan’s rapprochement with China had immediate repercussions for Tokyo-Moscow relations. It was evident to the Chinese that Japan could not have anticipated the possibility of a resumption of relations in any Japan-USSR trade agreement. Japan, which was concerned with satisfying national demand, still needed Sakhalin’s oil and the Siberian mining and forestry reserves, but after the opening up of Japanese diplomacy with Peking, the Siberian issue proved difficult to resolve and the 1973 oil crisis was decisive. Left with no viable alternative, Tanaka came to accept the “counter-hegemonic discourse” and to conclude an important trade agreement with China (Wang 2000, 91).

The 1973 oil crisis forced Japan to strengthen its access roads to oil and its derivatives. To do this, Tokyo adopted two different but complementary strategies. On the one hand, it increased its Official Development Assistance policies towards the countries holding energy reserves (in this context particular attention was paid to the Near and Middle East). On the other hand, it abandoned the markedly pro-Israel position followed in the past and began to support the Arab cause, recognizing the PLO as the Palestinian representative body and organizing an important diplomatic mission in the Middle East and North Africa to improve its image and its market (Morikawa 1996, 69). This reorientation of foreign policy was the synthesis of its traditional

strategic pragmatism and the recent tendency to achieve greater independence from the U.S. (Kataoka 2002, 70-72).

On 9 August 1974, Nixon resigned after the Watergate scandal, while in Japan the economic crisis was seriously undermining the political stability. Peking, on the other hand, was concerned that Fukuda could be elected as the new head of government in Japan, since his faction was traditionally a Taiwan's cause supporter. On November 12 of that year, in order to safeguard the agreement reached, Nianlong Han, deputy Chinese foreign minister, was sent to Japan to undertake the preliminary talks for the conclusion of a peace treaty. The meeting with the Japanese counterpart Tōgō Fumihiko, did not produce conclusive results, but allowed Tokyo to express its concerns about the anti-hegemony clause (which was requested by the Chinese and conceived against the Soviets). The new Prime Minister Miki, who took office in December 1974, weakened by a domestic political climate increasingly unstable, could not lead the country towards a normalization agreement with Peking. However, the negotiations were not abandoned.

On January 16, 1975, Tōgō met with the Chinese emissary Chen Chu, while Miyazawa Kiichi, the new Japanese foreign minister, was discussing at the Kremlin about the diplomatic terms of a possible peace treaty with the Soviets. The conclusion of a peace treaty with the USSR was one of the main aims of Japanese postwar foreign policy. Moreover, Japan could not ignore the pressure exercised by Moscow, worried about the idea that a possible alliance between Japan and China might turn against the USSR (Ogata 1988, 79).

In the climate of increasing internal tension generated by the possibility (widespread in the press) that Miki could sign a peace treaty with China that included an anti-Soviet clause, the government had to act decisively. Miyazawa, while attending in 1975 the UN General Assembly in New York, met with Chinese foreign minister Qiao Guanhua and tried to overcome this diplomatic impasse (Radtke 1990, 225). The so-called "Miyazawa's Four Principles," known as "Basic Posture on Japan-China Relations", pointed out that any form of hegemony had to be resisted not only in Asia but all over the world, and that a anti-hegemony clause could not be designed against specific third parties (Wang 2000, 191). This had angered leaders in Peking and a long silence followed on the Chinese side.

The Indochina's crisis exercised a considerable influence in this phase of stalled negotiations which coincided, moreover, with the death of Zhou and Mao in 1976, as well as the events connected with the Lockheed scandal, which involved Tanaka and other party members. In this context, the negative results of the Japanese legislative elections on 5 December 1976, led to the resignation the premier and the appointment in the same month, of Fukuda Yasuo (1976-1978). The new prime minister was able to foresee the disastrous effects of a "wait-and-see policy" towards Peking, and he soon commissioned a team of experts to investigate a new diplomatic course. While waiting for negotiations with China to go ahead, he worked towards adding new perspectives to the Japanese political development in Asia. The statement made in Manila on 18 August 1977 (later known as the "Fukuda Doctrine") outlining its guiding principles facilitated the acquisition of stronger relations with the countries in the area, the leaders of which, in some cases, had already availed of the opportunity to forge personal relationships with the Japanese prime minister (Joyaux 1993). The three principles underlying Fukuda's policy were the promise that Japan would not rise to the rank of military power, the pursuit of a new "heart-to-heart" political understanding with Southeast Asian countries and the building of a full partnership with the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) member countries (Sudō 2005).

## Concluding remarks

The gradual disengagement of U.S. in Asia, following the defeat in Vietnam – that is an expression of a global trend towards multipolarity - and the emergence of three Communist states in Indochina concurred during the launch of Japan's 'new course policy' in Southeast Asia (Hellmann 1972, 142). Japan's official renunciation of military ambitions showed the will to contribute to the development of peace and prosperity in the region, as well as its determination not only to be engaged on an economic and political-diplomatic level, but also to build good relationships in social and cultural fields. The first ASEAN Summit, held in Bali on 23 and 24 February 1976, had indicated that it was no longer possible to postpone a new policy for Southeast Asia. Fukuda's state visits that took place in August 1977 in five ASEAN countries plus Burma demonstrated Japan's reorientation (Iokibe 2010, 178). For some of those states it was the first official visit made by a Japanese prime minister in the post-war years, the last official occasion of meeting at the intergovernmental level dating back to 5 and 6 November 1943, in the notorious political context of the *Dai tō-A kaigi*, or "Greater East Asia Conference" (also known as the "Tokyo Conference").

Fukuda's ASEAN diplomacy marked a clear shift in Japan's Southeast Asia policy: "After his visit to the ASEAN countries in 1977, the word 'ASEAN' replaces 'Southeast Asia' in Japanese political parlance, and China and ASEAN emerged as two major regional units in Japan's Asia policy" (Takashi 1997, 185-186). Initially founded on the mere primacy of the economy and, subsequently, on a combination of economics and politics, it marked the high point of the Japanese political and diplomatic strategy. It was by means of this strategy that Japan was aiming to become the central focus of a large area of economic development and political stability in Asia. At the same time, the Japan-China rapprochement and the normalization of U.S.-China diplomatic relations announced in December of that year formed the cornerstone of a policy aimed at laying the foundations of Japan's redemption in political terms and resolving the crucial security dilemma. In terms of security, this was the basis of the emerging geopolitical triangulation of Asia Pacific, which included Japan, China and the U.S. (Vogel, Ming, Tanaka 2002). Irreversibly, "their security would now hinge on the stability of that [triadic] structure" (Iriye 1996, 50). No longer potential enemies, Japan and China became part of a new regional structure designed to last until the end of the bipolar era.

As we have seen, the stages that have marked the development of Japan-China relations were deeply influenced by intervening variables that shaped their historical path. It finally appears clear, within the broader context of the Cold War, the manner in which the *beiatsu* and the structure of the international system have affected the evolution of their diplomatic relations.

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