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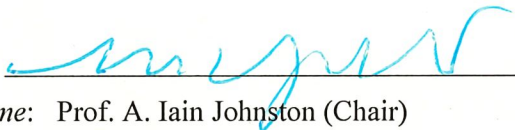
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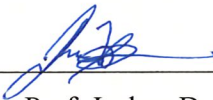
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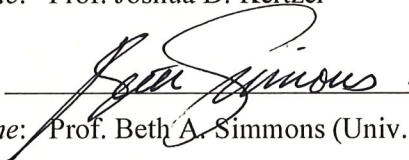
**“Elite Consensus and Rising Power Foreign Policy: China's  
Active Management of Security Disputes with Japan, South  
Korea and the Philippines”**

presented by **Jeehye Kim**

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certify that it is worthy of acceptance.

Signature   
Typed name: Prof. A. Iain Johnston (Chair)

Signature   
Typed name: Prof. Joshua D. Kertzer

Signature   
Typed name: Prof. Beth A. Simmons (Univ. of Pennsylvania)

Date: **June 17, 2019**

**Elite Consensus and Rising Power Foreign Policy:  
China's active management of security disputes with Japan, South Korea  
and the Philippines**

A dissertation presented

by

Jeehye Kim

to

The Department of Government

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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**Elite Consensus and Rising Power Foreign Policy: China's active management of security disputes with Japan, South Korea and the Philippines**

**Abstract**

How can a rising power avoid violent confrontations with the dominant power and continue rising? Not all power transitions are accompanied by war between the dominant and rising powers. This dissertation studies a rising power's coercive diplomacy patterns during power transition. When the commitment problem between a rising and dominant power becomes acute during power transition, costly signaling by the rising power can prevent great power war. I examine how a rising power manages the process of power transition so that its increasing material capabilities does not provoke preemptive action by its adversaries by focusing on the rising power's foreign policy behavior towards non-great powers in the region. I compile a list of provocative and reassuring gestures that China has made towards its neighbors Japan, South Korea and the Philippines from 1979 to 2018, and track China's elite discourse towards each of the three neighboring states in major think-tank and academic journals. I find that when a majority of the rising power elites pay attention to security topics associated with negative sentiment, the rising power tends to be proactive in managing sensitive security disputes either in the form of provocations or reassurances. Similarly, when elites are more interested in other issues such as expanding trade and deepening economic cooperation, or when they are divided in their priorities when discussing security-related agenda of a given neighboring state, I find that the rising power becomes passive, and avoids involvement in disputes.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Research Question

This introductory chapter motivates the dissertation's core research question: how does a rising power avoid war during its rise? I identify costly signaling to be a key challenge that the rising power faces during power transition. The rising power must signal the dominant power its status-quo nature so as to avoid the dominant power's preemptive strike, but at the same time also signal its willingness to stand firm if provoked so as to avoid being taken advantage of the dominant power. I point out how existing studies on foreign policy behavior of rising powers tend to focus on the outbreak (or lack thereof) of war, which I characterize as an outcome of costly signaling failure.<sup>1</sup> Instead, in this dissertation I focus on the variation in costly signaling of a rising power by identifying three categories of distinct behavior: provocation, reassurance, and neither (inaction). To explain this variation, I suggest that the rising power's domestic political factors, mainly the degree to which elites are in agreement inside the rising power, is an overlooked factor in understanding the timing and the intensity of a rising power's costly signaling towards its neighboring states in the region.

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<sup>1</sup>These include Organski and Kugler (1980); Snyder (1993); Copeland (2001); Glosny (2012); Edelstein (2017); Shiffrinson (2018, 2020), just to name a few.

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The rise of China since 1978<sup>2</sup> has offered a puzzle to power transition theory in that there has not been a major war between China and the dominant power, the United States. As Kang (2009) notes, China's military and economic rise may have increased regional tension, but we have yet to observe a full-scale war or use of force between the two major powers. Some scholars also suggest that far from eclipsing the US, China may not be as powerful as we think based on how we measure capabilities, according to Beckley (2011/2012, 2017, 2018). Yet this puzzle is one of many historical examples in which rising powers did not wage war against the dominant power during power transition (Schweller 2006; Schake 2017). At the same time, it is also puzzling that a rising power risks conflict escalation or loss of bargaining leverage by engaging in costly foreign policy behavior in the form of provocations and reassurances that may be unprecedented in scale. This dissertation asks under what conditions rising powers are more likely to engage in such costly foreign policy behavior, or "active management," towards its neighboring states in the region. This is an important question because up until now, most scholarship on rising power behavior have exclusively focused on war (and the lack thereof), and have not investigated other means by which a rising power manages the tensions of power transition in more subtle ways such as diplomacy and costly signaling.<sup>3</sup> This research question is also important because often the target of rising power behavior is not another great power, especially if it does not directly border the rising power in the same geographical region. I also note that crises between a rising power and lesser powers often act as catalyst to a rising power's crisis with another great power during power transition. By asking what causes a rising power to provoke, reassure or do neither towards a less powerful state, we can better understand the process of conflict escalation or even the possibility of de-escalation of tensions among great powers.

Empirically, the dissertation focuses on rising China's foreign policy behavior towards

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<sup>2</sup>I date the year of China's rise from the start of economic reforms launched under Deng Xiaoping in 1978. For a discussion of periodizing China's rise, see Liebman (2009); Johnston and Chestnut (2009)

<sup>3</sup>On China's coercive diplomacy towards other states in East Asia, please see Christensen (2011/2012, 2006); Fravel (2007/2008a); Fravel and Swaine (2011); Fravel (2015, 2016, 2017); Hyer (2015).

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three of its neighboring countries since 1978—Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines. While the question of conflict propensity during power transition has been addressed by many scholars of international relations, most notably by Organski and Kugler (1980); Kugler and Lemke (1996); Lemke and Reed (1996); Copeland (2001, 2014); Kim and Gates (2015).<sup>4</sup> The basic tenet of the power transition conflict model is that a balance of power does not result in stability and peace, but rather the converse: in the process of achieving parity, conflict is more likely between great powers. But extant scholarship has paid less attention on how exactly conflict becomes more or less likely from the viewpoint of the rising power, and even less attention on the role of the rising power's regional foreign policy behavior, which is often the first place for a rising power to signal its shifting preferences during power transition.

The People's Republic of China (hereafter China) has engaged in various costly foreign policy behavior towards its neighboring states since its economic reforms of 1978. China has used official statements and has taken part in militarized confrontations against Japan for asserting exclusive claims on the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands following a long period of silence from 1979 to 1989. On the South China Sea, China has asserted territorial and maritime claims against the Philippines and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Vietnam) using official statements and naval vessel dispatches at various times, but has also been willing to ratchet down tension through formal apologies and negotiating joint development with each state at other times. Meanwhile, China has consistently avoided initiating maritime and territorial conflicts of interest with the Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea, or ROK). Similarly, China has at times escalated on crises that involve the denuclearization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter North Korea, or DPRK), but at times de-escalated.

The pattern of China's attempts to challenge the status quo on its regional security disputes including the territorial and maritime disputes in the East and South China Sea at certain times and

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<sup>4</sup>For a more complete list of scholars writing on power transition theory with a focus on the Sino-US dyad please see: Chan (2008); Friedberg (2005); Goldstein (2005); Ross (2008).

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to uphold at other times is puzzling because the variation is not adequately captured by structural variables such as China's military capabilities or the changes in U.S. security commitments in East Asia. Neither is it necessarily correlated with the rise in China's nationalist propaganda towards its domestic audience, which began with its patriotic education in the early 1990s (Gries 2005). According to structural variables, we should expect to see China attempting to change the status quo as its power increases. According to nationalist rhetoric explanations, we should expect to see China attempting to change the status quo as pressure from its nationalist domestic constituents increase. Yet while there has been unilateral increase both in material capabilities and popular nationalist discourse highlighting territorial disputes, China's attempts to challenge the status quo in the East and South China Seas have coexisted with, if not outnumbered by, attempts to uphold the status quo. What, then, explains this variation?

To answer this puzzle, I first point to the rising power's commitment problem during power transition. Namely, the rising power cannot commit to *not* being more belligerent at a later time due to its expected gain in material power. At the same time, the rising power cannot be assured that it would not be taken advantage of by the dominant power in the present, as the latter has motivations to undermine the rising power preemptively before overtaken. I argue that rising powers such as China post-1978 manage the commitment problem that it shares with the dominant power through coercive diplomacy in which In the case of China, its reluctance to escalate on territorial conflicts, especially with those neighboring states that share security commitments with the U.S., is one way of signaling to the U.S. that it is a status-quo oriented state. Simultaneously, because the rising power also fears that it may be attacked by the dominant power before the power transition is complete, the rising power faces a signaling dilemma in which it has to signal its status quo-ness to continue rising, but also signal its willingness to stand firm if provoked.

## 1.2 Theories of foreign policy behavior during power transition

This dissertation differs from past research on China's signaling behavior over territorial disputes in that it does not concern itself on the effectiveness of its signals. Rather, the dissertation focuses on the external and domestic conditions that accompany China's attempts at escalation and de-escalation towards its neighboring states. Drawing on insights from existing research on the role of domestic political actors on foreign policy, I offer and test hypotheses on the propensities of a rising power to escalate or de-escalate on regional security issues, including but not limited to territorial and maritime disputes.

While the likelihood of preventive and preemptive war as the rising power's capabilities eclipse that of the declining power has been often studied, diplomatic behavior that falls short of outright use of force by either the rising or the declining power during power transitions remains under-explored. This is puzzling, since coercive diplomacy is one of the ways by which the rising power can signal its preferences to the dominant power. While there exists a large body of both case studies and book-length research concerning China's activities on its territorial and maritime claims in the South and East China Sea, a more complete range of Chinese rhetoric and behavior over time regarding its territorial and maritime disputes has yet to be analyzed.<sup>5</sup> Pundits often attribute an overall increase in tension regarding the territorial disputes to a rising-thus-revisionist China without clearly distinguishing crises that China initiates from those that its neighboring states initiates and to which China responds. For crises in which China is the respondent and not the initiator, analysts fail to account for the diversity in China's response - ranging from government statements to military involvements, or often no official response at all. Interestingly, crises in which China does not retaliate or do not initiate albeit the opportunity to do so, are easily overlooked by analysts and calls for further scrutiny.

This dissertation's research question is significant in numerous ways. First, the question of

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<sup>5</sup>Chubb (2015) looks specifically at the SCS.

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how a rising power manages its regional, non-great actors during its rise is a key missing link to better understanding great power interactions during power transition. Major conflict, including both World Wars in Europe started off with crises in which a great power attacked a much weaker neighboring states as opposed to a direct confrontation between two great powers. A rising power's behavior towards its immediate neighbors is a key signal of the rising power's preferences and often itself a trigger to further escalation of tensions with other great powers. My research question also highlights a previously overlooked aspect in power transition namely, how great powers confront one another indirectly through small states as their proxy. As in the case of China, a rising power's neighboring states often align or ally with other great powers to offset the security imbalance in the region. Yet with much of the focus on direct interactions between great powers themselves in the IR literature, how the dynamics of the neighboring states' alliances can alter the rising power's foreign policy has largely been missing.<sup>6</sup> This element is crucial in the case of China, as five countries that it directly borders in East Asia—Japan, Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Taiwan—are either formally allied or share deep security commitments with the United States, another two neighbors that allies or aligns closely with the US (Singapore, Australia), and Vietnam which has recently stepped up defense cooperation with the US at an unprecedented pace and intensity, with participation in US-led joint military exercises for the first time in 2018.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the research question aims to explain a wide range of foreign policy behavior that has not been covered by previous research on great power interactions. These behavior include actions that may be violent but fall short of actual use of force, and actions that may be conciliatory but fall short of institutionalized cooperation or outright concessions. It is crucial to build a theory that includes these in-between behavior because they occur more frequently than extreme behavior

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<sup>6</sup>There are studies that look into how US alliances in East Asia have reacted to China's rise, such as Medeiros (2009), Liff (2017) but currently there has been no single, comprehensive study on China's management of US alliances in East Asia. There are also studies that look into China's record of less provocative and more cooperative diplomatic gestures such as Lai (2015), but there has not been a single study that looks at the complete range of actions ranging from provocative to reassuring other than the seminal work by Fravel (2008b)

<sup>7</sup><https://www.cpf.navy.mil/rimpac/>



such as war or concessions, and make up the bulk of interactions between a rising power and its neighboring states. Previous scholarship has paid scant attention to this behavior relative to the attention spent on studying major wars and interstate crises involving use of force. Yet there is much to be gained by changing the unit of analysis from war to provocation, given that war itself is a rare event. One is the ability to specify the conditions under which an aggressive gesture may escalate or avoid escalation. Another is to better understand why and at what point the impetus for policy change takes on a provocative or reassuring character. By focusing on the stages prior to major war or major concessions, we are able to depict a more comprehensive view of a great power's foreign policy trajectory throughout its rise.

### **1.2.1 Structural explanations for foreign policy behavior**

The trade-offs mentioned above suggest that certain structural-material and domestic-level political conditions favor escalation (threat) over de-escalation (reassurance), and vice versa. For the purposes of this dissertation, I define escalation as any rhetoric or behavior that attempts to change the status quo. De-escalation is defined as any rhetoric or behavior that attempts to maintain the status quo (operationalization and measurement will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter). In the following sections, I briefly examine theories in IR that predict aggressive foreign policy (or the lack thereof) as the outcome of structural-material factors.

Offensive realism suggests that as seekers of absolute security, a state will choose to escalate as long as it competes with other states for more security, with increasing military capability leading to increasing propensities to escalate (Mearsheimer 2001). Yet contrary to what offensive realism predicts, China has carefully avoided using force against many of its adversaries parallel to its rise, including globally and regionally powerful states such as the United States and Russia, as well as U.S. allies. China has in fact fluctuated between escalating and de-escalating on its territorial disputes. Defensive realism predicts that as seekers of relative security, a state prioritizes among its adversaries, being more prone to escalate when the balance of power is offset, for

instance.

Depending on how a state perceives the intentions of its adversaries, a state may escalate tensions thinking that demonstrating its toughness will trigger the adversary to back down, but such action may end up exacerbating its security when its toughness actually triggers the adversary to be tougher than before (Jervis 1976). While the prediction made by defensive realism is more plausible—since on the outset there seems to be a correlation between strengthening cooperation with U.S. and its allies and China’s perception of external threat—it still fails to account for the timing of escalation and de-escalation.

Rationalist explanations suggest that highly unequal distribution of power (Organski and Kugler 1980), lack of outside parties to monitor against time inconsistent preferences (Fearon 1995), misalignment of distribution of benefits and distribution of power causes the dominant/declining power (Powell 1999), result in a preventive war. Another rationalist explanations suggests that a states can increase its chances of being perceived as a status-quo type instead of a revisionist one by sending reassurances in the form of costly signals (Kydd 2005). Yet the question of how the decision to reassure was chosen in the first place over other more aggressive foreign policy options, remains. Recent work on effectiveness of signaling also illustrates the cognitive biases of state leaders who receive costly signals are prone to misinterpret them as cheap talk (Yarhi-Milo 2014). Altogether, variants of realist and rationalist explanations point to the direction of a major conflict as the commitment problem progresses. So why don’t we see major conflict for some cases that lead up to a power transition but not in others?

One must note that the structural-material change may be ill equipped to explain variation such as escalation and de-escalation that tend to occur more frequently than systemic wars. Structural changes occur much less frequently than foreign policy decisions. As the number of possible intervening events between the structural change and the escalation/de-escalation outcome increases, the direct causal effect of a structural change could also weaken. Relative military or strategic advantages predict a rising power to escalate out of prospect of loss and prospect of

winning, but one would first have to specify the factors as well as the process by which the rising power comes to regard itself as vulnerable.

In contrast to a well-established research agenda on why and how rising powers and dominant powers fight each other, explanations on why they may not fight each other are few and far in between. A lack of preemptive wars can be attributed to alliance interests (Reiter 1995), but for great powers the same political costs may not be applicable. Theories in liberal institutionalism suggest that states may be able to avoid conflict through trade relations and shared membership in international organizations. When benefits from trade weigh out the benefits of war, a state may decide not to risk hurting trade through escalation (Russett 2001).

Yet since regime type and organization membership rarely change, they also cannot adequately explain de-escalation, which occurs more frequently and is less permanent a solution. Empirical evidence from rising China does not hold up to hypotheses on increasing economic interdependence leading to fewer escalations or more de-escalations. For example, the growing trade interdependence between China and Japan—China being Japan’s largest single-state trade partner and Japan China’s second largest—has not prevented both countries from escalating the territorial dispute on Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

### **1.2.2 Domestic political explanations for foreign policy behavior**

Domestic-level explanations of coercive diplomacy can be broadly categorized into two types, based on whether escalation is a planned, deliberate strategy coordinated from the top, or a sub-optimal outcome resulting from coordination failure amongst the elites. Explanations in the first category include variants of the diversionary conflict theory, in which leaders resort to aggressive foreign policy as a means to distract constituents and stay in office (Levy 1988). An implication of this theory is that escalation is more likely as the rising power face internal security/legitimacy threats, or when competition for office intensifies. Apart from staying in office, a leader who needs to mobilize domestic resources in order to respond to an external threat is more likely to resort to

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aggressive foreign policy the higher the obstacles to mobilization (Christensen 1997).

Several assumptions are made about strategic uses of escalation, however. For example, it is assumed that escalation is costless for the leader. In waging a diversionary war to distract citizens from domestic problems, the leader also needs to take into account not only reputation costs in the case of defeat or withdrawal, but also the sheer costs of mobilizing resources to fight. Thus a more complete theory of strategic use of force would entail a calculus of both costs and benefits. The second type of explanation suggests that an aggressive foreign policy is less strategy and more an suboptimal by-product of a certain configuration of bureaucratic/special-group interests. For example, late-industrializing, transitional democracies in which elites are more capable of forming coalitions to pursue parochial interests at the expense of collective interest result in aggressive foreign policy in the form of overexpansion (Snyder 1993). Overexpansion occurs not because it is in the interest of each elite group in the first place, but because the process of accommodating parochial group interests brings unintended side effects that are difficult to undo. Similarly, the final policy outcome may depend largely on the bargaining process among bureaucratic organizations with widely varying motivations and threat perceptions (Allison 1971).

Theories that argue costly foreign policy change as a by-product of intra-elite negotiation also assume coordination to be relatively costless among elites. This assumption is worth addressing, because in reality not only is there coordination challenge among elites of the same level (horizontal coordination) but also among elites and the leadership (vertical coordination). Even if coordination is costless horizontally to allow for cartelization of interest groups as Snyder predicts, aggressive foreign policy may not materialize as easily if the leaders have strong control vertically over elites.

Leadership accountability, which varies by regime type, can also matter in the decision to not escalate. A leader may be less likely to escalate if she fears removal from office after failing to follow through a publicized decision to escalate (Fearon 2008; Weeks 2008). A leader is less likely to make bluffs in a regime in which political parties compete with one another, and

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have incentives to reveal information about incumbent resolve (Schultz 1998). In short, domestic political constraints prevent leaders from abusing threats to escalate as bargaining leverage with an adversary by making de-escalation costly. Yet such theories on informative institutions that explain why states do not escalate, cannot explain why states might choose to actively seek de-escalation. Once a threat to escalate is made, democratic leaders are more likely than leaders in less accountable regimes to actually follow up with the threat due to high costs of de-escalation (Schultz 1998). In short, existing domestic-level theories of cooperation cannot adequately address why and under what conditions states might choose to de-escalate, despite alleged reputation costs.

Domestic-level explanations that explain the lack of aggressive foreign policy under conditions conducive to conflict are just as rare as structural-level ones. Schweller (2006) offers a theory of underbalancing, in which states that face clear security threats do not make sufficient efforts to balance internally or externally. While elite fragmentation/cohesion and elite consensus/disagreement are introduced as key independent variables, they are operationalized only within the context of states that have electoral competition, making further application of the theory on more authoritarian settings challenging.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2.3 Ideational explanations of foreign policy behavior

Finally, ideational factors can also help explain the lack of escalation or active de-escalation. One factor is strategic culture. For instance, Japan and Germany's antimilitaristic security policy has origins in a political culture, or set of ideas and beliefs about critical historic events after WWII shared by the elite (Berger 1998). Yet China currently does not propagate a narrative that reinforces the gains of military expansion as part of promoting nationalism. In fact, if culture is indeed a significant variable, it could be that rising China is more likely to escalate against Japan, a country whose wartime atrocities form much of China's historical memory of victimhood. In addition,

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<sup>8</sup>For an explanation of China's ocean and naval strategy based on changing nature of China's bureaucratic institutions Mallory (2015).

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similar to theories of escalation, there is also the problem of temporal gap between the explanatory and outcome variables. Ideational variables change infrequently and slowly over time, and are less useful to explain escalation and de-escalation decisions within a single leader's tenure.

Leaders choose violence over peaceful settlements not because of severity of threats or legitimacy problems at home, but because of personal beliefs about how security should be obtained (Saunders 2011). Leaders' preferences are assumed to be shaped by social environments rather than material factors, so aggressive foreign policy could result as realpolitik-minded leaders face other similarly behaving state leaders and learn escalation as an appropriate response to a crisis. The problem with ideational factors is similar to structural ones in that it is largely a static variable. Causal beliefs about military strategy and national security tend to be sticky, and changes in beliefs may be too few and far in between to adequately explain the more frequent fluctuations in escalation and de-escalation within the same leadership. Strategic culture may also partially evolve in response to critical events, making it harder to attribute the cause of escalation to strategic culture alone over more transformative structural changes.

In sum, neither structural nor domestic-level explanations are compelling when each is considered in isolation, and ideational explanations are mostly not applicable given the measurement of the dependent variable. Changes in structural-level factors can supply an overall environment that could induce aggressive foreign policy, but cannot adequately explain the timing of specific policy decisions. Domestic-level explanations come closer to supplying events that might have triggered a specific policy decision, but cannot adequately explain why a similar event did not cause aggressive policy in other time periods. In the next section, I lay out the foundations for my own explanation, which synthesizes structural-level variables and domestic-level variables to explain why China undermines itself as a status-quo power through aggressive foreign policy.

### 1.3 Argument and empirical strategy

I contend that the existing theories of power transition do not fully explain the wide range of rhetorical and behavioral change that China has exhibited on territorial disputes. I build on the insights of existing theories on elite cohesion and coordination, as well as bureaucratic politics to construct my original hypothesis. I predict that changes in the rising power leaders' control of elite members that staff the key foreign policy/national security decision-influencing and decision-implementing research institutions, combined with structural changes in the rising power's external security situation, would result in responses that are different from what realists would have predicted based on structural changes alone.

The argument of this dissertation is that when a rising power enjoys a well-consolidated elite, the rising power is more likely to engage in costly foreign policy behavior, such as reassurance or provocation that attempt to change the status quo, towards its neighboring states. The reason for this is two-fold. First, reassurances and provocations are costly because of external audiences—they potentially invite a possible misperception of preferences, whereby the dominant power thinks that the rising power is more powerful and revisionist than it really is, or that the rising power is more conciliatory than it really is. Second, reassurances and provocations are costly because of internal audiences—provocative behavior raises the expectations of future action, while reassuring ones can be misinterpreted as selling out on national security interests by the public. In short, both provocations and reassurances risk spiralling into unintended conflicts with a great power rival, or spewing dissatisfaction among its own citizenry that could weaken the rising power's domestic stability. Due to these costs of active management (in the form of provocations and reassurances), the rising power's default strategy is to avoid<sup>9</sup> introducing new policy in managing its regional disputes.

However, if the rising power elites are paying more attention to security matters in their

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<sup>9</sup>Fravel (2008*b*) uses the concept of delay, in addition to the use of force and concessions.

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written discourse, and their attention is similar in sentiment, then I take this as an indication of the rising power leaders having strong control over their elites and enjoying fluid channels of intra-elite communication that can effectively convey the leaders' preferences to the elites. In this case, the theory predicts that the rising power would be more likely to engage in provocations and reassurances because these unconventional behavior would be less likely to spiral into greater conflict. This is because the theory makes the assumption that a consolidated elite is less likely to misinterpret or take advantage of events like provocations and reassurances to advance factional interests.

In order to investigate the conditions that lead a rising power to risk costly policy change towards its neighboring states, I first identify all occasions on which rising China engaged in provocation or reassurance towards its security disputes with Japan, Korea and the Philippines. Although there exist studies that track China's behavior in the East and South China Seas, this dissertation is unique in its approach of isolating just the government-enacted, officially-acknowledged activity to achieve measurement consistency over time. In the case of Korea, this dissertation is the first attempt to collect all instances of provocative and reassuring actions that China has taken against South Korea concerning North Korea. Secondly, I obtain elite discourse data as a proxy of elite consolidation strength, which is the key explanatory variable of my theory of rising power's regional foreign policy. Because I rely on think-tank and government approved publications as the source of elite discourse, at this time I am limited to studying the changes in elite preferences at the yearly level. I then confirm to what extent the changes in the elite discourse matches the outcomes, or the presence or absence of China's active engagement towards each of Japan, Korea and the Philippines, as predicted by my theory.

The theoretical focus on domestic political actors and conditions is a novel approach to understand authoritarian states where data on internal stability and policymaker preferences are difficult to obtain. This includes new ways to capture the state of elite unity, such as analyzing digitized texts published in journals that are approved by the central government in rising China. I



argue that in addition to taking into consideration alternative explanations that focus on structural and ideational factors, it is important to address the extent to which domestic political factors can also impact foreign policy making, as power transition can be destabilizing internally as much as it can be externally. The research question posed by my dissertation highlights this previously under-explored aspect of rising power foreign policy behavior, which is how the rising power expands outwardly while avoiding domestic turmoil during costly foreign policy change.

## **1.4 The Plan of the Dissertation**

The rest of the dissertation is as follows. Chapter 2 lays out the theory of rising power foreign policy behavior based on elite consensus, and introduces the concept of active management, which is challenging the status quo of disputes in either a provocative or reassuring manner, as opposed to refraining from any kind of explicit involvement. I explain how active management is a category of behavior that is distinct from use of force, concessions, or delaying tactics as these actually revise the status quo rather than merely challenging it. In this chapter, I also describe how I measure both the dependent variable (China's track record of provocations and reassurances) and the main independent variable (level of elite consensus as measured through discourse) as well as the method of analysis.

Chapter 3 tests the theory of rising power regional foreign policy on China's active management on the Senkaku/Diaoyu island disputes against Japan. Contrary to popular belief that China became notably aggressive towards Japan on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands beginning with the fishing trawler incident in 2010, I show that it was not until 2011 when China stepped in with a definitive provocation. Similarly, unlike most analysis that center on China's response to Japan's nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in September 2012 as a defining moment in China's management of the dispute, I demonstrate that from viewing the period after 2011 in its entirety, China has actually engaged in several reassurance attempts at an unprecedented scale, and that

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China's behavior after 2012 should be considered as part of its increase in total volume of activity and not just that of aggressiveness. In addition, I explain the timing of China's active management by observing whether or not the Chinese elite were consolidated at the time, as well as secondary factors such as leadership transition, providing evidence that confirms the expectations of the theory of rising power regional foreign policy based on elite consensus.

Chapter 4 tests the theory of elite consensus on China's active management of the North Korea problem against South Korea. This is the first-ever attempt to categorize China's varying levels of hostility towards South Korea on the issue of dealing with conventional and nuclear armament of North Korea, China's client state and informal ally. While there have been efforts to gauge the state of Sino-Korean security relations using indicators such as the type of bilateral agreement signed, number of high-level visits, and military-to-military cooperation, it has been difficult to obtain a measurement that is consistent across time. I use China's official government statements to track exactly when China had shifted from a position of accommodation to a position of hostility towards South Korea efforts to counter North Korea (often in conjunction with the US as Korea is a formal ally of the US). Similar to Chapter 3, I first refute the widespread belief that prior to the Cheon'an crisis of 2010, China had rarely issued provocative statements towards South Korea. In fact, up until the secret negotiations that eventually led to the two states' normalization in 1992, China had been ruthless in its provocative attitude against the South Korean government and its alliance to the US. I find that the pivotal year of China's active management of the Korean peninsula began in 2000, when the Chinese elites' focus on hard-security issues outstripped its attention on all other matters in discussing Korea.

Finally, Chapter 5 tests the theory of elite consensus on China's active management of the South China Sea disputes against the Philippines. I challenge the conventional wisdom that China has been singularly aggressive towards the Philippines on the South China Sea disputes since the Scarborough standoff in April 2012 as there have been reassurances amid provocations, even after the 2016 international arbitration proceedings that undermined China's claims. I also

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remind that despite the hyper-attention on Chinese behavior in the South China Sea in recent years, China's provocation had actually begun back in 1995 with the takeover of Mischief Reef and had been followed by over a decade of inactivity. Using the data on Chinese elite discourse on the Philippines from 1978 until 2016, I am able to explain most of the variation in China's behavior after 2000 as they match the predicted outcomes of my theory of rising power regional foreign policy: When elites are fixated on security topics and especially on issues that are associated with negative sentiment, active management is more likely to occur.

Chapter 6 concludes, with a discussion of the significance of each of the empirical chapter's core findings. I include the shortcomings of the theory, especially with regards to the inability of the current version of the theory to separately explain instances of provocation and instances of reassurances (the theory makes predictions on when either is likely instead of when one is more likely than the other), and several suggestions to refine the theory. I also discuss the generalizability of the theory on other out-of-sample cases aside from rising China as well as suggestions for future research and implications for policy.

# Chapter 2

## Theory

### **2.1 Theories of great power foreign policy behavior during power transition**

In this section, I review the existing literature that sheds light on the sources of rising power foreign policy behavior, especially during power transition. As I find that much of the literature on foreign policy during power transition centers on sources of great power conflict and great power cooperation, my central critique is that outcomes that fall short of major war or major concessions are left unexplained. Theories focus on the outbreak of war while overlooking hostility that fall short of war. The literature also does not sufficiently capture the possibility of cooperation during power transition, and tends to view the range of possible outcomes as either interstate conflict or the lack thereof. Braumoeller (2008) similarly uses the level of state activity as a predictor of great power conflict by first quantifying the amount of security-increasing activities of each great power, and then estimating whether conflict is more likely in the case where there is a balance of activity (spiral model) or an imbalance (deterrence model).

Aside from a focus on major conflicts, many power transition theories also study the interaction between the rising and declining powers instead of separately looking at the sources of

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either power's behavior. In recent years, there has been several studies looking at the origins of the declining (dominant) power as the main initiator of conflict or cooperation. For instance, scholars including Gilpin (1981), Copeland (2001), MacDonald and Parent (2011), Glosny (2012) theorize on the motivations and likelihood of great power conflict, but their focus is primarily on the decisions of the dominant or declining power towards each other: facing prospects of relative power loss, the dominant power considers strategies ranging from preventive war to retrenchment.<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, I study the motivations for the rising power's behavior, so I do not address in length scholarship that looks at grand strategies of dominant powers in the economic and military realm as the main outcome variable (Kim 2019; Shiffrinson 2018).

Finally, existing power transition theories have traditionally under-theorized on the conditions or specific causal mechanisms under which a more peaceful power transition can occur. Organski and Kugler (1980) proposes that power differentials among states is a driving cause of major conflict, but does not go into the specific conditions under which the power transition might be managed without resulting in a preemptive strike by the stronger power. Powell (1999) suggests that war is most likely when the distribution of benefits does not match the distribution of power, but does not address under what conditions the rising power can effectively signal its resolve so that the declining power would prefer appeasement to war. Although Kang (2009) argues that rising China has largely avoided major conflict and would be likely to continue to do so due to the numerous economic benefits and trade ties its neighbors enjoy with China, it is also unclear then, why a rising power aiming for peaceful transition sometimes attempt policy change that would alter the status quo in a more negative, conflict-prone direction.

Of the recent works that focus on a rising power's foreign policy behavior during power transition, Liebman (2009) offers an insight into why effective signaling by the rising power is difficult based on the assumption that rising powers will become more powerful over time. Liebman suggests that war occurs when the distribution of benefits become sticky (under which the rising

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<sup>1</sup>Others focus exclusively on the grand strategy and trajectory of declining powers such as Posen (2014)

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power's expanding interests can no longer be accommodated without exacerbating the zero-sum game between the rising and declining powers) and when the rising power has trouble effectively signaling threats and reassurances to the declining power. Since it is expected to grow in power in the future, the rising power's threats lack potency (as it has not risen yet) but its reassurances also lack credibility (as it is expected to grow more powerful). However, Liebman assumes that the rising power's threats and reassurances are similarly ineffective regardless of the time horizon, and does not go into the scope conditions under which some signals could be more effective than others. Similar to existing power transition theories, Liebman is most concerned with explaining how a rising power might initiate or avoid war, and does not probe further the mechanism by which the rising power can successfully delay conflict even as its interests are expanding and the distribution of benefits increasingly static. This dissertation takes up where Liebman left off by suggesting that while rising powers struggle with effective signaling, certain domestic political configurations, such as a well-consolidated elite, could make costly signaling more likely.

While there are several studies that look at the sources of interstate war during power transition, very few actually address the possibility of rising power's *cooperative* behavior during power transition. In this regard, Edelstein (2017) provides a much-needed analysis for an undertheorized phenomenon: why and how great powers might cooperate with each other during power transition. Edelstein suggests that alignment of short term and long term gains determines the likelihood of two major powers heading to war or maintaining cooperation. Cooperative gestures emerge when both the dominant power prioritizes short term gains, with cooperation more likely if the rising power additionally focuses on long term gains. The central insight in Edelstein's theory is the "logic of procrastination," suggesting that dominant powers may not necessarily focus on the long-term threats posed by the rising power and instead prioritize on the short term benefits of cooperating with the rising power. As long as the dominant power is fixated on "now" an ignoring "later," any cooperation deep or shallow is more likely than conflict.

Likewise, Edelstein does not elaborate why the dominant power would be willing to turn

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a blind eye on long-term threats other than that it is out of convenience; addressing long-term threats requires significant costs, often prohibitive enough for leaders to avoid the issue for as long as they can. Unlike Schweller (2006) who suggests that certain domestic political configurations such as a unified elite make states better positioned to balance long-term threats, Edelstein does not suggest the conditions that makes either state prioritize short-term over the long-term. It is also worth noting that Edelstein does not propose formal indicators of leadership time horizons: in other words, how does one know *a priori* that a leader is operating under a short-term horizon vs. a long-term one? Without a consistent measurement of leadership time horizon, it becomes difficult to distinguish the main causal variable from the outcome it is trying to explain. While Edelstein's study deserves praise for theorizing the causal pathways under which great power cooperation becomes more likely during power transition, it faces the limits of inductive reasoning. It is also worth pointing out that by characterizing cooperation as an interaction, Edelstein could be missing out on "missed" opportunities in which either side initiated cooperative behavior but was not reciprocated by the other. Finally, as the impetus of change lies with the dominant state's time preferences, the theory is most amenable to explaining the strategies taken by dominant powers and limited in its capacity to explain cooperative gestures initiated by the rising power.

In short, both explanations of why a power transition might result in conflict or cooperation share two shortcomings. First, they are limited in what they can explain; they explain only the most extraordinary cases (war or concessions) and only those that occur with great power audiences. Second, they rely on inductive reasoning, which makes *a priori* measurement of causal variables and theory falsification difficult. My theory attempts to fill in the gap by explaining foreign policy behavior that is not necessarily all-out war or outright concession, and behavior that is not necessarily directed at great powers. It also identifies and provides measurable indicators of the key explanatory variable of elite consensus, making *a priori* empirical predictions possible.

Both Liebman and Edelstein's work reveal that there is an ongoing tension in the rising power's goals: it needs to avoid provoking others to continue rising, but in order to rise stably it

also needs to demonstrate its ability to “flex muscles” from time to time in order minimize the chances of actually confronting its adversary during power transition. Similarly, the rising power needs to reassure others to continue rising, but reassurances can also be misinterpreted internally as caving into foreign pressures. I argue that one way to solve this dilemma—to rise without risking preemptive action by external adversaries and destabilizing internally—is costly signaling that showcases what the rising power is capable of doing but showing that incrementally, in the most limited manner. The limited scope of these actions demonstrate that the rising power is capable of but is not willing to change the status quo.

A closer look at the record of provocations and reassurances reveal that most of the time, China’s most vocal elites do not equally endorse aggressive foreign policy change. Moreover, the group of elites that support changing the status-quo with regards to one dispute may be silent on another. The timing of demonstration of support varies across issue areas and across bureaucratic institutions. This suggests that perhaps certain configurations of elite dynamics might offer a more compelling explanation as to why China is more willing to change the status quo on certain disputes than others, or why China is more willing to change the status quo on the same dispute at certain points of time than at others.

## **2.2 An elite-based theory of rising power foreign policy**

The literature review above reveals several gaps in extant theories of rising power foreign policy behavior. First of all, existing theories tend to focus uniquely on major wars or the lack thereof, and does not address why the rising power may engage in hostilities and concessions that are significant but lower-level than an all-out war or complete acquiescence. Secondly, existing theories tend to focus on rising power behavior towards its great power adversaries once it has risen, and is mute on how it behaves towards non-great power states, and during the time period leading up to its rise prior to taking over the dominant power. Finally, existing theories tend to view acts of ag-



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gression and cooperation as having separate causes, although rising powers exhibit both behaviors frequently and in conjunction with one another.

My theory of rising power attempts to address these gaps in extant theories of rising power foreign policy behavior. It provides a unifying theory of rising state's security activity in the form of provocations and reassurances, as well as neither. Why and when would the rising power engage in costly foreign policy decisions towards other weaker states in the region despite superiority of its military and economic capabilities. The core argument is based on the simple intuition that a rising power should avoid an all-out conflict just as it would try to avoid an all-out concession to other states for as much as possible until it surpasses the dominant power (power transition). Meanwhile, in order to postpone these unfavorable outcomes as much as possible, the rising power needs to demonstrate that it is *capable* of executing such outcomes but *unwilling* to do so in the meantime.

Ideally, the rising power seeks to send these costly signals of capability and resolve as much as possible so as to keep other states from attempting preemptive attacks. However, crafting a costly foreign policy change entails risks on both external and domestic political fronts because of the possible repercussions in the case the foreign policy change is not restrained. Externally, a rising power's provocations and reassurances could invite preemptive moves by the declining power if the latter perceives the rising power will continue to escalate tensions. Internally, a rising power's provocations and reassurances could raise the expectations of the public too quickly or result in backlash of the regime by a resistant public. Given such costs, I argue that active management would be more likely to occur when the leadership is relatively confident in its ability to act in a restrained manner.

To begin with, the rising power faces a unique dilemma in that it needs to demonstrate to its rival dominant power that it is a status-quo oriented state for the time being, but at the same time demonstrate that it is capable of standing firm should it be challenged. The rising power can take actions that are either provocative or reassuring, and each type can be classified into strong

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or weak. The outright use of force or formal concessions are outside the scope of my dissertation which focuses primarily on more subtle forms of foreign policy behavior.

A rising power's active management can be either provocative or reassuring in type. Each action, in turn, has unique costs and benefits for the rising power. Strong reassurances and strong provocations provide the rising power an opportunity to signal to its great power adversary of its capacity, but both have the potential to become unrestrained, an outright use of force or concession with potential for domestic political backlash as well as international backlash.

My theory argues that rising powers are more likely to attempt active management of security disputes during power transition if they have elite consensus that minimizes the internal costs of foreign policy change. Forgoing active management is essentially passing up opportunities because the probability of preemptive actions of the rising power's adversaries as well as disrupt the expectations of the domestic population are too high. But active management can be stabilizing, and can prevent the rising power's adversaries from taking preemptive steps against the rising power by demonstrating the rising power's capacity (but unwillingness) for escalation. The logic of the theory is based on the assumption that an anticipation of increased power which defines a rising power also comes with an assumption of revisionist tendencies. In other words, time works against the rising power's attempts to signal itself as a status-quo power, and the adversary is poised to assume the worst of the rising power's actions. A rising power that shows the slightest signs of aggressiveness is likely perceived as a revisionist who is not yet fully capable (but would be, with time) as opposed to exercising self-restraint; a rising power that shows the slightest signs of cooperation would still be taken to be a revisionist who would be even less cooperative as time passes.

Of the range of actions that the rising power can take during power transition, forgoing active management of sensitive security disputes may temporarily relieve the rising power of the burden of —both internally and externally— for the rising power. However, because the rising power does not reveal how capable or willing it could be when it comes to securing its national

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security interests, it can invite preemptive measures from the great power adversary. In this regard, postponing active management can pave way for greater instability down the road.

A rising power could signal that it is not yet capable of war by avoiding direct, active involvement in the ongoing security disputes with neighboring states. However, the rising power's adversary may nonetheless be convinced that now would be a better time to take preemptive action, given the rising power's expected gain in capabilities in the future. The adversary may think that the rising power would be even less likely to cooperate as it becomes more powerful, and decide that it is better to demand concessions upfront instead of waiting longer. Not actively managing its security disputes therefore could increase the likelihood of conflict during power transition by inviting the adversary to take preemptive measures sooner than later.

Costly signals in the form of provocations can show that the rising power is capable of escalating and deter the adversaries from attacking preemptively. This can be done as long as the rising power is capable of constraining the provocation as a one-time deviation, as opposed to the first step in a series of escalations. Similarly, reassurance can prevent adversaries from demanding more concessions as long as the rising power demonstrates that it is capable of cooperating into the future. Yet the rising power's reassurances are effective only as much as the rising power's ability to restrain itself, as reassurances carry risk of domestic instability because it could be perceived as selling out on national interests. If unrestrained, both forms of active management—provocation and reassurance—could result in a reconfiguration of power domestically, as it could empower those with hawkish preferences inside the regime, and leaders facing a legitimacy crisis for caving into concessions. But if the rising power is able to restrain itself, the cost of active management decreases as the rising power can demonstrate that is powerful enough to challenge the status quo but at the same time has no intention to actually change the status quo.

Table 2.1: Costs vs. Benefits of Active Management

	Costs	Benefits
No Active Management	Invite preemptive measures from adversary	Maintain stability internally by delaying noticeable shifts in policy
Active Management (Provocations & Reassurances)	Invite instability internally by noticeable shifts in policy	Discourage preemptive measures from adversary

### 2.2.1 United Elites: Elite consensus as an explanation behind a rising power's costly foreign policy behavior

In the previous section, I laid out the logic behind why (or why not) the rising power might decide to actively manage its security disputes. Here, I identify the conditions which enable the rising power to choose active management. Specifically, I explain that the rising power would engage in active management in the form of provocations and reassurances when the cost of doing so is minimized, and one factor that may be strongly associated would be the degree to which the rising power elites are consolidated.

I focus on a source of great power behavior that has been overlooked by scholars writing on rising powers and power transition, namely domestic political explanations based on the role of the elites. In recent years, scholars have begun to study the role of public opinion, elite opinion and leadership in foreign policy decision-making, but often such studies remain limited to Western democratic states such as the U.S. There are two reasons why looking at the role of elites even in non-democratic regimes is germane to the study of rising power foreign policy, especially in the case of modern China during the reform era of 1978 and after. The first reason is that elites play a key role in disseminating and communicating important policy changes, and public opinion often takes cues from elite opinion. Although it is not clear *to what extent* and *how* they matter,

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elites matter, and more so in authoritarian regimes, as much of the policy-making and policy-implementing roles are fulfilled in a top-down manner. For example, in the case of China, despite the dearth of publicly available information on elite preferences and internal discussions, we now have evidence that elites are becoming a more prominent source of influencing Chinese public opinion on foreign policy through both public and personal channels. The number of think-tanks that produce research on foreign policy and national security is steadily rising<sup>2</sup>; elites often publish commentaries and give interviews in the news media, and some maintain an active presence on social media outlets.

Second, variation of elite and leadership preferences are exceptionally suitable as alternative explanations to existing theories that heavily focus on structural factors as the main driver of rising power foreign policy behavior, mainly because unlike the nearly unidirectional increase in material capabilities during its rise, variables such as elite cohesiveness and leadership strength can fluctuate both ways (become stronger or weaker). We often observe that rising power behavior does not necessarily always become more provocative despite an increase in power. Thus incorporating domestic political factors—especially at the elite and top leadership level—could enable us to explain more of the variation on why rising powers sometimes resort to costly foreign policy behavior, but oftentimes not.

My theory takes cue from the recent works in the IR literature that pay attention to elites' (as opposed to the public or individual top leaders') interests and preferences as a key explanatory variable in foreign policy change. For instance, Saunders (2015, 2018) suggests that elites (including decision-influencers such as advisors) are the primary cue-givers for the public when it comes to foreign policy matters. She suggests that if individual elites can be bought off and manipulated by the top leadership, the democratic leader does not necessarily have higher audience costs compared to her non-democratic counterparts. I apply the insight from Saunders' work that the leaders'

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<sup>2</sup>This is confirmed by the growth of think-tank publications specializing in foreign affairs and policy from 1978 - 2017.

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ability to manipulate the elites into giving unified cues to the wider audience (general public) earns the leadership flexibility on my theory. Namely, if the rising power can control its cue-giving elites, then it can back down from commitments without generating audience costs from her constituents.

In addition to this cue-giving, information-transmitting function between the leadership and the public, domestic political elites also serve as experts who actually executes policy. Thus a highly cohesive and coordinated elite is a more reliable conduit of top leaders' preferences, and provocations and reassurances are more likely to not spiral out of control when a stable environment holds. For instance, Fravel (2017/2018) argues that the unity of the Chinese Communist Party enables change in military strategy because a united party is more likely to delegate more authority to the military, which in turn perceives the party unity as a green light to engineering change. Similarly, in the realm of foreign policy, a more consolidated elite is more likely to promote policy outcomes in a manner most consistent to the leaders' preferences—just as a unified party gives the military more leeway to shape strategy, a unified elite allows the leadership more flexibility in formulating the rising power's national security policy.

To better understand the role of elite bargaining and consensus building in enabling policy change, I take insight from recent works in IR that looks into elite preferences, especially elite threat perception, as a key determinant of the type of foreign policy outcome. For instance, Saunders (2009) suggests that leaders' causal beliefs about the origins of threats determines the type of intervention strategy (transformative vs. nontransformative) a great power may take. Similarly, Schweller (2006) argues that the extent to which elites agree on the existence, source and remedies to external threats determines whether or not the great power would balance against its adversaries. If elite consensus—defined as the “measure of the similarity of elites' preferences over outcomes and their beliefs about the preferences and anticipated actions of others”—is lacking, then Schweller predicts “either underbalancing or some other nonbalancing policy option.” Yarhi-Milo (2014) also proposes the “selective attention thesis” to explain that elites vary in their threat perceptions based on their organizational interests and personal biases, allowing one to relax

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the assumption that elite preferences and perception are monolithic; even within the same regime, elites can hold divergent views on the same object. One caveat, however, is that I do not assume that the elites preferences necessarily match the content of the actual policy outcome, but rather it is the extent to which the rising power elites are consolidated that enables the leadership to attempt active management of disputes during power transition.

Based on the above studies as well as theoretical insights from in-person interviews conducted with Chinese foreign policy and security studies experts affiliated with government, military, and academia during my fieldwork in 2013,<sup>3</sup> I propose that the degree to which the elites' preferences on security issues are aligned and shared is an integral component of a rising power's decision to attempt provocations or reassurances. In other words, the depiction that elites are a viable and independent alternative to the incumbent leader with distinct and competing preferences may not be most accurate in the case of non-democratic states. Nonetheless, elites are still relevant as it is from this contingent that leaders are selected; while there may be fewer official platforms to formally manage conflicting preferences, it can be assumed that elites communicate their divergent views on policy through less obvious, indirect channels (such as leaders' small group meetings or *lingdao xiaozu* in China). Owing to the greater gap in power between the leader and its selectorate/elites in authoritarian contexts, the role of elites is more heavily skewed towards policy-informing and policy-executing roles as the elites are significantly less authoritative and visible than the incumbent, and resembles a bureaucrat or government servant rather than

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<sup>3</sup>I interviewed 22 individuals during my stay in Beijing and Shanghai, China from March - May 2013. I am grateful to the following individuals who spoke with me at length about cases of elite fracture and unity in China's foreign policy making towards Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines: Dr. Wang Yizhou, Dr. Wang Dong, Dr. Zhang Qingmin of Peking University, Beijing; Dr. Zhang Tuosheng at the China Foundation for International Strategic Studies (CFISS), Beijing; Dr. Sun Xuefeng and Dr. Zhang Chuanjie of Qinghua University, Beijing; Dr. Su Hao at the China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing; Dr. Ren Xiao at Fudan University, Dr. Xia Liping at Tongji University; Mr. Wang Wen, at Renmin University and Global Times; one researcher at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), two researchers at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) who requested anonymity; one researcher at the Shanghai Academy of social sciences (SASS) who requested anonymity; one researcher at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS); three researchers at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) who requested anonymity; Three individuals affiliated with the Academy of Military Science, Beijing, who requested anonymity; one historian of the Chinese Communist Party, Beijing, who requested anonymity.

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the policy-contesting, potential challengers to top leadership in Western democracies. In this regard, the extent to which the elite contingent is unified matters more for determining whether or not there will be active management at all, than for determining the specific *content* of the active management.

The elite-based theory of rising power foreign policy proposes that the existence of elite consolidation determines whether or not the rising power will attempt provocations and reassurances. The core logic of the theory depends on the assumption that in an authoritarian setting, elites matter most in their ability to effectively and accurately implementing the leaders' most preferred policy, with the top leaders' preferences overriding that of the elites. I posit that leaders attempt active management only if they are confident that the provocation or reassurance will be constrained and will not escalate. This means that if the elites are fragmented in their preferences, active management is less likely as the leaders have lower confidence in the elites' ability to faithfully abide by their preferences and not attempt to use the policy change as a pretext for advancing elite preferences that conflict with that of the leaders, which could lead to provocations and reassurances to spiral out of control. If the elites are united, active management is more likely as the leaders can be more assured in that the elites would execute policies that are closely aligned with the leaders' preferences, and would not use the policy change as a pretext for advancing their own preferences that could undermine the leaders' preferences.<sup>4</sup>

If the elites are well consolidated and therefore easier to coordinate, leaders may then have the confidence to try out a significant policy change that has the potential to be controversial both at home and abroad. My theory assumes that it is *after* this initial decision of attempting active management, that the leaders then decide what form—provocation or reassurance—the active management will take. The theory of rising power foreign policy behavior assumes that the decision

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<sup>4</sup>Although the current version of my theory does not make predictions for when elites are not consolidated, some possible implications could be that a) if the elites are fragmented and some of them are in powerful factions, hijacking of the state and extreme behavior can occur Snyder (1993); b) If the elites are fragmented and none of them are powerful enough to outstrip the incumbent, general inaction or underbalancing can occur Schweller (2006).



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of whether or not to pursue costly policy precedes the decision of what kind of policy (provocation or reassurance) to make. The theory also posits that the absence of active management is the continuation of the status quo (repeating a precedented action, delaying change in policy) can be either accidental or intentional. Following Schweller,<sup>5</sup> the lack of active management is similar to underbalancing or non-balancing in that the rising power does not proactively address the disputes at hand. A rising power's foreign policy decision that maintains the status quo means that there is no additional extraordinary effort required to inform, persuade and monitor the rising power elites to ensure that the policy change does not deviate from its intended target and stays within the planned range of actions.

The theory does not, however, make specific predictions as to which type of active management the rising power would take. I suggest that the type of active management in turn depends on secondary factors such as the rising power's external security environment, and domestic political settings such as the rising power leadership strength and the neighboring state's internal stability. For instance, because the foremost security concern for rising power leaders is the amount of threat posed by their great power adversary, the configurations of the rising power's external security environment at the time of deciding to actively manage its security disputes could be a primary factor in determining whether the active engagement would take the form of provocation or reassurance. If the leaders perceive considerable threat from its great power adversary's power projection around their geographical periphery, then the rising power is likely to choose provocation in order to thwart a preventive attack by the great power adversary. Meanwhile, periods of leadership transfer or a shuffling of high-level positions inside the rising power may motivate the leaders to choose reassurance over provocation in order to minimize the risk of foreign policy change undermining the legitimacy of the new incumbent. On the other hand, when a leader is vying for attention and to shore up her legitimacy in the eyes of the general public, she may re-

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<sup>5</sup>For Schweller, balancing occurs only when elites agree that a serious threat exists, and that the elites also agree to manage that threat by standing firm instead of other strategies such as appeasement and band-wagoning.

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sort to provocations instead of reassurances as a way to demonstrate her capacity to act tough on security disputes. The interplay of these two factors—external and internal security environment configurations—results in the theoretical implications below.

Table 2.2: Observable implications of the theory of rising power foreign policy

Level of Elite consensus	External security as predominant concern	Internal security as predominant concern
Elites fragmented	No active management	No active management
Elites consolidated	Active management (Provocation or Reassurance)	Active management (Provocation of Reassurance)

**Hypothesis** *If the rising power’s elites are consolidated, the rising power is more likely to engage in active management, in the form of either provocation or reassurance.*

There are several alternative explanations that look into the causes of interstate conflict and cooperation relevant in the study of behavior of a *rising great power* during power transition, especially in the case of China, which is the empirical focus of this dissertation. The first alternative explanation is that the foreign policy outcomes of a rising power, especially in an authoritarian one, depends entirely on the preferences of the top leadership such as Chinese president Xi Jinping’s and premier Li Keqiang. Yet not only are leader preferences difficult to assess in authoritarian regimes but relying on them alone may be inadequate to explain the variation of behavior *within* the same leadership, as authoritarian regime leaders often have prolonged incumbency. For instance, in the case of China after the death of its founding leader Mao Zedong, each leader’s tenure has lasted approximately a decade or more, but within each of the leaders (Deng Xiaoping from 1978 - 1989, Jiang Zemin from 1989 - 2002, Hu Jintao from 2002-2012 and Xi Jinping from 2012 to present)

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China has engaged in both provocative and cooperative gestures.<sup>6</sup>

Another alternative explanation proposes that interstate economic relations can be a source of issue-linkage with security disputes, as states may vary their policy on territorial disputes as a way to gain bargaining leverage on trade and investment negotiations. For instance, China's desire to extract economic concessions from Japan could partially explain the timing of its active management on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands against Japan since the two states normalized relations in 1978 Wiegand (2011). For instance, when attracting foreign investment and transfer of technology from Japan was China's top priority in the 1980s leading up to the 1990s, China had backed off from actively managing the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and East China Sea claims. On the other hand, economic dependence may be so significant that one state may be keen to avoid escalating against another lest the tensions from territorial tensions spill over to bilateral economic relations. This is more likely in the case in which economic interdependence is skewed in favor of the rising power and against the neighboring state, such as between China and South Korea. Yet a shortcoming in issue linkage based explanations is that often correlation is mistaken for causation, as economic agreements and security policy are likely made independently of each other. Most importantly, the logic of issue linkage rests on the idea that one could stall progress (or threaten to stop altogether) in one realm to gain advantage in the other, implying that the rising power's actions must not be so costly and irreversible that it cannot be negotiated again. However, by definition reassurance and provocation are costly, often unprecedented actions with real consequences as they challenge the status quo. Thus the logic of issue linkage may not be as helpful in explaining why the rising power engages in active management, as reassurances and provocations are too costly actions to be part of bargaining leverage.

Finally, under a diversionary logic, domestic instability or transitional events inside the rising power may also trigger the rising power to look for outlets to distract its citizens. Carter

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<sup>6</sup>Each Chinese supreme leader's tenure was calculated based on formal date of starting and ending his highest political office, that of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China.

(2018) argues that since autocrats draw support from both elites and the public, if elite support dwindles then the autocrat is likely to engage in aggression in order to intensify the rally-around-the-flag effect and shore up public support. But as only China's most prominent adversaries such as Japan and the US have popular narratives of negative sentiment, diversionary logic cannot account for why an authoritarian leader might resort to aggressive measures towards those states which the public cares little about, has no negative sentiment to rally against, and tends to be ill-informed, such as the in the case of the Chinese public to the Philippines and South Korea. On the other hand, under a counter-diversionary mechanism, a legitimacy crisis may motivate the rising power to de-escalate tensions and actually be more likely to engage in cooperative gestures Fravel (2008*b*). The counter-diversionary logic, however, is applicable mostly in cases in which the cooperative gesture itself is the remedy for the legitimacy crisis.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.3 Research Design

This dissertation addresses the question of how a rising power manages its regional disputes during power transition, which is a topic that has been overlooked in the power transition literature until now. I introduce a theory of rising power foreign policy based on how consolidated the rising power elites are in order to identify and explain a more nuanced variation in rising power behavior: why the rising power would choose costly behavior in the form of provocations and reassurances at different times. The dissertation presents new evidence from the case of rising China that are consistent with the theory's expectations, with some exceptions. In this section, I explain why I selected rising China (1978-2017) as the main empirical focus of this dissertation, define the main independent and dependent variables, describe the data sources and the method of data analysis.

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<sup>7</sup>For instance, the logic of counter-diversionary foreign policy predicts China to cooperate with neighboring states in Central Asia if there is unrest in Xinjiang province (a Chinese province that directly borders Central Asia) because cooperation would directly contribute to resolving the regional unrest.

### 2.3.1 Why rising China?

I define the transitional power period from the onset of a state's publicly acknowledged grand strategy that focuses on economic growth, which is the most important harbinger of a state's material increase in power. In the case of China, I start with the year 1978, as then *de facto* Chinese head of state Deng Xiaoping introduced reform policies that would prioritize economic growth over exporting the communist revolution abroad.<sup>8</sup> Before going into the reason behind selecting rising China (1978 - present) as the primary empirical focus of my dissertation, I first briefly go over what do I mean by a "rising power" in this dissertation.

Previous research on power transition and great power politics has used both objective indicators or perceptual bases to determine whether a state is rising. Objective variables can be based on factors such as the presence or absence of alliances, the pace of arms buildup, the growth and size of the national economy, victory in major wars, possession of nuclear capabilities, and holding permanent seats in the UN Security Council (Organski and Kugler 1980; Small and Singer 1982; Kim and Morrow 1992). Subjective variables would include threat perceptions, status recognition by the dominant power and other middle and minor powers by the rising power. For this project, I rely more on the objective, material indicators rather than a perceptual definition of "rise," mainly because I focus on the foreign policy behavior initiated by the rising power rather than the dominant power. Studies that focus on the behavior and strategies of the dominant power tend to rely more on perceptual definition of rise and decline. I consider only states that do not rely on another country or organization to defend itself, leaving out states that have compromised or placed limitations in their defense and offense capabilities such as Japan or Germany after World War II. I exclude these states as my theory requires the rising power's defense capabilities to be commensurate with its growth.

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<sup>8</sup>I acknowledge that it is also possible to define China as a rising power as early as 1949, as China has been growing in material capabilities since its establishment in 1949. The main reason for choosing 1978 as the cutoff year for this dissertation is because in addition to identifying economic growth as the primary goal, the Chinese state ceased to operate its longtime foreign policy goal of exporting the Chinese Communist revolution model overseas.

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For a more objective indicator of rise, I check to see if a state meets three conditions. First, I look at whether or not a great power institutionalizes domestic reforms that prioritizes economic growth over physical expansion. Second, I look at whether or not the great power takes measures to integrate itself into the global economic order. Third, I look at whether or not the state is a relatively powerful state compared to other states in terms of its share in world GDP. China has reinstated domestic political reform since 1978 that prioritized economic growth, which meets the first condition. While China did not join the World Trade Organization until 2001, it normalized relations with the U.S., the leading country with the highest share of world GDP since the end of the second World War, in 1979. Therefore, I take the normalization of relations with the U.S as the preliminary indicator of integration in the global economy. Finally, following Liebman (2009), I try defining a rising power using an arbitrary cutoff point of whether or not a state crosses 5% of the world GDP in terms of purchasing power.<sup>9</sup> A dominant power(s) is a state whose share of the world GDP is higher than the rising power at the time of crossing. A dominant power is a state that possesses economic and military capabilities that outweigh those of the rising power. I do not imply that the dominant power is a declining power, because its continued preponderance in economic and military power and the rising power's rise are not mutually exclusive phenomena.<sup>10</sup> According to the cutoff, China's GDP crosses 5% of the world GDP in 1985. Taking these three objective indicators into account, it makes most sense to define China as a rising power from at least 1978.

At least four other great powers satisfy the 5% criteria and could potentially qualify as a rising power in the post-industrial revolution era. They are the U.S. from the end of the Civil War until the beginning of World War I (1865-1914), Japan during the interwar years leading into the end of World War II (1930-1945), Bismarck Germany from 1880 - 1914, and the former Soviet Union from 1930 to 1970. The theory of rising power foreign policy implies that the rising power

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<sup>9</sup>Liebman relies on Angus Maddison's calculations in *The World Economy: Historical Statistics*, for the time period from 1816 to present, while consulting the Penn World Table for validity of the measurement from 1950 to present.

<sup>10</sup>See Beckley (2011/2012)

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is most concerned with demonstrating status quo preferences to the dominant power, and suggests that costly signaling can be accomplished by “testing the waters,” or provoking and reassuring satellite states to which the dominant state has a security commitment, instead of directly challenging the dominant power. Given this theoretical implication, it is most appropriate to identify a rising power that faced such satellite states to which it could signal its latent status-quo-ness. In this regard, two of the above cases deserve attention: the rise of the U.S. against Great Britain, the rise of Germany against Great Britain. Imperial Japan during the interwar years did not face satellite states of the then dominant power to signal to. Much of the rise of former USSR coincided with the early years of the Cold War, which was marked by bipolarity and operating under an ideological divide in which there was little occasion to signal to each others’ satellite states. Unlike the U.S. which faced two neighboring states Canada and Mexico—and Canada at the time of U.S.’ rise against Great Britain had been a British colony and not an independent state—rising China stands as an exceptionally fertile case with numerous opportunities to signal its preferences against several of its neighboring states to whom the U.S. has a security commitment.<sup>11</sup>

While the theory of rising power foreign policy could be tested against the case of rising U.S. and rising Germany against Great Britain as well, this dissertation centers on the case of rising China because it takes into consideration the rising power’s domestic politics as a source of key foreign policy change. As there has been a relative lack of studies that focus on non-Western (and democratic) regimes that were also rising powers, this study hopes to shed light on the most understudied case, that of non-democratic modern China. In addition, the dissertation attempts to make the most use of underutilized sources of data. While there are numerous studies that use elite discourse in the case of rising U.S. Schake (2017) and rising Germany Allison (2017); Edelstein (2002), relatively few studies have looked at elite discourse of other rising powers, especially for non-democratic states such as in the case of rising China. Although elites play a greater role in policy-making due to the nature of the authoritarian regime of rising China, most of the studies

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<sup>11</sup>See Lin (2019) for a theory of peripheral state management of a rising power.

that look at domestic sources of Chinese foreign policy have focused on the role of public opinion Weiss (2014) and individual leadership preferences Kennedy (2012). This dissertation makes use of the recent surge in publicly available elite discourse in digitized format that can be used for automated content analysis, and is the first dissertation to employ such data in the study of China's foreign policy behavior in the reform era.

### **2.3.2 Why Japan, South Korea and the Philippines?**

This dissertation attempts to explain why the rising power sometimes initiates costly foreign policies in the form of strong provocations and strong reassurances. The theory of rising power foreign policy maintains that while the greatest, most direct threat to rising power's continued rise comes from the dominant power, it is relatively rare for a rising power to confront the dominant power directly. More often than not we observe the rising power signaling its preferences towards states that are far less powerful than itself in a kind of litmus-testing behavior. This dissertation thus shifts the focus of the dependent variable interactions between great powers to interactions between a rising power and non-great power states.

While militarized disputes between a great power and its less powerful neighboring state often provide fodder for great power conflict, they have not been in the spotlight in the literature of power transition for two reasons. First, most of the power transition scholarship have focused unduly on the strategies of the existing dominant power directed at its challenger. Second, even in the case when the rising power's behavior has been the main focus, it has often been the case that the scholarship used empirical cases of rising Germany with multiple non-great power neighbors in continental Europe but in a multipolar setting, or the rise of the exceptionally (geographically) isolated United States. The theory brings to attention the possibility of a rising power signaling its preferences to the dominant power through its actions targeted at third party states that are not necessarily great powers themselves.

The reason why neighboring states matter in the rising power's foreign policy agenda is



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straightforward: rising powers wield a disproportionate amount of influence over its neighboring states. While past scholarship on power transition have been fixated on the power differential (and the disparity over growth rate) between the hegemon and its challengers, the rising power actually gains greater bargaining leverage vis-à-vis other non-great powers. This tension becomes even more acute when the rising power is geographically proximate to the non-great power, such as through sharing territorial and maritime borders. If the rising power and the neighboring state happen to have conflicting claims over territory and maritime boundaries, the tension exacerbates over time as the rising power begins to tower over the neighboring state more prominently. If the dominant power happens to have security commitments with a neighboring state of a rising power, a dominant state is more likely to pay heightened attention and even respond in kind to the rising power's measures. In this dissertation, I define neighboring states as states that occupy a strategic space by sharing borders with the rising power, or having claims to a territory endowed with natural resources or historical significance that the rising power also claims. For example, China borders 14 states by land (length of border in km): Russia, India, Burma (2185), Bhutan (470), Pakistan (523), Vietnam (1281), DPRK (1416), Mongolia (4677), Laos (423), Kazakhstan (1533), Kyrgyzstan (858), Tajikistan (414), Afghanistan (76), Nepal (1236). If one adds the maritime borders, Japan, Philippines, and the Republic of Korea, as well as states that are in the periphery but not directly border China such as Thailand and Singapore, the total comes to 19 states. Of these states, I select my cases based on whether or not a state meets two criteria that the theory implies: first, that the dominant power has a formal security commitment to the neighboring state and second, that the neighboring state and the rising power also share a contentious security issue which they have conflicting interests over.

The first criteria narrows down the pool of states to five—Japan, Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore. Applying the second criteria on these states, we are left with the first three, as Thailand and Singapore do not have major security issues with conflicting interests. Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Philippines satisfy both criteria in that they shares

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security commitments with the U.S. through a formal defense treaty and also have territorial and maritime conflicts of interest with China.<sup>12</sup> The next three chapters of this dissertation will take a deeper look into the relationship between the degree of consolidation within the rising power elite, and the extent to which it has been able to practice costly signaling towards each of Japan, Republic of Korea, and the Philippines.

Turning to the dependent variable, the rising power can actively manage the commitment problem with its neighboring states by engaging in limited provocation or reassurance. Therefore, the three values the dependent variable can take are: No action, costly action in the form of reassurance, costly action in the form of limited provocation, and unlimited provocation.<sup>13</sup> Empirically, we are interested in testing these implications in the case of rising China, to see under what conditions does China choose reassurance or provocation or neither towards the various security related disputes with its neighboring states. The key to defining what “counts” as an instance of active management (provocation or reassurance) is whether it is undertaken by a government actor and that it is officially acknowledged. Given that much of the activities that end up receiving media spotlight are unofficial in that they are not necessarily government endorsed, my definition is an attempt to separate the chaff (unconfirmed activities committed by non-government actors) from the wheat (government actors, confirmed by government). The active management of the commitment problem during power transition requires the rising power to signal resolve, but at the same time restrain its action just enough to demonstrate its willingness to preserve the status quo for the time being. It needs to clearly make an impression but stop short of revising the status

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<sup>12</sup>Fang and Li (2019) focuses on explaining China’s treatment of its disputes with Japan in the ECS using a survey experiment

<sup>13</sup>This is not to suggest that the rising power is incapable of an all-out conflict with a neighboring state; an all-out conflict such as the use of force to seize territory, however, would not be a strategy under managing a commitment problem but to resolve it; it is a strategy of overturning the status quo rather than to preserve it. Similarly, the rising power is also capable of concession or compromise that would resolve the dispute for once and for all, but just like an all-out war, this too is a strategy of revising the status quo rather than working to preserve it. Fravel (2008b) pioneering work on China’s use of force and compromises on its territorial disputes is relevant here, as he focuses on the instances in which China attempts to resolve the dispute. My dissertation contributes to extant research by explaining how China *manages* the unresolved disputes.

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quo to be counted as either provocation or reassurance. This stands in clear contrast to existing measurements of rising power foreign policy activity based on outright use of force or compromise (concessions), as both would revise the status quo, for better or for worse. Table 2 below lays out the characteristics associated with each.

Table 2.3: Reassurance vs. Compromise, Provocation vs. Use of Force

Example	Status quo change?	Type
China's border agreements with Central Asian states in 1992-1997	Yes (permanent demarcation of borders)	Concessions
China's joint energy development communique with Japan in 2008	No	Reassurance
China's proclamation of GPS coordinates of its claims in the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in 2012	No	Provocation
China's Battle of the Paracel islands against Vietnam in 1974	Yes	Use of force

### **2.3.3 Dependent variable: No active management vs. Provocation and Reassurance**

The dependent variable of this dissertation is a rising power's foreign policy strategy towards a neighboring state, which is also a state that the dominant power competes against the rising power for influence. This outcome is relevant in expanding our knowledge of power transition because first, non-great powers are the geographically most proximate and thus most likely conduit for the rising power to signal its preferences, and second, the dominant power also cares most deeply about neighboring states to which it also has a security commitment. The rising power's policy is characterized as either costly active management or the lack thereof, and within active management either as a provocation or reassurance depending on whether it makes competition or cooperation between the rising power and the neighboring state more likely in the future. Provocation is an escalatory response, and reassurance a de-escalatory response. The primary interest of this dissertation is on the intensity of the policy change, that is, whether or not the rising power engaged in

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any active management, rather than why the rising power chose reassurance over provocation and vice versa.

Provocation is an attempt to change the status quo in the direction of making conflict more likely. An example of provocation is when China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) ratchets up tensions on the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute by formally acknowledging surveillance activity by its own government vessels. This is a clear deviation from the normal maintenance of status quo that China and Japan had agreed to at the time of the Sino-Japanese Friendship treaty, which consisted of shelving the dispute for their posterity to solve and in the meantime pursuing joint development of resources.<sup>14</sup> As this entailed avoiding official claims of sovereignty, any attempt to strengthen Chinese claims would count as a provocation. On the other hand, I define reassurance as an attempt to change the status quo in the direction of decreasing the likelihood of the use of force on the dispute. An example of a reassurance is China's first-ever agreement with Japan on the joint development of natural gas and oil reserves near the disputed islands in 2008.

This dissertation departs from previous studies on rising power foreign policy behavior in the definition of what constitutes a strong, costly signals. Instead of limiting the scope of this study to a handful of events that are characterized as a militarized interstate dispute based on the MID hostility levels of 3 and higher,<sup>15</sup> I turn to a novel way of defining what is provocative or reassuring enough to be deemed as a costly foreign policy behavior: whether or not the deviation was officially acknowledged by the government as legitimate government action. I also add that in most cases, such actions are unprecedented, meaning that it was the first time for that action to take place in official capacity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>“Set aside dispute and pursuing joint development” Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18023.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18023.html), last accessed April 10, 2019

<sup>15</sup>According to the Militarized Interstate Dispute Data of the Correlates of War project, an event with a hostility level of 1 is no militarized action, level 2 is the threat to use force, level 3 is the display of force, level 4 is the use of force, and level 5 is War.

<sup>16</sup>Not all active engagement is unprecedented, such as naval vessel surveillance which has occurred at multiple occasions near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. These are counted as provocations because of the risk to conflict.

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Active management must be carried out by a government-affiliated actor, acknowledged publicly, and must clearly target the neighboring state that the rising power shares the dispute with (as opposed to a broad mandate). Because this dissertation isolates a rising power's actions towards each specific neighboring state, a rising power behavior that targets multiple states to begin with is not considered. On the other hand, if China had never acknowledged the sending of government surveillance vessels and suddenly does so publicly, then I count this as provocation as it fulfills both conditions (government-enacted, government-confirmed, targeting that specific neighboring state). This means that unlike past studies on Chinese foreign policy, I exclude actions that were not unequivocally carried out by a government actor. For instance, the fishing trawler incident in 2010 in which a Chinese fishing captain rammed a Japanese coast guard vessel and led to a major diplomatic row between China and Japan is not included as a provocation because the initial action was taken by a civilian actor.<sup>17</sup> The acknowledgement of action could come from any official actor affiliated with the government, such as the People's Liberation Army and Navy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Defense, an individual such as the Foreign Minister or General Secretary speaking on official capacity, and the publication must be in written form—in other words, I do not count comments given off the record or news reports that were not in print media or government publication.

Thus for the dependent variable of whether China engaged in active management or not (and if it did, whether it was in the form of a provocation or reassurance), I track all events between China and each of the neighboring states Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines in which China took official action on the given territorial/maritime dispute. I mainly look at three sources—international news media, the national newspapers of the neighboring state (Japan, Korea and the Philippines), Chinese official national-level newspapers and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives—to collect as comprehensive a dataset on all events initiated by China towards

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<sup>17</sup>In fact, it can be argued that it was Japan that had taken an unprecedented step towards China by officially arresting and detaining the Chinese trawler captain for trial under Japanese law. As this dissertation concerns actions taken by China towards neighboring states and not the other way around, this initial incident is not included.

the security disputes between China and each of Japan, Korea and the Philippines. For each event, I note the date, a short description of the event, the name of actor/official unit, the publication the event was reported in. My list of China's active management (provocations and reassurances) towards each of Japan, Korea and the Philippines contributes to existing data collection efforts by other scholars of Chinese foreign policy (Fravel 2013; Chubb 2019; Zhang 2019).

### **2.3.4 IV: Measuring the level of elite consolidation**

The main explanatory variable of this dissertation is the extent to which the rising power elite is consolidated on preferences towards a given neighboring state, especially on matters pertaining to security. For example, elites may be dividing up their attention between economic and trade related issues and security related issues. Even if the majority of elites are interested in the security agenda, within this same issue area elites may differ dramatically in their sentiment, which can range from negative to positive.

Existing studies of elite influence in policy-making are heavily skewed towards Western democratic states, tapping into a wealth of biographical and voting behavior data including parliamentary debate records (Eggers and Spirling 2016), and even survey data of elite opinion (Guisinger and Saunders 2017). In the case of rising China, however, comparable data is not yet publicly available, and researchers have addressed this problem by finding alternative means to capture elite preferences (Carter 2018).

This process is complicated by the fact that the process by which elites actually exercise influence on Chinese foreign policy still remains relatively opaque compared to Western democracies. According to Lu (2000); Barnett (1985), advising the top leadership through Leading Small Groups (akin to a congressional committee) is the most often mentioned course, but recently leaders of various government affiliated think-tanks and academic institutions are considered to wield more influence than in the past Liao (2006). For instance, although there exist studies on the scope and function of individual units such as the recently established China's National Security Council

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in 2013, exactly how these units fit into the existing foreign policy decision-making mechanism is relatively unclear Wuthnow (2017). Secondly, even if we can identify the key actors, the individuals staffing these important positions rarely comment publicly on foreign policy, let alone on security disputes. In other words, while most scholars would agree that elites increasingly matter in China's foreign policy making process, trying to gauge the exact role played by the Chinese elites remains a challenge given the sensitivity and lack of open debate.<sup>18</sup>

I use a novel measurement of elite cohesion that gets around the data shortage problem by turning to an alternative, underutilized sources of elite discourse: government-sponsored think tank publications and academic journals that publish commentary on foreign policy matters.<sup>19</sup> Since the beginning of the reform era in 1978, the top leadership has been keen to collect advice from regional experts and academics in forming its foreign policy (Jakobson and Knox 2010; Jakobson and Manuel 2016) Beginning with the establishment of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1977, China has since then established dozens of policy think tanks and academic institutes that specialize in expert knowledge on specific countries and geographic regions, and most of these institutions have an ongoing publication that targets both the policymakers in office as well as other elites. Table 3 lists some of the major foreign policy related think-tanks and academic institutions from which I obtain elite discourse from, and this list is modified slightly for each country.<sup>20</sup>

Each article is not necessarily authored by an elite that has experience in foreign policy making. The criteria for an article to be selected as part of the elite discourse is not based on the author's background, but rather on the nature of the journal that it was published in. Thus the articles have a broad author base, as authors range from prominent senior advisers to the government

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<sup>18</sup>Saunders and Scobell (2015) focuses on the role of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in China's foreign policy making process. See also Chen (2015) for a detailed case study of PLA's role in China's changing security policy. Jost (2019) also studies the effect of national security institutions on foreign policy behavior, including China

<sup>19</sup>Following studies provide an excellent overview of the evolution of think tanks' role in China's foreign policy and other public policy, see: Shambaugh (2002); Glaser and Saunders (2002); Zhao (2006); Zhu and Lan (2007); Li (2009); Sasaki (2010); Zhu (2011, 2013); Abb (2015); Li (2017)

<sup>20</sup>The Chinese government has paid more attention to Japan than it has to Korea or the Philippines, and the number of publications dedicated to discussing policy related to Japan is far higher than that of either Korea or the Philippines

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like Zheng Bijian (who coined the term “peaceful rise” for former president Hu Jintao in 2003) to lesser-known regional experts and academics. While these articles may not be necessarily written by elites and therefore not directly representative of elite preferences, at least these articles are the closest to what we have in terms of capturing the size, content and direction of elite attention. Each article matters less about who actually wrote it but in that it was written at all, at that time. This distinction is important because as all the publications used for this dissertation are government-affiliated or government-sanctioned, as opposed to elite remarks made on personal websites, *weibo* (Chinese twitter) accounts and media, including interviews for news programs.

A key assumption in using think tank discourse is that it is explicitly or implicitly sanctioned by the government (abides by propaganda guidelines) and thus can reveal dissonances or gaps among the elites. If elite discourse reflects an unusual level of unity in topic choice and sentiment, I take that as a proxy of strong leadership enjoying high control of the information and communication channels among the elites.<sup>21</sup> When the leaders—either out of ignorance or negligence—does not provide clear directives on what can or cannot be written, there is either a complete lack of mention of a specific agenda, or a diversity of opinion. Thus a *unity* in discourse is a proxy for an elite that has been informed of the specific directive issued by the top leadership and coordinated in advance, while *diversity* in discourse is proxy for an elite that has not been informed nor coordinated by the top leadership.

The ideal material to assess elite discourse would be comments made by elites themselves directly and publicly on a consistent basis. While some officials (both incumbent and retired) often give opinion in news program interviews and even on personal websites,<sup>22</sup> they are fewer in number in China compared to other liberal democracies given the professional challenges of being outspoken while still being affiliated to the Chinese government. Although elites play an

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<sup>21</sup>This was confirmed through interviewing several experts on Chinese foreign policy making process in Beijing, China from March to May 2013.

<sup>22</sup><https://southseaconversations.wordpress.com/2013/03/19/first-luo-yuan-now-liu-yuan-from-one-public-opinion-incident-to-another/>



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increasingly important role in China's foreign policy making process, they (to to a greater extent, those commenting publicly on foreign policy) are still governed by strict guidelines on what can or cannot be published. Due to this lack of comprehensive data, we use publicly available discourse that reflects the extent to which leaders are in control of their elites which then results in varying degrees of consensus among elites when discussing security matters. This is based on the assumption that if leaders are united and have good control over the elites, we expect that clear directions for publishing foreign policy opinion are provided and coordinated, which then leads to a high level of unity in the written discourse of prominent journals that focus on foreign policy and national security.

In addition, the Chinese think-tank and government affiliated journals offer another advantage: most of the publications have been consistently in press for over a nearly 40-year time period from 1979 to 2017. Similar to Krebs (2015) who utilizes editorials from the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune—two U.S. national-level newspapers occupying opposite ends of the ideological spectrum that has been consistently in press throughout the past century—I also take advantage of the publicly available journal articles that are also in digital form, enabling automated content analysis.

In previous studies using elite consensus as a main explanatory variable, there is usually an assumption that elites function in a democracy in which they are able to inform the general public as well as act as veto points to incumbents. For instance, Zaller (1992) defines elite consensus as the absence of a coherent opposition to the government's basic foreign policy (not the absence of criticism). Krebs (2010) also suggests that elite consensus is the absence of public manifestation of clear opposition to the government policy. For Guisinger and Saunders (2017), elites function as cue-givers to the public, and thus are a key audience that requires careful management even for democratically elected leaders as elite dissent on foreign policy could attract unwanted media attention and hurt the leaders electorally.

I slightly differ in both the definition of elites and the measurement of elite consensus.

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For instance, Saunders defines an elite as “those with at least some access to the state’s decision-making apparatus and information sources and who are seen as authoritative in their domains.” For Saunders, in the context of the former U.S. president Lyndon B. Johnson, these elites include congressional leaders, the members of his administration senators and advisors in the military and national security council. Yet in the case of China, not only is the membership of key advisory groups (such as Leading Small Groups) not public (for instance, we do not know the makeup of China’s National Security Commission that was established by Xi Jinping), but it is extremely difficult to trace comments by a leading elite such as a Central Committee member on foreign policy affairs. Thus I turn to an alternative source of elite commentary, namely, think tank journals that are published with government approval and conveys writings of various academics and military officials that are not necessarily at the level of active policy formation, but nonetheless serve as a channel of elite opinion that is structurally distinct from government official position. In other words, while elites can write about the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands largely in line with the official government position that the islands belong to China, their writings may not necessarily be identical to the government position by fusing the author’s own thoughts on aspects of the dispute that the government has yet to form an official position about, such as the cause of escalation of the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute, and the extent to which the dispute may or may not be harming Sino-Japan relations. The elites can be writing about it, but not necessarily all in the same tone, or giving the same amount of attention in each of the published articles, allowing us to observe variation in the elite’s interests and preferences on sensitive issues such as security.

In this dissertation, elite consensus is measured in two stages, first to determine which issue areas have been published and among the published topics in a given year, if security was is a predominant topic. Next, I assess the sentiments of all the articles published within the security topic to see to what extent they were “hard security” as opposed to topics that are tangential to security issues but not necessarily involving negative sentiment. The first stage consists of downloading all articles published in a Chinese think-tank or government affiliated institute (both academic or non-

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academic) on one of China's neighboring state (Japan, South Korea or the Philippines) in a given year from 1978 - 2017, and excising the abstract of each article (which is the only part of the article that is digitized at this time), and running the Structural Topic Model on the text data to estimate how many distinct topics were discussed that year.<sup>23</sup> For each year, I track the portion of articles that belonged to each topic to check whether the security-related topic received overwhelming attention, measured as whether that topic accounted for over half of all articles published that year. This measurement captures the extent to which elite attention was concentrated on security issues between China and either Japan, Korea, or the Philippines.

The next stage consists of reviewing all articles that fall under the security topic, if the security topic is what captivated the majority of the elite's attention during that given year. Unlike attempts to measure the tone of elite discourse using existing dictionaries of positive and negative vocabulary<sup>24</sup>, I rely on a list of terms that has a clear connection to negative sentiments when discussing security topics for each country. For instance, because China actively opposes the targeting of 3rd parties by US-Japan, US-South Korea and the US-Philippines military exercises, the word military exercise is included in all three lists for each of the countries. On the other hand, because to date only the Philippines has taken their dispute with China to the international arbitration court, the word for international arbitration is included only in the list for the Philippines and not in the list for either Korea or Japan.

For each article that is assessed to be a hard security or negative sentiment article, I also qualitatively review by hand similar to Krebs (2015)<sup>25</sup>. I ask whether representation of neighboring state or its relations with China as conflictual or cooperative and whether the predicted future outcome or policy recommendation is conflictual or cooperative. I confirm the elite consensus to

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<sup>23</sup>See Catalinac (2016) for an example of text data analysis to obtain topics (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) using Japanese election manifestos

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Schub (2015)

<sup>25</sup>Krebs uses a five-question, fourteen-point questionnaire to assess the Cold War Consensus. The questions are 1) what is the editorial's central concern 2) representation of communist powers/communism 3) representation of U.S. allies 4) global politics and interconnectedness 5) U.S. role in the world

be negative in sentiment if the article diagnoses the present and future relations between China and the given country as conflictual, based on the above two dimensions.

### 2.3.5 Method of empirical analysis

The main method of testing the theory of rising power foreign policy is by the congruence method George and Bennett (2005). A congruence method entails checking for spuriousness, causal priority, and causal depth. George and Bennett suggests that in order to assess whether the relationship between the IV and the DV is a causal one, the researcher must check for spuriousness (whether there is a confounding variable), causal priority (if the IV is an intervening and not independent variable) and causal depth (if the IV in fact is not necessary at all for the DV). As the existence of consistence between the predicted and actual values of the IV and the DV does not prove causality, George and Bennett suggests asking two additional questions that could aid in the process of determining whether a congruent outcome is also causal.

The first question is to ask if there are some outcomes that are consistent with my IV other than my current DV (“Is the independent variable that is causally related to this particular outcome of the case also consistent with other possible outcomes?” George and Bennett 2005, p.331). For the purposes of this dissertation, such an outcome could be a noticeable change in the Chinese top leaders’ threat perception, as threat perception is a widely used variable in the study of foreign policy (Saunders 2009; Yarhi-Milo 2014). The *People’s Daily* is known to frequently refer to the U.S. in negative light, especially during the Cold War prior to the normalization of relations between the U.S. and China. Even after normalization, China still remained wary of U.S. involvement in the Asia-Pacific region, and would sometimes use the word “U.S. imperialism or U.S. hegemony.” Therefore, I look into whether or not the *People’s Daily* newspaper published an article that portrays the U.S. in negative light as a proxy of the leadership having a high level of threat, and likely to be negative in sentiment on security issues. If it did not publish any negative accounts of the U.S., then we consider the leaders to have had a low level of threat at the time.

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Thus if the elites are united, one outcome aside from active management of the security disputes, could be a noticeable increase or decrease in the number of articles that mention the US alliance in the People's daily.

The second question is to ask if there are additional outcomes that are inconsistent with my IV (whether there are any historical outcomes that would not have been consistent with the independent variable).<sup>26</sup> Simply, if my IV can predict several other DVs (i.e. B,C,D) other than the current outcome (A), then my IV's explanatory power is weakened, but if I can additionally identify outcomes that are not consistent with my IV (such as X,Y,Z), then at least my IV can gain some explanatory power by being able to discriminate between a group of outcomes that is compatible with the IV (A,B,C,D) from outcomes that are not (X,Y,Z).<sup>27</sup> Applying this method of congruence to each of Japan, Korea and the Philippines' empirical chapters, I identify cases in which the outcome is inconsistent with the expectations of elite consensus. For each country, I find several instances in which the changes in the DV did not match that of the IV. One example is China's active management of the South China Sea disputes in the mid-1990s, including the Chinese takeover of Mischief Reef in 1995. Although there was no elite consensus, active management was still possible in this instance. I thus compare how t Comparing these "possible inconsistent outcomes" with "possible consistent outcomes" allows me to specify the kind of variation in the DV that elite consensus contributes most strongly to.

## 2.4 Roadmap

Each of the following three chapters goes on to test the theory of rising power foreign policy behavior on the case of rising China and three of its neighboring states Japan, Korea, and the

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<sup>26</sup>George and Bennett 2005, p 332

<sup>27</sup>George and Bennett provides an example of this setup in their book using Khong (1992). In Khong's case, both the Korean analogy and the Munich analogy predicted that the US would intervene, but only the Korean analogy predicted that the US would conduct a limited intervention due to fear of Chinese involvement, while the Munich analogy did not make that same prediction. This made the Korean analogy a better explanation for the outcome.

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Philippines. As mentioned earlier, each of these neighboring states pose a security threat to China, either in the form of territorial or maritime disputes (East China Sea for Japan and Southeast China Sea for the Philippines) or as adversaries of armed conflict (China is allied with North Korea, against South Korea and the US). Chapter 3 looks at China's active management towards Japan on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands dispute, and finds that while the theory correctly predicts much of the time period between 1978 and 2017, there are some points that the theory does poorly, such as some of the early 1990s and mid-2000s when, despite intense attention and focus on security issues that are negatively associated (such as the US-Japan alliance, Japan's denial of World War II crime) by the Chinese elites, there was no active management.

Chapter 4 looks at China's reassurances and provocations towards South Korea on security crises involving North Korea, which is formally allied with China. Again, the theory of rising power's regional foreign policy is largely on track with China's actual record of managing the security crises of the Korean peninsula (both nuclear and conventional) beginning with 2000, but it is not without caveats: for instance, the theory cannot explain some of the earlier years during the 1990s in which elites were not really focusing on hard security when discussing Korea, but China engaged in active management nonetheless.

Finally, Chapter 5 looks at China's record of reassurances and provocations towards the Philippines on the South China Sea disputes. Similar to previous chapters, I find that the theory performs well throughout the period of the study (1978 - 2017) with the exception of the mid-to late 1990s. While the theory predicts there to be no active management by China throughout the 1990s due to very low level of elite attention on hard security issues, we still find that China unambiguously challenged the status quo in the South China Sea disputes against the Philippines in the late 1990s, starting with the occupation of Mischief Reef.

In each of the empirical chapters, I address alternative explanations as well as possible reasons why the theory does not make accurate predictions in some of the cases, especially the earlier years and the 1990s. I point out that the most prominent factor is the size of available elite

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discourse data that is digitized, prior to the 2000s. This may have resulted in not being able to capture elite preferences accurately, leading one to conclude that even when there was sufficient elite consolidation regards to security topics in those earlier time periods. I further address the shortcomings and additional ways to improve the explanatory power of my theory in Chapter 6, including the possibility of refining the current version of the theory, which only explains the onset of active management *per se*, instead of explaining more specifically when provocations is more likely than reassurance, and vice versa.

## **Chapter 3**

# **China's active management towards Japan, 1978-2018**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This dissertation argues that a key variation in the rising power's regional foreign policy behavior can be explained by the strength of the rising power's elite consensus, which is the extent to which elites are consolidated in their preferences toward the neighboring state that they share a security dispute with. In this chapter, I test the theory of rising power foreign policy on the case of China's behavior against Japan on the contested East China Sea (ECS) disputes, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. While recent scholarship seems to suggest that China has grown increasingly provocative in the past few years in claiming its territory in the East China Sea, I offer a different picture using a consistent measurement of what counts as a provocative or reassuring action by a rising power. Using this new measurement, I first show that recent years are not uniform—provocative gestures have been made since 2011, but so have several gestures of unprecedented reassurance. More importantly, I also reveal time periods in which the Chinese government deliberately chose not to provoke Japan on the disputes by refraining to officially acknowledge Chinese



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transgressions. Using original text data sourced from over 2,000 think-tank and journal articles on the subject of Japan written by Chinese elites, I show that when elites are attentive to and focused on security issues regarding their neighbor, the rising power is likely to actively manage the dispute either through a provocation or a reassurance (depending on the content of the preference).

In September 2012, the Japanese government announced that it would purchase three of the eight islands in the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands from Japanese civilian investors to convert them into state property. Although the government's stated reason for this action was to preserve peace between Sino-Japan relations by preempting a group of right-wing activists from purchasing the islands,<sup>1</sup> condemnation of the Japanese government's decision nonetheless flared up inside China and Taiwan, two other countries that contest Japan's claim to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea. Large scale anti-Japan protests were followed by the Chinese government's official statement denying the validity of the purchases and refuting Japan's claim. China also stepped up government patrol around the disputed islands.<sup>2</sup> Ever since, analysts have begun to view China's newly aggressive behavior in the East China Sea, where the islands are located, as the new status quo.

This view, however, covers up a fascinating puzzle: China hasn't always been provocative on the ECS disputes including the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands,<sup>3</sup> and contrary to scholarly and popular media accounts that emphasize aggressiveness, China has actually engaged in a number of unprecedented cooperative measures. News of Chinese fishing vessels, destroyers, aircraft entering Japanese territorial waters and airspace easily make daily headlines, and analysts and scholars alike are eager to use this as evidence to conclude that China is becoming more aggressive after all. Yet news reporting by popular media about the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute can be misleading. While many scholars would readily agree that the Sino-Japanese tensions over the territorial dis-

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/fact\\_sheet.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/fact_sheet.html)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/diaodao\\_665718/t973774.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/diaodao_665718/t973774.shtml)

<sup>3</sup>In this dissertation, I refer to all of the disputes—territorial, maritime and airspace—that physically take place inside the East China Sea between China and Japan as “China's ECS disputes with Japan.”

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pute on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands have increased in the past few years, most overlook that China had begun its assertive actions starting from the mid-1990s. During that time, Chinese official vessels entered the territorial sea near the disputed islands for the first time (1996), allowed the largest number of Chinese research “surveillance” vessels to transgress into waters claimed by Japan (1999). Perhaps because this period is usually thought of as predating China’s rise as a economic and military power, or because it has been overshadowed by China’s more recent aggressive action, few explanations exist as to why China chose provocations back in the late 1990s.

Existing research on China’s behavior on the ECS have also overlooked a relative lack of provocative action in the early 2000s. Not only did the Chinese government intrusions of Japan’s territorial waters (which had peaked in 1999) gradually decrease to an all-time low, but also China struck two landmark agreements—a memorandum on the Prior Notification of Marine research vessels (2001) and the Consensus on Joint Development (2008). Unfortunately, this cooperative mood began to sour around December 2008, when the Chinese government admitted for the first time their government vessel intruding on the territorial waters of Japan-administered Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Bilateral relations also took a nosedive in September 2012, when Japan took an unprecedented move to purchase a part of the disputed islands to make them government property. By 2013 there was an all-time high number of government vessels intruding Japanese territorial waters, and the declaration of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in place. But to simply conclude that China has become aggressive after 2008 is incorrect, as China also continued its participation in numerous confidence building mechanisms during this time period: the Japan-China Maritime Communications Mechanism (JCMCM), the Japan-China Maritime Search Rescue Cooperation Agreement (SAR Agreement), and the High-Level Consultations on Maritime Affairs (High-level Maritime Consultations). Therefore, if these cooperative events are considered along with the conflictual, it seems that China may actually have been less provocative than it seems, or at least its provocative gestures have been accompanied by reassuring gestures.

Improving our understanding of under what conditions China is likely to be more actively

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asserting its claim on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and the surrounding area in the East China Sea is important because it serves as a testing ground of rising China's status quo-ness and the credibility of U.S.' commitment to its treaty ally Japan.<sup>4</sup> The Senkaku/Diaoyu islands dispute has the potential to be a battleground between rising China and the U.S., a great-power conflict during power transition.<sup>5</sup> Yet as available reports tend to overemphasize Chinese provocations and underemphasize its reassurances—it is becoming increasingly difficult to assess the actual probability of conflict occurring on this dispute. Media is often skewed in favor of depicting an “aggressive China,” and much of the data behind decision-making and agenda-setting on ECS issues in China is still publicly unavailable,<sup>6</sup> making us susceptible to overestimating the likelihood of China to use force. Placing the dispute into perspective - by taking into account *all* events with a consistent definition - not just the sensational ones that make headlines—is crucial, as well as investigating the lesser-known reassurances.

This chapter challenges the findings of recent scholarship that tends to overly emphasize China's provocative behavior on the disputed islands in the past few years in two ways: First, by applying a new, consistent definition of what constitutes a “provocation” and a “reassurance,” I present a more accurate picture of Chinese behavior on the East China Sea and Senkaku/Diaoyu island disputes to date. Second, I test an original theory on rising power foreign policy behavior based on elite consensus using a novel text-based dataset. The rest of this chapter is as follows. In Section 2, I provide the background literature on China's management of the ECS disputes with Japan, and briefly revisit the theoretical foundation behind the two main hypotheses that predict provocations and reassurances of rising powers. Section 3 describes how I obtain and measure elite consolidation in China's case toward Japan. I test the hypotheses using additional qualitative evidence in Section 4, comparing how my hypotheses with other alternative explanations. Section

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42761.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>While the dispute is really between China and Japan, actual conflict could involve the US armed forces through the US' commitments to the alliance treaty.

<sup>6</sup>See [http://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/senkaku/page1we\\_000012.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/senkaku/page1we_000012.html)

5 concludes, with implications for China's current policy towards Japan, as well as suggestions for future research.

## **3.2 Background and hypotheses**

To answer the question why China has provoked and reassured Japan on the ECS issues at certain times but not at others, three explanations appear most often. The first is change in China's leadership, especially the most recent power transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping from 2012-2013. The second explanation is a downturn of bilateral relations, namely the balance of power between China and Japan, and China and the United States (Japan's treaty ally). The third is the rise of nationalism and public opinion inside China.

While these explanations are useful in understanding parts of China's behavior on the ECS disputes such as escalation, the degree and form of provocation, there are several shortcomings in using them to understand the the broader trend of China's active management from 1978 onwards. All three explanations are most readily applicable to the more recent phase of China's management of the ECS disputes, such as the September 2010 Chinese fishing trawler incident or after the September 2012 Japanese government purchase (nationalization) of the islands. In addition, these explanations do not cover both provocation and reassurances, but only provocations. For instance, the leadership explanation suggests that change in China's head of state from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping is to blame for the series of provocative events after late 2012, as it coincided with the power transition. This is problematic, as although the most definitive and sustained period of China's assertive claims on the ECS did indeed take place in the Xi Jinping era, Xi's leadership has also seen two path-breaking reassurances—the 2014 Principled Consensus and the installation of a crisis-management communication mechanism in 2018.<sup>7</sup> For example, one could argue that Chinese restraint and cooperation was a result of the new Hu Jintao leadership, who had been

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<sup>7</sup><http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CLM41MS.pdf>

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eager to mend relations with Japan that had deteriorated during his predecessor Jiang Zemin's incumbency. Yet this explanation does not apply to either Jiang Zemin or Xi Jinping as each of them oversaw both reassurance and provocation strategies during their tenure.<sup>8</sup>

Structural explanations which suggest that the changing balance of power between China and Japan, or China and the US also fall short when trying to understand behavioral changes that can occur more frequently than changes in military capabilities. For instance, we should expect to see China attempting to change the status quo as its relative power to Japan increases. Yet the status quo remains just as unchanged as it was in 1978, when China claims it and Japan agreed to shelve the issue. At the same time, China has dabbled in both provocations and reassurances that have stopped short of actual status quo change, and sometimes even avoided taking any clear action in the past three decades that it has been "rising." An offshoot explanation argues that China's growth in relative power vis-à-vis Japan after 2010 when China took over Japan's title as the world's second largest economy, as well as the confidence from China coming out of the global economic recession in 2008 with less damage than the U.S. as a main reason for aggressive behavior on the dispute. While this explanation could account for the aggressive behavior after 2010, it cannot explain why China also simultaneously demonstrated restraint as well as active reassurances in the same time period.

The domestic politics based explanations that suggest the rise in Chinese nationalist (anti-Japan sentiment) rhetoric among its domestic audience and the increasing influence of public opinion can explain the variation in Chinese behavior on the ECS also face similar shortcomings. According to nationalist discourse explanations, we should expect to see China becoming more provocative as pressure from its nationalist domestic constituents increase.<sup>9</sup> However, even if the

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<sup>8</sup>Fravel and Johnston points to a noticeable decrease in Chinese naval vessel intrusions in Japan-administered waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands after 2013; see <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/04/12/chinesesignalingintheeastchina-sea/>

<sup>9</sup>Reilly (2011) suggests that the main reason behind China's restraint in many contentious issues in Sino-Japanese relations was the *lack* of public mobilization. Weiss (2014) also suggests that China's management of nationalist protests depends on its desire to maximize bargaining leverage against Japan. Bush (2013) suggests that a security dilemma exists between China and Japan, and it is when this security dilemma becomes more acute, that China behaves

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surge of Chinese nationalism triggered the provocations after 2012, it is unclear why the same sentiments did not trigger provocations during the years 2001 - 2008, when nationalist, anti-Japan protests were also prevalent. Nationalism and public opinion explanations also cannot account for reassuring gestures, but only hostile actions.

In short, existing explanations can account for select events of Sino-Japanese relations on a case-by-case basis, but there is no systematic study that tracks Chinese behavior specifically on the territorial and maritime issues with Japan prior to 2010. While China's material capabilities and popular nationalist discourse that highlights the centrality of territorial integrity to regime legitimacy have seen an almost continuous increase especially since the fishing trawler incident of 2010, China actually demonstrates a mixed record of attempts to reassure as well as to provoke. What explains this variation in China's management of the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute?

As most of Chinese behavior on the ECS disputes is of strategic nature—in which China either initiates or responds to its adversary—there are alternative explanations based on Japanese action. For instance, former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda attempted to signal departure from his predecessors PM Koizumi and PM Abe in that he would not visit the Yasukuni shrine that memorializes convicted war criminals from World War II, and refrained from stoking Japanese nationalism taking a less aggressive stance on Japanese war crime issues including comfort women and the revision of Japan's "pacifist" constitution. Thus it is possible that another major factor that contributed to the 2008 agreement was the compatibility between the two states' leaders. PM Fukuda, a Japanese leader whose policies at home did not trigger anti-Japan sentiments in China, and Hu Jintao, a Chinese leader who was eager to improve relations with Japan and successfully host a major international event (2008 Beijing Olympics). Others have turned to Japanese domestic political factors including its bureaucracy as the key to understanding the major milestones between China and Japan on the ECS issue. Manicom (2014), for example, attributes the signing of the joint development agreement in 2008 to Japan's successful coercive diplomacy against China. When

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in a more provocative manner towards Japan.

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Japan was able to demonstrate their resolve by threatening to begin drilling on Japan's side of the median line, China started to take Japan's offers to negotiate more seriously. I do not go into this alternative explanation in my dissertation because I am primarily interested in motivations of Chinese state behavior rather than the accomplishment of cooperation per se, and for this reason I attempt to exhaust the factors on the Chinese side first.

This chapter answers the question of why China has not actively managed the ECS disputes for many years by first framing the phenomenon as a specific example of a much broader phenomenon that has been often overlooked in the study of international relations: a rising power's regional foreign policy behavior. As a theory of IR as opposed to a theory of foreign policy, power transition theory does not go into detail about how the rising power might handle its commitment problem with the hegemon (declining power) or with other non-great power states. Research that tests theories of power transition tends to select on the dependent variable in which an all-out war occurred, but is silent on all other behavior that precedes war. In short, the rising power's (and the declining power's foreign policy behavior<sup>10</sup>) remains the underpinning of power transition, but the sources of rising power foreign policy behavior is currently under-theorized.

This dissertation identifies a theoretical puzzle that underlies the empirical one: Why does a rising power resort to actively managing its security disputes in the region through provocation or reassurances at certain times and not at others? I take cue from an insight that has often been overlooked in the study of powers' transition: That the theory of power transition is not just about rising and declining powers; it is also about non-great powers. This is because a rising power does not rise in a sterilized environment; power transition does not happen in a power vacuum. The rising power has neighboring states that can single-handedly threaten the stability of a rising power thanks to their geographical proximity (i.e. North Korea to China). In short, an often neglected factor in a rising power's ability to "rise," is the role played by its neighboring states.

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<sup>10</sup>On the rising and declining power's foreign policy behavior and threat perception during power transition, please see Shiffrinson (2018); Glosny (2012); Liebman (2009); Priebe (2015); Goh (2016)

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The core assumption underlying my theory is that the rising power must maintain the status quo with its neighboring states as much as possible, for as long as possible, so that *it can continue rising*. In order to do this, they *manage* their disputes with incremental or limited actions instead of definitively revising the status quo with extreme actions.<sup>11</sup> More specifically, the rising power chooses reassurance and provocation at different times out of different reasons, as each type of behavior has a unique function in maintaining stability. Reassurance produces stability by reducing the likelihood that the hegemon would interfere on behalf of the neighboring state, and keeping the dispute as a bilateral interaction as much as possible for as long as possible. Provocation prevents instability by signaling to the hegemon and the neighboring state that the rising is willing to take action if necessary to defend its interests. Thus the rising power's goal in using provocation and reassurance is the same—it desires to keep the hegemon out of regional affairs, and keep the dispute as a bilateral one between itself and the neighboring state as much as possible, for as long as possible during the period of power transition.

For a rising power, the extent to which the rising power's elites are consolidated in their preferences could be a key determinant of whether that power is able to actively manage a key source of conflict through limited reassurances and provocations. When the elites inside the rising power are consolidated, information is exchanged more fluidly at the top decision-making level and the cost to policy coordination drops, enabling the leaders to change the status quo through costly means such as a provocation or a reassurance. Once the decision to actively manage the disputes is made, secondary concerns such as facing a window of vulnerability or opportunity external security environment could lead the rising power to provocation as it provides a context for the rising power to stand firm. One could argue that it is in the interests of the rising power to provoke when its assessment of the regional security environment is benign, as a preoccupied hegemon is less likely

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<sup>11</sup>The term active management of territorial disputes is not new, though my definition of what constitutes an active management is novel; for instance, Fravel (2010) uses the same term to describe various aspects of Chinese, US and Japanese restraint with the goal of preventing crises: a combination of limiting physical access, avoiding domestic political mobilization.



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to intervene on behalf of the neighboring state and thus the dispute resembles a "bilateral" one. This is in the same vein as Fravel (2008b) "window of opportunity" thesis in which a state escalates when there is suddenly an advantageous setting. However, this is not applicable to a *rising* power whose priority is to *keep rising* first and foremost. The rising power does not provoke with the aim of strengthening its claim by changing the status quo. Use of force would be able to that, but a provocation is insufficient. Rather, a rising power provokes with the intention to signal to others that it cares enough about the dispute that it is willing to flex muscles, but does not wish to pursue further. Any provocation by the rising power during its rise is inherently destabilizing, so the rising power takes care to only commit when absolutely necessary—in other words, a rising power provokes as a last resort, to signal to the other side that it feels threatened and will not tolerate the current level of insecurity from the hegemon and the neighboring state.

The most comprehensive, theory-informed study on China's management of its territorial disputes is by Fravel (2008b, 2010); Fravel and Swaine (2011). In his pivotal work on China's use of force and cooperation on territorial disputes with its neighbors (Fravel 2008b), Fravel suggests three strategies—cooperating, escalating, and delaying. He argues that China chooses compromise when it faces external and internal security threats, and chooses escalation when it faces either a window of vulnerability or opportunity. My theory and empirical puzzle takes up where Fravel's left off - the unexplained phenomenon of the "delaying" strategy. China has yet to choose either extremes - use of force or compromise - on the issue of the ECS against Japan. Looking at the lack of militarized force, some analysts are quick to conclude that China is cooperative, while judging from the lack of compromise others call China aggressive.<sup>12</sup>

The inconsistency in the conclusions arise mainly because analysts use different metrics when defining Chinese behavior on the territorial and maritime disputes. If the metric is whether China used force or not, then China is "benign" as it has not yet used military force to back up its

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<sup>12</sup>To my knowledge, no study has looked at the causes of *both* reassurances and provocations. Manicom (2014) presents the most up-to-date, comprehensive study on the major events of the ECS dispute, but his work is much more concerned with the durability and effectiveness of cooperation rather than the sources of cooperation

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claims as it had done with other cases in the South China Sea. But if the metric is whether Chinese action was at an unprecedented assertiveness or reassurance, then China may indeed have become more “aggressive.” Similarly, if the metric is whether China agreed to compromise or not, then China is “aggressive” as it has yet to participate in the kind of negotiations and agreements that settles the dispute once and for all, as it had with other countries (mainly its Central Asian neighbors). I offer to straighten out the conflicting diagnoses by establishing a theory of rising power’s foreign policy behavior that uses clear, consistent metrics on China’s behavior in the past 30 years in the post-reform era. My theory of foreign policy concerns these “in between” range of state behavior that is neither the outright use of force or cooperation. When it comes to territorial disputes, I stress that the two extreme outcomes of outright force and outright compromise relatively rare occurrences (militarized conflict) nor outright cooperation (compromises that resolve the dispute).

My theory of rising power regional foreign policy begins with the commitment problem between the rising power and the hegemon.<sup>13</sup> First, I challenge the conventional wisdom that the commitment problem is a great power problem. Instead, I reveal that the commitment problem between the rising power and the hegemon is actually a regional problem, and involves non-great power states. Second, I identify and elaborate a hitherto under-explained phenomenon, which I term as the rising power’s “active management” of its commitment problem.<sup>14</sup> Until now, rising powers were expected to change the status quo either by initiating conflict (use of force) or removing the source of conflict (compromise). Yet more often than not, the rising power *maintains* the status quo by actively *managing* its commitment problem with foreign policy strategies that are more nuanced, and less definitive than use of force and compromise.

Third, in my theory I explain what active management entails. Above, I had mentioned that the rising power aims to maintain the status quo during its rise, and the reason is simple: Time

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<sup>13</sup>This is sometimes called the declining or dominant power. I use the word hegemon as opposed to a declining power because a hegemon is not necessarily declining Beckley (2011/2012)

<sup>14</sup>Fravel (2008*b*) calls this the delaying strategy and sees it as a deviation from his own theory of why states use force or compromise on territorial disputes (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed account of how my theory differs from Fravel)

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is on the side of the rising power, and it stands to benefit most by staying the course until it is stronger. However, this is true only if the rising power can, during its rise, reduce the likelihood of unintended, premature conflict that could cut short its "rise". This is why the rising power actively manages the commitment problem, which means that it takes action to minimize the source of instability and uncertainty between it and the hegemon through reassurances. At the same time, because the rising power eventually wants to change the status quo to its advantage (later point in time), it will also use provocations signal to the hegemon and the neighboring state the extent of its interests, and that it is willing to safeguard those interests at some point later on.<sup>15</sup>

Fourth, I suggest several secondary variables that could lead to two different types of active management, reassurance and provocation. Fravel (2008) also lays out two separate causal logics for each of escalation and cooperation. However, in Fravel's theory a state either commits to use of force or compromise; they cannot coexist. This becomes a problem when conditions for both cooperation and escalation both exist, such as an internal security threat *and* a window of vulnerability/opportunity. My theory overcomes this problem because it allows for reassurances and provocations to occur in the same time period.

Instead of compromise or outright use of force to revise the status quo, the rising power can maintain the status quo by managing the dispute through limited provocation and/or reassurance. I suggest that the extent to which the rising power's elites view the neighboring state in similar ways on the topic of security, could be an important contributing factor to whether or not the rising power chooses to actively manage the disputes.

A more united elite is a more dependable delegate from the leadership's point of view, and more easily managed from the top than a fractured elite. As the regime depends on the elites to give the right cues to the public and frame the issue in a consistent manner that does not undermine

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<sup>15</sup>The rising power's ideal strategy against the dominant power or hegemon's possible containment is to keep the neighboring states on edge: It needs to be capable of reassuring its neighboring states so that they would be less motivated to cooperate with the hegemon against the rising power, but also to be capable of standing firm on its neighboring states as to demonstrate that the rising power has limited tolerance for neighboring states that try to advance their interests against the rising power with a powerful patron's support.

the regime's legitimacy, a cohesive elite is preferred to a divided one. If the rising power elite is divided, its leadership cannot afford to pursue active management. If elites are divided over their preferences on their neighboring state, the costs of coordination rises. Leaders may lack the certainty that a decision to actively manage the highly sensitive security disputes would be interpreted consistently and favorably by its domestic populace. Thus, in the case of a fractured elite, the rising power cannot pursue active management due to the risk of losing legitimacy in the eyes of its domestic public. Active management in the form of either provocation or reassurance is not a means to secure a favorable, permanent outcome the way use of force is. Instead, it is a signal to other parties that it will not allow for a change of the status quo. Therefore the rising power only chooses active management when it can afford to do so, or in other words, relatively confident that the action would be limited and contained.

The theory rests on the assumption that deviating from the status quo is risky and costly for the rising power leadership. When the neighboring state behaves in a way such that the stability is insecure, China has an opportunity to respond with either provocation or reassurance to restore stability. When elite opinion is manageable and predictable thanks to elite consolidation, leaders have more confidence that they will not face blame for a sensitive, controversial foreign policy decision such as reassurance. On the other hand, if elites are less consolidated - then elite opinion is less predictable and more difficult to manage - and leaders would not be able to undertake costly, challenging foreign policy changes.

### **3.2.1 Hypothesis**

In sum:

- Hypothesis: The more consolidated the rising power's elites on the subject of security issues regarding a neighboring state, the more likely the rising power will actively manage its dispute with that neighboring state.

Table 3.1: Observable implications of theory

	Focused on core security topics	No Focus
Elite attention to security issues	Active management	No active management
Lack of elite attention to security issues	No active management	No active management

### 3.3 Measuring Chinese elite consolidation on Japan, 1978 - 2017

My main independent variable is the rising power's level of foreign policy elite cohesion in each year. I define foreign policy elite as an individual who has access to the foreign policy decision-making process either by means of membership in an authoritative organization that directly forms policy, or by more indirect means of influence, such as providing expert knowledge. It is important to note that according to my definition, an elite may or may not have direct access to the policy-making process. This definition allows me to work with a much more expansive population of "elites," unlike previous studies that only look into those who hold the highest political office. In the case of China, some elites are more powerful than others when it comes to specific neighboring countries, such as the members of the International Liaison Department on relations having most influence on matters pertaining to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Some elites are less authoritative, such as the academics who work in province-level research centers outside of Beijing. Chinese foreign policy making process still largely remains a blackbox, and absent the data on the elites' legislative activity, it is difficult to accurately measure how consolidated the elites are on foreign policy in a non-democratic setting such as China.<sup>16</sup>

Given the paucity of information that directly reports elite preferences on foreign policy in China, I turn to an indirect measure of elite preferences - written discourse published in the most prominent national and sub-national security think-tanks in China on the subject matter of foreign policy/foreign affairs. Think-tank journals are appropriate medium for four reasons. First, although they vary widely in influence, the ones I have selected are either affiliated with and report

<sup>16</sup>It is common for scholars studying the U.S. Congress, for example, measure elite polarization using roll-call voting.

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to official government institutions, or published by academic institutions are explicitly affiliated with a government office, meaning that these think tanks have a good chance of reflecting the preferences of the elites whose expertise could influence in decision-making by the central government. For example, the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) reports to the General Staff Department of the PLA, which is a high-ranking decision making unit for China's foreign policy. On the other hand, Chinese Institute of International Studies (CIIS) reports directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and its staff are often quoted in official capacity for insight on government policy. These two think tanks are thus officially affiliated with government organs, and to be able to decipher nuances in how each think tank portrays a given foreign policy decision could be crucial in identifying possible fracture in the Chinese decision-making elite.

Second, unlike newspapers, they are a rich source of China's top foreign policy priorities at the time that includes but is not limited to, what happened to be most newsworthy or sensational events at the time (for instance, think-tank journals would also report on Japan's Yasukuni War shrine problem and the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands but with often more information and opinion than news articles). Third, unlike memoirs or biographies, think-tank journal articles reflect much wider range of elites, and is useful for assessing elite preferences in the post-1978 reform era where the foreign policy decision making process has diversified. Finally, the think-tank journals are less susceptible to Chinese Communist Party propaganda than the official newspapers and more likely to reveal original opinion and individual preferences that could be distinct from that espoused by the government/Communist party. While it would be ideal to have more samples of elite discourse prior to 1989, fortunately in the case of the Sino-Japanese disputes in the ECS, there are no events recorded between 1972 and 1978 during Mao Zedong's incumbency, and only 1 event recorded between 1978 and 1989, during Deng Xiaoping's incumbency. So the lack of text data from 1972 - 1989 is not ideal, but nonetheless should not greatly impact the conclusion of the present chapter.

I collect my text data mainly through the online China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), which is a national information server that collects a wide range of texts ranging from

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academic publications to local newspapers and yearbooks in China. I decide on which journals should be included in my study after consulting the secondary literature on China's Japan policy<sup>17</sup>. I collect articles from journals from the most well-known, oft-cited major think tanks in China. These journals are not necessarily well-known to the Chinese public audience and foreign scholars (because only a few of them have English translated versions—CICIR is one of them), but the fact that these journals—unlike most publications that reach a wide public audience inside China—do not serve as channels of propaganda, and that authors do not cater to specific audiences other than their affiliated government organs makes these journals well-suited for the purposes of my study.

I download articles that are most relevant to the subject of “Japan” defined as articles that contain the word “Japan” more than 9 times in the full-text,<sup>18</sup> and contains the word for Japan in the abstract (not the title) of the article. Not every journal has articles about Japan every year let alone every issue, and the total number of articles for a certain year also depends on extraordinary events. After obtaining the texts of each downloaded article, I measuring elite cohesion in two ways: first, based on the proportion of elite discourse on security topic over other, non-security topics, and second, within the security topic articles, the proportion of articles that focus on issues that have been traditionally considered as either sensitive, controversial or negative topics for China on the subject of Japan.

The STM package is used to estimate to what extent elites are similar to each other in *what* they discussed. In the following section, I briefly go over how I compute the two components that make up the measurement of elite cohesion based on the *content* of the elite discourse. The goal of using the Structural Topic Model is twofold: First, I do not have to decide what the topics are beforehand as the topic model identifies them for me. This approach allows me to look at what is being talked about without entering my own bias of what they would have been talking about

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<sup>17</sup>See Liao (2006)

<sup>18</sup>The number 9 is selected because it is the highest number that one could set the minimum on in the CNKI search engine. In other words, one cannot search for articles with at least 10 mentions; 9 is the maximum digit available as input.

at any give year.<sup>19</sup> Second, by using STM I can also be more consistent with assignment of each article to a topic, compared to the biases that may be introduced when coding by hand.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning with the minimum of 3 topics, I try 4, 5, 6, and 7 topics successively, and choose 6 topics as the smallest number that reveals topics that distinct from one another. From these six topics I identify topics 2 (US-Japan alliance), 5 (security cooperation and institutions) and 6 (militarized disputes including territorial and maritime conflicts) to be explicitly security-related topics, and 1 (Sino-Japan normalization), 3 (Japan's History and textbook problem), and 4 (bilateral exchanges and meetings) to be less relevant to security. For the first measure of elite cohesion, I take the proportion of all articles that discuss security topics in a given year. The higher the proportion, the more attention was paid to security issues that year. Then, within the security-topic articles, I look at the extent to which the elite discourse was *focused* by taking the proportion of articles that mention the following words in Table 3.2.

The reason why I choose to measure negative sentiment by taking the proportion of negatively associated topic security articles is because traditional dictionary methods are less reliable and inaccurate given the format of my text data. Due to the difficulty of extracting the full-text for each article, I conduct my automated content analyses using the abstracts of each article. There is a limit on how much sentiment one can accurately gauge from an abstract. Secondly, positive-negative word dictionaries can be at best not informative and at worst, misleading. Few of the words from Table 3.2 are listed in the negative word dictionary because they are not necessarily negative words on their own, but derive their negative connotation from Sino-Japanese relations. Thus the words in Table 3.2 could be considered as a negative dictionary that is specialized for understanding Chinese elite opinion on Japan.

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<sup>19</sup>The topic itself is self-revealed by STM, but the *number* of topics is discerned by the user.

<sup>20</sup>Unlike *ReadMe*, STM does not assign 1 topic to 1 article, but outputs the proportion of each topic present in that article based on word frequency. I use the topic that has the highest percentage as the main topic for a given article. For instance, if an article is 90% of topic1, 5% of topic2, and 5% of topic3, then that article is about topic1. For articles where the percentages are close to each other, I manually check.



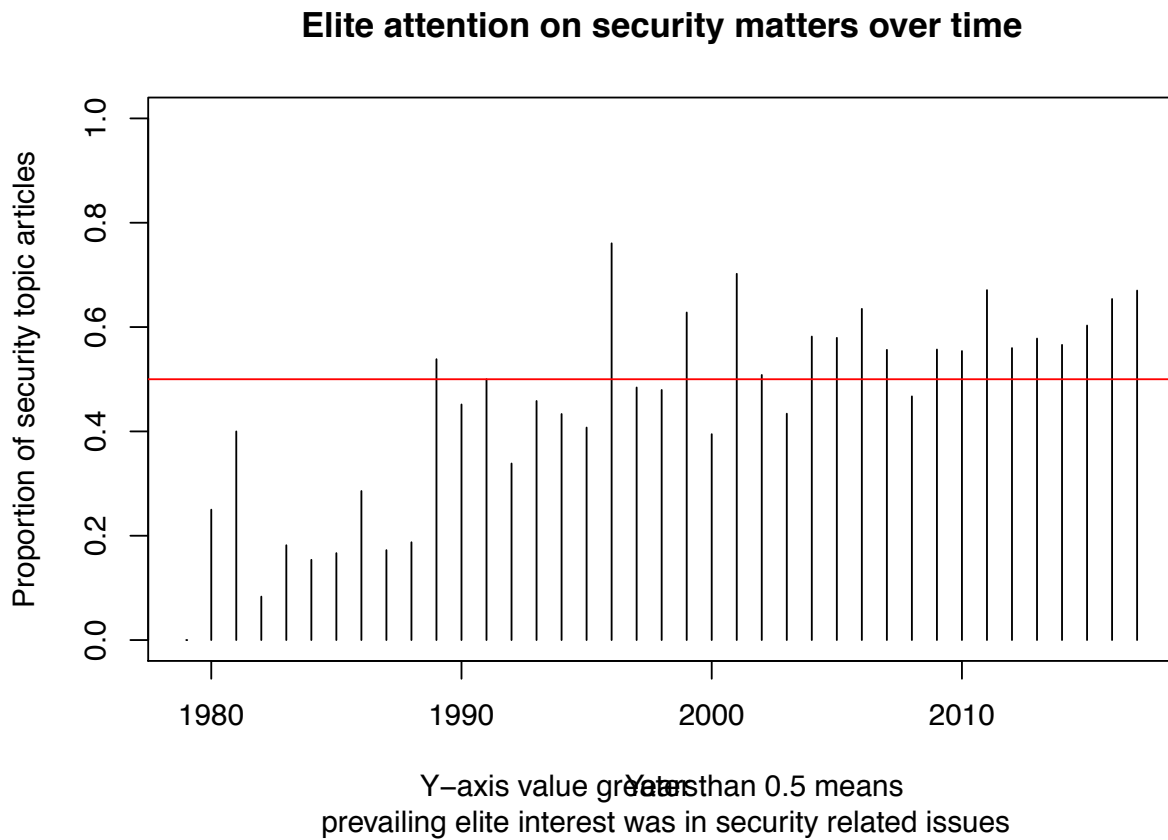


Figure 3.1: Chinese elite attention to security topics with regards to Japan, 1979-2017

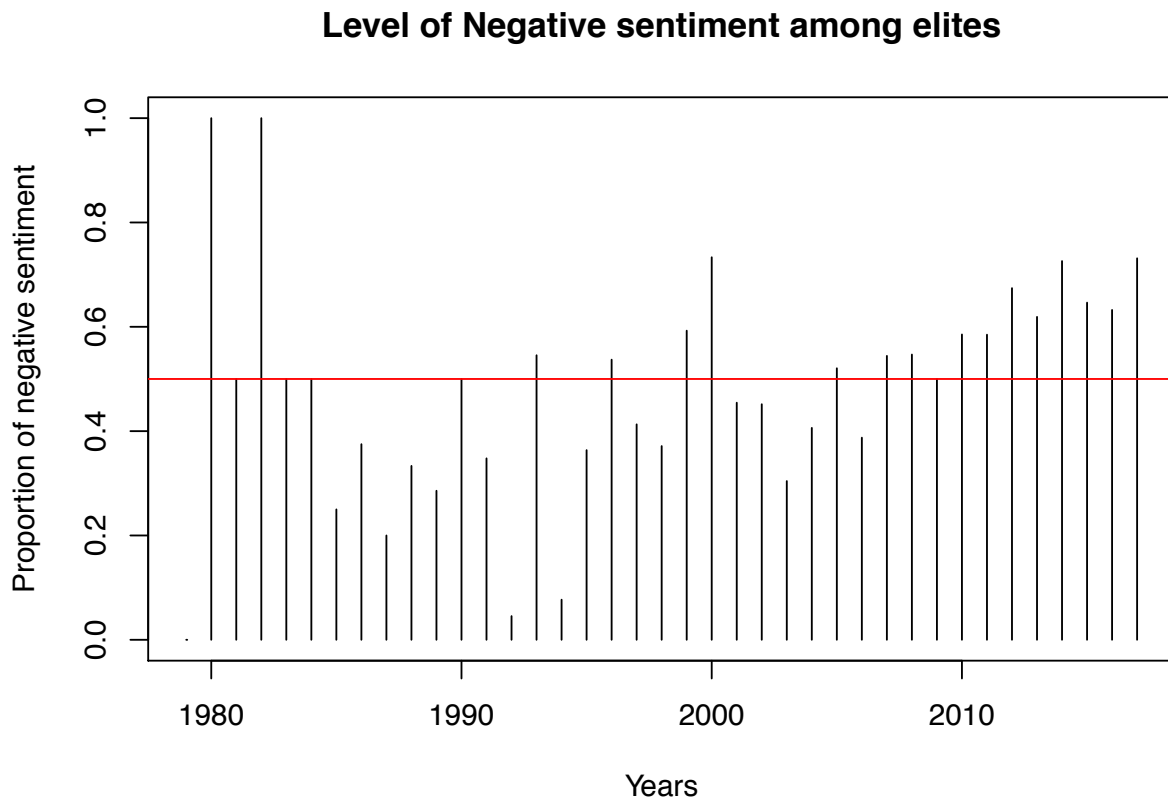


Figure 3.2: Proportion of Chinese elite discourse with negative sentiment on security issues with regards to Japan, 1979-2017

### 3.3.1 Tracking China's active management on the East China Sea disputes

In order to track down when China reassured and/or provoked, I first identify all the confirmed actions that were committed by actors in official state capacity from 1978 (the year of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's coming to power) to 2017 on the ECS dispute, mainly on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Since the purpose of this chapter is not to explain every single event that makes up the complex interstate dynamics between China and Japan, but rather trying to explain the key shifts in China's strategy in managing the dispute using a theoretical framework of rising power foreign policy behavior, I aim to primarily understand China's side of the reassurances and provocations.

The criteria of whether or not something counts as active management in the form of provocation or reassurance by China depends on whether 1) the act was committed by a government actor or affiliated actor 2) that the act was officially acknowledged by the Chinese government. Also, the act should challenge but not change the status quo, which in the case of the Sino-Japanese ECS dispute, the continuation of Japan's formal administration of the Senkaku-Diaoyu islands. I obtain the dependent variable by collecting all Chinese behavior related to the territorial and maritime disputes with Japan in the East China Sea, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands dispute. I look at three sources—international news media (Reuters), Chinese (Xinhua) and Japanese (Kyodo) national news-wires, and Japanese Defense White Papers to collect as comprehensively as possible every provocative or reassuring action China has taken toward the East China Sea dispute to date. Chinese provocations are rarely reported in its own domestic media outlets (especially prior to September 2012), and while the international news media such as Reuters does a better job at reporting them, they do not observe events consistently. Another resource has been the Japanese Coast Guard yearbooks, which are published annually and include updates on Chinese activities in the East China Sea.

A provocation can be unprecedented or precedented, and while the former is more likely to attract more attention, I count both as provocation. For instance, although December 2008 was the first time that the Chinese government publicly acknowledged its intrusion of the Japanese

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territorial waters near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, I count successive mentions of the same act as provocations (but do not necessarily list them in Table 3.4).(Fravel 2015). An unprecedented provocation is if it was record-breaking in quality. Similarly, reassuring gestures can also be unprecedented or precedented, although in the case of reassurance the latter is rare; usually joint statements are proclaimed only if it adds to what has already been established. The existence of a dialogue or routinized meeting between government officials does not count as reassurance as they do not attempt to deviate from the status quo. Negotiations that result in more formalized institutions on East China Sea issues such as the announcement of energy resources joint development agreement in 2008 are examples of reassurances. Table 3.4 shows the list of Chinese active management that were unprecedented, and demonstrates that sometimes China engage in both types at roughly around the same time, resulting in a "mix" of strategies. The key variation that this dissertation looks into is not whether there are more provocations or reassurances in one year than another, but rather, what makes the years in which there was active management different from those years in which there wasn't any.

This method of identification reveals China actively managing the ECS disputes after 2008, but with a hiatus from 2009-2010. Most importantly, my dataset reveals that prior to 2008, China frequently took action but did not engage in active management as it never publicly acknowledged its actions: in the 1990s there were several provocative actions that were never acknowledged, and in 2001, a key reassuring action was taken but again not recognized. The next part of this chapter is to see to what extent the theory of elite cohesion can explain why China did not actively manage its ECS disputes despite showing signs of assertive intent beginning in the mid-90s, why China did not actively manage despite showing signs of cooperative intent throughout most of the 2000s, and why China began actively managing around 2008 and up until now but with intermittent breaks during 2009-2010.

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Table 3.4: China's coercive diplomacy towards Japan on the East China Sea (ECS), 1978-2018

Date	Event	Type
Apr 1978	Dispatch of armed flotillas	no active management
Apr 1994	First-ever Chinese aircraft intrusion over Japanese airspace near SKK	no active management
Sep 1996	Intrusion of territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands for the first time by Chinese vessels	no active management
Apr 1997	Intrusion of Chinese vessels in territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands	no active management
1998	Intrusion of Chinese vessels in territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands <sup>21</sup>	no active management
Feb 2001	Note Verbale on the Prior Notification of Marine Surveillance Activities	no active management
Sep 2005	Chinese destroyer in the disputed waters	no active management
Jun 2008	China-Japan Consensus on Resource Development (Joint Communiqué)	Reassurance
Dec 2008	Chinese vessels enter into territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu	Provocation
Dec 2011	Agreement in principle reached "Japan-China Maritime Search & Rescue Cooperation"	Reassurance
Aug 2011	Chinese gov't (Fisheries) vessel in Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial waters is acknowledged <sup>22</sup>	Provocation
Jul 2012	Chinese gov't (Fisheries) vessel in Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial waters is acknowledged	Provocation
Sep 2012	Chinese government issues statement announcing the coordinates of the baseline around the SKK	Provocation
Oct 2012	Chinese Marine surveillance in Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial waters is acknowledged	Provocation
Nov 2012	Chinese Marine surveillance in Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial waters is acknowledged	Provocation
Dec 2012	The first-ever acknowledgement of Chinese government aircraft enter into Japan's airspace over the disputed islands	Provocation
Jan 2013	First time mapping excursion by State Oceanic Administration	Provocation
Feb 2013	First time Chinese destroyer electronically target a Japanese destroyer	Provocation
Feb 2013	Chinese Marine surveillance in Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial waters is acknowledged	Provocation
Sep 2013	First time Chinese maritime police in Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial waters is acknowledged	Provocation
May 2014	Chinese government aircraft intrusion and fly-by against Japanese air force (JASDF) into contested ADIZ	Provocation
Nov 2014	Sino-Japanese "Agreement to Improve Bilateral Relations"	Reassurance
Dec 2014	Acknowledges Chinese Maritime police cruising territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as legitimate	Provocation
Jul 2015	Acknowledges Chinese Maritime police cruising territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as legitimate	Provocation
Jan 2016	Acknowledges Chinese Maritime police cruising territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as legitimate	Provocation
Aug 2016	Acknowledges Chinese Maritime police cruising territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as legitimate	Provocation
Aug 2017	Acknowledges Chinese Maritime police cruising territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as legitimate	Provocation
Dec 2017	Acknowledges Chinese Maritime police cruising territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as legitimate	Provocation
Jan 2018	Denial of intrusions made by Chinese vessels (which later turn out to be Chinese nuclear submarines)	Provocation
Jun 2018	Establishment of a new crisis communication hotline to avoid accidental clashes at air and sea	Reassurance

From Table 3.4, we are able to identify the variation of the dependent variable, namely,

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when rising China chose costly change in the status quo in the form of either provocation or reassurance, instead of withdrawing from active management. First, it is most important to realize that in the span of nearly 40 years, China has more often than not chosen to maintain the status quo by refraining from active management. From 1978 to 2007, all the crises were handled by China evading a change to the status quo. China avoided acknowledging its provocations as well as reassurance attempts and instead stuck to its status quo position of declaring the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as falling under Chinese sovereignty and refraining from declaring the baselines for its presumed Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the East China Sea.<sup>23</sup> Despite the numerous crises initiated by the Japanese government actors (most notable is the lighthouse building incident of 1990 and a series of Japanese legislators visiting and climbing onto the disputed islands in 1996 and 1997), the Chinese government did not ratchet up tensions with public acknowledgement of its own provocative measures. Instead, the Chinese government repeated its original 1971 stance in that the disputed islands and waters near it fell under Chinese sovereignty. It also did not pursue costly change in the form of reassurance, as none of the agreements were publicly acknowledged during this time.

Following nearly two decades of inaction, the first active management occurred in 2008. In 2007 China and Japan had privately achieved a breakthrough in negotiating the first-ever energy cooperation in the disputed East China Sea. The first breakthrough was in April, when the then Chinese prime minister Wen Jiabao gave a rare press conference on April 5th with Japanese media outlets Nihon Keizai, Asahi, Yomiuri Shimbun and Kyodo News acknowledging that an important milestone had been reached between the two states on energy cooperation. This was again formally publicized by the two states' joint press communique (*zhong ri lian he xin wen gong bao*) on April 12, 2007 and again during a Ministry of Foreign Affairs press statement on December 28, 2007. These two breakthroughs culminated in China's declaration of the June 2008 Joint Statement

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<sup>23</sup>In 1996, China declared straight baselines around its mainland coast and the Parcel islands; China did not declare straight baselines in the ECS until September 2012 ([http://www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/CHN\\_1996\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/CHN_1996_Declaration.pdf))

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on Cooperation between Japan and China in the East China Sea, which is the first-ever active management in the form of a reassurance<sup>24</sup>. However, the reassurances were short-lived as the Chinese government acknowledged and defended for the first time the intrusion of Chinese marine surveillance vessels (中国海监船) in December 2008 near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. After 2008, we observe a nearly two-year break on provocations and reassurances, after which active management resumed with mostly provocations.

From these two waves of status-quo changing behavior in 2008 and 2011-2018, several trends are worth mentioning. First, while there indeed has been an increase in provocations since 2012, Chinese provocations actually resumed in 2011 and thus predates the Japanese nationalization efforts in September 2012. This is important, because popular media (and some scholarly analyses) often do not distinguish official government action from civilian actions; it also often mistakes effect for cause, pointing to Chinese popular reaction as evidence of increasing aggressiveness. By clearly establishing a working definition for what counts as provocation, even if it is conservative, we are able to work with the universe of cases, which in turn allows us to gauge whether in fact China has become more aggressive than the past.

Second, we are able to see that there are a number of crises in the 1990s and reassurances in the 2000s that rarely receive attention in policy circles. Not only does this highlight that the Chinese provocations after 2012 receive undue emphasis, but also reveals a series of events of the Senkaku-Diaoyu island dispute that pundits routinely overlook: *Japan's* hyper-activism on the Senkaku islands for much of the 1990s to which China had reacted with their own assertive actions.<sup>25</sup> Thus overlooking the events of the 1990s results in a distortion in which Chinese assertiveness as a recent phenomenon. Taking into account the events of the 1990s, what we see is not a sudden, unidirectional increase but rather a *resurgence* of provocative behavior that had in fact begun in the

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<sup>24</sup><https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000091726.pdf>

<sup>25</sup>Japan's official newspapers Sankei, Yomiuri and Asahi Shimbun from 1992-2002 extensively report Chinese actions in the latter half of the 1990s, as well as its own actions on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands including the lighthouse construction and excursions by right-wing Liberal Democratic Party officials.

1990s, dwindled in the 2000s, and back again after 2008.

Third, it is worth pointing out that there are in fact several reassurances after 2008. This is the period that many scholars point to as the beginning of China's aggressiveness in the East China Sea. Again, popular media and policy analyses tend to only highlight the provocations at the expense of understanding the timing of the reassurance attempts. Reassurance attempts do exist in the past 5 years, a time period that most analysts associate with China having become "more aggressive" than the past.

### **3.4 How elite cohesion explains China's crisis management of the territorial and maritime claims in the ECS from 1978 to 2018**

The theory of rising power foreign policy argues that elite consolidation is a key permissive condition to a rising power's decision to actively manage the sources of dispute with its neighboring state, and identifies both domestic political and external security environment factors as the key proximate causes. In the previous section, I presented the variation in the independent variable (elite consolidation) and the dependent variable (China's active management) to test the first hypothesis, namely, to what extent can elite consolidation explain the onset of a rising power's active management of its dispute. In this section, I test to what extent the secondary factors, or the proximate causes or triggers such as the need for domestic legitimacy and changes in the external security environment, may have contributed to whether the active management ended up taking the form of reassurance or provocation.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>It is important to note here, that unlike the primary variable of elite consolidation which provides a kind of systematic threshold for active management to occur, the secondary variables of domestic political and external security environment changes are solicited to examine what other factors may contribute to the decision to reassure or provoke.



### 3.4.1 Prior to 2007: No active management

From 1978 to 2007, the Chinese government did not engage in provocation nor reassurance against Japan on the East China Sea and Senkaku/Diaoyu island disputes. This does not mean that the Chinese government never took any assertive or conciliatory action; rather, the Chinese government never formally acknowledged those actions. This distinction is a key contribution of this dissertation, as previous scholarship on the topic of Sino-Japanese interactions in the East China Sea do not differentiate between an aggressive action that was taken but not formally acknowledged and an aggressive action that was taken and then formally acknowledged as such. This distinction also helps us place the interactions in perspective, by identifying several instances in which China took assertive or conciliatory action against Japan but never formally acknowledged them, leading to their frequent omission in scholarship.

In this section, I first review the level of elite consolidation measured using elite discourse in Chinese think tank and policy journals. Afterwards, I go over in detail a couple of cases in which elite consolidation was present but there was no active management by China (this does not disprove the theory as elite consolidation is a necessary but sufficient condition, but invites additional investigation as to what other factors were in effect at that time). I then review individual cases of Reassurance and Provocation from 2008 - 2018, in an attempt to identify as many contingent factors as possible and offer an explanation why some outweighed others.

To begin with, what is most notable about elite discourse from 1978 up until 1996 is how little focus there is on security topics. For every year except 1989, 1996, 1999, and 2001, Chinese elites writing on the subject of Japan, chose to focus their attention on topics that were not explicitly security subjects such as economic relations, trade policy, and commemoration of various landmarks in Sino-Japan relations including the historic 1972 normalization and 1978 Friendship Treaty.<sup>27</sup> Beginning from year 2001, the trend is reversed - with the exception of year 2003 and

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<sup>27</sup>I do not consider articles about numerous bilateral summits, political exchanges including the normalization in 1972 or the 1978 Friendship treaty as security topics because while they are clearly political in character, they lack a

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2007, in every year there were more Chinese elites writing about security topics than those writing about non-security topics.

From 1978 up until 1989, the first year in which there was a majority of elites paying attention to security matters in their discourse, the two most prevalent topics were that pertaining to the Sino-Japan normalization and recovery of diplomatic relations spanning from 1972-1978 (Topic 1) and articles about various academic exchanges and conference proceedings. The prevalence of these topics during roughly the first decade (1980s) reflect the lack of depth of bilateral relations during this time: Not particularly cooperative with each other, but not ostensibly hostile, either. Even 1989, the first year in which more elites write about security issues than other topics, is not a particularly prolific year with just 13 articles, meaning that security topics achieving a majority of elite interest is not necessarily because the elites were particularly drawn to discuss them but rather because so few elites wrote anything that year. As this decade also happens to coincide with the development of think-tanks and policy journals inside post-reform China, it is reasonable to expect that the discourse may not reflect all elite preferences. Still, the relative lack of attention on security matters in the discourse is does not mean that China had no existing contentions on security issues with Japan at this time, but rather the elites were simply more focused on non-security topics. First, China had been vocal about its claim to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands since its first formal protest against Japan in 1971, and Chinese vessels had taken aggressive action against Japan as late as 1978,<sup>28</sup> and had clearly expressed their objection and dissatisfaction to Japanese government's unilateral action in the East China Sea, including the construction of a helicopter launching pad, exploration activity in the continental shelf, and support for Japanese fishermen. Second, the mid-1980s saw the first wave of anti-Japan sentiment and public protests in China since normalization, fueled by then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine that memorialized war criminals from World War II.<sup>29</sup>

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specific reference to security issues between China and Japan.

<sup>28</sup>Tetriak (1978)

<sup>29</sup>Weiss (2014)

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What is worth noting is that despite these numerous circumstances that presented opportunities for commenting in public discourse, Chinese elites hardly paid attention to security topics during the 1980s, and when they did discuss security issues, the tone was decidedly pacifying. Within the security topics, the majority were not on the more controversial topics such as the US-Japan alliance, maritime and territorial disputes, and explicitly military affairs. When elites did discuss a contentious security issue, the discourse would be couched in terms that would make the topic look less controversial than it actually was. For instance, references to the US-Japan alliance rarely used the actual term “alliance” and instead used words such as US-Japan security relations (日美关系) and the US-Japan security treaty (日美安全条约). In addition, there are more articles about Japan's security relations with then Soviet Union than there are articles about Japan's security relations with either China or the United States (for instance, there are two articles about Japan's disputes with then Soviet Union on the Kurile Islands/Northern Territories (北方四島) while there aren't any articles on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands dispute). Finally, it is useful to note that aside from security issues, during the 1980s Chinese elites discussed very little about the “history problem.” This goes straight against the events of that time period during which Japan's continued denial of wartime atrocities and Japanese politicians' honoring the war dead were very much points of tension between the two states. While the topic of Japan's history problem is distinct from contentious security issues, the two are intertwined so that mention of the former often leads to the mention of the latter.<sup>30</sup>

Additional evidence of elite indifference to, or even elite accommodation of, contentious security issues between China and Japan during this period is evident in news media coverage about the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute. Between 1978 and 1989, there were only seven times that China's national and official newspaper, the *People's Daily*, mentioned the Senkaku/Diaoyu

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<sup>30</sup>For instance, a discussion of the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) can trigger a discussion of the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute as some claim that Japan strengthened its claim over the Senkaku islands as part of its acquisition of Taiwan as a result of the Treaty of Shimonoseki.

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islands.<sup>31</sup> From the seven news articles, it is immediately noticeable that in addition to the relative lack of attention on the territorial dispute throughout the 1980s, the general disposition taken by the Chinese government was that of friendly avoidance. The statement by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) regarding Japan's claim to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in 1989 is a telling example of how accommodating China was of Japanese interests during the 1980s. In the statement, the MFA spokesperson goes out of his way to tolerate the adversarial position taken by Japan by stating "of course, we know that the Japanese side also has its own claims (当然, 我们知道日本方面也有自己的主张)," and replying that the Chinese had not been simply told of Japan's most recent position (只字未提此事) without any further incrimination (which has become a staple in official statements made after 2012).

The trend of less attention paid to security affairs by Chinese elites continued until 1996, when the unprecedented restructuring of the US-Japan alliance took place over Clinton-Hashimoto summit declaration. The only other time that Chinese elites talked more about security topics over other topics was in 1999, after the passage of the Regional Affairs Law that allowed Japanese Self-Defense Forces to participate in the case of regional conflict dispatch to rear support its ally, the US. In each of the two years - the only two years during the 1990s in which Chinese elites were particularly attentive to security issues in their discourse - the topic on US-Japan alliance (Topic 2) was the most popular topic, closely followed by other topics that were also explicitly about security (Topic 5) such as a strategic relationship between US and other allies in the East Asia region.

Similar to the 1980s, news media coverage about the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute during the 1990s also provide additional evidence of elites who may have been more sensitive to Japan's increasing pressure on the dispute but nonetheless were reluctant to take a definitive, public remedy. For instance, 1990 was the first time that the Japanese government built a controversial lighthouse on one of the disputed islands, the Chinese government issued a single formal protests

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<sup>31</sup>These were: 1978 May (Deng's visit to Japan), 1979 May (meeting between Chinese FM and Japanese ambassador), 1979 September (then Chinese Vice-Premier Gu Mu's official visit to Japan), three articles calling for cooperation in energy development from 1980 - 1981, and in 1989 May (an official MFA statement).

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with statements issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and allowed no media coverage apart from the official statement at all. This trend continued until 1996, when Japanese politicians began to visit the disputed islands en masse and engage in provocative rhetoric and action such as hoisting the Japanese flag. The Chinese government began to publicize Japanese provocative behavior more extensively in the People's Daily beginning in 1996, but still did not acknowledge any of its own provocative actions. These patterns—in which China tried to avoid any publicity on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands between 1990 - 1996, and very limited reporting that focuses only on the Japanese actions after 1996—partly contribute to why most of the analyses on the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute between the two states often inaccurately date the first time an unprecedented intrusion occurred.

From 2001-2007, elites spent more attention on security issues over other issue area in every year except 2003. In the case of 2003, my data confirms what has been said about Chinese elite discourse during this time—a clear preoccupation with the history problem, especially the “New thinking on Japan” movement that began in 2002.<sup>32</sup> However, although Chinese elites paid more attention to security in their discourse after 2001, prior to 2007 there is only one year (2005) in which the keen interest in security was also met by a focus on explicitly controversial topics. All other years—in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006—elite discourse on security is not necessarily on the “hard security” but rather on the more cooperative aspect of regional security such as China's engagement with Southeast Asia through the ASEAN regional forum and China's participation in the Six-Party talks.

As seen from the elite discourse, with the momentum from elites lacking, it is not surprising that we did not see any instances of China actively managing its disputes in the East China Sea against Japan during this time. There are no known instances of Chinese assertive or conciliatory actions during the 1980s. Starting in the 1990s, China began to take both unprecedented assertive and conciliatory gestures regarding its claims in the East China Sea, but none of them resulted in

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<sup>32</sup>Gries (2005)

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either a provocation or a reassurance. For instance, the first time a Chinese government affiliated vessel enter the territorial waters of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands was 1996, but unlike the Japanese government and media, the Chinese government did not formally acknowledge this transgression. While Chinese government vessels made similar intrusions again in 1997 and 1998, no active management of these incidents occurred, most likely because although there was an increase in attention on security issues by elites, leaders were still not consolidated enough.

For the 1990s, the theory predicts that active management may be present (but not necessarily) in the years following in 1996 and 1999 as these two are the years in which there was elite consolidation (a majority of elites writing on security, and within that population the main focus being explicitly controversial, high-stakes topics). In order to address why there ended up being no active management in 1997 and 2000, we offer two plausible proximate causes from the secondary hypotheses. First, the external security environment did not present a window of vulnerability. The background context during this time period was the Third Taiwan Straits crisis (1995-1996) and the fear about Japan's possible military involvement against China through the US-Japan alliance. Second, China's domestic political circumstances did not present a window of opportunity, either. The mid-1990s was when Jiang Zemin was in power after fully assuming all key leadership positions from his predecessor, Deng Xiaoping. The Patriotic Education Campaign that Jiang espoused preferred to portray China as a victim, and the media spotlight on Japan as the main aggressor with China as the victim of Japanese transgressions in the ECS was perfectly aligned with the tenets of a patriotic education intended to fan anti-Japanese sentiment at the expense of actual policy improvement.

A closer look at China's conciliatory gestures during 1990s reveals how a lack of elite consolidation prevented active management in the form of reassurance. The 1993 bilateral consultation on the ECS security matters. Months after China's passage of the Law on Territorial Waters triggered a vociferous debate inside Japan, three incidents seems to have alarmed the Japanese government to press the Chinese government for a negotiation on ECS maritime security matters. The

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first event occurred in December 1992, when two Japanese vessels were tracked and fired threatening shots by an unidentified vessel (but nonetheless suspected to be Chinese, since the sailors spoke Chinese) near the ECS bordering the Philippines. The second event occurred on February 4, 1993 in the waters near Japan's Okinawa prefecture, where a Chinese public security owned vessel fired threatening shots at a Japanese vessel. As these events did not occur in disputed waters, they are not counted as provocations.<sup>33</sup>

These events triggered China and Japan to agree on the need for a confidence building mechanism on ECS security issues, and in Feb 25 1993 the the Japan Coast Guard met with representatives of China's Ministry of Public Security, Customs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the possibility of a consultation. In April 1993, this time an incident regarding 145 Chinese citizens being illegally trafficked in the East China Sea again raised the awareness of a need for interstate cooperation between China and Japan for maritime security, including humanitarian emergencies such as this one. Thus in June 1993, the two states finally held a bilateral consultation that was specific to the ECS maritime security matters for the first time ever. However, this first-ever consultation failed to institutionalize and become a more regular platform of solving ECS security incidents. It wouldn't be until over a decade later in 2004 when similar consultations would resume on a more regular basis.

It is possible to conjecture that both sides faced domestic pressure against further institutionalization. High costs for further rounds of negotiations is indicated by both governments' reluctance in reporting the event to the public; there was very limited press coverage on this landmark event in both states. On the Chinese side, the consultations were mentioned briefly (as part of another longer news report) twice in China's official paper of record, *The People's Daily*, on July 1 and July 4 of 1993. Japan's *Asahi Shimbun* only mentioned the event in reports published on June 25, June 30 as well. We can also induce from the Japanese news reports that another reason may have been the gap in the scope of cooperation between the two states: the Chinese government was

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<sup>33</sup>It is unconfirmed whether this was the first of its kind.

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represented by the MFA, MPS, Customs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Defense, as well as the Ministry of Transportation, which was a much wider range of representatives compared to the Japanese side, which only featured the MOFA, JCG and the Japan Fisheries Agency.

From 2000 until 2007, the theory of elite consolidation also predicts that we wouldn't observe any active management by China as elite cohesion lacking during this time. The theoretical expectations are largely confirmed with the exception of one year—year 2005—during which a majority of elites wrote on security with a clear focus on the more controversial, high-stakes issues, but this rare cohesion did not materialize into any active management of the ECS disputes. As with 1996 and 1999, we turn to the domestic political and external environment for a plausible explanation, and find that similar to 1996 and 1999, there weren't enough proximate triggers in 2005-2006 to pull off a costly active management. First of all, the external security environment offered few windows of vulnerability. The revised guidelines and report on the state of the US-Japan alliance of 2005-2006 lacked the fundamental change of 1996-1997 that had so alarmed the Chinese elites. In addition, unlike the 1990s during which Japanese politicians visited the disputed islands en masse, the first half of the 2000s saw the opposite - extreme caution by the Japanese government as they tried to prevent further politicization of the disputes by their own politicians.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the domestic political circumstances inside China also offered little in windows of opportunity for the leadership to take advantage of the dispute for legitimacy purposes. Similar to 1996 and 1999, 2005-2006 was a period of stable leadership by Hu Jintao as he had finished assuming all key leadership positions (including the formal assumption of the military through the CMC chairmanship in 2004). In addition, much of the Hu's policy initiative during this time focused on improving bilateral relations through a series of intensive negotiations that would ultimately lead up to the 2008 agreement, so Hu Jintao had few incentives to pursue any costly actions in the meantime in fear that they would derail fruitful negotiations. Thus aside from

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<sup>34</sup>The latter half of year 2006 in fact presented an opportunity to thaw bilateral relations thanks to the exit of then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan who visited the Yasukuni shrine during every year in which he was in office.



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not observing provocations, we also do not observe reassurances either, as prematurely publicizing interstate collaboration can also backfire during the negotiation process. In fact, China went out of its way to

A closer look at the China's conciliatory gestures during 2000s reveals how a lack of elite consolidation prevented active management in the form of reassurance. The Kono-Tang talks of August 2000 eventually led to the first-ever bilateral MoU agreement over the ECS dispute in February 2001. Like the events in 1992 that sparked the 1993 consultation, several incidents following the 1993 consultations alarmed Japan. The first of these events was the first-ever intrusion of a Chinese government vessel of territorial waters near the disputed islands in 1996, which occurred again in 1998 and in 1999. Another incident was the record-breaking number of research vessels (30) as well as the PLAN vessels (27), including the first time a Yanbing-class Chinese naval vessel entered Japanese territorial waters. In May 2000, a Chinese crossed the Tsugaru strait, which was the "first-ever transit of a PLAN warship through Japanese straits." (Dutton 2009)

This incident was quickly followed by two more similar incidents in which the Haibing 723 passed through the Tsugaru strait in late May 2000, and the Dongdiao 232 (a research vessel) conducted marine surveys inside Japan's claimed EEZ in June and July of 2000. As Manicom (2014) notes, these activities spurred intense public debate inside Japan about whether Japan should continue to give foreign aid to China, who could be using the aid to potentially threaten Japan militarily.

Japan's concern about China's frequent intrusions in the Japanese claimed EEZ and its territorial waters, combined with domestic political actors' preoccupation with solidifying Japan's jurisdiction of the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, led the Japanese foreign minister Kono Yohei to emphasize that unless China made clear efforts to cut down on the maritime intrusions, Japanese foreign aid (ODA) to China would be on hold. As it was rare for Japan to tie political conditions to its foreign aid towards China<sup>35</sup>, it was only then that China realized the extent to which the

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<sup>35</sup>See Takamine (2005)

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expansion of Chinese maritime activities in the ECS was irritating Japan, and acknowledged the need for a mutual notification mechanism prior to conducting "research" activities. Following the Kono-Tang foreign ministers' talk in August 2000, China and Japan began a round of negotiations in September 2000. However, agreement only reached the status of a *note verbale*, or an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) instead of a formal agreement due to the difficulty of compromising on both the geographical aspect (delimitation issues, or where exactly China's and Japan's jurisdictional authority would apply) and how far in advance each side should notify the other (1 week vs. 6 months).

There exists ample speculation that part of this difficulty was due to a disagreement between MFA and the PLAN on the Chinese side: The PLAN representatives wanted to make the wording of the agreement as broadly as possible so as to retain maximum flexibility in future naval operations in the ECS.<sup>36</sup> When the MoU was finalized in February 2001, it was merely an exchange of each state's positions on *when* the notification would occur, but lacking specifics on the area that the notification would be applied to, nor what was the range of acceptable "scientific research activities". The Japanese MOFA statement simply states that the notification procedure would be applied to activities conducted in "other states' near seas"(相手国の近海), without any further geographical reference.

The 2001 MoU took the form it did probably because anything more concrete and binding than a *note verbale* would have required more consensus among China's elites. One indicator of the domestic opposition to this MoU would be the complete lack of press coverage inside China. In fact, a report about the Kono-Tang talks held in Beijing in August 2000 was the first and only time that the People's Daily ever mentioned the possibility of negotiating a prior notification mechanism with Japan.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Manicom (June 21, 2016)

<sup>37</sup>RMRB, August 29, 2000 "双方同意通过外交渠道就相互通报的具体原则和内容进行磋商". The Japanese press also did not publicize the MoU widely, and of the two major national newspapers, only the progressive Asahi Shimbun published a brief article about the MoU emphasizing that China would notify 2 months prior to conducting research activities in "waters of interest to Japan." Asahi Shimbun, February 14 2001, "「2カ月前に相手に通」日

Thus in light of the elite discourse and supporting qualitative evidence, we are able to draw the conclusion that during the years 1978 - 2007, while elite consolidation is a necessary cause it is not sufficient, as we do not observe active management in the form of either reassurance or provocation following 1996, 1999 and 2005. On the other hand, during this time the theory of elite consolidation enjoys support as there was no active management for most of the years as they lacked elites prioritizing security issues, or elites paying attention to security issues but without a clear focus on the most controversial topics. In the following section, I discuss the details of 2008, in which, concordant with the expectations of the theory, we observe active management by China on the ECS disputes following a year of high elite interest and clear focus on security issues in 2007.

### **3.4.2 China's active management of the ECS disputes in 2008**

The year 2008 witnessed two groundbreaking instances of China actively managing its disputes in the East China Sea with Japan. The first case was the unprecedented agreement between the two states on jointly developing energy resources in the East China Sea, announced during the summit on June 18, 2008. The second case was an unprecedented intrusion of Japanese territorial waters by a Chinese government official vessel in December in the same year. While this was not the first time that a Chinese government vessel had violated territorial waters near the disputed islands, it was in fact the first time that the Chinese government had admitted to such intrusion through a formal statement. In this subsection, I confirm that while high elite consolidation in 2007 predicted China's active management the following year, the more proximate causes (both domestic and external factors) in 2008 point to reassurance as more likely, and offer a couple of alternative explanations as to why the December provocation may have still occurred.

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中船" Aside from this single report, the Asahi Shimbun also mentioned the negotiation of the MoU on September 14, and on October 9, and October 13, 2000 linking the cooperation on maritime notification with China's declared intent of not stigmatizing Japan on history issues and economic cooperation - these were declared by Premier Zhu Rongji during his state visit to Japan in October 2000.

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A few caveats are in order. First, it is important to note that the 2008 agreement was not a treaty with a binding clause nor a signed agreement with signatories from both states; it was an exchange of view that was higher than the level of an MoU in that it was referred to as a “political agreement,” and served as an intermediate phase for further negotiations and a possible treaty. Second, the 2008 agreement does not specify the actual joint development *sites*—it only marks off the geographical coordinates of the joint development zone within which the sites would be located. In a press conference following the announcement of this agreement, the Japanese MOFA indicated that future consultations would discuss the details regarding delimitation issues.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, the lack of specific, binding elements in the 2008 agreements is offset by the fact that it was the first-ever agreement achieved by the two states that implicitly promised cooperation on the contentious ECS demarcation issue.

Nonetheless, The June 2008 agreement is an unprecedented reassurance because it entailed at least two specific concessions on China's part. The first was that China essentially agreed to a joint development of a resource site - up until then China had not publicly agreed to any form of joint development in fear of undermining its sovereignty over Chinese claims in the East China Sea. The second was on speeding up the negotiation process with an actual deadline for a concrete outcome on a higher bureaucratic level, which it had until then never specified.<sup>39</sup>

The extent to which the Chinese elites were attentive to security related topics along with a clear focus on the more decisive issues within the topic of security, has often been overlooked. Chubb (2019) has pointed to 2007-2008 as the onset of Chinese provocative behavior in their territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and many other scholars<sup>40</sup>, have similarly pointed to the end of 2008 as a key turning point in China's behavior in the East China Sea because of the December provocations. Interestingly, most of the studies that date 2008 as the commencement of hostilities actually do not comment on China's provocations prior to 2008. However, based on

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<sup>38</sup>[http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm\\_press/2008/6/0618.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm_press/2008/6/0618.html)

<sup>39</sup>See Przystup (2008) at <https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/10724/uploads>

<sup>40</sup>Erickson and Liff (2016); Fravel and Johnston (April 12, 2014)

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the findings from the elite discourse analysis, I argue the contrary: Not only was the December provocation not the first one (the first of its kind occurred in 1996), but it was actually an aberration. The elite discourse of 2007 shows several indicators of active management in the following year. There is a clear majority of security-related topics, with an explicit focus on the most contentious issues such as military-to-military exchange and the expansion of Japan's security cooperation with other US allies in the region such as Korea and Australia, as well as the disputed maritime borders in the East China Sea. Compared to the previous year (2006) when security topics also accounted for the majority of topics discussed but lacked a clear focus on contentious issues, 2007 presented a key shift in which elites used specific policy terms and actual references including military exercise (*jun yan*), continental shelf demarcation (*dong hai da lu jia hua jie* 东海大陆架划界). This stands as a clear contrast from the previous year's discourse on security that was couched in vague and broad terms like "strategic relations" (*zhan lue guan xi*) and "Sino-Japanese contradiction" (*zhong ri mao dun*). These nuanced differences are worth note because even the analyses that agree 2008 was an important year for the first-ever Sino-Japan cooperation on the ECS disputes do not go into the details of what changed between 2005 (an year of intense anti-Japan sentiment inside China) and 2007 that would have enabled such an agreement to take place.

In addition to the think-tank journal publications, there is evidence from news media that confirms the extent to which elites were consolidated at the time. Unlike the 2001 MoU, the June 2008 joint agreement enjoyed unprecedented publicity in the official newspaper. In the case of the June agreement, in addition to the usual MFA spokesperson's official statement, official comments made by then Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei and Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on the agreement were also published, which is extremely rare in the case of Chinese foreign policy, along with a series of related news articles and editorials in the People's Daily from May to July 2008. It is important to point out that unlike the June 2008 agreement, the December 2008 provocation did not enjoy spotlight in the national newspaper. Apart from the MFA statement, no additional news report or commentary was made.

While the theory of elite consolidation anticipates China to actively manage the ECS disputes in 2008, it is not a sufficient cause. Thus I look at whether there were other proximate triggers that resulted in the reassurance of June 2008 and the provocation of December 2008. In the case of the landmark June 2008 agreement, I suggest that both the external and domestic political environment provided ample opportunities for reassurance. For instance, year 2008 marked the 30th anniversary of the 1978 Sino-Japan Friendship Treaty, and enjoyed two historic summits between the two heads of state (Hu's visit to Japan in May, and Aso's visit to China in October). China's hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and subsequent caution in avoiding disruptions in key security disputes with neighboring states may have also presented a convenient context to push through a costly policy that would not have been acceptable during previous years.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, the provocation in December 2008 is actually a poor fit with my theory of rising power regional foreign policy. It is not clear that the external security environment at the time presented a window of vulnerability, as Japan had not strengthened its claims in the ECS. It is also unclear whether the changes in the domestic political realm presented a window of opportunity for the leadership, as the top leadership did not face noticeable legitimacy challenges at the time. One possible alternative explanation is that China sought to raise the issue during the foreign minister's meeting that occurred almost immediately in the aftermath of the intrusion on December 9th.

### **3.4.3 China's lack of active management from 2009-2010**

Contrary to 2008, the two years 2009 and 2010 did not see any active management by the Chinese government. This is an important contribution made by this chapter that stands in stark contrast to

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<sup>41</sup>One cost would have been to persuade persistent opponents to energy cooperation. While first-hand evidence is difficult to obtain, anecdotal evidence suggests that the China National Offshore Oil Cooperation (CNOOC) was an opponent to negotiating the joint development consensus either because of the relative losses that it would suffer by having to split the profits with Japan. Similar to past negotiations on research vessel activity, the PLAN resisted because of the possible limitations on its maneuvering freedom in the ECS as a result of the joint development consensus. Manicom (June 21, 2016) The commercial and military sectors had opposed signing an agreement of joint development of energy resources with Japan in the East China Sea up until 2008.

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previous scholarship that often point to the events of 2010 as deeply provocative action by China on the ECS disputes. In September 2010, a Chinese trawler collided with the Japanese coast guard vessels inside the territorial waters of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China sea. What followed was a series of top-level diplomatic protests as well as a purported economic sanction (a temporary suspension of rare earth exports to Japan). However, what is often overlooked is the fact that there was no provocation from China on the islands during this time. Aside from one incident (often referred to as the “撞船事件” in Chinese) in October in which a Chinese Fisheries Administration vessel entered the waters near (but not inside the 12km territorial waters demarcation) the Senkaku/Diaoyu island, there was no instance in which the Chinese government acknowledged any costly action it may have taken on behalf of China's claims. I find that part of the reason could be found in both the lack of elite attention on security issues from 2008-2009.

We first review what the elite discourse looked like in 2008 and 2009. After 2001, year 2008 was the only year, aside from 2003, in which a majority of Chinese elites discusses topics that were not related to security. The contents of the elite discourse that year reflects a preoccupation with peaceful and cooperative relations with Japan, beginning with the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the 1978 Sino-Japan treaty of Friendship and the historic visit to Japan by then Chinese head of state Hu Jintao during which the two states announced a joint statement of “Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests”(战略互惠)<sup>42</sup>. Regarding focus, we see a clear prevalence of more controversial topics within security-related discourse in 2008. Thus we conclude that elites may have enjoyed a consensus on key security issues, such consensus was just not widespread enough due to elite interests on other topics in 2008.

In the following year, Chinese elite interest on security issues recovered momentum with a majority of elites discussing security issues, but their discourse did not necessarily focus on controversial topics such as the US-Japan alliance, the territorial and maritime disputes, or military

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<sup>42</sup><https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/joint0805.html>

affairs.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, elite discourse in year 2009 suggests the opposite of 2008, in which a majority of elites paid attention to security topics but on less controversial issues within the security topic.

There is also additional evidence of the government refraining from placing a spotlight on contentious security issues in 2008 and 2009 in the official media. There are just 10 articles published on the subject of Senkaku/Diaoyu islands from the beginning of 2008 to the end of 2009, and all of them (except one) are a reprinting of the Chinese MFA's complaint about Japanese assertive action in the ECS. The lack of news reporting or editorial comments about the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the national newspaper during this time testifies to the possible difficulty in achieving a shared consensus among the elites.

As the elite consolidation hypothesis predicts, we do not observe any active management of the ECS disputes in the two years from 2009 to 2010. This is remarkable given the spike of tension between China and Japan beginning from September 2010. Similar to the reaction after Japan's nationalization of parts of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in September 2012, the events of September 2010 also drew widespread anti-Japan protests inside China and lead to months of intensive news reporting in the official media following the incident. However, a key difference between these two events exist: China did not engage in provocation or reassurance in 2010, while it did in 2012. While I acknowledge other factors that may have contributed to this difference, I point out that the extent to which Chinese elites were focused on security issues may have been an overlooked explanation.

#### **3.4.4 China's active management of the ECS disputes 2011-2018**

This subsection demonstrates how high attention by Chinese elites on security matters regarding Japan, as well as a clear focus on contentious issues in discussing security matters, is a necessary (but insufficient) condition that precedes the rising China's active management of its disputes with Japan from years 2011 - 2018. In this subsection, I first review the status of Chinese elite discourse

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<sup>43</sup>This does not mean that no elite talked about these issues, but rather, that they were in the minority in 2009.



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from 2010 - 2017, and discuss to what extent elite consolidation and other proximate causes such as external security environment changes and domestic political changes can shape China's active management of the ECS disputes.

Since 2011, China has actively managed its ECS disputes mostly through limited provocations, but also through two limited reassurances that were remarkable in their passing—namely, the formal establishment of the “hotline,” or bilateral emergency communication mechanism on June 2018. Previous explanations have mostly focused on year 2012 being the pivotal year of China's behavioral change, but I suggest that the momentum for provocation actually predates the nationalization efforts by Japan in September 2012. While Japanese action do play an important role in the extent of China's provocation in 2012, I argue that a highly consolidated elite on controversial security issues after 2010 is what explains the presence of such provocative actions.

From 2010 onward, in every year we observe that elites inside China pay more attention to security-related topics than to other topics, and within this attention there is a clear, overwhelming focus on the discussion of the controversial topics that are frequently associated with negative sentiment. The variation in the dependent variable matches the theoretical expectations of the hypothesis on elite consolidation, as the rise in elite attention and focus on the most controversial security issues has been continuously high from 2010: In 2009 and 2010, we do not observe active management, but after 2010 there is an instance of active management every year, either in the form of provocation or reassurance.<sup>44</sup>

In August 2011, the Chinese government acknowledged for the first time since 2008 its vessels entering the territorial waters near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. One reason why China may have publicly acknowledged its assertive action, may have been because it saw a window of opportunity in the upcoming summit between the two states' foreign ministers in Japan in the latter half of 2011, and wanted to emphasize the need to establish confidence building mechanisms

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<sup>44</sup>It is worth reminding that I do not count the number of provocations and reassurances, but rather the existence or absence of either suffices that year to count as a year that had active management.

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to prevent crises such as the 2010 fishing trawler incident. The year 2011 was a year in which a series of conciliatory gestures were made by China. First, in April the Shanghai Maritime Search and Rescue Center and Hiroshima Branch of the Japan Coast Guard held a maritime search and rescue simulation, marking a first time cooperation between the two organizations between the two states. This was part of the two states' renewed efforts at concluding a Search and Rescue (SAR) agreement. By September 2011, both states' foreign ministers (Mr. Koichiro Gamba and Mr. Yang Jiechi, respectively) had formally renewed their mutual commitment to accelerate the process of concluding the SAR agreement as well as pursue a dialogue framework for discussing maritime issues at top-levels of leadership (later this would be named as the High-level Maritime Consultations). By December of the same year, both an agreement (in principle) for the SAR issue as well as for establishing the high-level consultations were in place.

The speed with which the two states reached both agreements was remarkable given the lengthy, drawn-out process of resolving the 2010 trawler incident; the Chinese MFA, for instance, was using formal statements to display its dissatisfaction on the trawler incident as late as February 2012, in addition to issuing a formal statement on the occasion of the anniversary of the incident in September 2011. In the backdrop of such tension, the cooperative developments after September 2011 could be considered as swift but substantive, and it is possible that the Chinese government used the August provocation as a catalyst to move things along quickly. By acknowledging its own provocative behavior, the Chinese government may have attempted to instill a sense of urgency and prod the Japanese side into action in the upcoming talks.

If China chose to manage the disputes with provocations in 2011 as a bargaining leverage to accelerate high-level talks, then the decision to manage the disputes in 2012 with provocation seems to have stemmed from both an opportunity and vulnerability presented by the external and domestic political changes in 2012. It is important to note that Chinese vessels resumed intruding Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands starting in March 2012, after a nearly 9-month hiatus (the last time Chinese vessels did so was in August 2011), and began to

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actively acknowledge its intrusion starting in July 2012, four months later.<sup>45</sup> The fact that these two provocations *precede* September 2012 suggests that Japan's formal nationalization incident cannot be the only reason behind China's decision to provoke. Why active management took the format of provocation in July 2012 is explained partly by both external security vulnerability and domestic political opportunity. China's position in the ECS disputes were made vulnerable by then Japanese mayor's public statement back in April 2012 on his plans for nationalizing the remaining privately-leased parts of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. It is also purported that the next Chinese head-of-state Xi Jinping was heading the Leading Small Group on the East China Sea matters at the time, which may have given Xi an opportunity to take bold, unprecedented action on the Senkaku/Diaoyu controversy and bolster his credibility as a nationalistic leader.

For provocations after September 2012, there are two proximate causes. First, efforts made by the Japanese government to formally nationalize, or purchase a part of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands that had previously been under private lease was a prevailing cause, as the Chinese government's decision to publicize the baselines of the territorial waters was in direct response to Japan's move. Another key explanation for the provocations after September 2012 may have been an opportunity for soon-to-be head of state Xi Jinping to solidify his credibility as a leader that prioritized national security and could raise his legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese public. As Xi Jinping was slated to take over Hu Jintao in late 2012/early 2013, Xi may have been motivated to take advantage of the assertive claims made by Japan on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as a chance to showcase his ability to tackle difficult foreign policy issues. This is plausible given that analysts have made the observation that under Xi Jinping's leadership, the LSG on Maritime affairs were largely responsible for increasing tensions on China's claims in the Southeast China Sea against the Philippines and Vietnam.<sup>46</sup> China's proclamation of its Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)

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<sup>45</sup> Although the Japanese government counts the March 16 2012 intrusion by China's Marine Surveillance vessel as a violation of territorial waters, China officially denied the claim, asserting that Chinese vessels were operating in waters near (but not inside) the territorial waters. (MFA March 16, 2012)

<sup>46</sup> Fravel (2016)

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over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and contested parts of the East China Sea in November 2013 can also be understood as a result of Xi Jinping's full consolidation of power that took place from 2012-2013, as there is evidence that the decision to announce the ADIZ was largely an initiative driven by the top-leadership rather than the People's Liberation Army or the Ministry of Defense.<sup>47</sup>

China's active management during 2014 deserves particular attention. In addition to acknowledging provocations by Chinese government vessels intruding on the territorial waters near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, the Chinese government also engaged in an unprecedented reassurance to control tensions. I offer two proximate causes based on the changes in external security environment to explain why China engaged in both provocations but also a reassurance. First, the reassurance that occurred in November 2014—a four-point consensus between the two states regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands—was largely possible because of the historic summit between the two states' top leaders that took place two days later. It is important to note that the consensus was not signed by the leaders themselves, but rather by the foreign ministers of China and Japan. Given that this was the first time ever that the two states had ever jointly confirmed on the specifics of their claims (so called “agreement on what they disagree”), the very existence of this consensus cannot be taken lightly. Yet the timing of the consensus, as well as the almost immediate resumption of provocations in the same month, suggests that the reassurance came about not so much as a real change in leadership preferences, but rather as an attempt to prevent a downturn of relations on the occasion of Xi Jinping and Abe's first-ever summit since both leaders took office.

A second reason for the provocations in 2014 could be traced back the renewal of the US commitment to defend Japan on the Senkaku/Diaoyu island conflict in April 2014. Then U.S. president Obama broke off from tradition by becoming the first-ever sitting U.S. president to publicly affirm that the US alliance treaty with Japan applies to the defense of the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The Chinese government immediately issued several formal protests after Obama's remark was made in April 2014. The extent to which the Chinese government had

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<sup>47</sup><https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43894.pdf>

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been concerned about this new affirmation made by the Obama administration is clear from the Chinese government's formal protest when the US and Japanese Defense and Foreign Ministers published the "Interim Report on the Revision of the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation" on October 8, 2014.<sup>48</sup> In the official Chinese government protest issued on October 9, 2014, the explicit mention of Diaoyu islands as well as including language such as "No external pressure will shake China's pursuit of its sovereignty"<sup>49</sup> reflect China's concern that the US and Japan would proceed with expanding the US-Japan alliance to cover contested areas in the East China Sea that are currently under de facto Japanese administration. That China had been paying keen attention to the developments in the US-Japan alliance Security Consultative Committee—something that is rarely discussed in official capacity—in October 2014 suggests that the efforts at both a high-level reassurance and provocation during the following two months could have been a Chinese government response to a new vulnerability of a more active US assisting Japan on East China Sea issues.

Similar to 2014, a key proximate cause for the 2015 provocations seems to be the historic revision of the US-Japan alliance guidelines, the latest major revisions to take place since 1997.<https://amti.csis.org/the2015usjapandefenseguidelinesendofanewbeginning/> In addition to strengthening Japan's collective security capacity, the revised guidelines enhanced Japan's material capabilities with new rules for arms exports. But the revision that the Chinese government focused most heavily on seems to be the prospect of the US-Japan alliance inching closer as a "regional alliance" that covers the contested areas of the East China Sea. This concern is evident in all three formal statements that the Chinese government put out immediately after the Revisions were announced in April 2015. Each statement makes an explicit reference to the regional aspect of the alliance, such as "geographic limits", "Japan's administrative boundaries", and "third party (Chinese) interests."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>[http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/anpo/20141008.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/20141008.html)

<sup>49</sup>The original text in Chinese is 任何外来压力都不会动摇中方维护国家主权和领土完整的决心和意志

<sup>50</sup>The original Chinese language text for each of these references are "地理限制" (April 28, 2015), "《美日安保条

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If the Chinese provocations (intrusions inside the territorial waters near Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, including the first-ever intrusion of an armed naval vessel in the contiguous zone) in the East China Sea during 2014-2015 were largely triggered by the reinforcement and renewal of the US' security commitment to Japan, Chinese provocations in 2016 seems to have been motivated largely by another external security factor, the landmark decision by the international arbitration tribunal in July 2016 that ruled in favor of Philippines against China in the South China Sea territorial and maritime claims. For instance, one of the most visible provocations in 2016 was the mass dispatch of Chinese maritime police vessels and fishing vessels and the subsequent recognition by the Chinese MFA. With 23 vessels entering the territorial waters of Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in August alone, this marked the third-highest in record (the first and second-highest number of vessels occurred in 2013). That the dispatch and formal recognition occurred within weeks of the July 2016 arbitration decision suggest that China bolstered its administrative and civilian presence in protest of the unfavorable tribunal decision.

Finally, while China's provocations in the form of intrusions in the territorial waters have continued in 2017 and 2018, it is crucial to note the unprecedented reassurance that occurred in June 2018, namely, the Bilateral Maritime and Air Communication Mechanism, which establishes a hotline between the two states as part of a crisis management in the East China Sea. The most plausible trigger for the timing of this reassurance seems to be the series of high-level negotiations that resumed in mid-2017, as there were more formal statements highlighting the High-Level Consultation on Maritime Affairs in 2017 than in any of the preceding years since the negotiations first began in May 2012.<sup>51</sup>

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约》适用于包括钓鱼岛在内的所有日本施政范围”(April 29, 2015), and “美日同盟不损害第三方利益” (April 30, 2015)

<sup>51</sup>In fact, the Japanese government openly attributes the establishment of the hotline to a breakthrough in negotiations that occurred in December 2017 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/c\\_m1/cn/page3e\\_000817.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3e_000817.html)

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the variation in Chinese behavior on the territorial and maritime disputes with Japan in the East China Sea, and mainly the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. This chapter challenges the conventional wisdom that China has grown assertive only in the past few years following the hotly protested Japan's nationalization efforts by pointing to multiple provocative gestures prior to 2012. It also places Chinese behavior in perspective by pointing to several cases of reassurance that occurred in the midst of high tensions. To improve our understanding of the undercurrents of Chinese foreign policy behavior, I theorize and test two hypotheses on the domestic determinants of a rising power's regional foreign policy. Using elite discourse gathered from Chinese think tanks and academic journals, I find that the empirical predictions of my theory generally matches the actual variation, with a few exceptions: When elites inside the rising power are consolidated in their preferences, the rising power is more likely to actively manage the disputes it has with that neighbor through either reassurances or provocations. Once the presence or absence of active management is determined by the main variable of elite consensus, I draw on secondary variables such as windows of vulnerability and opportunity posed by changes in the external security environment and domestic political changes to understand the type of active management—reassurance or provocation—at the yearly level.

The strongest evidence of my theory comes from the 1990s and the early 2000s, when the lack of elite consensus corresponds to China refraining from actively managing their disputes against Japan, and after 2008, when high elite consensus goes hand in hand with China's sustained provocations and reassurances. What determines China to choose reassurance at one point and provocation in another warrants further investigation, as the time period of this study is relatively recent, and thus there is a paucity of information that could shed light on the actual decision-making process for each case.

The chapter also contributes to the field of Chinese foreign policy by uncovering the much

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overlooked venue of China's cooperative gestures in the East China Sea.<sup>52</sup> Existing scholarship tends to emphasize China's aggressive actions in recent years, while at the same time omitting the instances of China's reassurances or brushing them away as just "talk." I emphasize that even such "talk" should not be taken for granted, the inclusion of East China Sea issues in the two states' bilateral meeting agenda is by no means guaranteed. By studying all forms of provocation as well as reassuring gestures by China, this paper attempts to put back the recent trends of China's "assertiveness" into perspective.

While the effectiveness or durability of agreements were out of scope for the present study, it could be a useful area to test my theory of elite cohesion in the future. For instance, it would be interesting to test whether regimes with divided elites are less likely to ratify international agreements at the domestic level. With more fine-grained data on elite cohesiveness that is not aggregated yearly but perhaps on a monthly basis, we would be able to test whether elite fracture prevented the advancement of the several confidence building mechanisms from 2011-2014. The next chapter studies China's active management of security crises with South Korea that are triggered by North Korea's nuclear and conventional conflict.

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<sup>52</sup>Manicom (2014) addresses instances of cooperation in fisheries, energy development, territorial disputes with Japan in the East China Sea extensively, but argues that provocation and cooperation depends on the nature of the stakes in involved, as well as the framing of the dispute, and not about elite cohesion within China.



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Table 3.2: List of Chinese words related to controversial or sensitive security topics on Japan

Chinese word	English meaning
亲日 ( <i>qin ri</i> )	pro-Japanese
亲美 ( <i>qin mei</i> )	pro-American
安全 ( <i>an quan</i> )	security
安保 ( <i>an bao</i> )	security, but used mainly in the context of the US-Japan defense treaty
尖阁 ( <i>jian ge</i> )	Senkaku
右倾 ( <i>you qing</i> )	Rightist
右倾化 ( <i>you qing hua</i> )	become Rightist
右派 ( <i>you pai</i> )	Right-wing
右翼 ( <i>you yi</i> )	Right-wing
同盟 ( <i>tong meng</i> )	alliance
同盟化 ( <i>tong meng hua</i> )	become alliance
同盟国 ( <i>tong meng guo</i> )	ally
盟军 ( <i>meng jun</i> )	allied forces
盟国 ( <i>meng guo</i> )	ally state
军国 ( <i>jun guo</i> )	military state
军演 ( <i>jun yan</i> )	military exercise
自卫 ( <i>zi wei</i> )	self-defense
自卫权 ( <i>zi wei quan</i> )	Right to self-defense
自卫队 ( <i>zi wei dui</i> )	Japanese Self-Defense Forces
自卫队法 ( <i>zi wei dui fa</i> )	Self-Defense Law or legislation
警察 ( <i>jing cha</i> )	police
钓鱼岛 ( <i>diao yu dao</i> )	Diaoyu islands
威胁 ( <i>wei xie</i> )	threat
近海 ( <i>jin hai</i> )	contiguous zone
领海 ( <i>ling hai</i> )	territorial waters
南中国海 ( <i>nan zhong guo hai</i> )	South China Sea
海权 ( <i>hai quan</i> )	maritime rights
海监 ( <i>hai jian</i> )	maritime surveillance
海防 ( <i>hai fang</i> )	maritime defense
防务 ( <i>fang wu</i> )	defense
防卫 ( <i>fang wei</i> )	defense
防御 ( <i>fang yu</i> )	defense
防控 ( <i>fang kong</i> )	prevention and control
防空 ( <i>fang kong</i> )	air defense
铁三角 ( <i>tie san jiao</i> )	“The iron three,” referring to the US-Japan-Korea alliance network

Table 3.3: China's Most Prominent Foreign Policy Think-tank Journals on Japan

Title	Think-tank/Publisher name	Date of first issue and frequency	Sector Type
National Defense (Guofang)	Academy of Military Science, PLA	1992, quarterly	Military
China Military Science (Zhongguo Junshi Kexue)	Academy of Military Science	1988, monthly	Military <sup>a</sup>
Journal of International Studies (Guoji Wenti Yanjiu)	China Institute for International Studies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1959, bi-monthly	Government
International Strategic Studies (Guoji Zhanlue Yanjiu)	China Institute for International Strategic Studies, General Staff's Second Dept.	1986, quarterly	Military
Contemporary International Relations (Xiandai Guoji Guanxi)	China Institute of Contemporary International Relations	1981, monthly	Government
China Strategy Observer (Zhongguo Zhanlue Guancha)	China Reform Forum	1994, monthly	Party
Strategy and Management (Zhanlue yu Guanli)	China Institute of Strategy and Management	1993, bi-monthly	Military
Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies (Dangdai Yatai)	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	1992, monthly, then bimonthly from 2008	Academia
Northeast Asia Forum (Dongbeiyu Luntan)	Jilin University	1992, bi-monthly	Academia
Chinese Cadres Tribune (Zhongguo Ganbu Luntan)	Central Party School	1988, Monthly	Party
Outlook (Liaowang)	Xinhua News	1981, weekly	Party
Contemporary World (Dangdai Shijie)	International Department of the Central Committee	1981, Monthly	Party
World Affairs (Shijie Zhishi)	World Knowledge Publishing affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1934, twice a month	Government
Theory Front (Lilun Qianyan)	Central Party School	1987, twice a month	Party
Journal of International Politics (Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu)	Peking University	1980, bimonthly	Academia

<sup>a</sup>Currently, instead of this source I use an assortment of journal articles authored by military affiliated elites available in CNKI

# Chapter 4

## China's active management towards Korea, 1992-2017

### 4.1 Introduction

A rising power's provocation towards its weaker neighbor is often catalyst to great power war. When is a rising power more likely to exercise restraint, and when is it more likely to resort to aggression? A rising power aims to minimize regional instability in order to sustain its rise through active management. In this chapter, I show how elite consensus inside the rising power is a key determinant of a rising power's active management by examining China's provocations towards South Korea, paying special attention to the time period following the two states' normalization in 1992. Due to its unfinished war with North Korea and its alliance with China's main great power rival, the U.S., South Korea is a latent security threat to China. China's mutual defense pact with North Korea has pitted its security interests against that of South Korea and the U.S. throughout the Cold War and up to now. This paper tests the theory of rising power regional foreign policy behavior based on elite discourse using an original dataset that tracks all of China's official statements on South Korea since China's reform era. I find that in line with the theoretical

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expectations, when the majority of Chinese pay attention to security matters exclusively and with a clear focus on the more contentious issues regarding South Korea, China is more likely to engage in active management on South Korea through either reassurances or provocations

In July 2010, after North Korea's alleged sinking of the South Korean naval vessel *Cheon'an*, China issued several official statements criticizing Korea's decision to hold military exercises in the Yellow Sea accompanied by a U.S. aircraft carrier. Possibly due in part to China's visceral reaction, the *USS George Washington* ended up not entering the Yellow Sea in July 2010. Instead, the U.S. aircraft carrier changed its course, and attended exercises in the East Sea instead of waters facing China. Many analysts both in and outside China have cited this incident as an indicator of how aggressive China had become in recent years. However, few analysts pointed out this was not new—China had been criticizing US-South Korean joint military exercises almost every year since they began in 1976, in even more flagrant language. For instance, earlier instances of U.S. aircraft carrier sightings in the Yellow Sea had resulted in even more threatening remarks, such as conveying to the U.S. embassy in Beijing that subsequent incidents of U.S. vessels in the Yellow Sea could lead China to “shoot-to-kill.”<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to conclude whether China had indeed become more provocative towards South Korea without tracking past Chinese behavior using a consistent measure. Depending on which issue area and the time period, China sometimes seems willing to cooperate with South Korea and the US even at the cost of hurting its patron-client relations with North Korea (i.e. economic sanctions for nuclear testing), but at other times China has made it clear by issuing explicit condemnations that its tolerance for South Korea's militarized behavior targeting North Korea, especially with the U.S., has limits. The question is then, what conditions may be associated with China's decision to behave in a reassuring manner (tolerate militarized behavior by deliberately not making public criticisms of South Korea) or provocative (make public criticisms of South Korea's military activities against North Korea).

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<sup>1</sup>[http://articles.latimes.com/1994-12-14/news/mn-8896\\_1\\_kitty-hawk](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-12-14/news/mn-8896_1_kitty-hawk)

Being able to improve our predictions on when and under what conditions China is more likely to tolerate South Korean gestures to deter North Korea through reassurances, and under what conditions it will not, through provocations, is important for two reasons. First, a miscalculation in which South Korea overestimates China's tolerance could lead to an inadvertent great-power conflict between China and the U.S. If South Korea (incorrectly) judges China to be more tolerant than it really is, it may ratchet up the intensity of its efforts to deter North Korea despite the heightened risk of being misinterpreted by China, and could lead to a confrontation between South Korea, its ally the US, and China. Some scholars have suggested that this is the reason behind the current diplomatic tension between China and South Korea on the latter's decision to deploy THAAD<sup>2</sup>: Both China and South Korea had been overly optimistic of each other, China on Korea's independent stance from the US and Korea on China's tolerance for its deterrence efforts against a nuclear neighbor (Swaine 2017). On the other hand, a miscalculation in which South Korea overestimates China's support for North Korea (and thus underestimates Chinese tolerance of South Korea's own assertiveness against North Korea) could lead South Korea to choose not to demonstrate resolve towards North Korea, further emboldening North Korea to behave provocatively in both conventional and nuclear armament. A successful case of deterrence is prevented because Korea unnecessarily feared retaliation and escalation by China.

The focus of this chapter is to first demonstrate that a clear variation exists on China's reaction towards South Korea's measures to defend itself against North Korean provocations, and to test the role of elite cohesion as a source of this variation. Systematic research on China's foreign policy behavior towards South Korea using consistent indicators is scant, and usually focused on the two countries' economic relations, such as trade volume and foreign direct investment.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, China and Korea have often conflicting interests when it comes to managing the

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<sup>2</sup>THAAD is a shorthand for Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, a missile defense system managed by the U.S. to target DPRK missiles. The proximity of the THAAD radar to Chinese territory has been cause of intense Chinese opposition.

<sup>3</sup>China became Korea's largest trade partner in 2004, replacing the U.S. which had been Korea's largest trade partner until 2003.

DPRK's nuclearization and its conventional military provocation on land and in sea.<sup>4</sup>

Research on China's security policy towards South Korea has been particularly lacking. China's alliance with North Korea, and Korea's alliance with the U.S., coupled with the fact that the Korean war armistice (signed in 1953) is still in effect, have placed China and South Korea at odds over security issues pertaining to North Korea. From China's standpoint, Korea's alliance relations with the U.S. is a latent threat as the alliance targets North Korea and thus has the potential to wreak instability on China's physical border. I propose that measuring the strength of elite preferences can enhance our understanding of why a rising power like China has at times taken the costly step of either reassuring or provoking its neighbor such as South Korea, and why at other times it has not been able to do so. Empirically, I compile an original dataset that tracks China's official reaction to South Korea's deterrence efforts against North Korea by tracking every Chinese government response to South Korea's coercive measures to defend itself against the North. These deterrence efforts or coercive measures include South Korea's military exercises (by itself or jointly with the U.S.) and missile defense such as THAAD.

The rest of the chapter is as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews the theory of the rising power's regional foreign policy and lays out the research design, including the definition, operationalization of the key independent and dependent variables. Section 3 tests the extent to which the elite discourse match the empirical expectations of the theory by studying in detail four distinct time periods marked by variation in China's foreign policy behavior towards South Korea (prior to Sino-ROK normalization in 1992, 1992 - 2001, 2002 to 2009, 2010 to 2016), and also test how alternative explanations fare compared to my theory. Section 4 concludes, with policy implications and future steps.

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<sup>4</sup>China and South Korea also have disagreements about history - China argues that the ancient kingdom of Goguryeo that occupied much of today's Northeast China was a Chinese vassal state, whereas Korea argues that Goguryeo was an independent Korean state. In addition, China and Korea have yet to solve the demarcation of the EEZ in the Yellow Sea— and subsequently, to which state Scotia rock—a submerged rock that houses a scientific research station by Korea. These two issues while salient are not currently militarized disputes, thus not the focus of this chapter.

## 4.2 Theory and research design

I test the theory of a rising power's regional foreign policy on the case of China's foreign policy behavior to South Korea since the two states' normalization in 1992 up to 2017. The theory predicts that the rising power is more likely to take the costly step of either provoking or reassuring its neighboring states if its elites are more consolidated in their preferences towards that neighboring state, and that the rising power is more likely to not actively manage its regional threat if its elites are not consolidated. In the case of China's policy towards neighboring South Korea, this would mean that China is more likely to engage in either reassurance or provocation when a majority of its elites discusses similar topics and in a similar tone on security issues pertaining to South Korea.

I distinguish active management from non-active management based on costliness, which is determined by the extent to which the action strays from routine, default behavior.<sup>5</sup> As the goal of the rising power is to continue rising, it prioritizes the maintenance of stability over anything else. The key assumption here is that a rising power postpones the revision of the status quo for as long as possible. The rising power attempts to maintain the status quo for as long as possible as it increases its material capabilities. Thus instead of engaging in high-risk activities such as the outright use of force, the rising power turns to provocations and reassurances as a way of delaying the revision of the status quo.

However, active management of disputes in the form of provocations and reassurances is costly for the rising power. Reassurance can appear as undermining national interests in the long-run by allowing adversaries to strengthen their claims on the dispute. The provocation strategy also has its costs and benefits. Provocation may place the rising power at the risk of losing control of stability, and set it on a path of escalation and ultimately premature great-power conflict. This is because provocation can backfire, increasing the resolve of the neighboring states and the hegemon. Domestically, once a provocation strategy is in place, it may also inadvertently empower a faction

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<sup>5</sup>Provocation is distinct from the use of force in that provocation does not change the status quo. Similarly, reassurance is distinct from compromise in that reassurance does not change the status quo.

that tries to outdo the incumbent in use of force (Snyder 1993) thereby letting lose the biggest source of internal threat to the rising power leadership.

Due to the costs of actively managing disputes with neighboring states through provocation and reassurances, I hypothesize that rising powers will be inclined to pursue active management only when would be managing a highly consolidated elite population. Elites play a crucial role as a bridge between the leadership and the domestic public in disseminating and interpreting foreign policy events.<sup>6</sup> An elite population that is highly consolidated is under tighter control by the rising power leadership. When its elites are united, there is less concern for having to suppress conflicting interests. As the rising power leadership does not face competition from the elites, the likelihood of being portrayed unfavorably as the party that sells out on national interest diminishes. A highly consolidated elite provides the rising power leadership the opportunity to risk without accepting the blame that may come from bold decisions. On the other hand, a consolidated elite is an advantage to the rising leadership as the elite can serve as a means of government propaganda that justifies costly foreign policy behavior.

- Hypothesis: When elites are consolidated in their discourse on security, we should expect to see rising power engaging in active management on disputes with neighboring states in either provocative or reassuring foreign policy. When elites are not consolidated in their discourse on security, we should expect the rising power refraining from active management.

#### **4.2.1 The independent variable: Measuring elite cohesion using elite discourse**

Similar to how I measure elite consolidation using elite discourse in the previous chapter, I use publicly available Chinese elite discourse on South Korea as a reflection of Chinese elite preferences; thus discourse change is a proxy for preference change. Because there is no single, consistent

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<sup>6</sup>Zaller (1992); Saunders (2015)



and continuous publication that represents China's policy priorities on Korea, I turn to the next best thing available: Elite commentaries published by authoritative think-tanks and prestigious academic journals in China. The frequency and style with which these journals discuss specific subjects on Korea could tell us something about to what extent the elites care about which issue(s) and in what manner. I use the Structural Topic Model (Roberts, Stewart and Airoidi 2016) to identify what are the main topics being discussed by the Chinese elites during a given year, and after identifying articles related on the subject of security, I also measure the extent to which elites focus on the more negative, controversial topics within the subject of security.

To measure the independent variable of elite consolidation, I first collect all articles on the subject of Korea published in 130 Chinese academic and policy journals from 1978 to 2016.<sup>7</sup> I select journals that either specialize in foreign affairs or policy-making, and select publications that is either directly affiliated or supervised by an official government unit. Of these journals, I exclude journals that resemble news magazines as they are not policy commentaries and the content is more likely to be influenced by newsworthy events at the time rather than elite preferences. Since each article varies in length, I use the abstract of each article instead of the full-text for the quantitative content analysis, and refer to the full-text for the qualitative analysis.

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<sup>7</sup>I access digitized versions of each article via the China Academic Journals full-text database, or CNKI.

### Elite attention on security matters over time

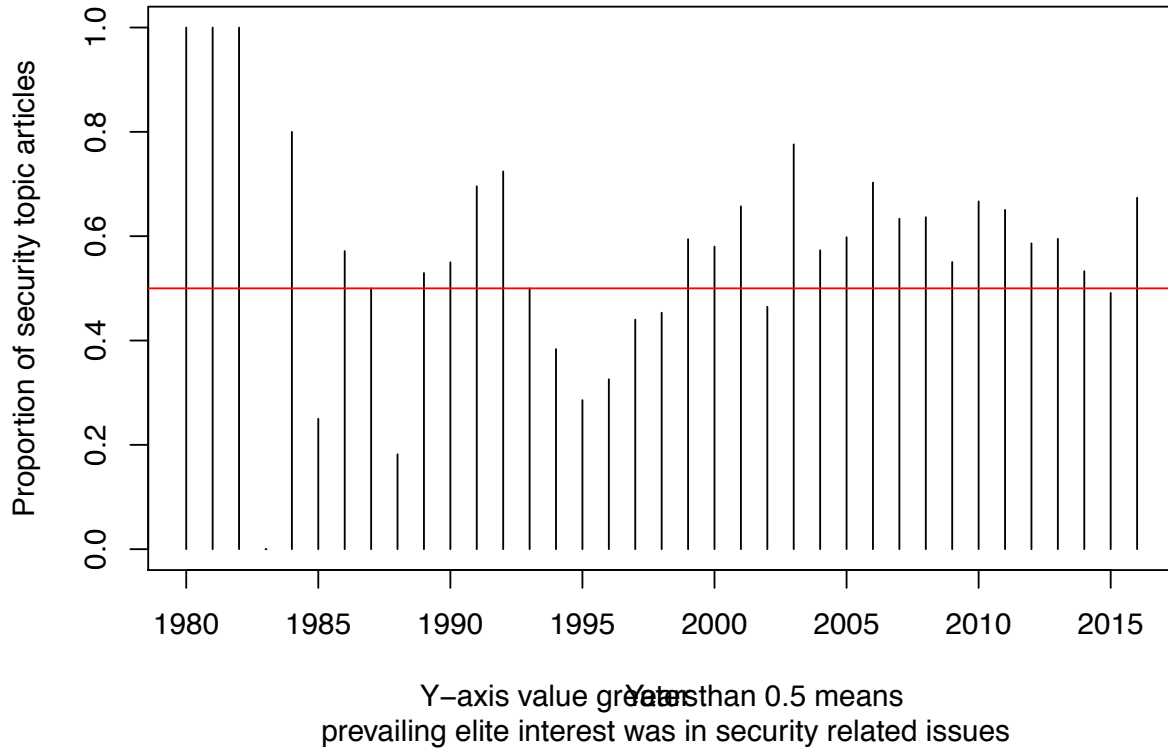


Figure 4.1: Chinese elite attention to security topics with regards to South Korea, 1980-2016

### Level of Negative sentiment among elites

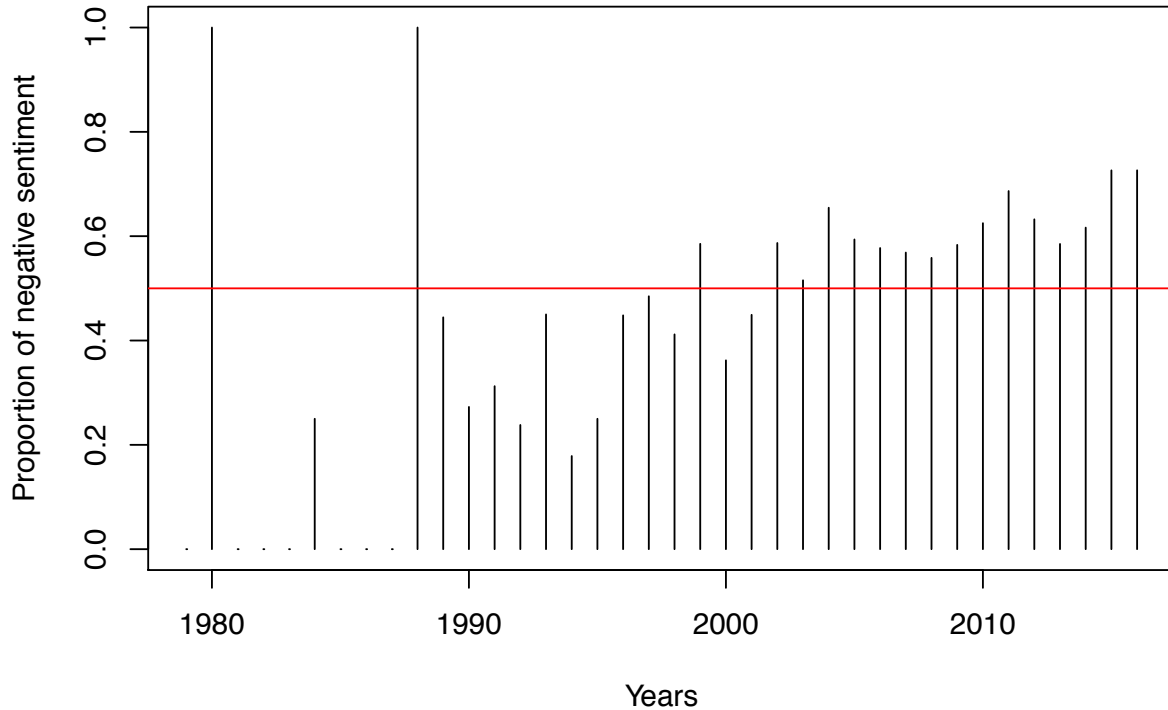


Figure 4.2: Proportion of Chinese elite discourse with negative sentiment on security issues with regards to South Korea, 1980-2016

After obtaining the metadata, or information about each article such as title, publication, year, author and abstract and preparing them in digital format, I use the Structural Topic Model (STM)<sup>8</sup> to estimate which topics, and how many articles under each topic, were written about by the Chinese elites about Korea in a given year. I find that in the case of Chinese elite discourse on Korea, six topics best capture the most prominent themes in the discourse. The number of topics is chosen through a trial-and-error basis, as I compare the trade-off between specificity and coherence (as the number increases, each topic becomes more specific, but each topic then covers

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<sup>8</sup>Roberts, Stewart and Tingley, “stm: R Package for Structural Topic Models.” last accessed July 17 2017, <http://www.structuraltopicmodel.com/> STM is suitable as the range of topics discussed by the elites are remarkably stable over time

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fewer articles). I find that at 6 topics, the model successfully estimates topics that are distinct enough from each other, but also specific enough not to encompass too wide a range of articles.<sup>9</sup>

Table 4.1 displays the words most frequently associated with each topic.

Table 4.1: Topics discussed by Chinese elites on the subject of Korea, 1982 - 2016

Topic	Sample words (Chinese)		Sample words (Translated to English)	
	Highest Prob (words highly associated with this topic)		Highest Prob	
	FREX (words likely exclusive to this topic)		FREX	
Bilateral exchanges and meetings	中国, 研究, 关系, 交流, 大学, 建交, 发展 大学, 建交, 学术, 友好, 妇女, 研讨会, 科学院	China, research, relationship, exchange, university, normalization, development university, normalization, academic, friendship, women, conference, research institute		
Korean domestic politics and society	政治, 社会, 经济, 发展, 国家, 总统, 政府 制度, 民主, 选举, 金泳三, 国会, 政党, 民主化	politics, society, economy, development, state, president, government law, democracy, election, Kim Young-sam, National assembly, political party, democratization		
Regional security cooperation and institutions	安全, 关系, 战略, 地区, 东北亚, 合作, 中国 同盟, 地缘, 北极, 能源, 中等, 安全, 东北亚	security, relationship, strategy, region, Northeast Asia, cooperation, China alliance, geographic region, artic, energy, middle, security, Northeast Asia		
US-ROK alliance and military	美国, 军事, 海军, 美军, 导弹, 国防, 苏联 海军, 美军, 作战, 部署, 演习, 武器, 部队	US, military affairs, navy, US armed forces, missile, national defense, USSR navy, US armed forces, military operation, deployment, military exercise, weapons, troops		
Korea's relations with Japan and history problem	日本, 历史, 问题, 海洋, 世界, 中国, 国家 海洋, 安倍, 教科书, 慰安妇, 黄海, 首相, 侵略	Japan, history, problem, maritime, world, China, state maritime, Abe, textbooks, comfort women, yellow sea, prime minister, aggression		
Relations with North Korea and nuclearization	朝鲜, 半岛, 问题, 关系, 政策, 会谈, 局势 半岛, 会谈, 南北, 朝鲜, 朝核问题, 无核化, 会晤	North Korea, peninsula, problem, relationship, policy, summit, situation peninsula, summit, North-South Korea, North-South Korea, North Korean nuclearization problem, denuclearization, meeting		

Using these six topics, I calculated how much elite public discourse was about security for each year (FIGURE). The greater proportion of these articles, the more attention Chinese elites were paying on security-related topics when discussing Korea. I used the cutoff of 0.5 to identify during which years elites were predominantly focused on security issues. Then, within those security-related articles, I measure the extent to which elites are focused on the more controversial issue-areas that have been known to be affiliated with negative sentiment, such as US-ROK military exercises and Korea's participation in US-led security initiatives. Taking these two measurements together,<sup>10</sup> I find that elites begin paying more attention to explicitly security topics as opposed to

<sup>9</sup>For instance, with 3 topics (minimum), one of the topics is too vague to be meaningful. At 7 topics, two of the topics could essentially be considered as 1 topic, as they are both related to DPRK-ROK relations

<sup>10</sup>In the current theoretical framework, how focused the elite discourse is on controversial issues that are frequently associated with negative sentiment, is a secondary concern, and is considered only if elite attention is predominantly on security-related topics to begin with. In other words, if elite attention on security topics was low to begin with, the

other topics such as Korea's domestic politics or regional diplomacy starting from 1999, and this overwhelming attention has been sustained continuously since 2003 (with the exception of year 2015). Interestingly, this intense interest on security affairs when discussing Korea also goes hand in hand with a clear focus on the most controversial, or "hard" security issues, as the proportion of articles that are affiliated with negative sentiment also stays continuously high from 2002. In short, the findings suggest that Chinese elites have been extremely consolidated in their preferences towards Korea since 2003. According to the theory of rising power's regional foreign policy, we expect to observe China to largely refrain from active management prior to 2003, and to be actively managing sources of dispute with Korea following 2003. In the following section, I turn to the dependent variable, and assess to what extent the theory is supported.

#### **4.2.2 The DV: China's reassurances and provocations**

The dependent variable for this chapter is the universe of the Chinese government's official commentary on South Korea's efforts at deterring North Korean aggression from 1992 and onwards. Specifically, I track China's official responses to Korea's measures to improve its security vis-a-vis DPRK, including efforts at deterrence (i.e. military exercises) as opposed to efforts at engagement (i.e. high-level talks and bilateral summits), as only the former category of action is susceptible to dispute and not the latter (in fact, China has been officially supportive of ROK's initiatives to engage North Korea).<sup>11</sup>

I count official statements mostly made by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), but depending on availability also include comments from Ministry of Defense (MOD), State Council and the International Department (an internal branch of the Chinese government that has traditionally been responsible for managing relations with North Korea). I do not include Chinese

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focus of the discourse is not meaningful for the purposes of this study.

<sup>11</sup>I choose 1979 as the start of the post-reform era in China under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, but due to lack of major think-tank publications prior to 1982, the data starts in 1982 while the study focuses on variation from 1992 onwards as the most meaningful due to the two countries' normalization.

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official statements that comment on South Korea's action on issues that are considered controversial but are not explicitly related to security such as North Korean refugees. At this time I also do not include China's reaction on fishing disputes with Korea in the Yellow Sea, as China has yet to produce an official position on the disputed claims against Korea in the East China Sea/Yellow Sea.<sup>12</sup>

Focusing on the presence or absence of the China's explicit criticism on South Korea's deterrence efforts against North Korea is analytically useful in several ways. First, it offers us a consistent indicator. Increasingly in recent years, China's criticism of ROK's coercive efforts have been used as a kind of litmus test for China's preferences on matters related to the Korean peninsula. Interestingly however, to date no scholar has consistently tracked the trend over time regarding such strongly provocative official statements. Despite the widespread attention that China received in 2010 for officially denouncing U.S.-South Korean naval exercises in 2010, media and academia have rarely paid attention to occasions where China denounced South Korea on similar matters before or after 2010.

Second, it is useful because it is not necessarily correlated with indicators that analysts tend to look at for measuring Sino-Korean relations. For instance, from 1992 to 1997 there were no less than 15 first-ever high-level visits to each country, but China's explicit denunciation of Korea's deterrence efforts did not stop. Condemnation occurred despite the historic Sino-Korean normalization in 1992, and it continued all the way up to 1999. Many analysts point to the right-leaning, U.S.-friendly former Korean President Lee Myung-bak who took office in 2008 as the origin of heightened tension between China and Korea, but again, it was not until mid-2010 that China resumed its explicit criticism.

Third, sticking to a clear indicator helps us place China's current behavior in perspective. It is worth noting that Chinese behavior after 2010 has not been a consistent downturn, and events

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<sup>12</sup>The data is part of a larger dataset which consists of 655 statements from January 1, 1978 to December 31, 2017 that tracks all official statements made by China on South Korea and North Korea.

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of 2016 have not exceeded (at least qualitatively) provocations of previous years. While in 2011 and 2012 China dabbled in official criticisms, strangely enough in 2013 China did not explicitly denounce Korea's coercive efforts. Starting in 2014, China resumed explicitly denouncing Korea's coercive efforts on both the traditional military exercises, as well as on the decision to deploy the U.S.-led THAAD anti-missile defense system. Although China's criticism of THAAD ran frequently starting in mid-2016, it has never reached a level of a *sheng ming* (highest level of official statement) nor has the THAAD dispute spilled over to a more costly action (such as official downgrading of diplomatic relations starting with the recall of the Chinese ambassador to ROK).

From Table 4.2, we note several interesting trends of the dependent variable. First off, we note the high incidence of provocations prior to the two states' normalization in 1992, in which China criticized ROK coercive efforts vis-a-vis the DPRK. Secondly, we notice that provocations are noticeably absent following normalization, but it is not replaced by reassurances, either. Instead, for most of the 1990s, China continues the status quo of putting out statements of concern, which are not at the level of provocation but also not reassurances. Until 1999, China issued official statements explicitly criticizing ROK's coercive endeavors against the DPRK, such as the decision to allow for US missile defense (Patriotic Advanced Capability, or PAC-2 and PAC-3) and annual joint military exercises with the U.S. Thirdly, beginning in 2001, we observe that China actively managed South Korea's deterrence efforts against North Korea by deliberately refraining from any official commenting; from 2000 - 2009, there was an absence official statements of explicit criticism that was unprecedented in duration (9 years). Reassurances are Chinese official responses that are intentional silence (not neglect) by forgoing any kind of critical position-taking at South Korea's military action aiming at North Korea. Finally, beginning in 2010 the explicit criticisms resurfaced in the aftermath of US-ROK joint drills in the Yellow Sea. The following section lays out how an increasingly consolidated elite in the early 2000s coincides with the onset of China's active management of South Korea as a security threat, beginning with a nearly decade-long unprecedented reassurance by China in 2001, followed by resumption of provocation after 2010. I

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also explain to what extent the lack of elite consolidation is accountable for there being no active management prior to 2001, such as after the Sino-Korean “honeymoon” stage after normalization.



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Table 4.2: Chinese response to ROK's coercive actions towards the DPRK, 1978 - 2017

Year	Official Acknowledgement	Outcome Type
1978	Explicit criticism of military exercises (Jan 25, Nov 18)	Provocation
1979	Explicit criticism of military exercises (Jul 13)	Provocation
1980	Explicit criticism of then ROK president Chun Doo-hwan (Sep 10 - 14)	Provocation
1981	Explicit criticism (fandui) of military exercises (Mar 27)	Provocation
1982	Explicit criticism of military exercises (Oct 10)	Provocation
1983	Explicit criticism of military exercises (Feb 8)	Provocation
1984	Explicit criticism of military exercises (Feb 9, Aug 9)	Provocation
1985	Explicit criticism of military exercises (Jan 10)	Provocation
1986	Explicit criticism of military exercises (Jan 13, Jan 19) Explicit criticism of US missile deployment (Dec 4)	Provocation
1987	Explicit criticism of military exercises (Feb 22)	Provocation
1988	Explicit criticism of military exercises	Provocation
1989	Explicit criticism of military exercises (May 1)	Provocation
1990	Less critical acknowledgement of military exercises (Mar 2)	No Active Management
1991	Less critical acknowledgement of military exercises (Jan 31)	No Active Management
1992	Less critical acknowledgement of military exercises	No Active Management
1993	Less critical acknowledgement of military exercises (Mar 12)	No Active Management
1994	Less critical acknowledgement of US Patriot missile deployment in ROK (Jan 28, Apr 8)	No Active Management
1995	Less critical acknowledgement of military exercise plans (Apr 24)	No Active Management
1996	[Team Spirit Exercises were canceled]	No Active Management
1997	[Team Spirit Exercises were canceled]	No Active Management
1998	No official statement (deliberate)	No Active Management
1999	Less critical acknowledgement of military exercise (Aug 18)	No Active Management
2000	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2001	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2002	Neutral acknowledgement on military exercise (Mar 19)	Reassurance
2003	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2004	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2005	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2006	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2007	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2008	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2009	No official statement (deliberate)	Reassurance
2010	Explicit Criticism of military exercise (Jul 10, Nov 25 Dec 9)	Provocation
2011	Explicit Criticism of military exercise (Jun 28)	Provocation
2012	Criticism of military exercise (Jun 14) Criticism of ROK military contingency plan (Oct 20)	Provocation
2013	Neutral comment on US-ROK alliance (May 8)	Provocation
2014	Criticism of military exercise (Apr 15) Criticism of THAAD (May 28)	Provocation
2015	Criticism of military exercise (Jan 12, Mar 2) Criticism of THAAD (Feb 5, Mar 17)	Provocation
2016	Criticism of military exercise (Mar 8) Criticism of THAAD (At least once every month except April, May, June, and October)	Provocation
2017	Criticism of THAAD (March, July, August, October)	Provocation

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The theory predicts that the degree to which elite preferences were consolidated, would enable a rising power to pursue an otherwise costly foreign policy behavior in the form of a reassurance or a provocation. Topic modeling results suggests that elite discourse became noticeably more consolidated around 2003. Based on the assumption that discourse change reflects shifting of preferences, I predict that active management would take place more likely after 2003.

The actual DV variation as seen in Table 4.2 largely supports the theory. China began to acknowledge the military exercises through a neutral statement beginning in 2002. Previously, in the years leading up to 2000, there was an explicit criticism of South Korea's coercive activity every year except in those years in which the military exercises were canceled. As the theory predicts, there was clear change in China's foreign policy behavior starting from 2003. Interestingly, China's active management did not occur after 1992 when expectations of reassurance was highest following the two states' normalization. I attribute this to the lack of elite consolidation at the time.

In the meantime, the dependent variable trends suggest that scholars should pay greater attention to elite discourse in the early 2000s. The often overlooked inter-Korea peace talks served as the one of the most significant watershed moment in steering the Chinese elite discourse on Korea. Many do not realize that it was on the occasion of this historical summit that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement at the "*sheng ming*" level - a level usually reserved for the most serious of statements. Not even at the occasion of the historic Sino-Korean normalization, had China published a statement at this high a level. The next time China would publish a statement of the same level regarding Korea would be on the occasion of DPRK's first nuclear test in 2006.

Table 4.2 also suggests that perhaps scholars may have been assigning undue significance to the events of 2010 as the watershed moment from which China's revisionist policy towards South Korea began to unfold. While 2010 was certainly the resumption of provocation that had been suspended since 2003, it was not the first time a major policy shift by China on South Korea's deterrence efforts against North Korea occurred. In addition, the changes in 2010 were probably

not brought on by a change in elite preferences. I echo findings in Johnston (2013)<sup>13</sup> in that the series of provocative actions by China in 2010 towards South Korea may have been more spontaneous than strategically planned.

### **4.3 Qualitative analysis**

The goal of this section is to test the hypothesis that as elites become more consolidated, a rising power is more likely to actively manage disputes with its neighboring states. Based on the content analysis of the Chinese elite's public discourse, I find that year 2003 is the first year that started off a period of sustained elite attention and focus on key security issues. According to the hypothesis, then, we should expect to observe China starting to actively managing in either reassurance or provocation, its disputes with South Korea after 2003. Broadly speaking, I find support for my theory in two ways. First, in line with the expectations of the theory, I find that after 2003 China exercised active management towards KOREA, first through unprecedented reassurances in the form of deliberately not making any official comments about South Korea's deterrence efforts against North Korea and then by provocations in the form of resumption of explicit criticism. Secondly, I show that other periods that have been often suggested as turning points in Sino-Korean relations such as the two states' normalization in 1992, and the conservative party coming to power in 2008 and in 2013 have not been accompanied by an onset of active management because elite preferences did not shift, as seen from the elite discourse that did not undergo similar change.

I find that prior to 1992, elite consolidation was not high enough to enable a costly behavioral change. On the other hand, starting from 2003, Chinese elites became both much more keenly interested in both the subject matter of security as well as a clear cut focus on the most negative aspects of security related issues between China and Korea. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the unprecedented shift in elite discourse beginning from 2000 may

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<sup>13</sup>Johnston argues that the Chinese criticism of U.S.-ROK joint naval exercises had been made in haste, partly as a response to a more vocal elite such as the People's Liberation Army General Ma Xiaotian

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have enabled China to try out an unprecedented act reassurance beginning in 2003: China stopped formally commenting at all about South Korea's coercive activities against against North Korea until 2010. Figure 4.1 lists the trends in elite consolidation, and Table 4.3 lays out the theoretical expectations and actual outcomes for each time period.

Table 4.3: Theoretical expectations and actual outcomes

Time Period	Elite attention to Security	Focus on Negative Sentiment within Security discourse	Expected Outcome	Actual Outcome
1982-1991	HIGH (>.5)	LOW (>.5)	No Active Management	No Active Management
1992 - 1999	LOW (except 1999)	LOW (except 1999)	No Active Management	No Active Management
2000 - 2016	HIGH (except 2002 and 2015)	HIGH (except 2001)	Active Management	Reassurances (2003-2009) and Provocations (2010-2017)

### **4.3.1 Prior to 1992: Low elite consolidation, no active management**

Two things stand out in studying the Chinese elite discourse on Korea prior to the two states' normalization in 1992. The first characteristic is that South Korea was not a major policy interest for China, and the low number of articles published each year reflect this. As China and Korea lacked official diplomatic recognition during this time, it is not surprising that Chinese elites paid far greater attention to the non-political aspect of Korea's domestic affairs such as Korea's economic development, rather than on the more controversial topic of Korea's hostilities against North Korea (a client state of China).

For most of the years from 1980 to 1991, any display of a high level of elite consolidation (either through attention or focus) is actually due to the small total number of articles published each year. It is not until 1989 that elites started to write more about Korea and at the same time pay more attention to security related topics. However, despite the increase in attention, the elite discourse related to security still lacked focus as the discourse primarily were about issues that were not necessarily associated with negative sentiment such as Korea's alliance with the US. For

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instance, elite discourse on security during this time period talked about South Korea's relations with North Korea and domestic security policy which included South Korea's response to key incidents such as the KAL bombing in 1987, President Roh Tae-woo's "Nordpolitik" initiative, and the South Korean defense budget.

Each year from 1980 to 1991 features a slightly different mix of these three topics, resulting in some year's elite consolidation as higher than others. For example, in 1982 and 1983, the discourse is extremely limited; just 1 security-related article was published in 1982, and two articles—concerning Korea's handling of the Chinese espionage plane incident and the Soviet Union shooting of KAL 007—were published in 1983. From 1984 to 1989, the Chinese elites' attention is almost evenly split between discussing the South Korea's democratization and internal politics and South Korea's changing diplomatic initiatives at the end of the Cold War. Thus in the early 1980s to mid-1980, Chinese elites were not focused at all on security when discussing Korea.

Chinese elites began to pay more attention on security related topics starting in the late 1980s, which accurately reflects the policies of the then South Korean president Roh Tae Woo.<sup>14</sup> However, this increase in attention to security related topics was not accompanied by negative sentiment, as the Chinese elite discourse on Korea prior to 1992 highlighted the positive aspects of South Korea's foreign relations, such as its reaching out to countries of the Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic) and paid scarce attention to Korea's traditional security relations with the U.S.

Given the low level of elite consolidation prior to 1992, it is not surprising that we do not observe changes in how China managed the sources of its disputes with Korea during this time.<sup>15</sup> China continued to prioritize its relations with North Korea by issuing official criticisms of South Korea's security cooperation with the U.S. that targeted North Korea. The continuation of these

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<sup>14</sup>This was Roh's Nordpolitik initiative, in which Korea actively sought diplomatic relations with the members of the Communist bloc. Korea normalized relations with the Soviet Union in September 1990.(Chung 1991)

<sup>15</sup>It is important to note that because explicit criticisms have been the default behavior by China since 1949, the provocations prior to 1992 do not count as active management.

provocative gestures does not mean that this period did not see any form of cooperative diplomacy by China, however. China's acceptance of South Korea's bid to join the United Nations as a separate nation from North Korea, as well as China's decision to normalize relations with South Korea, were major milestones in the relations of the two states. Although these two actions were critical junctures, they do not count as reassurances towards Korea for a simple reason: They were not costly decisions for China in that they required China to reverse their policy of favoring North Korea over South Korea. In the case of the UN membership bid, China supported South Korea's bid to join the UN *in conjunction with* North Korea's bid, making the two Korea's simultaneous membership of the United Nations possible. This stands in clear contrast to China's own membership of the United Nations in 1971 by replacing Taiwan (Republic of China). Similarly, China pursued normalization with Korea normalization, China continued to enjoy diplomatic relations with both Koreas, whereas South Korea had to pay the price of severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan in order to resume diplomatic relations with China.

#### **4.3.2 1992 - 1999: Low elite consolidation resulting in cautious rapprochement**

The years following China's normalization with Korea in 1992 up until 1999, when China made the last explicitly critical statement about South Korea's deterrence efforts against North Korea. On the outset, Chinese elites' discourse about Korea starting in 1992 seem to present a clear "break" from the years preceding it by calling Korea by its official name (*hanguo* instead of *nanchaoxian*), and also began talking more about about Sino-Korean bilateral relations reflecting the normalization between the two states that year. However, upon closer inspection, we find that with the exception of 1999, elites were not attentive nor focused on security related topics during this time.

The main takeaway from the elite discourse in the years following 1992 is that it had not changed fundamentally from previous years. While elite attention on Korea's participation in

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regional security institutions (topic 4) increased incrementally, Chinese elites continued to avoid discussing controversial, negatively associated issues such as Korea's alliance with the US. Chinese elites seldom talked about South Korea's security relations with North Korea (topic 6), despite the significance of the first nuclear crisis in the early 1990s. Thus in contrast to expectations of preference change following normalization in 1992, it seems that the Chinese elites continued to view South Korea as an economic partner, democratizing society, emerging actor in East Asia regional security, but not necessarily as a security threat nor opportunity.

This finding may come as a surprise to many, as most scholars have argued that there was a clear change in how Chinese elites viewed Korea after 1992 and this resulted in critical policy change. Chung (2007, 2014) suggests that the normalization of 1992 ushered in a new era of bilateral relations, but does not offer a measurement of how policy differed from one year to another to warrant that policy changes after 1992 were indeed significant. My finding suggests that the China's policy did not change much, and this is mostly because —underscoring that one cannot assume key “historic” events to automatically cause preference change, which in turn would result in behavioral change. This is not to argue that the Sino-Korean normalization in 1992 was not a watershed moment in Sino-Korean relations. Rather, the point I raise here is that normalization may have introduced new policy priorities, but elite preferences did not change so significantly that they began to focus on security issues predominantly, and within security issues, on controversial and negative sentiment topics exclusively.

Given the lack of elite consolidation from 1992 - 1999, my hypothesis predicts that China would not be engaging in active management during this time in the form of a provocation or reassurance. From Table 4.3, I confirm that during the years from 1992 and 1999, while China's diplomacy towards South Korea warmed up considerably, there were also countermeasures to placate the North, resulting in a lack of costly gestures that would have required China to choose one side over the other. To recap, costly action in the form of reassurance would amount to *not* explicitly criticizing South Korean military activities directed at the North. Similarly, costly action

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in the form of provocation would be explicitly criticizing South Korean military activities directed at North Korea as China had done prior to normalization in 1992.

China's behavior in the years following 1992 up to 1999 demonstrate that there was no active management—neither in the form of provocation nor reassurance. China continued to explicitly denounce South Korea's military activities and deterrence efforts against North Korea throughout the 1990s, all the way up to 1998.<sup>16</sup> Aside from the the dependent variable, we observe China's continuation of the status quo of favoring its client North Korea from additional indicators. One of them is how China reacted to the first nuclear crisis such as North Korea's threats to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (1993) and its withdrawal from the International Atomic Energy Agency (1994). China's official reactions to each of these occasions reveal that the Chinese government trying not to offend North Korea by turning a blind eye on the latter's nuclear aspirations. It is also notable that two missile launches that sparked an outpour of international criticism—the testing of *Rodong* (May 1993) and *Taepodong* (August 1998) missiles—also did not elicit any official statements and in fact received favorable coverage in Chinese official media. On the other hand, China criticized South Korea's decision to deploy US-guided Patriot missiles in 1994.

Thus, it is clear that in the years following 1992, no costly foreign policy was enacted by China—neither strict, explicit denunciation characteristic of the pre-normalization years, nor a complete abstinence of criticism. This may come as a surprise given previous scholarly accounts of Sino-Korean relations warming up quickly after 1992, as most studies tend to focus on the novel gestures made by the two governments ranging from opening each other's embassies and head-of-state visits (former Korean presidents Roh Tae-woo visiting in 1992, Kim Young-sam in 1994 and China's head of state Jiang Zemin reciprocating the visits in 1995) and other bilateral exchanges at the top level (Li Peng visiting Korea 1994, Hu Jintao visiting in 1998).<sup>17</sup> According

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<sup>16</sup>China did not issue criticisms in 1996 and 1997 because joint military drills were canceled those two years.

<sup>17</sup>It is important to note, however, that most accounts of Sino-Korean relations use economic indicators such as FDI volume and export surplus as a measurement of improved relations. Few studies focus solely on political/security indicators.



to this study, such gestures do not count as true reassurances in that they are not costly actions to China in the way that abstaining from explicit criticism of South Korea is. Just as normalizing relations with South Korea did not come at the price of severing relations with the North, the flurry of bilateral exchanges that followed normalization also did not replace nor diminish China's continued preference of North Korea even at the cost of alienating South Korea.

### **4.3.3 After 2003: Higher elite attention and focus leading to active management**

The most significant discourse shift in the form of an elite majority overwhelmingly interested in security topics *and* on security issues associated with negative sentiment, occurred in 2003. (both elite attention and elite focus) Based on close reading of the articles published from 2000-2003, I suggest that the discourse shift (which proxies a change in the elite preferences) may have originated in the events of 2000. This was sparked by an important landmark event – the inter-Korea summit held in Pyongyang in 2000. This was the first time since 1948 that the heads of state of the two Koreas, Kim Dae-jung (ROK) and Kim Jong-il (DPRK) met in person. This historic event began an era of “Sunshine Policy,” in which the progressively inclined ROK government under President Kim Dae-jung (and later his successor, Roh Moo-hyun) promoted a diplomatic initiative that prioritized dialogue and engagement with North Korea over arms buildup and economic sanctions. Relatively less attention has been paid on the impact this summit may have had on China's behavior towards South Korea. I argue that the events of 2000 had a large impact because it ushered in a new way of thinking among the Chinese elites—that the peaceful reunification of ROK and DPRK was in fact a possibility. While it took a couple of years for this “new thinking” to gain momentum as a widely shared idea by the elites, nonetheless I trace the origins of the 2003 elite consolidation to the inter-Korea dialogue in 2000.

While it may come as a surprise to many that the events of 2000 had a greater influence

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on elite discourse than the normalization of 1992 that ended a nearly half-century old animosity, upon closer look this summit deserves greater attention. Several pieces of evidence point to how much importance China attached to this event. First of all, this was the first time since 1986 that the Chinese government issued an official statement (*sheng ming*) on Korea; not even the normalization (1992) nor the establishment of trade economic exchange offices (1990) had received such high-level spotlight by the Chinese government. That China issued an official statement signals the enormous amount of significance that China attached to the event.<sup>18</sup> Third, the level of optimism harbored by the Chinese government is hard to understate. In March 2001, the Chinese government went so far as to officially state that “Kim Jong-il’s reciprocal visit to ROK was a matter of time,” a visit that has yet to occur seventeen years since the first inter-Korean summit. Based on these reactions, we could infer that China took the 2000 summit seriously may have been an integral factor in the shifting of Chinese elite discourse in the following years.

Elite discourse reached a new height of consolidation on security related topics by 2003. Since 1999, elites had been paying more attention on security related topics—from the Structural Topic Model analysis, the US-South Korea alliance topic (topic 3), South Korea’s regional diplomacy (topic 4), and Korea’s relationship with North Korea (topic 6). Not surprisingly, the prevailing topic among these three security-related topics during the years 1999-2003 was topic 6, or South Korea’s relations with the North.<sup>19</sup> The year 2003 started off a long-running continuation of the Chinese elites’ preoccupation with security topics when discussing Korea, narrowly excluding 2015.

Beginning in 2003, we observe elites choosing to write about an explicitly security-related topics, and also on the more controversial aspects of security that have traditionally been associated

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<sup>18</sup>China began to officially refer to the inter-Korea summit as the beginning of a favorable and viable alternative solution to the adversarial positions taken by both Koreas since the end of the Korean War. This is evident in the official statement comparing the China-Taiwan situation and the two Koreas (June 2000).

<sup>19</sup>Topic 1, or the topic that covered articles about top-level visits and academic exchanges between China and Korea, was the prevailing topic in 2002, as 2002 marked the 10-year anniversary of the two states’ normalization. This seems to reflect the fact that China had not yet prepared its own stance on the more costly, controversial topics such as North Korea’s precarious denuclearization process through the Agreed Framework

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with negative sentiment by China towards Korea. However, it is important to note that while we see China's active management around this time, China opted for reassurance during from 2002-2009, while it chose provocation from years (2010 - 2017). In order to explain why China's active management of Korea during this time took the form of a reassurance, we first explain why this action counts as a reassurance, and then turn to additional factors—external and domestic political factors—that may have influenced the direction of active management.

To not criticize South Korea's coercive efforts against North Korea, including South Korea's annual joint military exercises with the US, is an extraordinary decision in light of the fact that China had not done this even in the aftermath of normalization of relations.<sup>20</sup> This was a period of remarkable restraint, and the change in China's behavior to South Korea matches the theoretical predictions—the more consolidated the elites, the more likely China will take costly action in its foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> To forgo criticism for so long was simply unprecedented. China had published official statements criticizing the exercises even after the historic first-ever presidential summit between then South Korean president Kim Yong-sam and Chinese head of state Jiang Zemin in 1993. Not even the Chinese dissatisfaction with North Korea's threats to withdraw from the IAEA and Non-Proliferation Treaty (1994) detracted China from issuing an official criticism on South Korea's military exercises and missile defense system. In short, even during times when there were heightened tensions against North Korea and greatly improved relations with the South, China had remained steadfast and consistent in criticizing South Korea on its military exercises and missile defense against the North. For China to have withheld criticism in the years after 2002 (all the way up until the Cheon'an incident in 2010) exemplifies remarkable restraint and costly

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<sup>20</sup>The Chinese MFA spokesperson does make a comment on March 19 2002, but it is neutral and does not offer any criticism.

<sup>21</sup>This variation has hitherto gone unnoticed partly due to the difficulty of tracking official statements, as well as determining whether an omission of public acknowledgment was intentional or not. I am able to do exactly that task by taking advantage of a full-text archive of China's official newspaper (The People's Daily) as well as a database that tracks all of China's official comments on foreign policy published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I track how China published news reports about the military exercises in its national newspaper from 2000-2009, but did not officially criticize them.

foreign policy behavior.

The reason why this deliberate lack of criticism is a costly decision for China, is because it came with the risk of undermining China's patronage over North Korea. Traditionally, the official criticisms of South Korea's military exercises was one of the few remaining channels by which China indirectly voiced support for its client.<sup>22</sup> To refrain from criticizing South Korea—its client's adversary—on its military drills and missile defense was tantamount to tacitly accepting them as non-threatening and therefore could weaken China's commitment to North Korea.

Aside from China's decision to halt official criticism of South Korea's military exercises is the most important indicator of reassurance during this time period, there are a couple of other examples that demonstrate China's restraint during this time period. For example, there were no official criticisms from China when the U.S. aircraft carrier entered the yellow sea in 2009. Similarly, there had not been any official criticisms when South Korea and the U.S. publicly announced an alliance transition from a bilateral to regional one in 2009. This stands in clear contrast to China's reaction to similar proclamations made by Japan following alliance redefinition in 1997, 2005 and 2011. When South Korea accepted a second deployment of PAC-3 missile defense in 2003, China did not put out official comments, in contrast to 1994 when South Korea accepted PAC missiles for the first time. This also stands in clear contrast to the flurry of statements that China produced against Taiwan around the same time (PAC missile defense deployment began in 2001 for Taiwan)<sup>23</sup> Finally, China made a rare public approval of Korea's membership in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a U.S.-led effort to stop the trafficking of weapons of mass destruction that China has previously officially denounced, a day after North Korea's second nuclear test in May 2009.

If elite consensus enabled China to actively manage its source of dispute with South Korea—

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<sup>22</sup>China had criticized ROK's military exercises every year it was held since the inception of the exercises in 1976, except in 1998.

<sup>23</sup>There were official reports about the PAC-3 deployment in the People's Daily, which further underscores China's deliberate decision not to criticize South Korea.

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South Korea's military activities against the North—I suggest two factors that may have influenced China's decision to actively manage in the form of reassurances, as opposed to provocations, from 2003-2009. The first factor is South Korea's own domestic political agenda of "Sunshine Policy" that implied a dialogue-first approach to North Korea. The second factor was the opposite of the first—the US' explicit willingness to consider armed intervention against North Korea, and its participation in a global war on terror at the time that made such threats to attack more credible. To begin with, South Korea's commitment to the "Sunshine Policy" meant it was reluctant to join the US initiative of denuclearizing North Korea through "sticks" such as economic sanctions and external balancing. It also implied that South Korea was going to distance itself from the foreign policy trajectory of its ally, the United States, if not at least rhetorically. Elite discourse from 2000-2003 that discuss the most prevalent topic—topic 4, which is about South Korea and North Korea's relationship including denuclearization—reveals the Chinese elites' understanding of the inter-Korean summit of 2000 as a movement against the US-led attack on North Korea as one of the "Axis of Evil," and more compatible of China's policy priority of maintaining stability in the peninsula. Thus the positive outlook on South Korea's new agenda of pursuing stability and peace with North Korea even at the cost of straining its alliance with the US made reassurance more likely than provocation.

Aside from South Korea's strained relationship with the US from 2002-2008 due to a progressive party in power, another reason that China's active management resulted in reassurances may have been that from 2003 onwards, China was keen on continuing the Six Party Talks to address North Korea's nuclearization, an initiative that required active cooperation by the US. After North Korea withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty in January 2003, China quickly announced its prioritization of dialogue as the solution to North Korea's denuclearization. China went so far as to officially criticize the US-led economic sanctions, while at the same time agreeing to the first rounds of negotiations beginning with the 3-party (China, North Korea, and the US) talks in April 2003. The key to understanding why the Six Party Talks may have led China

to choose reassurance instead of provocation is identifying a case of issue linkage: China could gain the trust of its adversary through attempting an unprecedented reversal of its policy (explicit criticism of military exercises) that came at a price of limiting its own foreign policy options (loss of influence over North Korea, its client). I suggest that these two factors—China's own agenda for the success of the Six Party Talks, and the coinciding of a left-wing government in South Korea that prioritized dialogue over external balancing to counter North Korea—may have contributed to China's decision to take the costly step of reassuring, not provoking, its neighbor from 2003 to 2009. Below, I discuss how the opposite conditions—a right-wing government in South Korea that prioritized coercive diplomacy towards North Korea, as well as a domestic political constraint inside China in the form of a leadership transition which stressed the need for a more aggressive foreign policy—may have led China to switch to provocations starting in 2010.

#### **4.3.4 2010-2017: Continued elite consolidation leading to provocation**

China's remarkable restraint from 2003-2009 came to an abrupt halt in July 2010, when the Chinese government broke off a decade-long silence and resumed its official criticism of South Korea's joint military exercises. This was the first time since 1999, that China had issued an explicit denunciation of South Korea's military activities against North Korea. Scholars have pointed out that the decision to criticize the July 2010 US-Korean naval exercises in the Yellow Sea may not have resulted from elite consensus, but rather made hastily to appear consistent with its more vocal military elites<sup>24</sup> China's explicit denunciation seemed especially unwarranted given that the July 2010 exercises were *not* the first time the US and South Korea held naval exercises, and not the first time that a U.S. aircraft carrier had entered the Yellow Sea. Of the publicized incursions, both the entrance of *USS Kitty Hawk* during the first nuclear crisis in December 1994 and *USS George*

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<sup>24</sup>As scholars (Johnston 2013; Fravel 2015) have noted, China did not start out as a vocal opponent of the July 2010 exercises. This is evident in the very first Chinese official reaction on June 9th. Johnston points out that it was not until the comment made by PLA General Ma Xiaotian that the MFA spokesperson began to noticeably escalate the rhetoric to criticize the naval drills.

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*Washington* in October 2009 in the Yellow Sea were not met with similar opposition by China.

Although some have suggested the onset of conservative president Lee Myung-bak's presidency in early 2008 as a changing point of a new era in Sino-Korean relations, the discourse analysis demonstrates that the Chinese elites' preoccupation with security related topics. Chinese elites had been continuously consolidated in their preferences toward Korea and hence China had active managed South Korea's military activities targeted at North Korea since 2003, but in 2010 the mode of that active management switched from reassurance to provocation.

One factor that may have led to the change of course from reassurance to provocation could be the change in South Korea's incumbent political party. Since the abrupt halt of the six-party talks in 2009 following DPRK's second nuclear test, there had been little progress in the Six-party talks in 2010. In contrast to the early 2000s, when Chinese elites interpreted the inter-Korea summit and Sunshine policy as a sign that South Korea would try to distance its policy with that of the US, in 2010 elites seem to have taken the cue that President Lee preferred to strengthen its ties with the US even at the risk of weakening dialogue with North Korea. From the elite discourse, it is clear that Chinese elites were increasingly alarmed by South Korea's shift towards collaborating with the US and Japan at the expense of stalling dialogue with North Korea. In 2011, for example, there was a sudden increase in articles discussing the US-Korea alliance, as all 33 articles published in 2011, 14 articles clearly mention US-Korea security relations in the title or abstract. This was the year that China, Japan and South Korea issued a first-ever joint statement at the 4th Trilateral Summit held in Tokyo, followed by the establishment of the permanent body—the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat—in Seoul. Thus China may have decided to resume provocations once South Korea's multilateral military cooperation with the US and Japan became more noticeable after Korea's conservative party leader became President in 2008.

The second factor that may have contributed to China's decision to use provocations instead of reassurances when dealing with South Korea, was China's own domestic political instability during leadership transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping in early 2013, and a legitimacy crisis

that intensified. On April 15, 2014, China made a rare but explicit criticism on the annual US-Korean joint military drills. A month later in May 2014, China issued its first official reaction to South Korea's decision to deploy THAAD. The official statement was much more strongly worded than China's reaction to a similar decision by Japan to deploy the X-band radar in 2013 (X波段雷达).<sup>25</sup> This trend continued into 2015, as China criticized Korea's THAAD deployment plan as undermining Chinese security interests. In addition, China produced an explicit criticism of South Korea's own military drills in March 2016.<sup>26</sup> China's criticism intensified in 2016 with no fewer than 27 official comments in a single year, culminating in the highest-level official statement (*sheng ming*) on July 8th 2016. China had not produced a comment at the highest official level since the 4th nuclear test, which signified that China was taking the THAAD issue very seriously. This stands in clear contrast to China's restraint in the previous decade. For instance, during Roh Moo-hyun's presidency the U.S. installed several PAC-3 missiles upgraded its PAC-2 missiles, greatly facilitating ROK's transition into the US-led missile defense system. While China made it clear<sup>27</sup> that it was dissatisfied with the installation of missile defense that was in such close proximity from its own east coast (the PAC-3 missiles were installed along the west coast of Korea facing China), it actually refrained from official statements during 2003-2009.

### 4.3.5 Alternative explanations

I consider two main alternative causal pathways—the progressive political party coming into power in South Korea, and the onset of the second nuclear crisis—that are consistent with the variation in China's decision to change its foreign policy behavior towards South Korea around 2003. I emphasize here that most of the existing alternative explanations focus on explaining reassurances or provocations, but not both as my theory of rising power foreign policy behavior does, using

<sup>25</sup>“我们绝不允许在中国家门口出现局势紧张导致生战生乱”

<sup>26</sup>“中方坚决反对任何在半岛挑事惹事之举决不允许家门口生战生乱”

<sup>27</sup><http://www.pressian.com/news/article.html?no63453>



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the changes in elite preference consolidation. The first factor is South Korea's domestic political circumstances—that China enjoyed a closer bilateral relationship during the progressive, left-wing government under Kim and Rho. The second factor is North Korea's nuclearization in 2003. Why China exercised restraint towards Korea in the first decade in the 21st century has been explored but often through the lens of China's relations of North Korea.<sup>28</sup> Some scholars may additionally point out that a more favorable US-China relations in the early 2000s could be a third factor for China's behavioral shift. For instance, the U.S. involvement in the Middle East during this time, in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan presented opportunities for collaboration between the two great powers and favorable conditions for improved bilateral relations between the U.S. and China in East Asia.<sup>29</sup> However, this time period had begun fraught with tension between U.S. and China, on both security and economic issues. China and the U.S. suffered a downturn of relations following the EP-3 incident as well as the trials of China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001.

Still others give credit to the left-leaning progressive leadership in Korea for the overall highly cooperative Sino-Korean relations that began in the early 2000s. Each of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's parties emphasized improved relations with DPRK through the Sunshine policy, the Roh administration going so far as to pursuing detente with North Korea even at the cost of weakening the U.S.-ROK alliance. Roh was even elected into office largely thanks to the anti-American platform during his campaign. Although Roh Moo-hyun's anti-American rhetoric was largely symbolic (Roh's presidency was actually marked by unprecedented cooperation with the U.S. on both security and trade issues) the fact that he identified as the successor to Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine policy as well as his agenda for making Korean foreign policy more independent of the U.S. may have appealed to China. However, to argue that China chose to radically alter its foreign policy behavior towards South Korea because of the latter's leftist leadership is limited by the fact that many of the provocative behavior remained in place during the first years of the Kim

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<sup>28</sup>Chung (2014); Song (2011)

<sup>29</sup>Shirk (2007); Bush (2013)

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Dae-jung presidency. More recently, the election of a progressive president Moon Jae-in in 2017 did not lead to an equally dramatic shift in how China managed South Korea's military activities that target North Korea.

Another competing explanation as to why the shift occurred in 2003 has been the onset of North Korea's second nuclear crisis (withdrawal from the Nonproliferation Treaty on January 10, 2003) and China's strong commitment to the Six-party talks that followed. The imminence of a nuclear neighbor and possible great power conflict given the US' active agenda of military intervention against rogue states like North Korea may have been a critical motivating for China to turn a blind eye on Korea's deterrence efforts against North Korea beginning in the early 2000s. China hosted the Six-party Talks to address North Korea's denuclearization from August 2003 to April 2009, and was keen to have the two main state actors, North Korea and the U.S., on board for continued dialogue. It is plausible that China's goal of continuing the talks overrode its concern of South Korea and the US' as a security threat, and could have enabled the deliberate toleration of South Korea's less desirable actions such as the diversification of the joint military exercises and South Korea's cooperation with the US' in the War against Terror. As the host of the Six-party talks and its priority for institutionalizing the talks to address the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, China may have been actively refraining from an adversarial relationship with South Korea on the issue of how to deter North Korea militarily.

The key shortcoming for this alternative explanation is that it cannot explain China's continued active management of South Korea's deterrence efforts in the wake of the suspension of the Six-party talks since 2009. If China's concern for denuclearization through dialogue was so paramount in shaping its decision to reassure South Korea, then China should have reverted to the status quo of expressing disapproval when the talks ended. Not only did China's reassurance outlast the talks for a while, but even after the suspension of talks China continued its active management later in the form of provocations. For example, China refrained from explicit criticism even after ROK joined the U.S.-led PSI (May 2009). China also refrained from explicit criticism when South

Korea and the US declared the “Joint Vision” of the two states in transforming the bilateral alliance into a more regional one (June 2009 during the Obama-Lee summit) which included discussions to postpone the relocation of U.S. military bases in South Korea.<sup>30</sup> Looking back to how China had responded to Japan’s decision to broaden the scope of its alliance with the US in 1997, China’s reticence in 2009 to a similar event but this time regarding the US-South Korean alliance, is remarkable. On the other hand, starting in 2010, China began to resume explicit denunciations of South Korea’s armed efforts against North Korean aggression (both conventional and nuclear) in a style of language that it had not used since its normalization of diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992. The fact that China continued a costly foreign policy in 2010, when there weren’t any Six party talks nor a milestone in North Korea’s denuclearization (North Korea did not test nuclear weapons between May 2009 and February 2013), suggests that North Korea’s second nuclear crisis unfolding in 2003 was closer to a catalyst rather than a more fundamental factor in China’s decision to manage the South Korean security threat. That China’s active management after 2010 all took the form of provocation is also interesting, since if China had refrained from antagonizing South Korea in the hope of making progress on the Six-party talks during the years when talks were being held, it would have had all the more reason to continue to so after 2009 so as to resume the suspended talks.

## **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter tests the hitherto overlooked dimension of China’s elites in explaining Chinese foreign policy towards its neighboring states using the case of China’s management of South Korea’s armed efforts against North Korea, a key client state of China. Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, South Korea sought to deter North Korea through means that could invite instability for China—such as formally strengthening its alliance with the U.S. (2003, 2006 and

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<sup>30</sup>Talks publicly held in 2009, and postponement eventually announced in public in 2010 (<https://aa.usembassy.or.kr/pdf10/IN64.pdf>)

2008), continuation of coercive measures (annual and bi-annual exercises every year and participation in U.S.-led missile defense). But China took a reassuring stance and deliberately refrained from antagonizing South Korea during this time. On the other hand, as South Korea continued to strengthen its alliance relations with the US after the election of right-leaning conservative President Lee Myung-bak, China began to actively manage South Korea's deterrence efforts against North Korea through provocations. My theory of rising power foreign policy behavior recognizes that both reassurances and provocations are two facets of active management, which is a costly foreign policy decision. Thus I focus on what explains the timing of either reassurance or provocation, not the timing of one as opposed to the other. In addition, in contrast to existing studies that place undue emphasis on explaining rising China's provocative gestures, this study also attempts to account for the remarkable reassurance by China to South Korea for most of the first half of the 2000s.

This study advances a new explanation of foreign policy behavior based on a theory of elite cohesion. My theory argues that the degree to which elite perceptions on security issues are shared inside the rising power could be an indicator of elite strength, which in turn can determine whether the rising power could afford to engage in costly foreign policy behavior in the form of reassurances or provocations. In the case of China's behavior towards South Korea, we observe that a high level of elite cohesion (in both the amount of attention and degree of focus) coincided with China's unprecedented active management beginning in the early 2000s. The theory also confirms that in the absence of high elite cohesion, a "watershed" incident is not enough on its own to bring about either reassurance or provocation.

It must be noted that my theory of elite cohesion does not purport to explain the type of active management, or why China chose reassurances instead of provocations and vice versa. Instead, the theory aims at uncovering the conditions that enables a rising power to attempt costly foreign policy changes. The theory implies that we should expect to observe a high level of elite cohesion prior to any unprecedented cooperative or conflictual behavior. In the case of China's

policy towards South Korea, the theory is able to explain most of the variation in the dependent variable.

The empirical contribution of this chapter is twofold. First, I am able to demonstrate as well as anticipate the full spectrum of China's foreign policy behavior towards Korea, covering both reassuring and provocative cases. This has the effect of putting past and present Chinese behavior into perspective, mitigating an "aggressive China" often portrayed by the media. There is much to be gained by observing Chinese reassurances and provocations towards South Korea in its entirety. Existing research analyzing the causes of China's provocative behavior in the Asia-Pacific region have suffered from a lack of comprehensive events data that uses a consistent measurement over time. As a result, each provocative and reassuring gesture has been studied as individual cases. This chapter is an attempt to address the gap in Chinese foreign policy analysis by establishing an original dataset on all provocative and reassuring gestures by China to South Korea.

Second, the findings suggest that elite discourse should be taken more seriously as an indicator of overall elite preference on foreign policy when studying Sino-Korean relations. Traditionally, the study of Chinese foreign policy have paid attention to nuances in the remarks made by the top leaders for clues in foreign policy change. However, top leadership comments that are publicly accessible are few and far in between, and in terms of content leader comments vary little as they stress continuity. Turning our attention to elite discourse that may be sourced from less high-profile leaders, but nonetheless published on a consistent and continuous basis allows us to monitor subtle changes in preferences that we would otherwise miss. The ability to discern shifts in elite discourse could translate into an improved accuracy in predicting the timing and direction of policy change.

In the future, additional evidence of China's elite preference towards the Korean peninsula could be gathered to further elaborate the causal pathway by which a consolidated elite leads to major policy change. One source of elite preference could be editorials in major newspapers, or the tone (favorable and unfavorable) of news reports on South Korea over time. For example, we

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could look at the extent to which Chinese media cites the North Korean government and the *Rodong Shinmun* (North Korea's official national paper) as an additional indicator elite cohesion. In the next chapter, I look at the relationship between Chinese elite discourse and China's reassurances and provocations toward another U.S. ally in East Asia, the Philippines. I test the theory on China's official actions taken on the South China Sea islands dispute against the Philippines, particularly on the Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal.

# Chapter 5

## China's active management towards the Philippines, 1978-2017

### 5.1 Introduction

A rising power's aggression on weaker states is often the starting point or catalyst for great power conflict. When is a rising power more likely to exercise restraint, and when is it more likely to resort to such aggression? I argue that strong reassurances and provocations are possible when the policy-making elites inside the rising power are highly consolidated on issues regarding security. In this chapter, I explain the variation in China's official reaction on the South China Sea towards one of its main claimants, the Philippines using China's elite discourse in foreign policy. First, I find that contrary to popular belief that places undue emphasis on China's recent provocation, China has exercised restraint for most of the 2000s and again since 2016, which is remarkable given the initial Chinese reaction to the United Nations arbitral tribunal that largely ruled in favor of the Philippines. This trend is in line with the empirical expectations laid out by the theory of rising power's elite-based foreign policy - when elites are highly consolidated, the rising power

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attempts costly and often unprecedented foreign policy shifts that it would otherwise ill-afford.<sup>1</sup>

In the past decade, confrontations between the People's Republic of China (China) and the Republic of the Philippines (Philippines) regarding their conflicting claims in the South China Sea (SCS) have been on the rise. While scholars may disagree on the exact point of time in which China's attitude towards the Philippines became notably more hostile, most agree that tensions had begun to rise starting in the late 2000s,<sup>2</sup> with the recent few years seeing more aggressive moves by both sides, including the Philippines' seeking greater security commitments from the U.S., its treaty ally, and China's build-up of "artificial islands" through land reclamation since September 2013.<sup>3</sup>

Yet several shortcomings remain in understanding China's behavior towards the Philippines in the South China Sea. First, studies that focus only on China's actions toward a specific claimant are relatively rare. This does not reflect reality, as save for a handful of actions that simultaneously applied to multiple nations (such as the declaration of the Air Defense Identification Zone in 2013 or the Declaration of the Code of Conduct in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2002), China has not been unilaterally provocative or unilaterally reassuring to *all* claimants of the SCS *at the same time*—China could be exclusively provocative to the Philippines while reassuring towards others, and vice versa. However, as most analyses of Chinese behavior on the SCS dispute gravitate towards the more sensational aspects of China's strategies and actions, it is easy to walk away with an impression that China has been provocative to *all its neighbors at all times*.

The second limitation is that the magnitude of China's actions is often unclear, as its be-

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to my interviewees in Manila, Philippines in February 2013, including Dr. Renato DeCastro of De La Salle University, Dr. Jay L. Batongbacal of University of the Philippines, Vincent Perez of Alterenergy, three officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Philippines Foreign Service Institute who requested anonymity.

<sup>2</sup>Scholars have differing standards of what constitutes provocative behavior. For instance, Chubb (2019) suggests that 2007 was the turning point in China's action towards the Philippines based on the launch of Chinese rights defense patrols in the SCS. On the other hand, Fravel (2016) suggests 2009 as a turning point based on China's active participation in the U.N.'s Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. However, most scholars writing about Chinese behavior in the South China Sea do not isolate events in which China only targets the Philippines, but rather more broadly on China's behavior in the SCS on all claimants

<sup>3</sup>Dolven and Rinehart (2015)



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havior is often not defined using a consistent metric, qualitatively or quantitatively. For instance, the ramming of Philippine fishing vessels (and subsequent detention of Philippine fishers) by the Chinese marine surveillance may seem clearly provocative, but how should one compare this to occasional patrols conducted by Chinese naval vessels? At one level, the ramming incident may qualify as a more provocative act based on the extent of damage incurred, but alternatively, the patrols could also qualify as more provocative if considering the fact that a higher-level unit (naval force as opposed to marine surveillance) was the actor. As a result, we have conflicting accounts of whether or not China has been more or less provocative during a given period of time.

I address these shortcomings by taking a different approach. First, instead of looking at China's actions towards all claimants in the SCS, I focus only on Chinese behavior specifically targeting the Philippines that were and publicly acknowledged by the Chinese government. Instead of taking all incidents into account, as admitting in official capacity is costly. By focusing on the most notable actions taken by the Chinese government to date, I attempt to better understand the scope conditions that are prerequisite to a rising power's pivotal "change of course" in its foreign policy. Instead of explaining every incident in which China has been implicated one way or another, I focus on just those actions that were undertaken by government actors and publicly acknowledged as such.

My explanation for why a rising power such as China would commit such notable policy change in either form of provocation or reassurance centers on the need for elite support in costly foreign policy endeavors, especially during power transition (defined as the period leading up but temporally prior to overtaking the incumbent hegemon as the leading military and economic power). Elite support is crucial for rising power leaders because they need to minimize the risk of appearing "revisionist" to the external audience to avoid a preemptive strike by the hegemon, while at the same time continue to expand their power projection capabilities to satisfy their internal audience (selectorate). Under these circumstances, a consolidated elite enables the rising power regime to make *policy change* without being mistaken for *strategy change* thanks to its criti-

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cal function of coordinating and disseminating a coherent policy that prevents either a provocation or reassurance from triggering further action. A closely communicating elite is necessary for a major policy shift as it is crucial that the change (be it reassurance or provocation) is prevented from assuming any strategic significance and minimize the risk of being hijacked by overly eager factions. An additional function of the consolidated elite is to manage public opinion that could turn out to be unfavorable to the rising power leadership. For the rising power, both support and criticism from its public is not ideal, as supportive public opinion harbors potential for overly optimistic expectations,<sup>4</sup> and negative public opinion can undermine the legitimacy of the regime. Public opinion is most likely to strengthen in the absence of authoritative central government direction. Thus the rising power desires to suppress any “myth-making” that attempts to advance either political agenda (both for and against the leadership) by restricting competing interpretations of government decision. A consolidated elite enables the rising power to minimize positive and negative domestic repercussions by clearly stating what the government position is and what it isn't.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter consists of the following sections. Section 2 briefly revisits the original theory of this dissertation, an elite based theory of rising power foreign policy change, and lays out the empirical predictions of the core hypothesis. Section 3 reviews the research design, including the description of each of the explanatory and outcome variables, and the data from which they are sourced. Section 4 presents the findings, and confirms the theory with qualitative evidence from additional sources on Sino-Philippine relations in the South China Sea. Section 5 concludes, with implications for current policy as well as for further testing of the theory in other contexts such as China's actions towards Vietnam, another main claimant in the South China Sea dispute.

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<sup>4</sup>Ko (2017)

<sup>5</sup>Goldstein (2011) also suggests there exists a diverse array of viewpoints among Chinese naval elites regarding the strategies on the South China Sea.

## 5.2 A theory of rising power foreign policy change

This dissertation attempts to explain why the great powers rarely resort to extreme foreign policy behavior (both strongly provocative and strongly reassuring) during its power transition phase, and when it does, why. My argument centers on the role of the rising power's domestic political condition, mainly the level of consolidation among elites implicated in the foreign policy decision-making process. Existing scholarship on great power foreign policy choices during and after power transition have often been limited to an examination of the factors that lead to rare events such as overexpansion (Snyder 1993), preventive war and preemptive strike (Powell 1999).<sup>6</sup> In the case of rising China, attention to China's rise in military and economic power has led to scholarship that examines the potential for its relatively peaceful rise (Kang 2009), predictions for not-so-peaceful near future (Mearsheimer 2006). Scholars have identified scope conditions that explain China's use of force/concessions on territorial disputes (Fravel 2008*b*) and China's involvement in militarized interstate disputes (Johnston 1998; Christensen 2006; Zhang 2019), but to date none has particularly theorized on China's foreign policy behavioral change while undergoing power transition.

Since 1978, when China's top leadership under Deng Xiaoping shifted its energy into economic reforms instead of exporting its communist revolutionary agenda abroad, there has only been a handful of military interstate disputes (MID) that China has directly involved. This has led many to believe that China's rise has been peaceful based on the lack of provocative gestures at the level of a MID such as a direct invasion of another state, and the proliferation of unprecedented cooperative behavior especially in international institutions (Kang 2009). On the other hand, some scholars posit that depending on how one defines "provocative," China has behaved increasingly aggressive in recent years, such as declaring an exclusive Air Defense Zone over the East China

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<sup>6</sup>For a more extensive discussion on the effect of power transition on foreign policy behavior, see Organski and Kugler (1980); Gilpin (1981); Van Evera (1984); Copeland (2001); Levy (1988); LeBow (1984); Betts (1982); Reiter (1995)

Sea in 2013, and stepping up maritime patrols in both the East and South China Seas.

Aside from the lack of clear operationalization on what counts as a provocative or cooperative foreign policy gesture, there is another obstacle to more systematically and comprehensively analyzing foreign policy behavior of rising powers in that factors that often employed in explaining rare outcomes like use of force or peace agreements are insufficient to capture the variation in behavior. For instance, change in grand strategy, regime type, top leadership, and military doctrines are frequently cited as sources of conflict initiation - but these are also variables that seldom change. Given that a power transition may occur over a much shorter span of time or at least under the same regime type, a rising (or declining) great power's policy choices may not be sufficiently explained.

I take note that there has been a rise in scholarly work looking at domestic political factors as sources of foreign policy change. While this can be fruitfully applied to great powers whose political institutions and decision-making processes are relatively transparent, it has often been difficult in understanding the behavior of non-democratic great powers, as in the case of rising China. In the study of modern China, an increasing number of scholars look at public opinion as a source of foreign policy (Weiss 2014; Chubb 2019; ?), although due to the opaque nature of China's decision making process it is often difficult to accurately assess the just how much influence the public has on the government in the formation of foreign policy issues.

In this chapter, I test the theory of elite-based foreign policy change in rising powers that addresses the above shortcomings. First, my theory offers a clear and consistent definition of conflictual and cooperative actions, and presents a unitary framework for explaining both provocation and reassurance of a rising power by categorizing them as belonging to the same category of action - costly foreign policy. Second, the theory uses insights from existing works of elite-based great power foreign policy behavior in IR (Snyder 1993; Schweller 2006) to identify a novel explanatory variable—consolidated elite preferences. Below, I discuss how, given the benefits and drawbacks of highly provocative and reassuring policies, neither is an ideal option for the rising

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power, and how the presence of a highly consolidated elite minimizes the costs and thus motivates the rising power to actively manage regional disputes that pose a challenge to its rise through either provocative or reassuring foreign policies.

As in previous chapters, a rising power's chooses to minimize disruptions to its security from regional disputes by either maintaining the status quo (which does not require policy change), changing the status quo, or actions in between that I call "active management." Within the category of active management, a behavior is defined as either *provocative* or *reassuring* based on whether it lowers the likelihood of conflict between the rising power and its local adversary. A behavior can count as either provocation or reassurance only if it is an *official* action that is publicly undertaken by a government actor and acknowledged as such. For instance, while harassment of Philippine fishing trawlers and stand-offs against Philippine navy vessels are frequently cited as examples of China's "provocative" behavior in the South China Sea, I do not count them unless they are publicized accounts of official action. In other words, unless published in official print media (or directly acknowledged by official government channels such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson), the actions are not part of the outcomes that I explain.

To recap, a rising power faces two challenges in order to sustain a successful power transition. First, the rising power needs to signal to the outside world, especially to its great power adversary, of its status quo preferences. Not taking any action at all on contentious security matters such as territorial disputes could motivate neighboring states to take preemptive action against the rising power. At the same time, the rising power also needs to keep under control the expectations of its domestic populace, in demonstrating that it is indeed on a path to increased wealth and prestige as the next great power, continuing to grow in material (in both economic and military) interests. Not taking any action in fear of signaling revisionist preferences to the external audience might brew disappointment and criticism at home, where unmet expectations of great power prestige in the form of expansionist foreign policy could contribute to anti-regime sentiment and political opposition to the incumbent leadership. As these two tasks are at odds with each other,

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the rising power must carefully choose foreign policy actions that would maximize its national interests without undermining its image as a status-quo seeking power, and vice versa.

Given the above considerations, by default the rising power does not choose to actively manage its regional security disputes with local neighboring states. While this is the default outcome, at times we observe the rising power resorting to explicitly provocative and cooperative behavior that risks this careful balancing act of international and domestic expectations. What conditions might set up the rising power to deviate from its default position of “laying low” and try out a precarious policy that has the potential to backfire, both internationally (misperceived as revisionist) and domestically (popular dissatisfaction)?

I argue that during power transition, the rising power’s consolidated elite enables the rising power to attempt active management of regional dispute through either strongly provocative or reassuring foreign policy actions. A consolidated elite makes a key difference in the calculation of costs and benefits of either a strong provocation or a strong reassurance. In Snyder’s seminal work (1993) on the causes of overexpansionist foreign policy behavior, there are two necessary conditions—the elites form distinct coalitions that end up promoting each others’ parochial interests (“logrolling”), and the elites (or political entrepreneurs coordinating the elites) propagate a strategic ideology (“myth-making”) to gain mass support for their overexpansionist agenda. Snyder also acknowledges that even if there are strong forces for elite cartelization, there are counterpressures. For instance, he states that “When cartels are weak but unitary and democratic forces are both strong, overexpansion should be minimal.” In the case of authoritarian regimes such as China, we may discount the significance of such counteracting democratic forces. However, we could plausibly draw an analogy between the role of strong unitary forces such as a stable, highly centralized government and leadership that is akin to Snyder’s example of oligarchy in Great Britain and the Communist party in Soviet Union.

Assuming that the rising power elite is *under the control* of unitary forces such as a strong central leadership (as in the case of China), a consolidated elite is no longer a potential danger to

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the leadership but rather a useful governing tool, as it carries out two functions that Snyder found to be necessary in tampering down the tendencies for overexpansion: Preventing the “hijacking of the state” by elite coalitions, and preventing the spread of politically expedient popular myths. A consolidated elite can enable the rising power leadership to signal more effectively and clearly to both its international and domestic audience. The rising power can make an unprecedented, daring move on the foreign policy front (be it provocative or cooperative) without fearing that a group of elites can seize upon the policy change as an opportunity to promote parochial interests or use it as a jumping off point for a new political ideology. Rather, because the elites are all on board in terms of preferences, the burden of coordination and organization is minimized, and the rising power leadership may find limited expansion in the form of an unprecedented, one-time policy change more feasible and less risky than before.

A consolidated elite under the control of strong unitary leadership is no longer in competition against the state with popular ideologies, but rather is a useful tool for the rising power leadership to ensure that it minimizes the domestic repercussions of an unusually costly foreign policy (in the form of a strong provocation or strong cooperative act on contentious security matters). My argument centers on recent work on the role of the political elite as opinion leaders and gatekeepers to mass preferences on foreign policy issues (Zaller 1992; Saunders 2015; Guisinger and Saunders 2017).<sup>7</sup> The rising power needs to prevent an overly attentive domestic audience, as it wants neither explicit and widespread domestic support nor opposition to its bold foreign policy gesture. For the rising power, public support and public criticism are equally undesirable as they are really two sides of the same coin – potential breeding ground for dissatisfaction and disillusion, which can ultimately weaken the rising power leadership. The risk of elites taking advantage of the regime’s costly foreign policy move with competing strategic ideologies, bifurcating and even

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<sup>7</sup>So far, the research mostly concerns elites in liberal, highly institutionalized democracies. However, if the effect of elites as cue-givers in open societies is clear, I infer that the effect would be no less significant in more authoritarian settings, in which the public has even less open media on matters of foreign policy and especially on sensitive issues such as national security.

polarizing mass preferences with each elite coalition's own interpretation, is minimal with a highly consolidated elite under control. In contrast, with the challenges of effective top-down communication overcome thanks to aligned preferences, the rising power takes advantage of a consolidated elite to carry out bold foreign policy decisions (limited expansion) without fearing potential mass backlash.

Far from being an obstacle, a consolidated elite is in fact fertile ground for top-down policy coordination and communication, and can actually be conducive to the rising power's goal of limited expansion during power transition with low risk of cartelization and myth-propagation towards the masses than an elite that is highly fractured. Thus the theory predicts that a highly consolidated elite would be more likely to result in the rising power taking bold, unprecedented foreign policy gestures for both provocative and cooperative types of behavior. Once the leadership decides to take advantage of its consolidated elites, the type of behavior is determined by the leaders' interpretation of external circumstances, or namely on the extent to which the leaders consider the target country a security threat.

- Hypothesis: When the rising power's elites are highly consolidated, the rising power is more likely to engage in active management, or costly foreign policy behavior towards its neighboring state - either in the form of strong reassurance or strong provocation. When the rising power's elites are not highly consolidated, it is less likely to engage in active management.

### **5.3 Research Design**

This chapter tests the theory of rising power elite and foreign policy behavior using the case of rising China and its policies on the South China Sea against the Philippines from 1978 to 2017. While ideally the chapter should take into consideration Chinese actions taken towards all parties and not just exclusively on the Philippines, focusing just on the Philippines is useful for several reasons. First of all, China rarely takes action that affects each and every claimant at the same time;



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for instance, the area that is claimed by each claimant in the South China Sea is not the same, albeit some overlaps, and claimant states also vary widely on the start date of the claims. Thus a study on China's behavior towards other states in the South China Sea would essentially be a collection of bilateral relations (i.e. China's behavior towards Vietnam, China's behavior towards Malaysia, etc) Secondly, compared to studies that attempt to explain the few rare instances in which China took action that affected all claimants (such as the Declaration on the conduct of parties in the South China Sea in 2002), we are able to track down more country-specific factors that may have motivated China's behavior towards that state. This allows us to explain how China may have been conciliatory towards some states but hostile to others during the same time period.

As the previous chapters also looked at China's foreign policy behavior towards two other key allies of the U.S. in East Asia, it is especially fitting that of the six claimant states of the SCS against China, we look in depth China's treatment of the Philippines, which is the only country that is backed by formal security guarantees from the U.S. in Southeast Asia<sup>8</sup>

In the rest of the section, I review the measurement of the explanatory and outcome variables. In order to test the main hypothesis, I collect all instances of strongly provocative and reassuring behavior by China which exclusively targeted the Philippines on the South China Sea territorial and maritime dispute, which has been the most contentious security conflict to date between the two states. On that note, my data excludes two categories of events that often gets counted elsewhere: 1) actions by Chinese civilians against Philippine civilian/government actors 2) actions by Chinese actors that does not involve trespassing territorial waters or disputed territory (regulatory surveillance and patrol activities that occur near but not actually inside territorial waters

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<sup>8</sup>The other two countries that enjoy close security relations with the U.S. in Southeast Asia are Thailand and Singapore. While Thailand is a treaty ally of the U.S., it is a landlocked country and does not claim any part of the South China Sea as its own. Singapore is not a formal ally, but enjoys close relations as a security partner based on multiple basing agreements since 1990 (the 1990 and 1998 *Memorandum of Understandings*, the 2005 Strategic Framework Agreement, the 2012 littoral combat ship agreement, as well as the 2015 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement - see <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Paper-6.pdf>). Although it does not have formal claims in the South China Sea either, but has displayed keen interest in issue due to its stake in the freedom of navigation of international water as it is home to one the world's busiest ports.

fall under this category) 3) actions by the Chinese government that are comprehensive in coverage, in which Philippines is not explicitly mentioned as the main target (such as the Declaration of Conduct negotiated in 2002)

### ***Measuring a rising power's active management of regional dispute***

The outcome variable of this dissertation is whether or not a rising power engages in a costly foreign policy decision in the form of a strong provocation or strong reassurance. Thus the dependent variable can take one of three types— no active management, active management in the form of a strong provocation, and active management in the form of a strong reassurance. In the case of China's behavior towards the Philippines, examples of strong provocations include the Chinese navy's standoff against the Philippines in Mischief Reef in 1995; examples of strong reassurances include China's commitment to a bilateral code of conduct in the same year.

Due to the requirement that all events, in order to be counted in the outcome variable, must be state behavior carried out in official capacity, the bulk of my dependent variable data comes from Chinese government publications including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' annual yearbook (*waijiao gailan*) and press release/press briefings, the White Papers of the Ministry of Defense (*baipishu*), and three official national newspapers - the *People's Daily* (*renmin ribao*), the *People's Liberation Army (PLA) Daily* (*jiefangjun bao*), and *Xinhua Newswires* (*xinhua xinwen she*). On the Philippines' side, I consult the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (accessible online through the Foreign Broadcast Information Service), *Business World* (online access beginning in 1997), and the Official Gazette of the Philippine government.<sup>9</sup>

Table 5.1 lists a chronological list of provocations and reassurances, strong and weak, made by China towards the Philippines on the SCS. I acknowledge that although every effort has been made to document as exhaustively as possible all provocations and reassurances, the list is by no means complete, as the focus is on ensuring when costly forms of behavior occurred. If there is a

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<sup>9</sup>Accessible online at <http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/>

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time period in which neither type of behavior is found, I determine that period as an example of status-quo policy in which China did not attempt any active management on its security disputes with the Philippines.

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Table 5.1: China's coercive diplomacy towards the Philippines on the South China Sea (SCS), 1978 - 2017

Year/Month/Day	Event	Type
1978/12/29	China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) statement claiming the Spratlys in general	No active management
1979/12/18	Claim Huangyandao/Scarborough Shoal in the <i>People's Daily</i>	No active management
1980/07/22	MFA statement claiming the Spratlys in general	No active management
1982/11/29	MFA statement <i>sheng ming</i> claiming Spratlys (nansha)	No active management
1983/04/25	Claim Huangyandao/Scarborough Shoal in the <i>People's Daily</i>	No active management
1987/11/27	Xinhua editorial criticizing Philippines on Spratlys	No active management
1988/12/02	MFA statement claiming the Spratlys in general	No active management
1991/07/28	The Second Workshop on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea (first time China attended)	No active management
1992/07/21	Bilateral Foreign Minister talks: Acknowledge existence of dispute with the Philippines, but confirm plans to cooperate	No active management
1995/03/11	MFA confirms construction on Mischief Reef	Provocation
1995/08/12	First bilateral Code of Conduct and Statement on the SCS dispute	Reassurance
1996/03/16	Bilateral Vice-FM meeting statement on the SCS dispute	no active management
1997/05/23	First time MFA publicly acknowledges Scarborough Shoal as Chinese territory	Provocation
1998/12	Unpublicized Construction on Mischief Reef	No active management
1999/01/15	MFA officially claims Meijijiao (Mischief Reef), Zhongyedao (Thitu) islands	Provocation
1999/05/20		
2000/05/07	Bilateral statement repeating 1995 Code of Conduct	No active management
2012/04/11	Scarborough Shoal standoff	Provocation
2013/05/22-30	MFA acknowledgement of increased maritime surveillance near Ren'aijiao	Provocation
2014/03/17	Ren'aijiao/Second Thomas Shoal blockade	Provocation
2015/04/09	MFA acknowledge land reclamation in SCS including near Mischief Reef	Provocation
2016/10/20	MFA officially confirms the relaxation of restrictions on Philippine fishermen operating near Scarborough shoal	Reassurance
2017/05/19	First-ever Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the SCS	Reassurance

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Several interesting patterns emerge from Table 5.1. First of all, it is important to note that provocations actually began in the mid- to late 1990s. Given all the attention to China's behavior on the Spratlys contested by the Philippines in recent years (especially after the standoff at Scarborough Shoal in 2012), it is easy to forget that the very first time China had officially asserted its territorial claims against the Philippines was actually back in 1995. Second, there is a notable absence of active management in the form of provocations and reassurances during the most of the 2000s. While some may point out that the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU and TMSU a year later) was a cooperative move, I do not count it as reassurance as it does was not a formal interstate agreement. Third, while there is a clear return to provocations after the Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao standoff in April 2012 (such as China's first-ever official claim and public acknowledgement of increased surveillance of Second Thomas Shoal/Ren'ai Reef in the following year), it is worth pointing out that China did not engage in provocations in 2010 and 2011, two years which many analysts have pointed to as a time of resurgent Chinese aggressiveness in the South China Sea. Finally, there are surprising years like 2016 and 2017 where there were no provocations but instead reassurances in spite of expectations that China would become more aggressive after being challenged by the Philippines at the UN arbitral tribunal.<sup>10</sup> While this is partly due to the the way I define active management as costly foreign policy behavior that are publicly acknowledged and carried out in official state capacity, the fact that variation exists using this consistent standard of measurement across time contradicts most accounts that portray China as consistently aggressive in the South China Sea, especially on the case of the Philippines.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The Philippines vs. China arbitral tribunal case was the first time China had been summoned to an international arbitration court as a state.

<sup>11</sup>Fravel (2016) also provides a detailed account of how China and the U.S. have carefully managed the disputes in the South China Sea since 2009, with China undergoing phases of push back and moderation against other claimants as well as the U.S., but the analysis includes events that were not officially acknowledged by the Chinese government and does not focus solely on activities that targeted the Philippines.(Fravel 2017)

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***Measuring elite consolidation***

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In order to measure the main explanatory variable, the degree of consolidation among foreign-policy influencing elites, I turn to publicly available written discourse by key thinkers and policy-making elites inside China. As an authoritarian regime with a highly centralized and opaque foreign policy decision-making process, the deliberations of Chinese elites involved in both policy advising, formation and implementation are rarely made public. The closest Chinese equivalent to the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) would be the individual memoirs and biographies of influential officials who passed through highest positions in the Chinese Communist Party, Government ministries and the Military (People's Liberation Army and People's Liberation Navy). However useful these volumes, three problems persist with using elite memoirs.

First of all, not all influential elites publish their own memoirs or let biographers shed light on important moments of their career. For example, just over half of all 54 current and former members of the Politburo Standing Committee have any kind of biography or memoirs, and among those less than half of the 42 members that came after the reform period have them. Secondly, memoir publications of high-ranking officials are almost always vetted by the Chinese government, which means that controversial or sensitive matters such as those concerning territorial disputes or salient disagreements inside the government may not be published.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, memoirs and biographical notes do not capture each elite's preferences on a given topic in a consistent manner; accounts tend to highlight whichever event that was most memorable at the time, which naturally differs from individual to individual. As a result, despite the authority and validity of these auto- and biographical accounts, they are insufficient in themselves for tracking down elite preferences on a given subject matter, especially spanning a longer time period.

Instead, I turn to a slightly less authoritative but nonetheless highly pertinent source of elite

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<sup>12</sup>For instance, the memoirs of ex-General Secretary of the Communist Party Zhao Ziyang is banned by the Chinese government, and ex-Premier Li Peng's memoir goes only up to 1983, ostensibly avoiding the sensitive topic of Li's involvement in the Tian'anmen incident of 1989.

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preferences - articles published by major think-tanks and government-affiliated journals inside China (including university research centers, as major universities are also government affiliated). These journal articles have several advantages over elite memoirs. Not only are they publicly available, but they are published on a consistent basis (at least quarterly, if not monthly or bi-monthly), making the tracking of preferences over time possible. Because they are semi-government documents - in that the authors and commentators are frequently holders of official positions in Party, Government, and Military - the publications themselves are not necessarily internal circulations nor government propaganda, and may contain opinion and ideas that depart from the central government position covered by the official media. Finally, I make sure that these articles are not news reports or journalistic commentaries in that they are not simply reactions to major events inside and outside of China, but rather in-depth analysis and interpretation of the events that clearly reveal *what* the elite is paying attention at the moment, and *how*.

Table 5.2 lists the top twenty journal titles (present and past) that are used to source elite discourse for this chapter. I access each of the journals through the *China Academic Journals Full-text database* hosted by the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI).<sup>13</sup> In order to obtain elite preferences on the Philippines and the South China Sea, I first collect all articles that contain the word “Philippines” (*fei lv bin*) in the full-text and abstract in text-format, for each year from 1978 through 2016. Each document is prepared for automatic content analysis to rid of punctuation marks, numbers, symbols, and stop-words (such as “a” and “the”) and processed into a “bag-of-words” by breaking down phrases into the smallest unit that still retains its original meaning.<sup>14</sup>

To construct the variable of elite consolidation, I first use the Structural Topic Model (STM)<sup>15</sup> to detect the presence of any predominant topic in the elite discourse. Hypothesis 1 predicts that the level of elite consolidation determines the intensity (strong or weak) of the rising

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<sup>13</sup><http://oversea.cnki.net/>

<sup>14</sup>For instance, the compound word *mei fei jun shi tong meng guan xi* would be broken up to *meifei* (US-Philippine) *junshi* (military) *tongmeng* (alliance) *guanxi* (relations).

<sup>15</sup>Roberts, Stewart and Airoldi (2016)

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Table 5.2: Journals and think-tank publications featuring Chinese elite discourse on the Philippines

Title	Publishing unit	Year of first issue and frequency	Sector Type
Southeast Asian and South Asian Studies (东南亚南亚研究, formerly 东南亚)	Yunnan Province Academy of Social Sciences	1983, quarterly	Government
Southeast Asian Studies (东南亚研究, formerly 东南亚研究资料)	Jinan University Southeast Asia Research Center	1959, bi-monthly	Academic
Around Southeast Asia (东南亚纵横)	Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences	1980, bi-monthly	Government
Asia-Pacific Security and Maritime Affairs (亚太安全与海洋研究)	State Council Development Research Center	2004, bi-monthly	Government
Overseas Chinese (侨园)	Liaoning Province Foreign and Oversea Affairs Office	1991, monthly	Government
Southeast Asian Studies (南洋资料译丛)	Xia'men University Research Center for Southeast Asian studies	1957, quarterly	Academic
Southeast Asian Affairs (南洋问题研究, formerly 南洋问题)	Xia'men University Research Center for Southeast Asian studies	1974, quarterly	Academic
South Reviews (南风窗)	Guangzhou Daily	1985, bi-weekly	Government
Global Review (国际展望, formerly 国际问题资料)	Shanghai Institute for International Studies	1981, bi-monthly	Government
International Data Information (国际研究参考, formerly 国际资料信息)	China Institute of Contemporary International Relations	1987, Monthly	Government
Pacific Journal (太平洋学报)	Pacific Society of China	1994, monthly	Government
Contemporary World (当代世界)	International Department of the Central Committee	1981, Monthly	Party
Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies (当代亚太)	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	1992, bi-monthly	Government
Global Military (环球军事)	People's Liberation Army Press	2001, twice a month	Military
Contemporary International Relations (现代国际关系)	China Institute of Contemporary International Relations	1981, monthly	Government
Journal of Boundary and Ocean Studies (边界与海洋研究)	Wuhan University	2016, bi-monthly	Academic

power's foreign policy decision. I first use topic modeling to estimate the extent to which the elites are focused on the subject of security: is there overwhelming elite attention that year in discussing security topics, or is elite interest more evenly distributed over multiple topics? In the case that elite attention is indeed focused on security related topics (captured by topical prevalence of over 0.5), I then look at to what extent the elite sentiment within the topic of security was negative. <sup>16</sup>

Table 5.2 lists the terms associated with each of the five topics, of which two qualify as explicitly security-related.

<sup>16</sup>The number of topics to be estimated in topic modeling depends on the discretion of the user, but in general the rule of thumb is to find a number of topics there are more enough to be recognizable but few enough to be non-redundant. In this case, given a relatively small size of the discourse (1142 articles), it is not surprising that at 4 topics, I am able to uncover clearly distinguishable topics without any overlaps. In the case where I run 3 topics, one of the topics is not specific enough as it clusters 2 distinct topics into 1 (Domestic Politics and U.S. alliance is 1 topic), and in the case where I run 5 topics, two of the topics are too similar to be useful (two U.S. alliance relations topics).



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Table 5.3: Topics discussed by Chinese elites on the subject of the Philippines 1978 - 2016

Topic	Sample words (Chinese)		Sample words (Translated to English)	
	Highest Prob (words highly associated with this topic)		Highest Prob	
	FREX (words likely exclusive to this topic)		FREX	
Philippine domestic politics	政治, 关系, 政府, 政策, 经济, 美国, 发展 政权, 体制, 家族, 政党, 转型, 上台, 独裁		politics, relationship, government, policy, economy, US, development power, system, kin, party, transformation, assume office, dictatorship	
Economy and Development	发展, 国家, 社会, 经济, 东南亚, 华人, 马来西亚 华人, 移民, 教育, 农村, 高等, 作者, 非政府		develop, state, society, economy, Southeast Asia, overseas Chinese, Malaysia Overseas Chinese, immigration, education, village, high school, author, Philippine government	
South China Sea dispute	中国, 南海, 问题, 争端, 国际, 仲裁, 主权 南海, 争端, 仲裁, 主权, 公约, 仲裁庭, 南沙		China, South Sea, problem, dispute, international, arbitration, sovereignty South Sea, dispute, arbitration, sovereignty, convention, arbitration court, South China Sea islands	
Trade and investment	经济, 投资, 增长, 出口, 美元, 发展, 国家 投资, 增长, 出口, 外资, 金融, 增长率, 银行		economy, investment, growth, exports, US dollar, development, state investment, growth, exports, foreign investment, financial, growth rate	
The US-Philippine alliance	总统, 美国, 军事, 基地, 马尼拉, 科阿基诺, 海军 基地, 海军, 访问, 会议, 美军, 部长, 空军		president, US, military, base, Manila, President Aquino, navy base, navy, visit, meeting, US troops, minister, air force	

For those years in which 'security' was the predominant topic (in other words, more than half of all elite discourse published that year on security issues), I then estimate if there is an elite consensus on sentiment by measuring the extent to which elites focus on controversial security issues that are associated with negative sentiment. Thus only in cases in which there is a prevailing interest *and* if elites are sharing the same sentiment, do I deem there to be *elite consensus*. I predict that costly foreign policy endeavors may be closely related to periods of elite consolidation.

Since my theory aims to explain the timing of the rising power's active management and not the kind of active management it chooses, I do not hypothesize under which conditions a rising power is more likely to assert itself in the form of provocations or reassurances. The type of foreign policy decision—whether or not that costly endeavor takes the form of a provocation or a reassurance—depends on several external and internal factors such as the US power projection capabilities in the region at the time, and the extent to which the Philippines was vulnerable in the domestic political realm. Namely, external circumstances that threaten the rising power's status

quo could lead to active management in the form of a provocation, while internal factors such as regime instability that may stall the neighboring state from threatening the rising power's status quo, could make reassurance more likely.

### Elite attention on security matters over time

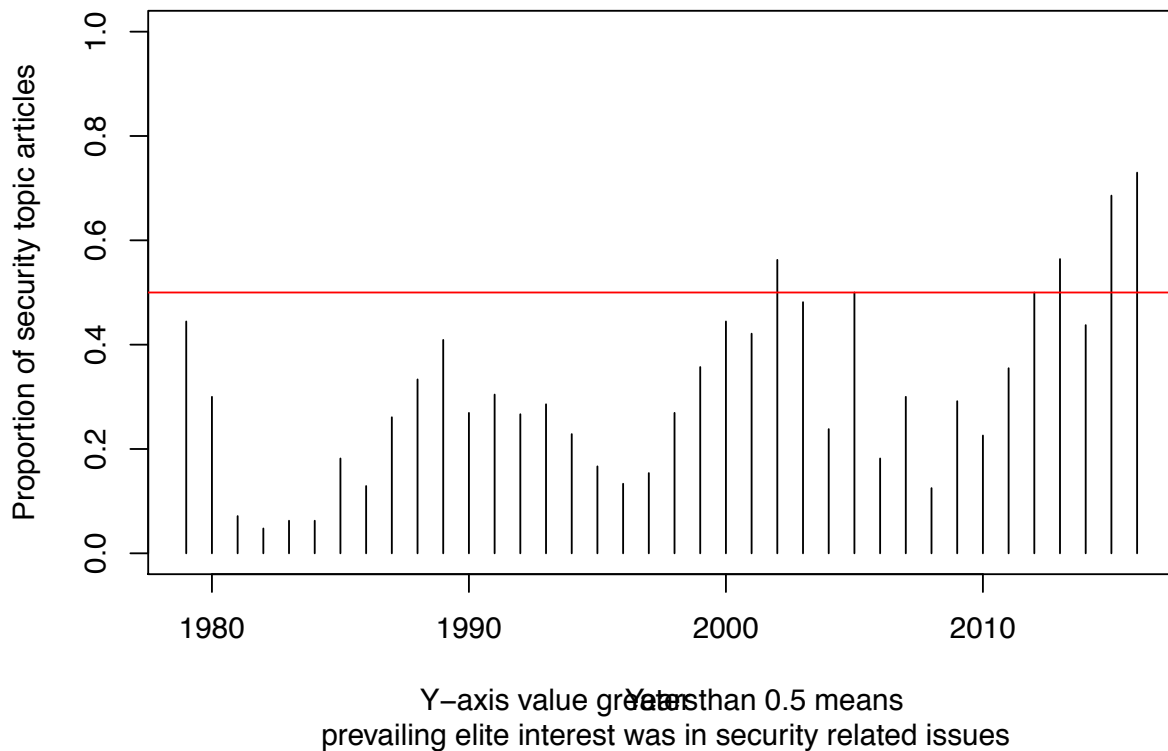


Figure 5.1: Chinese elite attention to security topics with regards to the Philippines, 1979-2016

From Figure 5.1, it becomes apparent that there are several years in which topics associated with security captured the attention of a majority of Chinese elites writing on foreign policy. Year 2002 stands out as particularly interesting, as it was the first time that more Chinese elites paid attention to security matters when writing about the Philippines. Also note that with the exception of 1 year in 2014, since 2013 Chinese elites have paid more attention to security than any other topic.

The next step is to determine during which of these four years of overwhelming elite atten-

tion on security also happened to coincide with negative sentiment. Similar to previous chapters, I calculate the proportion of articles within the security topic that are clearly associated with specific issues to which China has been opposed to. Specifically, any article that contains a negative word counts.<sup>17</sup>

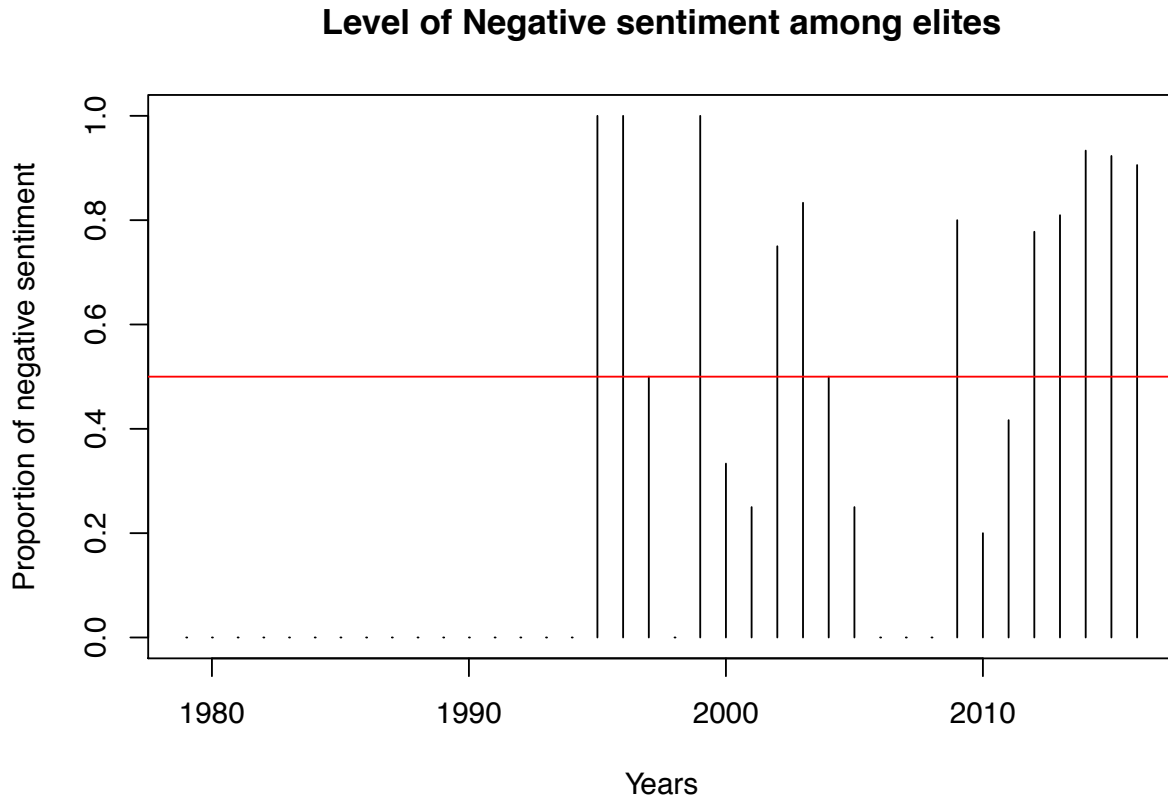


Figure 5.2: Proportion of Chinese elite discourse with negative sentiment on security issues with regards to the Philippines, 1979-2016

From combining these two analyses (Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2), we find that when it comes to the Philippines, Chinese elite consensus has been rare, and indeed is a relatively new phenomenon as there were only four years (2002, 2013, 2015, 2016) in which the Chinese elite

<sup>17</sup>This select word list is compiled from all word stems from the content analysis that are clearly related to the two issue areas of the security topic, the US-Philippine alliance and military partnership and the UN arbitral court. They are: ,, (alliance), , (military exercise), ,, (US troops), (US troop withdrawal), , (the Philippine army),,, , , (UN arbitral court).

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displayed consensus within the predominant topic of that year. The first year in which elites demonstrated consensus, was in 2002, in which the majority of articles highlighted a key security agenda at the time, Philippines' struggle against domestic terrorism. This matches the fact that the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom began deploying troops in January 2002.

The second year in which we observe elite consensus, is in 2013. Not surprisingly, this time the discourse concentrated on the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident and the following downturn of Sino-Philippine relations due to the intensifying confrontation in the South China Sea. It is interesting to note that there were precisely twice as many articles devoted to this issue in 2013 (18 articles) than in 2012 (9 articles), reflecting a significant temporal lag between the April 2012 Scarborough standoff and the elite consensus.

The third and fourth occasions during which there was an elite consensus on security were 2015 and 2016. Curiously, 2014 is left out. It is not until 2015 that elites focus wholly on the territorial dispute issue between China and the Philippines as their main security interest, surpassing interest in the U.S.' role as the Philippines' ally in the South China Sea claims. We find that it was not until 2016 that elite attention culminated in a consensus by criticizing in unison the Philippine action of taking the territorial dispute to the International tribunal at the Hague (Permanent Court of Arbitration). Based on this result, we should expect to observe costly foreign policy actions taken towards the Philippines following the four times there existed elite consensus - after 2002, 2013, 2015 and 2016. Whether we observe China behaving in strongly reassuring or strongly provocative manner following each of the four years in turn depends on the external and domestic factors which will be discussed in the case study in the following section.

## 5.4 Rising power elite consolidation and costly foreign policy:

### China's active management of the SCS against the Philippines, 1978 - 2017.

This section tests out the empirical implications of the main hypothesis through the lens of China's official positions taken towards the Philippines on the South China Sea territorial claims. The theory predicts that there needs an elite consensus for a rising power to engage in active management of a security conflict with a neighboring state, and the data is in line with the theory for the most part. For instance, as there is no elite consensus throughout the 1980s, we do not observe costly decisions during that time. The 1990s is an interesting case, as there was no clear elite consensus in the realm of security but China engaged in both provocations and reassurances from the mid-1990s beginning with the Mischief Reef incident in 1995. I offer several alternative explanations on this matter. Throughout the 2000s, the predictions of the theory are confirmed as there is a complete stall on active management from 2000 until the Scarborough standoff in 2012.

Table 5.4: Theoretical expectations and actual outcomes

Year	Elite attention to Security	Focus on Negative Sentiment within Security discourse	Expected Outcome	Actual Outcome
1978-1994	LOW	LOW	No Active Management	No Active Management
1995 - 1999	LOW	HIGH (except 1997 and 1998)	No Active Management	Active Management (Provocation in 1995, 1997, 1999 Reassurance in 1995)
2000 - 2012	LOW (except 2002)	LOW (except 2002, 2003, 2009)	No Active Management	No Active Management
2013 - 2017	HIGH (except 2014)	HIGH	Active Management	Active Management (Provocation in 2013, 2014, 2015, Reassurance in 2016 and 2017)

This section takes a more in-depth look at the degree of consolidation in the rising power's elite discourse as an indicator of key behavioral changes. According to the theory of rising power

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foreign policy, a well-consolidated elite is necessary for the rising power leadership to practice costly foreign policy. For each of the four time periods (lack of any active management prior to the 1995, instances of active management in the late 1990s, lack thereof throughout the 2000s, and instances of active management starting in 2012). Throughout the case study section, it is useful to keep in mind that I focus only on Chinese behavior that directly implicated the Philippines, and leave out incidents that was primarily between China and another Southeast Asian state (such as Malaysia or Vietnam), or incidents in which the Philippines was involved but was not the main target. Most of the existing literature tend to analyze China's behavior towards the South China Sea more broadly, and towards multiple parties simultaneously in the South China Sea.

To begin with, I briefly go over China's behavior towards the Philippines regarding the maritime boundaries and disputed territories in the South China Sea prior to 1978. I then review China's behavior towards the Philippines after the normalization until the beginning of 1990s, when the Philippines began accusing China of encroaching Philippine territory in the SCS. The main reason for not including the years prior to 1978 is the lack of publicly available Chinese elite discourse, as well as the fact that prior to 1978 Deng Xiaoping had not consolidated power as the *de facto* head of state. It is important to consider that prior to 1978, China had not engaged in any strong provocations or reassurances against the Philippines as defined in this dissertation: Unprecedented, publicized official action that mainly targeted the Philippines. There were two instances of weak provocation: one in 1971 when China claimed the Spratly Islands in the People's Daily, the national newspaper, and another one in 1975 when China claimed the Philippine-contested Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao in the People's Daily. Both do not count as strong provocations, however, as the 1971 statement had seen a precedent in 1958, and the 1975 statement was neither official nor had made a focused target out of the Philippines. The lack of costly gestures towards Philippines is indicative of China's overall behavior towards other claimants of the South China Sea throughout the 1970s, in which most of its attention was focused on disputes with Vietnam in the Paracels (xi'sha) while on the other hand tried to ameliorate relations with formerly antagonis-

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tic neighbors in ASEAN. By 1975, China had resumed normal relations with non-aligned Malaysia as well as two key U.S. allies in Southeast Asia Philippines and Thailand, after each suspended ties with the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Meanwhile, there is one exceptional case of provocation in 1976 following the Philippines' mineral exploration in Reed Bank (Liyuetan). The 1976 MFA statement was the first time China had used official government channels to claim a part of Philippine-disputed territory. While this was not the first time that China had issued a South China Sea claim through official channels - China had issued numerous MFA statements claiming the Spratlys and Paracels throughout the 1950s and as recently as 1974 against the backdrop of the Crescent group islands clash with Vietnam - the 1976 occasion stands out as the first time China used official government channels to publicly criticize Philippine action. The first-ever MFA announcement claiming the South China Sea islands was published on 1951 August 16 as a direct statement from then Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai; In 1974, in the course of four months (January 12, January 21, February 5, April 1) China published three statements at the highest official level (*sheng ming*) as well as a rare direct commentary/statement from the vice country representative to the UN-led Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE). This was the first time since 1956 May 30 that China claimed the SCS at the highest official government level.

Prior to China and the Philippines' normalization on June 9, 1975, there had been only 1 occasion in which China formally claimed the South China Seas. On July 17, 1971, the People's Daily published a rare editorial-like statement that asserted China's claim to the Spratly islands *sha qun dao* for the first time in its official national newspaper. Although on the surface it may appear as China's initiative, in fact this was actually responding to the Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos' earlier statement on July 10, 1971 in which Philippines proclaimed several parts of the Spratly island group as Philippine sovereign territory for the first time ever.<sup>18</sup> It is interesting

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<sup>18</sup><http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1971/07/19/presidents-week-in-review-july-9-july-15-1971/>, Lo, Chi-kin, *China's policy towards territorial disputes*

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to note that even in this unprecedented statement made by the Chinese government, Huangyandao/Scarborough Shoal—a key contested feature between the two states—was not explicitly mentioned. Not only did China choose not to name the sensitive Huangyandao/Scarborough in the editorial, but it also kept the explicit mention of other islands very limited. For instance, although the Philippines had announced their occupation and de facto control of two other islands in addition to the Thitu islands—namely, Lawak (Mahuandao in Chinese) and Flat island (Feixindao), the editorial only mentions the former and chose to ignore the latter.

Apart from this reactive statement, the Chinese government did not take any official action against the Philippines on the territorial dispute until 1975, five months after the normalization of the two states. On November 25, 1975, the People's Daily newspaper published a lengthy report under the pen-name Shi Dizu<sup>19</sup> Unlike the previous statement published in 1971 in response to the Philippine president Marcos' own provocative announcement, the 1975 article was the first-ever attempt by China to explicitly announce that the Huangyandao/Scarborough Shoal feature was a part of Chinese territory. Because 1975 falls under Mao Zedong's leadership and his communist-revolution driven policies and elite preferences had not yet diversified, a tenable alternative explanation for China's behavior during this time is found in Fravel (2008b): China is more likely to use force when it foresees claim strength weakening either due to a window of vulnerability (China's defensive capabilities decreasing) or window of opportunity (China's offensive capabilities decreasing). In the case of the Philippines, China may have exerted extra attention to claiming Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao in 1975 based on Philippine actions in the year before, such as the Philippines' direct protest to Chinese use of force against the Republic of Vietnam Navy in order to seize the Crescent group islands in the Paracels (Xisha) in early 1974. A year prior to the Crescent group clash, Philippines had followed up their first-ever official claim to the Spratlys made in 1971 with announcing the ratification of a new constitution outlining their national ter-

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<sup>19</sup>It is thought that instead of an actual person, Shi Dizu stands for the Department of Historical Geography at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences [http://www.cb.com.cn/life/2017\\_0624/1188463.html](http://www.cb.com.cn/life/2017_0624/1188463.html), [http://www.igsnr.cas.cn/sq70/hyhg/kyjl/201005/t20100526\\_2855986.html](http://www.igsnr.cas.cn/sq70/hyhg/kyjl/201005/t20100526_2855986.html)



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ritory in 1973.<sup>20</sup> Both of these assertive actions may have led China to perceived a window of vulnerability on their part. On the other hand, the then Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos had paid an official state visit to China in June 1975 on the historic occasion of signing resumption of diplomatic relations. While the territorial dispute was not mentioned in the Joint Communiqué that followed, it is reported that Marcos and Deng Xiaoping discussed the disputed territories in the South China Sea during Marcos' visit, and that both had agreed to settle the matter through bilateral diplomatic negotiation.<sup>21</sup> It is thus possible that China decided its offensive advantage against the Philippines would run its course soon after the recent warming of relations, and quickly acted to make an extensive claim five months afterwards. Still, as the claim was not in the form of a government statement but rather in the form of a research report under a pen-name, and even more importantly, not directed just to the Philippines, along with the 1971 article I do not count the 1975 article as an instance of provocation by China against the Philippines.

On a similar note, it is plausible that the strong provocative action by China against the Philippines in 1976 was part of Chinese effort to cement the offensive advantage gained from the 1974 clash with Vietnam over the Crescent island group, and a preemptive move to warn Philippines against further encroachment on other contested parts of the Spratlys. Already by 1974 Philippines had moved to occupy five of the contested islands against China - Lawak (Mahuan-dao), Flat (Feixindao), West York (Xiyuedao), Northeast Cay (Beizidao), and Thitu (Zhongyedao) islands, and in 1978 would go on to occupy two more.<sup>22</sup> As the Philippines was one of the first contestants to occupy features in the Spratlys as well as the first country to explore petroleum deposits beginning in 1970, China may have acted out of concern that their claim strength was on decline. As we do not have evidence of elite discourse at this time, the most plausible explanation for China's unprecedented criticism of Philippines in 1976 is that China perceived a window of vulnerability against Philippines' active pursuit of energy resources and continued physical occu-

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<sup>20</sup>Odgaard (2002)

<sup>21</sup>Lo (1989)

<sup>22</sup>Valencia and Ludwig (1997)

pation of contested islands in the South China Sea.

#### **5.4.1 An emerging elite discourse and Chinese behavior towards the Philippines on the South China Sea from 1978 - 1994**

After Mao Zedong's death (1976) and his successor Deng Xiaoping's consolidation of power (1978), the nature of China's foreign policy shifted from one oriented towards exporting the Chinese Communist revolution abroad to a more pragmatic one which favored fostering trade and economic exchange over revolutionary zeal. The process of China's foreign policy decision making also underwent change, with more actors of academic and non-governmental affiliations beginning to contribute expert knowledge; with independent think-tanks such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) producing research and commentaries around this time (CASS began in 1978, CICIR in 1981), we are able to track more reliably the interests and preferences of China's elites on the subject of the Philippines from this time period onward. A caveat: As elite discourse was in formation during this period, it is not surprising that we see elite discourse often concentrated on a single topic.

Up until the early 1990s, China's focus on Vietnam-contested Paracels (Xisha), or the group of islands laying west of the Spratlys, is evident in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) statements published throughout the 1980s and 1990s. From 1979 until 1993, the MFA solely criticized Vietnam in its claim to the Spratlys, never singling out the Philippines although the latter was also one of the claimants. China's preoccupation with Vietnam in the South China Sea culminated in its only use of force against another claimant state in the South China Sea to date - the conflict on Johnson Reef in March 1988 that resulted in Vietnamese casualties. Although China did not pursue further aggression against Vietnam following its victory in Johnson Reef, until 1995 China continued to mainly single out Vietnam and not so much the Philippines as a key rival contestant in the South China Sea.

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Aside from its rivalry with Vietnam on the Spratlys, China's desire to improve relations with the Philippines under the newly installed Filipino president Corazon Aquino helps explain why China did not take advantage of Philippines' domestic turmoil in 1987 to pursue their territorial claims. Deng Xiaoping, the then *de facto* head of state of China, extended his full support behind Aquino including an invitation for her official visit, during the Philippine vice-president and foreign minister Salvadore Laurel's visit as early as in June 1986.<sup>23</sup> Again in a show of support for the Aquino regime, the Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang had also met with the Cardinal Jaime Sin in November 1987, who had been a key figure in the success of the People Power Revolution in 1986.<sup>24</sup> A week later, the Chinese government made a rare statement through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refuting the claim that China continued to provide arms to the Communist Party of the Philippines (菲共 or *fei gong*), a longtime rebel force against the Philippine government. That China formally acknowledged its non-involvement with the Communist Party of the Philippines signaled its departure from the previous notion of exporting the Chinese communist revolution to third world countries, as well as a desire to convey full support to the Aquino regime.<sup>25</sup> China's handling of the Philippines' public announcement of its national territory in the Philippine constitution that same month also reveals the extent of China's restraint towards the Philippines. Instead of taking the matter through official MFA statements, the Chinese dissatisfaction with the Philippine's expansive claim of its national territory ended up with only a short editorial in the People's Daily that used noticeably moderate terms. For instance, instead of criticizing the Philippines directly, the editorial "*advises* the small number of people in the Philippine government and legislature" not to press further on the territorial claims, suggesting that China thinks such revisionist forces against Chinese interests are in the minority inside the Philippines. Editorial staff (November 27, 1987) China's goodwill towards the Philippines is also evident in the years following 1987. In the first presidential visit by a sitting incumbent since Ferdinand Marcos' inaugural visit 13 years

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<sup>23</sup>Wang (June 18, 1986)

<sup>24</sup>Zhang (November 12, 1987)

<sup>25</sup>Xinhua News (November 19, 1987)

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prior, Corazon Aquino's three-day visit to China in April 1988 publicly confirmed for the first time, the decision to delay the settlement of disputed territories and maritime boundaries between the two states.<sup>26</sup> Combined with China's preoccupation with deterring Vietnam on land and at sea, as well as its policy of stabilizing ties with the newly incumbent Aquino regime, a lack of China's elite consensus (as well as a clear lack of issue salience on the territorial dispute with regards to the Philippines) and unchanged neutral threat perception towards the Philippines resulted in no costly action such as a strong reassurance or provocation during this time period (1978-1990). China's steady increase of economic and military power, as well as the U.S.' continued security commitment to the Philippines under the U.S.-Philippine alliance cannot readily account for China's lack of costly behavior during this time. The lack of costly behavior cannot be readily attributed to Deng Xiaoping's leadership, as China actively engaged in strong provocations such as the Johnson South Reef Skirmish in 1988 against Vietnam during while avoiding similar confrontations with the Philippines during the same time period.

#### **5.4.2 Case 2: Chinese Elite consensus and provocation in the 1995-1999**

While some accounts point to China's occupation of Mischief Reef as the only instance of China's provocative behavior towards the Philippines in the SCS during the 1990s (Fravel 2008b), I identify three additional incidents, occurring in March and August 1995, May 1997 as costly behavior by China against the Philippines in the 1990s. The 1990s was the first time that China actually took costly foreign policy decisions towards the Philippines on the disputed territories, both in the form of a strong reassurance and a strong provocation. However, on all three occasions neither an elite consensus nor a change in leadership threat perception preceded. In fact, the only time there was an elite consensus in the 1990s was in 1999, which failed to result in a costly foreign

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<sup>26</sup><http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1988/04/15/speech-of-president-corazon-aquino-on-bilateral-relations-with-china/>; Unlike Aquino, Marcos did not publicize the discussion with his Chinese counterparts on the SCS issue during his official state visit in June 1975. Unfortunately, the Chinese government did not issue a formal communique or joint statement during Aquino's state visit that acknowledged the discussion regarding SCS, thus the delay of settlement does not count as an incidence of strong reassurance.

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policy move mainly because similar to 1986, despite there being an extremely focused elite, there was no change in the leadership's threat perception of the Philippines as a security concern. In this section, I review the nature of the Chinese elite discourse on the Philippines throughout the 1990s, and discuss why foreign policy decisions on the territorial disputes during this time does not necessarily follow the expected predictions of the theory based on elite consensus and threat perception. Similar to the time period that came before, China's increased economic and military power nor its leadership under Jiang Zemin can readily explain why China resorted to these several costly measures in the mid-1990s. Another explanation for Chinese intrusion of Mischief Reef is the potential for lower commitment by the U.S. to the Philippines in a security crisis, as the U.S. had withdrawn from the Clark air base in 1991 and the Subic Bay naval base in 1992. However, if the goal had been to take advantage of a window of opportunity it is unclear why then, the occupation of Mischief Reef remained an isolated incident (as China did not occupy any other feature claimed by the Philippines during the 1990s) and that China quickly attempted to reconcile with the Philippines with an unprecedented bilateral code of conduct months after the Mischief Reef incident. It is also puzzling why China did not make a big deal out of the Philippines occupying Second Thomas Shoal in 1999, only to openly condemn the Philippines for doing so years later in 2013. In short, the alternative explanations fall short of explaining the four cases of costly behavior by China against the Philippines. We now turn to what the elite consolidation was like during this time, and whether these two factors can better explain China's decision to provoke the Philippines on the South China Sea in the mid-1990s.

A distinct feature of Chinese elite discourse into the mid-1990s was an overwhelming interest on the Philippine economy foreign trade as a source of China's Philippine policy. With the exception of 1994, every time there was a predominant topic in the Chinese elite discourse in 1990s, it was on some aspect of Philippines' domestic economy or trade relations with other states. The overwhelming focus on the economy and trade topic in the 1990s is not surprising as it was also true of China's foreign policy towards other states as part of its attempt to end diplomatic

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isolation following the 1989 Tian'anmen incident. It is also plausible that given the U.S. exit of the Clark Air base in 1991 and Subic Bay naval base in 1992, the Philippines ceased to be less of a political concern and led the Chinese elites to pay even greater attention on Philippines' economic and trade sectors as a source of Chinese policy.

However, despite the general increase in diversity of publications as well as renewed interest on economy and trade matters when discussing the Philippines, the 1990s did not usher in increased attention on the subject of security by the Chinese elites *overall*. In February 1998, the U.S. and the Philippines had signed the historic Visiting Forces Agreement, the first formal agreement that would strengthen the two countries defense ties since the departure of U.S. troops from Clark and Subic Bay bases in 1991 and 1992. This agreement received scant attention from the Chinese leadership, as evidenced by a single news report in the People's Daily in 1998 and no official statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the Visiting Forces Agreement was a renewal of bilateral security relations which also reinstated joint military exercises ("Balikatan") as well as a near ten-fold in U.S. aid the Chinese government seemed to have paid very little attention to this matter at the time; the first time the Balikatan exercises is mentioned is not until January 2000.<sup>27</sup> It is telling that there is not a single article in the People's Daily in 1999 about the U.S.-Philippines security relations despite the ratification of the Visiting Forces Agreement that year.

As the theory of rising power foreign policy behavior suggests, if there is no consensus (combination of both high interest and negative sentiment among rising power elites on matters regarding a neighboring state) then it is unlikely that the rising power would engage in costly foreign policy measures.<sup>28</sup> However, we note that despite the absence of consensus, China had actively managed its disputes with the Philippines in the latter half of the 1990s. The strong

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<sup>27</sup>Balikatan exercises first began in 1984, but there have been interruptions in the 1990s due to the U.S. departure of the military bases. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/715540/philippines-us-start-exercise-balikatan-2016/>

<sup>28</sup>Wu and Hong (2014)

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provocation and reassurances made by China in 1995 (first the seizure and occupation of, then an unprecedented bilateral code of conduct signed following the Mischief Reef occupation earlier that year), and again in 1997 and 1999 were not preceded by elite consensus. Admittedly, the theory of rising power foreign policy does not purport to explain every instance of a rising power's costly behavior or non-behavior, but rather to predict that active management of security disputes to be more likely. It is thus necessary to review these cases of costly behavior that my theory failed to predict as it can lead to refining the main hypotheses as well as detect possible errors in the operationalization and measurement of the key variables.

In the case of the late 1990s, the deviation from theoretical predictions could be due to a relative dearth of elite discourse available so that an elite consensus cannot be reliably captured, or that there may have been alternate channels other than the *People's Daily* during this time period for leaders to express their opinion regarding the Philippines. At the same time, there are some features that set apart China's active management of the dispute in the late 1990s apart from later instances including the strong provocations that occurred after the 2012 Scarborough standoff. One shared characteristic of China's active management of the SCS dispute against the Philippines in the 1990s, is that the Chinese government seemed to have deliberately avoided publicity.

In the case of China's active management surrounding Mischief Reef in 1995, one reason for limited publicity could be that it was a genuine blunder, an accidental outcome that the central leadership in fact never intended in the first place. It is unclear when exactly the Chinese government vessels began the construction of structures on Mischief Reef; reportedly, Chinese occupation of Mischief Reef took place sometime in late 1994, and Philippines took official action against China in February 1995.<sup>29</sup> Fravel (2008b) suggests that the China's top leaders had been just as taken by surprise by the occupation and construction of structures on Mischief Reef as their counterpart in the Philippine government. The specific wording of the official MFA statement confirms the notion that this particular provocation may have not originated from the central

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<sup>29</sup>Reuters News (February 10, 1995b)

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leadership, as it emphasizes the role of the provincial government as well as the practical (fishing-related), non-threatening nature of the construction. The sovereignty of Mischief Reef is also put in discreet terms, with Chinese sovereignty claims worded as indirectly as possible. When the MFA made a statement in May 1999 in response to the Philippines' accusation of again constructing structures on Mischief Reef, this time the MFA made much stronger, direct references to Mischief Reef being part of Chinese sovereign territory, with mentions of China's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).<sup>30</sup>

Given the limited, passive nature of the MFA statement in March 1995 on Mischief Reef, it is understandable why China quickly took measures to mollify the Philippines through reassurances. China began talks and had agreed to negotiations about a code of conduct with the Philippines as early as March 1995, soon after the Chinese structures were discovered on Mischief Reef.<sup>31</sup> Given the lack of both an elite consensus, the main impetus for strong reassurance in August 1995 seems to stem from China's concern about the further complication of the dispute. In May 1995, the MFA put out another official statement, this time criticizing the Philippines' decision to bring 25 foreign reporters to the Spratly Islands as protest to Chinese occupation of Mischief Reef. In the statement China clearly states its opposition to the internationalization (*guo ji hua*) of the territorial dispute, as well as the involvement of third parties (*qita guojia jieru*). The fact that this official statement came out immediately after the U.S. State Department's press briefing on May 10 1995 underlines China's efforts to clamp down on international media attention as well as involving other great powers in the region such as the U.S.<sup>32</sup> The ensuing Code of Conduct that was officially announced on August 12, 1995 indeed places a heavy emphasis on the *bilateral* aspect of the negotiations - contrary to Philippines' initial preference for a multilateral negotiation that would include other claimants to the South China Sea - including an explicit reference to keep

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<sup>30</sup>In 1995, China simply states "China's sovereignty over the Spratly islands is indisputable. Lately, on Mischief Reef, which is part of the Spratly islands.." In 1999, China clearly states "Mischief Reef is a part of the Spratlys, and that the Chinese provincial government constructed fishing related structures is entirely within China's sovereignty"

<sup>31</sup>Reuters News (March 20, 1995a)

<sup>32</sup>Reuters News (May 10, 1995c)



third parties (such as the U.S.) out of the dispute.<sup>33</sup>

In the case of China's provocation in May 1997, the explanation for the timing of China's abrupt response seems to depend on what happened a month earlier. First of all, it is useful to keep in mind that while this was not the first time the Philippines' naval vessel intercepted Chinese vessels, this incident occurred less than a month after the Philippines lodged an official diplomatic protest against China for the presence of Chinese naval vessels as well as a hut-like structure on two of the islands (Kota and Panata) occupied by the Philippines in April 1997.<sup>34</sup> While the Chinese did not publicize the April 1997 incident, the extent of Chinese reaction could be at least partly attributed to previous action taken by the Philippines; Also, the statement explicitly accuses the Philippines' earlier claim in 1997 that announced the Scarborough Shoal as part of their Exclusive Economic Zone.

At the same time, as it had been with the 1995 incident, publicity on the 1997 standoff was extremely limited. Apart from the two official government accounts (MFA and Qian Qichen's comment), there weren't any other articles discussing the incident throughout 1997, and it was not until 1999 that there another public mention of Scarborough Shoal in the *People's Daily*. By limiting the incident's exposure to popular media inside China, the two provocations of 1997 and 1999 seem to have been aimed at setting a precedent for international audiences, especially other claimant states in the South China Sea. Although the central leadership may have been more involved in the 1997 and 1999 provocations (unlike the 1995 Mischief Reef incident), the two incidents could still be characterized as an outlier of generally cooperative, if not a passive attitude that China took to its territorial claims vis-a-vis the Philippines throughout the 1990s compared to the 1980s when it resorted to force against Vietnam on the Paracel islands. As there are multiple claimants to the South China Sea islands, reefs and shoals, the most plausible explanation for China's sudden strong provocation in 1997 seems to be China taking preemptive action against

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<sup>33</sup>“争议应由直接有关国家解决”

<sup>34</sup>Song (1999)

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other claimants as competition continued to intensify into the 1990s, along with a renewed interest in strengthening its claims after China finally ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1996.

In a nutshell, while the instances of costly behavior in 1995, 1997 and 1999 do not perfectly fit the predictions made by the elite consensus-based theory of rising power foreign policy, there are several reasons why this may be the case. Given the paucity of the data on elite discourse as well as limited availability of information on each of the incidents, I allow for the possibility that the current collection of elite discourse may simply not be enough to sufficiently capture a consensus that may have existed. It would also be helpful to keep in mind that in 1995, 1997, and 1999, the intention of the Chinese leadership to keep things away from public scrutiny is evident. As we observe after 2012 when the Chinese MFA engaged in a verbal campaign against the Philippines on the Scarborough Shoal standoff for months, but they chose not to in the late 1990s. These incidents suggest a slight revision of the theory - in as much as elite consensus can enable a rising power leadership to engage in costly behavior, perhaps the opposite situation—a total lack of elite interest/absence of issue salience as it was in the case throughout the 1990s—also frees up the leadership to do whatever it wishes to do without fearing elite backlash or the need to coordinate its elites beforehand.

**5.4.3 Lack of elite consensus as well as threat perception from 2000 to 2012, resulting in neither provocations nor reassurances**

Compared to the 1990s, the elite discourse starting in 2000 became more diverse in the number of publications on the subject of China's foreign policy towards the Philippines. During the years from 2000 to 2012, there was an additional 22 new journals that published Chinese elite discourse on the subject of the Philippines. Despite the increase in journals, the most notable feature of elite discourse during this time period is still the lack of elite consensus when it comes to discussing se-

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curity issues. Finally, it is important to note that the territorial disputes still had not gained salience among the elites throughout the entire decade, despite notable incidents between the two states such as the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking signed in 2004, Philippines' passing the baselines act into law in March 2009 against official Chinese protest, and China's official submission to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in May 2009, which was the first time the Chinese government used the nine-dash lines in an official occasion (2009).<sup>35</sup> While there is more elite discourse about the territorial dispute in the South China Sea in this decade compared to the 1990s, it is not until 2013 that we observe elite consensus.

Part of the reason for a continued lack of attention by Chinese elites on security issues could be that the landmark events in the security realm fostered between the U.S. and the Philippines in the first decade of the century concerned fighting insurgents and terrorism inside of the Philippines, and did not target China. The most significant change in the US-Philippine alliance during the early 2000s occurred in 2003 when the Philippines was designated as a major non-NATO ally of the U.S.<sup>36</sup> This designation reflected the close cooperation by the Philippines on the U.S. efforts on the War on Terror since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in which Philippines offered its ports and airports for U.S. naval vessels and military aircraft, and was one of the first countries to support the U.S. in its invasion of Iraq by contributing peacekeeping forces as part of the "coalition of the willing" in March 2003.<sup>37</sup> Less well known but just as significant was the signing of the Military Logistics and Support Agreement (MLSA) in November 2002 to allow for U.S. to use Philippines as a base for counter-terrorism activities in the Southeast Asian region. Effective for five years, the MLSA was renewed on November 21, 2007 for another 5-year term on November

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<sup>35</sup>To date, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has never used the controversial nine-dash lines (*jiu duan xian*) in any of their official statements as support of the Chinese claim of sovereignty in the South China Sea. When asked about the nine-dash line in MFA press briefings, the spokesperson has consistently used the term "historic" (for example: "China's rights in the South China Sea are formed by history" "中国在南海的海洋权益是历史形成的" MFA statement, Feb 8 2014) instead of referring explicitly to the nine-dash line - neither denial nor confirmation of the nine-dash line's role.

<sup>36</sup>U.S. Department of Defense, May 19 2003. Available at <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=28968>

<sup>37</sup>BBC News (March 18, 2003)

6, 2012 despite a heated controversy among the Philippine public for its secrecy.<sup>38</sup>

Interestingly, the Chinese leadership seems to have taken little note of these landmark security agreements between the U.S. and the Philippines in the first decade of the 21st century, as coverage on the security cooperation between the two states is extremely thin. From 2000 to 2004, the *People's Daily* reported on the U.S.-Philippines security cooperation at least once each year. The relationship, however, is not described using the term "alliance." Also, all news reports from 2000-2004 are exclusively about bilateral military exercises. References to the designation of the Philippines as a major non-NATO U.S. ally, and the two MLSA agreements (2002, 2007) are all conspicuously missing. After 2004, aside from the report on the resumption of Balikatan joint military exercises in 2007,<sup>39</sup> no mention was made of any aspect of the developments in U.S.-Philippine security relationship.<sup>40</sup>

The lack of elite consensus on security issues meant that rising China would have been unlikely to take costly actions on controversial security issues such as territorial disputes during this time period. As the theory of rising power foreign policy behavior correctly predicts, we do not observe either provocations nor reassurances from 2000 to 2012. I briefly review this outcome in light of preceding analyses on Chinese behavior towards the Philippines on the South China Sea during this time.

Most analysts point out that the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU) in 2004 and to a certain extent, the Tripartite Marine Seismic Undertaking (TMSU) in 2005 agreements, however important milestones each may have been, were not based on broad elite consensus in both China and in the Philippines. To begin with, the JMSU does not count as an instance of reassurance because it was not an agreement between official government entities. Rather, the agreement was

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<sup>38</sup>The review process leading to the decision to the renewal of the agreement were not publicized. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/132080.pdf>; <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/207351.pdf>; also see Lum and Niksch (2006)

<sup>39</sup>The Balikatan exercises held between the U.S. and the Philippines had been suspended in 2006 over the Subic Rape incident, in which a U.S. Marine was convicted of raping of a Filipina woman.

<sup>40</sup>In 2010, there was a fleeting mention of the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement as part of an article on the Philippines' new policy against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

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between the two states' national oil companies China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and the Philippines National Oil Corporation (PNOC) and was acknowledged as such in the initial Chinese MFA press briefings that reported on the agreement. It is telling that this agreement was not publicly announced as part of the Sino-Philippines joint communique during Arroyo's visit in September 2004, when the agreement was signed. It was another two months before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially acknowledged the signing of the agreement (November 18, 2004), and in fact it was not until Vietnam joined the JMSU (transforming the bilateral agreement into a trilateral pact involving Vietnam) the following year that the Chinese government officially publicized the agreement as such.<sup>41</sup>

The JMSU was a conciliatory moves made by China that was part of multiple trade and investment agreements made to the Philippines' Arroyo government after the latter's fallout with the U.S. in early 2004. Yet it had been forged hastily by leadership on both sides - the Philippine leadership that was in desperate need of foreign aid after the downturn of relations with the U.S. (hitherto its largest investor and aid-provider) and the Chinese elites who saw an opportunity in Philippine leaders who may have been more willing to compromise on the South China Sea as a return for large Chinese aid packages.<sup>42</sup> Yet as the extremely limited media exposure of the JMSU deal in 2004 demonstrates, the Chinese leadership seems to have lacked the confidence in officially publicizing the agreement. Had there been an elite consensus prior to 2004, the JMSU may have been publicized more and gained more attention as an achievement between China and the Philippines as the joint energy exploration agreement between China and Japan announced in 2008.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>March 15, 2005. The Chinese full name for the agreement is 南海联合海洋地震工作协议. It was only after Vietnam joined the JMSU and became the TMSU, that the Chinese government publicly referred to the agreement in its full name. This may have been because of vehement protest from Vietnam after China and the Philippines signed the original agreement in September 2004.

<sup>42</sup><https://www.csis.org/analysis/jmsu-tale-bilateralism-and-secrecy-south-china-sea>

<sup>43</sup>The agreement between China and Japan also lacks a formal name, although it is referred to as "Principled Consensus" (*yuan ze gong shi*) in China. However, unlike the JMSU, the Sino-Japan Joint Energy Principled Consensus enjoyed timely and extensive media coverage. It was made public by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on the day that the agreement was signed (June 18, 2008), and the full-text of the agreement was immediately pub-

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Some scholars may disagree that China did engage in active management of its disputes during the years from 2000 to 2012. However, such conclusions are based on a different criteria of what constitutes active management (definition of reassurance and provocation), or based on China's behavior towards multiple claimants, and especially Vietnam. For instance, Chubb (2019) points to year 2007 as a turning point in Chinese behavior in the South China Sea based on the initiation of several novel aggressive policies, of which includes the beginning of the regular rights defense patrols (定期维权巡航, or ding qi wei quan xun hang). The China Maritime Surveillance (Zhongguo haijian) vessels made frequent excursions around disputed territories in the South China Sea for which the Chinese claim has been traditionally weak or weakened by China's ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1996.<sup>44</sup> Yet similar to the JMSU, the onset of regular rights defense patrols was not officially acknowledged until much later, in 2013. In addition, the patrols were rarely targeted at the Philippines; in fact, most of Chinese aggressive behavior in 2007 had been directed to Vietnam, against its fishermen and energy exploration units.<sup>45</sup> Thus when we only count Chinese action that have been publicly acknowledged, there has been a clear lack of costly behavior during the first decade of the 21st century.

### **5.4.4 Case 4: After the Scarborough Shoal Standoff: An elite consensus that was slow in formation**

After a break of provocations and reassurances from 2000 to 2011, China resumed active management of its South China Sea claims against the Philippines after 2012 beginning with the Scarborough Shoal standoff in April 2012. While there was no elite consensus preceding 2012, after 2012 each year saw a strong elite consensus. This section first explains how China's active management

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lished in the People's Daily the following day (June 19, 2008). Both Wu Dawei (then vice foreign minister) and Yang Jiechi (foreign minister) each held press conferences to answer questions about the agreement (June 20 and 25, 2008, respectively), and the contents of the briefings were published in the People's Daily soon after.

<sup>44</sup>Chubb (2015)

<sup>45</sup>Fravel and Swaine (2011) notes that the PLA Navy had begun regular rights patrols as early as 2005.

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in the form of provocations in 2012 may have been possible despite the lack of elite consensus. Unlike the 1990s, when virtually none of the elites were discussing the territorial disputes as a predominant topic, by 2011 the South China Sea territorial dispute issue had gained enough foothold as a salient elite interest. Along with a couple of contributing factors, I mainly attribute the unprecedented aggressiveness of 2012 to the establishment of the Central Maritime Rights Protection Leading Small Group (中央海洋权益工作领导小组, or zhongyang haiyang quanyi gongzuo lingdao xiaozu) in which was headed by soon-to be Chinese head of state, Xi Jinping.<sup>46</sup>

Several features are noticeable with the Chinese elite discourse after 2010. As we have seen with previous years, with the passage of time we see that there is both an increase in the variety of publications as well as more articles published to reflect an increasing interest on the Philippines by Chinese elites. After 2010, there were 42 new publications that began publishing Chinese elite opinion on the subject of the Philippines. In addition, after 2010 each year had at least 30 articles, with 2016 having a record number of 74 articles in that year alone, which was the highest ever recorded for any given year. Perhaps the most noteworthy feature is the prominence of the U.S.-Philippines relations (alliance) topic. Beginning in 2010, elite attention and interest on the US alliance topic, which covers issues ranging from the U.S. involvement in the South China Sea on behalf of the Philippines, to the trajectory of the US-Philippine alliance grew; in 2013 and 2015 it almost ties with the topic of South China Sea as the most talked topic by Chinese elites when discussing the Philippines. It is not surprising that elite interest on the U.S.-Philippine relations topic began to peak at 2010. Year 2010 opened a new era of U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations with the new Philippine incumbent Benigno Aquino III attempting to strengthen security ties with the U.S. Beginning with the signing of the Manila Declaration commemorating 60 years of U.S.-Philippine alliance in November 2011, Aquino quickly turned from the China-centered foreign policy of his predecessor with a series of US-friendly security initiatives, such as the first-

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<sup>46</sup><https://amti.csis.org/chinas-maritime-rights-protection-leading-small-group-shrouded-in-secrecy/>

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ever Ministerial level dialogue the following year (also known as the 2+2),<sup>47</sup> and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) two years later, in April 2014. While increased elite interest seems to reflect these changes, it is noteworthy to observe that elite attention on the South China Sea topic falls far behind the U.S.-Philippines alliance topic until 2013. In fact, even after 2013, the South China Sea topic still does not overtake the elite attention paid to the US-Philippine alliance topic. It is only after 2016 that the South China Sea topic overtakes the US-Philippine alliance topic as the most popular topic with elite consensus. This greater elite attention towards the U.S.-Philippines relations topic up until 2016 reveals that the Chinese elites may have been more concerned about the U.S. as the *de facto* actor more so than the Philippines regarding Sino-Philippine disputes in the South China Sea related incidents after 2010.

Meanwhile, there is also a clear change in how China perceives Philippines as a security concern, as China explicitly referred to the Philippines as a U.S. ally (*tongmeng*) in 2012 for the first time since 2004.<sup>48</sup> The significance of the Chinese official usage of the word “*tongmeng*” when referring to the U.S. bilateral alliances in East Asia cannot be understated. China has often associated the hub-and-spoke system of U.S. bilateral alliances in East Asia with a definite negative sentiment, often calling it a “Cold-War era relic,”<sup>49</sup> or a clear threat to Chinese security interests. Instead of the unequivocal term “*tongmeng*,” China has often referred to the US-Philippines alliance using the word “*lianmeng*” (alignment), or more simply, “*guanxi*” (relations) or no explicit mention of the formal status of bilateral relations at all. Thus in the case of the Philippines, it is worth noting that in the span of less than a year, China went from merely mentioning of the US-Philippines bilateral joint exercises in 2011, to calling the relationship its full, formal title of alliance and mutual defense treaty by 2012.

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<sup>47</sup><https://www.csis.org/analysis/implications-and-results-united-states%E2%80%93philippines-ministerial-dialogue>

<sup>48</sup>See Yu (April 18, 2012). Prior to 2012, On August 25 2004, the *People's Daily* published a brief report noting that the Philippines is a major non-NATO ally of the U.S.

<sup>49</sup>For instance, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) repeatedly described the US-Japan alliance as a product of the Cold-war era (日美军事同盟是冷战时期特定背景下的双边安排2005.03.08). During Korean president Lee Myung-bak's official visit to China in May 2008, the MFA described the US-ROK alliance as a historical relic, (美韩军事同盟是一个历史遗留的产物 2008.05.27)



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Any time China refers the US-Philippines alliance as an alliance should not carefully noted, as China avoids using this term for the Philippines as much as possible. For example, on May 6 2014 China ran a single report on the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement between the U.S. and the Philippines (signed April 28 2014) but conspicuously avoided terming the relationship an alliance, instead referring the agreement as strengthening the two states' "military relationship" (*junshi guanxi*). Up until 2012, the *People's Daily* reports the US-Philippine bilateral military exercises without referring to the two states as formal military allies. After a single brief mention in December 2013, it is not until September 2016 that an article appears in the *People's Daily* that refers to the relationship as a formal alliance.<sup>50</sup> Based on these trends, Chinese leadership seems to have begun to view the U.S.-Philippine alliance in a much more negative light starting in 2012.

The 2012 Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao standoff is not readily explained by the theory of rising power foreign policy. Although elite attention on the territorial dispute was increasing (unlike throughout the 1990s, when elite attention to the topic of territorial disputes in the South China Sea was sporadic and negligible), elite consensus had been lacking in 2011. Based on the elite discourse that focused heavily on the US aspect of Philippine foreign policy, China may have chosen to actively manage its claims in the South China Sea against the Philippines largely out of concern for the growing U.S. threat and not necessarily Philippine's own strategy of taking the claims to the international arbitral court.

There are some additional explanations of how China's provocation in 2012 could occur without a consolidated elite. China's treatment of the April-May 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off is remarkable in several aspects. What began as a skirmish between Philippine surveillance vessels (which happened to be a U.S. Coast Guard decommissioned cutter *BRP Gregorio del Pilar*) attempting to apprehend illegal Chinese fishermen near the shoal and the dispatched Chinese maritime surveillance vessels trying to prevent the arrest of its own fishermen, evolved into a full-fledged diplomatic war between China and the Philippines with the former resorting to trade

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<sup>50</sup>See Yu and Shi (September 14, 2016); Yu and Yue (October 19, 2016).

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sanctions and travel bans on the latter. This provocation was the first-ever confrontation by official Chinese vessels against the Philippines' that was publicly acknowledged by China. The Chinese government chose to publicize the Scarborough Shoal incident at a frequency and intensity that was unprecedented. The Chinese MFA commented on the standoff incident 27 times between April 11 and June 6 2012, when the Philippine vessels withdrew (Even after the standoff ended in June 2012, the Chinese MFA continued to comment on the incident as late as into November 2012). In addition to the official MFA reaction, the People's Daily did not shy away from intensive reporting on the standoff; in fact, there were no fewer than 70 news reports in 2012 alone that mentioned the Scarborough Shoal/Huangyandao, which is intriguing given that up until 2012 actual mentions of this territorial dispute was extremely rare.<sup>51</sup>

The extensive coverage of the incident in the official media, as well as the government's official rhetoric via the MFA gives the impression of a Chinese leadership that actually wanted both its domestic and international audiences to follow closely and care about the standoff. Of all the strong provocations China committed towards the Philippines, it could be argued that the 2012 standoff was the costliest of them all, based on how active the Chinese government had been in promoting and publicizing the incident. It is all the more puzzling because in the actual course of events, while China may have emerged as the victor towards the end (as Philippine vessels had withdrawn first and China reneged on their promise to evacuate afterwards) China had not particularly done anything visibly impressive (such as cable-cutting or firing water cannons, as it had often done against the Vietnamese vessels) that could showcase China's growing naval prowess. The most aggressive action that was publicly acknowledged was China's stepping up administrative patrol (“加强了管控措施” 2012.05.23), and curiously China did not acknowledge sending reinforcements of naval and fishing vessels earlier that month (nor coordinating its actions with the PLA Navy) although this would have demonstrated China as a far more capable actor

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<sup>51</sup>In fact, the year that had the most coverage on the controversial Huangyandao/Scarborough Shoal claim before 2012 was in 2009, with 6 articles in total, and in 2001 with 5 articles. From 1978 to 2016, in 25 of the years not a single article was published in the *People's Daily* that mentioned this dispute.

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that could accomplish more than simple patrols. Similarly, the most aggressive peak in official government rhetoric was going from urge (“dun cu”) to strongly urge (“qiang lie dun cu”), which is still mild in comparison to terms such as “extremely dissatisfied” (“qiang lie bu man”) and “strongly oppose” (“jian jue fan dui”) that China has used to criticize unfavorable behavior by other claimants in the South China Sea. Thus the actual content of the extensive rhetoric and publicity sponsored by the Chinese government depicts a restrained actor that consistently attempts to lower tensions rather than a full-fledged great power showing off its relative power vis-a-vis a weak claimant like the Philippines.

China's extraordinary events of the April 2012 Scarborough Shoal crisis revealed an unusually restrained state in avoiding any comments related to the U.S.' role in the crisis. This is surprising given China has been consistently critical of the U.S. meddling in South China Sea issues, and in the case of the Philippines, as recently as in November 2011 following U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's pledge to help strengthen the Philippines' defense capabilities in the South China Sea, as well calling the South China Sea by the Philippine name of “West Philippine Sea” in official setting.<sup>52</sup> In the only mention of the U.S. during the April-May 2012 standoff, China avoided its usual comment of pointedly naming the US as an irrelevant outside party; instead, it used the phrase “each nation” (*ge guo*) as a broad warning not just to the U.S., but also to other claimants.<sup>53</sup>

I attribute China's decision to actively manage the Scarborough Shoal standoff in April 2012 to the emergence of a new high-level coordination mechanism, the Central Maritime Rights Protection Leading Small Group (中央海洋权益工作领导小组, or *zhongyang haiyang quanyi gongzuo lingdao xiaozu*). Unfortunately, detailed information about this important government

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<sup>52</sup>On both statements made on November 16 and 17 2011, MFA stated that it will only negotiate with the “relevant parties”; the criticism of outside forces was pronounced on both occasions (外部势力的介入，不仅无助于问题的解决，还会使问题更加复杂，不利于本地区的和平、稳定与发展2011-11-16; 引入外部势力无助于这一目标，反而使问题复杂化2011-11-17).

<sup>53</sup>China's more muted response may have been due to the U.S.' passive stance on the Scarborough Shoal during the US-Philippine 22 dialogue that coincidentally occurred in the same month as the standoff.

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organ is extremely limited. Basic facts such as when the group was launched (Jakobson suggests mid-2012, but the exact date is unknown), who serves in it, and what exact role it has played in the maritime-related incidents since 2012 are all publicly unavailable.<sup>54</sup> However, this group is known to have been under Xi Jinping's authority in 2012 prior to his official rise to power as China's head of state later in that year. Based on how similar China's management of the April 2012 standoff was to its management of several other maritime-related crises that followed—the establishment of the Sansha city on July 24, 2012, and China's official response to the September 2012 nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu island—it is plausible that the same unit was responsible for each event. Throughout 2012, there was unprecedented intensity and frequency in government rhetoric combined with publicity in official media, which defied China's track record in the previous decade of keeping a low profile when it came to territorial disputes, especially with maritime claims in the South China Sea. A possible underlying logic may have been Xi Jinping's eagerness to demonstrate his leadership skills and to establish himself as a leader capable of taking assertive action on controversial issues such as territorial disputes prior to assuming office, as the amount of publicity that the government allowed for each of the incidents had been unprecedented.

The elite discourse analysis suggests that after the April 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff, an elite consensus on security issues slowly evolved, enabling China to actively assert its competing claims in the following year. China's provocation against the Philippines in May 2013 regarding the contested Second Thomas Shoal/Ren'aijiao incident is not readily explained by the theory, either. The May 2013 incident counts as a strong provocation based on the fact that it was the first time that China had officially claimed the contested feature of Second Thomas Shoal/Ren'ai reef as subject to Chinese sovereignty<sup>55</sup> and that it was the first-ever acknowledged instance of official

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<sup>54</sup><https://amti.csis.org/chinas-maritime-rights-protection-leading-small-group-shrouded-in-secrecy/>;  
[http://ocean.china.com.cn/2013-03/02/content\\_28105606.htm](http://ocean.china.com.cn/2013-03/02/content_28105606.htm)

<sup>55</sup>Traditionally, China has been extremely reluctant to actually claim specific features of the South China Sea as Chinese territory in official setting. The only other features that have been officially claimed as Chinese territory in the South China Sea prior to claiming Second Thomas Shoal in 2013 are Reed Bank (1976), Mischief Reef (1995), Scarborough Shoal (1997), Thitu island/Zhong'ye dao (1999). This list does not include features that China has claimed unofficially over the years, such as the two reports published in the *People's Daily* on November 25, 1975 and

Chinese presence in a feature administered by the Philippines.

Along with the elite consensus that focused more keenly on security issues after 2012, I suggest that China's provocation in 2013 may also have been motivated by the Philippines' decision to submit the South China Sea territorial dispute to the arbitral tribunal under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in early 2013. Echoing Fravel (2008*b*) that China escalates in the face of declining claim strength, it is likely that China perceived a window of vulnerability when the Philippines announced their decision to submit their claims to the arbitral tribunal in January 2013. The Chinese government quickly criticized openly and officially through a series of comments from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>56</sup> While China carefully refrained from issue linkage at this stage of the conflict—China seems to have taken great care not to mention the Philippines' decision to take matters to the arbitral tribunal during the May 2013 incident on Second Thomas Shoal—subsequent Chinese behavior (especially after March 2014) confirms that its frustration with the unintended internationalization of the dispute was at least part of the reason for taking aggressive action at the Second Thomas Shoal confrontation. For instance, in January 2014, China offered to withdraw its surveillance vessels from Scarborough Shoal (which it had not left since the April 2012 standoff) as well as a promise of generous foreign aid and investment if the Philippines chose not to pursue the arbitration court to settle the claims. It was only after Philippines rebuffed the Chinese offer (as well as leaked the Chinese offer) that China resumed its anti-arbitration campaign, both on the diplomatic front as well as in the official media.<sup>57</sup>

By following the sequence of events from March to April 2014, one is able to confirm that Chinese actions on the Second Thomas Shoal/Ren'ai reef and Philippines' decision to proceed with

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April 25, 1983

<sup>56</sup>Official comments were made on January 23 2013, January 28 2013, February 1 2013, February 19 2013, March 26 2013, April 26 2013.

<sup>57</sup>Mentions of the arbitration court by the MFA ceased after July 2013, and did not resurface until March 2014. Similarly, after a passing mention in April 2013, the People's Daily did not publish on the arbitration court until March 2014. It is clear that China was dissatisfied with the Philippines' course of action, including the decision to publicize the offer to withdraw Chinese presence in Scarborough Shoal in exchange for halting the arbitration case, as China openly denied in official setting, pronouncing the rumors of such offers to be "entirely baseless" (original text 你提到的有关报道完全是子虚乌有 February 28, 2014 Archives of the Chinese MFA)

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international arbitration are closely intertwined. For example, when China publicly acknowledged for the first time its increased surveillance vessel patrols around Second Thomas Shoal on March 10 2014, China did not mention the arbitral tribunal in its official rhetoric nor in the *People's Daily*. However, once China receives the official notice of the Philippines' decision to pursue the arbitral tribunal process on March 26, China's official responses begin to harden. China's opposition towards the Philippines' decision to go ahead with the arbitral tribunal process is clearly stated in its MFA comment made on March 31, 2014: "As for the question of Ren'ai Reef (Second Thomas Shoal), I would like to point out that the day before the filing of the arbitration petition, the Philippines chose to organize correspondents to visit the waters of Ren'ai Reef. It is a deliberate plan to fabricate the problem of Ren'ai Reef for the purposes of gaining an upper hand in the international arbitration, an attempt by the Philippine side to illegally occupy the reefs of China's Ren'ai Reef. This shows that the Philippines' determination to to cover up its illegitimate occupation of Chinese territory and provoking incidents in the South China Sea, and an abuse of international legal norms."<sup>58</sup> As demonstrated by China's linkage of the two issues the Philippines' presence at the Second Thomas Shoal and the Philippines' arbitration court process, China seems to have decided to block the Philippines perceiving that its claim strength may potentially weaken in the shadow of the Philippines' initiation of the arbitration case.

Taken together, the April 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff and subsequent active management afterwards—the May 2013 Second Thomas Shoal standoff, the 2014 blockade and the acknowledgement of aggressive land reclamation near Mischief Reef in 2015—are best explained by elite consensus. That each action was provocative in nature, owes to the domestic and external circumstances at the time such as the establishment of the first-ever Central Maritime Rights Protection Leading Small Group and the Philippines' decision to take matters to an international

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<sup>58</sup>Original text, March 31 2014:“至于仁爱礁问题，我想指出，菲方选择在提交仲裁诉状的前一天组织记者到仁爱礁海域活动，完全是一起蓄意策划的行动，目的是进一步炒作仁爱礁问题，为菲方推进国际仲裁造势，为菲方非法侵占中国领土仁爱礁的企图服务。这充分表明，菲方一意孤行推进国际仲裁，是为了掩盖其非法侵占中国领土和在南海挑起事端的本质，是滥用国际法律手段的政治挑衅。” Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

We continue to observe elite consensus after 2014. For years 2016 and 2017, It is interesting to note that after the international arbitral tribunal court announced their ruling that favored the Philippines against China on July 12 2016, China again engaged in active management but this time in the form of reassurances. Not only was this the first time a South China Sea dispute claimant had taken its grievances to the UN arbitration court, but the ruling was decidedly against Chinese national interests as the outcome mostly upheld the Philippines' claims as legitimate. Curiously enough, however, China did not engage in provocations following the July 2016 announcement. On the contrary, China not only backed down on the Scarborough Shoal standoff with the ease of restrictions in October 2016, but they also agreed to the first-ever institutionalized settlement forum the following year, namely the China-Philippines Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea. Apart from the one-time negotiations held intermittently over the years (and without a formal title specific to the purpose of crisis management as most of them had been on the issue of energy development), this meeting remains the only institutionalized dialogue just for China and the Philippines specifically tailored to address the disputed territories and maritime claims between the two states. If Chinese elite consensus on security issues regarding the Philippines explains China's active management after 2012, we suggest that changes in the external security environment and domestic political factors accounts for why active management took the form of provocations from 2013-2015 and reassurances in 2016 and 2017.

In terms of elite consolidation, 2016 marked the peak of elite interest on China's territorial dispute with the Philippines in the South China Sea, with the highest number of articles published on this topic since 1978. Not surprisingly, all articles published in 2016 are elite criticisms of the unfavorable results of the international arbitral tribunal as most of the journals are government or party affiliated. Both the volume of attention, as well as the nearly unanimous tone of criticism is remarkable compared to 2012-2013 when there had been fewer reactions, and suggests that the arbitral tribunal results may have prompted a new elite consciousness to form. My key indepen-

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dent variable is the absence or presence of rising power elite consensus, as that is what facilitates inter-elite coordination necessary for the rising power to engage in costly foreign policy behavior towards its neighboring states.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, the external security environment saw a decrease in threat shortly after the arbitral court ruling came out in July 2016. Earlier in 2016, the official newspaper *People's Daily* made for the first time since 2013, several explicit references to the U.S.-Philippines relationship as a military alliance. Yet following the inauguration of the newly elected Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte in June 2016 the *People's Daily* began to highlight the negative aspects of the US-Philippines' alliance, the security cooperation unraveling quickly under Duterte announcing Philippine's new strategy of gaining more autonomy from the U.S. as well as the proposed gradual attenuation of US-Philippines' joint military exercises. By 2017, the *People's Daily* no longer referenced the U.S.-Philippine relationship as a military alliance, and conspicuously avoided negative portrayals of the security cooperation between the two states. In the only news report mentioning the bilateral relationship, the US commitment to the Philippines is depicted as even more transient, as the report focuses on Duterte's continued assertions of autonomy against the U.S. such as the denying the U.S. to build military bases on Philippine soil.<sup>60</sup>

While most analyses of Sino-Philippine relations during this period tend to either focus on the details of China's rejection of the arbitral tribunal decision, or use it as evidence of China's growing assertiveness.<sup>61</sup> Considerably less attention is paid to how little provocative action China has actually taken following the arbitral tribunal decision.<sup>62</sup> Against the expectations that China would ramp up provocative behavior against the Philippines even more vigorously than before,

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<sup>59</sup>If we look at the content of the individual writings rather than the relative amount of attention and sentiment portrayed by the elites, we might reach a different conclusion, such as China turning to a more provocative, not reassuring move towards the Philippines following the arbitral tribunal decision.

<sup>60</sup>See Ding and Zhiwen (January 31, 2017) “菲总统警告美勿在菲建军事设施”(Philippine President warns that the United States should not build military facilities in the Philippines)

<sup>61</sup>Swaine (2016)

<sup>62</sup>Thayer (June 28, 2017)



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China did not engage in new strong provocations. Part of the reason may be the China-leaning President Rodrigo Duterte, who had campaigned on an anti-US platform. Immediately after taking office Duterte did not shy away from distancing himself from his predecessor Benigno Aquino III's policy of working closely with the U.S. on national security. Recognizing the shift in Philippine's foreign policy, the Chinese MFA acted quickly and began referring to the tribunal outcome as a legacy of former president Benigno Aquino III, in an attempt to distinguish policies made under the "President Aquino/former government" (菲律宾阿基诺政府, or 菲律宾前政府) as opposed to Duterte. Beginning in August 2016, the MFA focuses on Duterte's statements and actions instead of the Philippines as the main actor when discussing the South China Sea dispute, choosing to highlight Duterte's potential for ignoring the tribunal outcomes for a direct bilateral negotiation with China. It is highly likely that Duterte's open criticism of the Philippines' dependence on the U.S. for its national security, as well as his willingness to work together with China aside from the tribunal results, contributed to the Chinese leadership's threat perception of the Philippines to decrease significantly. Along with just a single mention of the two states' security relations (without reference to the formal status of "military alliance") in 2017, the U.S.-Philippine joint bilateral exercises including a new exercise that began in October 2017.<sup>63</sup>

Relatedly, the fact that the U.S.-Philippine bilateral alliance has not been perceived as a consistent U.S. commitment as had the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK bilateral alliances may have also played a role China's reassurances. The U.S.-Philippine alliance had been initially weakened at the end of the Cold War with the removal of U.S. military bases, whereas the other two alliances remained stalwart, to a point of being augmented as regional, value-oriented alliances with bigger roles as guarantors of American military prominence than during the Cold War. Although the Philippines' territorial assertions may have strengthened in tandem with its security cooperation with the U.S. during the Benigno Aquino III era, Chinese elites may have had more confidence that the potential for U.S.' direct involvement in the South China Sea disputes was low. In the case

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<sup>63</sup>Parameswaran (October 2, 2017)

of the US-Japan alliance, there had been a baseline of expected U.S. behavior in a crisis between China and Japan in the East China Sea thanks to a number of public acknowledgements about US' treaty obligations to aid Japan in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. It is possible that a relative lack of information on the US' possible range of actions to help Philippines in the event of a crisis in the South China Sea had led the rising power to afford reassurance starting in 2016. Thus China's reassurances in 2016 and 2017 could have been motivated by the rising power's need to stop the progress of the internationalization of the bilateral territorial dispute, as well as managing a great power adversary operating in a nontraditional domain (South China Sea).

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I tested the implications of elite consolidation in a rising power's foreign policy behavior through the lens of the Sino-Philippines territorial dispute in the South China Sea. My approach differs from previous scholarship on China's behavior in the SCS in that it focuses only the actions in which the Philippines was a direct target of Chinese actions, and in that my explanation covers both the escalation (provocation) and de-escalation (reassurance) outcomes of the dispute. By focusing only on the unprecedented moves taken by the rising power in official capacity, I consider China's provocation and reassurances as two sides of the same coin: active management, or manifestations of a costly foreign policy.

I test a novel proposition that a rising power inherently avoids taking costly foreign policy measures during the course of its rise, as such behavior during the process of power transition renews popular expectations for new behavioral norms. The exception to this trend is when the rising power elite is unusually consolidated on security matters, measured by overwhelming (majority) attention to security issues and in a similarly negative tone. As a consolidated elite is easier to coordinate and control from the leaders' perspective, it provides an opportunity for the rising power leadership to pursue national interests without risking unmet expectations of its constituents

when it comes to sensitive foreign policy issues.

One potential critique of the theory of rising power foreign policy is the possibility of reverse causality: It is possible that such strong provocation and reassurances—instead of being the product of elite consensus—could actually be the means to conjure elite consensus. The rising power leadership may proceed with costly policy to “test the waters” and see what the domestic and international reaction would be like, and ideally, shore up more support for its regime. However, this logic suffers from two shortcomings. First, there is too much risk involved on the part of the leaders to “try out” a costly and often irrevocable policy on a sensitive national security issue, as elites can already be quite diversified. Also, costly foreign policy behavior can backfire, embolden key elite factions instead of uniting them on a single, government-sanctioned position. Second, even if the leaders succeed in making their elites “rally around the flag,” it then faces an even greater challenge of having to fulfill new expectations on foreign policy behavior and become burdened by additional criteria for judging regime competency. International backlash especially from the rising power’s main adversary may outweigh the short-term domestic gains.

In the case of China’s active management of its territorial and maritime disputes with the Philippines in the South China Sea, China has engaged in mainly provocations during the late 1990s followed by no active management throughout the 2000s, and both provocations and reassurances after 2012. While the variation is largely in accordance with the theory after 2000s, the 1990s are not completely explained by my theory. One reason seems to be that since the SCS is a multi-claimant dispute, China had taken provocations towards the Philippines when motivated to take similar action to other claimant states. Another reason is that until 2016, when the Philippines took their grievances directly to the U.N. arbitral tribunal and received a favorable ruling, China did not take the Philippines as a major security threat. Both factors influenced China’s policy towards the Philippines by delaying the interpretation of Sino-Philippine South China Sea disputes as a key security concern in Chinese elite discourse, and led to long stretches of time (all years prior to the mid-1990s, all of 2000-2012) during which China virtually took no costly foreign policy decisions

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against the Philippines.

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# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I summarize the findings of the dissertation, which tests the theory of elite-based foreign policy behavior change in rising China on Japan, Korea and the Philippines. I then highlight the theoretical and empirical contributions that the dissertation has made to IR in general and the larger political science literature. Finally, I suggest a research agenda for future studies, as well as policy implications of the findings. In this study, I explained the variation of a rising power's management of its security disputes during its power transition. While there have been several studies looking at why and how rising powers and declining powers attempt both preventive and preemptive wars during power transition, there have been relatively few studies that have examined the rising power's behavior at 1) a lower level of hostility than an outright war 2) towards states other than the great power adversary (such as a declining or dominant power) and 3) account for both inactivity as well as activity, and provocative as well as reassuring gestures. To address each of these shortcomings, I study a rising power's interactions (and the lack thereof) with its non-great power neighboring states, and also turn to many understudied events such as naval vessel intrusions and official proclamations of territorial claims (as long as they challenge

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the status quo) as I relax the assumption that only the highest and most visible forms of hostility are worth studying in a rising power's foreign policy behavior.

Based on modifications of theories presented by Snyder (1993) and Schweller (2006) of elite factions and elite mobilization in rising power grand strategy, I construct a theory of elite consensus-enabled foreign policy behavior change. I argue that any action taken by the rising power that challenges the status quo of a security dispute with its neighboring state is a costly one, whether it be a provocative move or a reassuring one. I argue that due to the high cost of such drastic foreign policy changes, a rising power is likely to attempt such costly changes if the top leaders have strong control of their own elites, leading to a consolidation of elite attention and elite preferences. Using elite discourse unity as a measurement of elite consolidation, I theorize that active management, or costly foreign policy change that can either take the form of a provocation or a reassurance, would be more likely to occur if the rising power elites are in agreement about two things: first, the rising power elites must agree that security is the most important issue regarding that particular neighboring state, an agenda that triumphs all other issue areas such as trade and economic relations, or the neighboring state's domestic political or social upheaval. Second, even if the elites' predominant concern is about security, the elites must also agree on the tone with which they discuss their security concerns. Active management is more likely only if elites are both highly interested in security issues and unequivocally negative in their sentiment when discussing those issues.

### **6.2 Summary of Findings**

I test this theory on the case of rising China and its active management (or lack thereof) of security disputes with each of its neighbors Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. Each case was chosen based on the similarity of all three states having a grave security dispute with rising China since 1978 (a territorial dispute in the case of Japan and the Philippines, and a state of war against South

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Korea through North Korea) being a formal ally to the rising power's main great power rival, the US. It is also crucial to note that while each of the three states differ significantly from one another in the size of their respective domestic economy, interstate trade and investment volume with China, and historical relations with China, thanks to the toning down of Communist revolutionary zeal after Deng Xiaoping's coming into power rising China's baseline foreign policy towards each of these three states have been remarkably consistent. For instance, just because Japan had an acrimonious past with China prior to 1945, did not mean that China would apply a different set of priorities towards Japan than the Philippines; rather, China has consistently favored strengthening economic relations over resolving security disputes towards all three countries to date as a grand strategy of continued growth. This allows us to study Chinese elite attention and tone on security topics towards each of Japan, Korea and the Philippines over time without the burden of possible shift in grand strategy or direction in foreign policy.

In the case of Japan, I find that the theory performs strongly in explaining the absence of active management for most years concerning the study—absence of elite consensus in the late 1990s and 2000s resulting in a lack of active management, and the emergence of an elite consensus that may have enabled China's unprecedented provocation and reassurance after 2011. The strength of the theory applied to the Sino-Japan dispute over the East China Sea lies in its ability to offer a more nuanced explanation that differs from existing accounts of Chinese behavior. For instance, although many researchers single out 2010 as a critical point of China becoming more aggressive after a Chinese fishing trawler captain rammed a Japanese Coast Guard vessel near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, I refute the claim by pointing out the lack of any follow-up provocations in the aftermath when we count just the official government actions alone. In another example, I point out that the lack of elite consensus inside China during the 1990s may have resulted in China not taking any concrete steps in active management of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands despite there being an awareness of a sudden resumption of Japanese activity on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands during that time.

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In the case of Korea, the theory of elite consensus also outperforms existing theories of Sino-Korean relations in that it is capable of explaining both the increase in provocative gestures by China as well as the absence thereof. Whereas scholars have frequently omit why China had not been so critical of South Korea's defensive military posture against North Korea throughout the 1990s and 2000s, I suggest that a key reason could be the inability of the Chinese elite to come to an agreement that when it came to discussing China's Korea policy. Not only were security-related concerns secondary, but also even among the elites paying attention to security, the focus was on cooperation and not necessarily on the more contentious issues such as the US-Korea alliance. Using the theory of elite consensus, similar to Japan I also refute the commonly stated argument that China suddenly became much more aggressive against South Korea starting in 2010 in the aftermath of the Korean naval vessel *Cheon'an* sinking. For the case of Korea, the challenge of the theory remains in identifying the secondary factors for why China's active management took the form of reassurance in the earlier half of the period (2000-2009) and provocations in the later half (2010-2017).

In the case of the Philippines, the theory of elite consensus finds supporting evidence in most of the years under study (1978 - 2017), except the mid- to late- 1990s. This is because the 1990s was the first time China had engaged in active management of the disputes in the South China Sea against the Philippines beginning with the Mischief Reef incident in 1995, but there had not been any signs of elite consensus that predicted China to attempt such costly foreign policy change. On the other hand, the theory finds support in later years, beginning with a lack of elite consensus on security from 2000-2010 resulting in China abstaining from active management, and the emergence of elite consensus in viewing the Philippines as a key security threat starting in 2012 coinciding with China's active management of the South China Sea dispute.

Overall, the theory performs poorly in several occasions in the 1990s where rising China's elites were not consolidated based on my measurement using elite discourse, but China ended up engaging in active management, or vice versa. This occurred in the case of Japan in the late 1990s



(elite consensus but no active management), in Korea in the late 1990s (elite consensus but no active management), in the Philippines in the mid 1990s (no consensus but active management). I offer a couple of alternative explanations on why this may be the case, and also acknowledge that the relative dearth of elite discourse prior to 2000 could be driving this result.

### **6.3 Contribution, policy implications and future research agenda**

Identifying the domestic political conditions related to a rising power's foreign policy shift helps us predict the likelihood of a future provocation or a reassurance. In addition, the dissertation makes several policy implications for better understanding how rising China manages its security disputes with neighboring states in the region.

My dissertation makes several contributions to the field of International Relations, specifically on the study of rising powers and foreign policy behavior. On the literature concerning power transitions and rising power politics, my dissertation sheds light on a previously understudied aspect of rising power-declining power dynamic by including the rising power's foreign policy behavior towards non-great power neighboring states. Studying the interactions between a rising power and its non-great power neighbor is important because major conflict often start out as an aggression by the rising power on a non-great power, rather than as an immediate challenge to the dominant power.

The dissertation also contributes to theory building and theory testing in comparative foreign policy, especially for non-democratic states. Specifically, on the literature of coercive diplomacy and crisis bargaining, my dissertation offers a new lens to understand how a non-democratic regime could still engage in coercive diplomacy albeit its relative lack of public information and political competition. This approach expands the research on the nexus of domestic politics and foreign policy by using elite discourse to measure elite consolidation. If monthly discourse data becomes available, it would allow us to identify variation that may occur more frequently than at

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the yearly level, which is the unit of analysis of this dissertation.

For policy implications, I suggest that the growing attention on the role of public opinion in influencing foreign policy outcomes inside China is warranted, but is incomplete without also taking into consideration the role of elite opinion. This is especially the case for countries such as Korea and the Philippines and most of China's neighbors that are not great powers and those states towards whom the Chinese public do not harbor historical animosity or trauma. Even for the case of Japan, it is useful to contrast elite responses with that of the public to see if they are similar in intensity and sentiment. This is because public opinion could be a genuine sampling of the masses or engineered top-down by elite motivation. If the former, then it is still interesting how public and elite opinions came to diverge. If the latter, then it becomes all the more crucial that elite opinion be well defined and the causal mechanism by which elite cue-giving results in the shaping of public opinion on foreign policy, which has largely been overlooked in the study of foreign policy behavior in authoritarian regimes.

I also stress the importance of evaluating elite opinion systematically and comprehensively when studying China's foreign policy behavior. With a proliferation of specialized and private media channels and online social media accounts, there seems to be no shortage of elite opinion for every issue at hand. However, I point out that the most outspoken elites are not necessarily representative of overall elites. An elite like Admiral Luo Yuan of the PLA may be a skilled firebrand with anti-Japanese rhetoric, but it would be misleading to take his remarks as a demonstration of elite preferences if not also supported with additional evidence that attest to both the volume of elite interest as well as sentiment in the same negative direction as Luo's comment.

In addition, I highlight the usefulness of analyzing provocations and reassurances together as two sides of the same coin—a rising power actively management its dispute by taking costly gestures. I point out that often highly reassuring gestures follow not long after highly provocative ones when it comes to territorial and maritime disputes, as in the case of the Philippines following the landmark arbitration court ruling in 2017. The theory of elite consensus suggests that either

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reassurance or provocation becomes more likely if elites are well consolidated, and that provocations and reassurances could be better explained using factors that could cause both, instead of one at the exclusion of the other.

Finally, I point to how one should take into consideration the role of a great power such as the US when deciphering relations between China and its less powerful neighboring states. Previous scholarship has looked into whether great power involvement is a destabilizing or stabilizing force, especially within alliances and for the target countries of the alliance Avey and Reardon (2018). However, few have studied the effect of whether a dominant great power patron's increased presence in the region results in more or less conflict-prone behavior between the client and the rising power Kim and Ko (2020). A common assumption is that the strengthening of relations between the great power patron and a client may trigger provocative gestures from the rising power, as in the case of China against the strengthening of the US-alliances in Japan, Korea and the Philippines. My dissertation suggests that this is not necessarily the case, as China did not become more provocative in response to the increased cooperation between US and its allies in East Asia. For instance, although the US-Japan alliance expanded in 1997, China did not follow up with any provocations on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Similarly, although the US-Korea alliance deepened in 2008 following the victory of a pro-US president, China did not behave provocatively against South Korea until 2010. Finally, while China began its aggressive gestures on Philippines-claimed Mischief Reef in starting in 1995, this was already 3 years after the US had withdrawn from Subic Bay, the former US naval base in the Philippines, in 1992. Rather, this study argues that instead of relying only on external factors such as alliance activities, the preferences and organization of domestic political elites play a key role in understanding why a rising power is belligerent towards neighboring client-states at certain times and not at others.

Future research would greatly benefit from paying more attention to the following. One major understudied area is the *interactive* nature of provocations and reassurances between China and each of its regional non-great power neighbors. While my dissertation focused more on the

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motivations behind Chinese actions, I acknowledge the necessity of incorporating critical junctures provided by the neighboring states as well. Another area that the dissertation could explore is the relationship between elite consolidation and higher levels of hostility in foreign policy behavior. Whereas the dissertation only looked at the presence and absence of active management (in the form of provocation and reassurance), future studies could test if the theory of elite consolidation also holds for more dramatic and aggressive events such as outbreak of war or territorial concession. One could also refine the theory to see if certain configurations of elite consolidation makes conflict more likely than cooperation, as in this dissertation the elite consolidation factor predicts whether or not active management takes place but does not go address *type*, or whether active management takes the form of provocation or reassurance.

Yet another area that this dissertation could further develop is how elite consolidation could work in conjunction with the theory of issue linkage and bargaining leverage. Interstate negotiations that occur in the aftermath of a provocation can also affect the intensity and frequency of the next round of active management, as either the rising power or its neighboring state demand or offer concessions on issue areas other than security disputes (such as improving cultural relations and deepening trade and investment). While in this dissertation we did not look in depth the role of high-level talks as a factor itself (mainly due to the unavailability of written reports on what had been negotiated on both sides), in future work it would be useful to study the role of interstate talks that took place prior to China's major provocation or reassurance. The point would be not to identify whether or not the causal mechanism of issue linkage existed at all, but rather on how issue linkage affected elite preferences towards a given neighboring state. For instance, in the case of China's remarkable restraint towards South Korea throughout the 1990s, the series of high-level visits and negotiations on trade and economic relations that began around the time of the two states' normalization in 1992 may have played a larger role in shifting elite cognizance of South Korea compared to 2012, and was more effective in preventing China from engaging in provocative behavior.

## *CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION*

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Empirically, the dissertation would greatly benefit from expanding the dataset of elite discourse, both on a temporal scale and by biographical characteristics. Instead of an yearly aggregate of preferences, monthly data such as blog or weibo content that tracks the amount of activity and sentiment could reveal more accurate patterns of elite preferences. Testing the generalizability of the theory of elite consensus on other rising powers in power transition, both historical and contemporary, would be useful—fine-grain elite discourse available from historical cases would help with refining the theory’s causal mechanism, and comparing with how elite consensus plays out in other contemporary cases could reveal factors that are unique to China’s elite. For instance, testing the theory on Bismark Germany or Taisho and Showa era Japan prior to the breakout of the Second World War could be useful to fill in the details of the process of how elite consensus actually results in the costly foreign policy decision.

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