

USJI Week Collaborated Lecture 2: Japan and the Asian Power Shift

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3:00pm-4:30pm

Georgetown University

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Moderator

Dr. Victor Cha, Director of Asian Studies and D.S. Song-Korea Foundation Chair,
Georgetown University

Dr. Victor Cha welcomes the audience and starts off by briefly outlining the agenda for today's lecture. He then proceeds with introducing the two speakers, Dr. Akihiko Tanaka and Dr. Michael Green. Dr. Cha then hands the floor to Dr. Tanaka for his discussion.

Speakers

Dr. Akihiko Tanaka, Chair, USJI/Vice President, The University of Tokyo

Dr. Tanaka briefly introduces his position as Chair of the USJI, as well as the USJI itself. He wishes to lay out a few issues, both theoretical and practical, to facilitate the audience joining in with opinions and questions.

Dr. Tanaka notes that just from following the news, one can see that China is constantly growing while Japan has been stagnant. Considering how Japan was a once a giant predicted to be capable of overtaking even the United States, one can clearly see that there has been a power shift. But what is a power shift? What does it entail and what are its implications?

He quotes Thucydides to help explain this: "The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable." Dr. Tanaka reasons that power shifts have since ancient times been a very important source of war. The question now is whether we can expect a war from the current power shift.

Dr. Tanaka gives some background on the power shift theory, which was first written on by A.F.K. Organski in his 1958 book "World Politics". Organski's theory divided global powers into tiers: the dominant or hegemonic power, great powers, middle powers and minor powers. According to this theory, among the great powers there are those that are dissatisfied with the international order established by the dominant power, and will pose a challenge to it.

Since the industrial revolution, nations have become capable of growing and developing internally and without having to rely on other nations. Dr. Tanaka illustrates Organski's argument that once a rising power reaches a point where it is almost equal to the hegemonic power, there will be incentives from both sides to start a war. The hegemonic power will

attempt to crush the rising power before it overtakes them, while the rising power will seek to completely and permanently remove the hegemonic power from play.

According to this theory, there have been numerous examples of this scenario throughout history. Dr. Tanaka cites the Napoleonic Wars, World War I and World War II as modern examples. He notes that some scholars have argued that the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 was also a result of power transition. Dr. Tanaka also recalls China's recent ascension to the position as the second largest economic power in the world, overtaking Japan in the process. He wonders if this is also an example of the power shift as detailed in Organski's theory.

Dr. Tanaka details the findings of a survey of Japanese feelings towards China from 1978 to 2010. He explains that the significant shifts in the opinion poll have corresponded with events in history. The Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1978 saw a period when Japan had mostly friendly feelings towards China, but this situation changed dramatically following the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. Negative feelings toward China jumped significantly once again in 2003 following Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine and China's subsequent reaction. The situation continued to deteriorate and positive feelings toward China in Japan hit a historic low in 2010 when Beijing decided to halt Rare Earth exports to Japan to retaliate against its handling of the then recent fishing boat incident. The Japanese sentiment is that Chinese reactions have been excessively emotional and irrational.

Dr. Tanaka is, however, optimistic about the situation and believes that there is no evidence suggesting a tendency towards war despite negative sentiments. However, he adds that the situation might be different in the future, when China finally reaches parity with the U.S.

As another factor to consider, Dr. Tanaka observes that there have been instances in history when a power transition did not result in war. The most prominent example of this is the U.S. overtaking Britain's position as the global power in the 19th Century. He then provides five potential factors that explain this scenario:

- If the growing power is satisfied with the international order, it will not seek to challenge this.
- If the dominant power has enough flexibility to adapt to the power shift and accommodate the rising power, the probability of war becomes lower.
- If the rising power is limited in its potential, when it does not have the capacity to significantly overtake the hegemon, the incentive to start a war increases.
- Conversely, if the rising power is so large and overtaking the hegemonic power appears inevitable, the likelihood of war declines as the hegemonic power tends to accommodate.
- Finally, there should be concrete issues of contention for a war to take place.

Dr. Tanaka then incorporates these five factors into the Chinese case:

- China is currently one of the most successful economic powers, because the current international order is suited to its growth. China should be one of the most satisfied countries in the current international order. If so, it is unlikely that the Chinese would

destroy such an accommodating system. But there signs of dissatisfaction in the Chinese media.

- The US relies heavily on Chinese exports and Japan has poured numerous investments into China. Dr. Tanaka argues that they can be quite flexible in their stance towards China.
- While China's growth is indeed rapid, Dr. Tanaka argues that this is because it had started at a very low point, and it would take a considerable amount of time for China to reach parity with the US.
- Furthermore, the size of China is quite big. If all parties understand its rise inevitable and unstoppable, the status quo powers may all accommodate its rise.
- Until recently the Taiwan straits was a sensitive issue that would fit this standard, but relations between China and Taiwan have improved marvelously. The Korean peninsula and the Senkaku islands might become potential problems that can trigger military conflicts but they are currently more or less under control.

Therefore, peaceful rise of China is quite possible. But there are still many uncertainties about the five factors. Dr. Tanaka concludes his discussion with a few quoted lines from the recently elected Noda's Prime Ministerial speech in regards to relations with China and the US. He notes that while Noda's reference to the US is very straightforward, his statement to China was very complex. Prime Minister Noda wants China to become a satisfied power with responsibility towards maintaining stability in the region. Dr. Tanaka questions how we would proceed with persuading Beijing into assuming this role, and notes that in any case it would be best for Japan and the US to maintain its current strategic alliance.

Dr. Michael Green, Associate Professor, Georgetown University

Dr. Green notes that he will provide brief comments on Japan's role in maintaining the strategic equilibrium and some observations on the five variables in Dr. Tanaka's discussion. He begins by giving a few insights into Japan's options in dealing with China as a rising power, in regards to the frameworks in Organski's theory. According to Dr. Green, Japan essentially has three options.

- Internal balancing: very complicated for Japan, because the economy prevents significant increases in defense spending, and the political and diplomatic costs for developing weapons would be almost if not completely prohibitive. There are, however, real opportunities for internal balancing such as in restructuring the economy to expand trade liberalization or empowering women. Reforming security policies to remove constraints left over from the post-war era also would free up significant power. Dr. Green believes that Prime Minister Noda understands this, but wonders what he can do.
- External balancing: Japan has only recently been expanding security cooperation beyond the United States, which can be seen through security treaties with Australia, India and South Korea. There exist many more untapped opportunities and neglected

relationships that would benefit Japan's power greatly. Dr. Green observes that Noda understands this as well.

- Bandwagoning: this was once thought to be a high possibility among scholars in the US, but the survey cited by Dr. Tanaka shows why this is unlikely. There are small examples of quasi-bandwagoning in the form of Japanese business investment in China.

Japan has opportunities to play a more active role in the strategic equilibrium, but there are fundamental challenges especially in a rapid changing political environment. Dr. Green moves on to introduce two points for consideration on China.

Firstly, he stresses that we do not know the answers to the questions that have been raised regarding China. He also notes there is currently growing dissatisfaction but high expectations in China, a situation that had previously led to Japan's military involvement in World War II.

Regarding the flexibility of the hegemonic power and using the case of Britain in America's rise, Dr. Green argues that flexibility had less of a role than the regime type. He believes that Britain could afford to be flexible because the US had an open and transparent political system, much in contrast to German or Japan's systems during their rise. Dr. Green notes that China's transparency and openness, is something that we must wait on. His opinion is that war is unlikely, considering that all sides involved understand the enormous costs that it carries.

Discussion

Dr. Cha offers a few questions for Dr. Tanaka and Dr. Green. To Dr. Tanaka, he asks whether China could potentially reach a point in its growth where its perspective towards the international system changes. To Dr. Green, he asks if there could be a fourth reaction from Japan, which is to buck pass the problem to the United States and simply do nothing.

Dr. Tanaka first provides his opinion on Dr. Green's observations, stating he would add regime type as another factor. If China were to transform fully into a democracy, this would obviously have an impact on how flexible and accommodating the other democratic powers are towards it. On Dr. Cha's question, he believes that it is quite possible. This can be seen in the example of Germany, when it grew successful economically under the Kaiser but came to believe that its desires could not be accomplished within the current order.

However, 19th Century Germany is different from China today; China's economic success is highly dependent on the liberal nature of international society. Of course, if China were to also believe that it is successful enough to discard external relations, it could possibly tread this path. A geopolitical similarity China shares with Germany is that both nations has the power to threaten all its neighbors, but at the same time they constantly feel threatened by the possibility of an united front against it. Dr. Tanaka adds that he is quite open ended on this topic.

Dr. Tanaka also observes that, in contrast to the recent coercive diplomacy, China has been playing a smile diplomacy to coop their neighbors. Most recently, Beijing extended invitations to the Philippines and Vietnam, and subsequently poured a large amount of investment into the Philippines. There is a possibility that all Southeast Asian nations will bandwagon with China, resulting in a situation where the US does not have the basis to intervene in future issues.

Dr. Green agrees that buck passing is indeed an option, nothing that Japan has more than often utilized this method. He does, however, add that there are serious challenges in doing this as relying on another power poses the risks of abandonment. He observes that Noda believes in striving against abandonment.

Dr. Cha then asks for Dr. Green's opinion on China's actions in 2010. Dr. Green believes that this was a misstep for China and they will have to deal with the consequences in the next 5 to 10 years. His opinion is that, tactically, everyone will try to avoid conflict.

Dr. Cha asks Dr. Tanaka for his insights on Prime Minister Noda's position on history and the Yasukuni issue. Dr. Tanaka thinks that Noda is quite pragmatic towards history and quite different from Koizumi and other previous ministers. According to Dr. Tankana, Noda will try to remove the history issue in dealing with China, as it would only result in futile arguments.