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국제학석사학위논문

# **Is China Increasingly Assertive Towards South Korea?**

**: South Korea Caught in Between the US-Japan  
Alliance and Rising China**

중국은 한국에게 더 강경한가?

: 미일-중 사이의 한국

2016년 8월

서울대학교 국제대학원

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## **Abstract**

### **Is China Increasingly Assertive Towards South Korea?**

**: South Korea Caught in Between the US-Japan Alliance and Rising China**

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Since 2010, scholars and media mostly from the US created a increasingly “assertive” China hype, like another strand of China threat theory. The narrative has three weaknesses. First, China is demonized by a lopsided, negative definition of assertiveness. Second, the narratives analyze Chinese action towards diverse actors to assess its intention, which is unsuitable for individual states’ policy making towards China. Third, the attitude is interpreted from the perspectives of the US and its allies, excluding others and ignoring the diverging interest amongst the US and its allies. This research presents a new definition and typology of assertiveness, based on international relations and behavioral science. It evaluates the bilateral relationship between China and South Korea in security issues. Based on the new framework, seven case studies were examined, finding whether or not China is increasingly assertive towards South Korea since 2010 in security issues, and if yes, what kind of assertive. The analysis found that China is defensive assertive or non-assertive in bilateral relationship with South Korea, defending its existing interest or not defending it

at all. However, when the issues with Seoul also involve Japan or the US, China is offensive assertive, expanding its interest. It displays Chinese “assertiveness” depends on the actors and in this case, more towards the US and Japan, but less towards South Korea. However, Seoul and Tokyo is linked to Washington through military alliance. Inevitably caught in the triangular relationship and facing the Sino-US, Sino-Japan rivalry, South Korea will have to face a dilemma between the two giants: the US-Japan alliance and China. Other countries, especially in Asia, are caught in the similar impasse.

**Keywords:** Assertiveness, China, behavioral science, China-US relations, China-ROK relations, China-Japan relations, Air Defense Identification Zone, the Yeonpyeong shelling, the Cheonan submarine sinking, maritime disputes, US-ROK military exercise.

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## 1. Introduction

It is no longer a debate that China is a great power, increasingly stronger. Currently, one of the intense debates in international relations lies in whether or not China is assertive and progressively more assertive. This discussion has been critical, since the changing nature and degree of Chinese assertiveness have often been used to determine Chinese intentions to become a revisionist power. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008, many US analysts, government officials and media started to argue that China's rhetoric and behavior started to change; China became "assertive."<sup>1</sup> By 2010, the discussion of assertive China narrative became fervent, like another strand of the "China threat theory." Many pointed to issues such as the South China Sea, Senkaku/Diaoyudao incidents, and response to Yeonpyeong shelling as evidence of such conventional wisdom.

The assertive China narrative has three weaknesses. First, the definition of assertiveness is often unclear or askew, demonizing China. What does it mean for China to be assertive in this narrative? Despite this raucous discussion about Chinese assertiveness, there is no consensus on the definition of assertiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 7.

Assertiveness is not a term to describe state action in international relations. However, there are some commonalities of the articles and commentaries that use the word assertive. In these narratives, assertive usually refers to aggressive, confrontational behavior, mostly against the US and its allies. Is this a fair, analytically meaningful definition when describing Chinese foreign policy across issues with different actors? In contrast, in behavioral science, where the word originated from, an assertive person can be also a confident, progressive, respectable person.<sup>2</sup> So, is there another way to define and categorize assertiveness in international relations that makes the discussion a more balanced view of China, instead of demonizing China as a threat from US mass media and pundits?

Second, the narrative evaluates general Chinese action towards different actors in diverse issue areas but lacks a specific bilateral analysis, which is critical when individual states make foreign policy. In one essay, the standard of gaging Chinese assertiveness would range from a statement in UN environment to maritime disputes with the Philippines to reaction to the Cheonan submarine sinking. Such analysis is problematic because a Chinese action can be perceived as assertive to one country, but not to another. For an example, a new, larger

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<sup>2</sup> Ding Ding Chen and Xiaoyu Pu, "Debating China's Assertiveness," *International Security* 38, no. 3 (2013/2014): 176.

Chinese military exercise with Russia could be considered assertive towards the US but beneficial to Russia. From the policy making perspective of a country, how China is acting towards the country, rather than how it is acting across the board is important in policy decision. A country may adopt a policy that provokes Beijing, based on a generally and wrongly perceived sense of assertive Beijing. Third, even if the narratives specify assertiveness towards certain actors as often the US and US allies, such a definition is still inadequate. US allies do not necessarily share the exact same position, interest and policy options with the US. Such analysis thus ignores the subtleties.

This research proposes a new definition and typology for “assertiveness,” departing from a lopsided, negative definition of the term. It synthesizes the concept in behavioral science and international relations. Then, it analyzes Chinese assertiveness towards South Korea by conducting seven case studies regarding security issues between the two states, recognizing China’s ardent claim on security issues such as territory and sovereignty. The research includes the case studies that occurred since 2010 and those that began earlier but continued past 2010. In each case study, there are two main points of discussion; was China is newly assertive post 2010? If yes, what kind of assertive was it, based on the typology? Some bilateral security issues inevitably were entangled with external actors such as the US and Japan. In such cases, a comprehensive

analysis was conducted to paint the whole picture. The case studies primarily focus on Beijing's actions, legal/ official statements and submissions. The secondary sources are from leadership comments and the official Chinese media. Afterwards, the paper presents the finding that in the Sino-Republic of Korea (ROK) bilateral relationship, Beijing is more aggressive when the conflict is related to the US and/or Japan, while less so when just involving South Korea. Then, it conducts a comparative risk analysis on the case studies. Based on the result, it presents policy suggestions on high risk Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ issue.

Currently, there is no source written in English that analyzes Chinese assertiveness specifically focused on Sino-ROK relations. The available researches only present a few cases of Chinese assertiveness towards South Korea as part of a general analysis of Chinese actions across the globe. The few examples include the Chinese reaction to Yeonpyeong shelling and towards the sinking of the Choenan. Nonetheless, many studies have been conducted regarding the overall Sino-ROK relationship. The available studies on this bilateral relationship since 1992 normalization generally focus on the trend of improving relationship in economics, diplomacy and even security, despite fluctuations during different administrations. Some scholars argue that China has focused on balancing against the US and Japan but tried to engage South

Korea. They also claim South Korea is leaning towards China and accommodating it.<sup>3</sup> However, since 2010 and even earlier, South Korea and China displayed signs of disputes in wide range of areas including trade, North Korean policy, territorial disagreements, history and etc.<sup>4</sup> Although the bilateral relationship remains benign in general, the sources of conflict have been growing, some dormant and some surfacing. South Korea must view and analyze these issues and Chinese actions before they become full blown disputes.

Chinese assertiveness towards ROK is a meaningful bilateral analysis; ROK is one of many countries especially in Asia that faces a dilemma between the two great powers: the US and China. Tied to Washington by a long lasting military alliance and geographically sandwiched between a growing economic and political partner Beijing and another US ally Japan, South Korea is stuck in a political impasse. It is doubtlessly an interesting case that displays many Asian countries dilemma since the rise of China; which side does one choose? When and for what?

In summary, is China assertive towards South Korea? This paper argues

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Ross, "Balance of Power Politics and the Rise of China: Accommodation and Balancing in East Asia," *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 355-395.

<sup>4</sup> Chung, Jae Ho. "Korean Views of Korea-China Relations: Evolving Perceptions and Upcoming Challenges," *Asian Perspective* 36, no. 2 (2012): 468-83.

two main points: i) There are four different types of assertiveness (active offensive, reactive offensive, active defensive, reactive defensive); they are defined by expanding/existing interest and provocation/no provocation from the other party; ii) China is (active/reactive) offensive assertive when the dispute with South Korea is related to Japan and/or the US, but is (active/reactive) defensive assertive when related only to South Korea. The paper is divided into six sections: i) introduction, ii) literature review, iii) framework/model, iv) case studies, v) analysis and implications, vi) conclusion.

## **2. Literature Review**

Assertiveness does not have a theoretical basis in international relations. However, many scholars have written specifically about Chinese “assertiveness.” The majority of government officials, media, and scholars in the US argue that China is progressively aggressive, but there are some diverging views in academia. This section, points to China scholars who commented substantially on it, explaining three points for each author: i) The author’s definition of assertiveness if the author presents one; ii) whether or not China is assertive and/or increasingly assertive; iii) the significance of Chinese “assertiveness.”

### ***2.1 “Chinese Assertiveness” in International Relations***

Many scholars and analysts argue that China is increasingly assertive. Michael D Swaine claims that China is more assertive in many areas, but not in some others. Swaine conducted extensive research on Chinese assertiveness regarding four aspects: core interests, maritime periphery, the role of military in foreign policy and the role of military in foreign crisis. In each research he provides a similar definition of assertiveness, but their nuances are different. In “China’s Assertive Behavior Part One: On “Core Interests”,” Swaine categorizes Chinese assertiveness by “official and unofficial actions or



utterances, productive or creative assertiveness and confrontational, destabilizing, or threatening (from a Western or US perspective) assertiveness.”<sup>5</sup> He mostly focuses on threatening assertiveness in his analysis. In his second research regarding maritime periphery, the definition of Chinese assertiveness is Chinese official or governmental behavior and statements that might appear to “threaten U.S. and/or allied interests or otherwise challenge the status quo in maritime Asia along China’s periphery, thereby undermining Asian stability and causing concern to U.S. and Asian leaders.”<sup>6</sup> In both approaches, his definition of Chinese assertiveness focuses on the threat to the US and ally interests. He argues that China is assertive in general regarding its core interests, but its attitude diverges regarding the maritime periphery.

Many others follow the footsteps of Swaine by claiming that China is assertive. Zhang Jian argues that the Chinese government is implementing an assertive stance in order to obtain domestic legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> He Kai and Feng Huiyun claim that it is normal for a rising power like China to change its policy to a confident/assertive direction due to expanding aims. They argue that the US

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior Part One: On Core Interests,” *China Leadership Monitor* 34 (2011): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior Part Two: Maritime Periphery,” *China Leadership Monitor* 35 (2011): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Jian Zhang, “The Domestic Sources of China’s More Assertive Foreign Policy,” *International Politics* 51, no. 3 (2014): 390-397.

and other countries need to adjust to Beijing's new stance.<sup>8</sup> Leszek Buszynski argues Beijing has been more assertive in issues in the South China Sea due to the territorial claims, access to fishing, oil and gas fields, and strategic interests.<sup>9</sup> He points to the Chinese argument that the area is controlled by the Chinese historically and that such a claim has been excluded by international law. Buszynski asserts that that it resorted to power projection, especially against smaller states such as Vietnam and the Philippines.

Thomas Christensen argues against the prevailing view that China is assertive. He claims that since the global financial crisis in 2008, China has not been assertive and innovative but reactive and conservative.<sup>10</sup> He says that many believe that China has damaged its relations with most of its neighbors from 2009 to his point of writing in 2011, unlike in the late 1990s when China adopted the policy of reassurance. However, according to Christensen, this is not due to Beijing's assertive manner. Instead, China has been "reacting," however abrasively, but not assertive. In his writing, assertiveness is not specifically defined, but he uses "assertive" in opposition to "reactive." Thus,

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<sup>8</sup> Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "Debating China's Assertiveness: Taking China's Power and Interests Seriously," *International Politics* 49, no. 5 (2012): 633-644.

<sup>9</sup> Leszek Buszynski, "The South China Sea: Oil, Maritime Claims, and U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry," *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2012): 139-56.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs* 90 no. 2 (2011): 54-67.

Chinese assertiveness infers acting first and proactively participating. His view is unique because he does not use the term “Chinese assertiveness” with a negative, threatening connotation as many other US analysts do.<sup>11</sup>

Alastair Ian Johnston argues that China is not increasingly assertive in relative terms compared to the past. In “How New and Assertive is China’s New Assertiveness,” he defines assertiveness in international politics as “a form of assertive diplomacy that explicitly threatens to impose costs on another actor that are clearly higher than before.”<sup>12</sup> He analyzes the cases that many scholars and media considered as examples of China’s new assertiveness since 2010, when the frequency of “assertiveness” skyrocketed in the US media.<sup>13</sup> He assess whether China became more assertive than it was before 2009. He concludes that China is more status quo-oriented than at any time since 1949 in relative terms, except for the South China Sea issue. He claims that the misleading popular narrative of Chinese assertiveness is dangerous because it can lead to the US enacting policies against China that are counterproductive.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Christensen, 54-67.

<sup>12</sup> Johnston, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Johnston, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Johnston, 8.

## ***2.2 Assertiveness in Behavioral Science and Social Psychology***

The second section delineates different definitions of assertiveness in other disciplines, forming the basis for creating a typology. I point out one work from international relations and others from behavioral science.

International relations scholars Ding Ding Chen and Xiaoyu Pu argue that China is assertive. They define assertiveness as “a confident and direct way to defend one country’s rights or claims.”<sup>15</sup> Chen and Pu provide several definitions of “assertiveness” in other academic fields. Their definition is based on behavioral science and social psychology, in which assertion involves “standing up for personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways which do not violate another person’s rights.” Deriving from the more positive, comprehensive definition of assertiveness in behavioral science/social psychology, Chen and Pu coined a typology for assertiveness with three categories: offensive assertiveness, defensive assertiveness, and constructive assertiveness. Offensive assertiveness refers to a great power’s use of coercion to expand its interest and influence. Defensive assertiveness refers to a great power’s capability and willingness to defend its current interests. Constructive assertiveness refers to which a great

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<sup>15</sup> Chen and Pu, 177.

power assumes a leadership role to solve regional global problems.<sup>16</sup>

The origin of the term “assertiveness” is not from international relations/political science, but from behavioral science regarding interpersonal relations. There are two major approaches on the concept. The first approach is the *unilateral approach*. Joseph Wolpe’s *Psychotherapy by Reciprocal Inhibition* (1958) is one of the earliest works that used the concept “assertiveness.” His work, along with the other earliest models of assertiveness, emphasizes self-interest, power, control, self-expression and personal rights<sup>17</sup> Andrew Salter characterizes assertiveness as “speaking up forcefully,” emphasizing coercive power. In the unilateral approach, the focus is on “me versus you.”<sup>18</sup>

The second approach of assertiveness is the *mutual approach*, which developed later. Robert E. Alberti, Michael L. Emmons, Arthur J. Lange and Patricia Jakubowski focused more on the issue of balance, respecting each other, leaving room for compromise, and the legitimate/appropriate assertive behavior.<sup>19</sup> This approach promotes confidence and self-protection, unlike the

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<sup>16</sup> Chen and Pu, 177.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Lee, "China's Unassertive Rise: What Is Assertiveness and How We Have Misunderstood It?" *International Journal of China Studies* 4, no. 3 (2013): 504.

<sup>18</sup> Lee, 504.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, 505.

unilateral approach that emphasizes coercion and forcefulness.

To explain the two kinds of assertiveness, Keithia Wilson and Cynthia Gallois noted that there is tension in the English language between “assertiveness as constituting self-confident, assured, direct expression of ideas,” and “assertiveness as aggressive expression to attain one’s own ends (i.e. dogmatic, peremptory, insistent).”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Lee, 516.

### **3. Framework/Model**

#### ***3.1 Defining Assertiveness***

##### *1-1 Synthesis: Applying the Behavioral Science Concept of Assertiveness to International Relations*

So far, the Chinese assertiveness narrative was discussed through the lens of international relations and behavioral science. Is it viable to apply the psychological concept of assertiveness to international relations? There are parallels between the two. First, both kinds of assertiveness are based on the relationship between actors. Psychological assertiveness is based on “interpersonal” person-to-person relations and international relations on “international” actor-to-actor relations.

Second, the founding ideas of the unilateral approach/mutual approach have strong reverberations to the concept of offensive/defensive realism. The unilateral approach, which focuses on self-interest, power, and speaking up forcefully, is parallel to offensive realism. In this approach, an assertive person is self-interested and seeks power over others, speaking up forcefully in order to achieve the aim. In offensive realism, states are also self-interested and desire to maximize power, gaining relative power over other states. They strike first and

act aggressively in order to achieve this aim.

The focus of the mutual approach is on the balance of relationship, legitimate assertiveness and restraint, refraining from harming others but being confident. Thus, an assertive person can be confident yet exercise restraint in offending others by balancing its relationships. Defensive realism is comparable to these characteristics. In defensive realism, although states are self-interested and seek power, they best increase their security by restrained military and economic strategies, which does not threaten other states, focusing on the balance of power.

In this comparison, the argument is not that human interactions are the same as state interactions. Instead, it attempts to find a sound basis for analyzing the overused term assertiveness in describing state action. In other words, rather than simply defining assertiveness as offensive and defensive, this section shows that this definition has a strong connection to the inherent meaning of the word and its original typology from another discipline. As assertiveness does not have any theoretical basis in international relations, this synthesis attempts to make the discussion of assertiveness more contingent to the international relations concepts.



### ***3.2 Typology for Categorizing Assertiveness***

In order to categorize different types of assertiveness, the concepts from international relations (offensive and defensive realism) parallel to behavioral science (unilateral and mutual approach) were applied.

I define assertiveness as “a confident and direct way that displays its capability and/or willingness to defend or expand one country’s rights or claims, with or without provocation.” There are four types of assertiveness: i) active offensive; ii) reactive offensive; iii) active defensive; iv) reactive defensive. Two indicators determine the four types of assertiveness: interest and provocation. Did the state claim a new/expanding interest? Did the state defend an existing interest? Did the other party initiate provocations? Did the state act without provocation from the other party? This model is for delineating different characteristics of assertiveness. Non-assertiveness is defined as “a way that does not defend existing interest either with or without the other state’s provocation.”

The definition of active offensive assertiveness is “A confident and direct way that displays its capability and/or willingness to expand one country’s rights or claims, without provocation.” This concept derives from offensive realism. Offensive realists argue that the international system provides

strong incentives for expansion.<sup>21</sup> Due to anarchy, states are insecure. Only by being the strongest can a state can be secure. Thus, states attempt to maximize their power in order to gain security. The states fear each other, and this fear leads them to prefer striking first. This encourages an offensive strategy. The states build up military and use unilateral diplomacy, mercantile foreign economic policies, and opportunistic expansion. A rising power with its growing capabilities will naturally expand its aims/interest. It will attempt to increase its influence and prestige in the international system.<sup>22</sup> Active offensive assertiveness can refer to statements, threats, and actions to prove its determination. It may also try to change institutions and rules. Thus, this type of assertiveness is based on the concept of expanding its new interest/first strike even without provocation.

Reactive offensive assertiveness refers to “a confident and direct way that displays its capability and/or willingness to expand one country’s rights or claims, with provocation.” The difference lies in the fact that the other party provoked it first, and the recipient state is reacting.

Active defensive assertiveness is “a confident and direct way that displays

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<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25, no. 3 (2001): 128.

<sup>22</sup> Taliaferro, 129.

its capability and/or willingness to defend one country's rights or claims, without provocation.” This approach is derived from defensive realism. In defensive realism, a country may not attempt to maximize power but maximize security.<sup>23</sup> Defensive realists argue that the international system provides incentives for expansion only under certain conditions. Often, security dilemma may cause spirals of mutual hostility and conflict. Thus, security-seeking strategies causes the others to become more insecure, inducing more dangerous situations in which other states balance against the aggressive states and contemplate first strike. For this reason, a state can actually gain more security if it pursues a more moderate and restrained strategies in military, diplomatic and foreign economic policies. Aggression is necessary only in some instances.<sup>24</sup> This type of assertiveness is based on the concept of defending its existing interests, when not provoked by another party. Examples include statements and actions that reassure a country's previous position even when there had been no provocation from the other party regarding the topic.

Reactive defensive assertiveness refers to “a confident and direct way that displays its capability and/or willingness to defend one country's rights or claims, with provocation.” It is different from defensive assertiveness in that the

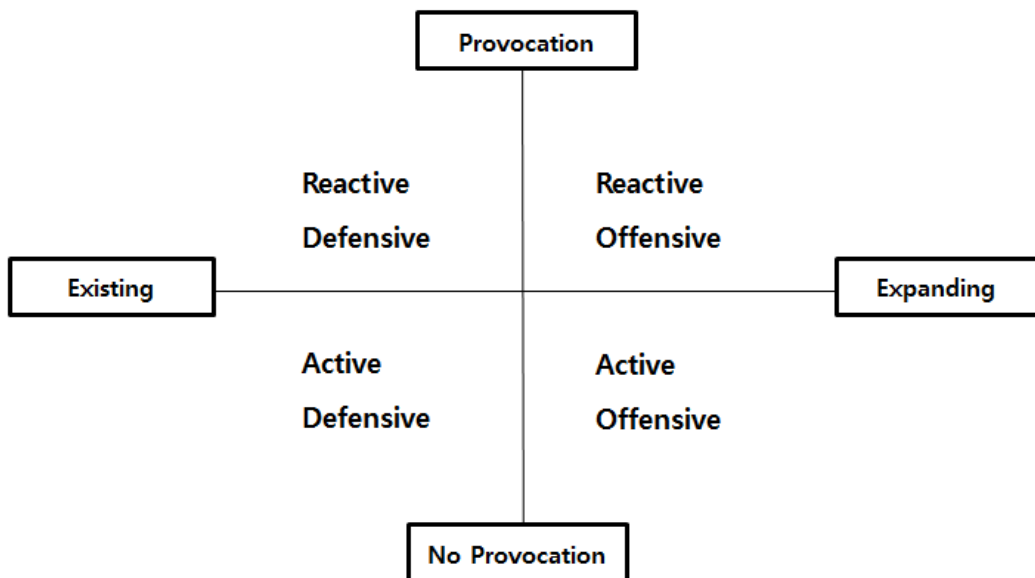
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<sup>23</sup> Taliaferro, 129.

<sup>24</sup> Taliaferro, 129.

state is provoked first and reacted assertively.

**Figure 1. Typology of Assertiveness**



## 4. Case Studies

The case studies include notable ROK-China frictions regarding security issues, especially focusing on Chinese assertiveness after 2010. However, some of the security issues began prior to 2010 and continued on past it. This analysis primarily uses legal, diplomatic and official statements and submissions. The secondary sources are from leadership comments, and the official Chinese media.

### *4.1 Active Offensive Assertive*

#### *4.1.1 Case 1: CADIZ declaration (November 2013)*

On November 23, 2013, China declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ).<sup>25</sup> The new Chinese ADIZ (CADIZ) overlaps with both Japanese and South Korean ADIZ, including the disputed area of Senkaku/Diayu islands and Socotra Rock. Although ADIZ does not have a basis in international law and is not regulated by an international organization, it is not prohibited by

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<sup>25</sup>Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, "Statement by the Government of the People's Republic of China on Establishing the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone" (November 23, 2013).

international law either. Thus, definitions and rules of ADIZ vary. In general, ADIZ is a defense concept to control the airspace surrounding a nation for military purposes, but it does not mean that the country has sovereignty over that territory. Specifically for China, in the November 2013 ADIZ declaration Defense Spokesman Yang Yujun stated that ADIZ is “an area of air space established by a coastal state beyond its territorial airspace to timely identify, monitor, control and react to aircraft entering this zone with potential air threats.”

This rather ambiguous concept of ADIZ originates from the Cold War. In the 1950s, the US declared the world’s first ADIZ in order to detect possible Soviet attacks. The South Korean ADIZ was established during the Korean War in 1951 by the United States Air Force. Similarly, the United States Armed Forces established Japanese ADIZ after World War II. Currently, more than 20 countries have announced ADIZ, including Taiwan, Vietnam, India, Norway, and Pakistan. In order to grasp a comprehensive picture of Chinese assertiveness towards South Korea in the case of CADIZ declaration, the interactions amongst the related actors must be evaluated. In each case of Japan, the US, and the ROK, three main points are evaluated: the impact of CADIZ declaration, the other party’s criticism on the declaration, Beijing’s reaction to the criticism.

## *Japan*

The Chinese act of declaring CADIZ was reactive offensive assertiveness against Japan. The category refers to “a confident and direct way that displays its capability and/or willingness to expand one country’s rights or claims, with provocation.” The US established Japanese ADIZ after WWII, and Tokyo extended its ADIZ in 1972 and again in 2010.<sup>26</sup> Its ADIZ includes the disputed area between China and Japan: Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. In the past, China has sent official patrol aircrafts to fly around the islands. When they entered the Japanese ADIZ, the Japanese Self-Defense Air Force fighter jets intercepted Chinese planes based on Japanese ADIZ. According to Chinese commentators, in 2012 Japanese interception amounted to about 200 times.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the interception dates back to the past 40 years, increasing dramatically since 2011. These increasing confrontations in the air expedited Beijing’s decision to implement an ADIZ.<sup>28</sup> Although Beijing argued that CADIZ does not target a specific country, many analysts suspect that the main target is Japan. Japanese provocations caused China to react. Therefore in this bilateral interaction, Tokyo’s expanding ADIZ, which includes Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and its aircraft interceptions based on ADIZ provoked Beijing to expand

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<sup>26</sup> Lai, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Lai, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Lai, 3.

its interest by declaring a new ADIZ.

Despite its role as an instigator, Tokyo criticized Beijing rigorously. On November 24, 2013 the Minister for Foreign Affairs made a statement that resembled that of the US, yet it further demanded China to revoke the ADIZ. He said that CADIZ has “no validity” on Japan.<sup>29</sup> He claimed that the Senkaku islands are an “inherent” part of Japanese territory and that CADIZ includes the airspace over Senkaku islands, as if it were a part of China’s “territorial airspace.” He continued that Japan cannot accept such description and will “defend resolutely its territorial land, sea and airspace.”<sup>30</sup>

Again, Beijing was reactive offensive assertive towards Tokyo. On November 25, 2013, Assistant Foreign Minister Zheng protested to Japanese ambassador to China Masato Kitera that Tokyo has “no right to make irresponsible remarks and to make deliberate attacks on Chinese side,” urging it to “stop making gratuitous accusations.”<sup>31</sup> On December 15<sup>th</sup>, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei stated that Japan “slanders China” and continued that “the Diaoyu Islands are integral parts of China's territory. Japan's theft and

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Announcement on the 'East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone' by the Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China" (November 24, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

<sup>31</sup> Micahel D. Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)," *China Leadership Monitor* 43 (2014): 14.



occupation of the Diaoyu Islands has been illegal and invalid since the very beginning. It is Japan who has been deliberately making an issue of the Diaoyu Islands since last year....practicing double-standards and misleading world opinion. Japan's attempt is doomed to failure.<sup>32</sup> On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Defense Ministry Spokesperson YangYujun also stated, “since September 2012....frequently sending vessels and planes to disturb Chinese ships and planes....openly making provocative remarks such as shooting down Chinese drones, playing up the so-called China threat, escalating regional tension...China has to take necessary reactions.<sup>33</sup>” In short, Tokyo provoked Beijing by strongly criticizing it, especially regarding the airspace above Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, and Beijing reacted by asserting its expanded claim over the new CADIZ.

### *The United States*

The Chinese announcement of ADIZ was reactive offensive assertiveness against the US. The US created the concept of ADIZ, establishing it for the first time. It also declared ADIZ for Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

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<sup>32</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Remarks on the Japanese Leader's Improper Comments on the Establishment of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone by China” (December 15, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, “Defense Ministry Spokesman on China's Air Defense Identification Zone” (December 3, 2013),

However, when Beijing announced its ADIZ, it did not recognize Chinese ADIZ and reacted with intense criticism. On November 23, 2013 promptly after the CADIZ declaration, both Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel stated that it was a “unilateral” action that attempts to change the “status quo” in the East China Sea.<sup>34</sup> Also, they confirmed that Washington will be committed to its “allies and partners,” especially Japan. Secretary of Defense Hagel affirmed that “article V of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands.”<sup>35</sup> After the release of the statements, the US sent B-52 into CADIZ.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, in contrast to Tokyo, Washington has not demanded the revocation of the ADIZ. Furthermore, there were signs of US officials trying to mediate Tokyo and Beijing. As an example, after the CADIZ announcement, Vice President Joe Biden visited China, Japan and ROK. He stated that the tension over the ADIZ “underscores the need for crisis management mechanisms and effective channels of communication between China and Japan to reduce the risk of escalation.”<sup>37</sup>

China reacted to US criticism with reactive offensive assertiveness, but

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<sup>34</sup> US Department of State, "Statement on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone" (November 23, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> US Department of State, "Statement by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone" (November 23, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Lai, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)," 12.

not as fervently as towards Japan. On November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013 the People's Republic of China (PRC) Assistant Foreign Minister Zheng Zeguang met with US ambassador Gary Locke demanding Washington "to immediately correct its mistake and stop making irresponsible accusations against China."<sup>38</sup> At the same time, China expressed appreciation for the US suggesting civil airlines to submit flight plans to China. Beijing insisted on its new claim, provoked by Washington's criticism.

### *South Korea*

CADIZ can be interpreted as an active offensive assertiveness against the ROK. The definition of offensive assertiveness is a confident and direct way to expand its interest and influence without provocation from other countries. After the Korean War, the US established the South Korean ADIZ. It did not extend to the disputed area between Beijing and Seoul around Socotra rock,<sup>39</sup> of which both states claim authority over. However, China included this area in its newly announced ADIZ, expanding its interest.

Along with Japan and the US, Korea promptly protested China's

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<sup>38</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)," 13.

<sup>39</sup> David Welch, "What's an ADIZ? Why the United States, Japan, and China Get It Wrong." *Foreign Affairs website*, December 9, 2013, accessed July 5, 2014. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-asia/2013-12-09/whats-adiz>.

announcement through foreign and defense ministry. On November 27, 2013, ROK Foreign Minister Yun stated that the ADIZ controversy would “heighten nationalism” in Northeast Asia and “exacerbate regional territorial and historical disputes.”<sup>40</sup> He also claimed that Seoul cannot accept China’s newly drawn ADIZ. South Korea conducted air and sea exercises within the ADIZ near Socotra Rock. It also flew military aircraft across the ADIZ without notifying flight plans to Beijing.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the fervent protest, Chinese responses were reactive defensive assertiveness and non-assertive. Reactive defensive assertiveness refers to displaying its capability and/or willingness to defend one country’s rights or claims, with provocation, and non-assertive refers to not defending existing interest either with or without provocation. Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang expressed hopes to resolve any issues through “friendly consultations and negotiations.”<sup>42</sup> When asked about Seoul criticizing Beijing while expressing “regret” regarding the CADIZ announcement, he replied that “the ROK and China have no territorial dispute” regarding Socotra Rock. He continued that

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<sup>40</sup> Saeed Ahmed, "South Korea Expands Air Defense Zone in Reaction to China," *CNN*, December 8, 2013. Accessed March 3, 2016. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/08/world/asia/china-korea-air-defense-zone/>

<sup>41</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)," 12.

<sup>42</sup> Yonhap News, “China says 'no dispute' with S. Korea over Ieodo in new air zone,” November 25, 2013, accessed March 2, 2016. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2013/11/25/14/0200000000AEN20131125007800315F.html>

the two countries are “friendly neighbors” and that Beijing wishes that it can “win coordination and understanding from the ROK side.”<sup>43</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei stated, “China will stay in communication with the ROK in the principle of equality and mutual respect. We hope that the ROK will meet China halfway.”<sup>44</sup> In short, despite Seoul’s provocative criticisms, Beijing reacted by defending its existing claim, and at times not defending the claim at all, evading answering the questions directly and emphasizing friendly relationship with Seoul.

### *Analysis*

Comparing the Chinese action, the US, Japan, Korea’s criticism towards Beijing and its reaction to criticism delineate a few points. First, although China actually have been discussing the need to establish an ADIZ for a while, Sino-Japanese trouble around Senkaku/Diayu islands ignited CADIZ declaration.<sup>45</sup> Second, its action and statement differs towards the three countries. Towards Tokyo, they are reactive offensive assertive, meaning “a confident and direct way that displays its capability and/or willingness to expand one country’s rights or claims, with provocation.” Regarding Washington, Beijing’s action and statements were reactive offensive assertive,

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<sup>43</sup> Yonhap News, “China says 'no dispute' with S. Korea over Ieodo in new air zone.”

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei’s Regular Press Conference on December 6, 2013” (December 6, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Lai, 2.

as it was towards Japan. However, Chinese assertiveness towards South Korea was conflicting. Its action was active offensive, but its statements were reactive defensive or non-assertive. Why is it the case and what does it mean?

South Korea is inadvertently caught in between Japan-US-China politics. As mentioned earlier, the US created the concept of ADIZ to detect Soviet attack, establishing one for itself, ROK, Japan, and Taiwan. The Soviet Union is gone, but ADIZ still prevails. This leaves questions. In the post-Soviet era, what purpose does ADIZ serve? Who is it against? In the hotly disputed region of Senkaku/Diayu islands, Japan used ADIZ as a basis to justify intercepting Chinese surveillance aircrafts. Created by the US and enforced by Japan in the disputed region, it is reasonable for Beijing to believe that a major purpose of ADIZ is to contain Chinese strategic interests in the Northeast Asia.

In short, China felt threatened by the US and Japan. Then, why did it adopt active offensive assertiveness towards ROK in declaring CADIZ, in contrast to its reactive defensive assertive and non-assertive statements? First, China has an interest in the disputed area around Socotra rock. Thus, it included the region in CADIZ. Second, Beijing also does not want to provoke Japan or the US extensively by overtly targeting Japan. At least officially, it does not want to target a specific country, and overlapping ADIZ with Japan, Taiwan and South Korea dilutes the intention. However, clearly, South Korea is not the

prime reason for the declaration, nor is it the prime target; Japan is. Specifically, the Senkaku/Diayu dispute is the ignitor of CADIZ declaration. Would China have declared ADIZ at that moment in that region if not for the intense, politicized Senkaku/Diayu islands dispute? In conclusion, it is not to say that China has no interest regarding South Korea, yet it is only a secondary reason. Enmeshed in the web of US-Japan-China politics, South Korean interest has been damaged.

## ***4.2 Reactive Offensive Assertive***

### *4.2.1 Case 2: Reaction to US-ROK Military Exercise (July 2010)*

South Korea and China also have disagreements on what kind of ROK and ROK-US military exercises can be accepted in South Korea's territorial waters and beyond. In the case of joint military exercises in July 2010, Beijing was reactive offensive assertive towards the two countries, expanding its claims with provocation from the other party.

After the Cheonan submarine sinking in March 26, 2010, Seoul and Washington announced to hold a joint naval exercise in the Yellow Sea in

between the ROK and PRC to deter North Korea.<sup>46</sup> The Chinese government opposed the exercise, which would involve the aircraft carrier USS George Washington. It issued six official protests with a successively tougher tone from calling to “maintain calm and constraint” to expressing “concern” and “serious concern”, then to “oppose” and “strongly oppose.”<sup>47</sup> In a statement on July 8, 2010, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang said that China “resolutely opposed” the presence of foreign ships in the Yellow Sea and other coastal waters that would influence “China’s security interests.” On July 15, he stated that “the Chinese public has also voiced their strong feelings. We will closely follow the developments of the situation.”<sup>48</sup>

High ranking military officials also criticized the military exercise. In Xinhua News, an official Chinese government newspaper, PLA navy rear admiral Yang Yi argued that the USS George Washington’s participation is a “provocation” because of its clear motive and the location that is considered to be a doorstep to China. On July 16, 2010 People’s Daily also quoted major general Luo Yuan. He pointed to the joint military exercise as “a direct security

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<sup>46</sup> Jon Rabirow and Kyong Chang Yoo, “China, N. Korea Wary of US-Korea Navy Exercises,” *Stars and Stripes website*, June 24, 2012. <http://www.stripes.com/news/china-n-korea-wary-of-us-korea-navy-exercises-1.181200>.

<sup>47</sup> Suisheng Zhao, “China and America Showdown in the Asia-Pacific?” in *Conflict and Cooperation in Sino-US Relations*, ed. Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Simon Shen (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 77.

<sup>48</sup> Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior Part Two: Maritime Periphery,” 13.



threat to China's heartland.” He warned that "we [China] will retaliate if offended" by the naval exercise. He repeated the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's position that the Chinese government “firmly opposes the activities of foreign naval ships in the Yellow Sea and other offshore areas of China that affect China's security interests and urged relevant sides to pay serious attention to China's concerns and stance.”<sup>49</sup>

From July 25 to 28, 2010, the United States and South Korea executed a massive joint military exercise Invincible Spirit as an attempt to strengthen its deterrence against North Korea and solidarity of the military alliance.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless they took note of Chinese opposition, then relocated the drills from the Yellow Sea to East Sea/Sea of Japan, further away from China. Still, Beijing protested the possibility of the following exercises that could take place in the Yellow Sea in the future.

Although the US and ROK have continued the customary military drills in the past, the new operation of Invincible Spirit involved substantial firepower and a strong message. Adm. Mike Mullen, Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman said

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<sup>49</sup> Luo Yuan, “Why China Opposes U.S-South Korean Military Exercises in the Yellow Sea,” *People's Daily*, July 16, 2010, accessed March 12, 2014, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90780/91342/7069743.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Chico Harlan, “South Korea and U.S. send message to North Korea with drills in Sea of Japan,” *Washington Post*, July 26, 2010, accessed March 23, 2013. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/25/AR2010072500754.html>.

that "The point of [the exercise] is, I think, to ensure that our relationship with the South is very strong . . . and also send the message to the North Koreans that their behavior is completely counter to international norms, completely unacceptable,"<sup>51</sup> In this operation, the United States and South Korea dispatched about 20 ships, 200 aircrafts, and 8,000 sailors and airmen to the East Sea/Sea of Japan.<sup>52</sup> This operation included the F-22 fighter jets and importantly the USS George Washington, which China vehemently protested against.

In June and September 2010, China held several "routine" military exercises in the East China and Yellow Sea. However, many argued that this was an unprecedented direct response to the US-ROK military exercise. Also, in June 2010 two high ranking PLA officers (Deputy Chairmen of the Central Military Committee) visited the Shenyang Military Region and the North Sea navy base near the Yellow Sea, which added to the suspicion.<sup>53</sup>

In short, Chinese assertiveness was reactive offensive. Firstly, South Korea and the US unintentionally provoked China. Even if their target was North Korea and their purpose was to display the US-ROK alliance solidarity to

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<sup>51</sup> Harlan.

<sup>52</sup> Harlan.

<sup>53</sup> Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior Part Two: Maritime Periphery," 12.

deter it, China was threatened and provoked due to the proximity and its ties to Pyeongyang. Secondly, although China is often provoked by Washington, the US-ROK alliance makes it inevitable that Seoul is also the source of provocation. On one hand, the source of threat for China was the US military, as PLA navy rear admiral Yang Yi's specific comment on USS George Washington's participation is a "provocation." However, South Korea and the US did the military exercise jointly. As long as this alliance exists, Beijing is provoked by both countries, not Washington alone. Thirdly, it expanded its interest. Its criticism, Chinese military exercises in the East China Sea and Yellow Sea in June and September 2010, and high ranking PLA officers' participation display a strong, unprecedented Chinese attempt to control the activities beyond its territorial water.

### ***4.3 Active Defensive Assertive***

#### ***4.3.1 Case 3: Fishing Boat Incidents***

There have been several tense incidents between South Korea and China when Chinese fishermen entered Korean waters. In these incidents, Beijing was active defensive assertive, displaying its capability and/or

willingness to defend one country's rights or claims, without provocation. According to Terence Roehrig, a professor of National Security Affairs at the US Naval War College, "of the many maritime disputes in Asia, one of the most violent in the past few years has occurred between South Korea and China in the Yellow Sea," referring to the fishing boat skirmishes.<sup>54</sup> According to one report, those arrested for entering Korea's territorial waters to obtain marine life resources drastically increased from 27 in 2007 to 294 through the first eleven months of 2011.<sup>55</sup> As a consequence, the ROK Ministry of Justice is working on strengthening its ability to protect Korean waters from illegal Chinese fishing. In recent years, Chinese fishermen have even coordinated to confront South Korean Coast Guards. The fishing boats at times had formations, and the fishermen were armed with metal bars, knives, and other weapons.<sup>56</sup> There were several intense incidents between the fishing boats and coast guards. One point to take note of is that more conflicts occurred in the late 2000s because the sheer number of fishing vessels entering ROK EEZ increased, which led to increasing numbers of arrest and conflicts between the fishing boats and Coast Guards that resulted in increased frictions between the two government.

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<sup>54</sup> Terence Roehrig, "South Korea–China Maritime Disputes: Toward a Solution," *East Asia Forum* by Australian National University website, November 27, 2012, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/11/27/south-korea-china-maritime-disputes-toward-a-solution/>

<sup>55</sup> Roehring.

<sup>56</sup> Scott W. Harold, "Jeodo as Metaphor? The Growing Importance of Sovereignty Disputes in South Korea-China Relations and the Role of the United States," *Asian Perspective* 36, no. 2 (2012): 301.

However, it is important to note that this cannot be interpreted as Beijing provoking Seoul or expanding its interest; the Chinese government did not initiate these incidents. Nevertheless, due to the changing situation, the two governments are placed in the position to manage the increasing conflicts caused by individuals fishing.

On September 29, 2008 near Gageodo in the Yellow Sea eleven Chinese fishermen fought ROK Coast Guards, who boarded the illegal fishing vessel in the South Korean EEZ, resulting in killing a Coast Guard. The ROK Foreign Ministry summoned the PRC Ambassador Ning to the ROK and expressed regret, demanding Beijing to implement measures to decrease illegal fishing. Ambassador Ning expressed “regret,” representing official PRC sentiment regarding the issue. He continued that it recognizes the importance of this incident and will reinforce education to stop illegal fishing.<sup>57</sup>

In December 18, 2010, a Chinese fishing boat rammed a South Korean Coast Guard vessel. Due to the fishing boat sinking, one Chinese man died and

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<sup>57</sup>이정진, 「정부, '해경사망' 中대사에 유감전달」, 『연합뉴스』, 2008년 9월 29일, (검색일: 2016년 4월 2일), <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=001&aid=0002289000>. Also see 연합뉴스, 「<연합시론> 중국 어선 불법조업 철저히 대처해야」, 2008년 9월 29일, (검색일: 2016년 4월 2일), <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=101&oid=001&aid=0002288193>.

two disappeared. The coast guard detained the rest of the fishermen. Beijing demanded three things from the ROK: i) to release the detained fishermen; ii) to apologize for the loss of life of Chinese men; iii) to compensate the boat owners. Although the ROK rejected initially, it released the fishermen and issued a statement “regretting” but not “apologizing” for the loss of life.<sup>58</sup>

On December 12, 2011, one ROK Coast Guardsman was killed and one wounded during the confrontation with a Chinese fishing vessel. After the incident Seoul increased the intensity of its law enforcement.<sup>59</sup> Beijing’s response to this increasing enforcement was non-assertive. A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry stated that China “regrets” that this incident “caused the death of an ROK coastguard, which is an unfortunate event.”<sup>60</sup> He also said “China is ready to work closely with South Korea to properly settle the issue.” Seoul and Beijing have also held meetings for a fishing cooperation committee and established a hotline to help manage these incidents. In general, the two have cooperated well despite the increasing aggression from Chinese fishing boats. The Chinese government did not show signs of expanding interest.

Bilateral cooperation also occurred regarding fishing boats. On April 15,

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<sup>58</sup> Harold, 301.

<sup>59</sup> Harold, 301.

<sup>60</sup> Harold, 302.

2016, two Chinese fishing vessels crashed within the South Korean EEZ and some sailors went missing. The ROK Coast Guard sent eleven vessels to find the missing sailors and quickly transported two to a hospital. The Chinese Coast Guard sent out an official letter to express gratitude for promptly notifying the accident and doing its best to rescue the sailors by sending the vessels. It continued that Beijing wishes that the two countries' coast guards can protect the fishermen's life, property and safety through reinforcing cooperation.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, China's assertiveness towards South Korea was active defensive, defending existing claims without provocation from the other party; there was no provocation from Seoul and Beijing did not expand its interest. First of all, it is important to note that the provocations did not come from either Chinese government or South Korean government; rather, they were from individuals: the Chinese fishermen. Mostly, these fishing boat conflicts occurred when Chinese boats infringed upon South Korean territorial waters, and the ROK Coast Guards reacted. So, when incidents such as the Coast Guard

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<sup>61</sup>김호, 「영광 해상서 중국어선 2척 충돌...해경 구조중」, 『중앙일보』, 2016년 4월 14일. (검색일: 2016년 4월 20일), <http://news.joins.com/article/19888549>. Also see 배명재, 「중국어선 2척 영해밖 서남해에서 충돌 침몰, 구조작업 중」, 『경향신문』, 2016년 4월 14일, (검색일: 2016년 4월 20일), [http://news.khan.co.kr/kh\\_news/khan\\_art\\_view.html?artid=201604141028001&code=940202](http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201604141028001&code=940202). 뉴시스, 「중어선 충돌사고 당시 인도적 구조활동에 감사」, 2016년 4월 19일, (검색일: 2016년 4월 20일). [http://www.newsis.com/ar\\_detail/view.html?ar\\_id=NISX20160419\\_0014031566&cID=10809&pID=10800](http://www.newsis.com/ar_detail/view.html?ar_id=NISX20160419_0014031566&cID=10809&pID=10800).

getting killed occurred, the Chinese government was apologetic, showing no sign of expanding interest. It even seems close to non-assertive, not defending its existing claim. However, when the disputes led to harm to the Chinese fishermen, Beijing still approached the issue with protective measures to secure the interests of their citizen; nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to call it an expanding interest. As an example the December 2010 case where one Chinese man died and two disappeared, China demanded the ROK three things: i) to release the detained fishermen, ii) to apologize for the loss of life of Chinese men, iii) to compensate the boat owners. Despite the fact that the Chinese boat first rammed the ROK Coast Guard boat in South Korean waters, Beijing actively defended its existing interest of safeguarding its citizen and such a position continued. The Chinese actions cannot be considered offensive assertive, since it did not expand its claims. Moreover, China opened a hotline with South Korea, attempting to cooperate. Furthermore, it displayed its gratitude for the ROK Coast Guard rescuing Chinese fishermen in 2016 and emphasized the bilateral cooperation. This illustrates that it wants to solve the issue in a restrained manner.

#### *4.3.2 Case 4: Reaction to the Sinking of Cheonan (March 2010)*

On March 26, 2010 the ROK navy 2<sup>nd</sup> fleet Cheonan was sunk when it



was on a routine mission near Baekryong Island. Baekryong Island is located near the Northern Limit Line, which is a disputed maritime demarcation line between North and South Korea in the Yellow Sea. There had been border skirmishes in the area between the two countries prior to the Cheonan sinking, such as a gun battle near Yeonpyeong Island in 1999 and a navy ship fire exchange in 2002.<sup>62</sup> As the result of the Cheonan sinking, 46 South Korean crew members out of 104 died.<sup>63</sup> In order to find the cause of the sinking, the South Korean Ministry of National Defense organized a Civilian-Military Joint Investigation Group (JIG) consisting of experts and advisors from South Korea, United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and Sweden.<sup>64</sup> The final investigation result in May 20, 2010 concluded that a North Korean torpedo attack caused a strong underwater explosion, which split and sunk Cheonan.<sup>65</sup> Chinese reaction to the Cheonan sinking and the subsequent events was active defensive, displaying its capability and/or willingness to defend one country's rights or claims, without provocation.

Right after the Cheonan sinking, the international response was muted

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<sup>62</sup>Bijorn, Jerden. "The Assertive China Narrative: Why It Is Wrong and How So Many Still Bought into It," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 1, (2014): 62.

<sup>63</sup> Civilian-Military Joint Investigation Group. Joint Investigation Report: On the Attack Against ROK Ship Cheonan. Ministry of National Defense Republic of Korea, 2010, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Civilian-Military Joint Investigation Group, 28.

<sup>65</sup> Civilian-Military Joint Investigation Group, 36.

because the cause of the incident was obscure. However, once the JIG investigation pointed to North Korea as the perpetrator, condemnation from the international community of North Korea's bellicose aggression ensued. The U.S. led the way, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made her first public comments on the Cheonan sinking since the JIG report was announced; "Let me be clear. This will not be and cannot be business as usual. There must be an international - not just a regional - response... I think it is important to send a clear message to North Korea that provocative actions have consequences... We cannot allow this attack on South Korea to go unanswered by the international community."<sup>66</sup>

However, China remained cautious in its response. PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu stated in the regular press conference on May 20, 2010, the day of JIG announcement.<sup>67</sup> Ma first indicated that China has "expressed its condolences and sympathy" towards the ROK. Then, he continued on that China has "noted the investigation results" by the ROK, and it encouraged that all parties "stay calm," "exercise restraint" and "avoid the escalation of the situation." He stressed that China viewed the

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<sup>66</sup> John Pomfret, "Clinton Says North Korean Attack on Ship Will Not Go Unanswered," *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2010, accessed April 9, 2016, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/21/AR2010052101077.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu's Regular Press Conference on May 20" (May 20, 2010).

international/regional issues “on their own merits” in “a fair and objective manner,” casting doubts on the JIG investigation results, as it was not invited as a member of the investigation team and was unable to access the evidence first-handed. Emphasizing “peace and stability,” he posed the Six-Party Talks and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula as a priority and opposed “behaviors against such efforts.”<sup>68</sup>

Then, on May 24, 2010 in the National Address South Korean President Lee Myung Bak condemned North Korea for the Cheonan sinking and announced that ROK government “will refer this matter to the UN Security Council, so that the international community can join us in holding the North accountable.”<sup>69</sup> Beijing responded promptly on the day of the address. On May 24<sup>th</sup>, spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu reiterated its previous position. He called for “calm and restraint” in dealing with the crisis. He further confirmed that the Chinese will act “in an objective and fair manner” regarding the Cheonan sinking. On May 25<sup>th</sup>, PRC foreign ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu reiterated the same phrase of “calm and restraint” and “objective and fair manner,” and on May 26<sup>th</sup>, Zhang Zhi Jun, Vice minister of Foreign Affairs further mentioned

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<sup>68</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu's Regular Press Conference on May 20"

<sup>69</sup> Myung-Bak Lee, "South Korean President Lee's National Address, May 2010," Council on Foreign Relations website, May 24, 2010, accessed April 9, 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/north-korea/south-korean-president-lees-national-address-may-2010/p22199>.

“objective and fair manner,” and continued on to China’s effort to collect the information, research and analyze the crisis.

On June 4, South Korea formally requested the UN Security Council to press for a resolution, directly condemning North Korea for the Cheonan sinking. President Obama strongly supported Seoul, but Beijing was reluctant. As a result, it hindered South Korean attempts to gain a prompt and resolute international response. Instead, the Council issued a Presidential Statement, a lower degree of Security Council censure than a resolution.<sup>70</sup> The statement condemned the attack on Cheonan, yet it did not criticize North Korea. Nonetheless, it noted Seoul’s accusation and Pyongyang’s denial of the responsibility.<sup>71</sup> The ambiguous statement was below South Korean expectations- a diplomatic setback, and the Chinese action disappointed South Korea.

Many scholars such as Thomas Christensen, Gilbert Rozman, Kai He, Huiyun Feng, Yoo Jee-Ho and Scott W. Harold argued that in the case of the Cheonan sinking, China became more assertive and this reaction was a

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<sup>70</sup>Scott Snyder, and See-Won Byun. "Cheonan And Yeonpyeong: The Northeast Asian Response To North Korea's Provocations," *The RUSI Journal* 156, no. 2 (2011): 76.

<sup>71</sup> Jerden, 63.

departure from China's earlier policy.<sup>72</sup> However, a careful analysis proves otherwise.

The Cheonan sinking is a border skirmish between North and South Korea around the Northern Limit Line; and such clashes have happened more aggressively in the 1970s, and intermittently in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>73</sup> As mentioned earlier, the gun battle near Yeonpyeong Island in 1999 and the navy ship fire exchange in 2002 are other violent clashes that happened around the area. Despite the similar pattern, the magnitude/scale of the incident is of another level. The 1999 incident resulted in seven South Koreans injured and an unknown number of North Koreans dead. The 2002 incident left four South Koreans dead and an unknown number of North Koreans dead.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Cheonan's death toll of 46 South Koreans was the highest number of South Korean casualties since the 1960s.<sup>75</sup> From the South Korean perspective, such comparison left Cheonan's scale beyond other incidents, even as a dramatic turning point.

However, Beijing did not view the Cheonan sinking as so much different; instead, it held its previous position towards border clashes between

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<sup>72</sup> Jerden, 62.

<sup>73</sup> Snyder and Byun, 74.

<sup>74</sup> Jerden, 62.

<sup>75</sup> Snyder and Byun, 74.

the North and South. For the 1999 incident, China expressed concern and urged both parties to “show restraint.” Similarly during the 2002 incident, China did not criticize either North or South.<sup>76</sup> Once again during the Cheonan sinking, China used the exact same phrase “show restraint.” Thus, it would be reasonable to conclude that China kept its standard position. During Cheonan, it had merely defended its existing interest of keeping North Korea alive and the Korean peninsula stable.

Even considering the magnitude of the Cheonan incident, China has done its part to increase its proportionality of reaction, within the limit of keeping the same line of policy towards South-North Korea relations. Previously China had never supported any multilateral criticism of North Korea for border clashes, unlike the nuclear issue.<sup>77</sup> Thus, China’s opposition to a UN Security Council resolution was also an act that was in line with its previous position. However, China agreed to a presidential statement, which is unprecedented for a non-nuclear issue<sup>78</sup>; thus, from the Chinese perspective, it is increasing its proportionality of reaction towards North Korea. Although from the South Korean perspective, the action may not have been supportive

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<sup>76</sup> Jerden, 63.

<sup>77</sup> Jerden 63.

<sup>78</sup> United Nations Security Council, UN Documents for DPRK (North Korea): Security Council Presidential Statements. Security Council Report (April 16, 2012), <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/dprk-north-korea/>

enough to say the least, this shows a sign of China accommodating international pressure. It would be inaccurate to say that China is non- assertive. Yet, the statement is at least a sign of China not expanding its own interest; it is only defending its existing interest. Without provocation from South Korea, Chinese assertiveness was active defensive in the case of Cheonan sinking.

#### *4.3.3 Case 5: Reaction to the Yeonpyeong Shelling (November 2010)*

On November 23, 2010, North Korea fired artillery at the South Korean territory Yeonpyeong Island, which is near the disputed Northern Limit Line. The attack resulted in the death of two South Korean military personnel and two civilians, also wounding 19. On that day, the ROK military responded by shelling the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) batteries, which killed an unknown number of North Koreans. In contrast to the Cheonan sinking, the perpetrator of the Yeonpyeong shelling was immediately and clearly visible. Thus, the international community promptly criticized North Korea's brash actions. China also reacted quickly, in contrast to its slow response to Cheonan sinking. However, its response was almost identical to that after the Cheonan sinking; China held its traditional position of avoiding direct criticism of North Korea regarding border clashes, discouraging escalation in

Korean peninsula, and advocating stability in the peninsula. It was active defensive assertive, as in the case of the Cheonan sinking.

On the day of the shelling, PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei stated during a regular press conference that China has “taken note of relevant reports” and expressed “concern” regarding the situation.<sup>79</sup> Similar to the case of Cheonan, he refrained from singling out North Korea as the perpetrator, even when in this case Pyeongyang’s fault was even clearer, commenting that “the specifics need to be verified.” Again, he urged for the parties involved to “keep calm and exercise restraint,” for “peace and stability” on the Korean Peninsula, calling for the resumption of six-party talks.

During another regular press conference on November 25<sup>th</sup>, spokesperson Hong Lei reiterated China’s basic position, commenting that Beijing is “paying great attention to the incident” and that it expresses “grief and regret.” When asked regarding the perpetrator, Hong Lei responded that the DPRK and ROK made different claims about the cause of the incident, both accusing each other of opening fire first, and China avoided blaming either party. Then, he strongly called on both to keep “calm” and “restraint,” as in the case of the Cheonan sinking. China hoped that the parties involved should deal

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<sup>79</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on November 23" (November 23, 2010).



with the disputes “peacefully through dialogue” for the “peace and stability” of the Korean Peninsula. Yet, it expressed that its willingness to “work with other parties towards this end [peace and stability in the Peninsula].” He confirmed that the US and China have communicated closely regarding the crisis. As a method to accomplish this goal, China again mentioned the imperative to resume Six-Party Talks. Regarding the possible discussion of the incident at the Security Council, Hong Lei remained ambiguous, stating that “China is highly concerned” of the Yeonpyeong shelling incident.

On November 24<sup>th</sup>, an article from the Global Times under People’s Daily placed responsibility on both North and South Korea. The article titled “North and South Korea’s conversation through artillery shelling is the tragedy of Northeast Asia” commented that the two countries “argue that they are right, but one cannot determine the cause of the shelling.” Furthermore it said that “both sides are losers.” It also pointed out South Korean security dependence on the US, arguing that “In terms of mapping out the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula, South Korea only depends on the US-ROK military alliance, but does not negotiate with China... the threat of US-ROK military exercises

returned to the original point.”<sup>80</sup>

In the context of other countries vehemently criticizing North Korea, it would be dangerous for Beijing to join the gang, as it may give a false signal to Pyongyang about abandonment. China has had a policy of separating North Korean nuclear issues and other like border skirmishes. It is more stern towards nuclear issues, but lenient towards others. Such is clear, as an example in 2006 when the PRC openly criticized North Korea regarding the nuclear test. It used the word “hanran (flagrant)” regarding North Korean provocation. It also agreed to several UN Security Council resolutions regarding to North Korean nuclear issues, but none for other issues regarding DPRK.

In the case of other issues such as border skirmishes, China’s reaction remained restrained as in the case of Yeonpyeong shelling. Beijing’s attitude remained unchanged, defending its existing interest. In lieu of the Cheonan sinking, China reiterated its standard position with the same wordings. The wordings were consistent to those of the gun battle near Yeonpyeong Island in 1999 and navy ships fire exchange in 2002. Despite the consistency, many viewed China’s policy in 2010 regarding Cheonan and Yeonpyeong as an assertive action to condone North Korea’s provocative behavior. The main

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<sup>80</sup> 環球時報, “朝韩大炮对话是东北亚悲剧” (2010. 11. 24)

problem was that Chinese reaction remained the same, while the scale of North Korean provocation increased. In other words, as Ian Alastair Johnston commented, “Beijing’s policy prescription for stability on the peninsula had not changed as much as the situation had, leaving China’s status quo-oriented policy even more in tension with the preferences of other states.”

However, if Chinese reaction had changed dramatically based on the scale of the provocation, it would have been likely to be taken as a policy change rather than a change in proportionality within the same policy. After the Cheonan sinking in March 2010, China had already increased its proportionality of reaction by agreeing to the UN Security Council Presidential Statement. Further intensifying the reaction so soon in November the same year would be a burden to its relationship with North Korea. Especially considering that scholars, media and government officials of other countries scrutinize slight changes of wording in Chinese official statements, it would be difficult to change its attitude just enough to give the impression that China did not change the policy but only adjusted regarding to the scale of the incidents, not making North Korea fearful of abandonment.

Thus, in the case of Yeonpyeong shelling, China kept its existing interest and pursued more or less the same policy. There was no South Korean

provocation towards China, so China's assertiveness was active defensive.

#### ***4.4 Reactive Defensive Assertive***

##### *4.4.1 Case 6: EEZ Baseline Disputes*

South Korea and China had an ongoing disagreement over how to draw the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) baseline. According to The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a state can claim a zone extending 200 nautical miles from its coast. Within the zone, it controls access to fishing and resources. Both South Korea and China ratified UNCLOS in 1996 and declared their EEZs according to the law, which resulted in an overlapping area across the Yellow Sea. In such a case, states sometimes draw a line in the middle of the overlapping zones, but not always. South Korea argues for the median line, but China contended that its longer coastline and population should be taken into consideration when marking the line. The two sides have negotiated over the EEZ demarcation point 16 times since 1998, yet failed to reach an agreement. Socotra rock (Jeodo/Suyanzhao) is at the center of this dispute. Both the ROK and PRC governments' claim that Socotra Rock belongs to them because its ownership will strengthen the country's position on

the EEZ demarcation line and access to resources. South Korea has exercised physical control over it since 2003.<sup>81</sup> Several incidents occurred regarding Socotra Rock, during which China mostly remained reactive defensive, defending its existing interest with the other party's provocation.

From 1995 to 2003, South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries investigated and researched the ocean around Socotra rock in order to build a research center. When South Korea started building the research center, China objected and sent several surveillance ships over the area from 1999 to 2002.<sup>82</sup> Both in 2000 and 2003, China officially raised objections to the South Korean government for building the ocean research center.<sup>83</sup> It argued that South Korea should refrain from building structures on the reef until their disagreement is settled.<sup>84</sup> Despite the opposition, South Korea established the Jeodo Ocean Research Center in 2003.<sup>85</sup> In 2005, China sent several aircraft surveillance around the area.

In 2006, there was another alarming quarrel between the two. This

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<sup>81</sup>Harold. The paragraph entails information from the same source.

<sup>82</sup> Harold.

<sup>83</sup> 김애경, 「한중 간에 존재하는 잠재적 영토 및 해양경계 획정 문제」, 정재호 (편), 『중국을 고민하다: 한중관계의 딜레마와 해법』, (서울: 삼성경제연구소, 2011), 278.

<sup>84</sup> Roehrig.

<sup>85</sup> 김애경, 277.

raised security concerns in South Korea, inciting a heated debate on building a naval base in Jeju Island, close to Socotra Rock.<sup>86</sup> In 2008, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website listed Socotra Rock as Chinese territory.<sup>87</sup> This caused the South Korean government to prepare a submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf that would claim that Socotra Rock as a part of South Korea's continental shelf. According to Joongang Daily, a major South Korean newspaper, on August 7, 2008, China Oceanic Information Network website under the State Oceanic Administration on December 24, 2007 wrote "Suyanzhao [Socotra Rock] belongs to China."<sup>88</sup> It presented the map of Suyanzhao's location and its historical background. When the South Korean Foreign Ministry asked for revision, China erased the wording that "Suyanzhao is a Chinese territory" on August 13, 2008, but the next day, it rewrote the same statement on the website. When checked on December 30, 2009, the website said that Suyanzhao belongs to Chinese territorial waters.<sup>89</sup>

In March 2012, a Chinese official said that Socotra Rock was in China's "jurisdictional waters." This escalated the tension, causing the ROK

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<sup>86</sup> Chung, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Harold.

<sup>88</sup> 김애경, 278.

<sup>89</sup> 김애경, 278.

President Lee Myung Bak to declare that Socotra Rock would ‘fall naturally into South Korean-controlled areas’, since the reef is closer to South Korea.<sup>90</sup>

Chinese assertiveness in these events was reactive defensive. Defensive assertiveness is a confident and direct way to defend its existing interests but not expand those interests without provocation from others. Firstly, China did not expand its interests in these events post 2010. The bilateral interactions between China and South Korea regarding Socotra Rock/EEZ were a continuum of two sides arguing that Socotra Rock belongs to its EEZ. Both countries argued consistently regarding the overlapping zone, both arguing that Socotra rock belonged to them, but China did not show a sign of expanding its claims further. Secondly, South Korea provoked China first. Without the EEZ being negotiated with China, South Korea established an Ocean Research Center on the rock in 2003. This action, rather than statements beforehand or afterwards was a critical provocation from South Korea. Thus, the Chinese action was closer to reactive defensive assertiveness.

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<sup>90</sup> Roehrig.

## ***4.5 Non-Assertive***

### *4.5.1 Case 7: Reaction to KADIZ declaration (December 2013)*

On December 8, 2013, South Korea declared a new Korean Air Defense Identification Zone (KADIZ) as a response to the Chinese Air Defense Identification Zone (CADIZ) declaration in the previous month.<sup>91</sup> KADIZ went into effect on December 15. It expanded to include the airspace over the disputed Socotra Rock, Marado and Hongdo. South Korean Defense Ministry spokesman Kim Min Seok claimed that the islands are South Korean territory and said Seoul's action was in accord with international norms.

Although Seoul was provocative in its new announcement, it also shows its effort to minimize the tensions arising from the announcement. First, the new KADIZ was in line with the Incheon Flight Information Region, which is internationally recognized. Second, unlike China, Korea pursued prior consultations with China, the US and Japan and tried to minimize tensions arising from a sudden, unilateral declaration. The effort in fact decreased the tension, as the US State Department Spokeswoman Jen Psaki said that "We appreciate the ROK's efforts to pursue this action in a responsible, deliberate

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<sup>91</sup> Victor Cha, "Korea's Mistake on China's ADIZ Controversy," *CSIS Korea Chair Platform*, December 2, 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, <https://csis.org/publication/koreas-mistake-chinas-adiz-controversy>.



fashion by prior consultations with the United States and its neighbors, including Japan and China."<sup>92</sup> Third, the South Korean government made official statements to display its unwillingness to escalate the tension. According to the Head of Policy for ROK Defense Ministry Jang Hyuk, the government believes that the move "will not significantly impact our relationships with China and with Japan as we try to work for peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia." Jang stated that the "related countries" are overall "in agreement that this move complies with international regulations and is not an excessive measure."<sup>93</sup> In summary, South Korean action was a provocation, but due to its deft diplomacy before, during and afterwards, the tension remained relatively low.

The Chinese reaction to KADIZ announcement was not assertive, as its criticism was limited. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Hong Lei commented that "China expresses regret" to the announcement. However, China mostly tried to shed light on the cooperative ROK-China relationship in the future. First, Hong clarified that China wants to separate the two countries' overlapping ADIZ from a territorial and sovereignty disputes, as

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<sup>92</sup> Saeed Ahmed

<sup>93</sup> Jack Kim and Jane Chung, "South Korea Expands Air Defense Zone to Partially Overlap China's." *Reuters*, December 8, 2013, accessed April 9, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-china-air-idUSBRE9B703M20131208>.

an attempt to decrease the tension between the two. Hong noted that an ADIZ is not "territorial airspace" and "has nothing to do with maritime and air jurisdiction."<sup>94</sup> Second, he also said that China will stay in communication with the ROK "in the principle of equality and mutual respect." He added the hopeful comment for the future of ROK-China relationship. He called South Korea "a strategic cooperative partner of China"<sup>95</sup> and that it hopes that the South Korea will "meet China halfway."<sup>96</sup>

In short, China's reaction to KADIZ was non-assertive. Non-assertiveness is defined as not defending existing interests either with or without the other state's provocation. China did not attempt to defend its interest of securing and reiterating its ADIZ, even as Seoul provoked Beijing by extending its ADIZ. Although it expressed "regret," the focus of the Chinese government was to minimize the tension in Sino-ROK relations and to promote cooperation. The Chinese reaction towards South Korea was muted for several reasons. First, China declared its own ADIZ, claiming that it was in accordance with international norms and precedent. Arguing that Korea does not have the

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<sup>94</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on December 9" (December 9, 2013).

<sup>95</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on December 9."

<sup>96</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on December 9."

right to do so and such actions would be self-contradictory. Second, the original KADIZ from 1950s did not include the disputed area. It only included the area as a reaction to the Chinese inclusion of it during the CADIZ announcement in 2013. Third, South Korea consulted and notified China before the announcement as confirmed by China Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Hong Lei.

**Table 1.** Summary of the Case Studies

	Typology of Assertiveness	Provocation (Yes/No)	Existing vs. Expanding Interest	US and/or Japan Involvement
Case 1: <i>CADIZ Declaration</i>	Active Offensive	No	Expanding	Yes
Case 2: <i>Reaction to US-ROK Military Exercises</i>	Reactive Offensive	Yes	Expanding	Yes
Case 3: <i>Fishing Boat Incidents</i>	Active Defensive	No	Existing	No
Case 4: <i>Reaction to the Yeonpyeong Shelling</i>	Active Defensive	No	Existing	No
Case 5: <i>Reaction to the Cheonan Submarine Sinking</i>	Active Defensive	No	Existing	No
Case 6: <i>EEZ Baseline Dispute</i>	Reactive Defensive	Yes	Existing	No
Case 7: <i>Reaction to KADIZ Declaration</i>	Non-Assertive	No	No Interest	No

## **5. Analysis and Implications**

### ***5.1 Offensive and Defensive Pattern***

In this section, the seven case studies are divided into two parts: i) only contingent to ROK-China bilateral relations; ii) contingent to the Chinese relationship with South Korea plus either Japan and/or the US. I found that Chinese assertiveness was (active/reactive) defensive when the issue was only contingent to South Korea, but it was (active/reactive) offensive when it was related to Japan and/or the US. First, Beijing was reactive defensive in the EEZ baseline dispute and active defensive regarding the Yellow Sea fishing boat incidents. Even though the disputes are ongoing without a solution, Beijing and Seoul are keeping the communication line open to discuss the EEZ baseline and fishing boat incidents. The PRC did not react with extreme measures that expand its interest further. In the KADIZ announcement, it did not even display an assertive stance. Instead, it stayed relatively muted.

However, when the disagreements involved the US and/or Japan, China was (active/reactive) offensive. The CADIZ declaration and US-ROK military exercises in South Korean territorial waters are reflective of this stance. The Chinese criticism was more intense than before the previous US-ROK military exercises in 2010. During the US-ROK military exercise, Chinese criticism and

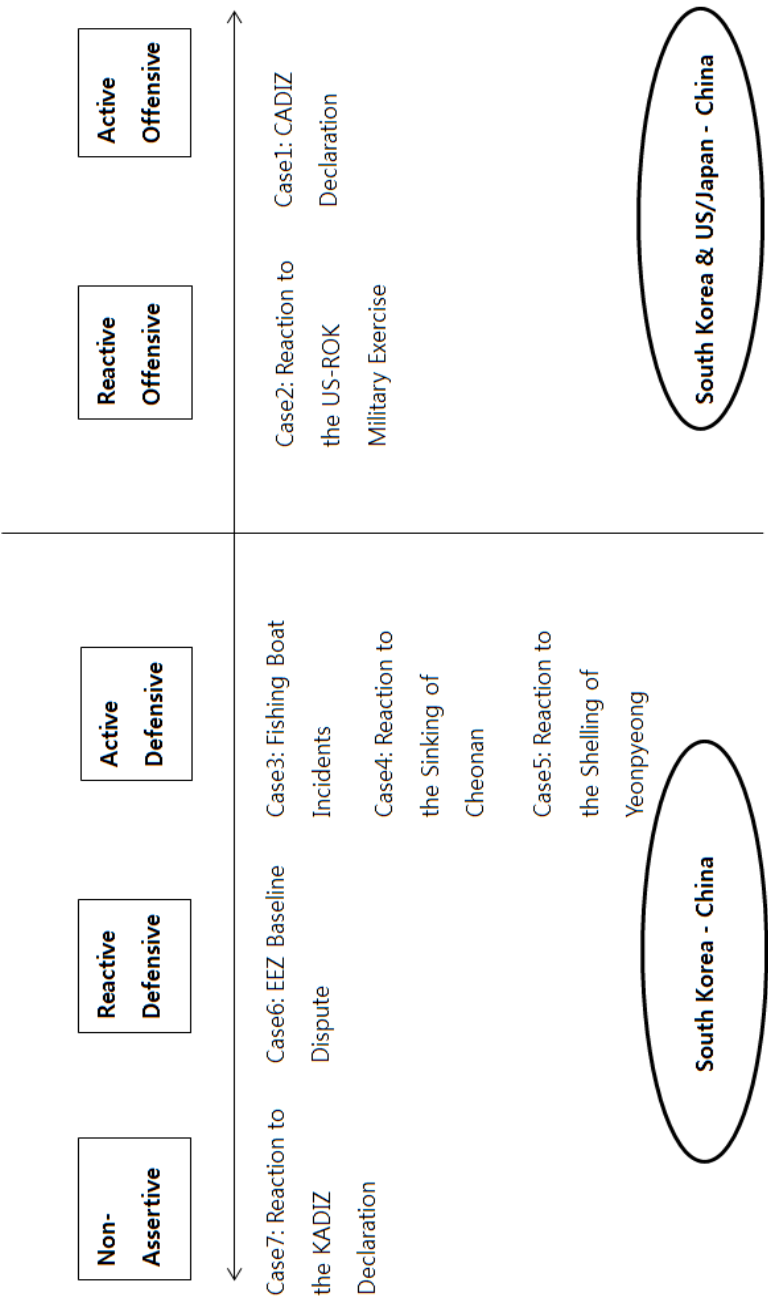
protests revolved around the US participation and the aircraft carrier USS George Washington being near Chinese waters. In the CADIZ declaration, although the PRC included overlapping areas with the ROK, its hostility mostly focused on Japan and then the US. As an example, its reaction to South Korean criticism and following the KADIZ announcement remained relatively muted, while it flared at Japanese and the US criticism. The Spokesman for the Chinese Defense Ministry claimed that since Tokyo established its ADIZ 44 years ago and one-sidedly allowed the zone to cover China's Diayu Island, Japan will have to "revoke its own ADIZ first, China will then consider this request in 44 years."<sup>97</sup> Both Xinhua and the Global Times criticized the US for displaying double standards by announcing world's first ADIZ yet discrediting China's declaration.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Chris Luo, "China Tells Japan It Would Consider Cancelling Air Zone in 44 Years," *South China Morning Post*, November 28, 2013, accessed April 26, 2015. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1367924/china-tells-japan-it-would-consider-cancelling-air-zone-44-years>.

<sup>98</sup> Zhou, Yongsheng, "China Will Not Revoke ADIZ, Due to Its Military and Diplomatic Necessity," *Global Times*, December 4, 2013, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/829869.shtml> and Liming Wu, "Commentary: U.S, Japan Wrong to Blame China for Air Zone," *Xinhua News*, November 26, 2013, accessed April 9, 2016, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2013-11/26/c\\_132919317.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2013-11/26/c_132919317.htm).

**Figure 2.** Range of Chinese Actions



## ***5.2 South Korea in between the US-Japan and China: Entrapment/Abandonment Fear***

So, what does this tell us? China is defensive assertive in its bilateral relationship with South Korea, but when South Korea brings along its older brother the US or is entangled with its quasi-ally Japan, Beijing becomes offensive assertive. Then, should Seoul feel relatively safe that Chinese hostility is mostly directed towards the US and Japan, but not as much towards Seoul?

My answer is no. South Korea and the US have a long standing military alliance. This fact is unlikely to change for the near future. So, it is impossible to talk about South Korean security without referring to the alliance. Thus, as US-China rivalry increases, South Korea will inevitably face the issue of being entrapped in the disputes between the two. It is likely to feel obligated to stand with the US, who is confronting China.

However, if South Korea aligns its position with the two allies in these disputes, China reacts with (reactive) offensive assertiveness. This reaction then will threaten Seoul. The security dilemma will intensify in this scenario. Such kind of escalation is not beneficial to the ROK. In the future, it will fear entrapment in the US-ROK alliance against China. Yet, if the ROK tries to “de-link” itself from the alliance, it will fear abandonment from the US. As an

example, after the CADIZ announcement, South Korea proposed to China to exclude the overlapping zone between the two countries. Scholars such as Victor Cha accused Seoul of de-linking itself from its traditional allies the US and Japan.<sup>99</sup> This in turn can cost South Korea abandonment from the US. However, such kind of pressure will continue to weigh on it. This finding regarding China clearly shows Seoul's dilemma of entrapment and abandonment fear in between Sino-US rivalry. These dormant issues may be further politicized in the future and exacerbate South Korean dilemma.

### ***5.3 Comparative Case Risk Analysis***

What specifically should the South Korean and Chinese policy makers pay more attention to? Some issues are of higher risk and require more management. The risk level of each case study will be analyzed based on Chinese assertiveness, frequency and duration of the conflicts, and actors involved.

First, the risk level of EEZ delineation dispute is low due to several factors. The Chinese attitude towards the issue is reactive defensive, meaning that it only reacts to South Korean provocations and defends existing interests, instead

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<sup>99</sup> Cha.



of expanding interests. The frequency of conflicts and incidents is low, although there is occasional surveillance by Chinese ships. In 2012, there were 14 Chinese government vessels and 34 naval vessels that entered water near Socotra rock.<sup>100</sup> The duration of the conflict is long term; despite the two governments' effort to delineate EEZs since 1998, it has failed. The actors involved in the EEZ disputes are police, and mostly ships. The mode of transportation decreases the risk; per se, the clashes between police ships do not necessarily lead to dire damage such as instant death, which is much more likely in other cases such as two planes crashing. Although the uncertainty lies in the fact that accidents can happen because there is no planning as in the case of military exercises, other factors of this case study do not escalate the disputes.

Second, in the case of the fishing boat incidents, the risk level is also low. The Chinese attitude is categorized as active defensive, which is that it acts without provocations, and defends its current interest. The frequency of Chinese fishing boats intruding the South Korean EEZ is high. Illegal Chinese fishing vessels captured EEZs and territorial water were 432 in 2008, 370 in 2010, and 467 in 2012.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, such an issue is a long term problem, as the demand

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<sup>100</sup> 고봉준. 2013. 「독도, 이어도 해양영토분쟁과 한국의 복합 대응」.

『한국정치연구』(충남대학교) 22, no. 1 (2013): 205.

<sup>101</sup> Chae-Hyun Lim. "A Study on the Law Enforcement of Korea Coast Guard against the Illegal Chinese

for fishery in China is likely to increase and thus overfishing in Chinese waters will push the fishers outwards. The actors involved are police and civilians. In such cases, the possibility of escalation is even lower than in the case of police to police or police to military confrontation as in the case of EEZ delineation disputes, and obviously less than military to military confrontations. If the number of Chinese vessels intruding increases and ROK decides to intensify its surveillance, there may be occasional incidents that may or may not be politicized, but this does not carry the risk of dramatic escalation.

Third, North-South Korean military conflicts are of medium risk level in terms of the occurrence escalating Sino-ROK conflicts. The case studies include Chinese reaction to the sinking of Cheonan and reaction to Yeonpyeong Island shelling. The frequency of such DPRK provocations is low, but the incidents of similar character and in a smaller scale have been generally consistent. From the 1950s to the 70s, conflicts were frequent, and less so in the 90s and 2000s. However, China has not displayed signs of creating conflicts with ROK based on these incidents. In the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents, the actors involved are North and South Korean military and at time civilians. Due to the direct military to military contact, the chance of escalation between the two

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Fishing Vessels," *Journal of the Korean Society of Marine Environment and Safety* 20, no. 1 (2014): 51.

Koreas is higher than the case of fishing boat incidents. However, Chinese military or civilians are not involved in these conflicts; the contacts in these cases are made between Chinese and South Korean government officials. Thus, the chance of escalation is less severe. First of all, the conflicts amongst government officials are not physical, not involving vessels or aircrafts, in contrast to the case of EEZ disputes, fishing boat incidents and ADIZ conflicts. Second, the interactions are often planned and controlled to represent government position, unlike the unexpected accidents in the case of the other disputes mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, the danger of South Korean popular opinion pressuring the ROK government to act more assertively towards China may cause Chinese reaction and the escalation may be expedited. However, such formation of popular opinion and it actually impacting policy choices takes time. Such a case is less immediate and more manageable than instant ship clashes or military contacts.

Fourth, reaction to US-ROK military exercises in South Korean territorial water is a medium risk. Chinese assertiveness was reactive offensive, which means that it expands its interest when provoked, which increases the risk level. The frequency of these exercises is low, and planned ahead in terms of location/scale and notified. There is no surprise like in the case of fishing boat incidents or EEZ delineation disputes. The duration is long term, as the

exercises have been routine. The danger lies in the fact that the actors are ROK and US military and that Chinese government usually reacts sensitively. However, due to the fact that such exercises can be planned, notified, controlled and managed without surprises, the risk level is medium. In the future however, if China-US rivalry increases and China opposes and reacts even more offensively, the risk level should be reevaluated.

Lastly, potential conflicts related to ADIZ are high risk. In the case studies, CADIZ declaration towards South Korea was considered as active offensive, and Chinese reaction to KADIZ declaration was non-assertive. The combination of the two is rather puzzling; Chinese attitude towards ADIZ issue is both active offensive and non-assertive. Regarding CADIZ announcement, China asserted itself, expanding its interest without provocation from the ROK. However, China shows unwillingness to provoke South Korea further when Seoul displayed its determination by declaring KADIZ. Thus, one can recognize that China is juggling its two interests: its desire to assert its security interest and an attempt to build an amicable relationship with South Korea. Despite this twofold picture of ADIZ case, I argue that this issue is high risk. Although the frequency of conflict is low at the moment, the future remains uncertain. Observing the Sino-Japan conflicts regarding ADIZ, especially around Senkaku/Diayu islands, the Sino-ROK conflicts have a potential to

increase in frequency depending on several factors such as the bilateral relationship, Chinese increasing power, Sino-US-ROK relationship, and Chinese domestic politics. The duration of this issue will be long term, as Beijing even commented that there might be further announcements of ADIZ in the future. The actors involved are critical in this case, as they are military to military and potentially civil aircrafts. Unlike the case of ships being the individual actors in EEZ delineation or fishing boat disputes, military aircrafts conflicts or accidents is much more likely to result in instant death of the personnel and/or complete destruction of the aircraft. Also, unlike in the case of US-ROK military exercises in the sea, ADIZ accidents are unplanned and uncontrolled. Moreover, since the ADIZ conflict is a recent development between Seoul and Beijing, there has not been enough time to verify whether or not dangerous situations can be managed peacefully and comprehensively. This is further complicated by the Japan-ROK-PRC ADIZ overlapping the area of Socotra Rock, which increases uncertainty.

#### ***5.4 Policy Suggestions***

From the previous analysis, it is evident that some issues are of higher risk of dispute escalation than others, ADIZ issue is categorized as high risk,

requiring more attention than the others. What are the possible options for Beijing and Seoul to mitigate the risk level of these two issues? The following policy suggestions further elaborate the current status of prevention, crisis management and dispute settlement mechanisms and future policy suggestions.

Currently, there are not enough effective mechanisms to prevent dispute escalation regarding ADIZ in Northeast Asia. On a positive note, Beijing and Seoul established a military hotline between defense ministers on December 31, 2012. It is South Korea's third defense minister-level hotline with a foreign country. Whether or not this hotline will be actively used is yet to be verified.

In terms of the broader picture, actors involving Japan, the PRC, ROK, ROC and the US, hotlines are available in some cases, but not in others. Seoul established one with the US in 1995 and Japan in 1999.<sup>102</sup> A Beijing-Washington hotline exists, and in 2015 September, they made agreements on the rules regarding military hotlines and on the behavior to govern air-to-air encounters.<sup>103</sup> The Beijing-Tokyo hotline was agreed upon but had not been established. In short, the establishment and usage of hotlines in Northeast Asia

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<sup>102</sup> Yonhap News, "S. Korea, China Establish Military Hotline," December 31, 2015, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2015/12/31/0200000000AEN20151231006500315.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Phil Stewart, "U.S., China Agree on Rules for Air-to-Air Military Encounters," *Reuters*, September 25, 2015, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-pentagon-idUSKCN0RP1X520150925>.

is intermittent and sporadic. The Northeast Asian countries should attempt to set up hotlines where they do not exist and utilize them effectively during crisis. Moreover, it is not to say that these are ineffective, but more supporting mechanisms are necessary. The available hotline can serve as a method to manage the crisis escalation and react quickly without prolonged process. Nonetheless, it cannot fulfill the purpose of dispute prevention and systematic crisis management. Hotlines can function as one of the instruments but not the only one.

Holding a multilateral meeting to discuss and regulate air-to-air encounter is one option. In December 2013, when Seoul expanded KADIZ, it also called for a trilateral meeting with Beijing and Tokyo to discuss how to handle the three countries' overlapping area of ADIZ.<sup>104</sup> The three countries are the most directly impacted by the issue, but further consultations with the US and Taiwan can also be helpful in creating a comprehensive system. China and Japan also attempted to establish a crisis management mechanism (CMM). A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said that "China is of the view that the two sides should enhance communication and jointly maintain flight security." Despite Beijing's initiative, Tokyo displayed an ambiguous attitude. On one hand, it

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<sup>104</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)," 12.

expressed a willingness to install an instrument for the militaries and defense ministries to communicate. Former PRC state councilor and foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan suggested installing a bilateral aviation CMM similar to the current maritime mechanism between Chinese and Japanese defense ministries. Such a mechanism is similar to US Vice President Biden's suggestion.<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, it showed reluctance regarding holding talks or consultations regarding CADIZ because of similar reasoning towards Senkaku/Daioyu disputes; it refuses to recognize the legitimacy of Chinese ADIZ above Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Tokyo believes that consulting on the topic indicates that it recognizes that there is a dispute and that China has some authority, which then needs to be negotiated.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the challenge lies in bringing Tokyo to the negotiation table.

Bilateral consultations are meaningful, but trilateral talks should happen; the zone above the disputed Socotra Rock is overlapped by all three countries, unlike the zone above Senkaku/Diaoyu island which is claimed by Japan and China. Moreover, a greater number of issues are politicized regarding ADIZ, involving all three countries. In 2013, after the CADIZ declaration, Tokyo and

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<sup>105</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)," 22.

<sup>106</sup> Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)," 14.



Seoul held joint air and naval training exercise in the area that overlaps with CADIZ.<sup>107</sup> Although they claimed that the rescue drill was planned before Beijing's announcement, analysts and media portrayed the event as Tokyo and Seoul sending a strong signal to Beijing. A South Korean military official said that two destroyers and two helicopters from each side participated.<sup>108</sup> Yet, they did not notify the Chinese authorities of the drill involving aircrafts when CADIZ requires them to do so; this indicates that Japan and South Korea were displaying unwillingness to comply with CADIZ. Moreover, the location of the exercise was close to Socotra Rock, which adds to this argument. Some experts such as Scott Harold observed that despite the tense relations between Japan and Korea for the past year, CADIZ "inadvertently brought the two countries closer."<sup>109</sup> The Japan-ROK cooperation in security issues can be a strain on Sino-ROK relations. As in this case, ADIZ further complicated trilateral politics. Sets of bilateral mechanisms may not be enough to smoothly resolve the issues when all three are involved, which is possible, especially in the area above Socotra Rock. Thus, trilateral consultation discussing the codes of conduct in

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<sup>107</sup> Eun-jung Kim, "S. Korea, Japan conduct search, rescue drill in East China Sea," *Yonhap*, December 12, 2013, accessed February 3, 2016.

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2013/12/12/23/0301000000AEN20131212007100315F.html>.

<sup>108</sup> Kwok, Kristine. "Japan and South Korea Hold Joint Exercise in China's Air Defence Zone." *South China Morning Post*, December 12, 2013. Accessed September 10, 2015.

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1379044/japan-and-south-korea-hold-joint-sea-drill-china-air-defence-zone>.

<sup>109</sup> Kwok.

air-to-air interactions in the region, in addition to bilateral talks is a safeguard against unexpected situations. Some of the established maritime mechanisms between China and Japan can be a starting point of creating a blue print of ADIZ codes.

The US can be an effective mediator. After the CADIZ announcement, Vice President Joe Biden promptly visited Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo to consult them and manage the crisis. Also, although Washington criticized Beijing, it suggested its civil airlines to comply with CADIZ, which China appreciated. Its attitude is less aggressive than Japan and displays willingness to manage the issue as an actor whose ADIZ does not overlap with the other three countries. Yet, it is inherently involved as the creator of the first ADIZ and that of Japan, the ROK and ROC. Thus, despite the skepticism from Beijing regarding the objective and fair role of the US, Washington has a potential to play an important role.

## 6 Conclusion

Unlike the popular notion of aggressively “assertive” China, the discussion of Sino-ROK relationship proves otherwise. First, this paper poses an alternative to define different kinds of assertiveness, moving away from the negative, one-dimensional concept of assertiveness. Deriving from behavioral science and international relations, the typology is divided into active offensive, reactive offensive, active defensive, reactive defensive, based on two indicators of expanding/existing interest and provocation/no provocation from the other party. Based on the framework, this paper analyzes the case study of Sino-ROK bilateral relationship. The paper delineates Chinese assertiveness towards South Korea, conducting seven case studies on security issues. The findings present that when the conflicts involved just the two countries, Beijing was defensive assertive and non-assertive towards Seoul, meaning that it either defended the existing claim without expanding it or at times did not defend it at all. However, when the US and Japan were involved in the conflicts, Beijing was offensive assertive, expanding its claims. The range of assertiveness differed also depending on whether or not it was provoked by Seoul.

Then, why does it matter to assess Chinese assertiveness towards South Korea? The significance lies in pointing to the drawback of analyzing Chinese

assertiveness towards different countries; Beijing may be assertive towards certain countries, but not towards some others. If such is the case, it is dangerous to make policy decisions based on general multilateral analysis. Moreover, the study tests whether or not it is analytically sound to unify the perspectives of the US and its allies. The result is that Washington and its allies do not necessarily share the same interest or position in the interactions with Beijing. The Sino-ROK relationship proves to be the case that displays the danger of accepting the popular narrative of Chinese assertiveness.

The limitations of this discussion exist in that the case studies target security issues, which tend to include state interests that cannot be compromised, in comparison to economic or social issues. This then in turn may emphasize more assertive aspects of Beijing's foreign policy. Thus, in terms of the Sino-ROK bilateral relationship, it will be meaningful to analyze Chinese assertiveness on non-security issues such as economics, politics and historical disputes. Such research can provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationship. Also, on the topic of security, observing further development of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) issue and how it affects US-ROK-China relationship will be another important point to assess Chinese assertiveness.

For future research, one may go beyond the Sino-ROK relationship. Analyzing Chinese assertiveness in bilateral relationships with other countries will be helpful for policy making for individual states, especially those in Asia who face similar pressure as South Korea, and can contribute to further clarifying Chinese intentions towards different countries. Furthermore, the assertiveness typology can be used not just for China, but studying other country's actions and statements. As an example, when studying the Sino-US bilateral relationship, evaluating US assertiveness towards China as well as the reverse can add to the two countries interaction.

Beyond the current dilemma, the findings reaffirm a popular historical picture of South Korea as a shrimp between the whales, in this case the US-Japan alliance and China. However, it is not just South Korea that faces this impasse. Many middle and small power states, especially ones in Asia feel the pressure to balance between these two giants. When the Sino-US relationship is amicable, the strain is lower. Yet when the relationship deteriorates, the middle and small powers in the region inevitably are forced into making decisions on which sides to choose in what circumstances and to what degree. If or when the countries face the dilemma, they may be better off not believing the implications of the assertive China hype.

## **Appendix1. List of Abbreviations**

ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
CADIZ	Chinese Air Defense Identification Zone
CMM	Crisis Management Mechanism
DPRK	The Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
KADIZ	Korean Air Defense Identification Zone
PRC	The People's Republic of China
ROC	The Republic of China
ROK	The Republic of Korea

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