

## Nationalism and the Chinese Communist Party's Attitude towards Japan

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China's overbearing approach towards maritime expansion mainly in the East China Sea and the South China Sea is causing a significant concern for Japan and the neighboring countries. Why does China continue to pursue changes to the status quo through coercive measures, even if it will lead to the deterioration of its relations with the countries of the region and attract criticism from the United States?

### Legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party Depending on the Two Types of Nationalism

China's political system is a one-party dictatorship controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP plays a dominant role in the policy making and, therefore, the interests of the party take precedence over the interests of the Chinese people. The major interest of the CCP is to maintain the current authoritarian political system. Although the CCP attempts to be forcing the people to accept the rule of the party by using the security apparatus including the People's Liberation Army and the Public Security Police, it is difficult to maintain its regime just through this method of suppression. The CCP, which inherently denies the free and fair election that is the foundation of democracy, needs to create its own legitimacy to convince the people of the monopolistic ruling of the party. The key pillar to this end is to strive for achieving the goals that are demanded by nationalism.

There are two different types of nationalism in the Chinese society of today. One is the "Nation State Nationalism" which seeks the independence and

reunification of China. The CCP is trying to obtain the consent of the people for the control of the party that depends on the Nation State Nationalism, by highlighting as its own achievement the establishing a government of national unity through playing a leading role in Anti-Japanese War to become independent from Japan as well as the victory against the Kuomintang in the civil war. Furthermore, the party is also claiming that in order to achieve the unification of China by recovering Taiwan, the Senkaku Islands and Spratly (Nansha) Islands, which are "lost territories," the strong leadership of the Communist Party is crucial.

The other nationalism is the "Middle Kingdom Nationalism" that is characteristic to China. Underlying this Middle Kingdom Nationalism is the historical sense of superiority that during the thousands of years of East Asia's history Chinese civilization has constantly played a central role, and the Chinese empire has reigned as the paramount leader in maintaining regional order. The Middle Kingdom Nationalism desires not only for China to be a major power, but also wants it to be a great power that overwhelms other countries in East Asia, and demands the reconstruction of an order where China sits on top. The Xi Jinping administration has put up a slogan "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," and this is a part of the effort to enforce the legitimacy of the control of the CCP, in response to the Middle Kingdom Nationalism sentiment that requests the restoration of a Sinocentric regional order.

### Japan - A Major Obstacle to China's Efforts in Restoring Sinocentric Order in the Region

For the Chinese Communist Party that places importance on these two types of nationalism in order to maintain its authoritarian regime, Japan naturally becomes its greatest target of criticism. Holding a massive military parade to mark the 70th Anniversary of victory against Japan, and the reinforcement of the challenge against Japan's territorial rights to the Senkaku Islands, are actions to meet the demands of Nation State Nationalism. Moreover, although Japan has been the only developed country to have represented economic leadership in East Asia since the World War II, the aim of Middle Kingdom Nationalism is for China to overtake the Japanese position in these aspects. The establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), an overlapping regional financial institution with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), can be seen as the first step to achieve this goal.

Furthermore, Japan poses a major obstacle to China's efforts in restoring Sinocentric order in the region, in that Japan is an ally of the United States. The existing order in East Asia is maintained by the military presence of the United States. The United States is supporting Taiwan in its efforts to defend itself, is committed to the security of Japan and the Philippines as an ally, and is strengthening its relationship with Vietnam and other countries in the South China Sea. The strong influence the United States has over East Asia provides the countries in the region with options to resist the growing pressure by China. Japan is the greatest ally that supports the presence of the U.S. Forces in East Asia. To the CCP aiming to gain a hegemonic position in the region, Japan is a major obstruction that continues to enforce the Japan-U.S. alliance through measures such as the revisions of the guidelines for defense cooperation.

### The Never Ending Pressure on Japan by the Chinese Communist Party

Additionally, the Chinese Communist Party views universal values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and rules of law that are the basis of existing regional order as something that endangers its one-party political system and regards them as enemies. For the communist regime that takes the view that in the background of the movement criticizing the CCP in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, there is a string being pulled by the opposition faction in the West such as the United States and Japan, the existing order led by United States and Japan is something that in principle it cannot accept. For this reason, the CCP is making every effort in promoting the change of the current regional order.

With the purpose of restoring Sinocentric order in the region in response to the request from the two types of nationalism, the critical issue for the CCP is to compel Japan to accept the superiority of China. So in order to try to extract concessions from Japan as regards issues surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and to aim at weakening the Japan-U.S. alliance, China will not only apply economic and military pressure on Japan, but also reinforce the international propaganda that takes up historical issues. For the CCP, it is indispensable to continuously exert pressure on Japan in various ways for maintaining its dictatorial regime.

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