

# Revisiting the “Cap-in-the-Bottle” Thesis: Negotiations and Disagreements among Japan, China, and the U.S. in the early 1970s\*

ISHIHARA Yusuke\*\*

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## Abstract

This study examines the “cap-in-the-bottle” thesis, an idea long considered as underpinning the post-war East Asian international order and especially the relationships between Japan, the U.S., and China. The analysis in this study primarily focuses on trilateral discussions and negotiations that took place during the processes of the U.S.-China rapprochement and the Sino-Japanese diplomatic normalization between 1969 and 1973, in which the “cap-in-the bottle” thesis emerged as an idea involving China. This study draws on insights offered by the existing literature , and also capitalizes on archival and other historical sources in substantiating and reconceptualising the “cap-in-the-bottle” thesis. It concludes that while an awareness of what could be conceptualized as the “cap-in-the-bottle” thesis had been developing in Japan, the U.S., and China respectively in the early 1970s, the period under consideration in this study, the three countries did not work out a clear common understanding about this concept’s purposes and functions, thus leaving significant disagreements unaddressed as a potential source of future tensions.

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## Introduction

When discussing the changes and crises to the international order in recent years, scholars often point out the increasing outdatedness of the “cap-in-the-bottle” thesis, (hereafter, “bottle cap” thesis) in relation to Japan’s place in the evolving East Asian regional order. While there is more than one definition of the “bottle cap” thesis, its broad common definition can be summarized as follows: (1) the prevention of Japan’s security expansion and military aggression through the presence of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region, centered around the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the U.S. Forces in Japan, and furthermore, (2) the assertion that this has been accepted for many years by various countries in East Asia, including China, and that it has supported regional

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\*\* Senior Fellow, Global Security Division, Policy Studies Department, NIDS

stability.<sup>1</sup> Yet, scholars often claim that the “bottle cap” thesis has collapsed with the emergence of certain trends—the prominent rise of China after the Cold War, the expansion of the Self-Defense Forces’ missions and activities, and the strengthening of the Japan-U.S. alliance—indicating a weakening of the role that the U.S. has long fulfilled in the East Asian order. This interpretation has become common in academic papers and think tank community discussions both within and outside Japan.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, some also claim, based on such understanding, that both Japan and the U.S., which have not adequately reassured China based on the “bottle cap” thesis, bear some responsibility for the recent destabilization and escalation of tensions in East Asia.<sup>3</sup> Yet, no focused examination has yet been conducted on whether this “bottle cap” thesis has actually been recognized and functioning in practical terms (or in what form) among Japan, the U.S., and China. As this study points out later, the term for the “bottle cap” thesis itself only emerged and developed after the 1990s (although the underlying concept is older), and the discussions conducted by scholars and policymakers at the time were often based on unsubstantiated hindsight rather than grounded in close empirical analyses. It remains a question, therefore, whether and how the “bottle cap” thesis, in terms of its function or recognition, supported the stability of East Asia. Neither has the literature so far established whether there was actually some form of shared recognition of this concept among countries in the region, especially Japan, China, and the U.S.

To address these issues and questions, this study takes a scholarly step forward in examining the “bottle cap” thesis by reviewing the trilateral discussions and negotiations that took place during the U.S.-China rapprochement and the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations between 1969 and 1973, which is widely considered to be the historical origin of this thesis, established as an idea that also involved China. It goes without saying that Japan-U.S., Japan-China, and U.S.-China relations during this period have already been empirically analyzed from various

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<sup>1</sup> The following are the representative examples of prior research addressing or mentioning the “bottle cap” thesis. Paul Midford, “China views the revitalised US-Japan Defense Guidelines: popping the cork?” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 4 (2004), pp. 113-145; Evelyn Goh, “Rising in a New Order? Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in East Asia,” *The Centre of Gravity Series*, Paper no. 11 (2013): 6; Fred Hiatt, “Marine General U.S. Troops Must Stay in Japan,” *The Washington Post*, March 27, 1990; Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1992), pp. 44-45; Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961–1974: From “Red Menace” to “Tacit Ally”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 176-177, 225; Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969–1972* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), pp. 124-136; Richard McGregor, *Asia’s Reckoning: China, Japan, and the Fate of U.S. Power in the Pacific Century* (New York: Viking, 2017), pp. 41-54; Nakajima Shingo, *Sengo Nihon no Bōei Seisaku: “Yoshida Rosen” wo meguru Seiji, Gaikō, Gunji* [Defense Policy of Postwar Japan: Politics, Diplomacy and Military Affairs over “Yoshida’s Policy Line”] (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2006). Among these studies, some are observed to focus solely on definition (1) of the “bottle cap” thesis adopted in this paper, omitting definition (2). This paper adopts a definition that includes the regional perspective of (2), establishing, as a premise for problem-setting, the academic background that has emphasized the “bottle cap” thesis as a mechanism for providing assurance to countries in the region within the context of regional order in East Asia.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the following for representative discussions that make this assertion. Hugh White, “Why War in Asia Remains Thinkable,” *Survival* 50, no. 6, (2008), pp. 85-104; Thomas J. Christensen, “China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the Security Dilemma in East Asia,” in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, eds. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 25-35. Also refer to the following regarding the point that there have been arguments stating that the “bottle cap” thesis has receded in China. Adam P. Liff, “China and the US Alliance System,” *The China Quarterly* 233 (March 2018): p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Evan Sankey, “Is the U.S.-Japan Alliance Still the ‘Cornerstone’ of Stability in Asia?” *The National Interest*, (May 2021), accessed November 1, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/us-japan-alliance-still-%E2%80%98cornerstone%E2%80%99-stability-asia-184039?page=0%2C1>.

angles through research on diplomatic history. Yet, there are no substantial studies so far that specifically focus on examining the “bottle cap” thesis in depth.<sup>4</sup> This study is not a historical research with a purpose of introducing new historical materials and showing new historical facts per se, but rather, to organize and systematize existing research and historical sources that are already widely used in order to assess and reconceptualize the ‘bottle cap’ thesis. It concludes that while an idea of what could be conceptualized as the “bottle cap” thesis had started to emerge in Japan, the U.S., and China respectively in the early 1970s, the period under consideration in this study, the three countries did not work out a clear common understanding about this concept’s purposes and functions, thus leaving significant disagreements unaddressed as a potential source of future tensions.

This paper is comprised of the following three sections. As a basis for analysing discussions in the early 1970s, the first section examines discussions from the 1990s to the early 2000s when the term “bottle cap” thesis was coined as such and established as a part of the East Asian security lexicon. The analysis of these post-Cold War discussions is useful for identifying what aspects and questions surround and inform the ‘bottle cap’ thesis. Based on such conceptual findings of the first section, the second section revisits the policy development in the early period of the Nixon administration, which attempted to use the “bottle cap” thesis as an instrument to assuage China’s worries of Japan’s growing economic strength, and thus to persuade Chinese leaders to accept the U.S. military presence in East Asia as a restraint over Tokyo’s potential menace. This section confirms that such an attempt by the Nixon administration largely reflected tactical considerations in persuading China. It also shows that China was then in the process of changing its stance toward Japan-U.S. security arrangements and more widely the presence of the U.S. military due to various domestic and international factors. The Nixon administration’s attempt to persuade Chinese leaders about the “bottle cap” thesis was one of several factors (not a single determinant) that informed such a broad reevaluation on the Chinese side. Overall, this section shows that China had acquiesced to the “bottle cap” thesis but emphasizes that this had only been provisional; that is, China still maintained its ideological and historical skepticism toward this idea. The third section examines whether and how Japan perceived discussions between the U.S. and China on what could be described as the “bottle cap” thesis, and how this perception influenced Japan’s review of its security policy at the time. By the time of the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in September 1972, Japan, drawing on various direct and indirect sources of information, had begun to speculate about the potential establishment of an understanding between the U.S. and China that was akin to the “bottle cap” thesis. This awareness can be said to have had a certain impact on domestic discussions taking place at the time with regard to the continuation of Japan-U.S. security arrangements. At the same time, Japan’s perception was largely based on speculation, and failed to reflect accurately U.S.-China discussions on this idea.

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<sup>4</sup> Ishii Osamu, *Haken no Kageri: Beikoku no Ajia Seisaku to wa Nandatta no ka?* [The Decline of Hegemony: What Was America’s Asia Policy?] (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobo, 2015); Sahashi Ryo, *Kyozon no Mosaku: Amerika to “Futatsu no Chugoku” no Reishen* [Search for Coexistence: the United States and Two Chinas during the Cold War] (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 2015); Jian Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961–1974: From ‘Red Menace’ to ‘Tacit Ally’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Komine Yukinori, “The “Japan Card” in the United States Rapprochement with China, 1969–1972,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 20, no. 3 (2009): pp. 494-514.

## 1. Post-Cold War coinage of the “bottle cap” thesis: the 1990s to the early 2000s

During the process of U.S.-China rapprochement, the Nixon administration emphasized the presence of the U.S. Forces in East Asia as a mechanism to suppress the danger posed by Japan. This fact became widely known after it was first mentioned by senior members of the Nixon administration in their memoir. In his own memoir, President Nixon touched on how he had emphasized to Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai the importance of U.S.-Japan relations and the presence of the U.S. in the region in order to alleviate concerns about Japan’s rising influence in the future, and highlighted that he had received a certain degree of understanding from the Chinese leaders.<sup>5</sup> Corresponding with this, Henry A. Kissinger, national security advisor to Nixon, also suggested in his memoirs that Nixon had made such statements and that they were supported by the Chinese side.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, John Holdridge, a Senior Staff Member for the Far East of the National Security Council (NSC) led by Kissinger, pointed out in his memoirs that both Nixon and Kissinger had emphasized the function of U.S. military presence in restraining Japan for the Chinese side.<sup>7</sup> The series of statements by these high-ranking officials was later corroborated by the publication of significant portions of the records of meetings between Kissinger and Zhou Enlai, and between Nixon and Zhou Enlai as well as between Nixon and Mao Zedong, in the early 2000s by the National Security Archive, a private organization based in Washington, DC, and in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, a compilation of diplomatic documents by the U.S. Department of State.<sup>8</sup> According to these records, Nixon and Kissinger had emphasized the need for the U.S. to exert influence on Japan to prevent it from advancing into Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula again, and to that end, they also stressed the importance of maintaining the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the presence of the U.S., including the U.S. Forces, in the region. Furthermore, these records also suggest that China was not necessarily opposed to the reasoning given by the U.S. side.

Yet, the explicit discourse conceptualizing this series of statements by the Nixon administration as the “bottle cap” thesis did not emerge in the same era, but instead, emerged and developed later from the 1990s to the early 2000s. In order to clarify the definition of the “bottle cap” thesis and the accompanying key points of discussion, it is necessary to first examine the background and discussions associated with the development of this concept in the post-Cold War era, even if this may seem to be the roundabout route. As described below, the “bottle cap” thesis is rather contentious and encompasses various unresolved points. This section first examines these, then establishes a conceptual foundation for looking at the discussions among Japan, the U.S., and China in the early 1970s in the subsequent sections.

There are two main factors underlying the emergence and widespread recognition of the “bottle cap” thesis from the 1990s to the early 2000s. One is the fundamental debate that arose

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Nixon, *Leaders: Profiles and Reminiscences of Men Who Have Shaped the Modern World* (New York: Warner Books, 1982), pp. 232-233.

<sup>6</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), pp. 1089-1090.

<sup>7</sup> John H. Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide: An Insider’s Account of the Normalization of U.S.-China Relations* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, July 9, 1971, 4:35–11:20 P.M., *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no. 139, p. 395; Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, October 22, 1971, 4:15–8:28 p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-13, no. 44, p. 7; Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, October 25, 1971, 9:50–11:40 p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-13, no. 54, p. 15.

after the end of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union regarding whether the forward deployment forces and alliance network of the U.S. military in East Asia should be continued going forward. Additionally, the idea that U.S. military presence should continue to serve as a restraint mechanism for Japan even after the end of the Cold War was put forward, and this idea became known as the “bottle cap” thesis. This was triggered by the reporting of the following statement made by Lieutenant General Henry Stackpole III of the U.S. Marine Corps stationed in Japan in March 1990.<sup>9</sup> In the context of discussing the future of U.S. military presence, he said, “No one wants to see a rearmed, resurgent Japan (in Asia),” and to prevent that from happening, “you can say that we are a cap in the bottle (restraining Japan)” (supplementary notes in parenthesis added by the author). Furthermore, at a time when Japan was still enjoying a bubble economic boom and there was much talk about its economic rise, Lieutenant General Stackpole pointed out that the Japanese had achieved the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere without using weapons, and stated that if the U.S. were to withdraw from the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, it would inevitably become a destabilizing factor in Asia. The concept of the “bottle cap” thesis as articulated by Stackpole became established within Japan’s academic and policy communities, which were witnessing a revitalization of discussions regarding the future of U.S. military presence. For example, during a House of Councillors Cabinet Committee Meeting held in May 1993, then-Director General of the Japan Defense Agency, Sohei Miyashita, responded cautiously as follows<sup>10</sup> regarding his understanding of the “bottle cap” thesis. While he stated that the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the U.S. forces in Japan do not exist to prevent Japan from becoming a military power, he also indicated that U.S. military presence is recognized in East Asia as a means of preventing Japan from becoming a military power. Following Miyashita’s response, the “bottle cap” thesis was frequently mentioned in the National Diet of Japan.<sup>11</sup> As discussed later, there were occasions where Cabinet Ministers, including the Prime Minister, as well as experts and scholars attending as witnesses, shared their views on the subject.

The second factor that contributed to the proliferation of the “bottle cap” thesis (although seeming to be in conflict with the first factor) is the emergence of the argument that changes in Japan’s security policy after the Cold War had become a source of concern among East Asian countries including China. To briefly name a few, these changes included the Self-Defense Forces’ participation in UN peacekeeping operations after 1992, the revision of the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation as one of the outcomes of the redefinition or reaffirmation of the Japan-U.S. alliance, setting out the assignment of new missions to the Self-Defense Forces in situations in the areas surrounding Japan as well as the various legislative measures that followed, and the exploration of Japan-U.S. cooperation in ballistic missile defense. Researchers at the time paid

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<sup>9</sup> The term “bottle cap” thesis became well-known after it was mentioned by Lieutenant General Henry Stackpole III of the U.S. Marine Corps stationed in Japan in March 1990, but the origins of this idea in the context of trilateral relations between Japan, the U.S., and China can be traced back to the early 1970s when progress was made in U.S.-China rapprochement and the normalization of relations between Japan and China. Fred Hiatt, “Marine General U.S. Troops Must Stay in Japan,” *The Washington Post*, March 27, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Miyashita Sohei (Remark 060), “123rd Session of the National Diet, House of Councilors Cabinet Meeting No. 5, May 14, 1993,” Full-text Database System for the Minutes of the Diet.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Kayahara Ikuo (Remark 009), 136th Session of the National Diet, House of Councilors Research Committee on Foreign Affairs No. 2, February 14, 1997.” Takagi Seiichiro (Remark 022), 141st Session of the National Diet, House of Councilors Research Committee on Foreign Affairs No. 3, November 5, 1998.”

attention to China's perception of these developments and to the trends of discussions within China, and conducted analyses while also referencing the "bottle cap" thesis. According to these analyses, Chinese experts and media held the perception that the Japan-U.S. alliance as a mechanism to restrain Japan had ceased to function, with some even assessing that the only positive element ("silver lining"), which had existed amidst unfortunate circumstances, in other words the "bottle cap" thesis, had come to an end.<sup>12</sup> As of the time of writing this paper, the 1990s were still a period when policy documents had only been partially released from both Japan and the U.S., making diplomatic historical research a difficult task. At least according to testimonies from the relevant parties and various studies, however, there are indications that the "bottle cap" thesis may actually have emerged as a point of discussion among government authorities in Japan, the U.S., and China. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Joseph Nye, who played a crucial role in the Clinton administration's process of reaffirming the Japan-U.S. alliance, described the following in an interview about the discussions between the U.S. and China at the time. While the Chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (\*The Chief of the General Staff whose tenure overlapped with Nye's tenure in office was General Zhang Wannian) had said that China was in principle opposed to the "overseas bases" of foreign military forces, he had stated definitively that the U.S. forces in Japan were treated as an exception in the sense that they serve to restrain Japan. This suggests that an idea akin to the "bottle cap" thesis existed on the part of the PRC government.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, according to Funabashi Yoichi's *Alliance Adrift*, which has become a classic in research on Japan-U.S. alliance at the time, there were suspicions among Japanese government officials at the time that the U.S. might be using the "bottle cap" thesis as a means of alleviating China's vigilance towards Japan.<sup>14</sup>

Concerning the essence of the "bottle cap" thesis that emerged and proliferated against this backdrop, there was general consensus that it refers to the fact that the restraint of Japan's security trajectory by the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the presence of U.S. forces in Japan, has been accepted by many countries in East Asia, including China. Yet, there are no studies that further develop this analytical concept, with the exception of pioneering work by Thomas Christensen and Paul Midford, which will be touched on later. Consequently, the "bottle cap" thesis has remained underdeveloped, leaving the following three conceptual issues in particular.

The first issue lies in the lack of clarity regarding what exactly constitutes the danger from Japan that should be prevented. This is evidenced by the ambiguity in the expressions used when discussing the "bottle cap." For example, in studies and discussions on this concept, terms such as "Japan's resurgence" or "resurging Japan," "militarist expansion," "militarism," and even "the avoidance of regional hegemony" are used, but what they mean precisely is not necessarily clear.<sup>15</sup> For example, it is unclear, which parts of East Asia such external expansions might be directed

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<sup>12</sup> Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glaser, "Chinese Apprehensions about Revitalization of the U.S.-Japan Alliance," *Asian Survey* 37, no. 4 (April 1997): pp. 383-402; Wu Xinbo, "The end of the silver lining: A Chinese view of the U.S.-Japanese alliance," *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1, (2005), pp. 117-130.

<sup>13</sup> Richard L. Armitage, Joseph S. Nye Jr., and Sunohara Tsuyoshi, "Nichibei Domei vs. Chugoku/Kitachosen" [Japan-U.S. Alliance vs. China and North Korea], *Bungei Shunju* (2010), p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> Funabashi Yoichi, *Domei Hyoryu (Ge)* [Alliance Adrift (part 2)] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006), p. 383.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Gerald L. Curtis, "U.S. Policy toward Japan from Nixon to Clinton: An Assessment," in *New Perspectives on U.S.-Japan Relations*, ed. Gerald L. Curtis (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2000), p. 1-38.

against. Of course, there are scholars who seek to define the risks posed by Japan that should be prevented in more concrete terms when approaching the “bottle cap” thesis. Still, a wide range of diverse perspectives actually exist among them, leaving the question of which argument more accurately captures the perceptions of Japanese, U.S., and Chinese authorities, largely unexamined and unorganized. Some scholars may include the following in the scope of the “bottle cap” thesis: (1) Japan’s activities outside its territory, including the overseas deployment of the Self-Defense Forces, including participation in UN peacekeeping operations; (2) Japan’s possession of nuclear weapons; and, (3) Japan’s enhancement of its defense capabilities. Based on the above, it can be said that when reviewing the relevant discussions in the early 1970s in this paper, it is necessary to elucidate the specific risks posed by Japan that the “bottle cap” thesis is supposed to suppress.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, it is necessary not only to distinguish and organize individual discussions but also to pay attention to their interrelations. For example, Christensen, who authored a foundational study on examining the “bottle cap” thesis, cautioned that U.S.-Japan cooperation on missile defense initiated in the 1990s could potentially pose serious concern for China, particularly in relation to the Taiwan Strait, even if its original purpose was defensive in nature, aimed at ensuring Japan’s own security.<sup>17</sup> Of course, cooperation on missile defense had not been on the agenda of Japan-U.S. relations in the early 1970s, but if we were to elaborate the implications of Christensen’s research, even when analyzing the discussions of the time, it is necessary to note, for example, how Japan’s defense efforts and security issues in the surrounding region (such as the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait) were connected to and discussed in the context of the “bottle cap” thesis (or whether they were discussed separately).

The second issue is that discussions regarding the means of preventing the risks posed by Japan remain underexplored. While proponents using this concept agree that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and the U.S. forces in Japan are important means of preventing risks posed by Japan, they also differ in their perception in the following points. The first is whether the presence of the U.S. military other than the U.S. Forces in Japan and the various treaties supporting that should be included as a part of the “cap” confining Japan within the “bottle.”<sup>18</sup> While it may seem more natural to comprehensively analyze the overall presence of the U.S. military in East Asia, this paper refrains making assumptions. Instead, I will seek to obtain empirical answers on how discussions in the early 1970s addressed this issue. A second and more important point related to the means of preventing the risks posed by Japan, and which calls for more refined conceptualization, is whether the presence of the U.S. military and various defense treaties are recognized to be directly restraining Japan, or alternatively, that these do not automatically possess a restraining effect but the U.S. needs to exercise the influence gained from its military presence and various treaties to prevent the risks posed by Japan. The former perspective is more frequently observed in existing research on the “bottle cap” thesis, but the latter cannot be ignored. For instance, according to a paper by Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glaser in 1997, there had been

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<sup>16</sup> Garrett and Glaser, “Chinese Apprehensions about Revitalization of the U.S.-Japan Alliance,” summarizes various discussions within and outside China. Regarding discussions in Japan, refer to Midford, “China views the revitalised US-Japan Defense Guidelines: popping the cork?”

<sup>17</sup> Christensen, “China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the Security Dilemma in East Asia.”

<sup>18</sup> For example, Christensen’s paper mentioned above broadly discusses regional presence, but when the “bottle cap” thesis is mentioned in Japan, it tends to focus on the Japan-U.S. alliance as a means. This will be further confirmed in the third section.

debate in China at the time over question of whether the close security relationship between the U.S. and Japan was being used as a tool for restraining Japan, or conversely, as a tool to encourage Japan to expand its security activities and military capabilities.<sup>19</sup> Their research suggests that for China, it was not only the presence of the U.S. military and the treaties, but also the underlying intentions (particularly those of the U.S.), that were key factors for accepting or rejecting the “bottle cap” thesis.

The third issue revolves around Japan’s stance regarding this thesis. Even if both the U.S. and China had accepted the “bottle cap” thesis in some form, can it be said that Japan, the target of restraint, had been aware of this? Furthermore, can it even be argued that Japan has contributed to the maintenance of this idea and its function? While this question has been briefly touched on in various literature, it has largely been overlooked as a subject of research. The only exception is the paper by Midford, mentioned earlier, in which he categorizes the perceptions of the Japanese people into two types for discussion and analysis. To be useful for the specific purpose of this paper, they can be paraphrased as follows.<sup>20</sup> On one hand, there is a position that simply acknowledges the existence of risks posed by Japan and which asserts that the U.S. presence functions as a “bottle cap” to restrain it (functional view). On the other hand, there is a position that the bottle cap should be emphasized strictly as a reassurance tool for East Asian countries, even though the U.S. presence is actually not functioning as a restraint over the feared menace of Japan’s remilitarization. It is precisely because doing so is useful as an instrument to promote regional stability and maintain East Asian countries’ acceptance of U.S. security roles in the region (instrumental view).

Looking back at the actual discussions that took place in Japan from the 1990s to the early 2000s, the usefulness of distinguishing between the functional and the instrumental views becomes evident. Many Japanese government and ruling party officials during the same period were likely to have been aligned with the latter instrumental view. For example, when it was reported that then-Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, who met with U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen in 2000, had made remarks implying that he viewed the U.S. forces in Japan as a “bottle cap,” then-Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Yutaka Kawashima, being asked to clarify the remarks by Prime Minister, had offered a cautious explanation from the perspective of the instrumental view, in a press conference that took place immediately after. He said that Japan will not become a military power, that it adheres to a constitution that sets out peace as the national policy, and that he would like Japan’s neighbors to understand that this is Japan’s position.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, however, from the perspective of Japan’s neighboring countries, there may also be some who would perceive this as not being entirely trustworthy. He admitted that, for these people, the presence of the U.S. forces in Japan may also be seen as a reassuring factor.

Cabinet Ministers at the time often denied that U.S. military presence serves the ‘bottle cap’ function while making statements acknowledging the possibility that countries in East Asia may perceive it that way. The response of Foreign Minister Yohei Kono in 1995 illustrates the

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<sup>19</sup> Garrett and Glaser, “Chinese Apprehensions about Revitalization of the U.S.-Japan Alliance,” p. 397.

<sup>20</sup> Midford, “China views the revitalised US-Japan Defense Guidelines,” p. 121.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Conference by the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, starting at 16:55 on September 25, 2000.



significance of this distinction for the Japanese government.<sup>22</sup> Kono acknowledged that he fully understood why the “bottle cap” thesis existed because many countries in Asia believed in such an idea. At the same time, he also countered, as a proud citizen of Japan, that he could not simply agree with it. He insisted that Japan poses no dangers to the region, not because of the security treaty restraining its military power, but because the 1946 Constitution of Japan is maintained through the national consciousness and consensus of the Japanese people. The maintenance of this constitution, Kono continued, means that Japan does not intend to resolve international disputes through military force under any circumstances. These statements correspond more closely with the instrumental view in the sense that they do not negate the possibility of the “bottle cap” thesis being used as an instrument for reassuring neighboring countries. Clearly, statements such as Kono’s do not correspond with the functional view as they do not take the stance that the “bottle cap” thesis is, in fact, functioning as such.

In the 1990s and the early 2000s, various discussions took place among experts and government officials in Japan concerning this point. In these discussions, it was observed that some supported the instrumental view, while there were also others who took the side of the functional view. For example, Hisahiko Okazaki, who responded in the Diet as an expert witness, suggested that while he agreed with the “bottle cap” thesis, there was a possibility that Japan could undertake militarist expansion if its alliance with the U.S. were to end.<sup>23</sup> The individual who evaluated the “bottle cap” thesis most directly, among all the Prime Ministers of Japan, was probably Tomiichi Murayama. During his tenure as Prime Minister, Murayama pointed out in a response to Diet deliberations that the development of Japan to become a military power is prevented by the presence of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, and that Asian countries recognized this reassurance mechanism. Unlike Kono, Murayama did not make any definitive statements on whether the potential for Japan’s militarization even exists in the first place<sup>24</sup>. Later, while reflecting on his time as Prime Minister, Murayama pointed out that Japan was able to get by without spending much on defense due to the security treaty, and that it provides Asian countries with a sense of security. He also mentioned the “bottle cap” thesis and unreservedly expressed his recognition of its function.<sup>25</sup> Although Murayama did not offer any more detailed explanation for his stance regarding the “bottle cap” thesis, with his strong belief that Japanese diplomacy is constrained by Japan-U.S. relations, the “bottle cap” thesis might not have been such a far-fetched idea. Looking back on his time in office, Murayama remarked that having U.S. military bases in Japan was akin to being grabbed by the scruff of the neck, and expressed his hopes of transforming the military character of the relationship to one that would be more equal and independent. On the other hand, he explained that he recognized that the Japan-U.S. relations,

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<sup>22</sup> Kono Yohei (Remark 048), “134th Session of the National Diet, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs No. 4, November 2, 1996,” Full-text Database System for the Minutes of the Diet. Ibid (Remark 101), “134th Session of the National Diet, House of Councillors, Committee on Foreign Affairs No. 9, November 30, 1996,” Full-text Database System for the Minutes of the Diet.

<sup>23</sup> Okazaki Hisahiko (Remark 045), “136th Session of the National Diet, House of Councillors, Research Committee on Foreign Affairs No. 4, May 15, 1996.”

<sup>24</sup> Murayama Tomiichi (Remark 041), “134th Session of the National Diet, House of Councillors Budget Committee No. 5, October 27, 1995.”

<sup>25</sup> Yakushiji Katsuyuki, ed., *Murayama Tomiichi Kaiko Roku* [Memoirs of Murayama Tomiichi] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2012), pp. 196-197.

which had been serving as the foundation for Japan's postwar diplomacy, could not be readily changed.<sup>26</sup>

In summary the analysis of the debates in the post-Cold War period demonstrate that three perspectives are important in analyzing discussions and negotiations back in the early 1970s. First, it is crucial to analyze how exactly the perceived risks posed by Japan that should be suppressed under the "bottle cap" thesis, were recognized and discussed by Japan, the U.S., and China at the time. Second, it is also of analytical use to examine how Japan, the U.S., and China understood and discussed the means of suppressing the risks posed by Japan. In this context, it is important to examine to what extent and in what ways the U.S. intention to exercise an influence over Japan, not just the mere maintenance of its military presence, was regarded as crucial in determining the effective function of the "bottle cap" thesis. Third, it is important to examine whether Japanese stakeholders aligned themselves with the functional view or instrumental view of the "bottle cap" thesis. In this paper, we aim to examine whether Japan perceived that China accepted the "bottle cap" thesis and sought to make use of this understanding (≡instrumental view), or whether Japan and the U.S. themselves also perceived the "bottle cap" thesis to be functioning (≡functional view).

## 2. U.S.-China rapprochement and the "Japan problem"

In an essay titled "Asia After Viet Nam," which Nixon contributed to the *Foreign Affairs* journal in 1967 before he ran for president, he highlighted Japan's dramatic economic rise as one of the important trends shaping Asia's future. He pointed out that it would be unrealistic to expect Japan, which aspired to join the leading group of major nations, to continue to rely completely on other countries for its national security, and suggested that there could be potential changes in Japan's defense policy in the future which, until then, had been fundamentally grounded in the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, in the first Japan-U.S. summit held after assuming office, Nixon, speaking to Prime Minister Sato Eisaku, likened the world's four major powers (the U.S., Soviet Union, China, and Europe) to fingers, and stated that Japan could become the "fifth finger" in addition to the current four, indicating his continued active interest in Japan's rise and its potential consequences. Hence, Nixon, who not only demonstrated a strong interest in foreign affairs in general but also perceived Japan's ascent as a long-term issue, endorsed the initiation of a review process on U.S. policy toward Japan upon the inauguration of his administration in February 1969 (a review process under the National Security Study Memorandum or NSSM). This directive was prompted not only by the pressing issue of the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, but also by the critical awareness inside the Nixon administration of the need to consider the future of Japan as an emerging power.<sup>28</sup> The interagency coordinated review process led by William Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Department of State, submitted a draft report (NSSM5) of the review results to Kissinger by April 1969. This document served as

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<sup>26</sup> Murayama Tomiichi, *So Ja No: Murayama Tomiichi "Shusho Taiken" no Subete wo Kataru* [Is that so? Murayama Tomiichi Reveals All about His "Experiences with the Prime Minister"] (Tokyo: Daisan Shokan, 1998), pp. 112-113.

<sup>27</sup> Richard M. Nixon, "Asia After Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 2, (October 1967), p. 121.

<sup>28</sup> National Security Study Memorandum 5, Washington, January 21, 1969, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, vol. XIX Part 2, no2, p. 4-5.

the foundation for the Nixon administration’s first Japan policy document and would subsequently be approved by the President.<sup>29</sup> As Shingo Nakajima pointed out, Bundy’s document effectively implied that the Nixon administration would follow the direction of the Japan policy that had been under consideration in the late stages of the previous Johnson administration. Specifically, it rejected the idea of encouraging Japan’s military role in the broader context of security in the Asia-Pacific region, deeming this to be risky.<sup>30</sup> Review papers from the last years of the Johnson administration cautioned against encouraging such a role, which could potentially encourage Japan to move away from the U.S. and create a Japan that is “neutral,” “nationalistic,” and “nuclear.” These discussions during the early days of the administration are useful in examining the U.S. perception at the time regarding the “bottle cap” thesis from the following two perspectives. First, with regard to the risks posed by Japan, regardless of the likelihood of these risks manifesting in reality, the U.S. wanted to prevent Japan from drifting away from the U.S.-Japan relationship and toward neutrality. To achieve this, the U.S. intended to encourage Japan to focus on its own defense rather than on regional security. Therefore, it can be said that this perception of risk by the U.S. was far from the pre-war image of Japan often evoked by the term “bottle cap” thesis, which is associated with preventing Japan’s militarization and external aggression. The second perspective is a point of contention related to the means. The Nixon administration believed that in order to avoid the emergence of a Japan that would be distanced from the U.S., it was important not only to maintain U.S. military presence and the security treaty, but also to carefully exercise its influence over the direction of Japan’s security policy.

While it can be said that the Nixon administration had initiated various discussions on the U.S. policy toward Japan from its early stages, it does not necessarily mean that the “bottle cap” thesis between Japan, the U.S., and China, which is the subject of this study, was established based solely on these early discussions. No documents indicate that the Nixon administration, at this stage, recognized the necessity or advisability of providing reassurance to China.<sup>31</sup> The only exception is the National Intelligence Estimate, which is, however, not a policy review document. The report briefly mentions that China is wary of Japan from a security perspective, while it does not offer any recommendations on what policies the U.S. should pursue toward China and Japan in consideration of these dynamics.<sup>32</sup>

The catalyst for a more explicit recognition of the “Japan problem” in U.S. policy toward China actually came about through the revitalization of communication between the U.S. and China. In December 1969, President Yahya Khan of Pakistan, who had been facilitating communication between the leaders of the U.S. and China, conveyed a message from the Chinese leaders to the

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<sup>29</sup> Memorandum, “Japan Policy (Response to NSSM 5),” NSSM5: Japan Policy, January 21, 1969 [2/2], H-128, National Security Council Institutional Files, National Security Council Files, ed. Ishii Osamu, *Documents of United States Policy Toward Japan XXXII-2* (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobo, 2013), p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> Nakajima Shingo, “‘Domeikoku Nihon’ zo no Tenkan: Jonson Seiken no Tainichi Seisaku” [Transforming the Image of Japan as an Ally—The Johnson Administration’s Japan Policy], in *Ikeda-Sato Seikenki no Nihon Gaiko* [Japanese Diplomacy During the Ikeda-Sato Administration], ed. Hatano Sumio (Kyoto: Minerva Shobo, 2006), pp. 78-83. Liang Pan, “Whither Japan’s Military Potential? The Nixon Administration’s Stance on Japanese Defense Power,” *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 1 (January 2007): pp. 117 -118.

<sup>31</sup> Minutes of the Senior Review Group Meeting, Sino-Soviet Differences (NSSM63), Washington, September 25, 2:25–3:35 p.m., *FRUS, 1969*, vol. XVII, no. 36, pp. 95-96.

<sup>32</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “National Intelligence Estimate, Number 11/13-69, 12 August 1969,” accessed on August 15, 2019, [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000261304.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000261304.pdf).

Nixon administration expressing serious Chinese concerns about Japan's expansion toward Taiwan and Southeast Asia.<sup>33</sup> Thereafter, in the process of the China policy review and assessment of the Chinese situation conducted again in 1970, China's concerns about Japan became the subject of more detailed and explicit discussions.<sup>34</sup> The National Intelligence Estimate related to China in 1970 and the China policy review document of February (related to NSSM106) discussed the fact that China was concerned about Japan's expansion in the region, including the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan. The policy document developed in 1971 in preparation for Kissinger's upcoming visit to China, based on this series of review documents, outlined broadly a logic that can be described as a prototype of the "bottle cap" thesis with China as the subject of reassurance.<sup>35</sup> The document proposed that Kissinger emphasize to Chinese leaders the importance of U.S. influence in preventing Japan's nuclear armament, and of maintaining U.S. military presence in the region as well as Japan-U.S. relations.

After reading the paper prepared by Kissinger, President Nixon himself repeatedly emphasized the need to exploit China's "fear" of Japan.<sup>36</sup> Clearly, Nixon believed that giving further rise to China's worries of Japan's strength would work to Washington's tactical advantage in the negotiation with Beijing during the Sino-U.S. rapprochement. In this sense, his idea of the "bottle cap" thesis was clearly informed by what this paper frames as the instrumental view. Meanwhile, Nixon was not entirely dismissive of the potential emergence of a powerful and radically different Japan moving away from the alliance with the U.S. In September 1971, during a discussion with Secretary of State William Rogers and other officials with a view to the upcoming convention of the Joint Japan-US Committee on Trade and Economic Affairs, for example, Nixon treated the expansion of Japan's national power as an important phenomenon in international politics, likening it to the genie in the bottle from the story in Arabian Nights and emphasizing the importance for the U.S. to keep Japan contained within the "bottle."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in the U.S.-UK summit held at the end of the year, he also turned their discussions onto Japan's rise and emphasized that keeping Japan "tied in" to the Japan-U.S. relations was an imperative in U.S. policy toward Asia.<sup>38</sup> Given that the administration's China policy planning was not the purpose of these discussions, Nixon's statements cannot be interpreted as negotiation tactics to boost Washington's position in the Sino-U.S. rapprochement. Rather, in this context, it is more natural to interpret that, his statements reflected his belief that Japan's security policy might change dramatically as the country's strength continued to expand. All in all, therefore, Nixon's idea of the "bottle cap" thesis represented not merely the instrumental view, but also the functional view, albeit to a limited degree.

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<sup>33</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, December 23, 1969, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-13, no. 2, 1–2.

<sup>34</sup> National Intelligence Estimate, NIE 13-7-70, Washington, November 12, 1970, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no. 95, p. 243; Draft Response to National Security Study Memorandum 106, Washington, February 16, 1971, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no. 105, pp. 264–265.

<sup>35</sup> "Positions," Box851, For the President's Files (Winston Lord)-China Trip/Vietnam, National Security Council Files, Ishii Osamu, *Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan XXVI-5*, pp. 278–281.

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum for the President's File, Washington July 1, 1971, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, China, 1969–1972, no. 137.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum for the President's File, CIEP Meeting, September 7, 1971, Box 82, President Special Files/Meeting Files, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum.

<sup>38</sup> Memorandum for the President's File, The President's Private Meeting with British Prime Minister Edward Heath, December 20, 1971, President's Office Files, White House Special Files: Staff Member and Office Files, Box 83, The Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum.

In parallel with the Nixon administration’s construction of the ‘bottle cap’ thesis, China was also in the process of reevaluating and adjusting its perceptions and policies towards Japan.<sup>39</sup> It goes without saying that China originally recognized U.S. presence in East Asia not as a restraint over Japan’s resurgence, but rather as a dangerous scheme that actually promoted the risks posed by Japan. According to Amy King, who has studied China’s post-war perceptions of Japan, since the early 1950s, China had been warning that the expansion of Japan’s industrial capabilities, supported in the economic and military aspects through its alliance with the U.S., could serve as a foundation for future military aggression.<sup>40</sup> Thus, from China’s viewpoint, the “bottle cap” thesis would be almost as the complete ideological antithesis. Furthermore, in June 1969 when the U.S. announced the Nixon Doctrine, indicating a reduction in its military presence and an expansion of allies’ responsibilities for their own defense, China further intensified its vigilance against Japanese militarism and began asserting that the U.S. intended to use Japan as a vanguard pawn to support its own imperialism and as a proxy for its Asian domination.<sup>41</sup> According to an extensive text analysis of Chinese discourse by Okabe Tatsumi, what China had meant by “militarism” did not refer to Japan acting as an independent major power attempting to invade Asia; rather, the Chinese understood this to be subservient to U.S. imperialism.<sup>42</sup> Against this backdrop, with the successive announcements of the Fourth Defense Buildup Program (a plan based on the premise of a budget twice that of the Third Defense Buildup Program), which had come under consideration soon after the joint statement by Prime Minister Sato and President Nixon in November 1969, China began pointing out from April 1970 that Japanese militarism had already been revived with the help of the U.S. and eventually went on to issue warnings that this would lead to external aggression. This series of interpretations by China was aligned with China’s ideological premise that the development of capitalist economies such as Japan would inevitably lead to external aggression. This view was also backed by China’s historical experience of having its territory overrun by Japan.<sup>43</sup>

Around 1971 as the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution gradually began to subside, however, China’s discourse on Japan shifted towards a more flexible direction. Zhang Xiangshan, who was involved in formulating China’s Japan policy, explained that the criticism toward Japanese militarism arose during the peak of the Cultural Revolution when it was not possible to conduct proper research on Japan.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, as the tides of Cultural Revolution ebbed, external exchanges expanded, and more information about Japan became available, there was naturally a possibility for a revision of the assessment that Japanese militarism had already been revived. Zhang Tuosheng from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations emphasizes that China’s initial overestimation of Japanese militarism was corrected because the majority of

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<sup>39</sup> As the author does not read Chinese, this paper will provide a limited introduction of China’s perceptions and deliberations that can be examined based on sources in Japanese and English.

<sup>40</sup> King, *China-Japan Relations after World War II*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>41</sup> Ross Terrill, “The 800,00010000: China and the World,” *The Atlantic* (January 1972), accessed October 1, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1972/01/the-8000001000-china-and-the-world/662570/>

<sup>42</sup> Okabe, *Chugoku no Tainichi Seisaku* [China’s Japan Policy], p. 80.

<sup>43</sup> Allen S. Whiting, *China Eyes Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1989), pp. 29-37.

<sup>44</sup> Based on the following cited texts. Li Yanming, *Nicchu Kankei to Nihon Keizaikai: Kokko Seijoka kara ‘Seirei Kei-netsu’ made* [Japan-China Relations and the Japanese Economic Circles: From Normalization of Diplomatic Relations to “Cold Politics and Hot Economics”] (Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 2016), p. 47.

the Japanese friends who visited China objected to it.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, according to Wang Taiping from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Premier Zhou had, in an internal meeting, expressed the need to reassess China's previous emphasis on Japan's imminent military aggression and to move forward with changing China's stance towards Japan.<sup>46</sup> In this way, the discourse on the revival of Japanese militarism receded, creating a certain degree of flexibility in dealing with issues related to the Japan-U.S. security arrangements and the problem of Japan.

Furthermore, as China proceeded to revise its perception towards Japan, it began to pay at least some attention to the concept that U.S. presence could serve as a restraining mechanism for Japan's resurgence; that is, the "bottle cap" thesis. This was triggered by China's efforts to improve relations and normalize diplomatic ties with the West at the time. For example, during their visit to China in early July 1971 (just before Kissinger's visit to China), Gough Whitlam, the leader of the Australian Labor Party, and his delegation spoke about the concept of the "bottle cap" thesis in meetings with Chinese officials including Zhou Enlai. According to Ross Terrill, who joined the Australian delegation to China, during preparatory meetings before the talks between Whitlam and Zhou, the Australian side had conveyed the background to the development of the Australia, New Zealand and United States (ANZUS) Treaty, which serves as the legal foundation of the Australia-U.S. alliance, and explained how it was initially expected to play a role in preventing Japanese militarism. Terrill attested to the fact that the Chinese side took great interest in this information. Furthermore, during the subsequent talks between Whitlam and Zhou as well, when Zhou heard about this discussion, he pointed out that such thinking represented a new approach for China and asked for further explanation.<sup>47</sup> Crucially, Zhou's response suggests the "bottle cap" thesis was no longer an antithesis that warranted immediate rejection from China. In response, Whitlam explained the differences between the roles of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and ANZUS in the context of the Asian Cold War (the former became the basis for Australian military involvement in Vietnam). He also noted that the U.S. had accepted the obligations of ANZUS in order to sign a peace treaty with Japan to address Australia and New Zealand's concerns about Japan, and even asserted that China and Australia had historically shared concerns about Japan. While Whitlam's intention was likely to smooth the path toward normalizing diplomatic ties with China while maintaining the ANZUS, it resulted in China's first contact with the basic concept of the "bottle cap" thesis prior to Kissinger's visit.

As described above, the meeting between Zhou and Kissinger in July of the same year approached as both the U.S. and China proceeded with their respective reviews of their policies toward Japan. The rest of this section will analyze how the "bottle cap" thesis was discussed in a series of talks from 1971 to 1972 (talks between Zhou and Kissinger in July and October 1971, various talks during Nixon's visit to China in February 1972, and various talks during Kissinger's visit to China in June 1972) as the U.S.-China rapprochement progressed and became public

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<sup>45</sup> Zhang Tuosheng, "China's Relations with Japan," in *The Golden Age of the U.S.-China-Japan Triangle, 1972–1989*, eds. Ezra F. Vogel, Yuan Ming and Akihiko Tanaka (Boston: Harvard University Asia Center), p. 203.

<sup>46</sup> Wang Taiping, "*Nicchu Kokko Kaofuku*" *Nikki: Gaikobu no "Tokuhain" ga Mita Nihon* [Diary of the Recovery of Japan-China Diplomatic Relations: Japan from the Eyes of a Diplomatic Correspondent] (Tokyo: Benseisha Publishing, 2012), p. 382-383.

<sup>47</sup> The minutes of the talks are recorded in the following. Whitlam Institute, *For the Record: Gough Whitlam's Mission to China, 1971*, July 2, 2013, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://www.whitlam.org/publications/2017/10/23/for-the-record-gough-whitlams-mission-to-china-1971>

knowledge. Records of these talks have already been widely released, and there are a number of empirically grounded books focusing on U.S.-China relations during this period. This paper (while not providing an exhaustive and chronological account of these talks), drawing on these excellent prior studies, illustrates the contents of discussions and articulates the emergence of both a shared and unshared understanding between both countries regarding the “bottle cap” thesis.

Zhou, who primarily presided over the implementations of China’s U.S. policy, made various statements regarding Japan through dialogues with Kissinger and Nixon. Throughout the talks, Zhou emphasized that as a result of the U.S. fattening up the Japanese economy for a long time after the war, Japan now stands at a crossroads where it must choose between taking the path of peace desired by the majority of Japanese, or heading down a path of militarism and aggression.<sup>48</sup> He repeatedly questioned whether the Nixon administration’s policy of reducing its presence in East Asia were intended to prompt Japan to follow the latter path. For instance, Zhou raised the question of whether there is a risk of Japan, using the pretext of the Treaty of Peace between Taiwan and Japan, advancing once again into Taiwan if the U.S. were to withdraw its presence from the island.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Zhou expressed concern that similar developments might occur on the Korean Peninsula with the continued withdrawal of the U.S. military.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, according to some recently released transcripts of conversations, Zhou implied that he was concerned that nuclear-related bases in Okinawa might be transferred to Japan if the U.S. military were to withdraw from Okinawa (which is geographically close to Taiwan).<sup>51</sup> These statements, although made in varying contexts, all sought to question whether changes in U.S. forward-deployed forces could lead to Japan’s military expansion and external aggression. In response, Kissinger and Nixon attempted to counter these concerns, as planned, from the perspective of the “bottle cap” thesis. Nixon and Kissinger emphasized the following points for preventing the potential problems posed by Japan, in order to counter China’s concerns: (1) The U.S. withdrawal from Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula is not intended to encourage Japan’s reentry into these regions;<sup>52</sup> (2) Despite military resistance, the U.S. is proceeding with the removal of nuclear weapons with the aim of returning Okinawa to Japan without leaving any such weapons behind;<sup>53</sup> (3) The U.S. is committed to maintaining

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<sup>48</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 23 February 1972, 2–6p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no. 197, China; Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, October 22, 1971, 4:15–8:28 p.m., Beijing, *FRUS, 1969–1972*, no. 44; Documents on China, 1969–1972, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-13.

<sup>49</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 10 July 1971, 12:10–6p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no. 140, China, 1969–1972.

<sup>50</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 21 October 1971, 10:30a.m.–1:45p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Vol, E-13, no. 40.

<sup>51</sup> The author visited the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum in October 2019 and verified the partial additional disclosure of the following historical materials. Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, October 22, 1971, 4:15–8:28pm, HAK Oct 1971 Visit (Box 1035) For the President’s Files—China/Vietnam Negotiations NSC Files, The Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. The reason behind the partial disclosure of conversation records that were originally undisclosed is believed to be due to the shift in the U.S. government’s policy to acknowledge the fact that there had been nuclear weapons in Okinawa during the Cold War.

<sup>52</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 9 July 1971, 4:35–11:20 p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no. 139, China 1969–1972; Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 22 October 1971, 4:15–8:28 p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-13, no.44, Documents on China, 1969–1972.

<sup>53</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Great Hall of the People Peking, 22 October 1971, 4:15–8:28 p.m., National Security Council (NSC) Files, For the President’s Files-China/Vietnam Negotiations, China-HAK October 1971 visit [part I] October 1971 [1 of 2] to HAK Visit to PRC Memcons-originals October 1971, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum.

its nuclear umbrella.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, they underscored that (4) the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which allows U.S. military to be stationed on Japanese territory, is a necessary foundation for restraining any military aggression by Japan against its neighboring countries.<sup>55</sup> These exchanges among Chinese and U.S. officials indicate several characteristics of the “bottle cap” thesis as was conceived in the Sino-U.S rapprochement. First and foremost, China’s concerns were not merely expressed in ambiguous terms such as “militarism” or “aggression,” but they were more specific with the scenarios of Japan’s military re-entry into its former colonies of Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula, as well as of the risk of Japan armed with nuclear weapons. While expressing China’s concerns over these issues, Zhou did not indicate his complete opposition to Japan possessing military capabilities for its defense.

Overall, China’s response to the series of statements made by Nixon and Kissinger can be conceptualized as representing a limited acquiescence. It is clear that China did not reject the logic of the “bottle cap” thesis entirely and demonstrated an attitude of utilizing it to China’s advantage, at least, for the time being. In response to Nixon and Kissinger’s persuasions as described above, Zhou made comments that could be interpreted as showing his recognition of the merits of the “bottle cap” thesis, stating that without U.S. control, Japan would be a wild horse.<sup>56</sup> By not demanding for a swift withdrawal of U.S. military presence in Taiwan, Zhou also specifically demonstrated a stance of tolerating continued U.S. presence for the time being to prevent Japan’s reentry into Taiwanese territory. This was the most explicit acknowledgment of the “bottle cap” thesis. His attitude in the conversations with Kissinger and Nixon corresponds with Zhou’s internal statement, in which he mentioned to his subordinates that it would be better for the U.S. to stay for a while than for Japan to come into Taiwan.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Zhou urged the U.S. to be vigilant about Japan’s re-entry into the Korean Peninsula when speaking to Kissinger, and he had repeatedly made similar statements on other occasions.<sup>58</sup> When the aforementioned Whitlam, leader of the Australian Labor Party, visited China in 1973 after becoming Prime Minister, Zhou hinted at an understanding based on the “bottle cap” thesis of preventing the expansion of Japan’s influence through the stationing of U.S. military forces on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>59</sup> This series of statements by Zhou suggests that China had a certain degree of understanding or tolerance of the function fulfilled by the U.S. presence in restraining Japan. This provides useful material for examining the issues concerning the means related to the “bottle cap” thesis. In discussions between the U.S. and China, U.S. presence, including not only the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and U.S. forces in Japan, but also more broadly across Asia, was debated as a means of restraining

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<sup>54</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 22 October 1971, 4:15–8:28 p.m., Beijing, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-13, no.44, Documents on China, 1969–1972.

<sup>55</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, February 24, 1972, 5:15–8:05p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no. 199, China, 1969–1972, p. 770.

<sup>56</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 22 October 1971, 4:15–8:28 p.m., Beijing, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-13, no.44, Documents on China, 1969–1972.

<sup>57</sup> Wang, “*Nicchu Kokko Kaifuku*” *Nikki* [Recovery of Japan-China Diplomatic Relations], p. 417.

<sup>58</sup> No. 139, Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 9 July 1971, 4:35–11:20 p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, No. 44, Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 22 October 1971, 4:15–8:28 p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Volume E-13, Documents on China, 1969–1972.

<sup>59</sup> Prime Minister’s Discussions with Premier Zhou Enlai, 31 October–3 November 1973, Summary, November 4, 1973, Wilson Center Digital Archive (International History Declassified, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/175869>).



the risks posed by Japan, as often pointed out in the “bottle cap” thesis. Moreover, China did not assume that this U.S. presence would automatically become a means of restraining Japan, but rather, repeatedly brought up the intentions and policies of the U.S. side as important elements in the discussion. As a result, China acquiesced to, even if not simply agreed to, the “bottle cap” thesis presented by the Nixon administration.

Meanwhile, the aforementioned “acquiescence” should be conceptualized as limited in the following two respects. Firstly, at this point, China had never expressed a willingness to unconditionally accept the presence of U.S. military in the long run, but only showed an attitude of temporary tolerance. In particular, regarding the withdrawal of U.S. military in Taiwan, China had stated that there was no need to hurry, while taking the position that even the stationed forces, along with the treaty between the U.S. and Taiwan, must ultimately be abolished in order to achieve the normalization of U.S.-China relations.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, while Kissinger did not explicitly state a final timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. military from Taiwan, Nixon had given Zhou his word of the complete withdrawal of U.S. Forces in Taiwan during the tenure of his presidency.<sup>61</sup> According to a Politburo report approved by Chairman Mao before Kissinger’s first visit, setting a timeline for withdrawal was one of Zhou’s top priorities in negotiations, and Nixon’s statement was undoubtedly a significant achievement for China. As Evelyn Goh, who studied U.S. rapprochement with China during this period, has pointed out, China had temporarily accepted the continued presence of the U.S. military in Taiwan for the present precisely on the condition that it would remain only for a limited period of time. Therefore, China’s stance towards the “bottle cap” function fulfilled by the U.S. Forces in Taiwan should also be assessed as temporary acquiescence for the time being.<sup>62</sup> This “limited acquiescence” also applies to the stationing of U.S. military on the Korean Peninsula. Kissinger had stated that the stationing of U.S. forces would ultimately not be a permanent situation. Based on this premise, Zhou had urged the U.S. to be vigilant about Japan’s advancement into the Korean Peninsula.

Furthermore, China was of the view that the Japan-U.S. security arrangements, through which Nixon and Kissinger emphasized the need to restrain Japan, were not sustainable in the long-term. Thus, the “bottle cap” thesis based on this was never considered to be more than a temporary measure. Zhou, using the example of the steel dispute between Japan and the U.S., warned that Japan would eventually stop listening to the U.S.<sup>63</sup> According to internal documents on U.S. diplomacy prepared by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in November 1971, China perceived economic contradictions as an indication of the limits of U.S. influence over Japan, and predicted that this would ultimately lead to estrangement between Japan and the U.S.<sup>64</sup> Despite the persuasions by Nixon and Kissinger, at least as of the time of Nixon’s visit to China in February 1972 and Kissinger’s visit to China in June the same year, China had not changed its perceptions that Japan was standing at a crossroads. It cannot really be said, therefore, that China had simply

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<sup>60</sup> Wang, “*Nicchu Kokko Kaifuku*” *Nikki* [Diary of the Recovery of Japan-China Diplomatic Relations], p. 417.

<sup>61</sup> Sahashi, *Kyozon no Mosaku* [Search for Coexistence], p. 131.

<sup>62</sup> Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China 1961–1974*, 197.

<sup>63</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 23 February 1972, 2–6p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no. 197, China, 1969–1972.

<sup>64</sup> This point is based on the following text owned personally by Sugiura Yasuyuki. Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, [Selection of Materials on the Basic Situation in the United States] (Foreign Affairs) (November 1971).

come to accept that the “bottle cap” thesis would continue to function.

The second reason for characterizing China’s understanding of the “bottle cap” thesis as “limited” lies in its ambiguity. While China was wary of Japan’s military expansion into Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula and urged the U.S. to exercise influence to prevent it, China also accepted Japan’s need to strengthen its military capabilities for its own defense. As pointed out by Chijiwa Yasuaki, however, it is one thing to distinguish these issues in abstract and it is quite another to do so in practice.<sup>65</sup> It is conceivable, for example, that conflicts in Taiwan or the Korean Peninsula would have various implications for Japan’s national defense (which means that these issues could not be treated discretely). Moreover, even if the conflicts in these regions were extremely limited and did not have serious physical impact on Japan (at the time, China did not possess the capability to invade Japan or Taiwan across the seas), it is still possible to envision a scenario in which U.S. military responding to such situations would use Japanese bases. Allowing the use of bases in this way would naturally make Japan a participant in responding to these situations. Indeed, it was precisely due to this awareness that the so-called “Korea Clause” and “Taiwan Clause” were inserted into the joint statement issued by Sato and Nixon in November 1969. In the same month, Sato’s speech elaborated on Japan’s commitment underlying these clauses.<sup>66</sup> Sato regarded a military attack on Korea as an event that would have a serious impact on Japan’s security, and clearly set out the need for positive and expeditious prior consultations regarding the use of Japanese bases by the U.S. military. Additionally, he emphasized the maintenance of peace in the Taiwan region as an important element for Japan’s security as well as something that threatens the peace and security of the Far East, and indicated that Japan would address these based on the recognition mentioned earlier. Both the U.S. and China did not directly touch upon these potential linkages of various issues. Nor were there any specific discussions about precisely what actions or policies the U.S. should prevent Japan from adopting in relation to the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan. Zhou pledged not to openly criticize the joint statement issued by Sato and Nixon in his talks with Nixon without substantial discussions on such important specifics. Overall, in the Sino-U.S. rapprochement the “bottle cap” thesis only emerged as a broad abstract idea rather than as a clearly defined agreement.

To summarize the discussions above, it is evident that China did not unequivocally accept the “bottle cap” thesis in the process of U.S.-China rapprochement. On the one hand, China remained vigilant against Japan’s potential military expansion into its neighboring areas such as Korea and Taiwan and urged the United States to take measures to prevent it. From this perspective, China hinted at its recognition that, at least for the time being, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, U.S. Forces in Japan, as well as U.S. military presence in the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan could serve as a means of implementing the “bottle cap” thesis. On the other hand, it is also important to note that China understood these to be ultimately temporary means, and that its understanding was imbued with a considerable degree of ambiguity.

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<sup>65</sup> Chijiwa Yasuaki, *Sengo Nihon no Anzen Hoshō - Nichibei Domei, Kenpō 9-jo kara NSC made* [Security of Postwar Japan - From Japan-U.S. Alliance and Article 9 of the Constitution to NSC] (Tokyo: Chuko Shinsho, 2022).

<sup>66</sup> Joint Statement Between Prime Minister Sato Eisaku and President Richard M. Nixon, *Diplomatic Bluebook*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/1970/s44-3-1-3.htm>

Furthermore, based on the analysis in this section, it is also clear that there was a significant gap between the “bottle cap” thesis that the Nixon administration had presented to China, and the actual policy toward Japan that was reviewed and formulated by the administration. To reiterate, Nixon’s administration aimed to essentially maintain the bilateral relationship based on the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, in order to prevent Japan from shifting toward neutrality and distancing itself from the U.S. At the same time, there were indeed underlying concerns about Japan’s future path given its expanding economic strength. On the other hand, what the Nixon administration conveyed to China involved far more wide-ranging scenarios such as the resumption of Japan’s external invasions, not least because Washington attempted to exploit Chinese leaders’ fear of Japan and to convince Beijing to accept the continuation of U.S. military presence in East Asia as a restraint over Japan’s menace. By doing so, the Nixon administration sought to discourage China from driving a wedge between Japan and the U.S., which the U.S. had been concerned about. In 1975, for example, Kissinger made the following statement to members of the US Congress, “In five years, they might try to move Japan away from us, but not now. They could raise hell by forcing Japan to chose (sic) between China and the U.S.”<sup>67</sup> The “bottle cap” thesis was a useful tool in restraining such actions by China. Clearly, therefore, the Nixon administration’s idea of the “bottle cap” thesis represented more of the instrumental view than the functional view.

While the analysis in this section has focused on the perceptions and discussions between the U.S. and China regarding the “bottle cap” thesis, the interactions between both countries concerning Japan had not been limited to this issue alone, but had also extended to the Soviet Union’s approach toward Japan.<sup>68</sup> In January 1972, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, Andrei Gromyko, visited Tokyo and proposed, for example, that Japanese companies participate in the Siberian development project, demonstrating a positive stance from the Soviet Union toward improving relations with Japan.<sup>69</sup> With such Soviet policy toward Japan in mind, Zhou and Mao advised Kissinger in June 1972 to be cautious about the Soviet Union’s approach toward Japan. They also suggested that it would be desirable for the U.S. to participate alongside Japan in the Siberian development, rather than allowing Japan to do so on its own. These discussions offer important insights in examining the “bottle cap” thesis. Those who analyze the idea often presume that China at the time had concerns about an economically prosperous and increasingly powerful Japan. In reality, however, underlying China’s vigilance toward the Soviet Union’s approach to Japan was not just such an image of a resurgent Japan, but also a more vulnerable Japan that was susceptible to the influence of major powers. An overemphasis on the “bottle cap” thesis may overlook the possibility that China’s understanding of Japan was thus.

### 3. Japan’s ambiguous inference

Japan succeeded in gathering a certain amount of information regarding the Sino-U.S. discussions on the “bottle cap” thesis. After Kissinger’s first visit to China in July 1971, he informed

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<sup>67</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, July 22, 1975, *FRUS, 1973–1976*, vol. XVIII, no.115, China, 1973–1976, 709.

<sup>68</sup> Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China 1961–1974*, 178–179; No. 139, Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, 9 July 1971, 4:35–11:20 p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no.139, China, 1969–1972; Memorandum of Conversation, Beijing, February 21, 1972, 2:50–3 :55 p.m., *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XVII, no.194, China, 1969–1972.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Pond, “Japan and Russia: The View from Tokyo,” *Foreign Affairs* 52, no. 1 (October 1973):141.

Ambassador Ushiba Nobuhiko that he had emphasized to China how the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was preventing Japan from becoming nuclear-armed.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Kissinger, who visited Japan in June 1972, directly explained the same reasoning to Prime Minister Sato shortly before the latter left office, and Sato himself also proposed that the “bottle cap” thesis should be emphasized to China.<sup>71</sup> In fact, Ushiba’s information was also used as a reference in the preparation of analysis papers within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to examine and predict the development of U.S.-China relations.<sup>72</sup> The information obtained by the Japanese government, however, was fragmented in the following three respects. Firstly, the Nixon administration did not explain to the Japanese side how China had reacted to the “bottle cap” thesis. As a result, the aforementioned analysis papers by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated, incorrectly, that China was unlikely to accept persuasions based on the “bottle cap” thesis, and did not have evidence-based insight into the actual discussions between the U.S. and China. Secondly, Japan did not obtain in-depth information about how the U.S. itself viewed the “bottle cap” thesis. In the end, it remained unclear to Japanese observers whether the U.S. was using the “bottle cap” thesis as a convenient means of convincing China (≡ instrumental view), or if the U.S. itself understood that it should and could restrain Japan (≡ functional view). Thirdly, to reiterate, the U.S. engaged in a wide range of discussions on the means related to the “bottle cap” thesis, including not only the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and U.S. Forces in Japan but also U.S. military presence in Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula. Yet, this was not shared with Japan.

In these respects, the U.S. had provided Japan with only fragmented information. Underlying this was its hesitancy toward engaging in close consultations and information sharing with Japan. In examining this aspect, the discussions conducted by the Nixon administration, from July to September 1971 in the course of its review of U.S. policy toward Japan (NSSM122), serve as a useful reference.<sup>73</sup> Initially, the first draft of the report prepared primarily by the Department of State in the NSSM122 process faced criticism by the National Security Council staff, which pointed out that the report ignored the mutual interaction between U.S. policy toward China and toward Japan.<sup>74</sup> In the NSSM122 process, the Department of State expressed concerns that the sudden announcement of U.S.-China rapprochement had put the then-Sato administration in a difficult situation with regard to domestic politics, and emphasized the importance of closer consultations with Japan regarding U.S.’s China policy. Meanwhile, John Holdridge, a Senior Staff Member of the National Security Council (NSC), criticized the Department of State’s proposal, arguing that it represented a one-sided consideration that dismissed a risk of stoking

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<sup>70</sup> Telegraph from Washington, DC, “Meeting with Envoy Kissinger,” October 15, 1971, *Visits by U.S. VIPs to Foreign Countries: President Nixon’s Visit to the People’s Republic of China, vol. 2*, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, A’2.4.2.U1-5.

<sup>71</sup> Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, June 19, 1972, *FRUS, 1969-1976*, vol. XIX Part 2, no. 122, Japan, p. 441.

<sup>72</sup> China Division, “Forecast of the U.S.-China Summit Meeting and Joint Communiqué,” February 10, 1972, *Visits by U.S. VIPs to Foreign Countries: President Nixon’s Visit to the People’s Republic of China, vol. 1*, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, A’2.4.4.U1-5.

<sup>73</sup> “NSSM122 Policy Toward Japan part One Political Psychological and Security Aspects of the Relationship,” ed. Ishii Osamu, *Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan XXXII-4*, pp. 66-122.

<sup>74</sup> Memorandum, “SRG Meeting August 6 on NSSM122,” SEF Meeting-Japan (NSSM122), August 6, 1971, H-058, National Security Council Institutional Files, National Security Council Files, ed. Ishii Osamu, *Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan XXXII-4*, pp. 8-26

Chinese concerns that Japan and the U.S. were colluding on matters relating to China. Amidst the ongoing NSSM122 review process, the Department of State issued several additional new reports and gradually began to acknowledge China’s concerns about Japan as a policy consideration.<sup>75</sup> As a result of the NSSM122 process and the close discussions with the Department of State, the NSC staff too started to learn that a single-handed emphasis on reassuring China could risk worsening U.S.-Japan relations and potentially give China an opportunity to exploit the rift between the two allies.<sup>76</sup> In fact, a policy document prepared by NSC staff in their preparations for Kissinger’s second visit to China (October 1971) carried the following warning. The document pointed out that China’s propaganda activities were fanning Japan’s distrust of the U.S. and highlighted China’s efforts to sow discord between the U.S. and Japan. The document also included a clear policy directive cautioning the Chinese leadership to cease such attempts. Such issues related to the potential rift between the U.S. and Japan brought to sharp relief the dilemma inherent in the “bottle cap” thesis.<sup>77</sup> In other words, if the U.S. were to prioritize its relationship with Japan, it would need to voluntarily share information with Japan regarding discussions between the U.S. and China, including the “bottle cap” thesis. Yet, if China may potentially concern close U.S.-Japan consultations on China policy, it may lead to the idea that consultations with Japan should be avoided. Faced with this dilemma, the NSC chose to convey broadly to the Japanese government that the U.S. had brought up the “bottle cap” thesis with China, but opted to continue withholding details about the logic as well as China’s response.

As evidenced by the above discussion, the Department of State was more forward-leaning in its consultations with Japan than the NSC. This led to further information being provided to Japan about the exchanges concerning the “bottle cap” thesis between the U.S. and China. After Nixon’s visit to China, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to gather information about the discussions between the U.S. and China, and drew out a number of important insights from Secretary of State William Rogers and Assistant Secretary of State Marshall Green, who had accompanied Nixon on his visit to China. During his explanatory tour to various East Asian countries about the results of Nixon’s visit to China, Green did not provide information about the “bottle cap” thesis when he came to Japan, but did introduce some relevant information to other countries. In particular, in his explanations to Indonesia, he conveyed the view that China’s concerns about Japan were not a form of propaganda but were ‘genuine’. Moreover, he explained that China was beginning to recognize the importance of the U.S.-Japan relationship as a preventative

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<sup>75</sup> Paper Prepared by the Interdepartmental Group for East Asia, “NSSM122 Addendum II: US-Japan Relations in the Near Future,” *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. XIX Part 2, no. 99.

<sup>76</sup> Memorandum, “SRF Meeting on NSSM122: Policy Toward Japan,” “SRF Meeting-Japan (NSSM122). August 6, 1971, H-058, National Security Council Institutional Files, National Security Council Institutional Files, ed. Ishii Osamu, *Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan XXXII-4*, pp. 146-152; Memorandum, “NSSM122-Addendum II,” NSSM122: Policy toward Japan, April 5, 1971 [1/3], H-182, National Security Council Institutional Files, National Security Council Files, ed. Ishii Osamu, *Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan XXXII-3*, pp. 44-51.

<sup>77</sup> “POLO II Issues and Statements, “For the President’s Files (Winston Lord)-China Trip/Vietnam, Box851, National Security Council Files, Memorandum, “NSSM122-Addendum II,” NSSM122: Policy toward Japan, April 5, 1971 [1/3], H-182, National Security Council Institutional Files, National Security Council Files, ed. Ishii Osamu, *Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan XXVII-5*, pp. 134-147.

mechanism against Japan's resurgence.<sup>78</sup> The Japanese government gathered information through its local embassies and succeeded in obtaining details of Green's explanation to Indonesia. In an oral history account, Green accounted that when he had accompanied Nixon on his visit to China, he had engaged in discussions with Xiong Xianghui (serving as Zhou Enlai's secretary in the diplomatic field at the time). He revealed that Xiong had repeatedly expressed concerns about Japan's growing national strength, prompting Green to convey, as Kissinger did, that the U.S.-Japan relationship was mitigating the risks associated with Japan's rearmament, acquisition of nuclear weapons, and further, the military threat it would pose to China.<sup>79</sup> In this oral history, Green also suggested that he received the impression that China had probably understood this line of reasoning. These discussions informed Green's understanding of the "bottle cap" thesis which, as Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs found out, he conveyed in his briefing to Indonesia. While this information, which Japan received, was generally consistent with what it heard from Kissinger, a key difference is that Green (and to a lesser extent Rogers) did explain that the Chinese side did not reject the "bottle cap" thesis altogether unlike the NSC staff who avoided providing precisely such information.<sup>80</sup>

Based on this information, how precisely did the Japanese side understand that China had responded to the "bottle cap" thesis? There is not much material available to analyze this issue, but it is certain that some within the Japanese government were beginning to infer that China was at least seeing some merits in the thesis. One of these officials was Foreign Minister Ohira Masayoshi, who was involved in the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China in September 1972. After returning from a visit to China with Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, Ohira mentioned in confidential talks, held at the Japan Institute of International Affairs in February of the following year, that China was anxious about the possibility of Japan ending its security relationship with the U.S.<sup>81</sup> Based on the ex-post account of Director of the Treaties Division, Kuriyama Takakazu, who had accompanied Ohira on the trip and played an important role in the normalization negotiations, it seems unlikely that the Japanese side had the "bottle cap" thesis in mind during the negotiations in Beijing at the end of September. Rather, it may have been after the normalization negotiations were concluded, and looking back on the information they had gathered and the series of events leading up to that point, that Ohira or officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to consider the possibility that the Chinese side had understood the "bottle cap" thesis.<sup>82</sup> In the negotiations for the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, the Chinese side had maintained a stance of not objecting to the continuation of Japan-U.S. security arrangements. As a result, Japan succeeded in avoiding an agreement that would

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<sup>78</sup> "Telegram from Indonesia: Nixon's Visit to China," March 15, 1972, *China Diplomacy* (2018-0019(1)), Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

<sup>79</sup> The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Interview with Ambassador Marshall Green, 13 December 1988, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, p. 107.

<sup>80</sup> Embassy of Japan in the United States, "Outcomes of Nixon's Visit to China: Explanations by the U.S. Government and Reactions from Various Circles," April 11, 1972, *China Diplomacy* (2018-0019(1)), Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

<sup>81</sup> "Confidential Talks of Minister Ohira on Japan-China Relations (Memo)," February 1, 1973, *Normalization of Japan-China Diplomatic Relations (Important Materials)*, (2011-0719), Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

<sup>82</sup> Kuriyama Takakazu, *Sengo Nihon Gaiko* [Postwar Japanese Diplomacy] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2016), pp. 120-121.

have imposed direct constraints on Japan-U.S. relations.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, in the aforementioned confidential talks, Ohira suggested that China seemed to have accepted the Japan-U.S. security arrangements due to its anxiety about Japan. He also indicated that, because he could not say so in the Diet discussions, he would only hint it by emphasizing, more indirectly, that Japan-U.S. security arrangements contributed to the on-going reduction of international tensions. In Diet sessions held during this period, the opposition repeatedly questioned the government about the need to sustain the Japan-U.S. security arrangements while using expressions such as “easing tensions” and “post-Cold War.” As prepared, Ohira refuted them by arguing that the continuation of Japan-U.S. relations contributed to easing tensions.<sup>84</sup> Thus, it is clear that the “bottle cap” thesis had been one of the rationales that Ohira had in mind in defending the policies of the Liberal Democratic Party’s government during the crucial Diet debates on the significance of maintaining Japan-U.S. relations after the Sino-U.S. rapprochement.

Of course, based on Ohira’s understanding of the “bottle cap” thesis as outlined above, it is impossible to conclude simply that Japan had been equally aware of the discussions between the U.S. and China. At the very least, Ohira’s inference did not accurately capture the following two key aspects of the discussions between the U.S. and China. Firstly, it pertains to the issue of the means related to the “bottle cap” thesis. Ohira’s focus was primarily on the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, but the discussions between the U.S. and China covered a wide range of topics including U.S. presence in Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula. Secondly, regarding the feared risks posed by Japan that should be prevented by the “bottle cap” thesis, Ohira’s reference to China’s anxiety remained undefined in any depth, while discussions between the U.S. and China specifically mentioned the possibility of Japan advancing into Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula once again. Furthermore, in addition to this lack of information, it remains unclear as to what extent Ohira’s understanding was actually shared within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Japanese government. All in all, this paper does not go as far as to assert that the ‘bottle cap’ thesis was established as a clearly defined and widely shared idea within the Japanese policy making circle at that time. Thus, the aftermath of the Sino-U.S. rapprochement was an origin of this idea’s emergence, but not yet the moment of its establishment as a policy idea within the Japanese government.

At a time when U.S.-China rapprochement and the normalization of relations between Japan and China were progressing, the only Japanese government official who systematically gave shape to the “bottle cap” thesis was Kubo Takuya, Director-General of the Defense Bureau of the Japan Defense Agency. Prime Minister Tanaka, upon returning from the negotiations for the normalization of diplomatic relations, issued instructions for a review to be conducted on the future of defense capabilities, which led to the announcement (and subsequent retraction) of the concept of “Defense Force in Peacetime” in February 1973, and Kubo was responsible for the practical

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<sup>83</sup> Inoue Masaya, *Nicchu Kokko Seijoka no Seiji-shi* [Political History of the Normalization of Japan-China Diplomatic Relations], (Nagoya: The University of Nagoya Press, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> As an example of the expression “post-Cold War,” refer to Wada Haruo (Remark 018), “68th Session of the National Diet, House of Representatives Plenary Session No. 8, February 29, 1972.” An example of its use within the ruling party, the Liberal Democratic Party, can be found in *Tanaka-Ohira-Miki Sanpa Seisaku Goi Jiko* [Tanaka, Ohira, and Miki Policy Agreement] (refer to Nakano Shiro, *Tanaka Seiken - Happyaku Hachi-jyu Roku Nichi* [Tanaka Administration: 886 Days] (Gyosei Mondai Kenkyujo, 1982), p. 79). As an example of Ohira’s response regarding the continuation of the Japan-US security under détente, refer to Ohira Masayoshi (Remark 182), “71st Session of the National Diet, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, No.32, August 24, 1973.”

work behind this review. While this work had begun as the Tanaka administration's response to the opposition parties' demand to articulate the limitations of future defense capabilities amidst the progress of détente, the interest of both the opposition party and Kubo, who played a central role in this work, were by no means limited to the consideration of defense capabilities development.<sup>85</sup> As mentioned earlier, amidst the easing of Cold War tensions and conflicts, the opposition parties raised questions about the *raison d'être* of Japan's security policy that was still based on Japan-U.S. security arrangements, and Kubo, too, contemplated this point. In constructing and reconstructing the rationale of the Japan-U.S. security arrangements, Kubo came to take positions that partly aligned with both the functional and instrumental views of the "bottle cap" thesis. He pointed out that while the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty did not have the effect of preventing Japan's nuclear armament (according to him, Japan did not have the option of acquiring nuclear weapons from the perspective of military rationality, regardless of whether the security treaty existed or not), it did play a role, at least, in preventing Japan from becoming a far more significant military power through the strengthening of its conventional forces should the alliance cease to exist. Such an idea is, albeit partially, akin to what this paper conceptualizes as the functional view.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, he speculated that there might be a possibility that China, in particular, would accept such a function. The basis for his argument was China's stance of not treating the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty as a problem in the process of the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan, as well as the public statements made by Zhou that seemed to imply tolerating the continuation of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty for the immediate future.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Kubo pointed out that if Japan-U.S. relations were to suffer a setback, it would risk intensifying the competition for influence over Japan among the three major powers of the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union. In this sense, Kubo inferred quite accurately about China's stance of desiring the maintenance of Japan-U.S. relations in order to inhibit the Soviet Union's charm offensive toward Japan as explained in the second section of this paper.<sup>88</sup> Based on this line of argument, Kubo concluded that even if tensions between major powers were to ease, it was still necessary for Japan's security and regional stability to continue the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. He argued that even with the easing of Cold War tensions, it did not necessarily signify that the Security Treaty would become unnecessary.

Nonetheless, Kubo's argument, while more concrete and systematic compared to that of Ohira, shared some of its limitations in the following two aspects. Firstly, regarding the risks posed by Japan that should be prevented by the "bottle cap" thesis, while Kubo mentioned that it restrains the rise of Japan's conventional forces, he did not touch on the scenario of Japan's military

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<sup>85</sup> As an example of the questions raised by the opposition, refer to Kawasaki Kanji (Remark 187), "71st Session of the National Diet, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs No. 23, June 20, 1973." Regarding changes in the discussions surrounding Japan-U.S. security arrangements at the time, refer to Tanaka Akihiko, *Anzen Hoshō: Sengo 50-nen no Mosaku* [National Security: Exploration 50 Years After the War], (Yomiuri Shimbun, 1997), pp. 236-244.

<sup>86</sup> Kubo Takuya, "Nichibei Anpo Joyaku wo Minaosu" [Review of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty], The World and Japan Database Project, December 10, 2022, <https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPSC/19720600.O1J.html>

<sup>87</sup> Kubo Takuya (Remark 279), "69th Session of the National Diet, House of Councillors Cabinet Committee No. 5, October 17, 1972."

<sup>88</sup> Kubo Takuya, "Wagakuni no Boei Koso to Boeiryoku Seibi no Kangaekata" [Japan's Defense Concept and Approach to Development of Defense Capabilities], The World and Japan Database Project, accessed December 10, 2022, <https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPSC/19740600.O1J.html>



advancement into Taiwan or the Korean Peninsula again, which both the U.S. and China had discussed. On the contrary, China did not necessarily express opposition to Japan’s defence efforts through conventional forces. In this respect, there is a discrepancy between Kubo’s argument and China’s responses to the “bottle cap” thesis. Secondly, while Kubo was engaged in discussions that focused on the effectiveness of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in relation to the means for the “bottle cap” thesis, both U.S. and China were discussing the overall presence of U.S. military in East Asia more broadly. These limitations seem to indicate that it was inherently difficult for Japan to gain insight into the discussions between the U.S. and China solely based on rational inferences and information that was far too fragmented.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined the perceptions and discussions among Japan, the U.S., and China on the “bottle cap” thesis in the early 1970s. As seen earlier, all three countries held a broad recognition of what could be described as the “bottle cap” thesis, but no common understanding was clearly established at the time of both the Sino-U.S. rapprochement and Japan-China diplomatic normalization. This paper also identified the misalignment among the three countries in their respective perceptions of the following three key points that it focused on: (1) the risks posed by Japan that should be prevented by the “bottle cap” thesis; (2) its means; and, (3) the functional/instrumental views. These can be summarized as follows. (1) Regarding the risks posed by Japan, it is evident that there were differences in perception among the three countries. China feared three aspects: Japan’s potential military expansion into Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula once again, its nuclear armament, and its approach towards the Soviet Union. In contrast, the U.S. was primarily concerned with Japan’s shift toward neutrality and the prevention of Japan from becoming a nuclear-armed state. The perception of Kubo, who provided the most systematic discussion of the “bottle cap” thesis in Japan at the time, was that nuclear armament was militarily irrational and not a feasible option regardless of whether the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty existed or not. Based on this premise, he recognized the “bottle cap” thesis as a means of restraining the augmentation of conventional forces. There were also discrepancies in the understanding of the means of the “bottle cap” thesis in (2). The discussions by both Ohira and Kubo were ultimately focused on the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. In contrast, the discussions between the U.S. and China were broader in scope and encompassed the overall U.S. military presence in East Asia. Additionally, there were important discrepancies in the perceptions of both the U.S. and China. China maintained the position that U.S. presence should ultimately be a temporary measure, while the policy of the U.S. was to continue maintaining this presence. Regarding the functional and instrumental views in (3), the fact that the U.S. itself also began to feel uneasy about Japan’s future role signifies a functional view, while the utilization of Japan’s presence in this sense in negotiations with China (including exaggerations for tactical purposes) indicated that it adopted the instrumental view. Elements of both the functional and instrumental views can also be observed in discussions conducted in Japan. As previously mentioned, Kubo took a functional view in the sense of restraining conventional forces, but took an instrumental view when it came to the concerns of the U.S. and Asia about Japan’s nuclear armament. These perceptions, however, were formed without necessarily having an accurate understanding of China’s position on the “bottle cap” thesis. The U.S. was the only party positioned to acknowledge the discrepancies between Japan, the U.S., and China on these

points. Yet, as far as the author can discern, there are no signs that efforts were made to bridge these gaps in perception. It may be natural to interpret that this had been left unaddressed due to fears that attempts to resolve the discrepancies could disrupt the management of U.S.-China or Japan-U.S. relations.

Of course, the various points mentioned above are based on an analysis that focused on discussions in the early 1970s. To conduct a more comprehensive examination of the “bottle cap” thesis, it is necessary to further analyze the discussions, changes in perceptions, and developments that may have taken place after this period. This paper at least notes, as its provisional conclusion, that in light of the discrepancies clarified in its analyses, there is room for reconsideration in recent discussions about the regional order in East Asia. In particular, the common claim that the “bottle cap” thesis has fallen into dysfunction due to the strengthening of the Japan-U.S. alliance and changes in Japan’s security policies after the Cold War, and that these changes had led to China’s security concerns, is obviously simplistic. Rather, based on the findings of this paper, another plausible interpretation would be that the sources of new tensions among Japan, the U.S., and China were inherent in the discrepancies about the “bottle cap” thesis existing among the three countries, which were left unresolved by the trilateral negotiations in the early 1970s when this idea was originally constructed. This important research question remains to be addressed by a rigorous academic study in the future.

(National Institute for Defense Studies)