



**Parahyangan Catholic University**

**Faculty of Social and Political Sciences**

**Department of International Relation**

*Accredited A*

*SK BAN-PT NO: 3095/SK/BAN-PT/Akred/S/VIII/2019*

**Struggle of the Restricted: Japan's Strategic Approach  
towards China's Assertiveness in the South China Sea**

Thesis

By

Archangela Rachel Dharmaputri

6091801020

Bandung

2021



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Supervisor

Idil Syawfi, S.IP., M.Si.

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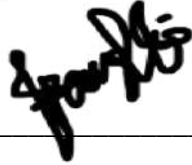
**Thesis Validation**

Name : Archangela Rachel Dharmaputri  
Nomor Pokok : 6091801020  
Judul : Struggle of the Restricted: Japan's Strategic Approach towards  
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Has been examined in the Final Examination  
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examiners**

Vrameswari Omega W., .SIP., M.Si.(Han) : 

**Secretary**

I'dil Syawfi, S.IP., M.Si : 

**Member**

Dr. I Nyoman Sudira : 

With the acknowledgement of,  
Dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences



Dr. Pius Sugeng Prasetyo, M.Si

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I, who signed below:

Name : Archangela Rachel Dharmaputri

Student ID : 6091801020

Department : International Relations

Title : Struggle of the Restricted: Japan's Strategic Approach towards  
China's Assertiveness in the South China Sea

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I declare this statement with full responsibility, and I am willing to take any consequences given by the prevailing rules if this statement was found to be untrue.

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Archangela Rachel Dharmaputri

6091801020

## ABSTRACT

Name : Archangela Rachel Dharmaputri  
Student ID : 6091801020  
Title : Struggle of the Restricted: Japan's Strategic Approach  
towards China's Assertiveness in the South China Sea

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The aim of this research is to understand Japan's rationale behind its balancing strategy and explore its methods of balancing within its alliance pertaining to the South China Sea. Japan's post-World War statecraft has posed limitations and restrictions towards its security posture, leaving room for a sufficient Self-Defense Forces to exert defensive mechanisms until today. At the same time, China's growing assertiveness around Japan's most important chokepoints – including the South China Sea – needs a response. Hence, this thesis aims to answer the question of “how does Japan respond to China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea amid its power projection limitation?”. Utilizing the balance of threat theory as the core tool of analysis, it is capable to affirm Japan's decision to balance against China instead of bandwagon through analysing the level of threat and prerequisites of external balancing. Conclusively, Japan portrays China as a threat towards its territorial sovereignty and objectives. Thus, under the Abe administration, Japan managed to externally balance China through strengthening its alliance with the United States and approaching Southeast Asian countries.

**Keywords: Japan, power projection limitation, China, assertiveness, alliance, balancing, South China Sea, threat**

## ABSTRAK

Nama : Archangela Rachel Dharmaputri  
NPM : 6091801020  
Judul : Perjuangan di tengah Keterbatasan: Pendekatan Strategis Jepang terhadap Sikap Asertif Tiongkok di Laut Tiongkok Selatan

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*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendalami alasan Jepang di balik strategi balancing sekaligus menyelidiki metode balancing yang diambil oleh Jepang di dalam aliansinya untuk menyikapi permasalahan di Laut Tiongkok Selatan. Keterbatasan proyeksi kekuatan dan militer Jepang sejak pasca Perang Dunia Kedua meninggalkan jejak hingga saat ini, termasuk postur keamanan yang hanya mampu bersikap defensif. Pada waktu yang sama, terjadi peningkatan sikap asertif oleh Tiongkok terhadap wilayah-wilayah penting Jepang – termasuk Laut Tiongkok Selatan – yang perlu ditindaklanjuti. Sehingga, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjawab pertanyaan “bagaimana Jepang menyikapi peningkatan sikap asertif Tiongkok di Laut Tiongkok Selatan di tengah limitasi proyeksi kekuatan?”. Teori balance of threat yang digunakan sebagai unit analisis utama mampu mengafirmasi keputusan Jepang untuk melakukan balancing terhadap Tiongkok dibandingkan bandwagoning melalui analisis tingkat ancaman dan prasyarat untuk melakukan external balancing. Secara singkat, Jepang menganggap Tiongkok sebagai ancaman terhadap kedaulatan teritori dan tujuan nasionalnya. Sehingga, di bawah kepemimpinan Abe, Jepang menyiasati untuk melakukan external balancing terhadap Tiongkok dengan memperkuat aliansinya dengan Amerika Serikat dan mendekati negara-negara Asia Tenggara.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Jepang, keterbatasan proyeksi kekuatan, Tiongkok, sikap asertif, aliansi, balancing, Laut Tiongkok Selatan, ancaman*

## **Preface**

For so long, discussions entailing the South China Sea have been wondering on the identity China is constructing while observing reactions from claimant states. It is true how the conflict has sparked states' insecurity on their territorial integrity, however, with the role that the South China Sea possess, every state has a pinch, if not more, interests represented there. This also applies to Japan – a former Asian hegemon – where its livelihood is highly dependent on the peace in the South China Sea. I, personally, see Japan's position in the South China Sea uniquely dilemmatic. If discussing the East China Sea dispute is the context of a border conflict, then the South China Sea is a true interest and perception-based arena for Japan. Hence, with Japan's inherent restrictive policy to react to the dispute in the South China Sea is more limited.

The times assembling this thesis have been challenging yet unforgettable. It was nice to have a reason to move forward everyday and progress during these times. However, I also realize the limitation of capacity posed in myself which might be seen throughout the research. Even so, I am very much open to any critics and opinions relating to my thesis.

Lastly, I am utterly grateful for all the support given throughout this long process. I hope I did not fail anyone. Enjoy!

Bandung, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Archangela Rachel Dharmaputri

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Signing off,

6091801020.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

A2/AD	: Anti-Access/Area Denial
AAAV	: Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicle
ADIZ	: Air Defense Identification Zone
AIIB	: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CoC	: Code of Conduct
CUES	: Code for Unexpected Encounters at Sea
DoC	: Declaration of Conduct
ECS	: East China Sea
EEZ	: Exclusive Economic Zone
FDI	: Foreign Direct Investment
FMS	: Foreign Military Sales
FOIP	: Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FONOPs	: Freedom of Navigation and Operations
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
GLCM	: Ground Launched Cruise Missile

GNP	: Gross National Product
ICBM	: Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IPD	: Indo-Pacific Deployment
IRBM	: Intermediate-range Ballistic Missile
JCG	: Japanese Coast Guard
JMSDF	: Japan Maritime Self Defense Forces
LDP	: Liberal Democratic Party
LHD	: Large Amphibious Ship
LNG	: Liquefied Natural Gas
LPG	: Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MRBM	: Medium-range Ballistic Missile
NDPG	: National Defense Program Guidelines
NSS	: National Security Strategy
PCA	: Permanent Court of Arbitration
PLA	: People's Liberation Army
SCAP	: Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers
SCS	: South China Sea
SDF	: Self Defense Forces



SIDA : Security Identity of Domestic Antimilitarism

SLOC : Sea Line of Communication

SRBM : Short-range Ballistic Missile

SSBN : Ballistic Missile Submarine

UNCLOS : United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas

US : United States

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background

Amid the growing regional instability and power contestations in East and Southeast Asia, Japan's capacity to insulate its nation is still under umpteen limitations. Until today, Japan's pacifist identity is marked on the Article 9 of their Constitution which is mostly interpreted as the inability for Japan to engage in any forms of conflicts and not possess any offensive power or military forces. The disengagement from war is supported by the interpretation of war as a sovereign right of the nations in dispute and the Japanese government shall not intervene in such issues. However, debates on whether self-defense wars are included in the passage is still ongoing and might affect the interpretation of the second paragraph. The legitimization of the Self Defense Forces (SDF) is contingent on whether Japan is allowed to conduct self-defense mechanisms or not. The bottom line, which the government renounces, remains on the inability of Japan to possess any war potential (*senryoku*).<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of how one interprets the article, the Japanese government clearly understands the limitation posed by the article. Japan Maritime Self-Defense

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<sup>1</sup> Sayuri Umeda, "Japan: Amendment of Constitution, Article 9," *The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Directorate* (2006): 1-3.

Forces (JMSDF) is one of the most sophisticated from three branches of forces but still experiences major constraints from the article. The JMSDF does not possess any nuclear submarines or aircraft, and the SDF's participation in foreign operations is often criticized. Coordination between the land, sea, and air forces were also recently conducted in 2006, in which before the period, zero communications were allowed.<sup>2</sup> The possession of the SDF is also limited to only defensive projections, meaning intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), long-range strategic bombers, and attack aircraft carriers are prohibited to be present in their inventory.<sup>3</sup> Especially with interpretations of the unjustified presence of the SDF, Japan is expected to bring up *ad hoc* and civilian powers if there were to be any attack towards Japan's sovereignty.<sup>4</sup>

Japan's loss in the Second World War has left scars for Japan's military mobility. The profanity of the restrictions was implemented after Japan's expansionist mission during the times and its downfall was followed by an active occupation from the United States (US), specifically from 1945 until 1952. Thus, the "Post-War Constitution" or the "Peace Constitution" was the disfigurement of Japan's loss and profanity lingering in the current constitution. The Peace Constitution was formulated in 1946 and came into effect in May 1947 under the supervision of the US and the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lee Hudson Teslik, "Japan and Its Military," Council on Foreign Relations, 13 April 2006, <https://www.cfr.org/background/japan-and-its-military>

<sup>3</sup> Government of Japan, Ministry of Defense, Defense of Japan White Paper, (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 2020), 200.

<sup>4</sup> Sayuri Umeda, "Japan" Amendment of Constitution, Article 9," 3.

<sup>5</sup> Axel Berkofsky, "Japan's Post-War Constitution. Origins, Protagonists and Controversies," *II Politico* Vol. 75, No.2 (2010):5-6.

Acknowledging the constraints, Shinzo Abe's second term in 2012 was highlighted with his intention to redefine the article, including the ability to join collective defense forces and be involved in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Abe's agenda is to transform Japan into a "normal" country as the post-war dynamics have heavily imposed limitations to the nation.<sup>6</sup> However, any amendment towards the article has not been codified in the Constitution and remains as a sole reinterpretation made by the Abe government. This implies that the nature of restriction and the values of pacifism are still bound in Japan's foreign policy. Taking it further, it might not permanently leave the soul of Japan as the Japanese have lived and accepted such identity and it remains as a passport for Japan to integrate back to the international society after the Second World War.<sup>7</sup>

## **1.2. Problem Identification**

### **1.2.1 Problem Identification**

Amid the limitations of power projection that Japan experiences, the region of East and Southeast Asia are in dire need for strategic forces. Recent updates on the region have shown significant changes in its power political dynamics. The rise of China's assertiveness and the involvement of new security-based multilateral arrangements have allowed even smaller countries to reconsider their military strategy. Maritime-based issues which question one's territorial legitimacy are mediums for power exertion, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute in the East

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<sup>6</sup> The Editorial Board, "Japan and the Limits of Military Power," *The New York Times*, 2 July 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/03/opinion/japan-changes-limits-on-its-military.html>

<sup>7</sup> Shoichi Koseki, "Article 9 of Japan's Constitution," *Peace Research* Vol. 37, No. 2 (2005):32.

China Sea (ECS) and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) confusion in the South China Sea (SCS).<sup>8</sup> Hence, with such changes in the region highlighted by power contestations, nations within the East and Southeast Asia region are leaning towards cautious decision making in their military moves.

Tension in the region has reached an inevitable stage, including for Japan. The “China Threat” perceived since the 1970s is rooted from several factors, including its fragile national security due to its geographic proximity and instabilities, the growth of perception studies, Japan’s strategic alliance with the US, and domestic public perception.<sup>9</sup> Such perception blooms until today, especially with China’s growing assertiveness. During Abe’s governance, China has increased its military budget over \$100 billion or equivalent to an increase of 74%.<sup>10</sup> While Japan has been considerably fluctuating, with its peak in 2012 of \$60.012 billion.<sup>11</sup> These numbers reflect two things: the increasing military power possessed by China and the disparity between the two nations.

The two conclusions from the latter then explain China's rigorous military attempts, which threatens Japan’s national interest. Recent updates have actualized China’s stance in opposing the status quo through expanding its territorial claims

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<sup>8</sup> Scot Marciel, “Maritime Issues and Sovereignty Disputes in East Asia,” US Department of State, 15 July 2009, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2009/07/126076.htm#:~:text=There%20are%20various%20other%20maritime-related%20disputes%20in%20East,attention%20than%20the%20in%20the%20South%20China%20Sea.>

<sup>9</sup> Wenran Jiang, “The Japanese Assessment of the ‘China Threat’” in Herbert Yee and Ian Storey, *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and Reality* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 152-153

<sup>10</sup> “Military expenditure (current USD) – China,” The World Bank, accessed 11 October 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?locations=CN>

<sup>11</sup> “Military expenditure (current USD) – Japan,” The World Bank, accessed 11 October 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?locations=JP>

and building administrative districts around the disputed area.<sup>12</sup> This also includes excessive military advancements and operations by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in SCS which is considered not transparent combined by the development of nuclear weapons and missile capabilities.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, China's strategy in exacerbating their island-building or land-reclamation in Paracel and Spratly Islands have also allowed the state to gain effective control over a wider range of territory.<sup>14</sup> This attempt has not only widened China's territorial control, but also changed such a landscape as an operating base with plenty of military equipment.

For Japan, China's effective occupation of the SCS would hinder its freedom of navigation, especially related to Japan's hydrocarbon exploration and international trading through the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs). Its massive military base and operations are also difficult to be contested by Japan's SDF, hence increases the threat perception from Japanese officials. Not to mention, regional instability might hinder Japan's approach to Southeast Asian nations, followed by unpredictabilities and conflict hindrance in the SCS. This would directly impact Japan's economic, political, and security objectives present in the SCS.

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<sup>12</sup> Tim Kelly, "Japan accuses China of pushing territorial claims during COVID-19 pandemic," Reuters, 14 July 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-defence-whitepaper-idUSKCN24F040>

<sup>13</sup> Luke Hawker, "South China Sea: Japan send Beijing chilling warning 'aggressors must be forced to pay'," Express, 16 December 2019, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1218070/south-china-sea-news-latest-japan-beijing-defence-military-ww3>

<sup>14</sup> "China's Actions in South and East China Seas: Implications for U.S. Interests – Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, 31 January 2019, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42784/87>.

Hence, China's operations in the SCS are highly deemed as a direct threat towards Japan's survivability, especially in conditions where Japan possesses limitations in their power projection. This becomes an interesting point to be examined even further on how Japan would compensate for such restrictions and how significant is China's level of threat.

### **1.2.2 Scope of Research**

This thesis takes a deeper analysis on Japan's strategy to overcome its limitations in the SCS dispute during Abe's administration, specifically 2012 – 2020. This period marks an interesting timeframe as Japan has just shown its recovery from previous Prime Ministers' decisions, the start of a more assertive approach from both Japan and China in the ECS dispute, Japan's increasing role in the SCS, and the growing issue for Japan's Article 9 redefinition. However, this research only focuses on the SCS while acknowledging Japan's indirect involvement in the dispute and its policies might be affected by the ECS dispute. Furthermore, the discussion highly involves the state to state level of analysis between China, Japan, the US, and other claimants of the SCS.

### **1.2.3 Research Question**

Within this thesis, the author aims to answer the question of: How does Japan Respond to China's Growing Assertiveness in the SCS amid its Power Projection Limitations?

### **1.3. Research Purposes and Utilities**

#### **1.3.1 Research Purposes**

The purposes of this research are to understand the decision of Japan to pursue stronger relationship and coordination with the US in the SCS dispute and analyze the degree of threat China posed within Japan's perspective. The discussion among scholars on this matter has been limited to the debates between hedging or balancing, however, this research seeks further to the resentment from Japan in directly engaging with China in the SCS. Hence, the paper provide identifications on various interests from the parties involved, explain the limitation on Japan's power projection, and elaborate on recent updates surrounding the issue.

#### **1.3.2 Research Utilities**

In developing the research, the author expects to open a new possibility of discussion on the issue, especially on the matter of the "China Threat" and its implications towards the Japanese government's decision making, provide alternative perspective on the regional studies of East and Southeast Asia, and examine new point of views in scrutinizing the SCS issue. Furthermore, the author wishes to increase their capabilities in interpreting, collecting, and processing quantitative data, improve understanding in proper theories, concepts, and logical trains, and increase sensitivity in regional issues through various variables in a dispute.



#### 1.4. Literature Reviews

Japan's strategy and foreign policy towards China has always been a discussion among scholars, in which most utilized a balance of power framework to argue on Japan's balancing behavior while others seek to find other types of strategies (e.g. hedging and middle power strategy). From these two sides, not only do their main argument differ, but the calculus also stems from different contexts. To be apparent, those who believe Japan's balancing strategy tends to consider the historical context before Abe's second turn in 2012 while others took the bigger picture of post-World War II.

Stemming from the identification of Japan as a middle power since the 1990s, Ll. Lopez I Vidal and Angels Pelegrin became two of the people who argued that Japan has actively exerted a hedging strategy ever since the Cold War through its neutrality in the international system and maintaining their cooperation lines.<sup>15</sup> The article adopted Kuik's definition of hedging which refers to "a behavior in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects, under the situation of high uncertainties and high stakes."<sup>16</sup> In this light, Vidal and Pelegrin acknowledged the recent developments of both countries relationship to be economically interdependent as China becomes the number one trading partner for Japan, followed by the growing of Chinese imports, the increasing amount of Japanese

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<sup>15</sup> Ll. Lopez I Vidal and Angels Pelegrin, "Hedging Against China: Japanese Strategy Towards A Rising Power," *Asian Security* Vol. 14, No. 2(2018):193-194.

<sup>16</sup> Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's Response to a Rising China." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 30, No. 2(2008):159-185.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to China, mutual transfers of technology, and through various communications bilaterally and multilaterally. However, both seem to not possess a robust cooperative strategy, specifically shown in Japan's external balancing with the US and internal balancing through its SDF advancements.

Jeffrey W. Hornung also supported this argument, however, instead of claiming Japan's strategy has been hedging since the Post-Cold War, he explained how Japan has gone through three phases of strategies. Hornung acknowledged the term of soft hedging and hard hedging concluded in the same spectrum. Soft hedging refers to a more cooperative relationship and promotion of mutual interests. While hard hedging is nearly close to balancing, where competitive policies containing military alignments and strategies are the atmosphere of the relationship. Hornung then categorized that 1995 – 2010, Japan utilized a softer hedging. The eruption of conflicts and expansion operations in the ECS, then triggers Japan to shift into a hard hedging. Then, if a harder hedging acknowledged internal and external balancing, is it really hedging? In essence, Hornung explained how hedging consists of cooperative and competitive policies, meaning as long as there is a cooperative aspect in the relationship, then it is included to the hedging spectrum. In this case, the existing but deteriorating economic cooperation where China's imports to Japan has dropped around 1.3% from 2010 to 2012. Furthermore, soft balancing with Australia, India, and Southeast Asia countries are part of the hard hedging strategy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung, "Japan's Growing Hard Hedge Against China," *Asian Security* Vol. 10, No. 2(2014): 97-122.

On the other side, Adam P. Liff has been debunking the arguments of hedging, especially after what happened between 2009 – 2018. Liff acknowledged the changing dynamics and insecurities brought by the China-US contestation might lead to Japan's reconsideration of strategy. However, even until Donald Trump's administration – which was unpredictable – Japan remained preferring and strengthening its security cooperation with the US. From bolstering its own security mechanisms to decreasing investments towards China, the logic has at least minimized the concerns coming from the other side. Liff managed to highlight how economic relationship between China and Japan does not matter, especially when Japan has shown zero interest in joining China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and redirecting Japan's FDI from China to Southeast Asia. Furthermore, conditions since 2012 were highlighted as Japan's unambivalent alignment with the US which was included in its White Paper through their three major policies.<sup>18</sup>

Liff's main premise was then echoed by Kei Koga. In Koga's perspective, Japan's dependency towards China does not go far considering mitigation efforts to overcome their dependency have been conducted through various material diversification. Furthermore, Koga's contributions also include their elaboration on Japan's strategy transition from balancing to engagement and to square one. Seeing it through the similar light of balance of power as Liff, Koga argued how Japan has always posed a balancing posture which is triggered by China's increase of

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<sup>18</sup> Adam P. Liff, "Unambivalent alignment: Japan's China strategy, the US alliance, and the 'hedging' fallacy," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* Vol.19, (2019):453-491.

offensive capabilities.<sup>19</sup> China's widening scope of military reach and operations have become both Liff's and Koga's core analysis when discussing factors triggering Japan's balancing. Japan has been bolstering its deterrence effect through internal and external balancing, such as building its national security policy and strengthening its SDF as well as the US-Japan alliance. Attracting regional neighbors such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States were also part of the game to balance China's assertiveness.<sup>20</sup>

As the arguments on Japan's strategy in mitigating China's assertiveness have been circling around hedging and balancing, this thesis takes its stance in supporting the argument of balancing. Different from previous balancing scholars, this thesis sees Japan's responses rooted from China's growing threat, specifically since Japan's purchase of islands in the Senkaku/Diaoyu instead of only China's aggregate power. Not to mention, studies on Japan's responses in the South China Sea are considerably lacking in comparison with the macro-analysis of the Japan-China relationship or the case of East China Sea as well as the study of hedging in Abe's late years are sort of hard to be relevant. Hence, the balance of threat theory is utilized to understand the relationship.

## **1.5. Conceptual Framework**

To provide further emphasis on the alliance formation and threat perception, this thesis adopts Stephen M. Walt's balance of threat theory. The core issues posed

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<sup>19</sup> Kei Koga, "The rise of China and Japan's balancing strategy: critical junctures and policy shifts in the 2010s," *Journal of Contemporary China* (2016):1-14.

<sup>20</sup> Adam P. Liff, "Unambivalent alignment: Japan's China strategy, the US alliance, and the 'hedging' fallacy," 465.

in this theory are regarding: (1) how states respond to threats – whether they decide to balance the source of threat or to bandwagon towards the threat, (2) how does similarities in domestic characteristics affect alliance formation, and (3) whether alliance formations are contingent to policy instruments, such as economic aid. However, the main premise delivered by Walt is the tendency of states to exert a balancing policy against a threat rather than balancing against power. This premise is to debunk the assumption from balance of power theorists which sees aggregate power such as offensive capabilities as the core motivation for states to respond. Furthermore, both ideology and policy instruments possess less incentive as a balancing motive.<sup>21</sup>

Before proceeding to the theory's elaboration, Walt provided a detailed definition on the terms used. Firstly, alliance is defined as a formal or informal arrangement among two or more sovereign states aimed as security cooperation. The definition is accommodative to alliances which are bound without formal treaties or historically formed.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, to distinguish between bandwagoning and balancing, it differs on which side does the state ally with. Bandwagoning emphasizes the alignment with the source of threat while balancing refers to allying with other states against the threat.<sup>23</sup> According to Walt's hypothesis, the international system is more likely to support balancing to occur as the thought of unpredictability of states' behavior remains.

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

Both balancing and bandwagoning are deemed as responses to a certain threat and as a method of alliance formation. In order to decide which action that states should take; Walt provided essential factors which measure the level of threat of a source. These factors include aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.<sup>24</sup>

#### Aggregate Power

This factor implies the total resources of a country, including industry and military capabilities, technology, population, etc. The greater a state's aggregate power, the higher threat it might direct to others. However, this factor can also be a gift that gives states power to punish or reward. Hence, aggregate power on its own is an incentive to balance or bandwagon.<sup>25</sup>

#### Geographic Proximity

The main premise is the closer a state is, the higher level of threat it poses. This is due to the ability of power projection which includes geographic proximity and how it translates to decision-making based on the closest states. States are most likely to engage in an alliance based on their proximate threats.<sup>26</sup>

#### Offensive Power

Different from aggregate power, offensive power refers to the ability of a state to pose a threat towards one's sovereignty or territorial integrity. Aggregate power might turn into offensive power if the factors to calculate offense-defense relative advantage were to be checked out. Hence, the level of threat posed by a

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 23.

state and its likelihood to invite alliance to have a contingency relationship with the level of offensive power possessed.<sup>27</sup>

### Aggressive Intentions

The intention marks the tipping point of Walt's balance of threat theory, where it is believed that the more likely a state is to exert aggression, the higher chance others will balance. The perception remains a fundamental element in alliance formation and choices, especially in cases where smaller states are either way going to be the cost from the unalterable aggressiveness.<sup>28</sup>

From these four factors, it can be summarized how the formation of allies, especially if one decides to balance, is determined by the same perception of threat. In general, we should expect balancing to be more common in a considerable bipolar system, but still there are conditions which determine the actions taken. Firstly, the decision of weak states to either balance or bandwagon is contingent on the likelihood of them being protected. If the source of threat provides a bigger umbrella, then bandwagoning would be the go and vice versa.<sup>29</sup> Superpowers tend to seek allies to diminish the influence and threat of the source, while regional powers have the option to seek external help either from superpowers or their neighboring countries.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, the confidence of possessing an alliance triggers states to choose balancing instead of bandwagoning. This balancing alliance is also supported by

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 25-26.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 149.

effective diplomatic communication and shared interest among the states.<sup>31</sup> However, the degree of commitment also varies in the definition of alliances. There are at least three levels of alliances based on the commitment and collective help provided. The highest level marks the point with the most invested commitment, where allies provide tangible assets such as monetary help, territory, and manpower. The moderate level provides diplomatic sacrifices, however, not in a costly manner. The lowest level solely acts as a symbolic alliance where sacrifices are not present.<sup>32</sup>

Lastly, the atmosphere of the situation also determines further actions taken. Balancing is more likely to occur in a peaceful or early conflict stage situation while bandwagoning might occur after the results of early deterrence appear. Some states might defect from the initial alliance.<sup>33</sup>

To conclude, the balance of threat theory should be able to explain Japan's choices in responding to the SCS dispute despite its limitations. Hence, it shall identify the source of threat and its level of threat, then followed by the alliance created afterwards.

## **1.6. Research Method and Data Collection Technique**

This thesis utilizes a qualitative research method where it emphasizes on building understanding through the interpretation of data and theory. When such a research method usually interprets words as data, observations entailing this method

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 30-31.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 152.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 31-32.



focus on the qualities, behavior, and complexity of the issue to explore, describe, and explain a certain social phenomenon through literature studies, case studies, and interviews.<sup>34</sup>

This thesis adopts a narrative method under the qualitative research model to analyze the data. The narrative analysis allows the research to focus on sequences of events and make sense of an event's results.<sup>35</sup> Hence, it ends as descriptive data and explanation sourced from literature sources.<sup>36</sup> This method is suitable to provide a detailed explanation and answer from the topic and the research question.

With the array of phenomena lining up relating to the topic, this research has gained its data from descriptive sources which are secondary data. Government official websites and publications, international organization statistics, journal articles, books, and news are mostly present as the main source of data. Furthermore, the author also utilizes official government reports and laws to further understand the domestic context of each subject being analyzed.

## **1.7. Thesis Organization**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter I discusses the background, problem identification of the topic, and further introduce the theory utilized. Chapter II explores Japan's limitations in power projection and their national interest. Chapter III elaborates the recent development in the issue during 2012 –

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<sup>34</sup> Umar Suryadi Bakry, *Metode Penelitian Hubungan Internasional* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2016), 18.

<sup>35</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods 4<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 582.

<sup>36</sup> Umar Suryadi Bakry, 113.

2020, as well as understanding the Japan-China relationship. Chapter IV dives into the analysis which starts with the identification of China's level of threat and followed up by Japan's balancing behavior. Lastly, this thesis is concluded in Chapter V.

