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THE RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM IN EAST ASIA

A THREAT TO REGIONAL STABILITY?¹

Peter Hefele / David Merkle / Janina Sturm

The social, economic and political modernisation of East Asia and its regional and global interlacing have not led to a decline in nationalism in these countries. On the contrary, nationalist sentiments and resentments have been revived over the past few years and are clearly gaining in importance for domestic and foreign policy in these countries. On 2 September of this year, the 68th anniversary of Japan's surrender in the Second World War, the historical legacy that has always been a source of tension in the relationship between China and Japan, and to which serious attempts at resolution have never been made, once again became clear. Seldom have polls shown such a negative image of neighbouring countries as they have over the past two years.

What is causing this growing nationalism in East Asia? To what extent does it actually influence domestic and foreign policy? Who are the most significant supporters of nationalism? And what role does nationalism play in the current territorial disputes between the neighbouring countries?

NATIONALISM IN EAST ASIA: CONCEPTS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The development of modern nationalism in East Asia is closely connected with the processes of modernisation that have been taking place there since the 19th century.

1 | This paper examines nationalist trends in the People's Republic of China and Japan, as well as Taiwan's unique situation. For the situation in South Korea, we refer to the article which appears in this issue by Norbert Eschborn of the KAS Seoul/South Korea office.

It has evolved from resistance to Western colonial powers and, particularly in China and Korea, to Japan's imperialist expansion into North-East Asia. The struggle to resist assimilation through foreign cultures, languages and values and ultimately, the pursuit of national independence and autonomy have also contributed to East Asian nationalism.²

The concept of nationalism that originated in Europe denotes an ideology and associated movement that sought to establish and maintain a sovereign nation and the conscious identification and solidarity of all its members with the (often yet to be established) nation.³ Furthermore, one can distinguish between inclusive nationalism, which includes all societal groups regardless of their cultural identity, and exclusive nationalism, which regards other nations or minorities as unequal. The latter leads to degradation of other nations or even legitimates a "civilising mission" based on excessive belief in the importance of one's own nation. Nationalism is often closely tied to national identity, meaning that social ties depend on cultural conformity and, accordingly, "ethnic and political boundaries generally overlap".⁴

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Nationalism in East Asia exhibits both inclusive and exclusive aspects. Strong identification with one's own country of origin is often accompanied by a sense of superiority rooted in ethnicity and dissociation from other nations. Due to the high degree of ethnic and cultural homogeneity in Japan (and Korea), the momentum of cultural unity plays a decisive role in nationalism there. In China, on the other hand, nationalism came and comes primarily from the Han Chinese majority (91 per cent of the population). However, the communist leadership is attempting to convey a picture of cultural unity, in which all ethnic groups are defined

- 2 | Cf. Jochen Buchsteiner, "Fernost: Das Dreifache Feuer", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 Apr 2005. <http://faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/fernost-das-dreifache-feuer-1233693.html> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).
- 3 | Cf. Eckart Thurich, *Demokratie in Deutschland*, 2011, <http://bpb.de/nachschlagen/lexika/pocket-politik/16503/nationalismus> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).
- 4 | Cf. Herfried Münkler, "Ein gemeinsames Dach", *Die Zeit*, 1 May 1992, <http://zeit.de/1992/19/ein-gemeinsames-dach> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

as “Chinese” (*zhōngguó rén* / 中国人).⁵ In doing so, the 57 officially recognised ethnic groups are considered together as one national unit.

China and Japan are able to look back, to some extent, on more than 2,000 years of state and cultural continuity, which represents an important point of reference and a source of their modern national identities. Nevertheless, nationalism in both countries is a relatively “new creation”, which has had to establish itself in the face of older concepts of identity (e.g. dynastic loyalty or ethnic origin) and has found no conclusive territorial definitions as of yet (particularly in China).

Despite its general modernising function since the 19th century, nationalism in China and Japan is based on very different reasons and historical processes.

Nationalism in East Asia was and still is a “vehicle of modernisation” without necessarily incorporating political and emancipatory values, such as freedom and democracy,

which are often associated with this in the West.⁶ Notwithstanding this general modernising function which has been in place since the early 19th century, nationalism in China and Japan is based to some extent on very different reasons and historical processes.

China

Chinese nationalism, which emerged in the 19th century, is closely connected to Sun Yat-sen’s (孙逸仙) “Three Principles of the People” (*sānmínzhuyì* / 三民主義). Sun Yat-sen

5 | The Chinese term *minzu* (民族) covers a range of meanings identified by several different words in European languages: country, people, nationality, ethnic group, ethnicity. Thus, for example, the term *zhonghua minzu* (中华民族) can be translated to mean two different things: the “Chinese nation” and the “ethnicities (nationalities) of China”.

6 | In Europe, it is ideally possible to distinguish between liberal (western European) and ethnic-cultural nationalism. The former also strives for political emancipation in terms of enlightenment. Approximately ten years ago, sinologists were occupied with the discussion as to whether a “liberal” nationalism could also occur with political and emancipatory objectives in the People’s Republic of China. There is no longer any indication of this. Cf. Gunter Schubert, “Nationalismus in China – Der liberale Gegentext zum anti-westlichen Etatismus”, Project Discussion Paper No. 18/2001, Discourses On Political Reform And Democratization In East And Southeast Asia In The Light Of New Processes Of Regional, Community building, Duisburg, 2001.

is considered one of the fathers of modern China.⁷ In order to prevent the decline of the Chinese people and its culture under the oppression of Western powers feared since the Opium Wars,⁸ he developed (based on the ideas of several of his predecessors) a concept of nationhood that stemmed primarily from a Han Chinese nation and that attempted to distinguish itself politically and ethnically from the Manchurian Qing Dynasty. While Sun Yat-sen continued to search for a synthesis of ideas of Western liberalism (democracy / *mínquánzhuyì* / 民權主義) and social welfare (*mínshēngzhuyì* / 民生主義), Chinese nationalism was reinterpreted after the Chinese communists' victory under Mao Tse-tung. Social and national liberation were ideologically conflated and employed in an "anti-imperialist" manner. During the mass campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s, the concept withdrew in favour of patriotism (*aiguozhuyì* / 愛國主義). Since the 1980s, a revival of the old nationalist sentiments has been established. This is meant to counter-balance the dwindling significance of communist ideology as a legitimating principle for the ruling party and to overcome social and ethnic frictions in society. The question of reunification with Taiwan illustrate a distinctive feature and a challenge for the nation (see the section on Taiwanese nationalism below).

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Japan

Japan was the only country in East Asia to escape direct colonisation by Western powers in the 19th century. However, the forced opening of Japan by the United States of America in 1853 provided the key impetus for a fundamental reform of the Japanese Empire. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 established a modern state and set in motion the modernisation of, in particular, the economy and the army, which allowed Japan's ascent to the most powerful state in East Asia within three decades.

7 | Cf. Werner Meissner, "Nationalismus", in: Stefan Friedrich, Hans W. Schütte and Brunhild Staiger (eds.), *Das Große China-Lexikon*, Darmstadt, 2008, 530-533.

8 | Cf. Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Chinas Aufstieg: Der geteilte Himmel", *Zeit Geschichte*, 28 Feb 2012, 16, <http://zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2012/01/China-Essay> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

The aggressive policy of expansion, initially towards North-East Asia (Korea and Manchuria in the North Eastern part of the Chinese Empire), was motivated by power and economic politics. The ideological foundations were formed from a mix of pride in an ancient, unique culture, which Japan had preserved despite reforms that were predominantly limited to the technological and administrative sectors, and of (modern) nationalism feeding on its feeling of superiority due to its progress. This alleged ethnic and cultural superiority justified the occupation of its neighbouring states in Asia and even attempts to assimilate them. The defeat of the Russian navy in 1904 in the Yellow Sea further strengthened Japan's self-assurance as it finally succeeded in conquering a great European power.⁹ The concept of a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere"

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(*daitōa kyōeiken* / 大東亞共榮圈) developed by the Japanese military and government in the 1930s and 1940s purported to establish a "bloc of Asian nations led by the Japanese and free of Western powers".¹⁰ However, this pan-Asian nationalism did not find lasting

support among national liberation movements in East and Southeast Asia due to Japan's military and exploitation strategy. Particularly in China and Korea, the painful experiences of Japanese occupation shaped a form of nationalism that manifested itself in a dissociation from Japan and forged anti-Japanese sentiments that persist to this day.

After the Second World War, the forced democratisation of Japan by the U.S. led to a thorough unsettling of Japan's perception of itself, but not to a systematic overhaul of its own imperialist and nationalist history. The "womb of nationalism remained fertile" in Japan and, since the 1980s, has been able to increase its influence in the political sphere once again. The economic rise of this island empire, tremendous technological achievements and international success of Japanese companies has returned a sense of national identity to the country. However, the

9 | Cf. Wolfgang Zank, "Japans Triumph, Russlands Debakel", *Die Zeit*, 15 Feb 2004, <http://zeit.de/2004/07/A-Japan> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

10 | "Großbostasiatische Wohlstandssphäre", Encyclopedia East Asia, Ludwigshafen University of Applied Sciences, <http://oai.de/de/component/content/article/52-ostasienlexikon/ggg/1337> (accessed 6 Nov 2013).

economic stagnation and demographic challenges that have existed since the 1990s have formed a breeding ground for nationalism as a reaction to the economic and political rise of neighbouring powers, especially China, and their own relative decline.¹¹

SUPPORTERS OF NATIONALISM IN CHINA AND JAPAN

Nationalism often serves “as a tool for legitimising the government and as a means of strengthening solidarity among the population”.¹² This form of legitimation of authority plays a particular role in authoritarian regimes, as they are not legitimated by democratic elections and alternative sources of legitimation (for example, religion or secular ideology) are less influential. At the moment, nationalist trends are gaining considerable influence in political decision making during political crisis situations, often evolving to become a “political genie in a bottle” with fatal momentum that is difficult to then rein. If effective mechanisms for conflict resolution within states and societies, as well as within intergovernmental relations are lacking, there is significant conflict potential – and this is the current situation in East Asia. The most significant supporters and “channels” of nationalist ideas in Chinese and Japanese politics and society can be found in the political and military spheres, in the media and in societal associations.

Parties

In *China*, the Communist Party of China (CPC) uses nationalist sentiments to preserve the legitimacy of the political system. Along with providing assurance of a lasting increase in prosperity, it views itself as the guarantor of the nation’s territorial identity. So as not to jeopardise its legitimacy as the singular political power during times of weaker economic growth, the CPC always alludes to “elements of an ideational legitimation of the system”, which includes nationalism.¹³

11 | Cf. Buchsteiner, n. 2.

12 | Cf. Julia Bader, “Innenpolitischer Wandel und seine Auswirkungen auf die Außenpolitik Chinas”, Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, *Discussion Papers*, 4/2008, 12. Ibid. below.

13 | Cf. Nele Noesselt, “Politische Historiographie: State-Building-Strategien der VR China”, *GIGA Focus Asien*, No. 11, 2011, http://giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf_asien_1111.pdf (accessed 31 Oct 2013).

Japan, on the other hand, has been governed by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) (Jiyūminshutō / 自由民主党) almost continuously since the end of the Second World War. The LDP, along with its current president, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the right-wing populist Restoration Party (Nippon Ishin no Kai / 日本維新の会), led by the former Governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, most strongly represent Japanese nationalism within the the landscape of Japanese political

During his term of office, Prime Minister Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine every year to honour fallen Japanese soldiers from the war.

parties. High-ranking LDP representatives have repeatedly made headlines with nationalist opinions and policies. During his term of office (2001 to 2006), Prime Minister Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine every year to honour fallen Japanese soldiers from the war. Koizumi purposefully used these visits to garner more votes among the traditional rural population. Even recently re-elected Prime Minister Abe said in the run-up to the last elections that he does not regret visiting the Yasukuni Shrine during his first term of office as Prime Minister.¹⁴ Furthermore, he vowed that if he won the election, he would amend Article 96 of the Constitution to facilitate the reform of the Japanese “peace clause”.¹⁵ In the run-up to his visit to the USA in February 2013, Abe caused a stir by expressing views critical of China regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, to which both Japan and China have laid claim. Abe accused the Chinese leadership of having a “deep rooted” desire for territorial disputes with Japan and other neighbouring states, and of specifically using nationalism for domestic political purposes.¹⁶ The most recent visit to the Yasukuni Shrine by members of the Japanese

14 | Cf. Frances Rosenbluth, Jun Saito and Annalisa Zinn, “Japan’s New Nationalism: The International and Domestic Politics of an Assertive Foreign Policy”, 01/2007, 9-12, <http://eastasianstudies.research.yale.edu/japanworld/rosenbluth.pdf> (accessed 14 Oct 2013).

15 | “Nationalism may rise under Japans next Government”, *South China Morning Post*, 12 Sep 2012, <http://scmp.com/news/asia/article/1040775/nationalism-may-rise-under-japans-next-government> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

16 | Cf. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Japan’s paradoxical shift to the right”, *Inside Story*, 6 Dec 2012, <http://inside.org.au/japans-paradoxical-shift-to-the-right> (accessed 14 Oct 2013). Article 96 provides strong obstacles to constitutional amendments. Amending this article would be a pre-condition of enabling an amendment of Article 9 of the National Constitution of Japan, which is also currently being discussed. This article stipulates that force may not be used except for cases of national self-defence.

government in remembrance of the 68th anniversary of the Japanese surrender in the Second World War triggered large protests in China and South Korea.

Military

China's current constitutional structure gives Chinese forces a unique position in the political system, compared to all the other states in North-East Asia (with the exception of North Korea). The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is represented in every important political institution, including the National People's Congress and the Central Committee of the CPC. The party and the army are closely intertwined. The PLA, together with the CPC, views itself as the guarantor of the nation's stability and unity.

Over the past few years, high-ranking active generals and foreign and security policy think tanks aligned with the PLA have repeatedly aroused international attention with provocative nationalist opinions.¹⁷ Territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas provide an effective sounding board for nationalist agitation. This also presented an effective legitimation for the massive military modernisation and armament that has taken place over the past few years.¹⁸

In contrast, the *Japanese* Constitution is shaped by a fundamental pacifist character and, as a result, has faced massive criticism by nationalists since its adoption in 1947. According to Article 9, Japan may "possess neither an arms industry nor military forces".¹⁹ Even though Japan now possesses one of the most modern armies in the world, it is officially designated a "self-defence forces", making

17 | Chico Harlan, "Shinzo Abe accuses China's rulers of using island dispute to retain power", *The Guardian*, 26 Feb 2013, <http://theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/26/china-japan-senkaku-islands-dispute-abe> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

18 | See also: Peter Hefele, Benjamin Barth and Johanna Tensi, "Military build-up Dynamics and Conflict Management in East and Southeast Asia", *KAS International Reports*, 6/2012, 8 Jun 2012, 71 et sqq., Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.31266> (accessed 16 Oct 2013).

19 | Cf. Dirk Schmidt, "From the Charm to the Offensive: Hat China eine neue Außenpolitik?", *China Analysis* 94, Mar 2012, 47, http://www.chinapolitik.de/resources/no_94.pdf (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

the debate a symbolic one. Although Article 9 is seen as a symbol of Japan's peaceful intentions by those on the left of the political spectrum of Japanese politics, those on the right view it as a national disgrace and a symbol of their defeat in the Second World War. However, unlike in China, high-ranking representatives of the armed forces are not present in the public discussion. This role is assumed by representatives of right-wing parties.

Citizens' initiatives, media, blogs

The growing significance of organisations in civil society in the *People's Republic of China* can be primarily explained by changing ways of communication, particularly through internet-based social networks. These new opportunities for social and political participation have also been welcomed by the international community. Unfortunately, these (semi-) public platforms for expression also have a "nationalist ambiguity". Nationalist groups run hundreds of online forums, such as the "Iron and Blood Network" (Tiexuewang / 铁血网) or the "Forum for Military Issues" (Junshi Luntan / 军事论坛).

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Nationalist groups run hundreds of online forums, such as the "Iron and Blood Network" (Tiexuewang / 铁血网) or the "Forum for Military Issues" (Junshi Luntan / 军事论坛). Current international conflicts are broadly discussed from a nationalist perspective, demanding unyielding assertion of its own interests (as with the island conflict) and criticism of the government itself is exercised. In China, the idea also holds that "striking messages can be better sold through a medium of general nationalism than a differentiated, sober analysis of the situation".²⁰ Additionally, it is often difficult to perceive whether and to what extent government bodies influence these discussions.

In *Japan*, there are approximately 900 ultra-nationalist citizens' groups (*uyoku dantai* / 右翼団体), with a membership totalling some 10,000 members. These groups represent extreme right-wing and nationalist points of view. They are anti-communist, anti-American, they wish to revise Japan's pacifist constitution, and they glorify Japan's imperialist past. They often disseminate their views and slogans using minibuses equipped with loudspeakers. In 2006,

20 | Fabio Ghelli, "Japan wird nationalistisch", *Die Zeit*, 15 Dec 2012, <http://zeit.de/politik/ausland/2012-12/japan-parlamentswahl> (accessed 10 Oct 2013). Ibid. below.

former LDP General Secretary Koichi Kato's house was burned down by one of these groups after he criticised the Japanese Prime Minister's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine.²¹



Anti-Japanese demonstrations: Chinese protestors demand Japan's withdrawal from the Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands. | Source: © Ng Han Guan, picture alliance / AP Photo.

One of the largest groups in the nationalist camp is the Japanese Youth Federation (Nihon Seinen-sha / 日本青年社). These groups have repeatedly caused conflicts in the past between China, Taiwan and Japan regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. For example, these groups constructed lighthouses on the group of islands in 1978, 1988 and 1996 and unsuccessfully requested that the Japanese government officially recognise the structures.²² Such actions allow these groups to continually fan the flames of conflict.²³

21 | Schmidt, n. 19, 50.

22 | Cf. "Old habits die hard", *The Economist*, 17 May 2007, <http://economist.com/node/9205495> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

23 | Cf. Han-yi Shaw, "The Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands dispute: its history and an analysis of the ownership claims of the P.R.C., R.O.C. and Japan", *Contemporary Asian Studies*, No. 3, 1999, 17 et sqq., <http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1151&context=mscas> (accessed 31 Oct 2013).

“NATIONAL EDUCATION”

Patriotic education plays an important role in general educational curricula in East Asia. In the process, historical depictions of particular neighbouring states and the conflict-prone history of the 19th and 20th centuries are often the cause of cross-national quarrels. What is taught in China and Japan is far from a critical view of history, though its essence finds its way into the official school.²⁴

Some Japanese school books contain passages that play down or deny the Nanjing Massacre of 1937, the testing of biological weapons on Chinese civilians or the forced prostitution of so-called “comfort women”.

Japan’s imperialist expansion toward Korea and China, in particular, and the playing down, if not outright denial, of the atrocities committed by Japanese occupying forces is heavily criticised in China (and Korea).²⁵

Thus, some Japanese school books approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology contain passages that play down or deny the Nanjing Massacre of 1937, the testing of biological weapons on Chinese civilians or the forced prostitution of so-called “comfort women”. In fact, the sensitivities of Japan’s neighbouring states should be officially considered in the preparation of school books; coincidentally, however, the LDP government issued a guideline in 2006 declaring love of country to be an important educational objective.²⁶

NATIONALISM AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

While Japan, like Korea, is rather ethnically homogeneous, today’s People’s Republic of China’s national territory comprises a huge number of ethnic and linguistic minorities.²⁷ Approximately eight per cent of the population is pitted against the dominant Han Chinese majority, who regarded themselves as the real people of China. Because Chinese

24 | Cf. Min Gyo Koo and Vinod K. Aggarwal (eds.), *Asia’s New Institutional Architecture: Evolving Structures for Managing Trade, Financial and Security Relations*, VS Springer, 2006, 117.

25 | Mariko Oi, “What Japanese history lessons leave out”, *BBC News Magazine*, 14 Mar 2013, <http://bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21226068> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

26 | Cf. Iris Wiczorek and Dirk Nabers, “Offene Wunden im chinesisch-japanischen Verhältnis – Japanische Schulbücher, der Yasukuni-Schrein und die Diayou Inseln”, *ChinaAktuell*, Mar 2005, 11.

27 | Rosenbluth, Saito and Zinn, n. 14, 8 et sqq.

minorities have largely settled in the western and southern border regions, particularly strong questions of identity and separatism, autonomy and (forced) homogenisation (sini-cisation) are raised. In the CPC's political campaigns, such as the "Great Leap Forward" and the "Cultural Revolution", national idiosyncrasies were violently suppressed and, to a great extent, traditional cultures were destroyed – a traumatic experience that continues to have an effect today.

In fact, since 1982, the 4th paragraph of the Chinese Constitution has required the state to protect the interests of minorities and to prevent ethnic discrimination. In addition, economic and cultural development in minority-inhabited regions should be supported, and the use of their own writing systems and languages should be permitted.²⁸ However, this stands in opposition to a reality marked by inadequate representation of ethnic minorities in politics, the regime and the military, as well as economic discrimination. Additionally, the massive settlement movement of Han Chinese into the western part of the country since the 1980s has led to an existential threat of perceived expulsion, loss of identity and assimilation. The reaction to this, at least with the politically significant minorities of Tibetans and Uyghurs, has been an "ethno-nationalisation" (Thomas Heberer). The importance of security and material resource policies in the western regions of China, but also the Han Chinese people's self-image of being a superior nation, has repeatedly led to ethnic disturbances among minorities. Economic and political marginalisation has thus become "ethnicised". On the other hand, the "harmonious" integration of all ethnic groups remains a primary objective of the Communist Party – admittedly without the option of true autonomy *within* the Chinese federation.²⁹

Japan's nationalist conception of itself as an ethnically homogeneous population is increasingly divergent from its reality of a rapidly changing society. Though progress has

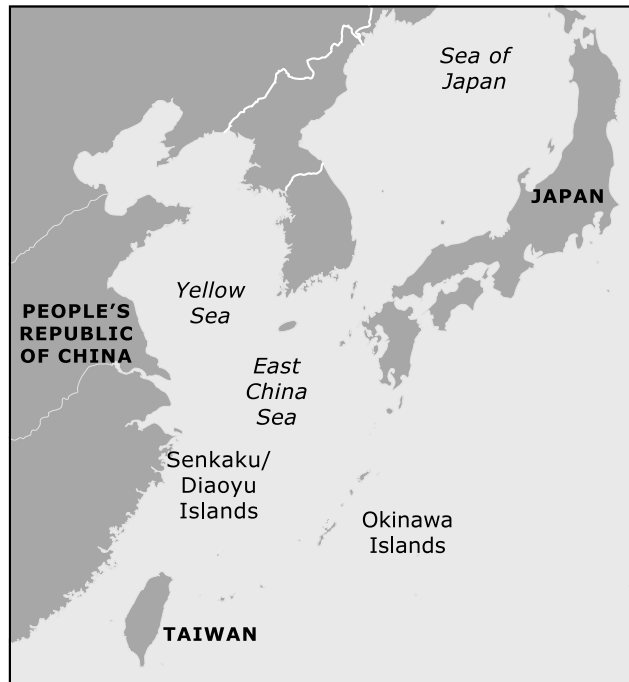
28 | The Chinese central government officially recognises 55 "national minorities" (*shaoshu minzu* / 少数民族), in doing so, a number of smaller ethnic groups are combined into one despite their cultural and linguistic differences. On closer inspection, even the Han Chinese themselves cannot be regarded as a single ethnic entity.

29 | Cf. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/25/content_6944738.htm (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

been made over the past few years in recognising indigenous population groups (the Ainu in northern Japan, for instance), this changed almost nothing with regard to their economic disadvantages. In the future, a latent or even apparent xenophobia is certain to play a considerably more significant role in response to the increasing number of migrant workers coming in from Southeast Asia.

Fig. 1

Island conflicts in the East China Sea



**EAST ASIAN NATIONALISM: ISLAND CONFLICTS
IN THE EAST CHINA SEA AS AN EXAMPLE**

The current conflict surrounding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea is one example of where a lack of assessment of one's own historical responsibility, along with nationalism, a relative shift in power, and insufficient methods of conflict resolution can lead.³⁰ Even

30 | Cf. Wieland Wagner and Bernhard Zand, "Nationalistische Muskelspiele in Asien: Vom Zukunftsmarkt zum Krisenherd", *Spiegel Online*, 10 Dec 2012, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-871703.html> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

without the significant role played by the supposed natural resource deposits in this part of the ocean in the escalation of this conflict, the extent of the confrontations can only be explained against the backdrop of growing nationalism. This nationalism and the question of who this territory belongs to have become the greatest obstacle to Chinese/Japanese reconciliation over the past three years and the source of dangerous regional tensions in East Asia.³¹ China has substantiated its territorial claims by arguing that the Islands had already been documented by Chinese cartographers in the 14th century. Japan, on the other hand, has claimed that it had discovered the then-unclaimed islands and took possession of them in 1895. From a Chinese perspective, the territory, along with Taiwan, was surrendered to Japan following the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and then should have been returned, along with Taiwan, in the course of the peace negotiations following the Second World War in 1951. Because China officially lodged its claim only in 1971 after returning to the United Nations, Japan is now accusing Beijing of only becoming interested in the islands after energy resources were discovered in the surrounding area.³²

Because China officially lodged its claim only in 1971 after returning to the United Nations, Japan is now accusing Beijing of only becoming interested in the islands after energy resources were discovered in the area.

The conflict intensified when Shintaro Ishihara, the right-wing populist Governor of Tokyo at the time, announced in 2012 that he would buy the islands. Then-Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda purchased the islands from their private Japanese owners and “nationalised” them to prevent further disputes between the two nations. Since then, there have been several outbursts of anti-Japanese and anti-Chinese sentiments in China and Japan, respectively. To some extent, this resulted in violent riots in many Chinese cities, nationalist Chinese boycotts of Japanese products and in August 2012, the sales figures for Japanese vehicles sold

31 | Cf. David Pilling, “Asia-Pacific: Desert Island Risks”, *Financial Times*, 1 Dec 2012, <http://ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/e0bc4358-0ba5-11e2-b8d8-00144feabdc0.html> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

32 | Cf. Oliver Müser, Anna Yumi Pohl and Nadine Godehardt, “Inselstreit zwischen Japan und China gefährdet die regionale Stabilität in Ostasien”, *GIGA Focus Asien*, No. 12, 2012, http://giga-hamburg.de/de/system/files/publications/gf_asien_1212.pdf (accessed 31 Oct 2013).

in China plunged rapidly.³³ However, when the protests threatened to interfere with public order, they were quickly suppressed by the authorities.



Anti-Chinese demonstrations: In November 2010, Japanese protesters demonstrate against China during a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. | Source: © Kimimasa Mayama, epa.

Uniqlo, a large Japanese fashion chain, faced a particularly strong backlash of nationalist resentment that saw them facing protests against their Chinese branches. However, when news spread to Japan that the manager of one of the Shanghai branches had put up a poster in the shop window declaring that the islands belonged to China, there were large protests. Japanese customers threatened to boycott Uniqlo.³⁴

EXCEPTION: NATIONALISM IN TAIWAN

Since the loss of its UN membership in 1971 and because of the nearly universal enforcement of the One-China policy by Beijing, Taiwan's isolation at the international level increased. In response to this, the Republic of China sought increased international recognition of its sovereignty on

33 | Cf. "Honda kappt seine Gewinnprognose", *Handelsblatt*, 29 Oct 2012, <http://handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/industrie/7314606.html> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

34 | Cf. Carsten Germis, "Nationalismus in Japan: Die langen Schatten", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 Sep 2012, <http://faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/-11898462.html> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

the island of Taiwan.³⁵ Nationalism in Taiwan is closely linked with questions of Taiwanese identity and the island's political future. The range of positions held in Taiwan spans from that of *Chinese* nationalism, which views Taiwanese culture as just a part of a comprehensive Chinese culture and nation (this position is held by the current governing party, the Kuomintang), to that of explicit *Taiwanese* nationalism, which views "Chinese-ness" as just *one* constituent element of the Taiwanese nation and is accompanied by a tendency towards "de-sinicisation".³⁶

Colonial occupation, the oppression of many Taiwanese people under Chiang Kai-Shek (蔣介石, 1949 to 1987), cohabitation with a multitude of mainland Chinese who had taken refuge in Taiwan with the military and nationalist supporters and ultimately Taiwan's peaceful transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy in the 1990s have all led to a societal cleavage. This is closely tied to the key question of Taiwan's national and territorial future. The 2000-2008 government, led by the Democratic Progressive Party (Mínjindang / 民進黨), a party whose roots stemmed from the Tangwai ("outside the party") opposition movement, once again intensified Taiwan's dissociation from the mainland and placed stronger emphasis on their independent identity as "Taiwanese".³⁷

The 2000-2008 government once again intensified Taiwan's dissociation from the mainland and placed stronger emphasis on their independent identity as "Taiwanese".

35 | According to the One-China policy, all states that enjoy diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China must acknowledge Taiwan as a part of China and maintain no official diplomatic relations with the government in Taipei. Currently only 23 (mostly) smaller states in Central and South America, Oceania and Africa maintain official relations with Taiwan. In Europe, only the Vatican officially acknowledges Taiwan.

36 | Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Specificities and Limits of Taiwanese Nationalism", *China Perspectives* 62, Nov-Dec 2005, <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/2863> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

37 | Cf. Shaocheng Tang, "Das Dreiecksverhältnis zwischen den USA, der VR China und Taiwan", The Federal Agency for Civic Education, 20 Aug 2003. <http://bpb.de/apuz/27443/das-dreiecksverhaeltnis-zwischen-den-usa-der-vr-china-und-taiwan> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

Since the regime change in 2008, cross-strait relations have become much more closely intertwined due to the resumption of (semi-) official contacts,³⁸ several economic and trade agreements, educational and cultural exchanges and growing tourism numbers. In fact, Taiwan's question of identity is repeatedly played out in the media landscape through the dualism of both political camps and cleavages between political camps and the media. However, the more than one million *Taishang* (Taiwanese businesspeople on the Chinese mainland) and the growing labour market opportunities for young Taiwanese in China indicate that Taiwan is acting increasingly pragmatically. Polls back this up: In December 2012, approximately 54 per cent of people identified themselves as Taiwanese, but 38.5 per cent identified themselves as "Chinese and Taiwanese".³⁹ This suggests that many Taiwanese no longer categorically oppose a Chinese-Taiwanese nation.⁴⁰

The discussion of the question of an independent Taiwanese nation is not only controversial in Taiwan. At the same time, it is of utmost significance for the self-image of the People's Republic of China⁴¹ and for Chinese-American relations. It is bound up with the geopolitically explosive question as to whether (and how) it could undergo a reunification with the mainland. Beijing's policy regarding Taiwan remains based upon the strategic aim of Taiwan uniting with the mainland on its own terms. With the Anti-Secession Law of 2006, the leadership in Beijing made it clear that it would confront Taiwan's official secession militarily if necessary. This stands in opposition to the USA's position as a "protective power", in which Taiwan's incorporation would only be accepted under peaceful circumstances. China, on the other hand, perceives this as interference in its domestic affairs. While the Chinese population naturally

38 | Direct talks between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan take place regularly through both the Association for the Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) and the Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF) on the Taiwanese side.

39 | "Change in Taiwanese-Chinese Identity of Taiwanese", Elections Study Center, National ChengChi University, Taiwan, 1992-2012, <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/english/modules/tinyd2/content/TaiwanChineseID.htm> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

40 | Cf. Gunter Schubert, "Taiwan's Political Parties and National Identity: The Rise of an Overarching Consensus", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 4, Jul-Aug 2004, 537.

41 | See also Stefan Fleischauer, *Der Traum von der eigenen Nation*, Frankfurt am Main, 2008.

considers Taiwan a part of China and thus believes a disengagement from Taiwan would call into question China's sovereignty and integrity, along with a significant source of legitimacy for the Communist Party, the conflict surrounding the Taiwan Strait is also of particular interest for the People's Liberation Army because it justifies China's military armament.⁴²

It is interesting that Taiwan has also intervened in the Chinese-Japanese dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. As "legitimate representation" of the Republic of China, Taiwan has also staked a historical claim to the group of islands and has demonstrated this interest with patrol boats, which were sighted near the islands in September 2012 after their purchase by Japan.⁴³

CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

The increasing significance of nationalist trends in East Asia is negatively affecting the domestic and foreign policy of the nations involved. Domestically, nationalist and racist forces are threatening cultural and social diversity and tolerance of social and ethnic minorities. However, internal and cross-border migration will increase due to demographic imbalances (e.g. ageing). Multi-ethnic societies will become the norm in East Asia in the future, and this demands a clear change in attitude to allow for successful social integration.

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In the Europe of the 19th century, commitment to one's own nation was accompanied by the pursuit of freedom, equality and democracy; recent trends toward nationalism in East Asia lack such democratising potential. On the contrary, it is more likely to be used to suppress emancipatory movements.

In terms of foreign policy, nationalism is thwarting attempts to reach for regional integration extending beyond purely economic interdependencies. In East Asia, it has once

42 | Cf. Bader, n. 12, 36.

43 | Cf. "Streit mit Japan: Taiwan schickt Schiffe zu Senkaku-Inseln", *Spiegel Online*, 13 Sep 2012, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-855616.html> (accessed 10 Oct 2013).

again become apparent that globalisation and economic interdependency between nations are no guarantee of increased trust and peaceful relations. Concerns of a relative decline rather fan the flames of nationalist sentiments.

Through its ever-closer global economic links with East Asia, Europe's prosperity and security would be directly threatened by regional or even domestic conflicts. As the birthplace of modern nationalism, Europe has had to endure the experience of nationalism and racism to the brink of (self-) destruction. However, the successful unification of Europe over the past 60 years has also demonstrated how nationalist mindsets can be overcome. Because of this, Europe and its political sphere are being called upon to communicate the notion of regional integration and a model of a tolerant society in its dialogue with its partners in Asia.