Ballistic Missile Defense and its Effect on Sino-Japanese Relations: A New Arms Race?

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Abstract

The present article discusses the implications of ballistic missile defense systems for the stability and security of the Northeast Asian region. The paper aims to find out whether the ballistic missile defense systems contribute to the stability and security of the region, or are rather detrimental to it. A constructivist approach is utilized to analyze the problem. Relying on both strategic culture and historical memory, the paper analyzes how the ballistic missile systems of Japan are perceived by China, and whether they contribute to Chinese militarization.

Keywords: Japan; China; ballistic missile defense; strategic culture; historical memory; Chinese security policy; Japanese security policy

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1. Introduction

During the Cold War, we witnessed the debate on whether the development and deployment of ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems enhanced global security, or rather endangered it. The Cold War debate pertained chiefly to the USA-USSR (or broader NATO-Warsaw Pact) security relations. However, the security implications of BMD systems are not exclusive to the USA-USSR (or currently USARussia) relations. In the post-Cold War era the proliferation of both ballistic capabilities and BMD systems has occurred in almost all the world regions. One of the regions where BMD system proliferation occurred to a great extent in the past years is Northeast Asia. Japan, China, and South Korea all possess BMD capabilities nowadays. Northeast Asia is also one of the regions where tensions have remained high since the end of the Cold War. Numerous territorial disputes (e.g. the Taiwan issue, or the disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands between China and Japan and

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the Southern Kuril Islands between Japan and Russia) are few of several hotspots of the increased inter-state tension in the region. In addition to the two extra-regional powers (the USA and Russia, both of which have important interests in the Northeast Asian region), two of the countries in the region – China and North Korea – possess nuclear capabilities. All of these countries also have ballistic capabilities. Furthermore, China has been increasing its military spending over the last decade. Since 1997, the average growth rate of military expenditure has been 15 % per annum (Bitzinger 2015). China's increasing defense budget has translated into rapid modernization of its armed forces. This is viewed by the other countries in the region, especially Japan as the traditional rival of China for regional leadership, as a threat, and thus leads to increasing militarization across the region, possibly even to an arms race between the key actors (AP 2014).

Following the logic of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), the traditional notion of owning ballistic missiles equipped with nuclear warheads is to deter the enemy from launching a nuclear first strike by threat of second strike retaliation. It has been argued that in the Cold War era the possession of BMD systems had eroded the MAD logic and has thus led to destabilization of that era's security order (Hynek 2010). Notwithstanding, the changed security environment of the post-Cold War world has affected the role that BMD systems play in national defense, as they can provide security against non-state actors such as terrorist groups (Shapir 2013). Moreover, due to the changed security environment, the Cold War assumptions about nuclear deterrence and BMD are not automatically transferable to the current security situation in Northeast Asia (Cimbala 2005: 314). As many of the states in the examined Asian region possess BMD systems to protect themselves from perceived ballistic threats, it is important to examine whether the possession of these systems is beneficial for regional security, or if it is actually detrimental to the stability of the region.

The main objective of the research paper is to answer the following research question: '*To what extent does the proliferation of BMD systems in Northeast Asia contribute to the region's stability and security?*' My hypothesis is that the BMD systems actually cause the Northeast Asian region to be less secure and stabile due to the manner in which the historical memory and strategic culture of the actors involved influence the perception of BMD systems as a threat. The paper focuses on the mutual relations of China and Japan, as Sino-Japanese relations are the key pillar of stability and security in Asia (Shambaugh 2014: 17). The perception of Japanese BMD systems by China, and how that translates into Chinese militarization and threat perception is going to be researched. The central sub-question of the paper is: *'Does the continued militarization of China cause Japan to procure its BMD systems?'* To be able to answer the main question, the following sub-questions are also asked: '*How do historical and cultural elements influence policy making in China and Japan?*'; '*What are the security threats the BMD systems of Japan aim to eliminate?*'; and '*How is the continuing deployment of BMD systems in Japan perceived by China and does this perception cause further Chinese militarization?*'

From the perspective of International Relations theory, the realm of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile defense is traditionally dominated by realist approaches, with defensive neorealism being especially relevant for the problem of BMD systems (Kantor 2013). According to the realist notion of security dilemma, also known as the security spiral model, when actor A strengthens its military for defensive purposes, it will lead to the militariza-

tion of actor B, as actor B cannot be certain whether actor A is militarizing for offensive or defensive purposes (Dunne et al. 2009: 102). Applying this theory onto the issue of BMD systems in Northeast Asia, it can be predicted that the other states in the region would respond to BMD deployment with increased militarization and further development of ballistic capabilities so as to negate the increased BMD capabilities. Continuing militarization would thus lead to the destabilization of the region.

Recent literature on the topic of ballistic missile defense has argued, however, that the realist school of international relations theory is not the only one that is able to explain the developments in this realm. A constructivist approach might be more useful in explaining the BMD policy development in East Asia. Both theories consider different aspects to be relevant for the prediction of a state's behavior within the international system. Proponents of the constructivist theory, which puts emphasis on the role of history, national identity, strategic culture, and mutual perceptions in the formation of foreign and security policy, hold that the past experience of the states in the region (e.g. nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, or Japanese aggression prior to and during World War II) influence the way East Asian states think about the BMD systems in the regional setting. Taking into account these ideational factors, one can explain why the Northeast Asian states would consider BMD systems to be a threat, disregarding the apparent defensive purpose for their possession (Assman 2007: 30). While both realist and constructivist approaches have their merits, the paper, due to its limited extent, will rely solely on the constructivist approach to the examined problem of BMD systems and their security implications for Sino-Japanese relations.

In the first section, the paper explores the theoretical background of the research. The basic tenets of constructivism are explained and a more detailed explanation of how the historical and cultural factors influence policy making follows. The second section outlines the particularities of historical memory and strategic culture in China and Japan, and discusses their impacts on the two countries' security policies. Last but not least, the nuclear and ballistic threats in Northeast Asia, their perception by Japan, and the BMD policy of Japan are explored in the third chapter, followed by an overview of Chinese perception of the Japanese policy. Based on the above, an answer to the research question is provided in the paper's conclusion.

Before moving on, certain caveats are in order. This paper does not aim to extensively evaluate the BMD systems' capabilities to counter ballistic missile attacks. It rather aims to discuss the perception of BMD systems by the regional actors. While this requires some basic understanding of the BMD system capabilities, it is not necessary to go into the particular details of individual systems. More important is a detailed understanding of the ideational milieu of strategic culture and historical memory which act as a lens through which the very existence of BMD systems is perceived.

Furthermore, BMD systems are only one aspect of the regional security setting. A complex picture of the regional security dynamics would require an analysis of other weapons systems besides BMD systems. Procurement of offensive weapons systems will readily be perceived negatively by other states. This does not necessarily have to be true for defensive systems (hence the constructivist approach). The interest in BMD systems rests in the perceptual transformation, as a result of which a purely defensive weapons system is viewed as a threat, which appears to be the case of China and Japan.

2. Constructivism in International Relations

When talking about constructivism, it is important to remember that the constructivist theory is not a substantive international relations theory *per se,* as it does not offer specific hypotheses about the workings of the international system. Constructivism rather deals with agent-structure relations and the way they influence how an international system and the processes that go on within this system are interpreted (Barnett 2008: 162). It is thus rather an epistemological than ontological theory. Despite the epistemological emphasis of constructivism, several basic tenets are relevant for the explanation of the international system, and thus for the topic examined in this paper.

For constructivists, both material factors and ideas define the world (Barnett 2008: 163). While the material factors are important for the actors, it is the intersubjective understandings and expectations, the distribution of knowledge, which influences the importance the actor will give to the specific material factor (Wendt 1992: 397). Among such intersubjective factors the factors of identity, culture, history, and norms feature prominently (Acharya 2014: 73). A constructivist focus on these factors substantially enriches the understanding of international relations compared to purely materialistic perspective of the realists (Acharya 2014: 76).

In the realm of security policy, national security is a concept defined in social terms. Cultural norms are capable of influencing the way a state acts in the global forum. For constructivists, the security dilemma is not a result of the axiomatic anarchy of the international system, but rather is based on competitive identities, interactions, and practices. Paraphrasing Alexander Wendt, security and threats are what states make of them (Peou 2010: 169).

The constructivist approach has given rise to security policy analysis based on the concept of strategic culture (Leheny 2014: 72). The existing literature on the topic of strategic culture differs in defining the concept. However, the core of the literature holds that strategic culture can be understood as a set of semi-permanent beliefs stemming from common determinants to which an actor has been displayed and which influences (but not necessarily determines) the making of strategic decisions by its leaders (Turcsányi 2014: 61–62; Johnston 1995: 33–39). Strategic culture directs the policy choices leaders make especially in situations of high uncertainty and incomplete information (Feng 2012: 49). The concept has been used extensively in the analysis of Chinese and Japanese security policies (Johnston 1995; Yan 2011; Katzenstein et al. 1993; Katzenstein 2008; Berger 1998), and will also be utilized in analyzing the policies of China and Japan in this paper.

Besides culture, another factor plays a key role in the constructivist approach to international relations. The English School (ES) authors emphasize the role of history and historical knowledge in the study of international relations. ES views that the study of the past can shed light on current international politics. The study of history can provide the IR scholar with the much needed context in which current inter-state relations operate. Similarly, to strategic culture, history is not an all-determining factor, but rather a source of influence on foreign policy making (Harding 2009: 119). History thus provides a basis for speculation about future outcomes. At the policy-making level, relying on history can actually lead to a

faulty reading of the facts on the ground and contribute to misguided political action (Linklater et al. 2006: 84–97). History thus plays an important role in studying the way an actor's action is perceived by the observer of such an action.

It is crucial to draw on the historical knowledge and strategic cultures of China and Japan for the following reason. Security threat can be viewed as a nexus of actor's capabilities and intentions to cause harm to another actor. Possession of capabilities is not enough to form a threat in itself. The element of intention is crucial for the emergence of a threat (Rousseau et al. 2007: 745). Moreover, a third element needs to be taken into account – the element of perception. How the threatened actor perceives the potential threat of another actor influences the way the threatened one will react (Stein 2013: 365). A potentially threatening act will usually not be viewed as a threat when carried out by an ally. The opposite is true when the actor is perceived as an enemy (Wendt 1992: 397). Sociocultural factors condition threat assessment so strongly that they reduce material factors to the position of lesser importance (Stein 2013: 367). Both the elements of intention and perception are constructed social realities, the construction of which is influenced by the actor's identity (strategic culture) and past interactions with other actors (historical knowledge) (Stein 2013: 398). Threat perception is most strongly influenced by the sense of shared identity between the actors. When the identity of 'self' differs from the identity of the 'other' then the 'other' will be perceived as threatening. The higher the level of shared identity, the less threatening the 'other' will appear (Rousseau et al. 2007: 749–750). Historical memory works in a similar manner. Conflicting interpretations of historical issues tend to worsen the perception of the intentions of other actors (He 2008: 175).

3. Historical and Cultural Determinants of Sino-Japanese Relations

3.1. Historical Memory

Only a handful of inter-state relations are influenced by outstanding historical controversies to a similar extent as the Sino-Japanese relations. Historical memories in the two nations continue to shape the mutual relations between China and Japan (Shambaugh 2014: 3). When talking about Sino-Japanese relations, several key historical events related to the Pacific war and prior Japanese imperialism in the region can be identified as central in shaping the collective historical memory of the Japanese and Chinese people.[1] The ways these events are remembered in the respective nations, and at times used by political elites for the purposes of domestic politics (Berger 2010: 190), have important ramifications for the development of national identity and in turn also on the development of mutual Sino-Japanese relations (Wang 2012: 20–23).

The interpretation of historical issues has been a major barrier both for reconciliation between Japan and China and the establishment of cordial relations between the two states (Berger 2010: 205). Downplaying of wartime atrocities committed by the Japanese military in the Japanese history textbooks has sparked outrage in China on multiple occasions,

culminating in the anti-Japanese riots in Shanghai and other Chinese cities in 2005 (Kingsley et al. 2012: 80–81). However, the Chinese are not without blame either. The patriotic education policy introduced in 1994 has contributed to the rise of nationalism in China, and has been criticized by Japanese officials on the grounds that it presents a unilateral view of history (Wang 2012: 208–209). Because of this, the Japanese population has come to identify China as 'anti-Japanese' due to its lingering on past Japanese aggression and ignoring the pacifist development of Japan over the course of the last seventy years. At the core of the issue lie, once again, history textbooks, in this case the Chinese ones. Their ignorance of Japan's peaceful development and their emphasis on Japanese cruelty is viewed as a source of 'anti-Japanese' sentiments (Gustafsson 2015: 119). This denial of the recent peaceful history of Japan has important ramifications, as it essentially denies a major component of Japanese identity and strategic culture, and may actually contribute, as an external factor, to changing the anti-militarist Japanese strategic culture (Gustafsson 2015: 134).

Besides the history textbooks issue, the visits of high ranking Japanese officials, including the prime ministers Koizumi and Abe, to the Yasukuni shrine, where (among others) 14 class A war criminals are enshrined, are another history related thorn in Sino-Japanese relations. Koizumi's 2005 visit to the shrine has caused a major rift in relations between the two countries (Green 2014: 203). Likewise, the 2013 visit to Yasukuni shrine by Abe was met with stern criticism by China (Panda 2013).

The nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is another historical event that influences Japanese identity and view of international security. Being the only nation to witness the horrors of nuclear warfare firsthand, Japan has developed a strong sense of 'victim consciousness'. Institutionalization of the 'victim consciousness' in the Japanese collective memory of World War II has in a way erased the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers from the Japanese collective memory (Dower 2012: 144). The memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki also contributes to the Japanese perception of nuclear threat, as it reinforces the anti-nuclear attitudes present in Japanese society (Assman 2007: 330).

Conflicting historical interpretations of the events leading up to and during World War II are the reasons why China views Japan as not coming to terms with its own past, while Japan views the Chinese persistence on the historical issues as interference in its own internal affairs. The mutual negative perceptions and mistrust of the other's intentions are derived from divergent recollections of the past which have caused the historical quarrels between Japan and China (He 2008: 176–177). These historical misperceptions can be illustrated by recent remarks by the Japanese Minister of Defense Tomomi Inada, who questioned whether some of the atrocities connected with the Rape of Nanjing really occurred (Xinhua 2016).

3.2. Strategic Culture

The theoretical basis of the role the strategic culture plays in foreign and security policy making was outlined in the previous chapter of the paper. This section builds on the theoretical basis and explores the specific strategic cultures of China and Japan.

The current scholarship on Chinese strategic culture is not united on what the key features of modern Chinese strategic culture are. A dichotomy exists between the writings of

Western and Chinese scholars (Turcsányi 2014: 62–64). Nevertheless, both camps agree on the role the Confucian traditions played in the construction of the strategic culture.

Most Chinese scholars describe the strategic culture of China as defensive in nature, with restraints on the use of force originating in the Confucian principle of virtue (*de*). It is for this reason that the Chinese forces unilaterally withdrew from the Indian and Vietnamese territories grabbed during the wars in the 1960s and 1970s respectively (Zhang 2002: 86–87). Another Confucian principle invoked in connection with Chinese strategic culture is that of humane authority (*wang*). Following this principle, it has been proposed that the rise of China will not take the path of hegemony (i.e. replacing the USA as a global hegemon), but the rise will be modeled on humane authority, allowing for more cooperation and greater security in the international system (Yan 2011: 99).

On the contrary, scholars affiliated with 'the West' are more skeptical about the peaceful nature of Chinese strategic culture. Alastair Johnston identifies two different paradigms within Chinese strategic culture. The first one, the Confucian paradigm, according to which war is avoidable and force is to be used for defensive purposes, acts as basis for the grand strategy. Pursuant to this paradigm, preference is to be given to peaceful, and then defensive means, with offense being the choice of last resort. However, Johnston identifies another paradigm present within Chinese strategic culture. Johnston labels the second paradigm *parabellum* and likens it to classical European *realpolitik.* According to Johnston the *parabellum* strategic culture takes precedence over the Confucian paradigm (Johnston 1995: 249–266).

To bridge the chasm of a dualist strategic culture, the idea of 'cult of defense' was proposed. In this instance, China will retain the pacifist facade. But when dealing with a threat to national security an offensive solution, portrayed as defensive, will be carried out quiet readily (Scobell 2002: 20–21). The cult of defense view of Chinese officials figures prominently in the official strategy documents, where it is formulated as the concept of 'active defense' under which China adheres to the '*unity of strategic defense and operational and tactical offense;* [...] *to the principles of defense, self-defense and post-emptive strike; and* [...] *to the stance that* [China] *will not attack unless … attacked, but* [China] *will surely counterattack if attacked*' (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2015).

Chinese elites truly believe in the pacifist and defensive nature of Chinese strategic culture. This form of Chinese exceptionalism results in the heightened threat perception of the Chinese. The siege mentality in turn causes Chinese leaders to see threats everywhere, even when they objectively don't exist (Scobell 2002: 11–12). This is particularly true for the Chinese perception of Japan (and even the USA), in case of which the culturally predisposed paranoid threat perception is reinforced by the historical memory of Japanese aggression. In Chinese eyes Japan is viewed as predisposed to aggression due to its (as perceived by China) blood thirsty and barbaric strategic culture (Scobell 2002: 15; Scobell 2014: 218–219).

Looking at Japan, it is obvious that its strategic culture has been far less static than that of China. Japan has undergone three distinct phases in which different iterations of strategic culture were dominant. Traditionally, Japan has subscribed to an isolationist strategic culture in which the warrior class exercised civilian power but nevertheless did not engage militarily outside of Japan. The first change in the strategic culture in Japan came during the era of Meiji restoration when the isolationist strategic culture was supplanted by a militaristic one. Following the defeat of Japan in World War II, the strategic culture changed once

more. The postwar era strategic culture is largely characterized as a culture of antimilitarism reinforced by the public opinion of utopian pacifism (Sajima 1999).

The antimilitarist strategic culture has endured to this day, even though the increasingly militaristic rhetoric of high ranking officials (such as Prime Ministers Abe or Koizumi) may indicate otherwise. The antimilitaristic strategic culture rests on the three basic tenets: (1) Japan will not possess traditional military; (2) no use of force except in self-defense; and (3) no participation in foreign conflicts (Oros 2014: 233). Even though actual security policy has been changing in recent years due to the changed security environment, the strategic culture itself has remained unchanged due to the resilience of the Japanese security identity of domestic antimilitarism (Oros 2015), which has been deeply institutionalized within Japan (Lantis 2002: 100).

Antimilitaristic strategic culture is institutionally rooted primarily in Article 9 of the Japanese postwar constitution, titled Renunciation of War, which has an almost sacrosanct nature for the majority of the Japanese public as it represents the very essence of the Japanese polity (Katzenstein et al. 1993: 103). Even though Article 9 has been reinterpreted several times, allowing the Japanese Self-Defense Forces to engage outside the territory of Japan and participate in collective self-defense (Oros 2015: 152–153), the most recent security policy documents use language consistent with the overall antimilitaristic strategic culture.[2]

Interestingly though, the pacifist strategic culture of a state does not necessarily mean that the state will never use force. The combination of pacifist self-perception with the perception of others as bellicose, influenced by heightened threat perception, paradoxically often leads to setting aside the pacifist predispositions when dealing with putative threats to the very essence of a state's pacifist identity (Abdelal et al. 2006: 699).

4. Missile Defense in Northeast Asia

4.1. Ballistic and Nuclear Threats

The main purpose of BMD systems is to provide deterrence and defense against a ballistic, possibly nuclear attack (Cimbala 2005: 320). It is therefore necessary to discuss the existing ballistic and nuclear threats in the region of Northeast Asia before talking about the effect of BMD systems on the region's security and stability. Out of the five countries in the region, ballistic missiles are owned by two, China and North Korea, both of which are engaged in the modernization of their respective ballistic arsenals (Swaine et al. 2001: 3).

As it was mentioned in the introductory part of the paper, China has been rapidly increasing its military spending since the mid-1990s, as a result of which it has undergone a massive modernization of its army on all fronts, including its ballistic arsenal. Out of the original nuclear Five (as stipulated by the Non-proliferation Treaty), China is the only one increasing its nuclear arsenal. It is estimated that China currently owns approximately 260 nuclear warheads and a large number of ballistic missiles with a multitude of ranges, from tactical SRBMs to strategic ICBMs (Kristensen et al. 2015: 77). Moreover, China has reportedly repeatedly tested a hypersonic ballistic missile with gliding capabilities, thanks

to which China could largely increase its penetration capacity, as gliding vehicles (unlike traditional reentry vehicles) are able to outmaneuver incoming BMD interceptors (Gady 2015). Even though China possesses the necessary capabilities to carry out a nuclear attack, it maintains a nuclear policy in line with its strategic culture. The 'cult of defense' Chinese strategic culture translates into the '*policy of no first use of nuclear weapons* [and] *a self-defensive nuclear strategy*' (Ministry of National Defense, People's Republic of China undated; Scobell 2002: 9). China thus has no intention of using its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in offensive warfare; this is recognized in the latest edition of China's defense white paper: '*China has always pursued the policy of no first use of nuclear weapons and adhered to a self-defensive nuclear strategy that is defensive in nature. China will unconditionally not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or in nuclear-weapon-free zones, and will never enter into a nuclear arms race with any other country*' (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2015).[3]

Another regional ballistic and nuclear threat is the one posed by North Korea. Even though the focus of the paper lies with Sino-Japanese relations, the North Korean nuclear and ballistic program needs to be mentioned. Originally, North Korea was a party to the Non-proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear state. That changed in 2003 when North Korea announced its withdrawal from the treaty and fully embarked on the road towards development of nuclear weapons and ballistic vehicles (UNODA undated). Currently the North Korean regime is believed to own up to 10 nuclear warheads (FAS 2015) and has growing ballistic capabilities as demonstrated by a series of missile tests (Parameswaran 2015), the last of which occurred in November 2015.[4] Its nuclear capabilities are also on the rise, which was demonstrated by the recent testing of what was possibly a thermonuclear device.[5] While North Korea's capability is at the moment negligible compared to China's, the lack of transparency of the North Korean regime makes it impossible to predict what the ultimate intentions of North Korea are, once it manages to operationally deploy its nuclear ballistic missiles.

To counter these two threats, Japan could pursue several policy options falling into both offensive and defensive categories. Since the offensive options, such as development of its own ballistic and cruise missiles (both conventional and nuclear), are out of question due to domestic normative constraints, Japan had to opt for the second option and pursue defensive countermeasures, namely procurement of BMD systems (Swaine et al. 2001: 23–29).

4.2. Missile Defense in Japan

The above described threat of rising Chinese militarization (including its nuclear ballistic missile arsenal) coupled with North Korean plans to develop nuclear ballistic missiles is cited by Japan as among the major threats it is facing in the region (Ministry of Defense 2015: 6–7). Perception of these two threats is reinforced by the enduring historical memory of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which reinforces the anti-nuclear views of Japan. Being the only nation that was subjected to nuclear warfare, the enduring historical memory is particularly strong. In order to deter a possible Chinese or North Korean

nuclear attack, Japan is relying on two strategies for which the U.S.-Japan alliance is of utmost importance. Japan counts on the extended deterrence of the U. S. nuclear umbrella to deter possible attacks, and should such an attack happen, it counts on the interception of the incoming missiles by its own BMD systems (National Security Council of Japan 2013: 16, 22).

To this end, Japan has deployed two BMD systems, the ground-based Patriot (PAC-3) and the maritime Aegis SM-3 IIA, and is further negotiating procurement of two other systems from the USA – THAAD and Aegis Ashore (Weitz 2013; JIJI 2014). All of the above mentioned BMD systems are of U.S. origin. The currently deployed systems, PAC-3 and Aegis, provide for a relatively effective protection against ballistic missiles, as the two systems together act as a multi-tier defense system, a BMD system capable of destroying incoming missiles at different altitudes – outside and inside the Earth's atmosphere (Ministry of Defense 2012: 187).

The decision to deploy BMD systems was made following the 1998 overflight of the North Korean Taepodong missile over Japan. Prior to the Taepodong test, only few domestic actors advocated for BMD system development and deployment, most notably the Japanese Defense Agency (Oros 2008: 155). While North Korean threat was the immediate impetus that persuaded a broader set of policymakers to become involved with BMD systems, China has featured prominently in the Japanese BMD discourse. On one hand, the Chinese missile program is also identified as a threat. However, when making the decision to collaborate with the USA on BMD development, special attention was paid to the Chinese perception of any BMD undertakings of Japan (Oros 2008: 160).

It has been previously stated that Japanese strategic culture rests on the following three basic tenets: (1) Japan will not possess traditional military; (2) no use of force except in self-defense; and (3) no participation in foreign conflicts (Oros 2014: 233). The shifts in security policy, which allowed Japan to work on the development of BMD systems and later to deploy them, are in line with the three tenets of the 'anti-militarist' strategic culture (Oros 2008: 149). Nevertheless, points were raised that the joint development of BMD systems with the USA is in breach of Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan. This issue was resolved when the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, the office in charge of preparing new legislative proposals and making sure they would pass the tests of constitutionality, has found that the integration of BMD systems with the USA is not unconstitutional (Oros 2014: 237–238; Oros 2015: 153). Furthermore, legislative changes had to be made to the arms export legislation which allowed for joint production and technology transfers when it came to BMD development with the USA (Oros 2014: 239).

What makes the Japanese BMD systems problematic for other regional actors, especially China, is the fact that with the modern BMD systems there is a thin line between the purely defensive nature of the systems and offensive capabilities. It has been demonstrated that, by making alterations to the SM-3 interceptor, the Aegis BMD system has offensive potential. This allows it to target satellites, thus making it an anti-satellite (A-SAT) weapon.[6] The offensive capabilities of Aegis are not a given parameter, though. Converting Aegis from a defensive BMD system into an offensive A-SAT system requires additional action on the part of the system's operator (alteration of the SM-3 interceptor missile). Looking back at the basic tenets of the Japanese strategic culture, Japan is very unlikely to take such an action.

The Japanese cooperation with the USA is another concern that needs to be addressed. It has already been mentioned that Japan had to reevaluate its arms export restrictions in order to make the cooperation with USA possible. However, the USA has played a much larger role in the Japanese BMD policy. The USA has been exerting pressure on Japan to participate on BMD development ever since the Reagan administration, when Japan was pushed to participate in research, as part of the Strategic Defense Initiative (Oros 2008: 158). The decision to adopt U.S. systems, especially Aegis, has raised questions regarding the prohibition of the exercise of collective self-defense. The Japanese government has reiterated that any BMD system will be used only for the purpose of protecting Japan, will be operated on Japan's independent judgment, and that it will not be used for defense of third parties (Chief Cabinet Secretary 2003). Nevertheless, effective operation of the Aegis system requires cooperation and information sharing between the Maritime Self-Defense Forces and U.S. Navy. This raises doubts about the actual independence of the Japanese BMD systems from its U.S. ally (Hughes 2013: 130).

Until recently, there was a strong belief that any form of collective self-defense is out of question both on policy and constitutional grounds. In 2014, the Japanese Government passed a resolution reinterpreting Article 9 of the Constitution in a way that allows Japan to participate in collective self-defense (Cabinet of Japan 2014). One possible implication of the reinterpretation is that Japan will no longer be normatively constrained at a constitutional level to help defend its allies, especially the USA, against ballistic attacks, by shooting down any missiles flying within the range of Japanese BMD systems even when they are not aimed at Japan itself (Fatton 2014). This has important ramifications for the regional balance of power. While the logic of Mutual Assured Destruction is not applicable for Sino-Japanese relations, as Japan does not possess offensive ballistic capabilities, this logic is still relevant for Sino-U.S. relations. China has previously raised concerns that the U.S. anti-missile shield has grave implications for the viability and credibility of the Chinese nuclear deterrent, and to reduce the concerns, China might have to speed up its ballistic missile research and development program and deploy more missiles (Finkelstein 2003: 50; MacDonald et al. 205: 12–15). Should Japan decide to indeed provide the benefits of its own BMD systems for the purposes of collective self-defense with the USA, the concern voiced by China will also apply to Japan.

Japan pays attention to how the deployment of BMD systems is perceived by China and other regional actors (Oros 2008: 160). In order to mitigate the concerns of other states in the region, Japan has pledged '*to ensure the transparency and increase the international understanding of its BMD system...*' (Chief Cabinet Secretary 2005). However, this did not manage to sway the Chinese perception of Japanese BMD systems as a threat. China continues to see Japan as hostile towards China due to the sovereignty conflict over Senkaku/Diaoyu islands (Information Office of the State Council 2013), and as revising the post-war peace and security arrangements by revising its military and security policies (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2015). Deployment of the Aegis BMD system is perceived as Japan abandoning the peaceful way (Xinhua 2013). The fear of Japanese re-militarization is omnipresent in the Chinese security discourse. In the view of the Chinese, the thin line between defensive and offensive capabilities of BMD systems could be precedence for Japan to procure more offensive weapons systems (Kawada

2004: 34). According to the Chinese, the joint BMD development carried out as part of the U.S.-Japan alliance can lead to technology transfers from the USA to Japan that will enable Japan to develop its own ballistic missiles (Freedman et al. 2004: 348). Such action on the part of Japan would be highly unlikely, as Japan is domestically constrained by the prohibition of owning offensive weapons by Article 9 of the Constitution which embodies the Japanese pacifist strategic culture.

However, in the view of the Chinese, Japan remains a troublemaking state seeking to revise the post-World War II status quo in Asia. The reason for this is the cultural predispositions of the Chinese leaders. While Japan deploys BMD systems chiefly to counter the North Korean threat, China views the deployment as indicative of Japanese militaristic culture and thus threatening to China (Scobell 2014: 222). Thus, for the Chinese, the very existence of Japanese BMD systems is problematic, despite the fact that the Aegis and Patriot BMD systems are capable of countering only a limited ballistic attack (which would be the case of North Korean attack), and could be easily penetrated by more sophisticated Chinese missiles.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this analysis was to find out what the impacts of ballistic missile defense systems are on the security and overall stability of the region of Northeast Asia. The main research question of the paper was: '*To what extent does the proliferation of BMD systems in Northeast Asia contribute to the region's stability and security?*' A set of sub-questions was asked in order to gain an understanding of the role the BMD systems play in the overall security environment of the region.

Utilizing the constructivist approach, it was found that cultural and historical elements play an important role in shaping Sino-Japanese relations. Strategic culture and historical memory influence the way states perceive the actions of other states, and thus either mitigate or reinforce the view that certain state actions are threatening. Both China and Japan view themselves as peaceful and defensive in nature, and view the other as bellicose and militaristic. This perception of the 'other' is reinforced by the historical memories of both nations concerned.

The reason why Japan decided to develop and deploy BMD systems was the need to protect itself against two threats. China and North Korea own ballistic missiles that can be armed with nuclear war heads, and which are capable of hitting the Japanese islands. In order to eliminate them, Japan has deployed a multi-tier BMD system consisting of Patriot and Aegis systems, and is discussing the possibility of buying THAAD and Aegis Ashore from the USA. Of the two, China possesses more developed ballistic capabilities and owns a larger number of missiles, the amount of which has been rising in the post-Cold War era, and thus it represents a threat to Japan. It can be concluded that the militarization of China, including the increasing of its ballistic potential, played a role in Japan's decision to procure BMD systems for its defense. The role of China in this regard is however smaller than the role of North Korea. DPRK's continuing ballistic tests, when missiles are fired into the Sea

of Japan, are much more sensitive and threatening than any Chinese missile procurement (provided that China's no first use pledge holds).

Even though the BMD systems have latent offensive capabilities(after some alterations they can serve as antisatellite weapons), Japanese pacifist strategic culture institutionalized in domestic norms (Article 9 of the Constitution) prevents Japan from using its BMD systems for any other than purely defensive purposes. Nevertheless, due to the historical memory of Japanese militarism and imperialism in connection with culturally heightened threat perception, China perceives any move by Japan towards procuring a weapons system with even the slightest possibility of offensive capabilities as a return to the Japanese 'old ways'. Japanese BMD system are perceived as threatening to China, with the threat being reinforced by Japan moving towards allowing participation in collective self-defense. As a result of this move, Japan could use its own BMD systems to protect its allies, including the USA, rendering the Chinese nuclear deterrent vis-à-vis the USA less viable and credible. One of the possibilities to overcome this is for China to increase its nuclear and ballistic arsenal. It can be concluded that the Japanese deployment of BMD systems contributes to the further militarization of China, but this deployment is the neither only nor the main reason for Chinese militarization. With the continuing militarization of China, it can be predicted that Japan will move to further increase its BMD capabilities by procuring THAAD and/or Aegis Ashore BMD systems.

Thus it is evident that BMD systems, while defensive in nature, can contribute to the deterioration of the regional security environment and stability. Taken out of the regional context, BMD systems are purely defensive systems. The context of Sino-Japanese relations complicates the issue of BMD systems due to how historical and cultural factors influence the perception of these systems. In the regional security context of Northeast Asia, BMD systems do not act as a stabilizing factor. They make the region less secure as they contribute to militarization across the region.

Footnotes:

1. Rape of Nanjing, annexation of Manchuria, interpretation of these events in Japanese history textbooks, or visits to the Yasukuni shrine to name a few.
2. E.g. National Security Strategy of 2013 cites Japan as a 'peace-loving nation.' Similarly, the Cabinet Decisions of July 1, 2014 emphasize Japan having an 'exclusively national defense-oriented policy.' See National Security Council of Japan (2013; Cabinet of Japan 2014).
3. Though there is a growing skepticism about China's no first use policy, the official Chinese stand is that China adheres to the no first use policy. See Blumenthal and Mazza (2011).
4. This was the failed launch of a submarine launched ballistic missile. See Kim et al. (2015).
5. While it has not been yet fully verified whether the device in question was indeed thermonuclear, or a more primitive nuclear fission device, the North Korean narrative shows North Korea as more confident, provocative, and unpredictable. See Tatsumi (2016).
6. This was demonstrated during Operation Burnt Frost, in which the U.S. military shot down a defunct satellite using the Aegis operating USS Lake Erie, which fired an altered SM-3 missile at the falling satellite. See Missile Defense Agency (2015).

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