

Sea Power, Maritime Strategy and Sino-Japanese Security Relations

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The East China Sea (ECS) is a factor of growing significance in Sino-Japanese security relations. Structurally, the People's Republic of China (PRC, hereafter China) and Japan are connected to each other through this marginal sea. Functionally, over the past two decades, its waters have come to play a primary role in their respective national security agendas. Today, the main sea routes of the ECS offer vital arteries for Chinese and Japanese trade. Fish stocks and natural resources in this basin are invaluable to food and energy requirements of both nations. The ECS constitutes also a main staging platform for the deployment of capabilities to defend national territories as well as for the projection of power (soft and hard) and influence in the region and beyond. How do Chinese and Japanese strategists view the evolving role of the ECS in security calculations and how is this affecting bilateral security relations? Is the maritime nature of the theatre going to affect the ways in which China and Japan engage with each other, and if so, how?

Scholars on sea power and maritime strategy pointed out that any analysis of power relations in a context where the sea is a primary systemic factor has to be carried out by bearing in mind its attributes. In this respect, the sea is different from the land, for it cannot be occupied or owned the same way pieces of land can. This enables the sea to be the largest single connecting highway in the world, defining three of its features as a medium of transportation, as a space that facilitated the spread of ideas, and a realm for dominion. The fourth attribute concerns the richness of life that characterises the sea, making it also a precious resource. This clarification of its attributes is important because some of the uses of the maritime realm are regarded as to favour cooperative forms of behaviour, others are considered to lead towards competition.

These attributes certainly well encapsulate the multiple roles of the ECS in Sino-Japanese relations. This maritime space stood at the heart of the cultural, diplomatic and economic ties between China and Japan, with documented interactions dating as far back as the *Yayoi* period (200 BCE – 250 CE) of Japanese history. Archaeological discoveries in Japan strongly suggested cultural and economic influence from mainland China in the Ryūkyū Islands by means of the presence of wheel-thrown pottery and bronze and iron implements, as well as of the practice of wet-rice culture. Archival evidence in China also pointed out the existence of regular diplomatic interactions with local kingdoms across the islands of southwest Japan. Throughout the centuries that followed, The ECS continued to represent a primary channel of commercial

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communication between the merchant maritime villages of the Chinese eastern coast and their counterparts in the south-western end of the Japanese archipelago and in the Korean peninsula. Proof of the flourishing nature of trade relations across this maritime theatre is provided by the phenomenon of piracy – mostly bands operating from bases in Japan – which, intermittently, cast a looming shadow over the security in the ECS. From a military perspective, it is interesting to note that until the second half of the 19th century, beyond the threat of piracy and the incursions of foreign traders from Europe, the distances separating China and Japan did not allow military elites on either side of the ECS to use it for the projection of military power. In fact, neither of the two largest expeditions organised against Japan, the Mongol attempted invasions of 1274 and 1281, was directly carried out from across its waters.

Today, the ECS remains a prime medium for regional trade, transportation of goods and raw materials, and a vital source of precious living and non-living natural resources. Across the past five decades, its waterways have been essential to the industrial growth of regional economies, facilitating intra-regional exchanges as well as regional interdependence with the global economy. Every year, approximately 60,000 ships enter the Straits of Malacca to deliver 80% of the oil transported, through the ECS, to Northeast Asia. From 1999 to 2004, the increase of maritime traffic passing through the Straits of Malacca was estimated of 45% within the six-year period. In 2009, the top five world trade routes originated in East Asia, accounting for more than a quarter of the total shipping traffic of the top twenty world maritime arteries. In 2010, seven of the world's top ten container ports were in East Asia, with the port of Shanghai in the East China Sea holding a firm first place, handling 29.07 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs). By comparison, this is almost a third more than the numbers of TEUs handled by the first two non-Asian ports in the list, Dubai and Rotterdam, combined together. Growing energy imports are the single most important reason for the sharp rise in regional traffic. For Japan, the import of energy resources is a longstanding feature of its economic outlook. As of 2010, imports of mineral fuels amounted to almost 30% of Japan's total imports, with crude oil alone accounting for half of the energy share. China has the lion's share in terms of impact on energy imports. Consumption of oil went from 88 million tons in 1980 to 368 million tons in 2007, of which 203 million tons of crude and oil products were imported, an amount up 6% from 2006. According to recent reports, in 2011, China imported 6% more crude oil than in 2010.

In all, the ECS has historically played an important role in Sino-Japanese relations, operating as a connecting network for regional economic enterprises. Today, this significance underpins also the commercial relations between China, Japan, and the world economy. Transportation at sea, trade, natural resources, all contribute to make the maritime realm of the ECS a prominent item in Beijing and Tokyo's political agendas. Indeed, economic data from the past two decades would suggest that the engines of Chinese economic development have grown increasingly more dependent on access to the maritime realm, and the ECS represented the main gateway to economic growth. Sea routes became the lifelines for the distribution of Chinese trade and manufacturing in the region and beyond, as well as the crucial arteries for oil imports to fuel the Chinese industrial core. More recently, the confirmed presence of untapped resources in the seabed of the ECS added to the economic relevance of this theatre to national security. With the maritime realm gaining centre stage, so did questions on the ability to gain secure access to its resources. This, in turn, prompted Chinese and Japanese political authorities to engage with each other over unresolved maritime and territorial disputes as a way to come to terms with the need to secure access to this theatre's main sea routes and resources.

There are, in fact, two different types of disputes between China and Japan in the ECS. The first is about the sovereignty over the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands; the second concerns the demarcation of the maritime borders between the two countries and the consequent delimitation of their exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This distinction is important because sovereignty over a piece of land is different from sovereignty at sea. The former is connected to a vital national interest and historically, represented a primary reason for war. The latter is, by comparison, a weaker form of sovereignty for nation states do not enjoy full sovereign rights over the bodies of water included into their EEZ. For example, they must allow freedom of passage and transit to foreign vessels. Sino-Japanese territorial and maritime disputes in the ECS existed in principle since the normalisation of bilateral relations in the 1970s, but only in recent times they have come to represent a major issue in bilateral security relations. Why?

The issue of the formal ownership of the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands was first raised in May 1970, after Japan and Taiwan had started talks of joint explorations of energy resources around the islands. The first public statement by the Chinese Foreign Ministry claiming the islands was published more than one year later, at the end of December 1971. The response of the Japanese government was unequivocal. It rejected the Chinese line of argument, underlining that the islands had been integrated into the country's territory before the signing of the treaty, on 14 January 1895. In particular, during the previous decade Japanese authorities had conducted a series of surveys of the islands to ascertain that they were inhabited and that there was no trace of Chinese control. Only at that point, Japanese authorities proceeded to integrate them into the Ryukyu Islands. As a result, they were not to be included with the territories (such as Taiwan) ceded by China with the treaty. This position would be indirectly confirmed by the fact that from 1945 to 1972, the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands were occupied by the United States as part of the Ryūkyū Islands, and they were returned to Japan when the occupation ended.

Throughout the years from the normalisation of diplomatic relations in 1972 to the signing of the Peace and Friendship Treaty in 1978, political authorities in Beijing and Tokyo sought to avoid discussions on the status of the islands to stand on the way of the goal to improve bilateral relations. In particular, Chinese authorities seemed to prefer a strategy of delaying and deferring settlement of the disputes. In 1972, Zhou Enlai made clear to the Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei that he did not have the intention to deal with the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands. From his point of view, the issue had emerged because of Taiwanese and American commercial interests in it in light of the oil resources ascertained in its vicinity. Along similar lines, in 1978 Deng Xiaoping further explained that 'it does not matter if this question is shelved for some time, say 10 years. Our generation is not wise enough to find common language on this question. Our next generation (...) will certainly find a solution acceptable to all'. By the time the treaty had been signed and until the early 1990s, Chinese and Japanese authorities seemed to agree on their disagreement on the subject and to pursue a *de facto* 'shelving arrangement' of the affair. From the Japanese perspective, this state of affairs was particularly convenient since the administrative control of the islands was in Japanese hands.

This brings about the role of the United States in the dispute. Whilst American policy towards the sovereignty issue was (and is) to remain neutral, the country administered the islands on behalf of Japan from the end of the Pacific War until early 1972, and it played an important role in

the dispute through the US-Japan alliance. Officials from Washington consistently stated that the administration of the islands and the treaty did not affect their legal status, though under Article V of the 1960 bilateral Treaty, the United States committed itself to defend territories under Japanese administration in case of attack. This position was repeated in 2004 and again in 2009, and in both occasions these clarifications were prompted by Chinese maritime actions in the proximity of the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands. Regularly scheduled patrols of US warships in the ECS – in areas not too far from the disputed islands, as well as bilateral training exercises further contribute to underline this point. In December 2010, a little more than two months after a collision in the vicinity of the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands involving a Chinese fisherman boat and two Japanese coast guard cutters that had raised tensions between Beijing and Tokyo, Japanese and American forces conducted a very large exercise. This involved approximately 34,000 Japanese and 10,400 American personnel, a total of some 400 aircraft, and 60 warships, and it included a variety of scenarios, notably sea and air operations for the defence of Japanese off-shore islands.

Subsequent actions suggested a degree of disagreement in China over how to best deal with the sovereignty issue and how far to push for a quick solution. On the one hand, from the end of the 1990s onwards, Chinese maritime activities in the vicinity of the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands increased constantly. In 1999, Chinese military vessels conducted their first manoeuvre in the waters south the islands. In 2008, vessels from the Chinese Maritime Surveillance (CMS) force belonging to the State Oceanic Administration frequently operated around the islands. In November 2010, shortly after the September incident, the *Yuzhen 310* – a large 2,500 ton patrol boat from the Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) – made its maiden voyage in the vicinity of the same waters. In August 2011, patrol and information gathering aircraft flew as near as 50km from the airspace over the islands. On the other hand, Chinese political authorities did not seem to consider a solution over the territorial dispute as a preliminary condition to explore joint developments of gas fields with Japan in the wider disputed EEZ, as proved by the 2008 agreement over the Chunxiao Gas Field (known in Japanese as Shirabaka Gas Field).

Japanese counterparts used a similarly cautious approach – though over the decades they took actions that sought to show their position as the party that administer the islands, especially to meet pressure from domestic nationalist groups. In 1978 and again in 1996, members of these groups landed on the islands to erect lighthouses, whilst in 2005 the government ceded to the demands to take over the maintenance of the lighthouse structure built on Uotsuri/Diaoyu island. Between 2002 and 2003, the Japanese government leased some of the islands from their private owners. On 16 April 2012, the controversial governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintaro, made a new addition to this type of controversial initiatives by announcing that the metropolitan government had obtained approval from an individual landowner to buy the three islands of Uotsuri, Kita-Kojima, and Minami-Kojima. Explaining the reasons that prompted his action, Ishihara pointed out that ‘China has embarked on radical movements in an attempt to knock down Japan’s effective control on the Senkaku Islands. That’s scandalous’.

The second dispute concerns the delimitation of the Sino-Japanese maritime borders and of their respective EEZ. This particular type of dispute falls under the wider process of ‘territorialisation’ of the maritime realm prompted by UNCLOS. Originally concluded in 1982, UNCLOS came into force in 1994 with the aim to empower littoral states with the right to manage and exploit maritime spaces adjacent to their coasts. UNCLOS did so in three ways. It

extended a coastal state's territorial waters from 3 to 12 nautical miles from their baseline along the coast. It established an EEZ that extended from the edge of the territorial sea out to 200 nautical miles from the baseline, enabling the coastal state exclusive exploitation rights of all natural resources within it. It similarly defined a state's continental shelf as the natural prolongation of a state's land territory to the continental margin's outer edge. This could extend up to a maximum of 350 nautical miles and give exclusive rights to the coastal state over all mineral and non-living materials in the subsoil or attached to it.

In the ECS, the application of these definitions proved problematic since the distance between China and Japan is only about 360nm at its very widest, and the convention does not give specific details as to how overlapping EEZs and continental shelf claims should be resolved. In this case, Japan proposed the application of the equidistant approach, with a 'median line' between Japanese and Chinese coast to be used as the main parameter to demarcate national maritime rights. China disagreed with this approach insisting for the use of the principle of the prolongation of the continental shelf. Through this principle, Chinese authorities argued that the country's claims would extend to an area extending up to the Okinawa Trough – well within the 350nm limit. The Japanese argument against the application of this principle rested on the consideration that the Trough should be regarded as a dent in the continental shelf. Unsurprisingly, the median line approach favours Japan – setting the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands within the country's maritime area, whilst the continental shelf favours China.

An issue related to the definition of Chinese and Japanese maritime sovereign rights in the ECS includes also their different positions as to the legal status of Okinotorishima. This atoll, located some 1,700km to the east of Tokyo, is considered by Japan as an island – and therefore capable of generating EEZ rights – a notion objected by Chinese authorities. This position is of no secondary importance for the Japanese government since the atoll sits over an area that is recognised to possess significant natural resources which would be exploitable by the country. In China, this coral reef is considered as a set of rocks falling under Article 121 of UNCLOS, rocks that cannot sustain habitation or economic life and as a result, that do not generate EEZ or claims based on the principle of the continental shelf. Similar difference of opinions exists in regard to the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands, though until recently Chinese authorities did not take official position as to whether they regard the group of islands as capable of generating maritime sovereign rights beyond the 12nm territorial zone and 12nm of CZ.

Both types of disputes receive today considerable attention by political authorities in Beijing and Tokyo. Issues of sovereignty seem to walk hand in hand with issues of economic advantage and maritime sovereign rights. Yet the two are not the same, and the confrontational behaviour that might emerge over disputed land borders, is nuanced by the dynamics of a disputed maritime space. In the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands, the question of their ownership speaks to the ability of both countries to meet the requirements of a vital national interest. In the border demarcation issue, economic considerations of access to navigation and exploitation of resources seem to be crucial to their role in Sino-Japanese relations. As pointed out earlier, this is underscored in the content of the main legal framework defining maritime sovereign rights, UNCLOS, where the nature of maritime sovereignty is weaker when compared to territorial sovereignty. At sea, nation states do not own bodies of water; they own rights to use and manage resources within the EEZ.

This entails two observations. First, in the ECS, the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands, whilst politically very sensitive for both parties, falls within a wider problem of demarcation of the maritime space between China and Japan. Since maritime disputes are based on weaker sovereign rights they are regarded by some scholars as less likely to block or prevent cooperation among the parties involved even without a definitive solution in sight. This, in turn, might well ease tensions in the conduct of negotiations (or their postponement) in regards to the sovereignty of the disputed islands. On the other hand, a second consideration pertains to the very existence of these two disputes and to the strategies envisaged to defend the political and economic interests behind them. The strategic approach to defend the islands, or take them (in the case of China), is different from one to exert control over the body of water of the ECS to defend maritime interests. The extent to which de-escalation is possible equally depends on how Beijing and Tokyo prioritise their interests in the ECS and how military and paramilitary elites develop strategies and ways to deploy resources and capabilities accordingly.

The changing role of the ECS in Chinese strategy can be easily detected in the evolution of the Chinese navy. For over two decades, the creation of a modern, capable naval force has been an important tenet of the modernisation process of the Chinese military apparatus. General Secretary Jiang Zemin is credited to be the political figure to enhance the maritime profile of the Chinese military outlook. In 1992, he pointed out for the first time that the roles of the navy were to expand beyond the defence of the sovereignty and unity of the country to create 'a safe and stable environment for the nation's economic development'. As the 1990s drew to a close, Jiang reaffirmed this vision, stressing that China had to 'strive to establish a modern navy with a strong comprehensive combat capacity'. In 2004, shortly after his appointment as chairman of the Central Military Commission, Hu Jintao further confirmed this trajectory. The sovereignty of territorial seas as well as the protection of China's expanding maritime rights and interests were central elements underpinning the navy's expanding capabilities. Indeed, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) had to speed up 'its transformation and modernisation in a sturdy way, and make extended preparations for warfare in order to make greater contributions to safeguard national security'.

What is Chinese maritime strategy about then? How does the East China Sea fit into it? Chinese contemporary strategy seems to argue towards a progressive expansion at sea in two consecutive areas known as the First and Second Island Chains. The former encompassed the space of the 'near seas', the Yellow, East and South China Seas. The latter stretched further out to include the Kuriles, the Bonins, the Marianas, and the Carolines. Sea control capabilities in the area encompassing the near seas represented the first phase of expansion, and they were to be achieved - according to the Admiral - by the end of the century. To date, recent pronouncements about the intention to move into the second island chain and further out into 'far seas' notwithstanding, the PLAN is still striving to enjoy the capabilities to fully implement the near seas active defence strategy. In fact, in the ECS - where countries like Japan, the Republic of Korea and the United States deploy modern and sophisticated naval forces, the Chinese navy is estimated to be currently looking at a form of robust sea denial, also known as anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy, as it continues towards its modernisation and procurement of enhanced capabilities.

The ECS featured prominently in the near-seas active defence strategy. The near-seas strategy makes clear that the PLAN stood at the forefront of the prevention by force of Taiwan's *de jure*

independence. This became particularly evident especially after the 1996 crisis that saw the United States deployment of two carrier battle groups in the vicinity of the strait. This incident reinforced the navy's call to procure capabilities to prevent this kind of intervention. This strategy highlighted also the navy's function to guarantee the security of Chinese territorial claims over disputed islands such as the Senkaku/Diaoyudao, as well as of the country's EEZ. In both cases, the existence of the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF), featuring capabilities that enabled it to implement a degree of sea control within the theatre, and of the similarly capable Japan Coast Guard, represented reason enough to support Chinese concerns about the procurement of enhanced capabilities. Similarly, the new strategy explored the question of sea lanes defence and how naval modernisation went hand in hand with the protection of the Chinese economy. In 1993, China became a net oil importer, and dependence on imported raw and energy resources, and on maritime trade to sustain development increased exponentially. This presented the PLAN with an additional opportunity to link naval strategy, military capabilities and national security.

The implementation of this strategy leaves unresolved two main issues. At the strategic level, the navy went a long way to expand its profile. Yet, the island chain approach behind the new doctrinal grammar leaves doubts as to whether the service has moved away from a continental approach to strategy and beyond a perception of the maritime realm as a moat surrounding metaphorical towers like Taiwan to secure and defend. This similarly raises questions as to how and when the PLAN will be in the condition to move away from this approach, given the increasing competition for funding on behalf of the different constabulary forces operating in the ECS. This is particularly important especially since in aspects of maritime enforcement policy in the CZ and the EEZ, the PLAN competes in its functions with five agencies – including the China Coast Guard, the Maritime Safety Administration, the China Maritime Surveillance, the General Administration of Customs, and the Fisheries Law Enforcement Command. The second issue pertains to the long-term sustainability of the current phase modernisation, essential to move from sea denial to sea control. Maintaining a large, modern fleet with resources distributed across a long coastline facing different maritime theatres will likely prove to be more complex than building it. Both factors will contribute to define how Chinese military and political authorities will pursue security in the ECS.

Whilst in China the ECS made its first appearance in the navy's doctrinal reassessment of the past two decades, in Japan the strategic significance of this theatre was debated in naval circles as early as the mid-1960s. Nonetheless, it was from the second half of the 1970s onwards that a strategy aimed at seeking a degree of sea control in the ECS served, to the eyes of Japanese strategic planners, both crucial national economic interests and those of the US-Japan Alliance. In particular in 1981, following American pressures on Japan to increase its contribution to the security burden-sharing, Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko (1980-1982) conferred to this choice the highest political support, pledging to commit Japan to the protection of its sea lanes towards the ECS out to 1,000nm. This substance of this commitment was subsequently proved during the rest of the decade by the policies of his successor, Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro (1982-1987). In Japanese naval strategy, the security of the ECS was pre-eminently – but not exclusively – a question of trade routes defence. Operationally, this involved a combination of mine counter-measures (MCM) and surveillance activities of the archipelago's three main straits (Soya, Tsugaru, and Tsushima – the latter representing the primary entry point of the ECS), and regular patrols 'in the sea areas of several hundred miles surrounding Japan'. Restrictions on Japanese defence budgets meant that

the control of the waters of the ECS was to be achieved by maximising the combined effect of underwater sound surveillance systems, submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, and an ASW-focused surface force. For this task, fleet target goals listed approximately 60 major surface units, 16 submarines, and some 220 aircraft. The main efforts were directed against the Soviet submarine fleet, estimated by the end of the 1970s to include a force of 125 boats, almost half of them nuclear-powered, ideally suited to conduct raiding activities to harass Japanese shipping.

In the post-Cold War era, the ECS remained at the centre of Japanese strategic interests. Two incursions of North Korean 'suspicious ships' in 1999 and 2001, the latter taking place southwest of Kyushu, and the underwater sailing of a Chinese nuclear submarine in Japanese territorial waters around the Sakishima Islands, approximately 200km southwest of Okinawa, added a new dimension to the role of the ECS in Japanese strategy. The safeguard of maritime traffic was to be coupled with 'guard and surveillance' operations to deal with the violation of Japanese air and maritime space. In the aftermath of the Chinese submarine incident, these operations became part of a wider effort to prevent aggressions to Japan's offshore islands. Accordingly, the JMSDF set out to acquire advanced photo transmission equipment for its P-3C patrol aircraft to improve data transfers to commands ashore and analysis capabilities, and progressively expanded the air patrol areas in the theatre. Surface vessels were provided with flat-nosed shells and high performance 20mm machine guns, whilst six 44-knot capable *Hayabusa* missile patrol boats were procured and a special boarding unit was established. In particular, the ECS became a ground for new normative and operational developments involving the JMSDF and the Japan Coast Guard (JCG), the country's primary maritime organisation for policing activities.

In a document published in 2008, Admiral Takei Tomohisa, one of the JMSDF's leading strategists, reaffirmed the centrality of this theatre in the Japanese new naval strategy. Within the triangle Tokyo-Guam-Taiwan (TGT), an area where sea lanes overlap with disputed maritime and resource-rich spaces, the JMSDF was to undertake a wide range of missions, from maritime security to missile defence and sea control. The TGT area was essential to Japanese trade and energy security - and offshore islands within this space were key to monitor and, if necessary, protect maritime routes. Similarly, this space was crucial to the logistical effort in support of the American presence in the western Pacific and in turn, to American military contribution to the US-Japan alliance. Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities were regarded as the minimum additions for Japan to patrol and deter competitors effectively, and at affordable costs.

There are four concluding remarks that unfold from the analysis above. First, the enhanced profile of territorial and maritime disputes in Sino-Japanese security relations cannot be explained without engaging with the question of the impact of maritime geography on East Asian economic, political and military interactions. The ECS is the main physical space of interaction for China and Japan, the place where they're boundaries - contested as they are - meet. For centuries, the ECS represented a medium for trade, exchange of ideas, piracy - a container of maritime routes for those seafaring communities across its opposing borders. This leads to a second observation on the nature of the territorial dispute. Japan and China fundamentally disagree on the question of the sovereignty of the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands. Japanese authorities maintaining a firm position as to the simple fact that there is no dispute, whilst the People's Daily - the official newspaper of the Communist Party - defined the islands

as a 'core interest'. International jurisprudence seems to favour the Japanese position, but in both countries the question of territorial sovereignty is highly politicised. Nonetheless, there are positive signs. In January 2012, several members of the Ishigaki municipal assembly landed on the Senkaku/Diaoyudao islands generating strong protests among Chinese activities, and the two governments acted to avoid further escalation.

The third conclusion is that the whilst the territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyudao Islands is first and foremost about the political meaning of sovereignty matters in China and Japan, the maritime border is pre-eminently about economic issues. The rich living and non-living resources of the ECS, the latter mostly untapped, represent a unique opportunity to help satisfy vital energy and food requirements for both countries. In this respect, some of the examples mentioned in the chapter about the willingness to jointly investigate and explore gas fields, like in the case of the Chunxiao Gas Field, would suggest that the existence of an agreement of the border is not regarded as a precondition for economic cooperation. What complicates the matter is the increasing assertiveness of the different Chinese organisations with enforcement powers in matters of fisheries and EEZ protection. Last but by no means least, what of the prospect for conflict and cooperation? Beyond issues unfolding from the disputes, the ECS is and is likely to remain a vitally important basin for both China and Japan. Both countries use this realm for transportation and trade, both countries aspire to explore its resources. There, is where an opportunity exists for both countries to off-set political disagreement. There, is where Japanese and Chinese authorities can decide whether they want the waves of the ECS to separate or unite them.