

Low Levels of Military Threat and High Demand for Increasing Military Spending: The ‘Puzzle of Chinese Students’ Data in the Asian Student Survey of 2008

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Abstract

This article examines perceptions of military and defense expenditure as held by Asian students. By using quantitative data from the Asian Student Survey¹ of 2008 it addresses the following questions: to which areas would Asian students like to see their government allocate more or less resources and, specifically, how supportive of defense and military spending are Asian students. This study finds that data concerning one country have appeared deviant. While designating the strongest will to increase defense and military spending among all countries sampled in the survey, Chinese students from leading universities ($N = 800$; Pekin and Renmin universities in Beijing; Fudan University and Shanghai Jiao Tong university) also exhibit the lowest levels of perceived military threats. The rest of the paper explores the ‘puzzle’ of Chinese students by generating and testing a null hypothesis. In it, Chinese students’ high demand for military spending is associated with an aggressive design, whereby anti-foreign, unilateral, and nationalist sentiments coincide. After refuting the null hypothesis, the paper advances an alternative explanation that links students’ inclination with the call to modernize the People’s Liberation Army.

¹ The Asian Student Survey 2008 was conducted by a research group headed by Prof. Sonoda Shigeto. Face-to-face interviews were made with approximately 400 students from six countries (Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore), and 800 students from China. The survey collected data regarding various fields such as social, economic, political, and cultural issues, as well as identity, media consumption, language ability, perception of other countries, and of threats.

Table 1. *Military expenditures of countries sampled in this paper, 2003–2008*

Year	Japan	China	South Korea	Thailand	Philippines	Singapore
2003	61460	57390	21898	3377	2419	7987
2004	61201	63560	22859	3047	2279	8138
2005	61288	71496	24722	3070	2279	8645
2006	60892	84021	25613	3199	2401	8718
2007	60574	96906	26773	4216	2630	9055
2008	59140	106774	28525	4962	2630	9126

Notes: This table was compiled from SIPRI Military Expenditure dataset. See SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2012, <http://milexdata.sipri.org>. These data are for military expenditure by country in constant price US\$ (millions), presented according to calendar year, and in current (2012) US\$m.

Source: Asian Student Survey 2008.

Introduction

Increased military spending in the past two decades and rising political tensions in Asia have produced dire predictions about the prospect for peace in the area.²

Considering a wide range of territorial disputes, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, historical animosities, different regime types, economic gaps, the anxiety caused by the rise of China as a self-assured actor in the region, and America's recent re-alignment towards Asia, one might indeed be left with a relatively gloomy vision of Asia's security trajectory.³ More recently, political tensions have been accumulating among regional actors over incidents such as the Chinese fishing boat crisis in Japanese territorial waters (September 2012), the Chinese–Philippine naval border dispute (April 2012), South Korea's presidential visit to the disputed islet between South Korea and Japan (August 2012), the nationalization of three of the contested islets by the Japanese government (September 2012), and China's announcement of its new air-defense identification zone (September 2013).

This study rests on the way people feel about their own security: the relationship between this feeling and the countermeasure they opt for, as well as the reasons behind advocacy for military expenditures. The objective aspect of Asia's security environment therefore remains outside the scope of the current analysis. Although the above-mentioned incidents have taken place after the survey was conducted in November 2008, regional tensions in East Asia are hardly a new phenomenon. One can easily recall for example the negative impact Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni shrine during his tenure (2001–06) had on the diplomatic relations of Japan

² For a summary of military expenditures of the six countries sampled in this paper, please see [Table 1](#). Specifically, the Chinese military buildup has been causing anxiety among China's neighbors and in Washington, see US Department of Defense (2011); *The New York Times* (2011); *Reuters* (2011).

³ Friedberg (1993/94): 5–33.

with South Korea and China. Stirred up by nationalistic politicians and conservative media, strong anti-Japanese sentiment surfaced soon after in both nations. Likewise, Japanese mass perception of China deteriorated dramatically from 2003 onwards, and the positive perception of South Korea dropped between 2004 and 2006.⁴ Therefore, to argue that data collected in 2008 is of little relevance for a contemporary analysis of Asian affairs would be short sighted.

In addition to students' perceptions of military spending, an examination of mass perception of threats among Asian students may provide us with insights concerning not only the students themselves, but also the policy options available for decision-makers. As Chen Jie (2001: 254) has argued, 'mass perception of threat can significantly influence a country's foreign behavior in at least two important ways'. The first way for threat perception to affect the international system is when it is used by decision-makers in order to allocate extensive resources for defense. The second way is when it provides solid political support for a hardline, coercive policy against a perceived enemy. So, a study of the security views held by students from leading universities in Asia sheds light on some of the complexities regarding threat perceptions, military spending, and the future security trajectory of the Asian region.

Theoretical background and earlier findings

Rational choice theory

Political theorists and social scientists in general have widely embraced the contention that all action is in essence 'rational' and that individuals calculate the possible costs and benefits when making a decision (Elster, 1986; Coleman, 1973; Coleman, 1990). Accordingly, rational-choice theory (RCT) posits, in formulating opinions regarding resource allocation, that individuals would rationally take into consideration factors such as existing external situations and economic self-interest. For example, Gamson and Modigliani (1966) and Reilly (1979) have pointed out that Americans who deemed Russia as a threat tended to support greater defense spending to counter it. Similarly, Phillips (1973) found that individuals whose jobs are related to military spending – such as military employees – or live in areas in which the local economy heavily relies on military production, were inclined to support higher defense spending. However, RCT reasoning has also been contested by various paradigms, such as the cognitive school. According to the cognitivist approach to decision-making, the neurobiological, psychological, and cultural grounds behind the choices individuals make remain unaccounted for under RCT. This criticism points to a need to further explore human motivation and goals in order to understand why actors want certain things and how they shape preferences, particularly in the case of military spending.

⁴ While in 2003 48% of the Japanese felt 'affinity' toward China, in 2007 only 34% did. See: cao.go.jp (2013). In 2006, positive feelings toward South Korea reached their low point in six years: only 48.5 of the Japanese felt affinity toward the country. See: cao.go.jp (2013).

Military spending

Various ‘non-rational’ explanatory factors have been considered in the literature. Psychological dispositions of individuals, such as aggressiveness, high concern for status in the personal sphere and gender, were found to have some correlation with the role of military power in foreign policy, the use of armed force and military spending, respectively (Christiansen, 1959; Scott, 1960; Hamilton, 1968). Higher level of education among American population was found to correlate negatively with the inclination to support military spending (Ladd, 1978), and frequent consumption of TV news was found to correlate with increased support for military spending (Hofstetter and Moore, 1979). Another set of variables capture the impact of the contemporary social–historical milieu on attitudes about defense spending (Kriesberg and Klein, 1980: 88). After studying possible explanations underlining the trend toward increased support for arms spending among the American public between 1972 and 1978, Kriesberg and Klein concluded that factors explaining this phenomenon shifted with time: specifically, ‘the decline of the impact of the Vietnam war, a rise in particular elements of conservative ideology, and an increase in anti-Soviet and anticommunist sentiment’ account for the fluctuating support for military spending they identified in the period under study (1980: 79). Whereas the literature on American public perceptions abounds, few studies deal with Asian mass perceptions of security issues and particularly, with students perceptions. Studies conducted on this topic seem to reflect the heightened security environment in North-East Asia. In their research of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students perceptions (N = 181), Gries, Zhang, Masui, and Lee found that all three countries displayed a strong tendency to protect national sovereignty. Chinese students were especially prone to encourage their government to ‘aggressively defend their national territory’ in relation to the disputed islands with both Japan and Korea (2008: 258).⁵ Likewise, Gries *et al.* (2009: 256–8) reported high levels of threat perceptions experienced by Chinese (Japan as the main source of threat), Japanese (China as the main source), and South Korean students (both China and Japan as the cause of alarm).

In the context of China, numerous researchers have contended that since the mid-1990s, as a means to strengthen its legitimacy in time of rapid economic development and social disruptions and in order to replace its outdated communist ideology, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has fostered party-centered nationalism (Friedman, 1997; Zhao, 1998; Chang, 2000). Indeed, indoctrination through history classes, school textbooks, ‘red song’ campaigns, and party-controlled media emphasizes Chinese past humiliation inflicted by foreign powers and the struggle for the foundation of the PRC, as pursued by the Communist Party. The educational lesson is clear; China, led by the CCP, will yield no more to external actors. Accordingly, nationalist sentiment and support-rates for military spending are expected to soar. More recently, Zhao’s findings

⁵ Yet their sample – collected in the spring of 2007 – is considerably smaller than the Asian Student Survey: only 61 students from Peking University in China, 69 from Niigata National University in Japan, and 51 from Chonbuk National University in Korea filled out the questioners.

(2003), regarding the students demonstrations which had followed the American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, suggest an aggressive, independent response pursued by the students.⁶ Presumably, the harsh reaction of the students was why China's official response to the bombing of its embassy in Belgrade had to be 'toned down'.⁷ In other words, more than simply guided by the authorities, students' nationalist-sentiment stands on its own feet. To summarize, earlier research findings emphasize the sensitivity to territorial disputes, high levels of perceived threats, and rising nationalist trend among Asian students. Specifically, nationalism in China is portrayed as an obstacle that strains Chinese decision-makers in their handling of foreign matters and incites occasional violent upheavals.

Two hypotheses are generated below.

1. Government spending in a specific policy area would be related to the perception of threat in that area. Particularly, a demand to spend more on defense and military issues in a certain country would be correlated with a heightened perception of traditional security threats such as war and conflict.
2. Since they display low levels of perceived military security threats, the relative tendency of Chinese students to support increased military and defense spending is a result of aggressive design, in which anti-foreign, unilateral, and national sentiments play a role (null hypothesis).

Methodology

In order to evaluate the hypotheses mentioned above, data from the Asian Student Survey of 2008 will be sampled. First, a statistical measure was applied to questions 15 (a)-(j). In these questions, student were asked to indicate to which areas they would like to see their government allocate more or less resources. Examining the data by country allows to determine if and in which sectors there exists a relationship between level of threat and the countermeasures in terms of government spending, and to pinpoint in which countries the desire to increase military budgets is most prominent. If hypothesis 1 is correct, there should be some sort of a statistical relationship between levels of threat and government spending; specifically, students who perceived high levels of traditional security threats would be prone to support higher spending on the military and defense.

Having evaluated the support for military and defense expenditures by country, the data sampled from Chinese students appeared deviant. Thereafter, Chinese students'

⁶ Zhao (2003: 8–9).

⁷ Shirk offers a scanning of the electronic archive of the *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party. Three terms were sampled from the archives: 'hegemonism' (referring to American dominance in the world), 'multipolarity' (referring to the goal of reducing American power), and 'win-win' (a rather cooperative term which refers to a situation in which everybody wins). According to the data, following the incident in Belgrade, the usage of both the first and second terms had been moderated, while the third, more positive term of 'win-win' had been used more frequently. This anecdote demonstrates the complex situation in which Chinese decision-makers are operating and their need to reconcile external incidents with internal pressures. See Shirk (2007: 98–9).

perceptions and intentions were examined: questions number 4 (influence on your country: Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, USA, Philippines, India, Vietnam, respectively); number 7 (stability in Asia – US military power, balance among great powers, economic development); number 8 (deciding policies: territorial issues), and number 10c (I see myself as part of my country), will be comparatively reviewed.⁸ If hypothesis 2 is correct, then (a) Chinese students' view of foreign countries would be generally negative and there would be a statistical relationship between military spending and foreign influence over China; (b) Chinese students would downplay the importance of American military presence and economic development in the region (the latter being naturally associated with peace-time, whereby growing interdependency between actors mitigate tensions), and emphasize balance among great powers as constructive to Asian stability; (c) Chinese students would be disposed to resolve issues of territorial disputes unilaterally, through their national government rather than regional or international organizations; (d) a statistical relationship between national identity among Chinese students, and the demand to increase military and defense spending, as well as negative perceptions of other countries (such as the US, Japan, or India) and of American military presence in Asia would be established; and (e) the relatively strong desire among Chinese students to increase government spending on military and defense would not be a byproduct of an overall tendency to support higher government spending in all areas.

Results

Hypothesis 1 – Government spending and threat perception

First, a statistical correlation between desired government spending and perceived threats was explored. Table 2 captures the data regarding government spending from all seven countries participating in the survey. Although not easy to assign each area of spending with a corresponding threat/compatible security sector, some connections are possible.⁹

One point becomes clear from the table: government spending in the realm of military and defense is ranked below all other areas.

It is important to emphasize that students were not asked to rank governmental spending according to their relative importance, but rather to indicate, independently, which areas they would like to see their government allocating more or less resources. Notwithstanding, the mean score of government spending on the military and defense (2.96) implies that the general tendency among Asian students is to maintain, rather

⁸ Data from Vietnam are missing for several sensitive questions.

⁹ Does 'health', for example, evoke the threat of infectious diseases in students' minds, or is it being associated with the state's healthcare system? While hard to determine, I chose to link it with the environmental sector. For other areas of spending, such as the environment (environmental sector) and the military and defense (military sector), it is easier to relate a threat with an area of government spending.

Table 2. *Government spending and corresponding threats*

Ranking	Area of spending	Corresponding threats	Mean	Std. error
1	Education	Economic inequality, Unemployment, crime, moral decline/spiritual decadence	1.83	0.015
2	The environment	Environmental destruction, Natural disasters	1.85	0.012
3	Health	Spread of infectious diseases	1.87	0.013
4	Public transportation	–	2.40	0.016
5	Retirement pensions	The aging of society	2.44	0.015
6	Unemployment benefits	Unemployment	2.45	0.016
7	Improve social status of women	–	2.47	0.015
8	Culture and the arts	–	2.50	0.016
9	Policing and law enforcement	Crime, corruption, refugee and asylum problems	2.54	0.015
10	The military and defense	Wars and conflict, terrorism	2.96	0.019

Source: Asian Student Survey 2008.

than augment, current defense budgets. Yet, the standard error of government spending on the military and defense was also the highest among all areas of government spending (0.19), pertaining to the relatively deviant nature of the data. Subsequently, the link between threat perception and desired military and defense spending by country should now be examined. The results draw attention to one country – China.

As can be inferred from Table 3, Chinese students are more prone to advocate increased government spending on military and defense than any other country sampled in the survey.¹⁰ What may the reasons be for that? One might expect that the demand for building up defense spending will originate from the threat perception, in which wars, conflict and terrorism – ‘traditional security threats’ – play a significant role. An example involving the environment sector may demonstrate this point. When applying an independent-samples T test to the question of government spending on environmental issues, a significant difference (0.00) between the mean scores of Chinese students who pointed to an environmental threat (‘environmental destruction’) and students who did not was revealed. In other words, and as RCT proposes, Chinese students who perceive environmental destruction as a threat to their country are

¹⁰ 19.5% of the Chinese students indicated that they want to ‘spend much more’, 37.7% want to ‘spend more’, 32.6% want to ‘spend the same as now’, 8.5% wish to ‘spend less’, and 1.7% to ‘spend much less’.

Table 3. *The disapproval rating of government spending on the military and defense*

'1' – spend much more; '2' – spend more; '3' – spend the same;
'4' – spend less '5' – spend much less

Ranking	Country code	Mean	Std deviation
1	China	2.35	0.942
2	Singapore	2.95	0.893
3	Thailand	3.05	0.894
4	Philippines	3.20	1.007
5	South Korea	3.29	0.967
6	Japan	3.51	0.949
	Total	2.96	

Source: Asian Student Survey 2008.

Table 4. *Traditional security threats (wars, conflicts + terrorism)*

0 – no threat, 2 – threat

Ranking	Country	Mean	Std. deviation
1	China	0.1786	0.48222
2	Japan	0.5213	0.67170
3	South_Korea	0.5634	0.65009
4	Singapore	1.0662	0.72870
5	Thailand	1.1825	0.64826
6	Philippines	1.5050	0.70086

*Source: Asian Student Survey 2008.

inclined to support increased governmental spending to counter the threat.¹¹ However, this was not the case for the military sector, where neither Chinese students nor any of the other countries who participated in the survey displayed such a trend.¹² In order to confirm this point, a new variable – 'traditional security threats' – was created. The new variable is a combination of two threats – wars/conflicts and terrorism. As Table 4 illustrates, Chinese students are once again the least concerned with traditional security threats. The desire to increase the military budget among Chinese students is therefore not the result of military threats.

How can we account for the discrepancy between low levels of threat perception and the desire to increase defense budget among Chinese students? One way would

¹¹ The mean score of government spending for Chinese students who assigned environmental destruction as a threat was 1.5129 ('1' stands for 'spend much more', '5' stands for 'spend much less'), while the mean score for Chinese students who did not assign it as a threat was lower, 1.7132.

¹² Although not statistically significant, the mean score of students who acknowledged the 'wars and conflict' threat was higher than those who did not when asked about 'military and defense government spending'. This was the case in all of the countries sampled in the survey, excluding China.

be to hypothesize that demand for augmenting a budget may originate in a sense of lacking, either in the face of a threat or in the face of meeting a certain target. Since the threat levels they exhibit are obviously low, Chinese students may feel that the current level of military spending is inadequate to achieve some goal, or a set of goals. What are the objectives and intentions that Chinese students have? Un-surprisingly, similar questions about Chinese policy-makers have been the center of scrutiny among both China's neighbors and the West. In fact, these questions are perhaps the primary source of contemporary miscalculations in Asia. In the next section, I will first set the context for assessing Chinese students' intentions by considering China's grand strategy, and then clarify their objectives and motivations by using the data available in the Asian Student Survey.

China's grand strategy. Formulated by influential think-tanks in the mid-1990s, the term 'Peaceful Rise' was first introduced by Chinese politicians to describe the country's foreign policy approach in the early 2000s. The term depicts China as a responsible leader, emphasizing the use of soft power, and pledging to avoid unnecessary international conflicts. Chinese leaders and scholars have reiterated the Peaceful Rise terminology on many occasions. Zheng Bijian, a policy advisor for the Communist Party, wrote for the journal *Foreign Policy*:

China will not follow the path of Germany leading up to World War I or those of Germany and Japan leading up to World War II, when these countries violently plundered resources and pursued hegemony. Neither will China follow the path of the great powers vying for global domination during the Cold War. Instead, China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development, and cooperation with all countries of the world.¹³

Later on in 2004, Chinese leaders followed president Hu Jintao and acknowledged the negative implications of the word 'rise', and modified the term to 'Peaceful Development'. On December 2005, a White Paper published by the State Council Information Office, elaborated on the new concept:

Peaceful development is the inevitable way for China's modernization; promoting world peace and development with China's own growth ... seeking mutual benefit and common development with other countries; and building a harmonious world of sustained peace and common prosperity.¹⁴

Despite Zheng's prediction regarding the peaceful rise of China, and the moderated terminology Chinese leaders have applied in international discourse, the link between growing economic power and expansionist aspirations is well supported by empirical evidence.¹⁵ Since the Chinese economy has grown at an annual average of 10% over the

¹³ Zheng (2005: 18–24).

¹⁴ China Daily (2005).

¹⁵ Samuel Huntington has argued that 'the external expansion of the UK and France, Germany and Japan, the Soviet Union and the United States coincided with phases of intense industrialization and economic development'. See Huntington (1991: 12).

last three decades, making it currently the second largest economy in the world, and since this economic growth co-occurred with extensive military spending in the past two decades, it is not surprising that regional actors are wary of China's intentions.¹⁶ Next, Chinese students' dispositions will be examined.

Hypothesis 2 (null) – The tendency of Chinese students to support relatively higher military and defense budgets is a result of an aggressive design in which anti-foreign, unilateral, and nationalist sentiments play a role

Chinese students believe that their country should evolve as a great power. Since military might is an important characteristic of great-power politics, they support the modernization of the PLA. Here is where things get slightly more complicated. What is the desired course of China's return to a great power status? Would Chinese students rather to see a peaceful and amicable China or, rather, an aggressive, self-assured one? How can we determine the inspirations and goals of Chinese students? Next, I identify five propositions and test them using the Asian Student Survey.

The first proposition (a) assumes that the desire to increase military spending originates from anti-foreign sentiment. Particularly, when considering expansion, Chinese students are likely to be aware of the dominant military actor in the region, the US. If the proposition is correct then (a1) Chinese students' view of the US would be negative, and (a2) a positive statistical relationship between Chinese military spending and American influence over China would exist. Yet 39% of the Chinese students claim that the US has 'good' or 'rather good' influence over their country, as opposed to 22% who think that the US has 'rather bad' or 'bad' influence (for 38% of the students, the US has neither good nor bad influence). Likewise, no statistical relationship between American influence over China and Chinese military spending was found. In any case, at least among the sampled population, there is no evidence indicating anti-American sentiment.¹⁷ Figure 1 displays Chinese students' perceptions of other foreign countries; Comparing US influence over China with other countries substantiate this trend.

As can be inferred, anti-foreign sentiment is particularly strong *vis-à-vis* Japan, Vietnam, and India. When looking for a correlation between the desire to increase military spending and the influence of these countries over China however, only the view of Japan was very weakly correlated at a level of 0.083.

¹⁶ In recent years, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has improved its air, missile, and naval strike capabilities. Specifically, the PLA had been investing in weapons which can neutralize American superiority and hinder the US navy's seventh fleet access to a potential conflict with Taiwan. See Friedberg (2011).

¹⁷ A very different interpretation of the Chinese mass perception of threat, based on Beijing's population surveys conducted in 1995, 1997, and 1999, is offered by Yu (1998) and Chen (2001). According to these surveys, the Chinese public had demonstrated high levels of external threat perception concerning both the US and Japan (about 75 % of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the US had hostile intention against China, and around 70 % in all three surveys believed that Japan had the same intention). Chen (2001: 255–6).

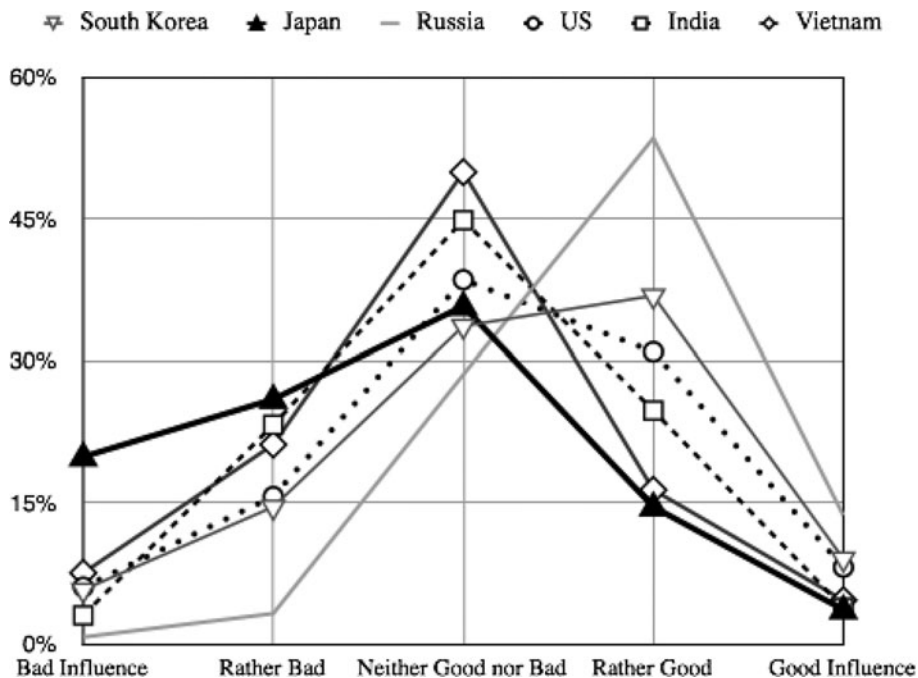


Figure 1. Influence on China by different countries

Source: Asian Student Survey 2008.

The second proposition (b) assumes that because they opt for regional dominance, Chinese students would downplay the importance of American military presence and economic development in the region, and emphasize balance among great powers as a stabilizing factor in the region. Perhaps surprisingly, almost two thirds (63%) of the Chinese students stated that they view the presence of US military in Asia as 'somewhat' or 'very' important factor for stability in Asia. This is particularly interesting because Chinese students' view of American military power is more positive than that of the Japanese, Thai, and Filipino (see Figure 2).

Notwithstanding, when asked about balance among the great powers, a decisive 96% of the Chinese students viewed it as a 'very' or 'somewhat' important factor in the stability of Asia. All other countries lagged behind: Japanese (77%), Vietnamese (88%), Thai (88%), Singaporeans (91%), South Korean (92%), and Filipino (94%). Excluding the Philippines, all of the other countries except China registered positive but more modest views of balance among great powers in the region; among Chinese students, almost two thirds (65.7%) indicated balance among great powers to be 'very important' (see Figure 3).

Similarly, the tendency among Chinese students to regard economic development as a 'very important' factor for Asian stability was high, second only to the Philippines

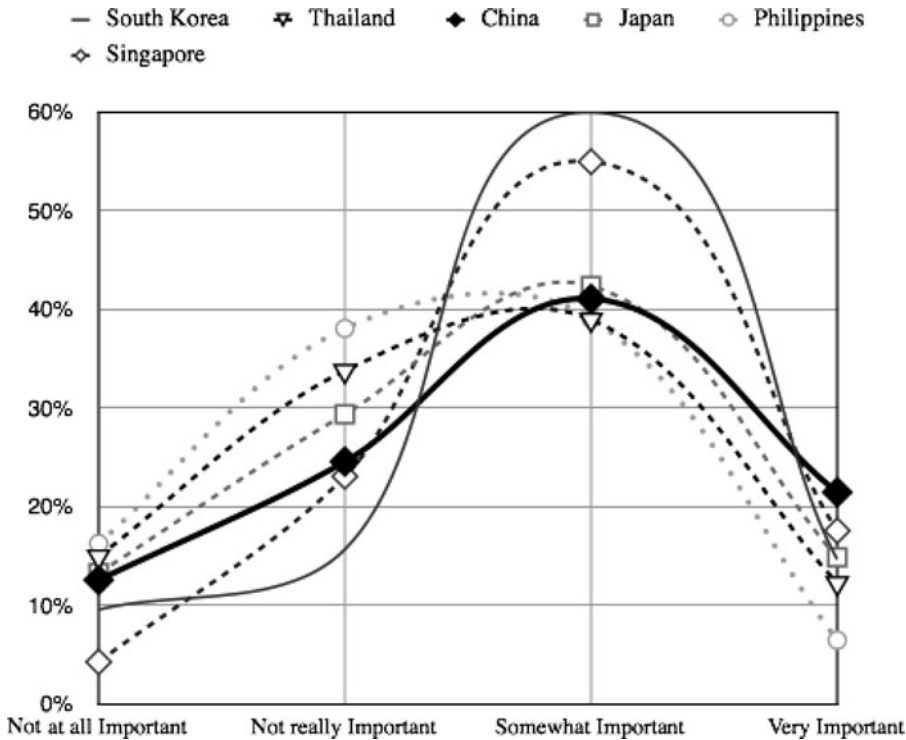


Figure 2. Stability in Asia – US military power
 Source: Asian Student Survey 2008.

(76.5% of Chinese students, 91.5% of Filipino). Overall, 97% of Chinese students view economic development as an important (either somewhat or very) factor for stability in Asia. These data indicate that Chinese students tend to view balance among great powers, rather than American military power, as a crucial factor in maintaining the stability of the region. Yet it also suggests that Chinese students believe that economic development is even more crucial to maintain stability in the region.

The third proposition (c) assumes that Chinese students would be disposed to resolve issues of territorial disputes unilaterally, rather than multilaterally. Asked to indicate which policies should be decided by national governments, regional organizations, or international organizations, only 33.2% of the Chinese students thought that territorial disputes should be decided by national governments, while 50.4% considered it as a policy to be decided by international organizations (the other 16.1% of the students opted for regional organizations). Perhaps surprisingly, the number of Chinese students who entrusted territorial issues to international organizations was higher than all other countries excluding Singapore (South Korea 46.4%, Vietnam 31.3%, Thailand 38.3%, Philippines 44.8%, and Japan 45.6%). These

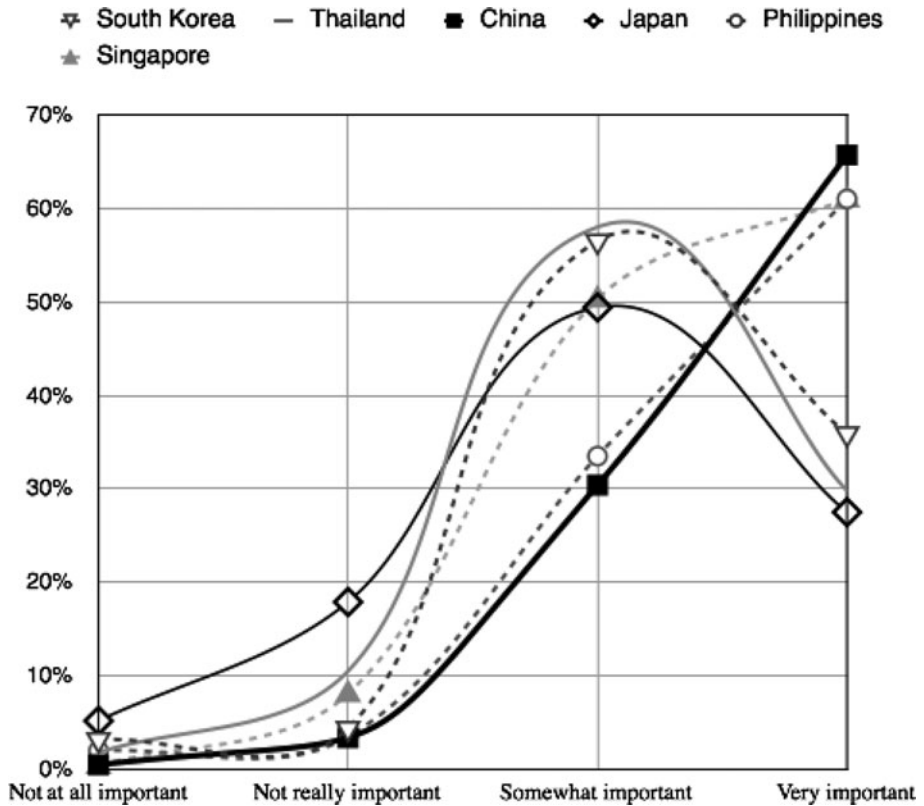


Figure 3. Stability in Asia – balance among great powers
Source: Asian Student Survey 2008.

figures are also interesting because in other ‘sensitive’ policy-areas, Chinese students indicated stronger unilateral tendencies: the protection of human-rights (49.8%, ranked 2nd after the Philippines), management of exchange rates (52.3%, ranked 2nd after Vietnam), and trade policy (47.6%, ranked 2nd after Vietnam).

The fourth proposition (d) assumes that the demand to increase military spending is associated with a strong nationalist sentiment. It presumes that a statistical relationship between national identity among Chinese students, and (d1) the demand to increase military and defense spending, as well as (d2) negative perceptions of foreign countries, and of (d3) American military presence in Asia would be established. Subsequently, when checking for a correlation between Chinese students’ national identity and the desire to increase military spending, a trivial correlation of magnitude 0.082 was found. Small correlation between Chinese national identity and perception of Japan’s (0.11) negative influence over China was found, and non-substantial correlation with US (0.071) negative influence was found. No correlations were found for India or Vietnam. Finally, when looking for a correlation between Chinese students’ national

identity and American military power as a stabilizing factor in Asia, no such relationship could have been identified. These data allow for insubstantial relationships between Chinese students' national sentiment and arming the PLA, between national sentiment and American influence, and deny a connection between Chinese students' national sentiment and driving American military power out of the region of the other. The only meaningful correlation – although small – was found between and national sentiment and Japan's influence.

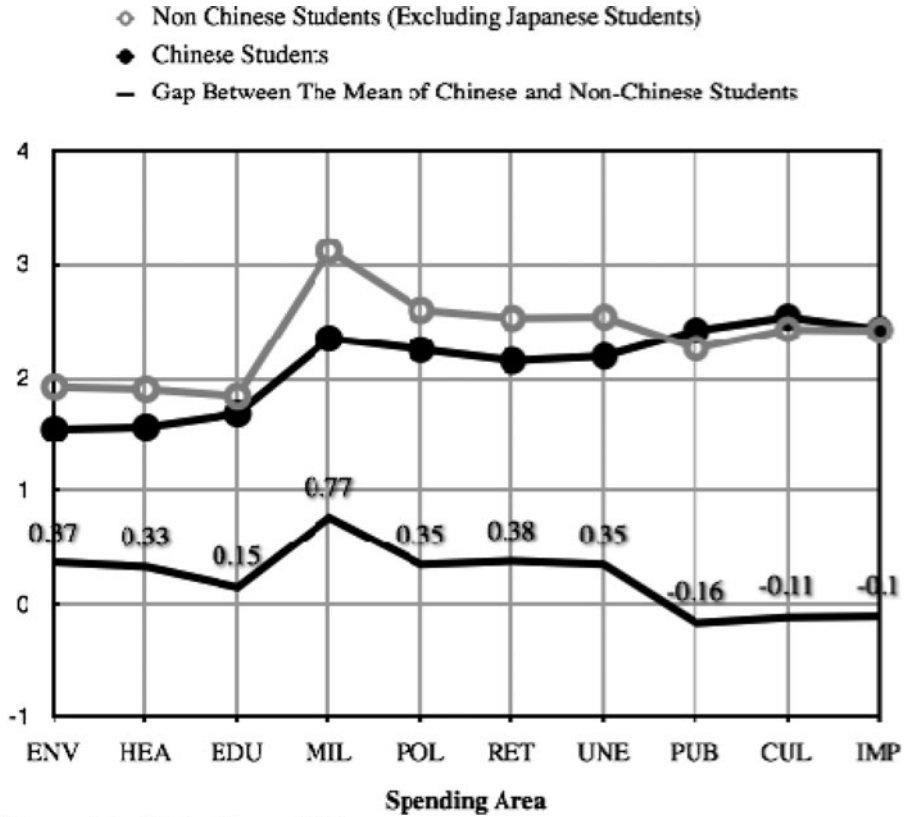
The fifth proposition (e) assumes that the relatively strong desire to increase government spending on military and defense – when compared with non Chinese students – would not be a mere byproduct of an overall tendency among Chinese students to support higher government spending.

Yet the data refute this proposition. As illustrated in [Figure 4](#), when compared to non-Chinese students,¹⁸ Chinese students support higher budgets in seven areas of spending and lower budgets in three: public transportation, the culture and arts, and improving the status of women. Marked in black, the line pertaining to the gap between the mean scores of Chinese and non-Chinese students is particularly high in the budget-areas of military and defense (0.77), retirement benefits (0.38), environment (0.37), unemployment benefits (0.35), policing and law enforcement (0.35), and health (0.33). Although the desire to increase military spending in China was ranked very low when juxtaposed with other governmental budget-areas (with only public transportation and culture and the arts below it), the spending gap between the mean scores of Chinese and non-Chinese students in the military and defense was about twice as large as the gap in the next area (retirement benefits). A further exploration of the aberrant nature of the data pertaining to Chinese students by gender, study major (sciences or arts), university, and exposure to domestically made media (TV/movie/animation) did not suggest other associations that can account for this trend.

After testing the null hypothesis, this paper finds that:

1. Unlike proposition (a) stipulated, Chinese students do not display strong anti-foreign sentiment, specifically in the case of the US, the global hegemon and the main military actor in the region. Although they do show adverse sentiment towards Japan – 45.9% viewed it as having either bad or rather bad influence over their country – this relatively negative view does not translate into stronger support of military spending. Moreover, 35.8% of Chinese students view Japan as having neither good nor bad influence, and 18.3% consider it to have a good or rather good influence. In other words, the perception of Japan among Chinese students is not absolute, and it allows for positive sentiment as well.
2. Unlike proposition (b) assumed, Chinese students do not reveal military expansionist intentions, as roughly two thirds of them believe that American military power is a stabilizing factor in the region and as an overwhelming

¹⁸ The data for Japanese students, who appeared as outliers with a low mean of 3.51 for military and defense spending, were omitted.



*Source: Asian Student Survey 2008.

Area of Spending (X axis) :

- ENV - Environment
- HEA - Health
- EDU - Education
- MIL - Military and defense
- POL - Policing and law enforcement
- RET - Retirement pensions
- UNE - Unemployment benefits
- PUB - Public transportation
- CUL - Culture and the arts
- IMP - Improve social status of women.

How much to spend? (Y axis)

- 1 - Spend much more
- 2 - Spend more
- 3 - Spend the same
- 4 - Spend less

Figure 4. Government spending by area – the mean of Chinese and non-Chinese students

majority ‘prioritize’ economic development over any other factor.¹⁹ Yet Chinese students also view balance among great powers as an important factor for

¹⁹ To suggest that this positive view of American military presence is a result of a fear of other countries in the region such as Japan would be to misinterpret the results, since Chinese students feel very safe, and indicate low levels of security threats.

- Asian stability. In-fact, their view of this factor was more positive than any other country sampled in the survey. How can one reconcile these results? Here I suggest that instead of simply wishing to drive American military presence away from the region, the majority of Chinese students opt for economic development and balance among great powers as stabilizing factors in the region. In other words, Chinese students seek to share the role of great power alongside the US – largely accepting the latter’s military presence in the region.
3. Unlike proposition (c) postulated, Chinese students do not demonstrate support for a unilateral approach to issues of territorial disputes, as approximately two thirds of them believe these issues should not be decided by national governments. These findings contradict Gries *et al.* (2009) findings concerning the same issue.
 4. Unlike proposition (d) assumed, nationalist sentiment among students is not correlated with the desire to increase military spending, or with American influence/military presence in the region. The only correlation that was found was with the view of Japan’s influence over China, but even that link was very weak. Reflecting on the issue of the self-identity of Chinese students, it becomes clear from the Asian student survey that national sentiment, or a sense of belonging to one’s country, is the strongest attribute of Chinese students’ sense of selfhood. Asked to specify their self-identity, e.g. whether they view themselves as world citizens, as part of Asia, their own country, as part of their local communities, or as autonomous individuals, not only Chinese but Asian students in general most profoundly expressed a sense of affiliation with their respective countries.²⁰ To the extent we can make inferences about the Chinese students’ national sentiment as a whole, it seems that while national sentiment is the most important attribute, this is by no means a unique phenomenon. In all of the other Asian countries sampled in the survey, national sentiment was the most compelling characteristic of self-identity. In fact, compared to all other countries sampled in the survey, Chinese nationalist sentiment stands below the Asian average.²¹
 5. Somewhat corresponding with proposition (e), although the gap between the mean of Chinese and non-Chinese students for the military and defense was the highest among all other areas, the initial abnormal nature of the data sampled from Chinese students appears less unusual taking into account their Chinese students’ inclination – compared with non-Chinese – to seek higher budgets in seven out of ten budgetary areas.

²⁰ 56.1% of Asian students ‘strongly agreed’ to the statement ‘I see myself as part of my country’, 40.7% ‘agreed’, 2.6% ‘disagreed’, and 0.6% ‘strongly disagreed’.

²¹ Chinese students’ mean score was slightly below the Asian average, similar to that of the South Korean students, and behind that of the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand. While the Asian average mean score of a sense of belonging to their respective countries was 1.47, Chinese mean score was 1.51 (1, the maximum score, stands for ‘strongly agree’, and 4 ‘strongly disagree’).

Conclusively, these findings undermine the null hypothesis. At least among Chinese students who participated in the survey, there is no sufficient evidence that associates nationalist-driven expansionism or anti-foreign sentiment with support for military spending. Additionally, there is no evidence of a unilateral approach to issues of international sovereignty, and belligerent motivations. Reflecting back to this study's main question and offering alternative explanations, it seems as if the overall inclination among Chinese students to seek higher government spending in most areas, can somewhat mitigate the puzzle underlining this paper; still, this is only partial solution. The next section outlines the major challenges to the above-mentioned analysis.

Discussion

The main challenges to this paper's findings regarding Chinese students' non-violent design are three-fold. First, there is the risk of shifting Chinese goals towards an aggressive-expansionist stance, as captured by the proverb 'appetite comes with eating'. According to this logic, desire, or facility, increases as an activity proceeds and, hence, China's economic and military buildup may lead to a surge in the assertiveness of its students. This, however, is by no means a predetermined course: cases of economic growth that did not lead to military expansionist endeavors are well documented.²²

Second, there is the unresolved issue of Taiwan. What role does the settlement of the matter play in the propositions suggested above? Do Chinese students seek to coerce Taiwan into the 'One China' policy or do they comply with the current status-quo? The majority opinion in the scholarly and political circles clearly links China's return to great power status with the incorporation of Taiwan, either on peaceful terms or by means of force. Moreover, the issue of Taiwan has been used by China's ruling circles in order to reinforce the party's legitimacy. It is reasonable to assume that when Chinese students grant the issue of territorial disputes to international and regional organization, they do not consider the issue of Taiwan in this context, since that issue is a matter of national sovereignty. However, as Friedman argued persuasively, economic interests play a restraining role in China's policy toward Taiwan, thus preventing the hardliners inside the military and the Communist party from taking the lead.²³ It seems that economic development is the first priority not only for Chinese decision-makers but also for Chinese students. Although questions concerning Taiwan are lacking from the survey, available data do seem to substantiate a tendency among Chinese students to prioritize economic development as a stabilizing factor in Asia.

Third, like all policy makers in the world, Chinese policy-makers are striving to balance domestic and external interests. However, in a non-democratic society such as China, the problem of balancing these often conflicting interests is intensified by what seems to be the CCP's prime objective, that is to maintain its rule over the population. To

²² The Japanese economic miracle of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s for example did not lead to a militaristic mood. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

²³ Friedman (2006: 205–26).

recall Krasner's observation regarding the Qing dynasty and its strategy in Central Asia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, '[the Qing rulers] feared that external losses would be taken as signs of weakness that could enhance the strength of internal enemies' (Krasner, 2009: 223). Likewise, contemporary political tensions between China and its neighbors, as mediated by state control media and the ruling elites, could potentially shift Chinese students' view towards a more aggressive stance. Similarly, the economic slump in China may induce the ruling elites to use foreign threats as a tool to maintain their legitimacy, generating a more aggressive international stance.

In an attempt to solve the puzzle of this paper, let us reiterate its reasoning thus far and propose an alternative explanation as to the still-somewhat deviant nature of Chinese students' data. Since very low levels of perceived military threats were detected, the RCT logic of threat-countermeasure has been undermined. Thereafter, the motivations and strategic goals of Chinese students have been scrutinized. As discussed, contrary to expectations, the demand for augmenting the defense budget was not associated with aggressive design.

Alternatively, Chinese students support military spending because they believe that the PLA was, and still is, far from being a modernized military force. Why does China need a state-of-the-art military force when it does not face military threats? Because China is a great power and because modern military is crucial to maintain balance among great powers (which is in turn, a crucial factor for stabilizing Asia according to the students). But this does not mean Chinese students are eager to use this military force in order to realize regional dominancy; instead, they believe China's armed forces should be on a par with other military forces and that the defense budget should match China's economic growth. In support of this proposition, one should consider that whereas the raw figures do pertain to a dramatic increase in its military budget since 1980s, the PLA was notably underdeveloped at that time. Likewise, if one considers China's defense budget in terms of its percentage of GDP, which has varied from 1.22% to 1.42% over the past decade,²⁴ then it becomes clear that this growth corresponded with China's economic growth. Consequently, the data pertaining to China's military expenditures do not appear to be extreme (for comparison purposes, the US defense budget share of its GDP averaged 4.7% in 2010–11).²⁵ The support for modernizing China's military force among Chinese students can therefore be seen in the context of a successful articulation of this need by China's leaders. How do Chinese leaders communicate the country's military buildup to domestic audiences?

Two examples demonstrate this political message as circulated in domestic media outlets. In 2007, the Ministry of Finance submitted its budget outline to the National People's Conference, justifying the requirement to increase military spending with the need to prepare the PLA for modern warfare, help it to deal with situations of emergency, keep territorial integrity and national sovereignty, and improve the socio-economic

²⁴ ISN Security Watch (2013).

²⁵ Ibid.

conditions of its personnel.²⁶ In a similar manner, the spokesman of the National People Conference asserted at the concluding press-conference of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held on 4 March 2008, that while the military budget increased by 17.6% from FY 2007, it paralleled China's economic growth. In addition, the spokesperson stressed that the share of the military budget actually decreased when compared to the overall government budget and elaborated on the reasons behind the increase: to improve the salaries of the military personnel; to respond to a decline in purchasing power; to enhance the educational and administrative capacities of the PLA; and to modernize its obsolete weapons systems, including preparation of the army for the digital age.²⁷ It is interesting to note that the issue of protecting the national sovereignty had been removed from officials' clarifications of budget increases. The 'modernization' narrative, however, is apparent in both public officials' messages. Although consistent with the data available in the Asian Student Survey, this proposition requires further analysis. Had questions pertaining to students' trust in their leadership and the army, as well as their possible awareness to this specific type of political message been presented to the students, this hypothesis could have been better evaluated. However, data sampled from a different survey – the Asia Barometer – indicate a relatively strong trust of Chinese population in the army, suggesting a positive view of the PLA. In turn, this view might have facilitated a perception among the students, whereby the necessity to modernize the PLA is recognized.²⁸ One must also consider that since all university first-year students in China are required to participate in PLA-mandatory regimen as part of their college education curriculum, it is possible to assume that they have a fair knowledge of the organization and its needs.²⁹

Further research about Chinese students may benefit from a longitude research design, in which questions of military spending can be measured in different time frames. This will enable the researcher to analyze trends and account for changes in these trends. Moreover, a better understanding of the PLA's public image and the

²⁶ The popular portal site CRI brought this news story on 5 March 2007, <http://gb.cri.cn/14714/2007/03/05/1945@1480891.htm>.

²⁷ The spokesman name is Jiang Enzhu, 姜恩柱。 Accessed from the popular portal site, 'Sina', on 26 November 2013, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-03-04/115515072601.shtml>.

²⁸ Eitan Oren (2014). Headed by Professor Inoguchi Takashi, The AsiaBarometer Represents the largest ever, comparative survey in Asia, covering East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia. It focuses on daily lives of ordinary people and their relationships to family, neighborhood, workplace, social and political institutions, and market place. The survey is Conducted country-wide face-to-face, using standardized instruments designed around a common research framework. The survey is headquartered at Tokyo Satellite Office, University of Niigata Prefecture and Jointly researched at the Research and Information Center for Asian Studies, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo. See <https://www.asiabarometer.org/en/profile>.

²⁹ Although the reactions among Chinese students to this compulsory military education are mixed, with many of the students reporting negative feelings towards it, it is reasonable to assume that it still increases awareness of the PLA among the students. For a brief review of the military-training program, see David Logan (2013).

implications of the military training that students have to go through may help verify the alternative hypothesis.

Conclusions

This study explored two hypotheses. Whereas in some particular cases there were statistically significant differences between threats and countermeasures, the assumed link between security threats and government spending was generally lacking. Specifically, a clear-cut relationship between military threats and defense spending was not found. Consequently, the rational choice theory alone cannot explain public perceptions of military spending. As critics of the RCT would posit, motivations and goals may indeed play a role in individual calculations. Trying to reconcile the data sampled from the survey, possible explanations as to why Chinese students are more prone to increase military expenditure, despite holding little fear of military threats have been tested; but anti-foreign, unilateral, and nationalist sentiments were all dismissed as having little or no correlation with the desire to increase military spending. The conclusion of this study is that rather than aggressive design involving hegemonic aspirations, Chinese students opt for economic development and great power balance. Although various challenges lie ahead, there was no evidence suggesting that they seek military supremacy in Asia or that their nationalist sentiment assumes a belligerent stance. Thus, the image of nationalistic, uncontrolled students that strain Chinese decision-makers in their handling of foreign policy issues does not appear to be in line with the data sampled from the Asian student survey. On the contrary, Chinese students aim for responsible conduct in the international arena, and for cooperation with international organizations on sensitive issues such as territorial disputes. Students' national sentiment in China is by no means a prerequisite for increased military spending, negative views of American power or curbing American military presence in Asia. In the end, Chinese students' preferences and world views do not seem to provide a political support-base for a hardline, coercive policy against a perceived enemy.

About the author

Eitan Oren is a PhD candidate at the University of Tokyo, studying under the guidance of Professors Tanaka Akihiko and Sonoda Shigeto. His research interests are NorthEast Asian security, Japanese politics and society, and Japanese threat and risk perceptions. Recently one of his research papers got published in Sonoda Shigeto's book *Risk in East Asia*, Keiso-shobo (2013). The chapter is titled '*funso risuku to ajia – gunji shishutsu ninshiki no hikaku seijigaku*' (Conflict risk and Asia – Comparative look on military expenditure perceptions), and deals with Asian perceptions of military expenditures. Oren is now working on publishing two more papers – 'North Korea's Threat Perception in Japan : A Comparison with South Korea', and 'Japan's Strategic Culture'. He participated in the IASA–IOS Join Workshop of Young Sociologists in

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