The Sino-Japanese-Russian Triangle

LOWELL DITTMER*

This paper attempts to understand the relations between three important actors in Northeast Asia – China, Russia, and Japan – since the end of the Cold War. Whereas the political changes attending the collapse of the communist bloc have opened new foreign policy opportunities to all three actors, only China and Russia have been quick to move on them. Japan's relative inflexibility, attributable to its alliance with the US on the one hand and its territorial dispute with Russia on the other, has had the effect of impeding the application of triangular diplomacy.

Key words: *Strategic triangle, Japan, China, Russia, Northeast Asia*

The concept of the "strategic triangle," though conventionally applied to the relationship between the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) during the later phase of the Cold War, is not a concept from area studies based upon the geo-cultural peculiarities of a particular time and place, but purportedly a social science term based upon the logical, quasi-geometrical relationship among political actors in the international arena.[1] The logic of triangularity should hence apply to any international situation meeting certain defining criteria: viz., (a) it circumscribes the possible relationships among three rational, autonomous actors, (b) the bilateral relationship among any two of these actors is contingent on their relationship with the third, and (c) each actor actively seeks to engage one or the other or both to forestall its defection or hostile collusion and advance its own interests. The relationship between the Russian Federation, China, and Japan appears to meet these criteria. All three are important actors, not only in a regional context but plausible claimants of the status of "world powers," and in view of their geographical proximity inextricably involved in one another's foreign affairs. China has in due course considered both Japan and Russia the main threat to its national security, is now aligned with Russia in a "strategic partnership" while its booming economic cooperation with Japan ironically accompanies increasingly frosty political relations. Both Japan and Russia, while remaining at loggerheads over a territorial dispute, agree in regarding China as well as each other as a strategically vital factor in their formulation of national security.

Yet their relationship has seldom been examined from a triangular

---

* Lowell Dittmer, Professor of Political Science at the University of California at Berkeley and editor of *Asian Survey*, has written or edited *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its International Implications* (1992), *China's Quest for National Identity* (with Samuel Kim, 1993), and many other analyses of Chinese domestic and foreign policy. His most recent book (with Haruhiro Fukui and Peter N.S. Lee) is *Informal Politics in East Asia* (Cambridge, 2000).

© *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, vol. 10, no. 1, April 2005

perspective. The apparent reason for this is that the three have not seemed to interact in accordance with the rules of triangular logic, at least as those rules were understood from the experience of the "great strategic triangle" (viz., the Soviet Union, China, and the US) during its heyday (ca. 1971-1991). The question is, why not? Obviously there are important differences between the two configurations. For one thing, the three actors are not equal, even readily comparable. China and Russia are both huge continental land powers, whereas Japan is essentially an insular maritime power. Whereas the populations of Japan and Russia are now about equal, their combined populations are only about a quarter that of the PRC, and whereas the former are relatively mature economies with recently declining growth rates, China is the world's most rapidly growing developing country, workshop of the world and a magnet for foreign trade and investment. Second, whereas the great strategic triangle was assumed to have implications for the international balance of power, the international implications of the Sino-Japanese-Russian relationship are more geographically limited. Yet though the relationships within the Great Strategic Triangle were also unequal, the weakest player was able to pivot the triangle. And while it is true that some actors also have important relationships beyond the triangle, this does not gainsay the strategic importance of triangular relations: it would be an ethnocentric delusion to reduce the international arena to a set of relationships with the sole superpower. Even if relations within this triangle had no relevance beyond the three actors participating (which is manifestly untrue), this would make it a significant factor in analyzing the dynamics of the economically and strategically vital but theoretically unscripted Northeast Asian region.

I argue here that the relationship between these three Northeast Asian powers is important and strategically interesting, both in terms of the security and economic development of the region and in terms of understanding the range of logically conceivable triangular dynamics, and that the triangular model offers a relatively systematic way of analyzing this relationship. What I call the "Russian" triangle is both "strategic" (among three world powers with global reach) and "triangular" (in the sense that a range of conceivable alignment options among the three is in play). The essay will consist of four sections. Inasmuch as a triangle consists of three bilateral "wings" or "legs," the first three sections deal in turn with Japanese-Russian, Japanese-Chinese, and Sino-Russian relations. The review is chronologically limited to the period since the end of the Cold War, as it was only then that the range of relationships became fully open-ended and hence "triangular." The concluding section will attempt to generalize about the shifting configurations of the triangle and to explain its dynamics.

JAPANESE-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Japan's relations with Russia remained almost completely frozen throughout the Soviet period. This was partly because of Japan's treaty commitment to the US in the Cold War, of course, but not entirely: ideological antipathy and treaty

commitments did not prevent Japan from developing a relatively healthy relationship with the PRC. The relationship was also fraught with the weight of history: Russia's humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, the defeat of Japanese expeditionary forces in the Soviet Far East in World War II (a nd the capture of a sizable contingent of Japanese soldiers, who were then sentenced to Siberian labor camps), and last but by no means least the Soviet annexation and resettlement of the southern Kuriles (or Northern Territories), based on a rather ambiguous legitimation in international law, which the US then conceived it in its national interest to tolerate.[2] This meant that when the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991, both sides approached each other with historical accounts to reckon. The Russians had never considered Japan as anything more than an American satellite, the Western equivalent of East Germany, and had some difficulty treating Japan as an autonomous actor. At the onset of perestroika and glasnost, informed Soviet public opinion became more aware of the Japanese developmental achievement, and there was even some early interest in adopting the Japanese "model," but Yeltsin then opted for the more Western-oriented "big bang" approach to marketization and privatization. The Japanese viewed Russia as the main threat to their national security and essentially the only country in the world to whom they owed no sense of guilt, having lost early in the war to Zhukov's forces, only to watch indignantly as Moscow then broke its neutrality pact to invade the Japanese colony Manchukuo in the closing days of the war, capturing 575,000 Japanese prisoners of war and shipping them to Siberian labor camps (where some 55,000 perished in very harsh conditions).

In the wake of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Japanese, having (despite their own difficulties) outpaced the downward mobile Russians in the industrialization sweepstakes, approached the question of rapprochement with a certain sense of entitlement: specifically, the four "northern territories" must be returned before a peace treaty could be considered--this was a question of "law and justice." But the Russians, whatever the merits of the Japanese argument, were after the collapse of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union strongly disinclined to make further territorial concessions, and when the fragile but avowedly democratic capitalistic successor of the old Soviet empire went into a precipitate economic nosedive very soon after its birth, Tokyo found that Western sympathy for its position on this issue had dissipated along with the Soviet threat.[3]

The Russian approach to Japan to some extent paralleled its approach to China. Gorbachev's two major speeches signaling his "new thinking" [*novo mischlenie*] on the issue – at Vladivostok, in July 1986, and at Khabarovsk, in September 1988 – were addressed first and foremost to the PRC (particularly his concession to the Thalweg principle on riverine demarcation), but to Japan as well, as both aimed at opening the neglected Russian Far East to the dynamic Asian Pacific region. But both China and Japan also had their respective reservations about Soviet/Russian initiatives. China insisted on prior removal of the "three fundamental obstacles" (viz., Sino-Soviet border claims, Soviet troops in Outer Mongolia, and the

Soviet presence in Afghanistan), and Japan insisted on return of the four Northern Islands. Both China and Japan were historical antagonists with whom Moscow had had little economic, political, or cultural intercourse for several decades. But although Gorbachev was eventually able to accommodate the Chinese, he paradoxically proved unable to accommodate the far more modest Japanese demands.

It seems ironic that at a time when Moscow was prepared to tolerate the defection of Eastern Europe, the reunification of Russia's historical nemesis Germany, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union into 15 independent states, that it would be unable to countenance the loss of four tiny, sparsely inhabited islands. Thus we need to explain an historical nonevent, the dog that did not bark, the diplomatic breakthrough never achieved. True, the Germans were willing to pay—a total of some US$40 billion – for the return of 17 million Germans (in contrast, American aid to the post-Soviet successor states amounted to only ca. $5 billion, while Japan seems to have granted perhaps $4 billion if we include $1.5 billion in ExIm bank credits). Also true, Beijing was prepared to show greater flexibility than Tokyo in the negotiation of their hotly disputed but also relatively small territorial dispute along their joint border (i.e., they also gave up some land, although they gained more than they lost). And perhaps more importantly, they reached agreement before the collapse and national humiliation of the USSR made further concessions intolerable (though formalization of the accords postdated the Soviet collapse).

By taking a harder line in response to the Soviet and then the Russian diplomatic overtures from the outset, the building of economic, cultural and other bridges that would begin in the Sino-Soviet case with the 1982-1989 "normalization" talks could never gain traction in the Japanese case. As Kimura and others have demonstrated, the initial Japanese position was that the return of all four islands was a precondition not only for signing a peace treaty, but for Japan's extension of economic assistance to Russia. The Russians accused the Japanese of donating less economic assistance to their ailing economy than any other advanced industrial economy – which may have been a slight overstatement, but this was not the point: other advanced industrial democracies were not soliciting the return of lost territory from Russia. During the Gorbachev era the Japanese position remained the "inseparability of politics and economics" [*seikei fukabun*] (i.e., no economic concessions until territorial settlement), which after 1991was modified to "balanced expansion" [*kakudai kinko*], meaning that aid might be initiated in balanced coordination with progress on the territorial issue (N.B., economic intercourse remained contingent on diplomatic concessions); thus in October of that year Japan announced aid to the Soviet Union amounting to $2.5 billion.

Further complicating the Japanese negotiating position was the question of "two islands or four," meaning whether to accept the 1956 offer and then negotiate for retrocession of the remaining islands later or to hold out for a "just" settlement.

The preferred Japanese tactic seems to have been: "all [islands at once] or nothing." From this perspective the good became enemy of the perfect, as the expected return of two islands was opposed lest the Russians then not return the other two. This escalated expectations so high that Yeltsin's long postponed October 1993 visit, which yielded no concessions on any of the four islands, came as a public relations disaster (diplomatically the Tokyo summit was more productive, setting forth in the Tokyo Declaration a clear framework to work toward normalization).[4] Not until Hashimoto announced his "three principles" and "multilayered approach" upon becoming prime minister in 1997 was it possible for economic exchanges to gather momentum without being directly linked to territorial concessions. In their two "tieless" or informal summits, at Krosnoyarsk in 1997 and Kawana in 1998, Hashimoto was also able to establish a strong personal relationship with Yeltsin, whereupon he elicited a promise to work toward a peace treaty by the end of the century. This of course failed to come to fruition, precipitating further disappointment. Putin, after dismissing the millennial timetable as purely normative rather than legally binding in his September 2000 visit to Japan (he did however declare that "the 1956 Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration is still valid."), has manifested no intention of returning any islands to Japan (despite avid interest in stimulating economic intercourse), as indeed would be logically difficult given his hard-line stance on Chechnya.

Thus the relationship has not been an easy one. Although their economies are complementary, absent resolution of the territorial issue, the trade relationship has made only modest progress: in 2000, bilateral trade was only US$5.2 billion, compared to Sino-Japanese trade (in 1998) of $62.75 billion (12.5 times larger). Japanese private investment in Russia by January 1998 amounted to only $119.7 million (0.2% of its total FDI), ranking Japan 16th among leading foreign investors. Without ongoing economic intercourse, mutual popular esteem as indicated by public opinion polls has remained consistently low from 1960-2000. Yet since the turn of the millennium the relationship had improved somewhat. Although Japan may still regard Russia's military presence in the region with reservations it is no longer (like China and North Korea) cited as a potential security threat (e.g., in the 2004 Defense White Paper), and regular joint military exercises and exchanges have since 2001 facilitated security cooperation undreamt of during the Cold War, including high-level consultations and annual naval port visits. In November 1998, Japan and Russia signed the Moscow Declaration for a Constructive Partnership (coinciding with the Sino-Japanese partnership announcement), and there have been some promising joint ventures for infrastructure, railroad or pipeline construction. Japan supported Russia's entry into APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), while Russia has indicated it would (unlike China) support Japan's permanent membership on the UN Security Council, for which Koizumi appealed in his September 2004 address to the UN General Assembly. In 1998 the two countries concluded a bilateral fishing agreement and established measures for visa-free travel between the

southern Kuriles and Japan. Japan has participated in a foreign joint venture (Russia's largest) to develop offshore oil and natural gas in Sakhalin Island, and seems to have succeeded in negotiating to build a gas pipeline to ship natural gas from Angarsk to the Pacific coast port of Nahodka (trumping a Chinese bid to build a bilateral line from Angarsk to Daqing). Trade has even picked up, increasing 38 percent in 2004 to reach $9.5 billion, about half of Sino-Russian trade. To facilitate resolution of the border dispute, subcommittees on border demarcation and joint economic activities were set up as part of a Japan-Russia Joint Committee on the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty. In a February 2002 meeting, Igor Ivanov, Russian foreign minister, and Japan's new foreign minister, Kawaguchi Yoriko, pledged once again to reach a solution to the dispute.

On the whole, the post-Cold War Russo-Japanese seems a rich field of lost opportunities. The two countries no longer pose a realistic threat to each other—Russia's decaying strategic force in the Sea of Okhotsk has no motive to strike Japan, and Japan's only territorial threat to the Russian Federation is four tiny shoals that are increasingly economically dependent on Japan. Japan is no teeming demographic time bomb with suspected revanchist claims on Russian territory. And the two have complementary economic needs. The Russian Far East is a rich storehouse of natural resources at commercially competitive prices, including energy, which Japan badly needs. As an advanced industrial economy with advanced industrial and financial resources, Japan could contribute greatly to the Russian ambition to replace its hitherto exclusively military presence in East Asia with an economically and commercially viable one. The frustration of this potential cannot be attributed to triangular dynamics but rather to the type of nationalistic fixation on essentially symbolic issues that seems to plague the post-Cold War regional arena. More meaningful than the admittedly complex question of right and wrong, whether Russia should have simply forfeited the islands or whether Japan was wrong to have staked so much on their prior return, is that the two get beyond this increasingly irrelevant issue to realize the larger opportunities at hand.

JAPANESE-CHINESE RELATIONS

China's immediate neighbor, Japan, after a long record of cultural emulation culminating in a nearly successful attempt at military conquest, emerged in the second half of the20th century from the ruins of the first losing war in its long history to surge past its larger neighbor economically, only to look over its shoulder more recently to see that neighbor catching up. Since beginning anew after World War II with new regimes leading both countries, Japan has endeavored to place the relationship on a more businesslike footing despite Chinese efforts to keep the past in play. Under strong American pressure Japan recognized Taipei rather than Beijing at the conclusion of the civil war, but Japanese interest in the China market led to the clandestine establishment of trade relations well ahead of American "permission." As early as 1948 Prime Minister Yoshida summed up Japan's attitude with: "I don't

care whether China is red or green. China is a national market and it has become necessary for Japan to think about markets." Sino-Japanese trade first became significant in the wake of the Sino-Soviet schism in 1962, with the shift from "friendly trade" to semi-official, long-term (5 year) trade agreements ("L-T Trade"), and by 1970 Japan had become China's primary foreign trade partner (accounting for 20 percent of China's total trade). Yet the signing of the Long-Term Trade Agreement (LTA) and the Peace and Friendship Treaty (PFT) in 1978 set the stage for a new era. Trade rose from US$5 billion in 1978 to $13 billion in 1984, $20 billion in 1985, $15.5 billion in 1986, $19.6 billion in 1989 (the post-1986 decline was due to Chinese adoption of import controls, as well as to a fall in the price of oil), accelerating after Deng's "southern voyage" in 1992, to reach $101.9 billion in 2002—and in contrast to Sino-American trade, the balance of payments has usually been in Japan's favor, though the degree of imbalance has recently declined. After many years (since 1975) as China's leading trade partner, Japan has been second largest trade partner since 1993, trailing the US (unless we, like the PRC, exclude entrepot trade through Hong Kong, in which case the rankings are reversed). Investment growth has progressed somewhat less smoothly, amounting to only $3 million in 1983, but accelerated in the 1990s after the 1985 Plaza accord drove up the price of domestically produced Japanese goods and China entered the WTO, reaching $100 million in 1985, $1.2 billion in 1987, 2.8 billion in 1990; in the later 1990s there was another lull, as Japanese investors bought into the legend they could make no profits in China, but China's entry into WTO in 2001 precipitated another upsurge. There were three major loans in the first reform decade, in 1979, 1984, and 1988; the last, for $5.2 billion, was suspended in the wake of Tiananmen, as Japan joined other members of the Group of Seven (viz., the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany) in sanctioning the crackdown. But immediately after the (July 7, 1990) Houston economic summit (where Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu succeeded in moderating the G-7's position on China in the final communiqué), Deputy Foreign Minister Owada Hisashi visited Beijing, assuring the Chinese of Tokyo's determination to resume the $5.2 billion loan despite Bush's request to go slow, and in August 1991 Kaifu became the first leader of a major industrial democracy to visit China since the crackdown. Since 1982, China has been the biggest single recipient of Japanese developmental aid, which has come to represent more than 50 percent of the total assistance China receives from both bilateral and multilateral sources.[5]

Yet the relationship has had its ups and downs. The Chinese, initially over-optimistic about how fast they could increase their oil exports, expanded imports faster than they could generate foreign exchange on the petroleum market to pay for them (imports doubled in less than three years during Hua Guofeng's "foreign leap forward"). Thus in 1981, China unilaterally cancelled or suspended contracts worth about 300 billion yuan, including the notorious Baoshan iron and steel plant; not until Japan agreed to provide 300 billion yuan in commodity loans could the project be

brought to completion. In 1984-85, this cycle was repeated: in a binge of uncontrolled industrial expansion, Japanese exports enjoyed a surplus of $6.1 billion. Blaming the Japanese for inflicting a massive trade deficit on China, the PRC once again restricted or cancelled a great many contracts with Japanese exporters, driving many small and medium-sized Japanese contractors into bankruptcy. In the fall of 1988, China again underwent drastic economic retrenchment following the bout of hyperinflation that summer, curtailing credit and placing restrictions on foreign exchange. Until the early 1990s, this volatile business climate prompted Japanese entrepreneurs to restrain their rate of investment in China.

As trade and investment experienced their most vigorous expansion in the context of Chinese hypergrowth and relative Japanese industrial stagnation during the 1990s, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) officials have expressed concerns about the "hollowing out" of Japanese industry and the prospect of being overtaken by the Chinese economy (thus the 2001 METI white paper described China's recent economic growth as "a new threat to Japan," alluding to Beijing's overtures to assume economic leadership of the region). [6] In November 2001 China proposed a free trade agreement (FTA) with ASEAN at an ASEAN+3 (APT) summit which was then endorsed by ASEAN leaders, which "sent a major shock wave throughout Japan," prompting Koizumi to propose a Japan-ASEAN FTA, an ASEAN+3 FTA, and an ASEAN+5 (viz., ASEAN, Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong), none of which aroused much Chinese enthusiasm.[7] As China's economy matures, not only does it pose the symbolic threat of surpassing Japan, but the two economies become less complementary and more competitive: thus whereas China in the early 1980s sold petroleum to Japan (otherwise dependent on the Middle East for 90 percent of its oil), it has since 1993 become the world's second largest oil importer, alone responsible for 40 percent of the global increase in oil demand since 2000 (while the Chinese economy grew by 9.7 percent in the first six months of 2004, its oil imports jumped 40 percent). This poses not only immediate price pressure and competition for drilling rights in disputed areas of overlapping economic enterprise zones but leads to the growing Chinese interest in air and naval force projection to control sea lanes of supply.

Grievances have by no means been limited to the Japanese side. Like many other countries, the PRC has complained chronically about the trade imbalance: Japan had a bilateral trade surplus every year from 1972 to 1989, except 1981 and 1983; since 1989 China gained a surplus by drastically curtailing imports, but the imbalance in Japan's favor resumed in the early 1990s. When Japan found itself with a suddenly enhanced surplus of foreign exchange in 1985-86 after the Plaza Accord forced a revaluation of the yen, China expected to reap a lion's share of the expected boom in foreign direct investment. And indeed, Japanese FDI in China did rise from US$100 million in 1985 to $1.2 billion in 1987. But China complained that more Japanese investment went to Southeast Asia (especially Thailand) or to the United States, and that the ratio of investment to trade remained too low. Since an

investment protection agreement was concluded in August 1988 after seven years of negotiation, Japanese FDI in China increased more rapidly. Yet China also finds fault, like Korea and Taiwan, with the quality of Japanese investment, claiming that it focuses on short-term, low-tech, high-profit enterprises such as hotels and office space and has little impact on improving production capacity. While Chinese complain of Japanese refusal to transfer high technology, Japanese businesses are worried about protection of their intellectual property rights, having seen several industries (such as motorcycles) taken over by low-cost Chinese emulators. Although China receives more Overseas Developmental Aid (ODA) from Japan than from any other country, the Chinese likewise have a critique of that aid. Most of those funds are tied to the purchase of Japanese goods, technology and industrial plants, creating substantial "technology dependence." The Japanese have been stung by this seeming ingratitude for ODA, seeing little impact of their aid on Chinese public opinion, and in the 1990s the perception of China as a Less Developed Country faltered in the face of double-digit Chinese growth amid Japanese economic arthritis; thus since 2000 there have been a series of aid cutbacks (3 percent), couched as across-the-board reductions in response to budget deficits. In terms of public opinion, mutual admiration between the two peoples, always relatively one-sided in China's favor, seems to have reached its acme in 1980, falling to a new low in the wake of Tiananmen and plunging again after the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, from which it has not yet recovered.[8]

Finally, China has bitterly and repeatedly raised the issue of Japanese war guilt: in 1982, 1984, and 1986 Japanese textbooks were assailed for failing to acknowledge Japanese indemnity for atrocities committed during the invasion of China. In 1985, Prime Minister Nakasone together with members of his cabinet made an official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, where Japanese war dead (including 14 war criminals) are interred, triggering the first major Chinese student protest movement since Democracy Wall against the "second Japanese [commercial] invasion." China reacted indignantly to a series of insensitive statements about Japanese war guilt by leading politicians: in 1986, Minister of Education Fujio Masayuki stated publicly that whoever complained about Japanese history books should first look back to see whether they had not committed such a thing (invasion) in their own history; Nakasone dismissed him amid a storm of protest after he refused to resign. When the Japanese defense budget for 1987 exceeded 1 percent of GNP China expressed its concern about the revival of militarism. In 1987, ownership of a dormitory (Kokaryo) in Kyoto was disputed between Taiwan and China, and Taiwan won in the courts; China indignantly (but fruitlessly) demanded that the decision be overruled by the government. In 1988 China was "shocked" by a series of statements by National Land Agency Director Okuno Seisuke, who contended that Japan had not intended to invade China; Okuno eventually was forced to resign. Each of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's annual visits to the Yasukuni shrine since his 1999 election have been greeted by national outcry in China, even more visible on the

internet than in the public media. Finally, notwithstanding the apology for war crimes articulated by the Heisei Emperor himself during his fall 1992 visit to the mainland, in the wake of the unprecedented issuance of a formal written apology to the South Korean Kim Dae Jung regime China immediately demanded an analogous apology on the occasion of Jiang Zemin's twice postponed November 1998 summit in Tokyo, which Prime Minister Obuchi refused to provide, in the absence of a comparable Chinese offer to forswear further recriminations over war guilt. This, together with Japan's refusal convincingly to renounce its commitment to the possible defense of Taiwan in the revised guidelines to the JASA, resulted in Chinese perception of a barely acceptable "partnership," and neither side signed the joint communiqué. Chinese sensitivity to such indications of nationalist amnesia are understandable, and a great many Chinese to this day remain firmly convinced that the Japanese leadership has never really apologized for war crimes (just as the Japanese recall an endless stream of apologies), but the timing of Chinese grievances suggests that they also serve a more pragmatic function. The first textbook protest in 1982 came on the heels of the Baoshan controversy, for example, and the 470 billion yen Nakasone loan package of 1984 helped soothe Chinese feelings; the 810 billion yen Takeshita aid package of 1988 was similarly intended to mollify the Chinese after the second textbook crisis, the Okuno affair and the Kokaryo dormitory incident. The 1998 apology brouhaha coincided with the negotiation of the terms of the next yen loan.

Throughout the era of the Great Strategic Triangle (viz., 1971-1989), Beijing's strategic stance vis-a-vis Tokyo was contingent on its relations with the two superpowers, making the Sino-Japanese-American triangle a subfunction of the overarching Sino-Soviet-American triangle. During the 1950s, when China was still aligned with the Soviet Union against the United States, China vehemently opposed the Japanese-American Security Alliance (JASA); this opposition continued through the 1960s despite the rising salience of the Soviet threat, presumably due to continued Chinese preoccupation with the US threat. In the wake of the Sino-Soviet border clash and the ensuing opening to the United States (followed by diplomatic normalization with Japan in September 1972, well ahead of the US) China lapsed into silence on the JASA, and by the end of the decade was explicitly endorsing JASA, even encouraging Japan to increase its defense spending.[9] With the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations back on track after 1982, China however began to reconsider, once again coming to view Japanese arms spending with misgivings. When at the end of 1986 Nakasone raised the defense budget above the tacit one percent limit, Deng Xiaoping criticized this as a sign of Japanese militarism. The Chinese have repeatedly pointed out that Japan ranks fourth in the world in defense expenditures (after the US, China and France), with a larger army than Britain or France, fifth largest navy, twelfth largest air force, without noting that China spends more. China has been sharply critical of both the expanded guidelines and the agreement to contribute to the development of missile defense, though they have not yet opposed the JASA *per se* (despite growing ambivalence, as the latter

provides a fulcrum for American demands for greater Japanese burden sharing) on grounds that it might preempt development of an independent Japanese force projection capability. There is no question that the Chinese are wary of what they view as Japan's growing international assertiveness, which they resent with the support of a public nationalism whipped up by memoir literature, translation of Iris Chang's book on the Nanking massacre and internet chatrooms.

Japan has reciprocated Chinese allegations of militarism with their own suspicions. In the 1992-1996 period China, before signing the test ban treaty, conducted a series of nuclear tests, particularly painful to the world's only victim of nuclear attack, for which nuclear-free Japan took the unusual step of suspending the grant portion of its loan for 1995-1997. Since 1989 China has reversed its prior relegation of military modernization to last priority with a decade-long series of double-digit budget increases exceeding even its booming GDP growth rate, spending over US$1 billion per year to purchase advanced weapons systems (fighter jets, radar, submarines, tanks, destroyers, missiles) from Russia, pointedly exempting Japan from its no-first-use pledge vis-à-vis non-nuclear states or its 1998 bilateral detargeting agreement with Bill Clinton. Although the main focus of China's military modernization is assumed to be the recovery of Taiwan, Japan is easily within range of Chinese medium-range nuclear-tipped missiles, and in any case in the revised security guidelines Japan may include Taiwan within its field of security responsibility. Thus the "China threat theory" is alive and well among conservative Japanese political elites: although the North Korean nuclear missile threat has higher priority, since the turn of the century the SDF has considered China a rising potential national security threat.[10]

SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

The Sino-Russian relationship is worth our attention as an instructive parallel and contrast to the Japanese-Russian relationship. During the Maoist heyday, Sino-Soviet relations were even more antipodal than Japanese-Russian relations: after a decade of embittered public polemics, the two engaged in a border conflict that culminated in Soviet threats of preemptive attack on China's nascent nuclear strike force. The imbalance of power between the two led the Chinese leadership to engage the US, forming the basis for an Asian shift from bipolarity to strategic triangularity two decades before the end of the Cold War. Whereas the entrance of the US into the game deterred the Soviet threat it did not result in any immediate improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, which saw only slight improvement during the waning years of China's decade of Cultural Revolution. Yet the rise of Deng Xiaoping and the advent of "reform and opening" presaged a thaw: though no fan of the Soviet Union, as one who had been tarred by the same polemical brush first applied to "socialist revisionism," Deng began by deideologizing the dispute, then proceeded to build diplomatic bridges. To focus on economic reform, China could ill afford to cultivate unnecessary enmities with powerful and threatening neighbors. The centerpiece of

his effort was the introduction of semiannual normalization talks in 1982, which initially did little more than contain the dispute from erupting in violence. But with the ascendance of Gorbachev in 1986 he had found a partner with the imagination to make concessions and take risks, and as the Soviets proceeded to remove the "three fundamental obstacles" one after the other, relations moved quickly toward "normalization." That consummation was celebrated at the May 1989 Beijing summit, which ironically coincided with the Tiananmen protests that helped trigger the wave of protests that were to precipitate the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and ultimately in the Soviet Union as well.

We may divide the relationship since normalization into three periods. The first, from 1989 to 1992, was one of considerable bilateral turbulence amid the repercussions of Tiananmen and the collapse of the European Communist Party-states; only skilled diplomacy was able to salvage the relationship. The period from 1992 through 1999 focused on building a "constructive strategic partnership toward the 21st Century," as both countries explored the possibility of forming a Eurasian counterweight to looming American hegemony. Since the ascendance of Vladmir Putin as Yeltsin's hand-picked successor in 1999, the strategic partnership has continued, formalized in July 2001 by a 20-year friendship treaty, but both sides seem to have relegated it to somewhat more modest diplomatic importance while cultivating other relationships--with the US assuming salient importance for both countries.

The relationship nearly fell apart in the course of the disintegration of the bloc and the collapse of the Soviet Union, as China's hard-liners, appalled by this apocalyptic turn of events, blamed Gorbachev's soft line and proposed to launch a new public polemic over the future of world communism. But Deng refused to permit this (blaming the West, instead, for promoting "peaceful evolution"), also however withholding premature recognition of the left-wing coup in August 1990 (with which the CCP had considerable ideological sympathy). Despite their dismay at the USSR's collapse and the rise of the right-wing Yeltsin, Beijing quickly recognized the RF and indeed all 15 of the newly independent republics. Beginning with the Gulf War (January-February 1991), Sino-Russian consultation revived in response to a US-proclaimed "new world order" that both deemed threatening, moving toward an informal alignment. Part of the reason for Chinese flexibility was that if Beijing did not promptly forgive and forget Moscow's apostasy, many alternatives seemed available: there appeared at that time to be a good likelihood of reconciling the old Russo-Japanese territorial dispute and signing a peace treaty with Japan; South Korea had just granted Moscow a $3 billion concessionary loan (in gratitude for diplomatic recognition), Washington established a "partnership toward the 21st century" with Moscow in 1991, and Taiwan briefly established consular relations with Latvia and very nearly exchanged ambassadors with the Ukraine before being deterred by PRC diplomats. The new mood in the Kremlin under Yeltsin and Kozyrev was decidedly anticommunist and prodemocratic; Kozyrev,

who cherished hopes of joining NATO, even criticized China for human rights violations during his March 1992 visit. Still ostracized by the West for Tiananmen, Beijing was apprehensive lest successful reform in the new Russia should lure foreign direct investment from China and thus undermine the CCP's increasingly performance-based legitimacy.

Yet the recent but painstakingly institutionalized network of bilateral ties proved surprisingly durable. The leading industrial powers, still overburdened with debt in the wake of the arms race and an oil price shock-induced recession at the end of the decade, were far less munificent with financial support than had been expected; only Germany, now reunified thanks largely to Gorbachev's refusal to invoke the Brezhnev Doctrine, made substantial subventions to Russian economic development (over US$20 billion in 1993 alone). The most decisive domestic consideration was of course that the "double bang" of marketization and privatization in a democratic political context proved utterly unsuccessful at reviving the Russian economy, which went into free fall: real GDP declined 13 percent in 1991, 19 percent in 1992, 12 percent in 1993, and 15 percent in 1994. Yeltsin's emergent political rivals, both on the left (Zuganov and the revived communist party) and the right (Zhirinovsky, Lebed) challenged his nationalist *bona fides*. In the West, Russia had become a diplomatic nonentity, completely excluded for example from a role in resolving the Yugoslav imbroglio, finally invited to the "Group of Seven" but only as an observer; in the Middle East, Russian arms were discredited (and an erstwhile Soviet ally defeated) in the Gulf War. Even in the Far East, illusions of new breakthroughs were soon dispelled: negotiations with Japan were disappointing, Russia's abandonment of Pyongyang resulted in banishment from the 4-power talks, and even after normalization of relations with Seoul in 1990, South Korean businessmen saw little intrinsic value in Siberian infrastructure investments. The 1997 enlargement of NATO to include three former satellites in Eastern Europe (rather than disbanding it, like the Warsaw Pact Organization), largely a product of American election-year constituency politics rather than any realistically conceived security threat, was the last straw. Kozyrev was replaced in 1995 by Yevgeny Primakov, former specialist on the Middle East (later chair of the Institute of the Far East) with a background in intelligence work. "China is the most important state for us," Yeltsin announced at a Kremlin meeting in July 1995. "It is a neighbor, with which we share the longest border in the world and with which we are destined to live and work side by side forever." During an April 1996 summit in Beijing the two sides signed a joint statement endorsing a "strategic partnership directed to the 21st century" (a formulation the Chinese claim was initiated by the Soviets), in order to promote the emerging multipolar structure of the world and oppose hegemony by any one power.

Although the ascendancy of Vladimir Putin in August 1999 inspired speculation that he would take a harder line toward China, the partnership has continued to move forward, orchestrated by the regularly scheduled summits and

multiple other diplomatic exchanges. Thus in June 2001, the Shanghai Cooperative Organization was formed, consisting of the 5 former Soviet republics (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, now joined by Uzbekistan) plus China, as the first international security organization to which the US did not belong, and agreed to hold joint military exercises along their joint borders and cooperate against terrorism. The following month, Jiang Zemin arrived in Moscow to sign a 20-year Friendship Treaty, formalizing the process of rapprochement. Unlike the 30-year treaty Mao signed with Stalin on February 16, 1950, this accord, reportedly drafted at Jiang's instigation, was no binding military alliance, and hence promptly dismissed by US spokesmen. But in Article 9, the two agreed that if one party "believes there is threat of aggression," they would confer about measures to be taken in common defense. The treaty also provided for extended cooperation in aviation, space, nuclear, military and information technology. The two would also coordinate policy at the United Nations Security Council, in the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Russian sales of advanced weapons to China would now increase in a two-phase, 15-year mutual security collaboration: In 2000-2005, China would spend up to $15 billion to purchase 70 Su-30MKI superfighters, six more Sovremenny-class destroyers, two Typhoon-class nuclear missile submarines and eight upgraded Kilo-class diesel submarines; during the second phase (2005-2015), the two will cooperate in the development of "next generation" weaponry and technology (lasers, particle beams, intelligence-gathering satellites and other military space technology). Bilateral trade, it was envisaged, would expand apace.

The relationship is based upon not only shared strategic interests but economic complementarity. Among China's top economic priorities is the resuscitation of its State Owned Enterprise sector, to which the sale of Russian heavy machinery—usually compatible with the old equipment, supplied by the USSR in the early 1950s—can contribute, and these in fact comprise up to 20 percent of Russian exports. Russia also has wide experience in hydroelectric power projects and nuclear energy development (notwithstanding Chernobyl). In terms of demand, the Russian Far East provides a convenient job market for unskilled Chinese migratory workers (i.e., contract workers), light industrial commodities and food. The personnel basis for China's interest in Russia consists of the a sizable bloc of Russian "returned students" who make up a good proportion of China's leadership, led by Jiang Zemin and Li Peng; they are representative of a generation of powerful (but now retiring) senior cadres who look back at the Sino-Soviet alliance with fond memories.

The base of Russia's interest in China has shifted kaleidoscopically over the years, from ambitious young communist reformers in the late 1980s to a "red-brown" coalition of communists and nationalists in the wake of Tiananmen. Though there is perhaps still an ideologically based core of support for pro-China policy (or more generally pro-Asia policy, whose supporters tend to endorse a "turn" from the West in favor of closer relations with the "near abroad" central Asian republics as well as the Pacific Rim), in the economically strapped 1990s the pro-China lobby has grown

beyond ideological boundaries to include bureaucratic and industrial interests. Specifically, the following groups tend to support the “partnership”: (1) The military-industrial complex, for whom China is still their largest customer, and heavy industry more generally (e.g., the machine tool industry, oil and gas companies, the nuclear and hydropower industries), for the same reason. (2) The state trading companies who, since the 1994 Russian tariff and immigration legislation, have regained monopoly control over bilateral trade. (3) Regional governors, though vociferously opposed to territorial concessions, have grown dependent on the Chinese economy as a locomotive for their own economies: as the Russian economic collapse destroyed their principal market and source of consumer commodities, trade with China boomed, even if the products are of poor quality. To be sure, the natives remain suspicious of Chinese ambitions, and support balancing the China tie with relations to Japan, South Korea, and the rest of the Pacific Rim.

Sino-Soviet trade has not kept pace with leadership expectations, largely because of the Russian economic recession. Trade (much of it informal border trade) expanded vigorously in the wake of the collapse of the USSR in 1990-1993, reaching $5.8 billion in 1992 and $7.8 billion in 1993, as inhabitants of Siberia and the Russian Far East turned to Chinese traders amid the collapse of Soviet commercial infrastructure. Trade came to include labor as well as commodities, as local labor organizations in northern China recruited and hired out gangs of lumberjacks, vegetable farmers, and construction workers—by the summer of 1992, some 20,000 Chinese workers were working in Siberia; by 2002, well-informed observers estimated perhaps half a million Chinese were living in Russia. Yet the regional Russian economy, previously based on trade monopolies by giant state firms, took exception to the influx of petty traders and shabby goods in the context of a steep decline of the indigenous population. Thus in February 1994 Russia enacted new import duties and visa requirements (with PRC concurrence) to regulate the uncontrolled influx of both commodities and people. This caused Russo-Chinese trade to plunge by nearly 40 percent in the first half of 1994. In 1995 it began to recover, reaching $5.1 billion that year and $6.85 billion in 1996; but in 1997 it sank to $6.12 billion, and in 1998 dropped another 7 percent in the wake of the November 1997 devaluation of the ruble. Though it failed to reach the goal of $20 billion announced at the 1996 summit, by 2000 it was up to nearly $8 billion, $10.7 billion in 2001, $12 billion in 2002, and $15.8 billion in 2003, and is expected to reach $20 billion in 2004.[11] Border trade now constitutes only 12-14 percent of the total (restoring the large Russian trading company monopoly) and the trade balance has been sharply redressed in Russia’s favor (e.g., a surplus of $1.7 billion in 1996). Although China’s trade with Russia is only a small fraction of its trade with the US, it is obviously growing fast, and for Russia China is its second leading trade partner (after Germany) beyond the "near abroad" (the CIS).

Reciprocal direct investment has hitherto been much more modest (in 1995, Russia invested US$22 million in China, China $40 million in Russia), due to meager

accumulations of export capital on both sides and to the risky Russian investment climate (cf. the 1998 currency devaluation). Construction has been largely completed on the nuclear power reactor and attached uranium-enrichment facility for making nuclear fuel in eastern China contracted in 1997, but Russia lost its bid for Three Gorges contracts to a European firm with more generous credit arrangements. There have been tentative agreements to cooperate on several pipelines, one to transport natural gas from the Irkutsk region and oil from East Siberia to China, the other to transport gas from Outer Mongolia to East Asia; also joint construction of a bridge linking Heihe to Blagoveshchensk, and a second transcontinental railway linking China to central Asia along the ancient silk route (through Xinjiang and Kazakhstan). But ongoing discussions and plans for joint energy development projects tend to have lacked follow-up, and recent Russian pipeline negotiations with Japan indicate that Sino-Russian cooperation is by no means exclusive. Chinese ambitions to jointly develop the Tumen River basin have been undermined by Russia's waning enthusiasm since 1993 for a project that would give China direct access to the Sea of Japan, which the Russian navy still deems strategically vital.

One trade item has clearly battened on the post-Tiananmen sanctions: military technology and equipment. Deprived of American arms since 1989, the Chinese turned back to the Russians, from whom much of their original hardware came and which hence offered advantages in terms of compatibility of parts. Soviet global arms sales dropped "catastrophically" in the wake of the Gulf war, where Soviet weaponry was seen to be so completely outclassed by high-tech American munitions. Inasmuch as military equipment was the second largest item in the Soviet export repertory (after petroleum products), continued Chinese interest was particularly welcome.10 As the Russian economic downturn deepened throughout the 1990s the military-industrial complex became dependent on foreign sales to maintain serial production, as the Russian military budget shortfall precluded new commissions; Russian officers began joking about the prospect of facing a Chinese military better equipped with Russian weapons than their own. Negotiations for the purchase of Sukhoi SU-27 fighters, under way since early 1990, culminated in the purchase of 26 at a "friendship" price of more than US$1 billion, with an option to buy an additional forty-eight; in March 1992 China also took delivery of the highly sophisticated S-300 anti-aircraft missile system and SA-10 anti-tactical ballistic missile missiles. In November 1996 the two signed a bilateral defense cooperation pact, and in December China purchased two diesel-powered (Kilo-class) submarines, two Sovremenniy-class destroyers with accompanying Moskit anti-ship missiles, an additional 24 SU-27 fighters (bringing the total up to 50), and a license to produce 200 more (as Chinese F-11s) in an aircraft factory in Shenyang. The PRC also ordered an unconfirmed number of MiG-31 high-altitude interceptors. Chinese purchases of Russian weaponry weighed heavily in the composition of trade throughout the 1990s, taking 30-50 percent of Russia's annual deliveries. But Russia also attempted to sell nonmilitary big-ticket items, as questions began to be raised about the wisdom of

rearming a once and possibly future security threat—thus some 25 percent of the Chinese civilian aircraft pool is now Russian. The Russians dismiss Western concerns that their weapon sales might upset the military balance in East Asia, downplaying any Chinese threat and claiming that if they do not sell arms to the PRC some other country will, with the worst conceivable consequences for Russian security (perhaps forgetting that in the 1969 border clashes, both sides used Russian weapons).

The partnership also has regional strategic implications. Their tacit cooperation in the six-power talks arranged to deal with the revived North Korean nuclear crisis will probably serve to moderate any solution imposed on the DPRK regime (e.g., precluding sanctions or forcible regime change). While in vigorous support of the "war on terror" with regard to Chechnya and Xinjiang, both took exception to the "axis of evil" rhetoric and sanctions and opposed the unilateral invasion of Iraq in the UN Security Council, continuing to do business with Iran and North Korea. For China, neutralization of the border issue permits a reorientation of its military structure from the north to the southeast, and from the infantry to "force projection" arms in the navy and air force. In the context of a continually waxing PLA budget amply subsidized by a burgeoning economy, this reorientation has particular relevance for Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, which depend on sea lanes of communication through the busy South China Sea. China's relations with India and Vietnam have also been affected by the partnership, in the sense that both former Soviet clients have been thrown upon their own resources to cope with the PRC. Similarly, China's access to markets and resources (including vast oil reserves) in Central Asia has been considerably facilitated by the replacement of the USSR with the far looser Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

From the Russian strategic perspective, Asia has gained importance since the Cold War, following secession of the protective glacis of Eastern European satellites, the Baltic states, Ukraine and Belorussia: though still preferring to consider itself "Western" in terms of national identity, the Russian Federation (RF) now defines itself geopolitically as a land bridge between Europe and Asia. And China and India are clearly the twin pillars of Moscow's Asia policy. Although the post-Gorbachev thrust into Asia was originally three-pronged, including overtures to Tokyo and Seoul as well as Beijing, only Beijing responded with sufficient alacrity to facilitate the development of a promising relationship. Still, one of the hallmarks of the Putin era has been to relativize the partnership by augmenting it. Russia changed its Asia policy in three ways: restoring ties with North Korea, pushing (successfully) for multilateral talks in the region, and warming relations with Japan (without giving any land back). Russia has gained entree to the ASEAN Regional Forum and finally (late 1998) to APEC, and has opened a consulate in Chinese Hong Kong (from which it was excluded before 1997). If there is a tougher line to China or the US this is visible in a multilateral rather than a bilateral context: after bargaining for whatever concessions he could get, Putin ultimately acceded in December 2002 to American

withdrawal from the ABM treaty, stopped fighting NATO expansion to join a new NATO-Russia Council, and did not block the US from gaining basing rights in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to wage their air war against the Taliban.

CONCLUSIONS

Triangular analysis has, in the Japanese-Russian-Chinese case, become more open and flexible but also more opaque since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the triangular relationship could be divided into three periods: first, a "marriage," between 1949-1959, during which Tokyo had negative relations with both Moscow and Beijing, who had apparently good relations with one another; second, a "unit-veto triangle" between 1960-1970, during which the Sino-Soviet marriage degenerated into the Sino-Soviet dispute, though neither Moscow nor Beijing took advantage of this development to improve relations with Tokyo substantially; and finally, the period of the "strategic triangle," from 1971 through 1989, when Tokyo normalized relations with Beijing while retaining hostile relations with Moscow (i.e., the Americans introduced a "romantic triangle" by improving relations with both, but Japan improved relations only with China). Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Japanese relations with both China and Russia have officially improved somewhat thanks to the fall of ideological barriers and the increase in trade and diplomatic exchanges, but both relationships are still clouded by residual ambivalence and uncertainty. It is interesting that all three actors have engaged in bilateral partnerships: there is a Sino-Russian partnership, a Sino-Japanese partnership, and a Russo-Japanese partnership. These partnerships betoken "betrothal," in the sense that full economic and commercial relations are officially encouraged in the context of uncertainty about the ultimate scope of the relationship and simultaneous preparation for contingent hostilities. The two partnerships that may be said to be strategically operational are the Sino-Russian partnership, based on weapon sales and military exchanges, and the Russo-Japanese partnership, with exchanges and joint exercises but no sales; the Sino-Japanese partnership is obviously the most tenuous of the three.

The "triangularity" of the relationship consists of the leverage of each bilateral tie on the other two. A triangular dynamic in the triangle is typically touched off by the conspicuous strengthening of one set of bilateral ties; only in the case of unusually ambitious and concerted diplomatic efforts, such as those introduced by the Nixon administration in the early 1970s, are two sets of bilateral ties improved simultaneously. If one dyad enhances bilateral ties, this can motivate the third actor either to improve relations with one or the other (or more unusually, both) members in hopes of offsetting a possibly threatening coalition, or to view the dyad as threatening and take a position of hardened opposition to both (perhaps even to strike before the dyad becomes fully consolidated). The latter option is the most high-risk and costly one, which it would be the task of any rational diplomacy to avoid. During the strengthening of Sino-Russian relations in the first post-Cold War decade

culminating in the 2001 friendship alliance, for example, Japan's initial offsetting effort seems to have been to improve relations with the PRC. Thus Japan was the first to discard sanctions and resume normal economic relations (and ODA) with the PRC following the Tiananmen incident. While this effort resulted in considerable progress economically, with trade and investment still forging ahead, the diplomatic and cultural dimension of the relationship has been roiled since the mid-1990s by the growth of nationalism in both China and Japan, which tends under the circumstances to jeopardize the relationship. Chinese nationalism also tends to polarize relations with Taiwan, which adds to the anxieties of the Japanese, who are dependent on South China Sea lanes for energy supply.

Thus Tokyo has begun to swallow its resentment and turn since the late 1990s to the cultivation of improved relations with Moscow. Despite the disappointing outcome of negotiations on the sensitive territorial issue and only incipient progress on economic cooperation, Moscow does not seem to share China's sense of unrequited grievance for war crimes nor its high sensitivity to any sign of Japanese nationalism; thus it has taken a somewhat more benign view of the role of expanded guidelines for the JASA and for such long cherished Japanese goals as permanent membership in a reorganized UN Security Council. One might say that the international dimension of the Russo-Japanese partnership has considerably outdistanced its regional base. While in view of the low current prospects for war the Russian triangle might be characterized as a *ménage a trois*, its opacity permits it to embody elements of "marriage" (in its bilateral partnerships), the "romantic triangle" (in its attempts at balancing), perhaps even the "unit-veto triangle" (in mutual armament efforts) as well. We might call this "triangular courtship," in which all three actors prepare for a variety of mutually beneficial exchanges, while simultaneously girding themselves for the contingency of hostilities. Thus although Sino-Russian political economic relations remain strong despite local resistance and Sino-Japanese political relations spiral downward despite growing bilateral economic exchanges, Russo-Japanese relations have begun to warm compensatorily.

While intratriangular developments have been moving in interestingly ambiguous directions, the triangle is also subject to extratriangular intervening events, the impact of which may be expected to depend on which actor, or which relationship, is thereby affected. The configuration per se does not react to extratriangular events—we are not positing a "collective mind," for the lack of transparency or adequate communications linkages precludes that—extratriangular events impinge on individual national actors, and usually more on one actor or relationship than the others. Such events may be categorized into two types: those that strengthen an actor's relative position (windfalls), and those that threaten it (crises). The most natural response to a crisis is to stimulate bilateral relations with those actors deemed likely to augment one's security, while the most natural response to a windfall is to strengthen self-assertive proclivities. Thus in the last decade, three of the most important events to affect triangular relations have been the

Asian financial crisis of 1997-1999, the post-9/11 War on Terrorism, and the North Korean nuclear threat. The Asian financial crisis seems to have been a windfall for the PRC, whose economy withstood the crisis better than either Japan or certainly Russia (largely because China's economy is not yet fully globalized), strengthening its relative position in both the triangle and the region. Indeed, a heightened nationalism and sense of self-assurance could be detected during this period. The War on Terrorism, arising in response to an American setback, seems to have been a windfall for both China and Russia, inasmuch as both countries saw their interests similarly benefited--by a legitimation of their crackdown on domestic terrorism, and by American diversion from "human rights" to a crusade against the "Axis of Evil." Yet it did not strengthen bilateral ties, as each became more self-assertive in its own way. The North Korean nuclear threat is a crisis impinging on the entire triangle but of greatest and most immediate threat to Japan, as neither Russia nor China seem likely to be targets of North Korean nuclear strikes. Yet China too would be affected if North Korean nuclear armament upset the regional power balance and triggered Japanese self-defensive efforts, conceivably including assertive nationalism, repeal of the peace constitution, even acquisition of its own nuclear weapons. If not carefully handled, the North Korean crisis could further attenuate Sino-Japanese relations and push Tokyo and Moscow into each other's arms, robbing Beijing of its most vital security partnership.

Notes

[1] E.g., see Michel Tatu, *The Great Power Triangle: Washington-Moscow-Paris* (Paris: Atlantic Institute, 1970); Thomas M. Gottlieb, *Chinese Foreign Policy Factionalism and the Origins of the Strategic Triangle* (Santa Monica: RAND Corp, November 1977); and Lowell Dittmer, "The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game-Theoretical Analysis," *World Politics*, vol. 33, no. 4 (July 1981), pp. 485-516.

[2] Hasegawa Tsuyoshi, "Why did Russia and Japan Fail to Achieve Rapprochement in 1991-1996?" in Gilbert Rozman, ed., *Japan and Russia: The Tortuous Path to Normalization, 1949-1999* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 167-198.

[3] At the San Francisco Treaty of 1952, Japan was forced to renounce territorial rights to southern Sakhalin island and to the Kuriles. The Soviet Union attended this conference, but chose not to sign the treaty. After negotiations a Joint Declaration was signed in 1956, in which Russia agreed to transfer Shikotan and the Habomai islands to Japan. The Joint Declaration was ratified and came into force, and the two reestablished diplomatic relations. But Russia reneged on retrocession of the islands when Japan renewed its security treaty with the US in 1960. For the rest of the Cold War, the Soviet Union denied the existence of a territorial problem with Japan altogether. Watanabe Koji, "Japan-Russian Relations: Searching the Creative Partnership," in Zhang Yunling and Guo Weihong, eds., *China, US, Japan and Russia in a Changing World* (Beijing: Social Sciences Documentation Pub., 2000), pp. 208-219.

[4] Edamura Sumio, "Russo-Japanese Cooperation Imperative to Bring Peace Treaty Negotiations Back on the Right Track," *Asia-Pacific Review*, vol. 8, no. 2 (November 2001), pp. 96-112; "A Former Diplomat's Advice on Talks with Moscow," *Japan Echo*, October 2001, pp. 36-40.

---

[5] Chinese aid amounted to $3.6 billion in 1982, $3.5 billion in 1983, $3.8 billion in 1984 and 1985. Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, *kaigai keizai kyoroku binran*, 1987, p. 251; as cited in Ogata Sadako, "Regional and Political Security Issues: Sino-Japanese-United States Triangle," unpublished paper, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

[6] Allen S. Whiting and Xin Jianfei, "Sino-Japanese Relations: Pragmatism and Passion," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 8, no.1 (Winter 1990-1991), pp. 107-135.

[7] Naoko Munakata, "Seize the moment for East Asian economic integration," *PacNet 5A*, February 1, 2002, as cited in Soeya Yoshihide, Jianwei Wang, and David A. Welch, "A New Look at the US-China-Japan Triangle: Toward Building a Stable Framework," *Asian Perspective*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2003), pp. 177-219.

[8] According to a poll conducted annually by the Japanese government to gauge the feelings of the people toward various countries, the high point of friendly Japanese feeling toward China was reached in 1980 at 79 percent (15 percent felt unfriendly). After Tiananmen, the ratio fell to 50 percent friendly 40 percent friendly, and after the 1995-1996 Strait crisis unfriendly feelings for the first time eclipsed friendly feeling (45 percent friendly, 51 percent unfriendly). This predominantly unfriendly public sentiment lasted until the last three years of the century, when friendly feelings again predominated (but only marginally, both hovering around 50 percent). Chinese feelings about Japan were at their most positive at 35 percent in 1982, from which they declined to 14.5 percent in 1997, and 16 percent in 2000. Kawashima Yutaka, *Japanese Foreign Policy at the Crossroads: Challenges and Options for the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), pp. 95-96; *China Times*, January 30, 2001, p. 11.

[9] In 1980 China's deputy chief of general staff, Wu Xiuqian, intimated to Nakasone that Japan should increase its defense spending to two percent of GNP. Drifte, *Japan's Foreign Policy*, p. 52.

[10] Reinhard Drifte, *Japan's Security Relations with China since 1989: From balancing to Bandwagoning?* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp. 33-39.

[11] Yong Deng, "Fellow Travelers out of the Periphery: The Politics of International Status and Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership," unpublished paper prepared for presentation at the American Association for Chinese Studies 46th Annual Conference, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, October 22-24, 2004.