Asian views of China in the age of China’s rise: interpreting the results of pew survey and Asian student survey in chronological and comparative perspectives, 2002-2019

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ABSTRACT

In order to see how Asian countries in this special volume (Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia) are looking at China in chronological and comparative perspectives, using Global Attitudes Survey data conducted by Pew Research Center would be the best way because they cover the data from 2002 to 2019 as of now.

We can get a lot of insights on different views of the rise of China in Asia through the analysis of Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Survey data, but there are some inconveniences. Some data in Asian countries are lacking, and the timing of survey is different from one country to another, which makes it difficult to compare the results across the countries.

In order to overcome such limitations, this paper uses the second wave and third wave data of Asian Student Survey. Main findings of the analysis are as follows.

(1) As of 2018, Singapore and Indonesia were comparatively positively viewing the influence of China, while Vietnam was viewing it negatively, and Japan and South Korea were in-between. The changes in these five years, however, were different from country to country.

(2) Changing views of Chinese toward Asian countries were basically symmetrical to those of Asian countries toward China.

(3) In these surveyed countries, “peaceful rise frame” was the most powerful determinant of the views of China, which explains why views of China were worsening in these countries. But the concrete determinants of the views were different from one country to another.

1 Introduction

Recently, the rise of China has been receiving special attention. In fact, there are some public opinion poll projects of perception of China in Asia. In Japan, for example, the Cabinet Office and the Genron NPO have been investigating the public’s evaluation of
Japan-China relations since 1978 and 2005, respectively. In South Korea, the Asan Institute of Policy Studies has taken up comparatively short-term issues, taking up current events to collect time-series data on the perception of China. Asian Barometer and AsiaBarometer cover many Asian nations to compare their views of some countries including China. Some researchers have started to investigate global views of China by using available secondhand data for comparative purposes.

However, because concrete questions have been tailored to local circumstances, it is not easy to compare perceptions toward China in multiple countries/regions, and it is difficult to identify which factors affect the overall evaluation toward China across countries/regions because different surveys in different countries are using different parameters.

In order to see how Asian neighboring countries in this special issue (namely, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia) are looking at China extensively in comparative perspectives, which is one of the missions of this paper, using Global Attitudes Survey data conducted by Pew Research Center would be the best way because they cover the data from 2005 to 2019, which are already disclosed as of December 2, 2020

### 2 Changing views of China: analysis of the global attitudes survey, 2002-2019

Data of Global Attitudes Survey have comparative advantages in the following three points. Firstly, sample size is large enough and covers a wide range of people in terms of their residence, generation, and other socio-economic status. Secondly, some socio-economic variables which might have something to do with people’s perception are available in the Global Attitudes Survey. Thirdly and most importantly, chronological data are available, which makes it possible to see the trends of perception toward China over time.

Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Survey contains three different types of frequently asked questions on China one is whether the informant evaluates China (as well as US) favorably or not, another is whether the informant sees economic growth of China positively or not, and the other is whether the informant sees military development of China positively or not.

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1. Nelson and Carlson, “Charmed by China?”; Linley, “Who’s afraid of the dragon?”; Herrick, China’s Peaceful Rise: Perceptions; Yu, Quanqu Minyi Diaochazhong de Zhongguo Xingxiang [China Image in the Global Opinion Polls]; and Kolodko, China and the Future of Globalization.
2. Asian Barometer Survey can be another candidate (Chu, Liu, and Huang, “How East Asians View the Rise of China”; Chu and Chang, “Xi’s Foreign-Policy Turn”) for internal comparison in Asia, but Global Attitudes Survey is more desirable in terms of the length of survey as well as its questions on the rise of China added on to the question on the influence of China.
3. More questions are there in the questionnaire in Global Attitudes Survey concerning evaluations toward China, but many of them were asked only once or twice, or asked only in a small number of countries, which makes it difficult to see changes over time extensively in Asia. These questions include, for example, those of threat perception (whether China is a major threat to the informant’s country or not) and confidence the informant has on Xi Jinping, asked in the 2017 survey.
4. For example, Chung argues whether people’s views of China’s economic and military development have any impact on the favorable / unfavorable views of China by using 2013 Global Attitudes Survey data. See Chung, “Economic interest or security concerns?”.
2.1 Declining favorable views of China

Figure 1 shows the chronological change of the percentage of people with favorable views of China from 2002 to 2019.\(^5\)

When the survey started in 2002, discrepancies among four countries toward the views of China were not so large; there is only 11-points difference between South Korea (66%) and Japan (55%) in the percentage of favorable views. Soon after, however, the discrepancy enlarges due to a drastic drop of Japan’s score, though we can see the same declining pattern across countries until 2008. The gap among countries had widened across the time since then, and it is in 2013 when the gap became largest between Indonesia (70%) and Japan (5%), where public opinions toward China were so tight and negative because of the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands issues. Interestingly, however, the gap started to become narrower since then due to the gradual decline of favorable views in Indonesia as well as the gradual rise of favorable views in Japan, which continues until 2019.

The concrete timings of change of views are different across countries as well, reflecting different bilateral relations with China in Asia, which creates different changing patterns in surveyed countries. In the case of Japan, for example, favorable views declined until 2008 when Sichuan Earthquake happened and China-Japan joint rescue activities were conducted in an emergency, which gave Japanese informants opportunities to have a look at positive aspects of China. Japanese views of China faced a turning point in 2012 when the Minshutō (Democratic Party of Japan) administration purchased the Senkaku Islands from a private landlord, which triggered an intense confrontation between Japan and

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\(^5\)The question asks “please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of China.” Though the Global Attitudes Survey covers many countries other than Asia, all the results in this paper will be confined to the countries (Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia) targeted in our international joint project.
China. After this event, Japanese views of China hit rock bottom, and then became better steadily but very slowly. Accepting the deployment of US THAAD missiles was the critical turning point from positive to negative views of China in South Korea from 2015 to 2016.

Despite these fluctuations in Asian nations’ views of China, we can find some stable patterns over time as well. In other words, Figure 1 tells us that we can categorize Asian countries into three groups in terms of their views of China after the year of 2005; first is a negative group composed of China’s neighboring countries that have serious territorial (sovereignty) issues; second is a positive group to which most of the Southeast Asian countries belong; and third is a neutral group which is in-between the above two groups. Japan and Vietnam belong to the first group, Indonesia belongs to the second group, and South Korea belongs to the third group, even though there are some fluctuations of views depending on the nature of political /economic /socio-cultural /international events taking place in their bilateral/multilateral relations with China.

In terms of the degree of consensus among informants about the views of China, however, we will get a different picture. Figure 2 shows the chronological changes of standard deviation in four countries’ views of China from 2005 to 2019.

As can be seen in this figure, Japan and South Korea show relative stable score of standard deviation, while Indonesia’s standard deviation is continuously on the rise. As views of China have been worsening, consensus building on China is becoming difficult in Indonesia.

### 2.2 China vs. US: A rivalry or not?

Under the current situation where China’s rise is cautiously observed by the US, both countries are apt to be treated as competitor in global politics and economy. Some strategists in Asia are pointing out that some ASEAN countries are taking a “hedging
strategy" for this challenging situation, but how are the ordinary citizens looking at the US and China? Are they looking at the US and China in a zero-sum situation or a positive-sum situation?

Figure 3 shows the correlation coefficient between the views of US and China in four Asian countries over time. All in all, views of US and China are positively correlated in all the countries, but the coefficient is low and has been fluctuating over time. Coefficients in Indonesia have been highest among the four countries except in 2007, and this finding partially provides an empirical support for Fitriani’s argument that Indonesia has been trying to take an equal distance and establish good relationship toward the US and China.

Interestingly, South Korea shows constant decline of correlation from 2007 to 2017. The score of correlation was 0.37 in 2007, but the score was lowered as much as 0.02 in 2017, meaning views of the US and China are basically independent from each other. The same pattern can be witnessed in the case of Vietnam as well. Such a change might reflect changing geopolitical circumstances in South Korea and Vietnam.

2.3 Different evaluation of China’s economic and military development

Sino-Japanese relations after normalization of diplomatic relations in 1972 was stable and positively evaluated before the Tiananmen Incident happened in 1989,
which triggered Japanese people’s concerns about the Chinese authoritarian regime, due to positive-sum relations; the Japanese side wanted to assist China’s economic development partly because such an assistance will create much better conditions for FDI and promising situation for Japanese companies, while the Chinese side needed Japan’s economic as well as technological assistance for the project of Four Modernizations.

Paradoxically, both parties needed economic collaboration despite their different political regimes. When China started to show her aggressiveness over territorial issues in the 2010s, however, Japanese people started to have a strong concern over the military development of China, which eventually resulted in a negative evaluation of China’s rise in Japan. Then, what about other Asian countries? Do they evaluate China’s economic and military development in a positive way or a negative way? Are their evaluations changing over time?

Table 1 and Table 2 show four countries’ evaluations of China’s economic as well as military development over time, respectively. All in all, Asian nations’ evaluations of China’s economic development are more positive than that of its military development.

Though the percentage of those who evaluated the Chinese growing economy as a “good thing” declined in Japan since 2006, those who are positively looking at the phenomenon is more than those who are negatively looking at it, even when only 5% of the informants viewed China favorably in 2013. People in Vietnam tend to negatively evaluate China in many aspects, but those who positively evaluate the economic development in China outnumbered those who positively evaluate its military development by 23% as of 2017.

Conversely, a vast majority of the respondents in Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam have negative views of the Chinese military development. Most drastic changes can be seen in Indonesia; positive views of Chinese military development declined from 60.1% in 2005 to 32.7% in 2017. Thus, increasing economic presence of China is generally welcomed, while increasing military presence of China has been negatively received in Asian countries.

### Table 1. Evaluation toward China’s Growing Economy.

|                  | Good thing | Bad thing | Don’t know | Refused |
|------------------|------------|-----------|------------|---------|
| **Japan**        |            |           |            |         |
| 2006             | 67.7%      | 28.3%     | 4.0%       |         |
| 2010             | 62.7%      | 28.1%     | 8.7%       | 0.4%    |
| 2011             | 60.0%      | 33.0%     | 7.0%       |         |
| 2013             | 48.3%      | 38.7%     | 13.0%      |         |
| 2017             | 54.0%      | 34.2%     | 11.8%      |         |
| **South Korea**  |            |           |            |         |
| 2010             | 45.2%      | 49.0%     | 5.8%       |         |
| 2014             | 57.7%      | 36.0%     | 5.7%       | 0.6%    |
| 2017             | 45.9%      | 48.1%     | 5.2%       | 0.7%    |
| **Vietnam**      |            |           |            |         |
| 2014             | 21.5%      | 71.7%     | 6.4%       | 0.4%    |
| 2017             | 27.9%      | 64.0%     | 7.9%       | 0.2%    |
| **Indonesia**    |            |           |            |         |
| 2005             | 69.5%      | 23.4%     | 6.7%       | 0.5%    |
| 2010             | 60.8%      | 27.6%     | 11.6%      |         |
| 2011             | 62.5%      | 25.0%     | 12.5%      |         |
| 2013             | 53.5%      | 33.4%     | 13.0%      | 0.1%    |
| 2014             | 56.3%      | 27.3%     | 15.9%      | 0.5%    |
| 2017             | 52.1%      | 33.7%     | 14.0%      | 0.2%    |

*Source: Pew Research Center, Global Attitudes Survey.*
Table 2. Evaluation toward China's Growing Military Power.

|        | Good thing | Bad thing | Don't know | Refused |
|--------|------------|-----------|------------|---------|
| Japan  | 2006       | 3.2%      | 93.4%      | 3.4%    | 0.6%    |
|        | 2010       | 4.1%      | 88.7%      | 6.6%    | 0.4%    |
|        | 2011       | 6.6%      | 88.0%      | 5.4%    |         |
|        | 2013       | 2.1%      | 95.7%      | 2.1%    | 0.1%    |
| South Korea | 2010       | 7.6%      | 86.3%      | 5.9%    | 0.1%    |
|        | 2017       | 4.2%      | 92.9%      | 2.3%    | 0.7%    |
| Vietnam | 2017       | 4.3%      | 90.7%      | 5.0%    |         |
| Indonesia | 2005       | 60.1%     | 27.8%      | 11.8%   | 0.3%    |
|         | 2010       | 40.9%     | 39.4%      | 19.7%   |         |
|         | 2011       | 47.4%     | 31.5%      | 20.6%   | 0.5%    |
|         | 2013       | 35.8%     | 38.3%      | 25.0%   | 0.9%    |
|         | 2017       | 32.7%     | 47.7%      | 19.6%   |         |

Source: Pew Research Center, Global Attitudes Survey.

3 Competing frames on the rise of China: analysis of the Asian student survey, 2008–2019

Though Global Attitudes Survey provides us with a lot of information as we could see in the previous section, it is not free from limitations. Firstly, timing of research is not the same across Asian countries, and the Singaporean data is missing. Secondly, some competing frames of the rise of China which might determine people’s views of China are simply missing in the questionnaire. And thirdly, data is not appropriate to check the mutual perception between China and the rest of Asian countries because almost all the data are focused on the perception toward China.

In order to compensate for these limitations, it is better to further explore the Asian Student Survey data which covers all the targeted countries in this project (See Table 3). Though the data was collected in three periods (2008, 2013–4, and 2018–9) with limited number of samples focused on the students who are studying at flagship universities in their undergraduate programs, Asian Student Survey contains questions on mutual perception among Asian countries including China and competing frames to understand the rise of China in the second and third wave, which makes this survey quite unique from other large-scale datasets including Global Attitudes Survey and Asian Barometer.

Before looking into the Asian Student Survey data, we will first investigate chronological changes of views of China in the surveyed four countries in the Global Attitudes Survey, and in Singapore.

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11Asian Student Survey was initiated by the research group in Global COE Program “Global Institute for Asian Regional Integration” at Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, in 2008 (first wave) to get basic information of people’s mutual perception among Asia by focusing on the university students in top-tier universities to foresee what will happen about the future regional integration in Asia. Five years later until today, Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo has succeeded this survey to see chronological changes of mutual perception among Asia. The second wave was conducted in 2013–14, and the third wave was conducted in 2018–19 respectively. In each country/region, two universities were surveyed and at least 200 samples were collected in each university. For more detailed explanation about the survey project, see Sonoda, Ajia no kokumin kanjo, 253–256.

12Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore also conducted large-scale survey of the students in ASEAN to see how they perceive ASEAN and its member countries in 2008 and 2017. These surveys, however, didn’t include China as a target of their perception. See Thompson and Thianthai, Attitudes and Awareness Toward ASEAN; Thompson, Thianthai, and Thuzar, Do Young People Know About ASEAN?
Before starting the exploration of causality, we will check (1) how respondents in surveyed countries have been evaluating China’s influence on their countries, (2) whether their views of China are corresponding to the Chinese views of them, and (3) how competing frames for understanding the rise of China have been accepted by the respondents in surveyed countries.

3.1 Asian view of China’s influence

Asian student’s evaluations of China’s influence are diverse and fluctuating over time (see Table 4). As of 2018, compared to other countries, Singapore and Indonesia were positively viewing the influence of China, while Vietnam was viewing it negatively, and Japan and South Korea were in-between them. Changes within these years were also different from country to country. South Korea showed a decline of positive evaluation, while Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia showed an increase of positive evaluation from the second wave

Table 3. Asian Student Survey: Second to Third Wave.

| Country | University | Date of Research | Second Wave | Third Wave | Sample Size |
|---------|------------|------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Japan   | Univ. of Tokyo | 2013.10.1–11.15 | 2014.9.26–7.12 | 230 | 211 |
|         | Waseda Univ. | 2013.9.30–10.4 | 2014.10.2 | 234 | 235 |
|         | Korea Univ. | 2019.1.31 | 2019.8.15–12.12 | 395 | 262 |
| China   | Peking Univ. | 2013.10.1–10.8 | 2018.9.15–12.12 | 200 | 207 |
|         | Tsinghua Univ. | 2013.9.15–10.25 | 2018.9.18–10.1 | 200 | 203 |
|         | Shanghai Jiaotong Univ. | 2013.9.17–9.25 | 2018.10.3–11.22 | 200 | 216 |
| Vietnam | Viet Nam National Univ. Hanoi | 2013.10.1–11.30 | 2018.10.1–11.30 | 200 | 245 |
|         | Viet Nam National Univ. HCMC | 2013.10.1–11.30 | 2018.10.1–11.30 | 200 | 245 |
| Singapore| National Univ. of Singapore | 2013.9.17–9.25 | 2018.10.3–11.22 | 200 | 245 |
|         | Nanyang Technological Univ. | – – | – – | – – | – – |
| Indonesia | Univ. of Indonesia | 2014.11.30– | 2018.9.14–9.24 | 200 | 206 |
|         | Gadjah Mada Univ. | 2015.3.17 | 2018.9.14–9.24 | 200 | 206 |

Source: Sonoda, Ajia no kokumin kanjo [National Sentiments in Asia], 254–255.

Table 4. Asian Views of China’s Influence: 2013–2019.

| Country | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Japan   | 2.8% | 7.1% | 3.3% | 1.1% | 1.9% | 2.9% | 5.9% | 4.2% | 6.6% |
| South Korea | 17.4% | 40.1% | 36.6% | 28.8% | 11.0% | 17.4% | 40.9% | 49.6% | 41.5% |
| Vietnam | 18.3% | 26.8% | 18.0% | 13.4% | 16.7% | 28.4% | 23.1% | 19.9% | 18.8% |
| Singapore| 38.3% | 20.7% | 32.3% | 39.0% | 32.6% | 32.3% | 23.1% | 12.3% | 11.8% |

Source: Asian Student Survey.
to the third wave. To our surprise, Japanese students’ evaluation became drastically better between 2013 and 2019.

### 3.2 Chinese view of other Asian nations’ influence

Changing views of Chinese toward Asian countries are basically symmetrical to those of Asian countries toward China (see Table 5). China-Singapore relations are most positively evaluated, while China-Vietnam relations are most negatively evaluated mutually.

However, two points should be noted here. Firstly, Chinese evaluations are more negative compared to Asian neighboring countries’ counterparts except Singapore. And secondly, DK answers are more commonly observed in the case of evaluation by Chinese students, especially toward Vietnam and Indonesia, which suggests some asymmetrical interests held by the Chinese students and other Asian students in terms of evaluation of the influence.

### 3.3 Competing frames to understand China

When it comes to competing frames to understand the rise of China, Asian Student Survey prepared four frames which are frequently discussed either in academic community or in daily life conversation.

### 3.3.1 Political instability frame

The first one is the “political instability frame.” Observers outside China who believe in freedom and democracy might look at China not as their “ally” because of its

| Table 5. Chinese View of Asia’s Influence: 2013–2018. |
|-----------------|--------|--------|-----------------|--------|
|                 | Good   | Rather Good | Hard to Say | Rather Bad | Bad   | Don’t Know |
| **Japan**       |        |           |               |            |      |            |
| 2013            | 2.1%   | 13.2%     | 21.5%         | 38.0%      | 19.1%| 6.1%       |
| 2018            | 7.2%   | 39.6%     | 25.4%         | 22.0%      | 2.5% | 3.4%       |
| **South Korea** |        |           |               |            |      |            |
| 2013            | 3.3%   | 27.6%     | 44.0%         | 16.4%      | 2.0% | 6.8%       |
| 2018            | 2.6%   | 24.1%     | 40.9%         | 22.0%      | 2.3% | 8.1%       |
| **Vietnam**     |        |           |               |            |      |            |
| 2013            | 0.6%   | 6.6%      | 41.9%         | 27.4%      | 6.1% | 17.3%      |
| 2018            | 1.5%   | 8.9%      | 48.4%         | 18.9%      | 2.3% | 19.9%      |
| **Singapore**   |        |           |               |            |      |            |
| 2013            | 9.3%   | 51.5%     | 27.3%         | 2.8%       | 0.6% | 8.5%       |
| 2018            | 8.7%   | 48.3%     | 30.7%         | 3.4%       | 0.8% | 8.1%       |
| **Indonesia**   |        |           |               |            |      |            |
| 2013            | 1.1%   | 12.2%     | 41.3%         | 23.5%      | 4.0% | 17.9%      |
| 2018            | 1.6%   | 13.8%     | 49.0%         | 11.4%      | 1.5% | 22.7%      |

*Source: Asian Student Survey.*

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13This finding is different from that of the Japanese Cabinet Office’s surveys as well as Genron NPO’s opinion polls. According to our interview results, one possibility is that Japanese students, especially those who major in engineering, have come to appreciate China’s IT development and evaluate its impact on Japan more positively than ordinary citizens in Japan. See Sonoda, “Chugoku seifu ga Ittaiichiro ni sennen dekiru noha nazeka” [Why can Chinese government promote Belt and Road Initiative without being bothered by the objections from the citizens].

14Questions about the frames for understanding China were included the questionnaire from the second wave, so we have data only from two waves.

15Sonoda, “Chugoku taito no kokusai shirut” [The rise of Chins in the eyes of Asians in comparative perspectives]. As to the four frames to understand the rise of China, there is a huge difference between Chinese students and other Asian students. Chinese students prefer more positive views, while other Asian students prefer more negative views. See Zhai’s analysis which used Asian Student Survey second wave’s data. Zhai, “The Gap in Viewing China’s Rise”.
authoritarian, repressive regime, which might result in forming a negative image of China. Some experts claim that China is facing the dilemma that the more successful China’s economic growth will be, the stronger its political leaders will feel insecure and threatened.16 According to Takahara,

“It is easy to foresee that China will try to maintain a cooperative attitude in its diplomacy by emphasizing peaceful development to contain the China threat theory. However, at the same time, it will try to expand its military capacity and will never soften its tough stance over specific disputes with other countries. The more unstable its domestic situation is, the tougher its attitude will become in international relations. China’s domestic politics and diplomacy are closely linked.”17

As is shown in Table 6, students in Northeast Asia tend to accept this frame much more than their Southeast Asian counterparts. Clearly percentage of DK is larger in Southeast Asia than Northeast Asia, which suggests different political gaze toward China between East Asia and Southeast Asia.

### 3.3.2 Increasing opportunity frame

The second one is the “increasing opportunity frame.” As is well known, CCP’s legitimacy has been maintained by its provision of (mostly economic) opportunities to the people.18

According to the Pew Research Center’s data analysis of the case of the Philippines in 2017, “(T)wo-thirds say having a strong economic relationship with China is more important for ties between the two nations, while 28% say being tough with China on territorial disputes is more vital. This represents a dramatic shift since this question was last asked in 2015; at that time, Filipinos were almost evenly divided between forging a strong economic relationship with China (43%) and being tough on territorial disputes (41%).” If this is the case, “increasing opportunity frame” probably must be a popular frame among Asian nations.

**Table 6. Political Instability Frame: 2013–2019.** “In spite of rapid economic growth, China is politically unstable.”

|                | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don’t know |
|----------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| Japan          |                |       |          |                   |            |
| 2013           | 35.3%          | 50.0% | 5.0%     | 1.1%              | 8.7%       |
| 2019           | 18.1%          | 56.4% | 17.4%    | 0.9%              | 7.2%       |
| South Korea    |                |       |          |                   |            |
| 2013           | 24.6%          | 50.5% | 13.0%    | 0.5%              | 11.3%      |
| 2018           | 31.2%          | 47.1% | 12.7%    | 1.1%              | 8.0%       |
| Vietnam        |                |       |          |                   |            |
| 2013           | 12.8%          | 41.3% | 23.2%    | 2.8%              | 19.8%      |
| 2018           | 22.0%          | 45.5% | 12.3%    | 2.6%              | 17.6%      |
| Singapore      |                |       |          |                   |            |
| 2013           | 9.7%           | 48.4% | 25.6%    | 1.3%              | 15.0%      |
| 2018           | 7.3%           | 36.9% | 34.3%    | 3.0%              | 18.4%      |
| Indonesia      |                |       |          |                   |            |
| 2014           | 11.5%          | 49.3% | 20.0%    | 0.5%              | 18.8%      |
| 2018           | 8.5%           | 38.7% | 22.7%    | 1.7%              | 28.4%      |

Source: Asian Student Survey.

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16Shirk, China: Fragile Superpower; Shambaugh, “The Coming Chinese Crackup”.
17Takahara, “The Rise of China and Its Neighborhood Diplomacy,” 65.
18Tang, Populist Authoritarianism; Sonoda, “Chugoku seifu ga ittaihicho ni sennen dekiru noha nazeka” [Why can Chinese government promote Belt and Road Initiative without being bothered by the objections from the citizens].
19Poushter and Bishop, “People in the Philippines Still Favor U.S. Over China.”
The popularity of the “increasing opportunity frame,” however, is different among the countries. While this frame is well received in Singapore and Indonesia, evaluations are divided in Japan and Vietnam (see Table 7).

### 3.3.3 Global threat frame and peaceful rise frame

The third and fourth ones are somehow related to international relations.

“Global threat frame” frequently appears in the Western media, which sees China as a challenger to the global order. Though there are a lot of arguments on whether China’s commitment to the establishment of the Asia International Investment Bank (AIIB) or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a threat to the existing global order, this frame assumes that China is threatening the global order regardless of her intention. It is reported that news narratives in English language publications are sparking anxiety about China and its global ambitions.

“Peaceful rise frame,” on the other hand, is the official claim of the Chinese government. It is a well-known fact that Zheng Bijian, adviser to Hu Jintao, proposed a new concept of *heping jueqi* (meaning “peaceful rise” in Chinese) at the Boao Forum in 2003. The word *heping jueqi* will soon disappear in the official documents in China which has come to use *heping fazhan* (meaning “peaceful development” in Chinese) to avoid the connotation that they will challenge the global order. It is also the case that the Chinese government has kept on explaining that the rise of China is peaceful by nature. This frame assumes that China, which denies all kinds of China threat theories, will not destroy the existing peaceful environment which is needed for its further economic development. Chinese scholars prefer this frame.

As to the “global threat frame,” Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam have more yes answers while Singapore and Indonesia, which are relatively free from territorial, sovereignty, and security issues than the other three countries, have less yes answers (see Table 8). As to the “peaceful rise frame,” targeted countries are divided into two groups; one is Vietnam where the majority of the respondents accept this frame and the other is Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Indonesia which have roughly equal number of those who agree and disagree (see Table 9).

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20 Okuda, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise/Peaceful Development’”.

21 Zheng, *Zhongguo Fazhan Dazhanlv*.

22 Xin, “Cooperation Opportunity or Confrontation Catalyst?”; Jin, *Rising China in a Changing World*. 

### Table 7. Increasing Opportunity Frame: 2013–2019. “The rise of China offers us a lot of opportunities.”

|                | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't know |
|----------------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| Japan          | 2013           | 5.0%  | 35.1%    | 37.3%             | 8.2%       | 14.3%     |
|                | 2019           | 8.4%  | 40.2%    | 33.3%             | 3.9%       | 14.2%     |
| South Korea    | 2013           | 10.7% | 54.0%    | 20.8%             | 2.1%       | 12.5%     |
|                | 2018           | 9.5%  | 52.1%    | 22.5%             | 5.0%       | 11.0%     |
| Vietnam        | 2013           | 3.8%  | 31.8%    | 37.7%             | 12.3%      | 14.4%     |
|                | 2018           | 5.5%  | 35.8%    | 33.4%             | 8.4%       | 16.8%     |
| Singapore      | 2013           | 16.3% | 66.1%    | 8.5%              | 0.9%       | 8.2%      |
|                | 2018           | 27.5% | 60.1%    | 8.1%              | 4.3%       |           |
| Indonesia      | 2014           | 14.3% | 61.5%    | 19.8%             | 1.5%       | 3.0%      |
|                | 2018           | 17.1% | 55.3%    | 19.8%             | 1.5%       | 6.3%      |

*Source: Asian Student Survey.*
Table 8. Global Threat Frame: 2013–2019. “The rise of China has been threatening the global order.”

|          | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don’t know |
|----------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| Japan    | 2013           | 9.3%  | 44.4%    | 34.4%             | 2.2%       | 9.7%       |
|          | 2019           | 8.6%  | 39.5%    | 44.0%             | 2.3%       | 5.6%       |
| South Korea | 2013          | 9.4%  | 40.9%    | 37.0%             | 3.5%       | 9.1%       |
|          | 2018           | 7.5%  | 49.1%    | 26.7%             | 5.4%       | 11.2%      |
| Vietnam  | 2013           | 14.2% | 41.3%    | 30.6%             | 3.2%       | 10.8%      |
|          | 2018           | 16.5% | 48.8%    | 19.1%             | 3.3%       | 12.3%      |
| Singapore | 2013          | 6.5%  | 39.9%    | 43.9%             | 1.9%       | 7.8%       |
|          | 2018           | 9.3%  | 36.0%    | 42.3%             | 3.5%       | 8.8%       |
| Indonesia | 2014          | 9.3%  | 32.3%    | 50.3%             | 3.8%       | 4.5%       |
|          | 2018           | 7.3%  | 35.8%    | 44.1%             | 2.5%       | 10.3%      |

Source: Asian Student Survey.

Table 9. Peaceful Rise Frame: 2013–2019. “China will maintain her peaceful relations with Asian countries in spite of her rise.”

|          | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don’t know |
|----------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| Japan    | 2013           | 2.4%  | 11.5%    | 50.2%             | 16.7%      | 19.3%      |
|          | 2019           | 1.8%  | 19.5%    | 54.1%             | 8.6%       | 16.1%      |
| South Korea | 2013          | 1.5%  | 17.1%    | 43.6%             | 8.7%       | 29.1%      |
|          | 2018           | 1.5%  | 16.8%    | 41.7%             | 13.1%      | 26.9%      |
| Vietnam  | 2013           | 2.8%  | 9.4%     | 41.7%             | 35.3%      | 10.8%      |
|          | 2018           | 5.3%  | 20.7%    | 45.6%             | 14.1%      | 14.3%      |
| Singapore | 2013          | 5.3%  | 44.5%    | 19.6%             | 2.8%       | 27.7%      |
|          | 2018           | 7.3%  | 39.8%    | 26.3%             | 3.3%       | 23.3%      |
| Indonesia | 2014          | 13.8% | 58.5%    | 11.5%             | 1.0%       | 15.3%      |
|          | 2018           | 8.0%  | 53.2%    | 16.9%             | 3.2%       | 18.7%      |

Source: Asian Student Survey.

3.3.4 Identifying determinants of evaluation of China’s influence

Takahara’s (2020) “four factor model” of China-Japan relations originally focused on the interaction (or one-way determination) between four factors; they are (1) (domestic) political factor, (2) economic factor, (3) international or security factor, and (4) socio-cultural factor (sentiments and emotions that people have toward the other country) and Takahara tries to identify which factor(s) affect the bilateral relations between Japan and China. This paper is interested in applying this model to explain the bilateral relations between five countries and China, but one of the difficulties of testing this model derives from the difficult operationalization of “bilateral relations.” If “bilateral relations” mean a bundle of four factors, explanation will be tautological. In fact, it is extremely difficult to substantiate and evaluate “bilateral relations” by using or combining different types of macro data, including total amount of trade or FDI, number of inbound/outbound visitors or politicians, number of signed political agreements, and so on.

In order to overcome such difficulties, this paper operationalizes these four factors as explaining variables and bilateral relations as explained variable in the following ways:23

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23As this paper is using survey data, explained variable as well as explaining variables is influenced by each respondent’s perception. Thus, Takahara’s four factor model is modified in this paper.
Firstly, we will use the evaluation of China’s influence (five-point scale)\textsuperscript{24} in each country as explained variable. It is true that this parameter is subjective data rather than objective data, but this modification assumes that overall positive evaluation will reflect “objective good relations.” In fact, we already confirmed a symmetrical nature of mutual perception of bilateral relations with China in this paper.

Secondly, we will use the “political instability frame” (four-point scale)\textsuperscript{25} as a political factor, the “increasing opportunity frame” (four-point scale) as an economic factor, and the “global threat frame” (four-point scale) and “peaceful rise frame” (four-point scale) as international or security factor. Again, it should be noted that these parameters are subjective by nature.

Thirdly and finally, we will use “personal connection with Chinese” (three-point scale)\textsuperscript{26} and “Chinese proficiency” (four-point scale)\textsuperscript{27} as socio-cultural factors. It is quite possible that those who acquired Mandarin (official language of China) will be more positive about China’s influence on their society. Also, if contact theory can be applied to bilateral relations with China, we can speculate that close social distance and linguistic knowledge of Chinese will contribute to the creation of more favorable views of China in Asia.

To sum up, the equation of the model can be expressed in the following way.

\[
Y \text{ (Evaluation of China’s influence)} = \text{Constant} + X_1 \text{ (Political instability frame)} + X_2 \text{ (Increasing opportunity frame)} + X_{31} \text{ (Global threat frame)} + X_{32} \text{ (Peaceful rise frame)} + X_{41} \text{ (Personal connection with Chinese)} + X_{42} \text{ (Chinese proficiency)}
\]

It is expected that political instability frame as well as global threat frame might produce negative evaluation of China’s influence especially in democratic countries, while increasing opportunity frame and peaceful rise frame might lead to positive evaluation of China’s influence in Asian countries, but what were the results?

3.3.5 Results of the analysis

The results of analysis in the second and the third waves are presented in Tables 10 and 11, and we get the following findings.

Firstly, the parameter that has the strongest power of explanation of (perceived) influence of China is the “peaceful rise frame.” Though Vietnamese data in 2013 doesn’t show statistical significance, other countries’ data both in the second and the third waves show positive impact on the influence of China. In other words, worsening image of China’s influence in Asian countries can be attributed to increasing skeptical gaze on China’s official statement of their peaceful rise.

Secondly, the “increasing opportunity frame” has also a positive impact on the influence of China in South Korea and Singapore both in the second and the third

\textsuperscript{24}Those who answered “Good” are coded 5 and those who answered “Bad” are coded 1. Therefore, the larger the number is, the more positively respondents evaluate China’s influence on their society. DK answers are excluded from the analysis.

\textsuperscript{25}In all four frames, those who answered “Strongly agree” were coded 4, and those who answered “Strongly disagree” were coded 1. DK answers are excluded from the analysis.

\textsuperscript{26}Those who answered that they have Chinese friend(s) are coded 3, those who answered that they have Chinese acquaintance(s) are coded 2, and those who answered that they have no Chinese friend are coded 1. DK answers are excluded from the analysis.

\textsuperscript{27}Those who answered “fluent” in Mandarin are coded 4, those who answered “daily conversation level” are coded 3, those who answered “very little” are coded 2, and those who answered “not at all” are coded 1. DK answers are excluded from the analysis.
waves. On the other hand, this frame doesn’t have a statistically significant impact on the influence of China in Vietnam. Thus, impact of the “increasing opportunity frame” is different from country to country.

Of course, the “peaceful rise frame” and the “increasing opportunity frame” show different aspects of China’s rise. As China develops economically, neighboring countries might get economic benefits, while its military development might bring them a sense of fear and threat. In the third wave survey, both frames had positive influence on the views of China in Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, which suggests that these Asian countries are sandwiched by the two competing frames.

Thirdly, the “global threat frame” is not a good predictor of views on China. Though a lot of experts on China affairs refer to the global threat China poses, Asian students’ views of China are not influenced by their arguments.

Fourthly and finally, socio-cultural factors are not good predictors of the influence of China, either (except in South Korea in 2018). Despite their continuous efforts, China’s cultural diplomacy seems to be not successful in improving Asian students’ views of China through their personal contact with Chinese and Chinese language acquisition.

### 4 Summary and discussion

In the first half of this paper, we looked at the results of analyzing Pew’s Global Attitudes Survey data. From 2002 onward Japanese and Vietnamese views have been most negative while Indonesian view has been the most positive, and the Korean view is somewhere in-
between. However, the timing of ups-and-downs of the views is different from one country to another and the variation among views as well as correlation between views of China and US shows different patterns across surveyed countries. All in all, economic development in China is positively evaluated (except in Vietnam) while her military development has been viewed with caution (except in Indonesia) in surveyed countries.

In the second half of this paper, we analyzed the second wave data (2013–4) and the third wave data (2018–9) of the Asian Student Survey and got the following findings.

(1) As of 2018, Singapore and Indonesia were positively viewing the influence of China compared to other countries, while Vietnam was viewing it negatively, and Japan and South Korea were in-between. The changes in these five years, however, were different from country to country.

(2) Changing views of the Chinese toward Asian countries were basically symmetrical to those of Asian nations’ changing views toward China, though Chinese responses contained more DK answers.

(3) In these surveyed countries, the “peaceful rise frame” was the most powerful determinant of the views of China, which partially explains why views of China were worsening in these countries. But the concrete determinants of the views are different from one country to another.

The biggest contribution of this paper is to identify the dominant frame to understand the rise of China in five Asian countries. It is paradoxical that the “peaceful rise frame,” which is an official claim of the Chinese government, is the main cause of the worsening views of China, because this frame is becoming less popular in Asian countries (except in Vietnam) between 2013–14 and 2018–19.

This paper basically supports the observation of Chung who claimed that security concerns were stronger than economic interest in determining views of China in five Asian countries (Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and South Korea) in 201329, but our results reveal much more complicated reality. For sample, no statistically significant factor could be identified in Vietnam in 2013. “Increasing opportunity frame” was a better predictor in South Korea than “peaceful rise frame” both in 2013 and 2018. Considering a lot of exceptions for general observation, it is desirable for us to pay more close attention to concrete bilateral relations with China in each country by making best use of local knowledge, rather than just applying some theoretical models or frameworks30.

Our survey results also show how differently China and other Asian countries are looking at the rise of China. Chinese are most positively and optimistically looking at the rise of China while some countries’ views of China, especially those of Vietnam, are most negative and pessimistic. Such discrepancy might create some overt rather than covert conflicts between China and her neighboring countries in some way or another.

29Chung, “Economic interest or security concerns?”
30The meaning of “Chinese”, for example, might mean different across countries, which makes it difficult to generalize some findings of impact of socio-cultural factors onto the views of China.
Though this paper tentatively used a modified version of Takahara’s four factor model and Asian Student Survey data to identify the dominant frame in understanding China’s rise in five Asian countries, there is a huge room for improvement in the future research.

First of all, it is more desirable if we could use the data of national scale which contains more diverse social groups.\textsuperscript{31} Secondly, other wordings should be attempted to identify which is the most appropriate expression of the competing frames. For instance, this paper used people’s responses to the statement “In spite of rapid economic growth, China is politically unstable” as “political instability frame,” but there might be a better wording than this.

Thirdly and most importantly, the variables we used in this paper are subjective evaluation of four (political, economic, international, and socio-cultural) factors of bilateral relations with China, which is more or less “biased” by preoccupation, insufficient knowledge, or even prejudice of the respondents, rather than objective measurement of four factors.\textsuperscript{32} We can sometimes observe that there are some gaps between people’s subjective understanding and objective characteristics of bilateral relationship between two countries. It is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is desirable to check what sort of gaps are there between subjective understanding and objective measurement of bilateral relations with China in the future research.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by JSPS’s Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) “Perception toward the Rise of China in Comparative Perspectives: Focusing on the Post-Cold War Generation in Asia-Pacific Region” (Project number: 19H04347). The author is grateful to the Pew Research Center for allowing me access to their original data from 2005 to 2019 as well as to two peer reviewers whose insightful comments were of great help.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science [19H04347].

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\textsuperscript{31}The author conducted national-scale survey in 2020 in Japan (sample size is 3,000) by using the same questions of views of China. The results we could get were similar to those of this paper as far as Japan’s portion is concerned.

\textsuperscript{32}In order to include some objective measurement of the bilateral relations with China, it is necessary to increase the number of countries as target of analysis. The number of five countries in this paper is too small to draw some meaningful finding.
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