CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

5.1 Research Conclusion

The research has examined the strategic transformation of Japan's space policy from 2019 to 2024, analyzing how the historically pacifist nation shifted towards space militarization in response to the perceived threat from China. Rooted in Kenneth Waltz's neorealist paradigm and Stephen M. Walt's Balance of Threat theory, this research argues that Japan's strategic pivot is best understood as rational balancing behaviour in an anarchic international system. Through structured analysis, this thesis reveals that Japan's space policy reforms are driven not only by technological ambition but also by the growing threat perception originating from China's rapidly evolving space capabilities. These include China's kinetic anti-satellite (ASAT) tests, vast satellite constellations, and broader strike potential embedded in its military space doctrine. By applying the four BoT variables, such as aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive capability, and perceived intent, the findings clearly show that Japan's policy is a textbook case of balancing against a rising threat.

The empirical analysis suggests that between 2019 and 2024, Japan has substantially increased its defense space budget (reaching nearly 1 trillion yen by 2023), created new military institutions such as the Strategic Headquarters for Space Policy and the Self-Defense Forces Space Operations Group, and developed a new strategy linking space to national security. The report also disclosed that Japan, while maintaining a pacifist image in public, has invested in latent anti-space capabilities such as SM-3 interceptors and non-kinetic defenses. This supports Walt's argument that states facing a threatening environment will counterbalance, either through internal development or strengthening alliances. Geographically, despite being physically close to China, Japan's perception of proximity has been altered by the reality of satellites orbiting in its airspace. The Japanese

government now treats space as an integrated national defense theater, blurring the line between geographic distance and strategic proximity. Perceived intentions also matter. Chinese activities are not only interpreted as capabilities but also as signs of aggressive and revisionist intentions. Japanese strategic documents and expert commentary repeatedly refer to China as a challenger to regional stability.

Theoretically, this thesis strengthens BoT theory by applying it beyond the traditional land or sea domain to outer space - a domain previously considered peaceful. It suggests that the logic of equilibrium remains relevant in this new frontier. At the same time, it validates the neorealist assumption that states, even those with a pacifist legacy, cannot avoid prioritizing survival when faced with structural threats. Japan, once an exception in realist theory due to its pacifist stance, is progressively conforming to realist logic under the pressure of changing geopolitical conditions. In conclusion, the case of Japan has shown that space is no longer a neutral domain. It has become a contested domain of strategic importance. This research not only confirms existing IR theories but also expands their applicability, showing that the logic of threat balance is still alive and is now extended to orbit.

5.2 Research Advice

Based on the findings of this thesis, several practical and academic recommendations can be drawn. For policymakers in Japan and other countries, the main suggestion is to acknowledge that space is no longer a passive environment but a critical strategic domain. Japan's pivot towards space militarization should not be perceived as a radical departure from its pacifist principles but rather as a necessary adaptation to the evolving international structure. For national security planners, it implies that space policy must be fully integrated into a broader defense strategy. Investments in early warning systems, satellite constellations, launch capabilities, and resilience to anti-satellite threats must continue and be prioritized.

Second, Japan must maintain transparency and communicate its

space intentions to avoid any misperceptions and reduce the chances of triggering an arms race. While balancing is rational under threat, it also risks raising security dilemmas if not managed diplomatically. Therefore, Japan should engage with allies and international partners through confidence-building measures and multilateral frameworks to ensure that its enhanced space capabilities do not trigger regional instabilities. This will allows Japan to engage actively in the regional area that could build a beneficial relationship between states to perceived regional stability.

For future scholars and researchers, this thesis provides a foundation for further exploration of how traditional IR theories can be integrated into new domains. As space becomes more crowded and contested with the increasing involvement of private actors, new technologies, and non-state threats such as debris, there is an urgent need to expand the theoretical lens to acknowledge these factors. Future studies might explore how Japan balances threats not only from rival states but also from transnational risks or the dual-use nature of commercial technologies. In addition, more attention should be paid to the internal political debates, bureaucratic drivers, and alliance politics that shape Japan's defense decisions.

Finally, it is advocated that international institutions and regional organizations such as ASEAN or the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) explore mechanisms to contain the escalation of space militarization. Japan, given its technical capacity and historical experience in pacifism, can play a unique role in promoting responsible space behaviour while ensuring its own security. In summary, this thesis recommends a dual-track approach: strategic investment in space defense to counter rising threats, and diplomatic engagement to manage tensions and preserve space as a stable domain. As the balance of threats expands into space, so too must the state's arsenal evolve to meet the new reality.