

Constructivism and Japan's Identity and Foreign Policy: A Critique

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Orientalist ideas could enter into alliance with general philosophical theories and diffuse world hypotheses, as philosophers sometimes call them; and in many ways the professional contributors to Oriental knowledge were anxious to couch their formulation and ideas in language and terminology whose cultural validity derived from other sciences and systems of thought.

Edward Said, *Orientalism*

1. Introduction

On the whole, post-World War II international relations theory paid little attention to domestic non-material factors such as national identity and culture. Theory became increasingly structuralist, and has drifted toward largely unvarying systemic properties to deduce what were assumed to be uniform national interests. Kenneth Waltz's seminal work *Theory of International Politics*, written in 1979, became the symbol of this neo-realist tradition, which assumes states to be rational unitary actors, pursuing the accumulation of power. The focus of attention is the anarchical nature of the international system, which is perceived to be the main factor explaining states' behavior. Neoliberalism, which ascribes major importance to international institutions and emphasizes the possibility of cooperation among the states in the anarchical system, has taken most of the neorealist assumptions for granted and have maintained the "economic mode of analysis" which views states as unified and rational actors.¹⁾

Of course, it can also be argued that every basic notions of neo-realism, such as security and power rely on the notion of identity, since their meaning depends on the particular understanding of the "self," survival and rationality.²⁾ However, the identity which resides in the neo-realist framework is homogenous and shared by all the actors (states) in the international system as the framework envisages a single universal meaning of survival, rationality and utilitarianism.

Theory, particularly problem-solving theory, which aims to provide a general framework for solving puzzles in relations among the nations, cannot exist in a vacuum detached from the actual dynamics of the world as its validity depends on its utility and technical applicability.³⁾ The end of the Cold War, which meant the end of ideological confrontation between communism and capitalism, as well as the dramatic developments in the international arena (for example, the war in former Yugoslavia) that followed, resulted in a drastic revision of the theoretical framework as this events

could not be explained by the established analytical approaches.⁴⁾

An important part of the revising process was to reconsider the relevance of national characteristics to states' foreign policy. Scholars' attention has been drawn by the fact that different responses to questions related to European and Asian identities have been frequently appearing in political speeches and programs (for example, the notion of "Asian values" advocated by Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew) and were presented as at least one of the factors that determine the preferred foreign policy.

Furthermore, the concepts of identity and culture, which were perceived as singular, self-evident, and non-problematic, have also undergone a revision, and the motifs of multiplicity and social construction came to dominate the debate of identity and culture in social theory in general. The conception of identities has become "emergent and constructed, contested and polymorphic, and interactive and process-like."⁵⁾

Japan has proved to be a popular case study in testing and verifying the usefulness of the constructivist frameworks in explaining state domestic and foreign policies. Works of Peter Katzenstein and Thomas Berger, which have become the cornerstones of empirical constructivists' scholarship, explore the norms and political culture of postwar Japan and attempt to establish causality between those non-material factors and Japan's foreign and domestic policies during the same period.

The works discussed here are Peter J. Katzenstein's *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (1996) and Thomas U. Berger's *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (1998). The arguments advanced in these works have been repeated by the authors elsewhere,⁶⁾ and citations from these works will be used occasionally to clarify the points made.

The main purpose of this article is to expose the limitations of these analyses. It does not seek to question the validity of the constructivist theory in general, but limits itself to outlining the pitfalls of the empirical works that have explored the normative/cultural and foreign policy nexus in the context of postwar Japan. However, since the author believes that one of the main sources of the shortcomings discussed below is the need to establish a direct causal relationship between the ideational and the state's policy, this analysis probably has certain ramifications for the constructivist framework in general.

Furthermore, the aim of this article is not to provide an argument supportive of the neo-realist (or neo-liberal) analytical framework that focuses solely on the systemic and perceives states to be rational actors. In this article the author argues that the focus on monolithic and comprehensive "culture" or normative structure combined with the positivist approach as applied by Berger and Katzenstein results in simplification and essentialization of both foreign policy and the non-material social structures. In other words, the author does not seek to refute the importance and the validity of non-material aspects in analyzing international relations but criticizes the constructivist positivism and its conception of national identity. Furthermore, the author seeks to criticize the dichotomous conception of both identity and foreign policy that defines both of the discourses as either "militarist" or "pacifist."

The following section will introduce the conceptual frameworks and the

conclusions of the two authors. This will be followed by an examination that implements a suggestion made by Katzenstein himself to question what is “natural” and “normal,”⁷⁾ but also to go beyond the militarism/pacifism dichotomy that dominates the works discussed here, and a decade later still continues to be the main paradigm in Katzenstein’s newly developed “eclectic analysis” of Japan’s security.⁸⁾ Through a brief introduction of alternative approaches to Japan’s pacifism on one side and its foreign/defense policy on the other, I will try to show that the perceptions of both the cultural/normative structure and the policy as pacifist are too essentialized and simplified to be regarded as a meaningful inquiry into either aspects of “Japan.”

2. Constructivist Framework and Japan

Both Berger (1998) and Katzenstein (1996) are answering the same “big” question of why Japan has been reluctant to use military force since the end of the Pacific War.⁹⁾ As Katzenstein formulates it, “Over the last few decades the Japanese police and military have been, by international standard, very reluctant to use violence.”¹⁰⁾ Katzenstein argues that the contrast between Japan and the United States is self-evident regarding the use of military force since the end of the Pacific War. Berger’s work is very much dominated by the same *problematique*, or what he calls the puzzle of “the dog that did not bark,” with Japan representing the dog and the use of military force the barking.¹¹⁾

Both authors criticize the two dominant theoretical approaches to international relations, or what Berger calls “system determinism and material rationalism”¹²⁾ for their lack of explanatory power. Emphasizing the importance of the domestic as a factor in shaping States’ policies, Berger criticizes the realist and liberal approaches for their focus on the systemic. He explains that States’ (governmental, *my addition*) perceptions of the systemic signals and the tools of response that are available to them, are influenced heavily by domestic forces. Non-material factors play an important role since actors’ understanding of the environment is conditioned by cognitive perceptions. These perceptions are in many ways a result of socially negotiated understanding of past events.¹³⁾

Hence, an understanding of the cultural context within which the cognitive perceptions are located, allows for a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of State’s policy choices.¹⁴⁾ Culture is seen as supplying the fundamental goals and norms of political actors, determines the perception of domestic and international political environment and conditions the ability to mobilize the national resources for military purposes.¹⁵⁾ Methodologically, Berger proposes that culture should be disaggregated from behavior in order to avoid the tautology of deriving culture from behavior, and can be discerned from public opinion polls, parliamentary debates, books and articles by opinion leaders, newspaper editorials, and other sources of information.¹⁶⁾

Katzenstein’s analytical framework also emphasizes the importance of the domestic factors. He explains that the realist approach is indeterminate in its understanding of Japan’s security policy and is “too restrictive” as it treats Japan as a “unified and rational actor.”¹⁷⁾ While sympathetic with the liberal approach, which focuses on the role of norms in regulating states’ behavior, Katzenstein criticizes it for overlooking

the “thick” constitutive norms that “define the identities of the actors”¹⁸⁾ and, in the case of security policy, shape the interests that inform the policy.¹⁹⁾ Norms are defined as “collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity.”²⁰⁾

In general, this conception of the non-material factors and their relationship with policy is located within the broadly defined constructivist framework, outlined by Alexander Wendt. Culture is defined as a “socially shared knowledge”²¹⁾ which is inscribed in the collective memory²²⁾ and constitutes the identities and interests of the actors involved.²³⁾

Both authors propose solutions that are rooted in domestic non-material factors. According to Berger, the solution to the puzzle of why Japan, in spite of her “economic and technological prowess” and formidable military potential²⁴⁾ did not use military force as a tool of foreign policy “lies in the strong antimilitarist sentiments” that emerged domestically in the wake of the World War II defeat.²⁵⁾ These sentiments have played a vital role in the postwar national identity construction and were institutionalized to become constitutive components of postwar political culture. According to Berger, the Japanese have “stood the prewar cult of Bushido and the Japanese warrior spirit on its head,”²⁶⁾ fundamentally changing their perceptions of State’s interests and the international environment. Berger concedes that other factors may have played a role as well,²⁷⁾ but the cultural factors have had a “profound influence”²⁸⁾ on Japan’s approach to national defense and security related issues.

Katzenstein, whose work focuses on institutionalized norms as shared knowledge that has shaped the decision making process, notes that in the postwar period, the Japanese have embraced an identity of a “merchant nation,” or an “economic identity.”²⁹⁾ Japan’s external security is largely shaped by the normative context, which is defined by the interaction between the institutionalized social norms that are expressed by public opinion³⁰⁾ and the legal norms,³¹⁾ which “condition the definition of interests that inform Japan’s security policy.”³²⁾ These norms have become institutionalized in the media, in the judicial system and in the bureaucracy and they shape the interests and policy choices of the government.³³⁾ Besides the emphasis on economic strength and the public support for Article 9 of the Constitution, Katzenstein’s analysis emphasizes the norms of peaceful diplomacy, low-key consensus approach, the lack of popular respect for the Self Defense Forces (SDF), and the lack of willingness by the public to resort to armed defense. These are seen as proof of Japan’s stable anti-militarist social norm.³⁴⁾ The legal norms are those embedded in Article 9 of the Constitution, which outlaws war and prohibits the state the right of belligerency.³⁵⁾ Japan’s security policy is portrayed as being determined by the interaction of the social and legal norms, which condition the definition of interests that inform the policy.³⁶⁾

3. New Concepts, Old Ideas

There is no doubt that both works belong to a more sophisticated body of Western scholarship which has been preoccupied with what John Dower³⁷⁾ calls “sizing up” Japan. However, there are two critical ontological and methodological issues which undermine the validity of the empirical findings proposed by the works discussed.

Ontologically, the formulation of the puzzle involves a number of assumptions

shared by a large part of the Japan-related scholarship that is preoccupied with Japan's uniqueness. Like numerous other studies of Japanese society, these works evolve around the same master narrative of Japan as different and as the "other" for the (Anglo-Saxon [added by the author]) either in positive or negative terms.³⁸⁾ This body of scholarship is dominated by the need to essentialize and simplify the various aspects of Japanese society (or, what Clammer calls "categorical mode" limitations). As a result, Japan, "one of the culturally richest, sociologically most complex and conceptually most challenging of the societies, becomes dull."³⁹⁾

First, the postwar cultural/normative anti-militarism presupposes a drastic change and a break from a culture of militarism. It assumes an existence of militant and inherently jingoistic totalizing normative/cultural structure in pre-1945 Japan, which shaped Imperial Japan's policy. This perception of Japanese as being inherently bloodthirsty has dominated the Western imagery since long ago, especially after the attack on Pearl Harbor.⁴⁰⁾

This assumption is most visible in Berger's work. One of the most vivid proofs for this conception of prewar Japan is the emphasis on the lack of the concept of "civilian" in prewar Japan, a concept which was introduced to Japan for the first time by the American occupation.⁴¹⁾

A more careful analysis will reveal that "civilian" did exist in prewar Japan and was translated as *futsūmin* or *heimin*, while "civil" was translated as *minkan no* or *shimin no*.⁴²⁾ A detailed inquiry into the creation of the concept *bunmin* reveals that it is related to the drafting of the new constitution under the guidance of SCAP in 1946. Among other demands, the Far East Commission insisted on inserting "civilian" as one of the qualifications for the Prime Minister and other members of Cabinet. When the Japanese government proposed "Prime Minister and other Ministers of the Cabinet should not have a military background," which in Japanese corresponds perfectly to the "civilian control" demand, the Occupation authorities (commonly known as GHQ) expressed its dissatisfaction and insisted on inserting "civilian" in Article 16.⁴³⁾ As Yoshida Shigeru stated in his memoirs, since there was no explicit *legal* term (italics added by author) in Japanese corresponding to "civilian," eventually the compound word *bunmin* was created.⁴⁴⁾

Furthermore, in order to illustrate the militaristic nature of prewar Japan, Berger gives an example of Fukuzawa Yukichi's "Rich Country, Strong Nation" motto that "reflected the country's peculiar blend of militarism and with aggressive notions of national destiny."⁴⁵⁾ Besides that this is an over-simplified reading of the rich philosophy of Fukuzawa, the leading Enlightenment thinker of Japan, Berger completely forgets that Fukuzawa's liberal ideas were not in favor during the years of militarism and could hardly have been considered as part of that ideology. Ironically, Maruyama Masao, one of the most prominent critical intellectuals of postwar Japan, has used Fukuzawa's ideas to criticize Japan's militarism.⁴⁶⁾ Also the rationale behind the "strong nation" part of the motto as the need to preserve Japan's independence from the greed of European imperialism seems to be considered irrelevant. Similarly, the aggressive and bloody nature of European imperialism that provided the Meiji rulers with enough reasons to worry about the future of Japan is also ignored in the quest for the militaristic Japan.

The nature of the pre-1945 Japanese normative or cultural structure is a rather complex issue. The simplistic understanding of Bushido as to “die happily for the sake of one’s lord”⁴⁷⁾ was probably shared by the military, but it also must not be forgotten that the ideology of Imperial Japan was more complex than simple jingoism and also emphasized the peaceful and civilized nature of the Japanese.⁴⁸⁾

It also should not be forgotten, that the broader notion of Bushido, popularized by Nitobe Inazō in his famous *Bushido, The Soul of Japan* (1899), originally written in English as a depiction of Japanese moral code, does not deviate from the Western norms and includes the pursuit of justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, sincerity and loyalty. In 1932, after Japan’s invasion of Manchuria and the growing criticism of Japan in the West, Nitobe himself toured the United States with a series of lectures trying to promote understanding and peace between Japan and the United States.

How deep did militarism penetrate into people’s minds is another important question, providing an answer to which lies beyond the scope of this article. However, it must be noted that even the highly orientalist account of Japanese national character provided by Ruth Benedict, written during the Pacific War, notes that Bushido has been a “modern official term which has no deep folk-feeling behind it.”⁴⁹⁾ Reflecting this complexity of the Japanese self-image, after the defeat in the Pacific War, the newly “peaceful” Japan, was seen by many intellectuals not as a departure but as a return to the traditional values.⁵⁰⁾ The argument of Japan as being “traditionally peaceful” is also one of the cornerstones of the voluminous *nihonjinron* literature that aims to establish the essence of Japan’s national identity.⁵¹⁾ Actually, Shiba Ryōtarō, one of the most famous and widely read writers on the “original form” of Japan argues that the militarism of the early Showa era was a deviation from the “normal” values of Japanese society pursued by the military elites.⁵²⁾ As such, it seems to be a grave oversimplification to claim that the cultural/normative framework of “militarist” or “jingoistic” national character can provide a plausible explanation for the pre-1945 behavior of Japan.

Needless to say, postwar Japan has not been unique in its “not barking policy.” There are probably more nations in the world that did not deploy their military overseas over the last five decades than did so over the same period of time. Japan and Germany stand out as leading economic powers and therefore the conception of the puzzle, that is, the question of why Japan has not resulted to military force also implies that economically powerful states are naturally bound to resort to a use of force. This conception conceals two major problems. One is that this assumption can be traced to the realist understanding of states’ interests, which the authors are actually trying to deviate from. After all, it is the realist framework of Hans Morgenthau and Waltz that assumes that states’ interests are unified under a universal rationality of power accumulation and the pursuit of self-preservation through means of violence.

Second, and more important, is that this formulation of the puzzle presupposes an existence of situations where Japan would “rationally” need to resort to military action. There is no doubt that the case of postwar Japan is unique compared to other economically powerful states. However, her security environment has also been unique, as Japan’s security policy has been firmly located within the framework of the U.S.–Japan Alliance, where the United States has taken on itself a leading role.

Furthermore, during the Cold War years, Japan never faced an immediate objective or subjective security threat, that would force her to make drastic decisions regarding the use of force. Hence, it can be argued that the case of Japan provides positivist evidence to support both the realist and constructivist theories⁵³⁾ since it never faced the need to consider a military option.

Methodologically, the constructivist framework seeks to establish a positivist causal relationship between the policy and the non-material structure. As such both the dependent and the independent variables are simplified and treated as relatively stable and consistent in order to fit into the cause-effect framework. As noted, Katzenstein focuses on institutionalized norms which by definition become integral and consistent parts of the social structure. Berger notes that culture will experience only incremental changes in response to ordinary historical events such as shifts in the balance of power or the formation of international institutions.⁵⁴⁾

Japan's policy during the postwar years is also portrayed as consistently static. Katzenstein accounts for the various changes that occurred in Japan's security policies over the four decades since the end of the Pacific War but concludes that no "sharp changes" have occurred in the security policy.⁵⁵⁾ Berger engages in a very brief discussion of the changes in the international environment, such as détente, its end, and the end of the Cold War, and describes the responses of the political establishment to these challenges. While admitting that various changes have occurred in Japan's defense policies and interpreting them as a "rational learning process"⁵⁶⁾ responding to domestic and international challenges, Berger asserts that these changes were minor and the basic norms and values of different subgroups have displayed continuity.⁵⁷⁾ Even such major shocks as the end of the Cold War and the Gulf War forced Japan only to modify its views and to adopt "less parochial" approaches to national security but these changes served only to confirm the antimilitaristic core values.⁵⁸⁾ The yardstick for measuring change is unclear but it seems that nothing short of full-scale invasion of a neighboring country conducted by the SDF would account for a change in policy.

The essentialization implied in the focus on the general norms and culture dangerously treads on the thin line between inquiry into Japan's cultural setting and the Orientalistic framework of analysis. The comparison of the accounts of Japan with the Western Orientalism is too tempting to be avoided here. According to Edward Said, present-day Orientalism can be seen not as a "sudden access of objective knowledge," but as a modified set of structures that previously dominated the discourse and were modified by new trends in the social sciences.⁵⁹⁾ There is a certain epistemological similarity between Orientalism and constructivist framework that focuses on non-material factors, as both are providing accounts of collective behavior based on essentialized images of culture and normative structures of the society. However, stripped of the scientific language of political science, the findings of the works discussed here seem to repeat numerous clichés that have been present in other, less theoretically sound explorations into Japan's culture and norms.

Hence, the Japanese Left "appeared almost hopelessly naïve" regarding the Soviet propaganda and realities,⁶⁰⁾ and while it had been "idealizing" the communist nations, the Right was "glorifying" the past of imperial Japan with the political Center

“idealizing” the United States.⁶¹ It is interesting how this depiction of the Japanese resonates with the one provided by General Douglas MacArthur, a well-known “admirer” of the Japanese, who noted that “measured by the standards of modern civilization, they [the Japanese] would be like a boy of twelve as compared with our development of forty-five years.”⁶² More importantly, though, the Japanese Communist Party, which had been the second major political party of the left but has also been strongly nationalistic and pursued a course independent from both the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties since the 1960s, is left out of this account of Japan’s political spectrum.

There is nothing revealing about the notion of Japanese pacifism as the “uniquely Japanese pacifism,” one which has been an integral part of *nihonjinron*.⁶³ There, pacifism is seen as part of Japan’s traditional values and perceives the postwar to be basically a return to the normal. Japan’s political culture as defined by the norms of consensus has also been depicted in the *nihonjinron* literature⁶⁴ and its origins have been traced to the social and economic circumstances of the pre-modern *mura* (village) society.⁶⁵

Interestingly, the *nihonjinron* literature of the 1970s and 1980s shares certain ontological and epistemological premises with the constructivist works as its main goal was to provide an explanation for Japan’s postwar success through culture, norms and tradition. On the policy level, we can agree with Hirano Kenichirō⁶⁶ that *heiwa* (peace) has become one of the keywords of post-Pacific War Japan diplomatic ideology. At the same time, the term’s purely rhetorical nature, the hollowness of meaning, and contradictions with other “pillars” of Japan’s foreign relations, such as the U.S.–Japan military alliance, have also been pointed out and criticized.⁶⁷

The last part of this article aims at showing the complexity and the dynamism of the norms and culture, and providing some different interpretations of Japan’s security policy, divorced from the causal framework of analysis.

4. Beyond the Pacifism/Militarism Dichotomy

4.1 *The General Interpretation of Postwar Pacifism*

It is far beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed analysis of Japan’s postwar political culture and norms. However, by examining separately the societal environment and the policy, this section hopes to expose the simplifications of the dichotomous approach used by Berger and Katzenstein. This section will illustrate that if we depart from the pacifist/militarist dichotomy in analyzing the society and the foreign policy, Japan’s “postwar” can be seen in a completely different light.

There is little doubt that the general perception among the Japanese public that Japan is a “peaceful nation” has become part of the postwar mainstream discourse and discussed by numerous Japanese intellectuals from various perspectives.⁶⁸ However, the actual meaning of this pacifism is highly debatable. In general, the whole attempt to find a consistent normative/cultural structure in the context of pacifism for postwar Japan is problematic. Numerous authors have emphasized the different stages in Japan’s postwar era (*sengo*), with different ideologies and different master paradigms that have dominated the intellectual debates and the general public.⁶⁹

First, I propose to examine the meaning of the Peace Constitution. Katzenstein and

Berger ascribe an important role to the Peace Constitution in the institutionalization of the pacifist norm and the emergence of the anti-militarist culture respectively. A “dovish public climate” is seen as being “reinforced by the legal provisions”⁷⁰⁾ and the antimilitary and pacifist clauses in the constitution have acted as important constraints on Japanese military policy.⁷¹⁾

Obviously, in the immediate postwar years, the understanding that “peace” is to be the common basis for the new Japanese state has been shared by all the groups in the society, including even the nationalistic right-wing groups.⁷²⁾ This seems to be common sense as opposition to peace would mean the advancement of jingoism or militarism, and there is no modern state that had these ideas as the basis of its Constitution.⁷³⁾

Furthermore, propagating militarism would have been unthinkable in Japan as the country had been defeated militarily and economically. Interestingly, the economic factor (and not the pacifist mood or the constitution) was perceived as the main reason for the general public reluctance to rearm, as was pointed out by American Japan watchers in their analysis of Japanese public opinion in the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁷⁴⁾ Hence, it can be plausibly argued that initially Article 9 has been treated as a self-evident expression of Japan’s postwar reality. It also can be said to reflect the realities of the international society of 1945–47, one which was tired of war and hoping for long lasting international peace.⁷⁵⁾

However, the interpretation of the Peace Constitution and its meaning has varied greatly. Maruyama, the most celebrated postwar scholar of Japanese political thought and the most prominent progressive intellectual, has examined the normative meaning of the abolition of armed forces and the renouncement of war. He divides the interpretations into two groups, those that see this as a manifestation of an ideal which is separated from the real politics (dualism) and those that see the declaration as imposing certain limitations of the politics, serving as a kind of a “limiting fence” for the actual policies to be pursued by the government. However, in opposition to those static interpretations, he proposes a more “progressive” one: the Constitution serving as a broad and *dynamic* set of guidelines, a kind of a compass for the politics.⁷⁶⁾ Departing from this understanding of the new Constitution, Maruyama interprets the passages in the preface of the Constitution that refer to the Japanese people trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world and the desire of “Japanese people to occupy an honored place in the community of the peace loving peoples.” He perceives this not as an expression of desire to rely on other nations but actually as extending a positive obligation on the government to engage in actions necessary to achieve a peaceful resolution of international conflicts.⁷⁷⁾ In other words, Maruyama perceives the Peace Constitution as progressive and internationalist, committing Japan to active participation in the process of peaceful change of the international society.⁷⁸⁾

Few would argue that Japan has fulfilled this mission of active promotion of international peace or that this interpretation of the constitution has found support among the Japanese people. One of the leaders of the peace movement, Kuno Osamu, wrote in 1953 that unfortunately both the pacifist idea and the realistic idealism are yet to be embraced by the political power and so far have remained on

the “civilian” level.⁷⁹⁾ However, even on the societal level, the notion of pacifism has evolved from being a negative concept in pre-1945 Japan to a positive symbol, but *failed* to become part of the (national) consciousness.⁸⁰⁾

Hence, the “popular pacifism” or “defending the constitution” movement of the 1950s and 1960s can be interpreted more as an expression of Japan’s nationalism than as an expression of popular belief in international peace. The “people” did not want war, but the main consideration was to avoid war on Japan’s land. The greatest fear of the Japanese was the reoccurrence of the attacks on the Japanese homeland which were still vividly remembered by the majority of the population.⁸¹⁾ These memories were also part of the sentiment behind the mass anti-U.S.–Japan alliance demonstrations in 1960. As one of the participants recalls, the “defending the Peace Constitution” cause was mainly justified by the slogan “Never again war on *our* land!”⁸²⁾

As is visible from public opinion polls conducted in the early 1950s, the majority of the Japanese did not oppose recreation of the military *per se*, but opposed it in the context of the military becoming part of the American forces. The same reason was behind the opposition to overseas deployment of the newly created Self Defense Forces, namely it was not much of a pacifist belief but more an expression of nationalism, a lack of desire to get involved in a war, conducted by the former enemy.⁸³⁾

Interestingly, Eiji Oguma traces certain parallels between the various anti-colonial movements and the Japanese “defending the constitution” movement (*goken undō*). The situation which “small and weak” Japan found itself in the early 1950s in the context of her relations with the United States has resembled the colonial setting, and hence the opposition to constitutional revision was more an expression of nationalism directed towards both the United States and the Soviet Union than an expression of pacifism.⁸⁴⁾

The mass anti-U.S.–Japan Alliance movement (*AMPO*) of 1960 had been an expression of anger towards the “undemocratic” way Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke concluded the treaty and was dominated by the slogans of “patriotism” and “nation.” As such, it was also much more an expression of anti-American nationalism than pacifism. Emerging from the war memories of the intellectuals, Kishi, the pardoned war criminal, symbolized all the bad of the imperial past, and their anger was very much a product of their own guilty consciousness regarding their passive stance during the years of militarism. On the other side, the “citizens” that participated in the demonstrations were not interested in the ideological rivalries of the Marxist, Trotskyist, and other student groups, but were instead motivated by the feeling of struggle against corrupt politicians.⁸⁵⁾

While it can be argued that initially there was a certain synergy between the progressive intellectuals and the masses, since the failure to prevent the renewal of the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty in 1960, the progressive intellectuals became further and further alienated from the general public.⁸⁶⁾ While the intellectuals continued their critique of the alliance with the United States, a general “optimism regarding the further continuity of peace in Japan” and growing lack of interest in foreign affairs spread among the Japanese public. However it can be explained by a simplistic (or,

overly optimistic) view of the state of international affairs and Japan's place in it. This view is not based on pacifism but founded on the self-centered belief that Japan is unlikely to get involved in a conventional war, that at least in the near future nuclear war will not occur, and that the international economic activities of Japan are peaceful and cannot present a threat to peace.⁸⁷⁾

4.2 Public Opinion Polls

The public opinion polls cited by both Katzenstein and Berger as a proof of a widely spread pacifism, reveal a rather different picture if examined detached from the comparison with the imaginary jingoistic "spirit of Bushido" and beyond the related pacifist/militarist dichotomy.

Asahi Shinbunsha publishing house has continuously conducted public opinion polls regarding the general population's views on the constitution and military and defense policy. In the overall summary of the Japanese public attitudes during the "postwar" years, written in the last days of the Cold War, the general trend of the Japanese attitudes is seen as not favoring Japan becoming a military superpower but as having consistently agreed to the need of a military. The public has also affirmed that over the years, since its creation, the SDF has played an important role in protecting Japan's peace. Only 15% in 1970 and 21% in 1988 of those polled stated that there was no need to rely on military power and there is no need for either the SDF or the American military to protect Japan.⁸⁸⁾

The public opinion polls conducted annually by the Prime Minister's Office confirm these findings as they reveal a gradually increasing favorable impression regarding the SDF among the public during the Cold War years (66% in 1967 and 74.3% in 1984) and the need to maintain or increase the present level of defense capability (44.4% and 22% respectively in 1969 and 61.4% and 12.6% in 1984) and only a minority supporting a reduction in defense capabilities (10.8% in 1969 and 11.8% in 1984)⁸⁹⁾ (Prime Minister's Office [*Naikakufu*] homepage <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/> accessed on October 10 and October 15, 2004).

"Unarmed neutrality," which has been one of the main slogans of the intellectuals of the left, found little support among the general public in the years after the 1960 protests. In a poll conducted in 1967, only 17% supported unarmed neutrality as the optimal way to guarantee Japan's security.⁹⁰⁾ In a similar poll conducted in 1975, fifteen years after the mass protests against the U.S.-Japan security alliance, only 9% showed support for the abolition of the U.S.-Japan Security treaty and the abolition or reduction of SDF forces. In 1984, the numbers of supporters of the abolition of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and the reduction or abolition of the SDF further decreased to 6.8%. Furthermore, 57% answered that, while diplomacy should be the most important way to prevent acts of aggression against Japan, a necessary minimum of defense capabilities should be maintained. Also, 44% in 1976 and 60% in 1981 replied positively when asked whether there was a possibility of Japan being involved in some kind of military conflict. In 1981, out of the 34% that negated this possibility, only 29% stated the reason to be the war abolition norm under the present constitution, while 28% stated the United Nations efforts to achieve international peace, reflecting the "naïve optimism" criticized by Nakamura.⁹¹⁾

Regarding the “fighting spirit” of the Japanese, the large majority has always shown a willingness to defend their country. True, to the direct question regarding a will to protect the country, the percentage of polled that have expressed a strong or quite strong willingness has been relatively low (around 50%), followed by “I cannot say” or “I do not know” (around 40%). However, it must be noted that those polled were asked to express the strength of their will as “compared to others.” Treading dangerously on the line of Orientalism myself, I would attribute the low level of expressions of strong willingness to defend Japan and a high percentage of “do not know” to the Japanese modesty and humility when asked to compare themselves with others. Furthermore, it must be also remembered that the numbers of those that have explicitly expressed a weak willingness to defend their country has consistently been very low (around 7%).

The author believes that the figures below that show the patterns of response to the question regarding their action in case of invasion confirms the above speculation and also the existence of patriotism and a readiness to defend their homeland among the Japanese population. In 1969, only 6.5% replied that they would not resist invasion, 12.5% said they will resist in a non-violent way, 42% said they would support a violent resistance, and 36.9% said that they do not know.⁹²⁾ In 1982, when asked the same question, 43% replied that they would either participate or support violent resistance, 16% replied that they would resist in a non-violent way, and only 12% replied that they would not engage in any act of resistance.⁹³⁾

Furthermore, after the end of the Cold War, the numbers of “realists” and “patriots” have continued to climb. In 1991, 62.4% replied that Japan’s security should be achieved through the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and the SDF, 7.3% have shown support for self-reliance thorough the abolishment of the Security Treaty and the enhancement of the SDF, and only 10% have shown support to the “unarmed neutrality” to be achieved through abolishment of the Security Treaty and either reduction of the SDF capabilities or its complete abolishment.⁹⁴⁾

In 2003, after the beginning of the War on Terror and Japan’s participation in it, responding to a question regarding their actions in case of invasion by a foreign force, 48.9% said they would support the SDF in one way or another, 18.3% said they would resist in a non-violent way, and only 7.7% (from the highest of 12.4% in 1981) replied that they would not resist in any way. At the same time, an equal number of respondents replied that they would fight the invaders by joining the SDF or engaging in guerilla resistance.⁹⁵⁾

Furthermore the collective memory of the Pacific War, which is generally perceived as the central driving force in the opposition to Japan’s remilitarization, has undergone an important transformation with the change of generations. In an opinion poll regarding Japanese perceptions of the pre-1945 history, almost half of those polled (44.8%) replied that Japan’s military interventions were unavoidable acts of survival and the largest number (36.9%) of the polled replied that the people were the victims of militarist propaganda and hence bear no responsibility.⁹⁶⁾

Possibly it can be argued that, reflecting the non-existence of an actual or perceived threat to national security and lack of patriotic education, the Japanese “fighting spirit” has been lower and the perceptions of international affairs much more optimistic than

those of Americans or Europeans. However, the results of the above analysis reveal a population neither pacifist or militarist, but one that firmly supports its military and the military alliance with the United States, with a large majority willing to actively contribute to the protection of the country in one way or another in case of invasion. It seems that we can confidently conclude that this population can hardly be called pacifist or even anti-militarist in the sense of opposing the legitimacy of the military or military solutions or believing in Gandhi-like non-violent resistance.

In light of these findings, the popular reluctance to actively participate in the first Gulf War, which is used by Berger as evidence of Japanese pacifism, can be more correctly interpreted not as pacifism but as a manifestation of a lack of interest in affairs which are not perceived as directly related to Japan. As Oguma has noted, Japan has been suffering from isolationism, meaning “rejection of any troublesome event outside Japan in an attempt to maintain domestic peace and stability.”⁹⁷⁾

4.3 Views of Japan's Security Policy

As already mentioned, during the Cold War years Japan did not face an actual or perceived danger that would demand a resort to military means. During the two main wars (Korea and Vietnam) that have taken place in Asia during those years, Japan's establishment has been preoccupied with achieving more immediate national interests and perceived the wars more as opportunity than as threats.

During the Korean War, from which Japanese economy benefited greatly, the perception of immediate danger to Japan's security did not exist among the Japanese elite⁹⁸⁾ and Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru's policy had generally been oriented towards regaining independence from the American-led occupation.⁹⁹⁾ Furthermore, it seems that the general public also did not feel threatened even when the North Korean army was rapidly advancing southward and, in general, did not show much interest in the war.¹⁰⁰⁾

The same lack of threat perception continued to prevail across political factions and social classes after the San Francisco Peace treaty was signed and Japan again became an independent nation. In an opinion poll conducted among business leaders, high government officials, labor union leaders, and scholars in May 1954, just over a year after the truce in the Korean peninsula, only 3% of the respondents indicated a fear of communism or communist aggression.¹⁰¹⁾ At the time, the reluctance to re-arm in response to American demands during the Korean War was rooted not in the fear of war but in the need to focus on economic recovery, Prime Minister Yoshida's personal suspicion of the military, the harsh economic situation, and the alarmist view of Japan's rearmament by Australia and other neighboring countries.¹⁰²⁾

The Vietnam War, the other major war in Asia, was perceived by a large number of the population as a war of American aggression but not directly related to Japan. The anti-American feelings among the Japanese public were on the rise, and the government, trying to facilitate the return of Okinawa, was preoccupied with maintaining the stability in the relationship with the United States.¹⁰³⁾

As for the Soviet threat, the Japanese have never felt it to be as menacing as in Western Europe. A surprise attack by the Soviet Union on Japan was never a conceivable possibility for the Japanese policy establishment.¹⁰⁴⁾

Needless to say, Japan's general postwar policy has rarely been perceived as pacifist by the Asian nations, especially China and South Korea. As already mentioned above, the issue of Japan's frictions with these two nations is complex and should not be treated as a simple reflection of Japan's policies. However, the fact that Japan has never managed to project the pacifist nation image into the regional debates and her intentions continue to be viewed with suspicion should not be forgotten. In other words, the argument regarding Japan as a peaceful nation contrastingly different from Imperial Japan has certain validity in the domestic and Western discourse, but has been continuously rejected in the regional discourse on Japan.

Furthermore, Japan's policy has rarely been perceived as pacifist by the domestic intellectuals, who have continuously criticized the government for not living up to the standards set by the Peace Constitution. Ishida Takeshi, one of the main ideologues of pacifism in postwar Japan, reviewed the place of Japan in the postwar international system, and observed that in spite of the fact that Japan has not been directly involved in any military conflict since the end of the Pacific War, it has become an important contributor to the "structural violence" through its economic activities overseas and indirect support of militarization of numerous Asian states.¹⁰⁵⁾ He warned that the concepts "peace" and national security have become identical, both on the policy level and as part of the broad public *Weltanschauung*.¹⁰⁶⁾

Writing during the final stages of the Cold War, Sakamoto Yoshikazu, of Tokyo University and one of the leading public intellectuals of that time, stated that in light of the recent developments such as new emergency legislation, the controversial official visits to Yasukuni Shrine, *kigensetsu* (Anniversary of the Empire Foundation), and textbooks related problems, as well as the increase in defense expenditures, it seemed that the Japanese government had embarked on the road of militarization. Hence, he classified Japan as a medium military power.¹⁰⁷⁾

In the same book edited by Sakamoto, the Japanese people are warned that today "even the small territory of Japan is densely covered with modern weapons" and that the process of "snatching away the peace from Japanese society and bringing militarization to Japanese society" is rapidly advancing.¹⁰⁸⁾ The authors see the process of militarization as being fueled by the rise of "military technocrats," the weakening of the democratic idea in Japan that is reflected in domestic and international policies and the friendly, and, from an economic perspective, mutually beneficial relations that Japan has established with military dictatorships in numerous developing countries.¹⁰⁹⁾

It also has been pointed out that the Japanese military might have become a few times larger than that of the Imperial Japanese Army, and that starting from 1970s Japanese defense budget (as of 1980s) has become the sixth largest in the world, larger than the budgets of the four Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, and Austria combined.¹¹⁰⁾

These perceptions of Japan's security policy were not limited to domestic intellectuals; they have been shared by numerous foreign Japan experts. Like Sakamoto, Glenn Hook also views the changes that occurred in Japan during the 1970s and 1980s as of major importance and sees it also as the process of the militarization of Japan.¹¹¹⁾ Hook notes that Article 9 of the Constitution, which is supposed to be the basic document of the anti-militaristic norm, has been subject to

various interpretations, ranging from the admission of wars of self-defense to the comprehensive prohibition of all kind of wars, including wars of self-defense. He asserts, quoting the head of the United States Defense Information Center in support of his claim, that already by 1984 Japan was well on the way to becoming a military power and in 1985, after the appreciation of the yen resulting from the Plaza Accord, its military budget became the third largest in the world based on dollar calculations.¹¹²⁾

In spite of no experience in actual warfare, the SDF has come to be considered as one of the most potent armies in the region. As Ian Gow has noted, the SDF is the “most technologically sophisticated non-nuclear force in the Asia-Pacific.”¹¹³⁾ As of 2001, only China surpassed Japan’s military budget and both of the countries’ budgets combined account for more than 60% of East Asia and Australasia’s defense expenditures (The Military Balance, October 2002). In short, the perception of Japan as a pacifist state has not been shared by the progressive domestic intellectuals and even by some Western Japan specialists.

Even the so-called “nuclear allergy,” or the three anti-nuclear principles that were established in 1967 by the Satō cabinet, that is, the political decision not to possess, produce, or introduce nuclear weapons, which, along with the Constitution, can be seen as the second pillar of Japan’s pacifism, were far from being as solid as claimed by Katzenstein.¹¹⁴⁾ The evidence that in spite of the anti-nuclear stance Japan’s actual policy has been much more pragmatic than advertised officially has been plentiful. In 2004, Ohta Masakatsu, a Kyodo news agency reporter in the United States, provided a detailed account based mainly on American documents, of Japan’s nuclear policy since the end of the Pacific War. In general, it argues that Japan has continuously maintained the possibility of developing an independent nuclear arsenal and on various occasions has secretly agreed to American nuclear weapons being brought to Japan. The purely rhetorical nature on the “three no’s” is obvious from the fact that one of the governmental studies into the possibility of developing nuclear weapons was conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1968, less than one year after its declaration by Prime Minister Sato Eisaku.¹¹⁵⁾ The *Asahi Shinbun* has also revealed that in 1970 Nakasone Yasuhiro, at that time Director-General of the Defense Agency, agreed to American nuclear weapons being brought into Japan at a meeting with United States government officials.¹¹⁶⁾ In 2002, Wakaizumi Kei, who served as Prime Minister Satō’s secret envoy to negotiations on the return of Okinawa, mentioned a secret memorandum in which Japan agreed to the American deployment of nuclear weapons on Okinawa in the case of an emergency. Furthermore, there is also plenty of evidence that Japan has considered the possibility of building nuclear armaments on at least three occasions and that the option was rejected on purely strategic grounds.¹¹⁷⁾

4.4 Post-Cold War Developments

How should we interpret the recent developments in Japan’s domestic and international stance? An analysis of the developments conducted within the “pacifist/militarist” dichotomy would conclude, like Tamamoto Masaru,¹¹⁸⁾ that Japan’s participation in the War on Terror in Afghanistan and in the Second Gulf War, the

swift adoption of various national security-related legislation,¹¹⁹⁾ and the growth of constitutional revision momentum should be interpreted as a revolutionary change in the normative structure and in the foreign policy strategy. It concludes that Japan is losing its identity of a “civilian power”¹²⁰⁾ and transforming into a “militaristic” nation.

However, a less categorical look at the public opinion trends reveals that there has not been any change in public opinion regarding militarism or forceful solutions of international conflicts. Since 1993, constitutional revision has been gradually gaining support among the broad population. The overwhelming majority of the supporters of the revision (around 50%) have stated the need for Japan to engage actively in contributing to international society as the main reason.¹²¹⁾ The public has also shown support of the SDF dispatch to Iraq as part of the humanitarian effort (49% and 55% in January 2004; TV Asahi poll, February 21, 2004). In the most recent poll conducted by the Prime Minister’s Office in 2005, the majority of the polled (49.3%) voted for an active participation in humanitarian aid and peaceful resolution of regional conflicts as the most important international role for Japan.¹²²⁾

However, the debates regarding the revision of the constitution and overseas dispatch of the SDF are conducted within the framework of international peace building and peace keeping and do not indicate in anyway “Americanization” or Japan’s involvement in overseas conflicts. After all, the same public has shown a strong opposition to the war in Iraq war per se (79% against; TV Asahi poll, February 22, 2003) and only 14% has expressed support of the American invasion.¹²³⁾ Furthermore, the support for the SDF presence in Iraq has decreased sharply, following the revelations regarding the non-existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the growing Iraqi resistance to the occupation (for example, NHK polls regarding the Iraq War conducted in 2003, NHK homepage.) There is little evidence that the “active participation in peaceful resolutions” means becoming an active partner in American wars for the Japanese.

It seems that there is a stronger will among the public for Japan’s more active participation in international affairs, including United Nations peace keeping and humanitarian missions. This is paralleled by the rise of patriotic feelings and the decrease in guilt regarding the misdeeds of Imperial Japan. However, this should not be viewed as an abandonment of pacifism in favor of militarism, but as a complex and dynamic social change.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this brief analysis is not to argue that, contrary to Katzenstein and Berger’s propositions, Japan has never ceased being a militaristic nation, as claimed by some alarmists.¹²⁴⁾ Obviously, the structure of Japanese politics, the role of the military, the definitions of national interest, and the social and legal normative contexts of postwar Japan are fundamentally different from those of pre-1945 Japan. It is beyond doubt that the war experience, the constitution, and the popular mood have established certain parameters¹²⁵⁾ within which political leadership has operated.

However, this article argues that the perception of Japan (her social structures and foreign policy) in terms of either pacifist or militarist is simplistic and essentialist. The adoption of the “Peace Constitution” and the rhetoric about “peaceful Japan,” as well

as the fact that Japan has not engaged in military operations overseas since the end of the Pacific War¹²⁶⁾ till the beginning of the War on Terror do not necessarily mean societal and political pacifism. Detached from the “pacifist/militarist” dichotomy, different periods of postwar Japan’s policy and public opinion can be interpreted in a number of ways, such as political realism, isolationism, and even nationalism.

The main conclusion is that the focus on broad and consistent general norms and culture as positivist factors determining foreign policy results in a simplified and essentialized analysis of both. In order to provide a more nuanced analysis of national identity and its relationship with foreign policy, the author argues that it is important to focus on particular identity discourses and to abandon the positivist approach.

Notes

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- 11) Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, 193.
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- 14) Berger, *ibid.*, 18.
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- 18) Katzenstein, *ibid.*, 27.
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- 23) Wendt, *ibid.*, 177.
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- 25) Berger, *ibid.*
- 26) Berger, *ibid.*, 199.

- 27) Berger, *ibid.*, 194.
- 28) Berger, *ibid.*, 193.
- 29) Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security*, 20.
- 30) Katzenstein, *ibid.*, 39.
- 31) Katzenstein, *ibid.*, 18.
- 32) Katzenstein and Okawara, *Japan's National Security*, 129.
- 33) Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security*, 19.
- 34) Katzenstein, *ibid.*, 116.
- 35) Katzenstein, *ibid.*, 118.
- 36) Katzenstein and Okawara, *Japan's National Security*, 129.
- 37) John W. Dower, "Nihon o hakaru: Eigoken ni okeru Nihon kenkyū no rekishi jojutsu," *Shisō*, No. 855, (1995), 65–95, and No. 856, (1995), 67–89. Citations are from the original unpublished English version.
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- 39) Clammer, *ibid.*, 27.
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- 57) Berger, *ibid.*, 148.
- 58) Berger, *ibid.*, 167.
- 59) Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 122.
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- 72) Wada, “Sengo Nihon heiwashugi no genten,” 5–26; Umemori, “Hensō suru tōchi.”
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- 111) Glenn D. Hook, *Militarization and Demilitarization in Contemporary Japan*, (London: Routledge, 1996).
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- 113) Ian Gow, “Civilian Control of the Military in Postwar Japan,” Ron Matthews and Matsumura Keisuke eds., *Japan’s Military Renaissance?* (London: Macmillan Press, 1993), 57–58.
- 114) Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security*, 128.
- 115) Ota Masakatsu, *Meiyaku no yami* [The Shade of the Pledge], (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 2004), 303.
- 116) *Asahi Shinbun*, December 20, 2000.
- 117) *Asahi Shinbun*, June 19, 2004.
- 118) Agawa Naoyuki, Nishi Toshio, and Tamamoto Masaru, “The People vs. Koizumi? Japan–US Relations and Japan’s Struggle for National Identity,” Washington, D.C., Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Asia Program Special Report, February 2004.
- 119) This was done in spite of the strong resistance from the opposition, by this dealing a blow to the myth of “consultative norms” that is emphasized by Katzenstein.
- 120) Hanns W. Maull, “Germany and Japan: The New Civilian Powers,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 69, No. 5, (Winter 1990/1991), 106.
- 121) Yomiuri Public Opinion Polls, 2002, 53.
- 122) Prime Minister’s Office website, *ibid.*
- 123) TV Asahi polls at www.tv-asahi.co.jp. Accessed on November 12, 2004.
- 124) For example, Jon Halliday and Gavan McCormack, *Japanese Imperialism Today: Co-prosperity in Greater East Asia*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).
- 125) Kenneth B. Pyle, *The Japanese Question: Power and Purpose in a New Era*, (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1992), 20; Maruyama, “Kenpō dai 9 jō o meguru jikkō no kōsatsu.”
- 126) Actually, this is not completely correct as Japan sent mine sweeping vessels during the Korean War, and even suffered one casualty. Also, quite a large number of Japanese employed by the American forces during the war died as a result of various accidents.