

The First and Second Abe Administrations' Foreign Policy from a Role Theory Perspective

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Abstract This paper provides an outline in relation to the foreign policy of the first and second Abe's administrations, mainly in the areas of security, economic/trade policy and Japanese history, and it extracts Japan's roles by using role theory. It is argued that Prime Minister Abe's foreign policy indicates a substantial role shift from Japan's previously reluctant approaches in international security toward Tokyo's self-perception of being pivotal in Asia. Prime Minister Abe's objective is to make Japan more assertive in political affairs by putting more emphasis on the defense of democratic values, i.e. respect for rule of law, human rights and pacific resolution of conflicts. More than ever before, this can be achieved through the active cooperation with other like-minded nations, including in the field of security but also in expressing more explicitly the voice of Japan in political affairs.

So far, it seems that Abe has been successful in doing that by reinterpreting Article 9 and legislating new security-related laws. In the sphere of economics, Abe tries to have Japan take a leading position by responding to China's challenge in the Northern and Southeast Asian region. With respect to Japan's history, Abe wants to liberate Japan from the historic shackles of the postwar period, although he is cautious with regard to historical issues. Aware of the danger of rekindling old feuds with countries such as China and South Korea, he makes statements and adopts a behavior that allows him to evade being regarded as a historical revisionist.

Role theory indicates that Abe is not changing Japan's fundamental roles. Rather, the Prime Minister modifies the realm of the roles and the way to pursue them. There are four meta-roles: Japan as a reliable security partner; Japan as a country that puts emphasis on multilateralism; Japan as a pacifist country based on non-militarism, and Japan as a world/regional leader. It should be possible to observe the changes in them. The core roles are unlikely to change but the meaning of what the components imply in Japan's foreign policy are at stake. In conclusion this paper focuses on: Japan security shift; Prime Minister Abe second term; Japan foreign policy and new role in Eastern Asia and the World; Historic shackles of the postwar period over; even so Japan is a pacifist country based on non-militarism

Keywords Role theory, Abe Administration, Security, Values, Economy History, Relations with EU and US

JEL Classification F51, F52, F53, F680, P51, P57

Introduction

Japan, through its foreign policy, has a high economic and political influence in East and Southeast Asia (SEA), on par with China and the United States (the US). Moreover, as the largest liberal democratic country in the region, Japan's influence extends further through relationships with European, Indian and Australasian allies. The objective of this paper is to explore the evolution of Japanese foreign policy during the first and second periods of Abe's administration (2006-2007 and 2012-2016). It mainly focuses on security with subtopics covering the country's economy and history. However, the economic undertone of Abe's foreign policy and his objective of revitalizing Japan's economic strength appear clearly in his eagerness to deepen relations with the US. He hopes that Japanese firms in the US market can benefit from the goodwill created by a proactive Japan in defense-related activities. The willingness to have the US engage more in Asia through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) project but also through common action with some SEA countries in order not to let China take control of key transportation lanes in SEA also has crucial economic dimensions besides geopolitical concerns. The same can be argued in the case of Abe's proactive policy toward India that has already concretized in large transportation and energy-related projects.

Role theory originates from the studies of Holsti (1970) who was the first to apply socio-psychological and sociological theories about the role(s) of individuals in society to states' behavior. His idea is that it is possible to know how cognitive and ideational factors can change state policy preferences. It can be done through the analysis of foreign policy statements by heads of state, high level officials, and government documents. What he coined national role conception (NRC) forms the perspective of external environment and options for decision-makers to choose. Language and action signal expectations (including prescriptions) of the other actors and the NRC can be expected to cover them (Holsti 1970: 245-246). The Abe administration's foreign policy is analyzed in this paper from this viewpoint. It focuses on what role theory terms the ego-part, i.e. the domestic roles a leader is supposed to represent in foreign policy, and the alter-parts, i.e. the roles vis-à-vis Japan of other countries. In this paper, the alter-parts are the countries with whom Japan has important relationships: the US, China and some SEA countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam.

This paper consists of two sections. The first section presents the explanation of role theory's key concepts in analyzing Japan's security policy. The second applies role theory in analyzing the characteristics of the NRC the Abe administration intends to present to the alter-parts in his foreign policy, including some aspects of economic policy, the presentation of historical issue viewpoints, and what kind of issues and possible changes may emerge from his initiatives due to the reaction of alter-parts.

After analyzing the Abe administration's foreign policy empirically using role theory methodology for the examination of Japan's key postwar four meta-roles, this paper concludes that Abe's security policy is more proactive than that of his predecessors. This is shown by the new laws he has made and by the security and defense-related institutions that he has created. Therefore, it can be argued that his initiatives have transformed the content of Japan's pacifism, although it does not shake the fundamental tenets of the nation's traditional stance on such a belief. With respect of economic/trade policy, Abe wants to be a rule-maker with the US in East and SEA through the TPP. He puts emphasis on sharing the same values on issues related to security, rule of law and human rights but the TPP also includes the enhancement of market principles. As for history, he has displayed great caution so far through the continuity of his predecessors' policies. He refrains from expressing historical revisionist views in order not to rekindle trouble with China and South Korea.

1. Role theory concepts

National Role Conception (NRC)

Role theory has been applied in the case of many countries, for example the US (Maull 2011), China (Harnisch et al 2016), Germany (Sakaki 2011), India (Hansel and Möller (2015), and Latin American countries (Thies 2014). Research has also been done regarding Japan using role theory: Elgstrom (1988); Macleod (1997); Sakaki (2011) and Hirata (2016). So far, role theory has not been used to analyze the Abe administration. Therefore, this study is the first one to do so, and in that sense, it makes a contribution to the field of role theory.

The study covers the topic comprehensively, including an analysis of both ego-part and alter-part. Japan is in a transitory period during which a new generation of Japanese politicians seems to want Japan to play a more assertive political role in the world than the passive position deemed necessary by their predecessors. Abe emphasizes values in politics explicitly and his initiatives, especially those linked to security, are considered to challenge traditional interpretations of the NRC related to pacifism. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine whether they either transform the existing roles or whether they may even open the possibility of Japan developing different ones that would be deemed more appropriate. To do so, role theory's concepts can be considered appropriate to examine the dynamics of Abe's value-oriented foreign policy and the complex interaction that it may have with alter-parts.

The objective of role theory is to describe and analyze a variety of roles which are defined as a set of norms that describe a state's objectives, interests, obligations and responsibilities. They can be understood to be social positions (as well as socially recognized categories of actors) constituted by expectations, prescriptions and proscriptions about proper behavior in a social position in an organized group (Thies 2010). For Holsti (1970: 306-307) a NRC includes the policy-makers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable for their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. In this paper, Japan's foreign policy is analyzed on the assumption that defining roles subjected to norms and having those roles accepted by other countries are the objective of the state (Le Prestre 1997).

Ego-part and alter-part conceptions

This paper assumes that both ego-part conceptions, i.e. consisting of the rights and obligations a country's leaders perceive on behalf of their nation— taking into account role contestation - and alter-part conceptions, i.e. behavioral expectations and prescriptions held by other countries or by international organizations have an impact on state behavior. They impose duties on actors and have an effect on what should be done or not (Le Prestre 1997). Both ego-part and alter-part conceptions are important because roles involve implicit or explicit counter-role in the intersubjective process of interaction. Interdependency, constant reconstruction and recreation are inherent in the nature of foreign policy roles. Policymakers often internalize alter-part behavioral expectations or role prescriptions through socialization at the bilateral and multilateral level through other countries' language and action (Holsti 1970; Aggestam 2004; Barnett 1993; Sakaki 2011).

Meta-role and Context-specific role

Role theory separates roles into meta-roles and context-specific roles. A meta-role is a role that is based on an actor's material or immaterial power resources that induce expectations of

consistent generic role behavior across issues and/or over time. As Le Prestre (1997) points out, a role reflects a claim on the international system, i.e. it is constitutive of international actors' recognition, and of a conception of national identity. Foreign policy changes rest on a redefinition of a meta-role and/or context specific role and on its congruence with political initiatives. Roles are generally stable as they reflect on widely expected behavior that socialization constantly reinforces. This creates over time what Maull (2011) described as a 'structural environment of roles'. In the case of Japan, it means that in the postwar period, including under Abe's leadership, meta-roles developed (and became deeply engrained in the socio-political environment) that emphasize that Japan acts to maintain peace in adherence with the spirit of the Japanese Constitution, i.e. that it will not become a militaristic nation again; that it will work toward the eradication of nuclear weapons, and neither will nor does not challenge the historical conception of the countries involved in the war. These meta-roles are linked to a number of context-specific roles, i.e. roles that are related to mutual behavioral expectations specific to a certain policy area, country, or geographic region (Harnisch 2011). For instance, Japan always adopted a behavior in the postwar period that aimed to keep a stable relationship with the US and to share values with the US in a follower role in world affairs. In economic terms, it meant that Japan always refrained from adopting protectionist policies that could impede the penetration of Japan's market. In return, Japan's expectation was that the US would keep its commitment of protection in matters of security. In the case of the other alter-parts, the traditional expected role is that Japan will never attempt to change unilaterally the postwar political status quo in East and SEA. Likewise, Japan will keep its promise to China to separate business from politics and to focus on mutually profitable business relations and to help China's economic development. This means that Japan will do its best to avoid escalation of the territorial conflict on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and will not interfere in the South China Sea affairs.

The extent to which meta-roles and context-specific roles coincide with the alter-parts' demands and expectations is important because discrepancy is a source of inconsistency and subsequent conflict if the respective expectations are not matched. Even if Japan considers its role conception correct and responsive to the alter-part's role demand, the conception may not be mirrored by others' role expectations. In the postwar period, it can be said that little role inconsistency appeared internally or in the relationship with the key alter-parts but the extent of Abe's initiatives is such that it may be worthwhile to examine whether changes will occur as a result.

2. Application of role theory to Abe's Administration

The first Abe administration (September 2006 to August 2007) and value-oriented diplomacy

The US devoted itself to promoting global democracy at the end of the Cold War. To serve this purpose, it promoted the so-called 'democratic peace' idea. The rationale of the claim was that no war is likely to erupt between democratic states. Values and ideals came to occupy a prominent position in international politics. At the beginning of the 21st century, neo-conservative proponents in the Bush administration supported again the spread of freedom and democracy (Hosoya 2011). Diplomacy changed from the pure pursuit of national interests to spreading values the country supports. Those ideas became popular in Japan's conservative camp which went with the flow. At the 2006 Japan-US summit, Prime Minister Koizumi and President Bush issued the 'Japan-U.S Alliance of the New Century' declaration that stated 'The United States and Japan stand together not only against mutual threats but also for the advancement of core universal values such as freedom, human dignity and human rights, democracy, market economy, and rule of law. These

values are deeply rooted in the long historic traditions of both countries (MOFA 2006). Liberal democracy became a key term in Japan's foreign policy which led to the promotion of 'value-oriented diplomacy' and to the 'arc of freedom and prosperity' – called 'diplomacy of a bird's eye view of the globe' in the second Abe administration. Those concepts were used as a normative justification to highlight the Abe administration's international position (Hosoya 2011).

Then foreign minister Aso (2006) defined 'value-oriented diplomacy' as foreign policy based on the principles of the declaration at the Japan-US Summit in 2006. The intention was to further anchor Japan in the democratic camp. The term the 'arc of freedom and prosperity' was used to specify the geopolitical areas that are supposed to be covered. The Democratic Party of Japan administrations (2009-2012) did not promote those ideas but the importance of democracy and values in diplomacy are present again in the second Abe administration.

The Diplomatic Bluebook specifically mentions that 'Japan will strengthen cooperative relations with countries with which it shares universal values and strategic interests' (NSS 2013: 23). The intention is to show, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, that Japan can be a 'torchbearer' for universal values and an Asian 'thought leader'. After the lull of the Second World War period, it is presented as a normal evolution for a country with a long history of democracy, respect for human rights and for the rule of law (Taniguchi 2010: 3). Promoting those concepts was an opportunity to play the roles of a reliable democratic security partner and for a world/regional leader engaged in strengthening ties with the US and with other democracies. It indicated that Japan should play a role not only for itself, but also for the region. In his book, *Towards a Beautiful Country*, Abe (2006) writes about closer relationships with Australia, India and the US. He suggests a regular meeting to discuss how to expand universal values to other countries in their region. Through such diplomatic activities he expects Japan's roles to gain importance in world affairs. Furthermore, Abe (2012) also launched the idea of the 'Democratic Security Diamond' that is indirectly related to his China policy. The objective is to compose a diamond consisting of Japan, Australia, India, and the US (Hawaii) to address the territorial disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. As Abe argues, Japan is an important maritime power and an advanced democracy, different from China in this respect. It justifies the idea that Japan must connect values and foreign policy, and favor relationships with partners sharing them.

The Second Abe administration (26 December 2012 to 31 December 2016) and proactive pacifism

During the first administration, Abe committed himself to changing NRC fundamentally with the slogan of 'escaping postwar Japan', in the sense of moving beyond the mercantilist and passively pacifist Yoshida doctrine (Singh 2016: 595). To adopt a more proactive behavior inside the Japan-US alliance was the key point on Abe's agenda (Abe 2006). In this line, Japan has pursued its self-defense stance in the first and second Abe administrations, through constant upgrading of the Self Defense Forces' (SDF) technical capacity and increased interoperability with US forces in the first and second Abe administrations. The proposals of Abe went farther to the point that critics say that they aimed at redefining Japan's concept of self-defense to a degree that goes toward reinforcing Japan's military 'normalization' (Weston 2013: 172). During that period, the Defense Agency became a ministry, Japan concluded its first security agreement outside the US-Japan Security Treaty with Australia, and strong support was given to NATO activities in Afghanistan (Yasutomo 2014).

During his second administration, Abe stopped advocating escape from the postwar period and named his assertive foreign policy 'proactive pacifism.' This can be interpreted as the willingness to have Japan move away from a passive to an active defense policy (Shi 2016). Role theory

tells that actors are able to redefine their role conceptions in all circumstances (Holsti 1970). As a result of the complex socialization process it is possible that Abe's initiatives will eventually lead to the emergence of new roles. This could mean the shift away from and disappearance of some traditional roles to the emergence of a different role-set. Although significant changes have not been observed yet, an analysis of the current moves seems to indicate that Abe is willing to alter the behavior and identity of Japan away from the passive international security approach that limited involvement in world affairs. This process of the socialization of diplomacy can have an impact on actual cooperation and conflict among states. Drifting away from a role-set that fundamentally satisfied all alter-parts, Abe's initiatives are bound not only to create role inconsistency and even conflicts with some of them but they could also be perceived differently by each of them. The US and the other democracies could welcome Abe's proactive pacifism as a proof of his reliability as an ally. However, China and traditional pacifists in Japan could consider it unwelcome assertiveness and an expression of nationalistic sentiments (Drifte 2014) that break the postwar role proscription of non-militarism. So far, Abe has implemented some important security policies and they are described in detail in the following.

Four pillars of Abe's security policy as a reliable and faithful ally

a) The Secret Information Protection Act and the National Security Council (NSC)

With proactive pacifism, the Abe administration has developed a new security policy to ease the military constraints that are built on four pillars (Sakaki 2015: 6). In November 2013, a new law dealing with state secrecy was enacted to ensure a better control by government of security information. The law designates as state secrets 23 types of information related to counter-terrorism, defense, and diplomacy. Rejecting public concerns, the law allows for alleged information leaks to result in severe penalties to those who violate the law and impose rules that lead to the regression of Japan's postwar democracy, Abe insists that the secrecy law is a crucial precondition for the NSC to operate efficiently (Maslow 2016). The NSC is designed to function as a control institution of Japan's foreign security, integrating information among key security agencies in order to facilitate the implementation of its foreign policy and defense initiatives (Yachi 2013; Hughes 2015).

b) National Security Strategy, National Defense Program Guideline, ODA and arms transfer policy

In December 2013, the government released a new National Security Strategy (NSS) (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2013) with the aims of redefining Japan's international role, calling for the reinforcement of Japan's defense capabilities, rejecting 'status quo by coercion' imposed by China and advocating the need for US 'rebalancing' to the region (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2013: 8). The NSS refers again to an international order 'based on rules and universal values, such as freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights, and the rule of law' (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2013: 21). It outlines Abe's perception of what should be done with a group of countries that shape international rules and norms, and contributes to the stability of the global security environment (Yuki 2013).

In this line of thought, Abe replaced the 1967 'three principles' of the Sato administration (1964-1972) that virtually banned arms exports with 'three principles on transfer of defense equipment and technology' in March 2014. This portends the end of the self-imposed ban on arms exports and the participation in joint defense research to strengthen military capabilities in the long

term. It allows joint development of military equipment with countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam (Carr and Wallis 2016). In February 2015, the Abe cabinet approved a new 'Development Cooperation Charter' that replaced the 2002 Official Development Assistance Charter as a guide for Japan's aid policy for developing nations. The new Charter stipulates for the first time that ODA to foreign military forces is allowed as assistance in disaster relief, anti-terrorism and anti-piracy in the name of law enforcement issues (Asplund 2015; Sakaki 2015: 20; Hughes 2015).

Abe also revised the National Defense Program Guidelines and Mid-Term Defense Plan in 2013. Based on the 2010 "dynamic defense forces" concept, it calls for change in force structure and deployment to reinforce naval and air forces. As Japan wants to strengthen its surveillance capabilities vis-à-vis China, the plan includes among others the procurement of 52 amphibious landing vehicles and three Global Hawk surveillance drones along with a large budget increase for paramilitary coast guard (Maslow 2016).

c) Reinterpretation of Article 9

In his second administration, Abe reinterpreted Japan's constitution to allow collective self-defense in July 2014 and to open the way for an active role within the alliance with the US and other partners. In this respect, he seems to renounce the constitutional revision's stance of his first administration (The Japan Times 2 July 2014; Hirata 2016). The policymakers' own images of the appropriate orientations or functions of their country toward the external environment or inside it are included in NRC (Holsti 1970: 245-246). It is assumed that Abe desires Japan to have different role conceptions, and consequently different foreign policy preferences. Making wider use of Japan's military capability and deepening security-related relationships with value-sharing allies requires revising Article 9 or, at least, reinterpreting it (Nagy 2017). Like his predecessors Abe considers the Japan-US alliance the cornerstone of Japan's security policy. Amending Article 9 would fulfill the US long time expectation of Japan playing a larger military role (Akimoto 2013: 234-235), something that the Japanese were always reluctant to do.

Abe's stance is inherently revisionist (Fisher-Nielsen 2016). Indeed, he began his new term in 2014 by reiterating his intent to revise Article 9 and to remove the constraints that it had imposed (Carr and Wallis 2016). Assisting an ally under attack is a fundamental right of any nation, but the conventional interpretation of the pacifist constitution considers it beyond the 'minimum necessary' use of force and Japan has been unable to exercise this right so far. Since his first administration, Abe has attempted to build role location, the interactional process by which an actor locates itself and the other in the social structure, that is different from previous administrations in this respect. He feels emboldened because he perceives that support for the traditional pacifist roles, in the passive sense of the role, leading to the quasi impossibility of the SDF to be utilized efficiently and effectively, has gradually declined since the Cold War. However, he is aware that it has not declined to the point of a revision of the Constitution being easily accepted (Miyamoto and Watanabe 2014). It is difficult for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) alone to achieve the two-third majorities necessary to amend the Constitution, either in parliament or by referendum. Therefore, he limited himself so far to cautiously reinterpreting Article 9 and gradually increasing the visibility of Japan's security-related foreign policy. Rather than eschewing international conflicts, Abe seeks to engage with like-minded countries without amending the constitution to change Japan's NRC.

As an example of willingness not to adopt a high profile in security affairs, the new interpretation of collective self-defense in 2014 is a compromise with the New Komei Party (NKP), reached after a severe debate. It limits collective self-defense to helping a country with

close ties against which armed aggression was directed and when it results in a threat to ‘Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness’ (MOFA 2014a) there is no page in the website. Thus, collective self-defense is allowed if Japan and Japanese people are concretely under threat (Sakaki 2015: 18). In addition, the exercise is limited to situations where no other means of survival are available (Sakaki 2015: 18; Nakanishi 2015: 413). Thus, it preserves the tenet of an exclusively defense-oriented policy fitting to the identity of non-military pacifism. Abe probably perceives a window of opportunity to push his agenda of revision of Article 9 as a result of North Korea’s nuclear development and China’s expansionism (Hasebe 2017). It fits the desire to fulfill the role of faithful ally but enlarging roles and missions of the SDF conflicts with the NKP and public opinion over non-military pacifism meta-role.

The basic principles of not becoming a military power that poses a threat to other countries, and the observance of the ‘three Non-Nuclear Principles’, i.e. neither possessing nor producing nuclear weapons nor allowing third parties to bring such weapons into the country is maintained (NSS 2013: 3). During the first administration, Abe confirmed that Japan would maintain its commitment to the three non-nuclear principles and would never enter the nuclear weapon race. He purposefully reaffirmed those principles soon after the North Korean nuclear test on October 9, 2006. In doing so, he wanted to reaffirm Japan’s pacifist credentials even in the case of political tension. In addition, Abe consistently announced that Japan aimed for worldwide nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, Japan has asked the US to provide the nuclear umbrella as a principle of ‘extended deterrence’ since the signing of the security treaty (McCormack 2016). Japan abstained when a UN resolution on the ‘no first use’ of nuclear weapons was brought forward in 1998. During the second administration, and following the 2014 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, a ‘Humanitarian Pledge’ outlawing the use of nuclear weapons was endorsed by 159 countries (by August 2015) but not by Japan. In May 2016, US President Obama and Prime Minister Abe reiterated their commitment to nuclear disarmament, but Japan once again voted against a resolution of the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, in the same year, that launched the process of forbidding possession or use of nuclear weapons (McCormack 2016). This indicates that as long as Japan refuses to possess nuclear weapons, it relies on US nuclear deterrence (Mochizuki 2007: 305). Therefore, it confirms that Japan’s non-military pacifism (including anti-nuclear) has been maintained under the condition of US extended deterrence.

d) New Guideline and New Security Laws

The Abe administration and the US revised the 1997 US-Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines for tighter bilateral cooperation in April 2015. Coinciding with Abe’s US visit, the ‘2+2’ Defense and Foreign Ministers’ meeting finally revised the defense cooperation guidelines. The new guidelines allow Japan to intercept missiles targeting the US. The area where the SDF can provide support under the US-Japan security treaty has been extended to ‘Asia-Pacific and beyond’ and the word ‘regional contingencies’ was deleted. It now potentially allows greater SDF participation in military activities with the United States transcending the original boundaries on the use of force by the SDF (Craig 2016).

The security laws can be considered an incarnation of these new Japan-US guidelines. The New Security Act that took effect in March 2016 is presented as a ‘peaceful security legal system’. Its main points address issues in relation to protecting the lives and peace of Japanese people. Therefore, the law is once again based on the concept of proactive pacifism, meaning

that it does not challenge Japan's pacifism. Based on the New Security Act, the Diet revised ten security-related laws¹, the most prominent of which are: the Law on a Response to Contingencies, enabling the aforementioned Japan's exercise of the right to collective self-defense; the Law to Ensure Security in Contingencies Significantly Affecting Japan - replacing the 1999 Regional Contingencies Law - designed to bolster Japanese non-combat logistical support for the US, and also other states, regionally and globally – the use of this latter term meaning that there is no geographical restraint. The revised International Peace Support Law, which removes the need for Japan to enact separate laws for each SDF dispatch providing logistical support to multinational forces and enabling the SDF to use force during PKO missions in the pursuit of certain duties rather than solely in self-defense (Hughes 2016: 143; Akimoto 2016: 143).

In this way, Japan puts some importance on multilateralism, taking on responsibility in the UN. However, the SDF activities remain constrained despite the new legislative arsenal. The revised International Peace Support Law is based on five PKO principles². The SDF are not permitted to provide logistic support, as well as recovery and humanitarian support in places where combat activities are actually being conducted. If fighting were to break out, they would have to withdraw. The position of the NKP is that the new legislation does not change the position of war renunciation and exclusively defensive security policy. The laws thus deny full-fledged participation in collective-security measures involving the use of force such as in the Vietnam War and in the Afghanistan War even if the US requests it (Fisher-Nielsen 2016; Akimoto 2016: 156-157).

3. Regionalism, historical issues and Japan's role

Japan's role as a free trade promoter

Since the 1990s, Japan's policymakers are hesitant to choose between East Asian and Asia-Pacific regionalism. Japan's NRC in this respect is well defined by constant attempts to keep a balanced position and to take advantage of it economically and politically (Watanabe 2011). As pointed out before, Abe wants to expand the scope of foreign policy to give Japan an important and responsible role in the world, something that he perceives to be what alter-parts expect from Japan in terms of role demand. Under his helmsmanship, Japan intends to be involved in many economic organizations not only because it can contribute to economic development but also because Japan conceives its role as a counterbalance to China's economic and political rise in Asia. In this regard, the TPP involvement is a turning point of Japan's policy related to free trade agreements in Asia-Pacific (Sohn 2015: 357). First of all, Japan decided to take part for economic reasons, i.e. to help Japanese companies retake ground in a region where regional linkages largely developed owing to these companies since the 1970s but where China has recently been getting the upper hand. To dominate the TPP with the US would make Japan a rule-making regional leader putting emphasis on multilateralism and respect for the law to protect the market economy in all areas of trade and investment in the region. Once again, the emphasis on values is put to the fore. Respect for those principles is considered to create points of difference with China whose trade policy is presented as mercantilist. Other member countries can be expected to relish the possibility to do business in a predictable and safe business environment where the interests of all are respected. Japan presents itself as being able to create such an environment while China

¹ See Akimoto's article (2016: 143) for more details on the bill.

² See MOFA's website (2013) <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/pko/issues.html> for more on Japan's PKO principles in detail.

cannot or is not willing to do so. Concurrently, the economic bloc's frontiers would coincide with security because some of the would-be participants are key allies and strategic partners of both Japan and the US, and others such as Vietnam and the Philippines, feel threatened by China. Thus, the economy-security nexus and the linkage to Japan's strategic national interests are evident beyond trade matters (Huang 2015). China's Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) precludes US membership and its dominance would mean further lowering of the US presence in Asia. Thus, it would counter Japan's support for continuation of the US-dominated East Asian order against China's quest for its own regional domination (Yachi 2011; Murakami 2015; Zhang 2016). The RCEP is likely to develop whatever the circumstances which force Japan to reposition itself. Japan is the only country that could be signing both agreements. However, China will dominate the RCEP and Japan's influence is likely to be lower than in the TPP. Moreover, the RCEP rules can be expected to be looser than the TPP ones. Therefore, Japan is bound to be unable to differentiate itself thanks to superior standards of governance at state and company levels. China's maritime claims in the Western Pacific are a concern because they threaten Japan's economic and security presence in the region. From both the military and economic perspectives, Abe needs TPP members' support to contain China and the agreement is a structural factor in the current Japan-US-China relationship. Thus, it may have a great impact on China's perception and response to Abe's foreign policy (Zhang 2015: 435) in a role theory perspective. However, Japan needs to be careful not to be a destabilizing factor in SEA. No SEA country wants to be forced to choose between Japan and China and it could create a role conflict with Japan³ if these countries perceive its foreign policy as arousing tensions that could force them to take sides (Interview with Professor Fukushima, 19 July, 2017). However, the TPP deal is now in limbo as the new US administration decided not to enter the agreement (Pugliese et al 2016). In November 2017, a number of countries seemed to be ready to revive the TPP agreement under the aegis of Japan, without the US. However, it will be hard to reach an agreement. Some countries such as Chile, Australia and Singapore are ready to compromise but others such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Canada made compromises on the condition of larger access to the US market. Therefore, the agreement, without the US, is less attractive without the US for them and they are already showing reluctance to conclude an agreement on the same terms. Thus, it seems unrealistic to expect a rapid conclusion. It would likely take years of protracted negotiations before a reasonably attractive agreement could be concluded. But for Japan the economic and political stakes are indeed high (Reuters 9 November 2017). A failure to put the TPP in force would be a major setback. It could furthermore marginalize Japan in shaping the new economic order. It would leave the country with many fewer international linkages than South Korea and China (Pempel 2015: 373) and would force Vietnam and other countries to come closer to China. Still, despite the willingness of Japan to contain the rise of China, Japan cannot ignore the interdependence of the Japanese and Chinese economies. Therefore, there is a limit to the defense of liberal democratic values and Japan wants to continue to keep politics separated from economics. While linking the TPP to security and values, it also wants to develop strategic economic relations with China. This is not completely new as the agreement between both governments in 2006 to realize a 'mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests' (MOFA 2008 there is no page) testified that the two countries did not want their relations to be emotion-laden. So, Abe's current policy is a continuation of the previous one (MOFA 2014b).

³ Del Rosario, then Foreign Secretary of the Philippines, expressed its support for Japanese rearmament in order to contain China's hegemonic behavior (Bello 2013). Still, it is not so straightforward because Duterte, current President of the Philippines, added that he wanted to be friends with China when he addressed Japanese businessmen in Japan (The Japan Times 26 October 2016).

Historical role demand and Abe's role enactment

Disputes related to historical issues in Northeast Asia are not new. During the Cold war, periodic cooling and warming of relationships between Japan, South Korea and China over historical issues such as the 'comfort women' issue, the Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial dispute and Japan's war atrocities were common features accepted as a fact of life. Japan began to try to earnestly tackle them for good in the 1990s, with some ephemeral success. By the late 1990s, Japan and South Korea appeared to move toward lasting reconciliation. The Kono and Murayama statements⁴ seemed to appease the tension. China and Japan were happy with their fructuous economic relations. South Korean, Chinese and Japanese policymakers seemed to be willing to prevent the hindrance from becoming a broader diplomatic agenda.

Since the early 2000s, however, historical issues threaten again the long-term attempts of cooperation. One reason was Koizumi's yearly visits between 2001 and 2006 to the Yasukuni Shrine where tribute was given to all Japanese war dead but where 14 convicted war criminals are also enshrined. Tensions over the visits spilled over into territorial disputes and other issues. For both Korea and China, the control over disputed islands erupted with stronger force than before. Korean leadership and media started again to link it to the colonial annexation of Korea, while China argued that Japan's control over Senkaku/Diaoyu was an extension of the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895.

Role conflict dynamics can lead to nonlinear and unexpected outcomes if it spirals out of control. Abe acknowledges the importance of historical issues. He recognizes that Japan must come to terms with its history and to show it is ready to reduce tensions and avoid mutually disadvantageous outcomes. For example, during his first administration, he did not visit the Yasukuni Shrine. However, recent historical disputes, which have been restricted to being an Asian issue until now, are of broader significance nowadays. Increasingly they have the potential to disrupt the Japan-US relations as well. The US does not want Japan to put into question the international order in the region that resulted from the Second World War, including the territorial status quo and the acceptance of Japan's war responsibility.

Abe's 'historical revisionism' exemplified by attempts of constitutional revision, a proactive security policy and his visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in 2013 resulted in Chinese criticism because it was perceived as Japan's willingness to reconsider the established vision of Japan as war aggressor (Zhang 2015: 426). It has had a negative impact as well on East Asian cooperation. It can lead to what China would consider provocation over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Indirectly, it could also negatively impact the US perception of Japan's reliability as an ally. Likewise, Abe's position on the Comfort Women issue that denies the fact that they were victims of forcible conscription (Financial Times 6 May 2015) continues to undermine Japan's relationship with South Korea. This makes the task of coordination of military collaboration with the US more complicated. In the case of emergency, it may threaten attempts to present a unified front against the enemy.

In the terms of role theory, proper enactment of roles usually leads to positive reaction, and negative valuations are placed on actors who fail to perform appropriate roles from their alter-part's viewpoint (Harnisch 2013). Japan upsets China when it tries not to enact its role as a country deeply reflecting on its past behavior in having its leaders visiting the Yasukuni Shrine. It also receives US criticisms for that behavior (Zhang 2015; Hughes 2015; Maslow 2016).

⁴ The 1993 Kono statement refers to the Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono apologizing to Korea for the experiences of the comfort women and admitted the involvement of the Japanese army - and the 1995 Murayama statement refers to the apologies for Japan's wartime colonial rule and aggression across Asia (Pempel 2015: 376).

However, despite his revisionist stance Abe is also willing to appease its key alter-parts. He does not behave as if he wanted to revive militarism and trivialize war crimes. He opposed the right's challenge to the Murayama and Kono statements that, respectively, made explicit apology and acknowledgement for the invasion and the coercive women's conscription as sex slaves. With the so-called 'Abe Statement' he sought to appease China's historical sensitivities in putting emphasis on postwar Japan's positive role and his contribution to peace through his initiatives (Pugliese 2015: 53).

Abe inherits a critical understanding of Japan's history during the Second World War from his predecessors. His initiatives reflect the difficulties in reconciling viewpoints in his attempts to define and redefine what Japan did in the past and how this affects Japan's roles in current world affairs. It could become a source of role conflict, because all alter-parts, including the US and the other democracies are likely to have negative reactions to the issue of revisionism. This creates uncertainty concerning the role Japan intends to play in the region; it might put in question the US legacy of building a democratic Japan, and it could rekindle feuds among US allies, notably Japan and South Korea. A compromise is needed lest Japan loses its credibility as a main US ally in Asia. Although Abe understands that he must appease China, South Korea, and the US, he cannot neglect his constituency, i.e. the right-wing groups such as the Japan Conference and the Japan War-Bereaved Families Association. They still expect revision of the Constitution and also push for reconsideration of the postwar consensus about war responsibilities. For them, Japan must be given the right to exercise military power to protect its national security interests. The current shackles prevent Japan from recovering great power and international status (Larsson 2015; Hughes 2016: 133).

The heritage from the Second World War is likely to remain constitutive of how Japan thinks of itself and its role in the world. The current political debates center on what historical legacy means, and what they imply in international affairs today, i.e. how and to what extent it could impact the Japanese NRC. Faced with international and domestic pressures that are liable to lead to contradictions, Abe has to keep the balance for the moment so as they do not create role conflict. If Abe is seen as a historical revisionist by Japan's security partners, his security policy may not advance smoothly. If Abe is seen as indecisive from the viewpoint of nationalist supporters, he loses his support base. Still, whether Abe emphasizes pacifist and international norms or makes concessions to his right-wing supporters, the question remains how to manage both at the same time in a longer perspective, i.e. in which cases, under what conditions, and to what ends he will have to shift the balance in one direction or another.

Conclusion

Using role theory concepts, notably in observing the evolvement of the traditional meta-roles that have anchored Japan's foreign policy in the post Second World War, it was possible to observe behavioral changes in Japan's position on important foreign policy related issues. An examination of Abe's foreign policy indicates a substantial role shift from Japan's reluctant approach to international security toward more assertiveness of its roles in the world. As regards history, Abe tries to meet right-wing supporters' role expectations but cannot proceed without taking international and domestic expectations into account. Thus, his policy related to history is cautious so as not to become an obstacle to his foreign policy. He makes symbolic gestures, for example when he becomes the first Japanese Prime Minister to express his apologies to Australian prisoners of war in the Australian Parliament (The Australian 9 July 2014), or when he visits Pearl Harbor to express his condolences for the lost lives in Japan's attack in 1941 (BBC 28 December 2016). The self-perception of Japan being pivotal in Asia is present in many statements of Abe. Japan also seems to be more forward looking in the acceptance of the long-

standing request from the US to contribute more to its own defense and to utilize its greater security-related technical, legal and managerial capabilities more pro-actively in Asia. In this line of thought, Japan has pro-actively acted as a reliable security partner to contribute to President Obama's 'Pacific Pivot' strategy of US rebalancing to the Asia Pacific region. Although Prime Minister Abe has yet to revise Article 9, he rammed through his unilateral interpretation that collective self-defense can be exerted. As for the economic/trade policies, Japan's NRC about the TPP is closely linked to its long-term interest in economic growth in the region that would be beneficial to Japan. At the same time the objective of the TPP also seems to maximize politically a leading position because the boundaries of the project coincide with that of a key security partner, such as Australia, and include countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines that are considered politically important in Japan's policy toward China.

Abe is most likely to strengthen its philosophical orientation of active cooperation with other nations as shown by his stress of Japan's significant international role in the postwar period. He plans to have Japan confirm its 'forward-oriented' attitude through his proactive pacifism concept (Pugliese 2015: 50). In terms of role theory, it does not seem that Abe's initiatives are questioning. The key postwar NRC. As argued by Abe himself, the differences fall in the realm of how best to interpret and to pursue existing role conceptions, rather than concerning the role conceptions themselves. The core norm as a non-militarist pacifist state is unlikely to change but the meaning of what the components imply as acceptable behavior seem to be at stake because of Abe's initiatives. A deeper understanding of the ego-part and key alter-parts' reaction to Abe's claim and a subsequent assessment of the impact on NRC requires the use of an empirical method such as a qualitative content analysis for further research. Analysis of political leaders' speeches, for example, clarifies what roles the country is eager to play. As Holsti wrote, language and actions signal expectations (including prescriptions and proscriptions) of the other actors and the NRC can be expected to cover them (Holsti 1970: 245-246). Therefore, it is necessary to examine speeches concerning Japan's duty, responsibility, and the obligation of Japanese and foreign political leaders and, if necessary, their aides. In doing so, it should be possible to observe more precisely the possible changes in the key traditional meta-roles mentioned in the text. It may also be possible to deepen the knowledge of Abe's foreign policy in examining the case of context-specific roles between Japan and foreign countries on important issues, such as the Japan-US alliance, and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands territorial dispute between Japan and China.

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