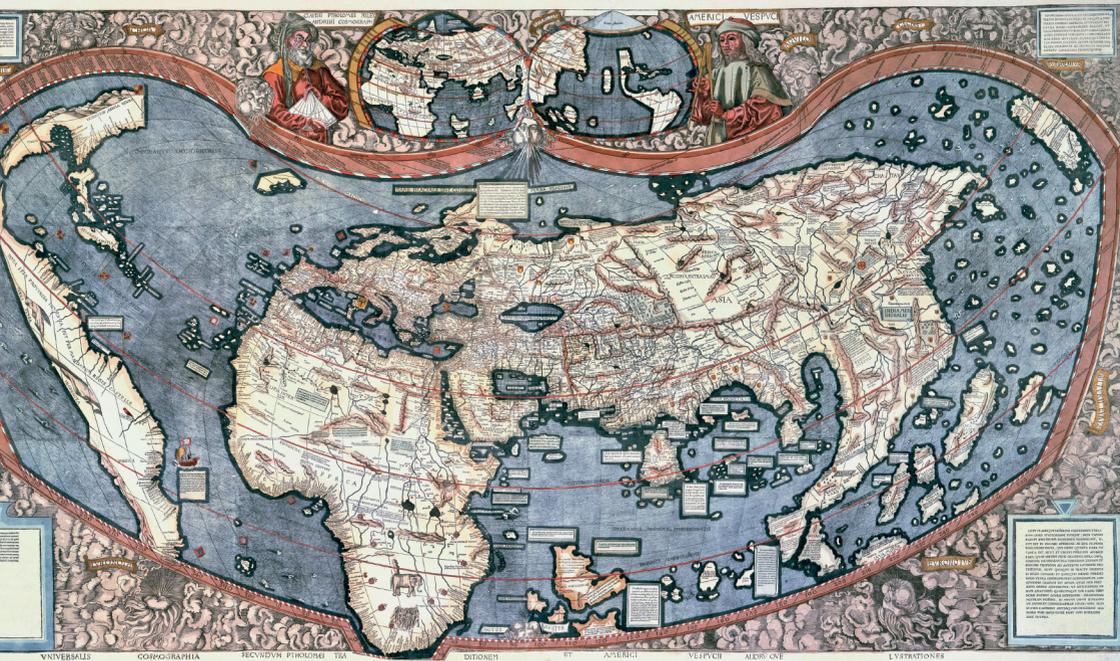


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# Tracing the Roots of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy: Anxiety and Opportunism in Foreign Policy Narrative Construction in Japan from the late 1970s to the mid-2000s

di MARCO ZAPPA

***Abstract** – In recent years, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept has gained popularity and created a new geographical reality, the Indo-Pacific. Despite its relatively successful performativity in this regard, this strategy, mostly aimed at containing China, originates in Japan's continuous sense of anxiety caused by the progressive end of Cold War strategic and ideological arrangements since the late 1970s. Clarifying the causes and modalities of recurring narrative changes since, based on previous studies on ontological security, this article seeks to contribute to the understanding of anxiety as a major driver of changes in Japan's self-representations. To this end, several previously announced grand strategies, such as Hashimoto Ryūtarō's "Eurasian" or "Silk Road" diplomacy and Ōhira Masayoshi's 1980 plan to establish a system of comprehensive security and create a Pacific Community, will be discussed. Based on official documents and biographical materials it will be showed that these ideas and policy proposals were in fact instances of Japanese leaders and policymakers' anxiety reduction strategies and attempts at building a national image against the backdrop of a transformed or rapidly transforming international environment at the end of the Cold War.*

## **Introduction**

Since 2018, the concept of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP, hereafter) has acquired popularity and power. The term is now widely used by mainstream media becoming increasingly "performative" insofar as it creates an entirely new geographic reality (the Indo-Pacific). Originally attributed to former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, the concept has been adopted

officially by the United States Department of State as the primary scope of U.S. diplomacy and security<sup>1</sup>.

It has been widely demonstrated that the FOIP stems out of a series of narratives, both Japanese and American, whose shared objective is that of reaffirming both Japan's and the U.S.'s role in Asia while countering or containing the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s assertiveness in the region<sup>2</sup>. Besides its clear security rationale, in the last decade, the FOIP also has provided the broader framework for Japan's geoeconomic strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, mostly based on demand-based aid provision, particularly in infrastructure development without ruling out, at least hypothetically, the possibility of coordinating with the PRC on several projects. This policy platform is theoretically open to any cooperation from other regional actors, including the PRC, but is ultimately aimed at securing Japanese companies' competitiveness and domestic economic growth<sup>3</sup>. Such narratives are "stories" which might be constructed by policymakers, experts, academics, and intellectuals and promoted by state leaders both domestically and abroad<sup>4</sup>. They are best described as "state self-representations" and usually based on arbitrary representations of the state's relations with the region within which it is situated, in a manner which is reflective of inherent power

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<sup>1</sup> A. Blinken, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, U.S. Department of State, 14.12.2021. <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific/> (Accessed on 26.9.2022).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance G. Pugliese, *Japan's Kissinger? Yachi Shōtarō: The State Behind the Curtain*. "Pacific Affairs", vol. 90 (2017), no. 2, pp. 231-251; Y. Hosoya, *FOIP 2.0: The Evolution of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy*. "Asia-Pacific Review", vol. 26 (2019), no. 1, pp. 18-28.; R. Yamamoto, *Understanding Abe's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision Through Japan's Development Assistance*. "Issues and Insights", vol. 20 (2020), no. 1, pp. 7-11; A. Palit - S. Sano. *The United States' Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy: Challenges for India and Japan*. "ISAS Insights", no. 524 (2018), pp. 1-6; and W. Choong, William, *The Return of the Indo-Pacific Strategy: An Assessment*. "Australian Journal of International Affairs", vol. 73 (2019), no. 5, pp. 415-430.

<sup>3</sup> Yamamoto, *Understanding...*, cit., pp. 8-9; Hosoya, *FOIP 2.0*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> L. Hagström - K. Gustafsson, *Narrative Power: How Storytelling Shapes East Asian International Politics*. "Cambridge Review of International Affairs", vol. 32, no. 4 (2019), pp. 387-406.

structures, imaginative geographies or, as they will be called later, geonarratives<sup>5</sup>.

In light of these facts, it might be worth addressing the following research questions: why have narratives changed? To what extent are they effective in guaranteeing ontological security? In this article, I will argue that the construction of FOIP-like geonarratives have emerged chronically whenever Japanese political leadership perceived an existential threat to some of its foundational values (ontological insecurity) due to changes in the international political environment. This trend has emerged particularly since the late 1970s, at a time when Cold War arrangements were already in crisis and bound to extinction. It is worth noting, however, that since the late 1970s Japanese geonarratives have changed periodically. If in the late 1970s and in 2010s, the focus has been on the Pacific, in the 1990s and 2000s Japan's "Eurasian connection" has been particularly highlighted in speeches and official documents<sup>6</sup>.

Contrasting the successive Eurasian strategies of the 1990s and 2000s with Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi's 1979-1980 proposal of creating a "comprehensive security" system (*sōgō anzen hoshō*) entrenched in the creation of a Pacific Community (*kantaiheiyō rentai*), this paper will shed light on the historical origins of the current FOIP and on the phenomenon of narrative adjustment in Japanese foreign policy that can be observed since the late 1970s. The main hypothesis of this paper is that such periodical readjustment is the consequence of chronic "ontological insecurity"<sup>7</sup> arising from the sense of anxiety caused by the progressive demise of basic values constituting Japan's Cold War posture and the need to quickly readjust Japan's identity and self-representations to a transformed or transforming (possibly in the short run) international environment. In turn, this has

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<sup>5</sup> J. Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics*, London-New York, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance T. Dadabaev, 'Silk Road' as Foreign Policy Discourse: *The Construction of Chinese, Japanese and Korean Engagement Strategies in Central Asia*, "Journal of Eurasian Studies", vol. 9 (2018), no. 1, pp. 30-41.

<sup>7</sup> J. Mitzen, *Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma*, "European Journal of International Relations", vol. 12 (2006), no. 3, pp. 341-370; K. Gustafsson - N. C. Krickel-Choi, *Returning to the Roots of Ontological Security: Insights from the Existentialist Anxiety Literature*, "European Journal of International Relations", vol. 26 (2020), no. 3, pp. 875-895.

pushed Japanese policymakers toward creative solutions enabling progressive narrative adjustments, which have, in certain cases, proved ephemeral. To better elucidate the argument, a close reading of speeches, official documents and recently published biographies of Japanese PMs have been taken into consideration.

### **Japan's strive for ontological security**

Against this backdrop, key to attaining “ontological security”, or, at least reducing “ontological insecurity”, for any state is the adoption of a unifying narrative self-representation, which, in turn, is apt to constitute its identity in global politics, and results from a negotiating process between conflicting storylines<sup>8</sup>. Based on Hagström’s studies on the relations between narrative power and ontological security, it can be argued that in recent decades, national governments, particularly in the so-called “great powers”, have increasingly relied on the “construction and dissemination of narratives that strive for stability, consistency, and coherence.”<sup>9</sup> These self-representations are best understood as a combination of narratives on the state’s own strengths and weaknesses. These latter are interpreted, nonetheless, as reflections of a form of nationalistic narcissism promoted by the state’s leadership rather than honest self-examination<sup>10</sup>. As it will be shown below, even governments in non-great powers, such as Japan, have periodically attempted at constructing grand “autobiographical narratives” based on, mostly, “pride”, i.e., informed by the awareness of a loss of specific “tangible power resources” that can be compensated with other forms of influence (economic, intellectual or cultural, for instance)<sup>11</sup>. The AFP is a case in point. However, as pointed out by Agnew, such spatial representations, being pictorial as maps or narrative in nature, are not “passive”, but rather “convey a strong message on behalf of a particular world-view”, while “identifying and naming sites” based on a perceived “social and geopolitical

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<sup>8</sup> Hagström, *Great Power Narcissism and Ontological (In)Security*; Hagström - Gustafsson, *Narrative Power*.

<sup>9</sup> Hagström, *Great Power Narcissism...*, cit., p. 332.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibi*, p. 336.

significance”<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, FOIP-like “geonarratives” are not only based on a certain self-representation of the promoting actor, rather it interacts with a specific representation of the external world, i.e., an “imaginative geography”, apt to make the very self-representation more coherent and effective.

As poignantly shown elsewhere, the rationale for the AFP was to change Japan’s “overall international image”, particularly the one of a mercantilist “free rider” in global affairs<sup>13</sup>, thereby gaining status, respect and ultimately international acceptance in a post-Cold war era<sup>14</sup>. On the one hand, the fear of stigma, in fact, is a powerful driver of foreign policy making. To say it with Zarakol, who compared the dynamics of acceptance and exclusion in the international system with those of a suburb in Leicester, where sociologists Norbert Elias and John Scotson did their research in the 1960s,

Stigmatization not only made the “outsiders” feel inferior, but also cut off their access to certain political, economic, and social privileges [...] far from corresponding to some kind of inherent, objective cause of relative inferiority, stigma labels often are themselves enough to generate inferior conditions, which are then mistaken as a cause<sup>15</sup>.

Most relevant for the present discussion, however, is the literature on anxiety as a factor in determining ontological (in)security. It might be said, with Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi, for instance, that grand strategies such as the FOIP and, prior to it, the AFP, originate from a shared “anxiety” within Japan’s ruling elite that the meaning of the state’s existence is threatened in its essence. Anxiety can be triggered by external events or actors, or,

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<sup>12</sup> Agnew, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> K. Zakowski - B. Bochorodycz - M. Socha, *New Pillar of Japan’s Foreign Policy: Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and Values-Oriented Diplomacy*, in K. Zakowski - B. Bochorodycz - M. Socha (ed), *Japan’s Foreign Policy Making: Central Government Reforms, Decision-Making Processes, and Diplomacy*, Cham, 2018, p. 122; S. Islam, *Foreign Aid and Burdensharing: Is Japan Free Riding to a Coprosperity Sphere in Pacific Asia?*, in J. Frankel and M. Kahler (eds) *Regionalism and Rivalry: Japan and the United States in Pacific Asia*, Chicago, 1993, pp. 321-322.

<sup>14</sup> A. Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West*, Cambridge-New York, 2011, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Zarakol, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

most importantly, by one state's intrinsic and constitutive factors. Specifically, however, anxiety emerges when a key value to one's sense of self is threatened<sup>16</sup>. This condition, which is something "necessary" and integral to human life as it is caused by the "uncertainties of everyday life" can affect individuals, collective entities, and even historical periods. Therefore, precisely to cope with anxiety, states, much in the same guise as individuals, enact specific defense mechanisms<sup>17</sup>. Based on the work of existentialist psychologists such as Rollo May, Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi further stress the difference between "normal" and "neurotic" anxiety, both characterized as originating from a gap between one actor's expectations and the reality in which it lives, with the first, however, diverging from the latter in terms of the degree to which the external world is realistically appraised<sup>18</sup>.

### **Imaginative geographies 2.0. From the "Indo-Pacific" to the "Silk Road"**

As argued in the previous paragraph which surveyed the relevant literature on anxiety in IR, it might be concluded that when creative solutions to cope with anxiety do not help to fill the gap between reality and expectations, governments might run the risk of incurring in a "neurotic" anxiety leading to continuous narrative construction or update of previous grand narratives. Despite the rapid acceleration of the last two decades, this trend can be identified in Japanese foreign policy since the final phase of the Cold War in the late 1970s.

The construction of the "Indo-Pacific" narrative is often attributed to former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō who, during a 2007 during a state visit to India, stated the following.

The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity. A "broader Asia" that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form. Our two countries have the ability – and the responsibility – to ensure that it broadens yet

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<sup>16</sup> Gustafsson - Krickel-Choi, *Returning to the Roots...*, cit., p. 888.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibi*, p. 887.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibi*, pp. 889-890.

further and to nurture and enrich these seas to become seas of clearest transparency<sup>19</sup>.

By uniting, at least rhetorically, the Pacific with the Indian Ocean, Abe declared his resolve to push forward Japan's ties with other large democracies in the wider Asia-Pacific region, particularly with India and Australia. In his 2006 political pamphlet, "A Beautiful Country" (*Utsukushii kuni e*), the late leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP)'s largest faction had argued for the enhancement of its country's ties with "emerging" economic powers like India, in terms of future trade, economic, energy and security collaboration opportunities. Particularly, he stressed the importance of enhancing his country's ties with "Japan-friendly democratic nations" (*shin-nichi minshushugi kokka*), with which it shared universal values such as democracy, rule of law and the respect of human rights, through minister-level summits and dialogues<sup>20</sup>. Consistent with these issues was Abe's call to pursue a proactive value-based grand strategy, labeled the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" (*jiyū to han'ei no kō*, AFP, hereafter)<sup>21</sup>. As stated in the 2007 Diplomatic Bluebook (DB), the main values Japan would promote were "freedom, democracy, fundamental human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy". Reinforcing its peaceful and non-interventionist approach to foreign policy and somehow distancing itself from the US' proactive regime change policies of the early 2000s, the 2007 DB stressed that Japan would maintain "a balance between political stability and economic prosperity and always giving full regard to each country's unique culture, history, and level of development"<sup>22</sup>. As shown in fig. 1, the geographical scope of the AFP embraces the entire Eurasian continent spanning from the Korean peninsula to Scandinavia, leaving out Southeast

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<sup>19</sup> S. Abe, *Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, at the Parliament of the Republic of India 'Confluence of the Two Seas, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, 22.8.2007. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>, (Accessed on 26.9.2022).

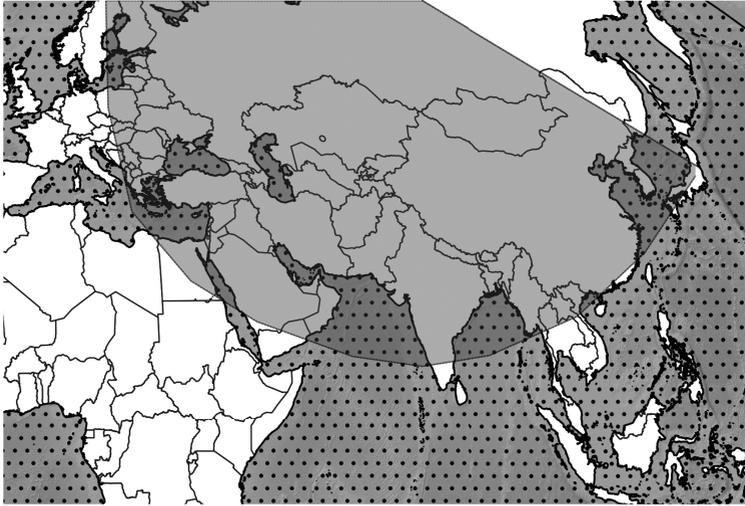
<sup>20</sup> S. Abe, *Atarashii kuni e [A New Country]*, Tōkyō, 2013, pp. 163-164.

<sup>21</sup> Abe, *Speech...*, cit.; T. Asō, *Jiyū to Han'ei No Kō' o Tsukuru. Hirogaru Nihon Gaikō No Chihei [Building an Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: The Expanding Scope of Japan's Diplomacy]*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 30.11.2006, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/18/easo\\_1130.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/18/easo_1130.html) (Accessed on 26.9.2022).

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2007*, Tōkyō, 2007.

Asia and Pacific nations like Australia and the US, while including South and Central Asia, the Caucasus, Turkey, portions of Eastern Europe and the Baltic, and Russia.

*Fig. 1 – AFP's geography*



Elaborated by the author with QGIS based on MOFA,  
Diplomatic Bluebook 2007, p. 2.

In hindsight, the AFP became the major political contribution of Asō Tarō, then Foreign Minister and, until very recently, a close associate of Abe within the LDP ranks<sup>23</sup>. However, the influence of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) bureaucrats like Kanehara Nobukatsu and Yachi Shōtarō, a key advisor to Abe and then first secretary of Japan's National Security Council, was evident<sup>24</sup>. The

<sup>23</sup> Currently the party Vice-President and influential power broker, Asō was Foreign Minister during Abe's first stint as Prime Minister in 2006-2007 and later served as Prime Minister between 2008 and 2009. More recently, he has been Minister of Finance and Vice-Prime Minister between 2012 and 2021, outliving Abe as he stayed in power during Suga Yoshihide's one-year premiership between August 2020 and October 2021.

<sup>24</sup> G. Pugliese, *Japan's Kissinger? Yachi Shōtarō: The State Behind the Curtain*, "Pacific Affairs" vol. 90 (2017), no. 2, pp. 241-242; Zakowski - Bochorodycz

AFP arguably had in fact a twofold aim. On the one hand, it was an attempt by the Japanese government at promoting a new image of Japan as a proactive global power and defender of universal values. On the other it could be read as a geopolitical strategy to contain China's increasing assertiveness in the East and South China Seas<sup>25</sup>. It aimed to do so by acting in partnership with other like-minded nations to promote free trade and investments and, concomitantly, by supporting developing countries in diverse areas such as healthcare, education, institution building and democratization through official development assistance (ODA)<sup>26</sup>.

Despite its short-lived success, the AFP served as a grand narrative to re-position Japan in the post-9.11 world. The use of geonarrative strategies by Japanese leaders and policymakers is consistent with Japanese diplomatic strategies since the early postwar aimed at creating "stability" to promote regional economic development and "de-politicize" nationalist and postcolonial movements in Northeast and Southeast Asia<sup>27</sup>. Clearly, with the AFP, the Japanese government of the time attempted at reshaping Tōkyō's role in a changed international environment and, at the same time, project a new imaginative geography of Eurasia thus showing its commitment to the region. Furthermore, a long-term target of this strategy, one might argue, was to enhance Japan's partnership with the US and Western Europe while minimizing the impacts of Japan's relative decline in the face of the PRC's global ascent<sup>28</sup>. Apart from such contingencies, however, the AFP itself has an overlapping character with other grand geonarratives such as the "New Silk Road" launched in the mid-1990s by Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtarō. Hashimoto was the first Japanese leader after the end of the Cold War to propose a proactive Japanese engagement with former Soviet Union countries, establishing economic and polit-

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- Socha, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> C.W. Hughes, *Japan's Response to China's Rise: Regional Engagement, Global Containment, Dangers of Collision*, "International Affairs", vol. 85 (2009), no. 4, pp. 839-841.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2007*.

<sup>27</sup> T. Miyagi, *Kaiyō kokka Nihon no sengoshi: Ajia henbō no kiseki o yomitoku [A Post-War History of Japan as a Sea Power: Reading Markers of Change in Asia]*, Extended edition, Tōkyō, 2017, ch. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 855.; A. Oros, *Japan's Security Reinassance: New Policies and Politics for the Twenty-First Century*, New York, 2017, p. 8.

ical ties that could eventually grant Japanese companies access to the region's stock of natural resources<sup>29</sup>.

In a July 1997 speech, the conservative leader redesigned Eurasian geography referring to the vast area comprised between the “Central Asian Republics” and the “Caucasus” as the “Silk Road region” evoking the “glorious” past of the trade routes which cut across Europe and Asia all the way to Western Japan<sup>30</sup>. At the narrative level, Hashimoto constructed Japan's engagement with several post-Soviet states (particularly Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan) as a “Eurasian diplomacy from the Pacific” (*Taiheiyo kara mita yūrajia gaikō*) a phrase that clearly illustrates Japanese insularity and, at the same time, the need for Japan, as a resource-poor archipelago, to build ties with the continent. In fact, he also expressed his government's desire to build a bridge with Eurasia in the wake of the demise of the USSR by developing the supporting the democratization and free-market reforms in the new Central Asian Republics. Besides stressing their high hopes (*ōkina kitai o yoserarete iru*) toward Japan and Japan's “nostalgia-like” sentiment (*kyūshū ni nita kanjō*) for the region, Hashimoto vowed Japan's commitment to maintain peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific expressing a sense of anxiety caused by the potential failure of the international community to let post-Soviet states into the neoliberal world order. On top of this, following Tōgō's interpretation, in the mid-1990s, particularly after the 1996 Strait Crisis, the Japanese government seemed willing to “use” Russia to maintain a position of strength in the Asia-Pacific against the backdrop of an emerging US-PRC dualism<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, as argued by Uyama, Hashimoto's “Eurasian diplomacy” was not so much a new concept, but rather the “rearrangement” of existing guidelines in the attempt to make the international community aware of Japan's commitment to Central Asia economic and political development<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Dadabaev, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> J.A. Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, 2013, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> K. Tōgō, *Nihon no yūrajia gaikō (1997-2001) [Japan's Eurasian Diplomacy (1997-2001)]*, “nippon.com”, 13.3.2014, <https://www.nippon.com/ja/features/c00205/>, (Accessed on 26.9.2022).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in U. Mahmudov, *Reisengo Nihon no kyū-sōren shokoku ni taisuru gaikō seisaku: 'shien iinkai' kokusai kikan o chūshin ni [Japan's Post-Cold War Foreign Policy*

## The 1970s as a decade of “anxiety”: Ōhira’s legacy

The above-mentioned existing guidelines can be found in two policy ideas (the “Pacific Community” and the “comprehensive security strategy”) attributed to Ōhira Masayoshi, Prime Minister of Japan between 1978 and 1980. Since the early 1960s, well prior to becoming leader of the executive, Ōhira had served in various cabinet positions, including Chief Cabinet Secretary, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Trade and Industry and Minister of Finance under three PMs, Ikeda Hayato, Satō Eisaku and Tanaka Kakuei and rose to become one of the major party power brokers since the birth of the LDP in 1955, displaying considerable skills in foreign policy making<sup>33</sup>. Throughout his long public service career, he had visited the US, Europe and dedicated himself to the normalization of the ties with South Korea in the early 1960s (in alleged conflict with then PM Ikeda’s will to prioritize the normalization of ties with the People’s Republic of China, PRC) and with the PRC since the early 1970s. He developed a strong friendship with the US ambassador Edwin O. Reischauer (1961-1966) becoming known as one of the most US-friendly LDP politicians of his generation<sup>34</sup> and, more broadly, his agency has been crucial in Japan’s quest for stability in Asia in the early stages of the Cold War<sup>35</sup>.

In the mid-1960s, shortly after losing his first son, Masaki, to a rare disease, Ōhira developed his own original perspective on diplomacy and foreign policy making. He voiced it during a speech in early 1966 at the LDP headquarters in Tōkyō in his capacity as vice-chairperson of the research group on foreign affairs of the policy research council (*seimu chōsa kai*). According to his view, a country without a stable domestic governance, could not implement an excellent (*mamareta*) diplomacy. Particularly, he argued for a more holistic approach to policy making both at home and internationally, adopting a “wider perspective”, particularly on

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*Toward the Former Soviet Republics: A Study on the International “Aid Committee”*], “Review of Law and Political Sciences”, vol. 117 (2020), no. 3-4, p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> H.D.P. Envall, *Japanese Diplomacy: The Role of Leadership*. Albany, 2014, pp. 88-91.

<sup>34</sup> R. Hattori, *Ōhira Masayoshi rinen to gaikō [Ōhira Masayoshi: Ideas and Foreign Policy]*, Tōkyō, 2019, pp. 61-63.

<sup>35</sup> Miyagi, *op. cit.*, ch. 1; Envall, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

security issues. “There is no such thing as absolute security (*zettai na anzen hoshō*), as nothing can be absolute”, he is quoted as saying, adding that the 1952 US-Japan security treaty covered only “one aspect of security, and moreover a complementary one”<sup>36</sup>. Implicitly, Ōhira referred to a strife within the LDP between his and then PM Satō Eisaku’s factions. Among the other consequences, this confrontation caused the cooling of Japan-PRC relations, against the backdrop of the 1965 US military escalation in Vietnam and conclusion of the Japan-Republic of Korea (ROK) Treaty on Basic Relations, which left Beijing authorities wondering of an emerging US-supported Japan-ROK-Taiwan front against the PRC<sup>37</sup>.

After a stint as chief of the influential Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), supervising the country’s strategy for energy and raw material supply and technological industries nurturing, in 1972, Ōhira took once again the post of FM, upon his friend and ally Tanaka Kakuei’s election as LDP president and PM. Just two years before, in an article published by a local bank magazine, he had maintained that “Japan’s catch-up phase with the West was over” and that it was time for the country to move on to a new phase of “creative development” (*sōzō teki hatten e no shikō*)<sup>38</sup>. Though he referred to the need for Japanese businesses to take steps to increase their global competitiveness, his future-oriented approach would emerge clear in his considerations on foreign affairs. Specifically, after the 1971 Nixon shock, the Japanese government found itself in dramatically changed international environment characterized by the US-PRC rapprochement and the recognition of the PRC as the sole legal representative of China to the UN instead of the Republic of China (ROC) which had been a founding member of the organization in 1945, and, as consequence, by ROC’s replacement in the Security Council. On one occasion shortly after these events, Ōhira spoke of a way in which the Japanese government could cope with the “anxiety” caused by rapid and unpredictable shifts in the international system, that is, enhancing a “self-reliant diplomacy” (*jishu gaikō*). Ōhira added

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<sup>36</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> D. Yasutomo, *Sato’s China Policy, 1964-1966*, “Asian Survey”, vol. 17 (1977), no. 6, pp. 537-538.

<sup>38</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

that Japan's overt reliance on the US ally had prevented Japan from actively participating in international politics. A new "vigorous deployment" (*seiryokuteki tenkai*) of Japan's diplomatic resources was timely now that the "dollar system" had weakened. Concomitantly it was necessary to "settle the accounts" (*sōkessan*) with the country's wartime legacy<sup>39</sup>.

### Japan's new diplomacy

In an essay called "Japan's new diplomacy" (*Nihon no atarashii gaikō*), which sharply criticized Satō and his cabinet, Ōhira highlighted the urgency to speed up the negotiations for Japan-PRC ties normalization. Once again, the precondition for a successful diplomacy was a radical domestic transformation, in terms of enhancing the populace's living conditions, rebuilding trust between citizens and politicians and rediscovering "human cooperation" (*ningen rentai no kaifuku*) as opposed to the dominant individualism and materialism of the era of sustained economic growth<sup>40</sup>. In fact, he characterized Japan as a "maritime nation" in Asia (*Ajia ni ichi suru kaiyō kokka*), with a territory too narrow for the large population who inhabited it. Furthermore, Ōhira stressed the fact that Japan was resource-poor and heavily dependent on imports of energy and raw materials and on overseas market to sustain its manufacturing economy. Therefore, Japan's survival (*seizon*) and prosperity (*han'ei*) on top of its security (*anzen*) and prestige (*meiyo*) depended on the stability of the seas surrounding Japan itself. For Ōhira, locating Japan in Asia meant, in fact, that any government should be aware of the region's historical instability (*antei o kaki*) and poverty (*hinkon de mo aru*) and should therefore contribute to the region stabilization<sup>41</sup>.

To this end, and in preparation of his coming forward as candidate to the LDP presidency, in May 1972, he further laid out five principles for a "peace diplomacy" (*heiwa gaikō go gensoku*) that were to become integral in Japan's "new diplomacy". First, nuclear attacks and nuclear proliferation will not be tolerated; second,

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibi*, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibi*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibi*, p. 109.

Japan will oppose any violations of the sovereignty of one nation; third, it will not support any international conflicts; fourth, Japan will not tolerate sea, air and water pollution and excessive depletion of natural resources; fifth, Japan will not tolerate the neglect of world hunger and epidemic diseases. Clearly, these pledges, particularly the first three, were first and foremost aimed at the PRC and would serve as the premises for FM Ōhira's diplomatic work toward the normalization of Japan-PRC ties<sup>42</sup>. At the same time, by highlighting Japan's diplomatic passivity, Ōhira seemed to recognize the self-inflicted nature of the 1971 Nixon shock and blamed it on former PM Satō's pro-Taiwan posture against this backdrop, it is worth noting that as a member of the relatively pro-PRC LDP faction, the Kōchikai, established by Ikeda Hayato in the 1960s and led, among the others, by Tanaka, Ōhira did not see Beijing as a "threat" nor as a strategic rival as it would become in later decades.

Ōhira sense of "anxiety" for Japan's future emerged clearly in 1973. In August that year, he was confronted with the abduction of former South Korean democratic presidential candidate Kim Taejung from a hotel in Tōkyō which quickly escalated into a foreign policy issue given that the act, being carried out by agents of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), could be read as a violation of Japanese national sovereignty. The event destabilized Ōhira's effort in stabilizing Japan-ROK relations, which had been going on since his first term as FM in the early and mid-1960s. The "Kim incident" embarrassed the Tanaka cabinet to the point that it became difficult, particularly for the FM, to defend the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibi*, p. 110. Particularly, the reference to nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation was intended to reassure China on the presence of nuclear weapons in Japanese territory, a contentious issue within the Japanese political landscape and within the very LDP particularly after the existence of a secret agreement between Tōkyō and US on the "introduction" of nuclear weapons on Japanese national territory, excluding, however, Japanese ports was revealed in the 2000s. S. Shinbun Akahata. *Kyōsantō Ga Akiraka Ni Shita Nichibeī Kaku Mitsuyaku. Rekidai Gaimujikan No Shōgen de Urazuke. Konpon Naku Hitei No Nihonseifu [The secret nuclear agreement unveiled by the Communist Party – A former diplomat's testimony offers new details – The government denies involvement, but offers no evidence]*, "Shinbun Akahata", 22.6.2009, [https://www.jcp.or.jp/akahata/aik09/2009-06-22/2009062201\\_03\\_1.html](https://www.jcp.or.jp/akahata/aik09/2009-06-22/2009062201_03_1.html), (Accessed on 26.9.2022). Hattori, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-71.

need to maintain peaceful relations with the ROK in the face of public criticism<sup>43</sup>. The start of the fourth Arab-Israeli war only a few months later in October 1973 triggered the first oil crisis, which severely affected Japan's and other industrialized economies in Western Europe. In the early 1970s, Japan's industrial complex depended upon oil bought from the Middle Eastern producers for the 80% of its total oil imports<sup>44</sup>. At a conference in Washington in early 1974, Ōhira maintained that because of the oil crisis, countries had come together as an attempt to build "one world united as a global community" (*gurōbaru kyōdōtai taru 'hitotsu no seikai*). His proactive stance, allegedly, even won him the praise of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger<sup>45</sup>. Despite the Japanese government's resolve to reduce its dependence from the oil of the region, as a form of soft retaliation against oil producing countries (OPEC), Japan's diplomatic efforts had ultimately no effect on the resolution of the conflict in the Middle East<sup>46</sup>.

These historical contingencies, combined with other unsettling events such as the US withdrawal from Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975<sup>47</sup>, nevertheless, accelerated the of Ōhira's elaboration of a comprehensive narrative strategy. The end of the Vietnam war and further congressional legislation putting restraints on US military involvement abroad had in fact raised fears in Tōkyō of a massive US pullout from Asia and hampered Washington's credibility in the face of its East Asian partners<sup>48</sup>.

In 1977, a year into his new position as LDP Secretary general, he published a political pamphlet entitled "Rough notes on Worldly Affairs" (*Fūjin zasso*) which included key elements of Ōhira's worldview and perspective on Japan's position in world

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<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, the issue was shelved in November upon a state visit by South Korean President Pak Chonghui and Prime Minister Kim Chongp'il in November 1973. The following month, during a bilateral cabinet-level meeting, Japan pledged a new aid package to Seoul. *Ibi*, pp. 128-29.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibi*, p. 135.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibi*, p. 136.

<sup>46</sup> T. Akaha, *Japan's Comprehensive Security Policy: A New East Asian Environment*, "Asian Survey", vol. 31 (1991), no. 4, p. 325.

<sup>47</sup> Miyagi, *op. cit.*, ch. 4; Akaha, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

<sup>48</sup> V. Cha, *Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in Asia: The United States, Japan, and Korea*, "International Studies Quarterly", vol. 44 (2000), no. 2, pp. 279-80.

affairs. Particularly, he stressed the persistent presence of the “shadows of postwar” (*sengo no kage*) and of a widespread sense of guilt and awareness of Imperial Japan’s war crimes (*zaiaku ishiki*). From a policy making perspective, he argued, the wartime legacy has been both a blessing and a curse as they allowed for cautious and “easier” solutions in terms of foreign policy, i.e., relying on the US. “Today – wrote Ōhira – there is a strong need for advancing the reconstruction of our country’s individual autonomy (*koseiteki na shutaisei*) through proactive participation in the planning of the international order (*kokusai chitsujo e no sankaku*)”. Moreover, the LDP Secretary General expressed his will to bring back Japan (*kaifuku shitai*) to a position of constituent member of the international order, whose position is acknowledged by the other members of the (US-led) international society in terms of (good) reputation (*meijitsu*) and prestige (*meiyo*)<sup>49</sup>.

### **Slave to the postwar narrative? Ōhira’s conservative reformism**

The above-mentioned ideas, combined with Ōhira’s own desire to overcome materialism by investing in culture and education, were finally incorporated in the “comprehensive security” (*sōgō anzen hoshō*) strategy at the end of 1978. In November that year, Ōhira was finally elected at the LDP presidency and in December successfully formed his first cabinet. In the wake of the second oil crisis, Ōhira’s priority was naturally to secure resources and markets for Japanese industries. This economic rationale could not however be possibly detached from a genuinely security rationale. As argued by Envall, the period beginning in January 1979 was characterized by a sense of anxiety involving Japan’s policy makers as well as in the public at large<sup>50</sup>. Contributing factors were both domestic and external. First, the limits of the growth strategies adopted in the mid-1970s became manifest as inflation rose because of the second oil shock. Second, one has to consider that factors like the Iranian revolution of January 1979, the political cause of the 1979 oil crisis, border clashes between Vietnam, China and Cambodia of March, worsening Japan-USSR ties, the Vietnamese refugee

<sup>49</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>50</sup> Envall, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

crisis, and US-Japan trade frictions heavily affected the sense of “ontological insecurity” within a rapidly transforming international environment anticipating post-Cold War era arrangements<sup>51</sup>.

Therefore, given Japan’s vulnerability potentially to “any small conflict” around the world, Ōhira maintained the need to constitute a collective security architecture by increasing state investments in Japan’s defense capabilities, economic cooperation and by strengthening the Japan-US alliance. As summarized by Akaha, the comprehensive security strategy entailed (a) enhanced capabilities of self-help and self-defense; (b) efforts to make the whole international system more secure, and therefore, contribute to Japan’s own security; (c) strengthened ties with regional partners to promote stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>52</sup>. On top of this, Ōhira pledged to strengthen the government’s efforts with regards to educational and cultural diplomacy and ordered the creation of special task forces bringing together researchers, experts, university professors and state bureaucrats to support the LDP and the government with ad hoc policy advice<sup>53</sup>.

Closely linked to the Ōhira’s security strategy was the idea of a Pacific Community (*kan-taihei'yō rentai kōsō*). To some extent, Ōhira defended Japan’s dominant position in the region, by comparing the country to other powers such as the US, West Germany and the European Community towards Latin America, Europe and Africa, respectively. However, as the US paid special consideration (*tokubetsu no hairyō o harau*) to the countries in Central and South America, West Germany to the European Community, the European Community, in turn, to Africa, he maintained that Japan’s diplomacy should naturally adopt a similar approach towards Pacific countries. Upon their development, in fact, depended “the world’s development (*sekai no hatten*)”<sup>54</sup>.

Ōhira went further by stating the following:

Needless to say, making proactive diplomatic efforts to build a peaceful international environment is essential [...] Japan’s interdependence with the nations of the Pacific like the US,

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibi*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>52</sup> Akaha, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>53</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibi*, p. 170.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand and our friendly ties with Central and South America are growing stronger and stronger<sup>55</sup>.

Particularly, Ōhira appointed long-time economist and diplomat Ōkita Saburō as the Pacific Community Group chair. Heavily influenced by economist Akamatsu Kaname's "flying geese" paradigm and advocate of Japan's primacy in East Asia, Ōkita had been a supporter of comprehensive security through economic means, specifically ODA, since the 1950s, contributing to shaping Japan's overall diplomatic approach in the postwar<sup>56</sup>. It is not surprising then that in 1980, Ōhira and Ōkita inaugurated the Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (PECC), a non-governmental economic summit platform, with Australian PM Malcolm Fraser whom Ōhira had introduced to his Pacific Community idea at a summit meeting in Canberra in January 1980, a few months before his death in June that year<sup>57</sup>.

## Conclusion

Despite his less than 2 year-long stint as PM, during his long career as LDP powerbroker and public servant, Ōhira Masayoshi has been one of the most influential political figures in postwar Japan, who has contributed to greatly reshaping the narrative framework of Japan's foreign policy and the country's actual security policies. His guidelines, particularly, the comprehensive security and Pacific Community ideas have been so influential as to clearly inspire the definition of subsequent foreign policy grand narratives until recently (i.e., the FOIP).

In the above paragraphs, we have shown how Japanese governments' grand narratives on foreign policy have been relentlessly characterized by the quest for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region to make up for policymakers' and citizens' growing sense of "anxiety" in a perceivably "unstable" or "dangerous" international

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibi*, p. 174.

<sup>56</sup> P. Katzenstein, *Regionalism and Asia*, in S. Breslin (ed) *New Regionalism in the Global Political Economy: Theories and Cases*, London-New York, 2002, pp. 104-105. P. Korhonen, *The Theory of the Flying Geese Pattern of Development and Its Interpretations*, "Journal of Peace Research", vol. 31 (1994), no. 1, p. 105.

<sup>57</sup> Hattori, *op. cit.*, p. 192; Katzenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

environment. The construction of such narratives, several of which are based on hierarchical imaginative geographies, as shown above, has consistently been a way for Japan's policymaking élites to reaffirm and adjust Japan's position in the international environment amidst the demise of Cold war arrangements since the late 1970s. A few issues raised in previous paragraphs deserve to be recalled in this concluding paragraph.

First, we have highlighted a continuity and relative consistency of narrative construction since the late 1970s as a response to the normalization of "anxiety" in Japanese foreign policy. If in the late 1970s, under Ōhira's leadership, the focus of the Japanese government official narrative was the Pacific, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union and of the 2-decade long US engagement in Afghanistan, Japanese policymakers have gradually reoriented the focus of their action toward Russia and Central Asia and, later, with the launch of the AFP, toward a wider region comprising South Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern and Northern Europe. To some extent, the launch of the FOIP as a Japanese American grand narrative which has contributed to creating a new geographic "reality" in recent years, has again turned the clock back to Ōhira's original plan of creating a Pacific Community including important economic and security partners such as Australia.

Second, we pointed at periodical readjustments of the dominant narratives as symptoms of a relentless anxiety and possible future "neuroticization" of such anxiety caused by the growing difficulty to predict transformations and changes in the international environment. Anxiety could not be related only to threats posed by rivals but also to perceived friends and partners. To further elaborate, contrary to the recent FOIP, a PRC-containment drive could not be noticed in Ōhira's foreign policy proposals. Ōhira, as a member of the Kōchikai, a moderate faction within the LDP, and close associate and friend of PM Tanaka Kakuei in the early 1970s, was a key figure in the process of Japan-PRC normalization and did not probably perceive the PRC as an actor that could enhance his country's sense of "anxiety". The same could not be said with regards to the USSR, in the face of which not even Ōhira's proactive diplomatic stance succeeded in completely normalizing ties, or to the US. In this regard, it might be worth noting that

despite the foundational character of the US-Japan alliance in defining Japan's foreign policy priorities, US' attitude toward Japan has repeatedly been a source of "anxiety" for Japanese leaders and policymakers since the late 1970s. At the same time, the opportunistic character of such "anxiety" reducing strategies emerges clear from the rekindling of subsequent geonarratives.

Third, we noticed the persistence of hierarchies and hierarchical thinking in anxiety reducing narrative strategies. Interestingly, similarly to the flying geese paradigm that inspired one of Ōhira's closest associate, Ōkita Saburō, hierarchies appear to be embedded in the process of strategic narrative formulation. This process can be observed both in the Pacific and Eurasian strategies as shown above. Particularly in the first, in fact, despite their vows to be a "maritime Pacific nation", Japanese (and more recently US) policymakers and diplomats have rarely included Pacific island nations such as Papua New Guinea, or Kiribati and Micronesia, in their strategic narratives, as partners but rather as recipients of their generosity<sup>58</sup> or areas of neocolonial interests. The case of Papua, whose government along with regional organizations and partners, have long struggled to prevent tuna stock depletion in their territorial waters caused by excessive activity from foreign fishing fleets particularly Japanese is telling<sup>59</sup>. Once again with Agnew, spatial representations are conceived to arbitrarily enhance certain self-representations of the map promoter rather than promoting equality and objectivity.

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<sup>58</sup> Blinken, *op. cit.*: Jiji, *Japan, Papua New Guinea Aim for Free, Open Indo-Pacific*, "nippon.com", 21.8.2020, <https://www.nippon.com/en/news/yjj2020082100863/>, (Accessed on 26.9.2022).

<sup>59</sup> R. Kuk - J. Tioti, *Fisheries Policy and Management in Papua New Guinea*, "NRI Special Publication", no. 64 (2012). Bloomberg News, *Pacific Nations Ban Tuna Boats to Stop Stock Collapse*, "Los Angeles Times", 19.6.2008, [http://www.seaaroundus.org/news-papers/2008/LosAngelesTimes\\_PacificnationsBanTunaBoatsToStopStockCollapse.pdf](http://www.seaaroundus.org/news-papers/2008/LosAngelesTimes_PacificnationsBanTunaBoatsToStopStockCollapse.pdf), (Accessed 26.9.2022).

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