Identity politics and Japan's foreign policy

LINUS HAGSTRÖM

Specific aims

Japan's allegedly passive and reactive foreign policy in the post-war period has been a constant source of debate among International Relations (IR) specialists. Realists, in particular, have been taken aback by the fact that Japan for a long time failed to develop political and military power commensurate with its economic capability. This "enigmatic" or "anomalous" facet of Japanese foreign policy, however, has been reasonably explained by other theories. In short, liberals and constructivists have argued that Japan has just been following a different logic to the former for reasons of economic rationality, and to the latter as a consequence of various ideational factors.

In recent years, Japan has embarked on a distinctly more assertive and proactive foreign policy. While this development is less consistent with the liberal and constructivist understanding of the country, realists could argue that this is the development they have been waiting for for decades. However, realism does not answer the question why Japan's foreign policy is becoming more assertive and proactive now, in the 2000s, rather than in the 1990s or the 1980s.

This research project aims to further the understanding of Japan's changing foreign policy by elaborating the connection between identity politics and foreign policy, both theoretically and empirically. By doing so, it aims to create a framework within which it can be understood more clearly why Japan's foreign policy is changing now and why it did not do so one or two decades ago. Hence, this is a framework which can facilitate the understanding both of Japan's passive and reactive foreign policy in the post-war era and of the recent changes in a more assertive and proactive direction.

More concretely, this project will adhere to a relational and layered concept of identity; trace, expose and delve into the specific processes whereby identity is constructed, especially in the sphere of education and the mass media; and analyze the connection between such identity construction and the development of Japanese external relations after the cold war. The project is expected to make a distinct contribution to the understanding of Japan's foreign policy, particularly in the context of a volatile East Asian environment, with a special focus on a rising China and an unstable North Korea. With its theoretical focus, moreover, it will also be of interest to IR research in general.

Outline of the field

Japan's development after World War II has been nothing less than astonishing. The journey from military defeat to economic success took just some twenty years to accomplish. And yet many realist scholars have been rather more astonished by the fact that Japan for so long failed to fulfill the prophecy of their theory, namely developing political and military power commensurate with its renowned economic capabilities (Layne 1993; Waltz 1993). The country has thus been called a "structural anomaly" (Waltz 1993: 66), and even non-realist scholars have tended to reproduce the idea of Japan as an "economic giant" and "political pygmy."

However, the image of Japan as an "anomalous" or "enigmatic" power has met with two kinds of criticism.

First, and most famously, there are two different arguments, both of which boil down to the idea that Japan is just following a different logic in international politics—one that might actually be a model for other states. One the one hand, liberals like Rosecrance emphasize that Japan's foreign policy behavior is motivated by commercial interests rather than by security ones. The Yoshida Doctrine of 1954 left all military security concerns to the USA, for the sole reason that this would allow Japan to develop into a "trading state," or, in Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru's own terms, a "merchant nation." Against that background, Japan's supposedly one-sided possession of "economic" or "civilian" power is not enigmatic at all—it is simply the result of economic rationality (Rosecrance 1986). On the other hand, constructivists like Berger and Katzenstein consider Japan's postwar pacifist foreign policy to be a consequence of its national identity, historical experience, and domestic cultural, normative and institutional contexts. The gist of their argument is that after the war Japan established a distinctive, comprehensive and generally non-violent definition of security; it opted out of the violent world of realpolitik by institutionalizing antimilitarist culture and norms. Since such ideational factors are believed to transform very slowly—and since norms and identity are believed to infuse national interests with their content and meaning-constructivists predict little change in Japan's foreign policy (Berger 1996, 1998; Katzenstein 1996).

The constructivist approach, in particular, has become very popular, although a new generation of realists have responded

that it underrates the impact of international influences in shaping Japan's postwar norms, institutions, and "culture of antimilitarism." Midford, for instance, insists that Japan's non-conventional foreign policy stance should rather be understood as reassurance. He argues that Japan's cold war and post-cold war grand strategy reflects the fact that the government has rationally recognized that "normal" great-power behavior could encourage a spiral of suspicion among its neighbors, producing counterbalancing and an arms race (Midford 2002). Lind, on the other hand, finds that Japan's post-war foreign policy is more consistent with a buck-passing strategy, that is, a rational response to the international environment whereby a state delegates its balancing to an ally, while itself developing only as much military capability as necessary (Lind 2004).

Second, it has been argued that the idea of Japan as an "enigmatic power" is itself ambiguous as long as a property concept of power in terms of capability is applied, because for some time already Japan has not only possessed great "economic," or "civilian" capability; it has also developed exceptional military and political capabilities (Hagström 2005a; cf. Lind 2004). Scholars who define power in terms of capability should thus have to conclude that, in addition to being an "economic power" or a "civilian power," Japan has also become a "military power" and a "political power," or simply that it has reached the rank of "great power." The reason why they do not is probably that the assumed connection between capability and outcome has been regarded as unclear in Japan's case. In brief, the country has not seemed to use its vast policy base as anticipated, for example, by engaging in balancing behavior.

In my own research so far I have taken as my starting-point the second criticism above. I have addressed this issue by arguing that, unlike IR theory, foreign policy analysis (FPA) does not need power as an independent variable to explain the configuration of the international system. Hence, there is also no need to adhere to a property concept of power when analyzing Japan's foreign policy. Rather, since the treatment of power as a dependent variable suits FPA well-indeed, it could even be seen as tantamount to its very purpose—such analysis should be directed at instances of "control," that is, what all observers really wish to pinpoint by their focus on capability. By developing and employing a framework of "relational power" for foreign policy analysis (Hagström 2005b), my research has demonstrated that Japan has even exercised power over the People's Republic of China (PRC, China) in two divergent-albeit equally "significant" and "central"-empirical settings. It did so, moreover, for the most part by using civilian instruments positively, defensively, and through non-action. Japan's exercise of power over China in those cases warranted speaking of Japan's "quiet," but not "silent," power, because the strategies the country depended on were all very subtle and discreet, yet efficient (Hagström 2005c). By focusing on power as it is exercised in a particular relationship rather than the possession of capability in the abstract, my research has demonstrated one way to make Japan's foreign policy more intelligible in terms of power.

Project outline

Research problem

Unlike my PhD-dissertation, the proposed project will engage in the first dis-

cussion outlined in the preceding section. However, rather than accepting any of the disparate propositions at face value, this project aims to problematize all of them in the face of the Japanese foreign policy activism and assertiveness that have recently been growing. In a decade-old article, Berger states that "Japan...prefers to overlook simmering regional threats in North Korea and China and continues to insist that it will make only nonmilitary contributions to the international order" (Berger 1996: 345). More recently, Midford similarly notes that "Japan has not responded in kind [to North Korea's medium-range missiles], nor is it moving to develop the means to conduct effective military strikes at North Korean missile sites" (Midford 2002: 34). In spite of the "serious threats from North Korea and potentially from China in the future" (Lind 2004: 110), Lind moreover concludes that in the post-cold war world "conventional threats to Japan have declined, which suggests that Japan should decrease its military efforts" (ibid.). The problem, for both constructivists like Berger and Katzenstein and their realist critics, is that in recent years Japan has taken a much more proactive stance in its foreign policy-a development which seems to be related precisely to China and North Korea, and which has often crystallized in its policies toward those countries (Hughes 2004a: 42-6). Japan no longer seems to behave quite as the "quiet power."

First, after it normalized relations with the People's Republic of China in 1972, Japan's China policy was long characterized by war guilt and commercial interests. Yet the relationship was not frictionless; the so-called "history issues" and the territorial dispute over the Pinnacle (Senkaku/Diaoyu) Islands, in particular, have long been causes for concern (Tanaka 1991; Hagström 2005a). However, in more recent years such problems have been aggravated, and Japan has also started to handle them in a more proactive fashion. Since 2001, when Prime Minister Koizumi decided to honor Japan's war dead-including fourteen convicted and executed war criminals-by visiting the controversial Yasukuni Shrine annually, Chinese leaders have consistently refused to meet him other than on the periphery of multilateral summit meetings. For their part, Japanese leaders and public opinion have reacted with increased hostility to the repeated Chinese incursions into Japanese territorial waters and economic zones in recent years. In the December 2004 issue of the annual Defense of Japan, China was mentioned for the first time as a future military threat alongside North Korea. As Japan's image of China has grown increasingly negative, it has become opportune for politicians to demand that Japan's aid program in the country should be terminated, and that Japan should handle the islands dispute with force (Hagström and Lagerkvist 2005). The upsurge of anti-Japanese nationalism in China in the spring of 2005, and the indignant Japanese response, reflect the volatility of the bilateral relationship.

Second, since its establishment in 1948, North Korea has been a continuous source of unrest to Japan. As the structural constraints surrounding the country started to loosen after the end of the cold war, North Korea developed into a constant headache for Japanese policymakers. Yet, if Japan's involvement in the multilateral negotiations, which were prompted by the first nuclear crisis in 1993–94, is compared with its stance in the second crisis, which is presently unfolding, it becomes clear that the country's foreign pol-

icy has grown increasingly proactive over the last decade, especially since 2002 (Hagström, under review). Twelve years ago, Japan, together with China and South Korea, resisted US proposals that the nuclear issue be referred to the UN Security Council and sanctions be used against the country. At present, however, Japan is itself threatening to impose sanctions to resolve what is known as the "abduction issue" (i.e. the abduction of Japanese nationals to North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s), and it is doing so against the advice of both the USA and countries in the region. Japanese public debate features people usually known as moderates recommending that Japan should stage an attack against North Korea (McCormack 2004a; Hagström and Karelid 2005).

The preceding paragraphs are intended to demonstrate that, despite the fact that overall "conventional threats to Japan have declined," Japan is not overlooking the "simmering threats" in its nearby region any more. Berger's analysis continues to prove correct only to the extent that the country has so far handled its neighbors using mainly non-military instruments. However, the recent passing of ten related national emergency bills that establish comprehensively-for the first time in the post-World War II periodhow to respond to a direct attack, the dispatch of troops to Afghanistan and Iraq-entering hostile territory for the first time since World War II-and lively debates over whether to revise the "peace constitution," acquire nuclear capability, cut contributions to the UN unless Japan gets a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and become a "normal state"symbolizing a country with military power economic commensurate with its strength-all these are evidence enough that Japan has grown significantly more proactive, assertive, and even nationalistic in its foreign policy than predicted by either constructivism or its critics (Hughes 2004a; Hughes 2004b; McCormack 2004b; Hagström 2005d). How could the re-emergence of Japan as a more assertive military power be understood theoretically?

Theoretical possibilities

Recent developments in Japan's international outlook, especially in regard to China and North Korea, thus give reason to problematize the constructivist conclusion that Japan will remain in its "pacifist cocoon." They are also inconsistent both with the logic of assurance and with the buck-passing interpretation, and Lind, at least, admits that "In the post-Cold War era, the buck-passing theory receives mixed results" (Lind 2004: 115). More traditional realists like Waltz, however, could claim that Japan has finally been given the injection of realpolitik that will transform it in accordance with the maxims of their theory. Still, considering that the present material situation in East Asia differs only marginally from that of a decade ago, such a conclusion is not very convincing. Realists could also argue that Japan's emerging activism and assertiveness are a result of US pressure, thus reflecting the global material situation and a Japanese fear of abandonment (cf. Hughes 2004b). However, Japan has successfully resisted US demands for "burden-sharing" in the past, so why could it not continue to do so?

Liberals, on the other hand, are predisposed to seek an answer in Japan's domestic politics. For instance, they have ascribed importance to individual initiatives (Johnston 2004; McCormack 2004b: 29), or argued that a generational change is un-

derway in Japanese politics (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2002; cf. Johnston 2004; Lind 2004: 119). However, such explanations still beg the question: Why now? If the normative and institutional transformation after World War II was indeed as qualitatively thorough as constructivists argue, why are not later generations bound by it? In general, I accept the constructivist notion that national identity matters, and in this research proposal I will draw attention to two kinds of criticism against Berger and Katzenstein, which are drawn from within constructivism. Taking such criticism seriously, moreover, not only generates an alternative way to conceptualize identity in connection with foreign policy, but also-hopefully-a more plausible way to understand the recent development of Japan's foreign policy.

One critique against "conventional" constructivism is that it treats identity (norms, culture etc.) as a property concept, that is, as an intrinsic attribute of a state. Instead, the critique goes, identity should be treated as a relational concept, because even the way identity is domestically constructed typically relies on a process of differentiation between oneself and others (Neumann 1996)—and not just necessarily "the Other" in antagonistic terms (cf. Wæver 2002). Although the material situation in East Asia may not have changed so radically during the last decade, it is possible, and even likely, as can be inferred from the next section, that the discursive process of differentiation between Japan and, for instance, China, North Korea and the USA is different now than the process in the mid-1990s (cf. Morris-Suzuki 2003; McCormack 2004a).

The second point of critique is that Katzenstein and Berger's "take" on Japa-

nese identity is biased toward stability, and hence toward foreign policy continuity. Of course, if identity were not believed to be at least fairly stable, it would be virtually meaningless as an analytical device. However, other constructivists contend that, at its heart, "if constructivism is about anything, it is about change" (Adler 2002: 102; cf. Lapid 1996; Wæver 2002).

One way to handle both continuity and change within the same analytical framework would be to treat identity not only as a structure of meaning (Wæver 2002: 26) but as a layered one, so that identity is simultaneously constituted on differentyet mutually interacting-levels of intersubjective meaning. Somewhat in line with this idea, Wæver proposes a threelayered discourse analysis of the foreign policy of European states, where narratives of nation/state and Europe interact among themselves and with the contemporary policy debates (Wæver 2002: 25). Although I have yet to choose what "lenses of identity" (ibid.) to work with, with this perspective, identity change on a level nearer to the surface interacts with and builds on the structure on deeper levelswhether it too changes or not. The latter levels are "deeper" to the extent that they are "more solidly sedimented and more difficult to politicise and change" (Wæver 2002: 31). With this approach it would be possible to understand foreign policy change, and even sharp turns in identity construction-for instance, when the belligerency and emperor cult of the early and mid-1900s gave way to the culture of antimilitarism after Word War II-in light of recurring themes on the most sedimented level of discourse. However, not even the deepest structure should be reified; change is not just possible but necessary in a longer perspective.

Empirical focus and method

Neumann argues that "The focus for studies of identity formation should ... be ... how these boundaries come into existence and are maintained" (Neumann 1996: 167), and Wæver suggests that the construction of identity should be analyzed in terms of how self is distinguished from others in public texts such as parliamentary debates, speeches and so on (Wæver 2002: 26). I can see the relevance of analyzing such texts as representatives of discourse "nearer to the surface." However, I agree with Berger's idea that the task of getting Japan to assume an enhanced international role "will require a far-reaching resocialization" of the Japanese public and elites (Berger 1998: xi), and that is why I believe school education and the mass media should be taken to represent a deeper-perhaps intermediate-layer. The relevance of such agents of secondary socialization as battlegrounds for establishing, negotiating, and contesting a shared identity and for shaping a sense of belonging in relation to others is often stipulated even in various IR theories, but it has seldom been demonstrated analytically (Katzenstein 1996: 26, 31, 39-41, 58; Berger 1998: 13; Andersson 2001: 161-2, 166; Eriksson 2001: 293).

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* brings attention to, par excellence, the modern ways of mobilizing a citizenry by essentializing national identities that are firmly located in geography (Anderson 1991). Research on Japanese history, moreover, has demonstrated how educational institutions and the mass media mobilized Japanese citizens to accept the ambitions of Imperial Japan during the Meiji period (1868–1912) (Gluck 1985) and in the 1930s and 1940s (Midford 2002: 37), and how, in the wake of World

War II, schools became known as bastions of "the left," where generations of Japanese were socialized into the peace culture (cf. Klien 2002). In recent years, however, the imagination of national identities has supposedly been undermined by increased mobility and new forms of allegiances, where postmodern ways of identification—through transnational mass media, popular culture and consumer society—have gained prominence (Held 1995).

Recent events in Japan do imply the recurring relevance of the modern "hubs" for establishing, negotiating and contesting identities. The present re-evaluation of Japan's foreign policy in fact seems to go in tandem with important changes both in education and in the mass media. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology recently recommended that national symbols such as the flag and the national anthem should be hoisted and sung in Japanese schools. The City of Tokyo has even made them obligatory in all types of ceremony. Teachers and head teachers who refuse to obey are dismissed. At the same time, new high school history textbooks in 2005 reportedly whitewash Japan's wartime history to a greater extent than earlier textbooks and blank out narratives that set Japan in an unfavorable light. Media coverage also seems to have changed during the last decade. One indicator of the hysteria that is building up in the media in regard to North Korea and China (cf. Hishiki 2003; Morris-Suzuki 2003; Lynn, under review), is that, while the keyword "North Korea" (Kitachsen) generated about 500 hits in the Asahi Shimbun database between 1989 and 1999, there where 10,000 hits between January 2000 and October 2004. At the same time, politicians reportedly interfere with and censor the contents of TV programs (McCormack 2005), and as harassment, intimidation and death threats face dissenters in the bureaucracy, academia and the business world, self-censorship is likely to become more prevalent.

The present project will thus focus on the processes of socialization and normalization as they have been reflected in education and in the mass media in Japan since the early 1990s, and it will elaborate the links between them and the other public texts, as suggested by Wæver, and with Japan's evolving foreign policy direction, in particular the policies toward China and North Korea. Although my instinct as a political scientist leads me to ask if any one person or group benefits more than others from the establishment of a particular identity, or is more instrumental to its construction, the kind of textual analysis that I have in mind does not necessarily single out individuals who can be held responsible (cf. Lukes 2005: 57). However, this approach could and should ask about the power of discourse: How imperative is it? What kind of dissent is there?

I will use a case study method to analyze and compare aspects of identity construction in school education and the mass media in the early 1990s and the early 2000s, and investigate the linkages between that comparison and the development of Japanese foreign policy discourse and practice during the same decade. I plan to analyze textbooks in history and the social sciences as representatives of school education, and debate articles and editorials as representatives of the mass media. As a representative of an even more sedimented layer, I intend moreover to analyze the discourse on Japanese exceptionalism which unfolds recurrently, for example, in Japanese literature, because I believe that both belligerent and peaceful self-images in the past could be understood against the background of such exceptionalism,. Improving on the discourse analysis suggested by Wæver, in my project I will develop and use an interpretative and reconstructive method for textual analysis.

Preliminary results

I have already touched on the theme of this research project in various writings, but never in a consistent fashion (Hagström and Lagerkvist 2005; Hagström and Karelid 2005; Hagström 2005d). To my knowledge, only one book has so far attempted to analyze the construction of Japanese national identity, as a prerequisite for the definition of the country's foreign policy and its international role, roughly along the lines of my present proposal (Klien 2002). Klien's concept of identity is relational, but not layered. She describes convincingly the fragmented and diversified character of Japanese identity discourses, although she tends to "actorize" them. She also fails to make an overall assessment in regard to the robustness over time of such identity construction. Moreover, accounting for Japan's gradual shedding of its post-war pacifism in recent years, she does not really draw on her analysis of identity, but rather adheres to the common sense of liberal or even realist explanations.

Significance

The research project connects to and is expected to generate valuable results for research on Japanese foreign policy in the volatile East Asian context, Japanese society and identity construction, and, by elaborating on the more theoretical issue

of how to connect identity construction and foreign policy analytically, it will also contribute to foreign policy analysis, and perhaps to the more general understanding of the role of nationalism in international relations. Although it is distant, as the second-largest economy in the world Japan cannot be neglected, and the Swedish research community should be fostering expertise on all aspects of its external relations, especially now that East Asia is developing into a potential powder keg, with tensions growing all over the region.

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