

THE ABE ADMINISTRATION AND THE JAPAN CONFERENCE: AN UNFULFILLED PROMISE TO MAKE JAPAN GREAT AGAIN

Research Article

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Abstract

The article treats the relations between Japanese former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, who resigned in September 2020 for health reasons, and the largest right-wing group in Japan, the Japan Conference (*Nippon Kaigi* in Japanese). The organization's presence in Japanese politics is essential, and his influence cannot be denied. The research question in this article, using role theory as a theoretical framework, investigates the impact of the Japan Conference on Abe's domestic and foreign policy, assesses its extent, the specific issues it focused on, and its outcome exertion of its influence. The advent of a prime minister whose political faith and values are said to be close to the Japan Conference led to the assumption that it would be very influential on Abe's domestic and foreign policies. However, this article concludes that the Japan Conference has been less influential than expected during Abe's tenure. Confronting difficult to reconcile role demands from the domestic and foreign audiences forced Abe to scale down his objectives to transform Japan's socio-political system and to make compromises. These compromises were related to historical issues, the organization of the state, the educational system, the centrality of the role of pacifism, and the reinforcement of Japan as a military power. Despite the commonality of viewpoints on many issues, a gap emerged over time during Abe's tenure as prime minister between the aspirations of the Japan Conference and the outcome Abe achieved, creating disappointment and resentment as a result.

Keywords: Role theory, historical issues in East Asia, nationalism, Abe administration, Japan Conference

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INTRODUCTION

Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (December 2012-September 2020) and the Japan Conference share the long-term objective to remake a more nationalistic Japan, which supposes removing the limitations imposed after the Second World War on Japan's defense and security policy. Even more fundamentally, Abe and the Japan Conference have similar viewpoints on the perception Japan should have of itself as a country, how it must be perceived in the international community, and its roles per its national identity. Abe's achievements are considerable in those respects. Through his efforts, Japan may already have entered a period where the manner Japan behaves and presents itself as a 'pacifist' country is different from what it used to be during the whole postwar period. Abe's pacifism means that Japan strengthens the Japan-United States alliance and increase the Self-Defense Forces' (SDF) activity abroad to serve the cause of world peace. It does not mean to abandon pacifism and multilateralism, pillars of postwar Japanese diplomacy. His pacifism is to contribute to realize peace with like-minded countries with various means including the military so that Japan will not be accused of doing free riding.

Abe wanted Japan to present itself as a self-confident, mature, and trustful democracy reconciled with its identity, ready to defend human rights and the rule of law values and assume leadership in Asia. While considering its past, Abe's conception of pacifism rejects the idea that Japan is always the perpetrator of the damage and the neighboring countries are the victims. Japanese people, especially the young generations, must be proud of their country (Abe 2006). Abe's administration attempted to throw away the postwar pacifist philosophy because he believed it drained away all the vitality of the Japanese political, social, and educational systems (Nakano 2016). Japan does not have to remain the subdued traditional pacifism-driven country, reluctant to show assertiveness in political affairs that it had been after the war. It does not have to shy away from making alliances and partnerships related to defense and security matters and from claiming its readiness to defend itself against any threat (Abe 2006). However, to become a country fulfilling these roles requires radical changes, especially a constitutional one. The current Constitution does not reflect Japan's true self and is an impediment to play roles globally, commensurate to its status and identity among nations.

In 1993, at the beginning of his political career, Abe was advocating constitutional changes and insisting on the need for Japan to have an independent security policy (Saaler 2016). He also stated that it was feasible to flexibly interpret the current Constitution in order to allow Japan's right to collective defense. Thus, Abe said that it was possible to remove the shackles that limit the autonomy of Japan's defense policy imposed by the existing framework. It can be argued that he proved able to achieve his objectives by enacting an extensive array of laws deepening and

enlarging the roles and power of the SDF². In doing so, he thereby facilitated military-related activities in concert with the United States and other countries.

Therefore, in such perspective it could be said that Abe completed what former prime ministers such as Nakasone Yasuhiro and Koizumi Junichiro, had started to do in order to make Japan regain its security autonomy (Berkowsky 2014). Constraints remain in place after his departure with his resignation on 16 September 2020 but Abe created a strong momentum for further changes favoring the normalization of Japan's defense and security policy. The country can assert itself in world affairs more proactively and gain the legitimacy necessary to become the leading country in East and South East Asia, challenging the rise of China in this respect. As a result, from now on, Japan should enact and perform the large variety and importance of roles Abe – and the Japan Conference – believe fit better to its national identity and status.

However, Abe disappointed the Japan Conference because what he did went in the right direction but stopped far away from its aspirations on the most crucial issues. In role theory terms, the role performance the Japan Conference expected from Abe has never been strongly materialized. During Abe's whole tenure, numerous domestic issues, notably related to the relationship with Komeito, Abe's partner in the ruling coalition, and external factors concurred to mitigate the impact the Japan Conference could have had on Abe's policies. Despite Abe's departure from power, the Japan Conference influence is likely to remain significant in Japanese polity. However, it will continue to be constrained by many domestic and external factors in the foreseeable future.

1. Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

Role theory is used as the theoretical framework of the article. The theory is based on the concept of National Role Conception (hereafter referred to as NRC), which presents explanations, the rationale for why the state is the way it is in terms of identity, why settings and characters behave in the manner they do. It also examines why and how the state expects to be considered by the domestic public opinion (ego-

² The SDF was born in 1954. The cause was the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. The US army stationed in Japan was dispatched to the Korean Peninsula and the National Police Reserve was established for maintenance of the public order. The name changed to the National Security Force and finally the SDF. As the postwar constitution prohibits Japan from having an army, the successive governments explain that it is not an army and the court does not judge the constitutionality of the SDF as the issue is highly political.

part in role theory term) and the foreign actors, allies, and foes, called alter-parts in role theory term.³

The theory assumes that leaders and foreign policy elites develop particular interpretations or conceptions of their functions which often derive from their shared beliefs about how a state should behave in the international social system (Grossman 2005). In turn, those interpretations and conceptions produce preferences for and approaches to foreign policy issues (Holsti 1970).

Although these preferences and approaches reflect a degree of sedimentation of behavior and attitudes, they are not static. A role, like identity, is an intersubjective notion of holding two dimensions of an actor's understandings. Tensions and frictions can always occur and require adjustment. That is why constant intersubjective exchange between all parties, ego-part and alter-parts alike, is necessary to adapt behavior and attitudes over time according to socio-economic, social, societal, and political transformations (Holsti 1970). If the intersubjective exchange process operates smoothly, roles' inconsistencies and conflicts can be prevented and/or dealt with before they degenerate and cause damage to the state's international relations and lead to severe domestic political problems. It does not mean that disagreements disappear, but the consistency of the communication aims to make the NRC stable and thus predictable. It is possible that a country (or its leader) perceives it does not perform the roles that are the most appropriate for itself. It is why Abe wanted to reconsider Japan's current roles. Conversely, alter-parts may not be entirely satisfied with the role change. Many of Abe's initiatives created concern among alter-parts, because they were perceived as challenging the pacifist postwar behavior and attitudes of Japan. Both parties constantly assess whether the current roles and the mutual performances remain acceptable vis-à-vis each other. Then, they decide to keep or change them, or to adopt new ones. It is widely accepted Japan's key postwar NRC – constituting together Japan's role-set, the bundle of the key NRC – have been pacifism centered on Article 9 of the Constitution, promotion of multilateralism and universalist principles on rule of law, respect for human rights and economic development, alliance with the United States to defend those principles as a liberal democracy, and acceptance of the judgment of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) that Japan caused significant damages in Asia during and before the Second World War and should do its best to repair them through its actions

³ State roles' enactment, location, and performance conveyed by the leaders provide the overarching context that reflects locations or positions of the state in social systems. They define the boundaries of appropriate actions and make events, contexts, behavior, and attitudes coherent and understandable for ego-parts and alter-parts in social settings (Harnisch 2013).

(Sakaki 2011). Although constantly challenged from the left and the right, at home and by the alter-parts, those roles have remained stable and predictable. No severe role inconsistencies and conflicts have been observed during the whole postwar period. The NRC have been the backbone of the overarching principles of Japan's domestic and foreign policies, on which Japanese leaders based their initiatives during the whole postwar period.

In principle, it can be expected that the stance of a country's leader – the roles he/she considers appropriate for the country - does not create much controversy in the ego-part. The ego-part is supposed to be united in support of the state's leadership (Holsti 1970). However, the existence of role contestation (Hirata 2016) inside the state indicates that, while the ego-part can be expected to be more homogeneous than the alter-parts in its perception, behavior, and attitude towards the NRC, complete support of leadership is never guaranteed. In a democratic country, the authorities' policies can significantly impact the NRC in several ways. The traditional pacifists have strongly challenged Abe's policies from the left, arguing that the new roles he wanted Japan to play were denaturing the traditional concept of pacifism (Kimijima 2011). However, it is also essential to look at role contestation coming from the ego-part segment which is the closest to Abe in terms of political and philosophical values. Thus, in this article, it was decided to examine the relations between Abe and the Japan Conference. The Japan Conference is a prominent representative of a particular segment of the ego-part contesting Japan's roles from the right. As such, to assess the impact and influence it has had on Abe's domestic and foreign policy is worth to be considered.

The Japan Conference, which was established in 1997 by a merger of two nationalist organizations, *Nihon o Mamoru Kokumin Kaigi* [National Conference to Protect Japan] and *Nihon o Mamoru Kai* [Association to Protect Japan], is often referred to as the largest right-wing group in Japan (Tawara 2017a: 1-5). The Japan Conference introduces itself as a 'national movement organization with a nationwide grassroots network'⁴ (The Japan Conference 1997). Strongly present among the ruling party elites, it could be said the statements of its leaders, Miyoshi and Takubo⁵ reflect the view of a large segment of the conservative right in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)- and of other minor right-wing parties, such as *Ishin no Kai* and others – much beyond the organization's boundaries. A league composed of lawmakers affiliated with the Japan

⁴ Translated by Tawara (2017a).

⁵ Miyoshi Toru, President of the Japan Conference (2001-2015) and ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and Takubo Tadae, President since April 2015 and professor emeritus of international politics Kyorin University, Tokyo.

Conference has existed since 1997 in both chambers of the National Diet, which is Japan's bicameral legislature composed of a lower house, called the House of Representatives (*Shūgiin*), and an upper house, the House of Councillors (*Sangiin*). Abe and Aso Taro, Deputy Prime Minister during his second tenure, are special advisers in the Japan Conference's Diet Members League (Tawara 2017a). About 300 members (mainly from the LDP) belong to the league, and they were always the majority in the cabinet during the second Abe administration (Tawara 2018). In the 3rd Abe Cabinet (from October 2015 until November 2017), most of the Ministers, from education, welfare, agriculture, finance to the economy, were members of the Japan Conference Diet Members League (Tawara 2017a; Mulgan 2019). In the 4th cabinet (from October 2017 to September 2020), the proportion was the same (Akahata 2019).

The Japan Conference supports openly revisionist viewpoints and pushes for a reconsideration of the postwar consensus about war responsibilities. An event such as the Nanjing Massacre is claimed to be exaggerated, and an issue such as the comfort women one⁶ is said to have been invented. No women were ever forcibly gathered by the Japanese army to serve as sexual slaves (Ascione 2015). One of the main activities of the Japan Conference is to promote revisionist history textbooks in schools which justifies the Japanese war actions. It opposes Japan's "masochistic" view of history, a term that is used to stigmatize the narrative of the Second World War in school textbooks. The group also regards the Japanese army as a liberation army for East Asians colonized by the Western countries. So, the historical interpretation of Japan as a colonial aggressor must be reconsidered because it gives a biased idea of what happened. It creates permanent constraints to recover complete independence and does not allow young Japanese people to be proud of their country. In this line of thought, the Japan Conference also lobbies school boards of education to let schools wave the Japanese flag and sing the Japanese national anthem (Tawara 2017a).

Therefore, because of its undisputable strength in Japan's polity, it is worthwhile to examine its actual power. The methodology is based on the analysis of Abe and two Japan Conference leaders, Takubo and Miyoshi, related to Japan's attitudes and behaviors on specific issues. These issues concern their vision of history and the legacy of the Second World War, the importance of values and traditions in Japan's identity, Japan's Constitution and the perceived need for change, the relations with the United States, China, and other countries, and the expectations, reservations, proscriptions, and aspirations they have about the roles they believe Japan should play in the world.

⁶ The issue relates to the allegation that Korean (and women from other Asian countries) have been forced to serve as sexual partners of military personnel at comfort stations created with the involvement of the Japanese military during the war (Asahi Shimbun 2014).

2. The correspondence between Abe and the Japan Conference about values and aspirations

Abe grew up in a family of politicians. His grandfather was Kishi Nobusuke, who entered the LDP and later became a prime minister (1957-1960).⁷ Kishi's political goals were establishing an independent constitution and making Japan an equal security partner of the United States. His father, Abe Shintaro, also belonged to the LDP and worked as a Foreign Minister in the 1980s under another nationalist Prime Minister Nakasone. Like the Japan Conference, Abe claimed that since the beginning of his political career, the Japanese Constitution, which was enacted in 1947, was an imposition by the victorious countries. He does not accept the narrative that victorious countries released the Japanese people from oppressive militarism and that only Japan was responsible for the war damages. Moreover, Abe rebuked or at least minimized the claims about these damages caused to other Asian countries before and during the Second World War. In his commitment to recreating dynamism in Japan in having Japan recovering its true identity and pride, he always claimed the manner history was taught in Japanese schools after the war created negative feelings about their own country among the Japanese youth (Abe 2006).

Therefore, Abe's policies must be understood from a holistic perspective. They never aimed only to 'free' Japan from past obstacles impeding the autonomy of its defense policy in a narrow instrumental sense. Admittedly, they are linked to the perception of threat Japan faces because of North Korea and China's behavior in the region. Abe successfully exploited this perception electorally in the ego-part. It allowed him to have the large majority needed to enact the security laws reinforcing Japan's military might. However, Abe (and influential segments of the LDP to which he belongs) also share with the Japan Conference the respect of Japanese values and traditions. The perception that postwar Japan has lost essential parts of its identity in this regard and that something has to be done to have Japan becoming itself again is present in both Abe's and the Japan Conference's discourses (Abe 2006; Takubo 2015a).

Abe's viewpoints are based on clear roles' preferences built on the nationalistic ideology he defended during his entire career. The policies he devised and implemented are intimately connected to those roles' preferences. They reflect what he thinks is Japan's collective memory and identity as a country, its self-perception, and how it is perceived abroad (Kolmas 2018). His vision is encapsulated in a book

⁷ After the Second World War, he was arrested by the Occupation Authorities on suspicion of an A-class war criminal but later released without being brought to the IMTTE. In the trial, 25 Japanese military and political leaders were found guilty of waging an aggressive war as A-class war criminals.

titled *Utsukushiikuni e* [Towards the creation of a beautiful country] (Abe 2006), in which the fundamental elements of his constantly reiterated narrative can be found, domestically and abroad. The book exposes his views on Japanese society's social cohesion and specific concepts of family and community. It explains the concepts of public order, i.e., the respect for the state and the citizens' rights and duties, which, according to Abe, should correspond with Japan's psyche. Therefore, when Abe declared the postwar pacifist philosophy drained away all the vitality of the Japanese political, social, and educational systems (Nakano 2016), it expresses a viewpoint shared by the dominant segment of his party, the LDP. It also fits with Japan Conference's viewpoint on what should be considered the essence of Japan's identity that has to translate into appropriate roles in the world.

2.1 The viewpoint of Abe and the Japan Conference on the constitutional issue

A prominent member of the Japan Conference himself, Abe is a long-standing important member in several Diet or non-Diet groups advocating constitutional change weakening or removing the pacifist philosophy, such as the Japan Rebirth (*Sōsei Nihon*) and the Alliance for Promoting the Assessment of a New Constitution (*Kenpō Chōsa Suishin Giin Renmei*) (Kolmas 2018). Indeed, when Abe committed himself to change Japan's postwar politics with the slogan of '*sengo rejime kara no dakkyaku* [escape the shackles of the postwar regime]' during the first term, he had in mind that it meant Article 9 had to be amended. Short of being able to do so, Abe had to settle down for a new reinterpretation to reinforce the SDF (The Japan Times 2014; Hirata 2016). Nevertheless, despite the wide-ranging new power the comprehensive security-related laws bestowed, Abe reconfirmed his intention to revise the Constitution just after enacting them (Huxley & Taylor 2016). In May 2017, he decided to accelerate the drafting of the LDP draft constitution to have it passed in the Diet, and to have a referendum be organized before the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (Kolmas 2018). In doing so, he was pushing his vision. However, he was also responding to the constant pressure exerted by the Japan Conference to proceed to constitutional amendment during his tenure (Takubo 2015b).

Abe was the driving force behind the 2012 LDP draft of a new constitution, which explicitly calls for removing the pacifist provisions of the 1947 constitution and advocates creating a traditional army replacing the SDF. The draft states that the new Constitution does not prevent Japan from having a right to 'self-defense' including collective self-defense in the name of 'peace and security of international society', by 'National Defense Forces' (Sankei Shimbun 2017). It also indicates that the new forces can theoretically participate in combats worldwide with allied countries, notably the United States unless the Diet disallows the activity.

According to the Japan Conference, the historical interpretation of Japan as an aggressor must be reconsidered because it is a permanent constrain to recover its military capability. This issue cannot be separated from the current Constitution imposed by the Occupation Authorities and thus from the need to rebuild Japan's identity by enacting a new one. Miyoshi belittles the current one as a 'capitulation' (Miyoshi 2014a: 3) and Takubo also considers it an 'occupation basic law' (Takubo 2015a: 162). For him, the Constitution's preamble does not reflect the old Japanese historical and cultural values that have been honed for thousands of years (Takubo 2015a: 162-163). According to Miyoshi and Takubo, it is unrealistic to believe that peace can be achieved with this spirit in the 'dog-eat-dog world' in which states operate. For Miyoshi, it is too optimistic to rely on world goodwill. He regrets that the government renounced its ultimate mission to protect the Japanese people from the threat of foreign countries. If the situation does not improve, the government will be worthless (Miyoshi 2014a: 3). Likewise, Takubo refuses the constitution preamble for the same reason that Japan has to master its defense. He states that 'because peace-loving peoples do not exist', 'we have to conclude that a nation falls unless it makes efforts to secure its safety and existence' (Takubo 2015a: 162).

Both Abe and the Japan Conference are convinced that the current Constitution damages Japan's national honor. In addition to considering its preamble that entrusts Japan's security to international society as irresponsible, Abe also writes down in his book (Abe 2006) that he considers the postwar Constitution an 'apology'. By this, he means Japan's attitude and behavior in accepting and implementing the Constitution show excessive humility toward the victorious countries. In return, Japan just received the right to be included in their group as a second-class member because of the Constitution's constraints imposed on its behavior. They prevent Japan from behaving like a normal independent country. Japan should have an army (Abe 2006), allowing it to exert the right to defend itself militarily like any other democratic country. In his view, Japan cannot be fully independent and recover this right unless it amends Article 9 and rewrites its Constitution on its own terms. The lack of credibility of Japan on the world stage comes from the fact that the SDF is not officially an army, recognized as such by the UN, a situation which harms Japan's right to defend itself and its allies (Abe 2006). This stance is in line with that of the Japan Conference as shown in the following declaration of Miyoshi: 'The existence of armed forces can be a strong deterrent' (Miyoshi 2013: 27). Takubo goes even further in respect of the needed deterrent when he declares that, ideally, another attractive deterrent would be Japan's access to nuclear armament (Takubo 2017a). The original constitution draft, compiled in 1947 by the Japanese government, titled 'National Constitution of Japan' legalized the military 'in order to defend its independence and national security, safeguard its people, and contribute to international peace' (Sankei Shimbun 2017). The draft was amended, resulting in the current Constitution, which imposed strong

constraints on Japan's defense policy (Berkowsky 2014). As a result, similar to Miyoshi, Takubo argues that Japan's current defense policy is defective: 'The state is based on the three main pillars of the economy, politics and the military. However, in the case of Japan, one of these three pillars - the military - is missing, and the situation is one of a completely abnormal country' (Takubo 2016a).

The Japan Conference consistently expected Abe to proceed with constitutional change during his tenure and was ready to take initiatives to make its viewpoint clear. In November 2013, Miyoshi declared that the time to revise the Constitution had come because of the severe security environment around Japan. Pro-revision parties had secured two-thirds seats in the Lower House due to victory at the December 2012 general election, and Abe had a unique opportunity to achieve his goal. In order not to miss it, he went on to say: 'We have to encourage the Diet to organize a referendum as soon as possible to let the people express their voice' (Miyoshi 2014a: 3). To that effect, he formed the *Kokumin no Kai* (the People's Association to Create a Constitution for a Beautiful Japan) as a variant group of the Japan Conference in October 2014. The objective of the group's lobbying activities was to encourage the government to initiate the process of an amendment to the Constitution in the Diet. The group then started a grassroots movement to collect 10 million signatures supporting the Constitution (Tawara 2017b). Those activities served to prepare for a referendum following the Upper House election in July 2016. Takubo welcomed the result of the election, which reinforced Abe's majority. It boosted furthermore the Japan Conference expectation to see Abe starting the process of amendment of the Constitution. On July 13, 2016, during a news conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo, Takubo explicitly expressed the strength of its faith in Abe's commitment as 'the only politician who has made efforts to bring Japan from the extreme left to the center as a normal country' (Takubo 2016a). Takubo also expressed the desire to see him grasp a unique opportunity to proceed because 'those who support a constitutional amendment have reached more than a two-thirds majority in both houses. I believe this is the first time this has happened since the end of the world war. Therefore, it is indeed the best chance to go forward with the constitutional amendment' (Takubo 2016a).

2.2 The issue of national identity and return to cultural roots

The change of mindset required to make Japan a 'beautiful' and 'strong' country can only be reassessed with building blocks based on its unique culture and traditions. The 2012 LDP draft responds to this quest because it proposes drastic societal changes, based on concepts of citizens' rights, duties, and practices demarking significantly from the universalism of the current Constitution and proclaims to fit better with Japan's cultural and institutional identity (Liberal Democratic Constitutional Reform Promotion Headquarters 2012). In line with the conservative demand of the right since

the 1950s, echoed by Abe in his book (Abe 2006) and by the Japan Conference since its creation, the draft also calls for establishing a more robust state to pursue public and social order. Apart from the issue of creating an army through constitutional change, a notable feature of the LDP draft is the request to clarify the Emperor's status, another point dear to the Japan Conference, which always emphasizes the issues of identity and state organization and attempts to link those points to the constitutional issue. For Miyoshi, there is a problem of legitimacy of the Constitution because it lacks proper 'regulation of the head of state' status (Miyoshi 2014a: 3). The Constitution just stipulates that the Emperor is Japan's 'symbol' (The Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 1946). So, the Japan Conference wants to restore Japan's cultural identity in its Constitution by clearly stipulating that the Emperor is the head of state. The Emperor must become Japan's official head of state and not merely a figurehead symbol, a stance similar to that of the LDP draft (Liberal Democratic Constitutional Reform Promotion Headquarters 2012).

In promoting symbols such as the national flag, the national anthem, and the restoration of the position of the Emperor as the official head of state, the Japan Conference and the LDP advocate changes in the educational system aiming to instill pride in the nation and respect for Japan's communitarian traditions in the young generations' minds (Liberal Democratic Constitutional Reform Promotion Headquarters 2012). To that effect, Takubo proposed an 'Emergency Powers Act' to be stipulated in the Constitution, which would revoke the Constitution in emergency conditions and constrain individual rights. Those exceptional powers given to the executive could be used to address a civil war, a massive terrorist attack, a natural disaster such as an earthquake in a populated area, or a massive cyberattack (Takubo 2015c). Thus, Kolmas pointed out that the draft does not simply aim to replace a supposedly obsolete document (the current constitution) to coincide better with Japan's needs in the contemporary world. It promotes a vision for Japanese society and national identity in line with Abe and the Japan Conference's nationalist narrative (Kolmas 2018).

Although it does not mean Abe rejects postwar democratic institutions and values – and the same can be said of the Japan Conference - it is pointed out Abe showed some understanding of the moral value of the Imperial Rescript, which was made in 1890. It was used in every school during the prewar era to raise the people's loyalty to the Emperor (McCormack 2020: 2-4). As pointed out (Kolmas 2018), Abe's revision to the Fundamental Law of Education, the re-introduction of moral education as a particular school subject for the first time after the war, and the approval and support of controversial textbooks are clear indicators of support to revisionism, attuned to the credo of the Japan Conference (Takubo 2015a). In this respect, Abe's support to a school, Morimoto Gakuen school, whose education philosophy reflects

prewar education principles (McCormack 2020), confirmed his inclination to help fellow believers in traditional Shinto cause. This stance could reasonably be assumed to reflect his philosophy on the issue of education.

2.3 The common stance on the historical issues

Abe became a key member of the History Examination Committee created within the LDP in 1993. After then, Prime Minister Hosokawa declared that the Asia-Pacific War was a war of aggression. Regarding the IMTFE, Abe expressed the opinion on the House of Representatives Budget Committee that 'the war was not triggered by the Japanese themselves, but rather by the victorious allies. Therefore, because it is by their judgment only that [Japanese] were condemned', and in turn, A-class war criminals are 'not war criminals under the laws of Japan' (Abe 2013a).⁸ This remark implied that the court decision was unilateral. It imposed an arbitrary sanction to a defeated country, and the judgment is unworthy of a trial. Abe never contradicted the LDP leaders, including his ministers who declared that the IMTFE unfairly sanctioned Japan without considering the actions of the Western colonial powers in Asia during the last century.

Historical issues in East Asia are mainly linked to the Sino-Japan wars from the late 19th century until 1945 and Japan's colonization of Korea from 1910 until 1945. Japanese policymakers began earnestly to tackle them in the 1990s to settle them for good. As exemplified by the acceptance of the Kono and Murayama Statements, Japan's policy succeeded to a certain degree to improve Japan - South-Korea relations.⁹ In the early 2000s, however, historical issues erupted again (Nakano 2016: 5-8). The immediate reason for the crisis was Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's repeated visit from 2001 to 2006 to the Yasukuni Shrine, where 14 A-class war criminals are enshrined. Despite Koizumi's denial of having any revisionist viewpoint, his behavior was perceived as an attempt to depart from Japan's role as a non-military pacifist country, profoundly reflecting on its past behavior, a key component of Japan's NRC. From China's perspective, the Yasukuni Shrine visit can only mean that Japan does not condemn war criminals. It makes it difficult to establish relations of

⁸ When Abe visited India during the first administration, he demonstrated his admiration for Justice Radhabinod Pal and met his son, showing his positive evaluation of the judge. He said many Japanese people still respect Justice Pal for his courageous defense of Japan during the IMTFE (Abe 2007). This is because Justice Pal had a principled stance in the IMTFE when Japan was convicted of imperial expansion and war. He argued that all defendants are innocent. For Pal, the West shared the guilt with Japan (Nakanishi 2015: 419).

⁹ The 1993 Kono Statement - in which the chief cabinet secretary Kono apologized to Korea for the experiences of the comfort women and admitted the involvement of the Japanese army - as well as Prime Minister Murayama's apology for Japan's wartime colonial rule and aggression across Asia (Pempel 2015: 376).

trust in such conditions because such historical revisionist behavior reignites a long-standing grudge (Zhang 2015: 427). From the United States' viewpoint, visiting a symbol of past militarism where dead soldiers are enshrined means dismissal of the US legacy of building democratic Japan during the occupation. It can also destabilize the region (Stockwin & Ampiah 2017) and even rekindle feud among US citizens whose ancestors fought against Japan.¹⁰

The Japan Conference takes a revisionist historical view on what the Japanese army did during wartime. Like Abe, it argues the story of the Nanjing Massacre has been exaggerated, and the comfort women issue is said to have been invented. Abe refused for a long time to recognize that many women had been forcibly forced to perform sexual activities for the Japanese army (Saaler 2016: 5-8), a stance supported by the Japan Conference. The organization is much more radical than Abe in considering the Japanese army liberated Asians from Western colonial powers (Ascione 2015), a stance Abe never adopted. Nevertheless, the Japan Conference does not wholly support Japan's actions in the war, and Abe's stance is not different in this respect. Both agree that Japan should not be the only country to blame because victorious countries were also aggressors. Takubo justifies his viewpoint as follows: 'We cannot say that one party was completely right and or completely wrong' (2016a). Likewise, the Japan Conference argues like Abe that the IMTTFE was a 'made-up story' (Miyoshi 2014b: 5), i.e., a case of 'victor' justice. The organization made a statement that embodied its view on Japan's prewar history on August 6, 2015, just before Abe made his statement about the past war as a prime minister:

There is no reason why only the Japanese act of war was convicted one-sidedly. [...] The Greater East Asia War [the Asia-Pacific War] was a self-defense war to counter US, UK, and others' economic blockade [...] The so-called 'comfort women issue' is the same (The Japan Conference 2015).

So, as a litmus test of his commitment to their cause, the Japan Conference expected Abe to state on the day of the end of the war that Japan does not accept victorious countries' unilateral claim rooted in the IMTTFE, which ruled that Japan's war from 1931 to 1945 was an act of aggression (Nakajima 2011: 7). The Japan Conference is close to the religious right that aims to revive Shinto to embed Japan's cultural roots. Shintoism prospered in prewar Japan with governmental backup as an

¹⁰ The anti-Japan narrative is still used in the US politics as a useful tool to inspire nationalism as US President uses in public (CBS News 2017).

integral part of Imperial worship. Japanese people were required to visit the Yasukuni Shrine regardless of their faith until it was forbidden by the Occupation Authorities (Larsson 2014). Therefore, the Japan Conference expects prime ministers to visit the Yasukuni Shrine as proof of attachment to Japan's cultural and political traditions. The request is made in the name of recovery of Japan's identity in which Shinto provides an understanding of life and death. In line with Abe's statement that the condemned leaders are not criminals according to Japanese law, Takubo declared that 'There are no war criminals regardless of A or B class because this [the Yasukuni Shrine] is a shrine where the spirits of the war dead come. The visit is to respect the war dead who said 'Let's meet again at Yasukuni!' People who oppose the visit do not understand Japanese Shinto' (Takubo 2016b: 36-37). Miyoshi declared that 'It is natural that prime minister regularly visits the Yasukuni Shrine. This visit [Abe's visit in December 2013] pleased us because we had expected it for a long time' (Miyoshi 2014b: 5). Takubo also supported Abe's visit in December 2013 as Chairman of the Japan Conference because in doing so, Abe was defying the United States, China, and South Korea. He declared in dialogue with a right-wing critic, Sakurai Yoshiko: 'This was a historic, significant and excellent decision' (Takubo & Sakurai 2014: 137). In his view, Abe was showing that Japan had an identity to be protected.

2.4 The issue of security and relations with the United States

Regarding security, Miyoshi and Takubo perceive that the regional power balance is changing because of the United States' inward-looking orientation and China's expansionism. Miyoshi sounded an alarm bell on China's territorial ambition: 'It is clear that China has the ambition to control the Senkaku Islands' (Miyoshi 2013: 26-27).¹¹ Takubo regarded President Barack Obama as inward-looking, referring to Obama's remark 'America is not the world's policeman' (Obama 2014), and considered his policy toward China as too conciliatory. He notably deplored that the Obama administration did not use power to deter Chinese unlawful territorial expansion in the South China Sea (SCS). Takubo is concerned about what Japan should do to keep the right balance between the United States and China (Takubo et al. 2016: 174).

However, despite their willingness to reinforce Japan's military might, Miyoshi and Takubo's answer is not that Japan should develop an autonomous defense decoupled from the Japan-US alliance. The Japan Conference's position is that Japan has no choice but to continue to rely on the US for its defense (Miyoshi 2014b: 5). On

¹¹ Japan and China persist in their struggle for the small Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. While Japan claims those islands and annexed them on the basis that they did not have ownership in 1895, China claims that Japan's administration of the Diaoyu islands (Chinese name of Senkaku islands) was related to the Sino-Japanese war from 1894 to 1895 (Berger 2014: 10).

this point, too, the Japan Conference's position is close to Abe. The analysis of Abe's statements reveals that he also wanted Japan to take the initiative and gain international respect in playing a leading role in global issues. For example, Abe expressed the wish of Japan being considered one of 'we, the leaders of the world' (Abe 2014a), to play responsible roles, i.e., as one of the world leaders at the G7 level. However, there was never an indication that Abe believed the *Pax Americana* in Asia could fade away or decline so significantly that it becomes ineffective to keep peace and prosperity and assure Japan's defense needs. Abe has taken initiatives in foreign affairs such as in launching the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative and in being the driving force of the QUAD (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue grouping Japan, the United States, Australia, and India). Nevertheless, he has never expressed the possibility of creating a new foreign policy framework where Japan would intervene on its own, outside of the Japan-US alliance. US leadership constantly remained the lynchpin of Abe's policy. In the same line of thought, Takubo also argued Japan should 'strengthen the alliance with the US and take a course which enables Japan to make the maximum use of defense measures under the constraint of the constitution' to repel Chinese threat (Takubo 2015b: 48). Therefore, Takubo considered favorably Abe's statement that Japan would support the rebalancing policy of the United States thoroughly because it serves Asia-Pacific regional peace and stability (Abe 2015a).

Like other issues, the Japan Conference believes that Japan's commitment towards the US is also related to constitutional change. Takubo assumed Abe's support could change the United States' inward-looking orientation to a more outward-looking one. This increasing support would be facilitated by a constitutional amendment that would allow Japan to contribute more to security in Asia. It would satisfy the demand from the United States to see Japan fulfill its part of the security burden (Takubo 2015b: 48-49). In line with this statement, Abe advocated that the strict ban on overseas deployment of the SDF is a source of tension with the United States, leading to loss of trust from the United States. In one statement, Abe pointed out a case where the United States rescued the Japanese who fled a conflict in international waters near Japan. It allowed him to question current constitutional interpretation: 'Even in such cases, unless the Japanese nationals themselves were attacked, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) could not defend the U.S. vessels transporting the Japanese nationals' (Abe 2014b). Because of the trust decline, Abe was expressing the worry that Japan would be abandoned if it did not play a role strong enough to assist the United States.

Thus, there is a high degree of congruence between Abe and the Japan Conference on security. Abe's concern about China was expressed in an interview with *The Washington Post*, where he responded to questions about Japan-China

relations and maritime disputes in the SCS. Abe warned China that it was essential to make it understand that no territory could be taken with a threat. He added that he would increase Japan's defense budget to let China know its determination to protect its territory (Abe 2013b). Like the Japan Conference's realism-driven stance, Abe's statements revealed his worldview that Japan should increase military power to deter China in collaboration with the United States to tilt the balance of power in favor of Japan.

Still, Takubo supported Abe's rapprochement with China in 2017. He approved his visit to China as a national guest and the promotion of economic cooperation between the two countries in the name of 'Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests'. He justified his stance because the Trump administration did not necessarily think the alliance important and might suddenly join hands with China (Takubo 2017b). His move was justified as a balance of power diplomacy lest the US-China relationship becomes too intimate. Takubo warned that if the United States and China joined hands, 'Japan, an ally of the US, will be forced to make an important decision. Japan will be required to approach China rapidly' (Takubo 2017b). However, the Japan Conference opposed Abe's idea to invite Chinese President Xi Jinping to Japan as a symbol of détente. It could be said the Japan Conference's stance was reflecting the hardening of the US policy toward China. Japan should bandwagon the United States in this case. Takubo even suggested to Abe in the interview with him not to invite Xi Jinping to Japan. However, Takubo declared Abe did not follow the idea in a dialogue he had afterwards with Yoshiko Sakurai (Takubo & Sakurai 2020).

Abe's value-oriented diplomacy aimed to strengthen friendship with like-minded countries such as Australia and India based on universal values of human rights and the rule of law (Takubo 2016a) as represented by Abe's idea of 'Democratic Security Diamond' (Abe 2012).¹² Those ideas should normally be rejected by the Japan Conference because of its inherent opposition to Western universalism conflicting with Japan's tradition. However, for security reasons, the Japan Conference supported Abe's geopolitical stance, which continuously claimed that liberal democracy should be an important dimension of Japan's foreign policy. This is so-called 'diplomacy of a bird's eye view of the globe' by Abe as part of its role location in the world (Yachi 2014). This viewpoint is close to what Miyoshi argued when he declared to wish Japan 'having a good relationship with friendly countries' (Miyoshi 2014b: 4). Takubo was even bolder when he suggested Japan form a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity

¹² The objective was to form a diamond among Japan, Australia, India, and the United States (Hawaii) to cope with the territorial disputes in the SCS.

Sphere'.¹³ In Heisei era [1989-March 2019], Japan had to reform a group consisting of Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar, ASEAN states, Australia, and India with a central focus on the United States (Takubo & Sakurai 2014: 145). Therefore, for the Japan Conference, the combination of military reinforcement while collaborating with friendly countries is also the best option for Japan to secure its survival.

3. Congruence and chasm between Abe and the Japan Conference

From statements by Abe and the Japan Conference leaders, a natural fit can be inferred between them on history, education, organization of the state, security, and constitutional changes. Therefore, the Japan Conference had plausible reasons to believe Abe's policies would respond to its aspirations. In role theory terms, it could have been expected that Japan significantly changes its role-set, i.e., the bundle of roles the ego-part considers the most appropriate to fit with Japan's identity while being accepted by the foreign alter-parts. Abe himself was vice secretary to the Japan Conference, and half of his cabinet were members of the organization (Tawara 2017a; Akahata 2019). Nevertheless, the article concludes Abe did not transform the role-set only according to his political and philosophical faith.

3.1 The issues of the Constitution and security

The Japan Conference was pleased with the security laws Abe enacted during his second tenure. However, although the exercise of collective self-defense was legalized in September 2015, the Japan Conference expressed its displeasure because the laws do not go far enough. Despite the new interpretation of the Constitution, Article 9 remained the law of the nation. The SDF is not officially an army yet. Its activities are still restricted, and the right of collective self-defense is 'minimal' (Takubo et al 2016: 178-179; Fisker-Nielsen 2016: 17). The fact that the Abe administration did not participate at all in military operations against the Islamic State undertaken by the United States and its allies (Tatsumi 2015) and the SDF's withdrawal from PKO in South Sudan because of the risk of direct involvement in the conflict indicated Abe was not ready to implement the law fully (Tatsumi 2017). Because of the unswerving pacifist leaning of Komeito, its ruling partner, Abe was forced to compromise in respect of the SDF activities abroad. Komeito voted all the safety laws and has shown it is ready to accept that Japan participates more actively

¹³ The concept was initially born by Imperialist Japan during the Second World War. The aim was to establish Japan's hegemony in Asia from China, Manchukuo, to Southeast Asia, where Western colonialism had to be removed.

in security and defense actions insofar the key tenets of the pacifist role are respected. Komeito is adamant the laws do not give latitude to Japan to start activities abroad that would get the country involved in armed conflicts. Doing so would be a clear breach of the expected pacifist role of Japan (Yamaguchi 2015). The long-term partnership with Komeito is essential to Abe and the LDP to carry on reforms linked to regional revival, labor, and business issues. Therefore, Abe was squeezed between Komeito and the Japan Conference and decided eventually to satisfy Komeito in taking the risk of disappointing the Japan Conference (Fisker-Nielsen 2016: 17).

Concerning Japan-China relations, Abe gave up his idea of stationing civil servants on the Senkaku Islands that he had aired in the general election of 2012 (The Japan Times 2012). While Abe was determined to protect Japan's sovereignty over the islands, he had to tone down his rigid stance. Eventually, he withdrew this plan, refraining from strengthening direct control over the islands. It could have resulted in a deterioration of the stability of the mutual role expectation between Japan and China that they should put aside politics for good economic relations. Indirectly, it is also feared that it would also have negatively impacted the perception of Japan's reliability as an ally in US leaders' minds. The US stance has always been that Japan and China must discuss the issue of sovereignty on the islands in good faith without provoking each other. Moreover, China is Japan's largest trade partner, and many Japanese companies depend on the Chinese market and supply (Smith 2015).

Moreover, the improvement of Japan-China ties was deemed essential because Japan's tourism industry, which Abe promoted, heavily depends on Chinese tourists. In 2018, they accounted for about 34 percent of all expenditure by foreign tourists (Borah 2020). In 2019, the rate of Chinese and South Korean tourists was 47.6 percent of all foreign tourists (The Japan Times 2020). Japan feared that strained relations would adversely affect the number of Chinese tourists.

3.2 Abe's Compromise on Historical Issues

In role theory terms, proper role enactment and performance usually lead to a positive reaction, and actors who fail to perform appropriate roles are considered negatively (Harnisch 2013). While historical revisionism challenges anti-militarism in Japan (Berger 2014: 10) and is rejected by the pacifist segment of the ego-part, it can also become the source of role conflict with the alter-parts. Role conflict is possible because all of them, including other democracies, are likely to have negative role expectations on this issue. As a result, Abe had to keep his distance from the Japan Conference not to be regarded as a historical revisionist even by the friendly alter-parts and by significant segments of Japan's population, which do not accept his conservative vision of history (Kolmas 2018). His current stance is fundamentally different from what he advocated as a key member of the History Examination Committee at the beginning of his political career. In refraining from supporting his

conservative ideology openly as prime minister, it can be said he decided to be attuned to the ordinary Japanese people. It is pointed out (Kolmas 2018) that historical revisionism has not deeply permeated Japanese society to fundamentally change how Japanese people think of themselves and their history. The views on Japanese history are heavily contested in Japan, but as Kolmas (2018) observed, 'the revisionist narrative is not the most dominant one in defining the historical memory in Japan in Japanese schools'. Therefore, it cannot be said that Japan's education has turned nationalistic. Textbooks remain neutral, and provide for very succinct and purely factual explanation on historical issues without making any stance supporting ideological and philosophical viewpoints.

Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine in 2013 but never revisited it during his office term. So, it did not become the annual custom boosting Japan's Shinto traditions the Japan Conference expected. In adopting this constrained behavior, he indirectly rejected the stance of the Japan Conference that Japan must show explicitly that it refuses to play the ascribed role fitting with the conventional wisdom, i.e., that Japan is fully responsible for the war damage because it is the sole culprit. He wanted to avoid role inconsistency or even role conflict with the alter-parts in keeping his feeling for himself. Komeito and both allied and foe alter-parts proscribed Abe from visiting the Yasukuni Shrine in expressing openly the opinion that Japan was not performing the role it was expected to play. They expressed displeasure because it was perceived as an indication that Japan wants to reconsider the established evaluation of Japan as an aggressor during the war (Yamaguchi 2014; Zhang 2015: 426). It is pointed out former Prime Minister Koizumi's persistent annual visit to the Yasukuni Shrine from 2001 to 2006 significantly damaged diplomatic relations with China and South Korea (Larsson 2014).

Before the visit, Abe had compared the Yasukuni Shrine with Arlington National Cemetery to deflect the US criticism, indicating that the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine was a prime minister's duty. However, his explanation backfired. He declared that 'I think it's quite natural for a Japanese leader to offer prayers for those who sacrificed their lives for their country, and I think this is no different from what other world leaders do' (Abe 2013c). However, the United States did not accept this view, leading US officials to visit Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery in Tokyo, where unidentified Japanese soldiers' remains are enshrined (The Japan Times 2013). This US behavior was to tell Abe that a comparison between the Yasukuni Shrine and Arlington National Cemetery was inappropriate.

The United States is wary of a resurgence of Japanese nationalism and Japan's historical revisionism. Since the end of the war, the United States has imposed informal roles on Japan to embrace the postwar international liberal order and prevent the reemergence of prewar Japanese history interpretation and values. Attempting to

abandon the role, even symbolically through a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, means that the Japanese political elite admires the past militarism and does not accept the result of the past war. The United States strongly indicated its support for Abe's political reforms to reinforce Japan's role as a reliable security partner, but supporting historical revisionism would make such partnership very difficult to maintain (McCormack 2014: 77-78; Green 2013). When Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine in 2013, the US Embassy in Tokyo made a statement that 'the United States is disappointed that Japan's leadership has taken an action that will exacerbate tensions with Japan's neighbors' (The US Embassy & Consulates in Japan 2013).

During his tenure, unlike the Japan Conference, Abe never used the term 'The Greater East Asia War' that Japan government used during wartime to justify the invasion. He also never complained that Japan was unjustly blamed unilaterally. Besides, while he let some of his ministers criticize the 'victor's justice' of the IMTFE, he never criticized the tribunal himself during his whole tenure. Role conflict was also plausible with Komeito, which consistently opposed revisionist viewpoints (Yamaguchi 2014). In pursuing a revisionist agenda, Abe would have taken the risk of losing the support of a key partner to implement economic and social reforms. In definitive, it can be argued that Abe's role performance was far from historical revisionism. Facing criticism by China, a victim of Japan's invasion, and the United States, Japan's sole ally and promoter of postwar Japan's democracy, Abe decided not to behave as if he had wanted to revive Japanese militarism and trivialize Japan's war crimes. He made symbolic gestures one after another, aiming to facilitate historical reconciliation with neighboring countries, although the degree of involvement was different. Abe's reconciliation effort with China was passive. His role performance was relatively subdued in this respect, as shown by the fact that he did not visit historical places in China, for example, the Memorial Hall of the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre. His role performance was much more proactive with the allied alter-parts. Abe became the second prime minister next to Kishi to apologize to Australian prisoners of war in the Australian Parliament for their suffering during their captivity (The Australian 2014). Subsequently, it was the first time that both Japanese and US leaders stood together before the atomic bomb dome in Hiroshima to pledge denuclearization. Disappointing again the Japan Conference, he confirmed his commitment not to have Japan becoming a nuclear power in May 2016, when Obama and himself reiterated in the Hiroshima Peace Park their commitment to nuclear weapons' ban (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016). Abe did not mention the US responsibility for dropping atomic bombs and emphasized his forward-looking diplomacy to dispel his historical revisionist image in the United States and forge ahead with Japan-US relations. As proof of it, he was the first Japanese prime minister to visit the memorial site of the Attack on Pearl Harbor with President Obama to express his condolences for the lost lives in the attack (BBC 2016).

He also shunned attempts to take back or weaken the Murayama Statement that made an explicit apology for the invasion. The Murayama Statement included 'colonial rule', 'aggression', 'remorse', and 'apology' for the first time as an official historical view (The Japan Times 2015). Abe never attempted to challenge the statement, reflecting remarkable continuity in this regard. Furthermore, Abe delivered the 'Abe Statement' to emphasize Japan's contribution to world peace (Pugliese 2015: 53). In his statement, he went farther than Murayama when he declared that the invasion had started in 1931 with the Manchurian Incident. Once again, Abe wanted to demonstrate to the audience that he was not a historical revisionist and that he is sensitive to the suffering of the invaded countries' people:

With the Manchurian Incident, followed by the withdrawal from the League of Nations, Japan gradually transformed itself into a challenger to the new international order that the international community sought to establish after tremendous sacrifices. Japan took the wrong course and advanced along the road to war. [...] Incident, aggression, war -- we shall never again resort to any form of the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. We shall abandon colonial rule forever and respect the right of self-determination of all peoples throughout the world. With deep repentance for the war, Japan made that pledge. Upon it, we have created a free and democratic country, abided by the rule of law, and consistently upheld that pledge never to wage a war again (Abe 2015b).

The Abe statement is once again the result of a compromise with Komeito. Komeito rejected the first draft in which Abe excluded the terms of 'aggression' and 'apology,' and thus he decided to take over the past statement (Nikkei Asian Review 2015). His remark that 'we have the responsibility to inherit the past, in all humbleness, and pass it on to the future' in the statement aimed to reduce distrust relating to history and indicated that Japan did not intend to overturn the postwar international order.

Abe also compromised on the comfort women issue in deciding to accept the Kono Statement as such. In so doing, Abe changed his previous stance that no Korean woman had ever been forcibly conscripted during his first administration to that they were forcibly conscripted during his second tenure. This former position appeared clearly in a declaration in the Diet in March 2007. He said there was no evidence that the Japanese military had conscripted women in the invaded countries (Star Tribune 2015). In April 2013, Abe formed a panel in his government to assess the Kono Statement and check the possibility of its revision. The following year, the panel concluded that the Kono statement resulted from a compromise between Japanese

and South Korean negotiators (Park 2017). Eventually, Abe decided to consider it was a necessary compromise between the two countries and signed an agreement with South Korea in December 2015, in which he offered an apology and payment to the victims (BBC 2015). Foreign Minister Kishida emphasized in the joint press conference that the Japanese military authorities had been involved in the issue, and thus the then government was responsible (Kishida 2015). Once again, Abe had to find the best trade-off to satisfy the role demands of key alter-parts. If Abe's position on the Comfort Women had not changed, it would also have made Japan-United States-South Korea's security cooperation more difficult. Under pressure from the United States, Abe's compromise kept away lingering historical issues from hindering the triangle relationship to present a unified front against the explicit adversary, North Korea, and implicit adversary China.

In this way, Abe adopted a yielding stance to convince the world how Japan learned historical lessons from the past and how his forward-oriented outlook was correct. His behavior was considered an act of betrayal by the Japan Conference, but he understood he needed to solve the historical issue with the alter-parts.

3.3 Postponement of Amendment to the Constitution

Indeed, when Abe committed himself to change Japan's postwar politics with the slogan of '*sengo rejime kara no dakkyaku* [escape the shackles of the postwar regime]' during the first term from September 2006 until August 2007, he was convinced it supposed amending Article 9. He reconfirmed his intention to revise the Constitution and erase the military restrictions in all his successful electoral campaigns (Huxley & Taylor 2016). However, although the ruling parties won again in the House of Representatives election in October 2017 (Nikkei Asian Review 2017), Abe did not start the process of amending the constitution regardless of the two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives and a two-thirds majority in the House of Councilors occupied by pro-revision powers composed of the LDP, Komeito¹⁴ and other conservative politicians outside the ruling parties (Nippon.com 2016).

Indicating the resentment of the Japan Conference in front of what it considered procrastination, several months after the 2017 election, Takubo talked to Furuya Keiichi, Chairman of the Election Strategy Committee in the LDP, and complained 'Prime Minister Abe seemed to have abandoned his idea to stabilize the long-term administration' despite the international situation where the United States tended to

¹⁴ It argued for adding clauses on the people's privacy and right to a healthy environment to the Constitution and not to revise the peace clauses of Article 9 (The Japan Times 2016).

become inward-looking, and China and Russia became outward-looking (Takubo & Furuya 2017: 159). Later, the pro-revision camp lost its two-thirds seats in the House of Councilors after the election in July 2019 (The Mainichi 2019) and the opportunity to start the process evaporated. Before the 2019 election, Abe had suggested a compromise proposal called *Kaken* in Japanese, literally adding new elements to the Constitution. Concretely, in this case, the objective was to have the existence of the SDF be stipulated in a new third provision of Article 9. It could have been considered a substitute to amendment, but Takubo criticized *Kaken* as it believed it did not bring a solution to Japan's security issue. Takubo stubbornly continued to request a change of the 2nd provision, which forbids possession of the army. His opinion was that with *Kaken*, Japan still does not have an army. Therefore, *Kaken* is 'deceitful and lukewarm' (Takubo 2017c). Abe attempted to appease the Japan Conference through the video message to the organization's assembly that he aimed to enact a new constitution by 2020. However, he was never able to fulfill his objective.

It could be argued Abe had understood there was no solid support for the constitutional amendment of Article 9 domestically and abroad. Moreover, even in the unlikely case where he had been able to secure a two-thirds majority in both Chambers, whether the amendment proposal could win simple majority votes in the national referendum after the proposal passed in both Houses was quite unpredictable. So, he did not have a strong motivation to start the laborious and politically risky task with the risk of losing his solid political leverage in public opinion. For most Japanese people, the amendment to the Constitution was not a priority (Sakaiya 2018). Instead, voters' interest in Abe's reforms was focused on the economy rather than bringing back national honor (Larsson 2017).

Abe could have utilized the strained Japan-China relations to adopt the Japan Conference's political agenda to bolster Japanese security capability through constitutional amendment. However, he preferred not to do so to preserve diplomatic stability. Takubo stated his concern that Abe gave in to foreign opposition about the constitutional revision. He euphemistically declared he expected Abe to defy foreign opposition in a dialogue with Furuya, in which he declared that: 'The Constitution is a domestic matter and has nothing to do with foreign countries. I do not want to believe that Abe takes care of the opinion of opponents such as Russia and China because Japanese relations with them are not very good now' (Takubo & Furuya 2017: 161). Even though the amendment to the Constitution was a domestic matter and however hard the Japan Conference demanded the LDP cut ties with Komeito (Takubo 2017c), it was still difficult to satisfy the Japan Conference. The LDP electoral candidates needed the support of the Soka Gakkai, the large lay-Buddhist group from which Komeito emanates - to win elections (Liff & Maeda 2019: 70). Added to the fact he probably considered Komeito a much more long-term stable and reliable partner

of the LDP than the small right-wing parties, added to the reluctance of Abe to oppose frontally to his coalition partner.

CONCLUSION

The Japan Conference could be considered a driving force to spread historical revisionism. However, its impact on role formulation was minimal despite the political and philosophical viewpoints they shared with the former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Abe inherited a critical understanding of Japan's history during the Second World War from his predecessors to meet ego and alter parts expectations. Eventually, despite his earlier statements denying Japan was the sole culprit, Abe came to adopt the conventional historical view that Japan was wrong during the war. He did not raise any official objection to victorious countries' behavior and the Constitution's origin. His initiatives reflected the difficulties of integrating contradictory role expectations about what Japan did during wartime.

His statements and role performances showed Abe's effort to pay attention to prevent role conflicts to achieve his foreign policy objectives smoothly. Regarding his stance on pacifism, Professor Ezra Vogel at Harvard University argued in an interview that Abe contained his political faith and realistically assessed the geopolitical and diplomatic reality (Pastreich 2015). Under his helm, Japan's policy remained within the bounds of pragmatism and contingency prevention. Either way, the situation proceeded according to the policy line that constitutional amendment would be postponed indefinitely, i.e., *de facto*, meaning the continuation of conventional non-military pacifism. Abe was able to run the administration for a long time by keeping the balance between contradictory demands from the ego-part and the different alter-parts not to cause role conflict. Although he wanted to bring back national pride in adopting policies that would have pleased the Japan Conference, he did not take any significant steps to concretize his conservative views because he learned through constant intersubjective communication with other actors that this behavior was unacceptable for Japan's alter-parts and Komeito.

Conversely, this role behavior ended up disappointing the right-wing Japan Conference. He chose ends and means well based on the calculation of what roles to play. In this regard, this ability to avoid conflicts was important in terms of role theory. As Hollis and Smith wrote, 'Roles call for judgment, which involves reasoned belief, self-monitoring of aims, and a general shrewdness' (Hollis & Smith 1990). This statement would apply to Abe.

Abe did not meet the expectation of the Japan Conference in the realms of security and the Constitution either. The administration understood the importance of advancing security cooperation with friendly countries, but the role enactments were less radical than expected. He did not remove the 2nd provision of Article 9, did not insert an Emergency Powers Act in the Constitution, and did not designate the

Emperor as the chief of state. Abe and other conservative politicians do not accept the 'core tenets of anti-militarism.' However, they understood that Japan's political environment was not ripe for radical change in the pacifist role. The gap between Abe's pragmatism and the Japan Conference's wishes did not reduce over the years up to the end of his tenure. In conclusion, Abe's political legacy during his long tenure as prime minister suggests that the heritage from the Second World War is likely to remain constitutive of how Japan thinks of itself and its roles in the world.

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