

# Resentment, status dissatisfaction, and the emotional underpinnings of Japanese security policy

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## Abstract

What explains Japan's security policy change in recent decades? Heeding the 'emotional turn' in International Relations, this article applies a resentment-based framework, which defines resentment as a long-lasting form of anger and the product of status dissatisfaction. Leveraging interviews with 18 conservative Japanese lawmakers and senior officials, the article discusses the role, function, and prevalence of resentment in the remaking of Japan's security policy, premised on constitutional revision. The analysis reveals that conservative elites are acutely status-conscious; and that those who blame a perceived inferior status on Japan's alleged pacifism are more likely to see revision of Article 9 as an end in itself. For a subset of conservatives, however, the goal is rather to stretch the Constitution to enhance Japan's means of

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deterrence vis-à-vis objects of fear or in solidarity with allies. Overall, the article demonstrates that resentment provides a fruitful lens for analyzing status dissatisfaction in international politics.

## 1. Introduction

In the postwar period, Japan's security policy has remained an object of puzzlement for International Relations (IR) scholars. After Japan's emergence as an economic power in the late 1960s, and until the early 2000s, most scholars asked why Japan had become an economic 'giant' but remained a political and military 'pygmy' (Funabashi, 1991/1992, p. 65; Inoguchi, 1991, p. 1). Neorealists predicted that Japan would eventually have to remilitarize, acquire nuclear weapons, and challenge *Pax Americana* (e.g. Waltz, 1993). Proponents of liberalism and constructivism explained Japan's more restricted security policy as a product of economic rationality and the influence of pacifism or anti-militarism, respectively (e.g. Rosecrance, 1986; Katzenstein and Okawara, 1993). Meanwhile, a heterogeneous group of realists concluded that post-war Japan labored under the same structural and material constraints as other states, albeit with some atypical implications (e.g. Heginbotham and Samuels, 1998; Lind, 2004).

A more recent puzzle is whether Japan is finally starting to meet neo-realist expectations by remilitarizing and, if so, why from the 2000s onwards and not earlier? While most scholars acknowledge that security policy change has indeed occurred, the proponents in one camp, a mix of self-identified realists and constructivists, argue that changes have been incremental and remain largely constrained by pacifism or anti-militarism (e.g. Green, 2001; Oros, 2017; Katagiri, 2018; Liff, 2015; Kolmaš, 2020; Hatakeyama, 2021). A second camp, which is subdivided between realists and *critical* constructivists, believes that Japan's security policy of the past decade or so constitutes a more radical break with previous practices. Realists explain Japanese security policy change as a natural reaction to China's rise and the North Korean threat (e.g. Hughes 2009; Auslin, 2016). Critical constructivists, in turn, argue that if only considerations related to relative material capability were important, Japan would have been expected to remilitarize at an earlier stage. Instead, Japan's current policy seems dependent on how Japanese leaders and the public view the country's significant Others. Critical constructivists have demonstrated

how a Japanese self is constructed through continuous discursive or narrative negotiations vis-à-vis China in particular, but also North Korea, South Korea as well as past iterations of Japan's own self (e.g. Hagström, 2015; Suzuki, 2007; Hagström and Hanssen, 2015; Gustafsson *et al.*, 2018; Gustafsson, 2020). This article fills a gap in the existing literature by demonstrating how the identity narratives of conservative Japanese politicians and a senior government official in charge of security policy change surprisingly often (i) revolve around status; and (ii) are emotional and express resentment related to status *dissatisfaction*. The article argues that status dissatisfaction and resentment are important driving forces in Japanese security policy change.

Status is closely related to identity in that both concepts are positional (Ward, 2020); neither can exist in a vacuum and both require juxtaposition with other actors (Renshon, 2017, p. 35). Moreover, the status of 'great power', 'middle power' or 'humanitarian power' can all be understood as identity constructions. The literature on Japan's international relations provides some evidence that concerns about status and social recognition have propelled identity change and affected policy decisions in the past. Ward (2013), for instance, argues that elite perceptions of status immobility partly explain Japanese revisionist attitudes of the early 1930s. Gustafsson (2016) outlines how China's refusal to acknowledge Japan's reparation efforts and apologetic stance in the postwar period severed Sino-Japanese relations, especially after 2010. These instances of perceived misrecognition are said to have generated anxiety, which Japanese conservatives seized on to argue that it is time for Japan to abandon its 'abnormality' and allegedly servile accommodation of China's rise.

In this light, emotion is clearly a driver of status-seeking behavior and identity change. Emotion was once marginalized as both explanans and explanandum in IR but is now receiving more attention. Scholars even talk about IR having taken an 'emotional turn' in recent years (Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014). Whereas conventional IR theories have taken emotion much for granted in their underlying assumptions – such as *fear* in realist theories, or *amity* and *trust* in liberal ones – in the past two decades scholars have directed more attention to theorizing how emotions matter in decision-making processes and interstate relations (Crawford, 2000). They argue that shared emotional experiences are central to the formation of collective identities, and propel collective

political action (Sasley, 2011; Hutchison, 2016). Since emotion may help explain why one identity construct becomes more salient than others (Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014; Hall and Ross, 2015), the nascent focus on emotion in the literature on Japan's identity is a step in the right direction (e.g. Hagström and Hanssen, 2015; Ryu, 2018).

Resentment has made multiple appearances in the existing scholarship on Japan's international relations, especially vis-à-vis China. As an emotional attitude closely related to anger and envy, resentment stems from 'a sense of loss of entitlement, regard and position ... in comparison and relations with others', especially when this is interpreted as unjust (Mann and Fenton, 2017, p. 33). When China kidnapped five North Korean refugees from the Japanese consulate in Shenyang, Wan (2003), for example, linked the cause of Japan's 'emotional outburst' (2003, p. 828) to a combination of 'worsening views of China, cumulative resentment toward Chinese actions in recent years, and increasingly critical media coverage of China' (2003, p. 840). Similarly, Hughes assessed Japan's security policy as moving from 'reluctant realism' to a potentially more destabilizing 'resentful realism' that is 'driven by fear of China, lack of trust in the USA, and a desire to reassert national pride and autonomy' (2016, p. 150; see also Hughes, 2012). While this body of research is definitely on to something important, it has shied away from engaging more seriously with resentment. The present article, in contrast, investigates what this emotion is about, its subjects and objects and why it could have a lingering, deleterious effect on Japan's security policy and foreign relations.

More precisely, this article aims to explore whether, how, and with what implications conservative Japanese politicians and officials articulate resentment. The following sections bring together existing scholarship on identity, status, and emotion in IR to argue that extreme cases of status dissatisfaction can induce resentment and pave the way for policy preferences that aim to subvert the status quo. The empirical analysis reveals that about 80% of the conservative Japanese politicians and officials in our unique interview sample voiced resentful attitudes. Over half resented perceived acts of status denial by Japan's significant Others, most importantly China and South Korea. Resentful attitudes were strongest among conservatives who attributed Japan's alleged inadequacies to its pacifist Constitution and sometimes 'abnormality'.

These findings suggest that attempts to revise Article 9 of the Constitution will continue to dog Japan's politics in the years to come.

## 2. Resentment in international politics

### 2.1 *Resentment and its manifestation*

Research in various disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, and even literature, has debated the definition and social consequences of resentment and its associated *ressentiment*. We draw on this rich foundation here to extrapolate a framework for analyzing resentment in international politics. We begin by discussing the emotional experiences that resentment may entail, its entwinement with cognitive appraisals, and its social implications. Although scholars do not agree on a single definition of emotion, this article adopts one posited by Crawford – that emotion is ‘what we describe to others as feelings’ (2000, p. 125), and that its manifestation is inherently shaped by sociocultural factors. We may experience butterflies in our stomach, but social learning allows us to label this experience as ‘anxious’ or ‘nervous’. Based on this approach, we do not focus on emotion as bodily sensations (or ‘feelings’ as some would call it) but emotion in the form of linguistic representations (e.g. Clément and Sangar, 2018; Koschut, 2020).

Attempts to define resentment exhibit two different tendencies: one seeks to reveal the specific emotion that makes up resentment while the other discusses the conditions under which resentment can occur. Within the former, there is no consensus on what resentment entails. Based on the idea that resentment is closely related to anger, in that both are moral emotions that stem from a sense of injustice, Nussbaum (2016, p. 262) views resentment as a ‘vague’ product of our everyday language and contends that it is more productive to focus on anger. In contrast, accounts in psychology and philosophy suggest that resentment is a broad-ranging emotion that encompasses several basic emotions that are usually fleeting. TenHouten (2018) conceptualizes resentment as a tertiary emotion that pairs a primary emotion – such as anger, surprise, or disgust – with a secondary emotion – such as contempt, shock, or outrage. Building on this, Capelos and Demertzis (2018) and Demertzis (2020) view resentment as a combination of varying degrees of anger, hope, and anxiety. It therefore appears that

resentment comprises complex emotional experiences. Anger by itself does not necessarily progress to resentful attitudes. Instead, where there is an option to rectify its cause, anger can also inspire positive actions (Halperin and Pliskin, 2015). Nor is envy a sufficient component of resentment, because it is possible to envy the higher status of another person without feeling ill will toward them (Feather and Nairn, 2005). In any case, we find the concept of tertiary emotion especially useful as it allows us to identify the specific emotions that can appear in the language of resentment.

Broadly speaking, resentment can arise when an ‘intentional, unjust and harmful offence’ is inflicted on us or those we identify with (Demertzis, 2020, p. 114), or when we find ourselves in an unjust subordinate status position in relation to other actors (Petersen, 2002). By definition, resentment cannot appear outside of social relations and is preceded by the perception that another person, external group, or abstract institution has committed wrongdoing vis-à-vis the self. Resentment therefore forms when an individual or collective feels victimized and assesses that the undesirable situation is the outcome of someone else’s action. Examples of this ‘appraisal’ process abound in accounts of resentment. For example, Brighi (2016) views resentment as underpinned by normative expectations, as the resentful actor is fixated on the wrongness or unjust character of a situation and experiences moral grievances. To arrive at this point, however, the actor must first have undergone a cognitive appraisal process, through which it evaluates an event or another actor against preconceived notions of what is important or valuable in life. This extensive involvement of cognition means that resentment is unlikely to be fleeting. Instead, it can ‘[hold] our thinking captive, making it difficult or impossible to give sustained attention to anything other than the perceived offense’ (Congdon, 2018, p. 750).

Research in neuroscience and psychology has further established the cognitive dimension of emotion (Roseman, 1984; Lerner *et al.*, 2015). Appraisal theories posit that two people can have completely opposite feelings about a particular event, depending on the values they attach to it in terms of goal relevance and goal congruence, certainty, cause, and coping or control potential (Moors *et al.*, 2013). Philosophical accounts have made arguments along similar lines. For Nussbaum (2016), physiological changes may be a component of emotion but are not necessary

conditions. Instead, she highlights the connection between emotion and value as a key determinant of emotional reactions; for example, our feelings are usually more intense when a tragedy strikes those we cherish than when it occurs to distant, faceless strangers.

A focus on the cognitive dimension allows us to reveal other semi-related emotions that can give shape to resentment. Humiliation, for one, usually follows unfair conduct that damages dignity and reduces the self to an inferior social status (Lacey, 2011). Humiliation occurs following an undeserved backlash ‘as a result of who you are’ (Lacey, 2011, p. 78), whereas shame occurs when such damage is the legitimate consequence of one’s own actions. The perceived need to seek revenge may follow feelings of humiliation (Lindemann, 2010), which can transform into enduring resentment if capacity constraints prevent one from meeting this need. In contrast, gloating – also known as *schadenfreude*, or the experience of joy that comes from learning of or witnessing the harm of another – may arise after successful retaliation or simply from seeing the resented person suffer pain or setbacks (Feather and Nairn, 2005).

Resentment is also related to nostalgia. After all, resentment involves performing ‘acts of memory’ as actors replay ‘again and again, from different angles and different perspectives’ (Congdon, 2018, p. 751). When evaluating a situation, they may draw similarities with past offenses or contrast it with past experiences of ‘fairness, cooperation, or care’ (Congdon, 2018, p. 751). Nostalgia, understood as ‘a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past’ (Sedikides *et al.*, 2008, p. 230), therefore serves to reinforce positive attitudes to the self by acting as a reservoir of affirmative feelings, such as a happy memory from a long time ago. The happier the memory, the more likely actors are to conjure it up as a defense mechanism when their sense of identity continuity faces existential danger – be it because of fear, discontent, or anxiety. Group-level nostalgia works by the same token: in the face of social change, the emotion encourages positive attitudes to and behaviors toward in-group members while further elucidating the group’s distinction from other groups. Moreover, like resentment, collective nostalgia is a moral sentiment that construes the collective past as the epitome of ‘correct’ norms and values. For these reasons, scholars have suggested that nostalgia, too, has the potential to construct and reinforce identities in ways that might very well deserve stand-

alone scholarly examination in IR (Nakano, 2021). We draw on this body of research to contend that articulations of resentment may include nostalgic reminiscence – a reminder about a ‘glorious’ past or significant achievements, or a period in which interstate relationships were deemed to be more favorable.

The discussion thus far has portrayed resentment as a negative emotion that overwhelms our minds and prevents us from focusing on positive thoughts (Smith, 2018 [1759]). The resentful actor might seek revenge, which in practice could spark violence. However, the moral philosopher and economist Adam Smith argued that the objective of resentment is ‘not so much to make our enemy feel pain in turn, as to make him conscious that he feels it upon account of his past conduct, to make him repent of that conduct, that the person whom he injured did not deserve to be treated in that manner’ (Smith, 2018 [1759], p. 91). In addition, philosophers argue that resentment can engender change that is not necessarily based on revenge. At the interpersonal level, it is only by asking for redress that previous wrongdoing enacted on ourselves or others can be remedied. Moreover, resentment does not just help individuals understand how they have been wronged; the emotion can also call into question and help to transform the victim’s conception of what is valuable or important in the first place.

This conceptualization sets resentment apart from *ressentiment*. In many cases, where justice is not adequately meted out, the victims may still wish to see their offenders suffer and punished, and unresolved resentment transforms into *ressentiment* (Brighi, 2016). For Demertzis (2020), resentment can thus progress to *ressentiment* in the absence of hope, or when the situation is seen as impossible to remedy. As defined by Friedrich Nietzsche (2006), the desire for revenge – to make the perpetrators of injustice feel pain – drives *ressentiment*, even if such revenge cannot always be exacted. The analytical boundary between the two concepts, however, is not always as clear-cut.<sup>1</sup> For this reason,

1 For example, some authors delineate resentment and *ressentiment* based on duration – the latter is believed to be more enduring (Meltzer and Musolf, 2002; Nietzsche, 2006). Yet finessing this temporal characteristic for empirical application is not straightforward. It is unclear what should matter more: how long ago an event occurred that one has feelings about currently, or how long one has been holding on to those feelings. Another approach focuses on the differences in their targets: resentment arises from an unsatisfactory outcome of injustice and is directed at broad societal groups, whereas *ressentiment* is grounded in narratives of oppression, in which the agent’s obsessive demands shift from retribution to recognition (Fassin, 2013).

Nussbaum (2016) argues that resentment is a potentially harmful emotion overall. Within the scope of this article, we opt to focus on resentment because its existing conceptualization and operationalization are, by now, more established (e.g. Fassin, 2013; Brighi, 2016; Demertzis, 2020). We also strive to identify *ressentiment* wherever possible. However, if *ressentiment* is as ‘poisonous’ as Nietzsche (2006, p. 22) imagined, articulations of this emotion may be deemed socially undesirable and thus appear less frequently.

## 2.2 *Resentment and status in international politics*

The acrimonious aspects of resentment have drawn deserved attention from political scientists and IR scholars. Some have employed resentment to explain radicalized and violent movements around the world. In the UK, for example, uncertain life prospects and deteriorating material conditions have allegedly fostered resentment in the deindustrialized working class (Mann and Fenton, 2017). Although resentful articulations may come across as incoherent, they nonetheless provide the foundation on which radical parties, such as the UK Independence Party, can rise to popularity. Similar examples abound in elections around the world, such as the waves of electoral violence that followed in the wake of the 2020 US presidential election. Brighi (2016) traces the presence of resentment in several of the terrorist attacks in Europe in the 2010s. In a different context, Petersen (2002) considers resentment an instrument that translates inter-ethnic antagonism into violence in Eastern Europe. Finally, Wolf (2013) illustrates how Greek politicians constructed a discourse of status denial to spur nationalism and inspire public resentment towards the EU leadership.

Thus far, however, only a few studies have explicitly engaged with resentment in international politics (Wolf, 2013, 2017). While resentment is often associated with race and social class domestically, Wolf (2013) argues that the emotion tends to arise more from concerns about status recognition and prestige in international politics.<sup>2</sup> In this context,

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These cues may help us identify where a narrative belongs on the spectrum, but not *when* or *how* the transformation occurs. For more detailed discussions on the distinction between resentment and *ressentiment*, see Fassin (2013) and Brighi (2016).

2 This is not to say that race and class are absent from international politics (Zvobgo and Loken, 2020). Ward (2013), for example, demonstrates how Japan’s revisionist posture in

status refers to a state's 'standing or rank in the status community', and is essentially positional, perceptual, and social (Renshon, 2017). Because resentment is primarily a moral emotion, we should expect it to be directed against states that have ascended in social status without a commensurate increase in 'moral status' (Wolf, 2013). This implies that status is inherently relational. Moreover, what is moral or 'righteous' cannot be analyzed separately from existing international hierarchies. Norms of democracy, human rights, and economic liberalism currently exemplify the most salient standards in the international status hierarchy (Duque, 2018). By extension, there might also be alternative traits propagated by other 'clubs' of which a state might identify as a member (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010).

Explanations that draw on status have tended to err on the side of rational actorhood and avoid the more 'irrational' aspects of the phenomenon (Ward, 2020). For example, while status inconsistency theory suggests that war is a plausible outcome of status denial (Volgy and Mayhall, 1995), Renshon (2017) views frustration as irrational and incompatible with the strategic nature of state-centric international politics. This dismissal of frustration in status theories is itself slightly frustrating, given what we now know about the role of emotion in international politics. Indeed, emotion has always been at the heart of status denial. According to Ringmar, it makes us feel 'slighted, insulted, and brought low; our pride is injured, we have lost our status and [lost] face' (2012, p. 7). Despite this, most theories on status in IR have taken this emotional outcome largely for granted. Gustafsson (2016) somewhat remedies the problem by suggesting that if status is affirmed through regular exchanges between states, then status dissatisfaction should also be the result of multiple episodes rather than just a single instance of status denial.

We argue that the concept of resentment can help to explain the emotional process that underpins status dissatisfaction, from the initial acts of perceived status denial to the action-outcome. While existing work has suggested that there are multiple possible emotional responses to status denial, many of them can be categorized under the umbrella of resentment. By the time resentment manifests itself in international politics,

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the 1930s stemmed from a belief that the international order would not accept a non-white great power.

states have typically exhausted most options available and may resort to more extreme measures. In short, when states experience repeated instances of status denial that remain unresolved, dissatisfaction arises and prompts them to seek ways of regaining their desired rank. If such initiatives fail, dissatisfaction may take on a caustic quality as a state begins to resent the actors from which it sought to attain a higher status, or which are perceived as holding it back. This may result in costly militarized conflict behaviors. We surmise that resentment is most acute when the self's inadequacies are attributed to systemic factors that can be difficult to change, thereby enhancing the frustration. It is also necessary to point out that resentment can arise over issues that do not explicitly involve status, such as a grave humanitarian atrocity that has not been adequately acknowledged or compensated for. Meanwhile, it is difficult to disentangle any one behavior from status since status shapes the scope of actions available to a state. By achieving a higher-status position, for example, a state could make more credible threats of deterrence or engage in more aggressive behaviors with impunity.

### 3. Interpreting resentment: an empirical strategy

IR scholarship has long recognized the difficulty of analyzing emotion – after all, it is nearly impossible to tell whether what we report to be our emotions is congruent with bodily experiences. This challenge notwithstanding, several creative approaches have emerged in IR, not least a diverse array of interpretive methods. We agree with Hutchison, who suggests that representation as a means of meaning making is ‘as close as one can get’ to studying emotions in a specific context (2016, p. 18), and later indicates that narrative is ‘important to scholars of representation’ (2016, p. 117). Similarly, [Wolf \(2018\)](#) makes the case for studying resentment through public discourse, as the enduring nature of this emotion makes it reasonable to assume that it is articulated at the intergroup level. Resentful actors are likely to feel the need to share their negative views of Others to justify their stance, gain external support, and tarnish the reputation of those resented. Moreover, a narrative of resentment is sometimes produced and reproduced to stir emotions within a specific audience.

Instead of focusing on public discourse, which is often polished, for this article we conducted and analyzed 18 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with conservative Japanese lawmakers and a senior government

**Table 1** List of interviewees

Name	Date	Party affiliation at the time of the interview	Current party affiliation	Major positions held	Status concern/demand for recognition	Resentment against other actors	Resentment against the 'abnormal' identity	Resentment against Japan's pacifist identity/the Constitution
Aisawa Ichirō	03/26/2015	LDP	LDP	Budget Committee chairperson (2007–8)	x	x		x
Akiba Kenya	03/27/2015	LDP	LDP	Special Advisor to the prime minister (2019–20)				
Anonymous	03/27/2015	LDP	LDP	Cabinet positions in the field of foreign and security policy	x	x	x	x
Etō Seiichi	12/03/2013	LDP	LDP	Special Advisor to the Prime Minister (2012–19) and Minister of State for Special Missions (2019–20)	x	x		x
Etō Seishirō	12/11/2013	LDP	LDP	Defense Agency Director (1995–96) and Vice President of the Lower House (2009–12)	x	x		
Hagiuda Kōichi	03/24/2015	LDP	LDP	Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary (2015–16), Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2019–21) and Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry (since 2021)	x	x		(x)
Hiranuma Takeo	12/04/2013	LDP	LDP	Minister of Transportation (1995–96) and Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry (2000–3)	x		x	x
Hirasawa Katsuei	12/10/2013	LDP	LDP	Minister of Reconstruction (2020–21) and a former career official in the Police and Defense agencies	x	x	x	x

Table 1 Continued

Name	Date	Party affiliation at the time of the interview	Current party affiliation	Major positions held	Status concern/demand for recognition	Resentment against other actors	Resentment against the 'abnormal' identity	Resentment against Japan's pacifist identity/the Constitution
Ishihara Nobuteru	12/11/2013	LDP	LDP	Minister for the Environment (2012–14) and Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy (2016–17)				
Kishi Nobuo	03/24/2015	LDP	LDP	Minister of Defense (since 2020)	x	x		(x)
Kōno Tarō	12/10/2013	LDP	LDP	Minister of State for Special Missions (2015–2016), Minister of Foreign Affairs (2017–19), Minister of Defense (2019–20), Minister of State for Government Revitalization (2020–21) and for Handling the New Coronavirus (2021)	x	x		
Matsubara Jin	12/02/2013	Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)	New Liberal Club	Chairperson of the National Public Safety Commission (2012)	x	x	x	x
Nagashima Akihisa	12/03/2013	DPJ	LDP	Parliamentary Vice Minister of Defense (2010–11)				
Nukaga Fukushima	12/06/2013	LDP	LDP	Defense Agency Director (1998), Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy (2001), Minister of Defense (2005–6) and Minister of Finance (2007–8)				x

(continued)

Table 1 Continued

Name	Date	Party affiliation at the time of the interview	Current party affiliation	Major positions held	Status concern/demand for recognition	Resentment against other actors	Resentment against the 'abnormal' identity	Resentment against Japan's pacifist identity/the Constitution
Satō Masahisa	12/09/2013	LDP	LDP	Security expert in the LDP who served as Commander of the Japanese Iraq Reconstruction and Support Group				(x)
Tsuchiya Shinako	03/27/2015	LDP	LDP	House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee chairperson (2014–15)	x	x		
Watanabe Shū	12/11/2013	DPJ	Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan	State Minister of Defense (2011–12)	x	x	x	x
Yachi Shotarō	12/09/2013	Diplomat; head of the National Security Council	Diplomat	Administrative Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (2005–8), National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister (2014–19)	x	x		x

*Notes:* List of elite interviews and summary of coding results. The marker (x) represents partial resentment and was not counted towards the total number.

official during two visits to Tokyo in 2013 and 2015 (see [Table 1](#); on semi-structured interviews, see [Kvale, 2007](#), pp. 51–53). We selected the interviewees strategically. Many of them currently hold or have held important positions in government or the major political parties, and most have foreign and security policy as a special area of interest. As a method, in-depth interviews provide several advantages compared to the analysis of public discourse. First, they allow researchers to explore nuances in the answers given and provide opportunities to ask follow-up questions and seek clarification. Second, interviewees can be encouraged to talk openly about topics that might be considered sensitive in a group setting, and to reflect on issues that are typically not discussed together. Of course, the method can be criticized since interviewees may be prone to exaggeration or reticence. In this article, however, we seek to turn this potential weakness into a source of strength, since we wish to investigate not factual circumstances, but the interviewees' cognition and emotions. For this reason, any exaggeration or reticence can itself be illustrative. Moreover, understanding the specific content of the interviewees' sentiments and positions elucidates not only Japan's current security policy, but also the potential direction in which the country is heading. All the interviews except one (with Nagashima Akihisa) were conducted in Japanese, although key terms may at times have been expressed in English. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, and later transcribed and interpreted. All the interviewees agreed to speak on the record, and all but one did so without a condition of anonymity. One interviewee asked specifically to remain anonymous.

[Table 2](#) lists the questions that guided all the interviews. Overall, the goal was to prompt interviewees into speaking about topics related to Japan's relationships with other actors, its identity, and security policy. When analyzing the material, we looked specifically for expressions of status dissatisfaction, demands for recognition, and resentment, as well as the perceived cause of these predicaments. If evidence of resentment was absent from a specific interview, we sought instead to identify other possible emotions, counter-representations, and counter-narratives. Section 4 presents our analysis of the interview material with a focus on two different domains of Japan's security identity: relations with other countries, and the debate surrounding Article 9 of the Constitution and Japan's alleged abnormality.

**Table 2** Example questions that guided the interviews

1. Identification of threats	What are the threats facing Japan today?
2. Japan's pacifism	What does the notion of pacifism mean for Japan's foreign and security policy? What does 'active pacifism', as championed by Abe Shinzo, imply?
3. Power status	Is there any truth in the post-war images of Japan as an 'economic great power' but also a 'military dwarf'?
4. Perceptions of Japan's 'weak' foreign and security policies	Are analysts correct in assessing Japan's foreign and security policy in recent years as 'weak' or 'weakening'?
5. Normalcy/normalization	Is Japan a 'normal' or 'abnormal' country? Can Japan be interpreted as 'normalizing'?
6. Values in Japan's foreign and security policy	What values does Japan wish to convey in its behavior abroad? What is the origin of these values?

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Status dissatisfaction and resentment of Japan's Others

Japan's three closest neighbors – China, South Korea, and North Korea – stood out as Others in the interview material, albeit to different degrees. In addition to expressing fear about them as potential security threats, or frustration about their lack of cooperation, 13 interviewees in our material expressed status concerns regarding these states and a desire for recognition in response to questions about Japan's identity, values, and power status. We identify three broad identity constructions that the interviewees perceived as especially important: Japan's identity or status as an economic power, as a peace-embracing state that has sought to repent its wartime misconduct and advanced peace globally, and as a sovereign nation. Of the 13, the 12 who maintained that the first two identities were being denied, and that Japan was being treated as a less-than-equal state, were most prone to harbor resentful attitudes toward Japan's Others.

Both pride and anxiety were present in discussions about Japan's economic status. At least two-thirds of the interviewees expressed pride in Japan's achievements in overcoming its wartime destruction and postwar

challenges, and subsequent economic and technological development. Although the Chinese economy had long surpassed Japan's in size, Nagashima Akihisa, a former Parliamentary Vice Minister of Defense (2010–11), argued that: 'still ... in terms of inclusive wealth per capita Japan is number one, surpassing the United States.' Nonetheless, Japan's allegedly declining status as an economic powerhouse seemed to preoccupy many of the interviewees. Commenting on this topic, three interviews assessed that Japan had 'lost confidence', 'courage', or 'vision' (interviews with Hirasawa Katsuei, Matsubara Jin, and Nagashima Akihisa). For Kōno Tarō, who has held several important portfolios in recent years, among them Minister of Foreign Affairs (2017–19) and Minister of Defense (2019–20), stalled economic growth has also reduced Japan's soft power: 'Many South Korean officials used to be fluent in Japanese', he noted, 'but soon we will be conducting diplomacy in English'. He argued that foreigners' perceptions of Japan have changed: 'In the past, [key officials] from Thailand would study at the University of Tokyo. These days, however, excellent students would rather go to Europe, the United States or China.' Yachi Shotarō, a senior diplomat and National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister in 2014–19, raised several episodes of South Korean and Chinese officials making rude remarks about the Japanese emperor, and asked:

How did we get to this point? When all is said and done, they are no longer afraid of Japan's strength. Look at Samsung; I am confident that its sales are more than the total of all Japanese household appliance producers combined. ... We have gone from 'Japan passing' to 'Japan nothing'.

Watanabe Shū, a former State Minister of Defense (2011–12), also noted that the world no longer paid attention to Japan but has moved on to China and South Korea instead. He said that in the latter half of the 20th century, Japan acted as the 'elder brother' of Asia and China. However, Japan's 'weak diplomacy' has allowed China to become a disobedient 'younger brother'.

Meanwhile, over two-thirds of the interviewees expressed pride at the contributions Japan has made to international peace and security. For example, they brought up Japan's involvement in several peacekeeping missions, even in limited supporting roles, and boasted of the Self-Defense Forces' (SDF) display of discipline, which was said to have

inspired confidence in local populations (e.g. interviews with Satō Masahisa and Watanabe Shū). In several interviews, however, expressions of pride in Japan were immediately followed by negative depictions of China. For instance, Watanabe juxtaposed Japan's reliability with China's flashy appearance, with perhaps a hint of *schadenfreude*:

In the peacekeeping mission to East Timor, China built a magnificent building as a present ... whereas Japan built only a conventional-looking building .... When a typhoon came, China's magnificent building quickly collapsed, whereas Japan's stood firm.

Although neither country was lacking in terms of resources, the interviewee seemed to suggest that Japan's added value comes from its attention to detail and high standards. According to Yachi, Japan's virtues included 'dignity', 'decency' and '*bushidō*' – the latter of which means 'the way of the samurai/warrior'. Tsuchiya Shinako, who chaired the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee at the time of our interview in 2015, agreed. She was not so concerned about China surpassing Japan in economic power, but more worried about Japan's standing and influence in the international community. She pointed out that although Japan was the second largest contributor to the United Nations, China somehow received more attention. These examples show that status concern among conservative elites is also mapped on to international humanitarian realms, such as peace and development activities.

There was not only a sense of status inferiority in connection with China and South Korea but also a perceived lack of recognition or *status denial* by these countries, which had been further aggravated by diplomatic and security clashes in recent years. To begin with, four interviewees argued that both China and South Korea often 'played the history card' in their diplomatic exchanges with Japan, and indicated that the Japanese public, particularly the younger generation, no longer wishes to dwell on Japan's past (interviews with Anonymous, Hagiuda Kōichi, Hirasawa Katsuei, and Watanabe Shū). Furthermore, even those interviewees who recognized the validity of Chinese and South Korean demands for repentance believed that Japan had already done enough to compensate for its past war crimes, through both official apologies and the extensive aid packages offered to China and South Korea in the postwar period (interviews with Hagiuda Kōichi

and Watanabe Shū). To add insult to injury, Hagiuda Kōichi, Japan's current Minister of the Economy, Trade and Industry (since 2021) and a former Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2019–21) and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary (2015–16), complained that the governments and citizens of these countries rarely, if ever, acknowledged Japan's efforts. Moreover, four interviewees lamented that attempts to fan anti-Japan sentiments in China and South Korea often had negative consequences, even when it would have been more beneficial for these governments to build a rapport with Japan (interviews with Aisawa Ichirō, Hagiuda Kōichi, Kishi Nobuo, and Tsuchiya Shinako).

Interviewees highlighted how China and South Korea treated Japan unjustly. To make their case, some interviewees pointed to the double standards in China's conduct, from its lack of democracy and transparency to its mistreatment of ethnic minorities, and in South Korea's case to its war crimes in Vietnam (interviews with Anonymous, Etō Seiichi, Matsubara Jin, and Tsuchiya Shinako). In addition, several of them portrayed China as a troublemaker, whose military activities threaten regional stability (interviews with Anonymous, Etō Seiichi, Etō Seishiro, Hagiuda Kōichi, Matsubara Jin, and Tsuchiya Shinako). A conservative member of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) who wished to remain anonymous – and who has held cabinet positions in the field of foreign and security policy – compared the development trajectories of China and Japan, noting that while China's economic growth is already an accepted reality, its military expansion has gone largely unnoticed by the international community. This observation – which also appeared in other interviews – intimated indignation at a perceived injustice: it is inequitable that China refers to norms of sovereignty to justify its military activities, whereas Japan is quickly censured if it acquires new military capabilities (interviews with Anonymous, Hagiuda Kōichi, and Kōno Tarō).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Etō Seiichi, a Special Advisor to the Prime Minister (2012–19) and Minister of State for Special Missions (2019–20), found it absurd how China would often react strongly to Japanese domestic politics, such as the issue of

3 See also the interview with Nukaga Fukushima, who seemed to resent the fact that Japan is not considered to have the same status as a sovereign nation as China but did not clearly target his resentment vis-à-vis China.

constitutional revision or Japanese officials making visits to the Yasukuni shrine.

In these examples, the interviewees seemed to take offense at the notion that Japan enjoys fewer rights and freedoms than China, despite ostensibly being ‘equal’ sovereign entities. Watanabe argued that the indignation Japan experienced in its relationships with China and South Korea was ‘not a nationalism with the aim of regaining [Japan’s] past power status, but a nationalism that demands honor for our country’. It is also interesting to note that although North Korea was discussed as an object of fear, the country was barely mentioned when the conversations revolved around status comparisons.

How did elite members who expressed resentment of Japan’s Others differ from those who did not? One factor that characterized the latter group was the absence of status anxiety. Although these elites could acknowledge that Japan had fallen behind in economic terms, they focused more on the positive aspects of Japan’s future trajectory, such as by highlighting pride in Japan’s technological advances, the agricultural and service sectors, and its human resources (interviews with Akiba Kenya, Aisawa Ichirō, Hiranuma Takeo, Ishihara Nobuteru, and Kishi Nobuo). Ishihara Nobuteru – who was Minister for the Environment at the time of the interview (2012–14) and later Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy (2016–17) – did not seem as perturbed by Japan’s loss of economic status, but instead emphasized that more Chinese citizens were migrating to Japan than the other way around. Moreover, while some conservative elite members took offense at, and expressed fear vis-à-vis, Japan’s neighbors, others primarily blamed Japan’s own deficits, such as a dovish and unskilled Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administration (2009–12), Japan’s longstanding inability to take actions to defend itself, and the complacency that condoned its economic decline (interviews with Hiranuma Takeo and Matsubara Jin). The next section analyzes the type of resentment that stems from precisely this kind of introspection and how it can help us to understand Japan’s changing security policy.

#### *4.2 Resentment against Japan’s pacifism and ‘abnormality’*

In Article 9 of the Constitution, ‘the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force’.

They also forego the right to maintain ‘land, sea, and air forces’. Article 9 thus laid the ground for the pacifism that came to characterize Japan’s postwar security identity (Katzenstein and Okawara, 1993). Despite the constraints imposed by this identity, four conservative lawmakers expressed pride in Japan’s ‘unwavering path of pacifism’ since the end of World War II (interview with Anonymous; see also interviews with Etō Seishirō, Hagiuda Kōichi, and Nukaga Fukushima). However, this pacifist identity and its main source – the Japanese Constitution – have also spurred the goal of revising Article 9 among a branch of conservative politicians.

Among the elite members in our sample, the nine who displayed resentment toward the Constitution typically complained about Japan’s failure to react to security threats. However, their frustration with the Constitution went beyond mere fear or anxiety. In their view, Article 9 limits the scope of Japan’s actions in dealing with other countries, at times leaving it helpless. First, several conservatives noted that Japan’s post-war Constitution was based on the premise that Japan had to repent its past war crimes and aim instead for peace and prosperity (interviews with Hirasawa Katsuei and Watanabe Shū). However, although Japan had worked hard toward this goal in the postwar period, there was no guarantee that Japan would be able to avoid aggression from other countries (interviews with Hirasawa Katsuei and Matsubara Jin). For example, Hirasawa Katsuei, a former Minister of Reconstruction (2020–21) and former career official in the Police and Defense agencies, raised North Korea’s abduction of Japanese citizens – which ‘caught the Japanese public by surprise’ and found the government in a state of inaction despite existing intelligence – before concluding that the current Constitution is ‘nonsense’ (*nansensu*). He further suggested that the pacifist Constitution has left Japan with a ‘peace-senile’ (*heiwa boke*) mentality, making it entirely unprepared for crises. Watanabe concurred, noting that Japan’s adherence to pacifism had led the country to overlook wrongdoing by other countries. Also drawing on the abduction incidents, Matsubara Jin, a former chairperson of the National Public Safety Commission (2012), concluded:

It is now clear that the preamble to the Constitution does not match up with reality. . . . It is akin to leaving your house unlocked because you expect no burglars to be around. However, the world turns out

to be full of burglars. In that sense, this is more defenselessness than pacifism.

Yachi raised a similar point and criticized those who attempted to frame Japan's pacifism as exceptional:

I am not sure if these people truly believe this argument that Article 9 of the Constitution is outstanding compared to other countries ... but I think they are mostly driven by their distaste for Japan's militarism and the right-wingers who pushed for it. So these people praise the goals of Article 9 without knowing if they can be realized. ... It is fine to be a neutral party, but if you are attacked, there is nothing to be neutral about. In other words, choosing not to fight is a form of defeatism, isn't it? One might even call us a slavish nation. That, to me, is an extreme pacifism.

The lawmaker who wished to remain anonymous linked Japan's alleged 'peace-senility' to the fact that a fraction of Japan's public opinion, allegedly consisting of 'the extreme left, the mass media, and progressive cultural workers ... that is, very naive people' propelled the notion that the SDF constitutes 'an apparatus of violence'.

Three lawmakers made remarks that we classified as partial resentment because while they reflect both anger and contempt for Article 9, they do not involve clear status concerns. Kishi Nobuo, Minister of Defense at the time of writing (since 2020) and perhaps most famous for being the younger brother of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, for example, referred to the execution of a Japanese hostage by the Islamic State group in 2014 and the 10 Japanese citizens killed in an attack on a BP gas plant in Algeria as examples of the threats Japanese nationals might face overseas, and that Japan should be able to handle. Satō Masahisa, a security expert in the LDP who served as Commander of the Japanese Iraq Reconstruction and Support Group, noted that dialogues alone were no longer enough. He argued that Japan needs some means of deterrence, of a kind most other states possess even when conducting non-violent diplomacy, in order to exert credible pressures on 'rogue' actors such as North Korea. Similarly, Hagiuda argued that Article 9 of the Constitution has given other actors the impression that 'Japan would not strike back even when under attack'.

The strongest resentment against the Constitution was expressed by the now retired conservative heavyweight, Hiranuma Takeo. Asserting that the Constitution lacked legitimacy, he recalled with indignation how the victors of World War II imposed it on Japan. He claimed that the country was forced to ‘swallow its tears and accept’ the forced Constitution under the threat that the winners of the war would otherwise incriminate the emperor. Furthermore, ‘[n]ot a single line of it has been revised. So I think it is wise to keep in mind the perspective that this Constitution was created for the very purpose of occupation’. According to this recollection of history, there is a clear international hierarchy, in which Japan remains stuck at the bottom and is subject to unreasonable – and disrespectful – demands of the victors and victims of war. Somewhat similarly, Aisawa Ichirō, a former Budget Committee chairperson (2007–8), remarked that as a defeated party, Japan had no choice but to be ‘subservient’ (*otonashiku sezarū o enakatta*) to the postwar order created by the victors. Whereas for the other elite members, the Constitution merely imposes some inconveniences, these two conservative lawmakers justified their positions with stories of an unfair, oppressive social structure that has deprived Japan of its dignity. Yet, as Aisawa affirms, this structure also defines the identity to which Japan now aspires – one based on ‘universal’ values of respect for democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and so forth. This paradoxical narrative could be interpreted as a departure from the resentment that we have found thus far, and to better mirror *resentiment*. This begins with what Nietzsche describes as the ‘reversal of evaluating glance’ (2006, p. 10), wherein the powerless identifies itself against the values of a dominant external world. However, because these values and norms are internalized rather than transcended, it is the envy of the oppressed and their desire for the identity of the oppressor that are the main sources of frustration (Brighi, 2016). It is impossible to ascertain whether these are true representations of the feelings of these two interviewees. Yet, in reinventing the resentful self as the righteous side and the resented as the sole wrongdoer, these narratives have the potential to bolster a more destructive branch of nationalism.

Turning to an examination of resentful attitudes to Japan’s ‘abnormality’, Japan’s pacifism has given rise to the notion that Japan is an ‘abnormal country’, a phrase coined in the then-LDP Secretary-

General, Ozawa Ichirō's, 1994 bestseller, *Blueprint for a New Japan*. The book emerged just a few years after the 1991 Gulf War, to which Japan had been pressured by the United States to contribute not only financially but also with manpower. In the second part of the book, 'Becoming a "normal nation"', Ozawa argued that it was time Japan rearmed in order to contribute more actively to global peace and security (Ozawa, 1994, pp. 91–150). The 'abnormal country' is a framing of Japan's pacifism that has since become widespread among conservatives resentful of the Constitution (Hagström, 2015).

Overall, most of the interviewees understood 'abnormality' in connection with Japan's unique military arrangement – its inability to organize an army with offensive capability – but there also seemed to be room for interpretation. Etō Seishirō, a former Defense Agency Director (1995–96) and former Vice President of the Lower House (2009–12), for instance, defined a normal country as one that follows the rules and norms laid out in the United Nations Charter, specifically Article 51, which codifies the right of a nation to participate in collective self-defense. Others contended that an abnormal country was one that could not protect itself (interviews with Hirasawa Katsuei, Kishi Nobuo, Matsubara Jin, and Satō Masahisa), or seamlessly cooperate with other like-minded countries for security purposes (interview with Kishi Nobuo). Separately, two interviewees understood that a normal country is one that operates an intelligence agency; its lack of such an agency means that Japan remains abnormal (interviews with Kishi Nobuo and Nukaga Fukushirō). Following these interpretations, 11 interviewees agreed that Japan was rather 'abnormal', although some also suggested that it was heading toward 'normalization' (e.g. interviews with Nukaga Fukushirō and Yachi Shotarō). A few observed that Japan had already 'normalized' (interviews with Etō Seishirō, Nagashima Akihisa, and Tsuchiya Shinako). Etō Seishirō, in particular, suggested that Japan should strive to be 'beyond normal', arguably meaning exceptional.

Contrary to our expectations, however, only five interviewees explicitly displayed negative emotions regarding this alleged abnormality. Of these, four belonged to the group that we considered resentful of the Constitution, and their antagonism toward Japan's 'abnormality' was couched in similar language. For example, Hiranuma noted that Japan 'had always had weaknesses that made it impossible to be seen as an

independent country'. Again, referring to the abduction of Japanese citizens by the North Korean government, Hirasawa said:

Any normal country would not have let such an incident occur under its nose without noticing – and yet North Korea was able to send its agents to infiltrate Japan and abduct people so brazenly. And any normal country would have reacted strongly to such an incident. But it was not until Mr. Koizumi's trip to North Korea that the public discourse reached a turning point.

Matsubara echoed this sentiment and said that it epitomized Japan's abnormality to 'rely on other nations' goodwill', as stated in the preamble to the Constitution, and not raise hell about the suspected abductions. In a similar tone, the anonymous interviewee speculated that had Japan been a normal country, it would not easily have overlooked or forgiven the atomic bombs that caused massive suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II and brought Japan's imperialism to its knees. From outside of this group, Watanabe noted that the SDF were 'of no use' (*yaku ni tatanai*) when participating in peacekeeping operations abroad, arguing that despite all their training the troops still lacked combat experience.

In contrast to these five interviewees, others treated the issue in a more matter-of-fact manner. Hagiuda, for instance, said:

Japan is indeed abnormal in terms of its military. We do not have an army. But it is also true that we were a major aggressor during World War II and caused much suffering to our neighbors. In that sense we must be more restrained in our military affairs compared to other countries.

Others appeared wary of the concept of abnormality, making conscious efforts to distance themselves from it (interviews with Anonymous, Aisawa Ichirō, Kōno Tarō, and Nukaga Fukushirō). For example, despite several prompts in the interview, Etō Seiichi insisted on not knowing what the concept entailed, noting that it might be open to interpretation. Even lawmakers who elaborated on their definition of the concept at times cautioned that there might be a hidden political agenda behind the discourse on abnormality, which might be suggestive of remilitarization (interviews with Etō Seishirō and Kōno Tarō). Kōno further criticized the concept:

All countries in the world do things differently, and there are of course countries that do not have armies. Therefore, there is no such standard for who is right or wrong, or who is normal or abnormal. To use a more extreme example, the United States possesses so many arms and has assassinated many foreign heads of state. If you ask me, that is definitely not normal. But to be honest, I do not think there is any point in arguing about what is normal. ... [In Japan], people have been using this argument with an agenda, but I do not think it is a reasonable perspective at all.

This position could also be interpreted as an attempt to separate the abnormality discourse from the debate about remilitarization. When asked whether he believed that Japan was ‘normalizing’ or ‘rearming itself’ in response to security threats, Kōno skillfully turned the question around: ‘If that is the main reason for our rearmament, what about China, whose defense spending has grown by double digits for more than 20 years?’ Similarly, the anonymous LDP interviewee preferred to frame the issue of constitutional revision not as ‘normalization’, but as an attempt to undertake more burden-sharing for the ‘peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community’. These counter-narratives arguably reflect the dexterity with which some conservative lawmakers navigate this sensitive debate.

This observation, in turn, can help us understand why some lawmakers did not seem particularly resentful toward Japan’s constitution-based pacifism. While they appeared supportive of the revisionist agenda, they did not present the issue as crucial to Japan’s identity (interviews with Akiba Kenya, Etō Seishirō, Ishihara Nobuteru, Nagashima Akihisa, and Tsuchiya Shinako). Etō Seishirō agreed that Japan must enhance its national power because ‘it is no longer sufficient to maintain the status quo’ – referring to the Japanese–US security alliance. However, unlike some of his peers, he did not buy into the argument that Japan was ‘weak’. As a result, his suggested remedy was that Japan should ‘take the initiative in its diplomacy’. Similarly, Tsuchiya commented that the debate surrounding the right to collective self-defense was more pressing, and that the revision of the Constitution would only come after that. Finally, Nagashima spoke highly of then Prime Minister Abe’s ambitions, but admitted that he was ‘concerned about the Abe administration’s history revisionism’.

This internal drift in terms of agenda priorities could explain the stalled progress of constitutional revision in the years since the interviews were conducted.

Albeit not a perfectly overlapping circle, many of the conservatives who displayed resentment towards Japan's pacifism were also resentful of its Others. The following excerpt illustrates the significance of this association. Specifically, Matsubara linked the decrease in Japan's defense capabilities to the public's persistent reluctance to support military expenditure, especially when the economy experienced a downturn. 'However', he said,

if China establishes an Air Defense Identification Zone or something similarly aggressive, it may change people's minds once again. ... Now that China is assuming such a hegemonic posture, I think people are becoming more aware that this situation is not ideal. In other words, we should once again be properly equipped to defend ourselves. Now this, this is proper pacifism.

All in all, this account suggests that some conservatives might be fanning anti-China sentiments or Othering China to build support for constitutional revision.

## 5. Conclusion

The issue of Japanese security policy change has loomed large for decades. Scholars have debated whether as an economic power Japan must acquire commensurate military capability, and why until the 2000s Japan seemed to violate this ostensible rule in international politics. They have also debated the extent to which Japan's security policy has been changing more radically since the 2000s and what the driving factors have been. There has been a tendency to interpret security policy change in the direction of remilitarization as something that automatically vindicates realist theories, with their penchant for materialist and rationalist explanations. This is arguably the reason why the literature on Japan has seen a proliferation of arguments where Japan is dubbed 'realist', but with a preceding adjective to adapt to Japan's specific circumstances, for example 'mercantile realism' (Heginbotham and Samuels, 1998), 'reluctant realism' (Green, 2001), and most recently 'resentful realism' (Hughes, 2012, 2016) or 'new realism' (Auslin, 2016).

However, a more muscular security policy does not immediately vindicate realism, and critical constructivists have provided a range of competing explanations premised on Japanese identity construction vis-à-vis Japan's significant Others (e.g. Hagström and Hanssen, 2015; Gustafsson *et al.*, 2018). Meanwhile, the constructivist literature has paid scant attention to how identity construction intertwines with status concerns and emotions in Japan's security policy. As an emotion with strong connections to status concerns, Hughes' (2012, 2016) casual mention of resentment seemed worthy of further exploration and a particularly promising starting point for this article.

Heeding the emotional turn in IR, this article has contributed to IR theory, first by developing a distinctly resentment-based framework, and second by demonstrating that resentment provides a fruitful lens for analyzing the role of status dissatisfaction in international politics. Our third contribution to the emotional turn itself has been to demonstrate that semi-structured interviews can provide a unique angle compared to the conventional use of public discourse as a means of analyzing emotions in politics.

The article has also contributed to the literature on Japan's foreign and security policy by using resentment as a lens for analyzing rare interview material from 18 conservative Japanese lawmakers and a senior government official. Our analysis shows that most of the interviewees were acutely status-conscious. In addition, the material reveals that widespread status dissatisfaction is intertwined with expressions of resentment vis-à-vis Japan's Others – primarily China and South Korea – and also vis-à-vis Japan's constitution-based pacifism and, to a lesser degree, Japan's alleged abnormality. Those who blamed a perceived inferior status on Japan's pacifism were likely to see revision of Article 9 as an end in itself. However, for a subset of conservatives, the goal was rather to stretch the Constitution pragmatically to help enhance Japan's means of deterrence either out of fear of China and North Korea or in solidarity with allies. Hence, although Japanese conservatives might seem united in their view of China as a threat and of Article 9 as in need of revision in order to further strengthen Japan's security, the extent to which status dissatisfaction and resentment underpin and drive these views allows us to discern a more varied picture of Japanese conservative elites. This article thus sides with critical constructivist scholarship in assuming that relative material capability

alone cannot explain Japanese security policy change. It contributes by expanding on the notion that status dissatisfaction and resentment are important driving forces in Japanese security policy change.

Our findings may provide some insight on Japan's foreign and security policy in the coming years. Resentment is an acrimonious feeling that could lead to a perceived need to seek revenge or for aggression. Given the frequency with which expressions of resentment appeared in our interview sample, concerns about the long-term trajectory of Japan's security policy are warranted. Even with recent changes in leadership, key figures in the LDP continue to push the revisionist agenda; some have leveraged the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine to heighten the sense of urgency (Sugiyama, 2021; Lee, 2022). It may also be the case that resentment-based revisionism is louder and comes with a more coherent narrative – and thus receives (Rogstad, 2022) more attention – in public discourse, and from us as researchers, when selecting interviewees. Future research should continue to investigate how emotions and status concerns affect Japan's changing security policy. It should also continue to explore resentment as a potentially important factor in international politics, for example as one of the emotions that have stirred in Russia in recent decades and might help explain its recent aggression on Ukraine (Rogstad, 2022, p. 9).

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