

## *A Neoclassical Realist Account for Abe's Attempt at the Constitutional Revision*

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### **Abstract**

Why did Japan recently begin a serious attempt to revise/reinterpret the constitution to allow the right to collective self-defence in the early 2010s? This is a serious research puzzle for the researchers of Japan's International Relations. The primary aim of this paper is to put forward an alternative, yet theoretically rigorous explanation for it. The existing literature fails to explain why such an attempt was made in the early 2010s, not after the cold war or 9/11 when seemingly a window of opportunity was given. Nevertheless, Abe's administration set it as a political agenda despite the absence of an apparent sea change in the international system. This paper employs a neoclassical realist approach with four 'intervening variables' – leaders' image, domestic institutions, strategic culture and state-society relations. I argue that these variables mediate the influence of the international structure and are more effective in explaining the puzzle than structural realism and constructivism. Up until the second Abe administration started, a unique structure of domestic institutions and unpopularity of security policy that did not help in getting voters prevented the government from setting the constitutional reinterpretation. However, the LDP's defeat of election in 2009 that led the unification of the party and Abe's tactic manoeuvre of stabilising the government through another policy area such as 'Abenomics' as an effective election strategy finally enabled the cabinet to pursue the reinterpretation. This paper also sets itself apart from other studies of Japan's international relations because of its rigorous theoretical application.

Keywords: Japan's security, the constitution, Abe, collective self-defence

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## **Introduction**

Japan's recent attempt to reinterpret/revise the constitution to allow the right of collective self-defence in the early 2010s is a puzzle for Japan's International Relations scholars. From the realist perspective, it could have done so since the 1990s – posing a question as to the delay of response. On the other hand, constructivism cannot offer a satisfactory explanation regarding this somewhat radical attempt. Nevertheless, Abe's administration set it as a political agenda despite the absence of an apparent sea change in the international system. This paper employs a neoclassical realist approach with four 'intervening variables' – leaders' image, domestic institutions, strategic culture and state-society relations. I argue that these variables mediate the influence of the international structure and are more effective in explaining the puzzle than structural realism and constructivism. The purpose of this paper is to bridge the gap between structural realism and constructivism through the application of Neoclassical Realism. The paper finds that the constitution plays a crucial role in channelling international and domestic politics where contentious views, powers and institutions interact to construct a policy. It also specifically aims to address the conditions under which the constitutional reinterpretation takes place through the case of collective self-defence. This paper also sets itself apart from other studies of Japan's international relations because of its rigorous theoretical application while maintaining an explanatory power.

## **Unanswered puzzles**

Researchers in the field of Japans have long tried to examine under what conditions Japan's response to the international system fluctuate - accelerate and decelerate the velocity - and whether there is a limit on the upward trend of remilitarization (Christopher W. Hughes, 2015b). It is true that on the contrary to the realist expectation, Japan did not quite well adjust to the change in the international system, which attributes to its characterisation of 'structural anomaly' (Waltz, 1979). Despite the apparent presence of threats of North Korea since the mid-1990s, Japan did not pursue any hard-balancing strategy. Nor did it take any practical measures to contain the initial phase of the rise of China at the same time. Japan did not pursue the acquisition of nuclear weapons, and it does not possess any offensive weaponry as well as the military – only the quasi-military in the form of the Self-Defence Force with the strict prohibition of the use of force (Kliman, 2006). What it did instead was to upgrade defensive capability with strengthening the security alliance with the US (A. Oros & Tatsumi, 2010). It was not until 2010s efforts began to be made when the Cabinet invoked the constitutional revision to allow the collective self-defence to cope with both threats through the bilateral security cooperation with the US with the use of force (Christopher W. Hughes, 2015a, 2016). Given the clear absence of a realist-type of behaviour, it is as if 'the lost decades' in the security arena, giving a puzzle and frustration to realists with somewhat limited 'remilitarisation'.

Nonetheless, the puzzle has yet to be adequately addressed by other conventional IR theories or Foreign Policy Studies (FPS). Constructivism offers an explanation regarding the 'complete absence of balancing behaviour' in the 1990s. The so-called anti-militarism and its socially and legally institutionalisation had effectively prevented Japan from pursuing 'normalcy' with its static nature of norms, identity and culture (Berger, 1996; Katzenstein, 2008). Such a thesis notwithstanding, the

weakness surfaced together with the upward trend of defence upgrade with internationally expanded SDF roles. Indeed, it cannot capture a sense of radicalism that is most prominent when the constitutional reinterpretation took place to allow the right of collective self-defence for the wider participation in the international security with a possibility of use of force overseas (Catalinac, 2016).

FPS offers some keys to understand the internal dynamics of the delayed and limited response to the structure. Some argue conditions of security policy development is constituted by domestic political reforms and leadership (Shinoda, 2013a; Uchiyama, 2013). The enhanced authority of the prime minister and centralization of power on the cabinet has made it easier to push forward once-controversial security agenda such as the constitutional revision, adding up the explanatory power to the realist paradigm (Richard J Samuels & Schoff, 2014). On the other hand, the limited development can be made sense of the notion that the ‘pulling-back’ influence of the public on such sensitive issues has been a major hindrance together with the rigidity of the constitution regarding the procedure of the revision (Hagström, 2010). The revision requires two-thirds seats of both houses with a national referendum – more than 50% of votes should be in favour. However, we are yet to confirm the causal mechanism between structural forces and a particular policy outcome. These studies may often end up a single case study with the absence of relevance to wider theoretical debate or generalisability.

In sum, the bigger research question we have is ‘why Japan’s response to the international system has not been as first as one would expect and even if it tried, why the response is limited’. This is a rather tricky question, particularly because the answer seems to lay middle ground between realist and constructivist interpretations. Moreover, a rough attempt with the lack of theoretical rigour may lose as solid a predictive value as it should have, whereas strict adherence to conventional IR theories does not come with sufficient explanatory power. FPS – albeit highlighting key perspectives – often lacks a theoretical relevance in the field of IR. In the next section, I would argue that in order to overcome the individual weaknesses and incorporate valuable insights into a theoretical framework, Neoclassical Realism will pave the way for establishing a theoretically rigorous framework with both predictive and explanatory values.

### **Neoclassical Realism and its application**

Neoclassical Realism is helpful in comprehending the interplay between the international system and the domestic politics. In particular, this section not only sketches out the theoretical framework and analytical model but also argues that the constitutional reinterpretation serves as a channel between them within which ‘intervening variables’ interact to construct a policy outcome.

Neoclassical Realism shares a fundamental assumption of Structural Realism in that it assumes that structural force is by far the most influential in shaping a state behaviour (Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009). However, it radically differs from neorealism in the sense that structural force is not exclusively determinant, rather the influence is mitigated by ‘intervening variables’ to incorporate domestic politics (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016). Therefore, the complexity of domestic politics in security policy-making can be effectively analysed within a realist paradigm (Rathbun, 2008).

The intervening variables include ‘leaders’ image’, ‘strategic culture’ ‘domestic institutions’ and ‘state-society relation’. As the definition of these will be discussed more in depth later, these variables can pave the way for accommodating the strength of FPS and constructivism. The former’s emphasis on institutions and leadership and the latter’s focus on norms and identity can be analysed through the concept of intervening variables.

Centred on the constitutional interpretation as a policy making process, the intervening variables helps understand and examine the causal mechanism between a cause (structural force) and an outcome (the allowance of the right of collective self-defence). First, domestic institutions refer to regulations and laws which determine a policy making process and hence delineating who are the key actors in policy making (Ripsman et al., 2016). For instance, as decision-making authority, the prime minister and the cabinet office are the highest bodies (Shinoda, 2013b). The structure of policy planning can be both from the cabinet or bureaucracy (George, 2012). Furthermore, the constitutional reinterpretation requires two-thirds approval in both houses. Thus, it helps determine and identify “institutionally who matters when”. Second variables are concerned ‘leaders’ image’ that what policy vision each key actor holds (Snyder, 2002). In order to analyse, the third variable – strategic culture – comes into play in that it serves as an analytical tool to examine the second variable. The existing literature suggests there are broadly four distinctive strategic cultures in Japan – normalist, US ally, UN-peace keeper and pacifist (Akimoto, 2013; Richard J. Samuels, 2007). Often in tandem with revisionism, normalist idea pursues the revision of the constitution to upgrade the SDF to the military with independence from the US (Soeya, Tadokoro, & Welch, 2011). The US ally sees the security alliance as a critical means to achieve security, while UN-centrists relish the thought of peace promotion through the UN-led missions or idea. Last, pacifism, albeit far less prominent, emphasise the rather backwards idea and stick to the original interpretation of the Pacifist Constitution – even not acknowledging the existence of the SDF and hesitate PKOs. The last variable is ‘state-society relations’ which examine the power relations within the domestic institutions – the public, coalition partner and opposition parties (Zakaria, 1998). For example, the government as of 2012 held a majority with the Komeitō, which is however opposed to the idea of ‘militarization’ and hence an extensive negotiation or compromise is necessary for the policy making (Robertson, 2013). The same goes for the opposition parties and the public. These groups might influence a policy plan and result in adjustment or abortive attempt of policy implementation (Midford, 2006).

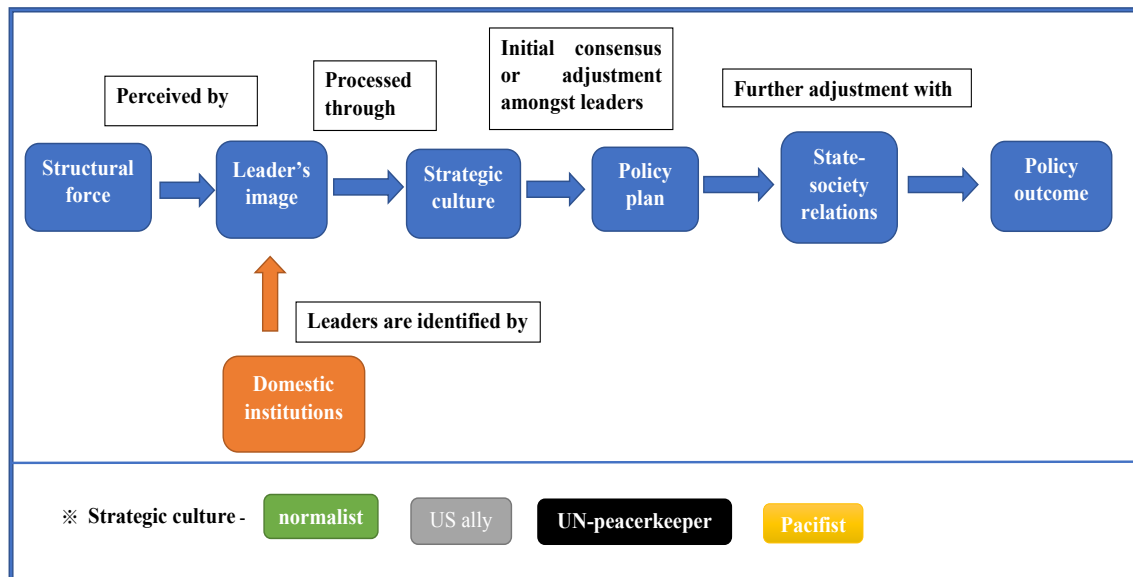


Figure 1 Neoclassical Realism and its application to Japan

Thus, drawing an overall causal mechanism between a cause and outcome with intervening variables starts with structural force as a cause – the rise of China and North Korea. These are perceived by the leaders’ image that is analysed through the lens of strategic culture to explain why a particular policy plan (collective self-defence) came up with the initial analysis of domestic intuitions to identify the key actors. However, as discussed, such a policy initiative might have to be compromised towards its making and implementation by the coalition partner, opposition parties and the public, which is to be examined by state-society relations to add a theoretically rigorous explanation to a particular policy outcome with rich empirical data. The relation and interaction of all of these can be showed as Figure 1.

Before moving on the actual application of Neoclassical Realism to Japan, it is imperative to situate the current interpretation(s) of the Constitution in the historical context so that we can assess how the allowance of collective self-defence as a policy outcome has relevance with the past. Furthermore, it helps to visualise the connection of the constitutional interpretation with security policy and posture, which enables us to grasp with the implication and of the future trajectory of it through the reinterpretation.

**The interpretation of the Pacifist Constitution: the accumulation of the past and indicator for the future**

By comparing the so-called pacifist constitution - seemingly even renounces the right of individual self-defence - to activities allowed by the right of collective defence, one can notice the fact that the upward trend of the security policy development in Japan can be a fundamental overturn of the Pacifist stance. The means for the expansion of the SDF role is the accumulation of the constitutional reinterpretations. Referring to Article 51 of the 1945 United Nations Charter, the right of collective self-defence is to defend other countries with the use of force (United Nations, 1945). Article 9 – the Pacifist clause – is as follows

*“ARTICLE 9. (1) Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.  
(2) To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognised.”*

On the other hand, the current enactment of laws in 2015 to allow the right of collective self-defence, for instance, will allow the SDF to protect the US military with the possibility of the use of force through the Ballistic Missile Defence. How can it be possible to come thus far from the Pacifist Constitution through the interpretation? The short answer is the accumulation of the past constitutional reinterpretations to expand and enlarge Japan’s security role little by little. The Japanese government made otherwise unconstitutional decisions possible by institutionalising and legitimising interpretation into laws. To connect the dots for this seemingly inexplicable discrepancy between the Constitution and the allowance of collective self-defence is no mean feat given the length of the paper. Nevertheless, even sketching out does help to understand at least the dynamics of the past development, leading to the enactment of laws to allow the right of collective self-defence.

First, there was a need to legitimise the existence of the SDF – created under the US pressure in the aftermath of Korean War in 1954. This was achieved by interpreting that (individual) self-defence does exclude the minimum degree of military force for only self-defence in Japan’s sovereign territory – such as the direct military attack on Japan’s soil. This had rendered any SDF activities overseas and joint missions impossible. Since then, delineating the scope of ‘self-defence’ has been intensively negotiated and redefined with the tactical maneuver of the conditions to allow the use of force – an attack to fundamentally overturn of Japanese citizens’ constitutional right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and there is no other way of repelling the attack. Although this interpretation is predicated upon the assumption that such an attack is directly towards Japan, the enactment of law concerning the situations in ‘areas surrounding Japan’ (*shūhen jitai hō*), largely stretches the scope of the SDF, including sea and air. Furthermore, the PKO law in 1992 and anti-terrorism law in 2001 allowed the longstanding taboo to dispatch the SDF overseas to provide logistical support with no use of force. Therefore, to put it simply, the allowance of collective self-defence is a necessary step to enhance security capacity for further international security contribution. This is because the right of collective defence is a next step for expanding the definition of self-defence from areas surrounding Japan to the wider geopolitical arena and enlarging legal capacity for SDF’s activities overseas. From the historical vantage point, the current enactment of the right collective self-defence is neither ‘radical’ as is the widely purported media coverage nor the product of Abe’s efforts. Since the current security policy is the accumulations of the past interpretations, the progression of them serves as an indicator for the future as well. In the following section, the paper analyses the conditions regarding the constitutional reinterpretation in the case of collective self-defence with a Neoclassical Realist lens.

## **Neoclassical Realist account of the constitutional reinterpretation**

### **Structural forces**

There has been a presence of potential threats since the 1990s. Since 1994, North Korea has consistently shown hostility and launched some missile tests. Given the proximity to Japan and the range of its missiles, the perception of threat has increased substantially (A. Oros, L., 2017). Moreover, the double-digit growth of defence spending in China with the ambiguity of its purpose has imposed serious concerns on Japan's policy makers (Ministry of Defense, 2014). In tandem with such growth, the relative decline of the US has been conspicuous, which has played a crucial role in providing security with Japan through the nuclear umbrella (Watanabe, 2016). A number of ways to address these threats exist, such as balancing strategy, increasing the military capabilities and strengthening the alliance with enhanced interoperability (Christopher W. Hughes, 2016). However, none of these is properly advocated due to the limits of constitutions. As discussed, the constitutional reinterpretation is a key to responding them. However, I would argue that the process of constitutional reinterpretation is a step-by-step and hence a time-consuming process, accounting for the delayed response that shall be explained through the intervening variables.

### **Domestic institutions – determining the key players**

The close examination of the policy-making process of security policy and the relevant constitutional interpretation reveals the complexity and interrelated web of authority and power concentration. Regarding the policy planning phase, the cabinet law – revised in the early 2000s, states that the prime minister and the cabinet are primarily responsible for policy planning. Technically it would be entirely possible for the prime minister takes the initiative for policy planning. This is most represented by Abe's establishment of Anpo Hōsei Kon (the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of Legal Bases for Security) as a policy planning body to initiate the constitutional reinterpretation/revision in 2006 that was re-evoked when Abe returned to his premiership in 2012 (Iwama, 2013). Nevertheless, the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are closely related to policy planning process, the voice of which is transferred through the relevant ministers (Hook, 2011). The upgrade of ministerial level from the Defence Agency in 2007 has given the authority to the Ministry in planning defence policy (George, 2012), while the MOFA has its own policy planning body such as Japan-US Security Treaty Division (Fukuyama, 2013). This suggests that an extensive coordination and negotiation might be necessary. A case in point is Hatoyama's attempt at relocating the US Air Base in Futenma where conflictive interests between the prime minister and MOFA and MOD appeared in a rather conspicuous manner (C. W. Hughes, 2012; Lipsy & Scheiner, 2012; Shinoda, 2012). The responsibility for drafting relevant laws as a policy lies in the hands of the ministries. As each minister represents their ministry and the cabinet decision, if the ruling party takes the form of coalition, ministers from the coalition party also has to agree on the decision. Therefore, overlapping authorities requires a broader consensus accommodating interests of each governing body to reach an initial decision, known as 'the cabinet decision', which is in line with the characterization of 'collective decision-making' (Pempel, 1982)

What complicates more is the constitutional reinterpretation process as a policy-making phase. Since the process of enactment of laws has to go through the “examination-work” by the Legislative Bureau – what is famously known as ‘hō no banning’ (the guardian of law) (Sakata & Kawaguchi, 2014). Moreover, in general, the enactment of law has to be approved by more than half of the members at both Upper and Lower houses (Neary, 2002). As of 2012, the LDP only held a majority in the Lower House, suggesting the potential abandonment of policy initiatives by the rejection of the Upper House – although in some cases, the Lower House can override the decision of the Upper House. However, this also suggests that if a policy initiative is not supported by the members of the ruling party, holding a majority does not necessarily lead to the enactment of law. Furthermore, the Diet law adopts (150 days with the right to extend the period once) a period within which the Diet must reach a decision. Otherwise, a policy plan is discarded (House of Representatives).

Therefore, institutionally there are several conditions to enact a law as a security policy. First, arguably there may need a consensus in the Cabinet, the coalition party, ruling party, MOFA and MOD. Second, the consensus is turned into law that has to be approved by the Legislative Bureau. Third, the ruling party has to have a majority in both houses. Fourth, a decision concerning the submitted law at the Diet has to be settled within the period of 150 days.

### **Leaders’ image – different strategic culture but consensus on collective self-defence**

As discussed, the key policy-making actors are the prime minister, the cabinet members (including the coalition party), MOD and MOFA. In this section, their leaders’ image is individually analysed concerning strategic culture. Prime Minister Abe’s image is closely linked with both the normalist view with his revisionist stance. As publicly opined, Abe’s ultimate aim is to revise the constitution to upgrade the SDF to the military and to reconcile historical issues (Kakizaki, 2015). When it comes to the cabinet members, the eradication of the tradition largely helped him to choose like-minded ministers. In the past, where the cabinet members were chosen based on the factional basis, it was hard to reach a consensus at the Cabinet in the first place (Uchiyama, 2013). Furthermore, Mikuriya (2015) argues that the catastrophic defeat of the 2009 general election against the DPJ has led the unification of the LDP and its members. For the MOD which has dedicated itself to legitimising the existence of the SDF, in general, an expansion of the SDF’s role is in favour (Eldridge, 2017). Since the US security alliance has paved the way for the constitutional reinterpretation and enlargement of the SDF activities, arguably the MOD is leant towards ‘US ally’ as a strategic culture. The same goes for the MOFA where apparently both ‘economic’ and ‘security’ factions exist (George, 2012). Berger, Mochizuki, and Tsuchiyama (2007) argue that the MOFA plays a crucial role in reconciling the conflictive interests with the US economically, and hence the strengthening the US alliance may reduce the need for economic compromise in return of security burden. Komeitō is the only party advocates Pacifism and strict opposition to wider active cooperation to the international security. Arguably the biggest obstacle for the constitutional reinterpretation is the Legislative Bureau. Due to the nature of its role to ensure the constitutional consistency of the proposed law, it, by definition, sticks to the Pacifist Constitution and hence Pacifism. In sum, in policy planning phase, it is necessary to reach an agreement with Komeitō and the Legislative Bureau in one way or another.



In policy enactment phase, much depends on the ‘political situation’ such as election and the government stability that are to be discussed through the variable of state-society relations in the following section.

### **State-society relations – the opposition dynamics weakened institutionally**

Arguably the biggest adjustment was made through the negotiation with the Legislative Bureau and the Komeitō to allow the right of collective self-defence. Initial ideas were already established through the Abe-led research council, known as Anpo Hōsei Kon where why and how the collective self-defence should be allowed given the current strategic environment (Asahi Shimbun Seijibu, 2015). When this document written by the Council was submitted to the Legislative Bureau, it was rejected. In response, Abe employed the taboo-like means – appointing Abe’s like-minded, Komatsu Ichirō as the Chief of Legislative Bureau (Nikkei, 2013). Although this does not mean the negotiation became easier, it rather aimed to make the negotiation within the Bureau with Komatsu as a de facto insider so that the Legislative Bureau should provide a framework which both allows the right of collective self-defence and keeps the constitutional consistency. This is where the limited degree of collective defence was the main constitutional basis for the reinterpretation (Asahi, 2015b). The Legislative Bureau, in the end, agreed with the right of collective self-defence by stretching the conditions of self-defence force to the collective one. That is, due to the aggravating strategic environment, the minimum degree of self-defence is reduced to extend to the collective self-defence. Therefore, it means Japan could not evoke the right of collective self-defence unless attack to its ally may potentially cause harm to Japan’s territory as well.

Although institutionally the Komeitō became weak due to the consistent LDP’s victory of the general election in 2013 and 2014, Komeitō has close linkage with the religious group, Sōka Gakkai. It has long held the stance of pacifism and hence showed the firm stance of being against the collective self-defence. However, the negotiation, in the end, found the compromise with which both parties agree. Since Komeitō has the principle of “the sanctity of life”, it was compromised to add another condition that collective self-defence is allowed when there is an attack to fundamentally overturn of Japanese citizens’ constitutional right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (Yomiuri, 2013). This led to the cabinet decision with the agreement of both the Legislative Bureau and Komeitō.

The remaining step was to push forward the bill at the Diet for which the LDP aimed to be institutionally able to enact the bill through the consistent victory of the election to secure enough seats. Abenomics – one of Abe’s key economic policy – has come in handy. Abe’s tactical manoeuvre of the election to turn the focal point to the evaluation of Abenomics, controversial bills of collective self-defence was tactically absent in the election campaign on purpose (Saltzman, 2015).

As expected, the cabinet decision was faced with extensive criticism and backlash from the citizens who were against the right to collective self-defence, followed by the drop of the public support rate of Abe (Yomiuri, 2015). In particular, the activities of opposition were intensified, followed by the memorial day of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs in August (Tokyo Shimbun, 2014). Abe decided not to take the issue forward immediately after the decision because of the concerns that immediate action

or discussion would exacerbate the opposition from the public. The debate between the LDP and New Komeitō stopped since the issue of the cabinet decision, not to mention bringing up it at the Diet meeting. This may have to do with the coming local election and the election of the governor of Okinawa, for which both parties cooperate (Asahi Shimbun Seijibu, 2015). According to the evidence, there was a broad consensus within the LDP, including Abe that the controversy and opposition would wane soon after time passes (Asahi, 2015a). Therefore, waiting for an opportunity was the choice Abe made, and energy was focused on further stabilising the government.

Abe announced the dissolution of the Diet in October in 2014 and call for a general election for extending the premiership. The LDP made the new taxation scheme and the evaluation of 'Abenomics' focal points of the election, and the issue of the right to collective self-defence was not on the manifesto or stated by the Abe when it comes to the election (Nikkei, 2014). The dissolution of the Diet is often initiated by a motion of no confidence or used as a *de facto* referendum. However, as there was not explicit account as to why the dissolution took place, the media called the call for an election as 'Taigi naki Kaisan' (the dissolution with no justification). As a result, despite the lowest turnout of the number of votes since the war, the LDP and the New Komeitō in total gained 324 seats in the lower house, securing two-thirds of seats (Yomiuri, 2014). Moreover, the weakening of the opposition parties helped the situation. Unlike before, there were no longer 'ideologically' complete opposite parties such as the former socialist party. The main opposition parties, DPJ and Ishin no Tō were both in fact not necessarily disagree with the constitutional reinterpretation, the DPJ's opposition has much to do with the aim to reduce the popularity of the LDP to gain more seats. In the end, with the resources gained by the election, there was institutionally not much to do to overturn the policy making process by the opposition or the public. Despite severe demos of the public and harsh critique from the opposition parties, the bills were enacted to allow the collective self-defence in September 2015.

## **Conclusion**

The application of Neoclassical Realism to the case of Japan, particularly the constitutional reinterpretation reveals that there are a number of causal mechanisms between structural force (cause) and the constitutional reinterpretation (outcome). In particular, the constitutional reinterpretation is a quintessential example to serve as a channel between international and domestic politics and an analytical lens to examine the interplay. The institutional obstacles with the constraints of the past interpretation give reasons as to why structural forces hitherto had not been properly reflected in an outcome. The examination of domestic institutions illuminates the difficulty to reach a consensus due to the nature of ideological difference and the role played by the Legislative Bureau. Moreover, as the constitutional reinterpretation regarding the SDF is still not welcomed by the public so that securing political stability through other means seems imperative to divert the attention of publicly unwelcomed policy and wriggle out of and keep at bay the opposition parties. Despite such an ordeal, it is also hard to deny that the public opposition has arguably waned, compounded by the disenchanted and weakened opposition parties, which helped pave the way for pushing for the legislative bills. These particularities – be it temporarily or not – account of what is referred to 'radicalism' in security policy development in Japan.

Although much depends on the domestic political situations, Japan's security policy will be further expanded and enlarged through future constitutional reinterpretation or possibly the revision – making Japan lean towards more of a neo-realist type of behaviour. If this happens, the period of the post-cold war and the time of revising the constitutions will be characterised as 'a slow, yet fundamental transformation into a normal country' with the possibility of escalated tensions in the Asia-Pacific – the second Cold War.

Moreover, what is crucial to capture an overall trend of Japan's security policy is the accumulation of the constantly evolving constitutional reinterpretations – to the policy makers, the collective self-defence is a logical extension in adjusting to the aggravating strategic environment. Therefore, the case study analysed in this paper elucidates a critical juncture where 'incrementalism' meets 'particularities' or what one might call 'radicalism' by highlighting conditions under which constitutional reinterpretation takes place to have a substantial impact on security policy in Japan. While some attribute the constitutional reinterpretation to Abe's ideological stance and leadership, this paper puts forward that political particularities on an incremental foundation of the interpretations are largely responsible for, whereby Abe with his leadership and ideology works as a 'last piece' to complete the process. All in all, the conclusion departs from the existing literature that often drives a wedge between incrementalism and radicalism or constructivism and realism, in that it incorporates these contested debates into a single theoretical framework while preserving predictive values.

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