

## SIGUR CENTER ASIA REPORT

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### AFTER THE 3/11 CATASTROPHE: WHITHER THE JAPANESE PEACE STATE?

Over the past several years, foreign policy circles both inside and outside Japan have been anxious to determine whether Japan should or would develop new strategies to deal with a changing security environment in Asia. The catastrophic impact of the 3/11 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster has only heightened the sense of anxiety over Japan's future direction. At a time of great uncertainty about Japan's future and the implications for its foreign policy, one might instead look to Japan's national identity for signs of continuity and consistency.

For decades, Japan's outlook and external behavior have been shaped by its identity as a "peace state" – a pacifist state associated with the so-called Yoshida Doctrine of cheap riding on U.S.-provided security while concentrating on economic development. That identity runs deep in the Japanese outlook, acting as both a guiding compass and an ideological constraint on state behavior. As the scholar Richard Samuels describes it, an identity is "a platform of ideas about a nation's place in history and its people's aspirations for the future."<sup>1</sup> For Japan, its identity as a peace state means that it is "essentially a reactive or adaptive state" which is not interested in becoming a great military power.<sup>2</sup>

This peace state identity has been consistently evoked in Japanese discourse and followed in practice, even as Japanese defense policy has seen increased debate and contestation in recent years, argued Mike M. Mochizuki at an April 14 Policy Briefing on "Identity and Rising Asian Powers: Implications for Regional Cooperation," organized by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies. The

strengthening of Japan-US cooperation since the Persian Gulf War has emphasized non-violence and "mutual aid," as did their joint humanitarian operations after 3/11. Japan's commitment to nuclear restraint, despite security threats such as North Korea's nuclear test in October 2006, can also be attributed in part to the Japanese identity as a non-nuclear peace state.<sup>3</sup> Even constitutional revision movements have had to couch their proposals in the language of the peace state.

More recently, the National Defense Policy Guidelines announced last December also emphasized peacemaking. Granted, some may cast doubt on the peace principle, citing Japan's recent recalibration of its defense policy that has included an increase in mobility to protect its southwest islands from China, the shifting of a squadron to Okinawa, a decision to procure more submarines, and greater emphasis on intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance. Nevertheless, as Mochizuki pointed out, all of this has remained within the narrative of the peace state identity, and Japan continues to adhere to a minimal defense capacity, forgoing offensive capabilities and insisting on the doctrine of no use of force, except in very restrictive self-defense purposes.

#### Post-3/11: Whither the Peace State?

Despite the historical continuity, will Japan continue to identify itself as a peace state?

The emergence of a national identity is generally attributed to the social, economic and political forces of a particular historical period, and Japan's peace state identity was

#### THE RISING POWERS INITIATIVE

This ASIA REPORT is based on a Policy Briefing on "Identity and Rising Asian Powers: Implications for Regional Cooperation," held on April 14, 2011 and featuring the following experts on Japan, India and China:

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The event is part of the Rising Powers Initiative, a research project that examines the national identities and domestic debates of rising Asian powers, and the implications for regional cooperation and U.S. policy in the region. The project is hosted by the Sigur Center and is generously supported by the Asia Security Initiative of the MacArthur Foundation. For more information, visit:

[HTTP://WWW.GWU.EDU/  
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indeed a unique product of the country's postwar reconstruction experience. While 3/11 will no doubt have far-reaching effects on Japanese society, it remains to be seen whether the catastrophe will herald a new era for Japan to "re-imagine" itself and be "reborn" from its domestic political and economic malaise, as some have suggested. Even if this is the case, the direction in which Japan might depart from its peace state identity is unclear. While some are speculating that a focus on reconstruction will take Japan down an isolationist path of self-help, history also shows that Japan took an outwardly militarist turn after the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923.

It is also possible that the peace state identity will not change, but will be overshadowed by Japan's other identities. In addition to the peace state identity, Mochizuki's research with Isao Miyaoka has shown that three other identities currently coexist in the Japanese discourse: the merchant state; the maritime state; and the democratic state.<sup>4</sup> Although the peace state has been the primary identity, other identities could emerge as increasingly strong drivers of foreign policy. For example, according to Mochizuki, the merchant state identity might lead Japan to further develop economic ties with China and other countries in the region, whereas the maritime and democratic identities might push Japan to promote a maritime alliance of democracies to constrain or balance the rise of China.

The persistence of Japan's peace state identity and its consequent policy choices are also affected by foreign perceptions of Japan as a peace state. There may be a gap between Japan's own self-identity as a peace state, and the way other countries recognize and accept that identity, said Mochizuki. Events such as last year's dispute with China over the fishing trawler incident and China's subsequent ban on the export of rare minerals to Japan, or the provocative visit of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to the contested Northern Territories, heighten Japan's sense of vulnerability and challenge the notion of a peace state that is dependent on the U.S. for security. So far this has pushed Japan toward re-strengthening its alliance with the United States, but one should also keep in mind that only a year ago, there was much talk in Japan by then Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama about building an East Asian community and distancing itself from the U.S.

### Implications for Regional Cooperation

As alluded to earlier, if Japan's merchant state identity is strengthened in the aftermath of 3/11, such that economic interests are prioritized in Japan's foreign relations, then it is plausible that Japan might try to forge closer relations with China and other economies in the region. An example of this is the May 22 trilateral summit in Tokyo between Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, where the three leaders said they would speed up preparations leading to formal negotiations for a trilateral free trade agreement. In the

meantime, Japan has not yet decided whether to participate in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, although Kan had pushed for this before 3/11.

At the same time, Japan's peace state identity could continue as the basis for Japan's external security relations, as it has for the past several decades. Just as the 1995 Hanshin Earthquake paved the way for closer Japan-U.S. cooperation, 3/11 has done the same for the bilateral relationship. Driven by its peace identity, Japan could remain an essentially reactive state, but that would not preclude participation in broader U.S.-led regional efforts at security cooperation, should such an opportunity present itself. Those who express skepticism of Japan's commitment to its security relationship with the U.S. would have to consider the track record of Japan's behavior as a peace state, and question whether the international and domestic conditions that fostered the peace state identity have actually changed in a fundamental way. Despite the trauma of the 3/11 catastrophe, Japan's peace state identity might still endure.

*By Amy Hsieh, Research Assistant, Rising Powers Initiative*

1. Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007) 4.
2. Mike M. Mochizuki, "Change in Japan's Grand Strategy: Why and How Much?" in "Book Review Roundtable: Kenneth B. Pyle's *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose* / Richard J. Samuels' *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia*," *Asia Policy* 4 (July 2007): 194.
3. Mike M. Mochizuki, "Japan Tests the Nuclear Taboo," *Nonproliferation Review* 14, no. 2 (July 2007): 303-328.
4. According to Mochizuki and Miyaoka, the debate over an Asian vs. Western identity has become less salient in Japanese discourse.



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