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Narrating the China threat in Defense of Japan

Narrative analysis of Defense of Japan annual white papers from 2020 to 2023

Centre for East Asian Studies/Faculty of Social Sciences

Master's thesis

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Abstract: This research examines the major themes that form the China threat narrative in Defense of Japan annual white papers from 2020 to 2023. These are policy documents published by Japanese Ministry of Defense (MOD). The research utilized a text-driven content analysis to go through the material and then the Narrative Policy Framework was implemented to specify themes from the policy narrative. The findings of this paper are that the China threat narrative in these documents can be analyzed and deconstructed into three major strands of threat narrative. Those are the threat to values-based international order, threat of Sino-Russian cooperation and threat related to technological development and new domains of security. The most common policy solution that the MOD advocates for in the narrative is to increase deterrence via military means, such as new counter-strike capabilities. The research also concludes that MOD utilizes China threat narrative as a policy tool to influence the image of China and Japan.

Key words: China threat theory, Narrative Policy Framework, Defense of Japan

List of Abbreviations

CCG	China Coast Guard
CCGL	China Coast Guard Law
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
JASDF	Japan Air Self-Defense Force
JCG	Japan Coast Guard
JCP	Japanese Communist Party
JGSDF	Japan Ground Self-Defense Force
JMSDF	Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force
JSDF	Japan Self-Defense Forces
KMT	Kuomintang
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party of Japan
MOD	Ministry of Defense of Japan
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPF	Narrative Policy Framework
NSS	National Security Strategy
PRC	People's Republic of China
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
UN	United Nations
USFJ	United States Forces Japan

Disclaimer: I acknowledge the use of AI software (ChatGPT) to read some parts of the final draft to improve grammatical clarity.

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1 Introduction

This master's thesis focusses on the issue of China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan annual white paper, published by the Japanese Ministry of Defense¹ (MOD) from 2020 to 2023. This research seeks to contribute to the existing research and knowledge in the field social sciences by examining the China threat narrative, formation of policy narratives in general and policy actors, such as ministries, as policy narrators. The research identifies the major narrative themes that form the China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan white papers from 2020 to 2023. Furthermore, it provides evidence that such a narrative does exist within these policy documents and explores the China threat as a dominant theme in the policy narrative constructed by the MOD, as well as in Japanese policy narratives regarding China more generally. This study also investigates narratives as tools used by policymakers to advocate for and produce specific policy outcomes.

To determine the most important and prevalent narrative strands of the China threat narrative in the MOD documents selected for this research, first a qualitative, text-driven content analysis was first conducted to extract essential information from the large amount of document pages. This more refined data was then further analyzed using the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) to ultimately answer the research problem. The NPF was utilized to better understand and read the policy narrative by detecting and categorizing narrative themes that held to determine the most prevalent and significant China-related topics in the white papers.

A key motivation behind this research, in addition to its intended academic contributions, is the practical application of the NPF to this specific topic by assigning defined narrative roles to the characters within this policy narrative. The analysis covers the content of the Defense of Japan annual white papers from 2020 to 2023, identifying the main aspects of China threat narrative within them. These are the themes that form the core of what the China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan annual white papers analyzed for this research are, in the context of the narrative messaging performed by the MOD in the white papers. Since the analysis primarily focuses on the MOD's messaging, it does not closely engage with alternative perspectives on the China threat narrative. However, the findings will be discussed in a broader context.

¹ From now on referred to as MOD

It may seem easy and straightforward to label China as a threat to Japan and the broader democratic world, given China's unilateral assertive actions against other nations such as Japan or Philippines. The increasingly hawkish stance of the United States (U.S.) towards China under the second Trump administration further reinforces the image of China as a threat in the narrative. However, a more precise examination of how the MOD portrays China in its own policy messaging—by identifying the specific themes it presents as threatening—enhances the understanding of both China and Japan as military actors in East Asia and their potential future developments. The narrative analysis also examines how the MOD seeks to influence Japanese policy by employing narratives as a strategic tool, and the broader role of narratives as policy making tools. Beyond utilizing narratives to shape a certain image of China, the MODs narrative also functions as a tool to present a certain role and image of Japan. Researching Japanese policy narratives on China gives insight to both countries and the region of East Asia as a whole. Moreover, deconstructing these narratives into thematic strands fosters critical thinking about the messaging strategies of political entities and their underlying objectives.

The China threat theory and narrative has received some academic attention, as will be discussed later in this paper. However, the Japanese security policy perspective regarding this topic and the Defense of Japan white papers have seemingly received surprisingly little scholarly focus. The scope of this research is influenced by the escalation of war in Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, along with its impact on the MOD's regional threat perception and Russia's role in the China threat narrative. Defense of Japan annual white papers from 2020 to 2023 were selected to get the most up to date picture of the threat narrative and MOD's policies in general. Another factor was to potentially determine any significant changes that would affect the formation of the China threat narrative before and after the escalation in Ukraine.

Researching Japanese policy narratives regarding China is relevant in to understand the potential policy changes that could unexpectedly change the balance of power in East Asia in surprising ways, affecting the lives of millions globally. China is widely acknowledged as a superpower both militarily and economically and its actions heavily affect the global community and has been a subject to much research. this study aims to approach the topic from the comparatively underexplored perspective of Japanese security policy, utilizing official documents that, despite their detailed content, have received limited academic attention. Japanese security policy and relations with China is a topic that attracts global

attention. Finland for example likely shares concerns with Japanese MOD regarding the state of global rules-based system. This is reflected in the Finnish military intelligence review for 2023² which mentions concern regarding Sino-Russian cooperation.

Previous research mentions of Defense of Japan annual white papers

There have been some English language research articles focusing on or referring to Japan's defense white papers. In comparison, China's defense white papers appear to receive more academic attention. Articles discussing the research of the white papers itself are scarce. Panda (2013) discusses the 2013 issue of the Defense of Japan white paper. This was the first issue released under Abe administration. According to Panda the tone of the 2013 issue appears more alerted compared to previous issues regarding regional security challenges and Japan's responses to them. The tone of 2013 issues resembles the more contemporary ones analyzed by this research, as the worry that Japan's security environment (which functions as the narrative setting) is becoming more threatening due to actions of China in Japan's vicinity. MOD expresses concern for China attempting to change the status quo in the 2013 issue. The 2013 issue also is seen as encouraging for Japan to obtain counterstrike capabilities such as missile systems (Panda, 2013). Panda (2013) states that China criticized the Defense of Japan 2013 of playing up the China threat and causing tension and confrontation. Mishra (2019) discusses the Defense of Japan 2019 issue stating that worries regarding China's military have taken priority over North Korea as Japan's main security threat. According to Mishra (2019), this was the first time that China surpassed North Korea as a security threat. The 2019 white paper addresses concerns regarding China's assertiveness to ensure Free and Open South China Sea, presence of Chinese assets in the Sea of Japan and Japan lacking behind China as a regional actor (Mishra, 2019). Przystup (2015) refers to Defense of Japan 2005 issue which expressed concerns regarding China's increasing military modernization and activities. The 2005 issue of Defense of Japan is concerned regarding the lack of transparency of China's military budget and acknowledged China as a considerable threat (Przystup, 2015 p14). While referring to Defense of Japan 2009³, Przystup (2015 p.12) mentions the 2009 issue highlighting Japan's commitment to combating international terrorism.

² Sotilastiedustelun julkinen katsaus 2023 (In Finnish) <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/-/sotilastiedustelun-julkinen-katsaus-2025>

³ Przystup provides a link to the white paper in his references to the MOD webpage, but this unfortunately does not seem to function anymore

Structure of the research paper

This thesis paper is structured in the following way after the introduction: First the methodology chapter introduces the Defense of Japan annual white papers which are the primary object and source of data for this research. Text-driven content analysis was utilized to go through, extract and transform the data from the white papers into a more manageable form. This data was then analyzed further utilizing the NPF, which is detailed in the methodology chapter. The second chapter is a background and framework chapter that introduces the history behind the issue and gives a brief overview of the history of Sino-Japanese relations after the Second World War. This time scope is seen as adequate regarding the research topic, as the focus is mainly on more contemporary relations between Japan and the People's Republic of China (PRC). In addition, the current constitution of Japan which is seen as a major component in the policy narrative setting was adopted after the Second World War. The reader is encouraged to view the background and framework chapter as an introduction to the main characters of the narrative story that is being analyzed. This chapter creates the historical context through which the issue is looked at, goes over the development of Japanese security policy and defense forces and introduces the issue of Chinese and Japanese policy narratives.

The background and framework chapter are followed by the analysis chapter that presents the analysis finding by detailing the three major narrative strands that form the core of the China threat narrative in the white papers. These are the values and morals-based threat narrative, threat narrative related to technological development and threat narrative related to Sino-Russia cooperation. After the analysis chapter, the findings of the analysis are discussed within the context of the research framework and wider context. In addition, comparison is made between the China threat narrative of the MOD and other perspectives of the China threat narrative for example. Lastly the research paper is wrapped up by a short conclusions chapter.

2 Methodology and data

This chapter introduces the methodology and data of this research. First the narrative analysis is discussed in more detail with examples of previous research and studies regarding the narrative analysis. Further, research theory and the NPF are introduced and explored. After that the general content and details of the primary source material of this research is covered. Finally, the chapter covers how the text-driven content analysis of the documents was performed in practice, before moving into the analysis chapter. The purpose of the analysis is to understand the role of China threat narrative in the material by examining what are the main topics and issues that form the China threat narrative in the documents. Themes and patterns are used to establish categories for the core aspects that form the threat narrative in the documents. The MOD is perceived as a storyteller, but the story itself does not have a clear beginning or end as it is an evolving story. The analysis focuses more on the current state of the story in recent years and the narrator is an institution rather than a person.

In the context of this research, security in the narrative is understood mainly in the context of military security and as a state-centric concept. This approach to security can be explained as hard security and it interprets security as dealing with external threats and inter-state security relations (see for example *Fatić, 2002*). However, the analysis shows that the MOD discusses other and new emerging aspects of security such as cyber domain. The institutionalized security narrative can be seen as both informing and promoting these national interests, especially when the narrator is the state organ responsible for security. The documents analyzed by the research present mostly an institutionalized narrative, but the messaging is occasionally enhanced by more personal accounts, such as stories of individual people participating in the national defense. The policy stories help to form the framework of the institutionalized security narrative, so while the personal experience itself is not the focus of this research, it can be interesting to see how it is utilized by an institution to shape a narrative. The institution that is the narrator sets the conditions on how the individual stories reinforce the overall narrative and the more personal stories about individuals are made to support the state security narrative in the material analyzed. The material itself as a story is evaluated as promoting a certain policy narrative, offering evidence to a wider narrative effort to shape policy. The material does not directly ask any questions but rather presents a certain view of the situation and lets the reader make their own assumptions based on that, but the way it presents the situation is meant to shape those assumptions.

2.1 Narrative in action

He Gang (2022) sees narrative as “organization by a subject of events involving characters into a symbolic text that can be understood by the recipient as having a temporal and meaningful orientation” and further discusses views on the narrative in IR theory such as how narrative itself is part of the story. Narrative contains three elements, material, narrator and receiver. Material is the most authentic events of stories that are not yet processed or narrated by the narrator, who in context of IR theory represents a political entity such as a state. The state utilizes the material to produce a narrative that serves their goals. This narrative is targeted at the receiver which the narrative seeks to influence (Gang, 2022). Events related to China’s actions, policies and relations with Japan are considered the material, which are narrated by the MOD in the Defense of Japan. The receiver is not completely clear but regarding the MOD publishing the full versions of the documents both in English and Japanese, it can be assumed that it is both domestic and international audience that the MOD seeks to influence. MOD’s narrative is used to back and reinforce the claim that Japan is facing a threat from China and is currently in the middle of a concerning security situation. This narrative also offers solutions or suggestions on how Japan should act to alleviate these problems to the reader. Analyzing the themes of the China threat narrative in the white papers also helps to decipher how the narrative provides the MOD itself *raison d'être* as a state organization, as a form of strategic narration.

In the context of the narrative of the MOD documents examined by the research, China is appointed the role of the antagonist or “evil” in the traditional storytelling sense. Related to this appointment of evil in the narrative is the role of morals and ethics. Technological development for example, can be narrated to lead to an increasing threat to civil liberties in the form of mass surveillance and even further global authoritarianism in the context of the China threat narrative. According to Sheikh (2014), claiming to combat evil is utilized as a legitimacy granting mechanism. Sheik further writes that related to narratives, morals are often inherent in the metanarrative and gives the example of principle of freedom as moral value. Regarding how drastic measures can be introduced to defend moral good or values depends on the cultural importance and the strength of the narrative status of the moral value, which is presented to be under threat (Sheikh, 2014).

A narrative is generally understood to be composed of elements such as action, setting, characters, and plot, including conflict. Assigning the role of an adversary or "evil" allows the narrator to justify countermeasures against the perceived threat and shape the narrative

accordingly. For example, by framing certain actions as part of a broader threat narrative, the narrator can introduce discussions and advocate for policy measures that may have previously been deemed unjustifiable by the general public. In this context, the MOD can depict China's actions as a threat to Japan to garner support for new legislation that would enable the development and acquisition of counterstrike capabilities. These are capabilities that Japan has historically been unable to obtain.

Aspects that are inherently not related to national security such as technological development can be transformed into a matter of security by the threat narrative. This securitization narrative can also explain why the threat of China is made such an important issue for Japan by MOD, rather than any other security issues such as natural disasters for example. Balzacq et al. (2015) defines securitization as a process that first establishes the security nature of a public issue, solidifies the social commitments arising from the acceptance of the threat, and thereby creates the conditions for the approval of a specific policy. According to Taureck (2006), securitization is an act of speech that can transform something into a security issue simply by labelling it as such. This in turn moves the issue from the sphere of normal policy making into the sphere of emergency policy (Taureck, 2006 p.54). Sheikh (2014) writes that the securitizing actor (which the MOD is in the case of this research) is required to convince the audience that the state of emergency and threat necessitates extraordinary measures, and that "normal" methods are insufficient to counter the threat (Sheikh, 2014).

According to Daiute (2014, p.18) narrating is an interaction between context and expression in a way that brings attention to the relationship between the prominent characters and events, even if the wider context is unknown to the audience as it influences their ideas regarding the situation. Further, narrating is an act of creating an identity and making sense of belonging to a setting (Daiute, 2014 p.31). The narrator utilizes a variety of features to share a specific message and hints of why the story is told the way it is and why at this specific time. The aspects of the story form a narrative that has goals and the perspective of the narrator and their stance towards the matter can greatly influence the expressions of the narrative (Daiute 2014, p.21-22).

2.2 Narrative Policy Framework

The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) is a theoretical approach to policy analysis that adopts the structural form of narratology and seeks to explain how narrative shapes and affects policy making and policy outcomes (Kuenzler et al., 2025). This research approaches

narrative as a tool that is used to influence policy outcomes and policy debate. Policy narrative as described in Jones et al. (2014 p.5) is distinct from other policy messaging by including narrative elements. These elements form the narrative structures of the policy story. Policy narratives contain elements such as **setting**, **characters** like heroes and villains, **plot** and **moral of the story**. In the context of a policy narrative, policy solution for example can represent the moral of the story. Jones et al. (2014 p.5 see also Jones et al., 2022) explain that these elements in the NPF can serve as a baseline for initial empirical inquiry, with additional elements potentially being identified through further analysis. This research will apply these elements to interpret the narrative within the MOD documents and examine how the China threat narrative is constructed in them.

The NPF assumes a structuralist stance towards a narrative by defining it as containing generalizable elements, such as plot and characters that are identifiable in different narrative contexts. Furthermore, according to Jones et al. (2014 p.10 see also Pierce et al., 2014 p.35) the policy narrative simultaneously interacts on three levels of focus towards units of analysis: Individual (Micro), Group/Coalition (Meso) and Institution/Culture (Macro) (See also Jones et al., 2022). The following analysis will primarily focus on the meso-level of policy narrative, as this level examines policy narratives within a policy system and assumes that the stakeholders involved aim to achieve specific policy objectives. This policy narrative is strategically constructed for a policy goal or policy solution by influencing policy preferences of the audience, whether they are public individuals or decision makers (Jones et al., 2014 p.15-16). According to Pierce et al. (2014 p.36), the Meso-level seeks to understand the ways policy narrative can be seen as influencing a policy outcome. Regarding the strategic focus of content in the policy narrative, Jones et al. (2014 p.9) explains that policy narratives are “strategic constructs of policy reality” that are used to promote policy and win a public policy struggle, or at least not lose one. Policy narratives can be strategic, for example, by seeking to mobilize support for a particular policy.

Pierce et al. (2014 p.29) writes that previous research utilizing the narrative policy framework has focused on the narrative elements of setting, characters and morals of the story. According to Jones et al. (2014), the aim of a policy narrative is to handle a specific policy problem in a specific context and the **setting** of a policy narrative is this context. The setting is formed from aspects such as facts that are generally agreed upon, defining legal characteristics that are considered unquestionable (such as basic human rights for example), environmental and geopolitical factors such as national sovereign territory, demographics and other facts and

rules that are generally agreed upon by the actors of the narrative. Security concerns arising from China's militarization of the East China Sea—for example, its incursions into Japanese territorial waters and the legality of these actions under international law—constitute a prominent part of the setting. However, the MOD also introduces various other aspects that can be interpreted and analyzed as part of this broader narrative setting. The **characters** in this interpretation of policy narrative analysis are divided into three categories. The heroes are the characters who seek to fix the policy problem, villains are the ones whose actions cause the problem and victims are the ones who are harmed by the problem and villain. In the context of this research, the characters are more vague than simple individuals. States and other political institutions or even vague concepts such as freedom or rule of law can be characters. The characters of the policy narrative shape the policy opinions of individuals. According to Jones et al. (2022) other characters like beneficiaries or allies etc. can also be operationalized.

In the context of policy narrative, the **plot** is the element that connects the characters and policy settings to one another via multitude of ways. For example, a scenario that begins with a state of crisis caused by a villain threatening victims, which is then resolved by a hero introducing a solution to counter the threat, constitutes a plot within the context of the MOD narrative and this research. The policy narrative usually contains a **moral of the story**, which is the proposed policy solution. In the context of this research, strengthening defense capabilities by allocating more resources to defense technology development can serve as a moral in the MOD's policy narrative. Jones et al. gives an example of simply seeking to maintain a status quo as the moral of the story. Policy narrative does not always present direct policy solutions to a problem; instead, its primary function may be to define the problem itself. In some cases, a simple call to action can also serve as the moral of the policy narrative (Jones et al., 2014 p.5-7 see also Jones et al., 2022).

When analyzed through the NPF, policy narratives can be categorized into two types: explanatory (independent variable) and dependent variable. This distinction depends on whether the narrative shapes policy perceptions and individual belief systems or whether institutional influences shape the narratives of advocacy groups (Pierce et al., 2014 p.32). In the context of the China threat narrative, this research approaches narrative as a tool that is used to influence perceptions of policy to advocate for a desired policy result. Articles studying what influences policy narratives tend to utilize content analysis on existing documents, and it is the most prevalent choice of data collecting in applying the NPF. Past

research has utilized documents such as organizational archives, online videos, editorials and news articles and government reports for example. Determining what document sources can be considered policy narratives can thus vary depending on the direction the researcher chooses. Pierce et al. (2014) advise that the full catalog of available documents should be considered when selecting materials for analysis. Additionally, messaging from other policy actors, such as the media and government entities, which contain elements like characters and plot relevant to the examined policy narrative, should be included when appropriate, depending on the nature of the research (Pierce et al., 2014 p.34-35). The analysis chapter will include references to relevant media sources that support the discussion, highlighting instances that could be interpreted as outcomes of successful policy influence by the China threat narrative on Japanese defense policy, budget prioritization, and the policies of other government institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

2.3 Analyzing the Defense of Japan annual white papers

The primary materials examined by this research papers are the English versions of the Defense of Japan annual white papers from 2020 to 2023. The white paper is published annually by the Japanese Ministry of Defense. These specific editions were chosen based on hypothesis that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has affected the Japanese China threat perception. The issues from 2020 to 2022 are analyzed to identify key aspects of the China threat in recent years of the issue. The 2023 issue is the most interesting issue of white papers from the perspective of the research, as it is the most recent one by the time of the analysis and fully considers the escalation of conflict in Europe and the ramifications it has for the security dynamics of East Asia.

It should be noted that while the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine serves as an interesting focal point in terms of the research timeframe, the primary focus of this study is the China threat narrative and the perceived threat posed by China to Japan, primarily within the East Asian theater. The threat from Russia to Japan is not the major central concern of this research, except in its connection to the China threat narrative. The portrayal of Russia as a threat in the MOD's narrative would likely warrant a separate study. Overall, this research considers the Defense of Japan white papers to be the most detailed and authoritative publicly available resources provided by the MOD to inform the public about Japan's defense policy. This is the key reason these documents were selected for analysis.

Defense of Japan is structured into chapters that cover various aspects of Japan's defense and security policy. These include an overview of Japan's current defense situation, the global security environment, and the defense policies of other nations. Additionally, the white paper discusses emerging trends in global security, Japan's defense policy, posture, and strategic positioning. It also outlines Japan's national defense architecture, which includes cooperation with the U.S. and other allies. Lastly, a chapter is dedicated to detailing Japan's defense reinforcement procedures and human resource management within its defense framework. This four-chapter division remains constant in all the white papers analyzed, with some variations on the specific theme of each chapter.

The English versions of the white papers in PDF document form that are analyzed for this research are each roughly between 570 to 510 pages long. The 2021 issue is shortest one and the 2020 issue longest. The oldest archived issue available at the MOD webpage in English is the 2014 issue, but the white paper has been published far longer than from 2014. MOD publishes a digest of each white paper, which covers the main topics of each document but is generally much shorter and much less detailed. The digest version of the 2020 issue of Defense of Japan is available in English, Russian, Chinese, Korean and French language, but other issues digest version is available in the ministry's webpage only in English and Chinese. Full versions are only available in English language, other than in the native Japanese. There does not appear to be a significant difference between the English and Japanese versions of the white papers. The research assumes that the English version is aimed more towards international audience and some differences potentially could be present but pointing them out is not the research goal.

The first Defense of Japan was published in 1970 and has been published annually since 1976 by MOD. Former Director General of the Defense Agency (preceding agency of the MOD) and Prime Minister of Japan Nakasone Yasuhiro⁴ reflects on the publishing of the Defense of Japan in the 2014 issue of the white paper. According to the minister Nakasone, the white paper serves as a tool for making the public understand the mission of the MOD and the JSDF which is an essential part of Japan's defense (*Ministry of Defense, 2014 Foreword*). It is bit difficult to say when exactly each white paper is made public. For example, an article by Yomiuri Shimbun (in Japanese) from 2022 mentions that the Japanese cabinet approved the 2022 Defense of Japan white paper in July. This article also implies that some cabinet

⁴ Note that Japanese names in this paper are written in Japanese name order, surname first

approval process is required before this policy document is released to public (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2022). Editorial from the English-language paper of the Sankei Shimbun, the Japan Forward discusses the release of the 2023 issue of the whitepaper which was introduced by MOD in late July 2023 according to the article (*Japan Forward*, 2023). Based on articles of this news site, it appears that at least the Japanese version of Defense of Japan has been made consistently public by the MOD in July in recent years. As an anecdote from the author's experience working as a trainee at the Defense Attaché's Office of the Embassy of Finland in Tokyo, it appears that the Japanese version of the Defense of Japan is published significantly earlier than the English version. Additionally, a physical copy is printed, at least in Japanese.

Defense of Japan annual white papers are reports detailing the state of Japan's defense from different perspectives such as issues related to defense spending, geopolitics, technology etc. The white paper is not only limited to Japan as it also goes over significant military situations around the world, focusing much on issues such as the conflict in Ukraine and the situation at the Taiwan strait for example. The white papers contain information regarding the organizational structure and mission of the Japanese SDF and even some information regarding the location of different air, navy, naval military units, command and military bases (see for example, *Ministry of Defense, 2022 Booklet – 24*). The vast majority of mentions of China occur in the chapters covering the security environment surrounding Japan. Each white paper contains a foreword from the Minister of Defense of Japan and this section also gives a good indication of the concerns that MOD seeks to express regarding China and the security situation in general. Further, the white papers also contain more personalized stories regarding the members and duties of the JSDF and special features that delve more deeply into specific matters such as advanced weapons systems or certain conflict points. This helps to personalize or give face to the story that is told by the MOD.

The white papers contain many graphical illustrations, numbers and other data about the armed forces of Japan and are generally rich in information regarding a multitude of security topics. Other than the JSDF and its different service branches and equipment, the white papers give many details about the strength and capabilities of other armed forces operating in the territorial vicinity of Japan, namely the U.S., Russian and Chinese forces. The documents detail and feature many systems like armored vehicles and aircraft utilized by different militaries and include many graphs, maps and diagrams that aid in understanding the different themes and topics better. The white papers also contain many special columns or sections that dive deeper into certain topics. The documents also include plenty of pictures about modern

military hardware utilized by Japan and other nations, including pictures taken from Russian and Chinese aircraft intruding in Japanese airspace taken by intercepting Japanese aircraft.

Alongside the Defense of Japan and other documents, the MOD also publishes a document titled the China Security Report, which can be found in the MOD webpage. This research focuses on the Defense of Japan annual white papers as the most comprehensive and detailed reports on the development of Japan's security policy and the various aspects shaping the broader China threat narrative within these documents. However, the existence of the China Security Report should also be acknowledged and it could provide additional insights and could be a subject for future analysis. This research generally considers Defense of Japan to be a reliable source of information regarding various military data, such as force numbers and references to other policy documents. However, readers should remain aware that these white papers are published by the MOD and should not be viewed as entirely neutral presentations of information. Military and defense affairs by nature are often veiled in secret and this research cannot guarantee that all the information given by MOD is a hundred percent accurate and honest. Determining that is not the aim of this research paper. As an anecdote, personally comparing some numbers in Defense of Japan to another source of military numbers published by Japanese government has sometimes resulted in the numbers not always matching up. This could be the result of semantic differences or the writers' lack of translation capability. Still to the MOD's credit, the Defense of Japan annual white papers do convey strong sense of transparency with how detailed the documents are about Japan's defense policy and military, which also enable this research itself to be conducted the way it is.

Content analysis of the Defense of Japan annual white papers

The research was conducted in practice by first applying text-driven content analysis to identify and contextualize narrative elements and themes related to the China threat or China in general within the documents. These identified elements were then subjected to narrative inquiry using policy narrative analysis. Text-driven content analysis as described by Krippendorff (2019) is a fitting approach in order to answer the research question. While the text-driven method was used to streamline the analysis process due to the great amount of material, it should be noted that the documents also contain much information in form of pictures and graphs for example. In practice, the research on the Defense of Japan annual white papers began by familiarization of the text as a source and determining aspects such as

repetition and overlapping in the documents or changes on how much certain topics are given space in the white papers for example. The general methodical steps introduced in Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2009, p.92-93) represent the flow of the content analysis conducted. The topic and presence of China is the main and only focus of this research and the coding of the material was done by going through the documents and making detailed notes on in connection to which topics and how often China was discussed in the documents. From the coding certain major themes present in all the documents appeared. This research utilizes thematic classification and similarities between the different documents and how they form the China threat narrative. The thematic classification is not solely based on statistical analysis but rather on the content of what is being said about the topic. This process also involved an initial effort to assess the tone of the document's language regarding China.

The qualitative content analysis of this research is interpreted similarly to the structuring method and category assignment as detailed by Mayring (2014). The results are then looked through and assessed by the NPF. Mayring (2014, p.95) describes the goal of the structuring to be "extracting a certain structure from the material". The categories are the main themes of threat in the wider China threat narrative in the documents, samples of which will be included in the analysis section. The coding rules are not necessarily as strict since this research sees the themes of the threat narrative as overlapping to some degree and supporting the message of each other. The content analysis is initially interested at in which areas is the topic of China discussed, and which is the relation of China for other topics of the documents. This approach is less focused on statistically measuring the documents and more concerned with interpreting meaning and identifying potential patterns. The role of China and Japan presented in the documents also helps to understand what kind of image the MOD builds for Japan as a security actor via the China threat narrative. In practice, all the analyzed documents were first read thoroughly, with notes taken to identify the topics in connection with which China is discussed. The second step involved determining the most prominent themes related to China and analyzing how China is specifically portrayed in a way that can be interpreted as a threat.

Categories of themes were established based on the frequency of topics and themes in all the documents analyzed. Frequency of themes such as China developing advanced military technology or dual-purpose technologies or concerns regarding lack of transparency in military affairs in individual documents and then comparing the co-occurrence of the major themes in all the documents combined. Further frequency of terms together, such as China and transparency was noted when going through the text. In addition, the content analysis

looked at potential rising terms or topics that would become more prominent in the newer issues of the white papers or topics that were given less attention. One such rising issue related to the China threat narrative was the discussion regarding acquiring counterstrike capabilities for Japan's defense for example. Virtually all mentions of China were looked at some point and to some extent in the documents.

3 Background and theoretical framework of the research

This chapter covers the history of relations between Japan and the People's Republic of China after the Second World War and the development of the Japanese defense policy and armed forces. The primary focus is on the Cold War era, emphasizing the key leaders and policies of both nations during this period. This historical overview is intended to provide a concise and digestible framework, as it ultimately covers a broad timeframe. The chapter's main purpose is to help the reader to understand the historical background and context of the Japanese security policy and its relations with other regional powers, mainly China and U.S in relation the China threat narrative. Finally, the chapter covers policy narratives produced in Japan and China and introduces previous discussion regarding the China threat narrative itself.

The chapter first contains a compact overview of the history of Sino-Japanese relations after the Cold War mostly focusing on the security and top-level officials and exchange between the nations, until including Prime Minister Kishida taking up the office and introducing new policy strategies in 2022. The second part broadly gives an overview of the development of Japanese security policy and the post war armed forces of Japan. Special attention is given to Prime Ministers Yoshida Shigeru and Abe Shinzo, and their respective policy doctrines, as this research considers them vital for understanding the historical context and development of the topic. The chapter does not specifically go into detail regarding the multitude of different exchanges regarding culture or scientific cooperation for example but rather seeks to provide the historical context and framework for this research topic. The literature used in this chapter presents much larger amounts of interesting and more detailed information regarding the topic than can be fitted to this chapter. Readers wishing to dive deeper into the nuances of the topic in greater depth are encouraged to consult the sources utilized in this chapter.

Second Sino-Japanese war

Modern Sino-Japanese relations are much of a product of the Second Sino-Japanese War⁵ that was fought from 1937 to 1945. The history of relations between Japan and the People's Republic of China began after a brutal and long war that continues to haunt the relationship. The hatred towards Japan for its wartime cruelties has helped to maintain the feeling of patriotism and national unity amongst the Chinese population and the war continues to shape Chinese attitudes toward Japan (see for example *Vogel et al., 2019 p.285*). The Japanese

⁵ As part of the wider Second World War

foreign and defense policy was formed while the country was still under occupation from the victorious U.S. forces and the security cooperation between these nations forms a firm backbone of Japanese security policy today. The economies of both China and Japan would come to rank among the largest in the world, a feat that demands respect considering both countries emerged in ruins after the Second World War and both nations can be now considered dominant powers in Asia.

During the war against Imperial Japan, the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government sought to diplomatically isolate Japan. According to some scholars, the KMT diplomacy was successful due to securing aid and assistance from the U.S. before the Pacific War and even from Germany at the time (*Yeying, 2020 p.64*). The U.S. had hoped that unified and pro-American China would have emerged after the war. The Soviet-Union eventually fully supported the communist side led by Mao Zedong against the Chiang Kai-Shek's KMT but declared war against Imperial Japan only towards the end of the Second World War, in accordance with the Tehran Conference. The Japanese invasion of China fueled the rise of nationalism among the Chinese population and provided the CCP with an opportunity to transition from a group of insurgents fighting the KMT into a formidable political and military force capable of seriously contesting the KMT for control over China. CCP developed plans and strategies on how to fight the civil war that resumed after the defeat of Japan, expand their organization and army and how to govern China after the unification. While the KMT proclaimed victory over Japan, it was achieved through countless defeats of its armies on the battlefield against the Imperial Japanese forces and unaccountable sacrifices for the Chinese people. The defeats had taken its toll on the KMT cause, and despite still appearing numerically superior against the CCP, who had become to enjoy much appeal among the Chinese population during the war, the civil war would eventually conclude on the defeat of the KMT (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.282-283*). Imperial Japan's military ambitions to dominate Asia through force collapsed with its surrender in 1945. The war resulted in millions of military and civilian casualties, leaving cities and industries in ruins. In the aftermath of the devastation caused by the militarists, the Japanese population embraced a path of peace, focusing on rebuilding the nation while undergoing a process of political modernization. (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.284*).

3.1 Short overview of Sino-Japanese relations after the Second World War

The first diplomatic contacts and exchange between Japan and the PRC revolved around the Japanese nationals who had remained in China for different reasons after the war (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.292*). Mulloy (*2021*) for example writes that after the Second World War, soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) under various and sometimes uncertain circumstances remained in China to fight for either the communist or KMT forces and the IJA personnel were in fact valued by their skills in aviation and artillery. Some IJA soldiers were not repatriated until 1954 and some even saw service in the Korean War (*Mulloy, 2021 p.17*). Diplomatic relations between Japan and China were only normalized on September 29, 1972. Japan had followed the U.S. policy of isolating the communist China, but due to a shift in policy during the Nixon administration, Japan opened diplomatic ties with the PRC in 1972 (*Gordon, 2020 p.302*).

Minoru and Si-Yun (*2014*) write that while PRC established formal diplomatic relations with Japan and thus recognizing the legality of the post-war Japanese government according to the international law, the war crimes committed by Japan against China can be never fade in the minds of the Chinese people despite the formalization of the relations. The Chinese perspective of Japan atoning from its war crimes differs from the Western view of justice, and China did not support Japan joining the UN security council due to Japan not making enough amendments to the China for example (*Minoru & Si-Yun, 2014 p.97*). Historical issues about the war trouble Sino-Japanese relations and incidents have led to sparks of worsening relations. Certain Japanese school textbooks approved by the government have for example caused controversy, due to the way they covered the war between Japan and China. Japanese policymakers have also caused controversy by visiting the controversial Yasukuni shrine that also enshrines war criminals or downplaying war crimes committed in China in their statements (*Gordon, 2020 p.308*). Despite the economic cooperation between Japan and China, worries over expanding Chinese economic power and military capacity have concerned Japanese public and policy makers alike (*Gordon, 2020 p.345*).

During the Cold War

The Cold War would draw the boundaries of Sino-Japanese relations after the Second World War, with Japan becoming an ally of the U.S. and PRC allying with the Soviet Union until the Sino-Soviet split. According to Vogel et al. (*2019*) Japan and China had relatively few contacts during the Cold War between 1949 and 1972, but the nations respective leaders

managed to keep the channels of communication open that would help the nations develop closest relations yet after 1972 (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.287*). Japan and China developed and implemented foreign policy between each other multiple times before officially opening diplomatic relations in 1972. According to Yasuyuki (2022), China's first policy platform concerning Japan was formulated in 1955. Its purpose was to normalize the Sino-Japanese relations. Masaya (2023) notes that Japan and China both sought to promote private trade, which was politically motivated during the Cold War with the PRC seeking to influence the public opinion regarding China among Japanese population and Japan seeking to expand exchanges between the nations while separating economic and policy goals. The global economy was practically divided into the Eastern and Western blocks during the Cold War. The Korean War resulted to a strict containment policy towards China by the U.S. that limited Japan's opportunities of exchange with China despite demands from the public and Japanese business circle (*Masaya, 2023*).

Sino-Japanese relations from 1949 to 1972 can be described as frozen since the two nations did not have official government to government relations, despite some form of trade and other exchange existing between them. During this frozen period Japanese and Chinese officials who were considered friendly to each other's nations acted as a link between the Japanese government and the Chinese leaders, which enabled a small amount trade to take place between them. The First Taiwan Straite Crisis in 1954-1955 saw deterioration of Sino-U.S. relations and the U.S. forming a defense treaty with the KMT controlled Taiwan. According to Yasuyuki (2022), Chinese leader Mao thought it important to pursue a "Japan neutralization" policy that sought to separate U.S. and Japan. Mao saw at the time that Japan was desiring increasing trade with China, which made the U.S. goal of economically containing China increasingly difficult as Japan began to act diplomatically more independently (*Yasuyuki, 2022*). Due to a pressure from the U.S., Japan established its armed forces first time since the Second World War which alarmed China who saw it as U.S. pushing for militarization of Japan (*Iriye, 1996*). Iriye (1996) further writes that while China and Japan were heavily incorporated into the Cold War alliances, military power itself did not play a significant role compared to other factors such as economy in the relations of the two nations. Rather, they sought to ensure that they would not directly become involved militarily in conflicts that would spark in the region during the period.

In 1950s and early 1960s Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping had frequent contact with Japanese socialists and communists in addition to meeting Japanese officials from other parties. After

the Sino-Soviet split, CCP officials sought to gain support from Japanese communists against the Soviet Union. However, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) refused to criticize the Soviets, leading the CCP to sever ties with the JCP. Afterwards China sought to work with the Socialist Party and the Buddhist Komeito party (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.310-311*). Despite few opportunities to do so, prominent Chinese official Zhou Enlai sought to improve relations with Prime Ministers Yoshida and Hatoyama between 1953 and 1957, but the relations worsened after 1957 as China and Japan became more divided in policy matters. Sino-Japanese relations during the Yoshida administration in 1949 was largely dictated by the demands of the U.S. towards Japan, that led to Japan establishing relations with Taiwan and declaring that Japan would not seek bilateral agreements with the PRC. Despite this, Yoshida made some concessions towards the PRC as well, for example not recognizing the KMT leader generalissimo Chian Kai-shek as the ruler of mainland China.

Prime Minister Hatoyama also hoped to improve relations with the PRC, but his China policy was hampered by greater focus on the Soviet Union and trying to keep up good relations with Taiwan, due to Japan's desire to enter the U.N. Taiwan as a UN security council member at the time could have blocked this ambition. Hatoyama's efforts to boost trade between the nations also faced opposition from the U.S. and domestic opposition. Sino-Japanese relations worsened when a conservative leaning Kishi Nobosuke was elected prime minister and China simultaneously tightened its foreign policies in 1957 to 1960. Prime Minister Kishi had served in Tōjō Hideki's cabinet during the Second World War, a government later associated with war crimes. Kishi became the first Japanese post-war Prime Minister to visit Taiwan, a move that displeased the mainland Chinese government. (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.318*). Kishi's term in office also saw the revision of security treaty between U.S. and Japan in 1960. Kishi was followed by Ikeda Hayato and during his term in the office China and Japan again developed economic relations and reached a limited trade agreement without official diplomatic relations. This agreement was strongly criticized by the U.S. due to pro-Taiwan lobbyists in the U.S. congress and by Japanese pro-Taiwan groups (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.320*). Ikeda sought to avoid provocations with the PRC, but the Chinese Cultural Revolution would once more see Sino-Japanese relations worsening. Trade relations would again improve after the Cultural Revolution. Japanese business community began hoping for more improved relations with China after the Sino-Soviet split and China's growing global recognition at the beginning of 1970s, but relations between U.S. and China remained a concern. The U.S announcement to establish relations with mainland China by the Nixon administration came without prior

notice to the Japanese, which greatly displeased Japanese officials and prime minister Eisaku Satō, as Japan had been previously prevented largely due to the U.S. pressure to seek closer ties with the PRC (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.322-323*).

Japan and China officially established and normalized diplomatic relations in September 1972. This also officially severed Japan's relations with Taiwan, as Japan would recognize the PRC's one China policy. Japan's strong security relations with the U.S. did not prevent the official establishment of relations and the Senkaku Islands dispute for example would only become a more serious issue later when oil would be discovered in the region. The PRC officials and Deng Xiaoping would come to view both U.S. and Japanese defense policies more positively, even showing some understanding regarding Japan setting up its own defense forces (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.329, 331 & 334*). China had claimed the ownership of the Senkaku Islands first time in 1971, but Deng Xiaoping was not interested at making the dispute a problem for the nations relations and claimed that the issue would be decided in the future. According to *Vogel et al. (2019, p.336)*, the territorial dispute would become more important issue only by the time Hu Jintao would be in power in China. China and Japan negotiated the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1978, and Deng Xiaoping became the first leader of the PRC to visit Japan in October 1978. This marked a highpoint in the Sino-Japanese relations at the time, with large majority of Japanese public having positive view on China according to a Japanese opinion poll (*Vogel et al., 2019, p.342*). Political frictions appeared again in 1980s regards to the history book controversy that occurred in Japan, which also resurfaced anger amongst the Chinese population for the Japanese aggression and war-crimes during the Second World War. In 1985 Prime Minister Nakasone became the first Japanese prime minister to officially visit the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, further evoking criticism from Japan's neighbors. According to *Ijiri (1996)*, the Yasukuni Shrine backlash served as a remainder for Japan that the historical grievances could resurface to hamper the Sino-Japanese relations without prior notice.

Japanese public was shocked by the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 and the Japanese government eventually decided to impose sanctions against the PRC in response. However, the sanctions were kept light compared to the response of Western nations, due to fear of political ramifications. Japanese willingness to retain cordial relations with China, despite the Tiananmen tragedy and ending the sanctions had the effect of China later signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty advocated by Japan (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.352-355*). Japanese governmental response to the Tiananmen was tempered by the historical issues between China

and Japan, as Prime Minister Uno Sōsuke explained that Japan cannot criticize China too harshly due to the Japanese aggression during the Second World War (*Ijiri, 1996*).

After the Cold War

Jiang Zemin visited Japan in 1992 and later that year Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko would visit China in a historic move. The emperor's visit was warmly welcomed by Chinese side and its was presented as an example of Japan's commitment to follow the path of a peace-loving nation. Vogel et al. (2019, p. 357) describe the visit as a "high point in the history of relations between the two nations" but the Sino-Japanese relations would drastically worsen after 1992. China responded with warnings and increasing military drills to warming relations of Taiwan and U.S. and began more aggressive military drills. Chinese missiles started to fall closer to Japanese territory. China, Japan and U.S. had shared the common strategic interests of opposing the Soviet Union after the Sino-Soviet split, but after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 this common interest did no longer exist. The U.S. response to the increasing Chinese military drills around Taiwan and close to Japanese territorial waters was the decision to send aircraft carriers to patrol the area (*Vogel et al., 2019, p.361*).

The Patriotic Education Campaign launched in China shaped more negative image of Japan among the Chinese population. Increasing anti-Japanese sentiment such as demonstrations and Chinese military presence near Japanese territory in turn shaped the public opinion in Japan and let to an emergent nationalistic sentiment in Japan. Hu Jintao who served as the leader of the PRC from 2002 to 2012, initially sought to improve relations with Japan but in 2005 China would end up blocking Japan from acquiring a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Prime Minister Abe's first term became in 2006 and broke tradition by Abe visiting China before the U.S. Abe sought to make some amendments to Chinese people on behalf of Japan for the war time aggression. Abe's successor, Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo, would later welcome Hu Jintao for a state visit in Tokyo (*Vogel et al., 2019, p.383-385*).

Notable incident occurred in 2010 between Japan Coast Guard (JCG) vessel and a Chinese fishing ship inside Japanese territorial waters. The incident resulted on the Chinese ship ramming the Japanese vessels and JCG boarding and detaining the crew. China later responded by arresting Japanese workers in China who were aiding in the disposal of chemical weapons left behind by IJA for pretext of filming Chinese military installations (*Vogel et al., 2019, p.388*). Japan nationalized the disputed islands in 2012 which prompted

the Chinese government to accuse Japan of violating the status quo and “unofficial agreement” regarding the island between the nations. According to the JCG, the number of Chinese vessels entering Japanese territorial waters surged in the 2012 (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024*). Japanese government claims that China changed its position regarding the Senkaku’s in 2008 with an intention of changing the status quo (*Tiezzi, 2015*). The main reason for the importance of this island is the rich natural resources that surround the area and due to its geopolitically strategic location. Jash (*2016*) suggests that in addition, the Chinese side also harbors strong emotional value towards the island due to the historical animosity between China and Japan. This in turn manifests as a strong foreign policy towards Japan, complemented by anti-Japanese sentiment amongst the Chinese domestic population (*Jash, 2016*).

Prime Minister Abe’s second term and the Abe doctrine

Abe returned to the position of prime minister after being re-elected in 2012 and would seek to pursue more hawkish foreign policy towards the challenge posed by rising power of China. Abe would adopt a values-oriented diplomacy while reinforcing alliances to balance the rise of China and would seek the revision of the Japanese pacifistic constitution. Abe made attempts to keep up relations with the PRC for example by conversing with the current Chinese leader Xi Jinping at the 2013 G20 summit held in Russia and in 2014 meeting between Abe and Xi took place which resulted in some crisis management steps between the nations according to Dobson (*2016*). Envall (*2020*) writes that Abe’s goal when returning to the office was to replace and remake the previous Japanese foreign and security policies and argues that Abe’s policies moved Japan towards what he calls new regional realism policy. According to Envall (*2020*) Abe’s policy doctrine has divided opinions among scholars whether his policies are described as evolutionary and gradual or as a radical agenda. Envall (*2020*) further argues that the Abe doctrine “demonstrates strong continuities with past Japanese security practices, particularly those from the Japanese realist tradition” and Cold War era realist thinking instead of a purely nationalist sentiment. Abe and many of his supporters, including members of the Japanese cabinet had and have ties to the ultra-nationalistic Nippon Kaigi organization, known for denying Japanese war crimes committed in China. The organization advocates for the revision of Japan’s pacifistic constitution and aversion of Japan’s apology regarding its past conduct. This connection between Abe and a revisionist organization strained Japan’s relations with China and South Korea according to Gordon (*2020 p.371*).

Abe introduced the Free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept which can be seen as counter to China's rising regional influence and militarization of the South China Sea. Abe stated in an article in 2012 that Japan should play a larger role in enhancing the peace and stability of the Pacific region. Abe expressed caution over the potential that China would come to dominate South China Sea as a "lake Beijing" and the presence of China's nuclear assets and aircraft carriers in the region (*Abe, 2012*). Abe saw the FOIP strategy as a network of nations and regional organizations that would promote freedom and oppose coercion, but officially the Japanese government does not present FOIP as being aimed towards countering China. The FOIP in practice contains veiled concerns that Japan has over China's aggressive foreign policy and the Abe administration sought to promote security cooperation with other countries in the FOIP framework. The U.S. government under the Donald Trump administration would embrace the FOIP in 2017, while portraying China as threat to the international community. However, U.S. officials have also cited that FOIP strategy should not rule out potential cooperation with China if it is possible (*Szechenyi & Hosoya, 2019*). The second Abe administration's general approach to China favored increasing security cooperation with Japan's allies and reinforcing deterrence amongst growing worries over China as a major security threat to Japan and maintaining a hard line to China (*Envall, 2020*). Despite the tougher stance towards China, Abe sought cooperation and dialogue with China. For example, he visited and had talks with Xi Jinping in 2018, with the two leaders discussing the further improvement of relations between the nations (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018*).

Abe's deviation from Japan's pacifistic policies and shift to pursue more proactive foreign and security policy while confronting China left a legacy that has impacted Japanese China policy up to date. Abe's policies identified two major security concerns, those being China as a military threat to Japan and North Korean missile program. Abe's term saw an increase in military spending, and he initiated the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) as an effort to reach out to India and Australia as more allies for Japan to help contain China.

Abe was followed by Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide in 2020, who in turn would be replaced by Kishida Fumio in 2021. Abe's vision of FOIP and QUAD continued to guide his successor(s) according to Hornung (*2021*). After Abe, Japan's relations with China continued under the threat of mutually increasing defense spending. Kishida continued to follow more proactive stance regarding Japanese foreign and security policy and nurture the FOIP and QUAD. In the 2022 National Security Strategy approved by Kishida's administration, Japan conveys much more concern regarding China's military activities compared to 2013 strategy

that was adopted under Abe's second administration. The 2022 NSS expressed Kishida administrations growing concerns over Chinas militarization of East and South China Seas and attempts to use coercion to change the status quo while also expanding its military capacities without clear transparency. China's claim of Japanese territory of Senkaku Islands also appears as a more relevant source of concern (*Liff, 2023*). In the broader historical context of Sino-Japanese relations, while current relations appear to be at a low point and more strained than at any time in recent history, the relationship between the two nations has fluctuated over the years, experiencing both periods of cooperation and heightened friction.

3.2 Development of Japanese security policy

After the second world war during the occupation of Japan, Prime Minister Yoshida's administration created the security and foreign policy framework which would be later known as known as Yoshida doctrine. This policy would steer Japan forward after the devastating defeat in the war. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) formed the cabinet of Japan in 1946 and Yoshida, who had previously served as a diplomat in the 1930s and served as a prime minister from 1946 to 1947 and later from 1948 to 1954. According to Mulloy (*2021*), referring to terms of historian John W. Dower, Prime Minister Yoshida "embraced defeat" and acted with loyalty towards the occupying U.S. to ensure Japan's security. Yoshida was a realist regarding the unbeneficial state Japan would find itself, if it chose true neutrality and sought to rebuild Japan's prestige and power by means of economic rebuilding (*Mulloy, 2021 p.20*). The Yoshida doctrine that emerged during his term would shape the Japanese policy of focusing on economic development while depending on the U.S. for military security and maintaining only limited armed forces for Japan. According to Koji (*2023*), the Japanese pacifistic constitution and the security treaty with the U.S. were the foundations of the Yoshida doctrine. Contemporary Japanese policy has started to shift to a more proactive and values based global policy and realism due to changes in the global world (*Koji, 2023*). According to Hoshiro (*2022*), the Yoshida doctrine or Yoshida line relied on the U.S. for military security while maintaining only limited amount of Japanese defense forces to focus on the economic growth and recovery after the war and avoiding involvement in international disputes. Hoshiro (*2022*) further argues that most researchers of post-war Japanese foreign policy agree that Yoshida doctrine formed the foundation of Japanese foreign and security policy, the concept itself coined by professor Masataka Kōsaka in the mid-1960s. The Yoshida

doctrine as a concept was used to justify Japanese foreign policy in the 1980s due to both domestic and foreign criticisms of low military spending (around 1% of Japanese GDP) despite the blossoming economy. Yoshida had refused U.S. demands for beginning rearmament and focused on the economic development, which had prompted some U.S. officials of criticizing Japan as receiving a “free ride” of U.S. security guarantees. In practice the Yoshida doctrine truly prospered directly only after the Yoshida administration, but Yoshida’s foreign policies were continued by further prime minister assuming office after him. Hoshiro (2022) offers criticism of Yoshida doctrine as a defining concept of Japanese foreign policy. The abandonment of Yoshida doctrine cannot explain the changes of Japanese security policy after the second Abe administration, as the aspects that define the doctrine have remained more or less intact (Hoshiro, 2022).

Introduced under the U.S. occupation after the Second World War, the constitution of Japan was ratified in 1946 and came into effect in 1947. The constitution places major limitations for Japanese armed forces and security policy. Japanese constitution contains a chapter renouncing war. Article 9. of the constitution states that “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 In order 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 recognized” (*The Constitution of Japan, Chapter II Article 9.*). In practice Japan does not arguably follow the article 9. to the letter, as the official interpretation assumes that Japan is still allowed to maintain a military force for self-defense, including advanced systems such as missiles and military vessels. Article 9. of the constitution is an ongoing subject for debate, with the ruling LDP having been advocating for the rewriting of the constitution. Despite the policy line of avoiding involvement in foreign conflicts, Japanese personnel and equipment in various support roles were involved in Korean War and Japanese naval assets even suffered casualties in minesweeping operations, despite the operation being an apparent violation of article 9. of the constitution according to Hoshiro (2022). Information regarding the Japanese involvement in the operations related to the conflict were thus hidden from public (Hoshiro, 2022 p.114).

Japan-U.S. security alliance

After the war in 1945, the U.S. forces stationed in Japan (USFJ) were the primary force defending Japan, with the USFJ maintaining a strong presence in the island nation up to today. The USFJ also provided initial training and development of tactics for the newly established self-defense forces of Japan, particularly for the navy and air force (*Mulloy, 2021 p.45*). The beginning of Cold War started to change the relations of Japan and U.S. The occupying U.S. began to view Japan as a potential partner against the Soviet Union in 1947 (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.302*). The Korean War broke out in 1950 and with it, the U.S. placed a surge of military procurement orders to Japanese industries, as Japan was conveniently located close to the conflict area. While no Japanese troops served directly in Korea, the Japanese infrastructure greatly aided the UN coalition forces efforts in the war (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.306*).

Japan would also later play a much similar role in aiding the U.S. in the Vietnam War with some Japanese citizens in support roles becoming casualties (*Mulloy, 2021 p.26*). The Korean war procurement brought great amounts of profits for Japanese industry in 1951-1953 and resulted in the occupation of Japan by U.S. forces ending sooner than anticipated, officially in April 1952. China, among other allied powers at the end of the Second World War had hoped for stricter peace treaty with a guarantee that would prohibit Japanese military revival. The U.S. maintained control of Okinawa and a great deal of U.S. troops would remain in Japan, which displeased the Soviet Union. Soviet Union retained control of disputed areas to the north of Japan, same areas which Russia still controls today, and Japan and Russia still have not signed a formal peace treaty. Almost immediately after signing the San Francisco peace treaty and formally ending the hostilities between Japan and U.S. in September 1951, Japan and U.S. signed the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. The treaty provides U.S. military the right to keep portions of its armed forces in Japanese soil and provide security for Japan. The treaty faced opposition from some Japanese politicians who saw it as a violation against the pacifistic constitution. (*Gordon, 2020 p.249-250*). Chinese leadership responded to the security treaty between Japan and U.S. in the 1950s by encouraging through established links with political groups such as Japanese left-wing associations and youth-organizations to criticize the security treaty (*Vogel et al, 2019 p.312*).

The Japan-U.S. treaty can be still considered as the most important aspect of Japanese defense policy planning, as it guarantees military assistance and protection from U.S. for Japan. The current version of the security treaty between Japan and U.S., the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan took effect in 1960, which also made the 1951 treaty to be considered expired. The amended treaty includes mutual

commitment to defend each other and clarifies the U.S. forces commitment to defend Japan if the nation becomes a target of an attack, as the treaty recognizes that a threat against Japan is a threat against U.S. as well. Along with military obligations, the treaty also incorporates economic collaboration between U.S. and Japan and desire for further development of relations and understanding (*Ministry of Defense*).

The Okinawa Reversion Agreement between U.S. and Japan returned the island territory to Japanese control in 1971. Okinawa continues to host significant U.S. military presence and most of the U.S. military forces stationed in Japanese soil. The security partnership between U.S. and Japan has not been without grievances, as Japan has felt that it has not always been treated as an equal partner. For example, during the Nixon administration in the 1970s, the U.S. drastically changed its policy towards the PRC by opening relations without consulting Japanese policymakers, much to their anger (*Gordon, 2020 p.301*). Japan's relations with the rest of Asia is framed by its close relationship and cooperation with the U.S. According to Gordon (2020) the persuasive reason for the unusually close relationship to the Japanese population was the notion that the U.S. was protecting Japan from the Soviet-Union/Russia, China and North Korea. Japan also benefitted from the U.S. bases securing oil supply lines from the Middle East. Considering Japan's position as a developed island nation, the country is heavily reliant on seelines for transportation of goods. Gordon also remarks that the U.S. was still cautious over Japan's remilitarization towards the end of the Cold War (*Gordon, 2020 p.348*).

Due to historical issues, Japan and South Korea signed the Treaty on Basic Relations only in 1965 where Japan recognized South Korea as the as the only legitimate government in Korea, a move that was disapproved by North Korean government (*Gordon, 2020 p.307*). in more recent times Japan, South Korea and the U.S have ramped up military cooperation in the form of trilateral military exercises for example (*NHK World Japan, 2024*). Japan's relations with the North Korea are harmed by issues such as the kidnappings of Japanese nationals by North Korean agents and North Korean missile threat, both nuclear and conventional. Japan together with the U.S. and South Korea have negotiated with North Korea to provide aid in exchange of dialing back the norths nuclear program, but negotiations for normalized relations have mostly stalled (*Gordon, 2020 p.346*).

Development of the JSDF

In 1950 a force known as National Police Force was established in Japan to free up occupying U.S. military members to fight in the war in Korea and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) were later established in 1954, which was an army dedicated to defending Japan in effect (*Vogel et al., 2019 p.302*). Domestic concerns such as communist groups and fears of potential North Korean infiltration operations, rather than external security concerns, prompted the Japanese government to form a new security force that would later evolve into the JSDF. Due to the pacifistic constitution, the existence of the JSDF was justified by presenting it as self-defense forces instead of military forces (*Mulloy, 2021 p.25 & 41*). The Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) was disbanded after the Second World War and the Self-Defense Forces that would ultimately follow it was officially cleaned of the militarist past. The legacy of the imperial army would still linger in the SDF. For example, in the navy, many former Imperial Navy officers would serve in the post-war fleet until 1987 (*Mulloy, 2021 p.35*). Examining the issues the IJA had faced in China such as cholera epidemics and subpar wartime medical care promoted the modern forces to develop expertise in water purification and a comprehensive medical service (*Mulloy, 2021 p.53*). These qualities have no doubt benefited the forces in their duties regarding disaster relief operations in the homeland. This also demonstrates an example of the development of civil-military fusion of technologies both suited for military and civilian use. As of 2024, the modern JSDF consists of three theaters of operation with their own service branches: Japan Ground Self-Defense Forces (JGSDF), Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF) and Japan Air Self-Defense Forces (JASDF) which is also responsible for space, electronic and cyber operations. Article 9. of the Japanese constitution place several limitations to the JSDF as well as the limited defense spending. Population density and urbanization of Japan as an island nation also places practical limitations for matters such as large-scale military exercises on Japanese home soil. According to Mulloy (*2021*) the JSDF was mostly visible for the public during the Cold War through roles the forces played in “snow festivals, sports events and Godzilla films”. The force contributed to many areas of society by constructing infrastructure in remote areas for example but is hardly remembered by its effort among the public. (*Mulloy, 2021 p.12 & 62*). Despite the apparent lack of publicity as a fighting force, the newly created JSDF and especially its naval branch would come to play a significant role in the U.S. security strategy during the Cold War against Soviet power in East-Asia.

The JSDF formed and matured during the Cold War period, shaped by the relationship between U.S. and Japan. During the Cold War, the JSDF could be ultimately counted among the best equipped and capable armed forces in the world, but at the same time it was organizationally hampered by lack of identity and legitimacy in the nation committed to pacifism. The 1954 established Japan Defense Agency which preceded the modern Ministry of Defense of Japan started as a lowly civil service institution inheriting much of its officials from other ministries (*Mulloy, 2021 p.39-40*). Due to the failure of the civilian control of the JSDF to provide sufficient direction, the different branches of the force had to invent their own strategies and direction. Mulloy (*2021*) goes as far as to write that the different JSDF branches lacked consensus when it came to threat perception, and it was not clear who in fact was responsible of controlling the overall defense of Japan during the Cold War (*Mulloy, 2021 p.114*). In 1957 Japan adopted the first Basic Policy for National Defense which sought to promote world peace and UN cooperation, promote public welfare and patriotism in Japan, develop Japan's capabilities for self-defense and deterrence against external aggression based on Japa-U.S. security cooperation and UN capacity to deter and repel such an aggression. Mulloy (*2021*) calls these approaches "overtly idealistic" (*Mulloy, 2021 p.42*). In these approaches the tenets of contemporary Japanese security policy as it is described by MOD in Defense of Japan white papers can be already seen, namely the reliance to the alliance with the U.S. and advocating for the rules based global system.

During the Cold War, the JSDF branches would be constructed at least on theory based on the potential perception of threat from the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, JGSDF primarily focused on deterring small-scale incursions, preventing a large-scale invasion, and countering potential insurrections or operations conducted by foreign agents. Hokkaido served as the main strategic focus for Japan's ground forces, given its proximity to the Soviet Union and the perceived threat of an invasion from the north (*Mulloy, 2021 p.57*). Japanese naval assets provided support for U.S. efforts during the Korean War, integrating doctrines and strategies and jointly addressed security concerns with the navy of U.S. By 1975 the JMSDF had been developed into a formidable blue-water navy including major combat vessels and submarines, with anti-submarine and anti-mine warfare being its notable expertise. The JMSDF would function as block to the Soviet Navy attempting to enter the Pacific and East and South China Seas undetected and the navy was arguably the most important branch of the JSDF from the perspective of the U.S. Cold War strategy (*Mulloy, 2021 p.67-68 &75*). By 1990s the JMSDF

would begin to suffer from lack of recruits, being “over-shipped and under-manned” (*Mulloy, 2021 p.82*), a problem that would strain other service branches of the JSDF as well.

Imperial Japan did not have a unified air service branch with navy and army possessing their own air services and the JASDF did not thus have to carry the burden of imperial legacy compared to other JSDF branches. Similarly to the navy, the JASDF would emerge as a high tech and capable force during the Cold War (*Mulloy, 2021 p.91*). JASDF conducts scrambles to identify and intercept foreign and potential hostile aircraft attempting to enter Japanese airspace but until December 1987 when a JASDF plane intercepted a Soviet intelligence flight, the planes did not carry live weapons onboard, indicating a cautious approach of air defense (*Mulloy, 2021 p.99*). JASDF received much support and training from the U.S. air forces and operates many U.S. designed systems and craft (*Mulloy, 2021 p.107*) again demonstrating the deep security cooperation and reliance between Japan and U.S.

After the Cold War, the focus of the JSDF changed from Soviet Union/Russia to more concerns regarding China and North Korea. Japan also began to take more active role in matters of global security, assisting its ally the U.S. The end of the Cold War did not immediately drastically change the Japanese security planning and defense policy, but Japan would face new external and domestic challenges such as the aging population of the country. The economic problems that Japan would face would translate to some changes in defense budgeted trajectory (*Mulloy, 2021 p.117-188*). Despite this Japanese defense budget would be the third largest in the world in the 1990s. Concerns over China as military threat did not immediately emerge either as Sino-Japanese relations had been warming but would then worsen in the years following the Cold War which would be reflected on the JSDF and security planning. Despite tensions the JSDF has been engaging in a successful cooperation with the PRC in the form of cooperation with the disposal of chemical weapons left in Chinese soil by the IJA and Japan and China have agreed on defense exchange among military personnel which were revised in 2018 (*Mulloy, 2021 p173*). The JSDF has been faced with challenges from new domains posed by China such as cyber and other hybrid operations, which according to MOD in 2017 have been directly connected to Chinese military (*Mulloy, 2021 p.175*).

Japan's beginning participation in global security

After the end of the Gulf War in 1991, U.S. was critical of Japan for not contributing enough to the war effort despite Japan's reliance of oil imported from the middle east (*Vogel et al.,*

2019 p.363). U.S. pressure led to first overseas operation of JSDF in the form of minesweeping mission in Persian Gulf in April 1991 (*Mulloy, 2021 p.130*). Japanese government authorized the participation of Japanese troops to participate on peacekeeping duties after the First Iraq War and the JSDF was deployed on a UN peacekeeping mission in Cambodia in 1992. The JSDF would then proceed to participate in numerous different missions following Cambodia. The overseas peacekeeping deployment would help the Japanese forces to gain operational experience that was not available by simple guarding the home territories. Along with increasing participation on global security via the UN missions, Japan and U.S. would amend the guidelines of their mutual security treaty that gave the JSDF more freedom to conduct different tasks. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. Japanese government enacted new anti-terrorism law that enabled the JSDF to support the U.S. in the war on terror (*Gordon, 2020 p.349*). Japanese participation in peacekeeping operations was politically motivated by making Japan appear as demonstrating cooperation for the global stability but faced administrative difficulties and conflicting opinions among the top administrators. Prime Minister Abe advocated for the Japanese participation in global security stating that Japan would adhere to the constitution but would no longer “shy away” from deploying the JSDF to overseas missions. The MOD however showed reluctance in 2008 to assign new missions for JSDF (*Mulloy, 2021 p.126-127*).

From Abe to Kishida

During his second term in office beginning in 2012, Abe’s political agenda was to remake the foreign and security policies of Japan. Greatly diverging from the tenets of Yoshida doctrine, Abe’s plan for Japan was to turn the nation into a more “normal” nation as a security actor and sought constitutional revision of the Japan’s self-imposed ban to limit its military capabilities so that Japan could take a more proactive approach to global peace according to Dobson (2016). Abe had attempted to counter China already in his first term by attempting to form alliance based on shared interests with India for example and initiating the QUAD partnership between Japan, Australia, India, and U.S. The second Abe administration would pass laws that redefined and “reoperationalized” the strengthening U.S. – Japan Security Guidelines and reinterpreted the constitution to allow more flexibility for self-defense (*Mulloy, 2021 p.177 & 200*) Abe’s approach to security would contrast with Japan’s previous minimalistic role in global security. In a speech to the UN General Assembly in 2013, Abe sought to promote Japan’s new more proactive contribution to peace and Japan’s more active role in UN peacekeeping operations and other collective security measures (*Dobson, 2016*).

With Abe's second term in office 2012-2020 the Abe doctrine dismantled the tenets of Yoshida doctrine according to Hughes et al. (2021) by removing constitutional constraints to the JSDF, departing from a minimalist and reactive defense posture and enabling the Japan to participate on "collective self-defense". Abe reinforced the Japan-U.S. security treaty by allowing Japan to function as a more full-fledged and integrated partner. Japan would also pursue more proactive and leading role in Asia to counter the rising China (Hughes et al., 2021). Mulloy (2021) instead argues that the Yoshida doctrine can be considered "alive and well" during Abe administration regarding Japanese defense spending, dependency on U.S. alliance and non-belligerent posture (Mulloy, 2021 p.264).

Japanese government under the Kishida administration released a new National Defense Strategy in 2022 which calls for a two percent of the national budget to be spend on defense (Koji, 2023) and the 2022 NSS highlights that Japan's security dialogue today is dominated by worries over China, North Korea, and Russia (Liff, 2023). The 2022 NSS included a decision to acquire counterstrike capabilities for Japan but already in 2017 followed by fears of increasing missile capabilities of North Korea, offensive counter air capabilities for Japan were confirmed to be considered and constitutional as a pre-emptive measure (Mulloy 2021, p.198). This signaled that Japan has become considering more active deterrence policy, which is also seen in the Defense of Japan as will be apparent in the analysis chapter.

Based on the 2022 NSS the Kishida administration also formulated the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the Defense Buildup Program for Japan in 2022. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), this new strategy comes when Japan is finding itself "in the midst of the most severe and complex security environment since the end of WWII" with maintaining international order being as important as ever. It is against this backdrop that the 2022 NSS was formulated, and the strategy consists of elements reinforcing Japan's national security by means of diplomacy and economy and by bolstering the nation's defense architecture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2022). In a statement regarding the NSS in 2022, prime minister Kishida expressed concern over the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the state of global order and development of threats close to Japan such as missiles and how the scope of security has expanded to new domains. To address the security concerns the Defense Buildup Program worth of 43 trillion yen would be carried out by Japan and the defense budget would be secured to 2 percent of the GDP in fiscal year 2027 according to Kishida (Prime Minister's Office of Japan, 2022). In a policy speech in 2023 Kishida further expressed concern over the state of international order and commented on Japan's sift in

security policy during 2022. According to Kishida the Russian invasion of Ukraine has marked the end of the post-Cold War world and Japan responded by strict sanctions to Russia and aid to Ukraine. Kishida then states that the Japanese security will be bolstered by the increasing defense spending, acquiring counterstrike capabilities, improving response capabilities in new security domains and stepping up defense posture in the Southwest region of Japan. Kishida claims that this new security policy will benefit the security of the whole Indo-Pacific region (*Prime Minister's Office of Japan, 2023*).

Narushige (2023) argues that Japan's new security policy means in practice that it is committed to the defense of both Taiwan and South Korea together with U.S. According to the article, the major security challenges Japan is facing in the future are North Korean nuclear threat and more advanced missiles that challenge existing missile defenses, China's rising defense spending and competition with China together with the U.S. (*Narushige, 2023*). These security concerns and more will be further examined in the analysis and discussion chapters of this research paper.

3.3 Japanese and Chinese policy narratives

According to Yoshimatsu (2024) both China and Japan have eagerly started to utilize narratives to improve their international standing and manage foreign relations. China and Japan are ideological competitors, and their narratives affect the global discourse with differing perspectives on global order and governance. According to Shao (2022) territorial disputes between China and Japan concerning the Senkaku islands has caused a battle of narratives between the nations. Yoshimatsu (2024) writes that the narrative goals of China and Japan are opposites when it comes to political goals regarding the international system, with China challenging and Japan seeking to uphold the existing system and status quo. Previous research has argued that China has sought to employ "strategic narratives to redefine existing norms and reshape the existing international system". Compared to China, Japan's narratives have been researched less and focus on relation between Japan's pacifist stance and the narrative power of the nation. Narratives related to Japan's territorial disputes with China have been also examined (*Yoshimatsu, 2024*). Yoshimatsu (2024) argues that Japan's narrative power plays a role in amplifying the ideational power of the U.S. which is important due to China's attempts at diminishing this power. Japan potentially also presents a narrative representation differing from those offered by China and U.S. in the context of regional

policies. China under the leadership of Xi Jinping has promoted the so-called Community of Common Destiny for Mankind narrative seeking to promote values such as mutual benefits, new type of international relations and win-win cooperation and encourages cooperation between China and other nations. This narrative has appeared quite vague in practice as agreeable and abstract slogans, but at the same time due to that same vagueness not really encountering any explicit opposition either (*Yoshimatsu, 2024*).

Yoshimatsu (2024) argues that Prime Minister Abe and his administration pushed narratives such as “proactive contribution to peace and diplomacy taking a panoramic perspective of the world” and Japan generally began more proactively promoting narratives to advance its diplomatic goals. Shao (2022) claims that the nationalization of Senkaku islands by Japanese government also saw a period of competing narratives among Japanese policy makers between narratives advocating for peace and stability and the change of status quo, implying that Japanese policy narratives regarding the handling of China are not always uniform. The narratives regarding Japan’s proactive contribution to peace and FOIP has acted as a key component of Japan’s diplomatic strategy and acts as a response to China’s growing assertiveness. Japan’s narratives have sought to promote stability and rules-based international order and importance of free and open maritime order which is also linked to Japan’s national identity as a maritime nation according to Yoshimatsu (2024). Prime Minister Kishida later expanded the principles of FOIP to include respect for diversity, inclusiveness, and openness. The FOIP narrative acts as a tool to promote an image of Japan as a defender of liberal values and rules-based international order together with its likeminded allies (*Yoshimatsu, 2024*).

3.4 China threat theory

The China threat is a theory or a view that essentially believes that the PRC as military and ideological power threatens the existing global system, democracy and peace. Goals of the totalitarian leadership of China are viewed incompatible with the U.S. led order based on values such as freedom in the context of the China threat. According to Broomfield (2003) some academics and policymakers view China’s rise as a serious threat especially towards the U.S and its allies and the issue of China threat can be categorized as ideological, economic, and military threat. Broomfield (2003) claims that those leaning towards the right-wing of political spectrum tend to be more advocating of China threat. The China threat theory views

that China threatens peace and security and seeks to replace U.S. which China views as a threat to itself as the dominant global power. Certain advocates of China threat theory also blame the U.S. for being too soft on China and turning a blind eye to the threat it poses (*Broomfield, 2003*).

The ideological threat of China stems from the fear that China seeks to replace the Western ideas of freedom and democracy with its own model of values, namely authoritarianism and communism. Broomfield (*2003*) notes that Chinese nationalism has largely come to replace the ideology of communism for the ruling CCP, and the China threat theory asserts that nationalism shall be utilized to justify territorial expansion of the PRC. The economic threat of China in the U.S. stems from the trade deficit the nation has with China, the threat to the global market share of the U.S. and that the economy of China can function as diplomatic weapon against the U.S. Broomfield (*2003*) counters these fears by stating that China's economic dependency on U.S. markets and foreign suppliers means that China cannot risk threatening these relations. Lastly the military aspect of China threat stems from the worry that China's economy and modernizing military would allow it to challenge the U.S. militarily and strategically. Modernization of the Chinese, army, development of weapons of mass destruction and Chinese arms exports combined with assertive foreign policy play into this notion of threat. Broomfield (*2003*) accuses the media like Washington Times for example of false contextualization of aggressive statements from Chinese officials regarding the U.S. as an enemy of China and potential conflict over Taiwan. Future of Taiwan especially is seen as a potential cause of military conflict between U.S. and China (*Broomfield, 2003*).

Japan as a close ally of the U.S. needs to approach the tensions between U.S. and China with caution, as Japan's geopolitical situation as an island nation makes it vulnerable to potential threats from China. Japan's alliance with the U.S. has in many ways defined the Japanese perception of China threat. Japan was not as keen to promote the threat posed by "Red China" but nevertheless followed the U.S. led security cooperation (*Jiang et al., 2002 p.152*). China's economic growth, expanding military and lack of transparency concerning its military goals and anti-Japanese sentiment in China feed the China threat discussion in Japan. Jiang et al. (*2002*) state that two sets of analytical frameworks regarding the China threat exists in Japan. First framework is based on conceptual aspects of China threat of image, intention and capability. Japan's bad image in China and negative opinions regarding China among Japanese public could constitute a level of threat. China's intentions should the nation become the dominant political, economic and military power globally remains uncertain and thus

could present a threat. Finally, the potential capability of China becoming a threat to Japan feeds into the threat theory. The second framework concerns the wider East Asian sphere and world politics regarding on how China threat would materialize. Identified threat scenarios in this framework are China becoming a hegemonic superpower, China turns into a weakened or disintegrated power and potential conflict or instability stemming from that, and lastly crisis over Taiwan and the ensuing wider conflict (*Jiang et al., 2002 p.154-155*).

Other than Japan and U.S., it has been argued that China is viewed as increasingly threatening in Europe. Europe's relationship with China is described as multifaced and complex, covering many sectors. European approach to China during 1990s and early 2000s was more positive with China regarded as an "opportunity" and "partner" (*Politi, 2023*). According to Politi (2023), the relations changed in 2010s and a "new narrative of China threat emerged" due to growing anxieties regarding human rights questions for example. Narratives of threatening China influences European policy making and China as a "systemic rival" is the dominant China narrative in EU according to Breslin & Mattlin (2025). In a 2020 statement, Britain expressed concern together in a joint statement with the U.S. for the threat posed by the CCP to their interests, including a worry of losing advantages in key technology areas to China (*Breslin & Mattlin, 2025*).

In Oceania, the Australian perspective of China threat can be traced to 1950s and the Korean War, where Australia was pitted against China. Security treaty between Australia, New Zealand and U.S. strengthened the Australian governments castigation of China as a threat to peace (*Mackerras & Yee, 2011 p.212*). While Australia developed close economic relations with China in 2000s and so benefited from China's rise, China's lack of transparency regarding military modernization garnered criticism from Australia (*Mackerras & Yee, 2011 p.220*). According to Goodman (2023), the current manifestation of China threat in Australian politics originates in 2017 foreign policy white paper, which proposed the Indo-Pacific as "Australia's Near North". Since 2017 the idea that China represents a threat to Australia has risen as a policy issue. In 2019 Australian defense official proposed that China sought to undermine Australian and U.S. sovereignty and in 2020 Australian call to investigate China as the source of Covid-19 pandemic further soured the relations (*Goodman, 2023*).

Criticism of China Threat Theory

The China threat theory as a concept has faced criticism from different academics. Frauen dismisses the notion that China threat is a theory and argues instead that the China threat is

rather a narrative. According to Frauen different views by Western (e.g. U.S. and Europe) perspective form the China threat narrative, which appears from the lack of knowledge regarding China and claims that that China threat as a concept has roots on the “Yellow Peril” narrative dating from the Opium War and the Cold War era fear of communism especially in U.S. Frauen states that China threat narrative stems from the U.S. rivalry with China and fears of China surpassing the U.S. as a global power (*Chen et al., 2023 p.132-135*). Keyu Jin criticizes the China threat theory as a “fallacy” and that Western society is attempting to portray China in a negative light due to Chinese system drastically differing from the Western norms. According to Keyu Jin the China threat theory and fear of rising China could stem from the power of China and supports the notion that Western views of China as threat stems from the lack of knowledge regarding China (*Chen et al., 2023 p.162-165*).

4 Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the Defense of Japan white papers from 2020 to 2023. These four documents cover a multitude of defense policy related topics, and the analysis puts a heavy emphasis on issues such as the Japan-China relations, Japan-U.S. relations, general defense environment situation in East Asia and contemporary Japanese defense policy. In addition to these primary documents, other sources from the Japanese government or relevant news agencies are occasionally referred to in support of the analysis.

The objective of this chapter is to examine the key themes identified within the white papers, which constitute the core elements of the China threat narrative. The analysis highlights three main aspects of this narrative: (1) China as a threat to the global status quo and shared values, (2) China-Russia cooperation as framed within the narrative, and (3) security risks stemming from China's technological advancements. Among these, the values-based theme is the most comprehensive. These narrative themes are interconnected, often overlapping and reinforcing one another. Beyond identifying concerns regarding China and role in the policy narrative, the analysis also examines how Japan is presented and how that presentation reflects on the China threat narrative. The NPF is applied to clarify the positioning of different policy actors within the broader policy discourse and the China threat narrative.

Based on the initial content analysis, three major themes have been identified as the core that forms the China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan issues from 2020 to 2023. These themes represent the most overarching and recurrent elements across all analyzed documents. While the documents contain a significant degree of textual repetition, certain topics gain prominence or evolve in emphasis over time. The role of Russia within the China threat narrative is a particularly notable example of this variation. Overall, the content of the white papers appears largely consistent across multiple issues. References to other Japanese policy documents give more perspective and understanding of how the threat narrative could have been influencing the development of the Japanese security and foreign policy. To supplement the analysis, select articles from Japan-based news agencies are also considered. These sources help contextualize how China-related security concerns are represented in Japanese media in addition to government publications.

The analysis chapter is followed by a discussion chapter that will reflect on the subject on more complex perspectives and further discuss the topic of the China threat in Japanese defense policy and potentially wider policy effects in the context of the theoretical framework.

4.1 Values-based international order and threat of unilateral actions by China

The values-based theme is the most prominent aspect of the China threat narrative identified in the Defense of Japan annual white papers. This theme emphasizes concerns over the stability of the existing global order, which the Ministry of Defense (MOD) perceives as increasingly uncertain. China's unilateral actions are a primary source of this uncertainty, raising alarms about the erosion of international norms and the potential for geopolitical instability (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.42*) Narrative aspects or NPF characters that are called universal values including freedom, transparency and democracy are contrasting value between Japan and China in the narrative setting promoted by the MOD. Related to the situation in South China Sea for example, MOD states that "Countries concerned, including China, are urged to refrain from unilateral actions that heighten tension and to act on the basis of the principle of the rule of law" (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.52; Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.190*). The values-based aspect of the China threat narrative ties together other different themes into a larger narrative picture. This narrative is reinforced by statements in the section detailing the security environment surrounding Japan such as "The two countries have a common view on promoting the multipolarization of the world and the establishment of a new international order, and have further deepened their relations" and "At the China-Russia summit meeting in early February 2022, the two countries assessed China-Russia relations as superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era⁶" (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.57; Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.82*).

Regarding technological development, it is not only the advanced weapons systems of China that cause concern, but also the impact on civil society control that increasingly advanced systems enable. All the issues of Defense of Japan analyzed contain a mention regarding China's "holistic view of national security" that includes culture and society as a part of the state control (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.56; Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.54*).

The way China is presented in the document reflects on the Japan's role and appearance in the context of China threat narrative. By examining the opening words of Defense of Japan documents, the role of Japan in the narrative is presented as exemplary as Japan and the MOD

⁶ The Cold War military alliance referred to is likely NATO in this context.

is the actor that is safeguarding against the threat of China, in addition of promoting the desirable values and morals in the region. For example, in the opening words of the Defense of Japan 2021 issue, the MOD emphasizes Japan's commitment to upholding the principles of FOIP. The document highlights Japan's role as a promoter of universal values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights in the region. Additionally, it underscores the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance, describing it as the "cornerstone of peace" and reaffirming the MOD's commitment to working closely with its allies to maintain regional stability. This framing positions Japan as a defender of the international order while implicitly contrasting it with China's perceived challenges to these shared values. (*Ministry of Defense, 2021*).

Lack of transparency regarding China's military objectives

In the narrative setting created by MOD in the documents, China's growing defense budget is threatening and China is blamed for the lack of transparency. On the other hand, Japan's growing defense budget is presented as necessary to defend the sovereignty of Japan and the values it upholds in the region. Defense of Japan displays the commitment of MOD and the Japanese government to uphold transparency regarding military affairs in the region, while it criticizes the PRC for the lack of transparency. The MOD emphasizes Japan's adherence to transparency in its defense policy, aligning it with international norms and democratic principles. In contrast, China's military expansion and strategic intentions are often described as opaque and unpredictable, contributing to regional uncertainty and security concerns. This contrast reinforces the narrative that Japan's military posture is defensive and rules-based, whereas China's actions are framed as aggressive and destabilizing. The Defense of Japan acts as narrative tool to showcase MOD'S commitment to transparency both to international and domestic audience. MOD is critical of the lack of and failure of transparency with Chinas military affairs, despite the PRC releasing a document detailing its defense policy roughly every two years (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.57*). Defense of Japan 2021 for example states that China's intensifying unilateral actions and coercion against the Japan and insufficient transparency "have become a matter of grave concern to the region including Japan and the international community and should continue to be closely monitored in the future" (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.59*).

In contrast to China, MOD seeks to express that Japan values the importance of transparency regarding military affairs to the international community. The opening remarks of Defense of

Japan 2023 state that “It is important above all that initiatives for defense of Japan have the understanding and cooperation of the people and are highly transparent to the international community. In this regard, this white paper has played a critical role” (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 On the Publication of Defense of Japan 2023*). To further contrast the image between Japan and China, Defense of Japan highlights domestic and other issues facing China, such as human rights violations, corruption in the leadership of the nation and the ruling party, economic and other inequalities between the rural and urban population, problems related to aging population, environmental issues and slowing economy (*Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.56*). These problems are repeated in every issue of the white paper (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.54*). However, MOD does note that Japan is also facing some similar problems compared to China, such as aging population (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.235*).

The China Coast Guard Law as a concrete example of threat and unilateralism

The China Coast Guard Law (CCGL) is used in the policy narrative as a concrete example and evidence of China altering the setting and status quo in a way that according to MOD discards and violates the existing global order and previously agreed upon rules. The opening words of Defense of Japan 2021 highlight the destabilizing factors that the planning of Japan’s defense must take into account. MoD is concerned about how international rules-based order has been greatly tested by various security challenges and destabilizing factors. The unilateral actions of China at East and South China Seas and the almost daily recurring activity of Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessels around the Japanese territory of Senkaku Islands are examples of this concern (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 On the Publication of Defense of Japan 2021*). According to the MOD, the CCGL enacted in February 2021 is inconsistent with international law and includes inconsistency and ambiguity regarding things such as geographical areas where the law applies to and the use of weapons (*Ministry of Defense, The Coast Guard Law of the People's Republic of China*).

MOD is notably concerned about the lack of transparency of the Chinese military development and the country’s unwillingness to disclose or admit military facts such as violation of Japanese territorial sovereignty (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.32*). Despite strong protests expressed by Japan, the CCG vessels have repeatedly intruded in Japan’s territorial waters (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.75*). In a special feature of the Defense of Japan 2023 issue titled “An Era of Upheavals: 10 Years of Change” the MOD further showcases while

utilizing statistics graphs, that incursion into the Senkaku islands and Japan's territory in general by the CCG has been a growing and worrying trend.

As China keeps unilaterally challenging the status quo at East and South China Seas, MOD notes how China's CCGL also causes issues for other nations at the region. Referring to the spokesperson representing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam who urges respect towards sovereign territory of Vietnam and to respect international and United Nations law, the foreign minister of Philippines who shares concerns with Japan and United States Department of State, MOD expresses that Japan is not alone in condemning these hostile actions of CCG. (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.68-69*). Besides as a physical example of the manifesting threat, MOD thus utilizes the CCG in the narrative setting to also foster a common cause with allies.

Japan-U.S. alliance

The role of U.S. as an ally of Japan is apparent every white paper analyzed and its importance as both military and ideological ally is highlighted in the narrative of the MOD. Japan-U.S. alliance as two democratic nations is highlighted often by the MOD to reinforce the image of Japan. Japan's strong alliance with U.S. shapes the narrative themes in a way that could be argued as a double standard in some cases. China developing advanced technology and weapons systems is portrayed threatening since China opposes the values and ideology of Japan, but Japan and U.S. developing similar systems and bolstering their military systems is safeguarding the values and status quo, thus presenting as a somewhat unfortunate but very necessary act in the narrative setting for Japan. The Defense of Japan reinforces the China threat narrative by citing U.S. recognition of China as a similar threat (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2023, p.47*). This aligns Japan's concerns with a broader international framework, emphasizing collective security and the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance in upholding the global order. MOD also as a state organ acknowledges Japan's reliance on U.S. for defense, and so it has an interest to portray U.S. as a more positive global actor to the audience of the policy narrative. MOD describes the alliance as an immovable pillar safeguarding peace in Asia and the world in *Defense of Japan 2020 (p.9)*.

In the section titled Three Approaches to Achieve the Defense Objectives of Defense of Japan 2023, MOD states regarding the Japan-U.S. alliance that "Japan has maintained its peace, security, and independence centered on the Security Arrangements with the world's dominant military power, the United States, with which it shares basic values such as democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and a capitalist economy as well as interests in

maintaining the peace and security of the world” (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.21*). For comparison, Japan’s National Security Strategy identifies that it is in Japan’s interests to “maintain and protect universal values, such as freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights, and the rule of law, and international order based on international law“ (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.218*). Japan’s role in the narrative in this context can seem almost subordinate to in some cases, but in the general narrative setting, MOD wants to portray Japan taking the leading role as guardian of the morally good values against China in the East Asian security sphere.

According to the MOD, the U.S. administration seeks to counter China on the long term and has referred to China as “the only competitor with the potential ability to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system” (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.19*). Revitalizing its global alliances and partnerships is pointed out as one of the tools how U.S. seeks to win the strategic competition with China (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.19*). This narrative shaping hints at Japan’s importance as an ideological and military ally to the U.S. which hosts numerous bases and troops in Japan. MOD further notes that President Biden viewed China as the only competitor with both the interest and capability to reshape the international order through economic, military, diplomatic and technological power. This statement comes with an acknowledgement that the administration has also expressed desire to work and cooperate with China where the nations interests align. (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.88*). Japan’s alliance with the U.S. is important for countering the rise of Chinese influence and ensure the rule of law in the Indo-pacific, as is remarked by the commander of the U.S. forces in Japan (*Tominaga, 2024*). The China threat narrative constructed by MOD in Defense of Japan creates a clear division: Japan, the U.S., and other "like-minded countries" uphold democracy and resist unilateral changes to the status quo, while China and Russia are portrayed as authoritarian states that threaten international law and the existing order (for example *Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.19; Ministry of defense 2023, p.222*).

Chinese model as a challenge for global order and values

China’s cooperation and expanding influence in the global community is a source of worry in the context of the values-based China threat narrative. Defense of Japan documents detail concerns that the so-called Chinese model threatens to establish a new form of global norms. Chinas Belt and Road Initiative is mentioned as an example of spreading Chinese influence and the initiative is actively promoted by the Chinese government (see for example *Ministry*

of Defense, 2022 p.54). The MOD sees it as a way for China to expand its strategic influence and believes it in addition to have direct military benefits for China as well (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.79*) Following the breakout of a full scale war in Ukraine, MOD expresses increasing concern regarding the state of the international order as is expressed in the opening words of Defense of Japan 2023 for example as minister Hamada states that “international community is facing its greatest trial since World War II (WWII), and we have entered a new era of crisis” (*Ministry of Defense, 2023*).

Worries of dangers and threats not only in Japan’s perimeter but across the globe are reinforced in the white papers by MOD via statements such that China’s cooperation with Russia as “promoting multipolarization of the world and establish new international order” (*Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.82*), “Furthermore, it has been pointed that there have been moves toward creating China’s own international order, including the establishment of China-led multilateral mechanisms in security, financial to influence political decisions in other countries through efforts such as winning over foreign politicians” (*Ministry of Defense 2021, p.83*) and “China’s influence in the international community has risen politically, economically, and militarily” and that China must improve its transparency for the sake of international community (*Ministry of Defense 2022, p.33*).

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic regarding the China threat is linked to the worry of China’s influence growing at the global stage and the setting of the narrative thus sifting to favor China more. The pandemic as a theme is more prevalent in 2020 and 2021 issues. The effects of Covid-19 are considered in the 2020 issue of the white papers section concerning Developments regarding the Novel Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) and brings up MOD’s concerns regarding China taking advantage of the pandemic situation to promote its national interests that might harm Japan’s national interests and global status quo. MOD’s shows concern that China might seek to “increase its own political and economic interests, create international and regional order to its own advantage and expand its influence, while strategically challenging the existing international order, by taking advantage of its assistance regarding countermeasures against the COVID-19 infection” (*Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.183*). MOD therefore states that while China actively has been offering aid to countries where the pandemic is spreading, it has also spread propaganda and misinformation to cause social uncertainty and confusion. MOD therefore outlines the need to monitor potential global security issues caused by China in conjunction with the pandemic with great concern (*Ministry of Defense 2020, p.185*).

Policy solutions and morals of the story

The role of Japan as a peace-loving nation, as is described for example by Minister of Defense Hamada in the opening words of Defense of Japan 2023 is to act as a guardian of the “good” and desirable values such as international law and democracy against authoritarianism. At the same time MOD seeks to express that it will do so only via means of mostly passive self-defense when it comes to direct military strength. The rhetoric of the China threat narrative is nevertheless starting to suggest for more proactive approach to military defense in the limits of the Japanese constitution by suggesting more bold potential countermeasures along with the overall desire to strengthen and update the military. The threat narrative advocates for Japan to increase its military capabilities framed by Japan’s role in the narrative as a defender of global values such as freedom against China. MOD states that “As a way of defending against any such changes to the international order based on universal values, Japan must not delay in bringing together its knowledge and technology and putting all its collective efforts into strengthening its national defense capabilities” (*Ministry of defense, 2022 On the Publication of Defense of Japan 2022*).

Japan’s role as a guardian against the threat of China justifies the actions that might be deemed militarization and assertiveness by Japan. MOD has shown willingness to act more boldly and participate on the exercises with its allies that it sees as upholding the values and core interests of Japan in the region. Whether intended or not, this development will inevitably displease China, which for example responded with a strong backlash against the MSDF destroyer joining an exercise and demonstrating freedom of navigation through the politically sensitive Taiwan strait. MOD responded to concerns expressed by the Chinese foreign ministry by stating that Japan would continue monitoring Chinas actions (*Kyodo News, 2024*). Tanikawa (2024) writing for Yomiuri Shimbun called the passage of the MSDF vessel through the Taiwan strait a “display of resolve against Chinese military threat” due to an increased alarm of Prime Minister Kishida over the Japanese security environment, which led to this decision to protect peace (*Tanikawa, 2024*).

Cooperation with China as a moral solution and MOD encouraging China to play by the rules

Despite MOD occasionally referring to the Chinese leadership, the ideologically driven values aspect of the China threat narrative is not personalized or represented by the Chinese leaders in the narrative constructed in the white papers. China as a threat and antagonist is rather

portrayed as a faceless state apparatus instead of specific individuals or people. The MOD is an organ of the Japanese state so this diplomatically sensitive language even when creating the threat narrative is to be expected. It is not in the interests of the MOD to completely antagonize China in the policy narrative, as it seeks to convey the security related worries to China and keep up at least cordial relations and it is important for Japan to maintain lines of communication with China.

In the section covering the Cooperation with likeminded countries Defense of Japan 2023, MOD remarks that Japan will build a “constructive and stable” relationship with China via communicating Japan concerns to China and encouraging China to act responsibly. The MOD specifically states that it and the JSDF will encourage communication between Chinese and Japanese defense authorities to improve the regional safety and stability (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.435*). While exchanges have stagnated after the Japanese nationalization of the Senkaku islands in 2012, MOD gives examples such as a video conference between Japanese and Chinese defense officials in 2021 (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.358*) and visit of the Japanese minister of defense to China in 2019 (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.358*) as major achievement in the defense cooperation between the nations. According to MOD, the PRC has a responsibility to peacefully cooperate and comply with international norms and rules, and MOD occasionally draws attention to what it presents as an existing or previous contribution of PRC to global stability. For example, in the 2020 issue MOD states that “China takes a proactive stance towards efforts in security areas, contributing to United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), counter-piracy activities off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, and various humanitarian assistance and disaster relief activities.” (*Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.56*).

4.2 Sino-Russian cooperation as a major threat

The analysis found that Russia’s role in the *China threat narrative* became more prominent after the 2022 Ukraine war escalation, influencing Japan’s defense policy narrative. The Russia threat is also interwoven with other key themes of the China threat narrative across the analyzed documents, reinforcing concerns about authoritarian powers challenging the international order. While both nations are regarded as threat to Japan based on the white papers, Russia differs from North Korea as a threat due to its open and seemingly close military cooperation with China. The narrative regarding the threat of North Korea on the

other hand exist more independently from the China threat narrative. Within the narrative, the threat posed by the Russian Federation manifests through its actions that threaten Japan's national security and interests especially via the cooperation with China. For example, regarding the incursions of foreign aircraft in vicinity of Japan, Russia is often discussed in context of joint air activities with China (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.253*). 2020 issue of Defense of Japan establishes the position of Russia in the narrative setting of the research as the other major revisionist power together with China. According to Defense of Japan 2020 (p.82-83), China and Russia in 2019 solidified their military partnership by signing various documents and began conducting joint strategic flight of bombers in Japan's vicinity. The 2021 issue remarks and repeats that China and Russia together promote multipolarization and threaten the existing world order. The trade of weapons between China and Russia also appears as a point of interest for the MOD (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.83*). Often mentioned together, China and Russia represent the authoritarian other and adversary to Japan's values and goals in the narrative plot. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has greatly amplified the role Russia plays in the wider China threat narrative in the documents. Russia is a narrative supporting character in the context of the policy narrative that shapes the China threat narrative and is also categorized as a villain in the narrative. Specifically, it is an ally of China in the narrative that is portrayed as potential enabler of China to increasingly threaten the status quo. Russia's actions are also major part of the blame for the state of crisis in the narrative plot, "the greatest trial after WWII" or "new era of crisis" as it is stated in the opening remarks of Defense of Japan 2022 and 2023 issues. Ukraine on the other hand is both a victim of the villain and a hero in the narrative setting related to this aspect of the China threat narrative in the MOD documents.

The documents highlight many concerns of the MOD regarding the cooperation between Russia and China and this concern is repeated through the white papers analyzed. MOD calls the relations between Russia and China a "marriage of convenience" and that China needs Russian technology, while Russia seeks to avoid diplomatic isolation caused by its role in the crisis in Ukraine which started already in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea by Russia (*Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.128*). Other examples are Russia's and China's joint air patrols in Japan's vicinity and Russia's apparent need to further cooperate with China due to the crisis in Ukraine according to MOD (*Ministry of Defense 2020, p.123*). China utilizes Russia to gain access to modern military equipment and is the biggest importer of Russian weaponry, although MOD also notes that Russia has concerns over China reverse engineering advanced

military systems sold to it (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.83*). The 2022 issue of Defense of Japan points to increasing Sino-Russian cooperation in developing technology and seemingly increasing trust to share technology and information, regarding advanced systems such as a ballistic missile early warning system (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.116*). According to MOD the U.S., China and Russia possess technology to develop hypersonic missiles (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.158*) and both China and Russia are believed to be researching and deploying anti-satellite weapons (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.133 & 178*).

The war in Ukraine escalating during 2022 - the new era of crisis

The conflict in Ukraine escalating to a full-scale invasion in February 2022 is heavily reflected to the China threat narrative in the 2022 issue of Defense of Japan, as MOD shows increasing concern regarding Russia as a threat together with China. The 2022 issue features a specific chapter in the part concerning the security environment surrounding Japan regarding the potential ramifications of the full-scale Russo-Ukraine war and concerns regarding this development is also present in other government messaging. In a statement from foreign minister Hayashi Yoshimasa, MOFA has strongly condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine and Japan has imposed sanctions against Russia and stated its support for Ukrainian people (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022*).

In the context of the China threat narrative, the MOD is increasingly concerned about the growing ties between Russia and China, particularly their potential shared security interests that could pose a threat to Japan. This concern is heightened by Russia's unilateral actions in Europe, which serve as a precedent for similar challenges to regional stability in East Asia. Russia and China are seeking to change the global values-based norms and to counter Japan's ally the U.S., which also ties to values-based threat theme of the overall narrative. MOD also highlight the fact that Russia is a permanent member of the UN security council, an organ that's duty is to prevent such international conflicts and protect international law, and thus Russia actions deeply undermine the stability of current status quo and global order in a way that should not be tolerated by Japan and the international community. MOD states that Japan must continue to monitor the situation with concern (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.6*).

In the opening words of 2022 issue of Defense of Japan annual white paper, Minister of Defense Kishi Nobuo express great deal of concern over the international crisis caused by the full-blown Russian invasion of Ukraine and the dire security ramifications it poses for Japan's national security interests. The minister states that "Such unilateral changes to the status quo

by force should never be tolerated, as they shake the very foundation of the international order based on universal values that has supported the peace and prosperity of the international community”. The minister further expresses concern that the growing competition between states will threaten the existing order in the Indo-Pacific region (*Ministry of defense, 2022*). This statement again showcases the wider theme of China threat narrative in the MOD documents regarding values based international order, or the status quo in the setting and plot of the story, which Japan is presented as a defender of in this policy narrative. Defense of Japan 2023 further demonstrates the heightened prominence of the role of Russia as a part and theme of the China threat narrative. In the opening words of Defense of Japan 2023, Minister of Defense Hamada expresses concern over state of the world following the break of full-scale war in Ukraine by Russia who is a member of the UN Security Council and threat of nuclear weapons. MOD continues to emphasize the effects that the conflict could have in the immediate security sphere of Japan as Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is just one example of states that do not respect international values and law trying to unilaterally change the status quo by force.

According to the MOD in 2023, the full-scale war in Ukraine shows that it is important to bolster Japan’s own security and defensive measures and to expands Japan’s role in preventing aggression to ensure Japan’s sovereignty. MOD states that the defense capabilities of Ukraine were not strong enough to discourage and deter the invasion from Russia and that an alliance with nations that possess the capabilities to jointly counter an invasion is important for deterring an invasion. The 2023 white paper states that “Japan will need to squarely face up to the grim reality and fundamentally reinforce its defense capabilities, with a focus on the capabilities of its opponents and new ways of warfare”. Based on this Japan will seek to reinforce its defense capabilities along with fostering its security cooperation with the U.S. and other like-minded nations (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.44*).

Moral of the story and policy suggestions to Russia in China threat narrative – deterrence and defense cooperation

The examples from Defense of Japan 2022 and 2023 showcase how in the context of policy narrative, the moral of the story and the policy suggestion tied to the Russia theme in the China threat narrative is the advocacy for increased deterrence capabilities for Japan. Russian aggression against Ukraine in the context of this policy narrative demonstrates the need for a strong deterrence against nations who do not respect the international rule of law, while MOD

also draws attention to China's disregard for the established international rules at the same time to reinforce this part of the narrative. MOD's concerns have increased since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the response to apparent security threats have become increasingly stricter in nature, with MOD expressing desire for developing direct counter-strike capabilities that could strike outside of Japanese territory and airspace for the JSDF in *Defense of Japan 2023 (p.34)*.

In 2024 Japanese Minister of Defense Nakatani expressed the need for Japan to advance the cooperation with NATO due regional security threats for Japan posed by Russia, China and North Korea in a ministerial level security meeting (*Tamura, 2024*). The successor of Kishida, prime minister Ishiba has expressed that the creation of an organization similar to NATO in Asia is essential to deter China and has brought forward the idea of introducing the presence of (U.S. deployed) nuclear weapons in the region to deter nuclear threat from North Korea, China and Russia. According to Ishiba, the events that are unfolding in Ukraine today could happen in Asia tomorrow with China and Taiwan, due to a lack of obligation for mutual defense. Ishiba also refers to the Abe administration era change to the interpretation of the Japanese constitution that allows the JSDF more leeway to use force in a response to a threat (*Hudson Institute, 2024*). Ishida expressed his thoughts in an article contributed to the conservative leaning, U.S. based think tank the Hudson Institute.

Related to the policy suggestion for deterrence is the policy of increasing cooperation with Japan's allies such as U.S. and seeking potential new cooperation with NATO or support for Taiwan for example. In the narrative setting, Taiwan's autonomy is considered a part of the ongoing status quo which Japan seeks to act as a defender of. In the white papers, MOD compares the situation with Russia to a potential future conflict between Taiwan and China and shows concern about Russia's actions that destabilize and defy the international laws and status quo. Russia has stated that it supports China in the issues concerning Taiwan (*The Japan News by Yomiuri Shimbun, 2024*) and it amplifies the threat of China in the policy narrative, by potentially enabling China to act more assertively. The PRC seemingly can expect at least diplomatic support from Russia and China and Russia have announced to expand their military cooperation on a ministerial level and China has stated the desire to "firmly defend the common interests" of the two countries (*NHK World-Japan, 2024*). MOD sees that Russia's actions demonstrate that a nation that does not abide by international laws can act unpredictably aggressive. Therefore, it is through keeping up a strong deterrence and alliance with the U.S. and like-minded countries that share Japan's values, can Japan achieve

a believable defense as is mentioned in *Defense of Japan 2023* (p.44). Hypothetically China also plays similar role in a theoretical Russia threat policy narrative created by NATO for example.

NATO has expressed desire to increase cooperation with Japan as a democratic partner due to the increasingly seemingly warm relations between Russia and China amidst the war in Ukraine. According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Russia makes use of Chinese provided components and technology in its war against Ukraine and China enables Russia's war economy (*NHK World-Japan, 2024*). Japan has also been moving closer to NATO as the organization is an ideological ally to Japan in practice and shares common worries. In 2022 Kishida's participation in a NATO summit meeting marked the first time when a Japanese prime minister attended the event, where Kishida stated his worries regarding the effects of Russian aggression against Ukraine that would be felt in the Indo-Pacific region in the future and highlighting the importance of NATO as a partner of Japan (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2022 Outcome of Prime Minister Kishida's Attendance at the NATO Summit Meeting*).

4.3 Threat of technological development and new military domains

Another recurring theme in the *Defense of Japan* annual white papers analyzed is the concern related to technological development by China and its potential wider security implications. This narrative theme heavily includes the U.S. as an ally character in the setting with many references made to U.S. by the MOD in the white papers. This theme expands the setting of the policy narrative to include new domains such as cyber and space domains, as China's threatening actions start to involve these new domains more according to the policy narrative. According to the MOD, China is heavily investing in new technologies along with its policy of civil-military fusion to develop technology and the rapid development of advanced technologies and their military application results in the expansion of new security domains that must be considered (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.13*).

This policy narrative setting is also based on the concern that China has been growing its defense budget without transparency. The transparency aspect again acts as an occurring theme in all the major threat themes of the China threat narrative. MOD details worry over how China has been growing its defense budget for over 30 years especially focusing on missiles, nuclear, naval and air power without clear transparency of its military aims (*Ministry*

of Defense, 2021 p.17 & 58). These are capabilities that allow a country to extend its military influence far from its conventional land and sea borders and are thus important capabilities for global power projection. MOD also for example refers to the China's National Defense in The New Era 2019 whitepaper to as a sign that China is seeking to militarize the usage of AI (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.58* see also *Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.48 & 56*). Notably, missile technology development has increasingly become a concern in the documents. Missiles strikes can threaten the Japanese mainland and defending against missile strikes via conventional means is believed to be getting difficult as is expressed in the Defense of Japan 2023 (*p.34*). MOD points out that during a Chinese missile training around Taiwan in 2022, several Chinese missiles landed into the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone, causing a threat to Japanese citizens (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.34*). China is also believed to be deploying anti-satellite weapons technology (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.158*) and MOD reports that Chinese electronic warfare aircraft have been sighted in Japan's vicinity (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.176*).

Based on the concerns expressed in Defense of Japan, MOD has potentially concluded that Japan cannot compete with China rapid development of new military related and other advanced technology. The threat of China exceeding Japan's ally U.S. technologically thus forms another aspect of the technology related China threat that can be identified from the Defense of Japan white papers. The rhetoric of MOD in Defense of Japan 2022 and 2023 issues especially shows that MOD is expressing the importance and necessity for Japan to increase its own defense capabilities and take more responsibility for its own defense. This especially comes apparent in the 2023 issue due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, where the MOD has observed these new domains in effect and determined that a lack of strong deterrence was one of the reasons for Russian decision to ultimately invade.

The technology threat is also tied to the narrative regarding China as an authoritarian system and threat to values such as freedom, which also reinforces the role of Japan as a character on the side of good who safeguards these values in the narrative setting. China has been tightening societal control and rapidly developing new technologies to further enable control over the society, according to MOD. MOD remarks in Defense of Japan 2020 that "China has enacted laws based on "a holistic view of national security" that covers not only external threats but also culture and society." (*Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.56*). MOD also draws a connection between strengthening central authority and the rapid military technological modernization of the Chinese armed forces, as China may "further accelerate the military

modernization against the backdrop of national power development and General Secretary Xi's enhancement of his power base in the CCP" (*Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.59*).

Dual-use technology and civil-military fusion blurring the lines in the narrative setting

The theme of technological development tied to China threat narrative is prominently linked to the development dual-use technology and so called civil-military fusion. This policy of civil-military fusion pursued by China is believed to develop cutting-edge technologies that can be used for military purposes (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.17*). MOD explains that the civil-military fusion is "an initiative promoted by China as a national strategy designed to promote the military use of civilian resources and the civilian use of military technologies in peacetime as well as emergency, in addition to the traditional development of defense mobilization arrangements for emergency" (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.55; Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.60*). According to MOD, the new emerging domains of space, cyberspace and AI are especially a focus for China as a priority in the Civil-military fusion initiative (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.55*). As an example, the systems utilizing artificial intelligence seemingly developed for the civilian field can in the context of China threat narrative be potentially adopted to military field or even masqueraded as purely civilian technology while its main implementations are believed to be military minded in nature. MOD reports that China has "proactively used space for military purposes, including information collection, communications, and positioning through satellites" (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.166*). However, it is likely that these systems also serve a civilian purpose and are an example of how it is becoming more difficult to distinguish between civilian and military technological systems. In the context of the threat narrative, MOD accuses China of introducing this new nefarious concept on to the setting that demands a reaction from Japan as a policy solution.

Role of U.S. in the technology related narrative

In the context of the China threat narrative and its technology related aspect, the antagonist of the narrative appears threatening due to it transforming these advances in technology to weapons that threaten Japan. In addition, this development threatens the values based international system that is favorable for Japan that serves as the narrative setting. In comparison, the U.S. as a close and important ally of Japan in the narrative is developing the same systems such as hypersonic missiles and other technologies, but these are not comparable to the threat of China. These weapons are presented on the narrative to be on the

side of “good” and protect the current status quo and international order. Threat narrative of China’s advancing military technology is also reinforced by references to the U.S. expressing concern regarding Chinese advance military technology, such as in Defense of Japan 2022 that details concern regarding Chinese hypersonic missile launch in 2021 while referring the U.S. Department of Defense (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.158*). As another example, MOD in 2020 refers to a U.S. produced threat assessment, the 2019 Missile Defense Review which states that China and Russia are developing advanced hypersonic missile technology to challenge existing missile defense systems (*Ministry of Defense, 2020 p.164*).

Referring to U.S. Department of Defense, MOD states that China is suspected of engaging in active cyberespionage to steal confidential information. MOD also points out that advanced cyberwarfare capabilities expose important industrial sectors for disruption. Furthermore, it refers to U.S. advising its allies to avoid employing Chinese manufacturers such as Huawei to build critical information infrastructure. While Japan and its allies have called for maintaining free cyberspace and rule of law, authoritarian characters such as China and Russia have sought to tighten the control of state authorities over cyberspace (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.170-172*). MOD states that “United States is engaged in a long-term strategic competition with China and Russia, and that China and Russia have expanded that competition to include persistent campaigns in and through cyberspace that pose long term strategic risk to the United States as well as to its allies and partners” (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.183*). As a further example, again referring to U.S. composed threat analysis, MOD states that according to the U.S. Department of Defense, China routinely conducts mission exercises in electromagnetic environments and the nation’s military forces “have taken advantage of such exercises to assess electronic warfare weapon research and development achievements” (*Ministry of Defense, 2022 p.176*).

Policy solutions for new technological threats

The threat narrative regarding the technology development aspect of the China threat narrative advocates for Japan to bolster its defense capabilities concerning advanced systems and technologies. Regarding the new National Security Strategy (NSS) that was adopted in 2022, the MOD remarks in the opening words of Defense of Japan 2022 that the Japanese government will establish new strategies to preemptively deter changes to status quo and to prepare for the possibility of modern war and threats including cyber and information warfare. Such aspects of modern war have been detected in the conflict in Ukraine by MOD. Referring to the 2022 NSS, the Minister of Defense Hamada remarks in the opening words of Defense

of Japan 2023 that the priority for bolstering deterrence will be to effectively make use of the already existing capabilities and strengthen the future core areas of Japan's defense such as advanced technological systems (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 On the Publication of Defense of Japan 2023*). The 2023 white paper also encourages to monitor the capabilities of belligerent nations as it states that "Japan will need to squarely face up to the grim reality and fundamentally reinforce its defense capabilities, with a focus on the capabilities of its opponents and new ways of warfare" (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.44*).

Linked to the technological development related threat, Japan's own unpreparedness as it is implied by the MOD documents is part of the threat narrative, as Japan requires a strong deterrence to contain and possibly prevent aggression in China. The Defense Technology Guideline 2023 states Japan's intention to pursue technological superiority on the long term by utilizing both private and public sector knowledge to "provide defense innovation that will transform our [Japan's] defense". According to this guideline, Japan's technological superiority will be ensured in the future by deployment of advanced technology ahead of competing nations that improve Japan's security through deterrence (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.6*). Along with the implied lack of preparedness to address threats from emerging domains, the policy narrative in the Defense of Japan white papers suggests that Japan must reconsider new policies, such as the acquisition of counterstrike capabilities. This narrative regarding counterstrike capabilities becomes more prominent in the 2023 issue of the white paper as MOD for example suggest that, due to the increasing difficulty of relying on existing missile defense to counter advanced systems, Japan will utilize counterstrike capabilities to deter missile attacks as "as an absolute minimum self-defense measure that is unavoidably necessary" (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.34*). From the perspective of the policy narrative, this is also an attempt to alter the established narrative setting where certain capabilities are not allowed for Japan to utilize.

In 2022 the JSDF specifically launched a new cybersecurity unit centered in Tokyo to bolster the capabilities to response against a cyber-attack (*Kyodo News, 2022*). In 2024 MOD hosted a panel formed of Japanese defense experts to discuss the importance of maintaining and expanding Japan's domestic defense industrial base and potentially expand the export of Japanese made defense equipment (*The Japan News by Yomiuri Shimbun, 2024*). Japan's defense equipment exports are limited by The Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology, but Japan has been amending these rules to more easily cooperate with allies in developing advanced technology such as fighter jets (Mitsubishi F-X) (*Kyodo*

*News, 2024*⁷). The Diplomatic Bluebook 2024 of Japan, covering the 2023 calendar year, further states that the Japan's security strategy considers that the "transfer of defense equipment and technology overseas serves as a key policy instrument to create a desirable security environment for Japan" (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2023 p.194*).

Fast passed technological and scientific progression and the worries that Japan is falling behind in the technological race can be also seen translating to policy by examining the 2023 Japanese defense budget. Compared to 2022, the amount of funds assigned for research and development (R&D) take a significant leap in the 2023 budget. The overview of fiscal 2023 budget published by the MOD states that 896.8 billion JPY, or 3.1 times the amount compared to 2022 budget was to be allocated towards R&D (*Ministry of Defense, Defense Programs and Budget of Japan - Overview of FY2023 Budget - [PDF]*). Despite the impressive amount allocated for defense spending and R&D in the Japanese fiscal budget, Japanese government left unused around 807 million dollars' worth of yen reserved for the defense budget after approving a record high defense budget for the fiscal 2023 (*Kyodo News, 2024*). The fiscal year 2023 was the first year of Japan's Defense Buildup Program. In the budget request for fiscal 2024, the MOD requests approximately 100 million yen increase into the R&D of the defense budget compared to the previous fiscal year (*Ministry of Defense, Progress and Budget in Fundamental Reinforcement of Defense Capabilities - Overview of the FY2024 Budget Request - [PDF]*).

⁷. See also *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) Announcement of joint development of next-generation fighter aircraft by the leaders of Japan, Italy and the United Kingdom*).

5 Discussion

This chapter reflects on the results of the analysis of the Defense of Japan white papers, discussing their broader implications within Japan's security policy environment. It examines how the findings contribute to understanding the China threat narrative and its potential influence on Japan's defense strategy and policymaking. The major issues and themes of the China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan annual white papers from 2020 to 2023 (or even glancing at the 2024 issue) have not drastically changed. This implies that the focus of the MOD and Japanese defense policy has been quite clear in the recent years, especially after the new policy guidelines adopted in 2022.

The analysis identified three major themes shaping the China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan white papers from 2020 to 2023: the threat to Japan's values and the international order, concerns over Sino-Russian cooperation, and the risks associated with technological advancements. These themes collectively define the overarching security discourse presented in the documents. These themes are often linked together in the wider threat narrative formed by the MOD. The threat narrative regarding China should be understood in the wider context of policy narrative regarding for example the current changes in Japanese approach to security policy that are taking place during the Kishida administration and paved by legacy of Abe's policies.

The trend of Japanese security policy based on analyzing the Defense of Japan annual white papers is appearing more tense towards China according to the analysis results. Watanabe (2015) observed that Japan's strategic policy appears shifting from "cooperative engagement with soft hedge" towards "competitive engagement with hard hedge". Watanabe further writes that policy makers advocating for a hard line towards China have had an influential policy making role in Japan's recent administrations as of 2015. Watanabe sees a future trend that Japan will be pushed by China's actions to seek closer cooperation with U.S. and build up its own military capacity while restraints of Japanese security policy fade (Watanabe, 2015). The analysis results from Defense of Japan white papers from 2020 to 2023 point to Watanabe having been correct in this assessment.

The 2024 issue of Defense of Japan has been published online in English by the time this research was concluded and a quick glance through it seems to suggest that the overall content and China threat narrative remain the same. Analysis of Defense of Japan 2024 and the further issues of the white paper could in the future determine if the China threat narrative of the

MOD remains favoring more proactive or even perhaps aggressive appearing military contribution and defense buildup to ensure Japan's security and to contain China's regional power.

5.1 Narrative findings

The purpose of the China threat narrative formed by MOD is to affect the domestic policy and image of Japan as a security actor among both domestic and international audiences. China threat narrative is a story and plot that is live and evolving as of conclusion of this research. It is difficult to say when the story begins and where it will end, or will it even be necessary to end the story from the perspective of policy goals of the MOD. China's potential threat to Japan's security is a constant policy issue for the MOD and it has an interest of constantly drawing attention to it.

The China threat narrative warns that China is seeking to alter the narrative setting which would lead to an unfavorable policy environment for Japan and calls for Japan together with its allies to counter it. However, at the same time the narrative calls for Japan to alter the setting, by calling for adoption of countermeasures that have been previously mostly considered not fitting on to the agreed upon framework of the setting. This can be a subtle process, treating on the interpretation of the constitution of Japan which bans Japan from possessing many offensive capabilities. Japan has for example modified its Izumo-class helicopter carriers⁸ of the JMSDF to be able to function as aircraft carriers. This has caused domestic criticism as breach of Japan's own constitution and the move draw condemnation from China (*Cannon & Rossiter, 2021*). The strategic goal of the narrative can be thus seen to ease this manipulation of the narrative setting and draw support from both domestic and global audiences by portraying Japan as a defender of good values like peace and democracy, against authoritarian nations such China, North Korea and Russia.

Compared to findings of Dell'Era (2022) regarding the Japanese security discourse, Abe Administration utilized a similar strategy to create a security discourse by associating China with aggressive behavior in domains such as maritime security. According to Dell'Era (2022) this strategy aided the Abe administration in pursuing both domestic and international objectives and further writes that MOD has increased its influence in Japanese security and foreign policy due to this securitization of China. Regarding the securitization theory, the

⁸ Referred to as destroyers in Defense of Japan white papers

threat narrative of the MOD is an example of securitization in the sense that it successfully goes through the three steps of securitization as explained by Balzacq et al. (2016). Notably, the China threat narrative lays groundwork for potential future policy in order to fight back against the threatening phenomenon. The China threat narrative examined in this research can be interpreted as a securitizing move and MOD certainly is a policy actor with the capability to securitize different policy issues. While securitization was not a major focus of this research, the issue certainly could be attempted to explain via securitization theory in a further analysis.

Policy narrative elements

The narrative elements of the policy narrative of the MOD presents Japan as a character that can be categorized as a hero in the plot, as it is a defender of good and represents good values such as transparency and democracy in the narrative setting. Instead of a hero character as was explained by Jones et al. (2014), Japan could be more specifically referred as a defender in the context of the China threat narrative. The character of defender suits Japan more, as it appears as a rather reactionary character to the threat posed by actions of the antagonist. This is a functionally similar character to hero but better represents Japan's role in the context of the policy narrative. Chinese state as a character is clearly appointed the role of evil by the MOD. In the context of the China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan, the narrative of MOD often justifies the altering of the narrative setting such as changing the policy regarding counterstrike capabilities, by implying that it is countering China as an evil and threatening character, therefore protecting so called moral good and the status quo of the narrative setting. This is a common narrative strategy as was referred to by Sheik (2014).

China is the clear antagonist of the policy narrative whose actions are deemed harmful for the victim. Interestingly, while Japan could also fit the role of the victim character as it is threatened by China, the victim is rather non-state concept such as the rule of law in the narrative. Japan as a defender seeks to protect in the victim in the narrative plot. Along with Ukraine, regarding the Sino-Russia cooperation aspect of the threat narrative, Taiwan for example is also a victim character in this policy narrative. Taiwan as a fellow democracy is occasionally emphasized by MOD in the white papers as an ideological ally of Japan. Taiwan can be especially seen as an ally of Japan in the values-based threat narrative, and it is pointed out that U.S. has shown interest to improve Taiwan's defense capabilities (*Ministry of Defense, 2021 p.91*). China on the other hand seeks to normalize the presence of its military

around Taiwan while threatening the self-governed island and MOD states that concerns regarding the stability and situation of the Taiwan strait are shared by Japan and the international community (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.76*). The U.S. plays a pivotal role in the policy narrative as military and ideological ally of Japan. The role of the U.S. as a character in this policy narrative would be best described as a helper of the protagonist or hero along with the protagonist. MOD portrays Japan as the foremost defender of moral good and shared values such as democracy against China's model of authoritarianism and unilateralism and this is supported by references to the close relationship between Japan and U.S. This narrative gives legitimacy to the policy narrative, as U.S. is generally recognized as the leader of the so-called Western block and promoter of Western democratic model. This is the role U.S. is appointed in the policy narrative and U.S. as a character can be also seen as an enabler of Japan in the policy narrative.

The moral of the story as a policy solution in the narrative is the clearest narrative element in the white papers. The moral of the story translates as a policy of increasing Japan's military deterrence via means such as acquiring increasingly advanced capabilities and reinforcing alliances with ideological partners, or like-minded partners as was referred to in the opening words of Defense of Japan 2021 for example. Lee (2023) comes to the same conclusion that the message of the Defense of Japan 2023 advocates for increasing countermeasures against new threats and trends, shows concern regarding the power balance between U.S. and China and the tone of the MOD regarding China has gotten stronger. Lee (2023, p.5) also points out how the Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the context of the China threat is utilized for advocating deterrence against China. According to Lee (2023) the white paper also highlights the importance of cooperation with Europe regarding FOIP, which is an interesting observation as in the context of focusing on China threat the U.S. as the closest ally of Japan in the narrative context clearly outweighs importance of Europe. Increasing deterrence via various means appears to be the main policy solution to all the major themes of threat identified by the analysis.

It could be argued that in the context of the MOD's policy narrative, morals function more as tools rather than agreed upon rules of the narrative setting. MOD forms the plot of the policy narrative in a way that it portrays Japan as the protector of morals, which also justify altering the setting to more favorable condition from MOD's perspective. This way morals in the China threat narrative justify Japan altering the setting of the policy narrative, but at the same time warn about the threat of China seeking to unilaterally alter the setting and status quo. The

policy narrative does not advocate a conflict with China but rather it claims to prevent potential conflict via increasing deterrence and seeks to according to MOD rather convey Japan's worries to China and global community in the spirit of cooperation. MOD does acknowledge that despite the threat it causes, China still values peace and stability to promote steady economic growth that augments Chinas national power.

Comparison to other recent China threat perceptions in security policy documents

While comparing the China threat narrative in MOD documents to U.S. equivalents could be a research subject on its own, even a glance to publications detailing China from U.S. Department of Defense shows many similarities between worries of MOD and U.S. defense policy. In the 2023 report to the U.S. congress, the U.S.-China Economy and Security Review Commission highlight many similar threats that are present in the narrative created by the MOD. According to the report, China's understanding of the rule of law does not follow the accepted global principles and instead the PRC seeks to implement its own interpretation of the common laws globally (*U.S.-China Economy and Security Review Commission, 2023 p.175*). The report thus expresses worry over China unilaterally altering the narrative setting. Other worries expressed in this document are China's growing global propaganda efforts and military strengthening. Similarly to Defense of Japan, the report claims that China seeks to undermine the global position of the U.S. by interacting with foreign militaries. Russia is similarly brought up as the most important military ally of China (*U.S.-China Economy and Security Review Commission, 2023 p.395*). This report (*p.9*) also claims that China has sought to destabilize the alliance between U.S. and Japan.

The U.S. Department of Defense in its 2023 report on China states that China's action in 2022 have become more coercive and expresses worry over growing capabilities of Chinese armed forces and technological advancements. Regarding the role of Russia in the China threat narrative, the U.S. report remarks that China defines and ranks its partnerships with other nations. Russia is China only "comprehensive strategic partner with coordination relations" while Pakistan for example is the only "all-weather strategic partner" (*U.S. Department of Defense, 2023 p.12*). Different from the MOD's white paper, the U.S. report seemingly does not offer direct policy and moral solution in the China threat policy narrative, and it functions more to raise awareness of the issue. Future comparative study of Defense of Japan and the U.S. Department of Defense report on China could further determine similarities and difference on the threat perception.

The Australian Defence Strategic Review of 2023 contains surprisingly little mentions of China, especially compared to the strong prevalence of China as a topic and issue in the Defense of Japan. In the over hundred-page long document, China is mentioned roughly ten times. The 2023 review remarks that a stable relationship between China and Australia are desirable for sake of both nations and the broader region (*Department of Defence of Australia, 2023 p.9*). The Australian defense review showcases concern regarding China's military buildup, lack of transparency and China's disregard for international rules (*Department of Defence of Australia, 2023 p.23*). Compared to the threat narrative of the MOD, the Australian review does not go into detail to explain more specifically what domains and actions of China are perceived as a threat. It does not mention China's threat from new domains such as cybersecurity and overall, the Defense of Japan as a document contains much more data regarding China.

No economic sanctions in MOD's policy toolbox

In comparison to MOD's suggested policy solutions Cha (2023) argues for "collective resilience" as a new strategy for the U.S. led alliance to counter China. Based on the analysis, economic coercion such as sanctions do not appear in the toolbox of the MOD when it comes to combating the China threat and China's unilateral actions. MOD also does not showcase much if at all concerns regarding China's use of economic coercion and sanctions, although it does refer economic sphere and economic security for example in regards of competition for controlling and developing advanced technologies. Related to this, Japan has taken up measures to promote economic security and passed legislation that seeks to protect vital supply chains and technologies (*Cha, 2023*). MOD does state that supply chain vulnerabilities have become a major security challenge (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.29*). Further, MOD acknowledges the effect of economic sanctions on hindering Russia's war sustainability in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine (*Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.39*).

It is likely that economic sanctions as a policy tool do not belong to the sphere of the MOD, but as the policy narrative of MOD seeks to influence policy it is nevertheless interesting finding that no advocacy for the utilization of economic measures as a policy solution are made to combat the China threat. Historically Japanese government has been seemingly hesitant to utilize economic sanctions towards China even despite the public sentiment likely accepting or even advocating for such, as was discussed in the framework chapter related to Tiananmen incident (see again *Vogel et al., 2019 p.352-355*). Lack of economic measures as a

policy solution are also explained by Japan's other policy realities. According to MOFA, China is both Japan's largest trading partner as well as largest investment direction destination for Japanese companies and that the two countries have very tight economic relations. However, MOFA does state that similarly to MOD that it seeks to convey worries Japan has towards China and encourage China to respect transparency and global rules (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024*).

According to Rogelja & Tsimonis (2020) the China threat narrative as framed by European think tanks focusses more on economic activities of China, such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Rogelja & Tsimonis (2020) cite a German based think tanks of warning about China's growing political influence in Europe and the spread of authoritarianism. Similarly to Japan in the threat narrative of MOD, Europe is presented in the China threat narrative as a bastion of good values and morals, such as human rights and democracy which distinguishes Europe from the antagonist China. However, the authors criticize this narrative as producing a misrepresenting image of European policy and hierarchy between European nations. The authors identify three major narrative strands of China threat from assessing European think tanks: Chinese investments in Europe, China's threat to the unity of EU and the authoritarian policy of the PRC as the "authoritarian other" (Rogelja & Tsimonis, 2020). Comparing this article to the findings of this research, there seems to exist some or rather even notable similarities between the Japanese and European understanding China threat narrative. However, it should be noted that Defense of Japan, as a policy document, differs from articles produced by economically focused think tanks, which approach China related issues from a different perspective.

According to Liu (2022) China threat narrative has become to dominate the Australian perception of China. Liu (2022) identifies Chinese investment, and property purchases to be a notable aspect of the China threat narrative in Australian policy. Other than these economic factors, number of Chinese students in Australia, the threat of China's rise to U.S. hegemony form important narrative themes of China threat narrative formed by Australian actors according to Liu (2022). Australia is considered a like-minded country in sharing the good and desirable values and morals with Japan in the Defense of Japan annual white papers (see for example *Ministry of Defense, 2023 p.142*). Based on the findings of this China threat narrative of MOD shares the worry with Australian threat narrative regarding China's threat to U.S. hegemony and its wider impacts on the global rules-based order. The topic of Chinese students is something the MOD completely ignores, the issue likely not belonging to the

realm of MOD as policy actor. Frauen (2021) draws heavy connection between the racist concept of yellow peril and China threat narrative, pointing to President Donald Trump on having portrayed the economic invasion by the Chinese against the U.S. and conspiracy of the PRC to gain popular support in elections (Frauen 2021, p.386). This research did not find anything that would point to any similar aspect in the MOD's China threat narrative, but Frauen's claim would support that such a theme does exist in some forms of the China threat narrative in the U.S. for example.

Economic realities would seemingly dictate that Japan pursues much warmer relationship with China, even over the U.S. despite the ideological closeness Japan shares with the U.S. as is so often highlighted by the policy narrative of MOD. It is worth noting that in reality the Japan-U.S. relations have historically not always been simply mutual harmony, as was the case with the U.S. establishing relations with the PRC without prior warning to Japanese policymakers. Still, Japan and U.S. remain strong and close allies, and it will be interesting to observe how the relationship will develop during the second Trump administration. The turbulent historical relationship between Japan and China explains the contemporary troubled relationship between the nations as was discussed in the framework chapter, which helps to explain the phenomenon of prevalence of China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan. However, while MOFA for example utilizes similar language compared to the policy narrative of MOD regarding the China threat, its statement of close economic relations and mutual understanding brings into question of China threat as a dominant policy narrative on a wider government level. Competing narratives to the policy narrative of MOD could potentially exist originating from other Japanese policy actors.

China threat as a dominant narrative in Defense of Japan annual white papers

According to Miller (2014 p.83) the dominant institutionalized narrative defines the status quo regarding how problems are understood, but does MOD have an institutional monopoly on defining the narrative regarding China. This analysis focuses completely to the China threat narrative of the MOD and does not consider other ministries or policy actors in Japan as answering the research statement does not require it. Determining whether China threat narrative as presented by MOD is the dominant policy narrative in the messaging of other ministries for example, could be researched by analyzing similar policy documents from different ministries and see how China is presented in them. It would be interesting to

discover if certain influential policy actors diverge from the apparent dominant narrative and in which level of government would this competing narrative exists is another question.

Miller (2012 p.4) argues that narratives and stories are embedded with ideographic patterns that normalize a certain vision of the world that justify action, belief, narrative or policy. It is a policy struggle to normalize ideographic patterns and an attempt to associate certain ideas with positive or negative resonance as an emerging policy debate draws on symbolic associations for example. A narrative that wins this struggle forms new relations and is institutionalized by public administration and then challenges established status quo and meanings according to Miller. Regarding the narrative policy analysis, Miller (2012) writes that the key practical insight of narrative policy analysis is that the stories that are utilized to analyze policy issues must be considered as a force in themselves. These policy narratives tend to be resistant to change and modification even if empirical data would contradict them, as they function as a stabilizing factor in policy making (Miller, 2012 p.36). Concerning this view and the research findings, the policy narrative of the MOD has indeed seemingly been following the same pattern in the years 2020 to 2023, without any drastic policy changes regarding China at core of the policy story. The policy narrative endorses the status quo as the setting of the policy narrative by framing the status quo to be based on so-called universal values and global order, which it portrays as being under threat from China's unilateral actions.

This research finds that the major themes of China threat narrative in Defense of Japan annual white papers do advocate for certain changes in the narrative setting. This is done by advocating for a change of rules that are seemingly binding Japan's potential as a security actor as part of the policy solutions, while its focus is to warn about China altering the setting by dismissing global rules. The analysis results further indicate that the China threat narrative has been institutionalized in the MOD policy. This narrative is a strategic construct, as was explained by Jones et al. (2014) that forms symbolic associations for Japan's role as a defender of moral good and values against China, which is appointed the role of an antagonist in the narrative. Miller (2014 p.82) also claims that dominant institutionalized narratives utilize defensive and offensive measures against challenging narratives. In the context of Defense of Japan annual white papers, this does not become apparent, as the China threat narrative is seemingly self-evident based on the setting and plot of the policy narrative. Competing narratives thus do not have to be addressed to any meaningful level other than perhaps encouraging cooperation between China and Japan. But in the context of the MOD's

narrative, encouragement of cooperation seems to be present more to influence the image of Japan as a character rather than China. In other words, MOD can purely focus on generating a story that reinforces the existing narrative. Would these measures even be present at this type of policy documents are unclear at this point, or potentially the defensive or offensive measures are so subtle that the analysis failed to detect any.

6 Conclusion

This research has thoroughly analyzed the contents of the Defense of Japan annual white papers to determine the major narrative themes and strands that form the China threat narrative in the Defense of Japan annual white papers from 2020 to 2023. The research problem evolved from a desire to determine if the China threat narrative exists in the policy documents and to a what degree. It soon became apparent that China threat narrative with detectable narrative elements introduced by the NPF was much present in the documents and perhaps a dominant narrative of the MOD. The research therefore evolved into questions about what the major issues or worries are that form the China threat narrative in these documents. In addition, the potential broader policy impacts of this narrative from the MOD were also of interest. The research acts as evidence that China threat narrative as a form of narrative policy tool exists in these MOD policy documents. The results of the research do not necessarily challenge the existing knowledge regarding China threat theory or threat narratives but bring new understanding to the topic from a less explored security perspective from a Japanese ministry.

The analysis found out that the China threat narrative in Defense of Japan annual white papers from 2020 to 2023 can be deconstructed into three overlapping but still distinct narrative themes or strands. They are the threat to values and international rules-based order, threat related to Sino-Russia cooperation and the threat related to advancing technology and new emerging security domains. The research discovered that the MOD's policy narrative in Defense of Japan contain narrative themes, that can be analyzed utilizing the Narrative Policy Framework. This resulted in the formation of the three major strands based on narrative themes such as setting, plot and characters. The three major narrative strands heavily connect to and support each other to form the wider China threat narrative. Another founding was that the Sino-Russian cooperation threat theme, while present in all the documents analyzed, become more heavily featured in the overall threat narrative after the war in Ukraine escalated. This came even more apparent from statements such as the 2023 issue deeming that the global community had entered a new era of crisis, so the narrative setting had become more threatening according to MOD.

The analysis chapter makes references to instances where it can be argued that the MOD's China threat narrative has likely influenced Japanese security policy. Besides being the most comprehensive and easily available document from MOD providing an extremely detailed look on Japan's defense policy and the security environment in East-Asia in general from

Japanese perspective, this research also wanted to focus on the Defense of Japan annual white papers to further showcase the potential academic value of this information rich source. At the same time the motivation for this research was to explore and test the Narrative Policy Framework on the topic of China threat theory and narrative in the MOD documents.

Due to limitations of scope and size afforded to a master's thesis, this research could not consider fully potential competing narratives from Japanese policy makers or other ministries, but the research hypothesis that competing narratives do exist to a certain degree at least. Determining and comparing competing narratives to the China threat narrative from different Japanese policy makers or institutions could be one interesting way this research topic regarding narratives can be advanced further. Another aspect that future research should expand upon is the Chinese side of the story regarding the Japanese narrative of China. The perspective and response of China to MOD's China threat narrative could not have been meaningfully incorporated either, despite that it could have added much interesting point for future reflection. The research did touch upon the topic of narratives that China produces and criticism of China threat theory in the section introducing the narrative aspect. This aspect could be developed even further. It seems that English-language research has focused on more on the threat perception of U.S., Europe and Japan, rather than Chinese perceptions and policy narratives of threat. On more aspect that could be researched further is the potential of realist international relations theory as an explainer of development of Japanese security policy and the findings of this research.

The utility of the Narrative Policy Framework should be also explored further, as it provides an interesting way to analyze and understand policy narratives. While the text-driven content analysis was sufficient to answer the research problem, future research it would likely improve and be more efficient by utilizing some kind of text mining tool when analyzing documents as large as the Defense of Japan annual white papers. Further, perhaps to the fault of this research, the analysis does not focus on other forms of data, such as pictures in the documents. The text-driven focus was utilized to streamline the data of the research and try to maintain the scope of the research from swelling too much. In hindsight, the inclusion of pictures to the analysis could have helped to contextualize the threat narrative and policy influencing of MOD more. Hopefully these aspects can be also explored more in future research concerning Japanese defense policy and policy narratives in general. The narrative of MOD is a live policy story, and its future developments will remain an interesting object of

observation, through which security environment and wider policy context of Japan and East Asia in general can be investigated even more.

Finally, as the research progressed further, a question started to form regarding to perceived moral standing of the MOD itself in comparison to the role it develops itself in the China threat narrative. The idea perhaps appears somewhat nefarious even, that the MOD seeks to blatantly manipulate and construct the narrative regarding China and Japan as global policy actors, in way that cannot be considered neutral. It can be argued that the image the MOD shapes and presents about China as a threat in the Defense of Japan is harmful for China in some ways. Of course, it is the main concern of MOD that Japan's defense capabilities are as strong as possible whatever the threat might be. Therefore, is it be justifiable for MOD to try to influence the image of both Japan and China as much as it can, as it is only fulfilling its mission as a ministry. The research paper cannot answer this question at this point, and so it now leaves it to the reader to decide what they think about the MOD as a policy actor and narrator in light of this research.

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