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The Clash of Japan's FOIP and China's BRI?

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ABSTRACT

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Since the late 2010s, the concept of the “Indo-Pacific” has been becoming increasingly significant in the international political arena. In August 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed a policy of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) as Japan’s new diplomatic vision at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) VI held in Kenya. The FOIP strategy was supported by the Donald Trump administration followed by the renaming of the United States Indo-Pacific Command. However, China has viewed the FOIP as a containment strategy against the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The FOIP vision is unclear for general observers, and it might cause a security dilemma with the Chinese BRI. Is it possible for the FOIP vision to coexist with China’s BRI, or are these two strategic visions destined to clash with each other? In an attempt to answer these questions, the article aims to provide multiple perspectives of the FOIP concept by applying international relations (IR) theory. This article warns that the FOIP and the BRI are likely to bring about diplomatic tension that could be escalated into a military skirmish over the territorial dispute. In order to avoid the possible military clash, it finally seeks to explore possible future pathways of the peaceful coexistence of the two visions in the Indo-Pacific region.

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Introduction: Emergence of Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Vision

The concept of “Indo-Pacific” has been developed in international politics over time. Historically, the United States Pacific Command (current US Indo-Pacific Command), established as the oldest and largest US unified commands in Hawaii in 1947, had been responsible for the peace and security of the Indo-Pacific region throughout the Cold War era as well as the post-Cold War period (US Indo-Pacific Command, 2020). In 2007, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered a speech at the Indian Parliament and pointed out the necessity of Japan’s commitments to harmonising the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2007). Based on the recognition of the two oceans, Japan has prioritised its maritime security in its defence and strategic policies (Komori, 2018). In addition, the Australian government used the word “Indo-Pacific” more than 50 times in its *Defence White Paper* published in 2013. The Australian Department of Defence emphasised the economic, strategic and military importance of the Indo-Pacific region for the defence of Australia and the region (Australian Government Department of Defence, 2013).

Since the late 2010s, the Indo-Pacific has been a focus in the study of international politics. Notably, a shift from the “Asia-Pacific” to the “Indo-Pacific” as a geopolitical sphere has been recognisable, and the latter has been increasingly becoming an important concept both in academia and the political arena (Jain, 2018).

A concept of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) as Japan’s new diplomatic vision was officially proposed by Prime Minister Abe in his keynote speech at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) VI held in Kenya in August 2016 (Shiraishi, 2018). Since the announcement of the FOIP by the prime minister, a large number of articles on the vision have been published in Japan and the world (Aizawa, 2018). The Abe administration promoted the FOIP as a core diplomatic strategy, but it was pointed out that its purposes and significance are unclear (Valencia, 2018). The reason why Japan’s FOIP is vague is because of its “lack of clarity about what is new in the FOIP” (Lindgren, 2019: 39). Indeed, norms and values in the FOIP are not necessarily new, and Japan has promoted these ideas since the end of the Second World War (Sasae, 2019). As a matter of fact, the Japanese government made “slow and steady” diplomatic commitments to the Indo-Pacific region (Enval, 2020). It was also argued that Japan had already made commitments to the maritime security of the Indo-Pacific over a decade (Thankachan, 2017). Another fundamental reason why the FOIP seems to be elusive and incomprehensible lies in the fact that the concept itself contains dual nature that encapsulates two different elements, namely international competition and international cooperation (Kamiya, 2020).

Importantly, the complicatedness of Japan’s FOIP concept can be better understood by applying multiple perspectives of international relations (IR) theory, but few previous research provided theoretical aspects regarding the FOIP scholarship. Although some earlier works conducted theoretical analyses on the FOIP, their theoretical perspectives are apt to be limited to a dichotomy between realism and liberalism (Watanabe, 2019). Moreover, most previous studies have not offered theoretical analysis through a lens of “analytical eclecticism” and did not explore solutions to a regional “security dilemma” potentially generated by the FOIP (Hayward-Jones, 2018). Here, it is important to examine whether a clash between Japan’s FOIP vision and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is unavoidable or not. Accordingly, this paper aims to analyse the FOIP concept from the perspectives of international relations theory (realism, liberalism, and constructivism) in an application of “analytical eclecticism” and to examine whether Japan’s FOIP and China’s BRI are destined to clash with each other, or the peaceful coexistence of these two strategic visions is feasible in the Indo-Pacific region.

Japan’s Foreign and Security Policy in IR Theory and Analytical Eclecticism

IR theory is applicable to the analysis of Japan’s foreign and security policy in general. The theoretical premise of realism is that international politics is inherently a “power struggle” for survival and national interests (Morgenthau, 2006). This world view stems from a political philosophy that human nature is based on egoism engaging in a “war of all against all”, as described by Thomas Hobbes (Hobbes, 1962). Theorists of neorealism argue that the inherent nature of the international system is “anarchy”, and the balance of power and alliance system are vital for the security and defence policy of a sovereign state (Waltz, 1979). Japan’s security policy has been shaped in consistent with these realist arguments. Being surrounded by nuclear-armed states, Japan has attempted to normalise its defence capabilities, has maintained and strengthened the Japan-US military alliance (Green, 1995), and has expanded its security alignments with strategic partner countries (Wilkins, 2019a).

At the same time, however, Japan’s security and defence policy is congruous with the premise of liberalism that values the altruistic nature of human beings and international cooperation by sovereign states in an anarchic world. Liberal theorists argue that the peaceful coexistence of sovereign states is achievable by promoting multilateral disarmament and establishing international organisations based on international law, as suggested by Immanuel Kant (Kant, 1939). As envisioned by Kant, Japan’s security policy has been influenced by its “peace clause”, Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution that stipulates renunciation of war and non-possession of armed forces. Indeed, Japan’s defence capabilities have been consistently restricted by Article 9 as well as the so-called “culture of antimilitarism” in the post-war Japanese society (Berger, 1998). Japan’s security policy based on the Peace Constitution is consistent with “liberal internationalism”, and Japan’s contribution to international peace and security is regarded as Japanese “pragmatic liberalism” (Berger, Mochizuki and Tsuchiyama, 2007).

In addition to these two leading IR theories, constructivism has been developed as an alternative approach in the study of international politics. Constructivists analyse “norm” and “identity” that construct sovereign states which are composing international relations (Wendt, 1999). Since combining both realist and liberalist perspectives, constructivism is referred to as the “liberal-realist theoretical approach” (Kegley and

Wittkopf, 2006: 52). Constructivists accept the premise of neorealism that international relations is anarchic but argue that anarchy with international competition is “what states make of it” and transformation of institution and identity for international cooperation is possible (Wendt, 1992). From a constructivist viewpoint, “pacifism” as a core norm that constructs Japan’s identity has been analysed (Gustafsson, Hagström, and Hanssen, 2019), and Japan’s “security identity”, such as a pacifist state, a UN peacekeeper, a normal state, and a US ally, can be observed in an eclectic manner (Akimoto, 2013).

In analysing Japan’s foreign and security policy, it is useful to employ IR theories as well as “analytical eclecticism”. According to Peter Katzenstein, the theoretical spectrum of international relations is broad, and the theoretical preferences of analysts (realist, liberalist and constructivist) on Japan’s security policy are too wide and varying. With a view to integrating these perspectives of international relations theory, Katzenstein set forth analytical eclecticism, noting: “Some writings on Japanese security may, in the future, be able to take a more eclectic turn, by incorporating elements drawn from three different styles of analysis – the testing of alternative explanations, the rendering of synthetic accounts, and historically informed narratives” (Katzenstein, 2008: 3). Notably, Kai He applied the three theoretical aspects to the study of the FOIP to analyse the concept as “balancing strategy”, “institutional setting”, and “ideational construct” (He, 2018), but he did not investigate the FOIP framework as Japan’s foreign and security vision. Accordingly, this paper applies orthodox theories of international relations and analytical eclecticism in order to offer these three theoretical perspectives on Japan’s FOIP framework. Finally, this article attempts to investigate whether the peaceful coexistence of Japan’s FOIP and China’s BRI is achievable in the Indo-Pacific region.

Realist Perspectives: Japan’s FOIP Vision in International Competition

The FOIP can be comprehended through a lens of theoretical elements of realism that values national interests and balance of power. From a classical realist viewpoint, national existence, political independence, and territorial integrity are supreme priorities in the national strategy of a sovereign state. Therefore, Japan’s FOIP policy should be inextricably connected with the national defence policy (Koga, 2020). From a perspective of geopolitical realism, it was observed that Japan as a “sea power” is in competition with the BRI promoted by China as a rising “land power” (Akimoto, C., 2018). From a traditional realist perspective, it has been observed that Japan’s FOIP is strategised against the Chinese BRI as a “propaganda rivalry” (Matsumura, 2019). In this kind of realist viewpoint, Japan’s FOIP strategy can be seen as a countermeasure or hedge against the rise of China and its BRI vision (Pan, 2014).

In terms of a theoretical premise of neorealism or structural realism that values the importance of the balance of power in an anarchic system (Waltz, 2000), the FOIP is a strategic vision to reinforce the Japan-US military alliance and build a “strategic equilibrium” in the Indo-Pacific region (Chellaney, 2018). On the basis of the Japan-US alliance, Prime Minister Abe has supported the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) with Australia and the United States since 2006 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006) and stressed the necessity of strategic alignment with Australia and India, dubbing it the “quadrilateral strategic dialogue” or the “quad” in 2007 (Rudd, 2019). Abe moreover set forth a concept of Asia’s democratic “security diamond” in his article published by *Project Syndicate* on December 27, 2012 (Abe, 2012). In the article, Abe argued that Japan should strengthen its strategic partnerships with Australia and India in order to maintain peace, stability, freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific Ocean, where China had increased its military expansion (Ibid). Obviously, Abe’s strategic approach to the Quad and security diamond is consistent with a policy of balance of power. The FOIP strategy can be seen as an updated version of the Quad or security diamond vision from a realist strategic viewpoint.

The FOIP vision proposed by Abe was adopted by the Donald Trump administration that replaced its rebalance strategy of the Barack Obama administration with the US version of FOIP strategy (Akimoto, S., 2018). American realists set forth the concept of “offshore balancing” strategy as a US grand strategy (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016), and it can be observed that the FOIP can be inherently consistent with the offshore balancing against China’s BRI concept. In accordance with the adaptation of the FOIP strategy, the US Pacific Command was renamed the US Indo-Pacific Command on May 30, 2018 (Copp, 2018). In the meanwhile, the US Indo-Pacific strategy as a realist approach brought about a security dilemma with China that perceives the Quad and the US strategy as a “containment strategy” against the rising Chinese military power (Chen, 2018). South Korea also found the US Indo-Pacific strategy a dilemmatic strategy as it would force the country to choose between China and the United States (Kim, 2018). In addition, although the

quad partners are basically supportive of the FOIP vision, Australia and India have been cautious about the security dilemma with China. For Australia, China is the largest trade partner, and it is not logical for Canberra to bring about “unnecessary anxieties” for Beijing (Brewster, 2018). India also showed its wary posture and insisted that it would be ideal for the FOIP to be “inclusive” to other countries, especially China (Horimoto, 2018). As another regional middle power, Canada has shown both understanding and hesitation to Japan's FOIP vision (Berkshire and Wilkins, 2019). The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) furthermore expressed their concerns over the FOIP vision concerning ASEAN's “centrality” as well as possible security dilemma with China (Kausikan, 2018). Ultimately, there has been a fear about the so-called “Thucydides's trap” regarding the US-China hegemonic competition in the Indo-Pacific region (Allison, 2015). For this reason, the Indo-Pacific countries are cautious about being entrapped in a trade war or potential military clash between the two great powers, as warned by a theorist of offensive realism (Mearsheimer, 2001). In other words, the FOIP strategy as a traditional realist approach as “minilateralism” has been still underdeveloped and ultimately faced with the traditional security dilemma (Tow, 2019).

Liberal Elements: Japan's FOIP Vision for International Cooperation

On the contrary, the Japanese government has placed an explicit emphasis on “liberal” aspects of the FOIP vision. If Tokyo appropriately promotes the FOIP vision, it has the potential to become an “attractive liberal alternative” to China's BRI (Brown, 2019). According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the FOIP vision is based on the two diplomatic concepts: “diplomacy that takes a panoramic perspective of the world map” and “proactive contribution to peace” (proactive pacifism) based on the principle of “international cooperation” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019a). In the premise of neoliberalism, “international cooperation” among nations is achievable and desirable even in an anarchic world, where the countries are mutually interdependent (Nye and Keohane, 1977). In essence, the primary purpose of Japan's FOIP vision shared by its partner countries is the “preservation of the liberal, rule-based international order across the Indo-Pacific” (Bassler, 2019b: 50). In this sense, the diplomatic philosophy of Japan's FOIP is fundamentally consistent with international cooperation as a premise of neoliberalism.

Japan's FOIP vision is designed to make proactive contributions to the peace, stability, and development of the two major continents, namely Asia that has been rapidly developing and Africa that possesses the tremendous potential for development. The commitments to the development of the high-quality infrastructure of the FOIP countries can be regarded as international cooperation and mutual interdependence in the Indo-Pacific region. Moreover, the Japanese government suggested that the FOIP could be evolved into “international public goods” that is a liberal element and could contribute to the peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community (Moravcsik, 1997). Theoretically speaking, moreover, it can be argued that if Japan's FOIP concept aims to shape a non-war community by democratic countries, the vision is congruous with “democratic peace” scholarship as a liberal peace theory (Macmillan, 2004). Likewise, the FOIP vision can be regarded as part of the regional integration process, which stems from a theoretical premise of liberalism (Haas, 1961).

Specifically, what are the liberal elements of Japan's FOIP? The FOIP proposed by the Japanese government intends to facilitate international cooperation with the following three pillars: 1) promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and fundamental values (democracy, human rights, and freedom), 2) pursuit of economic prosperity (improving connectivity and strengthening economic partnership including EPA/FTAs as well as investment treaties), and 3) commitment for peace and stability (capacity building on maritime law enforcement, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), non-proliferation, peace operations, etc.) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019b).

First, the Japanese government promised to cooperate with other countries that share fundamental principles and the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific by facilitating strategic communication in the international arena. For example, the FOIP vision has been discussed in an international conference, such as the Shangri-La Dialogue organised by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (Choong, 2019). Although the freedom of navigation is categorised as a military operation, it has been explained that the measure is taken for protecting the “liberal rules-based order” (Wirth, 2019: 488).

Second, the government has tried to improve: a) “physical connectivity” including quality infrastructure development (ports, railways, roads, energy, and ICT), b) “people-to-people connectivity” through human

resources development, and c) “institutional connectivity” through facilitating customs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019b). In particular, the FOIP vision aims to strengthen economic partnerships including EPA/FTAs and investment treaties. In this sense, Tokyo plans to maintain its commitments to both the Japan-US bilateral free trade as well as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) (Akimoto, 2021a).

Third, Japan hopes to contribute to capacity-building assistance to countries in the Indo-Pacific region. For instance, capacity-building of maritime law enforcement as well as maritime domain awareness (MDA) are imperative. In addition, it is expected that Japan contributes to regional cooperation in such fields as HA/DR, anti-piracy, counterterrorism, and non-proliferation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019b). These agendas for Japan's FOIP vision, especially in the field of peace operations, are consistent with international cooperation as a liberal premise as well as Japan's “proactive contribution to peace” in a mutually interdependent world.

Constructivist Aspects: Japan's Relational Identity in the Indo-Pacific Region

According to arguments of constructivism, it is important to analyse “norm”, “idea,” and “identity” that construct a sovereignty state on the basis of the premise that “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992). Indeed, Japan's FOIP vision emphasises the importance of “rule making” and “norm-setting” as well as shared “universal values” (Heiduk and Wacker, 2020). Some constructivist researcher, especially Ling Wei, proposes the framework of “developmental peace” in observing the FOIP concept, arguing that sustainable peace is achievable in the Indo-Pacific region (Wei, 2020). Moreover, some researchers have offered an optimistic future pathway of the FOIP so long as China promotes its BRI vision based on norms, such as “peaceful coexistence” and “non-interference” (He and Li, 2020: 6).

With regard to “identity,” Japan as an “Indo-Pacific state” cannot escape from its historical past as a former aggressor and militarist state in wartime. Hence, it is fair to observe that Japan's national identity has been shaped in relationships with “external entities” (Ibid), especially its neighbour states, such as Russia, China, and South and North Korea. Similarly, a relational constructivist approach provides an analysis of Japan's identity politics with its neighbour states (Lindgren, W. and Lindgren, P., 2017). In this view, Japan's FOIP vision has been faced with its past conducts and relational identity with its neighbouring countries of the Indo-Pacific.

As long as Beijing regards the FOIP as an “anti-China project with limited economic vision and inclusivity”, it would be difficult for Japan to effectively promote the diplomatic vision in the Indo-Pacific region (Palit and Sano, 2018: 2). For this reason, it is strategically imperative for Tokyo to encourage Beijing to comprehend the purposes of the FOIP vision and its compatibilities with the Chinese BRI. Moreover, Japan, as a former aggressor state would need to make diplomatic endeavours for confidence-building and mutual understanding regarding the Senkaku/Daoyu Islands (Brown, 2018). Likewise, Japan is required to make sensible diplomatic commitments to Taiwan that also claims territorial sovereignty over the disputed islands. In the case of Taiwan over which China has exerted “sharp power” and political influence (Bassler, 2019a: 41), Japan's FOIP vision is expected to be free, open, and inclusive to China and Taiwan as well. For Japan, the FOIP is a diplomatic vision for co-prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, but unfortunately, it reminds Japan's neighbours of the memory of the “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” that justified Japan's expansionistic policy advocated by Imperial Japan during the 1930s and 1940s (Lai, 2018). With these responses in mind, Japan's FOIP diplomacy is expected to overcome its negative historical legacy vis-à-vis neighbour states in the Indo-Pacific.

Clearly, if Japan places excessive emphasis on military and strategic aspects of the FOIP concept, it will cause a security dilemma with China. Due to the possible security dilemma between Japan and China as well as concerns of ASEAN member states, the Japanese government “stopped calling FOIP a strategy and relabelled it as a vision” at the end of 2018 (Soeya, 2019: 16). This can be regarded as a normative readjustment of Japan's FOIP concept in relation to its neighbouring countries in the Indo-Pacific. Japan's normative readjustment regarding its FOIP concept is a diplomatic consideration for the countries in the Indo-Pacific region, diluting its strategic implication for the Chinese BRI.

It has been thought that the Japanese government considers its engagement with the BRI was unnecessary (Okano-Heijmans and Kamo, 2019: 2), but it would be necessary for Japan to continue expressing its understanding and conditional support for the BRI vision so that the two visions can coexist in the long term (Hosoya, 2019). From a relational constructivist viewpoint, it is significant for Japan to face its regional identity and the historical legacy in the Indo-Pacific area. In light of the constructivist approach, the FOIP in an anarchic international system is “what states make of it”, and it is critical for Japan to ponder its relational identity with other Indo-Pacific countries and normative readjustment to effectively facilitate its FOIP diplomacy in the region.

The Clash or Peaceful Coexistence of Japan's FOIP and China's BRI?

As discussed in this article so far, Japan's FOIP vision has dual nature through the eclectic lens of international relations theory. It can be observed that the Japanese government has deliberately insisted on the liberal elements of the FOIP, and has strategically obfuscated the realist intentions so as not to cause diplomatic tensions with Beijing. This is why the purposes of Japan's FOIP vision seem to be ambivalent for the general observers. In essence, the FOIP vision is composed of two theoretical elements: international competition as a realist strategy and international cooperation as a liberal vision. Then, which theoretical approach should the Japanese government adopt in order to avoid the security dilemma with China? Is Japan's FOIP diplomacy destined for a clash with China's BRI vision? Or is it possible for the two regional powers to avoid the clash?

Importantly, it has been argued that Japan's FOIP concept is not in opposition to the Chinese BRI, and it has been becoming more comprehensive and inclusive for regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (Kitaoka, 2019). Politically, it would be reasonable for Tokyo to consider the inclusiveness of Japan's FOIP vision in relation to China's BRI through administrative dialogues and international conferences. Economically, Japan based on the FOIP vision would be able to facilitate a trilateral free trade agreement with China and South Korea, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), as well as the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP).

Strategically, it is possible for the US Indo-Pacific Command to invite China to their annual joint military exercises with a view to properly promoting mutual confidence building in the Indo-Pacific sphere. As a matter of fact, the United States had invited the Chinese and Russian Forces to the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise in the Obama administration. The Trump administration in 2018 decided to disinvite China to the RIMPAC (Freiner, 2018), yet it is still feasible for the Biden administration to invite China and Russia to the RIMPAC again on condition that the Chinese and Russian Forces would adhere to the principles of the RIMPAC. In addition, Japan and the European Union (EU) have conducted joint naval patrols in the South China Sea in order to keep Chinese territorial expansion in check (Berkofsky, 2020), and there needs to be proper diplomatic communication between Tokyo and Beijing regarding the purpose of the joint exercise, which is identical with that of the FOIP vision. Such joint military exercises would aid in facilitating confidence building as well as promoting the FOIP vision in the region.

In the case of Japan-Australia relations, Japan has substantially overcome its negative historical past and transformed its identity as a former aggressor that conducted air bombing on Darwin and submarine attacks against Sydney harbour during the Asia Pacific War. Notably, the Japanese Self-Defence Forces joined the Australia-US bilateral military exercise, Talisman Sabre, on Australian soil (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2019). In this respect, within the frameworks, such as the American “hub-and-spoke” system and Japan-Australia “security alignment” (Wilkins, 2019b), Japan's negative historical past has been transformed in light of the Japan-Australia bilateral relationship. In this regard, Japan needs to facilitate bilateral reconciliation with China so that it could promote the FOIP vision in a way that is congruous with the Chinese BRI. Japan's policy toward the BRI shifted from “non-participation” to “conditional engagement”, and it can be regarded as a realistic risk-hedging strategy (Ito, 2019), as well as a cooperative liberalist measure as well. From realist and liberalist perspectives, therefore, the FOIP vision can be promoted by Japan and the United States in an increasingly mutually interdependent Indo-Pacific region. Nevertheless, from a constructivist viewpoint, the future of the success of Japan's FOIP vision depends on Japan's relational identity and the coexistence with the Chinese BRI in a free, open, inclusive, and peaceful Indo-Pacific region.

Having said that, one cannot rule out a possibility that Japan's FOIP is likely to clash with China's BRI over their fault line, i.e. the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The United States moreover has considered China to be a strategic rival in the Indo-Pacific sphere. Hence, it is fair to observe that the US Indo-Pacific strategy as well as Japan's FOIP vision are in competition with China's grand strategy, namely the BRI. China's BRI as a grand strategy is composed of multi-layered strategies, such as the String of Pearls, anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, salami-slicing tactics, military technology innovation in the field of space, cyberspace, electromagnetic spectrum, and artificial intelligence (AI) (Akimoto, 2021b). It has been pointed out that Beijing furthermore plans to double the stockpiles of nuclear warheads while developing new types of missiles as well as hypersonic weapons (Ibid). Therefore, the strategic implications of China's BRI vis-à-vis Japan's FOIP under the US Indo-Pacific strategy for their territorial dispute, as well as the diplomatic tension over the Taiwan Strait cannot be ignored. Such a military clash has the potential to be escalated into a regional and international armed conflict.

Conclusion

This article has examined the emergence of Japan's FOIP vision from multiple theoretical perspectives. From the realist perspective, Japan's FOIP vision entails the aspect of international competition and values security arrangements, such as the Japan-US military alliance, the TSD, and the Quad, for national survival and balance of power in an anarchic nature of international politics in the Indo-Pacific region. Japan's FOIP vision was adopted by the Trump administration as the US Indo-Pacific strategy in competition with China's BRI. Whereas the ASEAN countries are apt to keep their distance from the US Indo-Pacific strategy so as not to be dragged into a potential military skirmish between China and the United States. In the meanwhile, European countries, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, share the strategic value of Japan's FOIP vision, forming Indo-Pacific security alignments against China's BRI (Akimoto, 2021b).

In light of the liberal perspective, on the other hand, Japan's FOIP vision includes elements of international cooperation based on Japan's core diplomatic policy, i.e. proactive contribution to peace (proactive pacifism) in the mutually interdependent world. In this respect, the FOIP can be regarded as international public goods among democratic countries. As a matter of fact, Japan's FOIP vision is composed of the following three pillars for international cooperation: 1) promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and fundamental values, such as democracy, human rights and freedom, 2) economic prosperity including economic integration, such as the CPTPP, the RCEP, and the FTAAP, and 3) commitment for peace and stability, such as disaster relief, peace operations, and non-proliferation. Obviously, these three pillars of Japan's FOIP vision are consistent with liberal perspectives for international cooperation. In other words, the liberalist aspects indicate that Japan's FOIP vision can peacefully coexist with China's BRI.

From the constructivist viewpoint, Japan's FOIP vision is fundamentally connected with its national identity as one of the countries in the Indo-Pacific region. As an Indo-Pacific country, Japan's diplomatic ties with its neighbouring countries are of significance, given Japan's past as a military aggressor during the Asia Pacific War. Japan's FOIP vision might be considered to be a similar strategic initiative tantamount to the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere that the Empire of Japan facilitated in the pre-war and wartime periods. At the same time, however, a constructivist aspect suggests that Japan's FOIP could be congruous with China's BRI, and the peaceful coexistence of the two strategic visions could be achievable even under the anarchic region, although a possible military clash between the two strategic initiatives cannot be ruled out. A trigger of the international confrontation would be their territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The territorial dispute, therefore, needs to be resolved for the sake of the peaceful coexistence of the two strategic visions in the Indo-Pacific region. In conclusion, Japan's FOIP contains both realist and liberal elements that construct Japan's relational identity as an Indo-Pacific state. The clash of the two strategic visions is not unavoidable, so long as Japan would continue to properly balance both realist and liberal goals, namely international competition and international cooperation, for the purpose of peaceful coexistence in the Indo-Pacific region.

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