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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unravelling military aggression: Ontological insecurity, great power narcissism, and Japan's international relations, 1868–1971

Linus Hagström [ORCID]

Department of Political Science, Swedish Defence University, Stockholm, Sweden
Email: linus.hagstrom@fhs.se

Abstract

This article examines the extent to which or how self-identified great powers resort to military aggression following events that challenge their sense of greatness. It problematises the prevalent notion that great powers and events exist and have effects independently of the narratives that constitute them. The article does this by engaging with Ontological Security Studies, Great Power Narcissism, and the psychology of vulnerable and grandiose narcissism, as well as by analysing Japanese identity narratives in two periods seemingly marked by equally challenging events – the Meiji era (1868–1912) and the post-war period (1950–71). It finds that Japan's military aggression against China in 1894–5 was enabled by vulnerable narratives of shame and insult, while the decision to wage war with Russia a decade later was facilitated more by grandiose narratives. Despite Japan's overwhelming defeat in the Second World War and the persistent desire among conservative elites for great power status and identity, however, overall post-war narratives did not feature similarly negative emotions and calls for revenge. Japanese great power aspirations were arguably curtailed in this period through intense narrative contestation, notably progressive counter-narratives featuring more self-reflective expressions of guilt and remorse, and even the self-reflexive desire for a *non*-great power identity.

Introduction

To what extent or how do self-identified great powers wage military aggression following events that disrupt their sense of greatness? This article aims to interrogate the analytical relationship between such 'challenging events', typically understood as defeats[1] or power transitions[2] and seen as exacerbated by a problem with status (inconsistency, deficit, immobility, denial, dissatisfaction, or anxiety) or external recognition;[3] the collective surge of 'negative

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[1] E.g. Robert E. Harkavy, 'Defeat, national humiliation, and the revenge motif in international politics', *International Politics*, 37:3 (2000), pp. 345–68; Catherine Lu, 'Shame, guilt and reconciliation after war', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11:3 (2008), pp. 367–83; Joslyn Barnhart, 'The consequences of defeat: The quest for status and morale in the aftermath of war', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65:1 (2021), pp. 195–222.

[2] E.g. Steve Chan, 'Can't get no satisfaction? The recognition of revisionist states', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 4:2 (2004), pp. 207–38; Randall Schweller, 'Rising powers and revisionism in emerging international orders', *Valdai Papers*, 16 (2015), pp. 1–15.

[3] E.g. Steven Ward, 'Race, status, and Japanese revisionism in the early 1930s', *Security Studies*, 22:4 (2013), pp. 607–39; Tudor A. Onea, 'Between dominance and decline: Status anxiety and great power rivalry', *Review of International Studies*, 40:3 (2014),

emotions',[4] such as shame, anger, frustration, humiliation, and resentment; and military aggression, typically linked to the ideologies of revanchism or revisionism. Notorious cases that seem to underscore the significance of this analytical relationship include Nazi Germany's aggression 1939–45,[5] and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine since 2022.[6]

In 2000, Harkavy noted an 'absence of attention' to the interconnections between defeat, humiliation, and revenge.[7] Despite subsequent scholarly contributions, the existing debate remains constrained by the presumption that great powers and events exist and produce effects independently of the narratives that constitute them. Treating status and recognition, or their absence, as objectively measurable, causal factors is equally problematic, as well as surprising if they are to be fully recognised as 'perceptual, positional, and social'.[8]

Moreover, while the existing literature frequently mentions emotions, it treats these as irrelevant, irrational, and/or epiphenomenal, leading to a lack of appreciation and theoretical exploration. Nazi aggression during the Second World War and Russian military aggression against Ukraine again serve as prime examples. Some argue that Germany and Russia were not *genuinely* humiliated, perhaps primarily by the 'events' of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) enlargement in the 1990s and 2000s, respectively.[9] Yet, in each case, military aggression seems to have been politically facilitated by the co-constitution of great power identity with those and other occurrences through emotionally charged narratives that resonated broadly within society.

This article thus contributes by reconceptualising the relationship between challenging events, negative emotions, and the risk that self-identified great powers wage military aggression. It does so by drawing and expanding on Ontological Security Studies (OSS), particularly Great Power Narcissism (GPN). OSS understands the state self as constituted through biographical narratives that strive towards coherence and consistency. Pride prevails when these narratives are experienced as more coherent and consistent; but when they falter, shame emerges.[10] GPN relies on the same two 'master emotions'[11] – pride and shame – but notes the puzzling tension between a desire for and inflated pride in greatness as well as exaggerated shame regarding weakness in great power biographical narratives.

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pp. 125–52; Jonathan Renshon, 'Status deficits and war', *International Organization*, 70:3 (2016), pp. 513–50; Joslyn Barnhart, 'Humiliation and third-party aggression', *World Politics*, 69:3 (2017), pp. 532–68; Barnhart, 'Consequences of defeat'.

[4]Dan Degerman (ed.), *The Politics of Negative Emotion* (Bristol: Bristol University Press).

[5]E.g. Carole Fink, 'German Revisionpolitik, 1919–1933', *Historical Papers/Communications Historiques*, 21:1 (1986), pp. 134–45; Gordon Martel, 'The prehistory of appeasement: Headlam-Morley, the peace settlement and revisionism', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9:3 (1998), pp. 242–65; Lu, 'Shame, guilt and reconciliation'.

[6]E.g. Tanya Narozhna, 'Revisiting the causes of Russian foreign policy changes: Incoherent biographical narrative, recognition and Russia's ontological security-seeking', *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies*, 15:2 (2021), pp. 56–81; Andrej Krickovic, 'Revisionism revisited: Developing a typology for classifying Russia and other revisionist powers', *International Politics*, 59:4 (2022), pp. 616–39; Elias Götz and Jørgen Staun, 'Why Russia attacked Ukraine: Strategic culture and radicalized narratives', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 43:3 (2022), pp. 482–97.

[7]Harkavy, 'Defeat, national humiliation', p. 345.

[8]Jonathan Renshon, 'Status deficits and war', p. 520; see also Onea, 'Dominance and decline', p. 138; Iver B. Neumann and Benjamin De Carvalho, 'Introduction: Small states and status', in Benjamin De Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann (eds), *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1–21 (p. 4). Status research that is neither objectivist nor causationist includes Paul Beaumont, 'Brexit, retrotopia and the perils of post-colonial delusions', *Global Affairs*, 3:4–5 (2017), pp. 379–90; and Pål Røren, 'The belligerent bear: Russia, status orders, and war', *International Security*, 47:4 (2023), pp. 7–49.

[9]Sally Marks, 'Mistakes and myths: The allies, Germany, and the Versailles treaty, 1918–1921', *Journal of Modern History*, 85:3 (2013), pp. 632–59; Anne Applebaum, 'The myth of Russian humiliation', *Washington Post* (17 October 2014), available at: {https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/anne-applebaum-nato-pays-a-heavy-price-for-giving-russia-too-much-credita-true-achievement-under-threat/2014/10/17/5b3a6f2a-5617-11e4-809b-8cc0a295c773_story.html}.

[10]Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[11]Thomas J. Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism, and War* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), pp. 39, 66.

In starting to develop GPN, I have previously argued that this dynamic renders self-identified great powers ontologically *insecure* in a way reminiscent of narcissists. In addition, like narcissists, I have contended that the risk that self-identified great powers wage military aggression is most acute when shame and pride are negotiated within a narrative of insult.[12] However, by conceptualising narcissism as a singular, albeit internally conflicted, construct, my previous research overlooked the distinction between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism and their respective similarities with narratives of shame and pride. This oversight hindered a deeper understanding of how narratives of shame and pride evolve into narratives of insult, triggering aggression. The next section addresses this issue by developing a more nuanced understanding of the narrative forms of GPN and their role in transforming and legitimising action, including vulnerable and grandiose narratives of insult and pathways to military aggression.

The third section begins by examining how challenging events and the ostensible lack of recognition manifest differently in vulnerable and grandiose identity narratives. While maintaining the belief that great power narcissism is pervasive, the section then revisits the assumption in OSS that state identities can be negotiated more self-reflexively, exploring the possibility that seemingly challenging events might not always trigger negative emotions and aggression, even among self-identified great powers. The section distinguishes between self-reflexivity and self-reflectivity, clarifying that while often conflated, they do not fully align. The article thus draws a parallel between narcissism and self-reflexivity/self-reflectivity, suggesting that these concepts can equally contribute to understanding the narratives through which states and great powers are imagined and perpetuated.

After outlining the method and material in the fourth section, two empirical sections undertake a 'plausibility probe' to establish whether the proposed theorisation warrants further attention.[13] These sections analyse Japanese identity narratives during two periods equally characterised by seemingly challenging events: the Meiji era (1868–1912), after Japan's forced opening up; and the post-war period (1950–71), from defeat in the Second World War until the two Nixon shocks, just after Japan had become the world's second-largest economy.

Was Japan really a great power in the Meiji era, let alone in the early post-war period? The article does not advocate objectivist indicators but demonstrates that dominant Japanese identity narratives have consistently expressed pride in and a desire for greatness, as well as shame related to weakness.[14] It concludes that Imperial Japan's military aggression against China in 1894–5 was closely associated with narratives characterised by vulnerable great power narcissism, while the decision to go to war with Russia a decade later was underpinned more by grandiose narratives.

Despite Japan's overwhelming defeat in the Second World War and a persistent desire for great power status and identity among conservative elites – not always recognised in the existing literature[15] – post-war biographical narratives did not exhibit similar negative emotions or calls for revenge. The article finds that Japanese great power ambitions were curtailed in this period through intense narrative contestation. The concluding section addresses the implications for Japan's security policy in the 21st century – another period marked by seemingly challenging events – and suggests avenues for future research.

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[12]Linus Hagström, 'Great power narcissism and ontological (in)security: The narrative mediation of greatness and weakness in international politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 65:2 (2021), pp. 331–42. Naude rightly notes that all states can adopt ego defences. However, a broad application of narcissism in IR inadvertently risks normalising the exaggerated narratives and violent behaviours that are associated with self-identified great powers. See Bianca Naude, *Revisiting State Personhood and World Politics: Identity, Personality, and the IR Subject* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 17, 170.

[13]Harry Eckstein, *Regarding Politics: Essays on Political Theory, Stability, and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 148–52.

[14]Miller adheres to more objectivist assumptions but concurs that great powers are distinguished, in part, by narratives about achieving such status and identity. Manjari Chatarjee Miller, *Why Nations Rise: Narratives and the Path to Great Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 25.

[15]Ibid., pp. 69–70. An exception is Ayşe Zarakol, 'Ontological (in)security and state denial of historical crimes: Turkey and Japan', *International Relations*, 24:1 (2010), pp. 3–23 (p. 17).

In addition to the points outlined above, the article makes two empirical contributions to the OSS literature on Japan. First, it emphasises that Japan's struggle with ontological insecurity is not solely rooted in misrecognition or identity threats[16] but is also intricately connected to lingering Japanese great power desires since the Meiji restoration. Consequently, the frustrated oscillation between shame associated with weakness and pride in greatness in Japanese biographical narratives is not merely a product of 'comparisons to the West'[17] but is arguably intrinsic to great power narcissism, understood as a socially and narratively produced predicament of self-identified great powers. Second, it identifies certain domestic sources of ontological security in progressive counter-narratives featuring self-reflective expressions of guilt and remorse as well as the more self-reflexive desire for a *non*-great power identity in the post-war period. It proposes these as a potential remedy to great power narcissism, thus supplementing previous propositions that the Japanese self could learn from its Okinawan other to live with its alleged weakness or, alternately, seek a cure for its Westphalian desires in East Asian medicine.[18]

The narrative forms of vulnerable and grandiose Great Power Narcissism

According to psychological research, the distinction between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism reflects the contradictory nature inherent in narcissistic personalities. Both forms exhibit 'grandiose fantasies and expectations about the self, a sense of entitlement, and a willingness to exploit other[s]',[19] while also harbouring chronic, underlying shame.[20] While personality and self-identification processes can oscillate between vulnerable and grandiose *expressions*,[21] developing each in an 'ideal type' fashion remains helpful.[22]

Vulnerable narcissism, first, is marked by shame stemming from failed attempts to inflate 'hubristic pride'.[23] This is manifest through expressions emphasising the self's inferiority, inadequacy, and helplessness, reflecting a lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, and 'hypersensitivity and disappointment stemming from unmet entitled expectations'.[24] Adapted to GPN, expressions of shame feature most prominently in a *narrative of shame*. In that context, it typically enables a political agenda premised on self-restoration or self-betterment, and the mobilisation of resources

[16] Karl Gustafsson, 'Identity and recognition: Remembering and forgetting the post-war in Sino-Japanese relations', *The Pacific Review*, 28:1 (2015), pp. 117–38; Shogo Suzuki, 'Japanese revisionists and the "Korea threat": Insights from ontological security', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32:3 (2019), pp. 303–21.

[17] Zarakol, 'Ontological (in)security', p. 20.

[18] Carmina Yu Untalan, 'Decentering the self, seeing like the other: Toward a postcolonial approach to ontological security', *International Political Sociology*, 14:1 (2020), pp. 40–56; Nina C. Krickel-Choi, Ching-Chang Chen, and Alexander Bukh, 'Embodying the state differently in a Westphalian world: An ontological exit for the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute', *Third World Quarterly*, 45:6 (2024), pp. 1122–40.

[19] Ryo Okada, 'The relationship between vulnerable narcissism and aggression in Japanese undergraduate students', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 49:2 (2010), pp. 113–8 (p. 113).

[20] Andrew P. Morrison, *Shame: The Underside of Narcissism* (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1989); Richard W. Robins, Jessica L. Tracy, and Phillip R. Shaver, 'Shamed into self-love: Dynamics, roots, and functions of narcissism', *Psychological Inquiry*, 12:4 (2001), pp. 230–6; Jessica L. Tracy, Joey T. Cheng, Jason P. Martens, and Richard W. Robins, 'The emotional dynamics of narcissism: Inflated by pride, deflated by shame', in W. Keith Campbell and Joshua D. Miller (eds), *Handbook of Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality: Theoretical Approaches, Empirical Findings, and Treatments* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011), pp. 330–43; Agnieszka Golec de Zavala, Aleksandra Cichocka, Roy Eidelson, and Nuwan Jayawickreme, 'Collective narcissism and its social consequences', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97:6 (2009), pp. 1074–96 (p. 1091).

[21] Kenneth N. Levy, William D. Ellison, and Joseph S. Reynoso, 'A historical review of narcissism and narcissistic personality', in W. Keith Campbell and Joshua D. Miller (eds), *The Handbook of Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality: Theoretical Approaches, Empirical Findings, and Treatments* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011), pp. 3–13 (p. 9).

[22] Max Weber '"Objectivity" in social science and social policy', in Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (eds), *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949), pp. 49–112 (pp. 92–3).

[23] Stephanie D. Freis, Ashley A. Brown, Patrick J. Carroll, and Robert M. Arkin, 'Shame, rage, and unsuccessful motivated reasoning in vulnerable narcissism', *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 34:10 (2015), pp. 877–95.

[24] Kelly A. Dickinson and Aaron L. Pincus, 'Interpersonal analysis of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism', *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 17:3 (2003), pp. 188–207 (p. 189).

aimed at approximating the desired/threatened sense of greatness, primarily through military, economic, industrial, cultural, and/or social reforms.[25] The prevalence of 'shame about shame', however, means that shame is seldom on full display.[26] Hence, consistent with the definition of narcissism, a narrative of shame also reflects entitlement and latent pride. Previous research indicates that small state biographical narratives tend to highlight alternative sources of pride,[27] a trend that is mirrored in the case of self-identified great powers, particularly when that status and identity have openly become the objects of shame. In the realm of international politics, such a *compensatory narrative of pride* may for example feature boasts about soft power.[28]

Grandiose narcissism, by contrast, is characterised by 'hubristic pride'.[29] This is manifest through expressions emphasising the self's superiority, uniqueness, and privilege, as well as its 'status, power, dominance, and physical beauty'.[30] It is reflected in arrogance, an exaggerated sense of self-importance, attention-seeking behaviour, self-aggrandisement, and 'little observable anxiety'.[31] Adapted to GPN, these features signify a *narrative of pride*, often by boasting about traditional markers of a great power, such as military, economic, and industrial power, large territory, and a glorious past. Originally conceptualised as a separate narrative form,[32] denial is better subsumed within a narrative of pride, since the grandiose palette includes 'denial of weaknesses'.[33] Consistent with the definition of narcissism, moreover, shame linked to weakness is also reflected in a narrative of pride, albeit in a latent and indirectly discernible manner.

Associated with anger, hostility, and aggression, the third narrative form of GPN – *a narrative of insult* – is consequential in the context of this article.[34] When shame linked to weakness cannot be verbally denied through a narrative of pride or mitigated through talk about reform in a narrative of shame, the self faces a threat of annihilation. In such circumstances, self-representations of weakness and greatness, along with their associated feelings of shame and pride, tend to be mediated through a narrative of insult. This may involve blaming others for a lack of recognition, which can lead to calls for revenge.[35] Similarly, narcissists become 'angry and aggressive after *experiencing* a social rejection'.[36] To maintain a sense of superiority, they resort to aggression, comprising 'any behavior intended to harm another'.[37] Groups that endorse narcissistic beliefs are similarly prone to 'retaliate to *imagined* provocations against the ingroup'.[38] Adapted to the realm of great power politics, a narrative of insult is thus believed to enable actions aimed at demonstrating that a self-identified great power truly deserves this status and identity.

[25]Hagström, 'Great power narcissism', p. 336.

[26]Thomas J. Scheff, 'Social-emotional origins of violence: A theory of multiple killing', *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 16:6 (2011), pp. 453–60.

[27]Neumann and De Carvalho, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[28]Hagström, 'Great power narcissism', p. 336.

[29]Morrison, *Shame*; Robins et al., 'Shamed into self-love'.

[30]Avi Besser and Beatriz Priel, 'Grandiose narcissism versus vulnerable narcissism in threatening situations: Emotional reactions to achievement failure and interpersonal rejection', *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 29:8 (2010), pp. 874–902 (p. 876).

[31]Levy, Ellison, and Reynoso, 'Historical review', p. 9.

[32]Hagström, 'Great power narcissism', p. 336.

[33]Dickinson and Pincus, 'Interpersonal analysis', p. 189.

[34]When conceptualising the connection between humiliation and revenge in international politics, both Scheff and Harkavy anticipated this move by alluding to 'narcissistic rage'. Scheff, *Bloody Revenge*, p. 67; Harkavy, 'Defeat, national humiliation', pp. 356–7.

[35]Hagström, 'Great power narcissism', p. 337.

[36]Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, '"Isn't it fun to get the respect that we're going to deserve?": Narcissism, social rejection, and aggression', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29:2 (2003), pp. 261–72 (p. 261, italics added).

[37]Brad J. Bushman and Sander Thomaes, 'When the narcissistic ego deflates, narcissistic aggression inflates', in W. Keith Campbell and Joshua D. Miller (eds), *The Handbook of Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality: Theoretical Approaches, Empirical Findings, and Treatments* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011), pp. 319–29 (p. 325).

[38]Agnieszka Golec de Zavala, Karolina Dyduch-Hazar, and Dorottya Lantos, 'Collective narcissism: Political consequences of investing self-worth in the ingroup's image', *Political Psychology*, 40:S1 (2019), pp. 37–74 (p. 37, italics added).

How narratives of shame and pride transform into a narrative of insult centred on the negative emotions of insult/humiliation and enable great power aggression, however, is somewhat unclear.[39] This is where the distinction between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism proves particularly helpful. To begin with, vulnerable narcissism is described as fuelling 'suspiciousness, dejection, and angry rumination' and as a 'powerful driver' of anger, hostility and aggression.[40] Vulnerable narcissists are sensitive to social evaluation and perceived rejection or betrayal; they become 'upset or angry when they do not receive what they think they deserve'.[41] They openly struggle with shame and are more dissatisfied and frustrated than grandiose narcissists. Since they seldom experience a steep drop in self-esteem, however, expressions of anger and hostility may be sufficient to restore some pride, at least temporarily. Moreover, their aggression can also be 'covert and indirect'.[42] These insights could help to explain why some self-identified great powers wage military aggression towards weaker and previously uninvolved third-party actors when experiencing humiliation.[43] The article posits that such a scenario is most plausible when great power identity narratives are characterised more by vulnerable narcissism.

Vulnerable narcissism is also associated with 'unrelenting resentment'.[44] Resentment figures prominently in scholarship on the links between events, revisionism, and aggression.[45] Closely related to anger and envy, resentment stems from 'a sense of loss of entitlement, regard and position … in comparison and relations with others',[46] particularly when that loss is interpreted as unjust. It is a more persistent form of anger than humiliation. This article proposes that narratives of insult may express resentment when the capacity to restore some pride through aggression is deemed insufficient. Therefore, resentment is also expected to surface more frequently when a self-identified great power's biographical narratives are characterised by vulnerable narcissism.

By contrast, grandiose narcissists wage aggression when suffering 'a blow to their ego', the risk of which is greatest when their self-esteem is most inflated.[47] Grandiose narcissists act aggressively 'to maintain their inflated view of the self'.[48] Those who construct identity based on exaggerated pride may be less sensitive to shaming and stigmatisation in the first place. However, in cases where denial fails to restore a sense of pride, the drop in self-esteem can be experienced as steep, thereby propelling violent aggression. Tracy et al. suggest that this emotional and behavioural pattern cannot be explained without considering narcissists' struggle with shame: 'If narcissists genuinely believe their aggrandised self-representations, it is not clear why they would need to defend them so fiercely, rather than brush off any critique or insult.'[49] Similarly, there is a risk of violent aggression when self-identified great powers 'face' challenging events at a time when their identity narratives are at their most inflated. This article conjectures that such aggression might also be waged against those identified as 'peers'. Building on the above discussion, Table 1 identifies indicators for the various narrative forms, adapted to the psychology of vulnerable and grandiose narcissism.

In originally conceptualising GPN, I positioned the uneasy oscillation between exaggerated shame and pride within psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's 'fantasmatic' narrative structure, which

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[39]Hagström, 'Great power narcissism', p. 337.

[40]Zlatan Krizan and Omesh Johar, 'Narcissistic rage revisited', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108:5 (2015), pp. 784–801 (p. 784).

[41]Freis et al., 'Shame, rage', p. 878.

[42]Okada, 'Relationship between vulnerable narcissism and aggression', p. 117.

[43]Onea, 'Dominance and decline', pp. 127–8; Barnhart, 'Humiliation and third-party aggression'.

[44]Aaron L. Pincus, Nicole M. Cain, and Aiden G. C. Wright, 'Narcissistic grandiosity and narcissistic vulnerability in psychotherapy', *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 5:4 (2014), pp. 439–43 (p. 441).

[45]Fink, 'German Revisionpolitik', p. 135; Chan, 'Can't get no satisfaction', p. 211; Lu, 'Shame, guilt and reconciliation', p. 369; Ward, 'Race, status', pp. 627–8, 631.

[46]Robin Mann and Steve Fenton, *Nation, Class and Resentment: The Politics of National Identity in England, Scotland and Wales* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), p. 33.

[47]Bushman and Thomaes, 'Narcissistic ego deflates', p. 319.

[48]Okada, 'Relationship between vulnerable narcissism and aggression', p. 114.

[49]Tracy et al., 'Emotional dynamics', p. 334.

Table 1. How to recognise the narrative forms of GPN, adapted to vulnerable and grandiose narcissism.

Narrative forms	Narrative indicators
Vulnerable narratives of shame and compensatory pride	Exaggerated expressions of the self's inferiority, vulnerability, low self-esteem, and dissatisfaction combined with expressions of entitlement; typically coexists with the identification of alternative sources of pride, serving as a compensatory narrative of pride
Grandiose narrative of pride	Exaggerated expressions of the self's superiority, privilege, dominance, self-importance, and confidence, as well as explicit denial of weakness; minimal direct signs of shame
Vulnerable narrative of insult	Less intense but more frequent expressions of insult and rejection, feelings of betrayal, anger, hostility, and resentment, along with calls for redress or restoration, all in the context of a vulnerable narrative of shame
Grandiose narrative of insult	More intense but less frequent expressions of insult, rejection, betrayal, anger, and hostility, along with calls for revenge, all in the context of a grandiose narrative of pride

features the juxtaposition of horrific and beatific future scenarios.[50] Clearly, a narrative of shame shares similarities with the horrific scenario. A narrative of pride, by contrast, may seem to offer a complete escape with its beatific scenario, but since shame is believed to drive the desire for pride, it does not. Although self-identified great powers may appear more secure in their status and identity than states identifying as 'small',[51] shame about weakness is reflected in that which exaggerated expressions of pride seek to conceal or refute. Narratives of this kind often carry gendered connotations. This is evident not only in the stark contrast between shameful (feminine) weakness and desired/proud (masculine) strength but also in the association between weakness and feminisation, which is in turn narrated as requiring a strong (male) protector and the projection of masculinist logics of strength.[52]

Finally, while the narrative focus in GPN diverges from mainstream psychological approaches to narcissism, it aligns well with OSS scholarship,[53] narrative psychology,[54] and collective narcissism research.[55] In addition, scholars agree that emotions are detectable through 'the systematic analysis of discourse'.[56] The assumption of a narrative ontology applies to both people and states,[57] although state ontology is arguably characterised by greater narrative contestation and uncertainty.[58]

Revisiting the link between events, emotions, and aggression

The existing research on the links between events, emotions, and aggression does not engage with the realist concept of external/exogenous/strategic 'shock' but could do so given its objectivist

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[50]Hagström, 'Great power narcissism', pp. 332–3; see Jakub Eberle, 'Desire as geopolitics: Reading *The Glass Room* as Central European fantasy', *International Political Sociology,* 12:2 (2018), pp. 172–89; Jakub Eberle, 'Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression: Fantasy as a factor in international politics', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 22:1 (2019), pp. 243–68.

[51]Neumann and De Carvalho, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[52]Christine Agius, Annika Bergman Rosamond, and Catarina Kinnvall, 'Populism, ontological insecurity and gendered nationalism: Masculinity, climate denial and Covid-19', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 21:4 (2020), pp. 432–50.

[53]E.g. Steele, *Ontological Security*.

[54]E.g. Michele L. Crossley, 'Narrative psychology, trauma and the study of self/identity', *Theory & Psychology*, 10:4 (2000), pp. 527–46.

[55]E.g. Zavala et al., 'Collective narcissism and its social consequences'.

[56]Scheff, *Bloody Revenge*, p. 8; see also Simon Koschut, Todd H. Hall, Reinhard Wolf, Ty Solomon, Emma Hutchison, and Roland Bleiker, 'Discourse and emotions in international relations', *International Studies Review*, 19:3 (2017), pp. 481–508.

[57]E.g. Margaret R. Somers, 'The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach', *Theory and Society*, 23:5 (1994), pp. 605–49; Erik Ringmar, 'On the ontological status of the state', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2:4 (1996), pp. 439–66.

[58]Adam B. Lerner, 'What's it like to be a state? An argument for state consciousness', *International Theory*, 13:2 (2021), pp. 260–86.

inclinations and the realist anticipation that such shocks cause the 'use of force' or 'force generation'.[59] The OSS equivalent of a shock, termed a 'critical situation', is defined in markedly less objectivist terms as a situation in which 'states are overwhelmed with anxiety due to their inability to maintain their self-identity narratives'.[60] Critical situations may thus seem narratively constructed 'all the way down'. However, Ejdus and others suggest that certain events – notably 'power transitions' – are more likely to trigger narrative ruptures than others.[61] They thus portray critical situations as events that states 'face' and must react to partly by constructing narratives,[62] rather than being narratively constructed from the outset.

Narrative psychologists similarly understand some life events – such as receiving an HIV diagnosis or enduring chronic pain – as inherently traumatic.[63] However, if critical situations are indeed constituted as part of identity narratives, certain occurrences that may not appear inherently shameful, humiliating, or insulting might still be narratively constituted as such, and vice versa. Recall again the cases of interwar Germany and contemporary Russia.

Moreover, a lack of recognition – especially from a significant other – is often said to intensify a critical situation and generate ontological insecurity.[64] As noted above, recognition often figures as an intervening variable between events, emotions, and aggression. While the actual or empirically identifiable lack of recognition *can* undoubtedly intensify negative emotions, GPN conceptualises shame regarding weakness as a more intrinsic feature of great power self-identification and ontological security-seeking than is typically acknowledged – hence the relevance of narcissism. Narcissists are described as 'so highly attuned to ego threat or social rejection that they perceive threats where none are intended'.[65]

By not granting *actual* recognition and its absence a greater analytical role, the above discussion might seem to downplay social relations. However, great power identity narratives undeniably feature relational comparisons in hierarchical terms, such as 'we are greater than x but weaker than y'. Additionally, 'collective beliefs' clearly underlie the projected desires and accompanying frustrations.[66] As Vulović and Eberle elucidate through Lacan, 'states do not just decide to desire a random object,'[67] and self-identified great powers primarily desire great power status and identity.[68] These signifiers are integral to master narratives within the symbolic order. The subject identifies 'vicariously' with them to enhance its self-esteem and prestige,[69] 'not least through cementing the state's club/positional status'.[70] Thus, the specific emotional landscape of a self-identified great power is presumed to be socially and narratively produced in the first place, forming part of its predicament.

[59]Håkan Edström, Dennis Gyllensporre, and Jacob Westberg, *Military Strategy of Small States: Responding to External Shocks of the 21st Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), p. 16.

[60]Filip Ejdus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession* (Cham: Springer, 2020), p. 1.

[61]Ibid., p. 19.

[62]E.g. Alicja Curanović and Piotr Szymański, 'Mission saves us all: Great Russia and Global Britain dealing with ontological insecurity', *International Relations* (1 December 2022), available at: {https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178221140093}, pp. 1–25 (pp. 1, 4).

[63]E.g. Crossley, 'Narrative psychology'.

[64]E.g. Jennifer Mitzen, 'Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:3 (2006), pp. 341–70; Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ejdus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity*, p. 19; Narozhna, 'Revisiting the causes'.

[65]Twenge and Campbell, 'Isn't it fun', pp. 261, 271.

[66]William C. Wohlforth, Benjamin de Carvalho, Halvard Leira, and Iver B. Neumann, 'Moral authority and status in international relations: Good states and the social dimension of status seeking', *Review of International Studies*, 44:3 (2018), pp. 526–46 (p. 527).

[67]Marina Vulović and Filip Ejdus, 'Object-cause of desire and ontological security: Evidence from Serbia's opposition to Kosovo's membership in UNESCO', *International Theory,* 16:1 (2024), pp. 122–51 (p. 126).

[68]Ibid., p. 128.

[69]Christopher S. Browning, Pertti Joenniemi, and Brent J. Steele, *Vicarious Identity in International Relations: Self, Security, and Status on the Global Stage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 26; see also Eberle, 'Narrative, desire', p. 246.

[70]Browning, Joenniemi, and Steele, *Vicarious Identity*, p. 70.

To fill the lack, moreover, self-identified great powers yearn for specific 'empirical' objects, typically markers of prominence and reputation *across the board*, perhaps particularly military capabilities and a capacity to project power and use force abroad.[71] In contrast, self-identified small states might primarily desire membership of the imagined West and stable relations with Finland, such as in the case of Sweden, or a sense of 'normality' in international society, such as in the case of Abkhazia. As such, these states have sought to fill their respective lacks by applying for NATO membership and sustaining diplomatic relations with remote and tiny islands, respectively.[72]

Returning to the distinction between vulnerable and grandiose narcissism, the tropes of challenging events and misrecognising others arguably recur more frequently in narratives premised on the former. The same goes for dissatisfaction, the collective surge of which is not necessarily limited to states either 'rising' or 'declining' in an objectivist sense. Instead, the question is when the biographical narrative of a self-identified great power exhibits the most frustration, which may revolve round a 'lack of external recognition' as well as 'relative decline' or 'lost greatness'.[73]

Meanwhile, as Schweller argues, 'while all revolutionary states are dissatisfied, not all dissatisfied states are revolutionary'.[74] GPN thus needs to remain open to the possibility that a narrative of insult could trigger courses of action beyond revisionism and aggression. Resentment is again a case in point, offering a temporary reprieve from aggression. More crucially, however, must great power self-identification and ontological security-seeking remain narcissistic in this way, or could it become more self-reflexive – a potential inherent in the existing OSS scholarship?

In my previous research on GPN, I acknowledged the possibility of more self-reflexive identity narratives, yet I expected them to be marginal where traits 'central to the self's greatness are at stake'.[75] This is arguably because great power identity remains largely 'traditional', whereas reflexive identification is more prevalent in post-traditional societies, hinging on a 'decisive break with tradition' and even 'radical doubt'.[76] Consequently, self-reflexivity is defined as self-awareness or the capacity to turn the attention back on oneself. This entails making 'aspects of the self strange', by 'stay[ing] with personal uncertainty, critically informed curiosity … to consider changing deeply held ways of being'.[77]

Given the high threshold, this article proposes a distinction between self-reflexivity and self-reflectivity. While there is debate over whether these terms denote the same concept, it seems advantageous to view self-reflection as a potential precursor to self-reflexivity.[78] In this context, self-reflection is defined as the capacity to learn from experience 'through examining what we think happened on any occasion, and how we think others perceived the event and us'.[79] This definition resonates with the healthier emotions and peaceful courses of action that some studies have identified even in conjunction with challenging events.

For instance, Lu argues that following a defeat, guilt could 'inspire a transformative, liberating politics of critical self-reflection and political reform', fostering reconciliation.[80] Whereas shame

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[71] Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 7, 19; Wohlforth et al., 'Moral authority and status', p. 530.

[72] Andreas Pacher, 'The diplomacy of post-Soviet de facto states: Ontological security under stigma', *International Relations*, 33:4 (2019), pp. 563–85; Elvira Hjertström Gylling and Linus Hagström, 'Changing identity to remain oneself: Ontological security and the Swedish decision on joining NATO', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, accepted for publication on 17 September 2024.

[73] Steven Ward, 'Logics of stratified identity management in world politics', *International Theory*, 11:2 (2019), pp. 211–38 (p. 216).

[74] Schweller, 'Rising powers', p. 8.

[75] Hagström, 'Great power narcissism', p. 334.

[76] Matthew Adams, 'Reflexive self or reflexivity', in Ronald L. Jackson and Michael A. Hogg (eds), *Encyclopedia of Identity* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), pp. 626–9 (p. 627).

[77] Gillie Bolton, *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), p. 14.

[78] Richard Malthouse, Jodi Roffey-Barentsen, and Mike Watts, 'Reflectivity, reflexivity and situated reflective practice', *Professional Development in Education*, 40:4 (2014), pp. 597–609 (p. 598).

[79] Bolton, *Reflective Practice*, p. 13; see also Malthouse, Roffey-Barentsen, and Watts, 'Reflectivity, reflexivity'.

[80] Lu, 'Shame, guilt and reconciliation', p. 381; see also Harkavy, 'Defeat, national humiliation', p. 362.

Table 2. How to recognise and distinguish between self-reflective and self-reflexive narrative forms.

Narrative forms	Narrative indicators
Self-reflective narratives	Expressions of self-criticism, acknowledgement, confession, or apology (guilt) – or, conversely, confidence, productivity, and self-worth (authentic pride) – related to specific actions or relationships
Self-reflexive narratives	Expressions of more fundamental self-awareness, self-questioning, humility, and acceptance of one's inherent worth

revolves around the self in a general sense, guilt derives from 'a negative evaluation of a specific behavior'. Guilt is thus defined as 'a painful feeling of self-reproach that arises from one's recognition of the (negative) consequences (to significant others) of one's agency'.[81] It can prompt reparative action, including acknowledgement, confession, apology, and efforts to make amends.

According to the psychological literature, self-reflectivity can also manifest in expressions of 'authentic pride' – another 'healthy' emotion, 'marked by feelings of confidence, productivity and self-worth'.[82] Like guilt, authentic pride is directed towards specific behaviours and relationships rather than the self in a broad and abstract sense.[83] By critically questioning the desire to be great or recognising that the self is already 'good enough',[84] however, a narrative of authentic pride can evolve in a more self-reflexive direction. These definitions are operationalised in Table 2.

Finally, a critical perspective has been raised that even self-reflexive practices might not necessarily lead us closer to a 'critical understanding of ourselves',[85] as subjects can hardly engage in such understandings autonomously of the master narratives that constitute them.[86] Consequently, the goal might need to be more modest: the substitution of 'destructive fantasies' with ones that are less harmful.[87] This is again where the additional focus on self-reflectivity might prove useful.

Method and material

In any empirical setting, multiple identity narratives reflecting diverse narrative forms are expected to coexist and compete for dominance. Empirical analysis, therefore, necessitates a wide array of sources, also representing the wider public. However, obtaining such empirical material presents challenges, particularly for the Meiji era (1868–1912). Therefore, this article focuses on more readily accessible elite narratives. While some scholars suggest that elites can craft narratives about decline and humiliation more or less at will,[88] elite narratives and their embedded emotions are arguably better understood as co-constituted with broader societal narratives.[89] From a Lacanian perspective, certain emotional narratives gain resonance and persist exactly because they tap into

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[81] June Price Tangney, Jeffrey Stuewig, and Debra J. Mashek, 'What's moral about the self-conscious emotions?', in Jessica L. Tracy, Richard W. Robins, and June Price Tangney (eds), *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), pp. 21–37 (p. 25).

[82] Tracy et al., 'Emotional dynamics', p. 335.

[83] Jessica L. Tracy and Richard W. Robins, 'The nature of pride', in Jessica L. Tracy, Richard W. Robins, and June Price Tangney (eds), *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), pp. 263–82.

[84] Morrison, *Shame*, p. 63.

[85] Mark E. Button, 'Reflexivity beyond subjectivism: From Descartes to Dewey', in Jack L. Amoureux and Brent J. Steele (eds), *Reflexivity in International Relations: Positionality, Critique and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 264–71 (p. 268).

[86] Adams, 'Reflexive self or reflexivity', p. 628.

[87] Vulović and Ejdus, 'Object-cause of desire', p. 25; Linus Hagström and Niklas Bremberg, 'Aikido and world politics: A practice theory for transcending the security dilemma', *European Journal of International Relations*, 28:2 (2022), pp. 263–86.

[88] Beaumont, 'Brexit, retrotopia', p. 380; Andrew Q. Greve and Jack S. Levy, 'Power transitions, status dissatisfaction, and war: The Sino-Japanese war of 1894–95', *Security Studies*, 27:1 (2018), pp. 148–78 (pp. 156–7); Agius, Bergman Rosamond, and Kinnvall, 'Populism, ontological insecurity', pp. 433–4; Robert Ralston, 'Make us great again: The causes of declinism in major powers', *Security Studies*, 31:4 (2022), pp. 667–702 (pp. 673–8).

[89] Naude, *Revisiting State Personhood*, pp. 39–43.

widely shared desires and anxieties[90] – in the case of self-identified great powers not least the desire for full and undisputed great power status and identity, as well as anxieties related to unfulfilled aspirations. Notably, in the case of Meiji Japan, foreign visitors to were struck 'by the way in which governments and people appeared to be struggling for common goals such as national strengthening and well-being.'[91] Moreover, even competing narratives can share common themes. For instance, most great power narratives are marked by pride in and a desire for greatness as well as shame regarding weakness.

In both periods, the selection of historical textual materials is driven by the objective of minimising investigator bias and unjustified selectivity.[92] The analysis of the Meiji era relies on the writings and recorded statements of prominent officials and intellectuals, in material accessed in English. The focus on educator and journalist Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) and historian and journalist Tokutomi Sohō (1863–1957) might appear disproportionate. However, Fukuzawa was the leading intellectual in the early Meiji era, and his writings sold millions of copies. He was the voice of *Meiroku zasshi* (*Meiji Six Journal*), a defining Japanese publication of the 1870s.[93] Similarly, Tokutomi's periodical *Kokumin no tomo* (*The People's Friend*) was hugely popular in the 1890s, and 'a great many Japanese, perhaps even most, shared his views at every turn.'[94] Drawing on secondary sources, I seek to make informed assessments about which identity narratives dominated in Japan during this period.

The analysis of elite narratives in the post-war period (1950–71) relies on the 'general policy speeches' (*shisei hōshin enzetsu* or *shoshin hyōmei enzetsu*) delivered by prime ministers from the Liberal Democratic Party (LPD) at the opening of extraordinary Diet sessions, having been elected in a special session or appointed during an ordinary session.[95] In these speeches, prime ministers typically reflect on Japan's past and outline their visions for its future. To capture narrative diversity, the analysis also includes the response speeches by a member of the main opposition party, during the period of investigation the Japan Socialist Party (JSP). The use of more consistent material in this period is facilitated by the relative ease with which post-war prime ministers' speeches can be analysed by someone able to read contemporary Japanese. Findings are again contextualised and triangulated using secondary sources.

Narrative analysis is conducted with the goal of distinguishing, first, between narcissistic and self-reflective or even self-reflexive narratives; and second, between different narrative forms. Rather than singling out complete narratives from each source, the analysis adopts an 'approach of aggregation'.[96] The focus is on how key actors, events, and solutions are described and emplotted using emotional language. A narrative is considered dominant if a 'critical mass of social actors' is emotionally invested in it and uncritically reproduces it.[97] The historical analysis in this article

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[90]Ty Solomon, *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), p. 26.

[91]Akira Iriye, 'Japan's drive to great power status', in Marius B. Jansen (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5: The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 721–82 (p. 736).

[92]Cameron G. Thies, 'A pragmatic guide to qualitative historical analysis in the study of international relations', *International Studies Perspectives*, 3:4 (2002), pp. 351–72.

[93]Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 78–9.

[94]John D. Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō, 1863–1957: A Journalist for Modern Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 6.

[95]These speeches were held three times in 1950, twice per year for several years in the 1950s and early 1960s, and annually between 1962 and 1971. All Diet material was accessed through the *Kokkai Gijiroku*, available at: {https://kokkai.ndl.go.jp}.

[96]Linus Hagström, Charlotte Wagnsson, and Magnus Lundström, 'Logics of othering: Sweden as other in the time of COVID-19', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 58:3 (2023), pp. 315–334 (p. 322).

[97]Jelena Subotić, 'Narrative, ontological security, and foreign policy change', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 12:4 (2016), pp. 610–27 (p. 615).

also inevitably assumes a narrative form, the structure of which is shaped by the theoretical themes introduced above.[98]

The Meiji Era, 1868–1912

The analysis in this section proceeds chronologically from the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, and then from the war until the end of the Meiji era in 1912, exemplifying in turn more vulnerable and grandiose narratives.

Vulnerable narratives (1868–94)

During the early Meiji era, a dominant narrative of shame portrayed Japan as weak, inferior, and subordinate and reflected dissatisfaction with this predicament.[99] This revolved around the forced signing of unequal treaties with the United States and European powers in 1854 and 1858, following the arrival of US ships in 1853 – 'events' that contemporary Japanese leaders characterised as shameful, insulting, and a 'disgrace'.[100] The sense of shame was arguably reinforced by the prevailing social Darwinism, which depicted the Japanese as racially 'inferior to Caucasians'.[101]

At the same time, Japanese elites – notably Fukuzawa in his 1875 book – complained that the public failed to 'realize' the extent of their weakness.[102] As a solution, Fukuzawa proposed that Japan should not only prioritise material progress – military, economic, and infrastructural – but also adopt Western ideals, legal systems, and political institutions.[103] More than a decade later, Tokutomi Sohō advanced a similar narrative of shame: 'Japan, like China, is backward and weak; Japan's position in the world is perilous.'[104]

Meanwhile, most Japanese elites did not accept the country's weakness as natural but saw their country as destined to achieve parity with, and preferably surpass, the existing great powers. Hence, a sense of indignation narratively intertwined with entitlement and the desire to become a great power,[105] or a 'country of the first rank' (*ittō koku*).[106] 'The West' was construed as both threatening and an object of desire, and Japanese elite narratives vicariously identified with it to foster independence and civilisation,[107] and to create a 'rich country, strong army' (*fukoku kyōhei*).[108] Fukuzawa, for instance, aimed to elevate 'Japanese civilization to parity with the West, or even … surpassing it'.[109] In the early 1880s, two army generals expressed similar entitlement, stating that 'Japan's aim in maintaining armed forces is … that of the first-class powers'.[110]

From the late 1870s, a compensatory narrative of pride emerged, praising Japan's allegedly unique history, culture, and identity.[111] Motoda Eifu (1818–91), Confucian tutor to Emperor

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[98] Hayden White, 'The question of narrative in contemporary historical theory', *History and Theory*, 23:1 (1984), pp. 1–33.

[99] Eiji Oguma, *A Genealogy of Japanese Self-Images* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2002), pp. xix, 11, 331.

[100] Ward, 'Race, status', p. 625; see also Iriye, 'Japan's drive', p. 737.

[101] Carmina Yu Untalan, 'Perforating colour lines: Japan and the problem of race in the "non-West"', *Review of International Studies* (31 October 2023), available at: {https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210523000566}, pp. 1–19 (p. 14).

[102] Fukuzawa Yukichi, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* [Bunmeiron no gairyaku], trans. David A. Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [1875]), p. 236, see also pp. 23, 247–53.

[103] Ibid., pp. 23, 252–3.

[104] Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō*, p. 199.

[105] Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 335.

[106] John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 44.

[107] Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 2, 118, 137.

[108] Gordon, *Modern History*, pp. 70–3.

[109] Fukuzawa, *Outline of a Theory*, p. 2; see also p. 20.

[110] Jansen, *Making of Modern Japan*, p. 400.

[111] Sandra Wilson, 'The discourse of national greatness in Japan, 1890–1919', *Japanese Studies*, 25:1 (2005), pp. 35–51 (p. 37).

Meiji, claimed in 1879 that Japan possessed superior moral values absent in 'foreign civilization'.[112] Such narratives occasionally linked history and culture with race, showing that the latter was not only an object of shame.[113] Moreover, by the mid-1880s, there was increasing concern that Japan might forsake its 'cultural soul' by emulating the Western powers.[114]

Another compensatory narrative of pride emphasised Japan's superiority over Asia, particularly China, which Fukuzawa deemed 'not equal to Japan'.[115] These depictions assigned gender roles to Japan and China, depicting them as masculine and feminine, respectively.[116] Fukuzawa urged Japan to 'depart' from Asia to demonstrate its inherent strength and distinctiveness.[117] Similarly, Tokutomi described Japan as the 'most progressive, developed, civilized, and powerful nation in the Orient', which nonetheless 'cannot escape the scorn of the white people'.[118]

In 1893, a year before the Sino-Japanese War, journalist and statesman Shimada Saburō (1852–1923) stated that Russia, China, or Japan would eventually conquer Korea, which he described as 'a vassal state'.[119] Comparing Japan to a European great power like Russia reflected a nascent narrative of pride. As early as 1891, Tokutomi asserted: 'we are above Spain and abreast of Italy',[120] explaining that Japan's 'productivity is higher than that of France, Spain, Italy and Austria'.[121] However, there was also 'shame about shame', and he lamented the people's lack of confidence, stating that some Japanese 'place us in the ranks of ruined nations like Turkey, Egypt, and Persia'.[122]

A narrative of insult strengthened towards the end of the period, shifting the focus from a fear of being conquered and colonised to a fear of being unable to conquer and colonise other states.[123] This emerged primarily around the unequal treaties. Statesman Iwakura Tomomi (1825–83) wrote in the early 1870s that the treaties 'disgraced the Japanese Empire', asserting: 'We should not endure the affront.'[124] Journalist Kuga Katsunan (1857–1907) echoed this sentiment in 1889, declaring: 'If we tolerate interference, we shall be classed with Turkey and Egypt.'[125] While initially appearing to be a narrative of shame, this can also be interpreted as a call to action. However, the widespread resentment towards the 'Western' great powers suggests that contemporary elites believed Japan was still incapable of alleviating the sense of insult.[126]

Grandiose narratives (1894–1912)

In the 1890s, the narrative of insult intensified, resentfully targeting both the lack of respect from the great powers in the imagined West and China's lingering and increasingly unwarranted

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[112]Jansen, *Making of Modern Japan*, p. 405.

[113]Jennifer Robertson, 'Blood talks: Eugenic modernity and the creation of new Japanese', *History and Anthropology,* 13:3 (2002), pp. 191–216 (pp. 197–8).

[114]Gordon, *A Modern History*, p. 110.

[115]Fukuzawa, *Outline of a Theory*, p. 29.

[116]Untalan, 'Perforating colour lines', p. 13.

[117]Fukuzawa Yukichi, 'On departure from Asia' [*Datsu-A Ron*], trans. Sinh Vinh, *Fukuzawa Yukichi zenshū, Vol. XI* (Tōkyō: Fukuzawa Yukichi kyōkai, 1984 [1885]), pp. 3–4; Urs Matthias Zachman, *China and Japan in the Late Meiji Period: China Policy and the Japanese Discourse on National Identity, 1852–1904* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 24.

[118]Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō*, p. 229.

[119]Stewart Lone, *Japan's First Modern War: Army and Society in the Conflict with China, 1894–95* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), p. 59.

[120]Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō*, p. 200.

[121]Tokutomi Soho, 'Idai naru kokumin' [The great (Japanese) people], *Kokumin no Tomo*, 23 May, in *Fukuzawa Yukichi, Nakae Chōmin, Okakura Tenshin, Tokutomi Sohō, Miyake Setsurei shū* (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 1891 [1980]).

[122]Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō*, p. 199.

[123]Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō*, pp. 226–7; Lone, *Japan's First Modern War*, p. 29.

[124]Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonialization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), p. 50.

[125]Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 115.

[126]Ward, 'Race, status', p. 627; see also Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire*, p. 179.

condescension towards Japan.[127] Zachman notes that the 'public bristled with just indignation and called for war' with China.[128] Tokutomi, for example, emphasised that Japan should fight 'to determine once and for all … [its] position in the world'. He construed military aggression as a means of proving Japan's greatness and dispelling 'all previous misconceptions' through 'a brilliant victory'. These 'misconceptions' allegedly amounted to the Japanese being a race 'close to monkeys'.[129] Similarly, statesman Soejima Taneomi (1828–1905) advocated war to make Japan 'strong'.[130] Japan declared war on China on 1 August 1894, following a series of events tangibly centred on control over Korea.

After the war, a narrative of pride gained prominence, revolving around Japan's political, economic, and military progress, in particular the military victory, treaty revisions, and Japan's annexation of Taiwan in 1895. Elites increasingly framed Japan as 'a world power' and equal to other great powers.[131] Tokutomi expressed satisfaction that 'we have tested our strength, we know ourselves and we are known by the world. Moreover, we *know* that we are known by the world!'[132] Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu (1844–97) remarked that Japan had 'commanded the world's respect' and become 'the object of some envy'.[133] Similarly, in 1897, politician Ōkuma Shigenobu declared that Japan was 'recognised as a truly independent Power, and … accorded the treatment of an equal'.[134] Statesman Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) commented that Japan's progress was 'seldom paralleled in the modern history of the world'.[135]

However, the narrative of pride soon became tainted with shame again, especially due to frustration that Japan's victory was 'not crowned with a triumphant entry into Beijing'. Newspaper articles condemned 'the weakness' of the Japanese negotiators of the Treaty of Shimonoseki with China in 1895 for failing to humiliate China or prevent it from becoming a future rival.[136] A more grandiose narrative of insult emerged after the so-called Tripartite Intervention, when Russia, France, and Germany forced Japan to retrocede the Liaodong Peninsula, which it had obtained as a concession from China. Scholars note that feelings of 'bitter shock',[137] humiliation',[138] and 'swollen resentment'[139] fuelled Japan's ambitious rearmament in the late 1890s and later influenced the decision to wage war on Russia in 1904–5 – one of 'revenge' for the intervention, according to Nish.[140]

After the Russo-Japanese War, a narrative of pride again intensified, focusing on Japan's victory over Russia and territorial expansion into Korea in 1910.[141] Japanese elites proudly asserted that 'Japan had finally joined the ranks of the great powers'.[142] According to Iriye: 'That was the moment of glory the Japanese had dreamed of since the humiliating days half a century earlier.'[143] In 1907, for example, Okuma stated that Japan 'has raised itself from its lethargy to such an extent that it has been able to cross swords with a leading military power of the West, has inflicted upon it defeat

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[127]Zachman, *China and Japan*, pp. 26, 30, 33, 153.

[128]Ibid., p. 34.

[129]Pyle, *New Generation*, p. 173; see also Iriye, 'Japan's drive', pp. 762–5.

[130]Zachman, *China and Japan*, p. 25.

[131]Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (New York: Longman, 1985), p. 10; Iriye, 'Japan's drive', p. 767; Wilson, 'Discourse of national greatness', p. 35; Zachman, *China and Japan*, pp. 1, 4, 41, 61; Gordon, *Modern History*, pp. 115–17.

[132]Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō*, pp. 235–6, italics in original.

[133]Lone, *Japan's First Modern War*, p. 45.

[134]Ōkuma Shigenobu, 'Foreign policy', in Alfred Stead (ed.), *Japan by the Japanese: A Survey by Its Highest Authorities* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), pp. 219–22 (p. 221).

[135]Wilson, 'Discourse of national greatness', p. 38.

[136]Zachman, *China and Japan*, p. 36.

[137]Ibid., p. 153.

[138]Nish, *Origins of the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 28; Zachman, *China and Japan*, p. 37.

[139]Nish, *Origins of the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 28.

[140]Ibid., p. 255; see also pp. 28–9; Zachman, *China and Japan*, pp. 36–49, 153–7.

[141]Zachman, *China and Japan*, p. 1.

[142]Wilson, 'Discourse of national greatness', p. 38.

[143]Iriye, 'Japan's drive', p. 777.

after defeat … and has aroused the interest of the whole world'.[144] Soejima similarly concluded that Japan's development was 'probably unprecedented in the world's history,'[145] and Shimada stressed that Japan's position was 'among the great Powers of the world'.[146] Philosopher and author Miyake Setsurei (1860–1945) boasted that Japan's success had 'replicated the 450 years of modern history' but 'within a span of forty-five years.'[147]

Overall, at the outset of this period, Japanese identity narratives began to portray weakness as a flaw that required proactive measures to resolve. In line with the revised version of GPN developed in this article, I thus interpret Japan as waging wars to restore its pride and allegedly rightful place among the 'civilised' and 'Western' great powers. Japan's military aggression initially targeted Asian neighbours rather than the group it sought to join. However, once vulnerable, Japanese identity narratives became more grandiose after the victory in the Sino-Japanese War. A grandiose narrative of insult centred on the trope of revenge arguably helps to elucidate the decision to go to war with Russia, which was identified as a great power 'peer'.

The post-war period, 1950–71

While beyond the scope of this article, secondary sources reveal that Japanese identity narratives in 1913–45 remained rather grandiose but were also tinged with frustration over Japan's status as a 'second-rank' great power, unable 'to impose her conception of justice onto the rest of the world'.[148] To achieve parity with or surpass 'the established "have" powers'[149] and to alleviate the sense of insult, such narratives yet again advocated war.[150] Moreover, Japan's aggression, notably the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, targeted another 'peer', which narratives directly blamed for Japan's predicament.

This section analyses speeches by post-war prime ministers from Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and opposition politicians from the Japan Socialist Party (JSP). It interprets the former as reflecting vulnerable narratives of shame and compensatory pride, and the latter as characterised more by self-reflectivity and, to some extent, self-reflexivity. The section supports Dower's view that 'there was no single or singular "Japanese" response to the defeat apart from a widespread abhorrence of war'.[151] Instead, the period was characterised by narrative contestation and mixed feelings.[152]

Vulnerable narratives (LDP)

During the 1950s, LDP prime ministers portrayed Japan's lack of sovereignty and dependence on the United States as leaving Japan vulnerable and as a source of dissatisfaction. For instance, Yoshida Shigeru (1878–1967) expressed 'alarm' at the 'loss of independence [*dokuritsushin*] and patriotism,'[153] while later celebrating Japan's return to the international community in 1952.[154] Notwithstanding, three years later Hatoyama Ichirō (1883–1959) lamented that Japan was not

[144]Ōkuma Shigenobu, 'A summary of the history of Japan', in Marcus B. Huish (ed.), *Fifty Years of New Japan* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1910), p. 1.

[145]Soejima Taneomi, 'Japan's foreign relations', in Marcus B. Huish (ed.), *Fifty Years of New Japan* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1910), p. 93.

[146]Shimada Saburō, 'Japan's introduction to the comity of nations', in Marcus B. Huish (ed.), *Fifty Years of New Japan* (Smith, Elder & Co, 1910), p. 71.

[147]Tadashi Anno, *National Identity and Great-Power Status in Russia and Japan: Non-Western Challengers to the Liberal International Order* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 138.

[148]Ibid., p. 166.

[149]Ibid., pp. 164–6.

[150]Ibid., pp. 146–7, 155, 166–7.

[151]Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, p. 25.

[152]Ibid., p. 38.

[153]Yoshida Shigeru, 14 July 1950.

[154]Yoshida Shigeru, 24 November 1952; see also Kishi Nobusuke, 27 February 1957.

yet a 'truly independent state' (*shin no dokuritsu kokka*) and still needed to be 'brought back' (*tachikaeraseru*).[155] In the 1960s and early 1970s, LDP prime ministers crafted a narrative of shame around territories under foreign control, but there were also some signs of pride, particularly after the 1971 decision to to put an end to US occupation of Okinawa.[156] According to Seraphim, conservatives drew parallels between Japan's post-war condition and the unequal treaties of the Meiji era.[157] Okinawa's annexation in 1879, driven by Meiji Japanese desires for great power status and identity, arguably made its return to Japanese control particularly reassuring for those nurturing similar aspirations.

From the mid-1950s, LDP prime ministers began to construct a narrative of pride regarding Japan's economic development,[158] citing the country's tripling of gross domestic product between 1952 and 1960. The 1960s saw the emergence of 'a kind of economic nationalism,'[159] with prime ministers praising 'the remarkable growth of the Japanese economy,'[160] calling it 'the wonder [*kyōi no mato*] of other countries'.[161] Prime Minister Satō Eisaku (1901–75) said that Japan possessed 'pivotal economic power' (*sūyō na keizairyoku*),[162] stressing its 'major influence [*ōkina eikyō o oyobosu*] on the international community'.[163] However, leaders also continuously articulated shame about various lingering problems of the economy.[164]

Being 'peaceful' or 'pacifist' soon became another central identity construct in post-war Japan,[165] paradoxically fuelling a desire for great power status and identity among some conservatives. Yoshida, for instance, crafted a compensatory narrative of pride about Japan's exceptional peacefulness, its people that 'loves peace', and contributions 'to world peace'.[166] In the 1960s, this narrative became more dominant, with Satō declaring the realisation of 'true peace' (*shin no heiwa*) to be Japan's national policy. He portrayed the Japanese people as 'more eager for … peace than any other people in the world' and the maintenance of peace as an issue of 'national honour' [*kokka no meiyo*]'.[167] Meanwhile, other conservatives allegedly associated peace with weakness and shame for undermining Japan's sovereignty.[168]

While these narratives of pride, centred on economic strength and peace, may appear to have constructed great power status and identity in a somewhat unconventional manner, they arguably reflected a shifting master narrative about great powers in the post-war period. While Japanese elites identified vicariously with such narratives,[169] it is also possible that Japan played a role during this period in expanding them in such a way that suited its specific purposes and constraints.[170]

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[155]Hatoyama Ichirō, 2 October 1955.

[156]E.g. Satō Eisaku, 3 August 1968; Satō Eisaku, 17 July 1971.

[157]Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), p. 213.

[158]E.g. Hatoyama Ichirō, 16 November 1956.

[159]James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 137.

[160]Ikeda Hayato, 18 October 1963.

[161]Satō Eisaku, 21 November 1964.

[162]Satō Eisaku, 25 November 1970.

[163]Satō Eisaku, 17 July 1971.

[164]E.g. Hatoyama Ichirō, 16 November 1956; Satō Eisaku, 30 July 1965; Satō Eisaku, 17 July 1971.

[165]Linus Hagström and Ulv Hanssen, 'War is peace: The rearticulation of "peace" in Japan's China discourse', *Review of International Studies*, 42:2 (2016), pp. 266–86; Ulv Hanssen, *Temporal Identities and Security Policy in Postwar Japan* (London: Routledge, 2020).

[166]E.g. Yoshida Shigeru, 14 July 1950; see also, e.g., Hatoyama Ichirō, 16 November 1956; Kishi Nobusuke, 25 June 1959.

[167]Satō Eisaku, 13 October 1965.

[168]Michal Kolmaš, *National Identity and Japanese Revisionism: Abe Shinzo's Vision of a Beautiful Japan and its Limits* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 36.

[169]Shunichi Takekawa, 'Forging nationalism from pacifism and internationalism: A study of "Asahi" and "Yomiuri's" New Year's Day editorials, 1953–2005', *Social Science Japan Journal*, 10:1 (2007), pp. 59–80 (pp. 65–6); see also Zarakol, *After Defeat*, chapter 1.

[170]Cf. 'status games' in, e.g., Neumann and De Carvalho, 'Introduction', p. 1.

Satō, for instance, explained that 'the days when military power was the only premise for peace assurance have passed', linking Japan's aspiration for peace to its economic prosperity.[171] Similarly, LDP prime ministers frequently associated Japan's power, status, and recognition with increasing international 'expectations' (*kitai*), 'responsibilities' (*sekinin*), and 'obligations' (*gimu*), especially towards other Asian countries.[172]

The 'obligation' (*gimu*) to compensate Japan's wartime victims might be interpreted as a self-reflective expression of remorse[173] but arguably also reflects lingering Japanese feelings of superiority over Asian countries.[174] While some prime ministers expressed a desire to 'overcome narrow national interests'[175] and transcend 'the egoism of one country',[176] most seem to have viewed the prerogative to take responsibility as reflective of Japan's imagined greatness. Japanese apologies for wartime atrocities have also been criticised as 'cheap talk' and 'selfish' rather than self-critical, let alone self-questioning.[177]

While vulnerable narratives prevailed in the period, prime ministers' speeches also consistently addressed Japan's power, status, and recognition. This reveals a sense of entitlement and a desire to be a great power among Japanese conservative elites, albeit more implicitly than in the Meiji era. From the late 1950s, prime ministers' continuous boasts about Japan's booming 'national power and international status' (*kokuryoku to kokusaiteki chii*)[178] featured a strong aspirational component. Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato (1899–1965), for example, hoped that Japan would be 'highly regarded around the world', while worrying whether this goal had been achieved.[179] Later, Satō expressed 'pride [*hokori*] … in being a leading member of the international community',[180] as well as in Japan's 'great development' (*idaina hatten*) and 'internationally high reputation'.[181] According to Kolmaš, these conservatives aspired to restore Japan's '"first-rate power" (*ittō koku*) status'.[182]

Self-reflective and even self-reflexive narratives (JSP)

Japan Socialist Party representatives such as then party leader Suzuki Mosaburō (1893–1970) also criticised Japan's lack of an 'autonomous, independent and self-reliant economy' (*jishu, jiritsu, dokuritsu keizai*), which he perceived as 'the basis for … the independence of a self-reliant nation state'.[183] While this may seem to echo LDP prime ministers' narrative of shame, the JSP narrative centred on Japan's subordination to the United States and complicity in US great power excesses rather than the desire for an independent great power identity.[184] In addition, JSP Diet Members members proudly agreed that the Japanese economy had 'achieved miraculous growth' (*kisekiteki na seichō*) 'from the very bottom of defeat'.[185] Yet they were far more critical of the capitalist system as a basis for growth,[186] and Japan's economic dependence on the United States, arguing

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[171]Satō Eisaku, 5 December 1967.

[172]E.g. Ikeda Hayato, 10 August 1962; Satō Eisaku, 21 November 1964; Satō Eisaku, 17 July 1971.

[173]Kishi Nobusuke, 28 October 1959.

[174]Philip A. Seaton, *Japan's Contested War Memories: The 'Memory Rifts' in Historical Consciousness of World War II* (London: Routledge), p. 40.

[175]Ikeda Hayato, 10 December 1962.

[176]Satō Eisaku, 17 July 1971.

[177]Zarakol, 'Ontological (in)security', p. 5; Hagström and Bremberg, 'Aikido and world politics', p. 275.

[178]E.g. Kishi Nobusuke, 25 June 1959; see also Ikeda Hayato, 10 August 1962; Satō Eisaku, 30 July 1965.

[179]Ikeda Hayato, 10 December 1963.

[180]Satō Eisaku, 19 October 1971.

[181]Satō Eisaku, 5 December 1967.

[182]Kolmaš, *National Identity*, p. 37.

[183]Suzuki Mosaburō, 15 July 1950.

[184]Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 132–3, 203.

[185]Yao Kisaburō, 11 August 1962.

[186]E.g. Ashika Kaku, 26 June 1959; Mizutani Chōzaburō, 17 November 1956.

there was 'a dark downside' (*kurai mainasu men o rotei shi*) reflected in worker exploitation and environmental degradation.[187]

Throughout the period, JSP Diet members also agreed that peace should be a marker of Japanese greatness and identity, albeit not necessarily *great power identity*. They hailed the spirit of Japan's constitution as 'unparalleled in the world'[188] and expressed hope that the country would become a 'unique new form of state aiming for peace' (*heiwa o mezasu tokuyū no atarashii kokka*).[189] However, their warnings that Japan's decision to forgo rearmament and the right to belligerence was 'gradually being forgotten' reflected a degree of self-awareness and self-criticism.[190] JSP leader Suzuki, for instance, cautioned that Japan risked being 'plunged into international conflicts' due to its nascent alliance with the United States.[191] In a revealing quote, he described Japan's pursuit of peace as the 'Garden of Eden', which Prime Minister Yoshida had jeopardised by eating the 'forbidden fruit'.[192] JSP Diet member Hososako Kanemitsu (1896–1972) even accused Yoshida of being 'obsessed with the evil spirits of rearmament' (*saigunbi no akuryō*).[193]

In the 1960s, JSP members continued to narrate government actions as antithetical to peace: its lack of 'efforts to ban nuclear tests and atomic bombs',[194] violation of 'the rights to self-determination in Vietnam, China, and Korea',[195] lack of remorse for invading China,[196] and Okinawa's role as a 'front-line base for the Vietnam War of aggression'.[197] JSP Diet Member Kitayama Airō (1905–2002) even cautioned against Japan becoming 'a vanguard of US imperialism and the stigma of being a "yellow yankee" [*ierō yankii*]'.[198]

Through their expressions of remorse, narratives promoted by JSP politicians arguably displayed self-reflectivity, whereas the ambition to construct a non-great power identity for Japan through a focus on peace even sounds self-reflexive. Dower notes that many 'progressive intellectuals' similarly formed a 'community of remorse' and 'self-criticism', dwelling 'openly on their guilt and responsibility for having failed to take a principled stand against repression and aggression'.[199] According to Orr and others, they approached 'their past with integrity and compassion for all who suffered during World War II in Asia and the Pacific'.[200] However, their sense of pride in 'having the courage to acknowledge past wrongs and squarely face the past'[201] was not necessarily *just* 'authentic'. Japanese progressives arguably also focused greatly on Japan's own victimisation,[202] reified pacifism as uniquely Japanese,[203] and construed their own group as 'humanitarian leaders of moral conscience'.[204]

In sum, although some argue that post-war Japan was a singular 'success story of international reconciliation',[205] the fact that post-war identity narratives did not *simply* 'embrace

[187]E.g. Yao Kisaburō, 11 August 1962; Yanagita Hidekazu 12 December 1968.
[188]Yanagita Hidekazu, 12 December 1968.
[189]Suzuki Mosaburō, 15 July 1950; see also Yao Kisaburō, 11 August 1962.
[190]Suzuki Mosaburō, 15 July 1950.
[191]Ibid.; see also Mizutani Chōzaburō, 17 November 1956.
[192]Suzuki Mosaburō, 15 July 1950.
[193]Hososako Kanemitsu, 1 December 1953.
[194]Yao Kisaburō, 11 August 1962.
[195]Yamamoto Kōichi, 15 October 1965.
[196]Kitayama Airō, 19 July 1971.
[197]Yamahana Hideo 16 December 1967.
[198]Kitayama Airō, 19 July 1971.
[199]Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, pp. 233–9, 563; see also Seraphim, *War Memory*, p. 2; e.g. Yamamoto Kōichi, 15 October 1965.
[200]Orr, *Victim as Hero*, p. 178; see also Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, pp. 198–9; Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany & Japan* (London: Atlantic, 2009 [1994]), pp. 111, 115, 121, 128, 231.
[201]Seaton, *Japan's Contested War Memories*, p. 24.
[202]Seraphim, *War Memory*, p. 19.
[203]Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, p. 497; Takekawa, 'Forging nationalism', pp. 65–7.
[204]Seaton, *Japan's Contested War Memories*, p. 24.
[205]Lu, 'Shame, guilt and reconciliation', p. 369.

defeat' suggests otherwise.[206] However, narrative competition, and especially the prevalence of more self-reflective and even self-reflexive counter-narratives among JSP Diet members and other progressives, appears to have restricted Japan's great power narcissism during this period.

Conclusions and implications

The existing research on great power politics, power transition, defeat, status, recognition, revisionism, and/or humiliation explores links between challenging events, negative emotions, and great power aggression. While significant, this scholarship is restricted by its objectivist, rationalist, and causationist inclinations, as well as dismissals of emotions as irrelevant, irrational, or mere by-products of manipulation or material developments. Two episodes in Japanese history, each seemingly marked by equally challenging events, highlight this problem.

In the Meiji era, dominant narratives indeed featured negative emotions, and the military aggressions of 1894–5 and 1904–5 followed a collective 'realisation' that Japan was entitled to be a great power and was therefore humiliated by states narrated as holding Japan back. Conversely, post-war Japan was marked by globally unprecedented military restraint *despite* defeat and enduring ambitions among conservative elites for great power status and identity. The crux is that Japan's great power status and the meaning of the events that it 'encountered' are inseparable from the identity narratives that dominated in each period.

This article proposes a 'solution' by addressing the variability of identity narratives. While OSS provides a more helpful conceptualisation of the event as a 'critical situation', it does not always acknowledge its dependence on narrative construction all the way down. This article establishes an analytical framework by significantly updating the concept of Great Power Narcissism. By distinguishing between 'vulnerable' and 'grandiose' narcissism, it delineates shame- and pride-based pathways to a narrative of insult and military aggression. In addition, the article contributes by differentiating between self-reflectivity and self-reflexivity, to explore the extent to which or how such processes of self-identification and ontological security-seeking might help mitigate great power narcissism as a phenomenon.

The empirical analysis highlights the relevance of the theory development and provides a foundation for further inquiry. In the early Meiji era, vulnerable narratives dominated, evolving from a narrative of shame to one of insult as weakness became increasingly portrayed as an affront necessitating violent action to restore national greatness. Consistent with research on vulnerable narcissism, Japan's aggression was first 'covert and indirect', targeting a weaker Asian neighbour – China – rather than the group of states Japanese leaders sought to join. Future research should investigate whether vulnerable narratives of insult have also enabled military aggression in other contexts and whether grandiose narratives of insult have facilitated aggression against 'peers', as seen when Japan later went to war with Russia in 1904 and arguably also when it attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Analysis of speeches by LDP prime ministers in 1950–71 reveals a shame/pride dynamic again centred on Japan's independence/autonomy, economic development, and power. Similar tropes appeared in opposition speeches, but JSP members' narratives self-reflectively expressed guilt and remorse, while self-reflexively engaging in self-criticism, ultimately advocating a non-great power identity for Japan. Intense narrative contestation of this kind likely curbed Japanese great power narcissism in the post-war era, as defeat was not generally associated with negative emotions and calls for revenge. Recent research concurs that domestic narratives might play a crucial role in explaining why some states pursue radically revisionist agendas while others do not.[207]

Additional research has noted that German conservatives attempted to subvert a political agenda premised on critical self-examination following the Treaty of Versailles,[208] and that the

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[206]Dower, *Embracing Defeat*.

[207]Jorg Kustermans, Benjamin de Carvalho, and Paul Beaumont, 'Whose revisionism, which international order? Social structure and its discontents', *Global Studies Quarterly* 3:1 (2023), pp. 1–13 (p. 5).

[208]Lu, 'Shame, guilt and reconciliation', p. 376.

'hard right' is particularly reactionary, nostalgic, and prone to feelings of humiliation when its sense of national greatness is threatened.[209] Further research is necessary, however, to address whether political progressives generally display more self-reflectivity or even self-reflexivity and thus a willingness to relinquish great power status and identity, or whether this is particularly the case if they identify as anti-imperialist and internationalist. Meiji socialists, for instance, opposed Japan's imperialist ambitions and the pursuit of national greatness but were a minority at the time.[210]

What are the implications for present-day Japan? Economic decline and China's rise have undoubtedly become 'events' in the context of contemporary Japanese identity construction and ontological security-seeking,[211] once again challenging Japanese great power desires. Some liberals and progressives propose that Japan should embrace the path of a 'middle power' (*middoru pawā*)[212] or even a 'small country' (*chiisana kuni* or *shōkoku*),[213] but these are again minority views. Instead, elite narratives continue to display the same old tension between pride and shame, as famously reflected in a statement by Japan's late former prime minister Abe Shinzō: 'Japan is not, and will never be, a Tier-two country.'[214]

As in previous periods, shame and pride continue to be negotiated primarily through vulnerable narratives of shame and compensatory pride. The latter emphasises soft power[215] and the ways in which Japan remains 'great' (*sugoi*), ranging 'from rice and fish consumption to etiquette, hygiene, and physical training methods'.[216] Nationalist conservative elites also express resentment, particularly directed at China and South Korea, as well as Japan's policy of relative military restraint.[217]

Resentment should be monitored because of its intrinsic connection to a vulnerable narrative of insult. Others argue that current great power ambitions in Japan should instead be viewed as an 'interlude' and that the Japanese will eventually accept their country's position as a non-great power.[218] Future research will need to explore these propositions further, while bearing in mind that narratives do not necessarily reflect material circumstances and often evolve gradually as they invoke and are empowered by other pre-existing narratives. Furthermore, Japan's recent remilitarisation[219] and the decline of the progressive left might potentially lessen existing barriers to great power narcissism in Japan.

Finally, the findings of this article have significant policy implications for contemporary international politics, particularly in an era where emotional narratives rapidly disseminate digitally within and across states. However, relying solely on qualitative narrative analysis might not be

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[209]Nir Eisikovits, 'Political humiliation and the sense of replacement', in Graham Parsons and Mark A. Wilson (eds), *How to End a War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 77–91 (pp. 89–90); see also Nadim Khoury, 'Plotting stories after war: Toward a methodology for negotiating identity', *European Journal of International Relations* 24:2 (2018), pp. 367–390. Agius, Bergman Rosamond, and Kinnvall, 'Populism, ontological insecurity'.

[210]Wilson, 'Discourse of national greatness', pp. 41, 49.

[211]Brad Glosserman, *Peak Japan: The End of Great Ambitions* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), pp. 102, 108.

[212]Yoshihide Soeya, *Nihon no 'midoru pawa' gaikō* [Japan's 'Middle Power' Diplomacy] (Tōkyō: Chikuma Shinsho, 2005).

[213]Sawachi Hisae, 'Chiisana kuni toshite ikiru' [Living like a small state], in Umehara Takeshi, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Okudaira Yasuhiro, et al. (eds), *Kenpō kyūjō wa watashi tachi no anzenhoshō desu* [Article 9 of the Constitution Is Our Security] (Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, 2015), pp. 48–57.

[214]Abe Shinzō, 'Japan is back' (22 February 2013), available at: {https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/us_20130222en.html}.

[215]David Leheny, *Empire of Hope: The Sentimental Politics of Japanese Decline* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018); Daniel White, *Administering Affect: Pop-Culture Japan and the Politics of Anxiety* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).

[216]Tomomi Yamaguchi, 'The "Japan is great" boom, historical revisionism, and the government', *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 15:6 (2017), pp. 1–6 (p. 1).

[217]Thao-Nguyen Ha and Linus Hagström, 'Resentment, status dissatisfaction, and the emotional underpinnings of Japanese security policy', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 23:3 (2023), pp. 383–415.

[218]Glosserman, *Peak Japan*, pp. 233–6.

[219]Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Remilitarisation* (London: Routledge, 2017); Karl Gustafsson, Linus Hagström, and Ulv Hanssen, 'Japan's pacifism is dead', *Survival*, 60:6 (2018), pp. 137–57.

sufficient to grasp the prevalence of different narratives and narrative forms among self-identified great powers, or to pinpoint 'tipping points' when narratives of shame and pride transform into narratives of insult. While problematic in the case of Japan, the issue is even more serious with other self-identified great powers. For instance, to better understand the emotional narratives behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Sino-US tensions over Taiwan, future research could explore data-mining and machine-learning techniques to detect and analyse narratives within extensive textual datasets.[220] This approach could also help establish connections between the emotions of GPN and the broader emotional landscape at play in great power politics.

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Linus Hagström is Professor of Political Science at the Swedish Defence University. He has recently published articles in *European Political Science, Life Writing, Alternatives, International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, European Journal of International Relations, Contemporary Security Policy*, and *International Studies Quarterly*. Address: Department of Political Science, Swedish Defence University, PO Box 27805, 11593 Stockholm, Sweden. Email: linus.hagstrom@fhs.se.

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[220]One step in this direction is taken in Linus Hagström and Karl Gustafsson, 'The limitations of strategic narratives: The Sino-American struggle over the meaning of COVID-19', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 42:4 (2021), pp. 415–49.