



“We Welcome Mr. Trump, But...”: Donald Trump and the Ambivalence of the Japanese Conservatives

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Abstract

The following three characteristics can be discerned among reactions by conservative elements in Japan to Trump’s ascendancy to the US presidency: 1) approval of Trump’s defeat of “liberal” forces in the 2016 election; 2) approval of the new US president’s criticism of China and support for Japan’s nuclear armament, and; 3) belief that Trump’s victory represents an opportunity to bring about change in Japan. However, such conservative elements are polarized between those holding pro- and those holding anti-US sentiments. Both sides are looking to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to play a key role in formulating and executing initiatives aimed at building a viable relationship with the US that also benefits Japan.

1. Introduction

The Japanese newspaper, the *Sankei Shimbun*, known for its right-wing tone, published the following article in February 2017. The newspaper belongs to the Sankei broadcasting and publishing group, its political sympathies standing in opposition to the liberal tone of its rival newspaper, the *Asahi Shimbun*.

During his first meeting with Mr. Trump at Trump Tower in New York in November last year, after talking about golf, Prime Minister Abe said, “Actually you and I have something in common.” Abe continued to Mr. Trump: “You were criticized by the *New York Times*. I was also criticized by the *Asahi Shimbun*, which is affiliated with the *New York Times*, but I won.”

Upon hearing this, Mr. Trump raised his right thumb and said, “I also won!”

Trump was supposed to have opened up his heart to Abe here. The first meeting extended to ninety minutes. Abe talked about the military threat and economic danger posed by China, and the importance of the Japan-US alliance, and Mr. Trump kept listening with a serious expression (Takita, 2017).*

In this paper, I investigate the reactions of Japanese conservatives to the rise of Donald Trump. For this

purpose, I examine material published in three conservative Japanese magazines, *Seiron* (“Justice”), *Will*, and *Voice*, between December 2016 and April 2017, the five-month period following the US presidential election. The bulk of my examples are drawn from *Seiron*, a monthly magazine published by the same group as the *Sankei Shimbun*, noted above. Authors featured in this magazine are key contributors to Japan’s conservative political discourse. Some of them are on course to becoming the brains of the Abe administration. Prime Minister Abe himself and conservative politicians close to him are also occasional contributors to the above three magazines. Below, I also make reference to public remarks made by conservative politicians during the same period. As far as I know, the paper that examined these reactions has not been published in either Japanese or English.

In this paper, I point to three types of tendency found among reactions by Japanese conservatives to the election of Mr. Trump: 1) anti-liberal tendencies; 2) anti-China tendencies, and; 3) general ambivalence towards the United States. With respect to the first and second type of tendency, discourses presented by the conservatives are remarkably homogeneous. Concerning the relationship with the United States, however, conflicts in opinion are evident, as further examined below.

As a prerequisite to this investigation, let me present an explanation of the “new conservatives” in Japan. In common with the United States and other countries, conservative forces in Japan have undergone a transformation since the 1990s. In the past, conservatives in Japan respected the traditional lifestyle and authority of the community, but did not care much about ideology. However, as traditional lifestyles started to disappear as a consequence of modernization and globalization, a new breed of strongly ideological conservatives emerged. These new conservatives in Japan are less interested in religious morality, reflecting the absence of strong religious beliefs in Japan. Consequently, they are not, for example, anti-Islam or anti-abortion. Instead, historical consciousness, or, more precisely, “correct” historical consciousness, is substituted for religious morality in their minds. They defend Japan’s record during the pre-World War II era, and do not credit democratization after the war. Although they advocate arms expansion, they are mainly concerned with opposing the postwar reforms that introduced arms restrictions, and show no interest in expanding Japan’s sphere of influence in a global sense – for example, in the Middle East. This kind of orientation has been consistently present among Japanese conservatives since the war, but ideological hues have become stronger as the foundations of traditional lifestyles have been lost. The conservative thinking that is investigated in this paper is not shared by the majority of the Japanese population, but holders of the kinds of opinions discussed below are said to be close to Shinzo Abe, the current prime minister. It is the potential for such thinkers to exert significant influence on Abe that warrants this investigation.

2. Anti-liberal tendencies

The first reaction by Japanese conservatives to Trump's was pleasure at the defeat of the Democratic Party. Although Japanese conservatives generally despise Trump, as we will see later, they welcomed the defeat of the "liberals." In their view, Clinton and Obama were representatives of the same lineage of liberal forces that succeeded socialism.

Hidetsugu Yagi, a close relative of Shinzo Abe and a member of his administration's Council on Educational Policy, echoes this kind of view. In a *Seiron* article entitled, "The United States was saved by Trump," Yagi writes:

Obama was tolerant toward minorities and socially vulnerable as the first black president. That invited illegal immigration and weakness in relation to terrorists. This was not a reflection of the spirit of the United States as the "land of liberty," but of the influence of the socialism that Obama was involved in when he was young. Obama was overwhelmed by the ideas of Saul Alinsky, a left-wing activist in Chicago who systematized a theory for the gradual socialization of the United States. Hillary Clinton is also his disciple. If Clinton had been elected, [yet another] disciple of this leftist activist would have become US president (Yagi, 2017a: 46-47).

Yagi also applies this view to Japan claiming that:

Although few people today insist on outright communism, communism and socialism have transformed themselves into [an emphasis on] issues such as historical consciousness, human rights, family problems, constitutional amendment, local autonomy, and so on... Especially in [relation to] the issue of historical consciousness, the communists are trying to portray modern Japanese history as a 'history of evil'" (Yagi, 2017b: 57, 58).

Yoshihisa Komori, a visiting correspondent for the *Sankei Shimbun* in Washington, D.C., shows a similar view in his article, "The day the liberals began to be defeated," also published in *Seiron*. According to Komori, Trump's victory showed that "conservative-oriented reaction at the American grassroots level against the extreme liberals, symbolized by Obama and Clinton, was broad-based and solid" (Komori, 2017: 56). In an interview published in *Will* magazine, Komori explains why the Japanese media failed to predict Trump's victory, stating that, "Another reason why American coverage in Japan is distorted is that many of the American researchers studying Japan are liberals." "I will specifically provide the names of such left-wing researchers," he continues, mentioning John Dower, Carol Gluck, Alexis Dudden, Susan Jane Pharr, Gerald Curtis, and Ezra Vogel. According to Komori,

these people are definitely “anti-Japanese,” in that they do not like what Japan does (Komori, Yamaguchi, 2017: 248). Interviewer Noriyuki Yamaguchi (a journalist who is also the author of a book on Shinzo Abe), replies to Komori, “The Japanese media readily quotes these scholars when they talk about issues [such as] the comfort women or the Nanjing Massacre. I am fed up with the Japanese media, which respect anyone if they are professors” (Komori, Yamaguchi, 2017: 248).

For these conservatives, the Trump victory was meaningful in two ways, representing a weakening of the “liberals” of the world, including those in Japan, as well as an easing of pressure on Japan to adopt “universal values,” such as freedom, justice, equality, and human rights.

Their welcoming of a retreat in universal values can be seen in the following examples. Terumasa Nakanishi, a historian with whom Abe has closely consulted, describes Trump’s victory in the following manner: “For Japan, there was one good thing. The thing is that Japanese people no longer need to feel [a sense of] inferiority compared to ‘the United States, Republic of Ideas’” (Nakanishi and Sakamoto, 2017: 109). This was because Trump’s victory showed that the United States itself did not respect the ideas of liberty, equality, and human rights. Further, Kanji Nishio, former chairman of an organization that has published historical textbooks denying the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese army, claims: “Mr. Trump, I understand your ‘America first’ policy very well. Then, from now on, we Japanese will manage with ‘Japan First’” (Nishio, 2017: 94).

Shōichi Watanabe, a senior conservative who is respected by Shinzo Abe (Abe, 2017), wrote an article titled, “Is the spirit of ‘Japan First’ waking up?” following Trump’s victory. In it, he states:

So far, Japan has been criticized by foreign countries for not accepting immigrants. However, President Trump clearly opposes the unlimited influx of immigrants. As there is a good relationship between the US and Japan, other countries will find it hard to comment on Japan’s immigration policy. How comfortable it is for Japan not to receive criticism without changing [its] immigration policy? (Watanabe, 2017: 62)

Such an attitude, involving the embrace of a retreat in universal values, is also shared by conservative journalist Akiyoshi Yamamura. He states, for example: “Regarding current immigration and refugee problems, liberal “equalityism” has spread in many countries, not only in the UK but also in France and Germany, which is causing trouble for these nations. [...] The appearance of US President Trump is...highly possible in ending excessive “liberalism,” not only in Japan, but also throughout the world” (Yamamura, 2017: 65).

These commentators regard Trump's victory as the defeat of the "liberal" media, believing that liberals dominate the media and suppress freedom of speech. In an article by Yamamura entitled, "The global trend that was misread by the mass media of Japan and the United States," he refers to the spread of "political correctness" in the United States (Yamamura, 2017: 64), stating: "Currently America is, literally, 'a society with no freedom.'" Yagi Hidetsugu, the member of Abe's Council on Educational Policy mentioned above, also claims that: "In the United States and Japan, the media have thoroughly looked down on Trump" (Yagi, 2017a: 46). But Trump's victory proved them wrong.

Critic Michio Ezaki demonstrates the same view, arguing that, in America, "Speech control suppressing the values traditionally espoused by the white middle class has been rampant" (Ezaki, 2017: 81). He continues: "In recent years, the number of criminals and terrorists among illegal Mexican immigrants has increased, and the prisons are full of violent criminals who are staying [in the US] illegally." Ezaki compares this situation with the views of Japanese liberals: "The JTU (Japan Teachers Union) crying out, 'Discrimination against minorities' is carrying out anti-Japanese education." Commentators such as Ezaki believe that, even in Japan, liberals dominate the media and are engaged in attacks on Shinzo Abe.

Some of the Americans in Japan who are active in the Japanese media maintain a similar tone to that shown above. An excerpt from a dialogue published in *Seiron* between Kent Sidney Gilbert, a commentator whose credentials include a claim to have formerly practiced law in California, and Robert D. Eldridge, Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-7, Government and External Affairs (G-7), Marine Corps Installations Pacific/Marine Forces Japan, reads as follows:

Gilbert: The storm of verbal abuse against Mr. Trump was also terrible... In the sense that they will never permit anything other than their own political claims, liberals are mostly totalitarians.

Eldridge: If Ms. Hillary had been elected, her difficulty in making decisions would have come up. When I worked for the US military, she was Secretary of State, but it was a disgusting four years. She and those surrounding her were all arrogant and incompetent...

Gilbert: By the way, there is some great news. Mike Honda, who greatly damaged Japan's honor as a result of the comfort women issue, was defeated in the House of Representatives election [that was] held simultaneously with the presidential election (Gilbert and Eldridge, 2017: 85).

It is unclear to what extent such views are shared by Prime Minister Abe and the current administration. However, the defeat of the liberals in the United States seems to have been accepted as felicitous by

the Prime Minister. An article carried in *Sankei Shimbun* on February 12, 2017 reports on the second meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President Trump as follows:

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe talked about the [desired] outcome of his first meeting with Mr. Trump in Palm Beach, Florida, [in] the southern United States, on the evening of the 10th (Monday morning Japan time). “I will talk about China, North Korea and Russia from now on. And South Korea too. This is the biggest opportunity to frankly tell the facts about Korea and the comfort women problem.” When Prime Minister Abe visited the United States four years ago for his first talks with President Obama at that time, the US administration was cold and cautious. On the history issue, the United States listened firstly to the assertions of China and South Korea, and made no attempts to readily accept the Japanese explanation. It took a year and a half from their first meeting for Obama to hug Abe. But Trump got hugged as soon as Abe arrived at the White House. For Mr. Trump, who is known for germ phobia and usually dislikes shaking hands, it was amazing behavior. Prime Minister Abe said, “He was in contrast to Mr. Obama” (Abiru, 2017).

Whether or not the descriptions of Obama’s reaction to Abe or Mr. Trump’s personality in this article are correct is not the issue here. The issue here is that the Japanese *Sankei Shimbun* is welcoming the relationship between Abe and Trump in this way.

3. Anti-China tendencies

The second major reaction among Japanese conservatives to Trump’s victory was excitement concerning Trump’s anti-Chinese stance. For example, when describing Abe’s facial expression at a press conference following his talks with Trump, the above-mentioned Shōichi Watanabe recalls, “When I saw his smile, I felt like I understood that Japan and the US would collaborate to contain China” (Watanabe, 2017: 58). In the same vein, Michio Ezaki writes:

Military and security experts supporting the Trump administration are called Dragon Slayers, and they are extremely strict toward China. Their analysis is that China is orchestrating the movement opposing the US military bases in Okinawa. Some of them understand that Beijing and North Korea are behind anti-Japanese publicity, such as [that concerning the] so-called “Nanjing Massacre” or the “Comfort Women.” I think we can talk and collaborate with these experts on many issues, including the war on history (Ezaki, Ogawa, Jhōnen, 2017; 75).

The irony is that these commentators actually ignored Trump's criticism of Japan's trade surplus. The Japanese business community responded to Trump's criticism of Japan's trade situation more than his criticism of China. The chairman of the powerful Japan Business Federation or Keidanren, Sada-yuki Sakakibara, criticized Trump, stating that "President Trump seems to be talking based on the perception of Japan-US trade frictions in the 1980s (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2017)."

But the conservatives actually ignored Trump's criticism of Japan's trade surplus. Although one of the reasons might be that they were not as interested in economic issues as Keidanren, the main reason is likely to be selective perception on their part. It seems as though they only perceive what is comfortable or convenient for them. In fact, they welcomed criticism of China by Trump, but made little reference to his criticism of Japan.

However, among many of the criticisms of Japan made by Trump, there was one to which the conservatives responded positively. This was his criticism of the US-Japan Security Treaty. Trump's view that the treaty put the US at a disadvantage, and his demand that Japan increase its defense budget in order to shoulder the cost of stationing US forces in Japan is, in itself, not an opinion that is well received among members of the Japanese public. For conservative commentators, however, such a critique is convenient in creating up a basis for arguing for a beefing up of Japan's military power vis-à-vis China.

The *Sankei Shimbun* published a signature article by the editorial chief of its Tokyo headquarters immediately after Trump's victory. An excerpt follows:

Japan should express her naked intention to deal with Trump's [own] naked intentions, such as [the one aiming to] "let Japan pay all the expenses of the US military stationed in Japan." We have to throw away the illusion that he will not make such a terrible request after he seized power for real. When the US military finally withdraws, we should greatly enhance the SDF [Self Defense Force]'s equipment. In that case, ownership of our own aircraft carriers will be an option, and we can expect to expand domestic economic demand (Inui, 2017).

Also welcomed was Trump's reference to the possibility of Japan's nuclear armament. Since Trump made a speech in which he implied that he would tolerate Japan's nuclear armament, this issue has become one promoted by conservatives. In an article that he contributed to *Seiron*, international political analyst Kan Itō states: "It is a mistake to rely on America. Japan needs its own defense capability, including its own nuclear deterrent capability" (Itō, 2017: 75).

It is well known that Shinzo Abe has advocated the amendment of the Constitution (which

restricts rearmament) in order to liberate Japan from the “postwar regime” forced upon it by US occupation forces after Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War. Conservative opinion includes the view that Trump’s victory is an opportunity for Japan to amend its constitution in order to rid it of the so-called peace clause.

Appearing in a *Seiron* interview, critic Tsukasa Jhōnen says: “If Mr. Trump distrusts Japan’s defense efforts, he should officially comment on the Japanese Constitution, [saying] that, ‘We [the US] are sorry. We forced it on you. Please change it’.” (Ezaki, Ogawa, Jhōnen 2017: 75) Journalist Masato Ushio, who also contributed an article to *Seiron*, supports “possessing our own aircraft carriers” and the “establishment of a Japanese Marine Corps,” and says, “In this way, a fair Japanese-U.S. relationship will be born, Japan’s “postwar” will be over. [...] It is a great opportunity to realize Prime Minister Abe’s ‘liberation from the postwar regime’” (Ushio, 2017: 79).

Such views are also shared by some politicians. One such politician is Yuriko Koike, Tokyo metropolitan governor. In an interview carried in *Seiron*, Koike says, “Debate in Japan on national security has tended to look away from the reality. I think that President Trump’s victory will be a good opportunity for Japanese to think about [the issue of] ‘what it takes to defend Japan’” (Koike, 2017: 134). Ichirō Matsui, governor of Osaka Prefecture, makes a bolder statement when responding to Trump’s reference to Japan’s nuclear armament, saying, “If we have to have military power to defend our country by ourselves, we will need to consider the ultimate weapon” (*Mainichi*, 2017).

As in Europe, in Japan, too, politicians who have been criticized for being right-wing populists have welcomed Trump’s victory. Matsui, Osaka prefectural governor, is also the representative of an up-and-coming conservative political party, Osaka Restoration. This party has been the target of criticism on many occasions by intellectuals and commentators in the mass media for being populist. In relation to Trump’s victory, Matsui says: “The US citizens chose Mr. Trump, who has no experience in government administration. [...] You should not condemn the political style of speaking directly to the people with frank words as populism” (Sankei, 2017). And, in a similar fashion to the European populists who welcomed Trump’s victory while advocating the exclusion of Muslims, Matsui’s remarks reflected anti-Chinese sentiment among the conservatives.

4. General ambivalence towards the United States

Nonetheless, the conservatives’ views are laden with innate contradictions. Firstly, they want to change the current constitution of Japan, which introduced democratization and pacifism to the nation.

They consider the current version was forced upon the country by the postwar American Occupation (1945-1952), i.e., their insistence on its reform and revision amounts to an attempt to counter the universal values imposed by the US. Secondly, however, they need American power and American approval in order to compete with China. That is why they welcomed the fact that Prime Minister Abe met with Trump for the first time before Chinese President Xi did.

In sum, they demonstrate an ambivalence between pro-US and anti-US stances. In this context, the pro-US orientation is based upon Japan's reliance on US economic and military power and its consequent need to obtain approval from the United States prior to making any major political decisions. The anti-US orientation is based upon a desire to resist the universal values brought by America to Japan – such as those embodied in the postwar Constitution of Japan. The conservatives exhibit a homogeneous tone, but closer examination reveals differences in opinion, such as can be seen in their ambivalence towards the United States.

Let us consider the discourses of some anti-US conservatives. Kanji Nishio and Terumasa Nakanishi are intellectuals closely related to Shinzo Abe who have recently been critical of him. It is their view that Abe is overly prioritizing diplomatic relations with the United States, China, and South Korea, and making compromises in relation to issues of historical recognition. They are not excited by Trump's victory. This is because although he has criticized China, he has not shown a readiness to defend Japan in relation to historical issues. The following is an excerpt from a discussion between the two commentators that was published in *Seiron* after Trump's victory:

Nakanishi: America will not approve of any Japanese politician or intellectual, unless they are “rightwing on security and leftwing on history.” [Those who are] rightwing on security are advocates of strengthening the Japan-US alliance. [Those who are] leftwing on history are believers in the historical views of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, which condemned Japan before the war as an invader state. Japanese politicians and intellectuals who do not fit both of them [i.e. these categories] will not be approved by Washington officials.

Nishio: It's a nice definition. In short, it means persons who will be manipulated by the United States, doesn't it?

Nakanishi: They are essentially leftwing. People who easily condemn the past of their own country as they have been told [to do] by other countries. They may be hawks in terms of security, but they are not [true] Japanese conservatives (Nishio and Nakanishi, 2017: 170).

Nakanishi is also skeptical of Trump in his writing, referring to the “unrealistic expectations of Trump” (Nakanishi, 2017: 105,106). He further states: “Expectations are seen among some conservatives

in Japan, such as [in claims that]: ‘Trump is the president who will support Japan’s independence, such as accepting Japan’s nuclear armament,’ or [in the claim that]: ‘He makes remarks that criticize China, and he will suit Japanese conservatives, won’t he?’ These seem to be only typically wishful observations.” Nakanishi continues by stating, “The nuclear umbrella of the United States is the main trump card that can bind Japan and Korea to the world order of the United States without cost, [and] there is no way that the United States will accept possession of nuclear [arms] by Japan and Korea.” According to him, “Criticism of China by the Trump administration is only made in response to ‘foreign exchange operations’ aimed at a depreciation in the yuan, which hurts domestic employment in the US. It is not born out of democratic thoughts and principles, or a recognition of the strategic threat.” He adds, “The naïve, sweet expectations of some conservatives in Japan that the ‘Trump administration is a friend of Japan’ are highly likely to be betrayed.” (Nakanishi, 2017: 105,106)

Mistrust of Trump has manifested itself in different ways. Following Trump’s victory, *Will* magazine carried an article entitled, “The shadow of China creeping up on his beautiful daughter, Ivanka.” Noting that Ivanka’s family babysitter is Chinese and that “Ivanka herself is also learning Chinese,” the article claims that “Dirty contact between the Clinton family and China has been frequently reported since the 80s, but the Trump family too has actually built up a China channel in a unique way (Kawazoe, 2017: 252, 254).

On the other hand, Hidetsugu Yagi, the member of the Abe administration’s Council on Educational Policy mentioned above and a consistent supporter of Abe, adopts a pro-US position. In an article published in *Seiron*, Yagi argues that the “conservatives” are characterized by an emphasis on “tradition and historical continuity,” as well as “endorsement of the imperial family and an emphasis on education.” Furthermore, conservatives emphasize “state, region, family,” national defense, and “correct” historical consciousness (i.e. the revision of history in which Japan was viewed as an aggressor), while “negative about same sex marriages, which will not produce children.” According to Yagi, however, their diplomatic views are more complex:

In diplomacy, a negative attitude towards socialist countries is clear. Attitudes towards the United States cannot be simply defined. Some [conservatives in Japan] would adopt an attitude of distrust toward the United States as a symbol of globalism which breaks from Japanese tradition, [while] others would find commonality with the liberalism or conservatism advocated by the United States and [would like to] cooperate with the United States as an ally. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is [one of] the latter [group], and I am in that position, too (Yagi, 2017b: 57, 58).

Nevertheless, both Abe and Yagi sometimes show a stance that could be seen as anti-US, especially when talking about post-war reform of what they view as having been imposed on Japan by the US Occupation. The boundary between pro-US and anti-US sentiment among the conservatives is an ambiguous one.

One way of solving the contradiction between anti-US and pro-US feelings is to distinguish between “liberal America” and “conservative America,” and to accept only one of them. As we have seen, the conservatives welcomed Trump’s victory and criticized Obama and Clinton.

Actually, however, they are not evaluating Trump as a person. Rather, it can be said that they have a contemptuous attitude toward him. We can find expressions in *Seiron* such as “President Trump, ‘King of abusive words’” (Ito, 2017: 75) or “I think he is an evil real estate mogul who prioritizes his profit-first principle without thought or belief” (Ōno, 2017: 286). A critic claims that Trump is the person “honest to his own desires [with a] philosophy that only [his own] family members and money are able to be relied upon,” calling him “a Chinese in America” (Kondō, 2017: 74). Of course, this is an evaluation that should be understood based on the prejudice against Chinese among Japanese conservatives.

In spite of them actually despising him, they must rely on his power and obtain his approval. One way of resolving such ambivalence is by having Shinzo Abe recognized as being in a dominant position in relation to Trump, with Japan taking the lead in US-Japan relations.

Reporting on the second Trump-Abe meeting in February, the *Sankei Shimbun* published an article entitled: “President Trump learns about the world through Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” stating that Trump, who has no experience in diplomacy, met up with Abe in order to learn about international relations from the Japanese Prime Minister. The article further states that, “President Trump has learned about the international community through Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and world leaders learn about Mr. Trump from Prime Minister Abe. It is not an exaggeration to claim that such a [new] configuration is being born.” The article continues as follows:

According to Prime Minister Abe, Mr. Trump said, “Please stay at the White House the next time you visit the United States.” A government official explained this as follows: .

“It seems that Mr. Trump, who is not familiar with diplomacy and security [and] without experience in politics or the military, would like to consult with Prime Minister Abe.”

Prime Minister Abe himself feels that he is being counted upon. After all, this is because Prime Minister Abe has increased his presence as a world leader.

Prime Minister Abe has been in power for over four years, since the establishment of his second

administration. He is already second [in terms of length of time as leader] after Chancellor Merkel of Germany among the [grouping of] seven advanced countries (G7). His domestic political base is also strong, with his cabinet approval rate exceeding 60%.

What kind of person is Russian President Vladimir Putin? What is Xi Jinping of China thinking? How can I deal with the EU? Other than Prime Minister Abe, Mr. Trump does not have anybody who can answer these questions.

Meanwhile, a situation is emerging in which leaders of various countries ask Prime Minister Abe about the “unknown” identity of Mr. Trump. This summit and the US-Japan dialogue are likely to announce the beginning of such an era (Abiru, 2017).

It seems that the Abe administration has the intention of spreading this kind of view. In an interview published in *Seiron*, Katsuyuki Kawai, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister and Member of the House of Representatives for the LDP, makes the following statements:

“I would like to emphasize the fact that Mr. Trump talked with Prime Minister Abe first among foreign leaders. I also heard from several officials close to Mr. Trump that ‘other foreign leaders had requested meetings as well, but we turned them all down.’ It was not only ‘The First,’ but ‘The First and the Only.’”

“In other words, first of all, the new Trump administration places great emphasis on Japan as a nation. It is because it recognizes Japan as “the most important ally” that the Trump administration had a meeting [with Japan] in the first place. Another [factor] is the person-to-person relationship. I think that Mr. Trump had made a strong personal request to meet with Prime Minister Abe.”

“It is [the case] that Prime Minister Abe, who has established deep trust with the national leaders of the world, has a large international profile. Prime Minister Abe has built good relationships with strong leaders from [around] the world, such as Russian President Vladimir Putin and Philippines President Duterte. For Mr. Trump, who has no political experience and has never held a public position, I think that Prime Minister Abe has a lot to offer in terms of experience. I guess that a strong interest in Prime Minister Abe became one of the motives for having that meeting” (Kawai, 2017: 87, 88).

It is not known whether this view represents the position of the Japanese government or whether is being presented here in order to serve public relations purposes with respect to a domestic political audience. However, the analysis that Abe is superior to Trump would have satisfied the conservatives. This is because it solves the ambivalence in their attitudes towards the US.

5. Conclusion

The above discussion concerning reactions to Trump among Japan's conservatives can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, Japan's conservatives welcomed Trump's victory as a defeat of "liberal" forces. They view the "liberals" as successors to the socialist movement, hostile to Japan in relation to issues concerning historical recognition and human rights, and dominating academic societies and the mass media. The conservatives in Japan believe that the defeat of such "liberals" in the United States will be an opportunity to change Japan in ways that they support.

Secondly, they consider Trump's victory as an opportunity to enhance Japan's military and improve the nation's balance of power in relation to neighboring countries, especially China. Trump has criticized various countries in various ways, but Japanese conservatives have only chosen to perceive those remarks favorable to themselves. These include remarks in line with the notion that the US will approve a strengthening in Japan's military power as well as its nuclear armament, even at the risk of provoking China.

Thirdly, they have shown an ambivalent reaction to Trump. They hate the universal values that the United States has advocated. Moreover, they actually despise Trump as a person, and do not trust him. Nevertheless, they want to rely on US power, and hope to secure US approval in relation to certain issues. To solve this ambivalence, they are constructing a worldview that frames Shinzo Abe as superior to the inexperienced President.

Whether or not this summary is appropriate should be judged by readers through a further examination of the issues explored of this paper. What I would like to suggest in this paper is that the reactions by Japanese conservatives may not, and in fact will not, be peculiar to Japan.

Certainly, proper nouns such as "Shinzo Abe" and "China" are particular to the Japanese context. But are examples such as welcoming a retreat in universal values, attempting to dominate relations with neighboring countries, and thinking of how to better utilize the power of the United States particular to conservatives in Japan? Very similar reactions may well be found in discourses around the world, often grouped under the umbrella term, "populism," even if the proper nouns used in each geographical context may be different. It goes without saying that such tendencies have had the effect of making the world more unstable.

In response to such developments, people around the world, including Japan, are feeling a sense of anxiety. In relation to Trump's victory, 83.8% of respondents to a nationwide survey conducted by Japan's Kyōdō news agencies on January 28th and 29th, 2017, said that they "feel concern" regarding future instability in international relations, while 54.6% answered that Japan-US relations will "get worse" (*Tokyo Shimbun*, 2017).

As this survey shows, conservatives welcoming Trump's victory are in the minority in Japan. In other words, their views are not representative of the majority of the Japanese population. As is the case in many other countries, many people in Japan wish for a society in which human rights are guaranteed, and in which good relationship with neighboring countries are maintained. I hope that this paper will contribute to further cooperation between such people throughout the world.

- All of the translations from Japanese sources are the author's own.

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