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Japan's Role in the New Global Economic Governance: Domestic and international factors

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Summary

Japan has traditionally assumed the role of regional representative in the leading mechanisms of global economic governance as the leading economic power in East Asia, historically speaking, and the only non-European/North American member of the G7/8. However, the rise of the G20, the inclusion of a number of Asian countries, and the supposed eclipse of the G7/8 represent considerable challenges to Japan's role in global affairs and its position as a contemporary great power. So far, Japan has responded by making significant contributions to the Global Financial and Economic Crisis and the G20, but these contributions have at times been qualified and even contradictory. This article will explore the external and internal factors that have both encouraged and limited Japan's behavior within the G20 to date.

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Introduction

Historically speaking, Japan has traditionally assumed the role of regional representative in the leading mechanisms of global economic governance as the leading economic power in East Asia and the only non-European/North American member of the Group of 7/8 (G7/8). However, the rise of the Group of 20 (G20), the inclusion of a number of Asian countries therein, and the supposed eclipse of the G7/8 represent considerable practical and conceptional challenges to Japan's role. These not only relate to Japan's traditional regional role but also to the country's position in global affairs as a contemporary great power defined not only by material and ideational power resources but also, in the tradition of the English School, by its sense of responsibility. So far, Japan has responded to these challenges by making important contributions to the G20 process and its initial handling of the Global Financial and Economic Crisis (GFEC). Yet, although significant, Japan's behavior has at times appeared to be qualified and even contradictory. It raises doubts as to Japan's status as a contemporary great power.

The aim of this article is to make sense of these recent developments and to explain how they intersect with Japan's behavior. It does so by first of all outlining the emergence and development of GX summitry in recent years before then highlighting Japan's role in and its contributions to the G20 process since 2008.

The article's focus then shifts to exploring the push and pull factors, both international and domestic, which have motivated these contributions but resulted in qualification and contradiction. In conclusion, it argues that rather than simply being a reactionary status-quo power, it would be more accurate to describe Japan as a reform-minded status-quo power whose efforts have been stymied by an absence of political leadership.

The changing world order, GX summitry, and Japan

The current period of change in the world order is seen to manifest itself in a number of ways. These include the eventual rise of genuine multipolarity with the decline in influence and power of the West and the rise of a number of countries collectively and often unhelpfully grouped together under the acronym of BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The debates surrounding the origins, nature, and extent of this changing world order have been going on for some time. However, the GFEC that began in 2008 is seen to be the catalyst responsible for the acceleration of these underlying processes, particularly in terms of the distribution of economic power, as outlined in detail in Chan's contribution to this special issue.

One of the most salient symptoms of these tectonic power shifts is the rise of the G20 and the decline of the G8. The G7/8 was regarded as ineffective in responding to the outbreak of the GFEC chiefly because of its exclusive membership. In its place, the G20, freshly upgraded from the finance ministers' level to the leaders' level, was the vehicle of choice in addressing the crisis, largely because the right countries were seen to be seated around the table this time. Whereas the G8 represents 66 percent of global economic output but only 14 percent of the world's population, in contrast, the G20 represents *90 percent* of global economic output and *67 percent* of the population. In short, the G7/8 paid the price for its failure by losing its position at the pinnacle of global governance to the more relevant, legitimate, and effective G20.

However, this popular narrative is oversimplified, to say the least. On the one hand, despite its future existence being called into question, the G7/8 continues to meet and has not faded away completely. On the other hand, in contrast to its self-appointment as the "premier forum for international economic cooperation," it was not long before the G20's own effectiveness and legitimacy came to be the subject of scrutiny with successive summits hijacked by the single issue of the euro-zone crisis and countries outside of the putative twenty calling for representation. As a result, a number of leaders including US President Barack Obama have lost their initial enthusiasm for a disparate and unwieldy group like the G20 and have rediscovered the benefits of a more intimate and like-minded forum like the G7/8 (Cooper 2011; Bayne 2013). Some have even gone as far as to suggest that it is in fact the G7 that has successfully socialized the rising powers into its priorities and norms (see Chan in this special issue). In short, reports of the G7/8's death have been greatly exaggerated, and the G20 has not proved to be the panacea to all our global economic governance problems. The result has been a rather "messy multilateralism," especially in terms of the institutional architecture of global governance, as evidenced by a proliferation in actual and imagined alphanumeric configurations ranging from a G2 to a "G192," for which "GX summitry" provides a useful shorthand.

These power shifts and their impact on the mechanisms of global governance have already been explored from a number of perspectives — from the viewpoint of the rising powers, especially China, through to the future evolution of the G20 and its relationship with the more established and legalized international organizations. However, the perspectives of the traditional great powers, which are seen to be in either absolute or relative decline as a result of the changing world order, have largely been overlooked. When attention has been focused on them, it has tended to be on the United States (US) and Europe; Japan appears to be a mere afterthought. Equally, the discussion focuses on material power resources rather than ideational resources or the defining sense of responsibility associated with great powers.

This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, the very "fact" of Japan's generally accepted decline is open to question. Second, the experiences of declining but still systemically important contemporary great powers seeking to maintain the status quo in some shape and form can be edifying in understanding the current shifts and future developments in world order (for a detailed discussion of Japan's experience, see Dobson 2012a). Equally, focusing solely on material power resources ignores the alternative options available to great powers in maintaining the status quo as well as other motivating factors. In the case of the G20, upon closer examination it becomes clear that Japan's contributions have been central to a number of the group's successes so far. However, a number of encouraging and limiting factors that have shaped Japan's responses have also resulted in frustrations and contradictions on the part of Japanese policymakers. Before moving on to explore these factors and their interplay in more detail, let us take a few moments to outline Japan's participation in and contribution to the G20 up until 2013.

Japan's role and contribution to G20 summitry

As mentioned above, the G20 was upgraded from a finance ministers' meeting to a gathering of government leaders in November 2008 in Washington. Following the model provided by the G7/8, its initial concern with macroeconomic issues, its agenda, membership, and order of hosting evolved organically. As a result, whilst finance ministerial meetings continued, the G20 met a further six times at the leaders' level: in London (April 2009), Pittsburgh (September 2009), Toronto (June 2010), Seoul (November 2010), Cannes (November 2011), and Los Cabos (June 2012). By 2011, the dust had settled on the GFEC to the extent that the G20 met annually rather than biannually and a future schedule of hosts was decided. At the time of writing, the eighth G20 summit is scheduled to take place in St. Petersburg in September 2013.

Looking across this period of time, Japan's contributions to the development of the G20 and its responses to the GFEC may not be immediately obvious. Yet they are nevertheless of crucial importance to the success of some summits both in terms of boosting its material power resources and providing ideational resources. They ultimately demonstrate Japan's sense of responsibility as a contemporary great power. For example, at the first summit of the G20 leaders in November 2008, Prime Minister Aso Taro sought to share the experience and lessons of Japan's lost decades of the 1990s and 2000s with the G20 leaders, as explained in Aso's post-summit press conference:

> I have felt very keenly the weightiness of the role that Japan is expected to play, and the role that Japan must fulfill. One of those roles is to present Japan's experiences. The experience of the collapse of the bubble and of overcoming it. Japan overcame that major crisis all by itself, of course also with major sacrifice. The other role is for Japan to take the lead in the building of a new framework. In order to respond to such expectations I made some concrete proposals, and I believe they have been reflected in the leaders' declaration today (Kantei 2008).

As regards taking a lead, after the summiteers had returned home, Japan was one of the few countries to honor the anti-protectionist pledges of the G20, unlike some of its regional neighbors and newcomers to GX summitry (Kirton 2009).

Japan was frustrated in its attempts to secure the role of G20 host and enjoy the benefits that accrue in terms of shaping the summit's agenda and direction. Nevertheless, Aso continued to take an active leadership role at the 2009 London Summit, with the highlight being his readiness to extend one of the biggest loans in history — US$100 billion — to the international financial institutions (IFIs), thereby supporting the central role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in resolving the crisis. He continued to provide the G20 with an understanding of Japan's past experiences and in the process received praise from the other summiteers, especially from the host, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Thus, Japan's contribution to the first two G20 summits appears to be that of a committed great power of the day in terms of material and ideational resources as well as demonstrating its sense of responsibility to international society. During this period, however, Aso also sought to make the case for the continued existence of the G8 by stressing the shared principles and values that lay at the heart of the G8 but were missing from the expanded forum of the G20. Thus, his support for the G20 was inevitably qualified (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009).

A month after the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) landslide victory over the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the Lower House election of August 30, 2009, Hatoyama Yukio was plunged into the diplomatic spotlight when he attended the Pittsburgh Summit of the G20, the United Nations Security Council Summit on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament, and the opening of the 64th session of the United Nations General Summit. As a result of pre-election fears in the US as regards the DPJ's level of commitment to the US bilateral relationship, attention was focused firmly on the Hatoyama–Obama relationship for any telltale signs of the state of the relationship. However, maintaining continuity in the relationship despite any change in government was the order of the day, and this was also the case in Hatoyama's defense of the utility and necessity of the G8 despite the rise of the G20, which followed the same script as Aso's (Kantei 2009). Thus, it was an emphasis on continuity that was chiefly in evidence.

Hatoyama's tenure as prime minister was short-lived, however, and in June 2010 he was replaced by Kan Naoto, who attended his first G8 and G20 summits when they were held back-to-back in Canada the same month. At these summits, Kan expended considerable time and effort in explaining the New Growth Strategy and Fiscal Management Strategy, which he had developed when serving as finance minister. He furthermore stressed "the need to pursue economic growth and fiscal reconstruction in tandem" (Kantei 2010). Kan claimed the strategy's inclusion in summit discussions and documentation as evidence of his own successful contribution to the summit. At the same time, he pursued a strong G8 statement condemning North Korea and its sinking of a South Korean warship. Whilst successful in these aims of shaping the agenda and resulting summit statements, Kan was also keen to ensure the continued existence of the G8. He argued for a division of labor that emphasized the G8 as the place for communication between leading countries and the G20 as the place for coordination with developing nations (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2010). Unexpectedly, he even went off-track: independently of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) bureaucrats and in contradiction of the shared democratic principles binding the G8 together, he proposed that China be invited to its meetings in order to bolster the legitimacy of summit discussions (Nihon Keizai Shinbun 2010).

The first G20 summit in Asia was held in Seoul in November 2010 and provided the South Korean hosts with an opportunity to play a global governance leadership role (Cherry and Dobson 2012). Little Asian cooperation or coordination was in evidence ahead of the summit, however; competition and conflict were actually more salient. As part of the currency wars that characterized the run-up to the summit, for example, both Kan and his finance minister Noda Yoshihiko were openly critical of South Korea and China, accusing them of artificially manipulating their currencies in contravention of the principles and agreements of the G20 (*The Japan Times* 2010a, 2010b). The summiteers attempted to paper over these divisions and focus on a number of more concrete outcomes including an emphasis on development and an agreement on reform of the IMF. Japan was supportive of this issue, having championed the cause of addressing imbalances in IMF and World Bank quotas and associated voting rights since the 1980s (Rapkin et al. 1997). Kan managed to survive as prime minister for almost another year in the face of the triple disasters of 3/11, but he was eventually replaced by Noda.

The Cannes Summit was Noda's first as prime minister and turned out to be a modest success. He was familiar with GX summitry, having previously represented Japan as finance minister under Kan, and although the summit was dominated by the euro-zone crisis and discussion of a financial transaction tax, he attempted to use the meeting to address the subjects of volatility in the currency markets and the high value of the yen. Noda also chose this summit as the venue at which to make a public commitment to introduce legislation raising Japan's consumption tax to ten percent by the mid-2010s as part of a range of efforts to demonstrate to the outside world that Japan was keeping its house in order. These were well received by other G20 leaders. On the issue of free trade and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Noda cited the need for intra-party discussion before a final decision could be made. With regard to a financial transaction tax, he appeared to be open to the idea and expressed his intention to explore it in more detail before reaching a decision. As a result, and compared to his predecessors, Noda managed to surprise summit observers by taking a more proactive role (Tiberghien 2011a).

The Los Cabos Summit provided another G20 summit that was overshadowed by events in the euro zone. In this context, Noda was eager to encourage Europe to improve its fiscal performance, to warn against any resulting contagion in the East Asian region, to explain the measures taken since Cannes to improve Japan's fiscal health, and to deliver on his pledge to increase the country's consumption tax. Whilst promising to provide a new US$60 billion credit line for the IMF, Noda was also eager to try and draw the summit's attention away from Europe to focus on issues such as the appreciation of the yen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012). Thus, Japan's contributions were more modest than had been the case at the earlier summits when the G20 was in crisis mode in dealing with the GFEC. Instead, media attention was focused on Noda's bilateral meetings with fellow G20 leaders, and particularly on his first meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin and their agreement to "reactivate" talks regarding the territorial dispute between the two counties (*The Japan Times* 2012). By the end of the year, Noda and the DPJ had suffered electoral near-annihilation — a worse defeat, in fact, than what they had inflicted on the LDP three years earlier.

It can thus be concluded that Japan has made a number of contributions to G20 summitry, ranging from the material (demonstrating Japan's traditional use of the economic means of foreign policy) to the ideational (contributing to the summit agenda as well as resulting statements and commitments). However, these contributions have inevitably waxed and waned as the G20 summit itself has developed from a crisis committee to a steering committee and back again. Equally, these contributions have sometimes appeared qualified (for example, Japanese perceptions of the utility of the G20 and the degree of coordination with its Asian neighbors) or even contradictory (such as Kan's proposal to invite China to participate). In order to discuss the factors that motivated Japan's contribution to the G20, let us now explore the international and domestic factors that have shaped this situation.

International factors

Two normative factors in particular have informed Japan's multilateral role broadly speaking but also historically in the case of G8 summitry (for a detailed discussion, see Dobson 2004: 165–184). Although originating internationally, they have been adopted by policymaking actors within Japan and provide the context to understanding Japan's motivations in the G20. The first normative factor is the expectation that Japan, as the only non-European/North American member of the G8, will respond to its regional leadership responsibilities and assume the role of Asia's representative. This has actually manifested itself in a number of initiatives and behaviors. On the one hand, the Japanese government has made repeated attempts in the past to expand the number of G8 summit participants (although stopping some way short of full membership) to include Asian voices from Australia, China, and Indonesia. On the other hand, successive Japanese prime ministers and MOFA officials have sought to sound out and provide feedback to East Asian neighbors regarding summit discussions before and after the actual summits (Dobson 2004: 173–175).

The expanded membership of the G20 has resulted in wider Asian representation. Now that Australia, China, India, Indonesia, and South Korea have all joined the summit table, there are five competitors who have all staked a claim to the role of Asia's representative or a bridge between the developed and developing world (Dobson 2012b). In the case of the former, South Korea made the most of the opportunity presented by hosting the G20 summit in Seoul in November 2010. It presented itself in a leadership role with a vision based on its own development experience to communicate to the world. In the case of the latter, Australia has declared itself to be:

> […] committed to consulting non-G20 member countries so their views can be considered by the G20. Australian ministers and senior officials conduct regular outreach with our neighbors in particular, to ensure that the decisions of the G20 reflect the needs of the region (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2011).

Thus, Japan now finds its regional leadership role under threat. It has responded with attempts to preserve this role, such as openly questioning China's and South Korea's levels of commitment to the pledges made at G20 summits, as mentioned in the previous section, and by extension their sense of responsibility to the international community and ability to behave as contemporary great powers. At the same time, Japan has doggedly stuck to its identity as Asia's representative, as seen in Aso's attempt to link the outcomes of the first G20 Summit in Washington to the ASEAN+3 and East Asian Summits that were held the following month (in December 2008). However, the increase in Asian membership of the G20 has also resulted in a degree of increased coordination, if not cooperation. Although this cooperation was initially more aspirational than concrete and was overshadowed by the competition mentioned above, the future hosting of the G20 summit forces the

Asian members of the G20 into discussing and agreeing who is going to host the 2016 Asian Summit. In addition, although sanguine in his evaluation of Asian cooperation in the G20, Tiberghien (2011b) has pointed us towards the case of all the Asian members of the G20, including Japan, cooperating in order to maintain an open global trading system. Thus, the realist lens of competition and national interest cannot sufficiently explain Japan's response to the loss of its long-cherished role as Asia's representative.

As regards the second normative factor, Japan has sought in a number of intergovernmental, multilateral bodies to behave as a trusted member of international society that takes its responsibilities as a contemporary great power seriously (Hook et al. 2012: 313–321). The historical record of Japan's actions within the G8 demonstrates the power of this normative factor with examples such as its high levels of compliance with summit pledges as well as its efforts in hosting consistently successful summits (Dobson 2004: 176–184). In theoretical terms, the motivation behind this behavior can be explained by the English School of International Relations' emphasis on the sense of responsibility that defines a great power more than its power resources. Thus, to quote Morris's (2011: 328–329) treatment of Hedley Bull's work:

> […] great powers are not just unusually powerful states, but collectively constitute an institution of international society. Accordingly, great powers must conform to certain behavioral expectations and in particular must "manage their relationships with one another in the interests of international order" […](Bull 1977: 202). In Bull's classic formulation, great powers have "a special mission [as] [...] custodian[s] or trustees[s] of the interests of international society" and are required to "accept the duty, and are thought by others to have the duty, of modifying their policies in the light of the managerial responsibilities they bear" (Bull 1977: 202).

This desire to manage relationships among fellow great powers for the benefit of international society can be seen in Japanese efforts and initiatives to ensure the success of the G20. However, Japan has also experienced frustration, most clearly demonstrated in its inability to secure the role of G20 chair so far. As a result, and as outlined above, Japan's enthusiasm for the G20 has at times been qualified by simple national interest and a preference for the G8. It wants to see the G20 succeed but not at the expense of the G8, which in the eyes of Japanese policymakers should continue in some shape and form as a central forum of global governance. This will protect Japan's traditional position as Asia's representative and a contemporary great power within a more select elite. Thus, successive Japanese prime ministers have praised the role of the G20 (Kantei 2009). Yet at the same time they underlined the fact that the G8 continues to be important, citing the like-mindedness of G8 leaders as the justifying factor for the G8's continued existence based on the members' shared belief in an "open, democratic society, dedicated to individual liberty and social advancement," as stated in the original Declaration of the first Rambouillet Summit of the G7 (G8 Research Group 1975).

In the initial years of the G20's existence, this strategy dovetailed neatly with the LDP's emphasis on values-oriented diplomacy, as signified by the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity initiative. The strategy was, to a large extent, inherited by DPJ prime ministers in their attempts to justify the G8's continued existence (Dobson 2012a). Only under Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko was this strategy abandoned for a time. However, with the return of the LDP — and particularly Abe Shinzo and Aso Taro, the originators and propagators of the original values-oriented diplomacy — a return to this emphasis in Japan's foreign policy and approach to GX summitry is already emerging.

Japan is not alone in seeking to carve out a role for the G8 within the architecture of global governance, and specifically in relation to the G20. UK Prime Minister David Cameron has sought to engage in a similar task, as seen in his vision for his presidency of the G8 in 2013 and his role as host of the Loch Erne Summit:

> Some people ask: does the G8 still matter when we have a G20? My answer is "Yes." The G8 is a group of like-minded nations who share a belief in free enterprise as the best route to growth. And as eight countries making up around half of the world's entire GDP, the standards we set, the commitments we make and the steps we take can help solve vital global issues, fire up economies and drive prosperity all over the world (Number 10, 2012).

Although many Japanese policymakers would welcome these words, they should not be regarded as unqualified support for Japan's position. Cameron's statement also highlights a slightly different tack from that adopted by the Japanese government in carving out and justifying a role for the G8. The Japanese approach has been based on emphasizing the ideological glue that binds the G8 together, whereas Cameron's onus is placed on the function (setting standards) and issue area, with only a nod in the direction of the G8's shared values. In any case, debates surrounding the future division of labor and/or function between the G8 and G20 are likely to continue for some time.

Finally, the importance of the US to the future direction and success of GX summitry — as well as Japan's behavior therein and foreign policy more generally — needs to be figured in as well (Dobson 2012c). In looking at Japan's behavior within the G20 (and previously the G8), the desire to manage its central bilateral relationship and to ensure continued US engagement with the international community has been salient. It either dominated Japan's objectives at particular summits or at least provided a constant background noise.

Domestic factors

Informal groupings like the G8 or G20 place a much greater emphasis on the role of individual leaders and the interpersonal relationships that they construct between and amongst each other. Since its inception, GX summitry has been founded on the potential of personal encounters within a community of like-minded leaders.

Obviously, the reality involves a considerable amount of bureaucratic assistance and preparation, but the central role is still played by the leader, i.e., the president, prime minister or chancellor. The way in which UK Prime Minister Tony Blair was able to place African issues on the G8's agenda pays testament to the influence an individual leader can exert in these kinds of informal fora. Thus, when seeking to understand the success or failure of any country's summitry, the role of the leader is central.

In the case of Japan, GX summitry has presented either opportunities or challenges. On the one hand, prime ministers regarded as proactive leaders, like Nakasone Yasuhiro and Koizumi Junichiro, embraced and successfully used the intimate/interpersonal nature of summitry and the potency of photo ops with the fellow leaders of the great powers of the day to achieve their goals. On the other hand, the weaker prime ministers, who have traditionally dominated Japan's politics as figures resulting from factional compromise, have found this format challenging in a number of ways. For example, Kan's suggestion to other leaders at the 2010 Muskoka Summit that China be invited to join in G8 discussions diverged from the script carefully prepared by MOFA bureaucrats and resulted in mixed messages. Some leaders, however, have even found extemporization difficult; reflecting on his experience of hosting the 1979 Tokyo Summit, Ohira Masayoshi described feeling "naked — like a little child" (Putnam and Bayne 1987: 257). Numerous other examples exist (Dobson 2004: 140–153). Ultimately, the role of the Japanese prime minister has been captured in the media by three words beginning with S — smiling, sleeping, and silent (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 1983).

The problem does not lie solely in the ability of the individual prime minister, but also in their increasingly short periods of tenure. This higher turnover rate of prime ministers has always existed to a degree in Japanese politics, yet it has come into stark relief in recent years. Again, Nakasone and Koizumi stand out as historical anomalies, but in the history of Japan's participation in the G8, nineteen Japanese prime ministers have represented their country compared to four German chancellors and seven US presidents (see Table 1). In the case of the seven G20 summits held since 2008, five Japanese prime ministers have attended, as compared with one German chancellor and two US presidents (see Table 2). Clearly, Japan does not display the same levels of consistency in representation that other countries enjoy and which is crucial to an informal mechanism of global governance that relies on nurturing interpersonal relationships. This inconsistency in personalia once led former Brazilian President Lula da Silva to comment that "it's like that in Japan — you say 'good morning' to one Prime Minister and 'good afternoon' to a different one!" (Financial Times 2010).

Table 1: US, German, and Japanese leaders' attendance at G7/8 summits, 1975 to 2013

Summit venue and year	US president	German chancellor	Japanese prime minister
Rambouillet 1975	Ford	Schmidt	Miki
San Juan 1976			
London 1977	Carter		Fukuda
Bonn 1978			
Tokyo 1979			Ohira
Venice 1980			(absent)
Ottawa 1981	Reagan		Suzuki
Versailles 1982			
Williamsburg 1983		Kohl	Nakasone
London 1984			
Bonn 1985			
Tokyo 1986			
Venice 1987			
Toronto 1988			Takeshita
Paris 1989	Bush		Uno
Houston 1990			Kaifu
London 1991			
Munich 1992			Miyazawa
Tokyo 1993	Clinton		
Naples 1994			Murayama
Halifax 1995			
Lyon 1996			Hashimoto
Denver 1997			
Birmingham 1998			
Cologne 1999		Schröder	Obuchi
Okinawa 2000			Mori
Genoa 2001	Bush		Koizumi
Kananaskis 2002			
Evian 2003			
Sea Island 2004			

Summit venue and year	US president	German chancellor	Japanese prime minister
Gleneagles 2005			
St Petersburg 2006		Merkel	
Heiligendamm 2007			Abe
Toyako 2008			Fukuda
L'Aquila 2009	Obama		Aso
Muskoka 2010			Kan
Deauville 2011			
Camp David 2012			Noda
Loch Erne 2013			Abe

Source: the author's own compilation

Table 2: US, German, and Japanese leaders' attendance at G20 summits, 2008 to 2013

Summit venue and year	US president	German chancellor	Japanese prime minister
Washington 2008	Bush	Merkel	Aso
London 2009	Obama		
Pittsburgh 2009			Hatoyama
Toronto 2010			Kan
Seoul 2010			
Cannes 2011			Noda
Los Cabos 2012			
St Petersburg 2013			Abe

Source: the author's own compilation

The reasoning leads us to the timely question of what one might expect of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo at his first G20 summit in St. Petersburg in September 2013. Despite any hints of consistency, it appears to be the case that Abe's second period of administration is not simply a continuation of his previous one. The LDP under Abe is hardly a radically different party as a result of its bruising defeat in the above-mentioned 2009 election. The party has, however, learned some lessons from its experience of being out of power, resulting in it becoming a more successful (but not necessarily responsible) opposition party, a factor that contributed at least in some way to its most successful electoral victory ever in December 2012 (Pekkanen 2013). One prominent example of the different emphasis in the current and previous Abe administration's agenda is the three-pronged economic policy dubbed "Abenomics," which contrasts with the earlier nationalistic one, "Towards a

Beautiful Country" (utsukushii kuni he). Regardless of whether "Abenomics" offers anything new or is simply Keynesian pump priming that threatens the independence of the Bank of Japan, it does demonstrate the LDP's and Abe's ability to learn from their previous mistakes.

Looking at Abe's experience of G8 summitry as an indicator of likely behavior provides little predictive power because Abe has only limited experience of G8 summitry. He only attended the 2007 Heiligendamm Summit, and he played a relatively peripheral role in a summit that mainly focused on climate change. However, at the 2013 G8 Summit in Loch Erne in June 2013 and three months prior to the upcoming G20 Summit in St. Petersburg, Abe arrived with the chief task of explaining and justifying his much-vaunted "Abenomics." In the past, Japanese leaders have often come to the G8 summits anticipating criticism and needed to be ready to explain or defend their position on the Japanese economy. The related fear has resulted at times in "gift-bearing diplomacy" (omiyage gaiko), a strategy of adopting policies immediately before the summit in order to pre-empt open criticism of Japan. This tradition has continued within the G20. For example, as mentioned above, Kan sought to explain his New Growth Strategy and Fiscal Management Strategy at the back-to-back G8/G20 summits in Canada in June 2010. Admittedly, Abe has to survive a House of Councilors election scheduled for July 2013 before he can attend his first G20 summit, but this should not prove to be a pitfall. Considering the amount of attention that "Abenomics" has garnered as an alternative to austerity, it is likely that Abe will follow suit and come to the G20 attempting to explain the substance of his eponymous approach. He can thus be expected to stake a claim to making an intellectual contribution to the G20's agenda and role in steering the direction of the global economy.

At first sight, the picture painted here may appear one-sided, as other actors are inevitably involved in preparations for the summit as well. In the case of Japan, the role of MOFA needs to be discussed, in particular for traditionally providing the sherpa who actively serves as the prime minister's personal representative and conscientiously prepares the summit agenda in collaboration with other countries' sherpas throughout the year preceding a summit. However, these kind of fora offer a rare opportunity for individuals to shape the summit agenda, as seen for example in UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown's role in fostering intergovernmental coordination at the 2009 G20 Summit in London. Ultimately, in informal, elite-level summits like the G8 and G20, any country's participation will stand or fall on the basis of its leader. Sadly, in the postwar period, Japan has suffered from both a leadership deficit and a "revolving door" of leaders as a result of its domestic political structures. In view of its recent history of alternating landslide elections, it is unlikely that Japan will discover the necessary consistency in its leadership any time soon, despite attempts to create the organizational structures within the Japanese government that might ensure successful participation in the summit regardless of the individual in power.

Conclusions

To conclude, how can we make sense of Japan's role in the new global economic governance and explain what it wants to achieve? Elsewhere in this special issue, Chan argues that despite the shift in economic power, the West is still dominant in terms of military, political, and social power. Moreover, the global financial system is resilient enough to resist the various challenges it faces and emerge even stronger. If this proves to be the case, then Japanese policymakers will no doubt celebrate. They will have made a number of important contributions to this outcome by (1) supporting and working towards the success of new mechanisms like the G20 through the provision of material and ideational power resources; (2) at the same time reforming and strengthening the traditional institutions governing the global political economy like the IMF; and (3) refusing to prematurely pass a negative judgment on the future of the G8 and instead persuading fellow great powers of the day of the G8's utility and worth, whilst seeking to socialize rising powers into the values of global summitry.

This would be the ideal outcome for Japan. It is hardly what one would expect of a reactionary status-quo power in decline that seeks to preserve an outdated world order at any price. Rather, Japan is a reform-minded status-quo power. Within the current rebalancing of global power, Japan has pursued its strategies in a typically quiet and incremental fashion (Hook et al. 2012). However, both behaviors to this end in the G20 and the G8 have often lacked political leadership that can transcend the traditional normative impulses and articulate a clear vision of Japan's future role in global governance. The result at times has been the qualified and contradictory behavior explored above. As is the case with many of Japan's political, economic, and social ills, although it may not provide a silver bullet, an injection of leadership into global summitry would certainly do no harm.

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