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Department of International Relations

Master's Thesis

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Abe's and Trump's Legacy?
The Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific

Master's thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.

2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.

3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 29th April 2024   Kristýna Švárová

References

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Abstract

The thesis seeks to investigate the respective strategic narratives of Japan and the United States regarding the Indo-Pacific. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept in Japan, followed by its adoption in the United States, raises questions about the formation of the Indo-Pacific narrative and the motivations behind these developments. The thesis challenges the assumption of a shared vision between the two countries despite their significant similarities in their terminology around the Indo-Pacific, aiming to unravel their strategic narratives. Building on the strategic narrative theoretical framework and distinguishing between three narrative types, the qualitative content analysis examines Japan's and the United States government communications from 2016 to 2021, covering the Abe and Trump administrations. The thesis analyzes each strategic narrative type to uncover the underlying motivations and goals shaping the Indo-Pacific narratives. Ultimately, the thesis argues that while both countries prioritize regional stability in the Indo-Pacific region, their narratives reflect distinct national interests and visions for the Indo-Pacific, underscoring the complexity of regional dynamics and strategic alignments.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se snaží prozkoumat příslušné strategické narativy Japonska a Spojených států týkající se Indo-Pacifiku. Vznik konceptu Indo-Pacifiku v Japonsku a jeho následné přijetí ve Spojených státech vyvolává otázky o formování indo-pacifického narativu a motivaci tohoto vývoje. Práce zpochybňuje předpoklad společné vize obou zemí navzdory jejich značné podobnosti v terminologii týkající se Indo-Pacifiku a klade si za cíl rozkrýt jejich strategické narativy. Na základě teoretického rámce strategických narativů a rozlišení tří typů narativů zkoumá kvalitativní obsahová analýza vládní komunikaci Japonska a Spojených států v letech 2016-2021, zahrnující období Abeho a Trumpovy administrativy. Práce analyzuje jednotlivé typy strategických narativů s cílem odhalit základní motivace a cíle, které utvářejí indo-pacifické narativy. Práce nakonec tvrdí, že ačkoli obě země upřednostňují regionální stabilitu v indo-pacifickém regionu, jejich narativy odrážejí odlišné národní zájmy a vize pro indo-pacifický region, což podtrhuje složitost regionální dynamiky a strategického uspořádání.

Keywords

Strategic Narrative, Content Analysis, Indo-Pacific, Japan, Shinzo Abe, the United States, Donald Trump, Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Klíčová slova

Strategický narativ, Obsahová analýza, Indo-Pacifik, Japonsko, Shinzo Abe, Spojené státy americké, Donald Trump, Svobodný a otevřený Indo-Pacifik

Název práce

Abeho a Trumpův odkaz? Strategický narativ Indo-Pacifiku

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List of Abbreviations

AOIP	ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
DoD	Department of Defense
DoS	Department of State
DSD	Democratic Security Diamond
ESC	East China Sea
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
IN	Issue Narrative
ISN	International System Narrative
IPEC	Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor
KANTEI	Office of the Prime Minister of Japan
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MSRI	China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NN	National Narrative
NSS	National Security Strategy
PACOM	Pacific Command
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
SCS	South China Sea
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
USINDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Puzzle

Defining the Indo-Pacific poses a considerable challenge. There are many ways to understand the term *Indo-Pacific*. We can see it merely as a geographical description of the area encompassing the Indian and Pacific oceans, including the seas that connect them.[1] Secondly, we can understand it as a geopolitical tool that helps politicians, researchers, journalists, etc., analyze the current challenges and problems of this part of the world. Thirdly, we can perceive it as a strategic concept, within which we can see significant security and economic cooperation between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia in recent years. Also, the Indo-Pacific can be viewed as a complex regional organization that guarantees political stability. Finally, we can understand the Indo-Pacific in the context of a strategic narrative.

This thesis will focus on the cases of the United States and Japan and their strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific. Strategic narratives are defined as *"means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors"* and to gain legitimacy for policy responses. Political actors use strategic narratives to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment (Miskimmon et al. 2013, p. 3). Barthwal-Datta & Chacko (2020, p. 244) state that *"developing strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific… help states* (India, Australia, the United States, and Japan) *to promote their preferred conceptions of regional order."*

Japanese politics have long referred to the Indo-Pacific as a seamless continuation of the idea of the famous speech *Confluence of the Two Seas* from 2007. However, from the perspective of the strategic narrative, this view is more complex than it first appears, given that Japan officially established the Free and Open Indo-Pacific

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[1] Some authors (e.g., Khurana, 2017; Haruko, 2020) point out that all countries do not universally employ the Indo-Pacific term to describe the whole area and that each nation considers its own geographical extent of the Indo-Pacific.

(FOIP)[2] concept only in 2016. It raises the question of why the term Indo-Pacific has not appeared sooner in Japan's foreign policy despite the earlier promotion of the concept by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Obama's administration (2009 – 2017) adopted the East Asia Strategy, also known as the Pivot to Asia, which shifted the country's focus away from the Middle Eastern and European sphere towards the East Asian and Southeast Asian nations. However, it was Trump's administration (2017-2021) that adopted the term Indo-Pacific in late 2017 in its National Security Strategy. What is not clear, however, is why and how the Indo-Pacific narrative emerged in the United States in the first place, even though the U.S. already had a strategy towards Asia (Yeo, 2023, p.1) and why it shared the exact wording as the Abe's promoted FOIP concept.

This thesis challenges the largely shared notion that these countries share the same vision for the Indo-Pacific. By analyzing Japan's and the U.S.'s strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific, we aim to gain insights into the areas where states' perceptions of regional order align and diverge, uncovering the distinct political and social dynamics that shape these perspectives. Although Japan's position on the Indo-Pacific seems to align closely with the one of the United States as both countries have produced narratives that appear similar in discursive terms as they articulate intersecting "visions" of a "peaceful" and "free and open" Indo-Pacific based on the "rule of law," the path towards it might be quite different.

The first aim of this thesis is, therefore, to understand the formation of the strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific of these two leading players. The formation is where the importance of the Indo-Pacific policy is formulated. Japan's and the United States' position on the Indo-Pacific aligns closely as both countries have formed narratives that seem similar in discursive terms. However, do these countries share the same vision for the Indo-Pacific region, given that the United States' narrative of the Indo-Pacific was created a decade later than Japan's? The second target of the thesis is to analyze whether these countries share common goals and motivations in

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[2] The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision is interchangeable with the Indo-Pacific policy.

shaping the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific. To answer these questions, we should examine how the narratives have formed and *why*.

In relation to the above, this thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

> *Q1*: *How has the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific been formed in the United States and Japan?*

> *Q2*: *Do these countries share common goals and motivations in shaping the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific?*

The thesis builds on existing research on strategic narratives in the field of International Relations to address these questions. Using Qualitative Content Analysis, I analyze speeches, official statements, policy documents, and press releases and then place the narratives constructed in these texts in the broader domestic and international context in which they emerge.

Doing so, the thesis puts forward the argument that although the existing scientific literature understands close links between the motivation for and the practice of the Indo-Pacific regional formation, Washington's and Tokyo's strategic narratives differ in two major regards. While Washington's narrative corresponds to its underlying *national interest,* Japan's narrative encapsulates its vision of a viable *regional order*. These findings question the validity of the literature linking the foreign policies of the two countries and provide a rigorous analysis of the formation and proliferation of their narrative strategies.

1.2 Research Significance

In answering these questions and proposing this argument, the thesis tries to contribute to the growing research on strategic narratives in IR by analyzing the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific, focusing on the cases of Japan and the United States. The literature review on the Indo-Pacific suggests that examining the Indo-Pacific can be highly problematic, mainly because each key actor perceives the Indo-Pacific slightly differently. The research aims to uncover areas of alignment and

divergence in their perceptions of the Indo-Pacific by investigating strategic narratives.

The author believes that unraveling the motivations and goals of Japan and the United States will help us better understand, at least in part, the complexities of the region and its possible direction. Finally, the Indo-Pacific is still a largely unexplored topic in the Czech academic debate. This is evidenced by the fact that the Czech Republic only adopted a strategy for the Indo-Pacific in 2022. From the author's perspective, this topic is significantly under-analyzed, and this thesis seeks to rectify this slightly.

1.3 Chapter Outlines

The thesis is structured into several main chapters to achieve the desired outcomes. The following chapter explores relevant literature regarding the Indo-Pacific. It will also introduce the theoretical framework, which comes from Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle's (2013, 2017) work on studying strategic narratives in IR, and a brief overview of soft power since this concept provides a kind of introduction to the study of narratives in international relations. The third chapter discusses the research's methodology and analytical framework employed in this thesis, presenting a qualitative content analysis approach that outlines the process of sourcing and utilizing texts. The fourth chapter will be dedicated to the empirical part, introducing the context of the formation of the Indo-Pacific narrative in Japan and the United States and finding specific narrative types (issue narrative, international system narrative, and national narrative) in Japan and the U.S.'s discourse regarding the Indo-Pacific. The last chapter will cover the results in relation to both research questions.

2 Literature Review

This chapter explores the issue of the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific based on existing literature. First, the Indo-Pacific concept is introduced within the academic debate, tracing its emergence from a geographical term to a strategically

significant concept in international relations. This part also examines how key actors, including Japan, the United States, Australia, and India, have embraced the Indo-Pacific concept. Furthermore, the emergence of strategic narratives through the prism of soft power is explained, serving as an introduction to understanding the importance of strategic narratives in international relations. Last, the chapter presents the theoretical framework from Miskimmon et al. (2013, 2017) to analyze the formation and projection of the strategic narrative, on which the methodology chapter follows. While many scholarly works are devoted to the Indo-Pacific concept, research on the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific has gained less attention than it deserves.

2.1   The Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific concept has received significant attention in the last decade, not only in academic circles. Beeson (2018) states that a few years ago, the term Indo-Pacific was rarely mentioned, and when it was, it served as a relatively obscure geographical term, mainly capturing the attention of marine biologists. The term itself, Indo-Pacific, first appeared in 2007 in the article *Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India–Japan Cooperation* by Indian researcher Gurpreet Khurana.[3] He defined the Indo-Pacific as a maritime space connecting the Indian Ocean with the Western Pacific, encompassing the contiguous seas off East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Africa, within which the key actors project their interests (Khurana 2007). A decade later, Khurana reflects that the term is being used increasingly by policymakers, analysts, and academics in Asia and beyond (Khurana 2017). Some scholars even use the word *buzzword* to describe the Indo-Pacific (Rajagopalan 2018, Wu 2022, Kolmaš & Qiao-Franco & Karmazin 2023) or as *an idea whose time has come* (Heydarian 2018, cited in Medcalf 2019).

There are many ways to understand the Indo-Pacific. In general, however, the Indo-Pacific term refers to the interconnected geopolitical space between the Indian

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[3] However, Indo-Pacific terminology emerged much earlier, concretely in biogeography and ethnography. It has been used since the 1850s as one way to identify the people of Indonesia (Medcalf, 2012. "A Term Whose Time Has Come: The Indo-Pacific.").

Ocean and the Western Pacific Ocean, linking the Indian and Pacific oceans and emphasizing the rising strategic importance of the region.

Despite the growing interest in the region in recent years, the scholarly literature is divided on how *new* the Indo-Pacific is. Medcalf (2019 & 2019) states that the idea of pan-Asian maritime connectivity goes way back to pre-colonial times, and the concept is explained not as an emergence of something new but as a restoration of the region's enduring maritime and multipolar character. According to Medcalf, the idea of Asia-Pacific, often mentioned as a predecessor to the Indo-Pacific, emerged to maintain Washington's involvement in the Pacific despite the end of the Cold War. Kolmaš, Qiao-Franco, and Karmazin (2023) also point out that the use of the "Asia-Pacific" term started in the late 1980s and reached its peak in the mid-1990s. The idea of the Indo-Pacific then represents an inevitable re-emergence of this concept once China has risen again and India has become an increasingly important international actor. Pardesi (2019) also opposes the idea that the Indo-Pacific is a new strategic region. He argues that the Indo-Pacific has been a single strategic system since the 1800s when the British strengthened their imperial power in India[4]. Li (2022) traces the genealogy of the Indo-Pacific term to Karl Haushofer's innovative Indo-Pacific politico-oceanographic vision to undermine colonial domination. Wu (2022) also refers to the German geographer, again arguing that the Indo-Pacific is not new. These authors share the assumption that the Indo-Pacific is founded upon longstanding connections that have linked the two oceans for centuries. Thus, they refer to the concept as re-emergence rather than emergence. Kolmas & Qiao-Franco & Karmazin (2023) try to uncover whether the Indo-Pacific concept offers other meanings for the region than in terms of security, also based on the assumption of the re-emergence of the concept. Focusing on institutional, economic, and cultural relations within the region, they conclude that despite strong political ambitions in geopolitical affairs, the concept does not have a strong

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[4] Except from the 1960s until the end of the Cold War (Pardesi 2019, p. 125).

footing regarding shared identity, cooperation within political institutions, and economic coordination.

On the other hand, some authors (Taylor 2010, Sahin 2022, Wilkins and Kim 2022) speak of the Indo-Pacific as something *new* and *artificial,* unlike the more established Asia-Pacific, saying that the concept was crafted for political purposes. Pan (2014) states that the Indo-Pacific is not a natural geographical space but a discursive construct with its own consequences in the field of IR (Pan, 2014, p. 455). Romancov (2020) refers to the beginning of this century as the beginning of the current Indo-Pacific concept. He highlights the US think-tank Rand Cooperation and Indian think-tank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) that initiated a dialogue between India and the United States over a number of issues that had previously divided the countries. Strategic dialogues between the countries have continued for the last two decades, mostly with the aim of economic cooperation. Medcalf (2019) points out a curious fact, stating that some scholars have hesitated to consider the Indo-Pacific as a substantial framework for academic exploration, arguing that it is merely a construct policymakers have *"just made up"* (Medcalf 2019, p. 84).

The policymaker who first articulated the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) was Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016. However, Abe's endeavors started considerably earlier by delivering a famous speech *Confluence of the Two Seas*[5] to the Indian Parliament in 2007. There is an academic consensus that that was the moment when Abe gained significant momentum for the Indo-Pacific idea. What is interesting is that Abe did not specifically use the term Indo-Pacific in his speech. Instead, he presented a vision of a *"broader Asia"*[6], stressing the strategic importance of seeing the two oceans of the Indian and Pacific oceans as one, which later became the grounding principle for the Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP).

In 2007, Abe stated that "*the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity. A "broader Asia" that broke away*

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[5] *"Confluence of the Two Seas"* Speech by H.E.Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, available here: https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html

[6] also known as *kakudai Asia*

geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form" (Abe 2007). Abe called for increased economic integration, promoting maritime security, and establishing a new framework for regional cooperation. He also emphasized the importance of shared fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and strategic interests (MOFA, 2007). In December 2012, following his vision that the Pacific and Indian Oceans represent a new center of prosperity in the world, Abe initiated the formation of a "Democratic Security Diamond" (DSD). The diamond points were figuratively formed by four leading maritime democracies - Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. This formation was later followed by a renewed group called the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD).

Following the Japanese initiative, Australia embraced the concept formally in its Defense White Paper[7] in 2013, stating that "*The Indo-Pacific is still emerging as a system…. But over time, Australia's security environment will be significantly influenced by how the Indo-Pacific and its architecture evolves*" (DoD 2013, p. 7). By that, Australia became one of the first countries to endorse the term officially. This adoption was unsurprising given the country's geographical positioning with coastlines along two oceans (Rajagopalan 2018).

The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated the more action-oriented "Act East" strategy at the end of 2014, following India's existing "Look East" policy, strengthening India's connectivity to the Indo-Pacific (Medcalf 2019, p. 81). The Indo-Pacific is then perceived as a natural consequence of the "Look East" policy (Barthwal-Datta and Chacko 2020, p. 251). Singh (2014) points out at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in December 2012 when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that ASEAN-India's „*future is inter-linked, and a stable, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region is crucial for our own progress and prosperity*" (Singh 2014, p. 101).

It was not until Abe's third term in office in 2016 that Japan officially formalized the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" as a key element of Japan's foreign policy.

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[7] Available here: https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/defence-white-paper

[8] One year later, the previously mentioned Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, also known as the Quad, a strategic forum comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, was restored. [9] The purpose of the Quad was to foster cooperation among the four countries on issues such as maritime security, counterterrorism, and economic development. The forum is seen as a critical component of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy promoted by Japan. It is also viewed as a means of balancing China's growing regional influence (Wei 2022, p. 289-291).

The United States adopted the term Indo-Pacific in late 2017 in its National Security Strategy.[10] The Trump administration defined the Indo-Pacific region as "*the most populous and economically dynamic part of the world*" and a place where "*a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place.*" Stating that "*the U.S. interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific extends back to the earliest days of our republic*" (NSS 2017). The NSS identified the Indo-Pacific as a region of growing importance and emphasized the need for the United States to work with partners and allies. The National Defense Strategy adopted by the Trump administration a year later identified China as one of the key security strategy threats to the regional order in the Indo-Pacific region (Kireeva 2020, p. 109). In the following years, many other countries adopted the term Indo-Pacific, e.g., Indonesia, Vietnam, France, Thailand, and even the Czech Republic.

While we cannot say that there is an academic consensus on how to approach the Indo-Pacific, it is evident that the concept is receiving more significant attention in security discourse by policymakers and academics. As the power dynamic in East Asia shifts and the Indian and Pacific Oceans start to be seen as one maritime space, many authors perceive the Indo-Pacific concept mainly as a security and strategic move by the US, Japan, India, and Australia to balance the power of an ever-growing China (Zhao 2012; Pan 2014; Lee & Lee 2016; Hagström & Gustafsson 2019;

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[8] Abe firstly announced the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" (FOIPs) at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) held in Kenya (Satake 2019, p. 69)
[9] It was first initiated in 2007 but was discontinued after a few meetings.
[10] Available here: https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf

Choong 2019; Chum 2019; Koga 2019; Medcalf 2019, Byrne 2020, Tellis 2020, Wei 2022). Wilkins and Kim (2022) state that the Indo-Pacific concept is an attempt by the United States and its close allies to establish a new geopolitical framework aligned with their own national interests and desired policies, as opposed to those of China. Beeson (2018) argues that even though the effort to balance China's rise is nothing new in the IR realm, the growing interest in the Indo-Pacific as a possible area for strategic and diplomatic efforts in addressing the challenges posed by China is. Some academics even talk about the Indo-Pacific as a joint project of the four powers, which may play a significant role in the future similar to that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the Euro-Atlantic area in the 20th century (Rabena 2020, Romancov 2022).

One of the most significant criticisms of the Indo-Pacific concept draws attention to the fact that the key countries cannot find agreement on how to respond to Chinese power and U.S.-China tensions, saying that the key actors have different visions for the Indo-Pacific (Medcalf 2019, p. 82). Barthwal-Datta and Chacko (2020) point out that the Indo-Pacific has become a common expression in the practice of IR, but there is still a lack of clarity regarding how it should be understood and approached. Medcalf refers to the Indo-Pacific *as a region of dualities*, pointing to several spheres in which the Indo-Pacific seemingly diverges – is this a region focused on economic integration or competition regarding security? Is this a region that should include China or exclude it? The answer Medcalf gives is that both of those options are correct. The Indo-Pacific is inclusive and exclusive as its origins lay in economic cooperation, but the consequences are strategic. The Indo-Pacific, on the one hand, draws China in, but on the other, also sets the ground for balancing its power (Medcalf 2019, p. 90-91). Last but not least, Byrne (2020) warns that the Indo-Pacific framework "*demands clarity and consistency in language, substantiated through policy and demonstrated in cooperative action… at this stage, the Indo-Pacific narrative falls short on all accounts*" (Byrne 2020, p.14.).

Kai's research (2018) also takes on the question of China within the Indo-Pacific. He approaches the Indo-Pacific from an IR theory perspective, concretely from a realist,

liberal, and constructivist point of view, and examines the *three faces* of the Indo-Pacific. Even though he concludes that examining the concept of the Indo-Pacific is theoretically problematic, he argues that there are two ways of institutionalizing the Indo-Pacific. One corresponds with the realist view of China as an outside actor whose power shall be balanced, and the other one is to accept China inclusively (Kai 2018, p. 19-20).

Barthwal-Datta & Chacko (2020) and Yeo (2023) investigate strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific to understand the diverse dynamic of the region better. While Yeo explores how the Indo-Pacific narrative has shifted from Japan to the U.S., Barthwal-Datta & Chacko examine India and Australia's respective strategic narratives of regional order in the Indo-Pacific. They conclude that although the discourse countries use around narrative looks quite similar in their terminology, they fundamentally differ in their substance. It is particularly in relation to China, where the authors show a fundamental difference. While Australia prefers the Indo-Pacific with the dominant US presence to counter-balance China, India promotes a multipolar regional order with an inclusive China (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko, 2020). Similarly, Choong (2019) explores differences in perception of the Indo-Pacific and says that while countries like the United States, Japan, Australia, and India use the same term, their conceptualization and individual strategies differ, especially in the area of maritime security, connectivity, and in the approach to China.

Finally, the comparison of our selected actors between Japan and the United States also receives some attention. Sato (2019) argues that Japan and the United States diverge in their conceptions of international order and specifically analyses their approaches to the disputed areas in the South China Sea and West China Sea. He states that Japan promotes a hedging strategy towards China, has a preference towards a rule-based order, and tries to maintain multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific. On the other hand, the United States promotes a power-based order, which also projects a nationalistic economic policy toward the region. He concludes that the Japanese notion of the Indo-Pacific is not a part of the US grand strategy, but Japan rather "*expects the United States to behave in certain ways*" (2019, p. 116 – 117).

2.2   Strategic Narrative in International Relations

The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on Miskimmon, O´Loughlin, and Roselle's books *Strategic Narratives Communication Power and the New World Order* (2013) and *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (2017). Their work became a practical guide for many academics and policymakers in the field of IR.

Strategic narrative is a relatively new phenomenon that has emerged in academic literature at the intersection of international relations, communication studies, and policy documents over the past two decades. The beginning of the rise of strategic narratives could be traced to the end of the Cold War. At that time, as is widely acknowledged, there was a debate in the IR realm about the new, non-coercive ways to influence the emerging world order after the end of the Cold War. The understanding of international relations based on hard power did not seem to be adequate to explain the emergence of a new world order. The well-known American political scientist Joseph Nye and his concept of soft power was at the center of this debate. His concept challenged the conventional view of the decline of American power in the 1980s and brought questions like „*How do we understand changing forms of influence in a changing international environment? What are the best methods to influence international affairs?*" (Nye, cited in Rosell et al., 2014, p. 70-71).

Nye's understanding of soft power acknowledges the significance of ideas and culture in the context of international relations and foreign policy. Instead of emphasizing hard power, which involves coercion, many scholars and political figures argue that soft power lies in the capacity to influence others through the *attractiveness* of culture, values, and policies, which are considered soft power resources (Nye Jr, 2006). In other words, soft power lies in the ability to influence the behavior of others to get what you want (Nye 2004, cited in Gackowski and Brylska 2022, p. 775). Thus, strategic narratives are being recognized as one of the main soft power tools of political and social agents (Gackowski and Brylska 2022, p. 773-774).

In the 1990s, there was also a constructivist turn in international relations, and concepts like discourse, language, and narratives received greater attention in examining the international society's development and the relationship between actors and structures. Constructivists and post-positivists have shown how non-material factors influence actors' behavior and how these factors serve international actors to provide meaning (Yeo 2023, p. 2-3).

Roselle et al. state that "*strategic narrative is soft power in the 21st century.*" They came from the same starting point as Nye as they tried to understand what kind of tools and methods work under what conditions regarding persuasion and influence in the international system. However, the authors point out certain limits of Nye's work, recognizing that he does not explore the nature of these soft power resources. It may also be difficult to identify how soft power resources operate and comprehend the circumstances under which they can be employed to endorse foreign policy. Further, they stressed the inability to trace and measure the impact of soft power (Roselle, 2014, p. 71-74). Roselle et al. argue that analyzing the formation, projection, and reception of strategic narratives fills this gap between hard and soft power concepts (Roselle, 2014).

Roselle et al. also draw attention to the changing nature of media in the 1990s, which was a significant factor for Nye and his concept of soft power. They saw a similar change happening two decades later as they say that "*The 'emergence' of new global powers like China and India and the continuation of major changes to media ecologies demand the development of a concept to explain power and influence that is fit for purpose – strategic narrative*" (Roselle, 2014, p. 80-81). Thus, strategic narratives have a similar basis to soft power but promise greater insight into how to examine influence. The explanatory power of strategic narratives, therefore, largely trumps the soft power concept, making them a good candidate for analyzing strategic communication.

One of the first cases where we can observe narrative introduction into strategic discourse was Freedman's paper (*Networks, culture, and narratives, 2006*[11]). Freedman explains that narratives are strategic because they do not emerge spontaneously but are intentionally crafted or strengthened based on already-existing ideas. A successful narrative can explain who is winning and who is losing in case of conflict because narratives are constructed to *"structure the responses of others to developing events"* (2006, p. 22-23). Academic scholars focusing on the fields of war and security have utilized the concept of strategic narratives ever since to interpret the *why, what,* and *how* of the conflict. To sum up, the concept of the strategic narrative presents a construct in the form of a story that is used to establish a shared understanding (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Due to the rapidly changing nature of media ecology, Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle argue that IR scholars have not fully integrated the communication of narratives into the broader theoretical debates about the order of the international system. Authors stress "media ecology" as a vital way to understand how to shape information and narrative circulation. Media ecologies empower and limit actors' communication, so it is crucial to give them more attention in narrative research. Their books (2013, 2014, 2017) contribute to remedying this gap by looking at strategic narratives theoretically and practically (Miskimmon et al. 2013, p. 1). They create a theoretical framework and methodology to locate the strategic narratives by focusing on their *formation, projection,* and measuring their *reception* (Miskimmon et al. 2017). This will be discussed more in the methodological part of the thesis.

Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle define narratives as a *"means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors."* Strategic narratives serve as tools for political actors to increase influence by shaping interests and identities,

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[11] He applied the concept of a strategic narrative as an analytical device in examining the difficulty the US armed forces face in shifting their focus from preparing for regular wars to irregular wars, in which civil society is integrated (Freedman 2006).

understanding the dynamics of international relations, and predicting their future course. They state that political actors may use these strategic narratives for strategic purposes in policy making. Strategic narratives may structure the international system and even the expected behavior of its actors. Leaders may use the strategic narrative to filter identity discourses within a set of specific contextual limits (Miskimmon et al. 2013, p. 3-6).

According to the authors, narratives are essentially stories that actors say about themselves and others. The structure of the story includes basic components, creating a clear storyline with the main actors. The audience can understand the story and identify with it (Miskimmon et al., 2013). The components are as follows (Roselle et al. 2014, p. 74-75 & Miskimmon et al. 2017, p. 7):

- *Actors or characters* are those who are important to the narrative, e.g., states, non-state actors, great powers, normal powers, rogue states, terrorists, NGOs, or even political parties and interest groups (agent).
- *Setting/environment/space* refers to the international system and how it works and is understood (scene).
- *Conflict/action/plot* indicates the reactions and interactions we can observe between actors, e.g., threats and responses to perceived dangers (act).
- *Resolution and suggested solutions* involve taking action to address conflicts or disruptions to the current status quo. The proposed solutions within a narrative often limit what is considered possible, both in terms of thought and action (purpose).
- *Tools/behavior* refers to the instruments and methods actors use (agency).

Other scholars identify different components, which tend to be similar in nature. Freedman (2006) also introduced strategic narratives to the field of international security as compelling storylines that describe events convincingly. Schmitt (2018) explains strategic narratives as essential stories political actors use to influence an audience. The seemingly unrelated phenomena are purposefully connected into a coherent story - strategic narrative – which becomes a communication tool through

which political actors achieve political goals. Also, those stories could be disseminated by political and non-political actors. (Miskimmon et. al 2013, p. 7-11).

Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle identify narratives at three different levels, all of which are connected. First, there are *International System Narratives,* which are used by states to create the preferred structure of the international system itself. They specify who the actors are, how the system works, and which actors challenge the system. For example, the authors mention the Cold War, the War on Terror, and the rise of China. The War on Terror narrative portrays states protecting people from non-state entities labeled as terrorists in the name of security. Thus, the narrative can potentially restrict policymaking, particularly when a political actor is globally labeled as a terrorist by others (Roselle et al. 2014, p. 76). Zhukova et al. (2022) add that states create a desirable vision of the world along with its problems. The next level is *Issue Narratives,* by which actors influence the development of policies. Zhukova et al. say that an issue narrative is *"a story of why a policy is needed… and how the policy will be implemented"* (p. 201, 2022). Through this narrative, we could understand the policy's context, identify key players with an explanation of what the conflict or issue is, and determine how a specific course of action will resolve the underlying issue (Roselle et al. 2014, p. 76 & Miskimmon et al. 2017, p 8). Finally, there are *National Narratives* through which actors project their identity in international affairs, or in other words, how the nation *"wants to be seen by others at home and abroad."* Through the national narrative, we can see *"what the story of the state is."* An example of a national narrative would be the US, a peace-loving nation committed to values like freedom and democracy. The state projects its values and goals through the narrative (Roselle et al. 2014, p. 76 & Miskimmon et al. 2017, p 8). It is crucial to recognize that the strategic narratives are inseparably linked. Inconsistencies between narratives at different levels can weaken the effectiveness of strategic narratives related to policy (Miskimmon et al. 2017, p. 8).

Hagström and Gustafsson assume that narratives set out how the state sees itself in the international system. Actors then tell stories within an established framework,

inherently shaping and limiting their identities and choices (Hagström and Gustafsson 2019, p. 391-392). Political actors employ strategic narratives intentionally to get the desired results and get others to take actions they wouldn't have undertaken otherwise (Hagström & Gustafsson, 2019, 2021). However, they stress that for the narrative to gain sufficient impact, the narrative must resonate not only within target states but also internationally (Hagström & Gustafsson 2021, p. 418). They locate the purpose of the strategic narratives by answering questions like: *"Who are the main protagonists, and how are they depicted? Is there a clear sequence of events or ascription of causality? Is there an indication of lessons to be learned or resolutions prescribed? (*Hagström & Gustafsson 2021, p. 420).

From Miskimmon comes Barthwal-Datta and Chacko (2020), who investigate India's and Australia's use of strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific to promote their preferred conception of regional order. The authors' choice is not coincidental, as India and Australia are among the four countries in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), a diplomatic partnership between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. Authors state that by deploying regional order narratives, actors can also shape the foreign policy behavior of other states (Barthwal-Datta and Chacko 2020, p. 247). They conclude that despite significant convergences in their terminology around the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific, political actors promote a different conception of regional order (Barthwal-Datta and Chacko 2020, p. 258). This is also evidenced by Byrne, who talks about *"the contest…"* that is *"…underway in the Indo-Pacific for strategic narratives"* (2020, p. 10) and about *"the contest of leadership, influence, and ideas, whereby success is ultimately demonstrated through the ability to set the political agenda while also framing the rules and terms of compliance for that agenda, thus shaping the future of regional order in the Indo-Pacific"* (Byrne 2020, p. 10).

Understanding how narratives are formed and exercising power seems more relevant than ever in the IR field. According to Miskimmon et al., forming a narrative requires understanding the domestic and international political context, actors' strategic goals, and types of communication. *"Actors can only form, and project*

narratives based upon the discourses available to them in their historical situation" (2013, p. 9-10). It means that narratives cannot be created at any time. Actors actively use discourses to craft stories with the specific (short-term or long-term) goal of shaping the beliefs and actions of others and legitimizing one's strategic situation and policy actions. The various components of a narrative (an actor, an issue, or the international system itself) are then *framed* in a certain way. According to Entman (2009), framing refers to the act of *"selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution"* (Entman, cited in Miskimmon et al. 2013). *"These frames, therefore, contribute to the construction of the shared meaning of certain components within a narrative, and the narrative gives a particular meaning to their connection"* (Miskimmon et al. 2013, p. 8). By analyzing frames, we can try to deconstruct the narrative to some extent.

This could lead to a clash among narratives. Livingston & Nassetta (2018) point out that *"frame contestation emerges as struggles over the meaning of events within the contours of broader strategic narrative"* (Livingston & Nassetta, cited in Gackowski & Brylska 2022). Hagström & Gustafsson (2019) state that texts, narratives, and discourses are not created in a vacuum but are shaped, challenged, and supported by each other. Moreover, they argue that the chances of a narrative being accepted are much greater if it already follows one that is generally spread, e.g., the Asia–Pacific power shift (2019, p. 394).

3 Analytical Framework & Methodology

In this section, the thesis introduces the research methodology. First, we will look at the methodological framework Miskimmon et al. (2013, 2017) use to explore strategic narratives and the spectrum of persuasion. Based on this framework, we will select a research method, namely Qualitative Content Analysis, which falls within this framework. It will also be explained why discursive analysis was not chosen, as indicated in the research project.

After introducing content analysis as a selected research method, the thesis follows Zhukova et al.' (2022) methodology, in which the content analysis is operationalized to explain different types of strategic narratives within four states (Canada, France, Mexico, and Sweden). We will adopt the approach to the context of the United States and Japan and their respective strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific. The content analysis is undertaken on texts reflecting the Indo-Pacific policy of Japan and the United States. The thesis focuses on the data from 2016 to 2021. This period covers the tenure of both leaders of chosen countries, including Abe's introduction of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept and Trump's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy.

3.1   The Spectrum of Persuasion

Once we know the meaning of strategic narratives and their social and political relevance, our focus should shift to identifying methodological tools that will allow us to study them. Methodology is crucial when it comes to understanding strategic narratives. According to Miskimmon, the right methods enable us to provide explanations of how strategic narratives are *formed, projected, received, and interpreted* (2017, p. 23). The authors set out a framework to understand and explain the role and potential effects of strategic narratives. The framework is based on the idea of the *spectrum of persuasion*, which shows "*how persuasion is theorized in IR, from thin rationalist explanations right up to thick post-structural accounts*" (2017, p. 23-24). On one side of the spectrum, there are individuals who consider a system and a group of participants as established entities and analyze how they interact and influence each other and how they project their interests. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are those who inquire about the origins of that system and the formation of participants' identities within it (2017, p. 27). As we can see, there are different approaches to analyzing strategic narratives, each leading to different methods. For the purposes of this thesis, we will position ourselves at the very thin pole of the spectrum, often labeled as soft rationalist analysis. Miskimmon et al. 2017 state that rationalist analysis can explain "*observable outcomes through an analysis of*

observable interactions between actors with given preferences within a given structure of anarchy" (2017, p.27).

In deciding which part of the spectrum to lean towards in my thesis, I looked at what research questions associated with each approach matched my own. In my research, I ask questions like: *How has the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific been formed in the United States and Japan? How might actors benefit from the formation of the narrative? Do these countries share common goals and motivations in shaping the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific?* These questions are compatible with the very thin pole of the spectrum, where the methods used include content analysis[12].

For better visualization, attached is a table that shows the methods used across the Spectrum of Persuasion (Miskimmon et al. 2017, p. 43)

Table 1. Methods used across the Spectrum of Persuasion

Spectrum:	**Very Thin**	**Thin**	**Thick**	**Very Thick**
Approach:	*Rationalism*	*Communicative Action*	*Reflexive*	*Poststructural*
Methods and methodology	Texts, surveys, and decisions. Content analysis of speeches and news reports, correlated with political decisions and shifts in public opinion survey data.	Inferences from positive data, sequences of interactions charted over time. Some inference beyond the data since actors' identities are deemed vital.	Analysis of state language and gestures. IR akin to theater, so visuality and emotion are important. Multimodal and cultural analysis needed, but not often done.	Trace through time how discourses produce relations, effects, identities. Identify how actors use any freedom. Primacy of language entails analysis of visual and verbal texts.

The table is taken from Miskimmon et al. 2017, p. 43.

Lastly, I would like to explain a deviation from the research project where I announced that discourse analysis, together with a cultural political economy approach (CPE), would be used for the research. A discursive analysis would also make sense for exploring the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific, as it would fit into the "*very thick field of the spectrum of persuasion*" category of Miskimmon et al.

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[12] The spectrum of persuasion with methods and methodology is traceable on page 43 (Miskimmon et. Al 2017).

Discourse analysis, in all its forms, understands reality as a social construct. The political actors create a discourse containing roles that others take on, establishing a distinct identity from which they express themselves (Miskimmon et al. 2017, p. 36 – 37). However, for the specific case of comparison of three types of the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific between Japan and the United States, it eventually became clear that content analysis would be a more appropriate method. Content analysis can be easily scaled up to analyze large datasets, such as collections of speeches, which is the case of this thesis. To sum up, the original decision was also based on the theoretical framework of Miskimmon et al. (2017), but to approach the set research questions and objectives of this thesis, the author opted for qualitative content analysis.

3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The thesis specifically adopts qualitative content analysis as its chosen research method. Content analysis is used to examine and interpret the content of various forms of communication within the context, with a focus on the text, which is particularly relevant to this case. It examines "*the content of a message by counting the number of occurrences of keywords corresponding to a particular category in the text*" (Beneš 2008, p. 98). Kolbe and Burnett state that content analysis provides "*an empirical starting point for generating new research evidence about the nature and effect of specific communication*" (1991, p. 244). Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) state that content analysis "*allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner.*"

By applying content analysis to the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific, the author aims to examine how the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific was formed and projected in the United States and Japan by analyzing and interpreting the government communication from various texts related to the Indo-Pacific.

This will lead to a crucial insight into the governments' communication of these actors and to answering the first research question. By the operationalization of the strategic narrative types and the subsequent evaluation, the author shall explain whether Japan and the United States share common goals and motivations in shaping the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific. Thus, this will lead to answering the second research question.

Since this is qualitative research, the author will focus on the method of data collection. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain how much data is needed in qualitative research to achieve quality qualitative work and present the concept, which is referred to as *the point of saturation*. They suggest that while it is essential to be flexible in how the researcher uses saturation, there should be a point at which gathering additional data no longer contributes to new insights, making the research less useful. Determining when saturation is reached depends on the type of study. Acknowledging it might ensure consistency between the research's

theoretical framework and how saturation is applied (Saunders et al. 2018). At first glance, the data on Indo-Pacific policy for Japan and the United States might seem unequally saturated, reflecting that Abe came up with the idea of *a broader Asia* in 2007, and the United States officially adopted the policy in late 2017. However, even though the idea has, to some extent, resonated in Japanese foreign discourse, during Abe's absence as Prime Minister, the term Indo-Pacific practically did not appear in official statements. Abe officially introduced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy in 2016, making the scale at which it projects the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific significantly smaller and comparable to the United States. Furthermore, Abe's tenure as Prime Minister ended in September 2020, making it comparable to Trump's tenure as President of the United States, which ended in January 2021.

3.3   Data Collection

For the purposes of this thesis, primary sources on Japan's FOIP policy and the U.S. FOIP policy were collected. The primary data consists of policy documents, press releases, public speeches (by the president of the United States, the Prime Minister of Japan, and the highest representatives of each administration, e.g., in the case of Japan it refers to Minister of Defense and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and in the case of the United States it refers to Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense), meetings with officials, and diplomatic notes by the central authorities of the United States and Japan. The texts were published by the Japanese Government (KANTEI), the Japanese Foreign Ministry (MOFA), the Japanese Ministry of Defense, the official White House archives, the U.S. Department of State archives, and the U.S. Department of Defense.

In the case of Japan, obtaining documents was considerably easier than in the case of the United States. The MOFA has a special section on its official website called "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," where policy speeches, diplomatic bluebooks, and records of meetings with officials related to the Indo-Pacific policy can be found. The selection of documents on KANTEI was made by keyword searches during

Prime Minister Abe's term (2016 – 2020), with search results containing "Indo-Pacific", as in the case of the Department of Defense (DoD). Also, only documents in the English language were included. In sum, 32 texts were selected for the analysis.

In the case of the United States, obtaining documents was slightly more challenging as these official bodies do not have any thematic section on the Indo-Pacific. The selection of documents was made from the archived White House website, the archived content of the U.S. Department of State, and the National Security Council[13] (NSC), covering Trump's presidency from 2017 – 2021. These texts from the NSC were found on the archived White House website as well. In the archived White House website, 159 items were found with search results containing "Indo-Pacific." In the U.S. Department of State, 1645 items were found with search results containing "Indo-Pacific." In sum, 34 texts were selected for the analysis. All the chosen texts from Japan and the United States are cited in the Primary Sources part of the thesis. Given the large disparity in the amount of data in these cases, the research has some limitations. The Limitations of the Research chapter specifically addresses these issues.

The thesis focuses on the data coming from 2016 to 2021. This period covers the tenure of both leaders of chosen countries, including Abe's introduction of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept and Trump's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy. The timeframe is set by the years when the topic of the Indo-Pacific gained significant momentum in IR, which has only deepened over time, and we dare to assume that the future will be no different. Also, the selected scale of time allows us to explore how the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific was formed and projected due to the large number of documents that were released.

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[13] Which is the President's principal forum for considering national security and foreign policy matters.

3.4   Categories and Coding

To analyze the documents by using qualitative content analysis, the text must be divided into different categories. Kuckartz (2019) stresses the importance of the categories in qualitative content analysis as they form the core of the research. Categories indicate elements within the text, which summarize the meaning of those elements in a nutshell (Mayring, 2015; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019).

Therefore, the information on the Indo-Pacific in the selected texts was coded for the three respective strategic narrative types (categories): issue narrative, international system narrative, and national narrative. These categories were derived from a theory on strategic narratives; thus, it is a concept-driven, deductive method (Mayring, 2015; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019). Subcategories for each type of strategic narrative have also been set to facilitate a more structured embedding of narrative elements. They were identified based on the academic literature discussed above (Miskimmon et al. 2017, p 8). The operationalization of the Indo-Pacific narrative was made by setting core questions that reflect the nature of the three strategic narrative types. This practice followed, to some extent, Zhukova et al.'s (2022) methodology, but I set the questions to the Indo-Pacific case by myself. The questions also followed the academic literature discussed above (Miskimmon et al. 2013, 2017) and their description of the three narrative types. The questions were set as follows:

- Issue Narrative: *Why is the Indo-Pacific policy crucial? What are the threats and concerns?*
- International System Narrative: *What is the approach to the international system in the Indo-Pacific?*
- National Narrative: *What values and goals does the narrator project through the narrative?*

Kuckartz states that in qualitative content analysis, the information to be coded is not usually identified in advance but created by the coding process and referred to

as coding units (2019, p. 185 – 186). The answers to the set questions reflect the most important elements (coding units) of the particular narrative as well as potential focus areas where the common goals and motivations of the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific may align and diverge in the case of Japan and the United States. These narrative elements mostly represent known concepts used in IR research. They were identified based on the academic literature discussed above, e.g., multilateralism and bilateralism, which are both concepts that are frequently mentioned in the academic literature on the Indo-Pacific as they represent focus areas, which are often the subject of research. They also stemmed from the collected data, using an abductive logic. Subsequently, they were sorted into each type of the Indo-Pacific strategic narrative.

- The issue narrative was operationalized into functional visions of security, the source of threats, and particular political issues, including maritime security, counterterrorism, denuclearization of China's assertiveness, and humanitarian crisis.
- The international system narrative was operationalized as structural visions of regional and global order, including multilateralism, bilateralism & ASEAN centrality, partnership, and alliances.
- The national narrative was operationalized as modes of national interest, including cooperation, competition & the rule of law, a market economy & connectivity, and capacity building.

Lacy, Watson, Riffe, and Lovejoy (2015) say that to limit the author's subjectivity, researchers should use several keywords that provide different facets of the same concept. The operationalization of each narrative into selected coding elements tries to reflect different facets of the subcategories in cases where this is applicable. By that, we relate the thesis's analytical framework to existing academic work on strategic narrative. The table on the analytical framework (operationalization of strategic narrative types) is presented below.

Table 2. Analytical Framework (Operationalization of Strategic Narratives)

Actors	Categories (Narrative Types)	Subcategories	Possible connecting questions to the Indo-Pacific strategic narrative	Narrative Elements (Coding units)
Japan and the United States (2016 - 2021)	Issue Narratives	Key Issues	*Why is the Indo-Pacific policy crucial? What are the threats and concerns?*	maritime security, counterterrorism & denuclearization
		Threats & Concerns		China's assertiveness, humanitarian crisis
	International System Narratives	Power Dynamics	*What is the approach to the international system in the Indo-Pacific?*	multilateralism, bilateralism
		Regional Positioning		ASEAN centrality, partnerships & alliances
	National Narrative	Perception of China	*What values and goals does the narrator project through the narrative?*	cooperation, competition
		Values and Goals		rule of law, market economy
		Strategic objectives and priorities		connectivity, capacity building

The table is created by the author herself.

Given the theoretical part presented, it is expected that individual narratives will be omnipresent in the collected data. As Miskimmon et al. (2017) say, they are "*inextricably linked.*" For the purposes of this thesis, to identify potential alignments and divergences in the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific of Japan and the United States, we need to set up a scale against which to evaluate the occurrence of a given narrative. Therefore, we can compare the level of occurrence of particular narrative elements across multiple texts and thus find out which focus areas of the Indo-Pacific narrative are emphasized. This approach will allow us to analyze textual data in a more systematic way.

Creating an evaluating scale in qualitative content analysis is a possible practice in this field. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) state that one of the approaches to content analysis can start with measuring the content by counting words and then extending the analysis to the deeper meanings and context of the specific word. They say that this approach might seem quantitative at first, but the objective is to explore the usage of the words in an inductive manner (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, p. 1285 – 1286).

Therefore, the scale provides a simple method of categorizing and comparing the occurrence level of each narrative in the data. I will analyze all the data in the sample (press releases, public speeches, op-eds by officials at home, and policy documents) based on the analytical framework and assign numerical ratings based on the coding scheme. The scale takes ratings from 1 to 3, with 1 indicating the lowest occurrence and 3 indicating the highest occurrence, by counting the word

occurrences within each category within the Indo-Pacific context. In case there is no word to count in the given category, 0 is used to mark this case. This approach allows us to identify the content of the documents and obtain results from the data.

The Example of Assigning the Numerical Values:

There is a policy speech entitled ASEAN Policy Speech from January 10, 2020. Within the speech, I look for all the occurrences of the set coding units mentioned in the Analytical Framework above in the context of the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the coding unit must be in the same sentence or paragraph, or it must be evident that the coding unit is used in reference to the Indo-Pacific.

I found out that coding units from the category **National Narrative** were mentioned 2 times (rule of law, connectivity), and the coding units from the category **International System Narrative** were mentioned 4 times (ASEAN centrality 3x, multilateralism). While the coding units from the category **Issue Narrative** were mentioned only 1 time (maritime security). Therefore, the evaluation of the mentioned policy speech is as follows:

- 1 (the lowest occurrence) → Issue Narrative
- 2 (the average occurrence) → National Narrative
- 3 (the highest occurrence) → International System Narrative

3.5   Limitations of the Research

This part will discuss some of the thesis's limitations and challenges and how the author addressed them. It will discuss limitations regarding the chosen theoretical framework, some parts of the methodology, and the analytical framework.

There are several challenges in studying strategic narratives, as acknowledged even by Miskimmon et al. (2013, 2017). One of the limiting aspects of this kind of research is that it is focused on the initial stages of strategic narratives, namely the formation and the projection phases. I decided not to address the reception phase due to the

need for a distinct scope and dataset. However, I am aware that as strategic narratives are distributed not only by political actors but also by non-political actors (e.g., NGOs and the media), investigating them could bring significant value in terms of the effectiveness of the Indo-Pacific narrative.

The next problematic aspect of the research is the data set covering the period 2016 – 2021. This period does not cover all possible texts containing information on the Indo-Pacific, especially in the United States part, as it is not within the scope of this thesis. In the case of the United States, I have encountered a huge number of operational documents and short statements that, for example, contain only one sentence mentioning the Indo-Pacific, but for the purposes of this thesis, these texts do not add significant analytical value. These types of texts were therefore excluded from the research. To address the significant disparity in the amount of data between Japan and the United States, I chose to focus more on the quality and relevance of the chosen texts. Therefore, texts of similar type and importance were selected as priorities, e.g., strategic documents such as diplomatic bluebooks or national strategies, which have the greatest analytical value. Furthermore, it was also considered that the time distribution of the selected texts was similar in both cases. Lastly, the process of excluding texts from the US part also took into consideration the significant events which helped to shape the narrative. If all available sources were examined, the methodology of the work would have to change from qualitative to quantitative.

With further comments on methodology, there are certain shortcomings when it comes to the analytical framework and the set coding scheme. The coding units were chosen based on the academic literature, as well as on how well they answer the questions that operationalize each narrative type. Even though their selection combines the theoretical part and the methodology, it does not mean that other possible narrative elements could not have been selected to fit the assignment. It is, therefore, necessary to admit a considerable degree of subjectivity in this part. Furthermore, developing a predefined set of categories and concepts allowed us to

stay focused on the specific concepts, yet it limited the thesis' flexibility to add new coding units through the process. Also, the text was coded exactly as the coding units appear, which lowered the level of implication. In other words, some words might imply the same concept, yet they cannot be counted. From the author's mere observation, if the scale of the coding units could be more flexible or more units could be added through the process, the results would not be much different in terms of the final narrative type. However, the results could have been more backed by the data and thus more valuable. Shedding light on these weaknesses can also outline areas where potential future research could take place.

4 Empirical Part

In this part, the thesis offers an empirical insight into the Indo-Pacific policy in Japan and the United States. The purpose of the first part of this chapter (focusing on Japan and the United States) is not to present further research but rather to outline the context of the formation of the Indo-Pacific strategic narrative in the cases of Japan and the United States. It is also useful to introduce these parts for better orientation in the next section of this chapter, which already specifically addresses the results of the content analysis. Based on the results of the Qualitative Content Analysis, the thesis introduces the different types of strategic narrative. For each type of narrative, we focus on the concepts that were the subject of the analysis. This will allow us to explore how much the strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific of Tokyo and Washington differ or align.

4.1. Japan

The origins of the formation of the Indo-Pacific strategic narrative can be found in Japan in Prime Minister Abe's famous speech, *Confluence of the Two Seas*, to the Indian parliament in 2007. Abe begins his speech by quoting Indian spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda: "*The different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea.*" He continued by quoting a book authored by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh, which was titled *Confluence of the Two Seas* (1655). Abe created a narrative that reflected Japan's and India's national identities based on

values such as freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights. He stressed economic cooperation and common security interests in protecting the seas, which are key to the global economy (Abe 2007). And he concealed it all under the label *"broader Asia."* It is exactly this moment that is cited in academic literature as the beginning of the Indo-Pacific concept, narrative, strategy, vision, or policy. We can find many different terms that basically encapsulates the same thing – the Japanese position across the vast expanse of the Indo-Pacific.

Miskimmon et al. (2013, p. 2) refer to narratives as a *"means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics."* In his speech, Abe could link Indian and Japanese history with present geography and share a vision of the common future.

Indications that Abe plans to push for greater cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region can be traced back to 2006. He stated that the region is an area *"undergoing the most dynamic change in the world,"* stressing the transformation of countries with different values and social systems into friends and that Japan should continue to exercise leadership for the development of APEC (KANTEI, 2006). In 2007, Abe began to indicate that he would push for more proactive diplomacy in foreign policy by strengthening their solidarity with the international community. To back his statement up, he referred to North Korea's *"nuclear and missile issues"* and *"24 precious Japanese lost lives in the September 11th terrorist attack in the U.S."* (KANTEI, 2007). However, Abe did not have a chance to push harder for a more proactive policy at that time as his first term ended in 2007 due to the failure of his political party in national elections.

In the following section, the thesis will briefly present Japan's evolving stance on the Asia-Pacific region by analyzing the official speeches of the following Prime Ministers, covering the period from 2008 to 2012. We will see that Abe's successors showed varying degrees of focus on the Asia-Pacific. While Prime Ministers Kan and Noda reaffirmed the importance of Japan-US relations, mentioning the term Asia-Pacific in connection with strengthening the relationship between Japan and

the United States, the focus of Abe's vision weakened. The focus is not on assessing the stance itself but on providing the context to aid in understanding the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept implemented in 2016, which will also be presented.

4.1.1. Japan's Outlook on the Asia-Pacific

In 2008, Prime Minister Fukuda (2007 – 2008) delivered a speech titled "When the Pacific Ocean Becomes an Inland Sea: Five Pledges to a Future Asia that Acts Together." This address followed up on Abe's vision. Fukuda envisioned the Pacific Ocean becoming an inland sea and stressed the importance of cooperation between Japan and a range of nations, including ASEAN countries, North and South America, China, Indochina, and Russia. He used the term "Asia-Pacific" twelve times in the context of the importance of joint efforts to address climate change and promote overall prosperity in the region. This is notable, particularly in comparison to subsequent prime ministers. However, we can also sense from Fukuda's speech a certain caution in pushing for more proactive steps, as if he was trying to soften his predecessor's ambitious declaration of proactive diplomacy. He reminded the "Fukuda Doctrine," a set of diplomatic principles outlined by Japan in 1977, stating that Japan would never become a military power, and stressed that the doctrine is still very much alive (KANTEI, 2008).

A slight weakening of this theme in Japanese official discourse was followed by an even greater decline with the arrival of following prime ministers. Prime Minister Aso (2006 – 2009), in his speech "Japan's Diplomacy: Ensuring Security and Prosperity," did not mention anything related to the Asia-Pacific region, as his attention was focused on Central Asia and the initiative for a Eurasian Crossroads (KANTEI, 2009). Prime Minister Hatoyama (2009 – 2010) mentioned the term Asia-Pacific only once in his speech "On the Future of Asia" in May 2010, which was related to resolving global environmental challenges (KANTEI, 2010).

It was only after this that Prime Minister Kan (2010 – 2011) mentioned the Asia-Pacific in a press conference regarding the alliance with the United States, stating

that *"Japan-US relations are important not only in a bilateral context but also for the stability of the Asia-Pacific and for peace and prosperity in the world..."* (KANTEI, 2010). However, beyond this proclamation, no other statements in his period mention the Asia-Pacific or Japan's role in its leadership. It was more about strengthening the alliance between Japan and the United States than about strengthening the idea of Asia-Pacific.

Prime Minister Noda (2011 – 2012) spoke in the same discourse, also mentioning the term Asia-Pacific in connection with strengthening the relationship between Japan and the United States. Cooperation with the United States is deepening under Noda and Obama as it takes on more concrete features not only in terms of security but also in economic aspects (KANTEI, 2011).

In 2012, Abe made a comeback to the premiership. His conviction that what he had started in the Indian parliament was right had only grown stronger. In December 2012, he expressed his concern that China's growing presence in the South China Sea could transform the region into *"Lake Beijing"*[14] and highlighted the cooperation among four democratic countries in the region: the United States, Australia, India, and Japan. His concerns were based on the fact that China was undergoing a transition from land-based power to maritime power at that time (Abe 2012).

As mentioned above, Abe initiated the formation of a "Democratic Security Diamond" (DSD) in December 2012. The diamond points were figuratively formed by four leading maritime democracies—Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. Those countries should guard the area from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific and oppose China's rising coercion (Lee & Lee 2016, p. 285-287). A few years later, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was renewed based on this constellation.

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[14] Available here: https://www.project-syndicate.org/magazine/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe?barrier=accesspaylog

In 2013, Abe delivered a policy speech titled *"Japan is Back"* at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). One of his initial statements was:

> *"Firstly, when the Asia-Pacific or the Indo-Pacific region becomes more and more prosperous, Japan must remain a leading promoter of rules."*

He mentioned protecting maritime areas, strengthening alliances with like-minded democracies, and focusing on areas like trade, investment, intellectual property, labor, and the environment (Abe 2013). The words Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific are interchangeable here, which is very similar to how the Obama administration (2009 – 2017) referred to the region at the beginning of the Pivot to Asia.

4.1.2. Abe's FOIP Vision

In 2021, the Japanese public broadcaster NHK published an interview[15] with Ichikawa Keiichi, Director of the General Affairs Department of the Foreign Ministry's Foreign Policy Office, which developed Japan's FOIP concept. He stressed that Japan needed a new concept, given Japan's declining influence in the international order. They searched across the top ranks of the State Department for a name that would capture the values and principles of a diverse and inclusive region while building on the idea of the *Confluence of the Two Seas* from 2007. The result was the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, which Abe subsequently introduced in Kenya.

In August 2016, Abe delivered a speech at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) in Nairobi, mentioning a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) for the first time[16]. Abe stressed the importance of international cooperation and highlighted that Japan:

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[15] Available here: https://www.nhk.or.jp/politics/articles/feature/62725.html

"bears the responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of

Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy,

free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous" [17] (Abe 2016).

Abe pursued three strategic goals through the FOIP: 1) Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade, 2) Pursuit of economic prosperity, e.g., improving connectivity and strengthening economic partnerships, and 3) Commitment to peace and stability, via capacity building on maritime law enforcement capabilities and assistance to countries in the Indo-Pacific region and cooperation in such fields as humanitarian assistance, counter-terrorism, and non-proliferation (Abe 2016).

Envall and Wilkins (2023) note that behind strengthening the regional order that stretches from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, other aims are concealed. They argue that Abe is trying to replace current thinking on East Asia or Asia-Pacific and form a new regional definition linking these two oceans together. He also forms the rules, expectations, and norms for the new regional arrangement (2023, p. 698). Abe's economic ambitions for the region have focused on prosperity and connectivity. The connectivity is to be achieved through infrastructure investment around the region (developing ports, railways, roads, energy and ICT[18]), building on the Abe government's establishment of the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure in 2015, which was an investment of approximately USD 110 billion for "quality infrastructure development" in Asia over the next 5 years. (Envall and Wilkins 2023, p. 699).

Takenaka (2022) states that *"FOIP is politically significant in terms of postwar Japanese diplomacy in that it combines economic policies as well as security policies into a comprehensive external policy for the first time in Japan's post-war history"* (Takenaka 2022, p. 3). When it comes to Abe's motives for launching the concept, Takenaka

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[17] Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI), Tokyo, Japan, August 27, 2016, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201608/1218850_11013.html.

[18] (ABE 2016) Available here: https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000430632.pdf

(2022) states three driving factors that motivated the Abe administration: 1) China's rise and its launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2012 and 2013; 2) increasing tension in maritime space, including territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea; and 3) India's rise and its expected rapid economic growth. Yamamoto (2020) says that the objective of FOIP for Japan is to strengthen the economy by improving connectivity and economic partnerships in Asia without being trapped in the growing tension between the US and China, which is basically an attempt to keep the *"right distance between the US and China"* (2020, p. 11).

Katsumata and Shibuichi (2023) agree with this view and extend their argument even further by describing how Japan, to some extent, supported Beijing's implementation of the BRI. They point out that Abe's willingness to cooperate with China started in May 2017 during the Leaders' Roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. The authors state that this was also a reaction to the United States leaving the multilateral TPP at the beginning of the year. After that, Japan began to stress the compatibility of its FOIP concept with the Chinese initiative. (2023, p. 309). By the end of 2018, Japan had stopped using the word "*strategy*" and begun to refer to FOIP as a "*vision*" on the grounds that *"the Japanese Foreign Ministry learned during the August 2018 ASEAN meeting that the word "strategy" would be controversial in Southeast Asia"* (cited Yamamoto 2021, Katsumata and Shibuichi 2023). Wirth and Jenne (2022) even argue that the Abe administration changed the term "*strategy*" to the "*vision*" because it sounds less military. Enval and Wilkins (2023) argue that Japan has been careful not to treat China as a competitor in the context of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative. To sum up, the Indo-Pacific vision in Japanese interpretation "*adopts a nuanced and sophisticated approach by promoting principles, and not the specific issues that challenge such principles*" (Choong 2019, p. 416).

4.2. The United States

The term 'Indo-Pacific' was officially introduced in U.S. discourse during Obama's first administration. However, some authors, such as Calabrese (2020) and Tellis

(2020), suggest that the idea of establishing a security framework for the Indo-Pacific region traces back to the George W. Bush administration (2001 – 2009) as there was an evident shift in the Bush administration towards recognition India as a key partner in promoting stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

During Obama's tenure (2009 – 2017), the 'Pivot to Asia' strategy was established, which is important to understand as it laid the groundwork for subsequent narratives. While this thesis does not evaluate the effectiveness of the Pivot to Asia, it provides context for understanding the Asia-Pacific narrative. This context is crucial for comprehending the later adoption of the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) strategy during President Trump's tenure (2017–2021).

The aim of the following section is to provide context on the Asia-Pacific narrative by examining the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia policy. The focus is not on assessing the policy itself but on providing the context to aid in understanding the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy implemented in 2017, which will also be presented.

4.2.1. The Pivot to Asia

The pivot to Asia, also known as the East Asia Strategy or the "*rebalance*" to the Asia-Pacific, represents a strategic shift in U.S. foreign policy, focusing away from the Middle Eastern and European spheres and towards East Asian and Southeast Asian nations. The strategy aimed to rebalance U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military focus towards the Asia-Pacific region, recognizing its growing importance in global affairs.

The first articulation of the policy was announced by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2009 – 2013) in a Foreign Policy article, "America's Pacific Century," in 2011. [19] She reaffirmed the United States' commitment to being a leading actor in shaping Asia-Pacific's future, emphasizing the strategic turn to the region and recognition of U.S. interests and engagement in the region. She also stressed the

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[19] Available here: https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/

growing connection between the Indian and Pacific oceans into one operational concept where the United States military presence will be distributed more broadly (Clinton 2011). Yeo (2023) points out that for Clinton, "*Asia represented the future, and U.S. diplomacy needed to reflect this priority.*" He also quotes Obama's Deputy National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, saying that the pivot "*emerged from a set of assessments, a set of activities – rising from a set of assessments that we did at the end of 2008 and into 2009 at the beginning of the administration*" (Yeo 2023, p. 10 - 11).

Secretary of State Clinton and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel (2013 – 2015) used the term Indo-Pacific in official communication, usually in connection with the term Asia-Pacific, or switched them with each other during their time in office. Clinton first used the term Indo-Pacific in 2010 to indicate closer naval cooperation with India, saying: "*We are expanding our work with the Indian navy in the Pacific because we understand how important the Indo-Pacific basin is*" (Clinton 2010). In 2012, Clinton delivered a speech at the University of Western Australia, highlighting the strategic importance of Perth in global trade and the U.S.'s commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. She said: "*how we think about the Asia Pacific or the Indo Pacific region is going to be critical to our future as well as yours*" (Clinton 2012). Scott (2018) notes that in the Department of Defense, a similar discourse was beginning to emerge. In 2014, Hagel, speaking in Sydney after the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation, highlighted the significance of the new U.S.-Australia force agreement in advancing regional security and the U.S.'s strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific and also said: "*I see a new, committed resolve to work together to build a security system across this Indo-Pacific region*" (Hagel 2014).

Behind the growing emphasis on intensive cooperation within the region was an apparent effort to counterbalance China's rise and growing assertiveness. This view is evidenced by the numerous academic literature (Löfflmann 2016, Scott 2018, Yeo 2023) and military pivot (or rebalance) from the Middle East to the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia.

The United States deployed U.S. Marines to Darwin in Australia in 2010, strengthened the defense cooperation with the Philippines in 2014, and increased cooperation with Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The credible commitment towards the region was also shown by modernizing alliances and participating in regional institutions (Yeo 2023, p. 12). Alongside these military efforts towards the region was the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) initiative, which aimed at *"shaping the future of trade and connectivity in the Indo-Pacific"* (Sumar 2014; also Biswal 2016, cited in Scott, 2018). It focused on connections between South Asia and Southeast Asia, excluding China, as the response to China's Maritime Silk Road (MSRI), which was announced in 2013 by Xi Jinping. The United States also demonstrated leadership in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral trade framework with US allies and partners[20] around the Pacific Rim that did not include China (Scott 2018).

Calabrese (2020) states that *"the overarching aim of the Rebalance* (or Pivot to Asia) *was to contain and channel Chinese ambitions peacefully by increasing US leverage over Beijing, while at the same time taking steps to strengthen positive-sum Sino-US cooperation on issues such as counterproliferation and counterterrorism"* (Calabrese 2020, p. 308). At the same time, however, he also points to the shortcomings of this project under the Obama administration, primarily in the sense that not enough strategic trust has been established in US-China relations. He's not the only one. Despite the consensus in the academy that the intent of the pivot was strategically sensible and sound, there is also criticism of the strategy's insufficiency and ineffectiveness. Kolmaš and Kolmašová (2019) also criticized the Pivot as Obama's administration struggled to live up to the expectations. They state that *"Obama was unable to combine support for Asian states and their multilateral settings with his containment policies towards China"* (2019, p. 76). Harris and Trubowitz (2021) argue that the Obama's administration capacity to project influence has diminished due to three domestic-level factors, one of them is *"the lack of an overarching foreign-policy narrative to make power projection*

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[20] It involved Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, United States, and Vietnam (Obama 2015).

attractive to a broad slice of the political class and domestic public" (2021, p. 189). They also argue that Obama failed to demonstrate the economic benefits of the pivot domestically. Due to strong opposition within the Democratic Party to TPP, which shared concerns about potential job losses, there was a strong resentment towards economic openness and trade liberalization within the Asia-Pacific region. They conclude that Obama's acceptance of multilateral trade agreements exposed him to critiques from both parties (2021, p. 208 - 210).

Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 2009-13, presented five categories of criticism of the pivot: "*1) the United States never left Asia to begin with; 2) superpowers should not pivot; 3) the Pivot risks provoking China; 4) the Pivot lacks resources and follow-through, and 5) the word Pivot should be replaced with the world rebalance*" (Campbell 2016, cited in Yeo 2023, p. 13). Ross (2012) also points out that the policy mainly aggravated US-China relations and made the region more tense, giving the example of withdrawing support from China for the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program (2012, p. 79). Davidson (2014), former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans from 2009 – 2013, clarifies the confusion surrounding the term *pivot*, which suggests that the United States is moving toward Asia at the expense of its long-standing allies in Europe. He states, "*There were no military units moved from Europe to Asia because the U.S. is not pivoting away from our long-time allies*" (Davidson 2014, p. 78) and that "*the military element of the rebalance is designed as a supporting element to the greater U.S. re-emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region*" (Davidson 2014, p. 82). Harris and Trubowitz confirm the view that the pivot was never meant to come at the cost of a robust military presence in Europe. They also point out that Obama's vision was not sufficiently connected to the long history of American involvement in Asia, which is a shame because the United States has been active in the region since the mid-nineteenth century (Harris and Trubowitz 2021, p. 207). Wirth & Jenne (2022) stress that „*policymakers on both sides of the Pacific struggled to imagine alternate futures*" as the U.S. allies, who faced threats from China and North Korea, remained uncertain about how much they could rely

on the United States and *"Beijing considered it* (the Pivot) *as an attempt to slow down China's peaceful development."*

When it comes to the Obama administration, we could observe some references to missing a compelling narrative. That brings us back to the theory of strategic narratives that are created by political actors to *"construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics"* (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 2). The weakness of Obama's narrative of U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific is that he had failed to create a compelling narrative of the purpose of U.S. engagement in the region, had not drawn on the history of U.S. engagement, nor presented a common future, and he had failed to connect the narrative to the economic benefits of the TPP on the home front. Using this example, we can see that the formation of an insufficiently convincing narrative can result in the failure of the whole policy. The author argues that even this failure has, to some extent, helped Trump set a "new" narrative.

4.2.2. Trump's FOIP Strategy

With the arrival of the Trump administration (2016 – 2020), it became clear that the new president would want to distance himself from his predecessor. President Trump made the immediate decision to pull the United States out of the TPP shortly after his inauguration in January 2017. Scott (2018) states that it reflected *"Trump's distrust of multilateral and state-led overseas economic initiatives,"* and thus, he began to foster bilateral and minilateral (trilaterals and quadrilaterals) initiatives and meetings (Scott 2018, p. 28). However, there has arisen a need for a new approach to Asia that reflects American interests and needs. Yeo (2023) points out that *"Trump-appointed officials were searching for 'something new, but they didn't know exactly what' other than it was a new approach to Asia"* (Yeo 2023, p. 14).

Harding (2019) points out that Trump was short on experts on foreign policy advisors. He states that unlike Clinton, who already surrounded herself with many experts during the presidential campaign with whom she was developing a pre-presidential foreign agenda, including a strategy for Asia, Trump did not have that

as many leading Republican experts opposed Trump's candidacy. The result had, therefore, been a rather reactive policy towards Asia *"guided by a deep skepticism of China and the reality that North Korea presented an increasingly untenable threat to the U.S. homeland"* (Harding 2019, p. 62).

At the beginning of the thesis, we asked: *How did the narrative move from one discourse to another?* Yeo states that other states might adopt a strategic narrative, especially if they are close allies (2023, p. 7). Harding (2019) also notes that the development of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy in the United States was greatly shaped by the extensive communication between top officials from the Trump administration and their Japanese counterparts (2019, p. 62). Trump's administration started noticeably adapting the Indo-Pacific rhetoric in late 2017 and early 2018. Several examples of leading government officials adopting the Indo-Pacific terminology can be mentioned.

Ambassador Alice Wells participated in the September 2017 Indian Ocean Conference in Colombo, where nations from the Indo-Pacific gathered to discuss peace, progress, and prosperity in the region (DoS 2017). Secretary of Defense James Mattis, until that time, used the terms "Asia-Pacific" and "Pacific" in official statements but then switched to using the "Indo-Pacific" for the first time in September 2017.

> *"A peaceful and prosperous future in the Indo-Pacific region is based on a strong rules-based international order and a shared commitment to international law, to peaceful resolution of disputes and respect for territorial integrity."*

Mattis said this at a press conference with India's Minister of Defense, Nirmala Sitharaman, during which they discussed their shared interests in promoting maritime security, freedom of navigation, and stability in the Indo-Pacific region (DoD 2017).

Scott (2018) notes that while Mattis' warnings regarding Chinese actions in the South China Sea, stating that China's behavior in the South China Sea is contrary to

the values promoted by the US strategy, were framed within particular "Asia-Pacific" contexts during the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2017, comparable warnings about China were framed within the "Indo-Pacific" contexts during the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018.[21] The term "Indo-Pacific" is mentioned 17 times, whereas "Asia-Pacific" is not mentioned once.

Similarly, the rhetoric of another senior Trump administration official, this time U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, adapted to the Indo-Pacific narrative. In October 2017, he delivered a speech to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, using the term "Indo-Pacific" 19 times (not counting the following questions and answers) and "Asia-Pacific" zero times. Tillerson presented the Indo-Pacific as a framing concept as he highlighted the bilateral cooperation with India and confirmed that the United States won't hesitate to address challenges posed by China to the established rules-based order. He argued that:

"The world's center of gravity is shifting to the heart of the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. and India, with our shared goals of peace, security, freedom of navigation, and a free and open architecture, must serve as the Eastern and Western beacons of the Indo-Pacific, as the port and starboard lights between which the region can reach its greatest and best potential." [22]

In November 2017, Trump departed for a visit of Asian allies. It was considered the longest trip to Asia by any American president in more than a quarter-century. His mission focused on three goals: 1) strengthening international resolve to denuclearize North Korea, 2) promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific region, and 3) advancing American prosperity through fair and reciprocal trade (Trump 2017). The most significant stop was his visit to Vietnam, where Trump delivered a speech at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. He did not mention "Asia-Pacific" once despite this being the APEC summit. That was the time that is referred to as the beginning of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. Even

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[21] Available here: https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/images-delta/dialogues/sld/sld-2018/documents/james-mattis-sld18.pdf

[22] Available here: https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-our-relationship-india-next-century-address-us-secretary-state-rex-tillerson

though Trump announced he was always going to put America first, stressing the bilateral agreements and warning about China-first trade policies, he also shared a vision *"for a free and open Indo-Pacific"* as *"a place where sovereign and independent nations, with diverse cultures and many different dreams, can all prosper side-by-side, and thrive in freedom and in peace."* Overall, he stressed the rule of law, individual rights, and freedom of navigation, including open shipping lanes, referring to the "Indo-Pacific" 10 times (Trump 2017). Harding (2019) notes that there was still a lack of a clear vision for a broad U.S. economic agenda for the region.

The final commitment to the Indo-Pacific region was indicated by adopting the United States' National Security Strategy (NSS), released in December 2017 with a specific part on the Indo-Pacific. After almost a year of signals in office, the Trump administration was presenting a clear vision for the United States' engagement in the region. Right from the opening, a clear reference to the competition with China is mentioned:

"A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region."[23]

The Indo-Pacific part of the NSS is divided into three main priority sections: 1) political, 2) economic, and 3) military and security. The strategy aims to reinforce freedom of the seas and peaceful resolution of territorial disputes, alongside a strong commitment to achieving denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. Emphasis is placed on increased quadrilateral cooperation between Japan, India, and Australia. The NSS also welcomes India's growth in the Indian Ocean (Trump 2017). Scott (2018) points out that the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) released in January 2018 was also critical to China. Next, the above-mentioned Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018 followed, warning against territorial disputes in China.

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[23] Available here: https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf

In June 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo clarified the geographical scope of the Indo-Pacific strategy, defining the region as stretching from the west coast of the United States to the west coast of India. Choong (2019) notes that "*this effectively excluded the western part of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and the eastern part of Africa and put the area within the Indo-Pacific Command's area of responsibility* (2019, p. 418 – 419).

Pompeo also delivered the keynote speech entitled *America's Indo-Pacific Economic Vision*[24], announced a $113 million plan to invest in new technology, energy, and infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific. The implication was that this action would offer an alternative to China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative from the United States (Scott 2018, p. 32). He also clarified what the Trump administration means by *free* and *open*. [25]

"When we say "free" Indo-Pacific, it means we all want all nations, every nation, to be able to protect their sovereignty from coercion by other countries…. When we say "open" in the Indo-Pacific, it means we want all nations to enjoy open access to seas and airways.... This is key for international peace and for each country's attainment of its own national aims" (Pomepo 2018).

In April 2018, Alex N. Wong, Deputy Assistant Secretary from the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, used the same explanation at the special briefing on the Indo-Pacific Strategy. He stressed why it is significant to use the term Indo-Pacific and not Asia-Pacific by stressing the current reality of South Asia, and especially India, playing a key role in the Pacific, East Asia, and Southeast Asia region. He also said that it is the US policy to ensure that India plays that role.[26]

In mid-2018, the United States also renamed its largest military command, the US Pacific Command, to the US Indo-Pacific Command to highlight its new approach to Asia (Pardesi 2020, p 124). The renaming was not only symbolic but, according

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[24] Available here: https://2017-2021.state.gov/americas-indo-pacific-economic-vision/
[25] Available here: https://kr.usembassy.gov/073018-secretary-pompeo-remarks-on-americas-indo-pacific-economic-vision/
[26] Available here: https://2017-2021.state.gov/briefing-on-the-indo-pacific-strategy/index.html

to Pardesi, sent a hidden message to India, namely that India *"is rising in only one world region that is covered by one single American military command."* By reinforcing India's position, the United States aimed to shift the focus away from China by de-centering China's position (Pardesi 2020, 139-140).

In general, President Trump sought a fresh approach to Asia, one that would effectively diverge from the policy trajectory established under his predecessor's "Pivot to Asia." At the same time, Trump had not given up on successful initiatives that were established during the Obama administration. Given its geographical scope, Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy is very much in line with the Obama and even Bush administrations, which also recognized India as a key partner in promoting stability in the Asia-Pacific region. In this sense, Trump's direction represents continuity rather than significant change (Harding 2019, p. 65). Trump's Free and Open strategy is committed to economic and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, promoting free markets, rule of law, and sovereignty for all while seeking to counterbalance China's influence. The inspiration from the Japanese FOIP strategy is palpable. So, we conclude this part with the statement that *"Washington has been a follower, not a leader, in lifting an Indo-Pacific banner"* (Medcalf 2019, p. 89).

4.3.   Results of the Qualitative Content Analysis

This chapter links the methodology and results. It also describes tables that will be presented, following the process of Zhukova et al.'s (2022) methodology, of course, with the adaptation to the Indo-Pacific case. Table 3 is called the Formation and Projection of the Strategic Narrative of Indo-Pacific, representing the types of government communication in the formation and projection of the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific by the U.S. and Japan. The formation is where the importance of the Indo-Pacific policy is formulated, whether the projection of the strategic narrative is about the medium of its delivery. That includes state actors and governmental channels. It contains policy documents, press releases, policy speeches, meetings with officials, and dipnotes.

Table 3. Formation and Projection of the Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific

Formation and Projection of Strategic Narratives

Government Communication					
Country	Policy Documents	Press Releases	Policy Speeches	Meetings with officials	DipNotes	Total Texts
Japan	6	0	12	14	0	32
the United States	4	18	10	0	2	34
All	10	18	22	14	2	66

The table is created by the author herself.

Tables 4 and 5 show the individual texts in each administration and the results of the content analysis. Each text is thus assigned a degree of occurrence of the narrative type—issue narrative, international system narrative, and national narrative. I would also like to draw attention to the type of texts selected. In Japan, we often encounter a document type under the label *Meetings with officials*, but in the United States, it is a *Press release*. However, on closer comparison, these documents are very similar in scope and nature, thus acceptable for a comparative examination of the narrative.

Table 4. Formation and Projection of Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific in Japan

No.	Administration	Date	Government Communication	Issue Narrative	International System Narrative	National Narrative
1	Abe	August 27, 2016	Policy Speeches	1	2	2
2	Abe	January 22, 2018	Policy Speeches	1	2	3
3	Abe	January 22, 2018	Policy Speeches	0	0	1
4	Abe	May 19, 2018	Meetings with officials	1	2	2
5	Abe	September 25, 2018	Policy Speeches	2	1	2
6	Abe	October 9, 2018	Meetings with officials	0	0	0
7	Abe	October 29, 2018	Meetings with officials	0	1	0
8	Abe	November 13, 2018	Meetings with officials	1	0	1
9	Abe	November 16, 2018	Meetings with officials	0	2	0
10	Abe	January 10, 2019	Meetings with officials	1	1	0
11	Abe	January 28, 2019	Policy Speeches	2	1	3
12	Abe	January 28, 2019	Policy Speeches	0	0	0
13	Abe	February 2, 2019	Meetings with officials	0	1	0
14	Abe	April 24, 2019	Meetings with officials	0	1	0
15	Abe	April 25, 2019	Meetings with officials	0	0	0
16	Abe	May 27, 2019	Meetings with officials	0	3	2
17	Abe	June 26, 2019	Meetings with officials	1	1	1
18	Abe	August 5, 2019	Policy Speeches	2	3	2
19	Abe	August 24, 2019	Meetings with officials	0	2	0
20	Abe	September 19, 2019	Meetings with officials	0	2	0
21	Abe	September 27, 2019	Policy Speeches	0	0	3
22	Abe	November 4, 2019	Meetings with officials	0	0	0
23	Abe	December 2, 2019	Policy Speeches	0	0	0
24	Abe	January 10, 2020	Policy Speeches	1	2	2
25	Abe	January 20, 2020	Policy Speeches	1	1	1
26	Abe	January 20, 2020	Policy Speeches	0	1	0
27	Abe	January 1, 2017	Policy Documents	0	2	3
28	Abe	January 1, 2018	Policy Documents	1	2	3
29	Abe	January 1, 2019	Policy Documents	1	3	2
30	Abe	January 1, 2020	Policy Documents	1	3	2
31	Abe	January 1, 2021	Policy Documents	1	3	2
32	Abe	January 1, 2021	Policy Documents	1	3	2

The table is created by the author herself.

Table 5. Formation and Projection of Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific in the United States

No.	Administration	Date	Government Communication	Issue Narrative	International System Narrative	National Narrative
1	Trump	April 22, 2017	Policy Speeches	0	0	1
2	Trump	September 1, 2017	DIPNOTE	0	2	1
3	Trump	November 2, 2017	Policy Speeches	1	2	3
4	Trump	November 10, 2017	Policy Speeches	1	3	2
5	Trump	November 15, 2017	Policy Speeches	2	3	1
6	Trump	December 17, 2017	Policy Documents	2	2	3
7	Trump	December 19, 2017	Policy Documents	0	0	1
8	Trump	January 8, 2018	DIPNOTE	3	2	1
9	Trump	April 2, 2018	Press Releases	0	2	3
10	Trump	April 18, 2018	Policy Speeches	0	2	1
11	Trump	July 30, 2018	Press Releases	0	1	3
12	Trump	August 4, 2018	Press Releases	1	0	2
13	Trump	September 28, 2018	Press Releases	2	1	2
14	Trump	October 4, 2018	Policy Speeches	1	2	2
15	Trump	November 18, 2018	Press Releases	3	1	2
16	Trump	January 20, 2019	Press Releases	0	1	1
17	Trump	April 26, 2019	Press Releases	2	1	0
18	Trump	May 27, 2019	Policy Speeches	0	0	0
19	Trump	June 28, 2019	Press Releases	0	1	0
20	Trump	June 28, 2019	Policy Speeches	0	0	0
21	Trump	June 30, 2019	Press Releases	2	0	0
22	Trump	July 2, 2019	Press Releases	0	1	1
23	Trump	September 12, 2019	Policy Speeches	0	1	2
24	Trump	September 20, 2019	Press Releases	0	0	0
25	Trump	November 4, 2019	Policy Documents	1	2	3
26	Trump	November 25, 2019	Policy Speeches	0	0	2
27	Trump	January 7, 2020	Press Releases	0	2	1
28	Trump	February 25, 2020	Press Releases	2	0	0
29	Trump	October 1, 2020	Press Releases	1	2	3
30	Trump	October 23, 2020	Press Releases	1	0	2
31	Trump	September 16, 2020	Press Releases	0	0	0
32	Trump	November 20, 2020	Press Releases	0	0	1
33	Trump	December 3, 2020	Press Releases	3	0	0
34	Trump	January 12, 2021	Policy Documents	2	1	3

The table is created by the author herself.

The results show that the International System Narrative is the most represented in Japan, followed by the National Narrative and ending with the Issue Narrative. In the United States, the most dominant is the National Narrative, followed by the International System Narrative and ending with the Issue Narrative. However, before we can answer the research questions based on the provided results, each narrative will be discussed in more detail. We focus on each narrative type, and

within it, we look at the different focus areas within which the states in question project their narratives. The result will be thematically presented, beginning with issue narratives, followed by international system narratives, and ending with national narratives. Then, we harness the findings from each narrative to answer the second research question of whether Tokyo and Washington share common goals and motivations in shaping the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific.

4.3.1. Issue Strategic Narrative

Zhukova et al. say that an issue narrative is *"a story of why a policy is needed… and how the policy will be implemented"* (p. 201, 2022). Following her methodology and adapting it to the Indo-Pacific case, the thesis operationalized the issue narrative by setting core questions: *Why is the Indo-Pacific policy crucial? What are the threats and concerns?*

Although the issue narrative is not the most emphasized narrative type in Japan nor the United States, we can identify significant issues states are concerned about regarding the Indo-Pacific. In the case of Abe's administration, we could observe a certain level of cautiousness when addressing specific threats through the Indo-Pacific narrative, be it China's assertiveness, denuclearization, or counterterrorism. This is even though these particular issues (except China's assertiveness) are highlighted as the main strategic goals of the FOIP strategy (Abe, 2016). The most significant issue Japan proposes through the narrative is, therefore, maritime security, as it appears most of the time in the dataset within the issue narrative category. Putting emphasis on this concrete issue can be traced back to Abe's *Confluence of the Two Seas* speech in 2007, to highlighting it in the QUAD cooperation in 2012, and to the FOIP strategy launched in 2016. Thus, the result of the analysis only confirms that the Abe administration has been consistent in this regard.

"Taking into account the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy," the participants…,

*shared their recognition regarding the importance of **the rule of law** in the seas, and …*

*support for **capacity building** in the area of **maritime security**, …, etc."* (May 19, 2018)

Nor is it surprising that through the analysis, we found essentially no mention of China's assertiveness, as Abe stressed the compatibility of its FOIP concept with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. References that would closely refer to this were mostly of type: *"The two leaders (Japan and New Zeland) also exchanged views regarding **other regional situations**, including **the East and South China Seas**."* (September 19, 2019) However, such references were not included in the results, firstly because of the different wording of the coding unit and mainly because they were never even part of a paragraph discussing the Indo-Pacific.

On the other hand, the Trump administration has far more often mentioned these issues and threats directly through the Indo-Pacific narrative. In the case of the United States, the issue narrative is dominated by references to counterterrorism and denuclearization.

*"We remain ready to respond with overwhelming force to North Korean aggression and will improve options to compel **denuclearization** of the peninsula."* (December 17, 2017) or *"President Trump and Prime Minister Modi are calling on other countries in the region (Indo-Pacific) to take steps to **counterterrorism**."*(February 25, 2020)

Despite the United States being far more direct in addressing threats in its official communication than Japan, "China's assertiveness" was almost absent from the documents. However, we cannot overlook other statements that depict a similar reality.

*"Across much of the Indo-Pacific region, the **Chinese Communist Party** (CCP) is using military and economic **coercion to bully its neighbors**, advance unlawful maritime claims, threaten maritime shipping lanes, and destabilize territory along the periphery of the People's Republic of China (PRC)."* (December 2, 2020)

There are certain limitations, which have already been mentioned above. The narrative elements do not cover every issue the actors promote through the Indo-

Pacific narrative. However, based on the theoretical framework of strategic narratives, issues should be related to some threats or concerns that states have, thus shaping the strategic narrative, which is not the case for infrastructure, energy, or digital issues, which were also often mentioned. The humanitarian crisis element was hardly present in the texts, but it could have probably overlapped with natural disasters. Their number would slightly increase but would not change the final results.

4.3.2. International System Strategic Narrative

Miskimmon et al. (2013, 2017) explain that the International System Narrative is used by states to create the preferred structure of the international system itself. Zhukova et al. (2022) add that states create a desirable vision of the world along with its problems. Therefore, the thesis operationalized the international system narrative by setting core questions: *What is the approach to the international system in the Indo-Pacific?*

By analyzing structural visions of regional and global order, including multilateralism, bilateralism, ASEAN centrality, partnership, and alliances, the thesis concluded that the international system narrative is the most prominent narrative in Japan's governmental communication, dominated by references to partnerships, ASEAN centrality, and multilateralism.

The thesis worked from the beginning with the argument that Tokyo's strategic narrative encapsulates its vision of a viable *regional order*. Upon closer examination of regional positioning and power dynamics, the qualitative content analysis confirmed this argument, the high occurrence of these coding units was especially in policy documents.

*"Seizing every opportunity of **bilateral** and **multilateral** dialogues, including the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. meetings, Japan will advance coordination and cooperation with the U.S., Australia, India and ASEAN as well as countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa"* (Diplomatic Bluebook 2021).

However, surprisingly, at least for the author, the international system narrative was not always the strongest one in analyzed texts. Since the beginning of our timeframe (2016-2020), the national narrative has been more prevalent in official texts, mostly emphasizing the values that Japan projects to the Indo-Pacific. It only reaffirmed that the types of narratives overlap and are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. However, since 2019, there has been more emphasis on international cooperation within established alliances, which can only underscore the deteriorating situation with China over the territorial disputes (Diplomat 2020). Another factor that could influence a slight shift toward the International System Narrative type was the adoption of the ASEAN Outlook of the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in June 2019, reinforcing the ASEAN-centered rules-based regional architecture and stressing inclusiveness, economic cooperation, and connectivity. Koga (2022) states that an ASEAN-centered regional architecture serves to negate any attempts to create an exclusive sphere of influence in the region (2022, p. 161). Kang (2022) argues that most ASEAN countries do not want to take any sides between the US and China. ASEAN's adoption of the FOIP thus stresses the multilateral and inclusive nature.

> "…the AOIP and Japan's FOIP concept share relevant fundamental principles in promoting peace and cooperation and declares that ASEAN and Japan will strengthen their strategic **partnership** through cooperation in the four areas outlined in the AOIP."
>
> (Diplomatic Bluebook 2021)

Lastly, the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, during which the Indian Prime Minister said that *"India does not see the Indo-Pacific region as a strategy or as a club of limited members…"* stressing the region's multipolarity and inclusivity (Mukherjee 2019), in the Indo-Pacific region.

On the other hand, the Trump administration pursued partnerships and alliances through the Indo-Pacific narrative; the emphasis on multilateral relationships was basically absent. This makes sense since America pulled out of the TPP shortly after Trump took office. Thus, Washington put a lot of emphasis on bilateral cooperation under the Indo-Pacific banner.

*"Since taking office, President Trump has placed 43 calls to Indo-Pacific leaders and conducted **bilateral** meetings with Japan, South Korea, China, India, Australia…"* or *"We will pursue **bilateral** trade agreements on a fair and reciprocal basis."*

(December 17, 2017)

4.3.3. National Narrative

Miskimmon et al. (2013, 2017) explain that the national narrative is how the nation *"wants to be seen by others at home and abroad."* Zhukova et al. (2022) add that through the national narrative, we can see *"what the story of the state is."* Therefore, the thesis operationalized the national narrative by setting the core question: *What values and goals does the narrator project through the narrative?*

By analyzing modes of national interest, including cooperation, competition, the rule of law, a market economy and connectivity, and capacity building, the thesis concluded that the national narrative is the most prominent in the United States governmental communication, dominated by references to a market economy.

The thesis worked from the beginning with the argument that Washington's strategic narrative corresponds to its underlying *national interest.* Upon closer examination of strategic objectives and goals, the qualitative content analysis confirmed this argument. The focus on the "economic pillar" of the Indo-Pacific strategy in the Trump administration clearly advances American prosperity through fair and reciprocal trade and connects the strategy with the American first policy. Palit and Sano (2018) state that US investments primarily aim to improve access to markets for US exports in the Indo-Pacific region. Trump's presentation of the FOIP strategy at several significant business gatherings, especially in November 2017 and July 2018, clearly demonstrates its importance in terms of trade and economics. Also, several references to unfair trade practices were made. Pant and Parpiani (2020) add that the Trump administration continued a confrontational posture against China, stating the example of the 2018 round of tariffs to negotiate more fair and open trade for the United States.

*"The initiative (FOIP) will grow foreign energy markets and boost U.S. energy exports by expanding public-private partnerships, fostering business-to-business connections, and helping partner governments set **market economy***-based energy policies.*" (July 30, 2018)

The national narrative also implies criticism of China, with the United States seeing China as a competitor in the Indo-Pacific region. The competition aspect is evident in US discourse from the first sentence of the National Security Strategy.

*A geopolitical **competition** between free and **repressive visions of world order** is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region. (December 17, 2017)*

In the case of Japan, the FOIP is also interpreted in the academic literature as a concept that aims to counterbalance China's influence, yet Japan nearly does not mention China through the Indo-Pacific narrative. Enval and Wilkins (2023) argue that Japan has been careful not to treat China as a competitor in the context of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative, which has been confirmed in our research. In addition, it is also necessary to point out the change in terminology, where Japan has stopped using the word *strategy* with FOIP but replaced it with *vision*, again to avoid China feeling threatened. From the results, we can assume that another reason is to create a narrative that is acceptable to the widest possible audience so that other countries in the Indo-Pacific region are not afraid to adopt the concept while at the same time not worsening their own relations with China, as many countries seem to be hesitant taking sides between Washington and Beijing. Instead, in Tokyo's Indo-Pacific national narrative, the focus on connectivity and capacity-building is highly emphasized. Japanese companies are involved in a wide range of "hard" projects, such as electricity, ports, railways, and urban development, as well as in soft aspects, such as technological and operational expertise. Maritime law enforcement and Maritime Domain Awareness are often mentioned in connection with capacity building. Japan emphasizes that these activities strengthen the rule-based international order. Tankachan (2017) says that the essence of Japan's FOIP lies in Tokyo's recognition of linking the Asian continent with Japan, alongside the Indian and Pacific oceans.

*"Of course, it goes without saying that in order to make the **connectivity** linking Japan and Europe something rock-solid, the Indo-Pacific, the sea route that leads to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, must be free and open."* (September 2019)

*"Collaborating on various international workshops and similar activities in the digital and cybersecurity sector which promote **capacity building** of countries in the Indo-Pacific region."* (May 27, 2019)

Also, we have seen the similarities in values. This is not surprising, given that both countries are democratic and promote similar values such as "rules-based order" and the "rule of law." However, even though each of their respective narratives promotes a "free" and "open" Indo-Pacific, in the United States, the values "free" and "open" are more economically driven than in Japan, where they occur more in connection with rules-based order and the freedom of navigation.

4.4. Discussion: The Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific: One or Two Legacies?

In the title of the thesis, there is a last *hidden* question behind the word *legacy*. The question is whether Prime Minister Abe and President Trump have created one shared legacy of the Indo-Pacific or each created their own. The revealed alignments and divergences between Japan and the United States in approaching their respective strategic narrative types of the Indo-Pacific indicate that Abe and Trump started two different legacies.

An "Indo-Pacific" narrative establishes both Japan and the United States as two key players in a strategically and economically significant region. The specific use of Indo-Pacific terminology by strategic elites at home and abroad constitutes "*a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors*" (Miskimmon et al. 2013, p. 3), including key actors, issues or threats, values, and goals, regional dynamic and positioning, strategic objectives and priorities, and desirable outcomes – and that illuminate Japan and the United States' different conception of the Indo-Pacific and how they want to

shape the future of the Indo-Pacific. The thesis reveals alignments and divergences in their individual assessment by analyzing three narrative types that distinguish these focus areas.

Through the issue narrative, we can understand the main issues and threats for the actors (Miskimmon et al. 2017, p. 8). Through the analysis, we concluded that Tokyo does not project specific issues through the Indo-Pacific strategic narrative but rather a value framework and principles through which it seeks to engage as many actors as possible, mainly based on the principle of maritime security. On the other hand, Washington actively promotes security policies through the Indo-Pacific narrative, e.g., denuclearization of the Korean peninsula or taking steps to counterterrorism in the region. This helps to explain, for example, why Japan has not joined the United States to challenge China with freedom of navigation operations in the SCS (Sato 2019, p. 114).

Through the international system narrative, we can understand the regional dynamic, positioning, and overall approach to the International System in the Indo-Pacific. While both Japan and the United States prioritize partnerships and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, Japan's narrative leans more towards multilateralism and ASEAN centrality, while the United States emphasizes bilateral relationships and alliances. This helps to explain Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was explained by other countries taking advantage of America and overall opposition to multilateral free trade agreements.

Through the national narrative, we can understand the goals and values that states try to achieve through the Indo-Pacific. While each country emphasizes the elements of *free* and *open* that fit its agenda and its domestic and international image, the United States is more economically driven. In Japan, however, they occur more in connection with rules-based order and the freedom of navigation. The analysis also showed that Japan's and the United States' perceptions of China through the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific differ. While the US tends to exclude China, portraying it as a competitor in the Indo-Pacific region and stressing the geopolitical

competition between free and repressive visions of world order, Japan is pursuing more of a hedging strategy. Its approach is characterized by careful terminology use to avoid provoking China and maintain broad regional acceptance. This helps to explain, for example, Japan's wariness around using the word *strategy* with FOIP and changing it to the word *vision*. The alignments of both countries in the national narrative are aimed at improving the capacity building and connectivity of Indo-Pacific countries.

Finally, there is a small note of the geographical examination of the Indo-Pacific, revealing that the maps diverge from actor to actor. Choong (2019) draws attention to the fact that in Japan's 2017 Diplomatic Bluebook, the Indo-Pacific was marked out as an area covering the Indian Ocean and the western part of the Pacific Ocean, including Southeast Asia, South Asia, and parts of the Middle East and East African countries but in 2019, Japan added China to the map, which was something not done by any other QUAD actors (Choong 2019, p. 418). On the other hand, the US defined the region as stretching *"from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States.'* This left out the western region of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and the eastern part of Africa, placing them under the jurisdiction of the Indo-Pacific Command. Choong concluded that this geographical description brought Washington's perspective more in line with Australia's definition and diverged from the views of India and Japan (Choong 2019, p. 418 – 419).

5   Conclusion

In conclusion, examining the formation and projection of the Indo-Pacific strategic narrative through the cases of the United States and Japan by analyzing their government communication has provided valuable insights into the strategic considerations and motivations of these two key actors in the region.

Although the United States has often been associated with pioneering the Indo-Pacific concept, the formation of the narrative emerged in Japan a decade earlier. The famous speech by Prime Minister Abe, *Confluence of the Two Seas*, from 2007,

formed a compelling narrative that captured the values and principles of a diverse and inclusive region. The roots of this story were a decade later projected to the national strategy, later vision, of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The use of specific Indo-Pacific terminology by strategic elites in the Trump administration adopted the already existing narrative to the United States, where the new President wanted to depart from Obama's "Pivot to Asia" policy to something new that would partially build on the Obama administration but also underscore his America First policy. Where Obama failed to connect the narrative to the economic benefits on the home front, Trump put the America First policy in place, stressing the economic advantages for the US and the national interest of being engaged in the Indo-Pacific region. This helps to explain, for example, the gradual disappearance of the term Asia-Pacific from the official US discourse. The FOIP strategy was launched at the end of 2017, and it largely followed its Japanese predecessor.

The findings based on the Qualitative Content Analysis demonstrate that while Washington's narrative corresponds to its underlying *national interest,* Tokyo's narrative encapsulates its vision of a viable *regional order*. In proving the thesis arguments correct, it was found that each country emphasizes the elements of the Indo-Pacific narrative that fit its agenda and its domestic and international image. The distinctions in each narrative type coincide with this argument as the international system narrative is the most prominent in Japan and the national narrative in the United States. As was revealed by the results, although both actors promote a "rule-based," "free," and "open" Indo-Pacific based on the "rule of law", these convergences are driven by divergent factors. While Washington stresses the FOIP's importance in terms of trade and economics, emphasizing the market economy in official governmental communication, Tokyo's most articulated narrative elements are connected to the regional order. Their respective narratives of the Indo-Pacific are related to strategic considerations.

Despite these differences, both countries share concerns about China's activities in the region. While many authors perceive the Indo-Pacific concept mainly as a

security and strategic move by the US, Japan, India, and Australia to balance the power of an ever-growing China, there are certain distinctions between Japan and the United States as well, evidenced by the thesis's findings. Although both countries share the concern of a rising China, Tokyo does not seem to project these concerns through the narrative as it only promotes quite indirect criticism of Chinese actions in the East China Sea and South China Sea. On the other hand, Washington openly shares its concerns about China's activities and, through the narrative, links them to threats to national interests in the Indo-Pacific region. This also explains why the Trump administration presents the values of *free* and *open* more specifically than Japan, openly accusing China of unfair trade practices and of coercion of other nations. Also, Japan's emphasis on multilateral rules, values, and principles rather than specific policies within the Indo-Pacific narrative, stressing the importance of ASEAN Centrality, is more indicative of an approach that is more inclusive of China than in the case of the United States.

To conclude, trying to understand the Indo-Pacific through the prism of the strategic narrative has proven to be a useful way to gain a more comprehensive understanding of strategic narratives to help states promote their preferred conceptions of regional order. Furthermore, by analyzing Abe's and Trump's governmental communication through qualitative content analysis, the thesis was able to draw meaningful insights into states' drivers and motivations in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific. Moving forward, it will be interesting to examine how the Kishida and Biden administrations navigate the Indo-Pacific landscape and whether they continue to follow the *legacies* of their predecessors in shaping the region's future. This opens avenues for further research to explore the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific strategic narrative and its implications for regional stability and cooperation.

Summary

This thesis argues that although the existing scientific literature understands close links between the motivation for and the practice of the Indo-Pacific regional formation, Washington's and Tokyo's strategic narratives differ in two major regards. The findings based on the Qualitative Content Analysis demonstrate that while Washington's narrative corresponds to its underlying *national interest,* Tokyo's narrative encapsulates its vision of a viable *regional order*. Their respective narratives of the Indo-Pacific are related to strategic considerations. Thus, each country emphasizes the elements of the Indo-Pacific that fit its agenda and its domestic and international image. The analysis reveals that Tokyo prioritizes a value-based framework, particularly focusing on maritime security, within its Indo-Pacific strategic narrative, contrasting with Washington's active promotion of security policies such as denuclearization and counterterrorism. While Japan and the United States both emphasize partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, Japan's narrative leans toward multilateralism and ASEAN centrality, while the US emphasizes bilateral relationships and alliances, exemplified by Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Lastly, the analysis also showed that Japan's and the United States' perceptions of China through the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific differ. While the US tends to exclude China, portraying it as a competitor in the Indo-Pacific region and stressing the geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order, Japan is pursuing more of a hedging strategy.

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Univerzita Karlova

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Diploma thesis project

Abe's and Trump's Legacy?

The Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific

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Introduction to the topic

Defining the Indo-Pacific poses a considerable challenge. There are many ways to understand the term *Indo-Pacific*. We can see it merely as a geographical description of the area encompassing the Indian and Pacific oceans, including the seas that connect them.[27] Secondly, we can understand it as a geopolitical tool that helps politicians, researchers, journalists, et., analyze the current challenges and problems of this part of the world. Also, we can perceive it as a strategic concept, within which we can see significant security and economic cooperation between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia in recent years. Finally, we can understand the Indo-Pacific in the context of a strategic narrative. Narratives are *"means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors"* (Miskimmon et. Al 2013, p. 3). Barthwal-Datta & Chacko (2020, p. 244) state that *"developing strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific… help states* (India, Australia, the United States, and Japan) *to promote their preferred conceptions of regional order."*

This thesis will focus on the cases of the United States and Japan and their strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific. *"It is a contest of leadership, influence, and ideas, whereby success is ultimately demonstrated through the ability to set the political agenda while also framing the rules and terms of compliance for that agenda, thus shaping the future of regional order in the Indo-Pacific"* (Byrne 2020, p. 10). We can assume that understanding how narratives are formed, and exercise power is becoming more relevant than ever in the IR field.

In Japan, the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) was first outlined by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in a speech entitled *"Confluence of the Two Seas"*[28], which he delivered to the Indian Parliament in 2007. At that time, Abe did not specifically use the term Indo-Pacific. Still, his vision of a *"broader Asia"*[29] became the grounding principle on which the FOIP would later be built. During the speech, Abe emphasized the strategic importance of seeing the two oceans of the Indian and Pacific oceans as one. He called for increased economic integration, promoting maritime security, and establishing a new framework for

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[27] However, some authors (e.g., Khurana, 2017; Haruko, 2020) point out that all countries do not universally employ the Indo-Pacific term to describe the whole area and that each nation considers its own geographical extent of the Indo-Pacific.

[28] *"Confluence of the Two Seas"* Speech by H.E.Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, available here: https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html

[29] also known as *kakudai Asia*

regional cooperation. He also emphasized the importance of shared fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and strategic interests (MOFA, 2007). In December 2012, following his vision that the Pacific and Indian Oceans represent a new center of prosperity in the world, Abe called for the formation of a "Democratic Security Diamond" (DSD). The points of the diamond were figuratively formed by four leading maritime democracies - Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. Those countries should guard the area from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific and oppose the rising coercion of China (Lee & Lee 2016, p. 285-287).

However, it was not until Abe's third term in office in 2016 that he actively promoted the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" as a key element of Japan's foreign policy[30]. One year later, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, also known as the Quad, a strategic forum comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, was restored[31]. The purpose of the Quad was to foster cooperation among the four countries on issues such as maritime security, counterterrorism, and economic development. The forum is seen as a critical component of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy promoted by Japan. It is also viewed as a means of balancing China's growing regional influence (Wei 2022, p. 289-291).

At the same time, the concept of the Indo-Pacific was receiving more attention from the United States. In December 2017, the term *Indo-Pacific* was adopted in the National Security Strategy (NSS) for the first time by the Trump administration. The NSS identified the Indo-Pacific as a region of growing importance and emphasized the need for the United States to work with partners and allies to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific that respects sovereignty, the rule of law, and the principles of the market economy (White House, 2017). The National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy adopted a year later, also labeled China as a key security strategy threat to the regional order in the Indo-Pacific region (Kireeva 2020, p. 109).

While in the case of Japan, we see the first efforts to construct the Indo-Pacific strategy as early as 2006, in the United States, the term Indo-Pacific is only beginning to appear with the Trump administration. Although Japan's position on the Indo-Pacific seems to align closely with the one of the United States as both countries have produced narratives that

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[30] Abe firstly announced the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" (FOIPs) at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) held in Kenya (Satake 2019, p. 69)

[31] It was first initiated in 2007 but was discontinued after a few meetings.

seem similar in discursive terms as they articulate intersecting "visions" of a "peaceful" and "free and open" Indo-Pacific based on the "rule of law," the path towards it was very different.

Research target, research questions

The thesis tries to contribute to the growing research on strategic narratives in IR by analyzing the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific, focusing on the cases of Japan and the United States. The first target of this thesis is to understand the formation of the strategic narratives of these two leading players. Next, the thesis will analyze which conditions had to be fulfilled in forming the strategic narrative. Japan's and the United States' position on the Indo-Pacific aligns closely as both countries have formed narratives that seem similar in discursive terms. However, do these countries share the same vision for the Indo-Pacific region, given that the United States' narrative of the Indo-Pacific was created a decade later than Japan's? To answer this question, we should try to analyze how the narratives have formed and *why*.

The research questions go as follows:

1. *How has the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific formed in the United States and Japan?*
2. *Do these countries share common goals and motivations in shaping the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific?*

Literature review

The interest in the topic of the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific has steadily grown over the past two decades. The term itself, Indo-Pacific, first appeared in the context of strategic and geopolitical discourse in 2007 in an article *Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India–Japan Cooperation* by Indian researcher Gurpreet Khurana.[32] He defined Indo-Pacific as a maritime space connecting the Indian Ocean with the western Pacific, encompassing the contiguous seas off East Asia, Southeast Asia and eastern Africa, within which the key actors project their interests (Khurana 2007). A decade later, Khurana reflects that the term is being used increasingly by policymakers, analysts, and academics in Asia and beyond (Khurana

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[32] However, the Indo-Pacific terminology has emerged much sooner, concretely in the field of biogeographic and ethnography. It has been used since 1850s as one way to identify people of Indonesia. (The Diplomat / A term whose time has come/)

2017). Pan (2014) states that the Indo-Pacific is not a natural geographical space but a discursive construct with its own consequences in the field of IR (Pan, 2014, p. 455). However, even though the Indo-Pacific has become a common expression in the practice of IR, there is still a lack of clarity regarding how it should be understood and approached (Barthwal-Datta and Chacko 2020, p. 245).

Kai (2018) approaches the Indo-Pacific from an IR theory perspective, concretely from a realist, liberal, and constructivist point of view, and tries to examine the *three faces* of the Indo-Pacific. Even though he concludes that examining the concept of the Indo-Pacific is theoretically problematic, he argues that there are two ways of institutionalizing the Indo-Pacific. One corresponds with the realist view of China as an outside actor whose power needs to be balanced. The other one is to accept China and other regional states inclusively (Kai 2018, p. 19-20).

As the power dynamic in East Asia shifts and the Indian and Pacific Oceans start to be seen as one maritime space, the Indo-Pacific is receiving more attention regarding security discourse. Many authors perceive the Indo-Pacific concept mainly as a security and strategic move by the US, Japan, India, and Australia to balance the power of an ever-growing China (Zhao 2012; Pan 2014; Lee & Lee 2016; Hagström & Gustafsson 2019; Choong 2019; Koga 2019; Wei 2022). Some academics even talk about the Indo-Pacific as a joint project of the four powers, which may play a significant role in the future similar to that of NATO in the Euro-Atlantic area in the 20th century (Romancov 2022).

The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on Miskimmon, O´Loughlin, and Roselle´s books *Strategic Narratives Communication Power and the New World Order* (2013) and *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (2017). The concept of strategic narrative they introduced has been widely adopted for analyzing government communication and has already been applied by many other authors who research strategic narratives. More on their definition of strategic narrative is presented in the *theoretical framework* section of the project. From Miskimmon comes Barthwal-Datta and Chacko (2020), who investigate India's and Australia's use of strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific to strengthen their desired conception of regional order. They conclude that despite significant convergent patterns in their terminology around the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific, they promote a distinctive conception of regional order (Barthwal-Datta and Chacko 2020, p. 258).

Conceptual and theoretical framework, research hypotheses

The concept of strategic narratives is a relatively new phenomenon that has emerged in academic literature and policy documents on international relations over the past two decades. One of the first cases where we can observe narrative introduction into strategic discourse was Freedman's paper (*Networks, culture, and narratives, 2006*[33]). Freedman explains that narratives are strategic because they do not emerge spontaneously but are intentionally crafted or strengthened based on already-existing ideas. According to Freedman, a successful narrative can explain who is winning and who is losing in case of conflict because narratives are constructed to "*structure the responses of others to developing events*" (2006, p. 22-23). Academic scholars focusing on the fields of war and security have utilized the concept of strategic narratives ever since to interpret the *why, what,* and *how* of the conflict. In short, the concept of the strategic narrative presents a construct in the form of a story that is used to establish a shared understanding (Oxford University Press's, 2016).

The notion of strategic narrative can be understood and thus conceptualized from various perspectives. However, one of the viewpoints that define narrative says that actors tell stories within an established narrative framework, which inherently shapes and limits their identities and choices (Hagström and Gustafsson 2019, p. 391-392). Narratives set out how the state sees itself in the international system. The concept of strategic narrative is also recognized as one of the main soft power tools of political and social agents (Gackowski and Brylska 2022, p. 773-774).

In 2007, Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle started thinking about power transitions and strategic narratives. The books (2013, 2017) they presented a few years later became a practical guide to the study of narrative for many academics and policymakers in the field of IR. They describe narratives as a *"means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors."* They also serve as tools for political actors to increase influence by shaping interests, identity, understanding the dynamics of international relations, and predicting its future course (Miskimmon et. Al 2013, p. 3). Even though

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[33] He applied the concept of a strategic narrative as an analytical device in examining the difficulty the US armed forces face in shifting their focus from preparing for regular wars to irregular wars, in which civil society is integrated.

narratives are created strategically by political actors, they cannot be produced at any time. The formation of a narrative requires an understanding of the domestic and international political context, actors' strategic goals, and types of communication (Miskimmon et. Al 2013, p. 11).

Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle identify three main forms of narratives. First, there are strategic narratives about the international system. They are used by states to create a preferred construction of the structure of the international *system*. Then, there are *issue* narratives by which actors influence the development of policies. The last form of narrative is the one through which actors project their *identity* in international affairs (2017, p. 2).

Based on this classification, Barthwal-Datta and Chacko argue that strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific promoted by Australia and India are *regional order narratives*, which meet the definition of narratives about the international system. Within regional order narratives exist types of roles for the actors that construct how states interact with each other. These narratives emphasize particular representations of the past, present, and future to justify normative preferences. By deploying regional order narratives, actors can also shape the foreign policy behavior of other states (Barthwal-Datta and Chacko 2020, p. 247).

For the purposes of this thesis, I set out a research argument that was deduced from the literature review:

A: *I argue that the United States and Japan created the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific to balance the power of an ever-growing China.*

Empirical data and analytical technique

There are different approaches to analyzing strategic narratives, each requiring different methods. Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle set out a framework to understand and explain strategic narratives' role and potential effects. This framework is based on the idea of the spectrum, which shows "*how persuasion is theorized in IR, from thin rationalist explanations right up to thick post-structural accounts*" (2017, p. 23-24). On one side of the spectrum, there are individuals who consider a system and a group of participants as established entities and analyze how they interact and influence each other. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are those who inquire about the origins of that system and the formation of participants' identities and interests within it (2017, p. 27). This thesis will focus

more on this side of the spectrum, thus on post-structural interpretations and analytical approaches.

The political actors create a discourse containing roles that others take on, establishing a distinct identity from which they express themselves. These discourses can be conveyed in different ways, "*whether material or representational, including narratives."* (2017, p. 36). Discourses are the subject of analysis by social constructionists who view discourse as "*constitutive of the social world"* (Zhai 2019, p. 3). They try to understand the relationship between discourse and reality. Discourses come to life through a range of written and spoken materials. Thus, discourse analysis explores how texts are made meaningful through their "*production, dissemination, and consumption"* and how they play a role in shaping the formation of the shared understanding of the social world by "*making meaning"* (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 3-4).

Within the discourse analysis of the Indo-Pacific, I analyze texts to identify patterns, themes, and trends. I will examine official documents, speeches, policy statements, and media coverage from the United States and Japan that discuss their perspectives on the Indo-Pacific from 2006 - 2022. This includes government white papers, official statements, press releases, and media articles.

To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the strategic narratives of both countries, I propose applying a cultural political economy (CPE) approach. This post-structuralist approach stresses the role of semiosis or *meaning making.* The strategic narrative through the prism of a CPE approach can be understood as the result of interdependent processes of semiosis and non-semiotic aspects of social practices (Sum and Jessop 2015, p. 155). Barthwal-Datta and Chacko applied this approach to India and Australia's respective strategic narratives of the Indo-Pacific and examined their purposes and drivers. They concluded that even though these countries have produced narratives that might be similar in discursive terms, they do not share the same motivations in shaping the narrative. The nature of the discourse, within which the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific is shaped, is influenced by non-semiotic factors like their material resources and power constellation in the region. Thus, they do not concentrate only on the question of *how* the narrative is formed but also on *why*. (Barthwal-Datta and Chacko 2020, p. 258-259). I would say that using a discourse analysis and a CPE approach in the case of the strategic narrative of the Indo-Pacific is not contradictory, but they rather complement each other.

Planned thesis outline

1. Introduction

2. Theoretical-Methodological Part

    o Strategic Narrative in International Relations

    o Discourse Analysis of the Strategic Narrative

    o Cultural Political Economy (CPE) Approach

3. Empirical Part

    o The Formation of Japan's Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific

    o The Formation of the United States' Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific

    o The Development of Japan's Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific

    o The Development of the United States' Strategic Narrative of the Indo-Pacific

4. Conclusion

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