

(Re)constructing Favorable International Images: A Corpus-based Discourse-historical Approach to Speeches Given by Japan's PM at General Debates of UNGA (77th-78th Sessions)

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Abstract

In light of various controversial events, it has become imperative for Japan to enhance its favorable international image through political discourse. This study employs a Discourse-historical Approach to examine official portrayals of Japan's international images in two speeches delivered by Prime Minister Kishida during the General Debates of the 77th and 78th sessions of United Nations General Assembly. The aim is to uncover how the Japanese government discursively (re)constructs these favorable images influenced by social-historical contexts. A corpus-based methodology is implemented, involving a comprehensive workflow: first, KH Coder is employed to identify prevalent hot-spot themes within the speeches; second, intertextual analysis is conducted to explore sub-topics that emerge under these common themes, further illuminating Japan's overall international image. Additionally, transitivity analysis is carried out using the UAM Corpus Tool to incorporate experiential details for macro-level representations. The findings indicate that: (1) Japan is (re)presented as a responsible democratic nation committed to UN principles and actively safeguarding human rights; (2) it is also represented as an innocent and peace-loving country, highlighting anti-war inclination and dedicated efforts towards denuclearization. Nonetheless, a comparison between these (re)constructed narratives and actual policies reveals that nationalism and opportunism remain significant factors within Japanese society.

Keywords: discourse-historical approach, Japan's international media representations,

corpus-based methodology, nationalism, opportunism

1. Introduction

Owing to a series of controversial events, including the implementation of the New Security Policies, interference in Taiwan-related matters, and the discharge of radioactive wastewater from Fukushima, Japan has faced considerable criticism from the international community (Yang, 2023), resulting in significant damage to its reputation. Given that a country's international image is an indispensable element in promoting the effectiveness of public diplomacy and expanding its prospects for engaging in regional political and economic affairs (Güneş, 2018), it is imperative for Japan to (re)construct its favorable international image to enhance diplomatic relations with other nations and to showcase its capabilities as a prominent global power (Shigemura, 2018).

Language plays a crucial role not only in communication, but also in shaping and expressing realities (Hernández, 2008). These experiential representations can be employed as tools to (re)shape images through discourses (Wodak et al., 1999). Serving as “an ideal platform” (Li, 2017, p. 48) for articulating current policies and future plans, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) provides its members with the opportunity to deliver political speeches during its annual General Debate. This process is therefore regarded as “a viable strategy” (Ali et al., 2020, p. 35) for repairing or sustaining advantageous international images through official discourse. Based on this, following its ascent to power in 2021, the Kishida government has actively reiterated Japan's contributions and visions for addressing common challenges facing humanity during both the 77th (2022) and 78th (2023) sessions of the UNGA, with the aim of optimizing its international image in the global context.

As the leader of Japanese government, Prime Minister (PM) Kishida's speeches can be classified as political discourses produced by authoritative institutions wielding power. These speeches serve as semiotic practices that (re)construct intricate realities with specific intentions rooted in particular ideologies (Van Dijk, 2003; Fairclough, 1995). Notably, these ideologically driven discursive representations do not exist in isolation; rather, they are embedded within a broader social-historical context (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015). When investigating the discursive construction of Japan's international images, it is also important to (re)position linguistic realizations within their specific social-historical conditions.

In order to critique the discursively manipulated favorable international images of Japan, the study conducts a Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) of PM Kishida's speeches delivered during the 77th and 78th sessions of General Debate at UNGA. By viewing these discourses as ideological products open to (re)interpretation and perpetuation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015), the analysis also takes into account Japan's specific social-historical factors, extending beyond mere linguistic examination.

2. Literature Review

The significant role of UNGA in facilitating positive self-promotion for each nation has attracted scholars to further explore the realization of these official portrayals. As such, previous studies have shed light on diverse linguistic strategies utilized to achieve the

(re)construction of international images. These strategies can be categorized into three general groups: 1) pragmatics-based methods (e.g., Zhang, 2017; Shang, 2020); 2) word frequency analysis (e.g., Dong, 2016; Ali et al., 2020); and 3) intertextuality analysis (e.g., Shao, 2017; Li, 2017). To begin with, the first category is exemplified by Zhang (2017), who employs presuppositions and implicatures, covert evaluative statements, ideology-laden linguistic structures, and overt labeling to investigate President Xi Jinping's General Debate speech at the 70th sessions of UNGA. In Xi's speech, in addition to directly labeling China's partnerships and quoting classic idioms to reinforce the willingness for cooperation, the inclusive second-person pronoun "we" is frequently used to sustain the face of the addressee. Secondly, word frequency analysis is often conducted with the aid of corpus tools. For instance, Ali et al. (2020) utilize AntConc to examine the most frequently used tokens (e.g., "Islamophobia," "Kashmir," and "India") in UNGA speeches (2019-2020) delivered by Imran Khan to showcase Pakistan's international images.

With regard to intertextuality analysis, Li (2017) qualitatively summarizes common themes (e.g., "sustainable development" and "Climate Conference in Paris") in Norwegian PM's UNGA speeches for two consecutive years (2015-2016). Although this approach enables analysts to discern overall themes among political discourses over time, it often lacks quantitative support in current studies when generalizing shared topics (see also Dong, 2016), indicating that the results may be contaminated by researchers' bias. Furthermore, more detailed information should be sought to optimize the overall intertextual analysis (Li, 2017). Therefore, both corpus-based approaches and linguistic actualization need to be considered for incorporation within intertextuality analysis of UNGA speeches, so as to enhance its objectivity and detail.

Moreover, different international images (re)constructed by PM's UNGA speeches are also revealed in previous researches. As for Western countries, aside from the United States—which positions itself as a "global leader" and "God's chosen nation" (Shang, 2020, p. 71)—most European nations tend to (re)shape their international images as "followers of UN principles" (see: Dong, 2016, p. 24; Nie, 2017, p. 67). In contrast, many emerging developing countries in Asia prefer to highlight their contributions to regional affairs, thereby emphasizing their national capabilities. For example, in Malaysian PM Najib's UNGA speech, Malaysia is portrayed as a "representative of a just and moderate Islamic world" and "a leader in the Southeast Asian region" (Shao, 2017, p. 12). Similarly, in PM Imran Khan's speeches, Pakistan is depicted as "an advocate of the wisdom of Islamic prophets" (Ali et al., 2020, p. 39).

In comparison to other Asian countries, Japan, as one of the few developed nations on this continent, has received relatively limited attention regarding studies of its PM's UNGA speeches. While Li (2017) has analyzed the linguistic strategy (i.e. Erasure) employed in Shinzo Abe's UNGA speeches, there has been a lack of in-depth interpretation of this actualization within Japan's social-historical context. Hence, this study employs a corpus-assisted methodology to conduct both quantitative and qualitative intertextuality analyses, alongside transitivity analysis, so as to provide more concrete insights into Japan's general international images, thereby addressing existing research gaps. In doing so, this

study tries to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the hot-spot themes containing in UNGA speeches delivered by Japan's PM? What is the intertextual relationship between these themes?
- (2) How do these intertextual themes contribute to the (re)construction of Japan's international images? And how can this portrayal be effectively realized at the linguistic level?
- (3) What power dynamics and socio-historical ideologies shape this (re)constructions of Japan's international image?

3. Methods

3.1 Theoretical Foundation

This section introduces the theoretical foundations of this study, utilizing DHA as the overarching framework and transitivity in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as the specific linguistic tools for discourse analysis.

3.1.1 Discourse-Historical Approach: A Three-Dimensional Method of CDS

Defined as a “socio-diagnostic” critique challenging the status quo constructed through discursive and social practices so as to make opaque powers and ideologies manifest (Wodak 2001), DHA is a prominent approach to CDS (Reisigl, 2017), which unravels social power abuse and all-pervading inequality in oral and written texts (Van Dijk, 2003). Originally employed to analyze anti-Semitism discourses in the 1986 Austrian presidential campaign (Wodak, 1991), it combines social context with historical embedding, facilitating the connection of past experience, present events, and future visions (Wodak 2009). These connections can be realized by linking texts to other texts within the process of constructing meaning through discourse (Wodak et al., 1999).

As a problem-oriented discourse analytic approach, DHA adopts a three-dimensional framework (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015), encompassing three fundamental aspects to implement its social-historical critique: (1) Identifying the specific content or topic(s) of a given discourse; (2) Investigating discursive strategies; and (3) Examining linguistic means and realization in social-historical context.

To be more precise, DHA also focuses on the interrelation of diverse topics through intertextuality analysis to capture a comprehensive understanding of discourses (Wodak, 2001; Xin, 2005, 2008), which are intentionally constructed by stakeholders. Additionally, it promotes the integration of various linguistic strategies to establish the principle of triangulation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015), effectively addressing social issues and uncovering the true intentions of social actors.

3.1.2 Combining SFL with DHA

According to the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language can be conceptualized as a complex network of interconnected choices that facilitate

meaning-making processes (Halliday, 1994). These options for constructing meaning are considered as social semiotic systems, reflecting societal norms and values (Martin & Rose, 2007). In that case, linguistic resources play a crucial role in representing and (re)constructing the intricacies of social realities within specific contexts (Halliday & Hassan, 1989), enabling analysts to interpret discourses critically (Fairclough, 1995).

As mentioned in previous section, the major purpose of DHA is to holistically unveil the (re)constructed realities, social-historical values, and underlying ideologies embedded within discourses. This implies that its linguistic strategies can be effectively implemented through meaning-oriented SFL approaches. Hence, to comprehensively explore Japan's international images as represented in UNGA speeches, this study not only employs corpus-based intertextuality analysis to depict overall national portrayals at the macro-level, but also scrutinizes how these images are realized at a micro linguistic-level by using transitivity analysis within SFL framework.

Transitivity refers to a linguistic system used to create and construct experiential meaning, manifested by six verbal processes (Thompson, 2014), namely, material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, existential process, and behavioral process (see Figure 1). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), these processes can be explained as follows:

- **Material process:** it refers to physical verbs showcasing action (doing), change (changing) and event (happening).
- **Mental process:** it refers to people's inner world, including thoughts, ideas, perceptions, desires, and emotions of human beings.
- **Relational process:** it highlights the connections between different entities, facts, and objects by primarily revealing their attributes and identities.
- **Verbal process:** it is known as the process of saying.
- **Behavioral process:** it encompasses both physiological and psychological behaviors exhibited by human beings such as breathing or smiling.
- **Existential process:** it denotes the existence of various entities and events.



Figure 1. The sphere of types of processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 172)

3.2 Research Design

This section outlines the complete workflow of the corpus-based approach, employing KH Coder to facilitate intertextuality analysis of Japan's overall international images and UAM Corpus Tool to investigate micro-level linguistic realizations.

3.2.1 Establishing Corpora: Data Collection and Preparation

To build corpora for analyzing Japan's international image, this study collects data from PM Kishida's speeches at UNGA during the 77th and 78th sessions, held on September 20, 2022, and September 19, 2023. Given that Kishida was inaugurated as the PM on October 4, 2021, these two speeches offer valuable insights into his overarching approach to Japanese international diplomacy on the global stage. The official English transcripts of these speeches are directly obtained from the Prime Minister's Online Office of Japan (<https://japan.kantei.go.jp/>). Consequently, two corpora—designated as “PM 2022” and “PM 2023”—are established, comprising a total of 5,794 tokens. Following the data collection from the official channel, ABBYY Aligner 1.0.6.59 is employed to align clauses in a parallel format. In this study, each “clause” contains one verbal group and concludes with a full stop. Ultimately, the study resulted in 177 clauses, which were prepared as two Excel files for subsequent analysis using KH Coder.

3.2.2 Mining Co-occurrence Words and Conducting Intertextuality Analysis

In order to holistically explore overall international images (re)constructed by Kishida's UNGA speeches, the study employs KH Coder, a text-mining software based on Stanford POS Tagger and R (Higuchi, 2016). Given that certain commonly used words, known as stopwords (e.g., “a”, “an”, and “the”), do not carry substantial meaning in discourse, it is

necessary to eliminate them to ensure the accuracy of results. After importing the aforementioned Excel files along with the built-in stopword file “stopwords_sample.txt” from KH Coder, data cleansing will be performed on the two corpora. Following the removal of stopwords, the co-occurrence network function will be utilized to identify and classify co-occurring words within the corpora. By examining the relationships among these words, different hot-spot themes in these corpora can be generalized. Subsequently, the study undertakes an in-depth qualitative intertextuality analysis of the common themes that appear in both corpora to elucidate their specific content, thereby enhancing our understanding of the overall international images of Japan as portrayed in the two speeches at UNGA.

3.2.3 Data Annotation and Descriptive Statistics for Transitivity Analysis

Beyond intertextuality analysis, the study also engages in transitivity analysis of specific experiential representations, so as to offer concrete linguistic details to reinforce Japan’s overall images. These linguistic-level features are annotated by the manual coding function of UAM Corpus Tool, a software application designed for linguistic analysis by a team of researchers at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) in Spain (O’Donnell, 2008). Once the annotations are completed, UAM Corpus Tool is capable of automatically conducting descriptive statistics on various linguistic features, generating the percentage for each category.

4. Results

4.1 Hot-spot Themes

Figure 2 shows overall hot-spot themes (topics) portrayed in Kishida’s UNGA speech in PM 2022 through the co-occurrence network generated by KH Coder, with 7 key linguistic clusters (C) represented by 7 different colors. These clusters can be categorized into 6 Macro-level Themes (MTs) according to specific contents (see Table 1).

In this speech, MT 1 stresses that Japan spares no efforts to ensure human rights (C1). MT 2 emphasizes the importance of ensuring UN’s function on the international stage (C2). MT 3 appeals each member state of UNGA to fulfill its duty (C3). MT 4 is about promoting the reform of UN (C4). MT 5 showcases Japan’s opposition both to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and to the usage of nuclear weapons (C5). Lastly, MT 6 focuses on obeying the rule of law (C6), represented by conforming to UN Charter (C7).

Meanwhile, Figure 3 illustrates 6 clusters based on overall contents in Kishida’s 2023 UNGA speech, which can be generalized by 5 MTs (see also Table 1). In PM 2023, MT 1 also focuses on the significance of ensuring human rights (C1), particularly those pertaining to vulnerable groups and women (C3). MT 2 is related to UN’s functions of promoting international cooperation (C2). MT 3 stresses Japan’s contribution of achieving denuclearization (C4). MT 4 is about how Japan assists developing countries (C5). Finally, MT 5 also emphasizes the observance of the rule of law (C6).

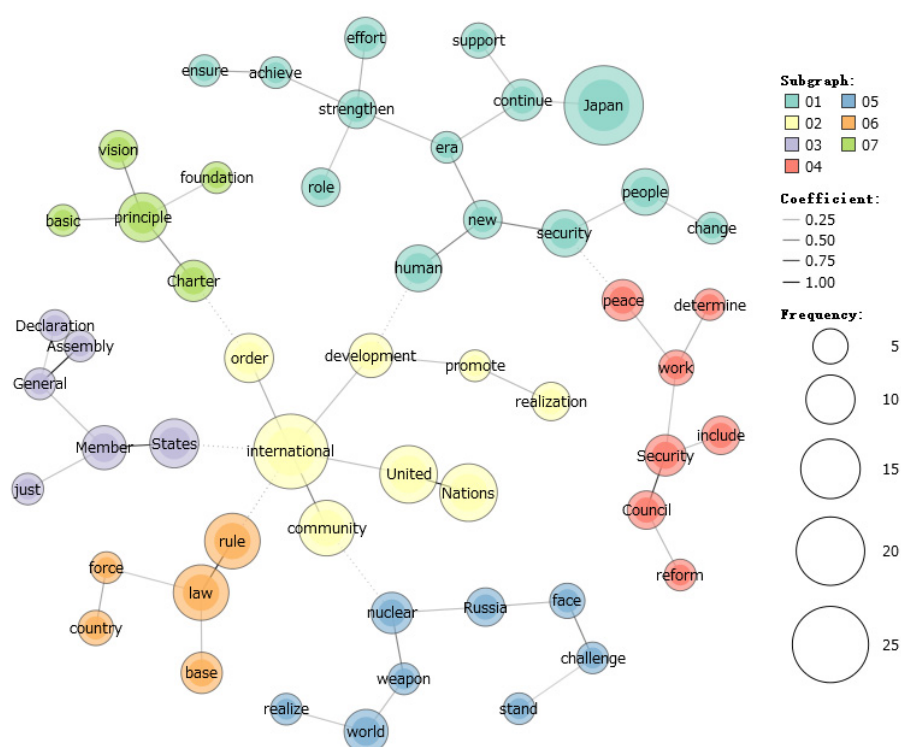


Figure 2. Co-occurrence network of 7 clusters of hot-spot themes in PM 2022

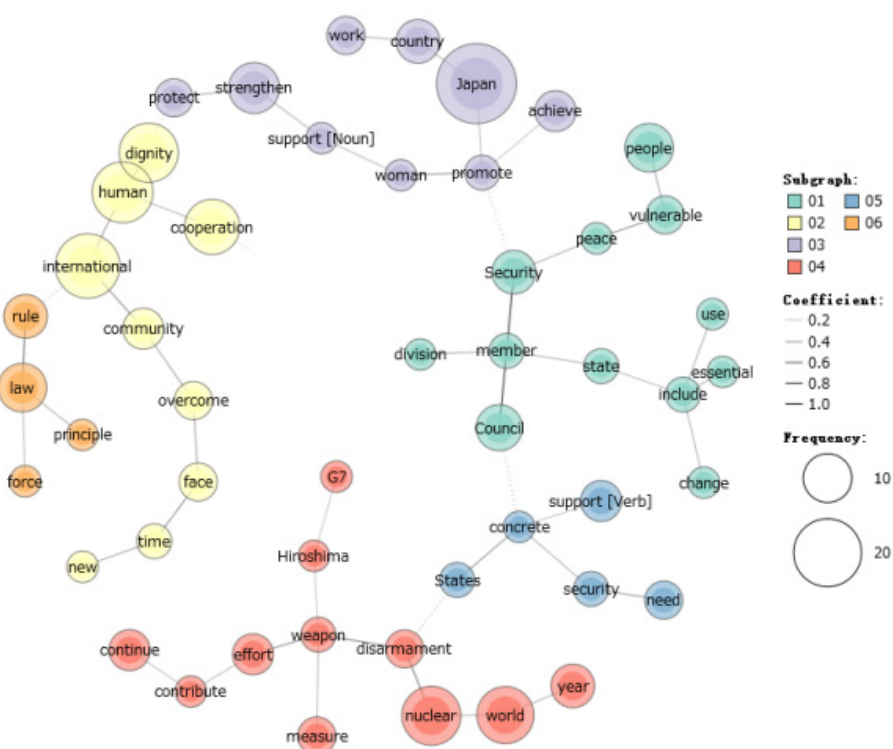


Figure 3. Co-occurrence network of 6 clusters of hot-spot themes in PM 2023

Table 1. Macro-level themes of Kishida's UNGA speeches

PM 2022		PM 2023	
Macro-level Themes (MT)	Clusters (C)	Macro-level Themes (MT)	Clusters (C)
Ensuring human rights	C1	Ensuring human rights	C1; C3
Ensuring UN's functions	C2	UN's function of promoting international cooperation	C2
Duties of member states	C3	Achieving denuclearization	C4
Promoting UN's reform	C4	Assisting developing countries	C5
Opposition to the war & nuclear weapons	C5	Observing the rule of law	C6
Obedying to the rule of law	C6; C7		

4.2 Topic-based Intertextuality in Kishida's UNGA Speeches

After comparing Macro-level Themes in PM 2022 and PM 2023, four repetitive MTs, namely “Respect for human rights”, “Anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons”, “Safeguard the rule of law”, and “Promoting UN's reform”, can be observed through Table 1, meaning that there exist intertextual phenomenon between the two speeches. Based on that, Figure 4 shows how specific contents in each major paragraph can be interconnected with these four intertextual MTs, which will be further discussed in this study.

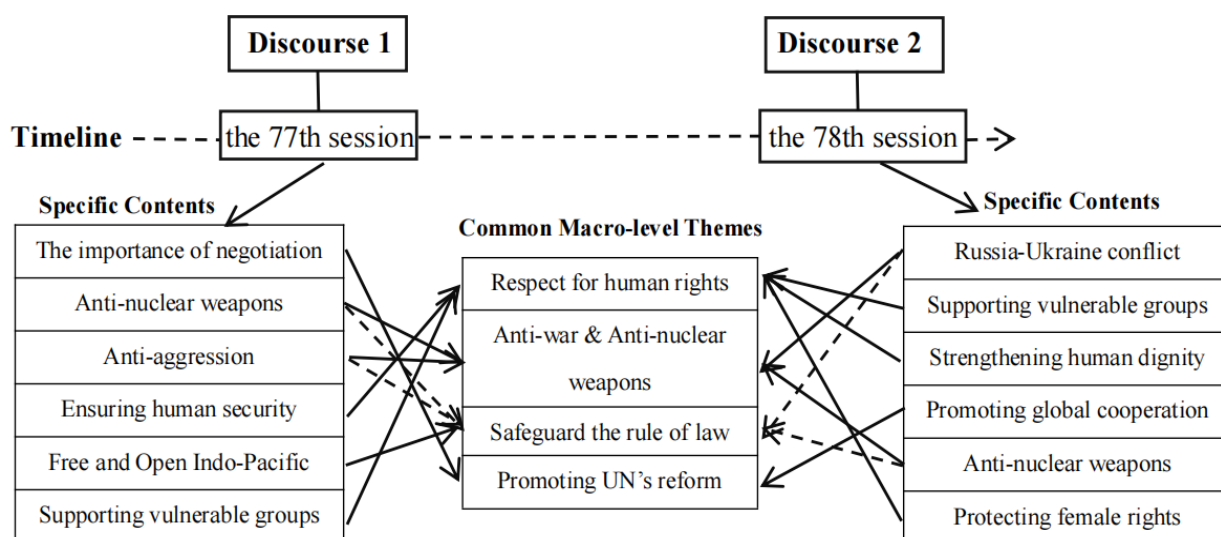


Figure 4. Framework of intertextuality in PM 2022 and PM 2033

4.2.1 Intertextual MT1: Respect for Human Rights

Since the Kishida came to power, his government set up a “Human Right Officer” in the cabinet, signifying that human rights policy has become an integral component of Japan’s international public relations strategy (Han & Lin, 2023). In that case, both the UNGA speeches in 2022 and 2023 have emphasized Japan’s dedicated endeavors to safeguard human rights. Examples are as follows:

(1) Japan will work with the United Nations to realize human security in the new era...In addition, Japan will also continue to invest generously in people in the post-pandemic era. (PM 2022)

(2) I announced the investment of US\$30 billion in Africa as the sum of public and private financial contributions over the next three years, with an emphasis on “investment in people”. (PM 2022)

(3) By shedding a new light on “human dignity”, I believe the international community can steadily advance “human-centered international cooperation”. (PM 2023)

(4) That is why I believe we should go back to the very basic foundation of treating human life and dignity with paramount importance...“A World Caring for Human Dignity,” where vulnerable people can live safely and securely. (PM 2023)

From the above examples, the Japanese government wants the international community to know that it is capable of providing financial support to vulnerable groups (ex.1) and developing countries (ex.2), thereby fulfilling its global responsibility as a developed nation through “the investment in people”. Meanwhile, the 2023 UNGA speech echoes these political actions by emphasizing “human dignity” (ex.3 & ex.4), which also encompasses the interests of non-powerful individuals (ex.4). All these examples demonstrate that, similar to

Western countries, Japan also seeks to utilize “human rights” as a political symbol (Liu & Zhang, 2024) so as to enhance its favorable international image.

4.2.2 Intertextual MT2: Anti-war and Anti-nuclear Weapons

Owing to the controversies caused by Fukushima wastewater discharge, the Kishida government needs to divert public attention towards other matters (Liu & Zhang, 2024). Therefore, he emphasizes the Russia-Ukraine conflict to highlight Japan’s unwavering anti-war stance, as demonstrated by the following examples:

(5) However, we see today its foundations being gravely shaken. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is an act that tramples on the vision and principles of the UN Charter. (PM 2022)

(6) To our dismay, the aggression against Ukraine has yet to cease. (PM 2023)

Example 5 and example 6 show that Kishida repeatedly mentions the Russia-Ukraine conflict in both his UNGA speeches of 2022 and 2023, defining it as an “aggression” to manifest Japan’s commitment to peace-keeping.

Simultaneously, Kishida also reiterates Japan’s resolution to fight against nuclear weapons, as shown in examples below:

(7) As a prime minister from Hiroshima, I am immensely dedicated to the realization of a world without nuclear weapons driven by the sentiments from the hibakusha. (PM 2022)

(8) Hailing from Hiroshima, which was devastated by atomic bombing, I have made nuclear disarmament my lifelong mission. Towards achieving a world without nuclear weapons, we will continue to bolster realistic and practical efforts. (PM 2023)

From Example 7 and Example 8, an intertextual phenomenon can be observed through Kishida’s emotion-driven statements, which highlight his determination to achieving global denuclearization. These contents could evoke sympathy towards Japan’s past experiences, enabling the government to divert people’s attention from another nuclear-related issue it faced (Tang & Yang, 2023).

4.2.3 Intertextual MT3: Safeguard the Rule of Law

With the aim of legitimizing Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, Kishida combines it with the UN’s principle of “the rule of law”, justifying that this policy is proposed within the framework outlined in the UN Charter. Examples are as follows:

(9) Strengthening the rule of law, in the long run, benefit all States and lead to sustainable growth...Based on this belief, Japan has been playing an active role...including efforts towards the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. (PM 2022)

(10) In March of this year, I announced a new plan for FOIP, a free and open Indo-Pacific. Based on the principles of freedom, the rule of law, inclusiveness, openness and diversity, Japan will work with countries that share a vision of a world where diverse nations coexist and prosper together. (PM 2023)

Example 9 and Example 10 demonstrate the interconnectedness of these two UNGA speeches, manifesting Japan's willingness of implementing its FOIP policy. To achieve this, Kishida (re)positions it as an approach to strengthen the rule of law in the UN. Under that circumstance, this strategy can be justified due to the UN's authority, thereby portraying Japan as a loyal follower accordingly.

4.2.4 Intertextual MT4: Promoting UN's Reform

Embracing the goal of becoming a recognized "great power" by the international community, Japan considers the "UN diplomacy" as a cornerstone of its foreign policies (Xu, 2008). Consequently, it actively advocates for the UN reform to enhance its ability to fulfill its functions, which will also bolster Japan's international standing. Examples are as follows:

(11) But there can be "No reform without negotiation". The various positions cannot be compromised or converge without any negotiation. The time has come to start text-based negotiations to reform the Security Council. (PM 2022)

(12) The United Nations should be a place of listening to the voices of people facing difficulties, empowering them, and overcoming such difficulties through cooperation; it should not be a place of confrontation and division. (PM 2023)

From the above examples, both Kishida's 2022 and 2023 speeches form the intertextual relationship via emphasizing the necessity of changing the status quo. In 2022, Kishida's government proposed the idea of the UN's reform (ex.11) and outlined specific requirements in 2023 (ex.12), manifesting that Japan shoulders the responsibility to improve the current situation as a member state of the UN.

In summary, Kishida's 2022 and 2023 UNGA speeches exhibit four significant intertextual relationships through mining MTs within these discourses. By examining these MTs and their specific contents, it becomes evident that Japan consistently emphasizes its concern of human rights, so as to establish itself as a responsible and democratic nation. In addition, Japan portrays itself as both a peace-loving country and a victim of atomic bombings, thereby expressing its strong opposition towards wars and nuclear weapons. Furthermore, by highlighting the importance of promoting the effective functioning of the UN, Japan positions itself as a steadfast supporter of this international organization. Collectively, these overall features contribute to enhancing Japan's international image positively. Following an exploration of the macro-level topic-based intertextuality analysis that reveals these representations, further examination will be conducted at the micro linguistic level to reveal how these images are actualized.

4.3 Transitivity Analyses of Kishida's UNGA Speeches

When conducting a macro-level analysis of Japan's international representations via topic-based intertextuality, this study delves deeper into the linguistic (re)construction of these overall images by employing transitivity analysis.

Table 2 presents an overview of process types in Kishida's UNGA speeches, indicating that material processes constitute the largest proportion (79.66%), significantly surpassing other

types in frequency. Among these process types, mental processes form the second-largest group, accounting for 11.30% in these two speeches. Given the notable frequency of material and mental processes, subsequent analyses solely focus on these two types while further categorizing them based on their semantic meanings. Specifically, material processes are subdivided into three semantic domains: “showing cooperative stances”, “taking concrete actions”, and “expressing emotive tendency”. Mental processes, meanwhile, are classified under “portraying current challenges” and “manifesting conviction”. The rationale underlying this categorization is detailed in Table 3.

Table 2. Distribution of process types in Kishida’s UNGA speeches

Transitivity		Kishida’s UNGA speeches	
Process types		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material		141	79.66
Showing cooperative stances		13	
Taking concrete actions		122	
Expressing emotive tendency		6	
Mental		20	11.30
Portraying current challenges		9	
Manifesting conviction		11	
Relational		8	4.52
Verbal		8	4.52
Existential		0	0
Behavioral		0	0
Total		177	100

Table 3. Rationales for the categorization of material and mental processes

Process types	Categorization in Kishida's UNGA speeches	Rationale
Material	Showing cooperative stances	Emphasizes collaboration and alignment with other nations to constructing an image of Japan as a responsible and reliable partner.
	Taking concrete actions	Demonstrates leadership and efficacy through concrete, outcome-oriented actions that translate cooperative pledges into tangible results.
	Expressing emotive tendency	Functions not primarily to denote physical action , but to convey national emotion and moral stance .
Mental	Portraying current challenges	Constructs an image of global awareness and compassion , highlighting Japan's attentiveness to international crises.
	Manifesting conviction	Projects an image of confident and optimistic leadership , reinforcing commitment to future-oriented solutions after acknowledging existing issues.

4.3.1 Material Processes

In Kishida's two speeches, material processes are observed to be the most prevalent, suggesting that Japanese government tends to utilize physical actions to (re)construct realities so as to represent favorable international images. Moreover, these physical verbs can be further categorized into three minor groups: verbs that "show cooperative stances"; verbs that "take concrete actions"; and verbs that "express emotive tendency". Due to this specific meaning-related division, Japan's image can be portrayed linguistically.

● Showing Cooperative Stances:

To define itself as a firm follower of the UN, Kishida utilizes a series of material processes

that demonstrate Japan's commitment to cooperating with other nations. Examples are as follows:

(13) We have all **gathered** [material process] here at this Assembly because we **stand with** [material process] the fundamental vision and principles of the UN Charter. (PM 2022)

(14) By all means, let us **gather** [material process] a wide range of wisdom, including from experts. (PM 2022)

(15) Japan will **work with** [material process] other countries to seek economies protecting human dignity. (PM 2023)

(16) Japan, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, will **work with** [material process] the UN and relevant States to promote dialogue between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States. (PM 2023)

Both the first two examples employ the verb “gather” as a material process, indicating cooperative actions. In addition, Example 13 also utilizes “stand with” to consolidate these endeavors, thereby emphasizing Japan's active participation in the UN where it collaborates with other nations to form a cohesive group (ex.13) aimed at pooling collective wisdom (ex.14) for promoting its development. Furthermore, Example 15 and Example 16 employ the verb “work with” to effectively implement specific measures to enhance global economy (ex.15) and achieve denuclearization (ex.16). These representative examples collectively demonstrate Japan's willingness to actively engage as a co-actor in supporting both the improvement of UN and mankind's common cause.

● Taking Concrete Actions:

Besides showcasing its cooperative stances in global affairs, Kishida also employs various verbs related to real and effective actions to depict Japan as a responsible nation. Examples are as follows:

(17) In order to **realize** [material process] a world that the UN Charter aspires to, we must **tackle** [material process] head-on the strengthening of the UN's functions. (PM 2022)

(18) Japan will **strengthen** [material process] efforts based on the concept of human security in the new era. (PM 2022)

(19) In order to **address** [material process] unprecedented crises and challenges, and to **protect** [material process] and **strengthen** [material process] “human dignity”, let us **start** [material process] step by step from where we can. (PM 2023)

(20) Japan aims to **reduce** [material process] inequalities and overcome [material process] social divisions by promoting women's participation. (PM 2023)

Examples 17 to 20 not only demonstrate Japan's aspirations to enhance current circumstances through material processes such as “realize”, “address”, and “aims to reduce”, but also exemplify specific actions aimed at tackling human rights issues (ex.18 to 20) by utilizing verbs like “protect”, “reduce”, and “strengthen”. These endeavors are directed towards the

practical and responsible implementation of Japan's ambitions, aligning with its commitment to promoting human rights.

- Expressing Emotive Tendency:

Japan, having endured the devastating impact of two atomic bombings, tends to present itself as both a victim and an advocate against nuclear armament. Examples are as follows:

(21) As the only nation to have ever **suffered** [material process] atomic bombings during war, Japan... (PM 2022)

(22) We must **ensure** [material process] that Nagasaki remains the last place to suffer an atomic bombing. (PM 2023)

Example 21 portrays the profound anguish endured by Japan as a consequence of the catastrophic impact of nuclear weapons, with the intention to elicit empathy from its audience. Meanwhile, Example 22 utilizes the term “ensure” to demonstrate Japan's determination in opposing nuclear weapons, thereby showcasing its peace-loving image.

4.3.2 Mental Processes

Apart from employing material process to represent physical actions, Kishida's two UNGA speeches utilize mental processes related to cognition, perception, desideration, etc. Similarly, these processes can also be classified according to their meanings, namely, “Portraying challenges in current situation” and “Manifesting conviction” (see Table 2).

- Portraying Challenges in Current Situation:

In Kishida's two speeches, he employs various verbs in order to manifest Japan's awareness of current challenges, thereby implying the responsibility of the Japanese government in addressing these obstacles for the sake of global peace. Examples are provided as follows:

(23) Seventy-seven years have passed since the establishment of the United Nations, yet we are still **witnessing** [mental process] the devastation in Ukraine and around the world. (PM 2022)

(24) Through those capacities, I **have heard** [mental process] the desperate desire for peace and the pleas of vulnerable people seeking help. (PM 2023)

Example 23 employs the verb “are witnessing” to convey Japan's recognition of the persistent threat of war. In Example 24, “have heard” is utilized to expound upon the catastrophic impact on humanitarian affairs. Both instances serve to heighten awareness among the UN members regarding the enduring negative consequences of warfare, thereby highlighting Japan's robust international responsibility and peace-loving nature.

- Manifesting Conviction:

In addition to addressing ongoing crises, Kishida also asserts a sense of optimism and potential for the future of humanity by employing verbs associated with demonstrating convictions. Examples are provided below:

(25) I **believe** [mental process] this document represents a new foundation for the international community to proceed with realistic engagements on nuclear disarmament in the future. (PM 2022)

(26) And as we **envision** [mental process] the post- 2030 Agenda in the future, I **believe** [mental process] human dignity should be placed as the core principle that illuminates the future of the international community. (PM 2023)

In order to cultivate a positive national image, Examples 25 and 26 demonstrate Japan's unwavering support for the UN's resolutions, positioning it as a steadfast adherent that fosters optimism for the eventual improvement of the current situation. This further emphasizes Japan's commitment to embracing a brighter future under the guidance of the UN.

To summarize, transitivity analysis primarily focuses on material processes and mental processes to uncover the linguistic realization of Japan's international images that have been discussed in topic-based intertextuality analysis. The findings indicate that Kishida strategically employs material processes to depict national representations, including demonstrating cooperative stances, implementing concrete actions, and expressing Japan's emotional inclination. Through these action-oriented verbs, Japan is portrayed as an active participant in supporting UN resolutions (e.g., ex.13 & ex.17) and advocating for common interests of humanity (e.g., ex.15), while also assuming the role of a responsible guardian of human rights (e.g., ex.20). Additionally, Kishida incorporates emotive verbs to present Japan as a peace-loving nation and highlight its victimhood during times of war (ex.21 & ex.22).

Meanwhile, these images are further reinforced through the utilization of mental processes, which not only exemplify Japan's profound concern for the current crises faced by humanity (ex.23 & ex.24), but also demonstrate its optimistic attitudes towards improving the situation. Based on these linguistic features, Japan's advantageous international images are established through constructed realities derived from ideational meta-function in SFL.

5. Discussion

5.1 Power Dynamics Manipulated by Left-Wing Government

According to Wodak (2015), political actors employ a variety of linguistic strategies to (re)shape public opinions, construct identities, and legitimize their policies. This suggests that discursive (re)construction serves as a viable approach for stakeholders to exercise political power (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 253). In this context, the positive international images (re)constructed in Kishida's two UNGA speeches can also be understood as being influenced by the power dynamics of the Japanese government.

Firstly, as the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which encompasses both left-leaning and conservative orientations, Kishida has aligned his administration closely with the "universal values" promoted by Western nations, particularly the United States (Ijuin, 2023). In his two UNGA speeches, he repeatedly emphasized Japan's commitment to human rights through a set of interconnected themes, deploying a wide range of verbal processes to outline concrete measures taken by Japan in pursuit of these ideals. This discursive effort

functions to legitimize his government's actions (Liu & Zhang, 2024) and forms a coherent national narrative that aligns with Japan's FOIP strategy. However, these so-called "universal values" are far from globally consensual. The lack of a unified international response even to salient events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine underscores profound divergences in value systems (ibid.). Nevertheless, Kishida's persistent emphasis in his speeches on Western-driven norms such as "human rights" (e.g., ex.18 to 20) and the "rule of law" (e.g., ex.9) closely mirrors the diplomatic doctrine maintained by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japanese Foreign Ministry, 2023). This consistency suggests that his political discourses should not be defined as personal improvisation, but rather constitute a strategically crafted national narrative.

Moreover, to repair the international image damaged by actions such as the discharge of nuclear wastewater, the Kishida government has continued the "Erasure" strategy previously utilized by former PM Abe (Li, 2017, p. 48). This tactic aims to deflect international criticism and alleviate diplomatic pressure by constructing a positive self-representation while reinforcing a negative image of the "Other" (Van Dijk, 2011). Specifically, Kishida highlighted Japan's wartime victimhood (e.g., ex.21 & ex.22) and explicitly condemned Russia's military actions in Ukraine (e.g., ex.5 & ex.24), thereby diverting attention from domestic controversies over nuclear waste management and obscuring its ambitions to pursue military normalization under the guise of national security policies. In addition, such a discursive approach is also evident in the Japanese government's public response to the Fukushima treated water release. For instance, during a visit to the facility, Kishida pledged that "the government will work to address concerns among local residents regarding technical safety" (Asahi Shimbun, 2021). Relevant authorities have likewise emphasized that the discharge "will be carried out to ensure safety" (Yomiuri Shimbun, 2023). These responses collectively establish a discourse framework centered on "technical rationality" and "external authorization" (re)framing what are ultimately ethical and political trust issues into purely technical and procedural matters. In doing so, the government evades substantive engagement with critics and undermines the legitimacy of international opposition.

Finally, "UN diplomacy" has consistently been a cornerstone of Japan's foreign strategy since the post-war period (Xu, 2008). Following its election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2023, Japan has had even greater incentive to portray itself as a steadfast supporter of the UN, enhancing not only its international reputation but also leveraging the discursive power associated with this role to advance its FOIP strategy. When compared to other major Indo-Pacific leaders, Japan's diplomatic posture shows distinct differences. For instance, Indian PM Narendra Modi emphasizes "strategic autonomy" and "multi-alignment", framing his discourse around Global South identity and development issues (Li, 2020). Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, though also a U.S. ally, focuses more on regional affairs in Oceania and Southeast Asia, climate change, and economic resilience (Snow, 2021), which reflect a tradition of Australian pragmatism (Wesley, 2009). In comparison, Japan demonstrates the characteristics of a global maritime power that proactively pursues military normalization and expanded strategic influence (Lu, 2024). It skillfully utilizes the UN to soften and legitimize its strategic goals. This positioning

distinguishes Japan both from India's strategic autonomy and Australia's regionally focused pragmatism.

5.2 Nationalism and Opportunism Rooted in Social-Historical Contexts

In essence, the portrayal of international image can be regarded as a political action (Van Dijk, 2011), (re)shaping collective identities and power relations rooted in the ideologies embedded within a unique social-historical context (Wodak, 2001). By analyzing specific international representations and the power dynamics they reveal, we can uncover the historical-based ideologies present in Japanese society.

In his two UNGA speeches, Kishida demonstrated pronounced nationalist undertones. His consistently positive self-representation sought to (re)frame Japan not merely as a follower of the UN's humanitarian missions, but as a proactive, peace-loving, and responsible international actor. This favorable image-building serves explicit political objectives, including obscuring Japan's nuclear policies and strategic engagements in the Indo-Pacific. From a historical perspective, Japan's political rightward shift, traceable to former PM Junichiro Koizumi's tenure (2001), exhibits features consistent with nationalist aspirations (Lyu, 2014). This trend is reflected in the tendency to frame its political actions as morally justified and to actively seek international recognition for such narratives (Pan, 2023; Wang, 2023). For instance, by emphasizing its identity as a "responsible victim-nation" severely affected by nuclear issues, Japan attempts to elicit international sympathy so as to legitimize its nuclear waste disposal practices. Within this context, its nationalist-driven self-portrayal exposes behavior that may be hypocritical.

Furthermore, Japan's construction of a multifaceted positive national image reflects a pragmatic opportunism in its foreign policy, which capitalizes on shifts in the international landscape while often overlooking the concerns of other nations. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated Japan's prolonged deflation and economic pressures, making its "UN diplomacy" an instrument for image restoration and a measure to enhance national strength (Shigemura, 2018). In projecting an image of a responsible power, Japan has actively promoted abstract concepts such as "investment in people" and "human dignity" (e.g., ex.2 & ex.15). However, in the absence of clear definitions and tangible commitments, such initiatives are often perceived as tactical instruments serving its own interests (Liu & Zhang, 2024). At a deeper level, these opportunistic tendencies stem from the high degree of external dependency inherent in its economic structure. Heavily reliant on international markets and resources, Japan's advocacy of "UN diplomacy" and "value-oriented diplomacy" constitutes a strategic effort to maintain influence and secure market access at low cost. As Sino-U.S. strategic competition intensifies, Japan, as a middle power, continually seeks strategic balance and self-advancement between the two major powers (ibid.). Its FOIP strategy epitomizes this strategic opportunism.

6. Conclusions

Utilizing corpus-based DHA, this study not only elucidates overall international image that Japan presents to the global community in PM Kishida's two UNGA speeches through a

variety of hot-spot themes, but also further analyzes sub-topics of common themes through a topic-based intertextuality analysis. Additionally, the study explores how these portrayals are linguistically manifested through transitivity analysis. The findings indicate that Japan employs intertextual themes at the macro level to demonstrate its support for the UN, commitment to human rights, and opposition to wars and nuclear weapons. At the same time, these speeches prominently utilize material and mental processes to portray Japan's sense of responsibility, democratic values, peace-loving characteristics, and its victimhood in the face of nuclear disasters. However, from a social-historical perspective, the underlying objective of these positive representations is to advance Japan's pursuit of global political power, significantly shaped by the power dynamics within its LDP government, as well as by deeply rooted nationalism and opportunism within society. Moreover, an overarching rightward tendency is evident in Kishida's speeches, which recast Japan's controversial political actions as positive international representations.

In addition, this study has several limitations. Linguistically, it relies primarily on intertextuality and transitivity analyses; future research could incorporate additional CDS tools, such as nomination and predication strategies, to more systematically uncover latent nationalist and opportunistic ideologies. Furthermore, as this study focuses exclusively on textual content, subsequent investigations might explore multimodal dimensions, including visual and performative elements of the speech delivery at the UNGA, or analyze international media reception so as to evaluate the actual dissemination and impact of such discourse.

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