

What kind of Europe? What kind of Japan?

The European Vision of the global geopolitical dynamics in comparison with the Japanese perspectives

Fabrizio Eva

The global geopolitical dynamics are still framed by unbalanced power relations in which the so-called hegemonic states play a relevant role. The main actors are the USA and Russia (ex URSS) as former superpowers during the Cold War period, the former main colonial power UK and France, and the emerging China; all these countries are permanent members in the UN Security Council, with veto power, and all are nuclear military powers. Occasionally there are other countries which try to or have a (relevant) role in some specific geopolitical dynamics. This kind of status could confirm as valid in practice the power factors indicated by John Mearsheimer (2001) and his “offensive realism” theory: 1) having specific (material) resources, useful for building the military power, 2) the most efficient military power is the army (the only one which allows the control on the ground), 3) for having strong military power it’s necessary to have population and wealth. According to the military strategic theorization a military menace should be credible, i.e. the “menacing” state should have a military capability according to the kind of menace and should be trusted of the will to concretize it.

The goals of the power (real and potential) by John Mearsheimer are: 1) Regional Hegemony, 2) Maximizing the control of the global wealth, 3) Dominating (hegemony) the global power balance, 4) Having (the superiority of) nuclear weapons. I add another characteristic of a global power, much more related to the issue of “prestige” and status symbol, i.e. being able to abuse the (international) rules and/or to force their interpretation with no judiciary/retaliation consequences.

But if in practice the current geopolitical dynamics are “inside” the Mearsheimer’s theoretical frame, this doesn’t mean that it is the best or the unique way to manage them; it is possible to consider geopolitics (and to act geopolitically) in different ways.

My critical key concepts, which I used as points of reference, are as follows:

- The concept of the state (see John Agnew’s *Territorial Trap*, 1998) is (also) a *Mental Trap*.
- The territory becomes iconographic (in the sense of Jean Gottmann, 1952) and takes the name of state.
- The intrinsic ambiguity of “nation” and “state” notions (actually state versus nation) is not (sufficiently) debated at the public opinion level and this is a source of confusion and also, sometimes, of conflict.
- The generally accepted assumption is that the territory and the human groups who live on it are indissolubly bounded (forming the “identity” of a people), but this is the asserted (pretended) Iconography of the nation-state, still conceived along the Friedrich Ratzel’s triad: (bounded) soil, people, political structure. It is a taken for granted statement, not the truth.
- The connection-link between human groups and specific territories is socially and “mentally” constructed from the bottom (see the Richard Dawkins “meme”, i.e. concepts-ideas [1995], the Elisée Reclus triad - language, history, *genre de vie* [1905] - and the Fabrizio Eva *selfcaging* [2012]).

- The common language is one of, or maybe the main factor of cohesion (the social “glue”) which drives the construction of the sense of the existence or simply to the acceptance of the existing lifestyle.
- Human beings, when they live in groups, are able to self-organize their social relations, which take the shape of *genre de vie* – lifestyle – cultural island. The “natural” social relation of a human group is based on some human characteristics, producing spontaneous or instinctive *memes* which are asserted as Iconographies and Symbols: links by “blood” (consanguinity), group (the people I know, the traditional behaviors, religion), and site (the place I know).
- The *genre-de-vie*, in the sense of imitation and/or day by day behaviors, becomes Iconography. (Actually no-one “explains” to the new generations the sense and the “articles” or the “clauses” of the social contract: this is, today and conceptually, taken for granted in the shape of the state.). The ordinary life continuously asserts and supports through the language the production and the diffusion of the *memes* which reinforce the asserted common principles-values.
- First the space, then the family and finally the school (as institution and/or as the “school of life”), are also among the main vehicles of shaping the lifestyle.
- I consider the space as formed by three overlapped and interlinked dynamics: 1) Physical Space, *physic-biological*, that is, everything that has no awareness of its own death, 2) Perceived Space, that is, everything that is subjective and emotional in each human being, 3) Represented/Symbolic Space, that is, everything that is told through narratives or asserted through the attribution of metaphysical or transcendent values (the discourse), including through symbols that require acceptance as (unquestionable) icons.

Through these three concepts of space the geographer (but not only) should observe the world in order to try to understand it and its dynamics in relation to the human beings.

The rigidity of the *territorial trap* in the shape of the state gives the borders a relevant, unavoidable role. After the end of the Cold War the geopolitical dynamics changed substantially their goals and most of their “narratives”; conflicts related to border disputes strongly decreased or remain “suspended”, while the internal secessionist claims and maritime disputes grew significantly. The disputes about maritime borders are in fact related more to the present (or probably present) natural resources on the seabed. This is also connected to the main differences in the physical characteristics of the land borders which the maritime ones haven’t: 1) the presence of fixed physical “natural” points of reference, which could avoid the necessity of marking the border, 2) the possibility to clearly evidence them, 3) the possibility to reinforce them, 4) the possibility of a durable permanence of military force and to augment it if the case. Thus the presence of islands is so important for the maritime borders and sovereignty claims.

The main difference between Europe and Japan is the fact that the borders of Japan are totally maritime while for Europe there are also relevant territorial borders, but both European territorial and maritime borders are substantially stable (for a post WWII mental attitude and because of the EU enlargement process) and almost 100% undisputed.

The issue of borders, the self-perception and the status/prestige are important in the still state-centered geopolitical dynamics. And for observing and evaluating the position and/or the aims of Japan it could be useful to do a comparison with Europe despite the differences: Japan is a nation-state, Europe is a supranational agreement.

Both Japan and Europe are still inside the post WWII mental and practical legacy; for Europe this means the partially forced acceptance of a reduced and dependent (from the USA) military role, but also the explicit will to overcome secular conflicts and to proceed towards a full economic and political integration for (almost) all the European countries, avoiding (at least theoretically) nationalistic discourses and narratives. Is this the same for Japan? The military dependence from the USA is still necessarily strong (stronger than the one of Europe) and also constitutionally framed, specially by art. 9. But in my opinion there is also a largely shared opinion among the Japanese people against the war and the use of force in the geopolitical dynamics.

But the issue of the borders remain significant for every state as well as the “old” question related to what are the borders dependent on? From Nature? From History? From Language? From Religion? From Identity? Which one? Ethnic, National, what else? From Principles? Which ones? From differences? Which ones? The European Union partially solved the issue of borders through the enlargement of the Union and through the disappearing of the border controls in the Schengen Area. This is the consequence of one of the legacies of the European History: too many (and destructive) wars in the past. In a different way also for Japan the idea of war is linked to the dramatic end of the WWII and in this sense there is a sort of communality with Europe.

After 1945 in Europe started and it is still alive a shared “discourse”, partially supported by coherent narratives. The main points of this discourse are: 1) no more wars, 2) negotiation as the main means to solve the problems, 3) the EU enlargement process made by free choice and not by force, 4) money for supporting the joining transition and/or negotiations.

But it's possible to identify two kinds of Europes, living in parallel: the Europe-Society and the Europe-Institution.

The Europe-Society is the one in action day by day through the ordinary lives of the Europeans. The construction of the European Union introduced a continuous process of small changes in the ordinary life of Europeans which the new generations (but largely also the old ones) accepted and perceive now as “normal”. “Europe is doing itself in the same moment in which it is thought, not merely by the philosophers, but from all the actors. In great measure it happens before and against every project of Europe” (Lévy, 1999, p. 312). The main characteristics of the Europe-Society are: 1) *Circulation* (in the sense of Gottmann), actors are the citizens, 2) it's already existing as a result of the historical and integration process lasting since several decades, 3) it is still active thanks to exchanges of every kind, 4) it's growing by voluntary choice.

The Europe-Institution is the political structure of the EU as the result of the process of enlargement and of the sequel of administrative-economic agreements signed from 1950s until today. The main characteristics are: 1) *Iconography* (in the sense of Gottmann), actors are the governments, 2) an iconic Europe, as theoretical political and economic subjects. This Europe has yet to be defined completely in rules and principles, even if currently there is a building attempt in the economic realm. But this is a consequence of the 2008-2013 financial crisis effects which in some way obliged the European countries to find a common action in order to “save the money” (and banks: the lesson of the Japanese '97-'99 financial crisis hasn't be learned!); it is formally along the “unionist” ideas declared since the 1950s and (slowly) pursued until the failed attempt of approving an European Constitution in the early 2000s, but in fact the nation-states resist. The ideas for the future of Europe still remain related to the concept of a supranational (federalist) state while the practices of the single governments are still along the defense of the so-called “national” interests.

Accepting these parallel conceptual lines (society and institutions) the considerations about Europe, and what it will be, it could also be useful for the people who like to meditate on the current (geopolitical) Japan and its future. Even if apparently the issue of different nationalities in Europe seems not to involve Japan, in fact it's possible to

do so, at the internal level of every state, a parallel with the different concepts of national interests and/or national pride. It's possible to consider as in action the Japan-Society and the Japan-Institution.

Here is a 5-point list of what kind of (f)actors could be considered as a pillar for Europe; I added to each point also a critical question in order to suggest a possible field of reflection. So, what kind of Europe could be forecasted?

- The one of the Nation-states (A mighty Europe competing with the USA?)
- The one of economy (the Europe of money: competing with USA , China and the emerging states?)
- The one of the “peoples” (the Europe of the self-affirmed identities: everyone has “its” territory, “its” culture? With boundaries or not?)
- The one of the citizens (the Europe of the individual rights: granted by supranational European institutions?)
- The one of the “visions”? (No War, liberté-égalité-fraternité, rules are always to be negotiated, etc.: with a written European Constitution?)

It is now more and more relevant to what kind of institutional model is better for the future of the European Union. The compulsory necessity to find a shared institutional exit from the financial-economic crisis brought to the agreement in December 2013 about the definition of the kind of control over the European banks by the ECB (European Central Bank, seated in Frankfurt, Germany). This restarted at least a debate about the possible political, institutional structure of the Union.

- 1) Nation-states federation (USA strong presidential model)
- 2) Nation-states federation (German parliamentary model, with two representative chambers differentiated in terms of power)
- 3) Nation-states (con)federation (Switzerland model, with large decentralized autonomies)
- 4) The Switzerland model could be applied also to a Regions (con)federation model

But it's relevant to underline the connections with what now are considered by political leaders, not only by Mearsheimer, as geopolitical power assets: 1) military power (being able to intervene everywhere), 2) control of the global financial fluxes and being the geographical basis for the main liquidity managing societies, 3) control over the global industrial production sectors, 4) being advanced in Hi-Tech and R&S. This taken for granted conceptual points reduce the ability to think critically the institutional structure of Europe. For example saying that Europe should be a strong military power, able to intervene by force of arms everywhere, means: 1) going out of NATO, 2) organizing a professional European army (multi-corps and unified as the recruitment), 3) being self-sufficient and having an integrated-standard production of weapons, 4) having a satellite electronic integrated control system (i.e. Galileo), 5) having military bases abroad in strategic points. And run a risk to be conflicting with the USA about some geopolitical issue (i.e., Middle East dynamics).

In the realms of the global financial fluxes (investment/commercial banks and liquidity managing societies) and the global industrial production the presence and control of Europe is already in action, but it would be necessary to be more competitive with the USA finance operators (i.e. Goldman Sachs and the others in the group of the so-called Big Nines) and more active in supporting the European industrial system as well the Hi-Tech and R&D sector (for being competitive with USA, China and other emerging countries).

Europe already has a “good” position in the global supranational institutions, but it’s strong in the challenge in this realm of new players like China, India and Brazil. Only in the UN Security Council, with United Kingdom and France as permanent members with veto power, the status quo seems undisputable, but ... until when?

The Europe of the “peoples” (the Europe of the self-affirmed identities: everyone has “its” territory, “its” culture?) is now decreasing as a theoretical appeal. The period of the electoral success of the separatist/autonomist parties seems to be finished while the dissatisfaction “against” the Europe and the euro currency (because of the economic crisis) now takes the nationalist path. But, in my opinion, this is with only a partial possibility of success because what I named Europe-Society is sufficiently strong and well-established. The weakness of this political position is also due to the fact that the concept of “people” is very ambiguous and disputable in defining who is in and who is out, and it is also conceptually the same used by the nationalists.

What about the Europe of the “visions”? Along ideas like No War, *libertè-egalitè-fraternitè*, rules are always to be negotiated, etc., maybe with a written European Constitution? These visions are still present in the European societies; but politically represented only by small minority parties. Oddly those are all European generated ideas, good to be used by politicians in formal official discourses, but put in practice with many contradictions and resistance by state bureaucrats and officials. But these visions are also unconsciously shared by many Europeans; I think that it’s possible to statue that the European cultural island and its Iconography (what I called Europe-Society) works in the ordinary life along those ideas and that there is a perceived ascription to the space-territory of Europe of them. Human beings mentally (and mainly unconsciously) ‘build’ their relationships with the space by imitation and social and cultural conditioning; after that there is a symbolic processing/theorization which gives sense to individual characteristics and to life. This psychological dynamics are instinctive, “natural”, acting within each human group and so, unfortunately, they can be used for political (nationalistic, exclusive, xenophobic) purposes when they are presented as “not negotiable”.

The sense of belonging to a “culture”, to a specific human group and to a specific territory, the process of building the national identities has been studied by several academics and scholars. Here I use the criteria of Anthony D. Smith (1992), but also stressing that in this realm it is not important to “quest the Truth” because we must accept as valid only the ideas-opinions which the persons consider significant (Barth, 1969, cited in dell’Agnese E., *Geografia Politica Critica*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2005) not our personal opinion about them.

Smith’s criteria for a human group identity existence are as follows:

- Link with a territory (typical sentences: “this is our land, the cradle of our culture, there is a special relation with this land, etc.”)
- Myth (“we descend from”; “this symbol always was our symbol”, etc.)
- History (some [or many] specific historical events are asserted as unique and/or with a special value)
- Diversity (“we are special ... from the very beginning, because ... we are special!!”)
- Genre de vie - Lifestyle (“our behavior is best than the one of the ‘others’”; we are civilized ... , people with different customs/values in our territory are a danger”, etc.)

I suggest an Europe-Japan comparison along these criteria:

Characteristics	Europe	Japan
Link with a territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Europe: yes, but locally different 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan: yes
Myth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Europe: partially and differentiated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan: yes
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Europe: not as a whole, only by “nations”. Common “past of wars” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan: yes
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Europe : yes, but locally different 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan: yes
Genre de vie (Lifestyle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Europe: yes (locally and in general) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan: yes

According to this comparison, obviously Japan, being furthermore a state-nation with the physical condition of an “island” with only maritime borders, seems as “built” and more stable than Europe. But perhaps, despite the appearance, both Europe and Japan share the condition of outsiders in the so-called World Order working along the Mearsheimer’s power factors. In my opinion this could be an advantage, but only if Europe and/or Japan decide to take a leading role in changing the current ideological/mental frame of the geopolitical world leaders.

Hereunder a list of points stressing the current situation of Europe from the point of view of economics, politics and sociology. It’s possible for a Japanese reader to do an autonomous comparison in order to evaluate if there is a similar situation or a gap in Japan:

- The EU institutional structure is under pressure because of the crisis; but this could be a possible stimulus to significant changes (or, at least, to a larger public debate).
- Europe has a stable political system (no relevant changes in the internal policy of the states between center-right and center-left governments).
- It is relevant to the role played by what I call the “Mass media party”, in the sense that mass media orients (too much and often too badly) the political debate and are the main “leaders-makers”.
- Substantially the public demonstrations in the streets/squares are non influential in changing the government decisions.
- European Union has an international role, but with some important members (UK, France, increasingly German) with an old (neo-colonialist) style in managing geopolitics (governments, top-down decisions, contracts, weapons, commerce [services and bank agencies, financial movements of capitals], tourism).

With these premises Europe is facing a progressive geopolitical irrelevance, due also to the reduced direct financing capability.

- The economic/financial crisis shows how much the so-called “international investors” and “markets” (actually who control the money fluxes) are the main actors. More and more the ordinary life and its spatiality is considered only if economically valuable.
- Because the still dominant conceptual frame that the model of (capitalist) economy is good everywhere, in Europe, after the collapse of the URSS, is largely shared by the political acceptance by the people of the socio-economic pyramid along the differences in the private property as the selecting criterion.

Europe is living today an historical phase in which the “Society” and the “Institutions” are conceptually overlapped, and perceived vaguely by the ordinary people. The missing public (and political) debate over the political future of Europe and the dramatic economic effects of the financial crisis 2008-2013 (still in action in Europe) bring part of the EU peoples to be critical of the process of construction of the Union and even with the utility of the euro currency. But these ideas are affecting only a minority part of the Europeans: the next European elections could be a good testing desk for this statement. My forecast is that the Europe-Society is still stronger than the nationalist claims. Paradoxically the weakness of the Myth of Europe foster a sort of coolness regarding the nationalistic fury which fuels the process of mental and spatial *caging* (Eva 2012).

For Japan, being a single country, it is easier and more psychological comfortable for the ordinary people looking for a power perspective and consider the nationalist option; the *territorial trap* is strong (for every state) and limits the imagination. The growing power of China, the characteristics of the already mentioned maritime boundaries, the Iconography of not “losing face” support the use of nationalistic iconography by the government and by part of the mass media. Is it not by chance that the prime minister Shinzo Abe is popular and he is now politically explicit in his claim for a stronger role of Japan in the geopolitical realm; this along the ideas of his booklet published in 2006. So in the guide-lines of the official document Strategy for the National Security (17th December 2013) is cited a “pro-active contribute to the peace” [*sekkyokuteki heiwa-shugi - kokuksaikyouchoushugi ni motozuku sekkyokuteki heiwa-shugi*] with a mode of expression not so far from the “pro-active pacifism” which was invented in 1941 by an Italian journalist Mario Appellius in his book related to Japan titled “Cannoni e ciliegi in fiore (il Giappone moderno)” (“Guns and flourishing cherry-trees. The modern Japan”, quoted in an article by Stefano Carrer, *Il Sole 24ore*, 27th December 2013).

The government support to a nationalistic narrative is a sociologically relevant factor, but I hold my opinion that the nationalistic appeal should be evaluated looking also (or mainly) at what is already present as shared ideas/behavior among ordinary people. For an external observer and also for internal self-interested players it is easy to misunderstand or to manipulate some traditional Japanese social tidy-attitude behaviors presenting them as nationalistic attitude or ideas. Maybe other *memes* (Dawkins, 1995) and Iconographies are still acting in the Japan-Society. For example the media success of the Shiono Nanami opinions and descriptions of the Italian *Rinascimento*, but overall of the Roman Empire as in some way conceptually similar to Japan (Miyake, 2010) could be more influential in supporting the feeling that it's necessary for Japan to rescue its pride and to play a “pro-active” geopolitical role along the Mearsheimer's power factors. In a different way in Europe the Roman Empire is not so up to date as a possible conceptual model; actually it has an appeal only for a very minority of Europeans. But the spreading appeal of the USA political-institutional model could be considered as an indirect appreciation, because the Roman Empire is an explicit model for the neo-con, the Right Wing and Tea Party sectors of the US Republican Party, who consider as obvious the Manifest Destiny of the USA to guide the World Order.

“Japanese students are not active to issues on politics and overseas” (Takagi-Eva, 2013); this sentence was made by prof. Akihiko Takagi at the IGU Kyoto International Conference as one of the final conclusions after having presented the temporary results of a joint work in progress, with questionnaires distributed to Japanese and Italian students. This attitude on one hand could be positive because there isn't animosity concerning geopolitics, but on the other hand this could be also evidence that “young generation go with the flow” (Takagi-Eva, 2013). “Spatial distance is also an emotional/perspective distance” (Takagi-Eva, 2013); this is for sure for Italians about the Far East Asia territorial disputes, but this could be valid also for Japanese (students or not) when the geopolitical problem is related to small, uninhabited, far away islands unless nationalistic symbols and Iconographies are regularly stimulated by influential subjects.

But I think that the article 9 of the Japanese Constitution (very similar to the art.11 of the Italian one) is still (and luckily) a strong iconographic limit with positive effects and symbolic value at the Japanese sociological level. It would be stimulating to transform it in *Circulation* (Gottmann, 1952), that is to say a dynamic conceptual element useful to be used both by the European Union and Japan as a geopolitical action tool. In this field there is no competition, no countries or international organizations are really active in this sense. This action could be (emotionally) gratifying and with possible positive, democratic, pacifist effects for the whole (geopolitical) world.

But the current “ideological” and iconographic points of reference of the “world order” are different.

In my opinion the current situation sees the spread of three main political-institutional models. The USA Presidential one (more and more spreading in the West, which is looking for “stability” and “governance”), i.e. more power to the government, political career through the “mass media party”, usually about 50% of voters over the eligible amount. The China “guided democracy” with a dominant party (also through elections like in Putin's Russia). The Sheik-Emir or Ideologic-Theocratic one with an undisputable Iconography which rules the institutions and the society (but this model could accept the guided democracy in the future).

Perhaps in the future is coming a “merging” model, similar to the current one in Hong Kong: strong decisional power to the government, parliament with two constituencies (55% elected with a multiparty system, 45% designed by economic and professional constituencies), political role of the “mass media party” in order to canvas the consensus, and no discussion about the Western style economic system. This “model” is formally democratic, with some granted individual liberties, but no possibility to change the socio-economic pyramid which is the “discourse”, supported by the political-economic rhetoric and the mass media narratives.

I'd like that human groups, countries and leaders would have a totally different vision for managing the geopolitical dynamics.

As a very brief conclusion I introduce hereunder some points inspired by the conceptual frame of the Barcelona Declaration, signed in the year 1995 between the European Union and the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, with the aim to build a pacific, economic and geopolitical friendly area. The points are a little modified because of the substantial failure of the project as a consequence of the collapse of the URSS bloc and the pressure of USA for orienting the (geo)policy of EU toward the East instead of toward the South (Eva, 1999). This kind of policy followed the conceptual power lines of Mearsheimer and of the traditional Geopolitics as well as the one of economic power (which is also compatible with the Mearsheimer one). The theoretical ideas of the Barcelona Declaration are still good, but they must be supported not only economically (and today it's not so easy), but overall politically and supported by the narratives of the mass media (party).

A new Barcelona Declaration (without the previous mistakes):

- Not all the (international) investors are good (the “big” aren’t). Banning the OTC exchanges and supporting (allowing only?) corporate bonds and private equity funds for small-medium enterprises.
- Give regular state aid directly to local communities (for doing schools, hospitals, community centers, cultural associations, etc.).
- Avoid the state-bureaucratic intermediation.
- Finance directly the projects (along the ONG model, i.e. Action Aid etc.); ask support through crowdfunding.
- Transfer of efficient, ecological, low cost technologies and knowledge for an autonomous local management (“small is beautiful”).
- Exchange of TV broadcasting, movies and docs, broadcasted by main state TV channels.
- Compulsory to host a United Nations TV channel with a multilateral-multilinguistic management and broadcasting, following the model of Euronews, the joint European TV-news channel, and the Italian one, significantly named Babel.

For Europe and Japan dealing with these ideas and trying to spread them at the international level as the geopolitical conceptual mainstream could be an interesting geopolitical challenge.

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