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Japan's National Role Conception and its Perceptions of China in the Region and World: The View of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's Administration

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Summary

The return to power of Abe Shinzō at the helm of the victorious Liberal Democratic Party in December 2012 heralded the opening of a new chapter for both Japan as well as the wider East Asia region. Despite the fact that in 2006–2007 he was credited with improving the relationship with Beijing after the preceding period of diplomatic freeze during the rule of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō (2001–2006), the policies of PM Abe's second administration in fact turned out to be far less reconciliatory — further souring the already strained relationship between the two neighbors. This paper aims to investigate the evolving perceptions of and approach to China of two PM Abe administration periods from a role theory perspective. We suggest that changes in the international environment during the five years between PM Abe's first and second tenures of office led to a higher level of uncertainty concerning Japan's international role(s) — resulting ultimately in a more proactive role taking by the Abe administration since 2012.

Keywords: Sino–Japanese relations, Abe Shinzō, role theory, international relations, Japan, China

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