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UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Press

Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu

Dissertation has been accepted for the commencement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (in Political Science) on January 27, 2025 by the Council of the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies.

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Commencement: 11 April 2025 at 13:00 at the University of Tartu (the UT Senate Hall)

The publication of this dissertation is granted by Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu.

ISSN 1736-4205 (print)
ISBN 978-9916-27-833-8 (print)
ISSN 2806-2558 (pdf)
ISBN 978-9916-27-834-5 (pdf)

University of Tartu Press
www.tyk.ee

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the culmination of five years of research and analysis conducted during my PhD studies in Tartu, Estonia. However, the inspiration for this work dates back even further to around 2014, when Russia illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimea. Witnessing how some senior Japanese Russianists echoed Russia's narratives on Ukraine, while others criticized them, prompted me to explore these dynamics more deeply. My tribute extends to the pioneers of area studies in Japan, irrespective of their political views, and to those who have steadfastly contributed to the development of this field.

Throughout this journey, I have been fortunate to receive the support and encouragement of countless individuals. First and foremost, I thank my supervisor, Andrey Makarychev, who has been an invaluable guide and conversation partner – even throughout the pandemic. I am also deeply appreciative of the advice and support provided by former and current PhD program coordinators Maili Vilson and Kristel Vits, as well as my colleagues at the Johan Skytte Institute and other departments at the University of Tartu, including Piret Ehin, Eva Piirimäe, Raili Marling, Andreas Ventsel, Thomas Michael Linsenmaier, Natalia Kovyliaeva, Kristina Muhhina, Shpend Kursani, Anselm Schmidt, and Martin Mölder, among many others.

Parts of this dissertation were presented at various conferences, where I received valuable feedback. The data collection was supported by the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University, under the grant "Individual Project-Based Collaborative Research." I am grateful for insightful comments from esteemed scholars such as Taras Kuzio, Sergei Zhuk, Olga Bertelsen, Yoshihiko Okabe, Viktor Denisenko, and Fumikazu Sugiura. The draft of this dissertation benefited from the reviews of the Johan Skytte Institute council members and external reviewers Joanna Szostek and Natasha Kuhrt. I am especially indebted to Takashi Hirano, a leading Japanese expert on Ukraine, who assisted with coding verification despite wartime conditions in Kyiv. I thank Naohiko Kudo and others for sharing their insights into the Japanese publishing industry. I also wish to thank Yevhen Fedchenko for consultations on Russian narratives about Ukraine. My acknowledgments would be incomplete without recognizing the contributions of Shin Tokiwa, Shigeki Hakamada, and James Sherr, who introduced me to the intellectual histories of Japanese and Western Sovietologists.

Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to my family for granting me a five-year moratorium to pursue this endeavor. Their lives, too, have been touched by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but thankfully not in the worst ways. Their unwavering support has been my anchor throughout this journey.

TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

Translations from Japanese, Ukrainian, and Russian to English in this dissertation are mine unless otherwise noted.

I transliterate from Japanese to the Latin alphabet according to Hepburn romanization.

Transliteration from Ukrainian to the Latin alphabet follows the system officially approved by the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers in 2010. When transliterating toponyms and other proper nouns, Ukrainian spellings are preferred over Russian equivalents. However, when the original Japanese text uses Russian-originated spellings, such as Kiev instead of Kyiv, the Russin versions are retained in direct quotes.

Transliteration from Russian to the Latin alphabet follows the BGN/PCGN system. Exceptions are made for some names where a different spelling has become conventional, e.g. Trotsky instead of Trotskii.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2013, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets to express their European choice and protest against President Viktor Yanukovych's abuse of power and corruption. These protests led to confrontations with and ultimate collapse of the Yanukovych regime in February 2014. This popular movement, known as Euromaidan or the Revolution of Dignity, was soon followed by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

While Ukraine's post-Euromaidan leadership and most Western partners viewed Euromaidan as a series of pro-European and anti-corruption protests, Russia characterized the same events as a "coup d'état" orchestrated by "fascists" with Western backing. Furthermore, Russia's narrative portrayed its invasion and occupation of eastern Ukraine as an internal Ukrainian "civil war." As a result, "diametrically opposed narratives" emerged between Russia and Western liberal democracies regarding the contested issues in Ukraine (Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project 2015).

Russian state-sponsored international media and news agencies, such as Russia Today (later renamed as RT), Voice of Russia (later *Sputnik*) and TASS, actively disseminated Russia's framing of the Ukraine events from the outset (Dyczok 2015, 198–99). However, their presence and influence were less pronounced in Western liberal democracies than in former Soviet countries. Even before these events, in 2013, Russia's image was broadly unfavorable in the West, and it deteriorated further following its illegal annexation of Crimea (Pew Research Center 2014a). Nevertheless, Russia's narratives on the "Ukraine crisis" managed to permeate media and public discourse in many liberal democracies, presenting a deceptive portrayal of the war in Ukraine (Pynnöniemi and Rácz 2016).

This raises a critical question: How were Russia's narratives about the Ukraine events disseminated in countries where the influence of Russian state actors and state-sponsored media outlets is relatively limited?

1.1. Scholars and the "Ukraine Crisis"

Various narratives denigrating Euromaidan and the Ukrainian government while rationalizing Russia's illegal actions have seeped into Western media and public discourse. The discursive normalization of Russia's illegal actions began with the language used by external observers, often rendered with an appearance of neutrality. Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the set of events described above was often referred to as the "Ukraine crisis." In peer-reviewed journals, many scholars preferred using ambiguous terms such as the "Ukraine crisis" and the "conflict in Donbas"(Kulyk 2019). Such wording exempted scholars from identifying the significant actor hidden under these abstractions (Kulyk 2020a, 43).

One of the most widely read journal articles on Russia's annexation of Crimea, Andrey Tsygankov's "Vladimir Putin's last stand: the sources of Russia's Ukraine policy" (Tsygankov 2015), published in *Post-Soviet Affairs* in 2015 with open access, earned 24,275 views and 100 citations by June 2024. This article effectively paraphrases Putin's theses, normalizing Moscow's illegal behavior and attributing blame to "NATO expansion" and the "Nazi roots" of Ukrainian paramilitary organizations. Part of Western academia interpreted Russia's invasion of eastern Ukraine as a Ukrainian "civil war" (e.g., Kudelia 2014; Katchanovski 2016; Matveeva 2016; Matsuzato 2017). Essentialist historians compared Euromaidan protesters to members of the Ukrainian nationalist groups, such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) during WWII, who have been labeled as Nazi collaborators in Soviet and Russian historiographies (see the critique by Zayarnyuk 2015).

Russia's overt and brutal invasion, marked by numerous horrific war crimes, eventually led many observers to question the appropriateness of using the term "Ukraine crisis" to describe not only the ongoing full-scale invasion but also the preceding eight years of Russia's hostilities against Ukraine. This dissertation explores how scholars and intellectuals reproduced Russian narratives about the transformative events that occurred in and around Ukraine in 2013-2014, including Euromaidan, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. Despite a substantial body of research on Russian narratives concerning these events, limited attention has been paid to the roles and functions of scholars and intellectuals in the reproduction of Russian narratives.[1]

For analytical purposes, this dissertation tentatively uses the term "Ukraine events" instead of "Russian invasion" or "Russian aggression" to refer to these events partially or collectively, while acknowledging Russia's interference, instigation and participation in them. This is a working definition, but the word choice is deliberate for three reasons. First, narratives necessitate events. A simple definition of "narrative," which this dissertation is based on, is "the representation of an event or a series of events" (Abbott 2002, 12). An "event" is regarded as a fundamental unit of action in a narrative, often involving a change of state with specific agency (Abbott 2002, 190; Thomas 2016, 143). Second, the complex of events, narratives about which were analyzed in this dissertation, includes Euromaidan, which took place before Russia's invasion. Third, logically, there were no Russian narratives on the "Russian invasion," as Russia consistently denied it was an invasion during the period examined by this dissertation (most Western academics began referring to Russia's invasion only after Russia publicly declared its "special military operation" in February 2022).

In this war of narratives surrounding Ukraine, Russia benefited from and strategically leveraged its asymmetric influence vis-à-vis Ukraine in academia, particularly through the uneven distribution of academic interest and resources between Russian studies and studies of other former Soviet states. Both during the Soviet period and after Ukraine's independence, Ukraine remained a peri-

[1] Exceptions include Kulyk (2020b), Kuzio (2020), Kuzio and Fedor (2023).

phery of Russia in the mental map of many Westerners. In the post-WWII period, Ukrainians along with other non-Russian peoples, such as those from Baltic, Caucasian, and Central Asian nations, were marginally regarded in American universities, and their publication activities were underfunded (Manning 1957, 78; see also Engerman 2009, 335–36). In the late Soviet period, Reshetar (1983, 72) noted that the insufficient knowledge about Ukraine among scholars of North America hinges on the fact that "the Ukrainian history is only superficially touched upon when it has something to do with 'Russian events.'" Before the Ukraine events, Laas (2013, 357), in a comprehensive review of the state of Slavic, Soviet, and Ukrainian studies in North America, concluded that topics related to Ukrainian history had not yet become a separate subject of scholarly inquiry. Although interest in Soviet/Russian studies declined in the West after the collapse of the USSR (Hanson and Ruble 2005), Russian studies retained a dominant position among the branches of area studies that succeeded what was known as Soviet studies.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the issue of epistemic injustice – a form of injustice "done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (Fricker 2007, 1) – received little attention in the field of Slavic studies, and such concerns were largely disregarded when raised by the few scholars who had migrated to the United States or Western Europe from the "periphery" of the former Eastern bloc (see e.g., Zhuk 2014; Burlyuk 2019). Instead, prevailing discourses perpetuated unequal relations and hierarchies within Slavic studies, aided by Moscow's specific approach to shaping knowledge production among international scholars.

1.2. Knowledge Production and Politics

The relationship between scientific knowledge and its social context and power has been a subject of critique for decades. Bueger (2014) classifies discussions on the expertise in IR into three "generations": the first generation examines experts as actors having a causal influence on international politics; the second generation, influenced by the Foucauldian studies, shifts attention to discourse, power of language and expertise; and the third generation focuses on the epistemic practices of the experts, as "an ontological middle ground between actors and discourses" (Bueger 2014, 48).

A leading example of the first generation, E. B. Haas (1964; 1990) focuses on the interplay between science and international politics. He highlighted uncertainty as central to expert influence, describing the "expert as crisis counsellor" who can analyze past trends and project future scenarios without being constrained by narrow objectives. Haas also demonstrates that expert-politician interactions vary significantly across issue domains, depending on whether the relevant knowledge is consensual or contested. Experts, he argues, have the greatest impact in technically dependent fields. Finally, he explores the concept of learning, asserting that policymakers can use scientific knowledge to shape inter-

national regimes and adjust expectations if they are open to learning from experts. This approach leads to the concept of "transnational epistemic community," whose members share a set of normative and causal beliefs, notions of validity, and "a common policy enterprise" across international borders (P. M. Haas 1992, 3).

The second generation focuses on discourse. The work of Michel Foucault provokes a shift in focus from studying the influence of experts to examining expertise as an expression of epistemic structures and regimes of truth. Foucault (2002) challenges the idea that there are universal, timeless truths or structures that exist beyond specific historical and social contexts, instead emphasizing the historical specificity and variability of knowledge. He argues that knowledge is not rooted in any ultimate or transcendental foundation but is produced through specific historical and social practices. Foucault's archaeological method focuses on examining how knowledge is produced and organized within specific discursive formations, viewing knowledge as contingent and constructed rather than universal and given. Further, Foucault (1980, 83–85), in his discussion on genealogies of knowledge, encourages scholars to examine the context of an "organized scientific discourse" and to deconstruct a unitary "hierarchical order of power" that filters out "local, discontinuous, disqualified illegitimate knowledges."

The third generation focuses on epistemic practices. For example, Büger and Gadinger (2007) argue that traditional "disciplinary sociology" debates often separate IR as a scientific endeavor from its social environment, which they see problematic. Instead, they argue that IR should be understood as a scientific practice inherently linked to its social environment, where knowledge production and disciplinary practices are shaped by and responsive to external social dynamics. The third-generation question, "by which practices (authoritative) expertise is produced" (Bueger 2014, 48), holds significant implications for research on knowledge production. While scholars are generally aware of their positionality and potential research biases related to race, gender, culture, ethnicity, and disability (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014, 465) and exercise caution toward the invisible pressures exerted by their research funders (Solovey 2013),[2] less attention has been paid to sources of epistemic injustice. According to Jasanoff (1987), knowledge is accepted as authoritative not necessarily because it can be empirically verified, but because it is validated through informal negotiations to fit into frameworks of shared assumptions and inference. Thus, social factors may influence whether pieces of scientific knowledge are accepted as authoritative, with scholars of different disciplinary trainings interpreting the same facts differently (Jasanoff 1987, 195). The implications of academic practices and epistemic identities – which can significantly impact the entire phase of the research process and its outcomes – remained largely underexplored among scholars of area studies until the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

[2] For scholars' relationships with patrons such as the military, civilian and private foundations in Cold War America, see Solovey (2013).

From a constructivist viewpoint, scholars, whether intentionally or not, often become participants in the social realities they seek to observe, thereby obfuscating the boundaries between actors and observers (Hopf 1998, 184). For example, securitization analysts acknowledge that their own writings risk contributing to the securitization of certain areas since analysts frequently address issues within heavily politicized contexts, with their work becoming part of "a political field where social questions are already contested in terms of crisis, threats, and dangers" (Huysmans 2002, 43). Guzzini (2000) emphasizes the need for reflection on the interplay between scholarly observations and the social realities they analyze. He argues that the study of social phenomena is inherently connected to the real world and has the potential to shape it, while making a reservation that "saying that social science has political implications does not mean that social science is *nothing but* politics" (emphasis in original) (Guzzini 2000, 175).

Scientists often deny or fail to recognize inherent policy implications their work may have regarding the objects of their academic research. Even "pure" science, such as environmental studies, as argued by Roger Pielke (2004, 406), is closely intertwined with politics and policies, making "utopian views of cleanly separating science from politics, facts from values" unhelpful.[3] Pielke (2007, 1–3) provides four typologies for the role of scientists in dealing with decision-makers: *Pure Scientist*, who have no interest in the decision making process and only share some fundamental information; *Science Arbiter*, who serves as a resource for the decision-maker answering factual questions; *Issue Advocate*, who tries to convince the decision-makers to limit their scope of choice based on the scientists' views, preferences or connections; and *Honest Broker of Policy Alternatives*, who provides the decision-makers with comprehensive information on each alternative to broaden the scope of choice. Both *Honest Brokers of Policy Alternatives* and *Issue Advocates* explicitly engage decision alternatives, with the former widening and the latter limiting freedom of choice. Scientists who purport to be *Pure Scientists* and *Science Arbiters* do not seek to compel a specific decision. However, when scientists claim to focus only on the science, they often risk slipping into "Stealth Issue Advocacy," where they arguably stay out of policy and politics, often by maintaining a position of objectivity, while in fact working to restrict the scope of policy choice (Pielke 2007, 7).

In the context of the Ukraine events, analysis shows that experts advocating for an "impartial," "equally critical" approach to both sides of the conflict have been susceptible to Russian narratives (Riabchuk 2020b, 281–82).

[3] For instance, when a paper published in the journal *Climate Research* in 2003 argued that 20th-century climate variations were not unusual when viewed over a millennium, advocacy groups opposed to the Kyoto Protocol predictably hailed the research as "sound science," while groups in favor of the Protocol dismissed it as "junk science." More concerning than the selective use of scientific findings by these advocates is the fact that many scientists' assessments of the paper's scientific validity were perfectly aligned with their public stances on the Kyoto Protocol (Pielke 2004, 405).

1.3. Authoritarian Influence on Knowledge Production

Scholars of humanities, political science, and social sciences dealing with Russia are not entirely immune from social contexts and the political influence of their target of academic inquiry. However, as the Ukraine events demonstrate, reducing susceptibility to Russian narratives solely to scholars' political-ideological positions along the left-right spectrum oversimplifies and obscures the dynamics at play. The Cold War-era stereotype that leftists are predisposed to favor Moscow's causes hardly explains the mechanism of contemporary Russian influence. Employing a flexible, "trans-ideological" repertoire of discourses (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2016), the Kremlin succeeded in winning the hearts of both leftist and (far-)right politicians in multiple European countries (Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014; Wendland 2014; Shekhovtsov 2018; Golianová and Kazharski 2020; Wood 2020; Koval 2020b). [4]

Similarly, the political spectrum of scholars sympathetic to Putin's Russia is broad, encompassing left-wing critics of US foreign policy such as Richard Sakwa and Stephen Cohen as well as right-wing realists such as John Mearsheimer. Realist structural explanations and geopolitical narratives often reduce Ukraine to a mere battleground for great powers, blaming NATO enlargement and rationalizing Putin's response to it. Despite a number of critiques of realist narratives on the Ukraine events (see the criticism by Kuzio 2017; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018, 5, 8–9; Gretskiy 2020; Koval et al. 2022, 7), these narratives were widely observed in the UK (Riabchuk 2020a, 91), Italy (Zarembo 2020, 184), Greece (Koval 2020a, 216–17), and Poland (Riabchuk 2020b, 281–82), and elsewhere.

Analysis of the relationship between authoritarian regimes and scholars needs a new framework to understand the dynamics that do not exist in liberal democracies, which respects the independence and integrity of the academic community. Huntington (1988, 3) argues that political science is not only an intellectual discipline but also a moral one, suggesting that democracy strengthens political science (and political science modestly contributes to democratization), while authoritarian regimes – such as Soviet and Chinese communist systems – hinder its development, rendering the occupation of political scientists dangerous (Huntington 1988, 6–8). Post-Soviet Russian higher education retains significant

[4] In the UK, Russian narratives gained support from both the right and left wings (Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014, 26–28). The situation in Germany was similar; leftists such as Die Linke supported Russian aggression only to counter the "imperialist United States," while supporters of the new right-wing such as AfD honored the Putin-style of authoritarianism (Wendland 2014). Research in Slovakia also suggests that there are often ideological contradictions among supporters of the pro-Kremlin narratives, as seen in the "rapprochement" between anti-fascist fighters and the far-right who glorify the wartime Nazi-client Slovak state (Golianová and Kazharski 2020). During the 2017 French presidential campaign, there was "incredible unanimity" among candidates regarding the priority of Franco-Russian relations, shared by the radical right-wing candidate Marine Le Pen, radical left-wing rival Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and the conservative François Fillon, with President-elect Emmanuel Macron launching initiatives for rapprochement with Moscow (Koval 2020b, 129).

Soviet-era legacies (Shibanova and Malinovskiy 2021, 274), remaining highly centralized with state control over accreditation, funding, and appointments of university rectors (Kaczmarska 2020). Hybrid regimes (Levitsky and Way 2010) – authoritarian systems with a democratic facade – often exploit legal ambiguities in constitutional guarantees of academic freedom in Russia (Kaczmarska 2020, 111–12). A longitudinal analysis reveals a progressive decline in academic freedom in Russia, with a marked downturn beginning in 2008 (Lott 2024, 1009).

However, understanding the relationship between authoritarian regimes and Western scholars requires a nuanced framework that considers dynamics distinct from limitations on academic freedom within domestic contexts. Historical research demonstrates that Western intellectuals were alluring targets for "cultural diplomacy" initiatives by authoritarian regimes, beginning with the USSR's founding years (David-Fox 2012). The range of targets was diverse, encompassing not only communists and fellow travelers but also politically uncommitted advocates of cultural liberalism (Laamanen 2017). Scholars and intellectuals were a distinct category for Soviet intelligence's active measures (*aktivnye meropriyatiya*) (Hosaka 2022b, 443) – influence operations aimed at shaping the foreign policies of target countries in Moscow's favor. Moscow's messengers, or the so-called "agents of influence," included not only foreign politicians, government officials and journalists but also academics whose influence and connections were assessed by the Committee for State Security (KGB) as useful for its operations (e.g., Shultz and Godson 1984). The application of agents of influence was broad: according to a classified KGB journal, agents of influence were "authoritative, highly qualified performers of active measures, designed to influence public opinion abroad, as well as in conditions of destabilization in some regions of the country and in other cases"("Nuzhny novye resheniya (k diskusii ob agenture organov gosbezopasnosti)" 1990, 17–19).

Conceptually, the active measures tactics have undergone minimal change in post-Soviet Russia (Bertelsen 2021, 22–23). Contemporary Russia continues to instrumentalize narratives in tandem with scholars and intellectuals to exercise influence on the public and leadership within liberal democracies. Moscow remains proactively engaged in international academia and, in some cases, has successfully shaped foreign public opinion. Prominent Western scholars of Russian studies have, perhaps unwittingly, disseminated Russian (dis)information planted by Russian political technologists in reputable publications like *Foreign Affairs* (Hosaka 2018, 327; 2019c, 764). Smagliy (2018) highlights the Kremlin's connections with European and US academic institutions and think tanks, particularly focusing on how philanthropic Russian oligarchs engage Western intellectuals, scholars and think-tank experts to promote pseudo-academic narratives legitimizing Putin's Russia. Experts from renowned Russian think tanks or institutes are particularly attractive to Western scholars as information sources, as

"they have access to the Russian government and president, in a way that few Westerners have" (Vendil Pallin and Oxenstierna 2017, 41).[5]

One of the largest venues for Russian academic influence remains the Valdai Discussion Club. Established in 2004 to improve Russia's international image, the Valdai Discussion Club invites foreign experts and journalists – at the Kremlin's expense – to interact with senior Russian political figures and reputable experts. Putin's extended Q&A sessions without notes or advisors impressed attendees like Professor Marshall Goldman of Harvard University, who noted Putin's impressive grasp of information. Notably, Moscow-based foreign journalists were excluded from the guest list (Evans 2005). Over time, the Valdai Club has attracted significant participation from the international scholarly community (Starr and Cornell 2014, 67; Vendil Pallin and Oxenstierna 2017, 26). According to the "Valdai Club Foundation," more than 1000 representatives from 85 countries have participated in this event to date. Importantly, many of the western scholars supportive of Russia's stance during the Ukraine events, such as Richard Sakwa, John Mearsheimer, Timothy Colton, and Samuel Charap, were affiliated with the Valdai Club.

Furthermore, Russian narratives appear to resonate with broader anti-Western sentiments among Western scholars. Some scholars in the field of journalism studies have focused on the "one-sidedness" and "hypocrisy" of Western governments and media regarding the "Ukraine crisis" (e.g., Boyd-Barrett 2017). In July 2014, a group of Western scholars, critical of "US hegemony" and supportive of a "multipolar world," visited Russian-occupied Crimea and signed the "Yalta Declaration of the Assembly of Citizens of Ukraine." The declaration, aligning with Moscow's narratives, accuses the Ukrainian government of conducting "a brutal military assault in the southeast of the country" and calls for "direct talks between Kiev and the representatives of Donetsk and Lugansk republics." Remarkably, the declaration was published in a Taylor & Francis peer-reviewed journal (Desai, Freeman, and Kagarlitsky 2016).[6]

However, Russia's strategic narratives differ across target countries and audiences. Due to complex intertextual chains, the original author(s) of these narratives are unlikely to fully consider the background knowledge of each country's audience (Madisson and Ventsel 2020, 29–30). That is where national scholars and experts play a crucial role; they customize Moscow's templates by taking into consideration the issues, concerns, and interests relevant to specific national audiences. This process of nationalization contributes to the reproduction and normalization of Russian narratives within specific socio-political contexts.

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[5] For instance, analysis suggests that relatively "less propagandistic" Russian think tanks (such as the Russian International Affairs Council) engage extensively with Western researchers, and their experts are frequently invited as speakers at international conferences and roundtables (Vendil Pallin and Oxenstierna 2017, 41).

[6] In 2016, *International Critical Thought*, a peer-reviewed journal of Taylor & Francis and an official publication of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, published an issue devoted to Western "imperialism" through the Ukraine crisis, co-edited by Desai, Freeman, and Kagarlitsky (2016).

1.4. Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

As argued above, academic and related narratives surrounding the Ukraine events are shaped by processes of knowledge production. These processes assume underlying ontological and epistemological positions. This dissertation, as a knowledge production process, is not an exception to that. It is essential to make my tacit ontological and epistemological assumptions explicit.

In the Western tradition of the philosophy of science, fundamental disagreements exist regarding the nature of the world – ontology – and how we come to understand that world – epistemology. Ontology concerns whether there is a real and objective world "out there" independent of our interpretation of it, while epistemology, as a theory of knowledge, profoundly influences the methods and processes through which we gain knowledge about the world.

A discussion on typologies of ontological and epistemological approaches (Furlong and Marsh 2010) identifies three main categories, though they should not be taken as rigid: positivism, interpretivism and realism. Positivism assumes that reality exists independently of an observer's perceptions and seeks to establish the cause and effect of a social phenomenon through empirical observation. Interpretivism argues that reality is socially and discursively constructed, making it impossible to separate cause and effect from an observer's perception. Realism suggests that reality exists independently of an observer's perception, while acknowledging that unobservable structures, such as social contexts, can influence reality and observations. [7]

This dissertation addresses two intertwined yet distinct topics: the Ukraine events and the production of knowledge and narratives surrounding them, with an emphasis on the latter. My ontological and epistemological foundations are close to contemporary realism (post-positivism), which recognizes an objective reality while acknowledging, under the influence of interpretivist critiques, the role of observers' interpretations in shaping outcomes. I assume there are fundamental facts substantiated by evidence pertaining to the Ukraine events (e.g., Russia's military invasion and related covert actions to stage a "civil war" in Ukraine), while observers' various interpretations shape their narratives on these events. I posit that observers possess a certain degree of agency that can not only interpret but also change or manipulate social contexts (structures) that may constrain and facilitate, if not determine, policy outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to identify both the external reality and the social construction of that reality (Furlong and Marsh 2010, 31).

Firstly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, bringing about massive physical destruction and human casualties in Ukraine since 2014, is not merely an observer's interpretative discursive construction, but a reality out there. This dissertation acknowledges the commencement of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, or the Russia-Ukraine war in 2014, a fact not explicitly recognized by most

[7] Realism in this context is close to neo-positivism or post-positivism in the typology developed by Della Porta and Keating (2008, 21–25).

scholars before February 2022. As pointed out above, many journal articles used ambiguous terms such as "the Ukraine crisis" and "the conflict in Donbas" instead of the Russia-Ukraine war (Kulyk 2019).[8] However, despite Russia's consistent denials, the development of open source intelligence over the period of the Ukraine events made it possible to collect ample evidence and make observations that the Russian Federation conducted covert actions to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty in 2013 (e.g., Hosaka 2018). By the spring of 2014, Russia had deployed its regular armed forces to Crimea and later to eastern Ukraine, waging an undeclared war against Ukraine (e.g., Hosaka 2019b; Hauter 2023).[9] Although the Kremlin attempted to portray local "separatists" in the Ukrainian Donbas as the primary actors of the conflict (Hosaka 2019c), analysis reveals that the bulk of the fighting, a criteria to determine primary war participants in the Correlates of War project (COW), the most comprehensive scholarly database on the wars of the past two centuries, was led by the Russian armed forces, categorizing the war in eastern Ukraine as an interstate war (Hosaka 2021b).

The 2023 summary report of evidence collected and corroborated by the Joint Investigation Team established by police and criminal justice authorities from the Netherlands, Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, and Ukraine to investigate the downing of the MH17 flight in 2014 (Openbaar Ministerie and JIT MH17 2023) concludes that the "Donetsk People's Republic" ("DPR") was under the "overall control" of the Russian Federation. For example, Aleksandr Borodai, self-proclaimed "Prime Minister" and the supposedly top leader of the "DPR" called a Russian government official "boss" during a phone conversation and acted under detailed instructions from the Kremlin (Openbaar Ministerie and JIT MH17 2023, 10).

Second, notwithstanding the reality, knowledge and narratives on the Ukraine events are socially constructed and shaped by observers' interpretations, their social milieu and discursive constructs. These social and discursive constructions influenced how people perceived the Russian invasion, with some interpreting it as a "civil war." For example, a November 2015 national survey conducted by Razumkov Center (n=2008) on perceptions of the situation in eastern Ukraine revealed diverse views. According to the survey, 31.5% of respondents described it as "a Russia-supported separatist rebellion," followed by "a war between

[8] A caveat is that the terminology used in peer-reviewed journal articles may not always reflect authors' original usage. In some cases, it may be a result of the compromise between the author and peer-reviewers (and editor) or the author's self-censorship. For example, in 2017, my article on the post-Euromaidan historical memory in Ukraine received the following comment from a peer reviewer of *Europe Asia Studies*: "the references to the anti-terrorist operation and a war between Russia and Ukraine in Donbas reflect terminology used by the current Ukrainian government, while most studies of this conflict by political scientists use different terms." To disguise academic neutrality, I placed "anti-terrorist operation" in quotation marks and replaced "undeclared war" with "armed conflict in eastern Ukraine."

[9] In January 2023, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Russia was in "effective control" of part of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine from May 11, 2014 (*EUobserver* 2023).

Ukraine and Russia" (28.0%), "a civil war" between the pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian citizens of Ukraine (16.3%), "a war between Russia and the USA" (8.4%), and "a struggle for independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics" (7.4%) (*National Security & Defence* 2015, 69). Scholars and intellectuals play a significant role in shaping shared understanding of the contested events in Ukraine, contributing to public opinion through academic journals, think tank reports, and news media outlets. In liberal democracies, their claims and opinions can vary widely, with some aligning with Russia's narrative of a "civil war" in Ukraine.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion, however, scholars from both positivist and interpretivist traditions tended to underestimate a significant external factor – Russia's systematic interferences in Ukraine's domestic politics and its leading role in the "Ukraine conflict." Positivist epistemology failed to explicitly recognize the difficulty of accessing the data necessary to gauge the causal weight of external factors of the war (e.g., Giuliano 2018), thus underestimating Russia's covert participation in the Ukraine events. In contrast, interpretivist traditions, analyzing identity narratives of seemingly local actors, such as their pronouncements and overt symbolic actions (e.g., Laruelle 2016; Suslov 2017; Malyarenko and Wolff 2019), were hardly able to detect or merely ignored hidden relationships between the local actors they were studying and the external actors who micromanaged the "people's republics" (see the relationship between the "DPR" leader and a Russian official mentioned above). Russian warfare's plausible deniability (Jonsson and Seely 2015, 4) disoriented scholars.

Breaks and ruptures in epistemes (Foucault 2002) occurred in Western academia only after February 24, 2022, when Russia declared the "special military operation," making its plausible deniability implausible. Russia's full-scale invasion, which resulted in devastating military loss, civilian casualties, and widespread destruction, directly impacting the lives of Ukrainian scholars, evoked far stronger reactions among Western scholars than eight years before. These new circumstances led to discussions that emphasize the decolonization and decentering of Russian, Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian studies, while highlighting the perspectives and experiences of Ukraine and other previously overlooked regions (see CHAPTER 9). This shift has prompted many scholars and practitioners to embark on the critical reassessment of the knowledge production frameworks used to understand Ukraine and Russia, and the narratives on the Ukraine events, leading to the development of new academic frameworks such as the RUTA Association for Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern European, Baltic, Caucasus, Central and Northern Asia Studies in Global Conversation (RUTA 2024). February 2022 may mark a watershed moment in the fields of area studies, IR and other related disciplines, particularly in European countries close to the theatre of war. This is akin to the aftermath of WWI, when wars became subjects of wider concern beyond traditional military and diplomatic circles, giving rise to a "new science," the science of international politics (Carr 2016, 3–4). As Foucault (2002) argues, discontinuities in knowledge production can be linked to significant historical events, such as revolutions, wars, and major

political shifts, which lead to the emergence of new discursive formations while marginalizing older ones. In examining narratives produced by scholars and intellectuals, this dissertation clearly distinguishes and seeks to avoid conflating two periods – before and after Russia's full-scale invasion – each characterized by distinct discursive formations.

Thus, I recognize an objective reality – Russia's invasion of Ukraine since 2014 – while acknowledging that scholars and intellectuals, who are the main targets of this dissertation, interpret this reality divergently, leading to their various narratives and, in some cases, policy outcomes.

Contemporary realism has some methodological implications. One of them is to acknowledge the utility of both quantitative and qualitative data (Furlong and Marsh 2010, 32), although methodology does not necessarily align with epistemological assumptions (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 34). As explicated in CHAPTER 4, I treat narratives as analytical units that can be categorized, observed, coded, and thus quantitatively operationalized, while examining the meaning of texts and discourse qualitatively.

Table 1 Ontology and Epistemology

	Positivism	**Contemporary Realism (Post-Positivism)**	**Interpretivism**
***Ontology*: Does reality exist?**	Reality exists independent of perception	Reality exists independent of perception; social contexts can influence outcomes	Reality is socially and discursively constructed; impossible to separate from perception
***Epistemology*: How we come to understand?**	Empirical observations	Identifying both an objective reality and its discursive construction; self-reflective	Interpretations of subjective meanings
The Ukraine events and narratives about them			
Methodological challenges	Failures to recognize the limitations in access to data	Emphasis on contexts makes it difficult to generalize findings without comparison	Overreliance on overt identity narratives

The second implication is that contemporary realism, emphasizing contexts, strongly points to comparative analysis: understanding how different countries, with their unique social and cultural contexts, can impact the phenomenon of interest in different ways (Furlong and Marsh 2010, 34). Although this dissertation is a single case study and I will not claim that the findings are instantly applicable to other countries, the case selection was carefully made to minimize endogenous factors that might affect the conclusion (e.g., the presence of local

Russian and Ukrainian diasporas) (see sections 3.1 and 3.3). Furthermore, major theoretical concepts used in this dissertation, such as national narrative agents (section 2.3) and transnational epistemic community (section 2.5), are applicable to many other liberal democracies as well.

1.5. Research Questions

This introductory chapter has provided an overview of the role of scholars and intellectuals in the spread of Russian narratives about the events in and around Ukraine, highlighting the asymmetry within Western academia in the production of knowledge about Russia and Ukraine. It has been argued that the narratives and actions of scholars on the Ukraine events can inadvertently have policy implications. As outlined, my ontological and epistemological foundations start with the understanding that there was a real war out there, while recognizing the diverse interpretations of historical and immediate contexts, direct and indirect causes, and overt and covert actors.

This dissertation sets out to explore how Russia's narratives on the Ukraine events were reproduced and normalized in liberal democracies. To explain this phenomenon, I employ the concept of strategic narrative (see CHAPTER 2). Through an examination of narratives on the Ukraine events, or Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it highlights the roles of national scholars and intellectuals and transnational epistemic communities in authoritarian settings, thus filling a gap in existing empirical research on strategic narrative and contributing to our knowledge about the socially constructed relationship between Western scholarship and authoritarian regimes.

In this dissertation, I use the term "(national) narrative agents" to encompass not only scholars in the narrow sense, meaning university professors and lecturers, but also thinktank experts and intellectuals who elucidate international events to national audiences through published texts (see section 2.3). National narrative agents do not automatically disseminate foreign states' narratives but rather endeavor to mobilize all intellectual resources to reach presumably well-informed conclusions. The process of reception and reproduction of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events appears to be multidimensional, extending beyond the conventional left-right political spectrum. Various factors related to narrative agents and their social practices may contribute to these outcomes.

This dissertation attempts to delineate the specific conditions under which narrative agents receive and reproduce Russia's issue narratives on the Ukraine events. Specifically, it examines the extent to which scholars' affiliations with certain branches of area studies and disciplines, linkage with the epistemic community (RQ1-1), as well as their shared worldviews and perceptions of Russia's self-image, operationalized as system and identity narratives (see section 2.6), and country-specific interpretations of international affairs, operationalized as national narratives (see section 2.7), are associated with their reception and reproduction of Russia's narratives on the Ukraine events (RQ1-2).

Given their critical role in shaping public opinion and policy consensus, scholars, think tank experts, and intellectuals in democratic societies are viewed by foreign states as essential conduits for strategic narratives. These narrative agents, who exercise a certain degree of agency, function as an intermediary audience, assisting states in conveying their messages to ultimate target audiences, which primarily include the general public, political and business elites, and, ultimately, political leadership. Reception analysis illuminates certain aspects of target audiences, such as genre conventions, social and cultural factors and interpretive strategies (Jensen 1987). The examination of narratives reproduced by these narrative agents, who have unique individual attributes and often provide more nuanced textual information than public opinion surveys, can offer unique insights into the reception of narratives – an area that remains underexplored within the field of strategic narrative studies (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 12).

However, merely analyzing associations does not elucidate how Russian narratives – what some experts called "a parallel reality" (Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014, 30) – such as the denigration of Ukrainians as "neo-Nazis," were normalized in academic and public discourse. To complement RQ1-1 and RQ1-2, I attempt to clarify the information sources and discursive strategies – sets of practices aimed at achieving social and political goals (see subsection 4.5.3) – employed by national agents in their knowledge-production process (RQ2) and how Russian narratives were adapted by national narrative agents to a country's specific social-political landscape to reach their national audiences including policymakers (RQ3).

The main research questions are as follows:

> **RQ1-1**: What types of national narrative agents are more likely to reproduce Russia's issue narratives about the Ukraine events? [10]
>
> **RQ1-2:** In the narratives of national agents, what kinds of system, identity, and national narratives co-occur with Russia's issue narratives about the Ukraine events?
>
> **RQ2**: What information sources and discursive strategies did national narrative agents use to generate knowledge on the Ukraine events?
>
> **RQ3**: How did national narrative agents instrumentalize Russian narratives on the Ukraine events alongside distinctively national narratives when addressing national audiences?

This dissertation examines the Japanese case (see CHAPTER 3). As will be explained in CHAPTER 4 (Methodology), it combines corpus-based content analysis and discourse analysis. RQ1-1 and RQ-1-2 will be mainly addressed in

[10] For concrete variables and hypotheses in content analysis for RQ1-1 and RQ1-2, see subsection 4.4.1.

CHAPTER 5 (Content Analysis), RQ2 in CHAPTER 6 (Discourse Analysis), and RQ3 in CHAPTER 7 (Nationalizing Narratives).

CHAPTER 8 (Conclusion) introduces major conceptual, methodological and empirical contributions of this dissertation. Although this dissertation analyzes narratives among scholars and intellectuals in 2014 to 2019, CHAPTER 9 discusses the implications of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine that started in February 2022.

1.6. Statement of Positionality of This Author

As highlighted, the positionality of scholars – their careers, academic and human connections, and attitudes toward and dependence on the field – may entail potential research biases in their ontological and epistemological underpinnings. Recognition of one's own positionality vis-à-vis the object of research is essential. The author of this dissertation is not to be exempt from such embeddedness; hence, I declare my positionality.

I was trained as a post-Soviet Russianist. However, I am a latecomer to academia, with limited connections and stakes in it. I graduated from the Russian Language Department of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Sophia University, Tokyo in 2006. I studied the Russian language in Moscow in 2000 and headed the Japan-Russia Student Conference in 2002. From 2002 through 2004, taking academic leave, I worked for the Japanese Embassy in Tajikistan, and upon returning to Tokyo I wrote a thesis on the delimitation of national borders in Soviet Central Asia. I served for 13 years as a project management officer in the Japan-funded intergovernmental committees in the field of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine.

In 2014, when Russia invaded Ukraine, I was startled by the extent to which many Japanese scholars and journalists uncritically received and reproduced Russia's narratives on the Ukraine events. At the end of that year, I took a one-week intensive Ukrainian language course in Lviv. Between 2014 and 2016, I wrote my master's thesis on the historical memories of contemporary Ukrainians at the Graduate School of the Japan Open University. Since 2016, I have been a member of the Japanese Association for Russian and East European Studies and have presented my papers twice. In 2018, I was dispatched to the Japanese Embassy in Ukraine as a political attaché based on a two-year work contract with the International Hospitality and Conference Service Association. Upon completing my diplomatic mission in 2020, I was admitted to the PhD program of the University of Tartu and embarked on research initially entitled "Covering Former Empire 'Peripheries': Academia's Reception of Russian Strategic Narratives in International Conflicts," which resulted in this dissertation.

Perhaps, the extensive exposure to Ukrainian history, language, and public discourse in recent years has solidified my political stance regarding the Ukraine events: to support Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as long as Ukrainians remain committed to them. My aim through this disser-

tation is to examine an overall tendency in academia and the intellectual milieu. I do not intend to target particular individuals; however, as is standard in academic practice, I cite specific works that I critique in this dissertation. I have sought to be open to criticism by sharing the main findings of this research not only at international conferences but also at Japanese conferences organized by the Japanese Association for Ukrainian Studies in December 2021 and the Japanese Association for Russian and East European Studies in November 2022.

1.7. Limitations

This research has several limitations. First, as mentioned in section 1.4, this dissertation is a single-country study, and its findings cannot be automatically generalized and applied to other countries. However, as discussed in CHAPTER 8, conceptual and methodological contributions of this dissertation may be useful for explicating similar phenomena in other liberal democracies. Additionally, the empirical contributions – particularly the Russia-centered ontology, such as "Western Russophobia" and the epistemological resistance to mainstream discourse (see section 8.3) – are relevant to scholars dealing with the post-Soviet space in Western countries.

Second, as elaborated in section 4.3, this dissertation analyzes only printed publications, leaving out web-based materials. A survey conducted by the Japan Science and Technology Agency in 2011 found that the digitization rate in the Japanese humanities and social sciences journals (34%) lagged significantly behind that of the natural sciences journals (75%) due to financial problems faced by academic societies and a lower demand compared to the natural sciences (Sato R. et al. 2012, 111–12). Another survey reported that the percentage of e-books based on paper books published in 2014 and 2015 was 21.3% (Ito Tamio 2019). Social media was not widely popular among scholars and experts at that time, who primarily contributed to paper-based journals and magazines for the dissemination of their opinions. However, as demonstrated in Japan's response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, more and more discussions by scholars and intellectuals are shifting to the web, especially platforms like Twitter (renamed X in 2023). Contributions to shaping public opinion by online experts, bloggers, and other influencers cannot be underestimated (see section 9.1). Future research of academic and expert narratives concerning controversial international events should address discussions in cyberspace.

Third, this research focuses solely on published narratives from scholars and intellectuals. In the policy formation phase, individual narrative agents may be consulted by policymakers, but such communication often takes place behind closed doors, making it opaque and much harder, if not impossible, to empirically gauge the contribution of scholarly recommendations to the formation of actual policies (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 132). Nevertheless, by scrutinizing published materials including memoirs of a policymaker, I attempted to track down possible narrative dissemination from scholars to policymakers in section 7.5.

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To explain the reception and reproduction of Russia's narratives on the Ukraine events within local contexts, this dissertation builds on the framework of strategic narrative, incorporating the concepts of national narrative agents and transnational epistemic community.

Strategic narrative provides an overall framework to elucidate the mechanism by which state actors formulate and project narratives to reach both domestic and international audiences. While this state-centered perspective constitutes a fundamental understanding of the strategic significance of state activities in engaging foreign target audiences, it does not fully explain how Russia's narratives on the Ukraine events are disseminated in countries where the activities of Russian state actors and state-sponsored media outlets are relatively limited.

To address this gap, I propose a more nuanced understanding of the communication of strategic narratives through national narrative agents. Russia's narratives are delivered by scholars and intellectuals to the national audiences of each target country. However, the proximity to the Russian State varies among national agents. The concept of a transnational epistemic community, where members loosely share ontological and epistemological approaches to scientific knowledge production as well as common policy enterprises, can serve as a measure of the proximity between the state actor and national agents.

This chapter elaborates on these conceptual terms, developing the theoretical framework and hypotheses to be tested in the subsequent analysis.

2.1. Narrative, Discourse and Framing

The manner in which we narrate things is inherently political, as it "shape[s] and define[s] the way we respond to the world around us, even how we see and experience the world" (Thomas 2016, 1). The question of what constitutes a narrative, i.e., narrativity, has been extensively discussed, and it is understood differently: as a core of meaning travelling across time and culture, a reading strategy rather than formal properties of a text, experientiality evoking emotional engagement, cognitive constructs creating the image of a world, and a condition of humanity (Thomas 2016, 1–4). The definition of narrative is of particular concern for practitioners in strategic communication, as the term "narrative" can be used differently across different national cultures and languages (Bolt and Haiden 2019, 11–12).

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the term "narrative" became one of the most abused in various fields of politics, life, and academia, often used interchangeably with "story." According to Gerald Prince, in order to hedge statements:

> One says "narrative" instead of "explanation" or "argumentation" (because it is more tentative); one prefers "narrative" to "theory," "hypothesis," or "evidence"

> (because it is less scientistic); one speaks of a "narrative" rather than "ideology" (because it is less judgmental); one substitutes "narrative" for "message" (because it is more indeterminate) (cited in Ryan 2007, 22).

None of the definitions of "narrative" proposed by narratologists, which include aspects such as problem-solving, conflict, interpersonal relations, human experience and temporality, are complete and self-sufficient (Ryan 2007, 23–24). Nonetheless, the simplest definition of a narrative is "the representation of an event or a series of events" (Abbott 2002, 12). An "event" is seen as a fundamental unit of the action in the narrative, which may include a change of state, while a "happening" occurs without specific agency, such as a bolt of lightning (Abbott 2002, 190; Thomas 2016, 143).

In interpreting a narrative, the reliability of the narrator often becomes a matter of dispute. Narrators should not be confused with authors, the real authors who actually write the narrative may remain uncertain (Abbott 2002, 63–64). As Abbot suggests, the real author is "a complex, continually changing individual of whom we may never have any secure knowledge," leading to the concept of the "implied author." Narratologists may never fully know the real author, but they "do have a chance of understanding the author, implied by the narrative, or at least of constructing a plausible author by inference"(Abbott 2002, 77–78).

As a mode of communication, a narrative requires an audience and "a whole team" intermediating between the author and the audience (Abbott 2002, 102). Similar to the distinction between the real author and the implied author, the "implied audience" should be differentiated from the actual audience. The implied audience is not necessarily any specific individual but rather the hypothetical audience that the narrative appears to be directed toward (Abbott 2002, 191–92). In strategic communication, an implied audience is often referred to as an "intended audience" or "target audience" (Bolt and Haiden 2019, 48).

It is also essential to address the conceptual overlaps and differences between narrative, discourse and framing (see Table 2). Beyond general definitions of discourse such as a verbal interchange of ideas or conversation ("Definition of Discourse" 2024), a post-structuralist definition of discourse finds its roots in the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's concept of discourse emphasizes the structures and rules that underlie the production of knowledge within a particular domain and historical context. According to Foucault, discourse consists of a group of statements belonging to a single system of formation, such as clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history and psychiatric discourse (Foucault 2002, 121). Norman Fairclough, in his critical discourse analysis, conceptualizes discourses in a Foucauldian sense as elements of social practice that mediates the relationship between events and structures (Fairclough 2013, 348). Fairclough further distinguishes his definition of discourses as analytical units from Foucauldian abstract "big-D" Discourses, defining them as "ways of representing the world from specific perspectives," articulating how issues, benefits, risks, institutions, relationships, publics, protesters, farmers, public participation, and the environment are depicted (Fairclough 2013, 418). This formulation is

akin to the simple definition of narrative mentioned earlier: "the representation of an event or a series of events" (Abbott 2002, 12). From the perspective of strategic narrative, post-structural discourse analysis does not exclude the role of strategic actors operating within historical experiences and identities embedded in big-D Discourse (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 37; for a critique, see Shepherd 2015).

The use of the term "narrative" with prefixes, such as meta-, master-, or with qualifying adjectives such as grand and umbrella is conceptually similar to the Foucauldian use of discourse. In children's literature, metanarratives refer to implicit complexes of ideologies, systems and assumptions that "operate globally in a society to order knowledge and experience" (Stephens and McCallum 1998, 4). For example, metanarratives, such as the struggle against evil, provide the structure of individual narratives and the criteria of perception, informing and shaping their outcomes, such as the triumph of good over evil (Stephens and McCallum 1998, 6). In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Jean-François Lyotard uses and criticizes "metanarratives," "grand narratives" and "master-narrative," all of which are overarching and totalizing narratives that appear to legitimize the development of human knowledge and history in a universal, deterministic way, such as Hegel's and Marx's philosophies of history (Lyotard 2002; see also Ryan 2007, 33; Thomas 2016, 69). Referring to Lyotard's work, Thomas (2016, 144) defines grand narratives as "certain kinds of validating or legitimating discourses (religion, history, science) that offer us a view of the world in which the consequences of our actions appear inevitable and part of some kind of larger logic."

Although some practitioners recommend avoiding these prefixes and adjectives, arguing that in many scholarly works a master narrative does not necessarily imply a bigger or more important narrative and does not add practical value to analysis (Bolt and Haiden 2019, 56),[11] the framework of strategic narrative, as will be elaborated in section 2.6, categorizes narratives into system, identity and issue narratives.

The concept of "framing" is defined as "the use of highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation and/or solution" (Entman 1993, 53). Framing targets audiences by selecting and emphasizing particular aspects of reality, directing attention away from other aspects. For example, to identify Russian media's narratives regarding the Ukraine events, Pynnöniemi (2016a, 55) employs the concept of framing. Although certain elements of a narrative can be framed, framing alone does not capture the full structure of narratives, which includes characters or actors, setting, conflict or action, tools, and (suggested) resolutions (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 7). Frames serve as tools used by actors, whereas narratives may

[11] Some practitioners in strategic narrative use a narrative almost in the same meaning as a meta-narrative. For example, Holmstrom (2015, 120) explains that a narrative "describes the past, justifies the present and presents a vision of the future. It offers a framework for the plot and the setting of a story. It provides context for raw information and facts, and helps to shape how we perceive ourselves and the world in which we live."

represent structured experiences shared by actors with their audiences (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 181).

Table 2 Comparisons of Terms

Terms	Definitions
Speaking subjects	Speaking subjects, including their roles and positions, are articulated through discursive formations; not autonomous originators of discourse(Foucault 2002, 55–56, 60).
Statement	An elementary unit of discourse; a function rather than a structure; not the same as linguistic elements such as sentences, propositions, and speech acts (Foucault 2002, 89–98).
Discourse (abstract, often uncountable)	A group of statements belonging to a single system of formation, such as, clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse (Foucault 2002, 121); a set of practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak (Foucault 2002, 54); a totality in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined (Foucault 2002, 60).
Discursive formation	The principle and rule of dispersion and redistribution of statements (Foucault 2002, 121).
Discourses (unit, countable)	Ways of representing the world from specific perspectives, articulating how issues, institutions, and relationships are depicted (Fairclough 2013, 418).
Discursive strategies	A more or less deliberate set of practices, often language-based, aimed at achieving social, political, psychological, or linguistic goals (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 44).
Narrative	The representation of an event or a series of events (Abbott 2002, 12). Narratives have the structure, which includes characters or actors, setting, conflict or action, tools, and (suggested) resolutions (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 7).
Event	A fundamental unit of the action of the narrative; may include a "happening" that occurs without specific agency (Abbott 2002, 190; Thomas 2016, 143).
Implied author	The author implied by the narrative or plausibly inferred by the audience (Abbott 2002, 77–78).
Implied / intended / target audience	The hypothetical audience the narrative appears to be directed toward (Abbott 2002, 191–92; Bolt and Haiden 2019, 48).
Meta- / master- / grand / umbrella narrative	A narrative that offers a view of the world in which the consequences of actions appear inevitable and part of some kind of larger logic (Thomas 2016, 144).
Framing	The highlighting of particular elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation and/or solution (Entman 1993, 53).
Strategic narrative	A means by which political actors attempt to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 6). See section 2.2.

Terms	Definitions
(National) narrative agents	Intermediaries who function locally and directly engage with target audiences by interpreting and adapting foreign states' strategic narratives for local consumption. National narrative agents include not only scholars but also thinktank experts and intellectuals who explain international events to national audiences. See section 2.3.
Issue narratives	Narratives explaining political actions in a context, including important actors, issues and solutions (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 8). See section 2.6.
Identity narratives	(Instrumentalized) identities of actors in international affairs (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 7). See section 2.6.
System narratives	Perceptions of how the world is structured, who the players are, and how the system works (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 8). See section 2.6.
National narratives	Country-specific interpretations of international affairs, crafted by narrative agents to align with the historical, cultural, social and political contexts of their respective national audiences. See section 2.7.

2.2. Strategic Narrative

The concept of strategic narrative focuses on persuasion in International Relations. While the interpretation of power in international politics is subject to debate, with some scholars viewing power as property or resources and others seeing it as relational (Baldwin 2013), the persuasive power of narrative has garnered increasing attention from scholars in International Relations and Communication.

Persuasion is a strategic action, and strategy inherently presupposes the presence of actors. The agency of these actors is central to this concept. Actors draw from the "raw material" of international affairs to construct narratives that shape the political understanding of the past, present, and future (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 12). As Shepherd (2015, 334) observes, this distinction between actors and the "raw material," or "available ideas" (Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 5), assumes the existence of agency that is not necessarily constituted solely through discourse. Thus, strategic narrative explores "how states seek to mobilise narratives to seek influence and shape the behaviour of third parties" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2012, 3) and "how all aspects of a conflict are defined, constructed and understood" (Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin 2014, 79). According to Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2017b, 6), strategic narratives are defined as "a means by which political actors attempt to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors."

Another critical element of strategic narrative is its provision of temporal and causal explanations, connecting a topic with past causes and future outcomes (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 7). Unlike isolated words and expressions (nomination), which offer limited insight into an author's assess-

ment,[12] strategic narratives primarily function to identify problems, explain causation, and/or offer solutions (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 55–56; Szostek 2017c, 383). During a crisis, strategic narratives encompass "a story about the nature of the crisis, what the resolution of the crisis should involve, and what the postcrisis landscape does and should look like" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 19).

The concept of strategic narrative is particularly useful in examining Russia's messaging activities for several reasons. First, strategic narratives are not concerned with whether the content of narratives is true or false, if it corresponds to reality or not. Russia's strategic narratives are sometimes characterized as "disinformation" – a term frequently conflated with false information, fake news or propaganda in popular discourse. However, *dezinformatsiya*, the Russian intelligence term for disinformation, does not necessarily refer to entirely false information. Although Soviet and Russian disinformation often contains forgeries or conspiracy theories, some of the most effective disinformation operations have relied on accurate information. For example, genuine accounts of racial violence against African Americans were distributed as pamphlets in multiple African countries, ostensibly by human rights activists, and the hacked email data from the US Democratic National Committee appeared in Wikileaks (Hosaka 2023a, 45).

Instead, strategic narrative addresses the strategic actions of these (often hidden) actors and their audiences. While Soviet government agencies published information under their own names – propaganda, with real authors as narrators – Soviet intelligence operated under a false flag, falsely attributing information to other government agencies, public organizations or media outlets. These complex, largely covert operations, designed to shape perceptions of reality and influence decision-making within particular target groups or individuals, are referred to as active measures. Active measures, which aim to incite a specific action (or inaction), carefully select targets, such as decision-makers and elites, whereas propaganda generally targets broader audiences. In practice, active measures are often employed in conjunction with overt propaganda, amplifying the latter's effect (Hosaka 2023a, 45–46).

In most liberal democracies, governments project strategic narratives through public diplomacy (Cull 2008). Efforts of public diplomacy are directed at advancing cooperation and mutual understanding, improving the image of their own countries, and promoting their foreign policy goals openly. In contrast, Russia's public diplomacy is traditionally substituted by active measures and disinformation (Kragh and Åsberg 2017), which aim at tarnishing the image of target states and sowing confusion among foreign publics to create conditions favorable

[12] For example, the use of the term "annexation," rather than "incorporation," to describe Russia's actions in and around Crimea does not necessarily reflect a critical attitude of the author. In the case of Greece, many authors employed this term despite their favorable assessment of the event (Koval 2020a, 206). Conversely, labels such as "rebels" or "separatists" used by the Ukrainian government to depict Russian collaborators in eastern Ukraine often reinforced Russia's narrative of a "civil war" (Tsybulenko and Francis 2018).

for Moscow's foreign policies, often concealing its involvement (Kux 1985; Rid 2020; Bertelsen 2021). Mostly covert, active measures are supplemented by overt state propaganda (Shultz and Godson 1984).

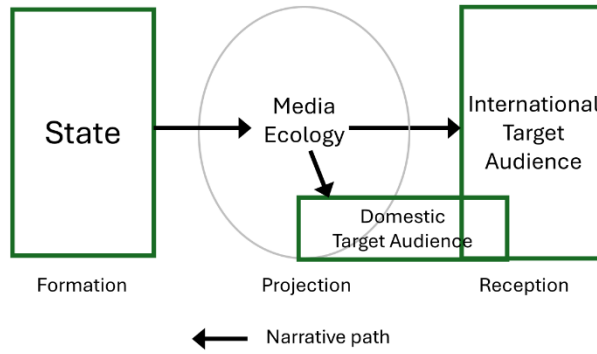

Figure 1 Modalities of Strategic Narrative

Persuasion through storytelling has long been acknowledged as a vital element of "soft power" in international politics (Nye 2004, 106). According to Nye (1990, 31–32), indirect or cooptive soft power behavior assumes getting "others to want what you want," rather than getting "others to do what you want." However, the existing literature struggles to address Russia's soft power, reconfiguring it as an influence based on illiberal conservative values (Keating and Kaczmarska 2019) and opposition to the Western hegemonic order (Kiseleva 2015). In Russia's "near abroad" – former Soviet countries – it is exercised as a mixture of conservative norms, propaganda and disinformation, accompanied by hard military power (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2018, 229). Soft power focusing on cultural attractiveness often overlooks negative aspects, such as information manipulation, which are not conceived as legitimate ways of exercising power (Forsberg and Smith 2016, 130). The concept of strategic narrative adds its values by bringing to the fore competitive aspects of narratives (Szostek 2017c, 383) and malign influence (Szostek 2017a, 573). Furthermore, these messages target not only international but also domestic audiences (Szostek 2017a). Strategic narrative also integrates historical perspectives, including state actors' perceived historical identity (Ashworth 2015).

Although Russia was one of the latecomers in declaring soft power as a strategy to rebrand its international image in the 21st century (Simons 2011), its narratives portraying Euromaidan and the post-Euromaidan Ukrainian government in pejorative historical terms such as "fascists" and "Banderites" (for Russia's historical narratives, see Yermolenko 2019, 24–26) and framing Russia's military invasion in Ukraine as an internal civil conflict are better understood within the framework of strategic narrative rather than soft power. Unlike soft power, which emphasizes a state's ability to persuade others primarily through attraction, strategic narrative illuminates how state actors instrumentalize narra-

tives to discredit others and shape the perception and behavior of domestic and international target audiences in their favor. Notably, in 2014, in response to the Euromaidan in Ukraine, the Kremlin-sponsored Valdai Discussion Club shifted its objective from "telling the world about Russia" to "practical work aimed at forming the global agenda and delivering a qualified and objective assessment of global political and economic issues" ("Valdai Club Foundation," n.d.).

Strategic narrative assumes the following modality: narratives are *formed* (often by political leaders and foreign authorities); *projected* through statements, news reporting, cultural diplomacy, and other media instruments; and, finally *received* and interpreted by domestic and international audiences (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2018, 4). This framework simply captures how strategic narratives are formulated by a state and projected through international and domestic media ecologies, finally reaching their target audiences, irrespective of the types of countries, languages, and audiences (see Figure 1).

The concept of media ecology frames media as encompassing not only technologies but also environments and actors, functioning as interconnected systems akin to organic life. These systems are dynamic, evolving alongside technological advancements and the emergence of powerful actors. Transformative innovations, like the Gutenberg press and the Internet, can significantly disrupt and transform these systems (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 11). Contemporary media ecology is characterized by the rapid expansion of digital technologies. Physical life, social interactions, and international relations are increasingly captured, distributed, and debated in real-time on a global scale. This evolution fosters participatory, multimodal, and multilingual media networks, featuring competing narratives across local, national, and transnational domains. For strategic narrative research, the intricate nature of these new media ecologies poses challenges to the methodologies of empirical research (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 11–12). Digitalization has rendered the concepts of media and audience more fluid compared to the rather static relationship of television and its audience. As new types of social media platforms emerge and quickly become obsolete, it becomes challenging to obtain comprehensive datasets for longitudinal and holistic studies of media ecologies (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 49–50).

Domestic themes of Russian strategic narratives projected through state-sponsored media are characterized and categorized into established frames such as "Ukrainians and Russians – one nation," "the Great Patriotic War," and "fascists in Ukraine." These narratives aim to appeal to emotions and are used instrumentally depending on the context (Gaufman 2015; Osipian 2015; Cottiero et al. 2015; Smoleňová 2015; Fedchenko 2016; Khaldarova and Pantti 2016; Lucas and Pomeranzev 2016; Babak et al. 2017; Khaldarova 2021). Russian narratives have permeated Western media outlets to varying degrees (Dyczok 2015; Pynnöniemi and Rácz 2016; Watanabe 2017; Nygren et al. 2018; Fengler et al. 2020). However, some Western scholars, especially those in journalism studies, argue that the Western reports on the "Ukraine crisis" exhibit US "media imperialism" and

bias (Boyd-Barrett 2017; Ojala and Pantti 2017; Ojala, Pantti, and Kangas 2017; Pantti 2019).

There is a limited number of studies that go beyond the projection stage to examine the reception of Russian narratives by target audiences: twitter users (NATO StratCom COE 2015), Russian youth (Szostek 2017b; 2018a), and residents of Ukraine's Odesa region (Szostek 2017c; 2018b). Furthermore, an examination of the interrelations between the ostensibly promoted Russian narratives and the strategic and tactical shifts of the Kremlin during the Ukraine events suggests Moscow's systematic but instrumental use of narratives (Hutchings and Szostek 2015; Nimmo 2016; NATO StratCom COE 2016; Lankina and Watanabe 2017; Hosaka 2018; 2019c; 2019b).

The framework of strategic narrative helps articulate how certain narratives, including disinformation and misinformation, are received and reproduced by national scholars and intellectuals, shaping the perception and behavior of target audiences. Making claims about the intentions of those involved in the hidden process of narrative formation and projection, such as policymakers, journalists, and social media influencers, is often challenging without firsthand access to them. Researchers must creatively address this issue through systematic analysis of their statements, actions and reactions to validate their claims (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 51–52; Madisson and Ventsel 2020, 17).

Another caveat is that strategic narrative does not necessarily assume coherent and optimal strategies on the part of the implied author nor straightforward and uniform effects on the intended audiences. Firstly, perfect communication is unattainable; the intended audience may not interpret a narrative as the author intended. Secondly, it is necessary to exercise caution toward attempts to establish the causal impact of narratives, as such attempts often oversimplify the complex mechanisms of influence. Thirdly, narratives can generate unintended, adverse effects. Fourthly, political actors may lack a coherent strategy. Finally, they may be uncertain about the effects they aim to achieve (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 25).

Specifically, during Putin's presidency, Russia often offsets the effect of its strategic narrative by pursuing contradictory policies. A notable example is Russia's suspension of gas supplies to Ukraine in early 2006, despite its efforts to portray itself as a reliable business partner (Feklyunina 2008, 606). Similarly, the "WeAreNATO" campaign aims to raise awareness among younger citizens in member states about the activities and importance of the North Atlantic Alliance. Utilizing social media platforms like YouTube and Twitter, the campaign tailors messages to address national and cultural differences. However, the campaign's authors cannot guarantee that all young citizens will be reached or that only young citizens will see the campaign. Others might encounter it and interpret its messages differently than intended (Bolt and Haiden 2019, 48).

2.3. Narrative Agents

Viewing discourse as a mode of organizing knowledge and ideas, Foucault places less emphasis on "speaking subjects," arguing that statements (elementary units of discourse) are not primarily driven by individual subjects but by broader discursive formations (Foucault 2002, 89–98). Foucault emphasizes that subjects are shaped by the discourses they inhabit – "an anonymous field whose configuration defines the possible position of speaking subjects" – rather than the autonomous authors of these statements (Foucault 2002, 107, 137). By contrast, narrative is "a purposive communicative act" (Phelan 2007, 203) intended to influence a target audience. Strategic narrative focuses attention on the role of actors both as communicators as well as audience-cum-users (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 180). Actors form and project narratives based on the discourses available to them in their historical contexts, meaning that Big-"D" Discourses contribute to shaping narratives (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 7).[13]

One study examining the diffusion of US and Chinese strategic narratives in Australia, India, South Korea, Turkey and the United Kingdom questions the efficacy of strategic narratives; these countries largely ignored the Sino-American narrative battles, instead focusing on disseminating their own strategic narratives (Hagström and Gustafsson 2021). However, the above study primarily examines narratives from government offices and officials, who tend to hedge their statements, potentially overlooking narrative battles occurring at the level of expert communities.

While state actors remain the center of concern for many researchers, the framework of strategic narrative encourages exploration beyond states. It suggests, for example, examining non-state actors and stakeholders of public diplomacy – such as citizens, NGOs, companies, and international organizations – as actors of strategic narrative (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 52). Barthwal-Datta (2015, 329) calls for attending to the role of policy communities, scholars, think-tank analysts, and media experts in shaping state strategic narratives. For instance, as argued by Arsenault, Hong, and Price (2017, 194–98), the Arab Spring demonstrates that non-state actors, such as NGOs and advocacy groups, may "hijack" strategic narratives, seeking to influence Western leadership.

Elucidating the interactions between state actors and audiences bring us to the role of intermediary actors who function locally and engage directly with target audiences in the context of strategic narratives. I use the term "(national) narrative agents" to encompass not only scholars in the narrow sense – namely, university professors and lecturers – but also thinktank experts and intellectuals who explain international events to national audiences, thereby contributing to shaping public opinion. These national narrative agents interpret foreign state's strategic narra-

[13] Notwithstanding its primary focus, the field of strategic narrative, which encompasses broad approaches, does not preclude "very thick" approaches, i.e., post-structural analysis. See section 4.1.

tives and adapt them for local consumption. Some reproduce these narratives, while others challenge and criticize them.

Furthermore, an analysis of texts on the Ukraine events published in European countries and the United States suggests that, apart from the Anglo-American tradition, the distinction between "scientific" and "analytical" texts is not always clear. For instance, German think tank researchers (degree holders) publish both analytical and scientific texts (Zarembo and Fakhurdinov 2020, 100). Similarly, French academic articles on the Ukraine events often resemble commentary and analytical texts, and are less theoretical compared to Anglo-American ones, blurring the boundary between articles in academic and popular scientific journals and those in popular magazines (Koval 2020b, 131–32). Consequently, the occupational categories of authors – such as scholar, expert, think tanker and journalist – do not necessarily indicate the type of texts they produce. Rather, as discussed in section 1.2, when issues become politicized, there tends to be little clear separation between academics and non-academics. Some scientists explicitly advocate a certain course of government actions, as think tankers, while others engage in stealth issue advocacy (Pielke 2007, 7). Therefore, the academic nature of a text should be judged not by the author's occupation (e.g., university professor) but by whether the text has undergone academic peer review.[14] However, regardless of whether texts are peer-reviewed, published texts authored by individuals with purported academic affiliations are often perceived by general audiences as carrying authoritative "expertise and prestige," thereby serving as "the dominant mode for interpreting reality" (Hyland 2009, 2).[15]

I refer to these intermediary actors as agents because I acknowledge a certain degree of their agency, which determines their behavior and output. Scholars and intellectuals are not automated devices that merely disseminate narratives prepared by the real authors located in foreign states. The process of delivering narratives to target audiences involves proactive interpretation by national agents; it is an interaction of what is in the text and what is in the person who interprets it (Fairclough 2001, 78). In other words, they are "not a blank slate for narratives to be projected onto" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 12). Instead, they filter narratives from foreign states, adding their assessments and tailoring the format and content to accommodate the needs of the target audience. Con-

[14] This aspect will be operationalized in the content analysis (see 4.4.6).

[15] The corpus for the content analysis consists of 460 texts. Of these, 323 texts, roughly 70%, were written by individuals judged, based on available information, to be currently or formerly affiliated with universities or relevant academic associations, while the remaining texts are authored by those affiliated only with non-academic entities, such as think tanks, government organizations and media outlets. As shown in Table 10 "List of Explanatory Variables," strictly academic texts – i.e., peer-reviewed articles – make up only 14 (3.0%) of the corpus, while university bulletins and thinktank papers account for 147 (31.9%) and commercial popular magazines comprise 174 (37.8%). Narrative agents can be related to some academic field(s). The largest cohort is "Politics/Diplomacy," with 236 authors (51.3%), followed by "Economy/Business" with 121 authors (26.3%), "History" with 67 authors (14.5%), "Security/Military" with 64 authors (13.9%), "Journalism" with 40 authors (8.6%), "Culture/Literature" with 14 authors (3.0%), and "Law" 6 authors (1.3%).

sequently, the final versions of narratives received by the audience are not necessarily identical to those produced by the real or implied author. Thus, the process of receiving and reproducing Russian narratives on the Ukraine events appears to be multidimensional, and various factors related to scholars and intellectuals and their social practices may contribute to these outcomes.

At the same time, I do not preclude the possibility of contextual effects being exerted on national narrative agents. As Foucault (2002, 60) argues, discourse is shaped by the various positions and contexts from which statements are made, rather than being a direct expression of a unified subject's thoughts. The dispersed and external nature of subjectivity encompasses who is authorized to speak, who is expected to listen, and how statements are received and interpreted. Consider a historian who writes academic papers, comments on a TV talk show, and gives thematic lectures to political and business elites. The historian's statements change depending on the contexts – academic writing might be more detailed and nuanced, TV comments more sensational, and lectures more policy-oriented and argumentative.[16]

2.4. Affiliation with Russian Studies

As argued in 1.1, Russian studies has retained a dominant position among area studies that emerged from Soviet studies. The Ukraine events articulated this historical asymmetry, unveiling the elephant in the room: the displacement of Ukraine in academic discourse. The main body of authors on the Ukraine events were Western scholars of Russian studies, whose "default is always to use sources from Russia," especially Russian President Vladimir Putin (Kuzio 2018a, 530–31). Leading Western think tanks relied far more on Russian sources than on Ukrainian ones (Kulyk 2020a, 5–6). For example, Richard Sakwa's book on the Ukraine crisis *Frontline Ukraine. Crisis in the Borderlands* (2015) cites Putin 31 times compared to zero citations of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko (Kuzio 2018a, 530–31). [17]

Notably, prominent Western scholars of Russia, often acting as "gatekeepers" to Russian and Eurasian studies (Kuzio 2020, 81), aligned with Russian narratives on the Ukraine events. These scholars include Stephen Cohen (2014) in the US (see the criticism by Zhuk 2014); Jörg Baberowski and other *Russlandversteher* scholars in Germany (see the criticism by Wendland 2014); and Richard Sakwa (2015) in the UK (see the criticism by Kravchenko 2016; Kuzio 2018a; 2018b). Critics describe them as "orientalists" whose views on the smaller states of Eastern Europe are distorted and hierarchized to cater to Russia (Belafatti 2014), or as followers of the "Russian imperial historical framework" that subsumes Ukrainians within Russian history, projecting Ukraine through the lens of Moscow (Kuzio 2018b, 5–6).

[16] For further arguments, see section 2.8.

[17] For Sakwa's *Frontline Ukraine*, see also a review by Kravchenko (2016).

Zhuk (2014, 205–7) points out the "historiographic Soviet nostalgia" observed among some US Sovietologists/Russianists, who, tired of the traditional emphasis on political and other dissidents after the collapse of the Soviet Union, seek "more positive and friendly approaches toward defeated and humiliated (by the West) post-Soviet Russians," leading to an uncritical "conformist" approach. Furthermore, particular disciplinary backgrounds – such as political science, law, history, literature, and journalism – may also be significant predictors of scholars' positions.

Thus, the hypothesis to be tested is as follows:

> **H1**: Scholars' affiliation with Russian studies, irrespective of their disciplinary backgrounds, is positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives, whereas their affiliation with the studies of other post-communist countries, such as Ukrainian studies, is negatively associated.

2.5. Transnational Epistemic Community

States can sponsor local activists to promote their strategic narratives, which opposing political forces may label as proxies or front organizations. Arsenault, Hong, and Price (2017) argue that sponsorship is key to the operation of strategic narratives because it affects the credibility and effectiveness of narratives. It is noteworthy, however, that when addressing states as major sponsors of strategic narratives, they make no distinction between democratic and non-democratic states in their ways of sponsoring, i.e., whether such a sponsorship is overt or covert. Arsenault, Hong, and Price (2017) focus exclusively on transparent sponsorship, citing the support of the U.S. Department of States for multiple activist organizations during the Arab Spring. In contrast, as noted in section 1.3, a key tenet of Soviet/Russian strategic narrative is covert sponsorship in influence operations, known as active measures, which "mask Moscow's hand" (Hosaka 2018, 323–24). In authoritarian regimes, where the state assigns and controls cognitive and epistemological resources and blurs the boundary between power and the expert community (Makarychev 2006, 7; 2015), academia often becomes another venue to advocate the state's interest and rationalize and normalize, if not legitimize, its illegal behaviors in the international arena.

National narrative agents, as defined above, are further complemented by the concept of "transnational epistemic community," whose members are believed to share not only a set of normative and causal beliefs and notions of validity, but also "a common policy enterprise" across international borders. The notion of common policy enterprises includes "a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably

out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence" (P. M. Haas 1992, 3).[18]

It is widely believed that transnational, non-governmental, person-to-person communications with the "liberal" part of Soviet academia – so-called "policy entrepreneurs" or "new thinkers" – promoted a mutual understanding between the two competing powers, allegedly leading to positive changes such as the successful outcome of US-Soviet arms control negotiations and the peaceful end of the Cold War (Adler 1992a; Risse-Kappen 1994; Checkel 1997). Advocates of epistemic communities argue that both Soviet and American scholars earnestly engaged in exchanges because of their scientific and professional missions (Adler 1992a). Using the terms of strategic narrative, epistemic community posits that Western scholars can *project* narratives onto their counterparts in an authoritarian state through various venues of like-minded professional communities, hoping that the latter will *receive* and communicate these narratives to decision-makers to contribute to positive policy changes.

However, James Sherr highlights fundamental differences in what "discussion" and mutual understanding meant for scholars from different political regimes. First, whereas Western academics engaged in dialogue in a personal capacity, not always out of their loyalty to the government, what their Soviet counterparts sought to achieve was the state's foreign policy goals as defined by the political leadership. In authoritarian regimes, individual preferences or concerns are secondary to state objectives, or at least are not primary drivers. Soviet scholars visiting the United States were entrusted with communicating disinformation to Americans, even using anti-Soviet jokes and sniping at *Pravda* so their arguments would not sound like instructed "lines" (Sherr 1987, 161–62).

Such methods of persuasion, including manipulation and deception, exemplify how non-democratic regimes can exert influence through transnational epistemic communities. The most well-known epistemic community for foreign scholars interested in Russia is the Valdai Discussion Club. As noted in section 1.3, since the Ukraine events, the Club has increasingly aimed to shape the global agenda and provide interpretations of international issues by promoting "dialogue among the global intellectual elite in order to find solutions to overcome the crises of the international system" and actively collaborating with opinion-makers across various fields ("Valdai Club Foundation," n.d.).

From the viewpoint of invitees, scholars in a marketized world "compete over interpretations of problems and access to policy debates, techniques to augment one's authority to make knowledge claims about specific crises and interventions" (de Guevara and Kostić 2017, 11). Foreign members of the Valdai Discussion Club often make knowledge claims based on "insider" information and by

[18] Although Haas's original focus is epistemic communities consisting of scientists, Cross (2013, 154–57) expands the study of epistemic communities to non-scientists (diplomats, judges, defense experts etc.) bound together by professionalism. Cross' definition even includes religious leaders, who share norms and causal beliefs derived from hermeneutics in interpreting a holy text like the Koran or Bible.

appealing to authority. Some members find the Club's annual conferences productive and intellectually stimulating because of the diverse topics addressed by Putin (*Valdai Club* 2014; *Valdai Club* 2015). According to Daniel Drezner, a US participant in the Valdai Club, Russia watchers are interested in "the year-to-year changes in the official rhetoric" of Putin, Lavrov, or other dignitaries, as well as "what is said during the coffee breaks." Drezner argues that the Valdai Club is even valuable for non-Russianists, as it helps them learn how their stereotypes about the country might not match up with what is actually happening, and provides opportunities to listen to off-the-record conversations on the thinking behind "some very sensitive foreign policy questions" (Drezner 2016).

Hospitality techniques of the contemporary Russian regime, such as those implemented during the Valdai Discussion Club, inherit practices from the Soviet Union and have significant implications for strategic narrative. One implication is the selective representation of reality and control of attendees' perceptions of political issues (Hollander 1981, 372–99). In 2005, a group made up of 30 foreign experts and non-Moscow-based journalists, took a boat trip down the Volga River. Attendees noted that the event featured a surprisingly balanced lineup of speakers, including outspoken Kremlin critics at that time Irina Khakamada, alongside Kremlin advisors such as Sergei Markov. Harvard professor Marshall Goldman remarked, "The openness of the event was puzzling. It seemed entirely at odds with everything else happening in the country" (Evans 2005). However, Professor Shigeki Hakamada, the sole Japanese participant in the Valdai Discussion Club (and the sole representative from Asia) during the years of 2005 and 2006, notes that in the early days of the Club, participants were allowed to ask questions freely without submitting them in advance. However, he observes that genuine critics soon ceased to receive invitations. President Vladimir Putin responded to questions with his own reasoning, without allowing opportunities for rebuttal or open debate to challenge his arguments. Notably, Putin has consistently abstained from participating in candidate debates during presidential elections, suggesting a lack of interest in engaging in genuine dialogue (Hakamada 2022). Beginning in 2007, the organizers opted to invite Professor Nobuo Shimotomai (see section 6.1) to the Club in place of Hakamada.

Upon returning to their home countries, participants disseminate key talking points or "insider" information they have heard from what they believe to be important sources, not only within the public discourse but also within government. However, foreign scholars enjoying the "surprising" access to sources in Russia run the risk of repeating the regime's legitimacy claims (Goode 2010, 1057). According to Giles (2019, 33), "a prominent academic" told him that "he *knew* Russia had no aggressive designs on any other neighbors – because he had been told so by Putin and Lavrov while seated as a guest of honor in the front row at Valdai" [italics original]. This established practice and narrative path not only legitimize the Kremlin's actions toward Western audiences (Foxall 2015, 12), but also create a great deal of "informational noise" for analysts of Russian domestic and foreign policies (Smagliy 2018, 18–19).

Another aspect is the provision of material and non-material privileges to foreign guests. This includes flattery and an "ego massage" for Western intellectuals (Hollander 1981, 355–72). For instance, Richard Sakwa, one of the most frequent guests at the Valdai Club, presented his book *Russia Against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order* there in 2017 (*Valdai Club* 2017a). Similarly, in 2019, John Mearsheimer's book *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* received the Valdai Club Award (*Valdai Club* 2019). Sergei Karaganov, Honorary Chairman of the Presidium of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, showered the Timothy Colton and Samuel Charap book *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia* with praise, calling it an "act of political and intellectual courage" and the "best work in the world on this issue" (*Valdai Club* 2017b). The book characterizes Russia's invasion of Ukraine as "a product of zero-sum policies pursued by Russia, the US and the EU" with no party having "clean hands." The book mostly accepts Russia's issue narratives, depicting Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity as a "violent overthrow," arguing that the West ignored Russian interests and violated alleged promises not to expand NATO (Charap and Colton 2017).[19]

A scholar's explicit linkage with prominent Russian elites and experts through epistemic communities may be a significant determinant of their narratives. Notably, Szostek (2017c), examining ordinary inhabitants of the Odesa region of Ukraine, argues that an individual's receptivity to Russian strategic narratives is partly predicted by personal linkages to Russia and the Russian culture, such as regular attendance at a Moscow Patriarchate church service, travel to Russia, and communications with friends or relatives in Russia. Epistemic communities, such as the Valdai Discussion Club, may function as social and communication linkages at the individual level. This epistemic community linkage can be operationalized by whether a scholar is an active regular participant in the Valdai Discussion Club (see 4.4.6). Thus, the hypothesis to be tested is as follows:

> **H2**: Epistemic community linkage, i.e., the active participation in the Valdai Discussion Club, is positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives.

2.6. Issue, Identity and System Narratives

According to the classification by Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2013, 7; 2017b, 8), strategic narratives can be divided into three levels: system, identity and issue narratives. Most of the narratives on the Ukraine events fall into the category of **issue narratives**, which "set political actions in a context, with an explanation of who the important actors are, what the conflict or issues is, and how a particular course of action will resolve the underlying issue" (Miskimmon,

[19] See the book reviews by Wilson (2017) and Mueller (2021).

O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 8). An example of Russia's issue narrative is the claim that "Euromaidan was orchestrated by the West." A significant body of research suggests that most of these issue narratives can be ascribed to Russian officials and state-sponsored media.[20]

Identity narratives concern "the identities of actors in international affairs," which are constantly negotiated and contested (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 7). These narratives often have historical dimensions and signify "what the story of a political actor is, what value it has, and what goals it has" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 8). In strategic narratives, identity narratives are seen more like instrumentalized images deliberately created to provoke a desirable reaction from others ("how others see us"), rather than being purely about identity ("who we are," "impressions given") (Zaharna 2016). During WWII, Soviet leadership manipulated historical identity narratives and developed "schematic narrative templates," such as the "Expulsion of Foreign Enemies," stressing that Russia had been historically peaceful while foreign invaders repeatedly attempted to destroy Russian civilization (Wertsch 2007).[21] Similarly, Moscow has utilized threat perception narratives. Analysis of Soviet propaganda analysis from the 1960s to the 1980s suggests that there is little evidence that Soviet leaders perceived a Western threat to the Soviet Union as serious. Rather, Moscow appears to have used narratives such as "Western threats to communist bloc" to portray itself as an "innocent victim" with tactical considerations (Shultz and Godson 1984, 93–95).

Examples of identity narratives include Russia's vision of the West as Russophobic, projecting itself as defensive and an innocent victim in international politics. Russia perceives its negative international image as a long-held stereotype and attributes it to the West's unwillingness to recognize any positive developments within Russia. This perspective contributes to the strengthening of the narrative of Russia as a "besieged fortress" (Feklyunina 2008, 626). Characterizing the Other as Russophobic reveals significant insights into how Russia perceives itself (Feklyunina 2012, 92). The accusation of Western Russophobia is frequently invoked by Russian officials, particularly following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Robinson 2019, 64). However, the Western Russophobia narrative has its roots in 19th-century imperial discourse (Darczewska and Żochowski 2015). This narrative was constructed historically, and echoed by scholars outside of Russia (e.g., Tsygankov 2009; Diesen 2022). Andrey Tsygankov's book, published following Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, posits that American Russophobia aims to undermine Russia's political

[20] For other issue narratives operationalized in this dissertation, see 4.4.2.

[21] Wertsch (2007) introduces the notion of "schematic narrative templates," which are more abstract than specific narratives about events, actors, time and place. One such templates is the "Expulsion of Foreign Enemies," which consists of the following elements: 1) Russia is peaceful and does not interfere with others; 2) Russia is viciously and wantonly attacked without provocation; 3) Russia almost loses everything in total defeat as the enemy attempts to destroy it as a civilization; 4) Through heroism and exceptionalism, and against all odds, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy.

reputation and compel it into "submitting to the United States in the execution of its grand plans to control the world's most precious resources and geostrategic sites" (Tsygankov 2009, xiii–xvi).

Meanwhile, identity narratives can also internalize characterizations of other states and peoples, thereby imposing their own identity (Szostek 2017a, 575–76) and influencing the behavior of those target states (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 26). A notable example is the "east-west divide" narrative that sets Ukraine within a cleavage of different civilizational, historical, ethnic, and cultural spaces, claiming that its eastern half is part of the "Russian World" (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 17). Another identity narrative posits that Russia and Ukraine are fraternal nations or "one people" (Kuzio 2018b, 7).[22]

Finally, **system narratives** are based on perceptions of "how the world is structured, who the players are, and how the system works" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 8), such as the Cold War and the War on Terror. It is argued that defining actors in conflicts (e.g., "who is fighting whom?") largely depends on system narratives, which political actors may use strategically under certain circumstances (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 4).

During the Ukraine events, multiple narratives reflecting authors' outlook on the international system(s) were expressed: a geopolitical competition between Russia and the West (Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018, 13–14; NATO StratCom COE 2015, 17); a "multipolar" world (Hutchings and Szostek 2015, 188; Szostek 2017a, 582); skepticism toward mainstream media (as exemplified by Boyd-Barrett 2017) and information warfare waged by the West against Russia (Pomerantsev 2019); and Western hypocrisy and double standards (Hutchings and Szostek 2015, 185; Szostek 2017a, 579).

Some of these system narratives were expressed by Russian officials and pro-Kremlin experts, but, importantly, these narratives along with many other identity narratives existed before the Ukraine events. Despite the leading role of Russia in their popularization, their authorship remains blurred and cannot be solely attributed to Russia. For example, the narrative that post-communist European countries were caught in the chessboard of a geopolitical game between two civilizations, Russian and "Western" (Kubik 2020, 65–66) is hardly monopolized by Russia, although there are Russian versions of this geopolitics narrative such as Alexander Dugin's *Geopolitka* (Dunlop 2004). Similarly, the concept of "multipolarity" has developed within Russian counterhegemonic discourse since the 1990s (A. Cohen 1997; Makarychev and Morozov 2013), yet insights into a multipolar world have also been discussed within neo-realism and in connection with BRICs (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 281). As Koval (2020c, 162–63) argues, some French elites, who see their national interests in weakening American influence in Europe, tend to embrace the narrative of creating a multipolar world order, viewing Russia more as an ally than a rival.

Similarly, skepticism toward mainstream media, such as "The West also uses propaganda," and "You cannot trust the media, it's all corrupt and biased"

[22] For other identity narratives operationalized in this dissertation, see section 4.4.2.

(Smoleňová 2015, 14), can date back to criticism of Western media during the 2003 Iraq war and other US interferences in the Middle East. This narrative views the mainstream Western media as a source of US government propaganda, suggesting that the problem can be solved by decreasing dependency on mainstream media and instead using "alternative media" or direct observations by the author (e.g., Boyd-Barrett 2015; 2017). Analysis of publications by a Soviet agent of influence apprehended in France demonstrates a tactical use of this theme to deflect criticism of the USSR and discredit the reliability and accuracy of the French and Western media in general: "The Western press is unreliable on many matters and is silent on others, and is subject to a wide variety of extraneous pressures" and it "reached the level of disinformation" (Shultz and Godson 1984, 148–49).

Scholars have highlighted the perceived hypocrisy and double standards in the behavior of the US and EU regarding international conflicts (Hutchings and Szostek 2015, 185; Spiessens and Van Poucke 2016; Szostek 2017a, 579; 2018a, 75–76; Zarembo 2020, 185). Critics argue that if Russia's actions are to be condemned, then the actions of the US in Iraq or Afghanistan should also be scrutinized (Leonor 2016; Babak et al. 2017, 26, 91; Fischer 2016, 298).

As observed in practice, one paragraph, and sometimes even one sentence, may contain different levels of narratives. Some issue narratives are closely intertwined with and function alongside system and identity narratives (Ventsel et al. 2021, 33). As argued by Hansen (2017, 28), metanarratives, such as "the West is locked in centuries-old conflict with Russia," entail smaller narratives, such as the "coup" in February 2014, serving as filters allowing audiences to "quickly connect the dots and to make sense of different events." Narratives on Ukraine fit into the bigger picture of the Kremlin's global strategic narrative that seeks a new world order (Laity 2015, 24).

An example of a system narrative apt to trigger multiple issue narratives is the geopolitics narrative. This narrative depicts the Ukraine events as a consequence of broader geopolitical competition between Russia and the West. By depriving Ukraine of agency in international politics, the geopolitical narrative appears to induce issue narratives, such as NATO expansion provoked the Russian reaction (Koval 2020b, 144; Pynnöniemi 2016b, 85–86; Hosaka 2018); the "Ukraine crisis" is a consequence of a mutual misunderstanding between the West and Russia, and the West should consider Russia's interests (Zarembo 2020, 186). A good illustration of the combination of an identity narrative and an issue narrative is the "east-west divide" narrative – the simplified depiction of a divided Ukraine – that seems to have driven foreign experts into reproducing various event narratives, such as "Russian-speaking people in danger" and "separatism" in eastern Ukraine.

Thus, the hypotheses to be tested are as follows:

> **H4**: Some international system narratives, such as geopolitical contestations between Russia and the West, are positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives.

H5: Russia's identity narratives, such as perceived Western Russophobia and the assumed historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians, are positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives.

2.7. National Narratives

This dissertation examines how scholars and intellectuals convey narratives on international events to their national audiences. This perspective necessitates, in addition to system, identity and issue narratives, the introduction of another type of strategic narrative: national narratives.

As noted in section 2.2, strategic narratives are designed to shape the behavior of target audiences. Narrative agents can be involved in all phases of the strategic narrative dynamics – formation, projection, and reception – but their participation becomes particularly evident in the projection phase, where their narratives are presented to the public. For states, a network of sympathizers in target countries is a valuable channel for diffusing strategic narratives deep into national audiences (Brown 2017, 170). For instance, the Kremlin seeks to propagate Russia's key messages in liberal democracies, such as separating business from politics (Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014, 6), highlighting the ineffectiveness and double-edged nature of Western sanctions against Russia (Gajos and Rodkiewicz 2016, 254–56), and advocating for the lifting of sanctions to resume economic partnerships (Babak et al. 2017, 98–99).

Russian narratives about the events in Ukraine have been nationalized to varying degrees. Case studies demonstrate that the narratives appearing in European media and academia were not mere repetitions of the Kremlin's propaganda templates but often reflected local historical, cultural, and political contexts (Pynnöniemi and Rácz 2016; Kulyk 2020b). Schmitt (2018) suggests that for an "external" strategic narrative to effectively engage a target audience, it must be capable of aligning with the local political myth – an endogenous factor within each political community. Siddi (2020) illustrates how the narratives of German, Finnish, and Polish leaders on Russia during the Ukraine events were shaped by each country's specific national interests and agendas, such as energy security for Berlin. However, these works presume the single author and narrator of strategic narratives, without addressing the mechanisms of multiplication and customization of Russia's narratives to national audiences and the role of national agents in this process. As demonstrated in the case of Poland, local journalists can domesticate narratives on the Ukraine events by linking them with the country's historical experience with Russia and bringing the issue into political debates concerning its security threatened by Moscow (Nygren et al. 2018).

During controversial international events, a flood of conflicting statements and information makes it extremely difficult to achieve consensus on the basic components of narratives, such as actors, scenes, actions, tools, and goals (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017a, 6–7). The flow of events euphemistically named the "Ukraine crisis" in 2014 serves as a case in point. According

to Snegovaya (2015, 15), Russia's key information strategies (reflexive control) concerning its involvement in the Ukraine events extend beyond mere denial and deception to conceal the presence of Russian armed forces in Ukraine. They also encompass concealing Moscow's objectives in the conflict, seeking to maintain flexibility and preserve its options, thereby confusing its opponents, which ultimately affords Russia an advantage in negotiations.

Meanwhile, audiences expect from national narrative agents, such as scholars and experts, clear-cut explanations of international events. Under such circumstances, much of the gatekeeper role typically played by mass media editors (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2013, 185) and translators (Schäffner 2004) is delegated to area specialists. These specialists, who are well-versed in foreign languages and possess deep knowledge of the history, culture, and politics of the country or area in focus, play a crucial role in selecting, translating, interpreting, and delivering narratives from foreign states to domestic audiences. The less familiar media editors and audiences are with the country or area, the more significant the role of these national narrative agents.[23]

National narrative agents tailor their narratives to the social and political contexts of target audiences. In this context, even those who align with Russia's strategic narratives have room for creativity. During the Cold War, socialist countries' intelligence services provided influential foreign authors – agents of influence – with "a two- or three-page outline of objectives and themes to be covered," allowing them to develop their own stories and opinions within these guidelines (Shultz and Godson 1984, 169).[24] This practice has continued in the present day. During the Russia-Ukrainian war, the use of *temnik*, or detailed instructions to the media experts on how to cover events in their news programs and blogs, was revealed (Rothrock 2014). For example, the document titled "Thematic Lines on Work with the Political Network for July 20–27, 2014" found in the leaked emails of Russian president aide in charge of Ukraine Vladislav Surkov includes topics and conspiracy theories Moscow wanted pro-Kremlin authors to cover in their publications to blame Kyiv for the MH17 plane crash in eastern Ukraine in the summer of 2014. (Hosaka 2019c, 762).

In this dissertation, I define "national narratives" as country-specific interpretations of international affairs, crafted by narrative agents to align with the historical, cultural, social and political contexts of their respective national audiences.

Thus, the hypothesis to be tested is as follows:

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[23] Moreover, the role of scholars is significant in countries where a majority of the population, being used to consuming daily news almost exclusively in the language of the country, are reluctant to access sources in English and other foreign languages – as discussed later, Japan is a case in point.

[24] As Ladislav Bittmann, a former Czechoslovak intelligence officer in charge of disinformation during the Cold War, testified that as it is almost impossible to perfectly reproduce an author's writing style, intelligence services provided influence agents only with "a two- or three-page outline of objectives and themes to be covered." Authors can develop their "own" stories and opinions following these guidelines (Shultz and Godson 1984, 169).

H6: Some national narratives, such as the aspirations to improve bilateral relations with Moscow, are positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives.

2.8. Publication Genre

National narratives can be examined through the analysis of published texts written by scholars and intellectuals. The production of texts for publishing is often a collective work involving authors and editors. The genre of the publication can define not only the types of text but also the social processes of text production (Fairclough 1992, 284). In certain types of publications, scholars may confront institutional limitations that predetermine the overall tone of their narratives, influenced by political inclinations and/or the marketization tactics of publishers.

First, the narratives of national agents may be constrained by the ideological framings of magazines.[25] Analyzing American academic and expert texts on the Ukraine events, Kulyk (2020c) notes the different tendencies of framings used in articles in *Foreign Affairs* and *The National Interest*. Almost half of the examined texts in *Foreign Affairs* used terms such as "aggression" and "invasion," sharply critical of Russia's illegal actions (Kulyk 2020c, 22). On the other hand, *The National Interest*, whose editors and authors are mainly so-called realists or supporters of a pragmatic understanding of Moscow, viewed the Ukraine events as an annoying obstacle to the normalization of relations between the West and Russia. They were primarily concerned with finding a way acceptable to both parties, the West and Russia, and not Ukraine, with some radical authors even outrightly discussing the recognition of Ukraine as part of Russia's "sphere of influence," using the derogatory term "Finlandization"(Kulyk 2020c, 30, 40).[26]

Second, scholarly narratives can be simplified to cater to a general readership. Unlike academic journals, popular science magazines avoid technical terms and omit caveats and reservations (Myers 1994). Commercialized profit-oriented media outlets, highly responsive to the reactions of target audiences, focus on producing news value that maximizes viewer attention based on factors such as timeliness, familiarity, negativity, and conflict-related issues (Bednarek and Caple 2017). Simplicity of narratives on international conflicts is critical to achieving resonance among target audiences, who usually have a superficial knowledge of and limited interest in the conflict-ridden country (Autesserre 2012, 207). Regarding the Ukraine events, many articles start with an explanation of

[25] Scholars may select magazines that best fit their own ideological belief. However, the ideological stance of an author is hard to observe; some scholars wrote on the Ukraine events both in rightist and leftist magazines simultaneously. For this reason, I treat ideological and political stance not as an attribute of individuals but as an attribute of publications.

[26] In 2016, Dimitri Simes, publisher of The National Interest, organized a meeting between Donald Trump, then a presidential candidate from the Republican Party, and Russian Ambassador Sergei Kislyak. Simes also traveled to Moscow, where he met with President Vladimir Putin and several other Russian government officials .

the historical and cultural "east-west divide," a stereotypical description of the little-known country.[27] Commercial publications tend to resort to sensational, eye-catching titles. Thus, the narratives that appear in different publications are often the result of negotiations and compromises between scholars and editors, with the latter exercising power in editing and word selection to appeal to their audience (market).

In contrast to politically-charged and commercially oriented publications, academic peer-review journals (and to a lesser extent, university bulletins, and think-tank reports) use hedges and reservations (Hyland 2009, 170–73). They avoid using terms that might signal their political impartiality, requiring authors to exercise the utmost restraint in assessing and describing ongoing controversial political issues. It has been noted that writings about the Ukraine events that did not undergo external peer review contained not only inaccuracies about the events but also conspiracy theories taken from Russian propaganda media (Kuzio 2020, 76–80). In the UK, think-tank papers tend to align more closely with the British political establishment, whereas scholarly journals provide more diverse views (Koval et al. 2022, 11). Riabchuk (2020a, 91–92) observes that UK expert-analytical texts focus on developing practical recommendations, with dominant pro-Ukrainian interpretations, whereas scientific publications tend to incorporate the positions of "realists" and, to a lesser extent, Russian and openly pro-Russian authors.

Thus, the hypothesis to be tested is as follows:

> **H3**: Commercially oriented popular magazine articles, irrespective of their position on a right-left political spectrum, are more likely associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives, which use simplistic and sensational framing of the Ukraine events, compared to academic peer-reviewed articles.

[27] This stereotype was rejected in the early 2000s by Ukrainian scholars, but continued to be used by the Party-of-Regions election managers to manipulate voters (Hosaka 2019a, 553).

CHAPTER 3 JAPAN AMID THE UKRAINE EVENTS

This dissertation aims to examine the role and functions of national scholars and intellectuals in liberal democracies as narrative agents in disseminating Russia's issue narratives to domestic audiences, particularly focusing on how Moscow's messages were tailored to local concerns and delivered to national stakeholders. According to Kulyk (2020d, 323), the predominant tendency of the Western expert communities, even if independent of political forces, generally aligns with the views of political circles and society, reflecting the prevailing perception of national interests. The analysis of analytical texts (Kulyk 2020b) separated a group critical of Russia (the US, the UK, and Poland) from another group more sympathetic to Moscow (Greece, Italy, and France), with Germany somewhere in between.

The selection of the country to focus on will consider local agendas for national agents, policy-academia nexuses and endogenous factors, including varied levels of pro-Russian support embedded in society. To empirically address the research questions, this dissertation selects Japan as a case study. This chapter justifies the case selection and elaborates on socio-political preconditions that might impact the reception and reproduction of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events in Japan.

3.1. Case Selection

In 2014, Russia's narratives on the events in Ukraine reached and, in some instances, resonated with scholars and intellectuals in liberal democracies. A vivid illustration of this is the Group of Seven (G7) – a political and economic forum consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US – which had previously included Russia as a full member under the Group of Eight (G8). These liberal democracies actively engaged Russia in various fields of cooperation for more than two decades since the collapse of the USSR. In response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the G7 members cancelled the planned G8 summit in Sochi, Russia, and suspended Russia's membership for its violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Although the G7 collectively condemned Russia's illegal actions and imposed sanctions, discussions emerged domestically within these leading democracies regarding their bilateral relations with Russia, shaped by both national interests and perceptions of the Ukraine events.

There are three major reasons for selecting Japan among these liberal democracies. Firstly, Japan has had distinct national security agendas and stakes among the G7 countries that could be mobilized by national narrative agents in the context of the Ukraine events. Whereas the Russian invasion of Ukraine directly impacted the strategic and security interests of NATO allies in North America and Europe – especially participants of the Normandy Format for peace negotiations, France and Germany – Japan's geopolitical landscape led Tokyo to con-

centrate its strategic security efforts in the Asia-Pacific, later reformulated as the Indo-Pacific region, rather than in Eastern Europe. Consequently, Japan's public image of Russia, which had been largely unfavorable, was minimally affected before and after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea (see Table 3). Japan's National Security Strategy, published in December 2013, highlighted the increasing concern over the rise of the People's Republic of China, particularly due to its growing military expenditures and activities, which were seen as a significant concern to Japan's security, and regional stability. In contrast, the strategy emphasized the importance to "advance cooperation with Russia in all areas, including security and energy, thereby enhancing bilateral relations as a whole" from Japan's security perspective (The Government of Japan 2013, 54, 61). This context allowed Japanese narrative agents considerable room for maneuver to interpret the Ukraine events in light of Asia-Pacific regional dynamics and Japan's national security. Furthermore, the Japanese political leadership remained committed to revitalizing diplomacy with Russia, especially regarding the territorial negotiations that resumed in 2012 after a pause of nearly a decade. Tokyo vacillated between aligning with the G7 and engaging with Russia, which Moscow perceived as an exploitable weak link in the G7 solidarity. Moscow often communicated messages to Tokyo through Japanese participants of the Valdai Discussion Club. For example, Japanese diplomats in Moscow were briefed by Valdai participants about the results of the conference and subsequently reported these findings to Tokyo (Noda 2011). This situation underscores the active role of national narrative agents and the contestation between international and regional-national agendas.

Table 3 "Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of Russia?"

	2013		2014		
Country	Favorable %	Unfavorable %	Favorable %	Unfavorable %	Change in Unfavorable
United States	37	43	19	72	+29
United Kingdom	36	39	25	63	+24
Germany	32	60	19	79	+19
Italy	31	56	20	74	+18
France	36	64	26	73	+9
Japan	27	64	23	69	+5

Note: Based on Pew Research Center (2014b).There is no data for Canada.

Secondly, exploring the roles of national scholars and intellectuals in receiving and reproducing Russian strategic narratives in environments where Russia already exerts considerable socio-political influence may encounter endogenous challenges. In some countries, inherent local structures, such as the Russian diaspora or pro-Russian political forces, may play greater roles in narrative diffusion than the narrative agents themselves. However, compared to other G7 countries, Japan's environment presents fewer confounding factors associated

with pre-existing Russian influence. Japan's historical memory of the USSR and its successor Russia is predominantly negative, with no political parties represented in parliament endorsing Russia's annexation of Crimea, and no significant Russian or Ukrainian diasporas in the country. In contrast, Germany hosts one of the largest Russian-speaking diasporas in Europe, with 1.3 million people (Roze 2022), and a right-wing populist political party, the AfD, whose leadership openly aligned with Russian narratives on the Ukraine events (Wendland 2014; Shekhovtsov 2018). Moscow can reach out to Russophone audiences in Germany, with disinformation and subversion, as evidenced by the "Lisa affair" (Braghiroli and Makarychev 2018). Similarly, France and Italy also had significant political forces supportive of Moscow, such as "Front National" and "Lega Nord," along with Russian government-supported media outlets such as *Sputnik* and *RT*, and numerous cultural organizations under the banner of *Russkiy Mir* (Koval 2020b; Zarembo 2020). These abundant pre-existing pro-Russian political and cultural resources could sway public opinion and decision-making in favor of Russia without necessarily mobilizing national scholars and intellectuals. Local Russian speakers could directly listen to and heed Putin's speech on the "reintegration" of Crimea without the need for translation or clarification by experts. In the same vein, though in the opposite direction, Canada's media reports and commentaries – influenced by its large Ukrainian diaspora amounting to 1.2 million people – were overwhelmingly negative about Russia's actions (McKenzie 2014).[28] Thus, among G7 countries, Japan remained relatively unaffected by endogeneity issues.

Thirdly, the "internationalization" of academic narratives poses significant challenges in clearly distinguishing "national" narratives, particularly when the texts are produced in English (Koval et al. 2022, 3). Despite the absence of overtly pro-Moscow political forces or substantial Russian-speaking minorities in the US, and considering the US's strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of China's rise and its rebalancing toward Asia (Holmes 2012), it remains technically difficult to address its national narratives produced by national scholars and intellectuals. In the US, and to a lesser extent in the UK, most academic journals, thinktank reports and political commentaries produced in the English language are written not only by American or British authors but also by authors from various other countries. Moreover, their target audiences are often commonly Anglo-American or internationally broader (Kulyk 2020c, 13; Riabchuk 2020a, 49–50). This practice of producing and consuming academic and analytical texts across national boundaries obscures – and makes it practically difficult to delineate – the role and functions of national scholars and intellectuals in delivering strategic narratives to national audiences. Prominent US and UK

[28] For example, content analysis of more than 250 Canadian newspaper articles published in February and March 2014 indicates the overwhelmingly negative coverage regarding Russia's actions, which may have reflected pre-existing dominant attitudes of the third-largest Ukrainian population outside of Ukraine and Russia (1.2 million, compared to the 500 thousand with Russian heritage) in Canada (McKenzie 2014).

authors, such as John Mearsheimer and Richard Sakwa, were often cited by authors from non-Anglo-American countries to support their arguments, promoting Russia's cause in interpreting the Ukraine events (for John Mearsheimer in Italy, see Zarembo 2020, 184; in Poland, see Riabchuk 2020b, 263–65). In contrast, in other non-English speaking G7 countries, scholars and intellectuals produce their texts mainly in their national language to reach out to their national audiences. Japanese narrative agents and their publications mostly target national audiences.

Table 4 Case Selection

Country	National security agendas	Endogeneity	(Inter)nationalization of narratives and audiences
United States	Euro-Atlantic and Asia Pacific	Little	International
United Kingdom	Euro-Atlantic	Little	International
France	Euro-Atlantic	Considerable	Mostly national
Germany	Euro-Atlantic	Considerable	Mostly national
Italy	Euro-Atlantic	Considerable	Mostly national
Canada	Euro-Atlantic and Asia Pacific	Considerable	Mostly national
Japan	Asia-Pacific	Little	Mostly national

The rest of this section elaborates on the backgrounds, i.e., socio-political preconditions for Russian strategic narratives in Japan, including the dilemma of political leadership, discursive pluralism, the limited local potential for Russia's influence, and the preponderance of Russian studies over Ukrainian studies.

3.2. Diverse Narratives and Distinct National Narratives

In the 1990s, along with other G7 countries, Japan provided economic and technical support to Russia to assist it in overcoming social and economic turmoil following the collapse of the Soviet Union. While Japan worked to resolve the territorial problem of the "Northern Territories," which has remained a major legacy issue in relations between Tokyo and Moscow since the end of WW II, it gave consent to the US to invite Russia into the G7 for deeper political engagement. Although there was a window of opportunity to resolve the territorial issue during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, by the early 2000s, Muneo Suzuki, a lawmaker who claims to have been the first foreign politician to meet Vladimir Putin after his victory in the 2000 presidential election and a key proponent of the "two-islands-first" approach to the territorial dispute, which was criticized as a compromise by hardliners, was arrested on corruption charges related to the

humanitarian assistance program for the Northern Territories.[29] This scandal led to a prolonged stalemate in bilateral talks on the territorial issue (Kuhrt 2007, 141–46).

Further momentum for boosting bilateral relations came in 2012, when a new Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, who later became the longest-serving PM in Japanese history, declared Russian relations as one of the priorities of Japan's diplomacy, while the corner stone for Japan's security remained its alliance with the United States. He visited Moscow in April 2013 and issued with Putin the "Joint Statement on the Development of the Japan-Russia Partnership," which stated, among others, that both leaders shared the view that it was "abnormal that a peace treaty has not been concluded between Japan and Russia 67 years after the end of World War II." This gave Tokyo a hope for revitalizing negotiations on the territorial issue. In November 2013, three weeks prior to the start of student protest rallies against Yanukovych's postponing of signing the EU Association Agreement in the center of Kyiv, Japan launched a security dialogue with Russia in a "two-plus-two" format of bilateral consultations of foreign and defense ministers, which Japan then maintained only with the United States and Australia. In February 2014, despite the boycott of other G7 leaders after Russia's controversial anti-LGBT legislation, Abe attended the opening ceremony of the Sochi Olympic Games. President Putin's visit to Japan – the last was in 2005 – was scheduled for autumn 2014.

Abe's fixation with Russia may be explained as his determination to follow in the footsteps of his father, Shintaro Abe, the Japanese foreign minister in the mid-1980s (Taniguchi and Bob 2016). By the end of 2019, Abe held bilateral talks with Vladimir Putin 27 times, on various occasions, including during the Eastern Economic Forum, an international conference annually held in Vladivostok since 2015. Japanese media intensively covered the bilateral talks on the Northern Territories. There was even a widespread narrative, albeit close to myth, among the establishment that Abe and Putin have good chemistry and they, as patriotic and conservative leaders, can put an end to the long-standing territorial issue between the two countries (e.g., Ishikawa 2014, 36).

In March 2014, when Russia invaded Ukraine by illegally annexing Crimea, Japanese diplomacy faced a dilemma, oscillating between aligning with the major Western democracies and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's commitment to revitalizing negotiations with Russia over the "Northern Territories." As the sole Asian member of the G7, Japan joined the West-led economic sanctions in response to Russia's violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine. However, Tokyo's official rhetoric condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea as "an attempt to change the status quo with force," a phrase also used to describe China's asserti-

[29] According to the "two-islands-first" approach, both countries should first agree on the two smaller islands (Habomai and Shikotan), the transfer of which was stipulated in the 1956 Japan-USSR Joint Declaration, and then continue negotiations on the remaining two bigger islands (Kunashiri and Etorofu). However, many experts viewed such a sequence, especially the shift to the latter, unviable once the territorial issue is settled this way (Kuhrt 2007, 141–46).

veness in the East and South China Seas. This rhetoric skillfully deflected focus from Russia's wrongdoings while implicitly linking what Tokyo called "the Ukraine situation" to China's assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan's ambiguous official position toward the Ukraine events – described as Tokyo's "delicate balancing act" (Shagina 2018) – provides significant latitude to interpret the Ukraine events, fostering a plurality of narratives.

3.3. Limited Pro-Russian and Pro-Ukrainian Influence

At a mass level, compared to European democracies, Japan presented less political, social, and cultural opportunities for Russian narratives to gain popularity. According to a 2013 Pew Research Center poll, Russia was viewed negatively by 64% of Japanese respondents, with only 27% holding a favorable view (Pew Research Center 2014b). Negative perceptions among the elder generation are partly attributable to memories of World War II, during which the Soviet Union violated the Neutrality Pact, seized the "Northern Territories," and sent 570,000 Japanese internees (former military personnel) to labor camps in Siberia and other parts of the Soviet Union. This historical memory has engendered a traditionally negative stance toward the Soviet Union and its successor, Russia, across the political spectrum, including traditional right and communists.[30]

What makes the Japanese case unique is that, unlike many Central European countries that were "liberated" by the USSR from Nazi Germany during WWII, Japan was invaded by the USSR, resulting in the seizure of its Northern Territories at the end of the war. Consequently, Japanese intellectuals rarely embraced the "anti-fascist" narratives that have been instrumentalized by both right-wing and left-wing groups in post-WWII and post-Communist Europe (Pirjevec, Pelikan, and Ramet 2023). Although this research does not claim causality, this context minimizes the indirect effects of pre-existing political traditions (Pynnöniemi and Rácz 2016, 313; Schmitt 2018), making it possible to trace the direct influence of Moscow's "anti-fascist" narratives on scholars and intellectuals.

Furthermore, Japan lacks a significant Russophone minority that could advocate for Moscow's narratives. Russian state-sponsored media has limited influence within the Japanese-language information space,[31] and most Japanese audiences do not have access to Russian-language sources. For instance, they did not

[30] Every year, Japanese radical rightwing groups organize massive protests in front of the Russian Embassy in Tokyo against the continued Russian occupation of the Northern Territories since the end of World War II. The Japanese Communist Party, historically critical of Stalin's hegemony, condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea in the strongest terms, viewing it as a return to such hegemony under Vladimir Putin. The JCP claims Japan's sovereignty over all the Chishima (Kuril) Islands, whereas Tokyo's official position focuses on the return of the four islands (Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomai islets).

[31] The influence of Russian state-sponsored media is limited in Japan. The Japanese language website of *Sputnik* (before March 2015, Voiced of Russia) has not been popular, only receiving a limited amount of referral traffic from anonymous gossip news sites.

read Vladimir Putin's speech on the "historical reintegration of Crimea" on March 18, 2014.[32] Instead, they relied on interpretations of Putin's speech as well as the Ukraine events by influential Japanese scholars. This situation makes academic channels particularly attractive for Moscow's influence operations.

3.4. Preponderance of Russian Studies

Despite the overall unfavorable image of Russia, there was a pronounced asymmetry between Russian studies and Ukrainian studies in Japan. According to the List of Slavic-Eurasia researchers issued by the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center in Sapporo in 2012, out of 1,467 scholars, only about 15 declared that their scope of interest included Ukraine. Even with conservative estimates,[33] the ratio of Russianists to scholars of Ukrainian studies is approximately 78:1. Multiple academic associations for Soviet/Russian and Slavic studies were established in the 1960s–1980s,[34] while a separate association for Ukrainian studies was formed only three years after the independence of Ukraine, in 1994, with significantly fewer members.[35] Similar imbalances are observed among journalists and diplomats.[36]

Uyama (1996), a Japanese scholar on Central Asia, noted that during the Perestroika period, it was widely recognized that the Soviet Union was a multi-ethnic state, distinct from Russia. However, the collapse of the USSR led to a misconception that it was no longer necessary to study countries other than Russia, with many academic associations and programs substituting the "Soviet Union" with "Russia" in their names. Uyama observed a tendency in Russian studies to overlook regions adjacent to Russia and instead portray Russia as directly linked to Japan and Western Europe, or to frame Russia-related issues as broader global

[32] Most mainstream newspapers did not publish the full text of Putin's speech, with one notable exception: a Japanese newspaper correspondent in Moscow shared a Japanese translation on his personal Twitter account.

[33] Each researcher briefly stated their "research topic" (e.g., "Russian literature and culture in the 19th century"). I counted approximately 15 researchers who explicitly mentioned Ukraine as their scope of interest. Although some researchers were not specific about their target countries, roughly 80-90% of researchers specialize in the Soviet Union/Russia, while the remaining researchers focused on Poland, Hungary, the Balkans, Central Asia, etc.

[34] For example, the Japan Association for Russian [Soviet] and East European Studies (established in 1971), the Japanese Society for the Study of Russian History (established in 1956), the Japan Association for the Study of Russian Language and Literature (established in 1950), the Japan Association for Comparative [Socialist] Economic Studies (established in 1963), the Japan Society for the Study of Slavic Languages and Literatures (established in 1984). These associations included Ukraine and the Ukrainian language in the scope of their studies.

[35] According to the Japanese Association for Ukrainian Studies, the initial membership was around 20 scholars in 1994, which has now grown to 60.

[36] In 2014, no Japanese journalists were studying the Ukrainian language or specializing in Ukraine. Nor were any based in Kyiv. Major Japanese news agencies and newspapers had their correspondents – Russianists – in Moscow who covered former Soviet countries (The author's interview with an experienced Japanese journalist-Russianist on October 11, 2014).

concerns. The Japan Association for Soviet and East European Studies was renamed the Japan Association for Russian and East European Studies.[37]

Geraskov (2018, 118), a Ukrainian scholar who conducted interviews with Japanese experts and students, highlighted that a critical lack of knowledge about Ukraine leads many Japanese to perceive Ukraine merely as the battleground of a proxy war between the US and Russia. He noted that "Ukraine's image in Japan is still often constructed under subordination to 'the Russian factor.'" When public interest in Ukraine surged in 2014-2015 amidst the Ukraine events (see Figure 2), the media, due to the scarcity of Ukraine experts and their little communication with journalists, predominantly invited well-known Russianists to comment on the Ukraine events. Narrating the Ukraine events became a part-time job for many scholars of Russian studies, who were often unprepared for Ukrainian issues (Ueno 2014a, 1; Okabe 2016, 44). However, the fault is not only on the side of scholars. A Japanese expert in 2014 described the challenge of avoiding clichés like "pro-Russian force" when he had to explain the complex nuances of the Ukraine events "within 20 seconds," the time given by media editors (Hattori 2019b).

In the Japanese expert community on Russia and Ukraine, the boundaries between scholars, analysts, intellectuals and journalists are often blurred. Professional journalists may teach Russia-related issues at universities, while Russian studies scholars can contribute to popular non-academic magazines.

These conditions have led to diverse narratives on the Ukraine events among scholars and intellectuals, with Japanese participants of the Valdai Discussion Club delivering the Kremlin's narratives to national audiences (see section 6.1). Furthermore, at a symposium on the "Ukrainian turmoil" during the 2015 Japan-hosted congress of the International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICCEES), representatives of the "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Crimea parliament" under Russian occupation were invited by the organizer to present an "alternative view" (see section 6.2.3). The Japanese case thus highlights the significant role of national narrative agents, namely scholars and intellectuals, in this process.

[37] For the discussion on the name change of American institutions, see Engerman (2009, 333).

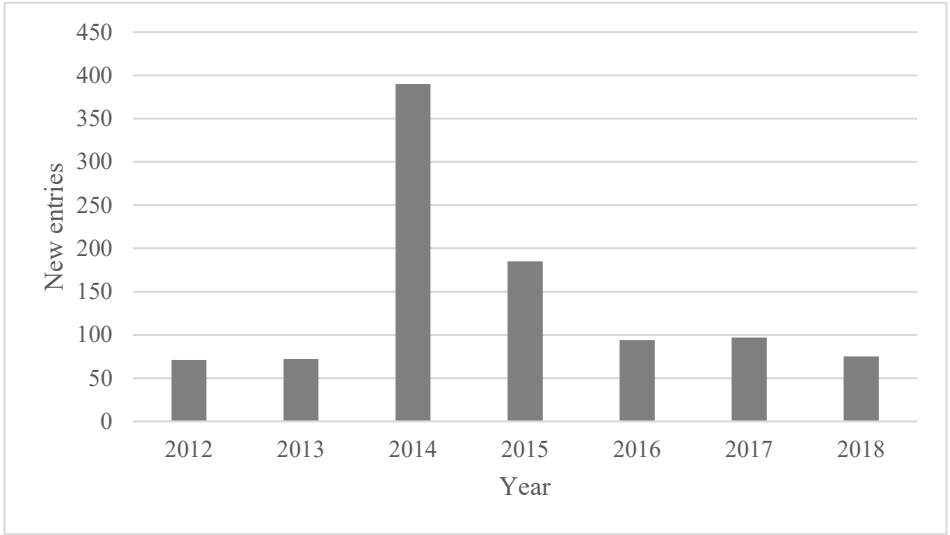

Figure 2 New Entries (Books and Articles) on Ukraine in the National Diet Library

3.5. Conclusion

The examination of national narrative agents in Japan amid the Ukraine events will reveal a complex interplay of socio-political factors that shaped the reception and reproduction of Russia's strategic narratives. Despite Japan's alignment with G7 sanctions against Russia following the illegal annexation of Crimea, the distinct geopolitical landscape in East Asia allowed Japanese scholars and intellectuals to interpret these events through a lens focused more on regional security concerns, particularly regarding China. This unique positioning provided Japanese narrative agents with considerable autonomy to recontextualize narratives on the Ukraine events in local contexts, reflecting Japan's own strategic priorities.

In academia, the asymmetry between Russian and Ukrainian studies in Japan further influenced the narratives that emerged. With a significant preponderance of Russian studies over Ukrainian studies, and a lack of significant Russian-speaking or Ukrainian diasporas, Japanese scholars and intellectuals played a pivotal role in interpreting and conveying the Ukraine events to the Japanese public. This situation underscores the vital function of national narrative agents in liberal democracies, who navigate between international strategic narratives and domestic socio-political dynamics to shape public opinion. The Japanese case highlights the critical need to understand the local contexts in which these agents operate, as they significantly impact the diffusion of foreign strategic narratives.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

Strategic narrative can be studied using various epistemological and methodological approaches. This dissertation employs a combination of corpus-based content analysis and critical discourse analysis to comprehensively address the three research questions raised in section 1.5.

Content analysis will be applied to examine the extent to which narrative agents' affiliations with certain branches of area studies and disciplines, their links with epistemic communities (RQ1-1), and their shared worldviews and perceptions of Russia's self-image (RQ1-2), are associated with their reception and reproduction of the Kremlin's narratives on the Ukraine events. However, analyzing these associations alone does not fully explain how the discursive normalization (Krzyżanowski 2020, 432) of Russia's narratives, such as the denigration of Ukrainians as "neo-Nazis," occurred in academic and public discourse. To complement RQ1-1 and RQ1-2, critical discourse analysis will be conducted to elucidate the information sources and discursive strategies employed by national agents in their knowledge-production processes (RQ2) and how Russian narratives were adapted to national social-political landscapes (RQ3).

This chapter elaborates on the methods and dataset used in this dissertation.

4.1. Broad Approaches to Strategic Narrative

Strategic narrative examines the dual role of narratives in international relations: as structures that shape actors' thoughts and behaviors (close to big-D discourse), and as tools used by actors to influence and persuade others. It emphasizes that narratives define how actors understand key elements like identities, historical trajectories and the international system. While these structures shape perspectives, they are not fixed; they are continuously contested and redefined. Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2013, 14) argue that this interplay between narratives as structuring and narratives as tools of strategic actors can be illuminated through what they call the "spectrum of persuasion," ranging from analysis of interactions within a given system that assume certain logics of behavior (thin analysis) to an exploration of the historical development and functioning of the system and its features (thick analysis).

According to the classification by Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2017b, 27–41; see also Table 2.1 thereof), the spectrum of persuasion, including ontological and epistemological approaches to the study of strategic narrative, is broad, with "different standards of evidence and validity to support their arguments" (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 40). At one end, the "very thin" approach focuses on interactions between actors with given, static preferences. This rationalist analysis often views public narratives as observable variables, seeking correlations or causal relations through content analysis. The "thin" approach examines communicative action, focusing on interactions between actors that shape consensus and shared understanding of international

affairs, often through democratic arguments and dialogue. Persuasion in this context may include strategic actions, such as "cheap talk" and manipulation of each other. The "thick" approach investigates actors' identity formation through media ecologies, considering language not only as a tool but also as an expression of identity. The mass media, in this view, are not merely mediators of politics but integral to politics itself (mediatization); equally, academia can become part of politics. At the other extreme, the "very thick" post-structural analysis examines power-knowledge systems within institutions, practices, and language, focusing on discourses that diffuse over long periods, such as the Cold War and bipolar order. As noted in section 2.1, while discourse does not exclude strategic actions, it rarely addresses how audiences consume and interpret texts (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle 2017b, 27–40).

Despite these diverse approaches, the study of strategic narratives involves aspects of strategic actions, including the formation, projection, and reception/interpretation of narratives, employed by actors to influence target audiences. While this dissertation is concerned with both the tools of actors (national agents' reproduction of narratives) and structures (the big-D Discourse, i.e., power manifested in the knowledge production of area studies), its primary focus is on analyzing the reproduction of narratives by narrative agents. The analysis of big-D Discourse, which requires further research into the intellectual history of the field, lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

4.2. Methodological Synthesis

This research adopts a methodological synthesis, combining corpus-based content analysis and discourse analysis (Baker et al. 2008). It consists of data- and concept-driven qualitative content analysis and data-driven coding (Schreier 2012), and critical discourse analysis, or CDA (Fairclough 2001).

The rationale of this mixed approach is that CDA offers little discussion about data collection methods and the statistical representativeness of analyzed materials (Meyer 2001), while the corpus-based approach alone is insufficient to explain why certain patterns appear more frequently than others. Thus, corpus-based content analysis enables transparent, rule-based text selection, and the quantified results of content analysis are contextualized in CDA, which considers broader social and political contexts.

The overall research procedure is as follows:

1. Conduct a meta-analysis of existing scholarly and expert literature on Russian narratives, propaganda, and disinformation regarding the Ukraine events. Apply the concepts and levels of strategic narrative to create a hierarchical coding frame containing 32 themes (categories).
2. Using this coding frame, manually code 460 texts in the corpus (see section 4.3). Verify the coding results with another coder to ensure the reliability of the coding. Also code the types of terminology used in the texts, author characteristics and publication types.

3. Conduct a regression analysis to determine how various attributes correlate with the total score of issue narratives, operationalized in this research as an indicator of receptivity to Russian narratives on the Ukraine events. Generate boxplots to examine the relationship between system, identity and national narratives and the total score of issue narratives.
4. Select texts based on the findings of the quantitative analysis and conduct critical discourse analysis.

4.3. Data Collection

For this research, I created a corpus. The data collection was limited to print publications for several reasons.

First, most print publications (books, journals, and magazines) undergo rigorous quality checks by editors (and, in the case of academic journals, peer reviews) and involve contributions from well-known scholars and experts. In contrast, online articles, especially those in personal blogs and social media, vary in quality and often include anonymous writers whose professional attributes remain unknown. The corpus excludes newspapers, which tend to offer fragmentary reports of daily news, lacking the in-depth analysis found in weekly or monthly magazines.

Second, the National Diet Library of Japan, the primary repository to which all domestic publishers must submit copies of their publications, has an online catalog ("NDL Online," n.d.) that allows researchers to conduct transparent, rule-based searches in the repository.[38]

The corpus for analysis was created based on the results of an online search of the National Diet Library of Japan (purposive sampling). An initial search in the categories of articles and books published between 2014 and 2019 (the end of the presidency of Petro Poroshenko) with the keyword "*Ukuraina* [Ukraine]" in their titles gave over 800 publications. Titles were manually reviewed to exclude articles that did not address the Ukraine events (for example, articles on the Chernobyl catastrophe). Additionally, 40 relevant articles with the keywords "*Roshiya* [Russia]" and "*Kurimiya* [Crimea]" were included in the corpus because topics relating to Ukraine often appear alongside discussions of Russia, with a primary focus on the latter.[39]

Articles in the form of dialogue or forums were divided into individual author contributions. To focus on Japanese scholars and intellectuals, the corpus excluded publications (including translations) of foreign authors. Editorials unsigned by authors were excluded due to the difficulty in determining author characteristics. After data cleaning, the corpus was reduced to 460 pieces that include different types of publications, such as peer-reviewed academic journals,

[38] For web-based articles and blogs, there is no such single repository. Instead, there are various search engines whose algorithm remains opaque, causing search results to vary.

[39] An observation of Reshetar (1983, 72) that Ukrainian history was "superficially mentioned when it has something to do with 'Russian events'" is valid in contemporary Japan too.

university bulletins, think-tank reports, popular weekly business magazines and monthly opinion magazines spanning a broad political spectrum.[40] 323 texts, roughly 70%, were written by individuals currently or formerly affiliated with universities or relevant academic associations, including senior academics in Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian studies, while the remaining texts were authored by those affiliated only with non-academic entities, such as think tanks, government organizations or media outlets.

4.4. Content Analysis

This subsection outlines the methodology employed in content analysis, including the formulation of hypotheses, the development of a coding frame, detailed explanations of the coding method, verification process, and the application of the regression analysis and the creation of boxplots.

4.4.1. Hypotheses for Content Analysis

As elaborated in CHAPTER 2, major hypotheses for the content analysis were formulated as follows:

> **H1**: Scholars' affiliation with Russian studies, irrespective of their disciplinary backgrounds, is positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives, whereas their affiliation with the studies of other post-communist countries, such as Ukrainian studies, is negatively associated.
>
> **H2**: Epistemic community linkage, i.e., the active participation in the Valdai Discussion Club, is positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives.
>
> **H3**: Commercially oriented popular magazine articles, irrespective of their position on a right-left political spectrum, are more likely associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives, which use simplistic and sensational framing of the Ukraine events, compared to academic peer-reviewed articles.
>
> **H4**: Some international system narratives, such as geopolitical contestations between Russia and the West, are positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives.

[40] Texts of these books and articles were copied and systematized online for sharing with another coder. The data collection was done within the framework of the project "Individual Project-Based Collaborative Research" of the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University, Japan.

H5: Russia's identity narratives, such as perceived Western Russophobia and the assumed historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians, are positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives.

H6: Some national narratives, such as the aspirations to improve bilateral relations with Moscow, are positively associated with the reproduction of Russia's issue narratives.

4.4.2. Creation of Coding Frame

Applying the concept and levels of strategic narrative, Russia's issue narratives (themes) on the Ukraine events, as well as system and identity narratives, were specified through an extensive meta-analysis of the literature. This literature examines, systematizes, and maps narratives, propaganda, and disinformation in news coverage and analytical articles in Russia and Western countries (e.g., NATO StratCom COE 2015; Fedchenko 2016; Pynnöniemi and Rácz 2016; Babak et al. 2017; Kulyk 2020b).[41] National narratives were inductively developed by pilot-coding the first 50 articles of the corpus. The detailed results of the meta-analysis are presented in Appendix 1 Survey of the Secondary Sources and a coding frame containing 32 themes is summarized in Table 5.

The issue narratives include 20 narratives in total, five for each of the following categories: Euromaidan, Russia's annexation of Crimea, the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, and related assessments. A caveat should be noted. Although "Donbas separatism" was a Russian issue narrative, the term "separatists" itself was not part of Russia's official vocabulary; Putin referred to them as "representatives of southeast Ukraine and supporters of federalization" (Hosaka 2019c). The term "separatists" is used by the Ukrainian government and armed forces, referring to Russia's collaborators (Nabok 2020, 308–9). The circulation of the term "[pro-Russian] separatists" in the media (Innola and Pynnöniemi 2016, 171), however, contributed to framing the events in Donbas as a separatist movement and a civil war.

[41] Since my focus is Russian narratives, and most Ukrainian narratives are the antipode or rebuttal of Russian narratives, I will not code the Ukrainian narratives separately in this research.

Table 5 Classifications of System, Identity and Issue Narratives

System Narratives	
"Geopolitics"	Geopolitical competitions between Russia and the West.
"Multipolar World"	A multipolar world; declining US hegemony; anti-globalism.
"Biased Media / Info War"	Biased mainstream media; information war by the West.
"Hypocrisy / Double Standards"	Western hypocrisy; double standards.
Identity Narratives	
"Western Russophobia"	The West is inherently anti-Russian.
"Russia Defensive / Victim"	Russia is defensive and a victim.
"East-West Divide / Clash of Civilizations"	Ukraine's east-west divide; civilizational fault lines.
"One People"	Russians and Ukrainians are "fraternal," "one people"; Russian history starts in "Kiev."
Issue Narratives / Euromaidan	
"Maidan Fascist"	Euromaidan was led by fascists and ultranationalists.
"Maidan West"	Euromaidan was orchestrated by the West.
"Maidan Violent / Illegal"	An illegal and violent overthrow of the legitimate president.
"Far Right Gov"	The Far Right is in the Ukrainian government.
"Failed State / Chaos"	Ukraine is in chaos and a failed state.
Issue Narratives / Crimea	
"Blame West / NATO"	The West/NATO is responsible for the crisis.
"Crimea Referendum"	Crimean people expressed their free will at the referendum.
"Crimea History"	Crimea is historically Russia.
"Discrimination"	Discrimination against Russian-speaking people in Ukraine.
"Crimea Analogy"	The analogy between Crimea and other cases.
Issue Narratives / Eastern Ukraine	
"Atrocities in the East"	The Ukrainian army's violence and intimidation of innocent civilians.
"Separatism"	The Donbas separatism and indigenous "people's republics."
"Obama Troopers"	The West sent mercenaries and weapons to Ukraine.
"Putin Peacemaker"	Russia is a peacemaker in the conflict in Ukraine.
"No Evidence"	No evidence of the Russian military in Ukraine and the downing of MH17.
Issue Narratives / Assessments	
"Not EU but Russia Welcomes"	Ukraine is not welcomed by the EU and cannot live without Russia.
"Ukraine Neutral"	Ukraine should be a neutral buffer state; Finlandization.
"Federalization"	Ukraine should implement federalization.
"Russia Misunderstood"	Russia is misunderstood by observers; the West should take into account Russia's uniqueness and interests.
"No Sanctions"	Business and politics should be separated; sanctions are ineffective.
National Narratives / Japan-Related	
"Improve Russia Relations"	Promote relations with Russia including the Northern Territories issue.
"Crimea-Northern Territories Analogy"	The analogy between Crimea and the Northern Territories.
"China Threats"	Worried about China's assertiveness in the region.
"China-Russia Alliance"	Worried about closer China-Russia relations.

4.4.3. Coding of Narratives

In the content analysis (Krippendorff 2004), the presence of multiple preset narratives in texts is examined and coded manually. When a certain narrative was detected and no criticism followed it (i.e., the narrative agent internalizes this narrative in their text), "+1" was assigned. Conversely, when the narrative agent cited the same narrative to criticize it, "-1" was given. If there was no mention of this narrative, "0" was given. For example, a text may read:

> In his speech on March 18, Vladimir Putin stated that the armed rebels in Kyiv had been trained in Lithuania and Poland. He stressed that it was not the first time that the Western states drove Ukraine into chaos.

If the narrative agent made no attempt to criticize or debunk this narrative, "+1" was assigned to the category "Maidan West" (Euromaidan is orchestrated by the West). However, if the narrative agent critically assessed this narrative elsewhere in the same text, for example:

> Despite Putin's claim that Euromaidan was a US conspiracy, as generally understood in other countries except Russia, Euromaidan was a mass movement of Ukrainian citizens aspiring for EU integration.

In such a case, "-1" was given to the same category.

The coding of quoted texts requires clarification. While it could be argued that quotes and an author's direct speech should be separately coded – the presence of a quote in a text does not necessarily mean the author's endorsement of it, this coding does not differentiate them. In the process of circulation of a narrative, it makes little difference whether a narrative agent quotes it (directly or indirectly) or states it in direct speech. Rather, efforts to achieve "objective reporting" by Western media have at times inadvertently reproduced Russian claims (Dyczok 2015). Researchers examining Russian narratives in Western media have pointed out that the Western media involuntarily disseminated Russian narratives, including false information, by citing Russian media sources (e.g., statements of Russian officials or comments of experts). For example, on July 17, 2014, the Estonian news site *Delfi.ee* published an article by citing a report from a Russian media outlet, which later turned out to be disinformation:

> Malaysian Airlines Boeing 777 was shot down by Ukrainian soldiers, whose target was probably Russian President Vladimir Putin's plane, claimed a source from Russian aviation offices *Rosaviatsiya* to Interfax. "It happened near Warsaw at the 330 attitude at a height of 10,100 meters. Plane number one was there at 16.21 Moscow time and the Malaysian plane at 15.44 Moscow time," reported a source via Lenta.ru (Tikerpuu 2016, 153).

Experts point out that Western media's seemingly neutral citation habits – intended to present "the other side of story" in Estonia (Tikerpuu 2016, 155),

Germany (Ahler 2016, 135–36) and Hungary (Huxley and Ljungman 2016, 218), "a balanced view of all sides" in Sweden (Huxley and Ljungman 2016, 204–5) and "pure news" in Poland (Gajos and Rodkiewicz 2016, 263), as well as the use of direct translations from Russian media in Slovakia (Fischer 2016, 302) – inadvertently resulted in the reproduction and circulation of Russian narratives, including forgeries. Thus, the spread of narratives takes place by way of citation regardless of a news editor's assessment (endorsement) of their trustworthiness.[42] Indeed, many Japanese journalists and experts cited Russian sources using terms such as "Novorossiya," "Donetsk People's Republic," "Lugansk People's Republic" and "Russian-speaking population" without critical examination (see Table 9).

Likewise, narrative agents construct their interpretation of events based on quotes – some explicitly and others implicitly. As mentioned earlier, narrative agents select, translate, interpret, and deliver foreign strategic narratives. In this modality, selected narratives, whether cited directly or indirectly, comprise part of their understanding and interpretation of events.

Another note is that the construction of strategic narratives, like any non-fictional narrative, is often complicated and not straightforward. A single text can contain multiple, sometimes contradictory, narratives, or at times, one may not detect any narratives at all in a text.[43] For example:

> On March 16, the referendum on Crimea's independence was held, with more than 90% approval, and Russia incorporated Crimea on March 18.… In terms of international law, the incorporation of the Crimean Peninsula into Russia has serious problems. Russia overturned the established borders between the two countries. But now we have to consider another aspect. It is a matter of self-determination; the Crimean Autonomous Republic wanted to secede from Ukraine and enter Russia. It is a conflict between the two principles: "territorial integrity" of a sovereign state and "national self-determination."

In this example, the narrative agent arguably admits in the second and third sentences that Russia's annexation of Crimea violated international law. However, the narrative agent further argues for the "self-determination" of the Crimean Autonomous Republic. This type of argument that incorporates objections is frequently seen in scholars' discourse (see "borderline discourses" in section 4.5.2). "Blaming both superpowers" was a convenient rhetoric to disguise the pro-Moscow position of socialist democrats during the Cold War (Bukovsky 2019). The juxtaposition of two opposing narratives does not necessarily mean the narrative agent's impartiality. In the above case, the narrative agent emphasizes the latter cause, and therefore "+1" was given to the category "Crimea Referendum" (Crimean people expressed their free will at the referendum).

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[42] Likewise, extremist narratives can be found in journalist reports or academic articles about the messages of a terrorist organization's leadership, however critical the authors are about the narratives (Archetti 2017, 237).

[43] I am grateful to Andreas Ventsel for this notion. See also Koval et al.(2022, 4).

4.4.4. Coding of Nominations

The terms narrative agents use to describe a series of events in Ukraine (Kulyk 2019) were coded as follows: "the Ukraine crisis," "the Ukrainian conflict," "the [military] conflict in eastern Ukraine [Donbas]," "the Russo-Ukrainian war," "the Russian intervention in (Eastern) Ukraine," and "the Russian aggression against Ukraine." Additionally, the most frequently used term by the government of Japan, "the situation in [around] Ukraine" (*Ukuraina josei*), was included, along with terms commonly used by Japanese scholars, such as "the Ukraine problem [issue]" (*Ukuraina mondai*), "Upheavals in Ukraine" (*Ukuraina douran*), "Ukraine political change" (*Ukuraina seihen*), "Annexation of Crimea" (*Kurimia heigou*), and "Incorporation of Crimea" (*Kurimia hennyu*). Each term was assigned a value of "+1" when detected and "0" when absent. Multiple terms could be recorded for a single article if different expressions were used to describe the same event. Certain terms specific to Russia's vocabulary (e.g., "civil war", "coup d'état") were categorized separately under Distinctive Vocabulary.

4.4.5. Coding of Distinct Vocabulary

The presence of specific vocabulary (monikers) used by Russian officials and state media (Pynnöniemi 2016) was coded. Terms such as "coup d'état," "junta," "slaughter [genocide]," and "punitive operations [punishers]" were used by Russia to negatively describe Euromaidan participants and the interim Ukrainian government and their actions. Conversely, terms like "local self-defense [*samooborona*] force," "militia [*opolchentsy*]," "supporters of federalization," "Novorossiya (Novorussians)," "[Donetsk, Lugansk] People's Republic," and "Russian and Russian-speaking people" were used to positively depict actors resisting Kyiv in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

Irrespective of using quotation marks (e.g., "they established the 'Donetsk People's Republic'"), "+1" was given when it is cited without warning or criticism. When the term was not mentioned, "0" was given. Similar to the coding of narratives, "-1" was assigned if narrative agents criticized the use of such a term. The labeling of Euromaidan participants as "far right," "neo-Nazis," "fascists" and "Banderite" was coded in Narratives.

4.4.6. Coding of Narrative Agents' Attributes

Scholars and intellectuals engaged with Russia were labeled as "Russianists" (scholars of Russia) with the help of the Slavic-Eurasia Researcher List (Osuga 2012) and other open-source information.[44] Journalists and writers judged to have knowledge of the Russian language or an extensive track record of covering Russia, based on their publications, were also coded as "Russianists." Scholars

[44] For this classification, I used the popular website for Japanese researchers to manage their research information "researchmap" ("Researchmap," n.d.) and other institutional biographies of authors.

specializing in other post-communist countries and regions (e.g., Eastern Europe, the Baltic region, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, the Balkans, etc.) were separately coded as "Other PC Country Expert." Active participants of the Valdai Discussion Club ("Valdai Member") were identified from official websites ('Nashi Eksperty' n.d.; 'Uchastniki vstrechi s chlenami mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba "Valdai"' 2012). Individuals who were previously Valdai members at some point in the past were not included.[45] Notably, individuals can have more than two attributes (e.g., one who studies both Russia and Ukraine is coded as both "Russianist" and "Other PC Country Expert").

The discipline of narrative agents was coded based on the above researcher lists as well as publicly available biographies: "Politics/Diplomacy," "Economy/Business," "History, "Law," "Culture/Literature," "Security/Military," "Journalism" and "Others." Given that some Japanese IR-related scholars adopt a historical approach (e.g., "political history" and "diplomatic history") (Yamamoto 2011), they were coded as both "Politics/Diplomacy" and "History." (Former) journalists and commentators were coded "Journalism" unless their disciplinary backgrounds or fields of interest were specified in their biographies. Likewise, (former) diplomats were coded as "Politics/Diplomacy."

4.4.7. Coding of Publication Political Stance and Genre

The political stance of publications, predominantly monthly opinion magazines, was coded based on their explicit tendencies and verified separately by two Japanese professional editors. The categories of the political spectrum include: "Communist" (Marxist and revolutionist); "Progressive" (liberals accentuating pacifism, human rights, environmentalist rhetoric); "Conservative" (anti-communist, traditional right); "Neo-Right" (anti-US right); and "None." Publication genres were coded: "Peer-Reviewed" journals, non-peer-reviewed "Bulletins/ Think Tank" reports, "Commercial/Popular" magazines, and "Other." Labels may overlap about a single narrative agent and publication.

4.4.8. Verification of Coding

To assess interrater agreement, Light's Kappa was employed – a method suitable for coding with two or more raters and two or more categorical variables. A trained coder evaluated 640 coding objects (20 articles randomly selected from the corpus, each against 32 narratives). The simple percentage of agreement was 90.78%, and the calculated Light's Kappa was .673, indicating substantial agree-

[45] In the 2000s, many experts later known as Russia critics still thought the Valdai Club to be a meaningful forum for communication with the Russian establishment. For example, Fiona Hill, top Russia adviser to US president Donald Trump in 2017–19, participated in the Valdai conference at least until 2011. In the mid-2000s Hill was receptive to Putin and urged the West to work with him on the Chechen question, but later changed her attitude, criticizing the Obama Administration's reset with Russia (Bertrand 2019).

ment beyond chance between the raters (Landis and Koch 1977).[46] The associated z-score is 10.7, and the p-value is close to 0, suggesting that the observed agreement is statistically significant.

4.4.9. Regression Analysis and Boxplots

Regression analysis (OLS) was conducted with an author's affiliation, publication political stance and genres as independent variables and the aggregated scores of issue narratives, a key quantity of interest, as the dependent variable. Since the total number of issue narratives is 20, the aggregated score may range from -20 to 20 (The coded results exhibit a mean of 2.083, a maximum value of 15.0, and a minimum of -9.0). For instance, an estimated coefficient of 2.0 signifies that, holding other factors constant, the variable would contribute, on average, two additional Russian issue narratives regarding the Ukraine events in a given text. Given that the corpus includes multiple texts by the same authors (maximum 22 texts by one author), standard errors were clustered by authors in the regression analysis to prevent an underestimation of standard errors.

System, identity, and national narratives were employed as nominal variables, each comprising three categories: present, absent, and critical. Since issue narratives and these types of narratives are not independent of each other, boxplots were used instead of regression analysis to visualize the distribution of the aggregated issue narrative scores across the three categories for each narrative and to examine their associations. No other variables are controlled for in this analysis. Additionally, Bonferroni-adjusted t-tests were conducted to assess whether statistically significant differences existed among the categories.

In the regression analysis, the length of a text and the time of its publication were controlled for. It is presumed that the longer an article is, the more likely it may contain different narratives. Additionally, it can also be posited that over time more scholars can learn and change their attitudes toward Russian narratives. Over the reporting period (2014-2019), more evidence of Russia's covert involvement in the Ukraine events became available through open-source investigations such as "InformNapalm" and "Bellingcat," and many of the Russian issue narratives (e.g., Euromaidan is a "coup" by "fascists") were subsequently debunked by fact-checking sites such as "StopFake" – a factor that might diminish the level of support for Russian narratives among scholars.

[46] Although the interpretation of Kappa coefficients must take into consideration the nature of data and the context of research, Landis and Koch (1977) provide the rule-of-thumb "benchmarks" to interpret the strength of agreement for Kappa coefficients: ≤0=poor, .01–.20=slight, .21–.40=fair, .41–.60=moderate, .61–.80=substantial, and .81–1=almost perfect.

4.5. Discourse Analysis

This subsection outlines the concepts and approaches employed in discourse analysis, focusing on critical discourse analysis, intertextuality and interdiscursivity.

4.5.1. Exteriority and Critical Discourse Analysis

Content analysis with coding is primarily concerned with "what is there" in texts. It can further map out static patterns of relationships between issue narratives on one hand, and author attributes and system, identity and national narratives, on the other, through regression analysis and boxplots. What remains unaddressed in content analysis is how texts interact with, and shape social reality. In this regard, my focus shifts toward the broader context of discursive and social practices, wherein power and ideology are wielded by those who produce texts. Foucault critiques approaches that focus solely on the internal content of statements, such as textual analysis, arguing that understanding discourse requires looking at the external conditions and relations, i.e., exteriority (Foucault 2002, 136–37), which shape and structure statements. The relations that shape discourse are not limited to linguistic signs but governed by a set of underlying rules that are embedded in and emerge through practice (Foucault 2002, 51–54).

To capture the elusive "what is not there" in texts, I transcend the confines of content analysis and scrutinize the intricate relationship between narrative agents and their academic subjects – Russia and Ukraine – thus positioning both texts and their authors within wider social practices. By building upon the findings of content analysis and considering sources outside the corpus, I delve into "the practice of [the] production, dissemination, and reception" of texts (Phillips and Hardy 2002).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), a research tradition, or a set of approaches established decades earlier than the framework of strategic narrative, shares a common focus on the transformative power of language with strategic narrative. CDA views language activity not merely as a passive reflection of social phenomena but as an active means in shaping social reality (Fairclough 2001, 19). Strategic narrative analysis further explores how actors mobilize language to exert influence on and shape the behavior of target audiences. As a wide description of communicative actions, CDA, with its emphasis on power dynamics, domination, and social inequality, examines how such power structures are perpetuated through textual and verbal communication (Dijk 2007, xxv). Academic discourse, in particular, infiltrates into our daily life beyond academic institutions with its authoritative "expertise and prestige" (Hyland 2009, 2).

4.5.2. Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity

The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) expands the analytical lens beyond specific texts, probing into intertextual and interdiscursive connections across various genres and public spaces. DHA, as "anti-objectivist," rejects the notion

of "value neutral science," while striving for conceptual clarity and meticulous attention to textual and discourse analysis (Reisigl 2007, 6; cited in Krzyżanowski 2010b, 72). Of particular interest to DHA for scrutiny is the historical situatedness of discourses that describe continuities, discontinuities, and discrepancies between the present and the past (Reisigl 2018, 53–54). Since part of the Russian narratives on the Ukraine events have their roots in the Tsarist or Soviet era and have traveled to the contemporary period with modifications and adaptations, and been consumed uncritically by Russo-centric scholars, it is necessary to put such narratives in the historical perspective.

First, I examine intertextuality, which is the "dialogic" relations of texts: texts are always in a state of interaction with other texts (Fairclough 2001, 128–29). In the late 1960s, post-structuralism had an immense impact on Roland Barthes, who challenged the idea of a universal narrative structure and the concept of a narrative text as a stable and fixed entity, instead emphasizing the relational meanings between texts, a concept that came to be known as intertextuality. A key change was that poststructuralists embraced indeterminacy, fluidity, and multiple meanings, in contrast to the structuralists' fixation on being systematic and clear-cut in their methodology (Thomas 2016, 38–39). Nevertheless, intertextuality is understood as the inherent nature of all texts, including narratives, to be made up of preexisting texts. This concept is grounded in the belief that our means of expression are limited to the words and forms already in existence. Consequently, even the most innovative artists rely entirely on the work of their predecessors (Abbott 2002, 192). Thus, Fairclough (2001, 129) argues that the concept of intertextual context emphasizes the importance of viewing discourses and texts in their historical context, unlike the approach that analyzes a text in isolation.

My primary concern in this dissertation is how the knowledge of national narrative agents is produced by way of intertextual references, that is, what sources they cite and quote to substantiate their arguments. Given the indeterminacy of poststructuralist interpretation (Thomas 2016, 38–39) and the complexity of intertextual chains in text production and consumption (Fairclough 1992, 287–88),[47] I focus on discernible patterns identified through content analysis. Additionally, I examine the impact of transnational epistemic communities, especially the Kremlin-supported Valdai Discussion Club, on analytical processes and outputs of narrative agents. Such discursive interactions are not always explicitly manifested in texts as citations and quotes, because some narrative agents avoid naming their insider sources.

Second, interdiscursivity is related to the concept of intertextuality and likewise highlights a historical perspective of texts, but it is more concerned with the "constitution of a text from diverse discourses and genres" (Fairclough 2013, 95–

[47] For example, the 21st-century media space provides too many channels to prevent extremist narratives from being dispersed (Archetti 2017, 236).

96).[48] Interdiscursivity envisages that communications inherently involve existing social and institutional practices, which are embedded in established discourses, genres, and styles. For instance, in a meeting, both organizers and participants rely on known practices for organizing and interacting; they do not have to invent new methods. These practices may be institutionalized or come from the public sphere either explicitly or implicitly (Fairclough 2013, 421). Thus, interdiscursivity explores the social and cultural spaces where discourses are intertwined. As encouraged by DHA (Baker et al. 2008, 296), I consult other information outside the corpus to examine interdiscursivity. Many narrative agents belong to academic and expert communities – loosely connected networks of scholars and experts including various academic associations of their interest[49] – in a country they are based in or associated with. Some of them interact with foreign counterparts or position themselves as members of an international expert community (Koval et al. 2022, 3) and transnational epistemic communities, such as the Valdai Discussion Club (see section 2.5). Some scholars' engagement with this platform and their communication with diverse audiences, such as business, industrial, and journalist associations, are scrutinized for insights into the promotion of Russia's strategic narratives.

4.5.3. Discursive Strategies

Discourse analysis delves into the nuanced discursive construction of academic narratives on the Ukraine events. In this strategic narrative research, I focus on strategic actions of narrative agents, by examining "discursive strategies" – a more or less deliberate set of practices, often language-based, aimed at achieving social, political, psychological, or linguistic goals (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 44). These discursive strategies operate at various levels of linguistic organization and complexity, representing systematic ways of using language to fulfill specific aims (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 44). Certain tactics in strategic narrative overlap with discursive strategies in the Discourse Historical Approach, such as predication and argumentation (Reisigl 2018, 52), while strategic narrative places greater emphasis on targeting specific audiences and shaping their attitudes and behavior.

Reisigl and Wodak (2001, 45), for example, outline five main discursive strategies used to construct social actors in either positive or negative terms. First, **reference or nomination strategies** categorize individuals or groups as insiders or outsiders, often using metaphors and figures of speech to reinforce these identities. Second, **predication strategies** assign attributes to these actors, frequently through stereotypes or evaluative labels that shape them in either positive or negative lights. Third, **argumentation strategies** use established themes or logical

[48] Here, Fairclough uses the term "discourse" as a count noun to mean the "way of signifying experience from a particular perspective" (Fairclough 2013, 96).

[49] In this dissertation I differentiate between academic and expert communities and epistemic communities. I treat the former as larger professional communities while the latter are more narrowed, with shared interpretations and policy enterprises (see section 2.5).

structures to justify the inclusion or exclusion and discrimination or favoritism of particular groups. Fourth, **perspectivation and framing** allow speakers to position their viewpoints within the discourse, shaping the way events and issues are narrated. Finally, **intensification and mitigation strategies** modify the impact of statements, either strengthening or softening their force, to influence the emotional or persuasive tone of the presentation. Together, these strategies shape social identities and judgments in discourse. For example, some Russianists framed Russians and Ukrainians as "fraternal nations" (nomination), emphasizing their "common history" and shared traits of the "Russian world." At the same time, they negatively depicted Ukrainians asserting their political agency, labeling them as "fascists" or "ultranationalists" (predication). They further accused the Ukrainian government of committing crimes against the "Russian-speaking population" in eastern Ukraine (argumentation, perspectivation), referring to government actions as "bloodshed," "genocide," and "atrocities" (intensification).[50]

Normalization, which can be understood as a form of mitigation strategy, involves a set of discursive practices that "gradually introduce and/or perpetuate in public discourse some new, and in most cases often uncivil or untrue – patterns of representing social actors, processes and issues" (Krzyżanowski 2020, 432). Some discourses navigate the fine line between the acceptable and unacceptable (for borderline discourses on xenophobia and racism, see Krzyżanowski and Ledin 2017). For instance, Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea was superficially criticized by national narrative agents in terms of international law, which guarantees the territorial integrity of sovereign states. However, Russia's claim to Crimea was simultaneously rationalized and normalized by invoking Russia's historical rights and the "self-determination" of the Crimean people (see also section 4.4.3).

According to Krzyżanowski (2010b, 77–78; 2010a, 128–29), interdiscursivity can be observed when arguments or elements typical of one form of discourse are recontextualized into another to achieve specific social goals. **Recontextualization** strategies removes specific meanings or arguments from their original contexts and places them into new ones, allowing them to persist beyond their initial settings. This process creates connections between different discourses and their components, such as genres or topics. For instance, a racist argument from immigration discourse might be recontextualized into unemployment policy debates to support stricter labor market regulations.

CHAPTER 6 delves into specific cases of discursive strategies commonly found among scholars studying Russia and beyond:

- Dichotomization between the West and Russia and the marginalization of Ukraine (perspectivization);
- Recontextualization of Western academic works (recontextualization);
- Privileging of Russian sources (argumentation);

[50] See Appendix 1 Survey of the Secondary Sources.

- Obfuscation of Russian's military intervention (mitigation);
- Psychologization of Russia's motives (argumentation);
- Resistance to Western mainstream discourse (perspectivization).

These perspectives facilitate a structured analysis of how discursive strategies are employed by narrative agents, demonstrating the nuanced construction and reproduction of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events.

CHAPTER 5 CONTENT ANALYSIS

This chapter quantitatively examines narratives among scholars and intellectuals regarding the Ukraine events. It analyzes nomination and lexical choices, with a particular focus on the use of Russia's distinctive vocabulary. Further, it presents the results of multiple regression analyses and boxplots, highlighting correlations between Russian narratives on Ukraine and various attributes, as well as system, identity and national narratives.[51]

5.1. Author Composition

The corpus comprising 460 pieces encompasses contributions from diverse backgrounds, including 267 pieces written by Russianists, 98 pieces by experts specializing in other post-communist states, and 27 contributions from members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Table 6 represents an overview of the most frequent contributors in the corpus.

Table 6 Top Authors

Author	Frequency	Score	Russianist	Other P.C. Countries	Valdai Member
Hattori, Michitaka	22	1.41	1	1	0
Sato, Masaru	20	2.25	1	0	0
Koizumi, Yu	15	0.93	1	0	0
Shimotomai, Nobuo	15	5.27	1	0	1
Fujimori, Shinkichi	9	1.89	0	1	0
Abiru, Taisuke	8	3.00	1	0	1
Nagoshi, Kenro	8	1.25	1	0	0
Matsuzato, Kimitaka	7	2.29	1	1	0
Watanabe, Hirotaka	7	1.86	0	0	0
Ishigooka, Ken	7	2.83	1	0	0

Note: Scores represent the average numbers of issue narratives per piece. The mean for the entire sample is 2.08. For categorical variables, 1 represents "true," and 0 represents "false."

The top author is Michitaka Hattori, who served as the deputy director of the Institute for Russian and NIS (Newly Independent States) Economic Studies within the Japan Association for Trade with Russia and NIS. Renowned for his expertise in economics and as an expert on Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, Hattori made substantial contributions through numerous analytical pieces featured in the Institute's monthly bulletin. Masaru Sato, a former senior Russia analyst at the Foreign Ministry, emerged as a prolific commentator on Russian topics after his involvement and arrest in the "Suzuki affair" corruption case (see section 3.2).

[51] This chapter is written based on Hosaka (2024).

Yu Koizumi, an expert on the Russian military, and Nobuo Shimotomai, a scholar of Russian politics and history and a longstanding participant in the Valdai Discussion Club, also occupy prominent positions within the corpus.

Table 7 represents the authors garnering the highest scores in issue narratives.

Table 7 Top Scores

Author	Score	Frequency	Russianist	Other P.C. Countries	Valdai Member
Kaneko, Atsuo	12.00	1	0	0	0
Haba, Kumiko	9.50	2	0	1	0
Takano, Hajime	9.50	2	0	0	0
Horie, Norio	9.00	4	1	0	0
Nakanishi, Osamu	9.00	1	1	0	0
Sawa, Kishirou	9.00	1	0	0	0
Omae, Kenichi	8.50	2	0	0	0
Fujii, Genki	8.00	1	0	0	0
Sahara, Tetsuya	8.00	1	0	1	0
Tomiyama, Eiko	8.00	1	1	0	0

Note: Scores represent the average numbers of issue narratives per piece. The mean for the entire sample is 2.08. For categorical variables, 1 represents "true," and 0 represents "false."

As the low frequency of these authors indicates, most of them are not area specialists and do not contribute to the topic regularly. However, their singular contributions marked the highest degree of Russian narratives. For example, Atsuo Kaneko, the top scorer, a journalist renowned for his critique of mainstream media coverage and a former professor and president at Osaka International University, espouses the "clash of civilizations" narrative, echoing the East-West divide in Ukraine. He also presents a realist narrative similar to those articulated by Mearsheimer and Kissinger, attributing responsibility for the Ukraine events to NATO expansion and legitimizing Russia's illegal actions as responses to Western interference in Ukraine – considered part of Russia's traditional sphere of interest (Kaneko 2014).

5.2. Naming of the Phenomenon

During the period under investigation, spanning from 2014 to 2019, Japanese narrative agents predominantly characterized the unfolding events in Ukraine as the "Ukraine crisis," eschewing terms such as "Russia's invasion" or the "Russo-Ukrainian war" (Table 8 illustrates the number of articles, out of a total of 460, that include these terms). The most frequently used terms were the "Ukraine situation [problem]" (217 counts; 47.2%) and the "Ukraine crisis" (207 counts; 45.0%). Conversely, the events around Euromaidan were often denoted as "poli-

tical change" (121 counts; 26.3%). The dictionary definition of the original Japanese term *seihen* includes "sudden changes in political power," having the meaning of both legitimate, such as cabinet reshuffles, and illegal change, like a coup d'état ("Seihen," n.d.).

Russia's action in Crimea was described as "annexation" (208 counts; 45.2%) or as "incorporation" (183 counts; 39.8%), with some narrative agents using both terms interchangeably.

However, divergent terminologies characterize the war in eastern Ukraine, with descriptors ranging from the "Ukrainian conflict" (35 counts; 7.6%) and the "(Armed) Conflict in eastern Ukraine [Donbas]" (42 counts; 9.1%) to the "Russian intervention in Ukraine" (39 counts; 8.5%) and "Russian aggression [invasion]" (29 counts; 6.3 %). Remarkably, few observers characterized what was going on in eastern Ukraine as a "Russia-Ukraine war" (3 counts; 0.7%).

Table 8 Naming of the Phenomenon

	Pieces	Percentage
Ukraine Crisis ウクライナ危機	207	45.0%
Ukraine Situation / Problem ウクライナ情勢［問題］	217	47.2%
Ukrainian Upheaval （東）ウクライナ［ドンバス］動乱［騒擾、争乱］	36	7.8%
Political Change （ウクライナ）政変	121	26.3%
Ukrainian Conflict ウクライナ紛争	35	7.6%
Conflict in Eastern Ukraine [Donbas] ウクライナ東部［ドンバス］（軍事）紛争	42	9.1%
Annexation of Crimea クリミア併合	208	45.2%
Incorporation of Crimea クリミア編入	183	39.8%
Russo-Ukrainian War ロシア・ウクライナ戦争	3	0.7%
Russian Intervention to Ukraine ロシアのウクライナ［東部、クリミア］（軍事）介入	39	8.5%
Russian Aggression / Invasion ロシアのウクライナ侵攻［侵略］	29	6.3%
Other その他	83	18.0%

Note: Percentages are calculated based on the total number of pieces (n = 460).

5.3. Distinctive Vocabulary

As in European media discourse on the Ukraine events (Pynnöniemi 2016b), Japanese narrative agents exhibit reluctance toward adopting part of Russia's lexicon to describe the events in Ukraine (Table 9 illustrates the number of articles, out of a total of 460, that include distinct Russian terms). Terms originating from Soviet propaganda dictionaries, such as "junta" (0 counts), "partisans" (1 count; 0.2%), and "punitive operation" (6 counts; 1.3%), find scant usage. Possibly, these terms are more directed toward Russia's domestic audience, evoking memories of military coups and WWII.

On the other hand, terms such as "civil war" (80 counts; 17.4%) and "coup" (52 counts; 11.3%) feature more prominently, reflecting Russia's interpretations of the Ukraine events. Also, multiple references to entities like "Novorossiya" or the "Donetsk [Lugansk] People's Republics" (71 counts; 15.4%) and the "Russian [Russian-speaking] population" (107 counts; 23.3%) indicate a lack of critical contextualization.

Furthermore, the term "local self-defense force," initially employed by Putin to deny the involvement of Russian armed forces in the annexation of Crimea, was subject to greater scrutiny, with more instances of debunking (27 counts) than affirmation (12 counts; 2.6%). This is perhaps because already in April 2014 the Russian president awarded the soldiers who participated in the special operations a medal, de facto admitting that his earlier statement denying the involvement of the Russian troopers was false. By contrast, the term "militia" [*opolchentsy*] in eastern Ukraine was met with less skepticism (21 counts, 4.6%), implying a degree of acceptance among narrative agents.

Table 9 Distinctive Vocabulary

	Pieces	Percentage
Civil War	80	17.4%
内戦	(4)	
Coup	52	11.3%
クーデター［国家、政府転覆］	(0)	
Junta	0	0.0%
フンタ［軍事政権］	(1)	
Slaughter/ Genocide	11	2.4%
虐殺［殺戮、ジェノサイド］	(0)	
Partisans	1	0.2%
パルチザン	(0)	
Punitive Operation / Punisher	6	1.3%
懲罰作戦（隊）	(0)	
Supporters of Federalization	11	2.4%
連邦制支持者	(0)	

	Pieces	Percentage
Novorossiya / Donestk and Lugansk People' s Republic	71	15.4%
ノヴォロシア（人）［ドネツク、ルガンスク人民共和国］	(4)	
Local Self-Defense Force	12	2.6%
［主にクリミア］自警団	(27)	
Militia (*Opolchentsy*)	21	4.6%
［主に東部ウクライナ］義勇軍［民兵］	(8)	
Russians / Russian-Speaking Population	107	23.3%
ロシア（語）系住民	(11)	

Note: Percentages are calculated based on the total number of pieces (n = 460). Figures in parentheses indicate the number of pieces that critically reference the term.

5.4. Regression Analysis and Boxplots

Multiple linear regressions were calculated on different explanatory variables to estimate the frequency for reproduction of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events. The overall score of issue narratives per piece is used as the dependent variable in a measure of the reproduction of Russian narratives. The total number of issue narratives is 20, hence the variable may range from -20 to +20 (the coded results: mean 2.08, max 15.0, min -9.0). System, identity, and national narratives were employed as nominal variables for boxplots (Table 10).[52]

[52] For the entire coded results, see Appendix 2 Counts of Narratives, Appendix 3 Coded Results and Appendix 4 Correlation Matrix.

Table 10 List of Explanatory Variables

Variables	Type	Value Range	Counts
Gender	Nominal		
Male		Category (ref.)	433
Female		Category	27
Author			
Russianist	Binary	1 for ”true“, 0 for “false”	267
Other PC Country Expert	Binary		98
Valdai Member	Binary		27
Discipline			
Politics / Diplomacy	Binary	1 for “true”, 0 for ”false“	236
Economy / Business	Binary		121
History	Binary		67
Law	Binary		6
Culture / Literature	Binary		14
Security / Military	Binary		64
Journalism	Binary		40
Publication Political Stance	Nominal		
Communist		Category	5
Progressive		Category	64
Conservative		Category	23
Neo-Right		Category	20
None		Category (ref.)	348
Publication Type	Nominal		
Peer-Reviewed		Category	14
Bulletin/ Think Tank		Category	147
Commercial / Popular		Category	174
Other		Category (ref.)	136
Page Count	Continuous	min. 1, max. 245	N/A
Elapsed Months	Continuous	min. 0, max. 77	N/A

Variables	Type	Value Range	Counts
System Narrative			
Geopolitics	Nominal	Present	74
		Absent	381
		Critical	5
Multipolar World	Nominal	Present	20
		Absent	440
		Critical	0
Biased Media / Info War	Nominal	Present	82
		Absent	373
		Critical	5
Hypocrisy / Double Standards	Nominal	Present	15
		Absent	441
		Critical	4
Identify Narrative			
Western Russophobia	Nominal	Present	43
		Absent	415
		Critical	2
Russia Defensive / Victim	Nominal	Present	71
		Absent	382
		Critical	7
East-West Divide / Clash of ...	Nominal	Present	95
		Absent	340
		Critical	25
One People	Nominal	Present	63
		Absent	390
		Critical	7
National Narrative			
Improve Russia Relations	Nominal	Present	66
		Absent	379
		Critical	15
Crimea-Northern Territories Analogy	Nominal	Present	16
		Absent	442
		Critical	2
China Threats	Nominal	Present	48
		Absent	408
		Critical	4
China-Russia Alliance	Nominal	Present	47
		Absent	386
		Critical	27

5.4.1. Area Studies (H1), Epistemic Community Linkage (H2), and Publication (H3)

First, an author's affiliation with Russian studies ("Russianist"), engagement in other post-communist countries ("Other PC country expert"), epistemic community linkage, i.e., active membership of the Valdai Discussion Club ("Valdai Member"), and publication political stance and types are regressed on the total score of issue narratives (Table 11). The results (Model 1) show that affiliation with Russian studies is not a significant predictor of the total score of issue narratives, while Valdai membership (=2.57, p<.001) is the strongest indicator, increasing the likelihood of reproduction of Russia's issue narratives. The coefficient of engagement in other post-communist countries showed a negative value (= -0.66), which, however, was not statistically significant. Among the disciplines (Model 2), only "Law" exhibited statistical significance, revealing that students of international law are less likely to reproduce Russian issue narratives (=-1.71, p<.05).

In publication political stance and types (Model 3), magazines of the progressive left displayed a higher receptivity to Russian narratives (=2.23, p<.001), and so did those of the neo-right (=2.15, p<.01). On the other hand, communist and conservative publications did not yield significant changes in the issue narrative score. Neither did peer-reviewed articles, think-tank reports, or popular magazines. Model 4 is the result of author characteristics conditioned on discipline and publication. The linkage with the Valdai Discussion Club (= 2.86, p<.001) remains a significant indicator of the issue narrative score. Additionally, the distribution of total issue narrative scores across author attributes was visualized by generating boxplots (Figure 3).

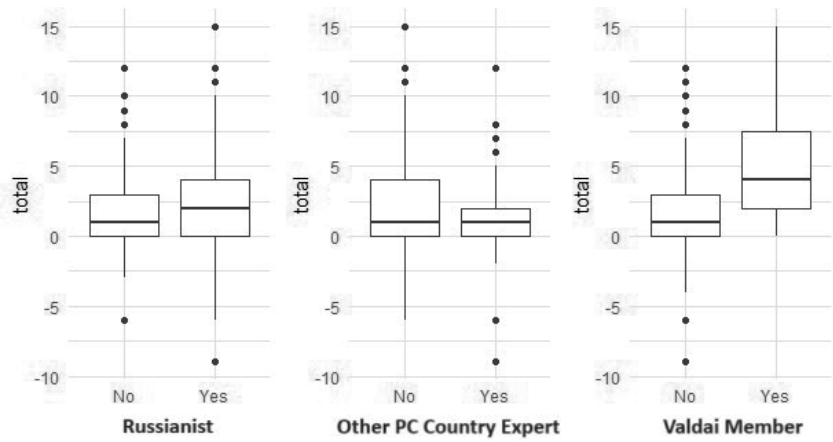

Figure 3 Boxplots: Distribution of Total Scores for "Russianist," "Other PC Country Expert" and "Valdai Member"

Table 11 Regression: Area Studies, Epistemic Community Linkage and Publication

DV: Total Issue Narratives	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
(Intercept)	1.90	***	2.42	***	1.50	***	1.64	**
	(0.28)		(0.50)		(0.39)		(0.52)	
Gender (ref.: Male)								
Female	0.30		–0.10		–0.15		0.26	
	(0.67)		(0.68)		(0.74)		(0.73)	
Author								
Russianist	0.01						0.15	
	(0.37)						(0.34)	
Other PC Country Expert	–0.66						–0.25	
	(0.40)						(0.42)	
Valdai Member	2.57	***					2.86	***
	(0.64)						(0.60)	
Discipline								
Politics/Diplomacy			–0.68				–0.61	
			(0.45)				(0.38)	
Economy/Business			–0.28				–0.04	
			(0.48)				(0.41)	
History			0.73				0.23	
			(0.77)				(0.61)	
Law			–1.71	*			–1.02	
			(0.71)				(0.63)	
Culture/Literature			–0.53				–1.18	
			(1.05)				(0.97)	
Security/Military			–0.20				–0.32	
			(0.59)				(0.44)	
Journalism			–0.89				–0.69	
			(0.78)				(0.66)	
Publication Political Stance (ref.: “None”)								
Communist					1.95		2.09	
					(1.55)		(1.38)	
Progressive					2.23	***	2.23	***
					(0.58)		(0.58)	
Conservative					0.58		0.91	
					(0.53)		(0.52)	
Neo-Right					2.15	***	2.40	***
					(0.63)		(0.69)	
Publication Type (ref.: “Other”)								
Peer-Reviewed					–0.34		0.06	
					(0.60)		(0.64)	
Bulletin/Think Tank					–0.30		–0.16	
					(0.33)		(0.36)	
Commercial/Popular					–0.03		–0.05	
					(0.39)		(0.36)	
Page Count	0.03	*	0.04	**	0.04	**	0.03	**
	(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.02)		(0.01)	
Elapsed Months	–0.01		–0.02	*	–0.01		–0.01	
	(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)	

DV: Total Issue Narratives	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
R^2	0.11	0.08	0.15	0.21
Adj. *R*^2	0.10	0.06	0.13	0.17
Num. obs.	460	460	460	460

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

5.4.2. System Narratives (H4)

The distribution of total scores of issue narratives in relation to each system narrative is illustrated in Figure 4. The horizontal line near the center of the box represents the median, while the upper and lower ends of the box are the 3rd and 1st quartiles, respectively. Thus, the box indicates the range within which the middle 50% of all observations lie.

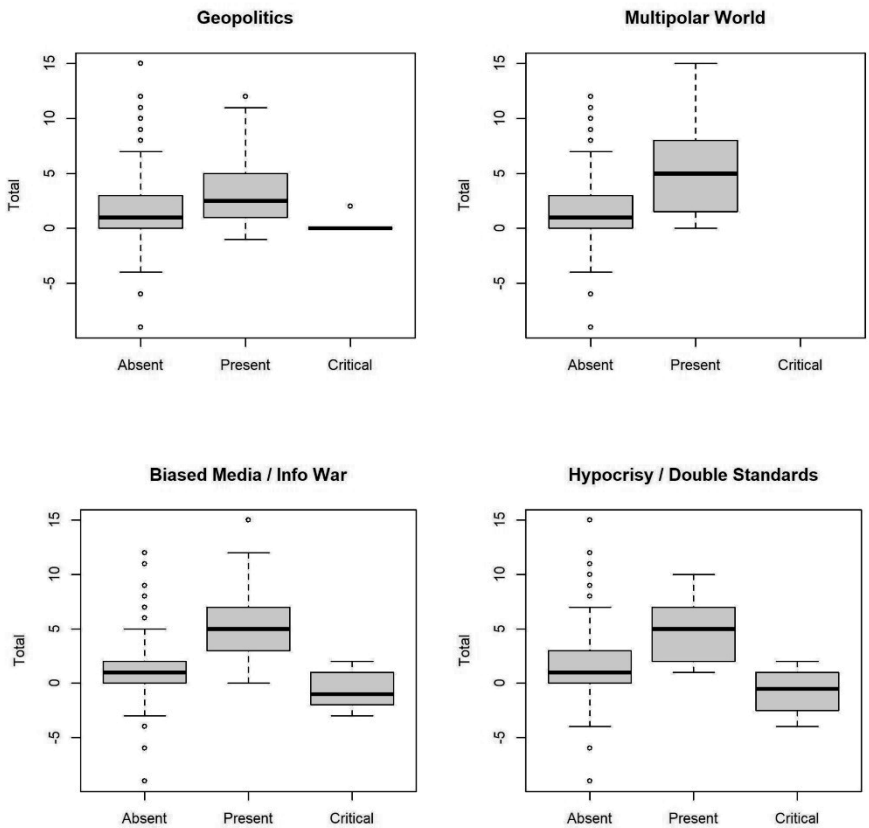

Figure 4 Boxplots: Distribution of Issue Narrative Total Scores for System Narratives

In all boxplots, the presence of system narratives appears to contribute to an increase in total scores. Upon conducting pairwise t-tests for each category (Absent, Present, Critical) using the Bonferroni method, statistically significant differences were observed between the "Absent" and "Present" categories in the narratives of "Geopolitics" (p=.0026), "Multipolar World" (p=5e-07), "Biased Media / Info War" (p<2e-16) and "Hypocrisy / Double Standards" (p=.00081). This implies that the presence of these narratives significantly affects the total score compared to their absence. Also, there were statistically significant differences between the categories of "Present" and "Critical" in "Biased Media / Info War" (p=6.2e-06) and "Hypocrisy / Double Standards" (p=.00243). The minimal overlap of boxes in "Biased Media / Info War" suggests a large effect size. The differences between the median values suggest that texts that incorporate this system narrative have a median score of 5 ("Present," n=82), which is four points higher than those that do not ("Absent," n=373; median 1) and six points higher than those critical of this narrative ("Critical," n=5; median -1).

5.4.3. Identity Narratives (H5)

The distribution of total scores of issue narratives for each identity narrative is depicted in Figure 5. Statistically significant differences were observed in the "Absent" and "Present" categories of all identity narratives, including "Western Russophobia" (p=5.6e-11), "Russia Defensive / Victim" (p=1.1e-10), "East-West Divide / Clash of Civilizations" (p=4.1e-10), "One People" (p=5.4e-11). [53] The most substantial effect size was associated with the "Russia Defensive / Victim" narrative. The difference between the median values of the "Present" category (n=71; median 4) and the "Critical" category (n=7; median -3) amounts to seven points, with a median of 1 in the "Absent" category (n=382).

[53] There were statistically significant differences between "Absent" and "Critical" (p=5.9e-05) and between "Present" and "Critical" (p=1.4e-09) in "Russia Defensive / Victim" and "Present" and "Critical" in "East-West Divide / Clash of Civilizations" (p=1.4e-07).

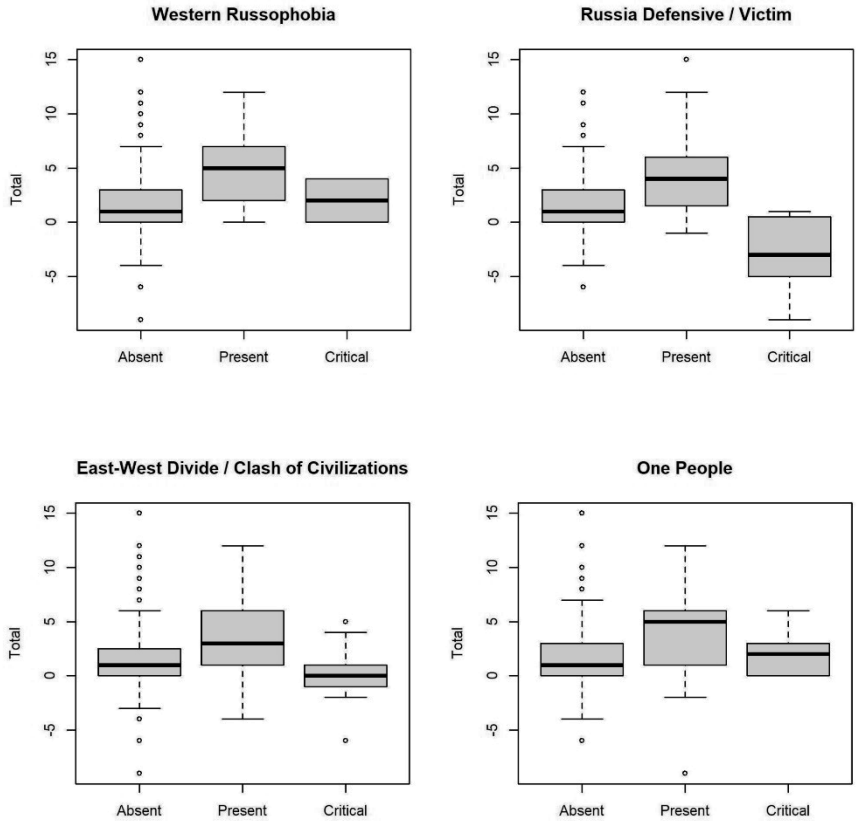

Figure 5 Boxplots: Distribution of Issue Narrative Total Scores for Identity Narratives

5.4.4. National Narratives (H6)

The distribution of total scores of issue narratives for each national narrative is depicted in Figure 6. While most of the boxes seem to overlap, pairwise t-tests reveal statistically significant differences between several categories. These include the "Improve Russia Relations" narrative, where significant differences were observed between "Absent" and "Present" (p=.0024), and between "Present" and "Critical" (p=.0040). Similar significant differences were found in the "Crimea-Northern Territories Analogy" narrative (between "Absent" and "Present," p=.0035), and the "China-Russia Alliance" narrative (between "Absent" and "Present," p=.0012; and between "Present" and "Critical," p=.0017). The "China Threats" narrative does not show a statistically significant association with the total score of Russia's issue narratives on the Ukraine events.

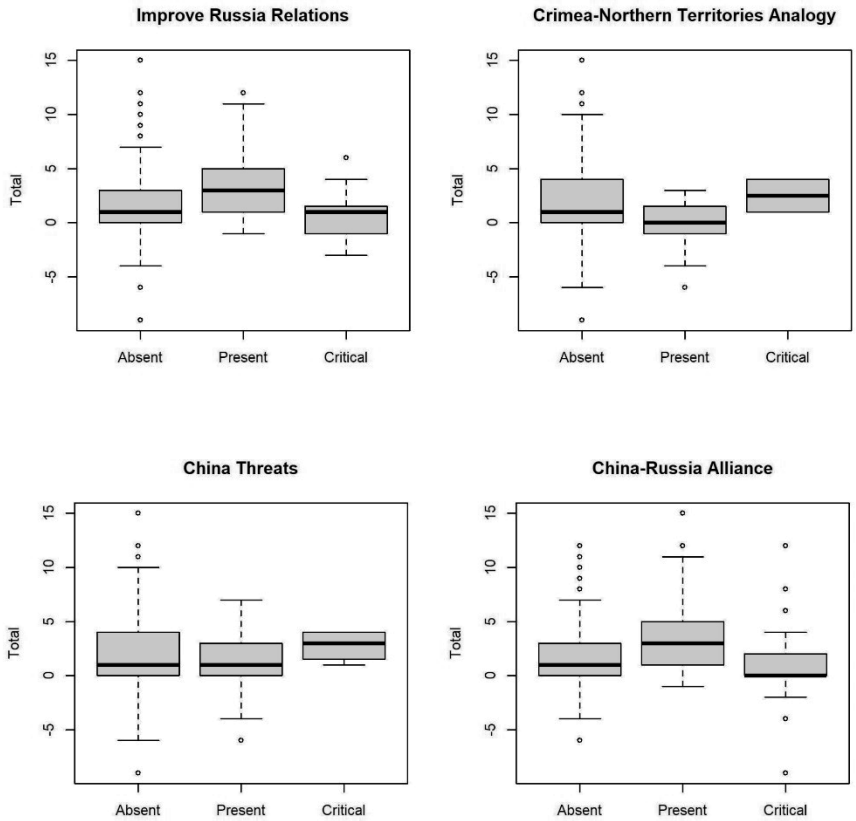

Figure 6 Boxplots: Distribution of Issue Narrative Total Scores for National Narratives

Texts expressing aspirations for improved relations with Russia (n=66) showed a positive correlation with the total score of Russia's issue narratives on the Ukraine events, with a median of 3, which was two points higher than the "Absent" (n=379; median 1) and "Critical" (n=15; median 1) categories. In contrast, texts drawing parallels between the annexation of Crimea and Russia's occupation of Japan's Northern Territories (n=16) were less susceptible to Russian narratives on the Ukraine events, with a median of 0, one point lower than the "Absent" category (n=442; median 1). Although these results came as no surprise, a puzzle emerged regarding concerns about the "China-Russia Alliance" (n=48), which exhibited a positive association with Russia's issue narratives on the Ukraine events. The median of 3 was two points higher than the "Absent" category (median 1) and three points higher than the "Critical" category (median 0).

5.5. Conclusion

National narrative agents' association with Russian studies has proved to be an inadequate gauge for assessing the extent to which Russian narratives are reproduced. Unlike in the argument made by Kuzio (2020), here the dissemination of Russian narratives cannot be solely attributed to scholars specializing in Russian studies. The boxplot results indicate a wide distribution of Russianists in their total scores: there were just as many Russianists who disapproved of Russia's narratives on Ukraine as Russianists who embraced them (see Figure 3). Remarkably, the most powerful indicator for the reproduction of Russian narratives appears to be active participation in the Valdai Discussion Club.

These findings suggest that an individual's linkage with the Kremlin-backed epistemic community provides a more robust explanation than mere affiliation with a particular subgroup of area studies. However, this observation allows for two interpretations of the narratives of Valdai participants: firstly, the Kremlin may prefer inviting scholars who are not only influential in their respective countries but whose viewpoints already align closely with Russia's narratives on the Ukraine events; secondly, in contrast, participants may, after exposure to Russian narratives on Ukraine presented by Putin and other Russian actors at Valdai conferences, subsequently disseminate these narratives to their national audiences. In other words, are we observing correlations or causation?

As noted in section 2.2, attempts to understand the power of narratives as a straightforward causal mechanism often oversimplifies the complex dynamics of influence. This dissertation acknowledges a degree of agency among narrative agents; scholars and intellectuals do not automatically propagate narratives prepared by foreign states (see section 2.3). Then, what reinforces the reproduction of Russian narratives by Valdai members?

As shown in sections 5.4.2, 5.4.3, and 5.4.4, this question can be better illuminated by considering the extent to which narrative agents embrace system, identity and national narratives. Among system narratives, a significant factor contributing to the reception and reproduction of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events is the belief that Western and Japanese mainstream coverage is inherently biased, rather than the view framing the events within geopolitical competition between Russia and the West. This "Biased Media / Info War" narrative is observed not only among Valdai members but also across a wide range of narrative agents in the corpus (82 counts). Curiously, this anti-mainstream narrative, as part of a broader counter-(Western)-hegemonic discourse, unites neo-right pundits with some progressive-left politicians and intellectuals in their efforts to discursively normalize Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea (see section 7.3).

A less pronounced yet significant positive correlation is observed with "Multipolar World" narratives (20 counts). Notably, the issue narrative most correlated with this system narrative is the belief that "Euromaidan was orchestrated by the West" ($r = 0.26$). In this combination, the Ukraine events were construed as a

consequence of declining US imperialism, which they perceive seeks to impose its unipolar hegemony on others (e.g., Shiobara 2014, 204).

The "Russia Defensive / Victim" narrative portrays Russian foreign policies as defensive, responsive, or spontaneous (71 counts in the corpus). With this narrative framework, Russia is often depicted as the side being "provoked" by the West, closely associated with the narrative of blaming the West or NATO for Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea ($r = 0.30$). Irrespective of their sympathy toward Russia, narrative agents subscribing to this narrative contend that, notwithstanding the surge of anti-government protests in Kyiv's Independence Square in late 2013, Russia initially maintained relative restraint and harbored no intentions of annexing Crimea. They argue that the annexation was precipitated solely by the sudden fall of the Yanukovych regime in February 2014 (e.g., Abiru 2014c; Mizoguchi 2015).

The "One People" or "fraternal nations" narrative (63 counts), a Russia-centered ontological construct emphasizing the purported historical bonds between Russians and Ukrainians and depicting the two peoples as "fraternal," is instrumental in bolstering Russian narratives on the Ukraine events. The "One People" narrative, which obfuscates the boundaries between Russians and Ukrainians, is reproduced not only by Valdai participants but also by many Western historians of Russia (Kuzio 2018a, 5–6). For example, Nobuaki Shiokawa, a historian of the USSR and Russia, emphasizes a hardly distinguishable and mixed nature of Ukrainians and Russians, denying the "consistently separate existence" of the two peoples. According to the Japanese historian, Ukrainian statehood and language were first articulated in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Shiokawa and Numano 2014, 41). Shiokawa claims that the deteriorating relations between the two countries pushed people in Crimea to assert their will, and despite concerns regarding rigged voting and ballot stuffing, "there is no reason to doubt the overall trend that many have supported [Crimea's] incorporation into Russia" (Shiokawa and Numano 2014, 58).

The "East-West divide" narrative emerges as one of the prevailing explanations for the Ukraine events (95 counts). However, critics of this narrative, primarily Ukrainianists, argue that the east-west dichotomy fails to capture the complicated cultural and linguistic realities of contemporary Ukraine (25 counts). Framing the country as torn between the Russian-speaking, pro-Russian and Russian Orthodox East and the Ukrainian-speaking, Europe-oriented, Catholic West, the "East-West divide" narrative exhibits a strong positive correlation with the Ukraine "Failed State / Chaos" narrative ($r = 0.33$).

Some narrative agents contend that Ukraine's historical formation process renders its existence as a unitary state untenable (Y. Suzuki 2014, 13), and a split is inevitable (Shimotomai 2014f, 54). Consequently, some interpret the conflict as a consequence of what Huntington (1996) termed the "clash of civilizations" (e.g., Shimotomai 2014b, 39; Kaneko 2014). Thus, several scholars close their eyes to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, framing it as a civil war fought between the east and the west of Ukraine (Shimotomai 2014a, 147; Haba 2016, 275).

At the outset, this dissertation narrowly defined the academic nature of a text by arguing that it is judged by whether the text has undergone peer review (see section 2.3). Despite the expectation that peer-reviewed texts contain fewer factual errors and Russia-originated conspiracy theories (Kuzio 2020, 76–80), the total scores of Russian issue narratives on the Ukraine events are statistically indistinguishable among peer-reviewed articles, think-tank reports and popular magazine articles (see Model 3 in Table 11). This suggests that peer-review may not effectively reduce the presence of Russian narratives in these articles. The number of peer-reviewed articles in the corpus is relatively small (n = 14), so this issue should be examined with larger samples. However, one assumption, which will be partially examined in the next chapter, is that if editors, who are usually senior scholars and gatekeepers in the field, embrace some of Russia's issue narratives or system and identity narratives, the moderating function of journals may not work as expected.

Similarly, as indicated by Model 1 in Table 11, elapsed time does not exhibit statistical significance, and the score of Russia's issue narratives remains unaffected by the period of publication, when the length of a text is controlled for. This indicates that, overall, narrative agents did not significantly alter their perspectives on the Ukraine events throughout the observed timeframe. Despite the accumulation of new evidence concerning Russia's covert involvement in the war, scholars and intellectuals persisted in adhering to established narratives, exhibiting minimal inclination to revise their previous assessments. For those narrative agents who denied Russia's leading role in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, this observation holds true even after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion (see section 9.1).

This phenomenon may be partially explained by the awkward application of familiar theories to the war in eastern Ukraine without paying attention to empirics (Brik 2021, 201–2). Examples are abundant. One illustration is the application of structural realism by John Mearsheimer to rationalize Russia's "defensive" response to NATO enlargement (Mearsheimer 2014). Another example is Rogers Brubaker's triadic nexus framework, which risks oversimplifying the complicated reality of post-Soviet Ukraine by reducing it to a simplistic relationship between Ukraine as a nationalizing state, Russians in Ukraine as a national minority, and Russia as an external homeland (Brubaker 1996; for a critique, see Kulyk 2001). Nonetheless, numerous scholars continue to implicitly or explicitly adhere to this framework of understanding, leading to the imagined political agency of "Russians," the "Russian-speaking population," or "Novorussians" in Ukraine (e.g., Matsuzato 2017).[54]

Lastly, while these findings offer valuable insight, they necessitate corroboration through further research. The coding frame, developed by the literature

[54] In section 6.1.1, I will touch upon a peer-reviewed article that, citing Hans Morgenthau's classic *Politics among Nations*, argues that Putin decided to annex Crimea due to "chains of mutual distrust" between the Yanukovych regime and opposition and between Russia and the West.

survey, could be refined using machine learning-based approaches, particularly if digital publication data becomes available in the future.[55]

Subsequent chapters will interpret these results by examining typical texts within broader social and discursive contexts.

[55] For the Japanese publications on the Ukraine events from 2014 to 2019, the paucity of electronic data rendered this endeavor unfeasible.

CHAPTER 6 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The content analysis indicates that affiliation with Russian studies alone does not offer significant insights. In contrast, active involvement in the Valdai Discussion Club emerges as a robust indicator for the reproduction of Russian narratives concerning the events in Ukraine. Additionally, some system and identity narratives – particularly the perception of bias in Western mainstream media and the belief that Russia is scapegoated – substantially explains susceptivity to these narratives.

Building on the approaches outlined in section 4.5, this chapter examines the processes of knowledge production by national narrative agents beyond the analyzed texts, with a focus on intertextuality and interdiscursivity. I analyzed all texts authored by active participants of the Valdai Discussion Club within the corpus (28 pieces) as well as selected earlier works predating the Ukraine events, to identify their discursive strategies – a more or less deliberate set of practices aimed at achieving social, political, psychological or linguistic goals (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 44). Their narratives consistently exhibit a Russo-centric ontology, characterized by five recurring patterns: 1) dichotomization of Russia and the West, often neglecting Ukraine's agency; 2) recontextualization of western academic works; 3) privileging of Russian sources; 4) obfuscation of Russian military interventions; and 5) psychologization of Russia's motives.

Moreover, among system and identity narratives, the "Biased Media / Info War" and "Western Russophobia" narratives show the strongest association with Russian issue narratives on the Ukraine events. I examine the contexts in which these narratives appear in the works of senior scholars. Furthermore, I explore how these narratives manifest within the broader discourse of Japanese Russian and Eastern European studies, focusing on the Japan-hosted Ninth World Congress of the ICCEES. A separate section discusses Japanese economists who espouse these system and identity narratives while advocating Euro-skepticism.

This chapter underscores the prevalence of Russocentric discursive strategies, particularly among Valdai participants, and a widespread aversion to Western mainstream discourse, conceptually aligned with the enduring image of "Western Russophobia."[56]

6.1. Russocentric Discursive Strategies

The discourse articulated by active participants of the Valdai Discussion Club is marked by conspicuous Russo-centrism. Nobuo Shimotomai, a senior scholar specializing in Russian politics and history, has been a leading Japanese member of the Valdai Discussion Club since 2007. Shimotomai held prominent academic and public positions, including chair of the Japanese Research Association of International Relations from 2002 to 2004. He was also a member of the Japan-Russia Emeritus Club from 2004 to 2006 and co-chair of the organizing

[56] Part of this chapter was published in Hosaka (2023a).

committee of the Ninth International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICCEES) World Congress in 2015. Another regular Japanese attendee, Taisuke Abiru, a senior expert of the Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research, has been participating in the Valdai Club since 2010. In November 2013, the Tokyo Foundation and the Russia International Affairs Council (RIAC) agreed to launch a second-track framework for Japan-Russia strategic dialogue. Meetings were held in late March 2014 in Moscow, shortly after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and again in November 2014. These discussions culminated in a joint statement emphasizing the importance of deepening bilateral dialogue across all levels, "in light of the rapidly changing strategic environment in East Asia" (*The Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research* 2014). Abiru played a central role in overseeing this dialogue.

Another participant Toshihiko Shiobara, a professor specializing in Russian economy, denies personal preference for Putin, characterizing himself as critical of Russia while valuing his membership in the Valdai Discussion Club. In 2015, he remarked:

> In 2012, Russian authorities recommended my membership to the government-supported Valdai Club, (…). In May 2012, I was invited to Moscow as one of the ten internationally acknowledged military experts. On October 25, the same year, I had a dinner with President Putin for about two and a half hours. That said, I have no such interest in this club, as some Japanese members of the Valdai Club who are extremely loyal to Putin and rely only on the connections. What is important is the fact that the Russian authorities are keeping an eye on me, a harsh critic of Putin. (…) If one believes this, no one would consider me a supporter of Putin (Shiobara 2015a).

Valdai members played prominent roles in public discussions regarding the Ukraine events. Shimotomai authored at least two books and ten pieces across various periodicals in 2014. Abiru contributed around ten articles and columns, while Shiobara published two books on the US conspiracies in Ukraine. Shimotomai and Abiru delivered speeches to the country's energy and business leaders, as well as the journalism community. Despite a lack of, or limited, peer-reviewed articles on Ukraine, they were frequently invited to conferences and television news programs to provide expert commentary on the Ukraine events. Shimotomai also wielded considerable influence as an agenda-setter in the Japanese Association for Russian and East European Studies and related policy discussions among academics.[57]

[57] In Autumn 2017, at the annual conference of the Japanese Association of Russian and East European Studies, Shimotomai remarked that the next conference should address a topic that was raised at the Valdai Discussion Club he took part in a few days earlier. Shimotomai also co-chaired a symposium co-sponsored by the ICCEES Organizing Committee and the Japan-Russia Association on the Ukraine crisis and Japan-Russia Relations in June 2014. His introductory remarks reflected Russia's perspectives on the events, such as the "violent take-over of power" and Ukraine's "civil war" ("Ukuraina Josei to Nichiro Kankei" 2014, 96–98).

6.1.1. Dichotomization Between the West and Russia – No Subjectivity for Ukraine

Portraying the Ukraine events as geopolitical contestations between the West and Russia often marginalizes Ukraine's agency in the international arena. This narrative, superficially akin to the "realist" perspective of John Mearsheimer (2014), a Valdai expert (see section 1.3), cited by Japanese Russianists – asserting NATO's encroachment provoked Russia's harsh responses, perceiving Ukraine and Georgia as its "sphere of influence" – aligns more closely with a Russo-centric discourse shaped by historical perspectives, rather than structural realism.

Shimotomai's narrative reflects what Zhuk (2014) termed as the Soviet nostalgia of Western former Sovietologists. In his lecture to the country's energy sector elite, the Japanese Russianist argued that in Western discourse, Ukrainian issues were discussed predominantly through the lens of a group of Ukrainians who collaborated with Nazis and resettled in the United States and the United Kingdom after World War II:

> Moreover, after the collapse of the USSR, the American intelligence community and educational institutions started to train "Sinologists" (experts on China). At the same time, they hardly prepared "Russianists" (Sovietologists) familiar with Russian issues. Neither did Japan. As a result, no one has a balanced view of what is happening in Ukraine. There is little information from Ukraine (Shimotomai 2014c, 32–33).

Moreover, Shimotomai asserted that the information the Japanese audience receives about Ukraine is "quite biased." Presenting himself as a former Sovietologist, the Japanese professor reduced the Ukraine events to "two perspectives" – a dichotomy between the East (Russia) and the West (the US). Implicit in his argument is the notion that only Russianists, viewed as legitimate successors to Sovietologists who cover voices from the little-represented "East," can provide a trustworthy picture of Ukraine (Shimotomai 2014c, 32–33). However, Shimotomai's "balanced view" of the events in Ukraine echoed Russian rhetoric, employing typical Russian monikers such as "coup," "civil war," "fraternal states," and "Chocolate king Poroshenko." The Japanese scholar went as far as to assert:

> In fact, during this time, Western Ukrainian nationalists hired snipers to shoot both the people and the government security forces. Yanukovych escaped because of this horror. This is the truth that the media failed to tell (Shimotomai 2014c, 33).

This conspiracy theory that Ukrainian nationalists opened fire on Euromaidan protestors in a false flag operation has been refuted by journalists and the 3-D model "Euromaidan Event Reconstruction"(Kuzio 2020, 79–80).

Elsewhere, Shimotomai expressed his dissatisfaction with the "one-sided" coverage and editorials of the Ukraine events in Japan. He even speculated that some journalists might not have been aware that there were initially Russian

forces stationed in Crimea. The mainstream media blamed Moscow "without checking the doubtful legitimacy of the [Ukrainian] interim government." Shimotomai thus urged for bringing attention to the US media bias amidst the "information war" (Shimotomai 2014b, 42).

In introducing international scholarly discussions on the Ukraine events, the Japanese scholar criticized Timothy Snyder for trying to "defend the Ukraine policy of the West, especially the United States" by separating Ukraine from Russia. He praised Henry Kissinger, John Mearsheimer, Aleksei Arbatov, and Dmitri Trenin for putting forth the "realist" view that reduces the cause of the Ukraine events to NATO enlargement, and supported Stephen F. Cohen, who "warned of the danger of ["Neocons" such as Victoria Nuland] who initiated the Ukrainian conflict."

Another regular Valdai participant, Abiru, stated that experts on Russia are those who see it favorably: "Originally I'm a Russia expert, so I'm a person who treats Russia with understanding*"* (Abiru 2014c, 15). This kind of thinking runs the risk of turning the object of their inquiry into an object of affection. Thus, the Japanese expert presented Russia's annexation of Crimea as the geopolitical struggle between Washington and Moscow over Ukraine in his piece titled "Foreshadowing of the US-Russia 'Ukraine Crisis'" published in April 2014. As is the case with Shimotomai, his attempt to compare and contrast the US and Russian perspectives resulted in an odd replication of the Kremlin's most egregious propaganda claims about Ukraine. Abiru argued, for instance, that "the pro-Russian Yanukovych administration was overthrown by the opposition coalition with the active support of the West"; that "US hardliners' desire to exact revenge on Russia to offset US diplomatic defeat in the Syrian chemical weapon deal" was one of the drivers of these events; and that the intercepted phone call with US State Department official Victoria Nuland was evidence of Washington's active involvement in the crisis (Abiru 2014a, 14–15). In his lecture organized by the Japan Press Research Institute for media representatives in May 2014, Abiru argued that "the interim government of Ukraine was created through an illegitimate procedure, with extreme, radical right-wing and neo-Nazis filling the principal offices of the government" (Abiru 2014c, 13), perfectly aligned with the Russian state propaganda line.

Narratives from Valdai members also permeated the work of other academics. In a magazine article, Akihiro Iwashita, a professor at the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University, references a discussion by a Russian expert during a Japan-Russia track-two dialogue held shortly after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. The professor argued that Russian's response to the events in Ukraine was predominantly passive:

> The key issue is whether this situation will lead to the complete collapse of the [border] regime or whether it will be regarded as merely an "exception" specific to Crimea. This divergence forms the central point of debate. Many in Russia's diplomatic circles and among its researchers, such as former Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who participated in a strategic dialogue hosted by the

> Tokyo Foundation in March 2014, maintained that they were merely reacting to the events imposed upon them (asserting they are not revisionists) and held out hope for the latter interpretation. Putin, who (at least ostensibly) supported Ukraine's general elections and urged restraint among opposition forces in eastern Ukraine, appeared to share this view. In contrast, many U.S. experts, citing legal principles, interpreted the situation in the former context and adopted a "hardline" stance (Iwashita 2014, 147).

In a peer-reviewed article, drawing on Putin's speech on Crimea and Hans Morgenthau's classic *Politics among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace-works* (Morgenthau 1985), Shuhei Mizoguchi (2015), a scholar of Russian politics, argues that chains of mutual distrust between the Yanukovych regime and the opposition and between Moscow and Washington prompted Russia to annex the Crimean peninsula. Mizoguchi, referring to the public statements of Putin and other Russian officials before February 2014, points out that despite the anti-government protests hardening in Kyiv's Independence Square at the end of 2013, "Russia initially remained relatively calm." A trigger was the collapse of Yanukovych's regime. According to Mizoguchi, Putin turned around and "decided to annex Crimea given the rising nationalism among the Russian people after seeing the political upheaval in Kyiv" (Mizoguchi 2015, 79–81). Although the scholar recognizes conflicting views among researchers as to whether Russia's action is an attempt to challenge the status quo of international order, or a defensive reaction to the actions of the West, he contends that such a discussion is "endless" and "not very important for understanding the essence of the crisis," which he reduces to a spiral of mutual distrust (Mizoguchi 2015, 86–87).

Narrative agents taking the public statements and assessments of the Russian leader and his proxies at face value assert that Russia maintained relative restraint at the early stage of the Ukraine events with no intentions of annexing Crimea. For them, it was "a spontaneous reaction to Yanukovych's ouster" (Mearsheimer 2014). However, leaked emails suggest that Putin's advisers conducted massive covert political warfare aimed at derailing Ukraine's Euro-integration aspirations as early as 2013, a year before the escalation of the Ukraine events (Hosaka 2018).

To sum up, the scholarly narratives drawing on historical perspectives and so-called realist frameworks ultimately replicate Russia's narratives, downplaying Ukraine's sovereignty. These narratives not only echo the Kremlin's rhetoric but also contribute to a skewed understanding of the Ukraine events, where Ukraine is portrayed more as a battleground for great power competition than as an independent actor with its own agency and aspirations.

6.1.2. Recontextualization of Western Academic Works

Some scholars recontextualized different academic texts into their discussions on the Ukraine events. Shimotomai explained the origin of the word "Ukraine" in Russian propagandistic terms: although "Ukraine" as a common noun has the meaning of "frontier" in Slavic languages, "the word Ukraine was first used as a proper noun in Russia after the Russo-Japanese War, so it has a history of about

a hundred years" (Shimotomai 2014a, 149, 155). The Japanese scholar argued that there is no entry of "Ukraine" as a proper noun in the Russian *Granat* Encyclopedia published in 1899 (Shimotomai 2014b, 40). Further, citing Russian historian Alexey Miller, the Japanese Russianist argued that Poles had preferred the term "Ukraine" to split the rival Russian empire and noted that "Ukrainians were referred to as *khohlov [sic]*" (Shimotomai 2014b, 40).[58]

According to Shimotomai, the country currently known as Ukraine is an "imagined community" founded by Soviet leaders Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin after the revolution (Shimotomai 2014b, 40; 2014f, 52), by fusing the "half-Polish" world and the "Russian" world called *Novorossiya* (Shimotomai 2014g, 14). Shimotomai's reference to an "imagined community" seems little to do with Benedict Anderson's intellectual achievement (Anderson 1991), but rather is aligned perfectly with a Russian historical propaganda theme: "Bolsheviks and Stalin created Ukraine" (Yermolenko 2019, 80–81); and Putin's assertion on Ukraine as "an artificially created state" (Putin 2022c).

Shimotomai (2014d, 78–79) and many Japanese Russianists took "*Novorossiya"* seriously as a given historical and political space, equating it with the entire East or "southeast" of Ukraine. However, neither historically nor administratively was Sloboda Ukraine, the current Kharkiv region, recognized as part of *Novorossiya* (Basora and Fisher 2014) until Vladimir Putin included it in his imagined *Novorossiya* as a way to justify Russia's interventions in Ukraine under the guise of protecting "ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the southeast of Ukraine" (Putin 2014b).[59]

Back in 2009, in a leading Japanese foreign policy think tank report, Shimotomai rejected the genocide characterization of the famine in Ukraine in 1932–33, calling Ukraine's argument on the Holodomor a "half-truth" (Shimotomai 2009). Shimotomai also vigorously promoted his viewpoint that Ukraine is "torn between the Eastern Orthodox Church and European Christianity," likening the divide to Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (Shimotomai 2014b, 39). For Shimotomai, Ukraine thus forms a component of the *Russkii mir* (Russian World). Relations between Russia and Ukraine are "brotherly," and he equated the war between the two countries to "fratricide" (Shimotomai 2014b, 42; 2014f, 50). There can be no question that "Ukraine's future lies only in improved relations with Russia" (Shimotomai 2014a, 157). [60]

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[58] For a critical review of Miller's interview to *Novaya Gazeta* of 16 April 2014, see (Hrytsak 2014, 221). According to Hrytsak, Miller's characteristic thesis is: "Ukraine is not a subject but an object in a game" run by "anyone except Ukrainians."

[59] On April 17, 2014, Putin stated: "The essential issue is how to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the southeast of Ukraine. I would like to remind you that what was called Novorossiya (New Russia) back in the tsarist days – Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa – were not part of Ukraine back then. These territories were given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government."

[60] Shimotomai attributes this statement ("Ukraine's future lies only in improved relations with Russia") to then Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, who became prime minister in 2021. However, I have been unable to locate any records of Kishida having made any such remark.

The reference to Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* extends beyond Valdai members. For example, Atsuo Kaneko, former professor and president at Osaka International University, argues:

> The Ukraine crisis is often seen as an example of territorial expansion and aggression by Russian President Putin, who is plotting the revival of a "great" Russia, and Putin appears to be portrayed as the main villain. However, things are not that simple. To grasp the essence of the problem, it is necessary to look at it from the perspective of "Clash of Civilizations" (just to be clear, this is not to defend Putin) (Kaneko 2014, 82–83).

Kaneko further posits that throughout the history of Eastern Slavs, "Russia has always been the strong elder brother and Ukraine the weaker younger brother" with this sibling rivalry as the primary background to the conflict (Kaneko 2014, 87). He also argues that after gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine followed the trajectory of a failed state, marked by the east-west divide, widespread corruption and an economy on the verge of collapse (Kaneko 2014, 88–89).

The selective incorporation of academic texts reinforces a portrayal of Ukraine as an artificial construct with no distinct identity separate from Russia. This perspective not only dismisses Ukraine's sovereignty but also aligns with Russian efforts to undermine Ukraine's legitimacy as an independent nation. While some narrative agents claim not to defend Putin, the recontextualization of authoritative academic texts lends a false sense of credibility, disguising de facto Russian narratives as academic.

6.1.3. Privileging of Russian Sources

The phenomenon of interdiscursivity is particularly evident in the way foreign members of the Valdai Club and other narrative agents engaged with Russia tend to prioritize and elevate Russian sources in their analysis of the Ukraine events. This practice involves the blending of various narratives, where narrative agents intertwine their narratives with the authoritative voices and information they claim to access through their privileged membership in the Valdai Club or their personal relationships with the sources. Foreign attendees of the Valdai Club tend to take Russians' statements and "insider" conversations seriously, believing that they enjoy exclusive access to the valuable Russian sources (Drezner 2016; Giles 2019, 33).

Shimotomai frequently refers to his membership in the Valdai Discussion Club. His 2012 report on the prospects of a third term for Putin and its implications for Japan-Russia bilateral relations underscores the scholar's appreciation for his unique access to Putin as the sole Valdai participant from Japan and the insights gained through this conduit:

> Only one Japanese now attends the international Valdai Club that meets President Putin. Recently, regional organizations [of the Valdai Club] were established in Asia as well as in the United States. This Asia-Valdai conference

> had been initially held only with China before it was joined by participants from South Korea, Singapore, and Japan in July (Shimotomai 2012, 6).

Japanese Valdai participants cherish their proximity to direct utterances of Russian political figures and experts. Shimotomai, characterizing the Valdai Club as "an international advisory council surrounding Putin," articulated:

> At the 10th anniversary meeting last October, I heard Putin saying that the expectations for Eurasian integration are not incompatible with improving relations with the EU (Shimotomai 2014a, 146).

Shimotomai continued that Putin appeared untroubled by the pro-European rallies in Kyiv, but it was "the violent overthrow of the government by pro-Western, illegitimate forces" that compelled Moscow to annex Crimea.[61] In the Valdai Club, the words of the Russian president hold an almost divine status, bringing crucial perspectives to the attention of Valdai participants. On one occasion, Putin's remarks at the Valdai Conference in November 2011 opened the eyes of the Japanese scholar to Russia's frustration with the shale gas revolution in the United States. Shimotomai admitted, "I am not an expert on this matter, but I realized this importance from Putin's remarks" (Shimotomai 2012, 2). Putin has a talent for leaving a strong impression on participants through his emotional delivery. Shimotomai recounted being particularly struck by Putin, "who enthusiastically criticized the environmental pollution caused by the shale gas revolution in the United States" (Shimotomai 2014e, 31–32).

A blind worship of Moscow sources is peculiar to the Valdai regulars. For example, Abiru traveled to Moscow immediately after the annexation of Crimea to exchange opinions with "local experts and journalists" to examine the reasons behind this fateful decision and its impact on Japan-Russia relations (Abiru 2014b, 63). Abiru argued that Putin did not intend to annex Crimea because both Putin and Lavrov publicly rejected such a scenario in early March 2014 until the Russian president changed his mind after "the Crimean autonomous government changed the referendum question from 'expansion of autonomy' to 'incorporation to the Russian Federation' and moved the referendum from May 25 to March 16" (Abiru 2014c, 13).[62] After the downing of the Malaysia Airlines MH17 in eastern Ukraine in July 2014, citing "a Russian expert well-versed in the situation in Ukraine," Abiru speculated that President Putin decided to provide the pro-Russian insurgencies in Ukraine with weapons in order to encourage "political dialogue between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian forces" (Abiru

[61] According to the Surkov leaks, Putin began his comprehensive influence operations (active measures) to impede Ukraine's aspirations to join the European Union as early as the beginning of 2013, and the groundwork for the Crimea operation first appeared in November 2013 (Hosaka 2018).

[62] The intercepted phone conversation between Sergei Glazyev and Sergei Aksenov shows that the change of the "referendum" question and date was initiated by the Kremlin (Conflict Intelligence Team 2016).

2014d, 22). Abiru concluded that Putin's remarks following the crash of MH17, in which the Russian president blamed Ukraine for the tragedy ("if military operations had not resumed in eastern Ukraine on June 28, this tragedy probably could have been avoided"), reflected Putin's "true intention" for a ceasefire, while "President Poroshenko refused that" (Abiru 2014d, 20–24).

Shimotomai cited an interview with "former foreign minister and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov" (also known as a former KGB agent and Russian foreign intelligence chief), in which Primakov claimed that Russia had attempted to incorporate Crimea "by political means, asking the will of residents." According to Primakov (and as cited by Shimotomai), Russia "demanded that an international conference including Ukraine be convened, but Ukraine opposed it, which eventually led to what happened in March." The Japanese researcher received a suggestion from Aleksei Venediktov of *Ekho Moskvy* (Echo of Moscow) radio that before the deployment of Russian forces into eastern Ukraine, "there seems to have been secret negotiations with Turkey" (Shimotomai 2014a, 147). In 2019, Shimotomai citing "Russian political scientist Dmitrii Trenin" (who is a "former" GRU colonel), argued that the Orthodox Church in the US, taking control of the personnel policies within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, was orchestrating the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to bring "the quarrel between the brothers" – Russia and Ukraine – over Crimea to the point of an ultimate division between the two countries (Shimotomai 2019, 87).

Importantly, the Valdai participants are not the only ones who value Russian sources. Other Russianists are also willing to cite Russian *politologi,* who are actually political technologists or spin doctors (Hosaka 2018; 2019c). Kenro Nagoshi, a journalist and professor at Takushoku University, quotes Mikhail Leontiev, a "Russian political commentator," as calling Ukraine "a failed state" and "a criminal conglomerate." According to the Japanese professor, the roots of the Ukraine events lie in its "poor problem-solving capabilities" and the initial reluctance of Europe, the United States, and Russia to engage with the issue (Nagoshi 2014, 128). Nagoshi refers to Ukraine as "Europe's ill person" (Nagoshi 2014, 134).

Narrative agents' personal ties with Russian sources, what they often refer to as "my Russian friends," significantly contribute to shaping their views on Ukraine. Ichiyo Ishikawa, a commentator and former Moscow bureau chief of Japan's public broadcaster NHK, argues for the "historical legitimacy" of Russia's claim on Crimea, citing what he was told by his Russian friend. His argument is that Crimea was given to Ukraine by Khrushchev as a gift, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Russia's annexation of Ukraine, in 1954; it was perceived as a change of administrative borders within the Soviet Union, but Crimea was not returned to Russia upon the collapse of the USSR (Ishikawa 2014, 20–22). Ishikawa named Igor Sechin, President of Rosneft, as a key person for Tokyo not only in energy security but also in territorial negotiations. Referring to his conversation with Sechin at the World Petroleum Congress in Moscow in June 2014, the Japanese journalist said: "Although I can't say much about it, he cherishes Japan as a country, and wants to cooperate with Japanese companies as

much as possible." Ishikawa emphasized the importance of backchannel diplomacy using Sechin: "It is absolutely necessary to have a channel that directly connects Putin and Abe" (Ishikawa 2014, 27).

In March 2014, Masaru Sato, a prolific writer on Russia, advanced Russian narratives on Crimea by quoting his "friend" close to the Presidential administration, saying that "unless Russia had sent troops to Crimea in a timely manner, the new Ukrainian government would have suppressed Crimea's autonomous government with force and prevented the referendum" and that Russia's military interference was "inevitable to protect the right to life of Crimean residents" (M. Sato 2014d, 34).[63]

Perhaps the sole case in which a narrative agent mentions a Ukrainian friend is "Who Can Save Ukraine: A Letter to My Friend Yushchenko" by Tomoaki Nishitani, a former researcher at the Embassy of Japan in Ukraine in the 1990s and president of Toyota Russia in from 2004 to 2009. However, Nishitani argues that "Ukraine has a history that makes it difficult to form unity as a nation" due to the East-West divide, and portrays the post-Yanukovych Ukrainian government as being influenced by radical anti-Russian nationalists, such as the Right Sector, and alleges that the government hired snipers to kill people on Independence Square (Nishitani 2014, 120, 123).

In summary, the interdiscursive practice of prioritizing Russian sources among narrative agents, especially those connected to the Valdai Club, demonstrates a pattern of intellectual alignment that often mirrors Russian state narratives. This reliance on Russian insights shapes their understanding of the Ukraine events and perpetuates narratives heavily influenced by Russia's geopolitical interests. These narrative agents contribute to an epistemic framework that privileges Russian viewpoints, often at the expense of a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the Ukraine events.

6.1.4. Obfuscation of the Russian Military Intervention

One country's military interference with its neighbor's sovereignty and territorial integrity could hardly be legitimized by scholars. However, it was still possible for narrative agents to obfuscate the very fact of Russia's intervention in Ukraine, using seemingly innocuous rhetoric.

The proposal for the "federalization" of Ukraine surfaced in February 2014 as a solution to the turmoil in Ukraine. It was, however, just a euphemism for a divide-and-rule policy pursued by Moscow. Insisting on the federalization of Ukraine, Russia aimed to subordinate its eastern part to Russia's control to block Ukraine's pro-Western foreign policies (Hosaka 2018, 361). A few Russianists warned that it was not at all about regional autonomy but Moscow's "Trojan Horse" to subordinate Ukraine to itself (e.g., Hakamada 2014b). While many other Japanese Russianists refrained from judgment, several, including two Valdai members, expressed explicit support for this Moscow's concept of blatant

[63] For Sato's popularity in the Japanese publishing industry, see McCormack (2010).

interference in Ukraine's sovereign affairs. In May 2014, Abiru argued that Russia's annexation of Crimea had become "an established fact," shifting attention from Crimea to eastern Ukraine:

> Russia's call for "federalization of Ukraine" is broadly in line with the spirit of the February 21 Agreement [on settlement of the political crisis in Ukraine] in terms of respecting the interests of eastern Ukraine. Therefore, it would be an ideal development if Europe and Russia would be able to agree on that, and then the US would join it (Abiru, Fuji, and Motomura 2014, 34).

A similar suggestion was made by Shimotomai, who described Ukraine as "a failed state": "A compromise may be to turn Ukraine into a federal state with autonomy granted to its eastern regions following the earliest possible ceasefire, as proposed by Chancellor Angela Merkel [*sic*]" (Shimotomai 2014c, 34).[64]

In response, a Berlin-based Japanese journalist Toru Kumagai (2014), who had a clear understanding of Putin's intention, criticized the Japanese Russia experts who advocated the federalization of Ukraine as a solution to the crisis. According to the journalist, "such a solution would not be acceptable in Western Europe, especially Germany." Indeed, Merkel clarified that what Berlin dubbed "federalization" was not what Russia proposed, but was rather a matter of "decentralization" (*Reuters* 2014).

Another discursive technique is to deny the fact of the Russian invasion by arguing, it is "Too early to draw any conclusion without smoking-gun evidence" or shift attention to "Russophobia" (see subsection 6.2.2). The Valdai members consistently claimed that there was no proof of Russian troops fighting in eastern Ukraine, thus portraying the conflict as a "civil war." According to Abiru, in July 2014, "the objective fact" was that "neither the interim Ukraine government nor the Obama administration has provided any evidence to substantiate the relationship between the pro-Russian groups in eastern Ukraine and the Russian special forces." Thus, Abiru subscribed to the storyline promoted by Russian journalists[65]:

> It is hard to say that Russia is not involved in the current situation in eastern Ukraine, but it would be unreasonable to assume that Russia is leading this [pro-Russian groups in eastern Ukraine] (Abiru 2014c, 15).

The Kremlin was not responsible for the events in eastern Ukraine, according to Shimotomai, who blamed "the half-demolished Ukrainian government structure and armed forces" and "oligarch rule":

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[64] Another overt proponent of the "federalization" was Masaru Sato (M. Sato 2014e).

[65] For example, Oleg Kashin (2014) argued that Aleksandr Borodai, the "prime minister of Donetsk People's Republic," was a Russian ultranationalist acting independently of Moscow: "This is not the hand of Moscow, it's just Borodai." Kashin's view was widely circulated by the mainstream western media (see e.g., Tavernise 2014).

> Relatively poor people in eastern Ukraine, dissatisfied with oligarch rule, probably appealed for the establishment of the people's republics. This situation was used by pro-Russian forces advocating federalization. Russian nationalistic groups and *siloviki* are seen occasionally, but the Kremlin has not been in direct control of them (Shimotomai 2014a, 157).

After the downing of MH17 in eastern Ukraine, a genetic fallacy led Shimotomai to blame what he believed to be Western anti-Russian sentiments: "Russia bashing would be fine. Jumping on the bandwagon by joining American sanctions would also be fine. But again, there is no smoking-gun evidence that a pro-Russian group shot down the Malaysian aircraft" (Shimotomai 2014c, 34). Similarly, Abiru asserted that it would be "premature" to make a final judgment on this matter (Abiru 2014d, 21). However, both experts have remained strangely silent about the evidence later collected by the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) for Russia's direct role in the downing of MH17 by transporting the BUK system from the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade, a unit of the Russian armed forces in Kursk, Russian Federation (Joint Investigation Team 2019), as well as Moscow's direct control and orchestration of the "people's republics" (Hosaka 2019c).

The obfuscation of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine by narrative agents highlights a deliberate effort to mask the Moscow's illegal actions behind euphemistic language and misleading arguments. By framing the conflict as a civil war or shifting blame away from the Kremlin, these agents contribute to forming a distorted picture that downplays Russia's responsibility.

6.1.5. Psychologization of Russia's Motives

As discussed in 6.1.3, Valdai participants construct an epistemic framework that privileges Russian viewpoints, interpreting Putin's alleged non-action before Euromaidan as evidence of his calm demeanor and passive approach, along with his purported intention to achieve a ceasefire in his statements. Robert Jervis, in his seminal work "Hypothesis on Misperception," observes a similar phenomenon in an appeaser's psychologization of an aggressor's intentions: "to the extent that the fear of war influenced the appeasers' perceptions of Hitler's intentions, the appeasers' views did have an element of psycho-logic that was not present in their opponents' position" (Jervis 1968, 461).

Koval (2020a, 216–19) highlights that many Western experts of Russia psychologize its motives, often using phrases like "Moscow perceives" or "Russia believes." The tendency to psychologize Russia's intentions can be attributed to the fears and unpredictability surrounding Vladimir Putin, whose actions lack adherence to the rule of law or accountability to voters, in contrast to democratic leaders. Utilizing "reflexive control," a technique of Soviet origin aimed at influencing an adversary's decision-making processes, Russia deliberately obscures its goals and objectives in conflicts. This strategy allows Moscow to remain flexible, preserve options, and confuse adversaries: "Not knowing

Russia's true goals, the opponent is put in a position where he must guess them, which often gives Russian advantage" (Snegovaya 2015, 15).

Psychologization often facilitates the contextualization and rationalization of Moscow's decisions and behaviors during the Ukraine events through the lens of Russia's purported identity, grounded in its historical and cultural experiences, similar to the concept of ontological security (Hansen 2016). Koval et al. (2022, 10) argue that the normative pressures for alleged neutrality often lead to the "symmetrization of responsibility" and "politically neutral and academically correct" narratives, even when discussing the invasion of one country by another. Consequently, the most crucial element in Western academic narratives on the Ukraine events, according to Koval et al. (2022, 10), is a tendency to substitute the whole story with arguments centered on Russian history and identity. This approach ultimately legitimizes Russian actions by framing them as understandable.

Koval's observation applies to many Japanese Slavists. Among the 34 cases of the issue narrative "Russia Misunderstood" found in the corpus, varying degrees of psychologization of Russia's illegal actions are evident. An interpretive analysis of Russia's threat perceptions often leads to an endorsement of Putin's rhetoric. For example, some narrative agents reference Moscow's alleged perception of insecurity by citing historical episodes, such as the Mongol invasion, Napoleon's invasion of Russia, and the Nazi Germany's invasion during WWII (e.g. Takahashi 2014; Hyodo 2014b, 55–56; Kameyama 2014b, 16). Kazuo Takahashi, a professor in international politics and Middle East studies, argues:

> Since the 19th century, Russia has twice faced existential crises. …Without Ukraine, Napoleon's France and Hitler's Germany could easily get to the heart of Russia. While the aggressors were conquering Ukraine, Russia was preparing to counterattack. The vastness of Ukraine gave Russia precious time. Because of this experience, Russia will not allow Ukraine to join NATO (Takahashi 2014, 32).

Thus, psychologization backed by historical arguments reframes the discussion on Russia's invasion of Ukraine since 2014 as Moscow's historical necessity to have a buffer zone, implicitly justifying Russia's claim on its "sphere of influence." Masaru Sato (2014b, 78), a prolific writer on Russia, even suggests that "to understand the internal logic of Russia surrounding the Ukraine events, it is essential to relive the perceptions of the Russian people on this matter," encouraging readers to consult a Japanese translation of a Russian high school history textbook.

The emphasis on Russia's historical insecurities and defensive postures provides fertile grounds for the gradual legitimation and normalization of Russia's arguments on the Ukraine events. For example, in his article for a Eurasian studies journal, Toshihiko Ueno, a professor of Russian politics and president of the Japanese Association for Russian and Eastern European Studies, reflecting on the Ukraine events, argues that the role of scholars should be to "illuminate the

historical background, analyze various events with concrete data and figures," rather than "blame one party to a conflict or make a superficial comment" (Ueno 2014a, 1). Ueno acknowledges that Russia's "incorporation" of Crimea contradicts the Ukrainian Constitution and international law, but he also states that "there are good reasons for Russia's incorporation of Crimea." He asserts that in the Patriotic War of 1812 and the two World Wars, Russia was invaded from Western Europe, and this historical memory constitutes the basis of Russia's threat perception that will never tolerate NATO enlargement or Ukraine's entry into it. Ueno further questions the legitimacy of post-Soviet Ukraine's borders, describing them as "extremely artificial" (Ueno 2014b, 6).

Mitsuyoshi Numano, a senior scholar of Slavic literature, adds cultural perspectives to defend Russia's position. He criticizes his US colleagues for accusing Russia of interference in Ukraine without considering "cultural and historical perspective" (Shiokawa and Numano 2014, 39). Numano emphasizes that Crimea, regardless of its political status, has been a mythical and sacred place for Russian literature since the late 18th century, arguing that "it is not easy to draw borders and decide on the attribution of such a historically and culturally diverse territory" (Shiokawa and Numano 2014, 40).

Scholars seeking historical background have often echoed Putin's assertions, such as Khrushchev's "illegal" 1954 transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR, Ukrainian nationalists' and Bandera's collaboration with the Nazis, and the concept of *Novorossiya,* which even includes Sloboda Ukraine (historically not part of *Novorossiya*), with little criticism (see e.g., Shimotomai 2014b; 2014a). These narrative agents, by referring to historical aspects, situate Russia's actions in the Ukraine events within a narrow official Soviet-Russian historiographical viewpoint. rather than a broader historical context that includes Ukraine's historical experiences.

Only a few scholars criticized these tendencies among Japanese Slavists. During the autumn 2014 conference of the Japanese Association for Russian and East European Studies, Shigeki Hakamada, a scholar of Russian politics, criticized a special session on "The Crisis in Ukraine and International Relations" for downplaying Russia's flagrant violation of international law. Instead, the session focused on the annexation of Crimea and the situation in eastern Ukraine only from historical, religious, political, and military perspectives (Hirose et al. 2014, 65–66). In 2016, Jun Yoshioka, a scholar on Poland, remarked that "those researching this region [Russia] are likely to think that public opinion is too harsh on Russia." Yoshioka observed there was "surprisingly many people" who, "given the history of Crimea, the history of the Soviet Union, and the peculiarities of Russia-Ukraine relations, think that blaming only Russia on the basis of Western logic is not correct." His interlocutor Sun Zhan Kun, a professor of international law, echoed this view by pointing out that although Russia's annexation of Crimea is a blatant violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and is reminiscent of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Japanese Slavists seem unsatisfied with this "simplified" explanation (Yoshioka 2016, 55).

The psychologization of Russia's actions in Ukraine often lead to the normalization of Russia's narratives, subtly justifying its actions by framing them as responses to historical insecurities and civilizational differences. While some narrative agents have critiqued this trend, it remains a prevalent method of analysis that downplays the legal and ethical implications of Russia's aggression.

6.2. Resistance to Western Mainstream Discourse and "Russophobia"

Among system narratives, a significant contribution to the reproduction of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events was made by the worldview that the Western and Japanese mainstream discourse is biased or that the West is waging "information war." This viewpoint is not limited to Valdai members but extends to a wide range of leading Japanese scholars and intellectuals resonating with Russian narratives (82 counts in the corpus).

Epistemological resistance to Western mainstream discourse rests on the perception of what they believe to be Western "Russophobia" and is intricately linked to aspirations of critical, often "progressive," scholars to present alternative explanations. In extreme cases, these epistemological concerns entail an astonishing degree of empathy with Russian suffering.

6.2.1. "Western Media is Biased": Conspiracy Rabbit Hole

All active Japanese Valdai participants despise Western mainstream media. Nobuo Shimotomai, a scholar of Russian politics and long-time Japanese Valdai member, complained to the Japanese Journalist Association that coverage and editorials on the Ukraine events were "one-sided," calling for a better awareness of the US media's bias during the "information war" (Shimotomai 2014b, 42). Likewise, Taisuke Abiru, another Valdai expert, blasted the international mainstream media for "overwhelmingly supporting the Obama administration's allegation" that Russia was involved in the downing of MH17 over eastern Ukraine (Abiru 2014d, 21). Toshihiko Shiobara, another Valdai member, criticized the Western mainstream media for being too loyal to the US government, which "infused nationalism among poor residents of Western Ukraine, provided them military training and provoked the armed coup in Kyiv," urging Japanese readers "not to trust experts and media" (Shiobara 2015b, 142).

Frequently, skepticism toward mainstream media precipitates an array of conspiracy theories regarding the Ukraine events. For example, Shiobara, in his book titled *Ukraine Gate*, holds that "the essence of the Ukrainian crisis should be understood as the imperialist aggression of the US government, led by Neocons, aimed at seizing Ukraine." According to Shiobara, what the US pursues is an incorporation of Ukraine into the EU and NATO in the future, assimilating it into a US-centered order, and confronting Russia with it (Shiobara 2014, 212). Shiobara's stance on the media landscape is particularly noteworthy; he asserts

that prominent Western newspapers like *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Economist* act as "spokespersons for imperialism." Furthermore, he contends that Japanese major national media outlets such as *Asahi Shimbun* (newspaper) and NHK (public broadcasting) either intentionally or unwittingly contribute to the concealment of imperialism (Shiobara 2014, i).

> As far as I can see, much of the media information in English either lacks analytical capability or intentionally distorts the facts .... Unfortunately, few Japanese people know these facts. Insufficient and distorted information is transmitted and amplified all over the world (Shiobara 2014, 158).

Shiobara's book explores Western media coverage of the Ukraine events, condemning its reporting about "alleged" Russian forces in Ukraine, its failure to uncover the radical "Right Sector" during the May 2014 Odesa incident, and "far-right extremists in the Ukrainian interim government." Shiobara contends that both Western and Japanese media repeated the mistakes made during the Iraq War (Shiobara 2014).

Such a conspiratorial viewpoint is not marginal in Japanese academia; other scholars also endorse Shiobara's views on the Ukraine events. For example, Takehiko Someya, a professor at Nishogakusha University who identifies as a leftist, praises Shiobara's (2014) book *Ukraine Gate* in a review article published in the academic journal *Eurasian studies.* Someya states, "For those fatigued by discussions on Ukraine led by the noble 'scholars' often aligned with American and European media, this work promises exhilaration after reading" (Someya 2015, 45). Someya further claims that the Japanese public has been manipulated by the Western media over Ukraine's "political change," echoing Shiobara's concept of "totalitarian democracy," in which American "capital concentration threatens national and individual liberty." Someya goes on to explain that the prevalence of biased Western mass media suggests "an Americanized worldview" among intellectuals worldwide (Someya 2015, 48–49).

Shiobara's *Ukraine Gate* is referenced by another senior historian of the USSR to show the alleged US intervention in Ukraine (Hidesuke Kimura 2015, 157), placed in the recommended literature list in an encyclopedia on contemporary Ukraine (Hattori and Harada 2018) and highly appreciated by a neo-right writer (M. Kimura 2015, 70). Only Takayuki Ito, a scholar on Poland, dismissed Shiobara's assertion that Ukrainians had military training in Poland to oppose the Yanukovych regime as "rather conspiratorial" (Takayuki Ito 2014, 18).

Other Russianists also exhibit a strong aversion to Western mainstream media. For example, Ken Ishigooka, a journalist specializing in Russia and lecturer at Reitaku University, argues in his contribution to the journal *Russian Eurasian Economy & Society* that Western media coverage of Russia's annexation of Crimea was replete with "emotional statements" denouncing Putin, with Japanese media blindly following suit. "Anglo-Saxon society dominates the world news agencies and television networks," he believes. According to Ishigooka, the West waged an information war against Russia after Putin's third-

term inauguration, when Putin began challenging the "universal values" of the West and advocating for Russia's "special values." Ishigooka further asserts that it is an oversimplification to claim that Ukrainians were merely standing up for freedom and democracy against the authoritarian Yanukovych regime, suggesting instead that the "truth" lies somewhere between two extremes – "a gray zone" between white and black (Ishigooka 2014).[66]

It is noteworthy how skeptics of Western mainstream media mislabeled Japanese journalists who critically covered Russia's actions during the Ukraine events. Two correspondents from *Asahi Shimbun* stationed in Austria and Italy and dispatched to Kyiv during the Ukraine events contributed an article "Local media situation and coverage environment" to journal *Shinbun Kenkyu* [Journalism Research]. Takashi Kida, the Vienna bureau chief, pointed out that the Russian media coverage was biased, focusing primarily on minority radicals such as "Right Sector" and promoting the Kremlin's narrative that Russians and Russian-speaking people in eastern Ukraine were allegedly persecuted. Hiroshi Ishida, the Rome bureau chief, expressed regret over having referred to individuals who applauded Russian troops and Crimea's transfer to Russia as "pro-Russian citizens," noting that they included non-local Russians and Cossack militants. Ishida condemned the "referendum" held at gunpoint and Putin's manipulation over Crimea's history. Importantly, the journalist reflected that his reports and tweets critical of the Russian government were labelled as "Western perspectives" by those skeptical of Western media, despite the fact that he did not express any admiration for Europe or the United States. Ishida observed that opponents often interpret any criticism of Russia as an endorsement of the West (Kida and Ishida 2014).

In contrast, Hiroyuki Tanaka, the Moscow bureau chief for *Mainichi Shimbun* offered a different assessment of the same events in his contribution "The Attempts to Communicate the Actual Situation" to *Shinbun Kenkyu*. Reflecting on the Ukraine events, Tanaka noted the "fierce information warfare on both sides, Russia and Ukraine" and thus he "tried to contrast the views of both parties." Tanaka saw that the far-right and extremist forces prevailed among the protesters. Reporting on Crimea's "incorporation" into Russia, he emphasized the "historical background" that in 1954, the leader of the USSR, Khrushchev, transferred Crimea, "the previously Russian territory with 60% of Russian population," from the Russian republic to the Ukrainian republic. While covering the Crimean "referendum" from the scene, Tanaka acknowledged the effectiveness of pro-Russian propaganda but stated that "97% supported the incorporation of Russia, far more than expected," adding that "President Putin will not be able to ignore this popular will. Otherwise, there will be a riot." (Tanaka 2014).

[66] According to Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky, a mistake all-too-often committed by Western journalists accustomed to media pluralism is to try to find the golden mean between the lie-laden Soviet propaganda and Western journalism. But such a middle is still a lie (Bukovskii 1990).

The skepticism toward Western mainstream media, particularly among participants of the Valdai Discussion Club and other Russianists, reveals a deep-seated mistrust of what they perceive as biased and agenda-driven coverage. This mistrust often leads to the endorsement of alternative explanations – even conspiracy theories – which challenge the dominant Western discourse.

6.2.2. Countering "Western Russophobia"

Distrust in Western media often entails the "Western Russophobia" narrative (43 counts in the corpus). As we observe a strong correlation between "Biased Media / Info War" and "Western Russophobia" (r=.35), these narratives share conceptually similar components, perhaps working together: the Western media is biased, and such a bias is anti-Russian. These presumptions make narrative agents extremely prone to Moscow's version of the story.

The image of the West perpetually "blaming" or "demonizing" Russia often leads scholars to abstain from "blaming" Russia and instead take what Zhuk (2014) calls a conformist approach. They confuse "Russophobia" with criticism of Putin's politics (Gretskiy 2020, 4–5), rejecting negative information about Russia as "Cold War stereotypes." Phrases such as "Russophobia" and "anti-Russian sentiments" are Moscow's ultimate fallback against well-grounded criticism from Western democracies (Putin's accusations about a Western "containment" policy fulfils a similar function). Consequently, the use of these phrases by the Russian foreign ministry and state-sponsored media increased dramatically after March 2014 (Nimmo 2018).

The rhetoric that Western (and Japanese) mainstream understanding vis-à-vis Russia is biased or simply "anti-Russian" is shared not only by the Valdai members but also by a wide range of prominent Japanese experts on Russia, at times leading to assertions that Russia's negative image was allegedly created in the US-led "information war."[67] These narrative agents believe that the US has aimed to weaken Russia's international position since the end of the Cold War in order to render Russia incapable of challenging US hegemony, dismissing the Western sanctions on Russia as "Russia bashing" (e.g., Shiokawa and Numano 2014, 49; Kameyama 2014a, 31–32; Mochizuki 2014).

In an interview, Ikuo Kameyama, a scholar of Russian literature and president of Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, expressed his resentment of Western intellectuals who draw parallels between Putin's annexation of Crimea and Hitler's Anschluss, arguing that such an analogy is humiliating for Russians who made a huge sacrifice during the war against Nazi Germany (ignoring the suffering of other Soviet nationalities, such as Ukrainians and Belarusians). According to Kameyama, Putin's decision to incorporate Crimea was not aggression, but the last straw that made Putin "defend what the state could never

[67] As discussed in sections 1.3 and 2.6, some Western scholars of journalism studies view the mainstream "Western" media as the source of US government propaganda, calling for reducing dependency on the mainstream media by using "alternative media" (e.g., Boyd-Barrett 2017).

tolerate." Kameyama urged readers to imagine how Russia perceives NATO's military threat and contended that if Ukraine chooses the EU, its social system will collapse, ending up a puppet state of the EU and NATO. He explained his empathy with Russian suffering as that of a "person who has been engaged in Russian literature and culture as well as deeply interested in Russian politics for 45 years, or who has, in a sense, identified himself with a Russian mentality" (Kameyama 2014a, 28–29).

The "Western Russophobia" narrative exemplifies a deeply entrenched distrust of Western media, often conflating legitimate critique of Russian policies with irrational hostility. This narrative, which gains traction among a broad spectrum of scholars and experts, serves to shield Russia from external criticism by framing it as a product of biased and anti-Russian sentiment. By dismissing negative portrayals of Russia as part of a US-led "information war," these narrative agents reinforce a polarized worldview that pits Russia against a supposedly hostile West. The rhetoric of Russophobia thus becomes a tool for justifying Russian actions, such as the annexation of Crimea.

6.2.3. Alternative Stories: Fixation with Spurious Local Actors

A good illustration of scholars' aspiration for alternative discourse is the fixation with spurious local actors controlled by Moscow, as demonstrated at the Ninth World Congress of the ICCEES. Here, discussions extended beyond academic debates, interdiscursively becoming part of a broader narrative that supported Russia's political agenda in Ukraine.

The ICCESS Congress was held in Makuhari, Japan in August 2015, hosting as many as 15 panels on the Ukraine events. According to Kimitaka Matsuzato, Professor of the department of law and politics, University of Tokyo, majoring in politics in former Soviet countries and secretary-general of the organizing committee of the ICCEES Congress, the significance of hosting the ICCEES Congress in Japan lay in the fact that "diverse views were expressed." Matsuzato stated that this would not have been possible had the Congress been held "in Europe or the US, where Russia is overwhelmingly seen as a villain" (Organizing Committee for the Ninth World Congress of ICCEES 2016, 26–27). In 2014, Matsuzato, who stayed in Simferopol and claimed that he saw no military personnel on the day of the Crimea "referendum," asserted: "Western media reports on 'the referendum at gunpoint' are a lie" (Matsuzato 2014, 99–100).

Matsuzato personally facilitated a special symposium on the Ukraine events titled "Did They Have Alternatives? The Ukrainian Turmoil from Local Perspectives," inviting Serhiy Kudelia of Baylor University, who was, according to Matsuzato, a "participant from North America but gave a critical view on the Euromaidan Revolution,"[68] Vladimir Dzharalla of the "Crimean parliament" and Kirill Cherkashin of "Donetsk University." Matsuzato stressed the academic

[68] Kudelia argues the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine was an internally motivated, "homegrown" phenomenon, failing to see Russia's central role in this conflict (see Umland 2014; Kudelia 2014; Hosaka 2021b).

importance of the event for two reasons. First, none of the international conferences on "the Second Ossetia War in 2008" had invited researchers from South Ossetia, "a principal party to the conflict," due to the difficulties in obtaining visas for researchers from the unrecognized republic. Second, he pointed out that it was "wrongly believed that South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Crimea and Donbas are all Russian puppets, hence no need for giving them the floor" (Organizing Committee for the Ninth World Congress of ICCEES 2016, 26–27).

In his article on the Donbas war, Matsuzato (2017) criticizes the "renewed Cold War perception" among Western scholars. He argued that such a view involves the stereotypical reduction of Ukrainian politics to oscillation between pro-Western and pro-Russian and fails to see relationships between local actors as well as social discontent as domestic sources of the conflict. This view is in stark contrast to the dichotomization between the West and Russia held by the Valdai members discussed above (see subsection 6.1.1). Matsuzato called for scholars to examine different domestic and local actors in the "civil war," including leaders of the "Donetsk People's Republic" (Matsuzato 2017, 177). However, after his visit to "one ruined and two destroyed but restored schools" in Donetsk City suburb arranged by the "DPR" in August 2017, Matsuzato referred to Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko as a war criminal in his article awarded a prize for best article published in *Nationalities Papers* in 2019: "Putting aside President Poroshenko's undisputable war crime of shelling children, I often explain to Donetsk citizens that, even under cruel Japanese militarism, children were evacuated from urban areas in the last months of World War II" (Matsuzato 2018, 1012–13). Besides his multiple fieldwork trips to the "DPR," Matsuzato hailed a visit made by a fellow member of his research team to "DPR" territory as "an advantage for Japan's Ukrainian studies," arguing that "researchers from other countries tend not to enter the separatist area for political and security reasons" ("Fiscal Year Annual Research Report" 2015).

Elsewhere, Matsuzato's indignation at the Ukrainian government is expressed in his contribution to the alumni magazine of the seven major Japanese universities, in which he called for the Japanese government to reconsider the assistance to, what he thinks is, a warmongering Kyiv government:

> What I expect from the Japanese government is to inquire the actual situation and progress in which the IMF's assistance to the Kyiv government has been used for military spending. Whether the IMF was deceived by Ukraine, or it handed over a large sum of money to Ukraine while knowing the country would use it for military purposes. It would be the international responsibility for Japan, the second largest contributor to the IMF, to investigate this issue (Matsuzato 2015, 34).

Importantly, Matsuzato's aspiration to tell alternative stories of unrecognized republics and his negative view toward the Ukrainian government discursively resonated with the guests invited by him to the ICCEES special symposium in Japan. Kirill Cherkashin, a representative of the "DPR," recalled in an outlet

published by "DPR" academia that a considerable part of Western researchers at ICCEES adhered to "objective positions," regarding it "not entirely correct" to understand the issue simply as "Russian aggression" and Ukraine as an "innocent victim." The Donetsk native stated that the representatives of the "DPR" and Crimea had been invited to the conference because of "the pre-existing academic connection," and thanked Matsuzato for his efforts to "ensure the presence of representatives of the regions of the former Ukraine at the conference," which allowed them to "convey to the international academic community the point of view of the majority of residents" of Donetsk and Crimea (Cherkashin 2015, 109).

Another speaker, Vladimir Dzharalla, a would-be "independent expert from Crimea," after taking part in the conference in Makuhari noted in a Russian media report that "in the academic community, there is an urgent need for independent sources of information about what is happening in these regions [Crimea and Donbas], without the mediation of the mass media." Responding to the questions from the floor on the reported coercion and harassment during Russia's annexation of Crimea, Dzharalla managed to change the audience's attitude "from distrust to contemplation on what they had just heard" from him. He concluded with satisfaction that an "information breakthrough" had taken place (Leonova 2015).

In order to ascertain to what extent the views of Cherkashin and Dzharalla represented the "majority of residents" in Donetsk and Crimea, one should place these views under a microscope alongside their track records. In 2012, Cherkashin was a speaker at the conference titled "Donbas in the Eurasian Project" organized by Andrei Purgin of the public organization "Donetsk Republic," a future "Deputy Prime Minister" of the "DPR." The conference was attended by guests from Moscow and local fringe intellectuals influenced by Aleksandr Dugin's *geopolitika*, Eurasianism and anti-liberalism (*Russkii mir. Ukraina* 2012). During the Russian–Ukrainian war, as the Surkov leaks show, Cherkashin joined the ranks of the illegally formulated "Supreme Soviet of the DPR," the membership of which was reported by its "Chairman" Denis Pushlin to Moscow's handler Vladislav Surkov in June 2014 (dnrpdv@mail.ru, e-mail 2014).[69] Cherkashin was wanted by Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) for treason, and photos of him holding a Kalashnikov gun when taking over Donetsk State University in 2014 were widely circulated on the internet (Bertelsen 2023a, 39–40).

Similarly, Dzharalla is exposed in the Frolov leaks.[70] In November 2013, the Russian-based CIS Institute, which actively enlisted local agents for subversive activities in Crimea, seriously considered the recruitment of Dzharalla as the most likely candidate for "speaker" of a new Russian political technology project in Crimea. An internal document describes him as a "talking head" on a local TV

[69] For the details of the Surkov leaks, see Hosaka (2019c).

[70] For the details of the Frolov leaks and the subversive activities the Russian CIS Institute conducted in Ukraine, see Hosaka (2018) and Hosaka (2019c).

show and "light infantry" for carrying out assignments in social and political events. The same document justifies Dzharalla's candidacy because of his "exotic" Iranian-Persian origin, his lack of affiliation with any local "clan," and the fact that Dzharalla "ardently" but carefully spoke "for Russia" at the meeting of young Russian compatriots in Sevastopol (institute@materik.ru 2013). Although the leaked emails do not provide confirmation that this recruitment took place, it is at least obvious that Dzharalla has been a mouthpiece in political technology projects.

This presumably unwitting collaboration between scholars and local political technologists to explore alternative views on the Ukraine events was criticized for the biased selection of guest speakers. One attendee of the symposium in Tokyo remarked that it should have invited participants from outside Crimea and the "DPR" (Organizing Committee for the Ninth World Congress of ICCEES 2016, 43).[71]

The discussion at the ICCEES Congress, supposedly an academic event, is interwoven with political issues such as the legitimacy of Russia-occupied Crimea and the "DPR," transcending the genres and obfuscating the boundaries between academic discussion and political advocacy. This international academic event was referenced by the political technologists in Russian and "DPR" media, where the original academic discourse is taken out of its context and repurposed to validate Russia's actions in Ukraine. Academic discourse, which typically values neutrality and critical distance, is co-opted to serve political purposes, thereby eroding the distinction between scholarly inquiry and political messaging.

6.2.4. Euro-skeptic Economists

The "Western Russophobia" narrative is espoused by some Russianists-economists who are outright opponents of Ukraine's EU integration. Hattori (2014), Deputy Director of Russian NIS Economic Research Institute, cites the joint research by the Institute for Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the Institute for National Economic Forecasting of the Russian Academy of Sciences, ordered by the Eurasian Development Bank in 2012 (Ivanter et al. 2012). Simulation results of this research show the superiority of Eurasian integration, while predicting negative economic impacts of Ukraine joining the EU's free trade zone. Although Hattori is aware that this research "can be biased to emphasize the benefits of Eurasian integration," he maintains that his statistical analysis also shows that "if Ukraine chooses the EU integration, departing away from Russia, some negative effects are expected, at least in the short term." However, Swedish economist Anders Åslund, (2013, 5–6) points out that multiple institutions including Polish and Ukrainian institutes, the World Bank, and the Eurasian Development Bank conducted quantitative assessments

[71] For the first-hand observations of this congress from the perspective of a Ukrainian scholar, see Bertelsen (2023).

of the effects of Ukraine's accession to Russia-led Customs Union and the EU-led Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) on the Ukrainian economy, where "all but the Eurasian Development Bank have obtained very similar results" in favor of the EU integration. Ignoring the results of other studies, Hattori argues that the dire prospect of EU integration made the Yanukovych administration announce the postponing of the association agreement (Hattori 2014b).

In another article, Hattori criticizes Åslund for allegedly attributing all the financial difficulties in Ukraine to "the bad deeds of the Yanukovych family," and instrumentalizing any means to defeat the Yanukovych regime (Hattori 2014a, 22). Ukraine's large consumption of Russian gas made Hattori state that: "from a cynical point of view, it was inherently difficult for Ukraine to be distanced from Russia and aim for the EU integration, and there seems to be no choice but to stay in the Russian zone like Belarus" (Hattori 2014a, 29).

In May 2015, Hattori expressed "some doubts" about the West's policies toward Ukraine. He criticized what he called rhetoric portraying Ukraine as "a victim confronted with 'the evil Russia,'" arguing that the EU and the US lacked both "the competence and the will to bail out Ukraine seriously." According to the expert, "it would be impossible for Ukraine to rebuild its nation and economy without normalizing relations with Russia," and he urged Western countries to "push Ukraine to repair relations with Russia, rather than mischievously illusion it" (Hattori 2015, 55). Hattori continued to be skeptical about the economic gains of Ukraine's Free Trade Agreement with the EU (Hattori 2017, 97). In 2019, Hattori argued that despite the national consensus on joining the EU, which was prescribed in Ukraine's Constitution, "early accession to the EU is unrealistic, and the EU is not ready in the first place." By contrast, he expressed hope that "the radical lines of the previous [Poroshenko] administration that cut off all relations with Russia could be rectified" (Hattori 2019a, 26).

In the same year, Hattori recounted that when the Russian NIS Economic Research Institute, where he was a deputy director, organized the Japan-Russia Investment Forum on March 19, 2014 – one day after Russia illegally annexed Crimea – several Ukrainians carrying their national flag, protested against the event, with the Embassy of Ukraine severing all ties with the institute. The Japanese economist acknowledges that the Russian NIS Economic Research Institute places great emphasis on Russia, the largest partner among the NIS countries, while condemning Ukraine for dismissing the Institute's efforts to develop bilateral relations with Ukraine. He writes, "I am very worried about whether there is a future for Ukraine, which does not understand such matters, and has a single-track way of thinking that 'the enemy's ally is the enemy'" (Hattori 2019b).

The "Multipolar World" narrative also gets along with Russia-friendly economic projections such as "Not EU but Russia Welcomes" Ukraine (r = 0.12). Yu Hasumi, a Russianist-economist and deputy editor-in-chief of the journal *Russian Eurasian Economy & Society*, citing Putin's article in *Izvestia* and his address to the Federal Assembly in 2012, suggests that the "institutionalized

geopolitics of the EU and NATO" overestimated the unipolar world while underestimating the multipolar world (Hasumi 2014b, 87, 93). In this context, Hasumi displays Euro-skepticism, questioning the EU's commitment to assisting Ukraine (Hasumi 2014b, 88). Hasumi argues that "given Russia's financial support for Ukraine so far, I am skeptical about the role of the EU." Elsewhere, citing Putin's letter sent to the leaders of 18 European countries in April 2014, Hasumi argues that "Russia has provided [Ukraine] assistance amounting to 35.4 billion US dollars," including unpaid gas prices and discounts, while "the EU support has been far from sufficient in terms of amount" (Hasumi 2014a, 45–46).

This Euro-skepticism is shared by Nishitani Tomoaki, economist and former President of Toyota Russia. Nishitani casts doubt on Ukraine's rationale to sign an EU Association Agreement. The Japanese economist alleges that the agreement will benefit only EU countries, while Ukraine cannot survive without the assistance of Russia, including its oil and natural gas. According to Nishitani, while Russia has been supporting the fragile Ukrainian economy, the EU is not prepared to do so (Nishitani 2014, 121–23).

The perspectives and analyses provided by these economists suggest a significant strand of Euro-skepticism within the discourse on Ukraine's economic and political future. These economists argue that Ukraine's integration with the EU may be detrimental to its economy and emphasize the importance of maintaining economic ties with Russia. This narrative not only questions the viability and benefits of EU integration but also underscores the perceived inadequacies of Western support for Ukraine. It also reflects a broader discursive alignment with Russia's geopolitical interests, advocating for a multipolar world order where Russia plays a greater role. As such, these voices attempt to contribute to a broader Euro-skeptic and pro-Russian narrative in shaping public opinion and policy discussions, particularly in contexts where economic considerations are intertwined with geopolitical strategies.

6.3. Conclusion

In the preceding sections, I have examined Russocentric discursive strategies, the aversion to Western mainstream discourse, and the methodological consequences of seeking alternative stories. These concepts, along with major system and identity narratives, reveal strong relationships with Russian narratives on the Ukraine events. These relationships can be synthesized into a structured framework, illustrating the phenomenon through three distinct yet interconnected aspects (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 Three Dimensions for Scholars Studying the Ukraine Events

First, Russia-centered ontology diminishes, if not completely dismisses, the significance of Ukraine as a separate object of academic inquiry. Labelling Ukrainian politicians and military personnel using Russia's distinctive vocabulary such as "junta" and "punisher" would be a direct way of denigrating Ukraine. However, scholars and intellectuals favored more nuanced discursive strategies.

The goal of borderline discourse is to blur the boundaries between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, gradually gaining legitimacy by introducing a new normative order (Krzyżanowski 2020, 432). Normalization of Russia's annexation of Crimea usually occurs when scholars explain Russia's alleged ontological security, which they built on historical events as far back as the Mongol invasion, whereas few addressed that of Ukraine, the nation invaded by Moscow 11 times in the past 500 years (Brekhunenko 2017).[72] This historical justification and subsequent rationalization of Russia's unlawful actions is frequently accompanied by scholars' ostensible acknowledgement of Russia's violation of international law and norms as well as their reservations that they do not endorse Russia's illegal actions.

In their effort to label Ukraine as a "failed state," some intellectuals recontextualized well-known scholarly works such as Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Furthermore, various conspiracy theories regarding the Ukraine events were disseminated through a book by one Russianist and further amplified through book reviews and

[72] Muscovites invaded Ukraine in 1492–1494, 1500–1503, 1507–1508, 1512–1522, 1534–1537, 1632–1634, 1658–1659, 1674–1676, 1917–1918, 1918–1921, and 2014–. Ukraine struggled for independence from Moscow in 1666–1668, 1692, 1708–1709, 1711, 1943–1950s (Brekhunenko 2017).

citations by other narrative agents who share an anti-US political stance. By instrumentalizing these academic discourses, de facto Russian narratives on Ukraine were disguised as extensions of scientific discussions, at least for general, non-academic audiences.

Rather than explicitly citing Russian officials and state-sponsored media, it is a widely used practice of scholars to refer to the works of influential Russian or Western researchers (often participants of the Valdai Discussion Club) who are in favor of and/or highly dependent on Russian information sources.[73] Such indirect references obscure the genuine sources of scholars' narratives. Favorite sources for Russocentric scholars, who explained the Ukraine events, were mainly Russians such as Fedor Lukyanov, Dmitry Trenin, Sergei Karaganov, Sergei Markov, Aleksei Arbatov, Vyacheslav Nikonov, Aleksei Makarkin, Gleb Pavlovsky, Aleksei Chesnakov, Sergei Glazyev, Aleksei Venediktov. They were introduced by Japanese narrative agents as "political scientists" or "political commentators," often with the phrase "close to the Kremlin," though many of them are close to political technologists (Wilson 2005) by nature of their activities.

However, in Russia "zones of indistinguishability" between politicians and experts erases the purported social distance between them (Makarychev 2006, 7), with the ignorance and corruption of bureaucrats leading to "pseudo-science" knowledge production (Kruglyakov 2012). When invited to international conferences, the seemingly independent position of Russian "scholars" gives trustworthiness to their narratives (Makarychev 2021). Lacking genuine political pluralism and competition, most of the Russian analytical communities were "forced to enter into a coalition" with the regime (Belyaeva 2012, 109). Informal relations developed between intellectuals loyal to the regime and pro-regime politicians. Belyaeva (2012, 46) differentiates the Russian case from the American model of a "revolving door system," where the transitions from private sphere to state or vice versa are formal and transparent. A study shows that expert advisory councils under Russia's regional authorities have a symbolic function of expert knowledge, by inviting "status" experts in the hierarchies of Russian universities or institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who only confirm the effectiveness of government activities (Sungurov and Karyagin 2017). While the decision-making is highly centralized and non-transparent, Russian scholarship is either excluded from this process or limited to "policy-based evidence-making" rather than "evidence-based policymaking" (Kaczmarska 2019, 245), although such practice can be occasionally seen and criticized in democracies as well.[74] In foreign policy issues, many Russian scholars agree that the decision-

[73] Such a practice is observed among western scholars. For example, see Boyd-Barrett (2017) intensively citing Sakwa (2015). Also, Ojala and Pantti (2017) list Sakwa (2015), Ishchenko (2014; 2015), Gessen (2014) and Boyd-Barrett (2017) as "the literature on the Ukrainian conflict they consulted."

[74] For example, in 2002, US President Bush was criticized by a number of scientists for "stacking" health advisory panels with scientists selected more for their political stances than their scientific credentials, in order to gather support for pre-determined decisions (Pielke 2004, 406).

makers rely on information provided by intelligence services (Kaczmarska 2019, 246).

Concealed relationships between scholars and authoritarian state actors are sometimes brought to light, exposing them to the public scrutiny. For example, leaked emails revealed that during the Ukraine events some Russian experts ostensibly working in a state research institution, such as the CIS Institute, and private analytical centers served the top-official in charge of Ukraine, Vladislav Surkov, taking an active part in the Kremlin's manipulation of Western media (Hosaka 2018, 362–63). Russian experts closely working with the Kremlin, such as Aleksei Chesnakov, also formulated and projected a set of malevolent narratives against Ukraine on the basis of what they call "*temnik*" – bullet points for disinformation (Hosaka 2019c, 761–62).

To rationalize Russia's illegal acts, Japanese Russianists also cited Western participants of the Kremlin-organized Valdai Discussion Club who criticize the West and NATO for provoking Russia's annexation, such as Moscow-friendly realists John Mearsheimer (2014) and Richard Sakwa (2015), as well as Henry Kissinger (2014), who suggested the Finlandization of Ukraine, the acceptance of neutrality to accommodate Russia's claim to maintain its independence. These authors share a Russia-centered ontology, which portrays Ukraine as a mere geopolitical battleground of the great powers.[75] However, as Riabchuk (2020a, 91–92) notes, if publications allow only an indirect expression of the author's ideological positions, Russian and pro-Russian authors have to build their arguments on an "alternative" perception of facts and conceal their ideological positions under the guise of ambivalent "realism." Intellectuals' arguments may use originally academic concepts to conceal their ideological and political underpinnings.

The second dimension is an epistemological resistance to Western mainstream discourse. The flipside of this epistemology is scholars' preoccupation with "alternative" explanations of Russian autocracy and aggressive foreign policies denounced by what they mentally reduce to the "Russophobe" or "anti-Russian" West. This worldview makes narrative agents extremely prone to Moscow's version of the story, including fabricated "local actors."

Thus, the first and second dimensions lead to the third methodological dimension. Academic passions may entail strong bias at the methodological level if scholars are captured by ontological Russocentrism, epistemological resistance, or both, and, no less importantly, if they are ill-equipped to correct the bias incurred by Russian political technology and information manipulation (see e.g., Hosaka 2018, 326–27; 2019c, 764).

[75] For a rebuttal of John Mearsheimer's discussion describing Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 as "a spontaneous reaction to Yanukovych's ouster," see Hosaka (2018). IR scholars such as Mearsheimer took the public statements of the Russian leader and his proxies at face value, while they were not able to capture Russia's active measures (comprehensive covert actions), launched by Putin in early 2013 to thwart Ukraine's aspirations to join the European Union.

More specifically, scholars exhibiting ontological Russocentrism are most likely to go to Moscow for direct interviews and data collection, while paying little attention to sources in Kyiv, even if their research topics concern Ukraine. Researchers who evade this initial trap may conduct fieldwork in Ukraine, but a second trap arises – their antipathy toward mainstream narratives and preferences for alternative explanations. This tendency can influence not only their choice of topics but also their methodology, including the selection of interviewees and the interpretation of data.

For example, the work of Matveeva (2018), which involves fieldwork in parts of Ukraine, appears to have overcome the first ontological trap. Nevertheless, while presenting what she terms a "bottom-up story of the rebellion," she ultimately characterizes the war in Donbas as a "civil war." Her analysis heavily relies on interviews with individuals such as Aleksandr Borodai, a "Russian volunteer leader" and the first "DPR Prime Minister," who is mentioned 96 times in her 337-page monograph. In contrast, Vladislav Surkov, Putin's senior adviser on Ukraine issues and the person who remotely supervised the political process in the Russia-occupied Donbas (evidenced by the leaked conversations between Surkov and Borodai in July 2014, as reported by Politie 2019), is not mentioned at all in the book. Matveeva's epistemological resistance to mainstream discourse is evident in her introductory chapter, titled "Talking Donbas, Not Putin." Here, she explicitly states: "Every recent book about Ukraine or Russia is a book about Putin. This one will be different."[76]

In a broader perspective, after the end of the Cold War, the growing number of smaller localized ethnopolitical conflicts prompted scholars to research domestic societal-level explanatory variables (Levy 1998, 160). It is, however, plausible that supposedly autonomous local actors do not have actual power over the political process, which is clandestinely controlled by the center of the patron state. In such cases, the propensity of researchers to demonstrate "alternative" local perspectives runs the considerable risk of overestimating the political subjectivity of seemingly indigenous movements if they have no means to examine the genuine, mostly concealed, relationship to the patron state.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine since 2014 is an excellent illustration of this hidden power relation. In the fog of Russia's disinformation and propaganda, a group of scholars focused attention on the role of sub-state and non-state actors (see e.g., German and Karagiannis 2016). Although the lively accounts of relations between "local" actors – "Novorossianists" ("New Russianists") (Matsuzato 2017) and "Russian Spring actors" (Matveeva 2018) – may reveal interesting details of the adventure of Russian "volunteers" or local "warlords," these bits and pieces obfuscate the most significant variable in unravelling the cause of the war – Moscow's central role. Koval (2020b, 148) points out that French researchers of local conflicts in the post-Soviet space (especially Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine) tend to ignore Russia's leading role in provoking and sponsoring

[76] The title of Matveeva's earlier work, "No Moscow Stooges" (Matveeva 2016), is also quite revealing.

the conflicts, stressing the agency of Russia-backed entities such as Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Indeed, Moscow tactically promoted the myth of "Novorossiya" – later the circumstances forced the Kremlin to replace it with "Donbas." These tactics gave false credibility to "separatists" who would voice Moscow's objections to any attempts by Ukraine to drift westward, creating an illusion in the domestic and international audience: the separatists are not puppets of Moscow but they desperately fight against the Kyiv junta for their localized identity, and Russia is just there to offer them a helping hand (Hosaka 2019c).

This analysis does not aim to review international academic works on the Ukraine events. However, such a comprehensive review of scholarly narratives, especially those reproducing Russia's narratives on its "incorporation" of Crimea and a "civil war" in Ukraine,[77] could identify ontological and epistemological underpinnings and their methodological flaws, providing valuable lessons for scholars and practitioners.

[77] This work is partially embarked on by Jakob Haunter. See Appendix 1 "Academic Articles Focusing on the Donbas Conflict's Causes" in J. E. Hauter (2022)

CHAPTER 7 NATIONALIZING NARRATIVES

This chapter delves into the instrumentalization of narratives concerning the Ukraine events by national narrative agents, focusing on their efforts to influence the most significant audience – namely, the decision-makers – rather than the public. It illustrates how narrative agents endeavor to persuade the Japanese political and business establishments, showcasing how Russian narratives on the Ukraine events interact with national narratives to reach necessary target audiences.

Based on the approaches to intertextuality and interdiscursivity (section 4.5) and the findings of the content analysis on national narratives (section 5.4.4), this chapter examines the processes of persuasion of Japanese political and business elites by national narrative agents. Special attention is given to narrative agents who are vocal about Japan-Russia relations, including Japanese Valdai Discussion Club participants and former diplomats Masaru Sato and Kazuhiko Togo, both associated with pro-Russian lawmaker Muneo Suzuki. This analysis incorporates texts from the corpus, other relevant writings by these authors, and materials, such as the reflections and memoirs of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which shed light on his epistemic frameworks regarding Russia and Ukraine and his interactions with these narrative agents.

The positive correlation between aspirations for improved Japan-Russia ties and the total score of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events can be explained by narrative agents' political attitudes. Proponents of stronger Tokyo-Moscow relations often resort to diminishing the significance of Ukraine for Japan by portraying Euromaidan as radical and nationalistic, and denying the historical and cultural agency of Russia's neighbor, rather than directly normalizing Russia's behaviors (see section 6.1).

Furthermore, the chapter uses the Japanese case to illustrate the practical application of strategic narratives, such as the "Sino-Russian alliance" narrative, to shape the behavior of policymakers. The Ukraine events triggered discussions among Japanese experts and intellectuals about the China-Russia strategic partnership, revealing how narratives advocating for Japan to decouple Russia from China became discursively intertwined with Tokyo's aspirations to enhance ties with Moscow during the Abe administration. This chapter underscores the role of such narratives in shaping Japan's foreign policy discourse.[78]

7.1. Political and Social Contexts

If Ukraine's issues were subjugated to Russian studies in academia, as mentioned in section 3.4, such a Russian factor was even more pronounced in Tokyo's foreign policy practice. According to the government's answer to a lawmaker's inquiry about the preparation of regional specialists covering the former Soviet Union states (March 31, 2006), 203 Japanese diplomats belonged to the "Russian

[78] Part of this chapter was published in Hosaka (2021a).

school" (those who studied the Russian language and completed a two-year program as trainees in the Moscow State Institute of International Relations or elsewhere in Russia) while only three diplomats hailed from "Ukrainian school." By the middle of the 2000s, within the Japanese Foreign Ministry, important decisions in Japan's policy toward the CIS countries required the consent of the Director of the Russian Division (Geraskov 2018, 106–7), reflecting a higher priority for the Russian Federation among former Soviet countries. Similar to American diplomacy toward post-Soviet Ukraine (Fishel 2022), Japan's Ukraine policy was more of a derivative of its policy toward Moscow.

In the face of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Japan, as the sole member of the G7 from among Asian countries, joined the economic sanctions against Russia, although it is widely believed that Japan's sanctions were softer than those imposed by other western nations. In his memoirs published after his assassination in 2022, former Prime Minister Abe recalls the G7 summit in Brussel in June 2014, where, in response to the proposal by the US president Barack Obama for sanctions against Russia, the Japanese prime minister replied that "We have territorial negotiations with Russia, so sanctions are impossible" (Abe 2023). Furthermore, Japan condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea, describing it as "an attempt to change the status quo with force," – the same phrase used by it to refer to China's assertive actions in the East and South China Seas. This discursive tactic not only served as a proximization strategy (Cap 2014) to substantiate Japan's claim about China's military rise in front of the US and European partners, but also shifted the attention from Russia to China to avoid continually blaming the former. The Japanese government refrained from using terms like "the Russian aggression," instead opting for "the situation in Ukraine." Concerning the conflict in eastern Ukraine, Tokyo stated that "implementation of the Minsk Agreements is the only path" ("Japan-Ukraine Summit Meeting" 2016) and urged "all the parties concerned to fulfill the Minsk Agreement" ("Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Receives a Courtesy Call from the Foreign Minister of Ukraine" 2015) without pinpointing Russia's wrongdoings. During the Japan-Russia Summit Meeting in Sochi in May 2016, Abe urged Russia to "use its influence over the armed groups and contribute to improving the situation," although it is not clear whether he was misinformed about the purported political agency of these armed groups, or if he just sugarcoated his words not to blame Putin directly. He also informed Putin that he had encouraged the president of Ukraine to fully implement the Minsk Agreements when he visited Japan the previous month, without mentioning Russia's violation of the Minsk Agreements ("Japan-Russia Summit Meeting" 2016).

Japan's conciliatory approach toward Russia and symbolic sanctions can be articulated as Tokyo's strategy to leave the door open for cooperation with Moscow in advancing bilateral and regional issues of greater interest to Japan: the Northern Territories issues and security concerns with China and North Korea (Kitade 2016; Shagina 2018). Japan's ambiguous position on the Ukraine events is comparable to Italy's, which Daniele Fattibene calls "doppio binario" (double track): "on the one hand, punishing violations of international law and adhering

to commitments to Euro-Atlantic partners, and on the other hand, leaving the door open for dialogue and cooperation with Moscow" (Zarembo 2020, 172). Whereas Italy's focus of foreign policy was the Mediterranean region rather than Eastern Europe, Japan's external priority remained the East Asia and Pacific region, of which Russia was a player but not Ukraine. Against this backdrop, Abe made the first-ever visit to Kyiv by an incumbent prime minister in June 2015, with a renewed pledge of continued economic assistance for Ukraine.

Japanese public perception of Russia was two-fold. According to a poll held by Pew Research Center, public trust in Putin among the Japanese was fairly low, 28% in 2008, and remained as such, with 26% in 2018, not significantly affected by the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Similarly, views of Russia in Japan were mostly negative, 68% unfavorable against 26% favorable. There was, however, a significant generation gap; young adults aged 18 to 29 tended to have a more favorable view of Russia, at 38%, than those who were 50 years and older, at 18% (Letterman 2018). The elder generation's assessment is possibly associated with the Soviet invasion of the Northern Territories after WWII. Meanwhile, a better image of Russia in the younger generation may reflect a growing interest in Russian culture and sports as well as curiosity about the little-known "mysterious neighbor." A website called "Osorosian" ("Scary Russia" as a wordplay) that collects funny viral videos and photos from contemporary Russia attracted more than 10 thousand twitter followers. Another bizarre phenomenon was that a large chain of stationery stores in Japan carried calendars with photos of Putin's macho body starting in 2015. This Putin calendar became the top seller among all the calendars dedicated to famous celebrities in 2018 (Rogers 2018). Also in 2012, the governor of Akita prefecture, the region facing the Russian Far East across the Sea of Japan, gifted a puppy of the local breed dog Akita-Inu to Putin as a token of friendship. In return, Putin sent him a lovely Siberian cat. The story was positively covered in the Japanese media.

7.2. Japan's Alleged "National Interests" and Narratives on Northern Territories

As revealed in the content analysis, narrative agents expressing a desire for improved relations with Russia tend to have a positive correlation with the total score of Russia's issue narratives on the Ukraine events (see subsection 5.4.4). For instance, in March 2014, amidst the initial weeks of Russia's operation in the illegal annexation of Crimea, Masaru Sato, a top author in the corpus (see Table 6) explained the background of the Ukraine events in his regular contributions to a popular business magazine. Sato asserted that "the forces that seized power in Ukraine through this coup [were] by no means democrats aligned with the values of Europe, the United States and Japan." He identified among them "xenophobic," "nationalistic forces based in the Galicia region of western Ukraine." Sato advised that while Japan should express concern over Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, it should refrain from engaging with "the dangerous new

Ukrainian government, which does not adhere to democratic principles" (M. Sato 2014a). Sato further speculated on the possible consequences of the Ukraine events on the Japan-Russia relation. Citing Russian state media's positive response to Japan's initial hesitation in joining the US and EU initiatives for sanctions against Russia, for its military interference in Crimea, in early March, Sato suggested: "if Japan continues to retain its own diplomatic position toward Russia, a dramatic development of negotiations on the Northern Territories is possible" (M. Sato 2014f, 111). However, unlike communists, the moderate left and the neo-right, Sato did not challenge the Japan-US alliance. He positively assessed the Abe administration policy: "the Abe administration is carefully maintaining the framework of the Japan-US alliance while pursuing maximum independent diplomacy with Russia" (M. Sato 2014f, 111; see also 2014c, 176; 2014e, 17).

The Ukraine events were narrated through the lens of "the Russian World." Nobuo Shimotomai, an influential scholar of Russian studies and a Valdai expert, in his article "The Russian World and the Ukraine crisis" published in a left-wing progressive magazine, asserted that a "historically divided" Ukraine "cannot avoid disintegration." He linked "the neo-conservative network around the US government and the Ukrainian lobby" to "Western Ukrainian nationalism." Shimotomai criticized US State Department official Victoria Nuland for fueling the conflict, and doubted Western countries' willingness to provide financial assistance to "the half-failed state which does not have institutional conditions" (Shimotomai 2014f).

Narrative agents who predicted Ukraine's impending collapse and downplayed the country's relevance to Tokyo sometimes share aspirations for improved relations with Russia. In their narratives, Ukraine was portrayed as an obstacle to enhancing relations with Moscow. While there exists only a weak positive correlation ($r = .16$) between "Failed State / Chaos" and "Improve Russia Relations" (see Appendix 4 Correlation Matrix), this combination of narratives is notably prevalent among members of the Valdai Discussion Club. During an August 2014 speech to the Japanese energy industry elites, Shimotomai drew the attention of the audience to Putin's "dynamic" pivot to the east, asserting that Japan must be aware of Russia's focus on Asia (Shimotomai 2014c, 34–35). He stressed Putin's "important message" to Japan at the International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg:

> Furthermore, in May of this year [2014], after the International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg, [Putin] sent a very important message to Japan: "In the Japan-Russia negotiations, when it comes to islands, there are not only two but four." … Putin mentioned "four" [islands] first time during his 15-year rule (Shimotomai 2014c, 35).

Shimotomai concluded that for a stable energy supply mechanism in East Asia, dialogue with Russia would be inevitable, suggesting that Japan should not allow itself to be drawn into the Ukraine events but should instead deepen cooperation with Russia, regardless of developments in Ukraine (Shimotomai 2014c, 34–35).

In December 2014, delivering a speech to Japanese industrial elites, Shimotomai furthered his hermeneutical reading of "Russia's mind." Expressing optimism regarding a potential resolution of the Northern Territories dispute, he speculated: "while Putin settled the historical dispute on Crimea by recovering what Russia thought to be its lost territory, I think that Putin may make a certain decision on the Northern Territories, which Russia does not consider its own at the back of its mind" (Shimotomai 2014g, 40).

Taisuke Abiru, another Valdai expert, argued, citing "a Russian expert," that Putin's high popularity following the annexation of Crimea could make him "take a dramatic decision on the Northern Territories" (Abiru 2014b). Similarly, Ichiyo Ishikawa, formerly Japan's public broadcaster Moscow bureau chief, speculated that the annexation of Crimea would have a positive impact on the Northern Territories issue. Ishikawa cited "a Russian," whose opinion he believed matters, suggesting that by annexing Crimea, Russia did not want territory but wanted to "restore historical legitimacy and justice." The Japanese journalist half-jokingly argued: "by returning the four Northern Islands, if not all, which are Japan's legitimate territories, Russia can prove the historical legitimacy and justice of Russia's annexation of Crimea" (Ishikawa 2014, 22). Shinji Hyodo, Head of the America, Europe, and Russia Division at the National Institute for Defense Studies, highlighted that despite Russia's reportedly tougher stance on the Northern Territories issue following its annexation of Crimea, Putin's reference to Crimea as Russia's "inherent territory" aligned with Japan's argument framing the Northern Territories as its own "inherent territory" (Hyodo 2014a, 37).

However, many other Japanese experts expressed the opposite view, arguing that a nationalist Putin would not make concessions over the territorial issue. For example, Terumasa Nakanishi, a scholar of international politics and intelligence studies, criticized those who entertained and disseminated the idea that Putin might return the Northern Territories, dismissing such expectations as unrealistic. Nakanishi questioned the notion that Russia, having seized territory from another country, would willingly return the Northern Territories, which it has consistently claimed as its own (Nakanishi 2014, 4, 29). Similarly, Shigeki Hakamada, a scholar of Russia, contended that, given the rise of great-power nationalism in Russia, it is highly unlikely that Putin would agree to any territorial concessions (Hakamada 2014a, 30).

According to Abiru, Tokyo's relatively restrained stance on the sanctions compared to the EU and the US signaled to Moscow its intention to "maintain a good relationship." The Japanese Valdai expert argued: "unless the situation escalates into the Russian military invasion of eastern Ukraine, we should view Russia as a reliable partner." Abiru recommended that Japan actively pursue the realization of bilateral projects with Moscow (Abiru, Fuji, and Motomura 2014, 36–37). Despite Russia's full-fledged military invasion of eastern Ukraine in the summer of 2014, Abiru persisted in advocating the improvement of relations with Russia, only adjusting his rhetoric in April 2015 by stating: "To ensure Putin's visit to Japan, regardless of further developments of the situation in eastern Ukraine, it would be necessary to prepare a 'Plan B'" (Abiru 2015b, 74). To

strengthen his point, Abiru, citing a *Foreign Affairs* article "Pointless Punishment" (Ratner and Rosenberg 2014), stated that there was an argument even among Americans that the US-led sanctions on Russia should not preclude Tokyo from developing relations with Moscow (Abiru 2015a, 11).[79]

These narratives, including Putin's allusion to the "four islands," reached the Prime Minister's Office. One official, who had previously expressed extreme skepticism about the progress of the Northern Territories issue, privately told a journalist: "If the Ukraine issue is resolved, the [Abe] administration may be able to proceed with Japan-Russia negotiations" (*Hokkaido Shimbun Digital* 2023b). Despite Russia's continued violation of the territorial integrity of its neighbor in Europe, there appeared certain optimistic expectations within the Japanese government about the prospects of territorial negotiations with Moscow.

In contrast, national narrative agents comparing the annexation of Crimea to Russia's seizure of Japan's Northern Territories are less susceptible to Russian narratives on the Ukraine events (see Figure 6). For example, Hiroshi Kimura, Professor Emeritus at Hokkaido University and a critic of Putin's Russia, reminded that Russia recognized the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine in return for Ukraine's abandonment of nuclear weapons in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, and therefore "the Crimean Peninsula is doubtless Ukrainian." Kimura draw parallels between Crimea and the Northern Territories as both territories have been under occupation by Russia. He argued that Japan should take a lead in Western sanctions against Russia, as Japan is the sole country among the G7 states that has suffered from the Soviet Union's and Russia's violation of international law (Hiroshi Kimura 2014). Another reason for stricter sanctions against Russia's illegal annexation is that it has implications for Japan's territorial conflicts with China and South Korea. Kimura and Hakamada argued that Japan should send clear signals to the neighboring countries, such as China, which claims Japan's Senkaku Islands, that it will not tolerate any violation of territorial integrity using armed forces (Hiroshi Kimura 2014; Hakamada 2014a, 29).

Despite what Shimotomai called Putin's "important message," 27 bilateral meetings held between the Japanese prime minister and Vladimir Putin did not produce any progress on the territorial issue. Instead, Russia rhetorically replaced the territorial dispute between the two countries with the issues of the conclusion of a peace treaty, as well as the presence of the US bases in Japan, to potentially drive a wedge into the US-Japan alliance (see section 7.5).

In sum, these narratives showcase the intertextual and interdiscursive connections that shape discourse on the Ukraine events and Japan-Russia relations. Shimotomai, for instance, intertwined Putin's message on the Northern Territories with energy security issues to make a case for Japan's specific approach to the Ukraine events, while Abiru referenced an American expert to argue against Japan imposing sanctions on Russia. By weaving these references into their argu-

[79] For the US administration's concern regarding Tokyo's approach to Moscow, see section 7.5.

ments, Japanese narrative agents were able to craft their positions with strategic nuance.

7.3. Marriage of Neo-Right and Progressive Left

As in Europe, a discursive resonance between Putin's regime and both ends of political spectrum was observed in Japan. Regression analysis on publication political stances (Table 11) shows an unexpected convergence between the progressive left and the neo-right in their high receptivity to Russian narratives on the Ukraine events. Both factions often employ similar discursive practices to undermine Ukraine's agency while advocating for stronger ties with Russia. A prominent supporter of Russian narratives on Ukraine has been the neo-right political organization "Issuikai."

"Issuikai" was established in 1972 as one of the neo-right organizations, provoked by the leftist student movements of the 1960s. Neo-rightists advocated not only anti-communism but also the abrogation of the Japan-US Security Treaty (Wakisaka 2004, 10). This anti-American stance set them apart from other traditional rightists and conservatives, who tended to ally with the US against Soviet threats during the Cold War (Szymkowiak and Steinhoff 1995). According to the website of Issuikai, its main political agenda includes anti-globalization and liberation of nations from US influence. Since 2010, Mitsuhiro Kimura, the leader of this organization, has been a frequent visitor to the illegally occupied territories of Georgia, and since 2014, Ukraine, participating in "international election observer missions" simulated by Moscow.

The widespread perception of American imperialism and hegemony suggests that such an overarching narrative can facilitate cross-boundary illiberal collaborations, such as the support by various European far-right groups for Vladimir Putin, while condemning American imperialism (Schmitt 2018, 506). Kimura, the Issuikai leader, also maintains connections with like-minded political forces in Russia, France, Italy, Greece, Austria, Belgium, and Hungary. In 2002, Kimura participated in the "World Rightist Parties Congress" hosted by the Head of Russia's Liberal Democratic Party, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, which was attended by the French National Front. In 2010, Kimura invited Jean-Marie Le Pen of the French National Front to Tokyo for the "Patriot Conference for World Peace."

In his article in a right-wing magazine, the leader of Issuikai displayed a full repertoire of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events, lambasting the "highly biased coverage" in mainstream media. He claimed that the media simplified the situation surrounding Ukraine and unfairly blamed Russia for the crisis. During his visit to occupied Crimea in August 2014, he claimed to have witnessed the reality in Crimea "with his own eyes" and conversed with what he referred to as "ordinary locals," all of whom convinced him of the legitimacy of the "referendum" as an expression of the free will of the Crimean people and the necessity of Russia's annexation as "an emergency evacuation measure to prevent bloodshed." Kimura further argued for the realization of Putin's visit to Japan, initially scheduled for autumn 2014, despite the Ukraine events, as a way to show "Japan's

self-reliant diplomatic stance in developing Japan-Russia relations" (M. Kimura 2014).

On Kimura's second visit to Crimea in March 2015 he was accompanied by ex-Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, leading to international criticism toward the Japanese government (Harding 2016). His grandfather being Ichiro Hatoyama, the liberal prime minister when Japan resumed diplomatic relations with the USSR in 1955, Hatoyama became an outspoken supporter of Russia following the Crimea annexation.

In 2015, the leader of the neo-right became a contributor to the book titled *The Real Facts of the Ukraine Crisis and Japan-Russia Relations*, along with former Prime Minister Hatoyama, Valdai old-timer Shimotomai, left-leaning journalist Hajime Takano and Japan-based Russian scholars. Takano, the editor of this book, explicitly states in the introduction that "From the beginning, I take it for granted that Crimea is a Russian sphere of influence, and I don't feel any discomfort." Expressing discontent over the Japanese mainstream media's coverage of the Ukraine events "only from a Western perspective," his intention is to "provide an opportunity to grasp this problem from multifaceted dimensions by taking into account how Russia perceives it" (Hatoyama et al. 2015).

These narrative agents from both the neo-right and the progressive left adopt Russian narratives on the Ukraine events to advance their broader anti-American agenda. The convergence of narratives from opposite ends of the political spectrum, facilitated through various platforms and international connections, demonstrates how interdiscursivity and intertextuality function to create a complex and layered discourse that transcends traditional political divisions.

7.4. The "China-Russia Alliance" As Scarecrow

The deterioration of relations with the West after the illegal annexation of Crimea prompted Moscow to strengthen its strategic partnership with China. In April 2014, Putin hailed the level of trust and cooperation between the two countries as "unprecedented," albeit rejecting the possibility of "a military and political alliance" (Putin 2014b). Russia's official discourse on China has evidently shifted from a passive explanation that "China is not a threat" to proclamations of "trust" and "friendship," portraying its eastern neighbor positively (Dharmaputra 2021).

Against this backdrop, Japanese experts actively discussed possible scenarios and consequences of the development of Sino-Russo relations for Japan. Observers agreed on the emergence of an increasingly close relationship between Russia and China after the Ukraine events, but the important question is how to interpret and describe these dynamics. Is it a robust "alliance" or an "axis of convenience" (Lo 2008) ? The choice of a narrative invariably entails certain political consequences that will shape the behavior of policymakers and how they view relations with the two countries in the international arena. Indeed, analysts who saw something closer to an "alliance" between them suggested to the EU policy

community that other Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea should engage Russia to decrease its dependency on China (e.g., Gabuev 2015, 126).

It is noteworthy that the initial wave of coordinated narratives on a China-Russia alliance was orchestrated by a pro-Russian Japanese lawmaker, Muneo Suzuki, and his associates known for the "two-islands-first approach," which was criticized as a concession in the territorial negotiation with Russia in the early 2000s.

As early as April 2014, Kazuhiko Togo, a former director-general of European affairs at the Japanese Foreign Ministry and Suzuki's ally, and professor at Kyoto Sangyo University (Director of the Institute of World Affairs), argued that the strong accusations by the G7 about Russia's annexation of Crimea would push Russia toward China, and that it might eventually lead to a China-Russia alliance, a "nightmare" for both Japan and the US. Further, citing an article from *Voice of Russia* that links Moscow's closer moves toward Iran with Western sanctions against Russia,[80] the former diplomat argued that Japan should convince the United States of the danger of "a new tripartite pact" between Russia, China, and Iran, and that the West should not only criticize Russia but work together with it toward a solution to the Ukraine problem. Togo believed that Japan and Russia, having "a common civilizational foundation," should promote bilateral dialogues (Togo 2014a).

Togo's optimism regarding Moscow resembles that of his grandfather Shigenori, Japan's wartime foreign minister who pinned his last hope on Stalin's USSR as a possible peace broker in the final months of WWII, failing to foresee the Soviet unilateral denunciation of the Neutrality Pact with Japan and subsequent invasion of Manchuria, Korea, Sakhalin and the Kuril islands, including what later became disputed as the Northern Territories (Wada 1999, 154–157; Togo 2018).

The fear of a China-Russia alliance was echoed by Masaru Sato, Togo's colleague and former senior analyst in the Japanese Foreign Ministry and a prolific writer on Russia topics. Sato suggested that, to avoid "a full-scale strategic alliance between China and Russia" which may tempt China to seize the Senkaku Islands – part of Japan's Okinawa Prefecture – by force, "keeping Russia away from China is a strategic task for Japanese diplomacy" (M. Sato 2014d). In September 2014, Muneo Suzuki, a pro-Russian parliamentarian and ally of Togo and Sato, questioned the sanctions on Russia, arguing that harsh attacks may provoke Moscow into "strengthening relations with China and Iran" (M. Suzuki 2014).

This campaign for scaring the Japanese leadership with the "Sino-Russian alliance" was joined by Valdai members. Nobuo Shimotomai warned that "unstable Japan-Russia relations will drive Russia more and more toward China, and this will be against the national interests of both Japan and the United States"

[80] This dubious statement was made by Igor Korotchenko, editor-in-chief of the *Natsional-naya Oborona* [National Defence] magazine at the roundtable of *Rianovosti*. Korotchenko is a regular participant of Kremlin's "expert meetings," where journalists and experts are given specific instructions to disinform target audiences. His participation in such meetings chaired by Putin's aide Vladislav Surkov and prepared by Oleg Bondarenko in 2015–16 can be confirmed in the Surkov leaks (Hosaka 2019c, 761–62).

(Shimotomai 2014c, 35). Another Japanese Valdai regular, Taisuke Abiru, citing "several Russian experts with whom he exchanged opinions" during his visit to Moscow just after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, pointed out that the deterioration of relations with the West would accelerate Putin's pivot to the East, with China as "the most promising partner" for Russia in this direction. The more Russia depends on China, the higher the strategic value of Japan for Moscow. In his opinion, Prime Minister Abe managed to establish "a personal relationship" with Putin after multiple meetings, with a view to restraining China as well as finding a breakthrough in the territorial negotiation with Moscow (Abiru 2014b, 63–64). Ichiyo Ishikawa, former chief of Japan's public broadcaster Moscow bureau, who chaired a session during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in 2014, told Japanese business establishments that his biggest fear was that a China-Russia strategic partnership might develop into a military alliance. He criticized the US sanctions against Russia for driving Moscow into dangerous rapprochement. He argued that both Japan and the US should engage Russia in cooperation rather than punish it. From this perspective, he said, "there is nothing to be ashamed of, and we should continue to develop economic relations in terms of our national interests" (Ishikawa 2014, 17, 19, 31).

Narratives of Sino-Russian joint threats tend to coincide with a call for the Japanese government to maintain good relations with Russia (see a positive correlation (r = .22) between "Improve Russia Relations" and "Sino Russia Alliance" in Appendix 4 Correlation Matrix). More importantly, both types of narratives often coincide with negative narratives on the Ukraine events (Figure 6). For example, Togo stressed that the Ukraine problem required observers to understand what Ukraine and Crimea mean to Russia historically. He refused to call the military operation to seize the Crimean Peninsula a Russian invasion, instead implying it was an operation by the "self-defense force" controlled by the "Prime Minister of Crimea." According to Togo, facing the result of the "referendum," in which the vast majority of Crimeans sought integration with Russia, Putin had no option but to annex the peninsula (Togo 2014b, 50). Togo further perceived that Ukraine was undergoing a civil war between the radical west and the pro-Russian east, while, like his grandfather, he was looking for an intermediary in the Russian leader: "If Ukraine becomes stable, Russia will not invade militarily. If the conflict is avoided through talks between Ukrainians, Putin will not lose face" (Togo 2014a, 32).

Togo's colleague Sato argued that Tokyo should stay away from the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, scaring the Japanese audience with a catchy but bizarre comparison: "if Russia is a viper, Ukraine is like a poisonous scorpion." In his discursive strategy, the denigration of Ukraine is often sugar-coated with superficial criticism of Moscow.[81] However, his emphasis is directed at the new Ukrainian government that included "not a few anti-Semites and Ukrainian

[81] Deliberately including criticism of the hidden operator in texts is a well-practiced technique of disinformation to relax the guard of the target audience (Bittman 1985, 55–56; Barron 1984, 114).

nationalists" who "do not share human rights, freedom and democratic values." Sato also cited his "friend close to the Presidential Aide" who justified Russia's deployment of troops to Crimea as an "unavoidable measure" to protect the lives of Crimean people from the military crackdown of the new Ukrainian government (M. Sato 2014d, 34–35).[82]

As mentioned in the previous sections, Valdai member Shimotomai called Ukraine "a failed state," proposing "federalization" as a solution to the crisis, while another member, Abiru, labeled the post-Euromaidan Ukraine government as "neo-Nazis" – both reflecting Russia's most extreme propaganda narratives on Ukraine. Former national broadcaster Moscow chief Ishikawa is sympathetic toward Russia's historical discourse on Crimea.

Although the contribution of Japanese sinologists to this topic is apparently less than that of the Russianists, some sinologists expressed skepticism about the supposedly robust China-Russia alliance. Toshiki Kanamori, a China expert, argued that the two countries' attempts to form a strategic partnership might be hindered by the long history of border conflicts, as well as their ideological and geographically derived differences. Given China's intention to turn Central Asia into a buffer zone and Russia's frustration with the trade structure of energy exports with China, Kanamori saw it as unlikely the two countries would build a long-term and stable relationship based on common interests. Instead, he saw it as more likely they would retain pragmatic relations, each using the bilateral relationship to maximize its gains, depending on circumstances as well as the overall relationship with the West, especially the United States (Toshiki Kanamori 2014, 44–47). China watcher Terumasa Nakanishi warned that the inner substance of Sino-Russia relations, as in other bilateral relations between undemocratic states, largely remains hidden from public view. He further cautioned that "China-Russia divide" tactics are based on the illusion that friendly dialogue between the Japanese prime minister and the Russian president would persuade Moscow to distance itself from China (Nakanishi 2014, 18–19). In 2017, Emi Mifune, an expert on China's foreign policies, maintained that, given the expanding position of China in the Russian economy and trade, the idea of "using Russia as a deterrent or restraint against China" claimed by some Japanese experts is "unrealistic." She argued that for Russia, the China-Russo alignment is an "axis of opposition," designed to show the West that Moscow is not isolated, whereas for China, cooperation with Russia is merely one option to expand its influence, along with the development of relations with the US and the deepening cooperation with European countries through "One Belt, One Road" (Mifune 2017, 75–86). Thus, sinologists remained skeptical about the wisdom of driving a wedge between Russia and China.

[82] Sato's friend is Alexander Kazakov, a participant of Surkov's "expert meetings" at least since May 2014, who worked as adviser to the "Prime Minister of Donetsk People's Republic" Aleksandr Zakharchenko in 2015–18. For Kazakov's disinformation operations against western audiences, see Hosaka (2019, 764).

It is evident that Russia experts' call for improving relations with Russia to keep it away from China is not based on a sober assessment of Sino-Russia synergy effects, but quite the opposite seems true. Those narrative agents who wish for stronger ties with Russia *a priori* instrumentalize narratives of Sino-Russian threats. A high degree of positive correlation between Russian narratives on Ukraine and the "Sino-Russia alliance" narrative can be interpreted in this context. This is further demonstrated by the fact that most discussions on the China-Russia alliance are led by experts on Russia, especially those whose viewpoint is close or identical to that of the Kremlin, but not sinologists. Their aspirations to improve relations with Russia thus colors all their assessments, appearing to precede their analysis of China-Russian relations.

7.5. Abe's "Decoupling" Strategy Failed

As outlined at the outset (section 1.7), the behind-the-scenes interactions between narrative agents and target politicians are the least observable to researchers. Nevertheless, the case of the "China-Russia alliance" narrative sheds light on how particular narratives contributed to shaping the Abe administration's policy toward Russia.

While Japan aligned with other G7 countries in imposing additional sanctions against Russia, the Abe administration intensified its backchannel diplomacy to maintain its relationship with President Putin. Prime Minister Abe secretly sent personal letters to Putin both before and after the imposition of these sanctions. Abe entrusted his Executive Secretary, Takaya Imai, with conveying messages that emphasized the importance of relations with Russia to key figures such as Russian Ambassador to Japan Yevgeniy Afanas'yev, Rosneft President Igor Sechin (a close ally of Putin), and Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak. Imai, a former trade and industry bureaucrat, complained that the Japanese foreign ministry was following US policies without any intention of resolving the issue with Russia (*Hokkaido Shimbun Digital* 2023b).

In 2016, after a pause following the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Japanese government resumed talks with Russia. The Abe administration inaugurated a comprehensive economic cooperation program with Russia, known as the "Eight Items." Furthermore, the Japanese government appointed an unprecedented "minister for economic cooperation with Russia." Japanese members of the Valdai Discussion Club welcomed this initiative, with Nobuo Shimotomai stating: "Because the Japan-US alliance exists, it is possible [for Russia] to engage with Japan without significant security concerns. Paradoxically, this makes it easier to separate security issues from economic cooperation." He argued that Putin was inclined to partner with Japan (Shimotomai 2016, 359).

The second Japan-Russia "two-plus-two" dialogue, which involved Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, agreed on defense exchanges and cooperation in addressing non-traditional threats such as drug trafficking. Despite Russia's continuing aggression in

Ukraine, Tokyo did not perceive Russia as a threat in the Asia-Pacific region. Instead, Japan viewed Russia as a state with no revisionist intentions in this region, expecting it to serve as a counterbalance to China and to play a constructive role in multilateral talks concerning North Korea (Shagina 2020).

In February 2016, media reports surfaced that the US president Barack Obama personally expressed concerns to Abe regarding the Japanese leader's planned visit to Russia, despite the G7's efforts to pressure Putin into complying with the Minsk Agreements. However, some narrative agents, such as Masaru Sato, had argued in 2014 that Japan should invite Putin to visit despite the US objections. He suggested that Japan could directly voice its disapproval of Putin's actions during a potential visit by Putin and he highlighted the political longevity of the Russian leader, stating, "Obama will soon be out of office, but Putin could remain in power for another 10 years" (M. Sato 2014e, 17). Thus, circumventing Obama's suggestion, Abe proceeded with his visit to Sochi, which Putin termed the "aspirations of Japanese friends to maintain relationships despite the pressures from the US." In Sochi, Abe announced "a new approach" aimed at achieving a breakthrough in the long-standing territorial and peace treaty negotiations. In December of the same year, the Russian president was warmly welcomed in Nagato, Japan – Abe's hometown and a hot spring resort.

As a result of the Japan-Russia summit, additional agreements and memorandums were signed to advance the "Eight-Item" economic cooperation plan, amounting to approximately 300 billion yen in economic projects. For Tokyo, progress in these projects became linked to peace treaty negotiations. As Japanese scholar on Eastern Europe and the Balkan region Shigeo Mutsushika points out, on the day before the Japan-Russian summit (December 15), the EU decided to extend sanctions against Russia for another six months, creating an impression that Russia had successfully disrupted the unity of Japan and the West regarding their policies toward Russia. Furthermore, during a press conference, President Putin emphasized the strategic importance of the Northern Territories to Russia's national security and even suggested the need for Japan to reconsider its alliance with the United States. Having secured Japan's promise of economic cooperation, Putin began pressing Japan for further concessions in the realm of strategy and security – a hallmark of Russia's traditional diplomatic style, adept at skillfully raising the stakes during negotiations (Mutsushika 2017, 30).

In 2019, a close aide to Abe, Katsuyuki Kawai, stated in a speech at a Washington think tank that Japan would continue to engage Russia to deal jointly with the threat posed by China (*The Sankei Shimbun* 2019).[83] This public statement embarrassed Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who refuted it as an "outrageous statement" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2019), leading the Japanese foreign ministry to disavow Kawai's views as unrepresentative of the government. However, Kawai's controversial statement turned out to not be completely his personal opinion but rather part of the foreign

[83] This rhetoric on engaging Russia in cooperation is similar to what former national broadcaster Moscow chief Ichiyo Ishikawa advocated. See section 7.4.

policy concept fully shared within the Abe administration. In January 2021, in a magazine interview, Abe, who resigned as prime minister, openly stated:

> The essence of Japan-Russia relations is the conclusion of a peace treaty and the resolution of the Northern Territories issue, which is the premise of the treaty. However, the reason why the Abe administration actively worked on it is not only in the context between Japan and Russia, but also because China is strengthening its military power in East Asia and attempting to unilaterally change the status quo in the East and South China Seas. As a strategic decision, there was a basic idea that Russia should not be driven to the Chinese side and that relations with Russia should be improved (Abe 2021, 97).

In Abe's memoirs, based on conversations with the former prime minister from October 2020 to October 2021 and published in January 2023, Abe expressed his perspective on post-Soviet Russia. He noted that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had become a G8 summit member, stating, "we cannot just continue to butt heads as we have been up until now." Within the evolving strategic environment surrounding Japan, Abe identified China as the predominant security threat, citing its significant military buildup: "the security threat is probably China, which is proceeding with overwhelming military expansion." Given the multitude of diplomatic challenges and threats, including those posed by China and North Korea, Abe asserted, "I felt it was necessary to significantly improve relations with Russia" (Abe 2023).

The logic behind Prime Minister Abe's decoupling strategy mirrors that employed by the pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian narrative agents mentioned earlier, who instrumentalized the "Sino-Russia alliance" narrative as a pretext to justify their longstanding agenda of strengthening ties with Russia. More importantly, some of these national narrative agents played a central role in shaping Abe's conciliatory stance toward Russia. Abe participated in a meeting of supporters for a pro-Russian lawmaker, Muneo Suzuki, in November 2021, and expressed gratitude to Suzuki and his ally Masaru Sato for their advice on the territorial negotiation with Moscow (*Hokkaido Shimbun* 2021). According to Japanese journalist Yoichi Funabashi, Abe instructed Shigeru Kitamura, Cabinet Intelligence Officer, a former police official, to draft the Japanese proposal on the territorial issue, interacting with Russian counterparts. Abe further opted to exclude the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the negotiations, instead seeking the advice of external experts. Abe's Executive Secretary Imai strongly recommended Kazuhiko Togo, and Suzuki recommended Sato to Abe (Funabashi 2024). As noted above, both Togo and Sato had argued for improving relations with Russia to decouple it from China before they were named as Abe's unofficial advisors. Thus, two narrative agents affiliated with Suzuki significantly shaped Abe's Russia policy.

Another common element underlying these narratives is geopolitical "strategic" thinking. In April 2014, a former diplomat, Togo, an ally of Suzuki and Sato, in a contribution to a neo-right magazine, mentioned having discussions

with American strategist Edward Luttwak. Togo quoted Lutwak saying that preventing Russia and China from forming an alliance as "a goal of grand strategy on the Eurasian continent," suggesting that Tokyo should be prepared to make concessions on the Northern Territories to strengthen relations with Russia (Togo 2014a, 31). In May 2014, the month following Togo's publication, Abe invited Luttwak to the Prime Minister's Office to discuss China-Russia relations, and they had another meeting later (The Hokkaido Shimbun Press 2021). Luttwak later praised the Japanese prime minister as "a rare strategist" in his book. These "strategists," however, seem strangely unaware that this kind of strategy turns into vulnerability once it is sensed by targets – all the more so when it is articulated publicly.

Abe's strategy ultimately failed to achieve its objectives. Not only did it fail to decouple Russia from China, but it also compelled Tokyo to take a series of conciliatory steps toward Russia, exhausting Japanese diplomatic resources with little tangible progress. Despite 27 meetings between Abe and Putin during Abe's seven-year premiership, along with Abe's regular participation in the annual Economic Forum in Vladivostok from 2016 to 2019, there was no substantive progress in resolving the territorial dispute. Putin further demonstrated his dominance over Abe by arriving almost three hours late to the summit meeting in Nagato in 2018.

There are indications that Abe himself was strongly influenced by Putin. For example, recalling the 2013 June G8 summit, Abe stated that he had been "especially impressed" by Putin's "realistic" approach toward Syria, saying, "given the later emergence of ISIL, Putin's power politics perspective that 'those powerful and cruel will win in the Middle East' accurately reflected the reality of the Middle East." When asked why numerous meetings with Putin did not contribute to resolving the territorial issue, Abe simply answered, "above all, the domestic backlash in Russia was very strong" (Abe 2021, 97). A rhetorical question arises: what kind of "domestic backlash" did Abe see in Putin's autocratic Russia?

Notably, Abe's memoirs reveal a sympathetic view toward Putin's historical claims that the Soviet Union and Russia made substantial "investments" in Ukraine, while denouncing Russia's violation of international law:

> The independence of the Republic of Ukraine was also something [Putin] could not tolerate. The Soviet Union had made huge investments in resource-rich Ukraine, and even after it became Russia, it continued to support resource development. Because of this background, although this is never permissible under international law, I think Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. In world history, the Crimean Peninsula is land acquired by the Russian Empire after defeating the Ottoman Empire. Although it is a selfish way of thinking for Putin, the annexation of Crimea is a symbol of the restoration of a strong Russia (Abe 2023).

On the one hand, throughout his memoir, Abe does not mention Ukraine's suffering, such as the Holodomor – a genocide that claimed millions of Ukrainian

lives in the 1930s – and Russia's persistent infringements on Ukraine's sovereignty after its independence in 1991. On the other hand, he appears to accept the notion of "Russian Crimea" without question, despite the fact that out of Crimea's 3,000 years of written history, it was part of Russia for only 168 years, which constitutes merely 5.6% of its documented history. Russians were the absolute majority on the peninsula for only 2.5% of the entire period, primarily as a result of Stalin's deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944 and the subsequent settlement of Russians (Yermolenko 2019, 43–44).

In November 2018, Abe met with Russian President Putin in Singapore, and "as a result of a one-on-one meeting," agreed to "accelerate negotiations on a peace treaty based on the Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration of 1956" (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan* 2018). The 1956 Declaration stipulated the transfer of Habomai and Shikotan islands to Japan after the conclusion of a peace treaty, but did not say anything about the handling of Etorofu and Kunashiri islands. Abe's agreement with Putin in 2018 indicated the implicit policy change of Tokyo, which focuses only on Habomai and Shikotan islands, without mentioning the 1993 Tokyo Declaration, in which the two sides acknowledged Etorofu, Kunashiri, Habomai, and Shikotan as the four contested islands between Japan and Russia. Abe abandoned his previous policy of seeking the "return of all four islands" of the Northern Territories, and instead made a major shift toward negotiations centered on the return of only the two islands of Habomai and Shikotan (Komaki 2020, 141–43; *Hokkaido Shimbun Digital* 2023a).

The prime minister's annual speech on the Day of Northern Territories (7 February) in 2019 and 2020 and Tokyo's Diplomatic Bluebook of 2019 even refrained from presenting Japan's basic stance on the territorial issue ("the four Northern Islands belong to Japan"), as if Abe had signaled to Putin that the negotiation could be settled by returning only two of the four islands, Shikotan and the Habomai islet group.[84] However, the long-awaited Putin visit to Japan in 2018, despite heightened media attention, did not mark any significant progress in the territorial dispute, disappointing the Japanese public.

In his memoirs, former Prime Minister Abe responded to interviewers' questions about whether he tried to conduct territorial negotiations with Putin while considering the separation of China and Russia:

> I spent a considerable amount of time talking to Putin about the problem of China both in Sochi and at subsequent summit meetings, but I could not detect Putin's true intentions. Although he criticized the United States, he was cautious in his comments about China. Basically, the Russian diplomatic authorities are on good terms with China. Even when I said, "China is a troublemaker," I got the sense that because Russia is also a troublemaker, they value their fellow troublemakers (Abe 2023).

[84] This phrase was returned in the 2020 edition of the Diplomatic Bluebook (*The Japan Times* 2020).

As Abe admitted himself, his attempt to decouple Moscow from Beijing, along with the territorial issue, did not produce tangible outcomes for Tokyo, highlighting Japan's diplomatic concessions and Abe's overture to Putin among G7 leaders.

This section has highlighted how the Abe administration's foreign policy strategy to decouple Russia from China might have been framed with the assistance of a group of Japanese narrative agents who advocated for stronger ties with Moscow. In this sense, the "China-Russia alliance" narrative was not just a public intellectual discussion; it reached the Japanese political leadership, shaping the decoupling strategy and likely influenced by those narrative agents who consulted Prime Minister Abe personally. This strategy was further amplified by advice from an American strategist, whose consultations with Abe may have also been arranged by one of the pro-Russian narrative agents. Although we have no way to access the exact details of these behind-the-scenes consultations, the combination of public narratives suggests that these narrative agents instrumentalized Japan's immediate geopolitical concerns to advance a particular agenda that prioritized engagement with Russia.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how Russia's strategic narratives on the Ukraine events interacted with national narratives to influence public opinion as well as the perception by political and business establishments. As we saw, the role of national narrative agents that customize universal Russian claims to local conditions is significant.

The augmentation of some national agents can be summarized in the following points: 1) the Ukraine events forced Japan to blindly follow the US-led sanctions on Russia; 2) Japan, however, should not allow itself to be held hostage by the Ukraine events and should pursue its own "independent" policies vis-à-vis Russia.

By "independent" policies, both progressive leftists and neo-right-wingers wished to see reduced influence from the United States; at this point, their narrative on the Ukraine events converged. However, both Japanese Valdai experts and former diplomats supportive of Moscow notably refrained from directly opposing the Japan-US alliance. This restraint is likely because doing so would render their narratives excessively leftist, making them less appealing to their primary target audience among the ruling party and their supporters. This audience, being traditional conservatives, generally view the Japan-US alliance as essential for Japan's security and are unlikely to question its necessity.

These two points closely align with Russia's talking points, as reflected in the joint statement issued by the Russian thinktank RIAC and the Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research in November 2014. Notably, the statement avoids any mention of Russia's violations of international law and Ukraine's territorial integrity. Instead, it euphemistically describes the events as "the sudden escalation of the

Ukraine crisis" and implies that Japan's participation in sanctions against Russia was motivated solely by the need to maintain the unity of the G7, rather than being its initiative:

> …These discussions confirmed significant opportunities for Japan-Russia collaboration in both security and economic domains.
>
> However, the sudden escalation of the Ukraine crisis and the ensuing imposition of economic sanctions on Russia by the United States and the European Union disrupted this momentum. From the perspective of maintaining G7 unity, Japan joined these sanctions, leading to the de facto postponement of President Putin's anticipated visit to Japan in late November 2014. This marked a significant setback in the strengthening of Japan-Russia relations. For both nations, which share common interests in establishing a stable strategic environment in East Asia, this outcome was highly regrettable (*The Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research* 2014).

A similar discursive technique to boost this line of arguments was to appeal to Japan's supposed "national interests" (for similar narratives in other countries, see Koval et al. 2022). Along with the speculation on an alleged window of opportunity for resolving the territorial issue, some narrative agents urged that Japan should buy into Russia's pivot to Asia to ensure a stable energy supply in East Asia. Content analysis shows that the rhetoric used by pro-Russian parliamentarian Muneo Suzuki in 2022 includes references to "national interest" and arguments for maintaining positive relations with Russia to secure energy resources (Kalashnikova and Schäfer 2024).

Regarding the implications of Crimea for the Northern Territories, in 2014, narrative agents were divided into two main lines of argument. Some commentators argued that both Crimea and the Northern Territories were territories under Russian occupation. They suggested that Japan should take a leading role in Western sanctions against Russia, warning that reluctance to support Ukraine could undermine Japan's sovereignty and territorial integrity in disputes with neighboring countries, such as China (e.g., Hiroshi Kimura, Shigeki Hakamada). Additionally, they emphasized that heightened nationalism in Russia following the annexation of Crimea would diminish opportunities for negotiating the return of the Northern Territories (e.g., Terumasa Nakanishi; Shigeki Hakamada).

Others interpreted the situation differently, proposing that there might be a "dramatic" development in negotiations over the Northern Territories if Japan pursued an "independent" diplomatic position distinct from the G7 (Masaru Sato). This group argued that Putin's elevated domestic popularity following the annexation of Crimea could create an opening for territorial negotiations (Taisuke Abiru). They also noted that Russia's search for historical legitimacy in Crimea might extend to similar considerations regarding the Northern Territories (Ichiyo Ishikawa; Nobuo Shimotomai; Shinji Hyodo). Notably, many proponents of the second perspective tended to reproduce Russian narratives about the events in Ukraine more extensively than those in the first group.

As was seen, Russianists' aspirations to improve relations with Russia, which colors all their thinking, appear to precede their analysis of China-Russian relations. After 2014, Moscow has learnt that strategic narratives on Russo-China threats can be weaponized to influence the decision-making of its targets and leverage concessions from countries alarmed by China's growing influence. For example, in October 2019, during the Valdai Discussion Club, Putin inflated Russia's relationship with China using every word he could within the limits of not embarrassing Beijing – "an allied relationship in the full sense of a multi-faceted strategic partnership" – disclosing with no hesitation that Russia was helping China create a missile attack warning system, which "will dramatically increase China's defense capability" ("Valdai Discussion Club Session" 2019). A year later, again speaking at the Valdai Club, Putin said that there was no need for a Russia-China military alliance, adding ostensibly that it is still "theoretically possible to imagine" (*The Moscow Times* 2020). These are examples of the instrumental use of an emotive, discretely coercive, and deliberately imprecise narrative in response to the frequent discussions on China's rise in the Euro-Atlantic expert community.

For a Sino-Russia alliance narrative to diffuse effectively in each country, it must align with a pre-existing, local political myth. In Japan's case, this narrative aligned with two political concerns: China's rise in East Asia and Japan's continued aspiration for the resolutions of the territorial issue with Russia. Examples of such myths may be the obsession with "grandeur," France's foreign policy tradition aimed at reducing US influence in Europe using the USSR/Russia as a counterbalance (Schmitt 2018), or Germany's new Ostpolitik, a belief that closer social and economic ties with Russia will lead to a positive change in Moscow (Meister 2019).

For instance, in November 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron argued that Europe required its own strategy toward Russia, which he believes should not be a "vassal of China"(*The Economist* 2019). In February 2021, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas stated he was against "burning all the bridges with Russia" to avoid driving Russia and China into an embrace, a scenario that might lead to "the largest economic and military alliance in the world" (*German Federal Foreign Office* 2010). In July, Maas repeated the same thesis when discussing Nord Stream, saying that if European business does not engage with Russia, this will make China-Russia relations closer, posing "a threat to our security in Europe" (*Ukrinform* 2021). These political remarks are reminiscent of Abe's rhetoric on Russia.

In conclusion, the alignment of Russia's strategic narratives with national ones has proven to be a potent tool in shaping foreign policy decisions and public opinion. The narrative of a Sino-Russia alliance, carefully tailored to align with Japan's specific geopolitical concerns, particularly China's rise, illustrates how these narratives can be localized to effectively address target national audiences. Similar patterns can be observed in other countries where pre-existing myths and political tradition provide fertile ground for the diffusion of Russia's narratives. The effectiveness of these national narratives underscores the importance for

authors of narratives to understand the local political contexts, where Russia's strategic narratives interplay with national ones to better shape the perception and behavior of target audiences.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

This dissertation has addressed the three research questions posed at the outset. CHAPTER 5 examined how scholars' affiliation with area studies, disciplines, epistemic communities, publication types, and political stances, as well as various system, identity, and national narratives are associated with their reproduction of Russia's narratives on the Ukraine events (RQ1-1 and RQ1-2). It demonstrated how system, identity, and national narratives are organically intertwined with issue narratives in the practice of strategic narrative. In other words, scholars and intellectuals who receive and reproduce Russia's narratives about the Ukraine events often simultaneously reproduce certain system, identity, and national narratives. CHAPTER 6 explored the narratives of scholars receptive to Russian narratives, particularly members of the Valdai Discussion Club, focusing on their sources and discursive strategies (RQ2). It identified Russocentric discursive strategies, counter-hegemonic epistemology and perceived "Western Russophobia" as primary factors associated with Russia's issue narratives on the Ukraine events. CHAPTER 7 examined how national narrative agents disseminated Russian narratives on the Ukraine events to national audiences by linking them with indigenous narratives, ultimately influencing policymakers (RQ3).

The results of this research offer insights into the interactions between foreign-state strategic narratives and the national narrative agents that deliver them to national audiences. However, the findings were obtained through a single country study. In the future, it would be meaningful to investigate whether scholars from other democracies show similar patterns in their narratives about Ukraine, addressing potential endogeneity issues and identifying national narratives. Furthermore, it would be useful to explore whether experts in other branches of area studies dealing with authoritarian regional powers, such as sinologists, encounter similar ontological and epistemological challenges in their research on the country of their academic interest and its smaller neighbors.

This dissertation does not address national agents and their narratives before 2014. Examining the historical context and evolution of scholars' perspectives, as broader discourse and knowledge production in the field, would require a comprehensive and voluminous study of intellectual history that lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. An excellent illustration is David Engerman's *Know Your Enem*y (Engerman 2009), which traces the evolution of Soviet Studies in the United States after WWII, delineating the political camps in which different scholars were situated.

Unfortunately, little comprehensive research on Japanese Sovietologists and Slavists has been undertaken, with the exception of notable studies by Yoshihiko Okabe on Japan-Ukraine relations from 1915 to 1953 (Okabe 2022; 2021). Most recently, Okabe (2024) discovered a book published in 1937 by the Dalian branch of the Ukraine Problem Research Society – one of the earliest manuscripts authored by a Japanese pioneer in Ukrainian studies. The book, *Hoero Kazakku Ukurayina* [Roar Cossack Ukraine], written by Katsumi Tsuchiya, provides a

comprehensive history of Ukraine, covering the period from Kyivan Rus to the struggles of Ukrainians against Muscovites and Bolsheviks, as well as tensions with Russians in the Far East. With his elucidate knowledge of Ukrainian history, Tsuchiya argued that "The Ukrainians' fervent desire for independence, as the parties directly involved, is truly something that must be deemed entirely justifiable." However, Tsuchiya's existence and his contributions remain virtually unknown within Japanese scholarship. Okabe highlights a discontinuity between pre-WWII Ukrainian studies and postwar Ukrainian studies, the latter of which were conducted within the framework of Soviet studies and eventually evolved into contemporary Ukrainian studies.

Notwithstanding the need for further corroboration, throughout these analyses, this dissertation makes several key contributions. Conceptually, it introduced national narrative agents and transnational epistemic communities to enhance our understanding of the process of nationalization of strategic narratives. Methodologically, it demonstrated the utility of multi-tier mechanisms of interactions among system, identity, national, and issue narratives in unravelling strategic narratives. Empirically, it identified the embrace of epistemological resistance to Western mainstream discourse and Russia's displayed identity, such as the alleged Western Russophobia, as primary factors associated with Russian narratives on the Ukraine events. Additionally, this research has paved the way for a reconceptualization of the Western understanding of transnational epistemic communities within authoritarian contexts.

This chapter will discuss these contributions to the existing literature.

8.1. Conceptual Contribution: National Agents and Epistemic Communities in Strategic Narrative

A central objective of this dissertation was to explore the role and functions of national scholars and intellectuals in delivering strategic narratives of an authoritarian state on international conflicts to domestic audiences. This research elucidated the mechanisms by which scholars' narratives align with or diverge from Russia's narratives and how they are adapted to the local social-political landscape. The findings further contribute to the theoretical foundations of strategic narrative.

While strategic narrative tends to emphasize the narratives of state actors, the role of scholars, experts and intellectuals in disseminating these narratives is far from negligible. A simplistic scheme of strategic narrative – where narratives are formed by state actors, projected through media, and received by the target audience – fails to capture the nuanced communications of narratives beyond national borders, especially when targeting a country with significantly different social, cultural, and historical backgrounds. Previous research suggests that the success of Russia's strategic narrative partially depends on pre-existing narratives circulating within specific local contexts (Schmitt 2018). However, the nationalization of narratives is not solely orchestrated by the state operator of strategic

narratives in Russia. As this dissertation demonstrated, local intermediaries – often scholars and intellectuals – are crucial in adapting narratives to national contexts and audiences.

This process begins with selecting terms that resonate favorably with target audiences. For instance, terms commonly used by the Russian government and pro-Kremlin media for Russian-speaking audiences in post-Soviet countries, such as "junta," "partisan," and "punitive operations," were rarely used by Japanese narrative agents (see Table 8). These terms have historical connotations from Soviet propaganda targeting its domestic audience, but do not resonate with the Japanese audience.

Although there is some skepticism about the efficacy of strategic narratives (Hagström and Gustafsson 2021), strategic narratives work well when they are intertwined with major concerns of the target country. In Japan's case, it was the issue of whether Tokyo should maintain a business-as-usual relationship with Moscow to pursue its political, security and economic interests.

This dissertation demonstrated that certain scholarly and expert narratives attempted, and likely succeeded, in persuading Japanese decision-makers to strengthen relations with Russia despite the G7 solidarity and sanctions against Moscow. They achieved this goal by demonizing the new Ukrainian government, diminishing Ukraine's significance for Japan, and recontextualizing the Ukraine events from Russia's blatant violation of a neighbor's sovereignty and territory to a matter of Japan's legitimate security concerns in East Asia. Specifically, a group of Russia experts advocated for enhancing relations with Russian to prevent Moscow from forming a military alliance with Beijing, a strategy doubted by most Japanese sinologists. Thus, Russo-Chinese joint threats were often purposefully overstated and used as a pretext to justify aspirations to return to "business as usual" with Russia. These narrative agents' pre-existing desire to see stronger Tokyo-Moscow ties influenced both their view of Russo-Chinese relations and their perspective on the Ukraine events. Conversely, Russia is supposed to have been well-informed about the ambitions and apprehensions of Western politicians and to have known how to disinform them through multiple channels, including Valdai members.

As Koval (2020b, 162–63) argues, the reproduction of Russian narratives is not only caused by traditional Russophiles and Russia's attempts to build networks of influence in the country. It also depends on how the target country's leadership perceives its national interests. For example, the French leadership pursued reducing American influence in Europe, creating a European security system in opposition to NATO, and fostering a multipolar world order, in which Russia appears more as an ally than a rival.

As the discourse among members of the Valdai Discussion Club suggests, Russia's issue narratives are most effectively shared and distributed via epistemic communities. Narrative agents closely working with the authoritarian epistemic community show a strong tendency to incorporate and deliver Russia's narratives to the audience of the countries of their origin.

Epistemic communities deriving from the liberal paradigm in post-Cold-War euphoria perhaps overstate the power of transnational non-governmental cooperation. In contrast, authoritarian regimes operate on Machiavellian realism, employing whatever it takes, including academic channels and scientists. Thus, this dissertation proposed viewing scholars and intellectuals as potential agents delivering strategic narratives of authoritarian states through epistemic communities (see Figure 8).

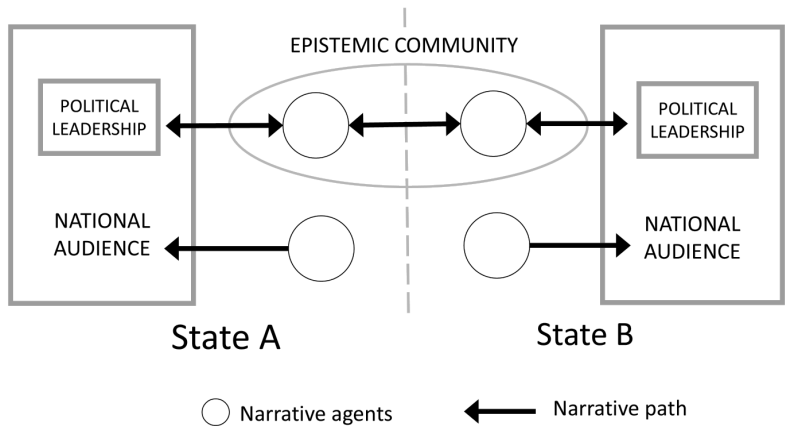

Figure 8 Strategic Narrative via Epistemic Community

The linkage through epistemic communities assumes that Russia's influence operates within a smaller, more targeted, network, focusing intensively on individuals directly exposed to Russian narratives through Kremlin-organized epistemic communities, rather than broadly affecting all scholars affiliated with Russian Studies. However, it is important to note that this is not as straightforward as the long-criticized hypodermic or needle theory of mass communication, which suggests that messages, like magic bullets, penetrate audiences who passively receive and respond to communicative stimuli in a uniform manner (Sproule 1989). Members of epistemic communities are not passive recipients. Rather, they are proactive actors who behave based on shared scientific principles and common policy enterprises (P. M. Haas 1992).

Just as the concept of soft power inadequately captures Russia's strategic narrative practice of discrediting and disorienting target states and individuals, the concept of transnational epistemic community requires reevaluation to address how this ostensibly benign co-operative practice becomes a venue for disseminating disinformation in an authoritarian environment. I will further develop this point later in this chapter.

8.2. Methodological Contribution: Multi-Tier Mechanisms of Strategic Narratives

This dissertation has examined the interaction between different tiers of narratives reproduced by national narrative agents: system, identity, national, and issue narratives. What practical implications might this differentiation have? Embracing particular perspectives on how the international system operates, how Russia defines its national identity, and what future relations with Russia are desirable plays an instrumental role in shaping scholars' perception of the events in Ukraine. Most system and identity narratives precede the Ukraine events. Although the content analysis does not cover the period before 2014, a casual search reveals that some narrative agents held a skeptical attitude toward Western and Japanese mainstream media long before the Ukraine events (e.g., Ishigooka 2007). Nevertheless, as this dissertation does not claim causality, it does not suggest that the pre-existing views of narrative agents, as reflected in system narratives, directly resulted in the reproduction of Russian narratives on the Ukraine events.

There are certain elements within texts that connect different levels of narratives. Such discursive connectors often include Vladimir Putin's speeches and auxiliary commentaries by influential pro-Kremlin experts. For example, the Russian president's address on Crimea's "reintegration" on March 18, 2014, encompasses not only his assessment of the events in Kyiv but also his worldview and his conception of Russia's identity, which are comparable to the system and identity narratives in this dissertation. Stressing the continued "infamous policy of containment" ("Western Russophobia") that drove Russia into "a position it could not retreat from" like a compressed "spring all the way to its limit" ("Russia Defensive / Victim"), Putin blamed "NATO's expansion to the East" (Putin 2014a). Narrative agents heavily exposed to Putin's utterances and rhetoric may have internalized his system and identity narratives along with issue narratives. Some Japanese narrative agents explicitly cite Putin's words on NATO expansion, encouraging readers to take into account Russia's logic (e.g., Shibayama 2014, 32). In such cases, it does not matter which type of narrative comes first; they may come simultaneously.

As research of narrative reception, this finding supports earlier studies of disinformation that highlight the crucial role of grand narratives in supporting smaller narratives and facilitating audiences' comprehension of events (Splidsboel Hansen 2017; Laity 2015). It also ties in with Szostek's (2018b, 22) argument that the credibility of Russian narratives for the Russia-leaning segments of Odesa residents is "not based solely on their confidence in particular facts, but also on their priorities." Szostek pessimistically concluded that values and priorities built on personal experiences and memories cannot be debunked. In this context, identifying underlying system, identity and national narratives may prove more meaningful for practitioners of strategic narrative than continually debunking countless issue narratives concocted by Moscow.

Methodologically, despite the recommendation by some researchers not to differentiate levels of narratives (Bolt and Haiden 2019, 56), this dissertation has demonstrated that breaking down a flood of elements in scholarly and intellectual narratives into several tiers – such as system, identity, national, and issue (Figure 9) – and operationalizing them as variables can help researchers articulate undercurrents within target audiences. Understanding multi-tier mechanisms of strategic narratives may be useful in investigating why certain segments of the audience outside of Europe, such as those in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, who are likely to have less interest in and knowledge of what is happening in Ukraine than those in Europe, have supported Russia's issue narratives on the Ukraine events. System narratives, such as anti-Western hegemony, may facilitate the acceptance of the issue narratives disseminated by Russian pundits. I will continue this discussion in the next subsection.

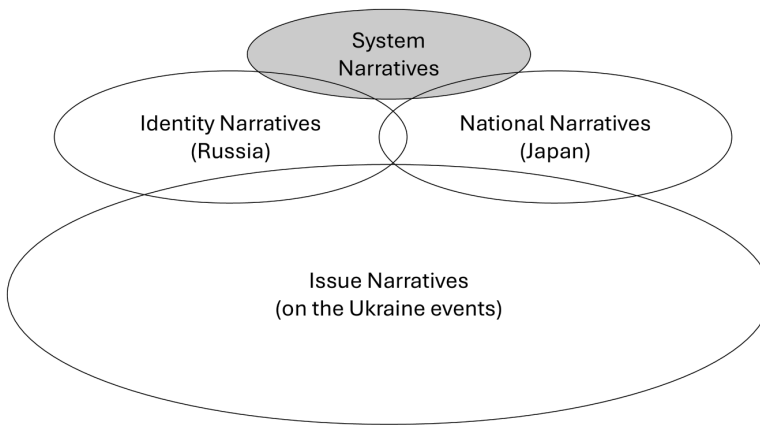

Figure 9 Multi-Tier Mechanisms of Strategic Narratives

8.3. Empirical Contribution: Resistance to Western Discourse and Perceived Western Russophobia

Among system narratives, a substantial contribution is attributable to counter-hegemonic endeavors challenging Western mainstream discourse. Epistemological resistance to mainstream discourse may fall prey to narratives disseminated by Russia's international outlet *RT,* which urges Western audiences to "Question More" (Rutenberg 2017). If we add the deliberately omitted object in this phrase, it will read: "Question Western Mainstream Media More."

I differentiate my argument from Zhuk (2014) by highlighting that the underlying motive for Western scholars to reproduce Russian narratives on Ukraine is not merely a "performative shift" but rather stems from an epistemological aversion to the Western mainstream discourse and a quest for alternative

explanations. This pattern of thought is widely observed among Slavists, as illustrated in a statement by Alexei Yurchak (2003, 483):

> much of the academic and journalistic writing about Soviet socialism and post-Soviet transformation is built on assumptions that socialism was "bad," "immoral," and "imposed," and/or was experienced as such by Soviet people, and that the collapse of the Soviet system was predicated on that.

As Zayarnyuk (2022, 201–2) argues, some Western scholars, in their search for alternatives to Eurocentrism and the global domination of Western capital, often place their hopes on an alternative imperial center, overlooking the "non-historic" peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. In this dismissive gaze, influenced by critiques of Western hegemony and the subsequent accommodation of Russo-centrism, the questions of Ukrainian identity and history are treated as occurrences of xenophobic nationalist constructs.

Despising their own Western societies and embarking on quests for alternatives in opposing political regimes is not a new phenomenon. According to Hollander (1981), who examined hundreds of travel reports by critical Western intellectuals attracted to socialist countries, such as the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, the popularity of these destinations among them were not always connected to their support for communism but had more to do with perceived flaws of their own societies. In contrast to totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, unappealing features of Western democracies, particularly the United States, were openly discussed and criticized on television, newspapers and movies. Societal ills such as ethnic slums, street gangs, political protesters on university campuses or streets, bloodshed in Vietnam, estranged and prompted Western intellectuals to embark on pilgrimages for Utopian alternatives to their own political system and culture (Hollander 1981, 7–16). Noam Chomsky has been one of the most prominent exponents of this occurrence, with his criticism preoccupied with the US government and its foreign policies in Vietnam and elsewhere (now in Ukraine), followed by many Western and non-Western intellectuals (Hollander 1981, 56–57). [85] The difference from the Cold War period is that aversion toward own Western systems is held not only by the left but also by the far right.

Moscow's tactic toward Western audiences is not novel either. It dates back to the Cold War, when Moscow's agents of influence attempted to discredit the reliability and accuracy of Western mainstream media (Shultz and Godson 1984, 148–49). As suggested by a study on media exposure patterns of citizens (Hameleers, Brosius, and de Vreese 2022), those who question the credibility of mainstream news sources tend to consume anti-establishment outlets, thus making such consumers susceptible to disinformation. The Kremlin's anti-mainstream messaging effectively impacts certain segments of the audience in liberal

[85] After Russia's full-scale invasion, Chomsky criticized what he called the "Western propaganda system" for pushing the idea that Ukrainians want more weapons, arguing for Ukraine's neutralization and moves toward compromises on the issues of Crimea and Donbas (Newsweek 2022).

democracies (Mader, Marinov, and Schoen 2022). These observations may apply to scholars seeking alternatives to mainstream knowledge in their research programs, especially vis-à-vis Russia.

Zhuk (2014, 205–7) detected, among some scholars of post-Soviet studies, quests for positive and conciliatory approaches toward post-Soviet Russians, who, they perceived, felt "defeated and humiliated" by the West. These scholars saw their role as providing alternatives to dominant Western worldviews as well as mainstream English-language information sources. Thus, opponents of US hegemony often pin their hopes on Russia as a counterbalance. Scholars with such an epistemological inclination may be tempted to increase their value and fill a niche in the academic market by differentiating their views from major Western discourses. Yet, concentrating on uncovering "double standards" or "hypocrisy" in US policies toward Russia can blind them to Russia's illegal and militarily aggressive actions against its neighbors. Scholars who criticize perceived political biases of Western mainstream discourse and claim "objectivity" on the Ukraine events often risk engaging in what Pielke (2007, 7) termed "stealth issue advocacy," effectively narrowing the scope of policy choice in favor of the aggressor.

The accusation of "Western Russophobia" is frequently invoked by Russian officials, particularly following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Robinson 2019, 64). However, this technique, based on a genetic fallacy, is reminiscent of the Soviet propaganda labeling any foreign and domestic dissidents as possessing "Russophobia" (Darczewska and Żochowski 2015). This historically constructed narrative has been echoed by scholars outside of Russia (e.g., Tsygankov 2009; Diesen 2022). Tsygankov's book, published following Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, posits that American Russophobia aims to undermine Russia's political reputation and compel it into "submitting to the United States in the execution of its grand plans to control the world's most precious resources and geostrategic sites" (Tsygankov 2009, xiii–xvi).

The findings of this dissertation should alert scholars dealing with the post-Soviet space to the potential consequences of a Russian-centered ontology, such as "Western Russophobia," and epistemological resistance to mainstream discourse in their academic endeavors. A remedy may be to challenge system and identity narratives such as "Biased Media / Info War," "Russia Defensive," and "fraternal nations" ("One People"). As noted by Fedchenko (2016, 166), Russian narratives are "variations of the Soviet paradigm" built on anti-Americanism, Soviet/Russian moral superiority and falsified historiography. Literature on Soviet propaganda might facilitate a better understanding of the historical backgrounds of these recurrent narratives (e.g., Shultz and Godson 1984; Darczewska and Żochowski 2015; Yermolenko 2019).

8.4. Future Research Agenda: Epistemic Community and Agent of Influence

This dissertation is a primary attempt to shed light on underexplored aspects of the relationship between Russia and foreign scholars and intellectuals. A possible area for future research is the validity of the concept of transnational epistemic community, which argues for the power of ideas diffused through transnational networks of scientists in international politics.[86] As we have seen in this dissertation, epistemic communities organized by authoritarian regimes, such as the Valdai Discussion Club, may not function in the way posited in Western academic works.

The existing literature argues that during the Cold War, both Western and Soviet scholars, earnestly engaged in exchanges anchored by their scientific and professional missions, evolved policy ideas independently of their governments (Adler and Haas 1992, 374). These exchanges supposedly led to positive changes on both sides, contributing to the US-Soviet arms control negotiations (Adler 1992) and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (Mendelson 1993). Adler and Haas (1992, 376) argue that during the US-Soviet arms control negotiations Soviet experts created an epistemic community of their own based on the American model. Similarly, Evangelista (1999) contends that transnational actors, particularly prominent scientists and physicists, taking part in international peace movements throughout the Cold War, contributed to the moderation of Soviet foreign policy.

Evangelista further explains that the highly centralised and hierarchical structure of Soviet authoritarianism allowed the transnational groups – Soviet "policy entrepreneurs" – to gain access to the top party leaders and implement their ideas despite the opposition from the military establishment. Evangelista (1999, 349) also asserts that post-Soviet Russia was "no longer centralized and hierarchical," which resulted in the same transnational groups losing preferential access to political leadership and their ability to influence Russia's security policy.[87]

However, in hindsight, the failed democratization and subsequent militarization of post-Soviet Russia – despite the increased freedom and international exchanges enjoyed by the same "Westernized" and "reform-minded" scholars who participated directly in policy formation – suggests that epistemic communities did not function as Western scholars had initially anticipated. For example, Georgi Arbatov, former director of the Institute of the USA and Canada (ISKAN) and a "new thinker" of the Gorbachev era (Zubok 2007, 178, 282), was elected as a deputy of the Russian State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) and a member of its Defense Committee in 1993, later serving as deputy chairman of the Defense Committee from 1995 to 2003. Similarly, Andrei Kokoshin, former ISKAN deputy director and described by Evangelista as "the

[86] Major arguments in this section were published in Hosaka (2025).

[87] By contrast, Adler (1992a, 142) argues that the pluralistic nature and the relatively decentralized process of the US political system helped the epistemic community diffuse an arms control agenda into the government.

Soviet scholar most attracted to and involved in transnational discussions," whose views were particularly influenced by Lutz Unterseher's work on "nonoffensive defense" (Evangelista 1999, 191; See also English 2000, 169), became first deputy defense minister and secretary of the security council, playing a significant role in shaping the contemporary Russian armed forces. Perhaps, the most remarkable political career was that of '*institutchik*' Yevgeny Primakov, former director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), who served as the head of Russia's foreign intelligence service, foreign minister, and prime minister under the Yeltsin administration.

Conversely, in post-Soviet Russia, Western scholars were able to communicate freely with their Russian counterparts at academic conferences and public diplomacy events, with little concern about censorship and surveillance by the authorities. Some Western scholars were even granted direct access to Vladimir Putin and other high-ranking officials (Giles 2019, 33). Logical questions follow: what happened to these "Westernized" Soviet scholars after the collapse of the USSR? Why were post-Soviet epistemic communities unable to make use of their access to the Russian leadership to positively influence its foreign policy direction? Rather, as seen in this dissertation, epistemic communities, such as the Valdai Discussion Club, have functioned as venues for Moscow to effectively spread disinformation. Symbolically, after the launch of Russia's full-scale invasion, major Russian foreign policy experts, such as Fedor Lukyanov and Dmitri Trenin, who dominated Western expert discourse on Russian foreign policies and were thus valued, cited and invited by Western interlocuters, subtly but outwardly expressed their political alignment with the Putin regime (Graef 2023).

A possible way to explore this question is by examining another hidden dimension of the relationship between scholars and states – the concept of "agent of influence" (see section 1.3). As James Sherr points out (1987, 162), the relationship between scholars and the political leadership in the USSR was fundamentally different from the informal relationships between scholars, bureaucrats and lawmakers in liberal democracies. Although both epistemic community and agent of influence describe the relationship between academia and states in the international arena and, to differing degrees, imply "influence" from Western academics on Soviet counterparts and vice versa, they have been unrelated to each other in the existing literature. In dealing with foreign academics, contemporary Russian leadership operates on concepts formulated and sophisticated by Soviet intelligence services. Soviet and Russian leadership, starting from KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov in the 1960s, *a priori* believed that there have been Western "agents of influence" behind any popular movement unfolding in its "sphere of influence," nowadays calling them "color revolutions."[88] This belief

[88] At the end of the 1960s, against the backdrop of the increasing cultural and intellectual exchanges with the West, Andropov believed that Western special services infiltrated the country with their "agents of influence," aiming to destabilize the regime from the inside (Hosaka 2022a, 5).

mirrors the actions that Soviet and Russian regimes have been taking against the West (Hosaka 2022a, 5).[89]

Authoritarian regimes exploit the vulnerabilities of foreign scholars who are professionally engaged in researching their countries. A Soviet intelligence manual states: "Sovietologists and some other specialists in capitalist and developing nations may lose their professional authority and influence if they lose the opportunity to visit the Soviet Union regularly and communicate with Soviet colleagues." Soviet intelligence targeted foreign graduate students and trainees who needed "access to the materials of their interest and the assistance of members of the teaching staff" and "the support of major scientific authorities recognized internationally" (Hosaka 2025). For example, a Western professor of political economy who wished to establish a relationship with a Soviet research institute was provided with the historical materials he craved for his research from the Soviet archives (Fabrichnikov and Ovchinnikov 1968, 56–57). Authoritarian regimes are focused on controlling the strategic narrative that is communicated to target audiences via epistemic communities. For example, in advance of academic conferences held in the USSR, the KGB, together with relevant agencies, prepared disinformation materials and identified "the concrete path of communicating disinformation to the adversary." When the Western scholars exhibited a professional interest in specific issues, Chekists exploited the opportunity to "successfully promote disinformation materials for the adversary" through Soviet scientists (Hosaka 2023a, 48).

The Valdai Discussion Club strategically invites "unbiased" foreign scholars whose views already partially align with Russia's narratives on international events. These individuals are also expected to hold a level of prominence in their respective countries, enabling them to influence public opinion and political leadership effectively. A Soviet intelligence training manual highlights the importance of inviting "well-known foreign scientists who do not have a biased attitude" toward the Soviet Union for major international conferences and symposia held in Moscow. Equally important was the involvement of Russian scholars who possessed sufficient expertise to "interest the foreigner and conduct a confidential conversation to obtain information" (Mudretsov 1981, 25–29). Moreover, Moscow systematically disseminated political disinformation to foreign scholars as part of these efforts (Chumakov, Prozorov, and Milovanov 1968, 42).

Although the concepts of "epistemic community" and "agent of influence" derive from entirely different political regimes, both share "a common policy enterprise" such as "fight for peace," and "prevention of nuclear war." The use of agents (and confidential contacts) of influence did not mean that foreign scholars were influenced by Soviet intelligence. Rather, Soviet intelligence sought "sophisticated" foreigners whose views were partially congruent with Soviet

[89] See how the Kremlin sees the role of "Western agents of influence" in Ukraine's aspirations for the EU integration in 2013 in the Complex of Measures, the document personally approved by Putin (Hosaka 2018, 335).

perspectives, gradually broadening common grounds in the name of transnational problem solutions and skillfully prompting them into actions to influence a target state's public, parliament, and government (Hosaka 2025). Disguised as public diplomacy efforts, contemporary Russia-supported transnational epistemic communities are targeting foreign scholars and students imbued with counterhegemonic epistemology, aspiring to challenge Western mainstream discourse and what they perceive as the US-led unipolar system.

As Japanese narrative agents argued for Japan's "independent" Russia policies for its "national interest," a Soviet foreign intelligence manual recommends that the activities of agents of influence should not cause any suspicion that they are acting on behalf of Moscow. Ostensibly, these agents should "act from the standpoint of the national interests of their country, the protection of sovereignty and national independence" (*Osnovnye napravleniya i ob"ekty razvedyvatel'noi raboty za granitsei* 1970, 56). This Soviet-era practice of providing themes to foreign authors continues to this day; the Kremlin regularly sends bullet points to a Japanese Russianist, expecting him to communicate these themes to various Japanese audiences. In 2021, Masaru Sato, a prolific writer on Russian topics in Japan, revealed that he had occasionally received talking points on Japan-Russia relations from Russia's Presidential Administration and that the Kremlin expected him to communicate them to various Japanese audiences (Hosaka 2023b, 28).

The intersections of transnational epistemic communities and agents of influence highlights the complexities and nuances in the relationship between academia and state power, particularly within the context of authoritarian regimes like Russia. While the concept of epistemic communities suggests that transnational networks of scholars can independently influence policy, the Soviet and contemporary Russian experience reveals a different reality – one where these communities are often co-opted or manipulated to serve state interests. The persistence of Soviet-era tactics in modern Russian strategic narratives, such as the use of agents of influence, underscores the importance of critically examining the role of scholars in international politics. This examination is crucial for understanding how narratives are shaped and disseminated, especially in environments where the lines between genuine academic exchange and state-driven influence are blurred. The ongoing practice of influencing foreign scholars to promote narratives aligned with Russian interests serves as a reminder of the enduring influence of Soviet strategies and the need for recognizing and addressing these tactics in the global academic and political arenas.

CHAPTER 9 IMPLICATIONS AFTER FEBRUARY 2022

On February 24, 2022, Russia initiated an unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine. At the time of drafting this dissertation, the war is still going on. However, Ukraine's strong resistance and the documentation of Russia's countless war crimes have introduced new dimensions to public and academic narratives on Ukraine.

The onslaught was justified by Putin with the narratives similar to those voiced by him and amplified by certain international scholars in 2014. For example, on February 21, 2022, Putin claimed that "Modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia, more precisely, Bolshevik, communist Russia," thus suggesting that Ukraine allegedly owes its statehood to Russia, its "older brother" (*Reuters* 2022). However, Russia's turn to undeniably nineteenth-century warfare with blatant violence caused mainstream media and academia to start referring to the event in Ukraine as the "[full-scale] invasion" instead of the "Ukraine crisis," a most frequently used term over the eight years since the start of the invasion in 2014 (Tyushka 2023).

On the other hand, Russia's wartime propaganda began to resort more to historical lineages familiar to its domestic public that also resonated with Western left and (far-)right and wider non-Western audiences, such as the victimization of Russia, US colonialism/imperialism and civilizational discourse and traditional Christian values (Tolz and Hutchings 2023). There are claims that Western historians "helped to create an intellectual framework in which Putin could make his claims about Ukrainian history with a high degree of credibility and expectation of acceptance" (Zayarnyuk 2022, 193; see also Kuzio 2018b).

Russian historian Alexey Miller, cited by Japanese Russianist Nobuo Shimotomai in his argument on Ukraine, joined the Valdai Discussion Club and Russia's Council on Defense and Foreign Policy. Miller continued to be a critic of Ukraine's allegedly "nationalist" historical policies. By the time of Russia's amassment of its troops at the Ukrainian borders in 2021, Miller was defending Putin's thesis that the Ukrainian state was invented by Lenin (cited in Zayarnyuk 2022, 194).

In the spring of 2022, foreign participants of the Valdai Discussion Club, such as John Mearsheimer and Samuel Charap, objected to the Western provision of weapons to Ukraine. Charap wrote in *Foreign Policy* that sending arms would not make sense as Ukraine would be defeated by Russia (Kuzio 2022). Mearsheimer's "realist" argument had the honor of being cited by Russian diplomatic missions to pin the blame on the West for Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Russian Embassy, UK 2022; Russian Mission in Geneva 2022). This confirms the argument by Richard Ashley (cited in Guzzini 2000, 173) that realism is not only about power, but realist discourse is a power exercise itself.

At the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many Western experts believed that Russian forces would capture Kyiv within days. Such a prediction turned out to be totally wrong. As Taras Kuzio (2022) points out, this

misperception suggests many Western scholars viewed Ukraine more or less through Russia's prism. They overestimated Russia's military reforms and the efficiency of its armed forces and chain of command, while underestimating the widespread corruption within the Russian military. Conversely, they overestimated Ukraine's corruption and the nation's east-west divide (which is mostly Russian propaganda), while underestimating the achievements of Ukraine's military reforms since 2014, the country's resilience, and the civic patriotism of local leaders and citizens, including those in the east. Kseniya Oksamytna (2023, 505–6) argues that the Russian aggression against Ukraine was enabled by historical discourses of Russian supremacy and Ukrainian "inferiority" shaped for centuries and accentuated by Russian media. Russian invaders, surprised by the high standards of living in Ukraine and the organized resistance of Ukrainians, suffered from the stereotypes that Ukraine is backwards, chaotic and fragmented – a "failed-state" where the Russian-speaking population is oppressed.

The war brought to light horrible war crimes committed by the Russian armed forces and Ukraine's heroic fight, prompting some scholars to decolonize, decenter, or rethink area studies. This entails self-reflection and revisiting conventional views about regions, as well as their positionality and epistemic injustice toward studies of smaller countries. Scholars are critically examining existing approaches, methods, and limitations of area studies. In particular, realists' tendency to ignore the agency of smaller nations like Ukraine, with little attention to empirical facts, has been subjected to substantial criticism by scholars of IR and other fields, including those from Eastern and Central Europe (see e.g., Mälksoo 2023; Specter 2022; Dutkiewicz and Smolenski 2023). Makarychev and Nizhnikau (2023) elaborate on the multifaceted normalization practice in Western academia: discursive rationalization and normalization of radical differences, liberal tradition of inclusiveness, critical attitude toward Western hegemony (but not Russian), neglect of Russia's neighbors' voices, imposition of the irrelevant Western perspective on the region "in-between," and the political instrumentalization of academic discourse. Most of these observations align with the arguments of this dissertation. In the meantime, scholars have also considered how to avoid being labeled as Putin apologists while representing Russian narratives (Brattvoll 2023). A group of motivated scholars, even in countries distant from Ukraine, such as New Zealand, chose not to remain silent. They acknowledged their active roles as objects and subjects in knowledge production, striving to foster knowledge on Ukraine among students and local communities (Chaban and Headley 2023).

This final chapter goes beyond original research questions and addresses new developments after February 24, 2022. It applies the concepts discussed in this dissertation and draws out implications in current discussions on the ontology, epistemology and methodology of area studies.[90]

[90] Part of this chapter was published in Hosaka (2023c; 2023b).

9.1. Ukraine's Agency in Japanese Academia After February 24

Japan's response to Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine included a variety of extraordinary and unprecedented steps both at official and grassroots levels. First, it has had far-reaching implications for Japan's foreign and security policies, notably ending Tokyo's "delicate balancing act" (Shagina 2018) between the G7 and Russia. Russia's brutal war buried Tokyo's last hopes for business-as-usual relations with Moscow and a resolution of the long-standing dispute on the Northern Territories in the near future, compelling the Japanese government to reframe the northern neighbor as a grave security concern.

Russia's war crimes also served as a wake-up call for Tokyo, promoting discussions on the country's national security and response to China's military growth. Practitioners and experts increasingly recognize that the security of Europe and East Asia are inextricably intertwined, and that a change of status quo by force in Ukraine might have domino effects on future developments in the Taiwan Strait. Consequently, Japan relinquished the strategy sought by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to decouple Russia from China by developing friendly relations with Moscow (Hosaka 2021a). Tokyo appears to have entirely reversed its rhetoric; Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said that "confronting Russia will deter China." Unlike in 2014, Tokyo has taken a leading role in international efforts to contain Russia in the Indo-Pacific region (Hosaka 2023b).

Furthermore, it was also unprecedented for Tokyo, known for its strict immigration laws, to accept 1,800 Ukrainian "evacuees." Despite its overly pacifistic constitution and bureaucratic impediments, Japan delivered bulletproof jackets, helmets, and commercial drones to Ukraine. Demonstrating solidarity with Ukraine, the Japanese government shifted from the Russian spelling to the Ukrainian spelling for Ukrainian geographical toponyms and the mainstream media followed suit (Hosaka 2023b).

At the grassroots level, there is strong sympathy and support for Ukrainians; Ukraine's unyielding resistance turned Japan blue and yellow. President Zelensky's address to the Japanese parliament, live-streamed by major nationwide networks, touched the hearts of the Japanese public, who had little knowledge about Ukraine before February 2022 (Hosaka 2023b).

In the eyes of the Japanese public, Ukraine became "independent" in a true sense of the word. Before the full-scale invasion, Ukraine's image was overshadowed by the "Russian factor" (Geraskov 2018). Ukraine's courageous fight against the Russian invaders stirred the interest of ordinary Japanese people in the nation hidden behind its northern neighbor, shedding light on Ukraine's rich history, culture and language. It also opened the eyes of most of the media gatekeepers to Russian propaganda on Ukraine. On nationwide broadcasting channels, Japanese participants of the Valdai Discussion Club and scholars of Russian studies who had spread Putin's talking points in 2014 were primarily replaced by Ukrainianists and European politics experts. In the early months of Russia's full-scale invasion, the chair and members of the Japanese Association of Ukrainian

Studies appeared on national networks nearly every other day to provide analytical views on Ukraine, exposing Russian propaganda and disinformation. Although many security experts, seeing the war through the lens of Russia, underestimated Ukraine's capabilities and resilience at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, expecting that Russia would likely take Kyiv quickly and defeat Ukraine, they nonetheless provided more substantiated analysis on what was happening on the battlefield than area studies scholars (Hosaka 2023d, 43).

Upon Russia's full-scale invasion, Twitter and other social media became valuable venues for Ukrainians to express self-determination and assert their own identity and choices, as a response to the dominating geopolitical discourse in the Western media (Penkala, Derluyn, and Lietaert 2023). Affective media practices, such as personal stories and testimonies by Ukrainian social media users, became central to wartime knowledge production as a form of resistance (Lokot 2023). It is worth noting the new types of narrative agents that delivered Ukraine's messages directly to Japanese audiences through the social media space. Along with the Ukrainian Embassy in Tokyo, which earned over 200,000 Twitter followers (for comparison, the US Embassy had 140,000, and the Russian Embassy had 90,000), Japanese-speaking Ukrainian influencers such as Nazarenko Andriy and Gurenko Andriy, who have 200,000 and 140,000 Twitter followers respectively, transmitted Ukrainian viewpoints initially not covered by mainstream media. They tweeted episodes such as the 13 Ukrainian border guards who defended Snake Island from Russian invaders, a Ukrainian woman who persuaded a Russian soldier to put sunflower seeds in his pocket, and regular people who successfully blocked Russian tanks on roads. These episodes went viral on social media and were subsequently picked up by conventional media outlets, and astounded the Japanese audience with Ukrainian people's bravery (Hosaka 2023b, 30). These narratives contrasted sharply with those in 2014 which mainly demonized Ukrainian soldiers fighting Russian invaders, as "neo-Nazis."

Since February 2022, overt Russian propaganda narratives have been substantially marginalized in Japanese mainstream media and discourse. When they resurfaced, they were quickly debunked by experts. However, as before, anti-US sentiments have prompted left-wing and neo-right intellectuals to perceive the "Ukraine war" as a proxy war between NATO and Russia, with Ukrainians as victims of American imperialism. Some commentators even proposed that Ukraine should surrender "to save human lives" (see e.g., the critique by Shinoda 2022). Pro-Russian parliamentarian Muneo Suzuki mixed up the perpetrator and victim by blaming Kyiv for "causing" the Russian invasion (Kalashnikova and Schäfer 2024). Former high-ranking diplomat and visiting professor at the University of Shizuoka, Togo Kazuhiko, affiliated with pro-Russian politician Muneo Suzuki, urged for a compromise by giving Putin a certain amount of a "gift" (Togo 2022b). In October 2022, Togo was added to the list of experts of the Valdai Discussion Club with his article titled "A Japanese View on the Conflict in Ukraine." In this article, Togo contended that Russia's actions were "of a defensive nature" and geared "against overwhelmingly aggressive actions taken by Zelensky and backed by Biden" and called for taking Putin's nuclear

intimidation seriously, which otherwise "would lead to a Third World War" (Togo 2022a).

In October 2023, Taisuke Abiru, a senior researcher at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and a Valdai expert, participated in the Valdai Discussion Club. When asked about why he chose to attend the conference despite the opinion that we should avoid non-governmental, private exchanges with Russia, which is invading Ukraine, Abiru replied:

> There is no contradiction between supporting Ukraine and maintaining dialogue channels with Russia. The future of the invasion is still uncertain, but negotiations will need to be held at some point to end the war. Even in the current situation, I believe there are things that can only be done by the private sector.

He also stressed the significance of maintaining close relationships with Moscow, arguing that despite the sanctions against Russia, energy transactions from Sakhalin were still continuing (*Asahi Shimbun Digital* 2023).

After February 24, accusing Japanese mainstream discourse of harboring a one-sided view and "Russophobia," some senior scholars of Russian and Ukrainian studies (Ueno 2022; Matsuzato 2022a) began collaborating with a conspiratorial website organized by the Happy Science religious organization, whose leader claims to be able to communicate with Putin's "guardian spirit" and spreads conspiracy theories about Russia's war crimes in Bucha.

Regression analysis on the data in 2014–19 showed that among disciplines only students of law were less susceptible to Russian narratives (Table 11). After February 24, the cleavages in academia seem to become more vivid between Russianists and Ukrainianists, between humanities scholars and international law and security studies scholars, and between senior and younger generations.

In March 2022, renowned historians of the USSR/Russia, including professors-emeritus Haruki Wada, Takeshi Tomita and Nobuaki Shiokawa issued a statement: "What should the Japanese government do to stop the Ukraine war as quickly as possible?" The statement urged the Japanese government to act as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine, alongside China and India, which abstained from voting for the UN General Assembly resolution denouncing Russia's invasion. The senior historians condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine but asserted that continuing the war would "threaten the lives of Ukrainians and Russians and deal an irreparable blow to the future of Ukraine and Russia." Because Ukraine neither invaded Russia nor harmed Russian civilians, these scholars tacitly equated the lives of Russian invaders to those of innocent civilians in Ukraine. Furthermore, the statement encouraged that "the Russian and Ukrainian forces must immediately cease hostilities at their current positions and initiate formal ceasefire talks," ignoring the fact the Ukrainian armed forces were defending their territory and population. Another sentence asserts that "the Russian forces must halt their all-out assault on Kiev, which is also a Russian religious holy site" (*Japanese Society for the Study of Russian History* 2022),

subscribing to Moscow's historical propaganda that views "Kiev" as Russia's origin (Kuzio 2018b; Yermolenko 2019) and unwittingly resonating with the "our historical land" narrative deployed by Putin (2022a) as a motive of Russia's "special military operation." In April, these historians, along with other like-minded scholars sharing a pacifist view and counter (Western) hegemonic discourse, convened an online seminar and visited the Russian and Indian ambassadors to Japan for an exchange of opinions (*Choshu Shimbun* 2022). Senior scholars' actions sparked controversy, and not all younger Russianists agreed with them (Kanamori Takayuki 2022).

However, the Board of the Japanese Association for Russian and East European Studies (JAREES) released a similar statement on March 2. The statement on "the Invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces" begins as follows:

> As researchers studying Russia and Ukraine and collaborating with scholars and academic institutions in both countries, we are deeply concerned about the great suffering of the people in these countries and the split in Russian society caused by the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces. Such aggression is completely inappropriate as a way to resolve problems between two countries that have deep ties to each other (JAREES Board 2022).

The statement makes no distinction between Ukrainian and Russian citizens ("the people in these countries"), thus obfuscating the perpetrator-victim relation.[91] It even appears that academics are more concerned about the split in Russian society, rather than the fate of the Ukrainian state and people against which Russia wages a genocidal war. While the signatories of this statement see the "deep ties" between two countries that they think should predetermine their relationship (implicitly, the "fraternal nations"), they fail to address Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and independence and international law. The statement concludes by calling for Russian troops to immediately withdraw "not to make further sacrifices" and "hop[ing] for the earliest possible restoration of peace" (JAREES Board 2022).

In contrast, the Japanese Association for Ukrainian Studies, comprised of not only Ukrainianists but also experts in European politics and security as well as former Japanese ambassadors to Ukraine, reacted more immediately and resolutely. Its February 27 statement expressed "solidarity with the Ukrainian people," strongly condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine as "a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity" and "the foundations of international law under the UN Charter." The statement goes on to say that "Ukraine is an independent sovereign state that is neither subordinated to Russia nor what it unilaterally regards as its sphere of influence,"[92] and that "all Ukrainians have chosen a path of freedom, democracy, and economic prosperity that will not be

[91] Under the alleged academic neutrality, Western intellectuals tend not to distinguish between the victim and the perpetrator (Koval et al. 2022, 10)

[92] The English translation was corrected by this author (Hosaka) to reflect the original Japanese version.

undermined by Putin's violence." The statement avoids both-sides-ism by emphasizing that the Russian army is "inflicting heavy casualties and damage throughout Ukraine," not vice versa. Notably, it concludes with, "Russia, stop the war immediately!" without any ambiguous "peace" rhetoric (The Association of Ukrainian Studies in Japan 2022).

As noted in section 5.5, many narrative agents did not significantly alter their perspectives on Ukraine between 2014 and 2019, despite the increased amount of evidence concerning Russia's covert but leading role in the war in eastern Ukraine. Similarly, the events following February 24, 2022, did not change the narratives of senior scholars in area studies. For instance, in July 2022, Kimitaka Matsuzato, a professor at the University of Tokyo, gave a press conference at the Japan National Press Club. Explaining the origin of the "Donbas separatist conflict" in 2014, Matsuzato argued that following the Euromaidan revolution and President Yanukovych's flight to Russia, "radicals" in Donbas expelled the old ruling class and established a "separatist" government called the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DPR). He emphasized that even after the start of Russia's outright invasion, the bulk of the battle was being led by the "DPR" army, not the Russian army, and stressed the importance of understanding the agency and independence of the "DPR" (Kitamura 2022).[93]

In his new book titled *Ukrainian Unrest*, Matsuzato reiterates the same arguments he previously published in Japanese and English journals. In the concluding chapter, with Ukraine in mind, he criticizes what he terms "the emotional representation of the nation," encapsulated in notions such as "the larger the nation's territory, the better" and "losing territory is the same as having a limb torn off." Matsuzato argued that adhering to this image of the nation would not facilitate the resolution of separatist conflicts. He contended that "there is an optimal territorial size," and that territory too costly to maintain should be abandoned or ceded (Matsuzato 2023, 488–89). Matsuzato further claimed that, around 2016, every second person in Kharkiv supported that idea of a "Ukraine without Donbas." However, he alleged that "Europe, the United States, and international organizations, who were worried about changes in borders, used aid as leverage to 'encourage' Ukraine to return to a hardline stance" (Matsuzato 2023, 490).

Masaru Sato, a prolific writer who admitted to receiving *temnik* (disinformation bullet points from the Kremlin) regularly, praised Matsuzato's book, stating that one cannot talk about the war without reading it: "Of all the works written by Japanese scholars about the Ukraine war, this book is the best" (Chikumashobo 2023). The Japanese neo-right organization *Issuikai* also lauded Matsuzato's book for elucidating the historical and cultural perspective of Crimea, and for highlighting "the long-term exploitative politics of the Ukrainian govern-

[93] For his similar discussion in English, see Matsuzato (2022b). In this article, Matsuzato discusses the "non-party democracy" of local leaders of the "DPR" and cautions against overestimating Russia's interference. Citing Kirill Cherkashin (see subsection 6.2.3), Matsuzato argues that conflicting local leaders invited Russians for their better coordination.

ment" that, according to it, promoted Crimean's reunification with Russia (Issuikai 2023).

At the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, Nobuo Shimotomai, a Japanese member of the Valdai Discussion Club, chaired the Russia research group within Tokyo's leading thinktank, Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIIA). In the March 2023 thinktank report, a year after the launch of the full-scale invasion, he continued to repeat Russia's narratives on "fraternal peoples" as well as "NATO expansion," along with a new narrative on "threat of nuclear war":

> In the context of Russian history, the regional conflict has the character of a conflict between two "brother states" that originated in Kievan (Kyivan) Rus'. In the context of NATO's involvement in Ukraine due to eastward expansion, Russia's military invasion has led Western governments such as the G7 to impose sanctions on Russia, and has become a long-term global conflict between East and West, including the threat of nuclear war (Shimotomai 2023, 1).

The fear of nuclear war in the West has been exploited by Moscow in its strategic narrative with the help of Russian and foreign epistemic communities. In 2022, amid the Westen military assistance to Ukraine during Russa's full-scale invasion, Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, publicly argued for "turning [Russian] nuclear weapons into an effective element of deterrence" against the United States (Trenin 2022). More recently, in June 2023, against the backdrop of Ukraine's counteroffensive, Russian experts such as Sergey Karaganov and Fyodor Lukyanov engaged in a public debate about the wisdom of preemptive nuclear use (Notte 2023).

The JIIA report commissioned by Shimotomai states: "one year after the start of the war, it has become clear that this conflict can no longer be resolved by military means." Without mentioning the need to provide weapons to Ukraine, it suggests the Japanese government should call for Russia to stop the invasion. It further discusses the need to reintegrate Russia into the international community after the end of the Russia-Ukraine war, stressing that a post-War international community should not exclude Russia, while holding it accountable for the invasion. The report also argues that Japan should maintain a dialogue with Putin's Russia, referring to the "neighborhood that cannot allow relations to halt" ("Seisaku teigen [policy recommendations]" 2023).

Both Kimitaka Matsuzato and Nobuo Shimotomai are recognized as prominent scholars on Ukrainian studies and Russian studies respectively. Matsuzato received a prize for the best article published in *Nationalities Papers* in 2019, while Shimotomai co-chaired the ICCEES World Congress in 2015. What unites them is their systematic dissemination of narratives that discredit the Ukrainian government, under the guise of academic and expert discourse, among Japanese policy and journalist circles. This approach, as Pielke (2007, 7) terms it, constitutes "stealth issue advocacy," which de facto attempts to limit policy options for

the Japanese government, while criticizing perceived political biases of Western (and Japanese) mainstream discourse.

Reviewing Japan's initial response to Russia's full-scale invasion at various levels reveals that Russocentric and anti-Western hegemony discourses remain persistent among senior academics in area studies. As I noted elsewhere, "Everything is ok with government and people, while academia is in trouble" (Hosaka 2023d). This trend, however, is not confined to Japan. Similar patterns of stealth issue advocacy under the guise of academic narratives can be observed in other liberal democracies.

9.2. Decolonization of Area Studies – Hijacked?

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine became a wake-up call for scholars to address the agency of a long-neglected East European country (Mälksoo 2023). It sparked renewed debates on the ontological and epistemological foundations in area studies and related fields. This disruption and new discourse formation is evident in various special editions of academic publications, such as *Slavic Review* ("Discussion: War Against Ukraine" 2022), *Ab Imperio* ("War and the State of the Field" 2022), *Post-Soviet Affairs* ("Conversations within the Field: Russia's War against Ukraine and the Future of Russian Studies"), and *Journal of International Relations and Development* ("Forum: The responsibility to remain silent? On the politics of knowledge production, expertise and (self-)reflection in Russia's war against Ukraine"). After February 2022, the trend of "decolonization," or alternatively "de-centering" or "rethinking" has become significant in area studies related to Russia. There appears to be a tacit consensus among scholars on the need to reexamine the scope, positionality, epistemology, and methodology. However, diverse discussions exist, including the fundamental question of what exactly should be "decolonized." For example, the 2022 Chicago ASEEES convention organized a vice-presidential roundtable on "Decolonizing and De-Centering Russian Studies" in preparation for the 2023 ASSESS theme "Decolonization." Despite the emphasis on "academic freedom" to define what decolonizing Russian studies means, there was a huge elephant in the room in this discussion – asymmetry between Russian studies and the studies of other countries in the region.[94]

There are two distinct arrays of conversations that derive from their own epistemological concerns but are related to the concepts of Russocentricism and counterhegemonic epistemology explored in this dissertation: "internal colonization" and depoliticized political science. "Internal colonization," which was discussed in the 2000s, resurfaced in the post-February 24 decolonization debate. This perspective treats Russian history as a process of "internal colonization" (Etkind 2011), rather than blatant external colonization of neighboring peoples,

[94] Author's observation in November 2022.

bringing the current discussion back to the decade-long discussion on Russia's self-colonization.

Literary scholars were particularly sensitive to the subtleties of coloniality in post-Soviet Russian studies. Although scholars of non-Russian cultures called for the need to consider post-Soviet space through the post-colonial paradigm in the early 1990s, such a voice was largely ignored by Russian intellectuals and Western scholars on Russian culture. Ewa Thompson (2000) demonstrates how Russian authors, in their privileged positions as "spokesperson for the growing empire," imposed Russia-centered narratives on the domestic and foreign readership of Russian literature, obscuring the discourses of colonized nationalities. While ardently deconstructing Western colonialism, many Western academics failed to recognize the Tsarist-Soviet colonial continuity (Thompson 2000, 46).

Russian scholars have been hesitant to label Soviet rule as colonial. Focused on Russia's perceived marginal status vis-à-vis the West (Morozov 2015), the Russian intelligentsia avoids facing Russia's cruel colonizing history. Critiques of "global coloniality" condemn not only the Russian regime, which de-westernized and impoverished the country by looting money into offshore banks, but also the "Global North" for using former Soviet Union colonies "merely as tokens of geostrategic dominance," with "flower and fruit revolutions" replacing the previous Soviet leaders with "champions of Western neoliberalism" (Tlostanova 2015, 277–79). In such an interpretative framework, the issue of the coloniality of knowledge, or what "decolonizing thinkers" should address, is reduced by Tlostanova to anecdotal instances of social privilege: in the UAE, a blond-haired blue-eyed Russian student was socially privileged as a "European" over his Bangladeshi and African colleagues despite having the same qualifications (Tlostanova 2015, 279). Nonetheless, Tlostanova, who advocates for "deautomatizing and delinking from the Western epistemic premises, … set free an alternative world perception" (Tlostanova 2019, 167–68), continues to be regarded either as a champion of de-colonizers among scholars of global coloniality after Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine (Tlostanova 2023), or as a "trickster" operating in Western academia but able to "infiltrate, undermine, and destabilize" the repressive systems from within (Donovan 2023, 169–70).

The discussion on knowledge production in the post-socialist Global East, the "peripheries" stretching from Poland to Kyrgyzstan, often focused on the marginal position of Eastern scholars vis-à-vis the Anglophone "hegemony" or "metropole" that dictates their empirical, theoretical and methodological concerns and funding priorities (Trubina et al. 2020, 639–40). However, this juxtaposition of the Global East with the West frequently overlooks the epistemological hierarchy within the Global East, especially among former Soviet countries with the Russian Federation at its top, and the possible accommodation by Western journal editors – gatekeepers of academic knowledge production.

In 2022, following Russia's full-scale invasion, Vitaly Chernetsky described the status of Ukrainian studies – which had long been treated as inferior to Russian Studies in the hierarchy in knowledge production – as an instance of epistemic injustice. Scholars of Slavic studies traditionally viewed the country

through the prism of Moscow, marginalizing Ukrainian language, culture and history (Chernetsky 2022). Koplatadze (2019, 475) also noted that Western scholars are more concerned about the "psychological destruction of Russian people" and that arguments on Russia's "internal colonialism" ignore the sufferings of the colonized peoples in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This perspective is clearly reflected in the aforementioned statement of the JAREES Board (2022), which expresses concerns about "the great suffering of the people in [Russia and Ukraine] and the split in Russian society caused by the invasion of Ukraine" rather than a possible annihilation of the Ukrainian nation. Koplatadze calls for students of Russian studies to address Russian colonialism from the viewpoint of the former peripheries (Koplatadze 2019, 471–72).

Since February 2022, Russia and its court academics have attempted to hijack the concept of decolonialization, especially among audiences outside of Western democracies, by projecting itself as a champion against "Western colonialism." Research analyzing the 2,700 most popular media outlets across 11 states – India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Ghana, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil and Argentina – designated by the Russian government as part of the Global South (and East) following its full-scale invasion, indicates that a dominant narrative portrays anyone opposing the West, notably Russia, as an ally. The researchers argue that the Kremlin has leveraged this post-colonial perspective to frame the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a reaction to "expansionist Western intervention." Discussions on the Russian invasion within these countries often focus on Western colonialism, trade wars, sanctions, globalization and other geopolitical debates, while largely ignoring Ukraine's agency (Bidochko et al. 2023). The Russian-backed concept of a "multipolar world" effectively aligns with grievances against US hegemony and Western "neo-colonialism" in these countries (Koval and Tereshchenko 2023, 164).

In the speech during the ceremony for the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions in September 2022, Putin spoke about centuries-old "Russophobia" and the colonial past of the West, denouncing its attempts to "preserve the neo-colonial system which allows it to live off the world." He stressed that the West "want[s] [Russia] to be a colony" and highlighted the "emancipatory, anti-colonial movement against unipolar hegemony" emerging in many countries and societies (Putin 2022b). At the Valdai Discussion Club in September 2023, the Russian president criticized the US and its "satellites" for their "colonial policies" over centuries and of their pursuit of "hegemony in military affairs, politics, the economy, culture and even morals and values" (Putin 2023). Putin's dystopian worldview, which portrays Russia as fighting to liberate Ukrainians from the influence of the West, finds traction among those unaware of Russia's imperial history of colonization (Kuzio 2023).

More recently, Russia's war against Ukraine led to the creation of a new intellectual movement entitled RUTA Association for Central, South-Eastern, Eastern European, Baltic, Caucasus, Central and Northern Asia Studies in Global Conversation, challenging conventional academic epistemologies and area

studies frameworks. The 2024 June RUTA inaugural conference "Re(kn)own Region(s) from Within" critiqued area labels such as "post-Soviet," "post-communist," "post-socialist," "Eurasia," "New East," and "Global East," addressing the imperial and colonial perspectives concealed within these labels (RUTA 2024).

9.3. Depoliticize Political Science?

Positivism claims to be free of normative, ideological, or political bias, but critics argue it often hides implicit value judgments and that its foundational assumptions reflect subjective choices (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 31). As Pielke (2007, 1–3) notes, scientists claiming to focus "only on the science" and be "objective" often risk slipping into "stealth issue advocacy," in fact working to limiting the scope of policy choice. To avoid this trap, Pielke proposes that scientists be *Honest Brokers of Policy Alternatives*, explicitly associating science with possible policy options (Pielke 2007, 7).

A group of comparativists, contributors to *Post-Soviet Affairs'* special issue "Conversations within the Field: Russia's War against Ukraine and the Future of Russian Studies," who view contemporary Russia as a unique laboratory for experimental research in authoritarian settings, are primarily concerned about limitations on their fieldwork, interviews, data collection, and access to archives in Russia. They distance themselves from "politicized" topics, including decolonization (hence their preference for "rethinking" Russian studies). In response to critiques regarding the failure of social scientists to predict Russia's full-scale war, Smyth (2022, 7) cautions that in the middle of a crisis, it is challenging to make definitive statements, while "work driven by policy concerns will suffer from greater biases than theory-driven studies and will focus on an extremely narrow set of questions." On the other hand, Yusupova (2022, 2–3), an anthropologist studying Russian ethnic minorities, ponders: whether scholarship should aim to influence policies and politics, or remain neutral for the sake of objectivity. She also considers whether research on Russia should continue to be predominantly positivistic or adopt a more critical approach. Yusupova's bifurcation of positivistic and critical approaches highlights the epistemological position within mainstream Russian studies scholarship.

Timothy Frye, whose monograph *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia,* is cited by most contributors to *Post-Soviet Affairs'* special issue "Conversations within the Field," believes that "views of Russia in the West are still highly politicized." He contends that the mission of scholars, apart from "the popular writing on Russia" by authors such as Catherine Belton, Peter Pomerantsev, Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, is to "gather large data sets that are subject to empirical testing" and "grasp broader trends." For example, Mikhail Khodorkovsky's arrest in 2003 is explained and normalized as a nationalization of the industry by oil-rich autocracies facing an oil price surge, as shown by Algeria, Bolivia, Chad, Dubai, Ecuador, Senegal, and Venezuela in the mid-

2000s (Frye 2021, 7–11), rather than Putin's persecution of a political rival or the historical continuity of the autocratic system in Russia.

In 2010, the Russian government provided a large grant for Frye and his Russian colleague Andrey Yakovlev to create a research institute at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow (Frye 2021, 5). Consequently, this center exercised caution in choosing research topics, and was less interested in dealing with specific cases of corruption, corporate raiding, and oligarchs' embezzlements (Frye 2021, 128). It is noteworthy that authoritarian regimes favor such benevolent research designs among foreign researchers. For example, Western scholars' dependence on research resources in the USSR and self-censorship muted their interest in uncomfortable topics for the regime (Slusser 1973; Richmond 2018, 35–36; Pallot in Kangas et al. 2023, 9).

Russian studies should not be canceled or boycotted, but neither should it be locked in a new ivory tower, such as "Russian IR," where pro-regime narratives disguised as academic ones often assert Russia's civilizational uniqueness, which, in the rhetoric of this school, cannot be understood by "Western" science (Tsygankov and Tsygankov 2014). While it is essential to understand the "native" social and political imaginary of long-neglected sections of area studies, such as Central and Eastern Europe (Kubik 2020, 79), Russian studies should not only rely on "native" conceptualizations. Although regression analysis of this dissertation did not show statistical significance (see subsection 5.4.1), engaging with non-Russian post-communist countries might help scholars to moderate Russia's metropolitan views penetrating their research agenda.

Research of Russia should be enriched by incorporating fresh perspectives from adjacent area studies branches, most notably, Ukrainian studies, Central Asian studies, and Baltic studies. Opportunities and materials are abundant in its neighboring countries. First of all, Russian history, which is based on imperial Russian and Soviet historiographies, should be re-examined in view of recent works by Ukrainian scholars (see e.g., Hrushevs′kyĭ et al. 1997). Remarkable research on contemporary Russia, not necessarily scholarly works, has been conducted on topics in Ukraine: "*Russky Mir*" (Yakubova 2018), Russian media and discourse (Fedchenko 2016; Popovych et al. 2018), Russian historical propaganda (Yermolenko 2019), the "Great Patriotic War" (Zhurzhenko 2015; Primachenko 2018), Russian "private military companies" (*InformNapalm* 2017), Russia's youth militarization such as *Yunarmia* (Leszkiewicz and Luchkov 2019), Russian elite structure ("Kremlin Towers. Who Will Share Putin`s Legacy?" 2023). Most notably, studies of Soviet/Russian security and intelligence agencies and their tradecraft are mainly led by scholars from Ukraine and other former Soviet countries, who are not only motivated to seek historical truth during the Soviet era but also have access to the former KGB archives (e.g., Bertelsen 2021; Zhuk 2021; Bertelsen 2023b), whereas Russian scholars lack access to Russian FSB archives and few show enthusiasm for this topic, perhaps due to its political sensitivity.

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Pelgalt poliitika? Venemaa Ukraina-teemaliste narratiivide taastootmine Jaapani teadlas- ja haritlaskonnas aastatel 2014–2019

2013. aasta detsembris tulid sajad tuhanded ukrainlased tänavatele, väljendamaks oma toetust Euroopa suunale ja protesteerimaks president Viktor Janukovõtši võimu väärkasutamise ja korruptsiooni vastu. See vastasseis rahvaga viis Janukovõtši režiimi 2014. aasta veebruariks kokkukukkumiseni. Kuid massiliikumisele, mis sai tuntuks nimedega Euromaidan ja Väärikuse Revolutsioon, järgnes peagi Krimmi õigusvastane annekteerimine Venemaa poolt ja relvastatud konflikt Ukraina idaosas. Moskva-poolset Ukraina suveräänsuse ja territoriaalse terviklikkuse rikkumist saatsid narratiivid, mille kohaselt oli Euromaidani näol tegemist „riigipöördega", mille taga olid Lääne toetatud „fašistid", samas kui Venemaa sissetungi ja Ida-Ukraina okupeerimist esitleti Ukraina-sisese „kodusõjana".

Venemaa riiklike toimijate ja riigi rahastatud meedia piiratud kohalolust ja mõjust hoolimata levisid paljude riikide meediasse ja avalikku diskursusesse mitmesugused narratiivid, mis diskrediteerisid Ukraina seaduslikku valitsust ja desorienteerisid Lääne avalikkust, ratsionaliseerides samal ajal Venemaa käitumist. Venemaa ebaseadusliku tegevuse normaliseerimine algas väliste vaatlejate keelekasutusest, mida püüti näidata neutraalsena. Nii nimetati neid sündmusi sageli eufemistlikult „Ukraina kriisiks", hägustades seeläbi Venemaa otsest rolli kriisis ja järgnevas sõjas Ukrainas. Järgnevalt viitan ma Ukrainas toimunule ja sellega seotud sündmustele, sealhulgas Euromaidanile, Krimmi annekteerimisele Venemaa poolt ja relvakonfliktile Ida-Ukrainas kui „Ukraina sündmustele", teadvustades samas Venemaa rolli neis sekkuja, õhutaja, ja osalejana.

Käesolevas doktoritöös uurin, kuidas Venemaa narratiive Ukraina sündmuste kohta taastoodeti ja normaliseeriti liberaalsetes demokraatiates, tuginedes Alister Miskimmoni, Ben O'Loughlini ja Laura Roselle'i (2017) strateegilise narratiivi kontseptsioonile. Strateegiline narratiiv annab põhiraamistiku mõistmaks, kuidas riiklikud toimijad sõnastavad ja projitseerivad narratiive kommunikatsioonitehnoloogiate ja meediakanalite keerulise maastiku kaudu, et jõuda nii kodumaise kui rahvusvahelise auditooriumini. Varasemates töödes rõhutatakse narratiivide kaksikrolli rahvusvahelistes suhetes: struktuuridena, mis kujundavad osalejate mõtteid ja käitumist ning vahenditena, mida toimijad kasutavad teiste veenmiseks. Strateegiline narratiiv hõlmab mitte ainult liberaalsete demokraatiate avalikku diplomaatiat ja pehmet jõudu, vaid ka autokraatiate kasutatavat desinformatsiooni, mille eesmärgiks on vastaste diskrediteerimine ja segadusseajamine.

Kuigi see riigikeskne perspektiiv aitab selgitada riigi tegevuste strateegilist tähtsust välismaiste sihtrühmade kaasamisel, ei aita see mõista, kuidas Venemaa narratiive Ukraina sündmustest levitati riikides, kus Venemaa riiklike toimijate ja riigi rahastatud meediaväljaannete võimalused on piiratud. Selles doktoritöös loon „(rahvuslike) narratiivi loojate" kontseptsiooni abil strateegiliste narratiivide

nüansseerituma käsitluse. Narratiivi loojad on vahendajad, kes tegutsevad kohapeal ja suhtlevad otse sihtrühmadega, tõlgendades ja kohandades välisriikide strateegilisi narratiive kohaliku tarbimise jaoks. Narratiivi loojate hulka ei kuulu mitte ainult teadlased, vaid ka mõttekodade eksperdid ja intellektuaalid, kes selgitavad rahvusvahelisi sündmusi kodumaisele auditooriumile.

Lisaks võib võõrriiklike toimijate ja rahvuslike narratiivide loojate omavahelise läheduse mõõtmiseks kasutada rahvusvahelise episteemilise kogukonna kontseptsiooni, mille liikmed jagavad nii arusaamu teadmiste loomest kui ka ühiseid poliitilisi ettevõtmisi. Selles väitekirjas operatsionaliseerisin seda episteemilist sidet selle alusel, kas narratiivi looja on aktiivseks osalejaks Valdai Rahvusvahelises Diskussiooniklubis, mis enam kui 1000 rahvusvahelise teadlasega üle 85 riigist on suurim Kremli rahastatud rahvusvaheline konverents.

Selles doktoritöös teen juhtumiuuringu Jaapani põhjal, analüüsides empiiriliselt kohalike teadlaste ja intellektuaalide rolli narratiivi loojatena liberaalsetes demokraatiates ja täpsemalt seda, kuidas nad aitavad levitada Venemaa narratiive kodumaise auditooriumi seas. Eelkõige keskendun sellele, kuidas Moskva sõnumeid kohandati vastavalt kohalikele muredele ja edastati rahvuslikele sidusrühmadele. Sellel on kolm peamist põhjust. Esiteks, Seitsme grupi (G7) – majanduslik-poliitiline foorum, mille liikmeteks on Kanada, Prantsusmaa, Saksamaa, Itaalia, Jaapan, Suurbritannia ja USA – riikide seas on Jaapanil olnud selgelt eristuv riikliku julgeoleku agenda ja mured, mida rahvuslikud narratiivi loojad saavad Ukraina sündmuste kontekstis ära kasutada. Kui Venemaa sissetung Ukrainasse mõjutas otseselt NATO liitlaste strateegilisi ja julgeolekuhuve Põhja-Ameerikas ja Euroopas, siis Jaapani geopoliitiline olukord suunas Tokyot koondama oma strateegilisi julgeolekualaseid pingutusi pigem Aasia ja Vaikse ookeani piirkonda kui Ida-Euroopasse. Jaapani 2013. aasta detsembris avaldatud riiklikus julgeolekustrateegias väljendati muret Hiina Rahvavabariigi tõusu pärast, rõhutades samas koostöö edendamise olulisust Venemaaga kõikides valdkondades. Ukraina sündmuste valguses kõhkles Jaapani poliitiline juhtkond G7 riikide juhtimisel Venemaa vastu kehtestatud sanktsioonidega liitumise ja Moskvaga tavapärase suhtluse jätkamise vahel. Need asjaolud pakuvad optimaalseid tingimusi, uurimaks, kuidas Venemaa strateegilised narratiivid suhestuvad Jaapani rahvuslike narratiividega ja kuidas rahvuslikud narratiivi loojad, sealhulgas Valdai Klubi regulaarsed osalejad, sellele protsessile kaasa aitavad.

Teiseks, kohalike teadlaste ja intellektuaalide rollide uurimine Venemaa strateegiliste narratiivide vastuvõtmisel ja taastootmisel keskkondades, kus Venemaal on juba märkimisväärne sotsiaal-poliitiline mõju, võib kaasa tuua endogeenseid väljakutseid. Võrreldes teiste G7 riikidega esineb Jaapani kontekstis vähem Venemaa varasemast mõjust tingitud segavaid tegureid. Jaapani ajalooline tõlgendus Nõukogude Liidust ja Venemaast kui selle järglasest on valdavalt negatiivne, Jaapani parlamendis ei ole esindatud ühtki poliitilist parteid, mis väljendaks toetust Krimmi annekteerimisele Venemaa poolt ning riigis ei ole märkimisväärset vene ega ukraina vähemust.

Kolmandaks, ingliskeelsetes riikides nagu USA või Suurbritannia, tekitab akadeemiliste narratiivide „rahvusvahelistumine“ märkimisväärseid probleeme

„rahvuslike“ narratiivide selges eristamises. Seevastu on enamik Jaapani teadlaste ja intellektuaalide loodud jaapanikeelsetest narratiividest suunatud kodumaisele auditooriumile. See suunitlus võimaldab selgelt tuvastada rahvuslikke narratiive ja hinnata rahvuslike narratiivide loojate rolli.

See doktoritöö kujutab endast korpuspõhise sisuanalüüsi ja kriitilise diskursusanalüüsi metodoloogilist sünteesi. Analüüsitava korpuse lõin Jaapani parlamendi raamatukogu veebiandmebaasi põhjal, kokku kodeerisin 460 teksti, mis on avaldatud aastatel 2014 kuni 2019. Kodeerimise tulemuste kontrollimiseks hindas teine koolitatud kodeerija 20 korpusest juhuslikult valitud teksti ning hindajatevaheline usaldusväärsus arvutati Lighti vastavuskordaja abil.

Kodeerimisraamistiku töötasin välja varasema kirjanduse metaanalüüsi kaudu, tuginedes Miskimmoni, O'Loughlini ja Roselle'i (2017) poolt välja töötatud strateegiliste narratiivide klassifikatsioonile, milles eristatakse süsteemi-, identiteedi- ja probleeminarratiive. Enamik Ukraina sündmustega seotud narratiive liigitub probleeminarratiivide kategooriasse, millega selgitatakse võtmeisikuid, vastuolulisi küsimusi ja pakutud lahendusi, nagu näiteks tõlgendus, et Euromaidan oli Lääne poolt orkestreeritud. Identiteedinarratiivid puudutavad toimijate instrumentaliseeritud enesekuvandit, mis mõnikord hõlmab ka teiste toimijate kuvandi internaliseerimist, näiteks väide, et venelased ja ukrainlased on „vennasrahvad“. Süsteeminarratiivid hõlmavad laiemat arusaama globaalsetest struktuuridest, võtmemängijatest, ja rahvusvahelise süsteemi funktsioneerimisest, nagu näiteks tõlgendus Venemaa ja Lääne vahelisest geopoliitilisest võistlusest või „multipolaarse“ maailma kontseptsioon.

Kuna doktoritöös uurin, kuidas rahvuslikud narratiivi loojad kohandavad Venemaa narratiive Ukraina sündmuste osas konkreetsele rahvuslikule auditooriumile, defineerin „rahvuslikke narratiive“ kui riigispetsiifilisi tõlgendusi rahvusvahelistest sündmustest, mida narratiivi loojad kujundavad vastavalt riigi ajaloolisele, kultuurilisele, sotsiaalsele ja poliitilisele kontekstile. Sisuanalüüsi jaoks tuvastasin korpuse pilootkodeerimise käigus mitu Jaapani-spetsiifilist rahvuslikku narratiivi, nagu näiteks püüdlused parandada kahepoolseid suhteid Venemaaga.

Regressioonianalüüs ja karpdiagrammid selgitavad, mil määral on Ukraina sündmusi käsitlevate Venemaa probleeminarratiivide taastootmine rahvuslike narratiivide loojate poolt seostatav mitmesuguste erinevate faktoritega, sealhulgas nende seotusega regiooniuuringute harude ja distsiplinaarse taustaga, epistemiliste kogukondadega, väljaannete poliitiliste hoiakute ja tüüpidega, ning süsteemi-, identiteedi- ja rahvuslike narratiividega.

Vastupidiselt ootustele ei olnud narratiivi loojate Venemaa-uuringute alane uurimisprofiil Venemaa narratiivsete käsitluste ulatusliku taastootmise osas kasulikuks mõõdikuks. Selle asemel osutus aktiivne osalemine Valdai Klubis kõige tugevamaks näitajaks. See leid viitab, et individuaalne seotus Kremli toetatud epistemilise kogukonnaga pakub tugevamat selgitust kui pelk seotus regiooniuuringute spetsiifilise allharuga.

Süsteeminarratiivide hulgas on oluline panus Venemaa narratiivide taastootmisesse tingitud veendumusest, et Lääne ja Jaapani peavoolukajastus on loomupäraselt kallutatud. Seda skeptitsismi Lääne peavooludiskursuste suhtes jagavad

paljud Jaapani juhtivad õpetlased ja intellektuaalid poliitilise spektri eri otstes. See Läänevastane narratiiv ühendas USA-vastaseid uusparempoolseid eksperte osaga patsifistlik-progressiivsetest vasakpoolsetest poliitikutest ja õpetlastest püüdlustes normaliseerida Krimmi ebaseaduslikku annekteerimist Venemaa poolt.

Kõik doktoritöö raames analüüsitud identiteedinarratiivid tugevdasid Venemaa narratiive Ukraina sündmustest: „Venemaa kaitsev / ohver", „Lääne russofoobia", „üks rahvas" ja „Ida-Lääne lõhe". „Venemaa kaitsev / ohver" narratiiv kujutab Venemaa välispoliitikat kaitsva, reaktiivse või spontaansena ja Venemaad Lääne „provokatsioonide" sihtmärgina. „Ühe rahva" narratiiv on aga Venemaakeskne ontoloogiline konstruktsioon, mis rõhutab erilisi ajaloolisi sidemeid venelaste ja ukrainlaste vahel, kujutades neid „vennasrahvastena".

Kriitilise diskursusanalüüsi käigus uurisin Valdai Klubis osalejate ja teiste õpetlaste kasutatavaid diskursiivseid strateegiaid, keskendudes kolmele erinevale, kuid omavahel seotud aspektile. Esiteks, Venemaa-keskne ontoloogia pisendab Ukrainat kui eraldiseisvat akadeemilise uurimise objekti. Selle saavutamiseks rakendasid Jaapani narratiivi loojad nüansseeritud diskursiivseid strateegiaid, nagu näiteks piiridiskursust. Näiteks toimus Krimmi annekteerimise normaliseerimine enamasti siis, kui teadlased psühhologiseerisid Venemaa motiive, raamistades neid Venemaa väidetava ontoloogilise julgeoleku võtmes. Seda konstrueeriti omakorda ajalooliste narratiivide kaudu, mis ulatuvad tagasi Mongolite sissetungi ajani. Mõned narratiivi loojad rekontekstualiseerivad tuntud teadustöid nagu näiteks Samuel Huntingtoni „Tsivilisatsioonide kokkupõrge" (1996) ja Benedict Andersoni „Kujutletud kogukonnad" (1983), näitamaks Ukrainat „lõhenenud riigina", Nõukogude Liidu juhtide poolt kunstlikult loodud „kujutletud kogukonnana" ning lõppkokkuvõttes „läbikukkunud riigina". Need strateegiad muutsid Venemaa narratiivid Ukraina kohta edukalt näiliselt akadeemilisteks aruteludeks.

Samuti on Jaapani narratiivi loojate seas levinud praktika, mille kohaselt Venemaa ametnike või riigimeedia otsese tsiteerimise asemel viidatakse pigem mõjukate Venemaa ja Lääne ekspertide töödele, kellest enamik on aga Valdai Klubi regulaarsed osalejad. Sellised kaudsed viited hägustavad nende käsitluste tegelikke allikaid, varjates seeläbi Kremli narratiivide võimalikku mõju.

Teiseks mõõtmeks on epistemoloogiline vastuseis Lääne peavoolumeedia diskursusele. See epistemoloogia suunab teadlasi keskenduma Venemaa autokraatia alternatiivsetele seletustele. Narratiivi loojad hoiduvad Venemaa kritiseerimisest, sest tajuvad, et Lääs süüdistab või demoniseerib Venemaad järjepidevalt. Nii ajavad nad segi „russofoobia" ja Putini agressiivsete poliitikate õigustatud kriitika, lükates negatiivse teabe Venemaa kohta tagasi kui „külma sõja stereotüübid". Narratiiv, et Lääne (ja Jaapani) peavooludiskursus Venemaa suhtes on kallutatud või otseselt „Venevastane", viib sageli väideteni, et Venemaa negatiivne kuvand on USA-juhitud „infosõja" tulemus. Teadlased, kes kritiseerivad Lääne peavoolumeediat tajutud poliitilise erapoolikuse pärast ja väidavad end sellele vastandumise kaudu olevat Ukraina sündmuste teemal „objektiivsed", riskivad sageli

sellega, mida Roger Pielke (2007) nimetab „varjatud propagandaks“ ja mis viib hoopis poliitiliste valikute kitsendamiseni Venemaa kasuks.

Akadeemiline kirglikkus võib viia metodoloogilise kallutatuseni , eriti kui teadlased on mõjutatud ontoloogilisest russotsentrismist, epistemoloogilisest vastuseisust Lääne peavoolumeedia diskursustele või mõlemast. Kui neil on samas vähene võimekus korrigeerida Venemaa poliittehnoloogilise ja infomanipulatsiooni põhjustatud eelarvamusi, muutub Venemaa akadeemilistele ringkondadele suunatud desinformatsioon eriti tõhusaks.

Positiivne korrelatsioon Venemaaga suhete parandamise püüdluste ja Ukraina sündmusi käsitlevate Venemaa narratiivide toetamise vahel on seletatav autorite poliitiliste hoiakutega. 2014. aastal ühines Jaapan G7 liikmena USA juhitud sanktsioonidega Venemaa vastu. Siiski väitis rühm Jaapani narratiivi loojaid, sealhulgas Valdai Klubi liikmed, et Jaapan ei tohiks olla Ukraina sündmuste pantvangiks, vaid peaks järgima oma „rahvuslikke huve“ ning ajama Venemaa suhtes „iseseisvat“ poliitikat, mis hõlmab ka oma Põhjaterritooriumite küsimuse lahendamist. Venemaa ebaseadusliku tegevuse otsese legitimeerimise asemel keskendusid nad sageli Ukraina diskrediteerimisele, nimetades Euromaidani osalisi neonatsideks ja pisendades Venemaa sissetungi Ukrainasse, kujutades seda Ukraina „kodusõjana“.

Samas kontekstis võib tõlgendada ka positiivset seost „Hiina-Vene liidu“ narratiivi ja Venemaa Ukraina sündmusi käsitlevate narratiivide koosesinemise vahel. Mõned narratiivi loojad instrumentaliseerisid võimalikku Hiina-Venemaa liitu hirmutaktikana, veenmaks Jaapani otsustajaid säilitama tavapäraseid suhteid Venemaaga jahoidmaks viimast Hiinale lähenemast. Kuna Hiina on Tokyo jaoks peamine julgeolekuprobleem, edastas rühm Venemaa-meelseid narratiivi loojaid seda narratiivi ka Jaapani peaministrile Shinzo Abele, kujundades seeläbi Jaapani valitsuse strateegiat Venemaa suhtes. Sellest poliitikast loobuti alles siis, kui Moskva alustas 2022. aastal täiemahulist sissetungi Ukrainasse.

Selle doktoritöö järeldused toetavad varasemaid desinformatsiooniteemalisi uurimusi, mille autoriteks on Flemming Splisboel Hanseni (2017) ja Mark Laity (2015). Nende töödes rõhutatakse suurte narratiivide – nagu käesolevas doktoritöös käsitletud süsteeminarratiivide – olulist rolli probleeminarratiivide toetamisel ja auditooriumi suunamist sündmuste mõistmiseks. Samuti on need tulemused kooskõlas Joanna Szosteki (2018b) väitega, et Venemaa narratiivide usutavus ei põhine mitte auditooriumi usaldusel nende faktitäpsuse osas, vaid pigem väärtustel ja prioriteetidel. Selles kontekstis võib nendel strateegilise narratiivi praktikutel – poliitikakujundajatel, kommunikatsioonistrateegidel, analüütikutel –, kelle fookuses on välismaised infooperatsioonid, olla suurem kasu süsteemi-, identiteedi- ja rahvuslike alusnarratiivide tuvastamisest kui pelgalt Moskva poolt fabritseeritud probleeminarratiivide ümberlükkamisest.

Käesolev doktoritöö panustab teaduskirjandusse mitmes olulises aspektis. Kontseptuaalselt tutvustan rahvuslike narratiivi loojate ja rahvusvaheliste epistemoloogiliste kogukondade mõisteid, parandamaks meie arusaamist strateegiliste narratiivide „kodustamise“ protsessist. Metodoloogiliselt näitan, et strateegiliste narratiivide keerukuse avamiseks on kasulik analüüsida nii süsteemi-, identiteedi-,

rahvuslikke kui probleeminarratiive ning nendevahelisi interaktsioone. Empiiriliselt tuvastan, et peamised tegurid, mis soodustavad Venemaa narratiivide taastootmist Ukraina sündmuste kohta, on epistemoloogiline vastuseis Lääne peavooludiskursusele ja samas Venemaa enesekuvandi omaksvõtmine, sealhulgas arusaam Lääne russofoobiast.

Lisaks sillutab see doktoritöö teed Lääne arusaamade ümbermõtestamisele rahvusvahelistest episteemilistest kogukondadest autokraatlikes kontekstides. Arvestades Valdai Klubi märkimisväärset rolli desinformatsiooni levitamisel rahvusvahelises teadlaskonnas, tuleks rahvusvaheliste episteemiliste kogukondade toimimist edasi uurida. See aitaks mõista, kuidas näiliselt heatahtlik koostööplatvorm toimib mittedemokraatlikus keskkonnas desinformatsiooni leviku vahendina, mitte vastastikuse mõistmise edendajana.

Selle doktoritöö peamine piirang seisneb selles, et analüüs piirdus trükiväljaannetega. Nagu näitas Jaapani reaktsioon Venemaa täiemahulisele sõjale Ukrainas 2022. aastal, toimub rahvuslike narratiivide loojate diskussioon üha enam veebis, iseäranis sotsiaalmeedia platvormidel. Seetõttu peaksid tulevased samalaadsed uurimused adresseerima veebipõhiste arutelude võimalusi ja piiranguid.

Käesoleva väitekirja tulemused põhinevad ühe juhtumi analüüsil. Edasised uurimused võiksid laieneda teistele juhtumitele, mõistmaks, kas teiste demokraatlike riikide teadlased ja intellektuaalid järgivad Ukraina-teemalistes narratiivides sarnaseid mustreid. Seeläbi oleks võimalik adresseerida võimalikke endogeensuse probleeme ning tuvastada täiendavaid rahvuslikke narratiive. Lisaks oleks kasulik uurida, kas teiste autoritaarsete regionaalsete võimude, näiteks Hiina, uurimisele keskendunud regiooniuuringute eksperdid seisavad oma uurimisobjektide tõttu silmitsi sarnaste ontoloogiliste ja epistemoloogiliste väljakutsetega.

Lõpetuseks tuleb mainida, et teadlaste vaatenurkade ajaloolise konteksti ja arengu uurimine kui osa laiematest diskursiivsetest struktuuridest ja reeglitest, mis kujundavad valdkondlikku teadmisloomet (Michel Foucault 2002), nõuaks põhjalikku intellektuaalse ajaloo analüüsi, mis väljub käesoleva doktoritöö raamidest. Jaapani sovetoloogide ja slavistide kohta on seni tehtud vähe põhjalikke uurimusi, välja arvatud Yoshihiko Okabe (2021; 2022) tähelepanuväärsed uurimused Jaapani-Ukraina suhetest perioodil 1915-1953. Tulevased uurimused peaksid tegelema sellega, mida Okabe (2024) kirjeldab kui ebajärjepidevust Teise maailmasõja eelsete ja järgsete Ukraina uuringute vahel; viimati mainitud muutusid Jaapanis osaks Nõukogude Liidu uuringutest.

See väitekiri keskendub Jaapani teadlaste jaoks piiratud, kuid väga vastuolulisele perioodile. Autorina loodan siiralt, et selle tulemused aitavad kaasa tulevastele laiematele uurimustele, tuues esile, et teadmisloome erinevate riikide, näiteks Ukraina või Venemaa kohta, ei ole ei universaalne ega ajatu. Selle kujunemist mõjutavad spetsiifilised poliitilised ja sotsiaalsed kontekstid, muuhulgas olulised ajaloolised sündmused nagu sõjad ja revolutsioonid, mis võivad viia katkestuste ja murranguteni teaduslikes vaatenurkadest. Heaks näiteks on jätkuvad arutelud Venemaa-kesksete episteemide dekoloniseerimise üle pärast Venemaa täiemahulise sissetungi algust Ukrainasse 2022. aasta veebruaris.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Survey of the Secondary Sources [95]

Level	Narratives & Variations
System	**Geopolitical competitions between Russia and the West – "Geopolitics"**
The Ukraine crisis is the rivalry between the "Russian Eurasian civilization" and the "Atlantic civilization led by the USA" (Darczewska 2014, 7–8); Ukraine is a "battlefield of titans" where good and evil struggle for influence (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 17); The Ukraine crisis is part of a broader geopolitical competition between Russia and the West, where Ukraine is just a battleground (Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018, 13–14); Ukrainians have no agency (they are objectified into non-subjectivity, into a mob allegedly manipulated by the West against Russia) (Shekhovtsov 2014, 29); Ukraine is a background for the development of relations between the West and Russia, rather than as a subject of international relations (Zarembo and Fakhurdinov 2020, 119–20); This is a geopolitical competition for influence over the post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe between the West and Russia (Koval 2020a, 215).	
System	**A "multipolar" world, declining US hegemony and anti-globalism – "Multipolar World"**
"The alleged desire of the United States to maintain a unipolar world where it dominates and prevents the growth of a multipolar world – something that will appeal to rising economic powers who may feel their time to dominate geopolitics has arrived" (Laity 2015, 24); The US seeks global dominance and acts without consultation with others; the existing US-led unipolar world should be replaced by a "multipolar" world, in which Russia and other non-western countries have a greater influence (Makarychev and Morozov 2013; Hutchings and Szostek 2015, 188; Szostek 2017a, 582).	
System	**Biased mainstream media / Information War by the West – "Biased Media / Info War"**
"The Western press is unreliable on many matters and is silent on others, and is subject to a wide variety of extraneous pressures" and it "reached the level of disinformation" (Shultz and Godson 1984, 148–49); "The West also uses propaganda," "You cannot trust the media, it's all corrupt and biased"(Smoleňová 2015, 14); "one-sidedness" and "hypocrisy" of western mainstream media (as exemplified by Boyd-Barrett 2017); "Relatively high levels of trust in the Russian media in the West may be exactly that – relatively high levels caused more by distrust of the Western media than trust as such in the Russian media"(Splidsboel Hansen 2017, 31); Subversion, net-centric or information wars waged by the West against Russia (Fridman 2017, 76–79); "The West wages information war against Russia through everything from anti-corruption investigations of the Russian elite, anti-doping investigations of the Russian Olympic team, the support of human rights NGOs and public broadcasting into Russia" (Pomerantsev 2019); "'Information War' is a term used by the Kremlin to justify disinformation"(Dobrokhotov 2019).	

[95] For the identification of some narratives including local narratives, primary sources are consulted.

System	**Western "hypocrisy" and "double standards" – "Hypocrisy / Double Standards"**
The US and EU behavior is hypocritical and uses double standards (Hutchings and Szostek 2015, 185; Spiessens and Van Poucke 2016; Szostek 2017a, 579; 2018a, 75–76; Zarembo 2020, 185); If Russia's is to be blamed, what about the US actions in Iraq or Afghanistan?(Leonor 2016; Babak et al. 2017, 26, 91; Fischer 2016, 298). *A direct analogy between Kosovo and Crimea can be categorized into "CrimeaAnalogy."	
Identity	**Western historical anti-Russian policy – "Western Russophobia"**
American Russophobia aims to undermine Russia's political reputation and compel it into "submitting to the United States in the execution of its grand plans to control the world's most precious resources and geostrategic sites" (as exemplified by Tsygankov 2009, xiii–xvi); Using its financially "superior" status, the West is opposed to Russia, which has a conservative value system (Robinson 2019, 73); Blaming the West for the "Cold War mentality" (Smagliy 2018, 14); The term "Russophobia" with its roots in 19th-century imperial discourse, has been reinvigorated in Russian political discourse in response to the Western criticism of Russia's actions in Ukraine (Darczewska and Żochowski 2015); Ukrainians and Western politicians historically suffer from "Russophobia" (Babak et al. 2017, 18–19); The "Russophobia" enables Russia to position itself as a moral victim despised by the West and its allies (Ventsel et al. 2021, 32).	
Identity	**Russia is defensive and a victim – "Russia Defensive / Victim"**
"In sum, despite the clearly predominant anti-American and anti-NATO tone of "International Review" commentary during the 1960-1980 period, careful analysis reveals little evidence that Soviet leaders in actuality perceived a direct Western threat to the Soviet Union during these years. In reality, Soviet use of the three themes connected with the notion of threat appears to reflect an effort to portray the USSR as an innocent victim" (Shultz and Godson 1984, 93–95); "a binary logic where the opposite sides are a passive Russia and an active West" (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 84); Russia is a victim, forced to react to NATO and EU enlargement and democracy promotion into Russia's "privileged zone of interest" (Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018, 5–10); alleged "humiliation" of Russia by the West, especially after the fall of the USSR (Schmitt 2018, 497); The Crimea annexation was Russia's responsive, spontaneous, improvised action to Yanukovych's flight (Hosaka 2018); Russia's direct response to the US attempt to repeat the 2004 Orange Revolution (Koval 2020a, 217); Ukraine's accession to the EU is the first step toward its accession to NATO, and Russia was forced to react to Euromaidan to protect its national interest (Zarembo 2020, 187); Russian policies are "reactive and defensive" and a "countermove to mitigate the loss incurred in and potential threat from Kiev"(Kuzio 2019, 1245–46). The Russian threat is limited and secondary to French and European security (Koval 2020b, 149–51); Russian threats are exaggerated by the Baltic countries and Poland (Koval 2020a, 219–20).	

Identity	**Ukraine's East-West divide – "East-West Divide / Clash of Civilizations"**
Ukraine's crisis is rooted in the historical confrontation between the eastern and western parts of the state (Hosaka 2019a; Kuzyk 2019); "Clash of Civilization" (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 17); Ukraine has developed as a state with limited sovereignty on historical and cultural grounds (Koval 2020b, 153–59); "an accidental state, artificially assembled from the wreckage of different empires, deprived of a common identity and marked by numerous internal conflicts"(Koval 2020b, 156; 2022, 8); ethnic, social and religious division of the Ukrainian state and nation (, making Ukraine as a place of battle of real players) (Koval 2020a, 206–7).	
Identity	**Russians and Ukrainians are one people / Russian history starts in Kiev – "One People"**
"Fraternal" Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are one nation within the "Russian world" (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 18); there is practically no difference between Russians and Ukrainians and, people in territories annexed to the Russian empire have a "common history" and felt themselves exceptionally as Russians (Nabok 2020, 311–12); "Kiev is the mother of Russian cities. Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other "(Laity 2015, 24); The history of Russia began in "Kiev" and continues to this date; the annexation of Ukraine by Muscovy was "reunification" (Thompson 2000, 16, 187); Traditionally, the Soviet, post-Soviet and Western historiographies describe "Kyivan Rus" as a state including eastern Slavs which was only destroyed by the Mongol invasion. In this framework, "Ukrainians and Belarusians are accidents of history and their 'natural' state is to be in union with Russians" (Kuzio 2018b, 7). Ukrainians are "Russians" (Yermolenko 2019, 11, 33–35, 68–69).	
Issue /Euromaidan	**The Euromaidan led by "fascists" and ultranationalists – "Maidan Fascist"**
Euromaidan activists are Nazis, Fascists and anti-Semites (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 19; Laity 2015, 24); Ukraine is a fascist state (Fedchenko 2016, 162–63); aggressive crowd and radicals, who throw Molotov cocktails at the police (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 84); "ultra-nationalist anarchy" (Right Sector) (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 99).	
Issue /Euromaidan	**The Euromaidan orchestrated by the West – "Maidan West"**
Euromaidan is covertly supported by the US and the EU(NATO StratCom COE 2015, 19); the West indirectly supported radical opposition forces in Ukraine but pretended not to see their violence (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 81); The Ukrainian interim government is the puppets of the US (Fedchenko 2016, 161); Western responsibility for the "coup" in Ukraine (Golianová and Kazharski 2020, 10); West-backed "Color revolution" is used as a code word for anti-Russian sentiments and actions in Russia's neighborhood while Russia's policies in the same region are presented as neutral or constructive contributions to the international mediation of conflicts (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 90).	
Issue /Euromaidan	**An illegal and violent overthrow of the legitimate president – "Maidan Violent / Illegal"**
A coup d'état or an illegal overthrow of a legitimate president (Fedchenko 2016, 159); Ukraine broke the 21 February deal made between President Yanukovych and the opposition leaders, mediated by EU foreign ministers (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 20); a violent "anti-constitutional coup" (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 82).	

Issue /Euromaidan	**Far Rights in the Ukrainian government – "Far Right Gov"**
Ukrainian nationalist groups in the government are a danger to Russian speakers (Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018, 17–18); The interim government includes right-wing radicals or fascism (Nazism) (Huxley and Ljungman 2016, 202; Rácz 2016, 259).	
Issue /Euromaidan	**Ukraine is chaos and a failed state – "Failed State / Chaos"**
A lack of social order and security in Ukraine (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 21); Ukraine is a failed state, unable to maintain its existence as an independent and viable political and economic unit (Babak et al. 2017, 14–15); Euromaidan generated chaos, radicalism, anarchy, the economic crisis (Babak et al. 2017, 16–17); Ukrainian government was incapable of controlling the situation in the country (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 100); Ukraine is a failed state that cannot provide order and welfare for its population (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 92).	
Issue /Crimea	**The West/NATO is responsible for the crisis – "Blame West / NATO"**
NATO broke a promise allegedly made to Russia in 1990 (Koval 2020b, 144); Authors avoid mentioning that the enlargement process is based on the voluntary choice of the countries concerned and although no legal agreement has been signed between Russia and the US concerning NATO's enlargement, whereas Russia's operation in Crimea violated the 1994 Budapest Memorandum (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 85–86); The EU did not have consultations with Russia in Ukraine's EU Association Agreement; the EU's Eastern Partnership policy put Ukraine in front of an impossible choice: the EU or Russia (Koval 2020b, 144–46).	
Issue /Crimea	**Crimean people expressed their free will at the referendum – "Crimea Referendum"**
The Crimean people expressed their free will at the referendum (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 97–98).	
Issue /Crimea	**Crimea is historically Russia – "Crimea History"**
Russia's annexation of Crimea is legitimate and historically motivated; In 1954 Khrushchev "gifted" Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Zarembo 2020, 182).	
Issue /Crimea	**Discrimination against Russian-speaking people in Ukraine "Discrimination"**
People of eastern Ukraine are discriminated against (Gajos and Rodkiewicz 2016, 259); Russia is responsible to protect Russians and compatriots living in Ukraine (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 91; Zarembo 2020, 187; Riabchuk 2020b, 259); Radicals attempted to ban the Russian language, thus infringing on the rights of ethnic minorities (Koval 2020a, 209–10).	

Issue /Crimea	**The analogy between Crimea and other cases – "Crimea Analogy"**
The UN Charter guarantees the right of nations to self-determination, there is a well-known Kosovo precedent (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 20); The West broke all sorts of laws in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya etc. (NATO StratCom COE 2015, 20); Russia's actions in Crimea are comparable to NATO's actions in Kosovo; Russia is just doing the same as the United States did in the past (Riabchuk 2020a, 78–79; Koval 2020b; Pupcenoks and Seltzer 2021).	
Issue /Eastern Ukraine	**Violence and threats against the civil population – "Atrocities in the East"**
Right-wing radicals in volunteer military formations took part in the fighting in the Donbas (Koval 2020a, 211); Banderites are a real danger to the Russian-speaking population (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 73); The Ukraine government and army committed a "crime against the civilian population," "crime against its own people," "bloodshed," "genocide," "atrocities" in eastern Ukraine (Ahler 2016, 137; Gajos and Rodkiewicz 2016, 261–62; Babak et al. 2017, 114–15; Pupcenoks and Seltzer 2021); the burning of the Trade Unions Building in Odesa is a genocide (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 57); the Ukrainian Army servicemen are cruel, organizing atrocities, slavery, rapes, organ trafficking, constructing concentration camps for Russian speakers (Babak et al. 2017, 17–18, 40–43).	
Issue /Eastern Ukraine	**The Donbas separatism and indigenous "people's republics" – "Separatism"**
Reducing the Ukrainian government to "Kyiv (government)", thus treating both the rebels in eastern Ukraine and the Ukraine government on an equal footing. Comparing Kyiv with eastern Ukraine also contributes to picturing the geographical divide within the country (Huxley and Ljungman 2016, 200). Russian collaborators in eastern Ukraine are "rebels" and "separatists" leading to the Russia-created narrative of "civil war" (Tsybulenko and Francis 2018, 131–32); The Donbas separatism and indigenous "people's republics" (Hosaka 2019c).	
Issue /Eastern Ukraine	**The West sent mercenaries and weapons to Ukraine – "ObamaTroopers"**
The US sent incendiary ammunition to Ukraine (Hutchings and Szostek 2015, 186). The Ukrainian internal troops and alleged foreign mercenaries conducted a "forceful suppression of protests by the population" (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 75); the NATO Legion is involved in clashes on the side of the Ukrainian Army (Babak et al. 2017, 18).	
Issue /Eastern Ukraine	**Russia is a "peacemaker" in the conflict in Ukraine – "Putin Peacemaker"**
A combination of military and political deceptions made Vladimir Putin the "peacemaker" in September 2014 (Hosaka 2019b); Moscow refrained from conquering as much of Ukraine as it could conquer, but instead created a stalemate around a small separatist enclave (Kulyk 2020c, 41); Russia exercises restraint, rejecting the Donbas's call for its annexation to Russia; Putin received permission to use military forces in eastern Ukraine, but did not use it (Koval 2020a, 220).	

Issue /Eastern Ukraine	**No evidence for the Russian military in eastern Ukraine/ the downing of MH17 – "No Evidence"**
Though there have been a lot of claims of Russia's involvement in the downing of MH17, none have been backed by proof (as exemplified by *RT* 2014); There has been no evidence supporting NATO's claim over the alleged presence of Russian forces in Ukraine (as exemplified by *RT* 2014b); As for technical proof of a Russian "invasion," NATO and the State Department mixed evidence for a stealth invasion; if there were to be an invasion, the world would have known it, as Putin implied (as exemplified by Sakwa 2015, chap. 7 The Novorossiya Rebellion).	
Issue /Assessment	**Ukraine is not welcomed by the EU and cannot live without Russia economically – "Not EU but Russia Welcomes"**
Ukraine is a burden, and the West does not need Ukraine (Babak et al. 2017, 22–23). Ukraine's pro-European choice is not realistic; with the Euro-integration Ukraine will end up in the poor periphery; economically devastated Ukraine would be a burden to the EU rather than a valuable addition; only Russia is capable of easing Ukraine's economic burden; Ukraine's economic and energy dependence on Russia is too large to get rid of (Koval 2020a, 207–8, 212–13); Ukraine outside the Russian World is an aberration that is being aided (Kuzio 2018a); an imminent normalization of Ukraine's relations with Russia (Koval et al. 2022, 8).	
Issue /Assessment	**Ukraine should be a neutral buffer state; Finlandization – "Ukraine Neutral"**
The west may reach a compromise with Russia on the Finlandization of Ukraine (Huxley and Ljungman 2016, 197–98; Kulyk 2020c, 40–41); an option is to fix the status of Ukraine as a neutral state, and stop its efforts for the integration into NATO and the EU (Koval 2020a, 223).	
Issue/ Assessment	**Ukraine should implement federalization – "Federalization"**
Ukraine is undergoing "a constitutional crisis," which requires "federalization" (Pynnöniemi 2016b, 101); the introduction of the federalization of Ukraine as the most promising solution to the conflict (Ahler 2016, 141, 288); The federal system of Ukraine i.e., provision of substantial autonomy to Russian-speaking regions is a solution of the conflict (Koval 2020a, 223).	
Issue/ Assessment	**Russia is misunderstood by observers; the West should take into account Russia's uniqueness and interests – "Russia Misunderstood"**
The Ukraine crisis is the consequence of a mutual misunderstanding between the West and Russia; the West should take into consideration the interests of Russia (Zarembo 2020, 186); Russians are "different," and therefore a different measure must be applied to them; various invasions since the 13th century forced Russia to create buffer zones along the perimeter of the borders (Koval 2020a, 218); "Psychologization" of motives of Russia (often with the formula "Moscow perceives" or "Russia believes," legitimize the declared ideas of Russia as facts of real politics) (Koval 2020a, 216–19); we should understand the civilizational uniqueness and the sphere of interests of Russia (Makarychev and Morozov 2013); looking for any plausible arguments to justify Russia's "unique historical mission" (Smagliy 2018, 13).	

Issue/ Assessment	**Business and politics should be separated; sanctions are ineffective – "No Sanctions"**
Business and politics should be separated (Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014, 6); western sanctions against Russia are ineffective and a double-edged sword, harming the West more than Russia (Gajos and Rodkiewicz 2016, 254–56); sanctions should be lifted to resume economic partnership (Babak et al. 2017, 98–99).	
National /Japan	**Promote relations with Russia for the Northern Territories and other issues – "Improve Russia Relations"**
If Japan continues to retain its independent diplomatic position toward Russia, a dramatic development of negotiations on the Northern Territories is possible (as exemplified by Sato 2014); Russia's foreign policy is pursuing a pivot to Asia, and Japan should buy in to strengthen ties with Russia with a view to the final resolution of the territorial issue (as exemplified by Shimotomai 2014, 34–35; Abiru in Abiru, Fuji, and Motomura 2014, 36–37).	
National /Japan	**The analogy between Crimea and Northern Territories – "Crimea Northern Territories Analogy"**
Ukraine's Crimea and Japan's Northern Territories both have been under occupation by Russia; Japan is the sole country among the G7 states, which has suffered the Soviet and (its legal successor) Russia's violation of international law (as exemplified by Kimura 2014).	
National /Japan	**Concerned about China's attempts to change the status quo with force – "China Threats"**
Japan has territorial conflicts with China and South Korea, and therefore should send clear signals to neighboring countries that it will not tolerate any military attempts to violate its territorial integrity (as exemplified by Kimura 2014).	
National /Japan	**Worried about closer China-Russia relations – "China-Russia Alliance"**
Accusations of Russia's annexation of Crimea would push Russia toward China, which eventually might lead to "the China-Russia alliance" (as exemplified by Togo 2014); [counterarguments, as follows, will be given "-1"] Russia's rapprochement with China after the Ukraine crisis was only superficial, and it would be unlikely to develop into a longer-term trend (as exemplified by Hyodo 2014).	

Appendix 2 Counts of Narratives

System Narratives	Pieces	Percentage
Geopolitics	74	16.1%
	(5)	
Multipolar World	20	4.3%
	(0)	
Biased Media / Info War	82	17.8%
	(5)	
Hypocrisy / Double Standards	15	3.3%
	(4)	

Identity Narratives	Pieces	Percentage
Western Russophobia	43	9.3%
	(2)	
Russia Defensive / Victim	71	15.4%
	(7)	
East-West Divide / Clash of Civilizations	95	20.7%
	(25)	
One People	63	13.7%
	(7)	

Issue Narratives **Euromaidan**	Pieces	Percentage
Maidan Fascist	91	19.8%
	(17)	
Maidan West	65	14.1%
	(9)	
Maidan Violent / Illegal	94	20.4%
	(6)	
Far-Right Gov	44	9.6%
	(8)	
Failed State / Chaos	39	8.5%
	(3)	

Crimea	Pieces	Percentage
Blame West / NATO	88	19.1%
	(8)	
Crimea Referendum	110	23.9%
	(37)	
Crimea History	78	17.0%
	(12)	
Discrimination	64	13.9%
	(10)	
Crimea Analogy	18	3.9%
	(8)	

Eastern Ukraine	Pieces	Percentage
Atrocities in the East	45	9.8%
	(2)	
Separatism	189	41.1%
	(16)	
Obama Troopers	9	2.0%
	(1)	
Putin Peacemaker	32	7.0%
	(1)	
No Evidence	28	6.1%
	(13)	

Assessments	Pieces	Percentage
Not EU but Russia Welcomes	52	11.3%
	(6)	
Ukraine Neutral	14	3.0%
	(1)	
Federalization	14	3.0%
	(23)	
Russia Misunderstood	34	7.4%
	(0)	
No Sanctions	36	7.8%
	(5)	

National Narratives	Pieces	Percentage
Improve Russia Relations	66	14.3%
	(15)	
Crimea-Northern Territories Analogy	16	3.5%
	(2)	
China Threats	48	10.4%
	(4)	
China-Russia Alliance	47	10.2%
	(27)	

Appendix 3 Coded Results

Accessible at:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1XYOKbbcSSTaJuPMuPPnFRap-caqhx9SlZqIapGECbDw/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix 4 Correlation Matrix

Accessible at:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WPdCzuBuADI11yTUliHwi5x06zxX1t0yM2b2ZZnSH7I/edit?usp=sharing

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Sep.2002–Sep.2004	Embassy of Japan in Tajikistan, Attaché of Administrative Affairs;
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July 2021–	International Centre for Defence and Security (Tallinn), Research fellow.

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Research Projects:

Mar.2021–	Research project “Russia’s Logic and Japan’s Strategy toward Russia” by Japan Forum on International Relations;
July 2023–	Research Professorship in Russian Studies 2023-2024” (Principal Investigator: Andrey Makarychev), University of Tartu;
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Research Awards:

- Japanese Association for Russian and East European Studies (2017) for the article "Revisiting the Regional Factor in Post-Maidan Ukraine: Quantitative Analysis of the Nationwide Survey Data on Historical Memory";
- Japanese Association for Ukrainian Studies (2022) for "Donbas 'Civil War'? Identifying the Main Combatant Leading 'the Bulk of the Fighting" and "The Opening of KGB Archives in Ukraine: Background and Advantages for Researchers";
- The 32nd "Yamamoto Shichihei" humanities and social science publication award (2023) for *Choho kokka Roshia – Soren KGB kara Puchin no FSB taisei made*.

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"Are You Really Interested in Really-Existing Russia?" In Aleksanteri Conference 2023 (Decolonizing space in the Global East: Legal Choices, Political Transformations, Carceral Practices), Helsinki, October 2023.

"Unrequited Love: Unveiling Shadows Between Autocratic Intelligence and Western Academia" In Eighth Annual Tartu Conference on Russian and East European Studies. Tartu, June 2024.

"Unrequited Love: Unveiling Shadows Between Autocratic Intelligence and Western Academia" in RUTA Annual Conference Re(Kn)Own: Region(s) from Within. Carpathian Mountains, Ukraine, June 2024.

ELULOOKIRJELDUS

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Märts 2006	BA välisuuringud, Sophia Ülikool (Tokyo);
Märts 2016	MA, Jaapani Avatud Ülikool (Chiba);
Veebruar 2020–	doktorantuur, Tartu Ülikooli Johan Skytte Poliitikauuringute Instituut.

Töökogemus:

September 2002–september 2004	Jaapani saatkond Tadžikistanis, administratiivküsimuste atašee;
Aprill 2005–märts 2018	Endises Nõukogude Liidus vähendatud tuumarelvade likvideerimise alase koostöö tehniline sekretariaat, projektihaldur;
Märts 2018–märts 2020	Jaapani saatkond Ukrainas, atašee, poliitika-osakond;
Juuli 2021–	Rahvusvaheline Kaitseuuringute Keskus (Tallinn), teadur.

Peamised uurimissuunad:
Strateegilised narratiivid, desinformatsioon, poliittehnoloogiad, Nõukogude/Venemaa aktiivmeetmed, luureajalugu, episteemilised kogukonnad, Balti riikide julgeolek, ajalooline mälu

Liikmelisus:
– Jaapani Venemaa ja Ida-Euroopa Uuringute Assotsiatsioon;
– Jaapani Ukraina-uuringute Assotsiatsioon.

Uurimisprojektid:

Märts 2021–	Uurimisprojekt „Russia's Logic and Japan's Strategy towards Russia", Japan Forum on International Relations;
Juuli 2023–	„Research Professorship in Russian Studies 2023–2024" (põhitäitja: Andrey Makarychev), Tartu Ülikool;
September 2023–	„Trends of Freedom and Democracy in Central, Eastern Europe and the Balkans" töörühma liige, ROLES, Tokyo Ülikool;

Uurimistööalased auhinnad:

– Jaapani Venemaa ja Ida-Euroopa Uuringute Assotsiatsioon (2017) artikli *"Revisiting the Regional Factor in Post-Maidan Ukraine: Quantitative Analysis of the Nationwide Survey Data on Historical Memory"* eest;
– Jaapani Ukraina-uuringute Assotsiatsioon (2022) artiklite *„Donbas 'Civil War'? Identifying the Main Combatant Leading 'the Bulk of the Fighting"* ja *"The Opening of KGB Archives in Ukraine: Background and Advantages for Researchers"* eest;
– 32. „Yamamoto Shichihei" humanitaar- ja sotsiaalteaduslike publikatsioonide auhind (2023) artikli *Choho kokka Roshia – Soren KGB kara Puchin no FSB taisei made* eest;

Publikatsioonid
[Monograafia]

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– – – . 2023. “Unfinished Business: 1991 as the End of the CPSU but Not of the KGB.” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization.*
– – – . 2023. “Ukraine’s Agency in Japanese Discourse: Everything OK with Government and People, While Academia in Trouble.” *Journal of Regional Security.*
– – – . 2024. “The Sino-Soviet Intelligence War: The KGB Counterintelligence Perspective.” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*.
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“Scholars’ ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches to the ‘Ukraine Crisis.’” Veebikonverents, Japanese Association for Ukrainian Studies, detsember 2021.
“The KGB Sbornik: An Assessment of the Source.” KGB Archives Workshop. Veebiseminar University of Melbourne, veebruar 2022.
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