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“Let’s Not be Laughed at Anymore: Donald Trump and Japan from the 1980s to the Present”

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Abstract

This article explores the central role of Japan’s rise to global economic prominence in the evolution of Donald J. Trump’s worldview. It traces how the transformation of the relationship between the United States and Japan during the 1980s informed Trump’s ideas about trade and protectionism, globalization, the international economy, and executive power. Trump, it argues, was a product of U.S.-Japanese relationship; while he began his public career as a prominent critic of Japan, claiming that the country exploited American trade and defense policy, his career in real estate heavily relied on Japanese finance. This contradictory approach continues to shape his understanding of Japan. As president, Trump repeatedly condemns Japan as predatory and protectionist, but also seeks expanded Japanese investment in the United States to revitalize the U.S. economy. Equally important, Trump has expanded criticisms originating with Japan to countries like China and Mexico, international agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the World Trade Organization. By tracing Trump’s rhetorical, financial, and diplomatic encounters with Japan over the past thirty years, this article uncovers the sources of Trump’s contradictory attitudes towards trade, globalization, and cross-border investment and his understandings of strong leadership and executive power.

Keywords

Donald J. Trump – Abe Shinzō – U.S.-Japan relations – world trade – protectionism – globalization

Japan has long stood at the core of Donald J. Trump's understandings of U.S. foreign policy, international trade, the global economy, and executive power. In the fall of 1987, when Trump first flirted with a run for the presidency—even giving an October speech in New Hampshire—he spent almost \$100,000 to release an “open letter” excoriating American leadership, defense spending, and economic policy in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Boston Globe*. For decades, Trump complained, “Japan and other nations have been taking advantage of the United States.” While the United States defended Japanese oil supplies in the Persian Gulf, “the Japanese, unimpeded by the huge costs of defending themselves (as long as the United States will do it for free), have built a strong and vibrant economy with unprecedented surpluses.” Trump offered his solution to this problem of freeloading allies: “It’s time to end our vast deficits by making Japan and others who can afford it, pay.” The United States then could invest the economic returns of such a policy domestically to foster a new era of economic growth. “‘Tax’ these wealthy nations, not America,” he recommended. “End our huge deficits, reduce our taxes, and let America’s economy grow unencumbered by the cost of defending those who can easily afford to pay us for the defense of their freedom.” For Trump, such solutions were obvious, yet remained out of reach because weak, naïve, and “soft” leadership hampered the United States. All the United States needed to do was grow a “little backbone,” he argued. “Let’s not let our great country be laughed at anymore.”¹

This ad is a potent introduction to the foreign policy vision that Trump consistently has perpetuated for the last thirty years. Its first component is a zero-sum belief that allies are freeloaders—post World War II liberal internationalism, premised on close alliances and an integrated global economy, is weak and foolish in a competitive world. A second feature calls for an economically aggressive, protectionist, and interventionist state in areas such as trade, while simultaneously declaring the need to lift economic interventions at home on issues like taxes and regulations. Completing Trump’s vision is an expansive concept of executive power that derides previous leadership as weak and foolish and declares that new, more aggressive and masculine leaders could fix these problems easily. Indeed, Trump’s January 2017 inaugural address sounded all of these themes, in language strikingly unchanged from his open letter. “For many decades,” he decried,

1 Ilan Ben-Meir, “That time Trump Spent Nearly \$100,000 on an Ad Criticizing U.S. Foreign Policy in 1987,” *Buzzfeed News*, 10 July 2015, https://www.buzzfeed.com/ilanbenmeir/that-time-trump-spent-nearly-100000-on-an-ad-criticizing-us?utm_term=.ggnGPaxMl#.rqxXz6Wq7 (accessed 13 April 2018).

we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry; Subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military; We've defended other nation's borders while refusing to defend our own; and spent trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay. We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has disappeared over the horizon.

Trump then promised to bring the power of the presidency to bear on nefarious allies and enemies alike. "From this moment on," he thundered,

it's going to be America First. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families. We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs.²

Trump unmistakably built his first speech as president on a central theme that he had developed during his campaign—"I alone can fix it."

While commentators have noticed similarities to Trump's complaints about Japan in the 1980s and his rhetoric as presidential candidate and president, they often dismiss his recent comments about Japan as outdated and passé. A *New York Times* article, for example, which detailed Trump's campaign criticism of Japan for freeloading in defense, manipulating its currency, stealing American jobs, and preying on the United States with unfair trade practices, declared his "preoccupation with Japan [as] perhaps more unusual, if not anachronistic."³ In the *Washington Post*, Glenn Kessler similarly depicted Trump's obsession with Japan as "out of date," while *The New Yorker's* Matt Alt described it as an "odd throwback" to the "Japan-bashing of the 1980s."⁴ For

2 Donald J. Trump, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, July 21, 2016," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=117935> (accessed 13 April 2018); Donald J. Trump, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 2017," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=120000> (accessed 13 April 2018).

3 Jonathan Soble and Keith Bradsher, "Donald Trump Laces into Japan with a Trade Tirade from the '80s," *New York Times*, 7 March 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/08/business/international/unease-after-trump-depicts-tokyo-as-an-economic-rival.html?_r=0 (accessed 13 April 2018).

4 Glenn Kessler, "The Roots of Trump's Trade Rhetoric are planted firmly in the past," *Washington Post*, 27 March 2016, p. A4; Matt Alt, "Donald and Shinzo's Excellent Adventure," *The*

Trump, however, Japan's economic rise during the 1970s and the 1980s remains powerfully relevant. Japan's ascent to the second-largest economy in the world seemingly exemplified all the dangers that globalization posed to American prosperity. Trump's constant criticism of Japan also presented an opportunity to herald the wealth and glory that he would create through more capable, aggressive leadership. Indeed, the evolution of U.S.-Japanese relations in the 1970s and 1980s was a key catalyst for Trump's worldview, which has remained remarkably consistent. It helped crystallize his fixation with the "rigged" economic international order, strong leadership, and the nationalist revitalization of an American nation in "carnage" and decline.

In conflating Japan with the broader forces of globalization, Trump was far from alone. For all of its idiosyncrasies, his thought reflected a broader American fascination with Japan, a potent blend of admiration and fear. Between the late 1970s to the early 1990s, it was the rise of Japan that made the economic shifts of the late 20th century visible and tangible to many Americans. People in the United States bought Japanese cars, the vanguard of a growing trade deficit between the two states, which expanded from \$16 billion to \$60 billion between 1981 and 1989.⁵ They watched movies on Japanese VCRs, played Nintendo, and enjoyed anime.⁶ Japan was also at the forefront of international finance, especially investment in the United States, posing increasingly visible challenges to American economic autonomy. Japanese investors purchased American companies and property from Honolulu to New York City, most visibly Rockefeller Center. Drawn by the high interest rates of the early 1980s, Japanese investors even partially funded President Ronald Reagan's approach to government spending, a deficit-expanding combination of lower taxes and growing defense expenditures.⁷ All of this meant that Japan, Japanese products, and Japanese money became a main site through which Americans encountered the profound shifts that were transforming the American economy, and its place in the world. As Andrew C. McKeivitt has asserted, many Americans "first

New Yorker, 7 November 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/donald-and-shinzos-excellent-adventure> (accessed 13 April 2018).

5 Michael Schaller, "Reagan and Asia," in *A Companion to Ronald Reagan*, Andrew Johns, ed. (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2015), 422.

6 For a detailed exploration of American encounters with Japanese products in the 1980s, see Andrew McKeivitt, *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

7 Greta R. Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 100–101. See also, Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 255; Schaller, "Reagan and Asia," p. 423.

conceived of the concept of globalization with Japan as the model of a dramatic world economic revolution.”⁸

By exploring Trump’s rhetoric and policy towards Japan from the 1980s to the present, this article has two main goals. First, it roots Trump’s view of foreign policy in the economic and political experiences of the 1980s. It explores how his thinking about Japan fueled his blend of populism and internationalism, especially the simultaneous advocacy of trade protectionism and tariffs and embrace of international finance. Indeed, Trump embodied the contradictions of the U.S.-Japanese relations in that era. He was a prominent example of “Japan-bashing,” criticizing Japan as freeloading and economically predatory, but at the same time personally profited from Japanese wealth, actively marketing his real estate properties to Japanese buyers. Second, this article examines how these contradictions have continued into Trump’s approach to Japan, and Asia, today. On the one hand, he continues to disparage the Japanese as military and economic freeloaders, whose products—especially cars—epitomize the “rigged” and anti-American global trading regime. His anti-free trade tirades and actions against countries like China and organizations like the World Trade Organization are direct updates of his 1980s-era critiques of Japan. At the same time, he expects Japan to support his political and economic agenda through investment in the United States, especially in manufacturing, and purchases of American products. Trump has managed to forge a surprisingly effective relationship with Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō yet repeatedly criticizes Japanese economic policy. His approach to Japan, in short, reflects his paradoxical and long-held attitudes toward globalization. It exemplifies his simultaneous fear of and infatuation with the global economy, his anxieties about its “unfair” destructive capabilities, and his supreme confidence that strong, aggressive leaders—namely Trump himself—nevertheless can harness it to fuel American greatness.

For over half a century, the U.S.-Japanese alliance has been one of the United States’ most important international relationships. Forged after a devastating war and during an unprecedented occupation, it has stood at the core of U.S. policy towards the Asia-Pacific since the end of World War II. Much of this importance stems from Japan’s geostrategic value; it hosts a large network of military bases, from which U.S. troops, planes, and equipment left for the battlefields of Korea and Vietnam. Throughout the early Cold War, Japan also stood at the center of American visions of economic growth in the Asia-Pacific. In keeping with their belief that economic deprivation led to political radicalism, American leaders sought to nurture Japan’s postwar recovery with

8 McKevitt, *Consuming Japan*, p. 25.

an extensive technical assistance program, access to American patents and technology, and entrée to the American market.⁹ As an increasingly prosperous non-western, non-white state, many Americans believed Japan would be the ultimate model for the superiority of a democracy and capitalism. It was, American policymakers hoped during the Cold War, a vision of the future for the rest of Asia.¹⁰

By the early 1970s, however, new concerns began to eclipse this older vision. While American bases in Japan had supported American fighting in the Vietnam War, Japan's growing economic dynamism sparked anxieties about U.S. global hegemony. From 1971 onward, the United States began importing more than it exported, developing a chronic trade deficit. Asia, and Japan in particular, increasingly became the center of this imbalance. Nevertheless, as the decade progressed, U.S.-Asian trade continued to grow, ultimately surpassing U.S.-European trade in 1980, with Japanese exports making up a large share of the total.¹¹ U.S. leaders viewed these trends with unease and began to worry about Japan's economic conduct. President Richard M. Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry A. Kissinger, were heavily critical of Japan, arguing that it had "enriched" itself through the war in Vietnam, while free riding on American defense spending.¹² Nixon and Kissinger also excoriated Japanese industrial policy, believing that the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI) utilized collusion between politicians, bureaucracy, and business to "coordinate a predatory trade strategy of export promotion and protection of domestic markets."¹³

The dawn of the 1980s only heightened these anxieties, as the Japanese economy seemed poised to surpass the United States. The American economy, reeling from successive oil crises, struggled with high inflation, stagnating wages, and growing unemployment and then plunged in the most serious recession since the Great Depression. In September 1982, unemployment climbed past ten percent.¹⁴ Japanese products, cars in particular, came to symbolize the

9 See, for example, Aaron Forsberg, *America and the Japanese Miracle: The Cold War Context of Japan's Postwar Economic Revival, 1950-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Sayuri Shimizu, *Creating People of Plenty: The United States and Japan's Economic Alternatives, 1950-1960* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001).

10 See Jennifer M. Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2019).

11 Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 376-77.

12 Schaller, "Reagan and Asia," p. 420.

13 Schaller, *Altered States*, pp. 231-32.

14 Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 43.

United States' shifting economic fortunes. In an era of energy shortages, sales of smaller, more fuel-efficient Japanese cars increased dramatically; while Japanese imports made up eleven percent of U.S. auto sales in January 1979, they rose to a peak 25 percent in July 1980, a higher share than leading American companies like Ford and Chrysler.¹⁵ The complaints from American auto unions and auto manufacturers were so vocal that some U.S. policymakers contemplated legislation requiring the use of local parts and even new tariffs. To alleviate this threat, the Japanese government agreed to implement voluntary export restriction on cars in 1981. Japanese companies also embarked on a new strategy to keep their access to the lucrative American market, opening automobile plants in the United States. The first Honda plant opened in Marysville, Ohio in November 1982, while Nissan followed with one in Smyrna, Tennessee in June 1983. Despite such measures, however, American politicians, lobbyists, unionists, and auto executives continued to rail against "Japanese" cars well in the 1990s. Even if these cars came from factories in the United States, their foreign ownership still rendered them suspicious, a potent symbol for the decline of "American" manufacturing.

With the economy mired in recession, unemployment growing, and a widening trade deficit, the Ronald Reagan administration targeted access to the Japanese market as a top priority.¹⁶ Many Americans believed that the fault lay with the Japanese, and policymakers, congressmen, and lobbyists repeatedly criticized Japan as protectionist. Others identified Japanese industrial policy as the main problem, arguing that government-bureaucracy-industry cooperation created "strong base from which the chosen firms can launch aggressive export drives" that preyed on the American market through low tariffs.¹⁷ Prominent commentators utilized historical language to convey their panic at the Japanese "threat." "Today, 40 years after the end of World War II,"

15 U.S. Department of State, Briefing Paper, "Japanese Automobile Sales to the U.S.," 21 November 1980, Digital National Security Archive, *Japan and the United States: Diplomatic, Security and Economic Relations, 1977-1992*, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB175/index.htm> (accessed 13 May 2018); Alfred E. Eckes Jr. and Thomas W. Zeiler, *Globalization and the American Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 199.

16 See, for example, National Security Decision Directive Number 62, "National Security Division Directive on United States-Japan Relations," 25 October 1982, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-62.pdf> (accessed 13 April 2018).

17 Lionel H. Olmer, "Japan Trip Report, November 26-December 4, 1982," Digital National Security Archive, *Japan and the United States: Diplomatic, Security and Economic Relations*, Part III: 1961-2000, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB175/index.htm> (accessed 13 May 2018).

Pulitzer prize winning reporter Theodore White wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1985,

the Japanese are on the move again in one of history's most brilliant commercial offensives, as they go about dismantling American industry. Whether they are still only smart, or have finally learned to be wiser than we, will be tested in the next 10 years. Only then will we know who finally won the war 50 years before.¹⁸

Such sentiments ultimately led the U.S. government to formally label Japan as an unfair trading partner in 1989.¹⁹ But much of this was to little avail; over the 1980s, the United States cumulative foreign trade deficit came close to one billion dollars, with Japan contributing about half of the total.²⁰

The panic of a Japanese “invasion,” however, was not just about the displacement of American products. Just as important was the flow of Japanese money. In particular, the high interest rates of the early 1980s drew in a steady stream of capital from Japan's booming stock market, as Japanese investors bought 35 percent of U.S. debt and Japan became the world's largest creditor.²¹ As Greta Krippner notes, this flow of Japanese funds fundamentally changed the global economy from one of “closed economies [to] a world of global capital” and the Reagan administration actively sought out international investment.²² Undersecretary of the Treasury Beryl Sprinkel, for example, traveled to Tokyo to market U.S. bonds to Japanese financiers as part of Reagan's efforts to make the United States more appealing for foreign investors.²³ As a result, even while Reagan and others complained about Japan's “unfair” economic behavior, the inflow of Japanese capital accelerated. Between 1986 and 1990, Japanese investors spent more than \$650 billion abroad with more than half going to the United States.²⁴ During this boom, they bought a visible array of American companies and landmarks from CBS records and Columbia pictures—which *Newsweek* magazine decried as “Japan buys Hollywood”—to Rockefeller Center. Japanese real estate investor Shigeru Kobayashi held over

18 Theodore White, “The Danger from Japan,” *New York Times Magazine*, 28 July 1985, pp. 19–44.

19 255 H.R. 4848—Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/4848/summary/35?> (accessed 13 April 2018).

20 Schaller, *Altered States*, p. 255.

21 Ibid.

22 Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis*, p. 100.

23 Ibid., p. 101.

24 LaFeber, *The Clash*, p. 378.

two million dollars of U.S. real estate, “including prime parcels spread across Manhattan.”²⁵ Japanese companies also continued open manufacturing facilities in the United States—a *New York Times* article from 1989 reported more than 600 Japanese-owned factories with more than 200,000 workers.²⁶ All of this made Japan a major theme in the 1992 presidential election. Democratic candidate Paul Tsongas famously thundered that “the Cold War is over. . . and Japan won!” Third party candidate Ross Perot contended that the Japanese have “picked our pockets” and used an army of lawyers and lobbyists to corrupt American government.²⁷

It was in this context that Donald Trump’s vision of U.S. economic fortunes received its first public articulation. Indeed, his anti-Japan rhetoric both reflected and exacerbated this “Japan-bashing” zeitgeist. The threat of Japanese economic competition—and what it symbolized about declining American prestige, power, and purpose—was a staple of Trump’s public interviews, especially in 1987 and 1988 when he first flirted with a political career. Trump’s rhetoric consistently singled out Japan as the greatest threat to the United States, despite the resurgence of Cold War competition with the Soviet Union. In particular, he zeroed in on the question of trade, arguing that it was not enemies that undermined the American economy, and by extension the United States itself, but close “friends” like Japan. “We don’t have free trade now because Saudi Arabia and Japan distort the market,” he asserted in a 1987 interview with Larry King.²⁸ Trump expanded on this in a 1988 interview with Oprah Winfrey, complaining

we let Japan come in and dump everything right into our markets and everything—it’s not free trade. If you ever go to Japan right now, and try and sell something, forget about it, Oprah. Just forget about it. It’s almost impossible. . . . They come over here, they sell their cars, their VCRs, they knock the hell out of our companies.²⁹

25 Martin Rosenberg, “Business Forum: Business Heroes; Look Out, Trump, It’s Kobayashi’s Turn,” *New York Times*, 5 March 1989, p. A3.

26 Ibid.

27 McKeivitt, *Consuming Japan*, p. 21; Jim Mann, “Harsh Views on Japan may help fuel Perot Campaign,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 June 1992, http://articles.latimes.com/1992-06-11/news/mn-353_1_trade-talks (accessed 13 April 2018).

28 Charles Laderman and Brendan Simms, *Donald Trump: The Making of a World View* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 34.

29 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 41.

What is more, he consistently argued, these supposed “friends” were thriving precisely because of American defense policy, which required them to sacrifice or pay little. Trump expanded on this theme in an interview with Phil Donahue, noting that Japan, and other rich allies, profiting off of their supposed helplessness, were “making billions and trillions of dollars while this country is going out and borrowing money from Japan in order to defend Japan.”³⁰

For Trump, however, countries like Japan were not entirely to blame. Rather, the blame rested with the U.S. government and its naïve, foolish, and misguided policies. As he bluntly asserted, “we have people that are stupid.”³¹ Trump’s criticisms of Japan served as the backdrop for his fantasies of executive power and his own business omnipotence. If he were president, he promised Oprah, “this country would make a hell of a lot of money from those people that for 25 years have taken advantage.”³² This was not only because he would “make our allies pay their fair share,” though this was a crucial stating point.³³ Trump declared that he would bring the necessary mercenary spirit to the halls of the White House, earning a new level of international respect through firm, masculine leadership. He ridiculed current American leaders:

There’s no aggressiveness, there’s no advocacy, and that’s really the word. Everything’s a compromise today. We don’t want to anger Japan. They are friends! They are partners. Don’t tax them. They’re laughing at us! They think the United States is made up of a bunch of fools. They’re laughing at us.³⁴

While this preoccupation with international respect and shame may have stemmed in part from Trump’s personal psychology, especially his obsession with dominance and competition, it also reflected broader fears about the future of the American economy in an increasingly globalized world. His agitated warnings about foreign exploitation were a more extreme version of sentiments many other prominent Americans shared.

Despite these criticisms, however, Trump also continued to insist on the inherent greatness of the American economy. If Japanese businesses were booming while American ones were declining, this was not because they designed superior products or because their workers had better education and training.

30 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 38.

31 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 3.

32 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 40.

33 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 40.

34 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 47.

The fault lay squarely with incompetent leadership; Japan's success only could come from gaming the system. Rather than long-term investments in American education or a focus on growing economic inequality, the United States needed assertive leaders, who could confront Japan, return it to its "natural" place as the junior economic partner, and thus lead the United States to an economic revival. Trump therefore routinely linked confronting Japan with the rebirth of American fortunes. As he claimed in his 1987 open letter, by making allies like Japan pay, the United States could

help our farmers, our sick, our homeless by taking from some of the greatest profit machines ever created—machines created and nurtured by us. "Tax" these wealthy nations, not America. End our huge deficits, reduce our taxes and let America's economy grow unencumbered by the cost of defending those who can easily afford to pay us for the defense of their freedom.³⁵

Insisting on Japanese unfairness and its dependence on weak American leadership was crucial for Trump's analysis. It reconciled the glaring gap between the assumed superiority of the United States with the reality of Japan's continued economic success.

Equally important, this vision entailed a firm commitment to the free market. For all his critiques of the Reagan administration's leadership, Trump shared its belief that deregulation, low taxes, and the cross-border flow of money was the key to U.S. prosperity. During the 1980s, he often paired his call for economic aggression overseas with an appeal to reduce taxes and state intervention at home. Unleashing the domestic market was another important way to effectively confront both the Japanese threat and the poor U.S. leadership that allowed Japan to succeed. Indeed, if Americans were experiencing stagnating wages, high unemployment, and decreasing prosperity, this was not the natural working of capitalism. It was because foreign governments subverted the global market. Trump's Japan bashing, then, was a direct response to the specific challenges of the 1980s. It articulated support for Reagan's free market, low-tax, and anti-union agenda, while explaining the growing gap between its promises of American economic greatness and its alarming realities, especially growing economic inequality.

To be sure, like so many of his actions in the 1980s, Trump's comments about Japan were in part self-promotion, designed to stoke buzz about a possible

35 Ben-Meir, "That Time Trump Spent Nearly \$100,000 on an Ad Criticizing U.S. Foreign Policy in 1987."

political career and keep the Trump name on everyone's lips. As *Newsweek* asserted in a September 1987 profile,

Trump is undoubtedly enjoying the hype associated with his recent political forays.... The equation is simple; if more people know your name and your reputation, more people will buy your flashy condominiums, dump quarters into your slot machines or pick up a copy of your new book.³⁶

Yet his comments about Japan were also consistent and clear; they formed the foundations of a worldview that he would continue to hone over the next thirty years. He railed against countries that allegedly preyed on the United States through a global regime of "free trade"; according to Trump, free trade simply did not exist because other countries manipulated the system. Yet though he believed that the current global economy discriminated against the United States, he also offered a simple solution—better leadership. With the right person in power, an aggressive and clear-minded dealmaker, the United States could stand up to freeloading allies and collect a windfall, which would enable it to cut taxes further. Taken together, Trump unsurprisingly called for less American investment in maintaining global economic and political order, and more focus on revitalizing the United States at home.

Yet for all his simplistic bombast about confronting freeloading and predatory allies like Japan, Trump's actual interactions with Japan were rife with contradictions. Reflecting the broader dynamics of the U.S.-Japanese relationship, his vision of a nationalist and protectionist economy paralleled an open embrace of Japanese capital. Trump personally benefited from the financial shifts of the 1980s, especially the rise of Japanese foreign investment. Despite his anti-Japanese rhetoric, he actively sought and attracted Japanese capital, Japanese gamblers, and Japanese buyers in his casino and real estate career, including signature New York City real estate projects like Trump Tower and Trump Parc. Members of the Trump Organization—including Trump himself—visited Tokyo to market new properties like the Trump Palace in New York City's Upper East Side and a condominium complex in West Palm Beach.³⁷ Following the success of Trump's *The Art of the Deal*, which was a best seller in Japan, some agents estimated that seventy to eighty percent of the buyers for

36 Bill Powell and Peter McKillop, "Citizen Trump," *Newsweek*, 28 September 1987, p. 50.

37 Jose de Cordoba, "Trump to See if His Name Persuades Japanese to Buy Slow-Selling Condos," *Wall Street Journal*, 31 March 1989, p. 1.

some of these projects had been Japanese.³⁸ Indeed, Japanese finance was so important for Trump's wealth accumulation that some observers even posited that his financial free fall in the early 1990s was a consequence of his growing unpopularity with Japanese buyers. The more his invocations of the "Japanese as economic exploiters" gained him attention at home, the more they may have alienated an important source of foreign capital.³⁹

Observers at the time recognized the entanglement of Trump's career and the growing presence of Japanese finance. For some, the two seemed like the twin manifestations of a new economy, what William E. Geist in the *New York Times Magazine* appropriately called a "Xanadu of conspicuous consumption."⁴⁰ No one captured this zeitgeist better than *USA Today* senior editor J. Taylor Buckley, who in a satirical December 1988 column mocked American responses to these economic anxieties. The Japanese, Buckley wrote, were buying "all the New York skyscrapers and Hawaiian hotels and French vineyards," but they were now facing a new opponent. "Pride of the USA, Donald Trump" defended the nation's honor through impulsive purchase that made no economic sense, but outbid the Japanese in their extravagance. Buckley referenced recent purchases to mock Trump's temperament, noting his \$365 million deal for Eastern airlines (renamed Trump Shuttle), which had followed his \$390 million acquisition of what Trump called "my Mona Lisa," New York City's Plaza Hotel (which he bought from the partial ownership of the Japanese Aoki Corporation).⁴¹ "When he gets word that Japan is buying NASA just to have shuttles faster than the ones he bought from Eastern," Buckley satirically predicted, "he is going to be mad." In part, Buckley's column may have been condemning not just Trump, but also the American media's obsession with Trump and economic gossip. Rather than serious reporting, he implied, it obsessed over the competition

38 Yumiko Ono, "Trump's Condos Lose their Luster for Tokyo Buyers," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 June 1990, p. A5.

39 In reality, it may not have been Donald J. Trump's unpopularity but the fall of the Japanese stock market that slowed Japanese investment. Larry Reibstein, et al., "Trump: The Fall," *Newsweek*, 17 June 1990, p. 38; Rick Hampson, "Trump singing new tune: Entrepreneur positively hungry for the money," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 19 June 1990, p. D14.

40 William E. Geist, "The Expanding Empire of Donald Trump," *New York Times Magazine*, 4 April 1984, p. 30.

41 Robert J. Cole, "Plaza Hotel is Sold to Trump for \$390 Million," *New York Times*, 27 March 1988, p. 1; Abram Brown, "The Suite Life: Inside the Plaza Hotel's 110-Year History," *Forbes*, 12 December 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/abrambrown/2017/11/21/the-suite-life-inside-the-plaza-hotels-110-year-history/#b9d290310107> (accessed 13 April 2018); David Stout with Kenneth N. Gilpin, "Trump is Selling the Plaza Hotel to Saudi and Asian Investors," *New York Times*, 12 April 1995, p. 1.

between Trump and Japanese investors for “trophies” like a piano used in the movie *Casablanca*.⁴² Buckley concluded by mimicking what he saw as Trump’s conflation of his own consumption with national pride. “It will probably come down to a big doomsday action at Christies,” he mockingly wrote. “Just Trump against Japan [as] Trump buys the Mormon Tabernacle Choir; Japan buys St. Peter’s Basilica; Trump buys Moscow Circus, Japan buys the Kennedy Center.”⁴³

In self-fashioning, public imagination, and financial reality, then, Trump was very much a product of the U.S.-Japanese relationship in the 1980s. His criticism of alleged Japanese predation and his reliance on Japanese finance both emerged from the broader dynamics that defined the economic ties between these two countries. Both politically and economically, it is not an overstatement to assert that this alliance helped make Trump possible. It profoundly shaped his conceptions of American greatness and American decline, of the opportunities and perils that the United States faced in the world, and fueled his supremely confident conviction that “I alone can fix it.”⁴⁴

This history of Trump’s encounters—both rhetorically and financially—with Japan is crucial to understanding President Trump’s approach not only to Japan and East Asia, but trade, diplomacy, and political leadership more broadly. Trump made repeated references to Japan during his campaign as part of his larger theme that foreign countries were “ripping off” the United States and stealing American jobs. He also returned to his older claims that such dynamics were the product of weak leadership, misguided policy, and a rigged global system that allowed predatory trade practices and currency manipulation.⁴⁵ If anything changed, it was the spread of such actions beyond Japan—Trump expanded the criticisms he first articulated about Japan to describe the entire global economy and trading system, most prominently Mexico and China. They, too, Trump bemoaned, “rigged” the economic system through misguided free trade agreements and government protection, which prevented the United States from what would be its inevitable “winning.”

For Trump, the solutions to these problems remained the same as the 1980s. A combination of aggressive leadership, nationalist tariffs, tax cuts, and foreign capital inflows would resurrect American greatness. This approach has

42 “Casablanca Piano Eludes Trump,” *New York Times*, 17 December 1988, p. 15.

43 J. Taylor Buckley, “Sale of the Century: Trump this, Tokyo,” *USA Today*, 22 December 1988, p. 13A.

44 Trump, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio.”

45 Soble and Bradsher, “Donald Trump Laces into Japan with a Trade Tirade from the 80s.”

defined Trump's relationship with Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and Japan more broadly. While he has confirmed Japan's value as a military ally, Trump is more obsessed with its ongoing presence as an economic competitor. Rather than merely "transactional," as some scholars have described it, his approach to Japan continues to draw on a set of deeply-held ideological assumptions—an infatuation with "strong" and aggressive leadership and a quest for national greatness laced with suspicions about economic conniving in a hyper-competitive world.⁴⁶

As president, Trump's approach to Japan has both built upon and departed from the dynamics of the last two decades. After the upheavals and tensions of the 1980s, both American and Japanese leaders worked to sustain the relevance and durability of the U.S.-Japanese alliance in the 1990s and 2000s. With the Cold War formally over, they focused on increasing U.S.-Japan military and defensive cooperation, while also adopting a new rhetoric for this alliance—that of "shared values"—that extended beyond mere economic or security rationales. This lingo first became common during the mid 1990s, when President Bill Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro jointly declared that the U.S.-Japan relationship was an "alliance for the twenty-first century" because it was based on "profound common values" of democracy and the rule of law.⁴⁷ This language has continued to circulate in publications, speeches, and joint statements that celebrate this trans-Pacific bond as the manifestation of political and ideological affinity. President Barack Obama especially embraced this rhetoric during his 2016 visit to Japan. As he put it during his speech at the U.S. Marines Air Corps Station in Iwakuni, the U.S.-Japan security relationship "is rooted in the shared values of today's Japan and today's United States: the values of freedom, the values of democracy, the values of human rights, the values of rule of law."⁴⁸

As president, Trump has continued to rhetorically emphasize the importance of the U.S.-Japanese relationship, but instead of democratic "partnership," he is far more likely to highlight its military and defensive value. The *New York Times*, for example, noted that "ironclad" regularly appears in the Trump

46 Sheila Smith, "Whither Trump's Asia Policy," *East Asia Forum*, 4 September 2017, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/09/04/whither-trumps-asia-policy/> (accessed 13 April 2018).

47 Kōji Murata, "The 1990s: From a Drifting Relationship to a Redefinition of the Alliance," in *The History of U.S.-Japan Relations: From Perry to the Present*, Makoto Iokibe, ed., Tosh Minohara, trans. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 227.

48 "Remarks by President [Barack] Obama to U.S. and Japanese Forces, Iwakuni, Japan, May 27, 2016," <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/27/remarks-president-obama-us-and-japanese-forces> (accessed 13 April 2018).

administration's characterizations of this alliance.⁴⁹ Speaking during Abe's visit in February 2017, Trump acknowledged that the "U.S.-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of peace and stability in the Pacific region," but emphasized its military capacities, which he hoped would become "impenetrable."⁵⁰ As observers like Satu Limaye, director of the East-West Center, have noted, Trump tends to marginalize "the shared values and interests of long-held alliances" and does not prioritize cooperation with democratic allies.⁵¹

Yet ironically, the language of "shared values" does describe Trump and Abe with a certain amount of accuracy, though with a content and valance that differs dramatically from its original intent. Both Trump and Abe are strong nationalists who place patriotism and national pride at the center of their political visions. After his repeated calls to "Make America Great Again," Trump made this unequivocal declaration in his inaugural address: "At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America, and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other."⁵² Abe too has placed confidence and national pride at the center of his political vision. He has been a vocal advocate of nationalist historical revisionism in Japan and has revised national education laws to emphasize patriotic education, based in part on the argument that "a positive vision of Japanese history was necessary to boost children's confidence in their country."⁵³

49 Motoko Rich, "Trump's Phone Buddy in the North Korea Crisis: Shinzo Abe," *New York Times*, 5 September 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/05/world/asia/japan-trump-north-korea-abe.html> (accessed 13 April 2018).

50 Donald J. Trump, "The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan. February 10, 2017," *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=123196> (accessed 13 April 2018).

51 Satu Limaye, "Trump in Asia: A 'Rebalance' Toward Trade," *NPR*, 13 November 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/11/13/563722510/trump-in-asia-a-rebalance-toward-trade> (accessed 13 April 2018).

52 Trump, "Inaugural Address."

53 Abe Shinzō is also a member of Nippon Kaigi, a large "rightwing unity organization" whose slogan is "Build a nation with pride." Nippon Kaigi members make up a large part of the Abe government; as of 2015, about 40 percent of the Diet's representatives were members, and in the third Abe cabinet, sixteen of 20 ministers were members of the Nippon Kaigi Diet Members League. Tawara Yoshifumi, "What is the Aim of Nippon Kaigi, the Ultra-Right Organization that Support's Japan's Abe Administration?," William Brooks and Lu Pengqiao, trans., *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 15, issue 21, no. 1 (1 November 2017), <https://apjif.org/-Tomomi-Yamaguchi-Tawara-Yoshifumi/5081/article.pdf> (accessed 15 May 2018); Tomomi Yamaguchi, "The 'Japan is Great!' Boom, Historical Revisionism, and the Government," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 15, issue 6, no. 3 (5 March 2017), <https://apjif.org/2017/06/Yamaguchi.html> (accessed 13 May 2018).

Not surprisingly, both Trump and Abe also elevate military power as a key element of their political vision. While Trump declared that the “wisdom of our soldiers” would be the source of a “new national pride,” Abe has been a forceful advocate of expanding Japan’s military capabilities, announcing plans to revise the postwar constitution’s Article 9, which outlaws wars and bans offensive military force, to “make ‘explicit the status’” of Japan’s defense forces.⁵⁴ Finally, both Trump and Abe express their nationalist agenda through celebrations of specific historical sites and monuments, ironically utilizing the language of culture and heritage to reclaim military disaster as national renewal. Trump is a vocal supporter of Confederate monuments as “beautiful” representatives of “the history and culture of our great country.”⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Abe repeatedly has visited Yasukuni Shrine, the controversial interment site for the souls of Japan’s war dead, including convicted war criminals from the Pacific War. To Trump and Abe, these are not anachronistic remembrances of a discredited ideology, but symbols of heritage and cultural pride. Not surprisingly, then, Trump repeatedly expressed his admiration for Japanese “culture” during his November 2017 visit to Japan. “For all of its modern splendor,” he said in appreciation, “the people of Japan maintain a profound respect for their rich culture, heritage, and traditions.”⁵⁶

This shared nationalist emphasis perhaps has made it easier for Abe to cultivate openly and actively a relationship with Trump. During Trump’s November 2017 visit to Japan, for example, Abe gifted Trump with a white hat embroidered with “Donald & Shinzo, Make Alliance Even Greater,” a play on Trump’s campaign slogan. Abe also has played to Trump’s recreational tastes with trips to steakhouses and golf outings; Abe was the first foreign leader that Trump hosted at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, where he presented Trump with a \$3,800 gold-plated golf club.⁵⁷ Yet Trump’s failure to reciprocate Abe’s efforts

54 Trump, “Inaugural Address”; Motoko Rich, “Shinzo Abe Announces Plans to Revise Japan’s Pacifist Constitution,” *New York Times*, 3 May 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/03/world/asia/japan-constitution-shinzo-abe-military.html> (accessed 13 April 2018).

55 Donald J. Trump, Twitter Post, 27 August 2017, 6:07 a.m., https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/898169407213645824?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Ftime.com%2F4904510%2Fdonald-trump-twitter-confederate-statues%2F (accessed 13 April 2018).

56 Donald J. Trump, “The President’s News Conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in Tokyo, Japan. November 6, 2017,” *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=128510> (accessed 13 April 2018).

57 David Nakamura, “Japanese Leader Shinzo Abe Plays the Role of Trump’s Loyal Sidekick,” *Washington Post*, 6 November 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/japanese-leader-shinzo-abe-plays-the-role-of-trumps-loyal-sidekick/2017/11/06/cc23dcae-c2f1-11e7-afe9-4f60b5a6c4a0_story.html?utm_term=.3328234e6a71 (accessed 13 April 2018).

fully and clearly demonstrate that the hierarchical nature of this alliance remains intact, no matter how repeatedly American rhetoric emphasizes an ironclad “partnership.”⁵⁸ During his visit to Tokyo, Trump laughingly mocked Abe’s sycophantic offering, describing how

he actually brought me the most beautiful golf club I’ve ever seen. It was a driver that’s totally gold. Right? It’s gold. (Laughter.) And I looked at it—I said, “If I ever use this driver—me—to use that driver at a golf club, I will be laughed off every course I ever go onto.”⁵⁹

In contrast, during his U.S. visit in February, Abe offered a far more flattering portrait of Trump:

Donald, President, you are excellent businessman [but] you have not experienced being in the public office. But you have fought the uphill struggle and fight for more than a year in the election campaign to become a new President. And this is the dynamism of democracy.⁶⁰

Abe’s words transparently sought to play on Trump’s self-image as an outsider, dealmaker, and populist combatant against a craven political establishment.

Indeed, Trump’s long history of anti-Japan rhetoric, and its continued presence in his campaign, has made it all the more important for Abe actively to assure that the U.S. remains defensively committed to Japan. Over the last two decades, clarifying and expanding U.S.-Japan defense cooperation has been a major focus on this alliance. Japan has increased slowly its participation in overseas military efforts, for example, sending Marine Self-Defense Forces to

58 Trump made clear that Japan was the junior partner in the U.S.-Japanese alliance in this remark during his November 2017 visit to Tokyo:

Japan is a very special place. The Japanese people are thriving, your cities are vibrant, and you’ve built one of the world’s most powerful economies. I don’t know if it’s as good as ours. I think not. Okay? And we’re going to try and keep it that way, but you’ll be second.

Trump, “The President’s News Conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in Tokyo, Japan,” 6 November 2017.

59 Donald J. Trump, “Remarks with Prime Minister Abe of Japan at a State Dinner in Tokyo, Japan. November 6, 2017,” *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=128721> (accessed 13 April 2018).

60 Trump, “The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan,” 10 February 2017.

the Indian Ocean to assist with coalition refueling operations for the war in Afghanistan.⁶¹ Abe has sought to continue this trend under his leadership; along with seeking constitutional revision, he has elevated the Defense Agency to the status of Ministry of Defense, increased defense expenditures, expanded joint training exercises with the U.S. military, and revised U.S.-Japan defense cooperation guidelines to make Japan “fully responsible for the defense of its people and territories.”⁶²

This dual agenda of strengthening Japan’s military capability while reinforcing the sinews of the U.S.-Japanese alliance has acquired a dramatically heightened sense of urgency in light of North Korea’s increasingly belligerent rhetoric and march towards nuclear capabilities, which Abe sees as an existential threat to Japan.⁶³ Abe has kept in constant touch with Trump via telephone and has been the most open and stalwart supporter of Trump’s hawkish approach. “Japan consistently supports the position of President Trump when he says that all options are on the table...,” as he put it in November 2017. “Japan and U.S. are 100 percent together.”⁶⁴ Thus far, this approach has proven effective in earning reassurances of the U.S. defense commitment to Japan, but its long-term viability is still unclear.⁶⁵ Abe’s efforts to deepen the two country’s diplomatic and military coordination appear more shaky after Trump announced in March 2018 that he would meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, only notifying Japan after the fact.⁶⁶

61 Makoto Iokibe and Fumiaki Kubo, “U.S.-Japan Leadership in the Post-9/11 World,” in *The History of U.S.-Japan Relations*, p. 238.

62 Ibid., pp. 245, 254; Taoka Shunji, “Trump’s Threat to Charge Japan More for U.S. Forces: Taoka Shunji says ‘Let them leave,’” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 15, issue 1, no. 5 (1 January 2017), <https://apjif.org/2017/01/Taoka.html> (accessed 13 May 2018).

63 Abe has a long history of being heavily critical of North Korea. For example, throughout his political career, he has drawn attention repeatedly to North Korean abjections of Japanese citizens in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

64 Trump, “The President’s News Conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in Tokyo, Japan,” 6 November 2017.

65 Rich, “Trump’s Phone Buddy in North Korea Crisis: Shinzo Abe.” Writing in August 2017, T. J. Pempel claimed that Japan had received 28 American reassurances of its defense commitment. T. J. Pempel, “Trump Swings a Wrecking Ball at U.S.-Asia Relations,” *East Asia Forum*, 27 August 2017, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/08/27/trump-swings-a-wrecking-ball-at-us-asia-relations/> (accessed 18 April 2013).

66 Motoko Rich, “Japan Fears Being Left Behind by Trump’s Talks With Kim Jong-un,” *New York Times*, 13 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/13/world/asia/japan-shinzo-abe-trump-north-korea.html> (accessed 13 April 2018).

But while the United States and Japan generally have continued to find shared ground on defensive questions, Trump's arrival at the White House has put new pressure on their economic interactions. Drawing on his long-held animosities from the 1980s, Trump immediately decried the U.S.-Japan trade relationship as "not fair" and "not open." The United States "has suffered massive trade deficits with Japan for many, many years," he bemoaned during a November 2017 visit to Tokyo. "Almost \$70 billion annually." Trump in particular zeroed in on cars, the 1980s' epitome of Japanese economic triumph. "Many millions of cars are sold by Japan into the United States," he angrily stated, "whereas virtually no cars go from the United States into Japan." Continuing themes from decades before, Trump insisted that this was not because American cars were inferior, explaining how "our car industry is doing very well and our product is fantastic."⁶⁷ The only answer was therefore the inequity of current trade practices, and the lack of fair access to the Japanese market. As he put it to donors in March 2018, it was obvious that Japanese government was using "gimmicks" such as an infamous "safety test" of dropping a bowling ball on the car hood to deny entry to American cars (allegations that were not based on any recorded information).⁶⁸ Trump may value the U.S.-Japan security relationship, but he also continues to see the Japanese as predatory cheaters in economic interaction who take advantage of the United States through trade.

Alongside this ongoing obsession with Japan, Trump's horizons have expanded since the 1980s, with other countries entering the ranks of "unfair" competitors. In addition to Canada and Mexico (members of the much-maligned North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]), Trump also has railed against the rest of Northeast Asia, especially China and South Korea. Indeed, while Trump has been concerned with U.S.-Japanese trade since the 1980s, the economic stakes are now even higher. Trade with Asia now forms the largest source of American goods from abroad, totaling one-third of all imports. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral trade deal drafted during the Obama administration that would have restructured forty percent of the

67 "Remarks by President Trump to U.S. and Japanese Business Leaders, Tokyo, Japan, November 6, 2017," <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/5769/> (accessed 13 April 2018).

68 John Dawsey, Damien Paletta, and Erica Warner, "In fundraising speech, Trump says he made up trade claim in meeting with Justin Trudeau," *Washington Post*, 15 March 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2018/03/14/in-fundraising-speech-trump-says-he-made-up-facts-in-meeting-with-justin-trudeau/?utm_term=.5c916f97970d (accessed 13 April 2018).

global economy, reflected the central role that trans-Pacific trade has come to play in the American economy.⁶⁹ Utilizing the rhetoric that he developed during the 1980s against Japan, Trump campaigned vigorously against TPP in 2016. He regularly declared that it was the product of a foolish and weak U.S. government that sold American jobs to Asian competitors and ravaged American factories. Indeed, it was no accident that one of Trump's very first decisions as president was to withdraw from the TPP. As he explained to union leaders, he was "going to stop the ridiculous trade deals that have taken everybody out of our country and taken companies out of our country, and it's going to be reversed."⁷⁰ Trump declared that ending the TPP actually would unleash trans-Pacific trade, because he would negotiate a better deal that would create "much bigger trade."⁷¹

Thus far, this decision mostly has reflected the limits of American unilateral action. Despite the U.S. withdrawal, Japanese, Asian, and South America leaders signed the TPP in March 2018; Chile's foreign minister even openly weighed the possibility of Chinese membership, an ironic outcome for a pact that its sponsors originally designed to contain growing Chinese influence in the Pacific.⁷² What is more, amid growing fears that Trump's increasing aggressive action on tariffs, especially towards China, would harm American agricultural interests, Trump directed his advisors to reconsider joining the TPP in April 2018, but then changed his mind. Before he dropped the idea, it was unclear if, when, or how this reconsideration would take place. Indeed, Trump framed this potential shift as a product of his own skills as a dealmaker, placing it squarely in line with his consistent claim that he alone can tame the forces of globalization. "Would only join TPP if the deal were substantially better than the deal offered to Pres. Obama," he declared on Twitter, going on to note that his administration was "working to make a deal with the biggest of those nations, Japan, who has hit us hard on trade for

69 Michael R. Auslin, *The End of the Asian Century: War, Stagnation, and Risks to the World's Most Dynamic Region* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 203; Pempel, "Trump Swings a Wrecking Ball at U.S.-Asia Relations."

70 Quoted in Alex Ward, "The Trans-Pacific Partnership has been resurrected—and it's happening without the US," *Vox*, 11 November 2017, <https://www.vox.com/2017/11/11/16637826/trump-trans-pacific-partnership> (accessed 13 April 2018).

71 "Remarks by President Trump to U.S. and Japanese Business Leaders, Tokyo, Japan, November 6, 2017,"

72 Ernesto Londoño and Motoko Rich, "U.S. Allies Sign Sweeping Trade Deal in Challenge to Trump," *New York Times*, 8 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/world/asia/us-trump-tpp-signed.html> (accessed 13 April 2018).

years!”⁷³ Despite seeming like a reversal, then, Trump’s potential reconsideration of TPP was not a radical departure from his self-conception or long-held beliefs.

If anything, Trump’s stance on the TPP and other international constellations, such as NAFTA and the World Trade Organization (WTO), has reflected his decades-old fantasies of total executive power. If prior U.S. leaders joined these “rigged” arrangements, it was because they were weak or misguided; Trump, by contrast, claims to possess the strength and audacity to stand firm and a businessman’s ability to cut the right deals. Trump often returns to his 1980s diatribes against previous U.S. leaders to distinguish himself from them. As he declared at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Da Nang, Vietnam in November 2017,

I wish previous administrations in my country saw what was happening and did something about it. They did not, but I will. . . . We are not going to let the United States be taken advantage of anymore.

Trump spoke openly and derisively of multilateral organizations like the WTO:

Simply put, we have not been treated fairly by the World Trade Organization. Organizations like the WTO can only function properly when all members follow the rules and respect the sovereign rights of every member.

While America had approached such organizations in (misguided) good faith, none of them had reciprocated. “While the United States had systematically opened our economy with few conditions...,” he complained, “other countries didn’t open their markets to us.”⁷⁴ Trump’s critique of multilateral

73 Donald J. Trump, Twitter Post, 12 April 2017, 8:15 p.m., <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/984631073865953280> (accessed 14 April 2018). See also, Erica Warner, Damian Paletta, and Seung Min Kim, “Trump Weighs Rejoining Trans-Pacific Partnership Amid Trade Dispute with China,” *Washington Post*, 12 April 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/trump-weighs-rejoining-trans-pacific-partnership/2018/04/12/37d59500-3e71-11e8-8d53-eba0ed2371cc_story.html?utm_term=.0aea57532241 (accessed 14 April 2018).

74 Donald J. Trump, “Remarks at the APEC CEO Summit in Da Nang, Vietnam. November 10, 2017,” *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=128727> (accessed 13 April 2018). See also, Office of the United States Trade Representative, “2018 Trade Policy Agenda and 2017 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program,” March 2018, pp. 1–2, <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/Press/Reports/2018/AR/2018%20Annual%20Report%20FINAL.PDF> (accessed 13 May 2018).

agreements and organizations draws in part from long-standing American suspicions that such agreements violate national sovereignty. But as his focus on the alleged ill intentions of other countries shows, they also stem from his conviction that such agreements are a cover for those who, like the Japanese in the 1980s, sneakily “cheat” the self-evidently superior Americans.⁷⁵ In private, Trump is far more emotional in his belief that only a firm stance can resolve these problems. “I want tariffs,” Trump allegedly roared at John Kelly during his first week as chief of staff early in August 2017. Just as Japan once was “laughing” at the United States, “*China is laughing at us*,” Trump added. “*Laughing*.”⁷⁶

While Trump best exemplifies the centrality of 1980s experiences and visions in contemporary thinking about trade, there are continuities beyond his idiosyncratic personality. For example, Trump’s trade representative, Robert Lighthizer, is a former deputy trade minister in the Reagan administration who used the threat of tariffs to negotiate voluntary export restraints on products like steel with Japan and others.⁷⁷ He then became a lobbyist for the U.S. steel industry and filed lawsuits on behalf of U.S. companies seeking government protection from foreign competition. Lighthizer, who accompanied Trump on the Asia trip where he gave his speech in Da Nang, shares Trump’s belief that foreign countries have manipulated the system of global trade and undermined American industry and manufacturing. Like Trump, *New York Times* correspondent Ana Swanson reports, he now views China, and not Japan, “as the biggest offender in the global trading system, accusing the country of using state subsidies to build more factories than it needs and calling China’s trade practices an ‘unprecedented’ threat to the world trading system.”⁷⁸ The Trump administration therefore has resurrected some of the Reagan administration’s tactics, using the same legal processes that Reagan once employed

75 Office of the United States Trade Representative, “2018 Trade Policy Agenda,” pp. 1–2.

76 Jonathan Swan, “Exclusive: Trump vents in the Oval Office, ‘I want tariffs, bring me some tariffs!’,” *Axios*, 27 August 2017, <https://www.axios.com/exclusive-trump-vents-in-oval-office-i-want-tariffs-bring-me-some-tariffs-1513305111-5c2a21a2-6438-429a-9377-30f6c4cf2e9e.html> (accessed 13 April 2018).

77 Zeeshan Aleem, “Robert Lighthizer may be the most powerful Trump official you’ve never heard of,” *Vox*, 12 December 2017, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/12/12/16705548/robert-lighthizer-trump-trade-nafta-wto-china> (accessed 13 April 2018).

78 Ana Swanson, “The Little-Known Trade Advisor who Wields Enormous Power in Washington,” *New York Times*, 9 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/politics/robert-lighthizer-trade.html> (accessed 13 April 2018).

against Japanese semiconductors to combat Chinese technological transfer policies.⁷⁹

In the Office of the Trade Representative, Lighthizer has initiated trade actions against China, engaged in efforts to change the practices of the WTO, and entered ongoing negotiations on the future of NAFTA and a trade agreement with South Korea. With Trump's 8 March 2018 announcement of new tariffs on steel (25 percent) and aluminum (10 percent)—coming just hours after the signing of the TPP—such actions are a reminder that Trump sees all countries as potential trade predators. It is perhaps no accident that under Lighthizer's guidance, other allies such as Australia, Mexico, and South Korea received temporary exemptions from the tariffs in March 2018, but Japan remained conspicuously off the list.⁸⁰ Through some observers speculate that the Trump administration did so to build more leverage with Japan for a bilateral agreement, Trump's own statements suggest other motivations.⁸¹ When announcing additional tariffs against China in March 2018, Trump referenced NAFTA, the “unfair” WTO, and the European Union, but ended his opening comments with a reference to Japan that played on long-standing and racialized American tropes of Japanese sneakiness:

I'll talk to Prime Minister Abe of Japan and others—great guy, friend of mine—and there will be a little smile on their face. . . . And the smile is, “I can't believe we've been able to take advantage of the United States for so long.” So those days are over.⁸²

79 Caroline Freund, “Trump Plays Reagan's Game on Tariffs and Taxes,” *Bloomberg View*, 14 December 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-12-14/trump-plays-reagan-s-game-on-tariffs-and-taxes> (accessed 13 April 2018).

80 Peter Baker and Ana Swanson, “Trump Authorizes Tariffs, Defying Allies at Home and Abroad,” *New York Times*, 8 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/us/politics/trump-tariff-announcement.html> (accessed 13 April 2018); Anna Fified and Michael Birnbaum, “U.s. Allies See Trump's Steel Tariffs as an Insult,” *Washington Post*, 8 March 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-allies-see-trumps-steel-tariffs-as-an-insult/2018/03/08/a3b1382a-22f0-11e8-946c-9420060cb7bd_story.html?utm_term=.c678ecd6f7bo (accessed 13 April 2018).

81 Motoko Rich, “Misreading Trump: Ally Japan is Spurned on Tariff Exemptions,” *New York Times*, 23 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/23/world/asia/japan-trump-tariffs-trade-.html> (accessed 14 April 2018).

82 “Remarks by President Trump at Signing of a Presidential Memorandum Targeting China's Economic Aggression, 22 March 2018,” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-signing-presidential-memorandum-targeting-chinas-economic-aggression/> (accessed 14 April 2018).

As these remarks show, Trump considers this alleged conniving to be the continuation of a decades-long dynamics. In his mind, little has changed in the last thirty years.

Yet while Trump and his advisors are quick to rail against foreign products and commodities, they are happy to take foreign money. As he did in the 1980s, Trump envisions borders that will be firm when it comes to immigration, commodities, and some products, but permeable to foreign capital. Following previous administrations—and his own career as developer—Trump has sought to lure foreign investors. For example, the United States was “open for business,” he declared in a January 2018 speech at the global economic forum in Davos, Switzerland. “There has never been a better time to hire, to build, to invest and to grow in the United States.”⁸³ Trump often links this claim to his experience in the business world: “I’ve always been good at building things, and I’ve always been successful at making money,” a past that he asserts has gifted with him an audacious and bold business-minded willingness to slash taxes and regulations.⁸⁴ As he declared to American and Japanese business leaders in Tokyo in November 2017,

we are very, very substantially lowering our taxes. . . . The United States is one of the highest-taxed nations in the world. But it’s also a market like no other; by far, the biggest market in the world. . . . I’ve reduced regulations terrifically, frankly, if I do say so myself—but at a level that nobody else has ever done. I’ve done more in nine months in terms of the reduction of regulations than any President has done in a full term, and it’s not even close.⁸⁵

This dual approach to foreign economies—simultaneously condemning them as enemies and embracing them as investors—also has characterized Trump’s approach to Japan as president.

Much as Trump relied on Japanese investors to support his real estate career, he continues to expect Japan to actively facilitate his economic agenda as politician. This is evident in his constant emphasis on Japanese investment

83 Anne Gearan and Heather Long, “Trump Encourages a Buy-American brand of globalism at Davos,” *Washington Post*, 26 January 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-encourages-a-buy-american-brand-of-globalism-at-davos/2018/01/26/3e991bf6-0220-11e8-8acf-ad2991367d9d_story.html?nid&utm_term=.65baae028861 (accessed 13 April 2018).

84 Ibid.

85 “Remarks by President Trump to U.S. and Japanese Business Leaders.”

in the United States as a mechanism for job creation. Even prior to Trump's presidency, Japan was already one of the largest foreign direct investors in the United States, totaling \$44.9 billion in 2014.⁸⁶ Indeed, Abe has been quick to highlight how Japanese investment fulfills Trump's agenda. As he declared in November 2017,

in the United States, already since the start of Trump administration, partly thanks to the Japanese investment, 17,000 jobs have been created in the United States. So all countries in the world, vis-à-vis the United States, they make investment. But Japanese investment ranks, in terms of job creation. So the economic relations between the two countries may develop further, thereby creating jobs, thereby growing the economy.⁸⁷

Trump clearly expects this to continue; in his words, a "balanced economic partnership" is one where the United States "welcome[s] more Japanese investments into the United States."⁸⁸ In his remarks to business leaders in Tokyo in November 2017, Trump heralded a recent announcement that Mazda and Toyota would "invest \$1.6 billion in building a new manufacturing plant, which will create as many as 4,000 new jobs in the United States." Reflecting his constant tendency to conflate his personal actions and interests with those of the United States, Trump offered gratitude as though this was a personal gift. "Thank you very much," he told Japanese executives and government leaders. "Appreciate it."⁸⁹

Much of the commentary on Trump's surprising political career has focused on its short-term context, such as the impact of the Great Recession, immigration, the opioid crisis, or the evolution of social media. Yet the core of his worldview, especially his ideas about trade, alliances, national greatness, and executive power, emerged decades earlier. Over the past thirty years, Trump has shown a striking consistency in his foreign policy ideology, especially his emphasis on protecting American jobs and manufacturing through aggressive trade policy; his criticism of "freeloading" allies; his constant denunciations of weak American leadership that has allowed other countries to manipulate both the United States and international economic order; and his view, brought from his business career, that life is struggle where the goal is always

86 Auslin, *The End of the Asian Century*, p. 203.

87 Trump, "The President's News Conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in Tokyo, Japan," November 6, 2017.

88 "Remarks by President Trump to U.S. and Japanese Business Leaders."

89 Ibid.

victory, never compromise.⁹⁰ At least in part, this ideology stems from the experiences of the 1980s, especially Japan's economic rise and its changing relationship, both real and imagined, with the United States. For Trump—and many others—the rise of Japan made globalization visible and tangible. As president, he has broadened criticisms once targeted at Japan to include the entire global economy.

Tracing this continuity is crucial not only out of historical interest, but also because it helps shed light on the roots and contours of Trump's thinking, especially his relationship with globalization. Trump is fond of seeing himself as nationalist rebel against a cabal of "globalist" elites, but in reality, this is far from the case. From the 1980s onward, his economic nationalism was always selective and self-interested, fierce on certain issues, but profoundly lax on others. Both as real estate investor and president, Trump railed against the inflow of foreign products. If non-American goods were outselling American ones, he claimed, this was the sign of a dark conspiracy, one that the United States had to block using tariffs and government intervention. At the same time, he was a firm believer in foreign capital, which he thought had to be free from state regulation. The flow of money between borders, in his eyes, was what "fair" and "free" economic competition looked like and would create a world where Americans—or at least Trump himself—would defeat all others. This contradictory vision has allowed Trump to depict the American economy as simultaneously a devastated wasteland because previous U.S. leaders allowed foreigners to ravage it and as a powerhouse that could easily outcompete its rivals. The goal is not to reverse globalization, but to correct it—to create a "real" free market, where the laughter would come from, not at, a "winning" United States.

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90 This characterization of Trump's foreign goals comes from Laderman and Simms, *Donald Trump: The Making of a World View*, pp. 9, 24–25.

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