Japan's Border Measures during Covid-19: How the Crisis Shaped 'Others' to Protect the 'Stability of Self'

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has prompted countries to implement a wide range of specific cross-border security measures. The fear and anxiety induced by this crisis have rapidly expanded and contracted countries' understanding of 'self' and 'other'. This study examines Japan's shift from liberal pre-Covid-19 border policies to the most stringent border closure measures among the G7 countries during the pandemic. In this study, we argue that the pandemic-induced fear increased anxiety in Japan's public health safety identity, rapidly reshaping the conceptualization of the 'self' and 'other' in crisis scenarios. This shift aligns with Japan's historical narrative of combating unprecedented threats to public health.

Keywords: Ontological Security, Public Health Safety, Human Security, Anxiety, Isolation

Introduction

Japan is among the countries that insisted on maintaining border closure policies during the Covid-19 pandemic, notwithstanding its slumping economic growth, declining soft power, and damaged international image (Swift and Lies 2022). International criticism of Japan's rigid border closure policies has been admonished as "xenophobic" and "isolationist" (Siripala 2022). Japan's border closure policies during the pandemic have been compared with *sakoku*, which literally means closed country, referring to the border closure policies of the Tokugawa Shogunate or the Edo period (1603–1867) and viewing them as isolationist measures (Vogt and Qin 2022). Before the pandemic, Japan had taken measures to deal with the visa exemption arrangements with 69 countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan,

2023a). Unlike strict international border policies, Japan has liberal domestic mobility rights. Although the government imposes certain restrictions, it is different from other developed countries or Japan's neighbors. Recognizing the benefits of Japanese domestic politics against Covid-19, Gordon (2020) claimed that "Japan's experience with the pandemic shows that harsh restrictions are not necessarily the answer to containing the virus".

This study's research questions are as follows: How has the Covid-19 crisis reshaped the concept of 'self' and 'other' in Japan, particularly in the context of its strict border control policies? Which underlying factors in Japan's human security approach have influenced these changing perceptions during the pandemic? This study contributes to Ontological Security Studies (OSS) to show how the concept of 'self' and 'other' expanded and contracted during the pandemic in Japan, using OSS to explain the 'anxiety' perception with regard to 'the stability of self' at both public and governmental levels.

Japan experienced a significant shift in its historical narrative with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, redefining the concepts of 'self' and 'others'. As we argue, OSS concerns self-identity and the security of 'self' (Rosher 2022: 23). The Covid-19 challenges have compelled Japan to construct a 'new' self-identity and redefine the concept of 'others' within its borders. One of the crucial elements of Japan's 'self' is 'public health safety', particularly after the Meiji Restoration with the introduction of public health challenges and countermeasures. The Covid-19 pandemic has threatened Japan's concept of 'self' and stable public safety in biosecurity. This study also investigates Japan's reaction to the epidemic.

However, another question, which is crucial and requires theoretical intervention in OSS is What Japan means by 'others'? OSS claims that 'anxiety' about the 'stability of self' leads to strict policies with reference to 'others'. This research aims to briefly show how Japan re-emerged from the Covid-19 anxiety and redefined the concept of 'others' during the crisis in public health safety. We argue that Japan's reaction to ontological instability reshaped the concepts of 'self' and 'others' during the three years since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a pandemic, and it has also reshaped the previous concepts of 'self' and 'others' after the crisis ended. The invention of the types of 'self' and 'other' during a crisis is rooted in Japan's historical narratives regarding public health and threats to safety. Although there are some examples of categorizing 'other' in OSS (see Rumelili 2004), we aim to show how anxiety and fear led to the redefinition of a different 'self' and 'other' in response to the crisis. Our framework shows that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused anxiety about and threatened Japanese public health, which is a part of Japanese identity and its 'stability of self,'. Also, the ontological insecurity triggered strict border closure policies with regard to 'others'.

To illustrate this phenomenon, we focus on the border policies that were adopted to safeguard against 'others' and examine Japan's border control policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study period is from February 3, 2020, which marks the implementation of the first border closure measures, to October 11, 2022, when the country conditionally reopened its borders. Data concerning border control measures were obtained from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan. We employed a document analysis approach to comprehensively investigate Japan's border control policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. This method

involved a systematic examination and interpretation of official documents, reports, policies, and statements released by the relevant authorities, including Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan. Through rigorous scrutiny of these documents, we attempted to gain a detailed understanding of the evolving strategies, rationale, and measures implemented by Japan in response to the pandemic. This document analysis method enabled us to extract key insights and discern patterns in policymaking decisions concerning border politics and safeguarding against 'others'. It is important to emphasize that most of these documents were originally in Japanese, necessitating a meticulous translation process to ensure the accuracy and coherence of this research.

Covid-19 was selected as the subject because it is the most recent event to trigger social anxiety on this scale. Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020: 242) stated that the pandemic can be linked to anxiety. It is theorized that anxiety exists at both the individual and state levels (Rumelili 2022: 2). According to Kirke (2020), "the Covid-19 crisis has posed a fundamental challenge to global security, yet this extends well beyond the economic and physical security of states. Indeed, it has posed a fundamental challenge to 'human security'". We focus on Japan's reaction to the crisis based on the country's distinct handling of its border control measures during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly because it was the last Group of Seven (G7) country to reopen its borders. Using the human security approach as the foundational doctrine, the identity of public health safety provides a unique perspective for examining this issue. Furthermore, Japan's pronounced division between the concepts of 'self' and 'other' serves as an instrumental tool for augmenting the country's security framework. During the Covid-19 pandemic, all the threats experienced by the public evolved into widespread fear and anxiety. Through this analysis, this study sheds light on the transformation of Japan's self, transitioning from an open-border nation to one with a heightened focus on border protection.

This study is organized into three parts. In the following section, we examine the OSS literature on 'anxiety,' 'stability of self,' and 'others'. The second section concerns the history of identity, the human security approach to health security, and the various methods to achieve public security in Japan. The third section investigates Japan's border policies from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic until the country opened its borders fully to show how the concepts of 'self' and 'other' expanded and contracted. While analyzing the transition in border policies, we provide a categorization of 'self' and 'other' to emphasize the various concepts of these two terms.

OSS's Explanation of 'Security/ Stability of Self,' 'Anxiety,' and 'Others'

The concept of OSS is rooted in Laing's (1990) discussion of the psychological phenomenon of ontological insecurity and Giddens' (1991: 37) view that ontological security is about having an inherent sense of certainty about being in the world. It focuses on the "management of anxiety of the constitution of the self" (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020: 240). In the International Relations (IR) literature, Jef Huysmans (1998) introduced the term 'OSS'; since then, it has developed significantly in conceptual analysis. Early works on OSS suggest that states

have concerns regarding not only physical security but also ontological security, which is extrapolated from the individual level (Mitzen 2006: 342). In some current works on OSS, authors have attempted to extend exploration on this topic to examine further connections between physical security and OSS by blurring the clear differentiation between them (Krickel-Choi 2022a).

First, OSS focuses on the security of 'self' (Kočan and Zupančič 2022: 116) and takes a socio-psychological approach to describe how 'identity', which is a stable sense of the 'self' is constructed and how this affects political behavior and relations (Berenskötter and Nymalm 2021: 22). In the field of IR, OSS has gained significant prominence by emphasizing the security of the 'self' (Untalan 2020: 40). It is argued that nation-states seek ontological security to maintain a consistent sense of the 'self.' The 'self'' of states is constituted and upheld through a narrative that breathes life into routinized foreign policy actions. Steele (2008: 32) further underscores that nation-states may pursue social actions to satisfy their self-identities.

The second concept is the 'other' which is invariably involved in the process of increasing ontological security for one person or group and pursuing securitization of 'others' (Kinnvall 2004: 746). An essential component of OSS is the process of identifying and dealing with perceived 'others.' It is possible to recognize and engage with these 'others', such as hostile states or immigrant populations, in a way that frequently allays existential apprehensions and feelings of ontological insecurity (Browning 2019: 225). One of the main criticisms of OSS is that it does not focus on the significance of transforming 'self' and 'other' connections into bonds of mutual coexistence (Untalan 2020: 42).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, some countries perceived biosecurity threats as external dangers or those originating from the outside world, that is, 'others', and research shows that this increased xenophobia (Zeng, Wang and Zhang 2020; Belder 2022). Whenever the stability of 'self', is threatened, anxiety levels increase in these countries, and the tendency is to view others as the reason for the instability. One way of critically viewing 'others' is to understand them as a unit of analysis instead of evaluating them in an intersection.

The third point is 'anxiety', which appears when self-identity is threatened or weakened. There are differences of opinion on whether a feeling similar to, anxiety is appropriate for actors beyond the individual, owing to the strong psychological assumptions made by OSS. While most scholars use the framework to analyze states and other collective actors, an approach that has been explicitly defended by some (Mitzen 2006: 351–53; Steele 2008: 15–20), others believe that the concept applies only to individuals or smaller groups and have criticized "scaling up" to the collective level (Krolikowski 2008; Croft 2012: 225–26; Krickel-Choi 2022b: 5–6). Kinnvall and Mizen (2020: 241) argued that one of the biggest differences between conventional IR and OSS is that the former focuses on 'fear', whereas OSS addresses 'anxiety'. The conventional IR framework refers to "realist, liberal, and constructivist thought about anarchy" (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020: 258). Anxiety is a more widespread feeling and its

cause is not always obvious, whereas fear is motivated by a clear cause that one can identify with and, therefore, fight against. In other words, anxiety is an internal feeling, whereas fear is an external emotion (Rumelili 2015: 12). There are several definitions of anxiety. Some consider it to be more of an "emotion", (Steele and Homolar 2019) but for others, it is not closely related to either "emotion or psychic condition" (Ringmar 2018; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020). Some researchers have associated anxiety with uncertainty (Cupać 2020; Ejdus 2020). Linking anxiety to uncertainty is common and is largely consistent with an "existentialist understanding" of the concept (Krickel-Choi 2022b); for example, Rumelili (2020) stated that anxiety is a "constitutive condition" of existence. Some examples of instability for OSS scholars are associated with "critical situation" (Steele 2008: 1–2, 12–13), "crises" (Croft 2012: 223), and "rapid change", attributed to the "destabilizing force of globalization" (Kinnvall 2004: 742). Thus, instability may lead to anxiety. Despite its significance in political and social theory, scholars in IR have overlooked anxiety; however, it should be recognized as a fundamental condition that complements, rather than competes with, concerns for survival, thus strengthening the theoretical foundation for distinguishing between ontological and physical security and elucidating various foreign policy behaviors and international outcomes (Rumelili 2020: 272). The Covid-19 as a 'crises' situation has sparked new discussions within the field of OSS.

Wright, Haastrup and Guerrina (2020) claim that the Covid-19 pandemic increased ontological insecurity among vulnerable groups in academia. Agius, Bergman-Rosamond, Kinnvall (2021) associated Covid-19 with ontological instability viewed through the lens of the toxic masculinity of populist leaders during the pandemic, while Purnell (2021) argued that Covid-19 "materialized individual bodies".

Japan's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was distinctive for several reasons, as it underscored the shift in how the country perceived the 'self' and 'others'. First, Japan maintained a dichotomy between its internal policies, which aimed to avoid lockdowns, and its border controls, which were some of the most stringent measures implemented during the pandemic. As mentioned earlier, this robust approach persisted despite Japan hosting the Olympics and the potential soft power. Second, Japan's sustained border restrictions distinguished it among the G7 nations, echoing historical tendencies toward isolation, such as during the *Tokugawa Shogunate*[1] period. Finally, this reaction highlights the importance of public health and safety, which are an integral aspect of Japan's national identity. Thus, amid the anxieties stirred by the pandemic, Japan's policies reflect the attempt to reaffirm ontological security by identifying and mitigating perceived threats.

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1   This isolation, also known as *sakoku,* included prohibition of Christianity as a practiced religion and the restriction of Japanese individuals from embarking on or returning from international journeys. Additionally, there were instructions limiting foreign trade with several nations (for more detailed information please see; Munez 2024).

Japan: Public Security and Health

Public health is an important aspect of Japan's self-conception. Japan has a unique pathway for understanding security and health as an element of the security sector. There are three main reasons for this. First, Japan's pacifist approach to security; second, Japanese investment in non-traditional security sectors is linked to the first, strongly emphasizing the 'human security approach' in policymaking; third, historical narratives about the epidemic after the country's openness during the Meiji Restoration (1868 ~), and the constant importance of public health safety. The Meiji Restoration was a major political event that influenced Japan to adopt a new self-identity that distinguished it from its Asian neighbors and established closer links to the West (Gustafsson 2022).

Japan is known for its pacifist approach to military security. After World War II, Japan reorganized its military into a Self Defense Force instead of the traditional official military force. Some scholars have criticized this aspect and even labeled it as "abnormal" (Waltz 1993; 2000; Layne 1993), although others suggest there is a need to re-consider the labeling and identify it as "civilian power" (Pehlivantürk 2021). Furthermore, Japan developed an alternative approach to national security by investing in nontraditional security areas. One of Japan's most important security contributions is its approach to human security. Human security has become an integral part of the Japanese identity over time. This concept was first introduced in the United Nations Human Development Report in 1994 (United Nations 1994), and the narrative focuses more on individual human security than on national security. Although human security is considered a foreign policy agenda, it also includes domestic policies. In addition, Howe (2010: 1319) mentioned that "Japan has been one of the most proactive states in the field of human security" and described the country as "the leader in human security promotion" (Howe 2019: 189).

Health is an important aspect of human safety. For example, Shigeki Sumi (2008), a former Ambassador of Japan to the International Organizations in Vienna, criticized governments for focusing on traditional security and ignoring health, which is a "core value of human beings", and for cutting down on health care benefits when investing in traditional security. Another example is the working group that was organized in 2007 by the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), which warned about the risk of epidemics and emphasized the strengthening of the health system with close linkage to the framework of the human security approach before the G8 Summit in Japan (Takemi et al. 2007).

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019), "Japan is highly different from other OECD countries with a very low rate of obesity, alcohol consumption and smoking, and has the highest life expectancy". However, the importance of health is not limited to personal health, it also includes people adopting public health measures and taking precautions to promote it. One of the best examples is the habit of wearing a mask even before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic; this habit, which originated from the wish to avoid any flu epidemic in Japan, was a result of the Spanish Flu in 1918. Thus, wearing a mask is considered a reliable public health precaution in Japan (Gordon 2020). Although Prime Minister Fumio Kishida relaxed the mask policy, people continued to

wear masks as they did during the peak of the pandemic (Japan Times 2022a). Public health education is another example. Since the Meiji Restoration, public health education has been practiced in Japan (Aoyama n.d.). The first public health safety challenge for modern Japan was the epidemic originating from the outside world. Japan was an isolated country between 1603 and 1868, until its opening to the outside world, people began to experience repeated epidemics of exotic infections, including cholera, bubonic plague, and smallpox. As stated in the Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) (2005: 15) report on Japan's experiences in public health and medical systems:

> "To combat this situation, the public health administration was strengthened, with emphasis on controlling acute infectious diseases through hygiene and sanitation measures. The basis of this program was 'social defense', with the police making up the front line. The public health and medical system was expanded in this way under firm central government control."

The health system was designed in response to these epidemics. New laws were enacted to protect against epidemic diseases and health bureaus were established (JICA 2005: 16). This situation could also be evaluated by the historical narrative of 'anxiety' against 'others' owing to public health safety. Until Japan's modernization, there was no concept of collective health; however, with the introduction of hygiene by Dr. Nagayo Sensai, the first director of the Board of Public Health, there was a strong link between public health and public hygiene, and hygiene was the first point of modern Japanese understanding of health (Fukuda 1994: 385). In addition, since the mid-nineteenth century, Japan has performed better than the West in terms of urban sanitization (Joshi and Tewari 2003: 1261).

Japan's concept of public health safety is embedded in two sources: (i) official politics to promote the human security approach, and (ii) public responsibility and awareness about health and public biosecurity. Health, particularly public health, is an important aspect of Japan's identity. The direct threat posed by Covid-19 has increased 'anxiety' and triggered a quick transition in the concept of 'self' and 'other' through border policies. However, this phenomenon is not unique to the Covid-19 pandemic. As detailed in the next section, these two components were linked to border restrictions, particularly at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Interestingly, the first public safety challenge for modern Japan, namely the Spanish Flu, was an epidemic that emerged from outside, and the precautions were similar to those applied for Covid-19. We argue that Japan was highly protective of its citizens during the pandemic, and the crisis compelled the government and citizens to reflect on historical narratives. This introspection has led to serious border control efforts, highlighting the country's cautious approach to this widespread health threat. Consequently, it can be inferred that there are various facets in the development of Japan's public health discourse, such as the significant role of historical narratives in shaping response strategies.

Japan's policymakers used insider and outsider discrimination during the Covid-19 crisis (Vogt and Qin 2022); there was propaganda of 'othering' foreigners by the old and new media and some policymakers. Primarily, Japan's entry policies were based on qualifications

before and after the Covid-19 pandemic following the reopening of its borders. For short-term stays, individuals eligible to enter the country were scrutinized by embassies on the submission of documents required for visa applications. The Japanese government requires applicants to obtain a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE) because entry policies are based on qualifications for work visas and long-term stays. Upon arrival, this CoE is exchanged for a residence card at customs. The CoE can be viewed as a provisional residence card that permits bearers to enter Japan freely, similar to the country's citizens (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2023b). Furthermore, as suggested in this study, foreigners are classified to enhance the separation between 'self' and 'other' (Foster 2021). For example, the government extends equal treatment to foreigners living in Japan in terms of financial and health support. Moreover, similar to citizens, foreign residents of Japan get a ¥100.000 social assistance payment (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan 2021). However, foreigners living outside Japan could not apply for new entry even though they were eligible to live in Japan; for example, international students who were participating in exchange programs.

Border Restriction in Japan During the Covid-19

Border regulations enhance the relationship between the state and its citizens. Border control is essential for monitoring and managing the movement of people. The border "constitutes an identity" for nationals and "regulates the very productive powers of the intercourses transacted by, between, and through population" (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008: 269). The outbreak of Covid-19 has brought border control measures to the forefront. Governments have actively closed their borders to manage people's movement and prevent the entry of 'imported cases' of the virus. On January 22, 2020, North Korea closed its borders to all foreign tourists to prevent possible contact with Covid-19. In the same month, Hong Kong, Mongolia, and Russia announced partial closure of their borders with China. In March 2020, countries worldwide started to close their borders for nonessential travel owing to the rapid spread of Covid-19 (Kantis et al. 2022). With globalization and international social mobility, border closure policies seem to be useful solutions to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the initial stage. It was viewed as a security apparatus for managing the movement of people, both domestically and internationally, to minimize the negative effects of the pandemic. Initially, Japan collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO), refraining from taking preemptive measures ahead of the WHO directives, although it was the second country to experience Covid-19 after China. However, as the severity of the pandemic worsened, Japan's politics veered toward isolationism. It began to adopt a more separatist stance concerning 'self' and 'other,' even ranking them, as depicted in Figure 1.

Among the G7 countries, Japan had adopted stringent border control policies during the Covid-19 pandemic (Foster 2021). Border control was initiated with restrictions on passports issued in China and expanded to 73 countries because 25% of those infected with Covid-19 had travelled overseas in late March 2020 (Asahi Shimbun 2020). These policies evolved through different stages of the pandemic; Japan announced that it would reopen its borders on October 11, 2022, to all individual tourists and start the "back to normal" track (VOA News 2022).
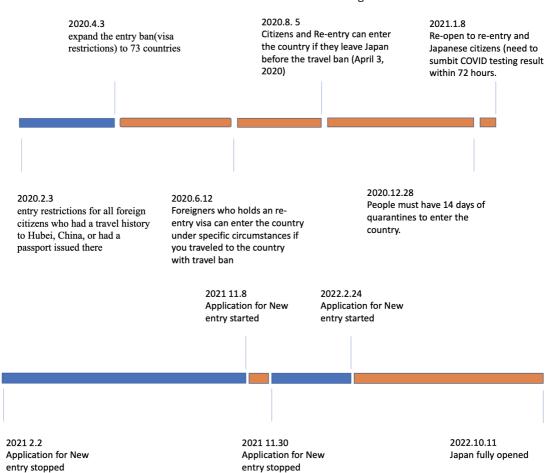
Table 1. Border Restriction Timeline during COVID-19

2020.4.3
expand the entry ban(visa restrictions) to 73 countries

2020.8. 5
Citizens and Re-entry can enter the country if they leave Japan before the travel ban (April 3, 2020)

2021.1.8
Re-open to re-entry and Japanese citizens (need to sumbit COVID testing result within 72 hours.

2020.2.3
entry restrictions for all foreign citizens who had a travel history to Hubei, China, or had a passport issued there

2020.6.12
Foreigners who holds an re-entry visa can enter the country under specific circumstances if you traveled to the country with travel ban

2020.12.28
People must have 14 days of quarantines to enter the country.

2021 11.8
Application for New entry started

2022.2.24
Application for New entry started

2021 2.2
Application for New entry stopped

2021 11.30
Application for New entry stopped

2022.10.11
Japan fully opened

Japanese nationals enjoyed unrestricted entry during the Covid-19 pandemic, whereas foreign nationals with valid visas faced strict border controls and travel bans. They were the main targets of the strict border control measures, were treated as 'others' and were regulated under a series of strict border restrictions and travel bans. These measures peaked on April 3, 2020, when a travel ban was imposed on 73 countries, thus making reentry into Japan an arduous task for foreign nationals (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan 2022a). Despite living and working in Japan, several people were denied entry even if they had undertaken short-term business trips abroad. However, on June 12, 2020, some visa restrictions were eased on humanitarian grounds as several foreign nationals faced significant life and job uncertainties owing to their enforced overseas stay (Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare of Japan 2022b). The emergence of Covid-19 variants further complicated the situation, resulting in the suspension of new-entry applications in early 2021. By November 2021, new entry applications were allowed for a brief 22-day period for business and long-term visits, including international students. By September 2022, the Japanese government introduced a three-category system for new entries, marking a gradual reopening of its borders (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan 2022a).
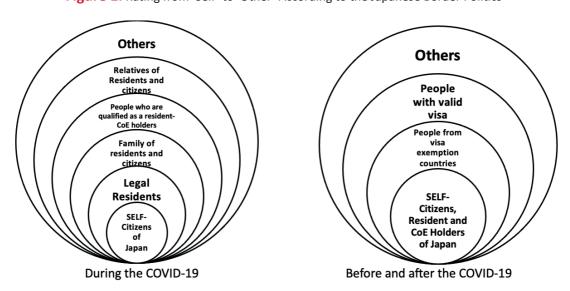
Figure 1. Rating from 'Self' to 'Other' According to the Japanese Border Politics[2]

During the COVID-19

Before and after the COVID-19

Figure 1, which is derived from the analysis of Japan's border control policies and timelines, illustrates the transition in the concept of 'self' and 'other' as a form of response to Covid-19. As can be observed, during the Covid-19 crisis, the concept of 'self' contracted in Japan. Japanese residents and CoE holders were no longer perceived as part of the 'self' owing to their different nationalities. Consequently, the scope of 'other' widened to encompass those previously considered 'self', indicating a significant identity shift during crisis management to restore the nation's ontological security. These stringent border controls, which intensified owing to the pandemic-induced 'fear', reflect the 'anxiety' stemming from the uncertain impact of the virus on public health and security from external sources. It is crucial to recognize the interrelated nature of 'threats', 'fear', and 'anxiety', where each can influence others. In the context of Japan, Covid-19 manifested as an external threat. Initially, the public perceived this with fear, which eventually evolved into anxiety. Thus, the pandemic delineated a clear boundary based on nationality, distinguishing Japanese citizens, residents, and CoE holders from the 'others'. The inability of individuals with valid visas and passports to enter the country exhibited 'anxiety' and challenged the stability of 'self'. Consequently, Japan began the transition from a qualification-based to a nationality-based entry status, embodying the ontological insecurity induced by the crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged Japan's identity, particularly in the context of public health. However, using externalism, the country converted identity anxiety into fear of foreigners to stabilize the 'self'. By excluding all foreigners, Japan endeavored to restore its ontological security.

These definitions of border control separated Japanese nationals and residents from foreigners, who were considered as 'other'. An example of this type of 'othering' is that almost 90% of public poll respondents backed the Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's

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2 This chart is based on Japan's border restrictions for different groups; please refer to the chronological order of policies also.

decision to suspend the entry of new foreign nationals amid the growing concerns about the omicron variant. With this decision, Kishida's popularity rose, being elected with a significant majority in October 2021 (Japan Times 2021). The Japanese government enforced various border control regulations to protect nationals and residents by monitoring the movement of its population, which was a biopolitical way to ensure the security of the nation. Moreover, the Tokyo Olympics 2020[3] were delayed owing to the spread of Covid-19. Research shows that 80.3% of Japanese people opposed holding the Olympics because of the high costs and fear of infectious diseases (Takumi 2021: 327). Tokyo also declared a fourth state of emergency ahead of the Olympics, and the public complained about the incompatibility of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic owing to the unregulated flow of foreigners (Time 2021).

In summary, the Covid-19 pandemic was considered a threat to health and public safety because the human security approach highlighted the Japanese health security discourse, and historical narratives about the pandemic compelled Japan to enforce more stringent actions regarding border politics. Japan Times (2022b) used the term "*Sakoku* 2.0" to draw parallels between Japan's stringent border policies during the Covid-19 pandemic and the historical era of national seclusion dating back to the 1603–1868 period. As discussed in the previous section, Covid-19 heightened 'anxiety' at both the public and government levels. The Japanese government adopted strict border policies against 'others' to secure 'self-stability,' which was viewed as a good condition for public health. The implemented policies aimed to reestablish the nation's ontological security through a clear separation between 'self' and 'other'.

Conclusion

Japan's approach toward border restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic provides a notable case study for understanding the dynamic nature of how the concepts of 'self' and 'other' can expand and contract. Japan displayed a liberal stance on mobility rights domestically, in stark contrast to its international posture, where it was one of the most restrictive countries during the pandemic. This study reveals that any underlying fear and anxiety concerning the preservation of 'self-stability' in public health safety motivated Japan's stringent and prolonged border controls. Japan's historical experiences with epidemics have sculpted a distinctive national identity tied to public health and safety, subsequently constructing its conception of the 'self'.

Public health is the cornerstone of Japan's notion of 'self-stability', which faced an onslaught owing to the Covid19 pandemic. During the pandemic, perceived threat was intimately associated with the external world, represented by 'others'. Consequently, backed by strong public support, Japan enforced rigorous border control measures and travel restrictions even for Japanese residents. This decision aimed to restore the country's ontological security, notwithstanding international criticism and potential economic repercussions.

Japan's approach to the Covid-19 pandemic highlights the reconceptualization of 'self' and 'other' during crises. The most evident manifestation of this can be observed in Japan's border practices, which are a literal and figurative delineation of 'self' and 'other.' This

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3   Due to pandemic, it held between 23 July to 8 August 2021

research contributes significantly to scholarly discourse by demonstrating how crises, through the induction of anxiety, can expand and contract the concept of 'self' and 'other' that is deeply rooted in historical narratives. Essentially, the anxiety evoked by the pandemic led Japan to revert or reassess its historical position, thereby adjusting its identity.

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