



The voice of Maria Dolens

n.69
Year VI
April 2026

Monthly newsletter from the Peace Bell Foundation

The Japanese challenge

In our previous analysis of Japan, (see issue 35 of La Voce), we highlighted how this Asian nation had regained a significant position on the international stage after a period of partial obscurity. The successful outcome of the G7 Summit, organised in the city-martyr of Hiroshima and extended beyond its core members to include leading representatives from the Indo-Asian region; the diplomatic activism of the then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, a tireless visitor to capitals of the five continents; the strong growth rate of the domestic economy, which had begun to rival that of the United States and China in

percentage terms, already represented key elements of a decidedly encouraging overall picture.

More than two years on, in this new assessment of the "Land of the Rising Sun" we are about to make, these indicators appear confirmed and, seem likely to strengthen further in the future. A considerable amount of the credit for this positive trend should go to the new Premier, Sanae Takaichi. Sworn into office only in October 2025, the 65-year-old Prime Minister, born and raised in Nara, has, within a matter of months, secured exceptionally high levels of support for both herself and her party, the

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DESIGN

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Agenzia di pubblicità
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Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a situation unprecedented since the post-war period.

Suffice it to note that in the snap elections for the House of Representatives held last February, the LDP increased its seats from 195 to 316, thereby achieving a two-thirds majority. This allows it to override any opposition that might arise from the House of Councilors (the equivalent of the Italian Senate), which (at least for now), remains outside the majority's control.

A variety of factors underpin Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's popularity—an appeal which, as election results suggest, is broadly and consistently distributed across contemporary Japan, cutting across both age groups and geographical backgrounds. Above all, she is the first woman ever to reach the top of government, after distinguished service leading major ministries such as the Economy and the Interior. Then there is her modest background—both parents were clerks—in a Japanese political system still strongly shaped by powerful family dynasties. Unsurprisingly, her main challenger in the LDP primaries was the son of a political peer, the former Premier Junichiro Koizumi. Finally, there is the widespread

perception of her as a figure with a strong progressive streak—evident in her decision, reversing convention, to have her spouse adopt her surname—and at the same time a nonconformist, as reflected in her stated passion for high-powered motorcycles and for playing the drums.

Yet her profile is more complex than it might first appear. These modern traits are tempered by more traditional positions, including her openly declared affinity with the political creed of her mentor, former Premier Shinzo Abe, who was assassinated in 2022. Abe's political vision, marked by a clear conservative and nationalist imprint and systematised in the well-known framework of "Abenomics", had helped establish a constructive relationship with Donald Trump during his first presidency.

As many commentators have observed, if Mrs Takaichi is to turn her current "honeymoon" with the Japanese electorate into a stable and enduring political union, she will need to swiftly address and successfully resolve a number of sensitive, long-standing issues.

In the international arena, this will mean keeping relations with China on a stable footing and avoiding



Japanese Premier Sanae Takaichi

potentially dangerous escalations. These traditionally complex ties were already strained shortly after her appointment, following her statement that "an armed invasion of Taiwan would pose a serious security problem for Tokyo." While fully understandable from a Japanese perspective, the remark was received very negatively in Beijing, where Xi Jinping and his circle interpreted it as interference in internal affairs and responded immediately with economic countermeasures. In the same region, relations between Japan and South Korea will also require careful management. Neither shared security challenges nor the fact that both countries are liberal democracies with strong economic and cultural ties have so far been sufficient to overcome the heavy historical legacy of the Second World War, including the atrocities (including forced labour and sexual slavery) linked to Japan's military expansion.

The development of a broad-based understanding with Tokyo's principal ally, the United States therefore appears to be equally essential. If the good relations at the time between Shinzo Abe and the "first" Trump can serve as a role model, it remains to be seen





how general political strategies and interpersonal “chemistry” will react in the case of Premier Takaichi and the decidedly less reliable and reassuring “updated version” of the Washington tycoon.

At their first meeting, scheduled at the White House in March, the new Premier is expected to confirm that Japan has raised its defence spending to 2 per cent of the GDP, a matter of particular importance to her MAGA-minded counterpart, especially against the backdrop of a projected US military disengagement from both Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

This is, however, also a highly sensitive issue domestically, given the presence in the 1947 Constitution—ironically imposed by the American occupation authorities—of Article 9, which renounces war in the name of “unarmed pacifism”.

In light of changing geopolitical conditions and clear parliamentary arithmetic, Premier Takaichi is likely to seek ways of reconciling this principle with the increasingly felt need, also among public opinion, to strengthen Japan’s defence capabilities.

These international considerations, on which we have, as usual, dwelt at length, leave limited room for equally important domestic issues.

We will therefore limit ourselves to evoking two, which we believe are central. The first concerns the worrying ageing of the resident population (plummeting birth rate; shrinking population and workforce, etc.) which is no longer addressable, in not only social but also economic terms, without the use of more liberal immigration policies.

While restrictive approaches to immigration are common not only in Tokyo but across much of Asia, in Japan the urgency of a shift in direction is particularly acute and no longer deferrable.

The second relates to the identification of measures capable of sustaining economic growth, as well as

increasing wages and purchasing power. By way of context, Japan remains the world’s fourth-largest developed economy, but the prospect of being overtaken by India, which is close behind, appears increasingly likely in the near future.

In this area, one of the first measures announced, concerning broad tax cuts, is a classic double-edged sword: undoubtedly welcome to beneficiaries, yet not without negative repercussions for an already very high level of public debt.

In conclusion, the influential British weekly “The Economist” recently described Sanae Takaichi as the “most powerful woman on the planet,” coupling this demanding assessment with a mention of the “courage” she will need to drastically transform her country from within.

This will be no mean feat, and one in which - we sincerely hope given Japan’s crucial role in ensuring stability in a high-risk region, as illustrated by the uncertain future of Taiwan— a jam session on her beloved drum kit or an informal ride on a Kawasaki motorcycle (her favourite brand) might provide moments of relaxation and inspiration.

Reggente Marco Marsilli, Fondazione President



TOLLING FOR PEACE FROM ROVERETO TO CIOCIARIA

Two bells, one memory

On two hilltops far apart, two bells tell the same story. One overlooks the Vallagarina valley from Colle di Miravalle (Miravalle Hill) in Rovereto, the other looks over Ciociaria from the Rocca di San Pietro in Castro dei Volsci. Two different landscapes - the Amaseno and Liri valleys on one side, the Adige valley on the other - but the same question: how to transform the wound of the war into a shared memory?

In Rovereto, that question took shape in the Campana dei Caduti, Maria Dolens, cast from the bronze of World War I cannons at the behest of Don Antonio Rossaro. Every evening, its one hundred chimes ring out across the valley like a call to the conscience of nations.

In Castro dei Volsci, the sign left by memory is more recent and more intimate. A Bell with the word "peace" engraved on its mantle in several languages was set high on the village's panoramic lookout point in 2004. This one is not made from cannons, but it does originate from the same need: to let memory have its say.

The two bells share a similar symbolic origin. The bronze of Maria Dolens represents the weapons that had devastated Europe, the bell of Castro dei Volsci carries with it the languages of the peoples involved in the war - Italian, British, French, German, Hebrew, Russian, Chinese, Japanese - as if its mantle wanted to translate memory into a universal language. In both cases that metal alloy is not only matter: it has become a public voice.

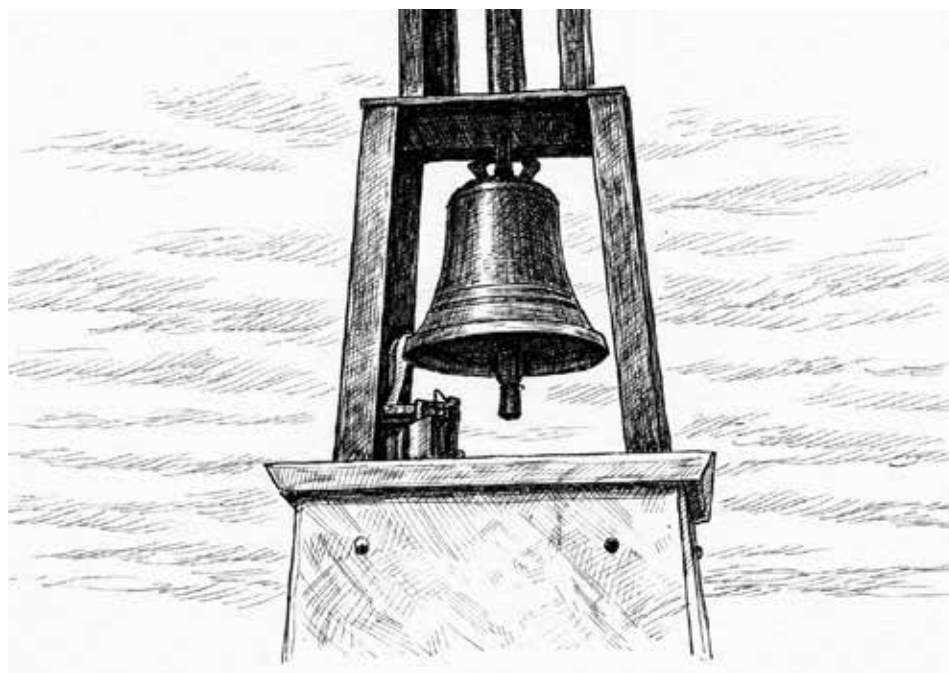


Image of the Peace Bell in Castro dei Volsci



Image of the Monument to the Mother of Ciociaria

The difference lies in the starting point of the memory it embodies. In Rovereto, the Bell was made to commemorate the fallen soldiers of the Great War. In Castro dei Volsci, the narrative was prompted by another wound: the one inflicted on civilians, and particularly on the women of Ciociaria in the latter months of World War II, when the Cassino Front and the Gustav Line turned these valleys into an area of devastation and violence.

For this reason, on the belvedere, the bell does not stand alone. In front of it is the Monument to the Mother of Ciociaria, a sculpture in Carrara marble by sculptor Felice Andreani, inaugurated on 3 June, 1964. The work depicts a mother shielding her daughter with her own body.

It is a simple, stark image, recalling the violence suffered by many women of Ciociaria during the advance of the armies in 1944 and it transforms that pain into a public act of remembrance.



In Rovereto near the bell there is a contemporary pi \grave{e} ta, and in the pages of the column "For Whom the Bell Tolls," which we published throughout the centennial year, the story of civilian victims frequently reappears alongside that of the soldiers involved. It is a difference of form rather than substance: in Castro memory takes shape in the marble statue of a mother defending her daughter, in Rovereto it is entrusted to the sound of a bell calling people to remember past events.

The Ciociarian monument was created as the outcome of a collective decision. In 1964, the local community chose to put a public face on the tragedy of the so-called "*marocchinate*" - the violence inflicted on the population during the war. The history of the Campana dei Caduti also bears the mark of a choice made by the community: in Rovereto, the project was inspired by a desire to transform the memory of the conflict into a gesture of international reconciliation. In both cases, remembrance is not merely entrusted to a commemorative memorial. It becomes a journey.

On the Colle di Miravalle (Miravalle Hill), visitors listen to the bell tolling in the evening and immerse themselves in a place created to host people coming together. On the Castro dei Volsci panoramic lookout, the journey is almost physical: climbing up toward the Rocca, visitors first encounter the statue of the mother and then the bell.

It is a sequence reminiscent, on a smaller scale, of the same principle that guides the experience in Rovereto: first the memory of war, then the commitment to Peace.

Maria Dolens tolls every night to remind us that Peace cannot be taken for granted. The Castro dei Volsci bell does not follow the same daily ritual, but its presence next to the Mother of Ciociaria has a similar effect. Those who reach that viewpoint understand that Peace does not arise from oblivion, but from the ability to look history in the face.

From our perspective, places like these form a kind of moral geography. The bell of Rovereto tolls not only for itself, but for all places where memory seeks a public form. Castro dei Volsci is one such point on the map: a balcony over Ciociaria that speaks the same language as the Colle di Miravalle (Miravalle Hill).

Together, the marble mother and the bronze bell tell a story that Maria Dolens repeats every night with its tolling: Peace is not a motionless monument, but an ongoing work of memory.

Therefore, although the two bells originated in different contexts, they seem to respond to each other from a distance. One bears in its bronze the memory of war, the other guards the silence of a civilian tragedy. Yet both turn memory into an appeal. And, ultimately, this is the same, deeper meaning also found throughout these pages: every bell that reminds us of war becomes, at the same time, a promise of Peace.

STORIES OF TARENTINI IN THE WORLD

Giuseppe Filippi, from Cis to Charleroi

We asked several descendants of emigrants from Trentino to tell their stories in the first person, focusing on how their origins have shaped and influenced their lives. This would not have been possible without the active and friendly support of the Trentini nel Mondo Association, founded in 1957 with the aim of promoting social solidarity and serving as a network of support and connection for Trentino migrants and their descendants. The individual we feature in this issue is Giuseppe Filippi, the son of an emigrant to Belgium.

I am the son of a man from Trentino who emigrated to Belgium in January 1948, four months before my mother and I joined him in Charleroi, a city that now has just over two hundred thousand inhabitants and is the main centre of an area called the “Black Country”, a name that refers to the high concentration of coal in the subsoil. Back then, miners arrived from many European countries, and even beyond.

My father Vittorio did not work underground but in a steel mill. I was only seven months old when my mother, Pierina Dalpiaz, packed me in a suitcase to join him. Of course, I actually travelled in her arms but I like using that image to emphasise how tiny I was, not only in age, at the time when I set off on that journey that took me away from Cis, the country of my ancestors.

My sister, Marie-Louise, was born in 1954, and until the founding of the Trentino Circle my ‘Trentino horizon’ remained limited to family members and fellow emigrant villagers; I had no idea just how many Trentino people there were in the world.

The first Trentino Circle in Belgium was founded in 1961. Although, as a young man, I was more inclined to move within ‘Belgian’ circles, it was inevitable that I would become involved, given that my uncle, Albino Dalpiaz, my mother’s brother, was one of its founders, along with other pioneers, including my father. It was therefore natural for me, partly through a kind of ‘contagion’ and partly out of healthy curiosity, to take an interest in all things Trentino, and I was surprised to discover just how large the community with Dolomite origins actually was, far beyond anything I had previously imagined.

From that time, I remember that, being naturally curious and despite my limited command of Italian, I literally devour every issue of the magazine *Trentini nel*



mondo that arrived in our home each month. Gradually, I began to understand the Association, explore the context in which it operated, its aims, and its key figures. From that point on, my village world expanded to the wider horizon of Trentino and its emigration, and even today I cannot think of Trentino without its emigrants—indeed, that is the first image that comes to mind.

Later, the then president of the Circle, Lino Fravezzi, offered me a job in his bank. In this way, with the indirect support of the Circle, I secured my first stable job and had the opportunity to come into contact with other aspects of the Trentino world.



At that time, partly out of curiosity and thanks to Fravezzi's attentive benevolence, I was able to experience the life of the Circle at close quarters—practically from the inside. He would keep me informed whenever the Association was going through a particularly significant period, and he introduced me to leading figures who would occasionally come to Belgium to meet, support and encourage the Trentino communities, bringing with them—quite literally in their suitcases—what was needed to strengthen and nurture the culture and traditions often neglected in the urgency of emigration. In the meantime, three more Circles had sprung up. So I gradually developed a real understanding of Trentino culture not to mention a strong desire to get to know the land of my ancestors.

I was able to satisfy this desire by gradually getting more involved in the activities of the association, regularly collaborating with it. But my hunger for Trentino was never satiated. Always wanting to learn more, and convinced that only by approaching "power" would I temper my greed for knowledge, in 1987 I agreed to take the reins of the Circle.

Unexpectedly, rather than fading away, my intense longing for Trentino turned into a true passion, which

I still try to share today with all my fellow countrymen and women, not only in Belgium, but across Europe and the world.

As a true "mother," as I like to call it, the Association has always sought to understand the material and moral needs of Trentino emigrants and their descendants, who are increasingly numerous and eager to feel like heirs to Trentino, its traditions, and its culture. In the same spirit, I served as president of the Circle until 2008.

My term as resident was an extraordinary period for me, studied with great satisfaction. I remember with emotion the success of initiatives such as "La Polentada," an event that attracted more than two hundred participants; the "Festa dei pòpi"; and the meetings held for International Women's Day. I also recall the Circle's involvement in the process that, in 2009, led to the twinning of Maria Dolens and Maria Mater Orphanorum, the bell that tolls 262 times in Bois du Cazier every 8 August at 8.10am, the time of the 1956 Marcinelle mining disaster, each toll accompanied by the name of one of the victims.

More recently, there was another date that will remain engraved on my heart: April 27 of last year, when in

Cis I had the honour of inaugurating "La valigia dell'emigrante" (The Emigrant's Suitcase), a wooden bas-relief created by Giuseppe Brun, dedicated to all the emigrants from the town of Noneso. Among other things, on that same day I was presented with the certificate of "Trentino nel mondo benemerito," an award granted by the Association to individuals who have made special contributions to the Association, to Trentino Circles, or to Trentino communities abroad.

I have been Coordinator of the Trentino Circles of Europe for Trentini in the World and, for three terms, Consultant abroad for the Autonomous Province of Trento. But beyond my commitment to emigration, my life has also been marked by moments of joy and fulfilment. When I had to leave the bank in the late 1980s due to corporate restructuring, I did not lose heart: I studied to become a religion teacher, working in primary schools until I retired. In 1972 I married Ginette: our two sons, Xavier and Damien, are respectively a school headmaster and a clerk at the Museum of Fine Arts. And obviously you will find it easy to imagine how wonderful it is to have five grandchildren, who are now between 17 and 26 years old.



Global tensions

IN IRAN A CRISIS BETWEEN WAR AND INTERNAL PROTESTS

The military attack conducted in recent weeks by the United States and Israel against targets on Iranian soil has brought the country back to the centre of the international stage and opened a new phase of tension in the Middle East. The raids targeted military infrastructure and installations considered strategic to Iran's defence system, with the stated goal of degrading Tehran's operational capabilities and limiting its nuclear programme. As is often the case in such situations, civilians paid a tragic toll in blood

The first wave of bombing was followed by the Iranian response. Tehran retaliated by firing missiles and drones at Israeli targets and U.S. military infrastructure in the region, while tense episodes and further attacks were also reported in other Middle Eastern countries. At the moment, the conflict does not appear to be confined to Iranian territory alone: In fact, a range of military actions and indirect attacks involves a network of regional actors and armed groups shaped by the area's geopolitical dynamics.

One of the most sensitive points remains the Strait of Hormuz, a sea passage through which a significant share of the world's oil transits. Iranian authorities are imposing severe restrictions on shipping traffic in the area, with immediate repercussions for energy markets and for governments dependent on crude oil imports.

The military escalation has also reinforced the climate of uncertainty that already characterised the internal Iranian situation. In recent months, the country had been

plagued by protests mainly related to economic hardship and deteriorating social conditions. High inflation and the consequences of international sanctions had fuelled demonstrations in several cities, involving traders, students and middle-class sectors. The protests had been addressed by the authorities with drastic security measures and interventions aimed at stabilising the economy, but widespread discontent remained one of the most prominent elements of the domestic picture. The military attack and the subsequent phase of international tension have shifted the focus to the external dimension of the crisis, pushing into the background the economic and social fragilities that had fuelled the protests.

It was precisely this combination of domestic and international factors that was highlighted in the February issue of "la Voce" by the President of the Foundation, Ambassador Marco Marsilli, who noted that the Iranian situation appeared "like a powder keg on the verge of explosion," marked by clashes between protesters and security forces engaged in suppressing the demonstrations. Should outside actors intervene in the internal confrontation, he added, 'we would face an escalation that would be difficult to control.

The developments seen in recent weeks appear to be moving precisely in this direction. The military attack and subsequent responses have expanded the scope of the crisis, turning an already complex situation into a geopolitical flashpoint of global significance.

In the short term, observers point to several possible scenarios. The first concerns the continuation of limited military operations, with attacks and counterattacks that would remain confined to certain strategic targets. In contrast, a second scenario envisages a gradual expansion of the conflict through the involvement of other regional actors, with potentially far-reaching consequences for global security.

Finally, the economic dimension remains a parallel concern to the military one. Tensions in the Strait of Hormuz or prolonged regional instability could affect energy markets and international trade balances even more heavily in the months ahead. In this context, the situation in Iran continues to be one of the most sensitive points in the global scenario, where domestic dynamics and geopolitical tensions are becoming increasingly intertwined.

