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Cosmopolitan in Form, Nationalist in Content: A Comparative Analysis of Japanese National Identity in the Postwar Era and Today

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Abstract

The arrival of MacArthur and the modern American “black ships” signaled to many Japanese that death of the militarist way and the birth of a new conception of “Japanese-ness.” To many Japanese, the postwar era offered an opportunity to eradicate the sources of nationalist militarism and advance Japanese civilization towards a pacifistic, progressive status that would engage with the larger international community; the US occupation from 1945-1952 also gave hope for a truly “democratic revolution.” However, the US and the Japanese Left would often see their attempts at engineering an international mindset undermined by localized forces—and at times by each other—resulting in a long-term failure in clogging the wellsprings of nationalist sentiment, thereby allowing nationalist ideas over the “imperial institution,” war responsibility, and the essence of Japanese identity, to once again creep into and shape Japanese society. As such, despite maintaining a cosmopolitan form, a contemporary Japanese nationalism has developed, in many ways paralleling the imperial identity of the prewar era. In this sense, Japan national identity is “cosmopolitan in form, nationalist in content.”

Keywords Nationalism, Japanese politics

Introduction

When the formal surrender of Japan aboard the *USS Missouri* was finalized with the signatures of Foreign Minister Shigemitsu and General Umezu, Japan's national identity, once full of vitality, crumbled under the weight of the occupation. And when the new Constitution of Japan was officially put into effect two years later, many observers were optimistic about the prospects of a liberalized Japan which would shed completely its nationalist proclivities and embrace the post-nationalism and cosmopolitanism of the new world order. However, despite the efforts of the General Headquarters (GHQ) Japanese national identity would ultimately be shaped by more localized forces even during the occupation from 1945-1952.

Following the occupation, these localized forces would be bolstered by the state. In time, the early pacifism of Japan would gradually change into a revived "soft" militarism, and Japanese national identity in a broader sense would revert once again to its older, more grandiose conceptions. This analysis will establish that while early Japanese identity formation was to a large extent liberal and pacifistic, this was quickly undermined by right-wing elements who sought to dictate what constituted the Japanese "national soul," and thus the seeds of a Japanese *new nationalism* soon took root within Japan. While the outer character of this reinvigorated Japanese identity has been liberalized, the core remains nationalistic—in other words, Japanese national identity has shifted from being genuinely cosmopolitan to being "cosmopolitan in form, nationalist in content."

Early Identity Formation in Japan

Democratic Revolution

To begin an assessment of early Japanese identity formation in this context, it is important to establish more precisely what is meant by a nationalist attitude—Hans Kohn, a pioneer in the study of nationalism, posited that it is defined "first and foremost [as] a state of mind, an act of consciousness . . . the individual's identification of himself with the 'we-group' to which he gives supreme loyalty."¹ From the very beginning of the occupation in September 1945, GHQ began implementing plans to advance the twin projects of statecraft and large-scale nation-building in Japan, a process which John W. Dower referred to as the "democratic revolution from above."² This top-down approach was adopted in part with the intention of nullifying any forces which would seek to direct Japan back towards its ultranationalist, traditional character. By all accounts, this process was accepted by most Japanese, who viewed the radical changes associated with this revolution as "gifts of heaven"—left-wing activists in particular, such as Communist Party leader Tokuda Kyuichi, embraced the "liberation" from the Japanese elite who had imprisoned many of them during the war.³ Thus, although many of the entrenched Japanese elite remained skeptical of GHQ's democratic project, those leading it were nonetheless optimistic about the prospects of transforming Japan from above.

In this social and political environment, Japanese national identity can most generally be described by the "*kyodatsu* condition," which referred to a collective psychological condition of

¹ Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*. Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1955. p. 27.

² John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. New York: W. W. Norton, p. 69.

³ *Ibid*, many of these same left-wing activists would soon be among the most vocal critics of the occupation as they pursued their own vision for Japan's future.

dejection and demoralization among the Japanese people.⁴ The onset of this condition was almost immediate—Dower notes how many of those who listened to Emperor Hirohito’s radio announcement of Japan’s surrender confessed to being overwhelmed with shame and guilt over their failure to achieve victory.⁵ Certainly, in the wake of defeat, Japanese society had become muted with shame. Remarkably, and quite literally overnight, Japan’s general ultranationalism appeared to completely implode, and explicit showings of nationalist sentiments were quickly criticized even by regular Japanese observers; there was even a passionate push towards internationalism among those Japanese who redefined themselves as being “citizens of the world.”⁶

In accompaniment with this collective shame, a peculiar pacifism was initially adopted by much of the Japanese, including its elites, which is most explicitly made clear by the opening clause of Article 9 of the new Constitution of Japan: “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order . . .”⁷ Although Article 9, and most of Japan’s constitution for that matter, was written up almost entirely by SCAP officials, the explicit anti-war sentiment was nevertheless shared widely by Japan’s citizenry.⁸ This was especially true among those Japanese who can be categorized as progressives—they were among those who were most disillusioned with the militarism and imperialism of Japanese expansion, and they rejected the ultranationalism and traditional state-ideology of pre-war Japan.⁹ Similarly to 21st century Western conceptions of the role of the state, Japanese progressives viewed the purpose of the new Japanese regime not as securing national glory through military and industrial power, but as protecting humanitarian ideals i.e. human rights.¹⁰ In the immediate aftermath of the surrender, this ideal was popular in a war-fatigued population; when the Yoshida Doctrine, which denounced war and asserted that Japan would avoid becoming involved in international political affairs, was formulated, it was to the relief of many Japanese.¹¹ Yet, it is the gradual rejection of the progressive ideology by many Japanese that will be discussed later.

Many of these postwar sentiments were developed through print; the publishing industry, once suppressed by the militaristic elite, rapidly expanded, and left-wing writers in particular found that their criticism of the old order, comprised of militarists, landlords, *zaibatsu*, and the Emperor-centered bureaucracy, were readily accepted by the Japanese people; their calls for an internationalized, democratized, progressive Japan found equal favor among many Japanese who were lost in the *kyodatsu* condition.¹² Unique “subcultures of defeat,” such as *kasutori* culture, characterized by escapism and hedonism, began to thrive in

⁴ Ibid., p. 89

⁵ Ibid., pp. 35-37

⁶ Dawn Renee Going, “Japanese Nationalism.” Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1989, p. 41.

⁷ Constitution of Japan, art. 9.

⁸ Dower, John W. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. London: Penguin, 2000, p. 347;

Going, Dawn Renee. “Japanese Nationalism.” Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1989, p. 49

⁹ Ibid., p. 50

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Going, Dawn Renee. “Japanese Nationalism.” Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1989, p. 49;

Wijgert, Tom van de. “Reconciliation and Development of Identity after the Second World War: A Comparison between Germany and Japan.” Thesis, Tilburg University, 2015, p. 14.

¹² Dower, John W. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. London: Penguin, 2000, p. 185.

Japan's postwar environment—especially in urban areas—as Japan's youth began to express themselves in ways unprecedented in Japanese history; while their range of expression had been severely limited under the militarist regime, the breakdown of Japanese society had given the freedom to explore entirely new domains of social life.¹³ To the dismay of both Japanese elites and the American occupation force, these subcultures were incredibly difficult to reign in. However, in the world of print, publishing companies would soon find that SCAP had constructed an elaborate apparatus for censorship which would suppress any speech that they deemed to be against their interests—writers criticizing either the occupation or even the emperor in any form found themselves being censored by SCAP's new Civil Censorship Detachment.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, this would have significant implications for the growth of Japanese national identity—namely, the continuation of the emperor as a symbolic “head” of Japanese society and a subtle but widespread discontent towards the US. The latter effect in particular would do much to encourage the Japanese to look inward for sources of Japanese identity, just as they did in the years leading up to war. This, of course, only laid further foundations for the future development of a new-nationalist conception of Japanese identity.

War Responsibility and Victim Consciousness

The question of Japanese guilt over having waged an extensive war for conquest in Asia and the Pacific deserves special attention, in no small part because of its absence. For Germany after the war, most Germans had followed the philosopher Karl Jaspers in deeply reflecting upon the guilt they were burdened with and rejecting collective thinking in order to “purify” themselves and find atonement.¹⁵ In the case of Japan, as was described in the previous section, many Japanese had felt shame after the surrender—indeed that is part of what the *kyodatsu* condition referred to. However, the feeling that was collectively shared among Japanese should not be mistaken as being guilt towards having engaged in the subjugation of various Asian peoples. As Dower notes, while the victors were focused on Japan's guilt in relation to the treatment of other countries and peoples, the Japanese themselves were overwhelmed by grief and guilt toward their own deceased.¹⁶ Per Dower:

This was the rhetoric of purity and peace so often heard in the war years. It was a nationalistic plea to forgive the dishonored dead. It was a smoke screen obscuring the horrendous reality of Japanese war crimes and atrocities. But it was also, in this extraordinarily introverted world, an antiwar sentiment.¹⁷

An especially illuminating example of this can be found in Nanbara Shigeru, who would become the president of Tokyo Imperial University after the war's end; having been one among many educators who passionately espoused the imperialist ideology of pre-war Japan, he outwardly expressed in 1946 the immense guilt he felt over having encouraged his students, some of whom would not survive the war, to participate in the war effort.¹⁸ However, he never made

¹³ Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 406-7.

¹⁵ Jaspers, Karl, E. B. Ashton, and Joseph W. Koterski. "Our Purification." In *The Question of German Guilt*, 96-117. New York: Fordham University Press, 1965. Accessed November 25, 2020. doi: 10.2307/j.ctt13wzz9w.10. pp. 96-8.

¹⁶ Dower, John W. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. London: Penguin, 2000, p. 486.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 521.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 487-9.

mention of the victims of Japanese aggression. In this sense, a pervasive victim consciousness began to develop in Japanese society, as many Japanese reflected only on their own troubled experiences and suffering in the poverty of the postwar environment and failed to recognize the suffering they had themselves helped inflict on the other peoples of Asia. Although, it should be made clear that their perception of imperial soldiers, once viewed with honor and respect, was shattered as reports came back of the soldiers' exploits in Asia.¹⁹

An interesting dynamic that exemplifies the unique way in which the Japanese handled the question of war responsibility and war guilt was in the relationship between the *hikiagesha* (repatriates), who lived abroad, and *naichi* ("inner territory"), who lived in Japan during the war. According to Kilby Hammond, enough slight differences had developed between those Japanese who lived in Japan and those who lived abroad that after the war, when many *hikiagesha* were forced to move to Japan—especially between 1945 and 1948—they experienced widespread, though subtle, discrimination, often detectable only through the nuanced language used by people in conversation.²⁰ In an interesting demonstration of collective denial, many *naichi* placed war responsibility on the *hikiagesha* for having gone to the colonies even though *naichi* themselves participated in Japan's imperialist project. One repatriate, Yasuo Kazuki, described in the mid-1940s a scene he came across whereupon the "red corpse" of a dead Japanese man was lying on a road, stripped and beaten.²¹ Believing that the man fell victim to vengeance on the part of the local population both for atrocities committed by imperial forces in Asia and Japan's ultimate surrender, he compared this corpse to the "black corpses" of Hiroshima, which was often used to symbolize Japan's victimhood.²² One was used symbolically as a device to stir up Japanese victimhood consciousness, the other was cast aside and left neglected. Yet, as Kazuki recognized, it was precisely the red corpses that Japan needed to remember in order to ensure that the same mistakes that brought Japan to war would not be repeated.

Perhaps the most important component to the issue of Japanese guilt is the emperor's failure to assume responsibility for the war, and the Japanese public responses to this failure. In the postwar political landscape, whether or not the emperor should accept war responsibility and abdicate the throne was a topic of quite heated debate, at least until the Civil Censorship Detachment began suppressing discourse on the topic.²³ Indeed, General MacArthur personally believed that allowing the emperor to take up responsibility for the war would plunge Japanese society into chaos and play right into the communists' hand, something entirely unacceptable to the liberal Americans—GHQ therefore engaged in extensive efforts to nurture positive perceptions of the emperor as being a figure who had long advocated for regional and global peace, even as the militarists pushed through Manchuria. However, many Japanese believed that the emperor *should*, in fact, assume war responsibility. Even one of the emperor's old confidants, Kido, believed that at the very least, Hirohito should hold himself responsible "for

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hammond, Kilby. "The Question of Japanese-Ness: Repatriation and Guilt in Postwar Japan." *Asia Pacific Perspectives* 14, no. 1 (2016). p. 111

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Dower, John W. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. London: Penguin, 2000, p. 329.

defeat” for the sake of his subjects who had suffered in his name.²⁴ Many other Japanese felt betrayed by the emperor for not taking responsibility. Watanabe Kiyoshi, an ex-serviceman, went even further than Kido and wrote about how the emperor had not lost his divinity or his authority, but rather he had thrown them away by showing no shame; the Japanese sovereign was, to Watanabe, a “shattered god.”²⁵ However, although Japanese identity formation in early post-war era was such that many Japanese had accepted the liberal democratic project brought by the victors, the seeds for a renewed new-nationalism were still firmly planted; the growth of victim consciousness and the avoidance of war responsibility and the continued presence of the emperor—and by extension, the Japanese old guard more broadly—would contribute much to the regrowth of Japan’s nationalistic “dark” side.

Japanese New-Nationalism

Changing Attitudes and Symbolic Power in Post-Occupation Politics

The advent of new-nationalism in Japanese politics and the undermining of the democratic revolution as a “dream within a dream” can be traced primarily through the growth of Japan’s foremost right-wing party, the Liberal Democratic Party (Jimintō), which reflected more general trends in the shifting attitudes of Japanese society. It is critical here to note that the new-nationalism of Japanese politics, while now the dominant ideology, still remains an area of intense debate in the public sphere; new-nationalism, which arose in opposition to the progressivism of early post-war Japan, is still rejected by many who are more pragmatic in their thought, such as the “liberal-realists” and “mercantilists,” who focus more on strategic considerations rather than ideological ones relative to the new-nationalists.²⁶ However, it should not go unnoticed that those Japanese elites associated with the Liberal Democratic Party had dominated the governmental apparatus since 1948 with the institution of Yoshida Shigeru as Prime Minister—there clearly were factions within the governmental apparatus that worked to reverse course in Japanese society back to pre-war conditions. With regards to new-nationalist thinking specifically, several important threads can be discerned in relation to the shifting perception of Japan’s role on the regional and international stage: 1) they recognize the supreme role of power in politics; 2) they reject the notion of a shared community of values at the international level; 3) as a result, it is necessary to establish economic and military superiority.²⁷ And though Japanese public opinion, especially among youth, reflected the occupation-era norm of pacifism, the rejection of liberal idealism nonetheless extended beyond traditionalist right-wing elites. When the Diplomatic Bluebook of 1957 was published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs affirming Japan’s foreign policy as being centered on the United Nations, membership in the “Asian community,” and continued cooperation in terms of trade with the international community, the response among many Japanese was quite negative.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., p. 329.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 340.

²⁶ For an in-depth description of the liberal-realist and mercantilist schools of thought in Japan, see Dawn Renee Going’s “Japanese Nationalism.”

²⁷ Going, Dawn Renee. “Japanese Nationalism.” Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1989, p. 55.

²⁸ Sasada, Hironori. “Youth and Nationalism in Japan.” *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2006): 109–22. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26999324>. 110. Shin'ich, Kitaoka. “Japan's Identity: Neither the West nor

And when the US and Japan signed a bilateral security agreement in 1960, protests erupted among academics and students who felt that elites were prioritizing foreign actors over the grievances of their own public.²⁹

In many ways these threads reflect realist perspectives on international politics; what differentiates the new-nationalist ideology with realist prescriptions is that while realists maintain a strict focus on material considerations i.e. the need for security against an increasingly powerful China, new-nationalists incorporate more metaphysical notions of a “national soul” that is unique to Japan which would justify a Japanese ascension towards hegemony, a notion that was supported by Japan’s isolation as being isolated geographically from continental Asia.³⁰ As an explicit demonstration of this shifting perspective, Prime Minister Nakasone of the Liberal Democrats asserted in 1985 that “now is the time to establish Japan’s identity once again.”³¹ This search for Japan’s national soul would come to be referred to as “Yamatoism,” and it would form part of the core behind new-nationalist thinking; its principal idea is, in its simplest form, that Japanese identity after World War II has been destroyed by foreigners, in particular Americans, during the occupation, and as prominent Yamatoist Takeshi Muramatsu would describe, the postwar Japanese identity was *created* by foreigners.³²

In response to this false identity, the new-nationalists propagated arguments and sentiments related to military development and an expanded role in regional politics while they nurtured popular xenophobic sentiments, in particular towards other Asian peoples e.g. Koreans and Chinese.³³ While this was still somewhat muted during the Cold War era, in no small part because of the need for secure bilateral relations with the US via the San Francisco System, the rejection of a cosmopolitanized national identity in favor of a traditionalist one would nonetheless pick up steam during the Cold War. The 1990s saw a large turnover of Japan’s political elite—the new guard, many of whom had grown up in highly privileged families, opposed any and all expressions of war guilt and reconciliation and adopted even stronger right-wing positions than their predecessors.³⁴ One of the members of this new guard was a charismatic and sharp Abe Shinzo, who was at the time a member of the Historical Examination Committee.³⁵ In 2006, and again in 2012, the Japanese would find a strong, commanding voice in Abe when he was instituted as Prime Minister.

Abe Shinzo, and the Liberal Democrats under him, would prove to wield significant influence over Japanese identity formation, and it was largely through the Abe administration that the political right would make their strongest efforts to shape Japanese national identity.

the East.” Japan Forum on International Relations, 1999.

https://www.jfir.or.jp/e/special_study/seminar1/conversation.html.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 57.

³³ Sasada, Hironori. “Youth and Nationalism in Japan.” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2006): 109–22. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2006.0044>, p. 111.

³⁴ Nakano, Koichi. “Contemporary Political Dynamics of Japanese Nationalism,” October 15, 2016.

<https://apjif.org/2016/20/Nakano.html>.

³⁵ Saaler, Sven. “Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan,” October 15, 2016.

<https://apjif.org/2016/20/Saaler.html>.

As an opening example, on April 28, 2013, the Japanese government held a ceremony for Restoration of Sovereignty Day; during the ceremony, Abe Shinzo, along with others, reportedly shouted “His Majesty Tenno, hurrah,” in a manner similar to Yoshida Shigeru following the drafting of the postwar Constitution of Japan.³⁶ The symbolic power of the emperor cannot be neglected, and it was through the Liberal Democrats and right-wing media such as *Yomiuri Shinbun*—the largest subscription newspaper—that the emperor as the centerpiece of Japanese national identity found a new voice.³⁷ Even as early as 2006, over 50% of Japanese respondents to a survey indicated that they supported constitutional revision, although as of 2018, 29% favored revising Article 9; this is still notable, however, considering that in 1965, a similar survey found that only 15.4% of respondents answered in favor of Article 9’s revision.³⁸ Moreover, by far the most cited reason for opposing revision was a pragmatic concern over the risk of war, not because of moral reasons. To the relief of liberal progressives, the general public remains somewhat skeptical, but the trend is clear: Japanese society has experienced a shift towards conventionally nationalist sentiments.³⁹ This increasing support for constitutional revision has been accompanied by remarkably high increases in xenophobic sentiments, particularly against Chinese and Koreans.⁴⁰ While this is shown in general public opinion data, the advent of organized parties and movements, like the *Zaitokukai*—a party explicitly against *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan—in the 2000s show not just what was constant in Japanese domestic politics in relation to issues involving Koreans, but also the shifting attitudes with regards to its isolated sense of identity on a much larger scale.⁴¹ Just as in Europe and the US, where Euroscepticism and white-nationalism have taken root in public discourse, so in Japan anti-Chinese, anti-Korean, and even anti-Western rhetoric has taken root.

Just two decades ago, discourse on constitutional revision and explicit shows of nationalist sentiments were taboo—now it is an important component of the dominant party’s domestic agenda and rhetoric. Unsurprisingly, then, Abe Shinzo and his administration had repeatedly attempted to pursue constitutional revision, specifically with regards to Articles 9 and 12, which deal with Japan’s pacifism and human rights, respectively.⁴² While strategic

³⁶ “安倍首相の”天皇陛下万歳”に日本国内からも批判 「戦前に戻った感じだ」 = 中国報道||,” Livedoor News. May 2, 2013. <https://news.livedoor.com/article/detail/7643924/>.

³⁷ Sasada, Hironori. “Youth and Nationalism in Japan.” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2006): 109–22. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2006.0044>, p. 111.

³⁸ Liff, Adam P., and Ko Maeda. “Why Shinzo Abe Faces an Uphill Battle to Revise Japan’s Constitution.” Brookings. Brookings, December 14, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/12/15/why-shinzo-abe-faces-an-uphill-battle-to-revise-japans-constitution/>; *ibid.*

³⁹ For primary insights on how discourse on Japan’s constitution developed since its drafting in 1945, see: <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/crrp/home>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Robillard-Martel, Xavier, and Christopher Laurent. “From Colonization to Zaitokukai: the Legacy of Racial Oppression in the Lives of Koreans in Japan.” *Asian Ethnicity* 21, no. 3 (2019): 393–412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2019.1575718>.

⁴² Boonen, M.C.H., and E.D. Herber. Publication. *Japan’s Constitutional Conundrums: A Topical Review of Japanese Constitutional Revision*. University of Leiden, February 2020. <https://leidenasiacentre.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Japans-Constitution-Conundrum-A-Topical-Review-of-Japanese-Constitutional-Revision.pdf>, p. 4.

considerations are naturally a part of the perceived need to revise Article 9, Abe is known for his militarist inclinations, and under his leadership, the Liberal Democrats have pushed for a “soft” militarism, a move that is reflective of their recognition that many Japanese still maintain the progressive values from the postwar era. But Abe’s focus on Article 12 is also undoubtedly in part because of his belief that Japanese national identity should be uniquely Japanese and grounded in Japanese cultural history rather than “Western European” theories of human rights.⁴³ Once again, it is here that the search for Japan’s “national soul” is conceptualized as being a look *back* to Japan’s past rather than towards new conceptions.

Historical Revisionism: The Internet, Manga, and Textbooks

To appreciate how this new-nationalism has manifested itself, it is appropriate to look to specific cases and developments in which nationalist sentiments have played a significant role, beginning with an assessment of the media and education.

As was established earlier, the early postwar environment, especially during the occupation, was such that historical revisionist narratives were explicitly and strictly censored by the Civil Censorship Detachment. However, marked by the formal creation of the Liberal Democratic Party was the development of these narratives, which, ironically, were indirectly supported by SCAP and GHQ in their attempt to absolve the emperor of war responsibility and suppress communist expression in Japanese media. Taking advantage of victim consciousnesses—the *kyodatsu* condition—right-wing elements began propagating nationalist renditions of Japanese history which involved the heavy reconstructions and distortions of certain historical realities and, in many cases, even the outright omission and denial of others. While the rape of Nanjing, the mass forced exploitation of “comfort women,” and the nature of Japan’s war in Asia as being one of aggression are accepted as basic facts by the overwhelming majority of historians, it remains a topic of heated debate in Japan, and many schoolchildren are simply not even aware of those events having occurred.⁴⁴

The politicization of history in Japan is, in part, the product of direct and active efforts by various administrations, with the Liberal Democrats under Abe Shinzo being especially notable for having questioned the validity of the history behind comfort women and the war as one of Japanese aggression—Abe has even called for a need to re-interpret the Tokyo War Crimes Trials.⁴⁵ With regards to the latter specifically, one event in particular has provoked sharp criticisms: his visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. Controversy surrounding the shrine first began in 1979, when the religious officials responsible for the shrine decided to enshrine fourteen military leaders who had been convicted of war crimes during the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, a move opposed even by Emperor Hirohito and, later, his son Akihito.⁴⁶ For many observers, especially other Asians, this was an obvious refusal to atone for Japanese atrocities during the

⁴³ Ibid, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Riddell, Alexandra J., "Comfort women: The unrelenting oppression during and after WWII" (2018). Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current. 627. <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/honors201019/627>, p. 45.

⁴⁵ Saaler, Sven. “Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan,” October 15, 2016. <https://apjff.org/2016/20/Saaler.html>.

⁴⁶ Tiku, Aman. “The Yasukuni Issue: Bringing Japanese Nationalism to Terms.” The Gate. University of Chicago, October 21, 2018. <http://uchicagogate.com/articles/2018/10/21/yasukuni-issue-bringing-japanese-nationalism-terms/>.

war. Indeed, China and South Korea both expressed anger and “regret” at having witnessed not just a number of lower- and mid-level right-wing officials visit the shrine, but specifically prime ministers Nakasone Yasuhiro and Abe Shinzo in 1985 and 2013, respectively, as Prime Minister.⁴⁷ But although Abe has shown, publicly, much of his nationalist inclinations in the later years of his career, his activity in pushing for revisionist history extended back to his membership with the Historical Examination Committee, the creation of which is often referred to as the beginning of the historical revisionist movement, at least as a state-led project. In the committee, Abe played a major role in injecting revisionist talking points, thereby influencing the content of history textbooks which were nationally distributed.⁴⁸

His particular role in advancing new-nationalism as it pertains to history can be traced through his membership in other Diet and lobbying committees, including the rather obscure Diet Members Liaison Committee with the Nippon Kaigi.⁴⁹ Moreover, if not for the textbook publishers sharing the same ideological disposition, the Liberal Democrats would not have been able to further their agenda through education; Hiromichi Moteki, the acting chairman of the publishing company responsible for the latest textbook controversy in 2017, would assert with regards to the subjugation of Korea that “Japan spent so much money that you could say it was the Koreans that exploited us.”⁵⁰ Yet, despite outrage by both Asian and Western observers, the controversies revolving around the content of these nationalist textbooks would not deter the new-nationalists from continuing to endorse revisionist history in Japanese education, as Abe himself perceives such revisionism as being necessary to completely eliminate the “postwar regime” built during the American occupation.⁵¹

Abe is just one part, albeit an incredibly important part, of the Japanese state and media’s efforts to disseminate new-nationalist perspectives and shape how opposing media is interpreted—there is an incredible variety of ways in which these narratives have become widespread. Right-wing nationalist organizations, such as *Tsukurukai*, have been established by former officials and academics.⁵² Nationalist writers, such as Watanabe Shōichi, have openly and fervently written apologetic rhetoric regarding Japanese history since at least the 1990s.⁵³ Lobbying groups, such as the aforementioned Diet Members Liaison Committee with the Nippon Kaigi, have been formed to advocate for nationalist policies in both the domestic and international spheres. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education had established a network of research institutions, such as the International Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto—also

⁴⁷ Wiggert, Tom van de. “Reconciliation and Development of Identity after the Second World War: A Comparison between Germany and Japan.” Thesis, Tilburg University, 2015, p. 16.

⁴⁸ Saaler, Sven. “Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan,” October 15, 2016. <https://apjff.org/2016/20/Saaler.html>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ryall, Julian. “Japan’s ‘Nationalist’ School Books Teach a Different View of History” DW.COM, August 15, 2017. <https://www.dw.com/en/japans-nationalist-school-books-teach-a-different-view-of-history/a-40092325>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Nakano, Koichi. “Contemporary Political Dynamics of Japanese Nationalism,” October 15, 2016. <https://apjff.org/2016/20/Nakano.html>.

⁵³ Saaler, Sven. “Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan,” October 15, 2016. <https://apjff.org/2016/20/Saaler.html>.

known as *Nichibunken*—to manage, produce, and restrict Japanese culture in ways that fit the agenda of the government, which is currently dominated by the Liberal Democrats.⁵⁴

However, two domains are especially interesting in the case of Japanese new-nationalism: manga and the internet. While print-publishing is an expected area in which nationalist sentiments may be spread, manga offers a unique mode through which nationalist ideas can be concretely established in readers by means of images. Like the woodblock prints of early Imperial Japan, mangas like *Sensoron* by Yoshinori Kobayashi have introduced nationalist concepts and narratives to younger audiences and in a more appealing, *visual way*.⁵⁵ The internet offers another highly accessible medium by which many Japanese youth are able to absorb nationalist talking points. On the internet, popular forums such as 2 Channel have been used to spread nationalist and conservative perspectives, with the New York Times reporting that many of the articles posted on the forum were “xenophobic, especially toward Koreans.”⁵⁶

All of these shifts in Japanese politics and society have led to the rejection of progressivism by many Japanese, including the youth. A case in point that demonstrates the metaphorical war between progressivism and traditionalist nationalism is the release of Hayao Miyazaki’s film, “The Wind Rises.” The movie shows a young Jiro Horikoshi, who created the now infamous Mitsubishi A6M “Zero” fighter plane, and how his engineering prowess was kidnapped by the militarists; Miyazaki, who has long expressed pacifistic ideals, used the film as an attempt to, in his words, “take back the Zero fighter from the hands of military technology nuts and military fantasy novels.”⁵⁷ However, the film was met with intense criticism, and a large controversy was made over Miyazaki’s loyalty to Japan, the meaning of the film, Jiro Horikoshi, and the militarism versus pacifism debate. Miyazaki faced personal attacks by right-wing outlets which labelled him as being “anti-Japanese” and a “traitor,” rhetoric which was, to the nationalists, self-evident considering that the film was released as debates raged over potential constitutional reforms, of which Article 9 was involved. Decades earlier, such a debate would be thought impossible in Japanese politics. Now it is the norm.

Conclusion

In the early postwar years, Japanese national identity was in shambles as the Japanese struggled to make sense of and derive meaning from the aftermath of their surrender and the subsequent occupation. And while most Japanese accepted or even embraced the liberal democratic ideals advanced by the Americans, the failure of the Americans lay in their inability—and in some cases, refusal—to effectively target the wellsprings of nationalist sentiment, including the emperor as a symbol. Through state institutions and media outlets, the new-nationalists have managed to effectively introduce and normalize discourses on issues related to reclaiming Japan’s “national soul” which were previously held as taboo, and it is unlikely that this trend will stop, even with Abe’s resignation. As such, the major thread that can be discerned here is that Japanese national identity has experienced a reactionary shift

⁵⁴ Eckstein, Andrew J. “Japan’s National Identity: Nationalists or Not?” Thesis, Lehigh University, 1999.

⁵⁵ Sasada, Hironori. “Youth and Nationalism in Japan.” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2006): 109–22. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2006.0044>, p. 118.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Yee, Andy. “The Twin Faces of Japanese Nationalism.” *East Asia Forum*, September 25, 2013. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/09/25/the-twin-faces-of-japanese-nationalism/>.

from a pacifistic, cosmopolitan, progressive conceptualization to one that is nationalist and traditionalist relative to what was present in the immediate postwar period; a new-nationalism has become the predominant political ideology despite the ostensibly liberal rhetoric pushed by right-wing organizations. It is because of this that Japan can be said to be “cosmopolitan in form, nationalist in content.”

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