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**THEOCRACY VS CONSTITUTIONALISM
IN JAPAN**

**CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AND THE RETURN
OF PRE-WAR SHINTO NATIONALISM**

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SINGAPORE**

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Abstract

This paper offers an understanding of the scope, nature, and context of constitutional change being proposed in Japan today, in internal terms rather than through external reconstruction. Rather than being a mere reaction to “external circumstances”, as portrayed by its apologists and by “realist/rational-reconstructionist” analysis, the movement to amend and replace the Constitution is a project with a history, underpinned by a worldview and driven by an ideology that provide it with its own momentum. The most overlooked aspect of the movement is religion. From the Meiji Restoration until the end of the War, Japan was governed through a *religio*-political system based on a newly invented State Shintoism. The scope and intent of today’s movement to amend/replace the Constitution cannot be understood without this background in mind. Failure to account for the ideological, cultural, historical, and indeed the constitutional dimensions of the issue seriously underplays the stakes for Japan and its neighbours. The constitutional movement is part of a multi-generational project to restore what its leaders declare to be the “true shape of Japan”, with the pre-war religious ideology and constitutional form that they deem to have been unjustly replaced by the US occupation administration after Japan’s defeat.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to understand the scope, nature, and context of constitutional change being proposed in Japan today. It aims to understand the movement to amend and replace the Constitution as a project with a history, underpinned by a worldview and an ideology that provides it with its own momentum, rather than as a mere reaction to “external circumstances”. Its working premise is that an understanding of the internal motivations and intentions of the architects and principal movers of this campaign is useful in appreciating where it is headed and what it intends; that it is useful to understand motivations and ideas in internal terms rather than simply through external reconstructions of those ideas from the standpoint of an unproblematically universalisable rationality.

This might seem a banal qualification except for the fact that most of the reactions in the English language media and commentariat frame the issue precisely through rational reconstruction, without reference to Japanese formulations of the issues. Accordingly, the present administration’s reversals of Japan’s post-war pacifism and its liberal democratic Constitution are accepted casually as “rational” reactions to “changing external circumstances”. This denial of the ideological, cultural, historical, and indeed the constitutional dimensions of the issue seriously underplays the stakes for Japan and for the region.

It might have seemed that the pre-war State Shinto system and ideology had been successfully abolished after World War 2. Japan’s post-war economic recovery and its rehabilitation in the international community have been impressive. Japan’s commitment to constitutionalism, pacifism, and democracy might have seemed secure. Through these decades, however, the ideology and form of State Shintoism, submerged in the first decades after the war, has survived. The movement to replace the post-war Constitution, the recent passage of the Security Bills, and symbolic occasions such as the Group of 7 (G7) leaders’ visits to the Ise Shrine¹ must all be understood within this context. The efforts of religious and ultra-nationalist groups and their close allies in the ruling party coalesce around a grand project to restore what they see as the prior and authentic form of the Japanese state.

This paper focuses on the groups that have kept the discourse and movement to restore the pre-war Japanese system and ideology alive for seven decades. Today, they lead the movement to amend and ultimately replace the post-war Constitution. The members of this movement consist largely of right-wing politicians and Shinto nationalists, including those in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and religious nationalist organisations such as Nippon Kaigi and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership. In many cases, the influential actors who led political and religious movements in the pre-war

¹ Shimazono pointed this out in Katayama and Shimazono (2017) and in “(Kenpō o kangaeru) Yuragu sēkyō bunri: shūkyō gakusha Shimazono Susumu san” (2017).

Shinto State continue to inspire the revisionist groups: in reproducing the language and discourse of pre-war State Shinto ideology and in publishing a new draft of a constitution by the LDP (Nihonkoku kenpō kaisē sōan 日本国憲法改正草案, hereafter the LDP Draft Constitution). Scholars in Japan point out that there is a revival of pre-war religious nationalism (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016).²

To understand the significance of the issue, we must look at what is at stake in the Constitution of Japan. The Constitution came into effect in 1947. Its birth cannot be separated from the Pacific War. A constitution defines the fundamental basis of a state. For Japan, the Constitution of Japan is the fundamental basis of the post-war Japanese state. It was created in special circumstances arising out of the War, in particular, the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration. Thus, the Constitution of Japan cannot be separated from the settlement for Japan's imperial past and the War, and is a cornerstone of Japan's relationship with the United States and other countries, and of the East Asian security architecture. Conversely, its repudiation will have deep consequences for that entire set of relationships.

The eminent constitutional scholar Kōji Satō writes that the end of the War on 15 August 1945 should have been marked as the day when the Japanese should thoroughly self-examine why Japan “so easily rushed to militarism (軍国主義) and totalitarianism (全体主義)”, and proceeded to the “reckless” War (Satō (2015b, 20, 80). Even though Japan showed “certain results in constitutionalism under the Meiji Constitution”, Japan, with Germany and Italy, “hurled itself into the reckless War under the *totalitarian* system of Nazism and Fascism” (Satō 2015a, 7, 222-225; 2015b, 20).³ Japan “signed a triple alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in Berlin” in September 1940, and “declared war on both the U.S. and the U.K.” in December 1941 (Satō (2015a, 180). Pointing out that the War took 20 million lives in Asia, Satō considers the constitutional form of post-war Japan a matter of concern in world history, given “the tremendous damage Japan's activities have caused to the world order” (Satō 2015b, 20-21).⁴

If the constitutional form of Japan after the War was a matter of concern in world history, so must be its amendment and replacement. All the more so, if the groups who have preserved the very system and ideology that had led Japan to militarism and totalitarianism in the 1930s are today leading the movement to overturn and replace the post-war Constitution. The changes they propose will alter the nature of the Japanese state and have untold impact on Japan's relationship with the United States, Asia, and the rest of the world.

² See also “(Kenpō o kangaeru) Yuragu sēkyō bunri: shūkyō gakusha Shimazono Susumu san” (2017).

³ Emphasis Satō's.

⁴ See also Herbert Bix (2016, 50), who gives the following figures, though “the true dimensions of the human losses from World War II in Asia and the Pacific” are not known: China more than 10 million, the Philippines 1.1 million, Vietnam 1.5 to 2 million, Burma 150,000, Malaysia and Singapore more than 100,000, Korea 200,000, and Taiwan 30,000; the number is unknown in Indonesia, but 4 million “forced laborers” suffered.

Although the Allied occupation administration, working with reform-minded Japanese constitutionalists such as Tatsukichi Minobe (美濃部達吉), tried to reverse Japanese militarism and abolish State Shinto, the pre-war Japanese system and ideology continued in post-war Japanese society in various ways. The post-war era saw the same government and the same ruling elite survive, albeit in repackaged form, and with them State Shinto.

As Satō points out, whereas in Germany the government collapsed and dissolved after its defeat in the War, “*the government* under the Meiji Constitution *continued* in the Japanese case” (Satō 2015a, 223).⁵ Constitutional scholars Yōichi Higuchi and Setsu Kobayashi⁶ describe the direct descent of Diet members from the pre-war establishment. These Diet members have inherited their political bases through the family line (Higuchi and Kobayashi 2016). Indeed, the LDP was founded with the revanchist objective of establishing *jishu kenpō* (自主憲法), or a “self-authored constitution”. This, to its proponents, means the rejection of the pacifist Constitution and a return to the pre-war constitution and political order. Over the decades the party has been careful about pursuing this goal openly, although it has never repudiated it. As Satō says, “the fact that the establishment of *jishu kenpō* is held up as the party platform has potentially always carried the possibility of fundamental amendment or all-out rejection [of the Constitution], and has cast a dark shadow over the true stabilization of the Constitution.” (Satō 2015a, 221).

On the other hand, as religious studies scholar Susumu Shimazono⁷ notes, State Shinto has not been fully abolished; religious groups and the institution of the Emperor have preserved it in post-war Japan (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016; Katayama and Shimazono 2017; Shimazono 2017.) Shimazono (2017) explains that the movement to strengthen State Shinto continues to the present date.

Today’s movement to amend and replace the constitution is led by political and religious forces originating in pre-war Japan that have emerged to restore what they claim to be the true shape of Japan. They are intent on restoring what they feel the nation has been unjustly deprived of.

The single most significant figure that has not joined these forces is the Emperor. His extraordinary plea to the Japanese people for a “symbolic” role under the Constitution of Japan is regarded as an explicit rejection of the revival of his old divine role under State Shinto (See Katayama and Shimazono 2017). His pointed references to his symbolic role were deeply significant in the context of a century-long debate in Japanese society between the militarist totalitarians of the 1930s and today’s constitutional reformers,

⁵ Emphasis Satō’s.

⁶ They are Emeritus Professors of Tokyo University and Keio University, respectively.

⁷ He is Emeritus Professor of Tokyo University

who are demanding an absolutist notion of imperial power, and the proponents of a constitutionally restrained role such as the “symbol-emperor” codified in the Constitution of Japan.

The Constitution anchors the fundamental principles of the Japanese state, including civil rights, democracy, and the rule of law. It also anchors the pacifism that defined Japan’s post-war relationship with Asia and the United States in the aftermath of a decade during which Imperial Japan expanded its Asian empire under the slogan “eight corners of the world under one roof” (*hakkō ichiu* 八紘一宇). The Emperor was allowed to continue as an institution — despite allegations about the central role it had played in Japanese militarism — based on the nation’s adoption of these principles of constitutionalism and pacifism. On its own official account, Japan had fought the War in the name of and for the sake of a divine Emperor. A rehabilitated Japan must therefore have relinquished the political form (*kokutai* 国体) and political theology (State Shinto) convergent on Emperor-worship that had motivated this behaviour. The Shinzo Abe government, together with its coalition partner Komeito and other revisionist parties, now have a two-thirds majority in the Diet. A proposal for constitutional change that passes the Diet then needs only a simple majority in a national referendum to be passed. There should be no surprise if this happens.⁸ In his policy address in January 2017, Abe called for concrete discussions on revising the Constitution. In April 2017, the members of the Lower House Commission on the Constitution held meetings to discuss the issue that the Diet should propose for constitutional amendment. On May 3, 2017, at the revisionist meeting led by Nippon Kaigi, Abe made his most concrete announcement on his plan for constitutional amendment, suggesting the addition of a clear statement on the existence of the Self-Defence Force in Article 9. He said he wanted “2020 to be the year when a new constitution comes into effect.” Based on this time frame, the first ever national referendum could take place as early as 2018.⁹ The biggest challenge to this agenda came on 2 July 2017, when the LDP suffered a historic loss in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election to Governor Yuriko Koike’s Tokyo Citizens First party and its allies. The Tokyo elections have usually been a bellwether for national politics. While this result may have complicated the path to constitutional amendment for Abe, the LDP lost over non-ideological issues such as performance and integrity rather than Abe’s right wing constitutional project. Yuriko Koike, the new governor of Tokyo, is a former member of the LDP who shares their core ideological positions. She is, like most of the LDP leadership, a member of the ultra-nationalist movement Nippon Kaigi.

In this paper, however, the author is not concerned with the course of day-to-day politics. What the author seeks is to understand the movements and the deep unresolved issues in Japanese history that continue to shape Japanese politics. This, in turn, will shed light on the unfolding and current state of affairs. The author hopes to achieve this by examining what the proponents leading the movement to amend and

⁸ Kobayashi (2016; 2017) has been alerting the Japanese public that a national referendum will happen.

⁹ The author wrote this paper over a period of time. The main writing, including this paragraph, was done between late 2016 and mid-2017.

replace the Constitution are saying, in their own language and vocabulary: by understanding their discourse on their own terms, in its own cultural, religious, legal, and historical context. For this, it is crucial to understand the pre-war State Shinto system and ideology. The discourse and the movement that the proponents of constitutional reform are reproducing today were formulated in pre-war Japan as the State Shinto system. The evidence for this is in their speeches and publications and in the LDP's draft for a new constitution.

The study here draws mainly on primary sources and on Japanese language commentary, as well as on emerging scholarly works by Japanese scholars. International interpretation of current events in Japan has largely ignored Japanese language sources, where the issues are laid out quite plainly.

The recent works of the following Japanese scholars have been particularly valuable in shaping this paper: economist Mitsuharu Itō (2014, on the critique of Abenomics); constitutional scholars Yōichi Higuchi and Setsu Kobayashi (Higuchi and Kobayashi 2016 and Kobayashi 2016, on the critique of the LDP Draft Constitution) and Kōji Satō (2015a and 2015b, on constitutionalism and the Japanese Constitution), and religious studies scholar Susumu Shimazono and his collaborators (Takeshi Nakajima and Shimazono 2016, on Japanese totalitarianism and its resurgence; Morihide Katayama and Shimazono 2017, on the Emperor; and Shimazono 2017, on State Shinto and the Japanese). Separately, they address the economic, constitutional, ideological, and religious dimensions of the Abe administration's policies and trace their roots in the pre-war imperial nationalism of Japan.

Religious and Ideological Movements in Pre-war Japan

Building a Shinto State

Nation building and the invention of State Shinto

The constitutional amendments being pursued by the Abe government and the nationalist circles driving this are part of a historical project of “repeal and replace” that dates from what they see as an unjust conclusion to the Pacific War. They want a “self-authored constitution” (*jishu kenpō*) as their predecessors and forbears did, against a Constitution whose democratic axioms and commitment to pacifism are resented as alien impositions corrosive of Japan's true spirit and form. They see Japan's present weakness as deriving from the loss of this form and tie the prospects for Japan's strength to its recovery.

The Abe government's agenda of *jishu kenpō* is embedded in a broader, and to its proponents sacred, project to restore Japan's *kokutai*, or imperial polity. It is a religious nationalist project in direct ideological and social continuity with Japan's pre-war imperial regime. It is at the same time a rejection of the interpretation of Japan's role in the War that is embedded in the present Constitution. It rejects the

“apology”, war guilt, and dependence on the international community, implied by the present Constitution’s embrace of pacifism. The Pacific War, in its conception, was a holy war to unite the eight corners of the world under a divine, eternal Emperor. What is at stake today is not just how Japan understands itself but how it interprets a war for which there has never been serious self-examination, unlike in Germany. This will have significant consequences for Japan’s relationship with its neighbours and its place in the regional security landscape.

The ideological and indeed religious underpinnings of the religious nationalism driving Japanese nationalism go back to Japan’s enormous effort to “catch up with the West” after the shock of its forced opening to Western trade under the guns of Commodore Perry’s black ships. The leaders of the Meiji Restoration restored imperial rule, formed a centralised, national government, abolished the traditional four feudal classes, and formed a national conscript army. They also identified the need for the creation of a national cult as a vehicle for the ideology of state. Thus it was that State Shinto, centred on the Emperor as a divine being, was created out of Japan’s complex of folk religious traditions and set above all particular traditions, such as Buddhism, as a civil, patriotic practice. As State Shinto developed and grew in popularity, it took on a life of its own as a popular religious practice.

The slogan “Revere the Emperor and expel the barbarians” (*sonnō jōi* 尊王攘夷) spread in Japan as foreign powers arrived in the country in the 19th century. Abandoning its policy of isolation, Japan urgently proceeded to build a modern nation-state. For this, the Restoration government introduced western systems, while unifying Japan under the Emperor. A system of *saisē icchi* (祭政一致), a kind of theocracy based on the unity of ritual with politics, religion with state, adopted by the government for implementing reverence for the Emperor (*sonnō*), led to the invention of State Shinto. State Shinto unified local Shinto shrines that existed in various forms throughout Japan into a hierarchical system with the Ise Shrine at the top. This shrine is dedicated to Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess considered to be the original ancestress of the Imperial line (Shimazono 2017, 9-10).

State Shinto made Shinto shrines state organisations, while it subordinated other religions such as Buddhism and various Shinto sects (*kyōha shinto* 教派神道). However, State Shinto allowed these other religions to enjoy the freedom of religion within their subordinate position. The logic that State Shinto governed the “public” realm of State “ritual” (祭、祭祀) and morality (道德), whereas other religions governed the “private” realm, justified the coexistence of *saisē icchi* (unity of ritual and politics/state) and *sēkyō bunri* (政教分離 translated as separation of state and religion or freedom of religion) (Shimazono 2017, 7-18).

Among the prominent figures who shaped Japan into a modern Shinto State was Toshimichi Ōkubo (大久保利通 1830-1878), a Meiji Restoration hero and Deputy Prime Minister Tarō Asō’s great-great-

grandfather. Ōkubo and others tried to increase the Emperor's sacred authority in order to establish a centralised government (Shimazono 2017, 120). The Imperial tour (*junkō* 巡幸) that Ōkubo and others promoted frequently took place in the 1870s and 1880s, spreading Emperor veneration (Shimazono 2017, 27).

The necessity of national defence created the Emperor's Army. National defence that was monopolised by the warrior class under the hierarchical class system (warriors, farmers, artisans, and tradesmen 士農工商) in the Edo period was transformed into one requiring the participation of all classes, treated as equals based on universal conscription, in the new nation-state. Emperor veneration served to unify the Army (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 66-70).

In this process, the Yasukuni Shrine (靖国神社) was established as a religious mechanism, channeling "religious energy into war" (Bix 2016, 32), to sustain the Emperor's Army. Having developed from Shōkonsha (招魂社), a Shinto shrine dedicated to the war-dead who fought for the Emperor, it was renamed the Yasukuni Shrine in 1879. Its status increased as Japan fought wars with other countries (Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War). The enshrinement of the war-dead at the Yasukuni Shrine became one of the most solemn rituals in State Shinto, as a religious state ritual with a special role. Being a state organisation, the Yasukuni Shrine should have eschewed dealing with the existential problems of salvation and suffering that religions in the "private" realm handled. The Yasukuni Shrine, however, came to deal with deep emotional issues of life and death because it dealt with the deaths of young soldiers (Shimazono 2017, 17, 99, 150; Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 73-75).

The Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors (軍人勅諭), issued by the Meiji Emperor in 1882, also served to unite and strengthen the army. In the style it adopts, the Emperor directly speaks to each soldier, analogising the soldiers to the Emperor's body (thigh and elbow). It created an emotional and religious unity between the Emperor and each soldier, generating values that glorified the sacrifice of the soldier's life for the Emperor including, as the War proceeded, sacrifice in the form of suicide attacks (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 82).

The Meiji Constitution (the Constitution of the Empire of Japan)¹⁰ and the Imperial Rescript of Education served to further institutionalise State Shinto (Shimazono 2017, 33).

¹⁰ Available in Japanese at: <http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/etc/j02.html>. In English at: <http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c02.html>

The Meiji Constitution (1889) compounded the “idea of theocratic kokutai (神権の国体観念, an idea that the Emperor received the rights of sovereignty from his ancestors)” and “constitutionalism” (Satō 2015a, 150; 2015b, 9).

Kokutai is the idea that Japan is an eternal family-state united under the Emperor at the centre. It was an important component of State Shinto. The term, adopted from classical Chinese, initially meant “the shape of the state” or “the appearance of the state”; however, by the latter half of the 18th century, it came to mean the “unique state structure based on Japan’s own tradition” (Shimazono 2017, 61-62). The most important among the idea’s many variations is the emphasis on the uniqueness and superiority of the Japanese tradition based on the unbroken line of Emperors (Shimazono 2017, 24, 62).

The idea of theocratic kokutai appears in the following portion of the Meiji Constitution. This Constitution begins with a report (the report is called 告文, which can be read either as *kōmon* or *otsugebumi*, an Imperial Oath at the Sanctuary of the Imperial Palace) from the Meiji Emperor to the Imperial founder and ancestors (皇祖皇宗), reporting that he established the Constitution (Higuchi and Kobayashi 2016, 56; Shimazono 2017, 34). The report declares the Emperor as the recipient of divine authority and clarifies that the Constitution is promulgated within the framework of State Shinto (Shimazono 2017, 34-35). Article 1 prescribes that “a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal” shall govern “the Empire of Japan”, thus “declaring and confirming ‘kokutai’” (Satō 2015a 150-151).

On the other hand, the Meiji Constitution clarifies the principle of constitutionalism. The Preamble (上諭) prescribes that the Emperor and his descendants abide by the provisions of the Constitution, and Article 4 prescribes that the Emperor “exercises” “the rights of sovereignty” “according to the provisions of” the Constitution.

Often misunderstood is Article 3. It states that the Emperor is “sacred and inviolable”. The term is a legal one adopted from the 1791 French Constitution, established after the French Revolution. The latter provided that the king’s position was “inviolable et sacré”, meaning only that the king shall not be tried in civil and criminal courts, not that the king must be worshipped as divine (Higuchi and Kobayashi 2016, 59). Article 3 also means that the Imperial Household is autonomous, a realm that the people should not interfere with (Satō 2015a, 151).

While few people read the Meiji Constitution, many Japanese actually read, memorised, and internalised the Imperial Rescript of Education (*kyōiku chokugo* 教育勅語) (1890) (Shimazono 2017, 35). Shimazono says he can never emphasise enough the significance of the Imperial Rescript of Education for understanding State Shinto (Shimazono 2017, 38-39). It is a “sacred teaching” on the principles of education the Meiji Emperor gave to the people — then called “subjects (*shinmin* 臣民)”, not “citizens” —

and taught at elementary schools (Shimazono 2017, i). The strong and sacred bond between the Emperor and his subjects that the document tried to create formed the “emotional foundation” of State Shinto (Shimazono 2017, 64).

Shimazono has provided a useful summary of the Imperial Rescript (Shimazono 2017, 38). The middle part of the document states the virtues that the subjects must uphold; the beginning and the end state the sacred bond between the Emperor and his subjects, its divine origin, and the sacred obligation of the subjects. The moral teachings in the middle are less religious, but the outer framework surrounding it stresses the kokutai theory, worship of Amaterasu, reverence for the Imperial ancestors, and veneration for the Emperor. It states the subjects’ obligation to serve the “public” (公) in times of emergency, for example war (Shimazono 2017, 36-38).

The influence of the Imperial Rescript of Education and the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors was such that the Emperor presided as the religious and moral authority in educating the people and the servicemen. There, the idea of theocratic kokutai dominated (Satō (2015a 155, 159).

Both these Rescripts created an emotional unity between the Emperor and his subjects. The emotional bond made the idea of theocratic kokutai real.

State Shinto from below: the development of religious nationalism

How did State Shinto spread and develop over time? Shimazono suggests the following four periods to illustrate this spread and development:¹¹

- 1) Formation period (1868-1890)
- 2) Establishment period (1890-1910)
- 3) Infiltration period (1910-1931)
- 4) Fascist period (1931-1945)¹²

The development of State Shinto in the Formation period was outlined in the preceding section of this paper. In the Establishment period, the ritual system, the education system, and the system and organisation of Shinto priests were established. It led the people to incorporate State Shinto into their

¹¹ The four eras framework suggested by Shimazono revises that suggested by Shigeyoshi Murakami in his influential work (2016 [1970], 78-80).

¹² Fascism of this period is often also referred to as “*Showa Fashizumu* (Showa Fascism)” (Katayama and Shimazono 2017; Satō 2015b), or “*Fassho jidai* (Fascist period)” (Maruyama 2015[1964]; see also Mizuuchi 2015), taken from the original Italian term “fascio” (Maruyama 2015 [1964], 291). For detailed explanation of the characteristics of Japanese Fascism, see Masao Maruyama’s brilliant work, “The ideology and behaviour patterns of Japanese Fascism” (1947), in *Thought and behavior in modern Japanese politics* (1969), pp. 25-83.

thoughts and practices so that, by the Infiltration period, State Shinto as a movement from below had intensified (Shimazono 2017, 143-145).

Not only does understanding the movement from below in the early 20th century help us understand the revival of religious nationalism today, but the religious nationalist movement from below in the early 20th century is actually linked to the religious nationalist movement being revived today.

Unlike Western secular nationalism, Japanese nationalism was inseparable from State Shinto. Originally positioned as a supposedly civil, non-religious innovation of the state for the inculcation of unity and obedience, Shinto nationalism spread and took root in Japanese society, where its core ideas emerged in new religious movements animating State Shinto “from below”. Grassroots religious movements gradually began to incorporate key doctrines of State Shinto such as kokutai and the Imperial Way (*kōdō* 皇道, a concept related to teaching (教), corresponding to the doctrine of State Shinto, and linking Emperor worship with kokutai).¹³ The incorporation took place during the Establishment period (1890-1910), which saw an extraordinary flowering of new religions based on State Shinto. These movements grew to be influential in national politics, particularly when members of the military became involved in them. Ōmoto-kyō (大本教, renamed Ōmoto in 1952) and Kokuchūkai (国柱会) are key examples of such movements (Shimazono 2017, 166-168).

It is worth looking at Ōmoto-kyō to understand where Nippon Kaigi and today’s constitutional reform movement came from. The movements from below that developed in the Infiltration (1910-1931) and Fascist (1931-1945) periods show how religious nationalism and Fascism took over the democratic system founded on constitutionalism that began to flourish under the Taisho Democracy (1912-1926). This may help us understand why, after 70 years of constitutional democracy under the Peace Constitution, we are now seeing a revival of a religious nationalism that seeks to overturn the Constitution and constitutionalism. Masao Maruyama claims, in his internationally acclaimed work on the Fascist movement, that understanding the developmental pattern of Japanese Fascism in which bottom up and top down movements interact is significant for understanding future Japanese political movements. His claim is highly relevant here (Maruyama 1969, 25-83; Maruyama 2015 [1964]).

Ōmoto-kyō and Kokuchūkai are religious movements that played a leading role inspiring the development of many religious movements. The two movements established their influence in the early 20th century and influenced Emperor veneration movements. They stimulated many people who participated in the Showa Restoration (a movement seeking reform towards a theocratic (神政) state centred on the Emperor) “through coup d’etat and terrorism, such as the February 26 Incident” (an abortive coup in 1936

¹³ See Nakajima and Shimazono (2016, 125-127) and Katayama and Shimazono (2017, 32-35, 148) on Ōmoto-kyō, and Shimazono (2017, 106-107) for an explanation of the Imperial Way.

perpetrated by young army officers who espoused the Imperial Way) (Shimazono 2017, 168). Hakkō ichiu (eight corners of the world under one roof), the ultra-nationalist idea under which Imperial Japan expanded its Empire in Asia, is the brainchild of Kokuchūkai's founder, Chigaku Tanaka (田中智学 1861-1939) (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016, 80, 85).

Ōmoto-kyō was a new religion founded by a poor housewife in Kyoto, Nao Deguchi (出口なお 1837-1918) and developed by her son-in-law Onisaburō Deguchi (出口王仁三郎 1871-1948). It began as a shamanistic practice by Nao Deguchi in a city in Kyoto with a small group of followers. Under Onisaburō Deguchi, the religion adopted State Shinto discourse and ideology, particularly the Imperial Way theory (*kōdō-ron* 皇道論), thereby changing its name to Kōdō Ōmoto in 1916. His writing in 1917 expresses Kōdō Ōmoto's purpose as the implementation of a "global great family system", in which Japan first implements a "state family system" as a model for the world, and aggrandise the "kokutai of the unbroken line" and the "foundation of the Imperial rule" (Shimazono 2017, 169-171). His idea was the forerunner of the radicalised Imperial Way theory, which led to the later Imperial-Way-theory-inspired right-wing movements (Shimazono 2017, 171-172).¹⁴

Such religious nationalist movements from below became a powerful force, eventually destroying Taisho Democracy that took place during the third (Infiltration) period (1910-1931). As riots and popular movements became common, the notorious Maintenance of the Public Order Act (治安維持法) was promulgated in 1925, foreshadowing the "totalitarian system" of "all-out mutual surveillance" (Satō 2015b, 14). The Act prohibited participation in any association that denied kokutai or private ownership. The Act had a chilling effect on civil freedom, as it "was used not only against communism and socialism, but also broadly against new religions, Christianity, and various liberal movements" (Satō 2015b, 14). The Great Depression hit Japan very hard after 1929, triggering the intensification of "militarism" and "totalitarianism", and bringing on so-called "Showa Fascism" (Satō 2015b, 14, 47, 50).

Ironically, the democratic trend that allowed the participation of the people from below, who had by then become the most enthusiastic adherents to State Shinto, led to a Fascist takeover. By the fourth (Fascist) period, it had become "too difficult to contain the movement from below", the movement that attempted to "overturn the existing order by upholding" State Shinto ideas such as "the Imperial Way" (Shimazono 2017, 176).

Ōmoto-kyō played a central role in a group called *Showa shinsē kai* (昭和神聖会), founded in 1934. The latter developed into a right-wing nationalistic movement that mobilised the masses who demanded a direct bond between the Emperor and the people, and began a fierce attack on a theory (called the

¹⁴ See also Bix (2016, 58) on the spread of the Imperial Way.

“Emperor-as-organ-theory”) that had been mainstream and had kept democratic trends and constitutional monarchy alive under the Meiji Constitution (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016, 128; Shimazono 2017, 178, 180).

These religious nationalist “movements from below” became interlinked with Showa Fascism, in which the people supported “ultra-nationalist” “terrorists” (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016, 124-130); Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 147-149; Mizuuchi 2015). Under Showa Fascism, the thought and speech control by the State intensified, and the people were conscripted (Satō 2015b, 50). The February 26 Incident took place in 1936, increasing the military’s interference in the Cabinet; the National General Mobilisation Act (国家総動員法, allowing the State war-time mobilisation of human and material resources) was issued in 1938; the triple alliance treaty was signed by Japan, Germany, and Italy, and the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (大政翼賛会, aimed at creating a totalitarian one-party state) was founded in 1940; and, finally, Japan entered the Pacific War in 1941 (Satō 2015b, 17).¹⁵

Bridging Pre-war and Post-war Japan

The pre-war origin of movements for constitutional amendment

Shinzo Abe’s ambition to amend the post-war pacifist Constitution has been widely known in Japan for many years. Under his leadership, the Diet in 2007 passed a National Referendum Act, an act that clarified for the first time the steps needed to amend the Constitution.

It has been little known until recently, however, that Abe and his administration have been collaborating closely with the right-wing religious nationalist group Nippon Kaigi for the goal of replacing the Constitution *in toto* with a new constitution.

What kind of group is Nippon Kaigi? How did Abe and Nippon Kaigi’s determination to create a new constitution merge? We shall now trace the origins of their determination, going back to pre-war Japan, to understand the historical background from which they emerged. Abe inherited the project to establish *jishu kenpō* (the replacement of Japan’s post-war Peace Constitution with a constitution written by the Japanese) from his grandfather Nobusuke Kishi (岸信介 1896-1987). Nippon Kaigi inherited their project from Masaharu Taniguchi (谷口雅春 1893-1985), the founder of a new religion called *Seicho-no-ie* (生長の家). Kishi and Taniguchi both lived around the same period, which bridges the pre- and post-war eras. Politicians such as Kishi and their political family line, and religious nationalists such as Taniguchi and

¹⁵ See also (2015a, 160).

their followers, preserved pre-war Japanese ideology in post-war Japan. The Abe and Nippon Kaigi projects bring pre-war Japan into the present and the future.¹⁶

Kishi's role in the War has been well documented by multiple academic authors. Here we simply rely on their descriptions. Through the 1930's, Kishi, whom historian John W. Dower describes as "brilliant and unscrupulous" in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, was a leading member of a group of ideologically driven "new bureaucrats" who detested democracy and held up Nazi Germany as a model (Dower 2000, 454); Driscoll 2010, 264, 269). This description should not surprise us, given that Japan eventually signed a triple alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in 1940.

The new bureaucrats played key roles in "Japan's military imperialism" and "the intensification of domestic Fascism inside Japan" (Driscoll 2010 264). In colonies such as Manchukuo (northern China) they pioneered the totalitarian "national defence state", with a state-controlled economy geared entirely towards the military, and with whose strength the nation was identified (Maiolo 2010, 26-29). They subsequently implemented that model on the Japanese mainland (Dower 2000, 454; Driscoll 2010, 264-265). As Minister for Munitions in Tōjō's war-time Cabinet, Kishi led the preparation of the economy for "total war" with the United States (Driscoll 2010, xv).

After the War, Kishi was arrested and charged by the Supreme Commander of the Allied powers as a suspected "Class A" war criminal. Post-war US ambitions to democratise and demilitarise Japanese society and economy were soon overcome by Cold War calculations, however, and Kishi was released and supported to lead Japan in a pro-American direction. By 1950, "Japan, like West Germany, became central to US anti-Communism strategy militarily as well as economically" (Dower 2014 [2012], 120). Kishi went on to co-found the LDP and later became prime minister. Kishi instituted *jishu kenpō* as one of two founding objectives of the LDP.

Less known is Masaharu Taniguchi. Taniguchi was a follower of Ōmoto-kyō, which adopted the *kokutai* and the Imperial Way theories under State Shinto, and led the radical religious right-wing nationalist movement that attacked constitutionalism and brought Taisho Democracy to an end. Taniguchi was a member of Ōmoto-kyō during the Infiltration period (as conceptualised by Shimazono), when Ōmoto-kyō and other religious nationalist movements were becoming an influential movement attacking the democratic trends. Taniguchi left Ōmoto-kyō and in 1930 founded a new religion called *Seicho-no-ie*.¹⁷ He taught a syncretic theology that also upheld as a political ideal the *kokutai* ideology and the notion of family-state, in which the people, as the nation, united inseparably as one organism, with the Emperor as

¹⁶ See also Ito (2014, 130), who states that the same politicians with the same ideology have remained at the core of politics in pre and post-war Japan, such as Kishi, whom Abe considers his model.

¹⁷ See the description of the founding of the new religion in "Seicho-no-ie no enkaku" on Seicho-no-ie's official website, 2010.

the head of family at the centre and as the core of its life (Taniguchi 1972, 3-6; “Taniguchi Masaharu” 2016; Wimberley 1969; 1972).¹⁸ Japan was entering the Fascist period as defined by Shimazono¹⁹ when Taniguchi founded Seicho-no-ie.

As Taniguchi later described in his book *The Source of All Evil: The Present Constitution* (1972), the real problem for him was post-war Japan, not pre-war Japan. He says nothing about the more than 3.1 million Japanese lives, not to mention 20 million Asian lives, lost in the War. He writes: “Today, Japan is facing a crisis even more serious than during the War. During the War, Japan had enemies outside, but internally the people’s heart (*kokoro*) was united as one organism with the Emperor at the centre” (Taniguchi 1972, 3). The Allied occupation of Japan brought that sense of unity to an end.

The Occupation and the birth of the Peace Constitution

In August 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied nations (the United States, the British Empire, and the Republic of China), accepting the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. The Allied nations subsequently placed Japan under occupation. The Potsdam Declaration required that “a new order” be established in Japan by driving out “militarism” and destroying “Japan’s war-making power”, removing “all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies”, and establishing “freedom of religion” and “respect for the fundamental human rights”.

The Japanese government worked to revise the Meiji Constitution as it did not meet the conditions for such a new order.²⁰ However, Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied powers, saw that the Japanese government’s draft of the new constitution was a mere superficial revision of the Meiji Constitution. MacArthur was concerned that the Far Eastern Commission that oversaw the Allied Council for Japan, formed by the governments of 11 countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and China, would disapprove it and seek the abolition of the Emperor Institution.²¹ MacArthur thus gave instructions to his General Headquarters (often referred to as simply “GHQ” in Japanese) to draft a new constitution based on three principles (MacArthur Notes 1946): “Emperor is at the head of the state;” “War as a sovereign right of the nation is abolished;” “The feudal system of Japan will cease”.²²

¹⁸ See also Seicho-no-ie seinenkai chūōbu (1973 [1967]) and Katayama and Shimazono (2017, 177-178).

¹⁹ Shimazono’s definition adopts Murakami’s definition, “the period of fascist state religion” (*fashizumu teki kokkyō ki*) (Murakami 2016 [1970], 80).

²⁰ Reform of the Japanese Governmental Systems (SWNCC228) January 7, 1946, shows how the United States wanted to reform the Japanese governmental system, including amending the Meiji Constitution or adopting a new constitution and retaining the Emperor Institution.

²¹ See also Satō (2015b, 81-82) for a more nuanced explanation of the process.

²² Three basic points stated by Supreme Commander to be “musts” in constitutional revision, GHQ Draft, Constitution of Japan, February 1946.

In the GHQ Draft, Constitution of Japan (1946), the Emperor became “the symbol of the State”.²³ This declaration, combined with the principles of democracy, popular sovereignty, and individual human rights that the present Constitution protects, prevents the Emperor from being politically manipulated by state power as the centre of worship, as was the case before the end of the War. The draft was adopted after some revisions by the Japanese and came into effect in 1947.

The GHQ also issued the Shinto Directive (*Shinto shirē* 神道指令) in 1945, in order to separate religion from state and abolish State Shinto, which they considered to have supported Japan’s militarism and nationalism that had led Japan to War.²⁴ The Constitution of Japan adopted the same principle.

The Potsdam Declaration stated that “stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals”. Nobusuke Kishi was detained as a “Class A” war crime suspect. However, as Dower has illustrated brilliantly, the Allied occupation, for Cold War reasons, kept largely intact the political, economic, and ideological elite who had led Japan to war, played down Japan’s transgressions in China and Korea, and left territorial issues arising from the war unresolved (Dower 2000; 2014). Kishi was released in 1948 as a promising US ally against Communist China, and worked for the establishment of *jishu kenpō* throughout his post-war political career.

The majority of the Japanese people welcomed the new Constitution regardless of who had drafted it. The above background, however, allowed some to argue that the Americans “imposed” the present Constitution and that the Japanese should establish *jishu kenpō*.²⁵ Early LDP politicians took this position, and the religious and right-wing revisionist groups leading the constitutional reform movement today have been reviving it.

Preserving pre-war Japan in post-war Japan

The birth of Nippon Kaigi

Despite the US attempt to remove militaristic and ultra-nationalistic tendencies of pre-war Japan, pre-war Japanese systems and ideologies survived in post-war Japan in many ways.²⁶ The preservers of pre-war

²³ It states, “The Emperor shall be the symbol of the State and of the Unity of the People, deriving his position from the sovereign will of the People, and from no other source.”

²⁴ Shinto Directive (Shinto shirei): Kokka shinto, jinja shinto ni taisuru seifu no hoshō, shien, hozon, kantoku, narabini kofu no haishi ni kansuru ken (Showa niju nen juni gatsu jūgo nichi rengokokugun saiko shireikan soshireibu sanbo fuku kan...nihon seifu ni taisuru oboegaki)
In Japanese: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/others/detail/1317996.htm.

²⁵ See also Satō 2015a, 220-221.

²⁶ Katayama and Shimazono (2017), Nakajima and Shimazono (2016), and Shimazono (2017) describe in detail how they survived.

Japanese nationalism, in their own words and in the words of others who studied them, have turned to pre-war Japan with nostalgia, a time when, in their view, Japan was united, strong, and glorious.²⁷

Some Shinto sects (kyōha shinto) and new religious organisations tried to maintain Emperor veneration under State Shinto in post-war Japan (Shimazono 2017, 209). This was the case with Seicho-no-ie under its founder Masaharu Taniguchi until the 1980s, after which the next leaders of the organisation changed its policy.

Anthropologist Howard Wimberley's study of Seicho-no-ie, based on his fieldwork conducted among a Seicho-no-ie community between 1964 and 1966, offers valuable insight into Seicho-no-ie practices in post-war Japan. His work shows that Taniguchi tried to preserve the pre-war family-state with the Emperor at the centre within his religious organisation.

In the post-war period, Seicho-no-ie's political branch developed lay political organisations such as Seiseiren (生政連)²⁸ and put up candidates who ran for seats in the Diet (Wimberley 1969, 192; 1972). The restoration of the pre-war Meiji Constitution and the sovereignty of the Emperor was Seicho-no-ie's key political aim (Wimberley 1969, 200; 1972, 180; Taniguchi 1972, 3-7). As they awaited the achievement of this goal, Taniguchi's followers worshiped him as "the surrogate Emperor" and considered his organisation, Seicho-no-ie, as the "surrogate pre-war Japan" (Wimberley 1972, 180).²⁹ By worshiping the Shinto Sun Goddess Amaterasu as the original ancestress of the Imperial line and of all Japanese, Seicho-no-ie replicated the family-state (Wimberley 1972, 180).

Wimberley describes the similarity between Seicho-no-ie's ideology and the ultra-nationalist concept of kokutai that Maruyama has described. The similarity is clear in Seicho-no-ie's idea of the "family-state" that Masaharu Taniguchi and Seicho-no-ie lectures propagated in post-war Japan (Wimberley 1972, 181-182):

Humans make up families, which make up the nation, which is the family-state; ... The modern constitution treats the national body as consisting in cells (i.e. individuals). But this theory is false since true sovereignty resides in the state with the Emperor at the center – not with the people.
[From a speech by Masaharu Taniguchi.]

²⁷ Wimberley (1969, 191) describes the "nostalgia for the pre-war past" expressed by the members of Seicho-no-ie that he studied. Constitutional scholar Kobayashi repeatedly pointed out that the LDP politicians, whom Kobayashi has known for 30 years and who "detest" the Constitution of Japan and attempt to amend or "destroy" it, are hereditary Diet members (seshū giin) of the pre-war establishment, for whom the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration was a "humiliation" and who have "nostalgia" for the Meiji Constitution and Japan during the Fascist era (Higuchi and Kobayashi 2016, 30-33, 34-35, 66, 134, 145, 146, 255).

²⁸ Seiseiren is abbreviation for Seicho-no-ie seiji rengo (生長の家政治連合).

²⁹ See also Katayama and Shimazono (2017, 177-178).

[W]e must [...] all protect the Emperor. The household head is the center of the family, and the Emperor is the center of Japan. [From a Seicho-no-ie lecture.]

Wimberley also describes how the Seicho-no-ie members he communicated with on a trip to Tokyo “mentioned that more than anything else they wanted to honor Japan’s war-dead at Yasukuni” (Wimberley 1969, 192).

Similar to his speech, Taniguchi’s own writing in 1972 shows how he worked to bring back the pre-war family-state and the Meiji Constitution in post-war Japan. He argued that the Constitution of Japan was an illegitimate and “false” “Occupation Constitution (占領憲法)” “imposed” by the “Occupation Army” for the purpose of taking away “the life at the core” of Japan as an “organism”, i.e., “the political life of the Emperor” (Taniguchi 1972, 3-6, 18-19). His organisation deemed the post-war Constitution the “Basic Law of Occupation”.³⁰ (Seicho-no-ie seinenkai chūōbu 1973, 60).

Masaharu Taniguchi’s student followers in the 1960s and 1970s are carrying out his political aim today. In the 1960s and 1970s, when Japanese society was polarised between left and right, student activism often led to violent protests using staves and Molotov cocktails. In the late 1960s, many students and followers of Masaharu Taniguchi and Seicho-no-ie were involved in the right-wing student movement fighting against the more dominant left-wing.³¹ Today, they are more than 60 years old. Those who participated in Seicho-no-ie activities at that time include the following five people, who are today supporting Abe:³²

Sēichi Etō. Currently Special Adviser to the Prime Minister, former member of the House of Councillors, Abe’s long-time ally, and a Nippon Kaigi Diet Members Discussion Group member.³³

Yūzō Kabashima. Secretary-General of Nippon Kaigi and a key person in its founding.³⁴

Tetsuo Itō. Founder and representative of a think tank, the Japan Policy Institute, and a Nippon Kaigi permanent member and policy adviser.

Akira Momochi. Professor at Nippon University.

Shirō Takahashi. A Nippon Kaigi official.

³⁰ Seicho-no-ie seinenkai chūōbu (1973), 60.

³¹ See Sugano (2016); also Katayama and Shimazono (2017, 177-178).

³² “(Nippon kaigi kenkyū) kenpō hen: Ge Kazoku sonchō, meibunmeiki o shuchō” (2016). See also Sugano (2016).

³³ See also “(Nippon kaigi kenkyū) kenpō hen: Jō Kaiken e, abe seiken to mitsugetsu” (2016).

³⁴ See also Sugano (2016, 44-47).

The core group of people who worked to establish Nippon Kaigi participated in Seicho-no-ie activities in the 1960s and 1970s as students. Besides those described above, Masakuni Murakami, a former member of the House of Councillors and a follower of Masaharu Taniguchi, was also deeply involved in founding Nippon Kaigi.³⁵

These former students and followers of Masaharu Taniguchi are pushing the movement for amending and replacing the post-war democratic Peace Constitution, keeping alive Masaharu Taniguchi's movement to restore the pre-war Japanese religio-political system and ideology. Today, they and Nippon Kaigi are wielding influence close to the core of Japanese politics.³⁶ Their demand for the amendment and replacement of the Constitution largely follows the demands that Taniguchi has been making.

On the other hand, under the new leadership that took over Masaharu Taniguchi, Seicho-no-ie (宗教法人「生長の家」) later disavowed the right-wing political agenda instituted by its founder. The opposing positions between Nippon Kaigi's key actors, who continue to carry out Masaharu Taniguchi's political agenda, and Seicho-no-ie's new leadership, who disavowed it, emerged after Tamotsu Sugano's book on Nippon Kaigi was published in 2016, exposing Nippon Kaigi's identity.

Little was known about Nippon Kaigi until Sugano's publication on the organisation. The fundamentalist followers of Masaharu Taniguchi formed Nippon Kaigi in 1997, by merging the National Conference for Protecting Japan (Nippon o mamoru kokumin kaigi 日本を守る国民会議) and the Society to Protect Japan (Nippon o mamoru kai 日本を守る会).³⁷ Nippon Kaigi describes itself as a private organisation that promotes national movements and makes policy suggestions.³⁸ It states that its aim is to create "a proud new constitution by the hands of the Japanese", because "the occupation force" "imposed" the current Constitution.³⁹

In a powerful intervention ahead of the critical Upper House elections in July 2016, Seicho-no-ie's new leadership released a statement clarifying the organisation's position, summarised by the author below:⁴⁰

Masaharu Taniguchi had identified the Constitution of Japan as the source of social chaos during the Cold War, when Japan was divided between the left and the right. Seicho-no-ie, however,

³⁵ See Sugano (2016, 45, 62-64).

³⁶ "(Nippon kaigi kenkyū) kenpō hen: Ge Kazoku sonchō, meibunmeiki o shuchō" (2016); "(Nippon kaigi kenkyū) kenpō hen: Jō Kaiken e, abe seiken to mitsugetsu" (2016); Sugano (2016).

³⁷ See Nippon Kaigi n.d.

³⁸ Nippon Kaigi (n.d.).

³⁹ Nippon Kaigi (n.d.).

⁴⁰ Seicho-no-ie (2016)

disbanded its political wing, Seiseiren, in 1983, to focus on its religious activities.⁴¹ Under its new leaders, Seichō Taniguchi (谷口 清超) [the founder's son-in-law] and Masanobu Taniguchi (谷口 雅宣) [the founder's grandson], Seicho-no-ie has "reevaluated its historic views" and "corrected mistakes", and has shifted to environmental issues such as climate change as a way to contribute to world peace.⁴² The Abe administration has neglected "constitutionalism that is at the root of democracy", forced, by a Cabinet decision, the change of interpretation of the Constitution to allow the right of collective self-defence, and made claims that "beautify" Japanese society during the time when democracy stopped functioning. The administration has been "oppressing" "the press" and "deeply interfering" in "textbook selection". Sugano's book reveals that "former adherents of Seicho-no-ie" are "deeply involved" in Nippon Kaigi and that Nippon Kaigi's "claims and goals" are almost the same as "the Abe administration's right-leaning path, including constitutional amendment". Our organisation is "deeply ashamed" of the "anachronistic" and "covert activities" of the "fundamentalist" "former Seicho-no-ie adherents". "Knowing that our prime minister is strongly influenced by our organisation's former adherents' wrong political ideal", "we feel responsible for having failed to persuade them".⁴³ "We express our clear disapproval of the Abe administration's political stance, so as to prevent Japan from taking the wrong path again."⁴⁴

It is important to note how the statement explains the reason Seicho-no-ie departed from the political activities of its founder:

... the restoration of the Meiji Constitution" or "the amendment of the present Constitution" should not be "carried out from the top by the religious order having political power"; rather, each citizen should pursue their political goals "from the bottom" following "democratic rules" through the ballot box.⁴⁵

This was what divided the present Seicho-no-ie and the fundamentalist followers of Masaharu Taniguchi, who split off from Seicho-no-ie. The statement shows that the fundamentalists, who formed Nippon Kaigi, are continuing the founder's political activity by the religious nationalist group having attained political power. The statement also describes the political activities of the founder as that "from the top".

⁴¹ See also Sugano (2016, 230).

⁴² See also Sugano (2016, 196, 223).

⁴³ See also Seicho-no-ie's statement in 2017.

⁴⁴ See also Sugano (2016, 221-232), who calls them "Seicho-no-ie fundamentalists" and explains how the "Seicho-no-ie fundamentalist movement" that they are carrying out is supporting the Abe administration, and how politicians and scholars with strong links to the Abe administration are participating in the movement.

⁴⁵ Seicho-no-ie (2016).

Thus, while Masanobu Taniguchi has mended the direction of the religious organisation his grandfather founded, Shinzō Abe continues to press the project of his grandfather Kishi, for whom he has publicly expressed admiration.⁴⁶ As the 2016 Seicho-no-ie statement put it, Abe is collaborating with the fundamentalist followers of Masaharu Taniguchi.

The Association of Shinto Shrines and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership

The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership (Shinto sēji renmē 神道政治連盟, literally Shinto Political Federation) is another religious nationalist revisionist group that is influential with the Abe administration. It is closely related to the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honcho 神社本庁), an organisation whose predecessor played a central role in pre-war State Shinto. The Association of Shinto Shrines, a grouping of Shinto shrines and priests, is one of the proponents of the State Shinto movement in post-war Japan (Shimazono 2017, v).

The Association of Shinto Shrines was formed in 1946 to take over the role of the Institute of Divinities (*Jingiin* 神祇院 1940-1946) that was abolished when the Allied forces issued the Shinto Directive.⁴⁷ We have seen that, after the Meiji Restoration, the various Shinto shrines that had existed throughout Japan were unified into a hierarchy with the Ise Shrine at the top (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 29-30). Today, the Association of Shinto Shrines claims to oversee about 80,000 Shinto shrines throughout Japan (Jinja Honcho 2009).

The Association's statement on its official website expresses resentment against the Allied forces: in 1945 "our country accepted the Potsdam Declaration of the Allied forces and faced the end of the war ... the General Headquarters [GHQ] of the Allied forces that took military control rapidly started reforming Japan, ... issued a 'Shinto Directive' on December 15, 1945, and ordered the separation of Shinto shrines from the state' ... since the Treaty of San Francisco came into effect in 1952 ... [the Association has been working on] ... restoring Shinto shrine worship that was unjustly oppressed by the 'Shinto Directive.'"⁴⁸

The Association and its movement is "political": the Association focuses on "the state and the Emperor"; it seeks to enhance "Emperor veneration", "the link between the Emperor and Shinto shrines", and State Shinto by promoting nationalism; it seeks to "raise the position of the Emperor" to a level higher than the

⁴⁶ Abe writes how, since he was small, he has come to feel proud of his grandfather, who had planned for the country's future despite public criticism for negotiating to revise the new US-Japan security treaty (Abe 2013, 22-28).

⁴⁷ See also Nakajima and Shimazono (2016, 168-169, 239).

⁴⁸ The Association's statement can be obtained from its website at: <http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/introduction/foundation/>

symbolic Emperor that the majority of the population agree to (Shimazono 2017, 196-202). The policies stated in the Association's charter show that they want to return to the State Shinto system (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016, 239-240).

The Association of Shinto Shrines is closely related to the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016, 169). The two conceal their link, but their websites reveal that they share the same address. The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership also has various links with Nippon Kaigi,⁴⁹ and shares with Nippon Kaigi the pre-war idea of kokutai. Their stated goals include "establishing a new constitution" that largely restores the pre-war Japanese religio-political system and ideology.⁵⁰ The Association has been playing a leading role in the movement to amend and replace the post-war Constitution.

The Network of collaboration

Groups such as Nippon Kaigi and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership brought over pre-war religious nationalism to post-war Japan.⁵¹

Abe and Asō are not only key members of the Nippon Kaigi Diet Members Discussion Group (日本会議国会議員懇談会) but also of the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership Diet Members Discussion Group (神道政治連盟国会議員懇談会). These two Diet Members Discussion Groups have drawn many Diet members.⁵²

Just like members of Nippon Kaigi and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership, the LDP politicians such as Abe and Asō maintain pre-war Japanese ideology, in the case of these two men through the family line.

Asō descends from a string of politicians, including former prime ministers, and Toshimichi Ōkubo, who played a crucial role in building Japan as a modern centralised state by increasing the Emperor's sacred

⁴⁹ The leaders of the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership and the Association of Shinto Shrines are members of Nippon Kaigi (Nippon Kaigi n.d.).

⁵⁰ See Shinto seiji renmei 2011; 2015b; 2016a; (Kenpō o kangaeru) Yuragu sēkyō bunri shukyo gakusha Shimazono Susumu san 2017.

⁵¹ See also Nakajima and Shimazono (2016, 239).

⁵² Tarō Asō was elected as the Chairman of Nippon Kaigi Diet Members Discussion Group in 2000, according to Nippon Kaigi's website (Nippon Kaigi n.d.). As of 15 September 2015, Prime Minister Abe and Deputy Prime Minister Asō serve as its Special Advisers, 246 out of 281 of its members are from the LDP, and 60 per cent of the Lower House and 50 per cent of the Upper House are its members, according to *Asahi Shimbun* of March 23, 2016 ("(Nippon kaigi kenkyu) kenpō hen: jo kaiken he, abe seiken to mitsugetsu" 2016). As of 21 October 2016, Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership Diet Members Discussion Group had 302 Diet members, 224 from the Lower House and 78 from the Upper House (Shinto seiji renmei 2016b). Prime Minister Abe serves as president of the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership Diet Members Discussion Group (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016, 240).

authority and spreading Emperor veneration. Just like Abe, his political ancestry bridges pre- and post-war Japan. Diet members such as Abe and Asō who inherit their political base through their family line are called “hereditary Diet members” (*seshū giin* 世襲議員).

We have seen that the establishment of *jishu kenpō* had been a founding objective of the LDP and that Abe’s grandfather, Kishi, had worked for the goal in his post-war political career. However, the LDP had not been consistent in pursuing this goal, and had often advocated the preservation of the present Constitution. This stance changed after Abe came into power. In his book, Abe (2013, 43) explains how he brought about this change in the LDP. The key issue after the LDP returned to power in 1994 was the founding objective, “the establishment of *jishu kenpō*”. There was no mention of *jishu kenpō* in the draft of the LDP’s manifesto, as the LDP wanted to “tone down constitutional revisionism”. Abe “could not possibly agree” because it was one of the very reasons the LDP exists. He fought for and succeeded in having the manifesto state that the LDP would “pursue discussion with the people” on how the constitution should look for a new era.

An *Asahi Shimbun* article⁵³ shows how, in this effort, Sēichi Etō, then a member of the House of Councillors and currently Abe’s Special Adviser, fought on Abe’s side for reinstating the goal of establishing *jishu kenpō*. Etō, born 1947, had participated in *Seicho-no-ie* when he was a student. In 1996, in a piece co-authored with Etō, Abe wrote, “I would like to suggest a wholehearted ‘revolution’ by the conservatives”. In October 2014, a Nippon Kaigi related group, the National Society to Create a Constitution for a Beautiful Japan (*Utsukushii nihon no kenpō o tsukuru kokumin no kai* 美しい日本の憲法をつくる国民の会), was founded for the purpose of creating a new constitution. Etō participated in their initial meeting that month and spoke to the audience, looking back at Abe and his struggle in the 1990s: “It is not too much to say that the Abe Cabinet was formed with everyone’s cooperation for the final goal of amending the Constitution.”

These groups and people not only have preserved the pre-war religious nationalism based on *kokutai* and State Shinto ideology but have been reviving it in mainstream politics under the Abe administration.⁵⁴

⁵³ “(Nippon kaigi kenkyū) kenpō hen: Jō Kaiken e, abe seiken to mitsugetsu” 2016.

⁵⁴ See also (*Kenpō o kangaeru*) Yuragu sēkyō bunri: shukyo gakusha Shimazono Susumu san (2017).

Reviving the Discourse and Practice of Pre-war Japan

Reproducing the discourse of kokutai ideology

Abe, Nippon Kaigi, and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership use the aestheticised language of building a “beautiful” and “proud” country. These are code words by which they mean pre-war Japan or kokutai. Shimazono explains that the phrase often used by the Abe administration and Nippon Kaigi, “the character of the nation with a beautiful tradition”, is based on the hidden ideology of kokutai (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 16).

For example, the National Society to Create a Constitution for a Beautiful Japan (notice the word “beautiful”) wants a new constitution that restores kokutai, as its name suggests. The organisation has been conducting a nationwide campaign for the holding of a national referendum. They claim that the Japanese urgently need to amend the Constitution so that Japan “is reborn into” a country that the Japanese can be “proud” of. They call the Constitution of Japan an “Occupation Constitution” that “was imposed by the GHQ under the Occupation by the Allied army”, just as Masaharu Taniguchi did.⁵⁵

Another example is Abe’s book titled *Towards a Beautiful Country* (notice “beautiful” country). In the complete version of the book, *Towards a New Country*, Abe (2013, 105) says that “the Emperor Institution” is the basic expression of “the character of the nation”. In short, he is talking about Japan based on the idea of kokutai with the Emperor at the centre.

Abe, Nippon Kaigi, and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership also all emphasise the necessity of paying respect to the war-dead. Visiting the Yasukuni Shrine is important to both these organisations. Nippon Kaigi has another partner organisation called the Diet Members’ Society for Everyone to Visit the Yasukuni Shrine (Minnade yasukuni jinja ni sanpai suru kokkai giin no kai みんなで靖国神社に参拝する国会議員の会).⁵⁶ The key goals of the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership include “establishing state ritual for the war-dead at the Yasukuni Shrine” (Shinto seiji renmei 2011). We have seen that the Yasukuni Shrine occupied a special role in pre-war State Shinto as a state facility for performing state rituals for those who sacrificed their lives for the Emperor. These organisations are not only preserving the discourse and practice of State Shinto but also trying to revive the status of the Yasukuni Shrine as a state facility.

⁵⁵ See their website: Utsukushii nihon no kenpō o tsukuru kokumin no kai 美しい日本の憲法をつくる国民の会 [National Society to Create a Constitution for a Beautiful Japan] 2014. *Utsukushii nihon no kenpō o tsukuru kokumin no kai* Home page, Available from: <https://kenpou1000.org/faq/> [April 24, 2017]

⁵⁶ See ‘(Nippon kaigi kenkyū) kenpō hen: jō kaiken he, abe seiken to mitsugetsu’ 2016.

In the case of Abe, in *Towards a New Country* (2013, 111-112), he states that Japan today builds on the lives that the young special attack corps of the War (widely known as kamikaze) sacrificed, and asks whether his Japanese readers have expressed respect for them and considered the fact that there exist values for which the Japanese need to sacrifice their lives.

The soldiers went to War saying, “Let’s meet at Yasukuni if we die”. The state ritual performed at the Yasukuni Shrine served to spiritually compensate for the life that they — many of them young farmers who could not otherwise understand why they needed to be conscripted — sacrificed in the name of the Emperor (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 72-77). Nippon Kaigi’s strong support for the Abe administration on establishing the Security Bills and emphasis on mourning for the war-dead and the Yasukuni Shrine visit should be understood in this context.

These constitutional revisionists have revived the word kokutai (body of the nation), or its contemporary code terms that they use, “character of the nation (kunigara 国柄)”, “shape of the nation (kuni no katachi 国のかたち)”,⁵⁷ and “beautiful” country, and its ideology and rhetoric.⁵⁸

As if echoing Taniguchi, who claimed that Japan is a country with history and tradition uniting as a family with the Emperor at the centre and where “individuals” sacrificed their lives as members of the nation, Abe says that the “Emperor Institution” is fundamental for the “character of the nation”, that “individuals” do not exist individually, and that to protect Japan, a country with “perpetual (yūkyū 悠久)” history, is to protect one’s family, equating Japan with one’s family (Taniguchi 1972, 3-5; Abe 2013, 100, 105). In short, Abe is expressing the idea of kokutai, the idea of an eternal Japan in which the entire Japanese population is mystically united with the Emperor.

“Perpetuity”, the word Abe used, indicating timelessness in mythos rather than time in actual history, is a key concept in the ideology of kokutai and the Imperial Way.⁵⁹ Abe uses the idea of “perpetuity” again, in

⁵⁷ Others (such as Satō 2015a; 2015b) use the “shape of the nation” in a more neutral and encompassing way, which may include kokutai but not as a code for kokutai.

⁵⁸ Nippon Kaigi uses both kokutai and kunigara. The principles of a new constitution they drafted states in its preamble that the constitution is established based on Japan’s own “kokutai”; it also states that Japan’s own “kunigara” must be clearly stated in a new constitution, adopting a statement made in 1991 by Nippon Kaigi’s former organisation, Nippon o mamoru kokumin kaigi (Nippon Kaigi 2016). In his book on kokutai, Takeda (2016, 14) explains that “kunigara” can be used instead of “kokutai”, but that he prefers the latter as the former does not carry the weight of the latter term. Some use “the shape of the nation (kuni no katachi)”. For example, the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals demands that the Constitution be amended to clearly state “the shape of the nation” (Kokka kihon mondai kenkyusho 2016). The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership uses both kunigara and kuni no katachi (Shinto seiji renmei n.d.; Shinto seiji renmei 2016a).

⁵⁹ The *Kokutai no hongī* (Monbusho 1937, 10-11) states that Japan originated in the “perpetuity (yūkyū)” that derives from the transmission of Nihonshoki (Chronicles of Japan). The Japan Institute for National Fundamentals (Kokka kihon mondai kenkyusho 2016) demands that “the shape of the nation” of Japan, based on Japan’s “perpetual history (yūkyū no rekishi), tradition, and civilisation” should be incorporated into Japan’s new constitution. See also Suzuki (2001, 255).

his description of kamikaze pilots: Young kamikaze pilots, who were “destined to die” for Japan, when facing death, “wished for Japan’s perpetual history (*yūkyū no rekishi*) to continue”, “in order to make their death meaningful and to make their life eternal” (Abe 2013, 111). His words invoke the Imperial Way: the Imperial Way is perpetual in time, and to protect it is the mission of the Imperial Forces (Maruyama 2015 [1964], 496; 1969, 22).

Nippon Kaigi (2016) also uses the term, demanding the establishment of “a new constitution’ based on Japan’s “perpetual history (*yūkyū no rekishi*)”. It means constitution based on kokutai.

Reviving pre-war ritual practice

The revisionists are reviving pre-war Japanese ideology not only in language and discourse but also in ritual practice. In State Shinto, the unity of ritual with politics (*saisē icchi*) is significant. Performing ritual is politics.

At the Ise Shrine in 2013, Abe participated in the most important ritual (*sengyo no gi* 遷御の儀) in a ceremony called *shikinen sengū* (式年遷宮), held every 20 years to commemorate the construction of a new shrine and the transfer of the “body” of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu (the body, called *Yatanokagami* 八咫鏡, is essentially a mirror) to the new shrine. Eight Cabinet members accompanied Abe. Shimazono questions Abe and the Cabinet members’ participation as overriding the separation of religion and state; since Abe participated officially as prime minister, the event was close to being a state event (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 16-17). No prime minister had attended the ritual since 1929, under State Shinto, when Osachi Hamaguchi attended it. Shimazono appears discomforted by the ominous implications of Abe’s presence at Ise Shrine (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 17).

Also at Ise, Abe on 26 May 2016 involved the possibly unwitting leadership of the G7 in Shinto rituals reserved for officials. Shimazono points out that the holding of the G7 summit in Ise-Shima, where the Ise Shrine is located, must be understood in relation to the fact that the Ise Shrine had been “the highest state facility in State Shinto”. Abe led the G7 leadership to practically make an official visit to the Ise Shrine; the act is close to bringing in a specific religion into a diplomatic event (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 17-18). Herbert Bix, an American historian, describes the incident thus: “The world leaders may have inadvertently furthered Abe’s intention to gain legitimacy for Shinto nationalism” (Bix 2016, 44). The current administration is turning Japan into a “holy state” by strengthening the Ise Shrine’s status as a state facility (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 19, 183).

In these ways, the Abe administration has been overriding the separation between state and religion that was instituted after the War to prevent a recurrence of Japanese militarism. We must not overlook the fact that the Shinto nationalists are trying to revive the Ise Shrine's official status concurrent with attempting to establish state ritual at the Yasukuni Shrine.

Looking at the timeline below of events under the Abe administration focusing on “theocratic kokutai” versus “constitutionalism”, we can see that the former is being revived while the latter (the democratic and pacifist post-war Constitution) is being challenged.⁶⁰

- 2007: Under Abe's leadership, Diet passes the National Referendum Act, which clarifies the steps needed to amend the Constitution (国民投票法).
- 2012: The LDP publishes the LDP Draft Constitution (the LDP version of jishu kenpō). Abe becomes prime minister for the second time.
- 2013: Abe and his Cabinet participate in the ritual (Shikinen sengū) at the Ise Shrine. The State Secrecy Law is passed.
- 2014: By a Cabinet decision, the Abe government changes the interpretation of the Constitution to allow the use of collective self-defence.
- 2015: The Diet passes the Security Bills.
- 2016: Abe leads the G7 leaders to visit the Ise Shrine.
The revisionist forces achieve a two-thirds majority in the Diet.
- 2018: Moral textbooks will be introduced in elementary schools.

Emperor Akihito made a speech in August 2016, immediately after the revisionists achieved the two-thirds threshold necessary to propose amendment of the Constitution.⁶¹ His speech, in the author's view, is significant in the context of the emerging shift towards theocratic kokutai, although it was presented as his wish to abdicate.⁶² While the Emperor refrained from “making any specific comments on the existing Imperial system”, in keeping with the restriction the Constitution imposes on his role, his message, reported worldwide by Japanese and overseas media, clearly showed his position as the “symbol” of Japan as defined by the Constitution of Japan. He expressed himself as an ageing human Emperor rather than a divine Emperor.

The Emperor began his speech by referring to the actual history of post-war Japan, in particular, by positioning his reign and Japan today in relation to the War without using the theocratic kokutai language

⁶⁰ See also Katayama and Shimazono (2017, 200).

⁶¹ The Emperor's speech in English is available at: <http://www.kunaicho.go.jp/page/okotoba/detailEn/12#41>

⁶² Katayama explains the significance of the Emperor's speech as “revolutionary”, stating that it is as though he is trying to de-deify the Emperor's role and prevent the progress of kokutai ideology (Katayama and Shimazono 2017, 201).

of “the unbroken line of Emperors” or “long tradition and history”. He talked about his body that was ageing (80 years at that time) and weakening, his physical constraints, his suffering from illnesses (he had had two surgeries), and the fact that he would face death (long funeral events would affect Japanese society and his family). The natural human Emperor that he described in his own words was the opposite of a living god. He uttered the word “symbol” many times, sought the people’s understanding of his role as a symbol so that he could fulfil his role as such, and said that he wished the Emperor’s role as the symbolic Emperor to continue stably.⁶³

Emperor Akihito was the first Emperor to be enthroned under the Constitution of Japan. His speech showed how he interpreted, defined, and shaped his role as a symbolic and human Emperor. No other Japanese has reflected so deeply on the meaning of a symbolic Emperor than the Emperor himself.

Japanese Kokutai vs Western Constitution: The Scope and Nature of Constitutional Amendment

Demanding kokutai and constitutional monarchy in 21st century Japan

We have seen that the pre-war Japanese ideology has been maintained in post-war Japan by political and religious groups that have preserved it for 70 years. Today, we are at a point where the Peace Constitution based on constitutionalism and democracy is being challenged by a new (but old) constitution that reflects the pre-war ideology of theocratic kokutai.

The root of the problem that has emerged today goes back a long way, to the beginning of the new nation-building project after the Meiji Restoration (Nakajima and Shimazono 2016). Unlike the modern European state that built itself on the idea of a secular and neutral state deriving its authority from external laws, the pre-war Japanese state built its sovereignty on internal values, embodied in the idea of kokutai and ultimately in the Emperor who was the source of morality.⁶⁴ From a constitutional perspective, the Meiji Constitution compounded the “idea of theocratic kokutai” and “constitutionalism” (Satō 2015a). How the two harmonised was a delicate issue (Satō 2015a, 152). As State Shinto spread among the people, religious and right-wing nationalist movements from below intensified, and the former destroyed the latter (Shimazono 2017; Satō 2015a; Maruyama 2015 [1964]).

Because of the way Japan after the Meiji Restoration was built, not as a neutral state as in the West, but as a Shinto State, constitutional issues under the Meiji Constitution were not neutral and secular as in the

⁶³ See also Chapter 7 of Katayama and Shimazono (2017).

⁶⁴ For space reasons, a more detailed explanation of the difference between European and Japanese states could not be included. See Maruyama (2015 [1964]; 1969) for his explanation.

West, but often religious. Similarly, given the historical depth and the ideological scale of today's movement to amend and replace the Constitution, the core issue is not merely a neutral and secular matter of amending an external law as most people think. The issue is more about whether to maintain the Constitution of Japan based on neutral and external principles founded on constitutionalism, or reincorporate the State Shinto idea of theocratic kokutai. The issue has been presented to the Japanese people as though it is merely the former, but the result of the author's research and analysis shows that the scale and nature of the revisionist project is the latter. The religious aspect of the issue, which Shimazono has been pointing out, has been largely overlooked.

With this in mind, we shall now turn to the ideas of a desired new constitution that the LDP, Nippon Kaigi, and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership have made public. Nippon Kaigi posted on their website a statement titled "Principles of a new constitution" on 11 November 2016. Here, it is undeniable that Nippon Kaigi wants to restore the idea of kokutai, because they openly and explicitly say the constitution is established based on "kokutai". Included is a statement by Nippon Kaigi's predecessor organisation, National Conference to Protect Japan, on the reason they want to establish a new constitution: The current Constitution was "established under an unfortunate procedure", is not based on our nation's tradition, is full of the logic of the "masochistic view of history", and does not prescribe Japan as an independent nation; thus, the people of Japan have "lost pride" in their home country and continued to receive "disdain and distrust from the international community"; when the Japanese people establish a new constitution on our own will, "the system based on the current Constitution will end", and Japan will be reborn into a nation that will be "respected and trusted by the international community".⁶⁵

The opinion then posts Nippon Kaigi's principles of a new constitution, first published in 1997 and revised in 2001. The preamble of the proposed constitution states that Japan is a nation with an inherent "kokutai" which "respects harmony" and in which the "Emperor and the people are united". On the Emperor, the principles state that Japan is a "constitutional monarchy" with the Emperor as the "head of state".⁶⁶

The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership's demands on constitutional amendment are also based on the State Shinto idea of kokutai.⁶⁷ They demand that the Constitution be amended to "clearly state" the "shape" or the "character of the nation", claiming that Japan is a "constitutional monarchy" with "the unbroken line of the Emperor", built on a "strong connection between the Emperor and the people". These are all ways of expressing the State Shinto idea of kokutai. The Association further demands that amendments be made to clarify that the Emperor is not a mere "symbol" but "the head of state", and to

⁶⁵ The statement by the National Conference to Protect Japan was made on 16 June 1991. It has been posted on Nippon Kaigi's website: <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/opinion/archives/8502>

⁶⁶ Nippon Kaigi's "Principles of a new constitution", posted on their website, can be found at: <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/opinion/archives/8502>

⁶⁷ See Shintō seiji renmei 2015; 2016a.

delete the clause on the separation between religion and state (Clause 3 of Article 20). In short, the demands express the Association's idea of a return to a Shinto State, based on the eternal and divine authority of the Emperor.⁶⁸ The Association's demands are largely, though not entirely, incorporated into the LDP Draft Constitution.⁶⁹

The 2012 LDP Draft Constitution

The draft constitution that the LDP published in 2012 is a complete overhaul of the existing constitution, a draft of a *jishu kenpō*. The LDP explains the reason for publishing the draft, excerpted and summarised as follows:⁷⁰

The Party's founding objective has been to "establish *jishu kenpō*". Japan needs to break away from the "Occupation regime"⁷¹ and become a sovereign state. The LDP has been making many efforts for this goal since 1956. The key points in the draft include revising the provision on "natural human rights", and adding provisions for the Emperor as "the head of state", "the right of self-defence", and "the establishment of a National Defence Army".

Various constitutional scholars and critics point out that the LDP Draft Constitution is designed to restore the pre-war Japanese system.⁷² Many see it as a practical return to the Meiji Constitution, the mere revision of which was submitted to MacArthur 70 years ago, whose incompatibility with democracy, human rights, and a non-aggressive Japan were the reason the present Constitution was adopted instead. Constitutional scholar Yōichi Higuchi likens the LDP Draft Constitution to a proclamation issued by the shogunate rather than a constitution (Higuchi and Kobayashi 2016, 29, 35, 51, 63). Despite such

⁶⁸ See also Katayama and Shimazono (2017, 16).

⁶⁹ The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership has presented eight issues for constitutional amendment, including the statement of *kunigara* (character of the nation) in the preamble and the statement of the Emperor as the head of state (Shintō seiji renmei n.d.; see also Shintō seiji renmei 2016a). The eight issues are all incorporated into the 2012 LDP Draft Constitution, largely in the way the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership has demanded. A few issues, however, fall short of the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership's demand. First is the separation between religion and state. The LDP Draft Constitution did not delete the provision for the separation between religion and state. It, however, carved out an exception for "social" and "customary" practices, which, critics contend, likely includes official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Second is the position of the Emperor. The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership demands that the preamble to the new constitution should state that Japan is a constitutional monarchy. The 2012 LDP Draft Constitution does not state this, but it adds a statement that the Emperor is *at the top* ("tennō o itadaku") and that the Emperor is the head of state (Shinto seiji renmei n.d.; 2016a).

⁷⁰ Jiyū minshutō kenpō kaisē suishin honbu (2013).

⁷¹ This seems to echo Abe's argument that constitutional amendment is crucial to achieve his oft-stated ambition to "break-away from the post-war regime". (See Kumada 2015)

⁷² See for example Higuchi and Kobayashi (2016). They devote the entire Chapter Two to a discussion of the 2012 LDP Draft's goal of restoring pre-war Japan. In fact, Higuchi argues that the 2012 LDP draft would take Japan back not to the Meiji era but to the pre-Meiji era.

harsh criticism against the Draft, on 18 October 18 2016, the Democratic Constitutional Reform Promotion Headquarters announced it as the Party's official document.⁷³

The following analysis seeks to show that the vocabularies, the concepts, and the discourses that characterise pre-war Japanese kokutai, Fascism, and State Shinto re-emerge in the LDP Draft Constitution.⁷⁴ It means that Japan under the LDP Draft Constitution will shift towards restoring the Japanese religio-political system that was in place before the country lost the War: a family-state with the Emperor at the centre and an Army that protects it. The LDP Draft restores the pre-war kokutai state founded on the moral authority of the Emperor, and the relationship between the Emperor, the state, and the people, in which the people are “subjects”, rather than citizens with individual rights, united with the Emperor with the obligation to serve the whole nation.

The preamble to the LDP Draft Constitution begins by stating that “Japan is a nation with a long history and unique culture, having the Emperor as the symbol of the unity of the people *over it (tennō o itadaku 天皇を戴く) (...)*”.⁷⁵ It states what *Japan is* as a nation: the shape and the character of the nation. This is in stark contrast to the preamble in the present Constitution, which begins as a proclamation by the people, using the voice of the people: “*We the Japanese people ... do proclaim that sovereign power resides with the people.*”⁷⁶ Here the Constitution begins with the people proclaiming popular sovereignty. The LDP Draft begins by defining and declaring what Japan is (kokutai).

The phrase Japan as “a nation with a long history and unique culture” is a code for kokutai often used by right-wing revisionists, with slight variations. Masaharu Taniguchi (1972, 3) expressed the pre-war Japan that he sought to restore as a nation with “history and tradition”. A statement by the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals — a think tank close to Nippon Kaigi and led by Yoshiko Sakurai — expresses its opinion that “the shape of the nation” with “perpetual history, tradition, and civilisation” be clearly stated in the new Constitution.⁷⁷

We should note that the preamble to the LDP Draft makes a small but significant change to the position of the Emperor by inserting the words “o itadaku”. This places the Emperor “at the top” of the nation. Combined with the new provision for the Emperor as “the head of state” and the overall structure of the LDP Draft (e.g., under the current Constitution, the Emperor has the obligation to respect and uphold the Constitution, but the LDP Draft does not entail such an obligation), it shifts the Emperor's position higher than a mere “symbol”, echoing the Association of Shinto Shrines and other groups' demands for the

⁷³ Jimintō kenpō kaisē suishin honbu (2016).

⁷⁴ Maruyama (2015); Suzuki (2001); Nakajima and Shimazono (2016); Katayama and Shimazono (2017); Shimazono (2017).

⁷⁵ Emphasis added.

⁷⁶ Emphasis added.

⁷⁷ Kokka kihon mondai kenkyūjo 2016.

Emperor's higher status. It shifts Japan towards restoring the idea of kokutai and State Shinto under the Meiji Constitution with the Emperor at the centre and as the highest authority. In the Meiji Constitution, Articles 1 and 4 clarified the idea of kokutai. Article 4 prescribed that the "Emperor is the head of the Empire", which was "based on the idea of 'kokutai'" and "clarified that the Emperor was the source of state governance" and "the highest authority" (Satō 2015a, 150-151).

In short, the statement of what Japan is in the preamble to the LDP Draft is a statement of the character of the nation, invoking the idea of kokutai.⁷⁸ Basically, the LDP Draft Constitution shifts Japan towards restoring the pre-war family-state based on kokutai ideology with the Emperor at the centre, by defining in the preamble what Japan is (the shape of Japan or kokutai), positioning the Emperor higher than a mere symbol at the top of the nation and as the head of the state, unbound by any obligation to respect the constitution, prescribing the family as the fundamental unit forming the nation, adding provisions of respect for family and harmony, abolishing "individual" human rights, and inserting morality, among others.

Within this ideological project, constitutional amendment is about far more than particular amendments. The amendment to Article 9 on the renunciation of war is a mere means to this end.⁷⁹

For proponents of amendments to Article 9, the core issue is not self-defence but the function and status of the Army in the state. The international community profoundly underestimates the amendment project by reading it as a "realist" response to contemporary security challenges.

⁷⁸ It reflects the demands of lobby groups such as the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership, Nippon Kaigi, and The Japan Institute for National Fundamentals that kokutai/kunigara/kuni no katachi be incorporated in a new constitution. The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership demands that kunigara/kunino katachi be clearly stated in the preamble (Shinto seiji renmei n.d.; 2016a). In Nippon Kaigi's drafted principles for a new constitution, the preamble *is* a statement of kokutai, using the word kokutai itself (Nippon Kaigi 2016). The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership demands that the constitutional amendment include in the preamble a statement of Japan's kunigara/kuni no katachi, as a nation united with the Emperor as the head (Shintō seiji renmei n.d.; 2016a). The Japan Institute for National Fundamentals also demands that the Constitution be amended to clearly state "the shape of the nation", based on Japan's "perpetual history, tradition, and culture". (Kokka kihon mondai kenkyusho 2016).

⁷⁹ Abe, certain members of the LDP, Nippon Kaigi, and the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership have been pursuing the amendment of the Constitution to add a provision on state of emergency, as well as other provisions ("Sumiyakana kenpō kaisei hotsugi no jitsugen o!," n.d.; Kimura 2016; Shintō seiji renmei 2016a). Constitutional scholars point out that the state of emergency is a "very dangerous provision" that can suspend the separation of powers, shift Japan to a "dictatorship", and even lead to repeating the mistake of the Weimar Constitution, which gave rise to the Nazis (Higuchi and Kobayashi 2016, 118, 122; See also Kimura 2016). Owing to strong resistance from the opposition such as the Democratic Party, no agreement has been reached on what issue should be amended first. This also shows that the issue for the revisionists is not that they find a specific problem in a certain provision of the Constitution and feel the need for amendment, but that the bottom line for them is that they just want to amend the Constitution and start from whatever provision possible. The question of which issue to amend first has been discussed by the Commission on the Constitution. In these discussions, the LDP has been trying to persuade the opposition, such as the Democratic Party, by adapting its strategy. For example, the LDP has been changing the suggestion for amendment, so as to avoid confrontation with the opposition ("(Jiji kokukoku) Honne fūin, jimintō no honki tō sōan/oshitsuke ron yokusei shūin kenpō shin 2016).

In the kokutai ideology, the Army is the Emperor's Army; it is at the core of the state and bears its honour. To kokutai nationalists, the gravest offence of the "imposed" and "shameful" Peace Constitution, and the reason why Japan cannot but "weaken" today, is the perversion of the Army's role. A civilian-controlled Army whose function is to defend popular sovereignty and democracy is anathema to them. In the kokutai state, the Army can only be the Emperor's Army. The mission of the Army must be to defend kokutai with the Emperor at the centre. The Yasukuni Shrine plays a key role in this effort to sustain the Emperor's Army.

As of May 2017, more than half (51 per cent) of participants in a Nikkei survey supported Abe's idea of adding a statement on the existence of the Self-Defence Force to Article 9.⁸⁰ As of this writing, the biggest challenge came on 2 July 2017, when the LDP ceded its majority to Governor Yuriko Koike's party and its allies in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election. The defeat will certainly affect Abe's constitutional agenda, as he will now need to focus on regaining popular support and maintaining the two-thirds majority in the Diet. Koike, however, was formerly an LDP member and is a current Nippon Kaigi member. Also, there is still time for Abe and the LDP to regain the people's trust. Even if Japan sees a change in political leadership, Shinto and right-wing nationalist forces in the Japanese public remain. Japan's anxiety amidst the rise of China, provocation from North Korea, and competition with South Korea could trigger the further rise of Shinto and right-wing nationalistic sentiment.

Where We Are Today

Contrary to popular understanding, the key and deeper issue is not whether Japan will change Article 9 or some other provision, but whether the post-war pacifist Constitution that preserves Japan as a constitutional democracy will survive or be replaced by a constitution, already drafted and made public, that is designed to restore the kokutai ideology of pre-war State Shinto. The meaning of the movement to amend and replace the post-war Constitution is ultimately about whether the Japanese will maintain the present Constitution founded on constitutionalism or re-adopt the pre-war State Shinto idea of theocratic kokutai.

Religion is the most overlooked aspect of the movement involving the Abe administration, despite its significance. This paper has shown that we are seeing the resurgence of religious nationalism — the revival of State Shinto. The passing of the Security Bills and the movement to amend the Constitution are taking place simultaneously as the religious nationalists seek to revive official State Shinto rituals at the Ise Shrine and the Yasukuni Shrine.

⁸⁰ See "Shijiritsu o ou: Nikkei seron chosa akaibu," 2017.

The revisionists have been extremely strategic about how to carry out the project. It has been well planned and orchestrated and has been pursued for many decades.

Japanese voters have been supporting Abe, for the economy initially and now, increasingly, for security. The opposition is weak and the left has diminished. The United States under President Donald Trump is unlikely to be attentive to this erosion of democracy in Japan, or even to the crisis of the Peace Constitution that the United States had drafted for Japan, given his domestic preoccupations. Many Japanese are unaware of the significance of the Constitution and of popular sovereignty because they did not fight for them.

In the wake of the publication of the LDP Draft Constitution in 2012, constitutional scholars have begun to act on what they could, facing a national referendum that may become a reality soon. Their work cited in this paper is an example of such attempt.⁸¹

While many in Japanese society and the international community have forgotten Japan's pre-war past, today's religious and right-wing nationalists have developed into extremely well organised and effective groups, unlike the right-wing groups the Japanese have known in the past. They have nation-wide networks to mobilise voters. They even have think tanks and task forces. They are at the centre of Japanese politics as Diet members and staffers in the Prime Minister's office. The "pacifists" are increasingly feeling the ground under them giving way.

⁸¹ Higuchi and Kobayashi (2016), Kobayashi (2016; see also 2017). Kobayashi (2016) has published his draft for a new Constitution.

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