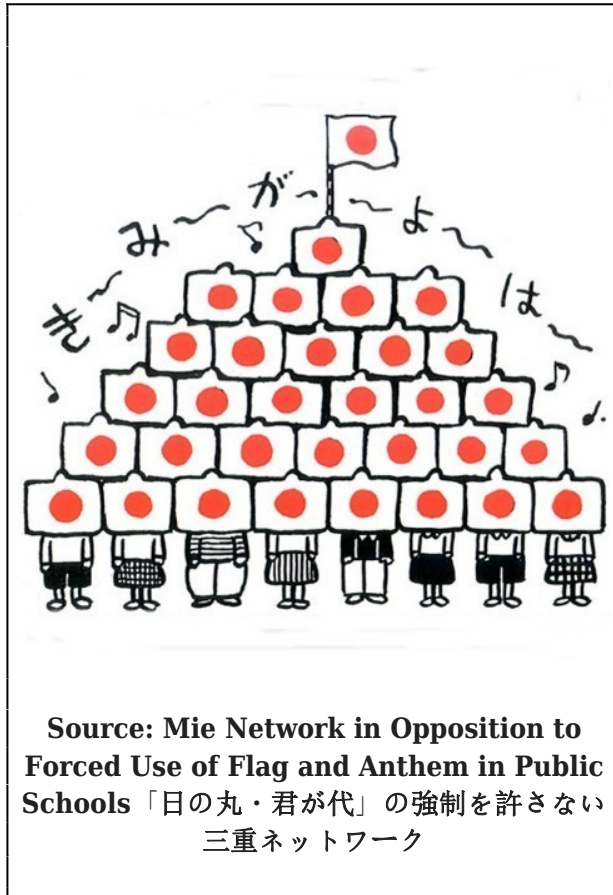


# Neonationalism, Religion, and Patriotic Education in Post-disaster Japan

Mark R. Mullins



## INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen a rise in religious nationalism around the world, and Japan is no exception. Over the past two decades there has been a significant rightward shift in Japanese politics and this trend is closely related to organized religion and its affiliated political efforts to “recover” or “restore” what had been destroyed during the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-52). Our focus here is on the close connection between the Association of Shintō Shrines (Jinja Honchō) and many politicians

belonging to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). This Association, which was organized in 1946, has some 80,000 affiliated shrines throughout the country and has been the base institution for Shintō nationalism throughout the postwar period.

According to Ueda Kenji, the beginnings of a “restoration movement” can be traced back to the early 1950s. The social status and “public character” of shrine Shinto had been undermined by the Shintō Directive issued by the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) in late 1945, and the strict application of Articles 20 and 89 of the postwar Constitution from 1947, which defined a clear separation of religion and state. As soon as the San Francisco Peace Treaty was concluded in 1952, Ueda points out, the Association of Shintō Shrines began to work actively on numerous fronts to “restore Shintō to its lost status and to revitalize the old tradition” (Ueda 1979, pp. 303-305).

In the following decades, the Association of Shintō Shrines nurtured the development of a number of affiliated groups to achieve its restoration goals. These groups, such as the Association for the Re-establishment of National Foundation Day (1957), the League Promoting Ties between Politics and Shintō (Shintō Seiji Renmei, 1969), which is known today as the “Shintō Association of Spiritual Leadership” (Shinseiren), the Association for Rectification of the Relationship between Religion and State (Seikyō Kankei o Tadasu Kai, 1971), and the Association to Preserve Japan (Nihon o Mamoru Kai, 1974), were all

mobilized by Jinja Honchō in their efforts to reverse the various reforms that had been instituted by the government under the direction of the Occupation authorities.

These groups worked closely with the LDP to bring their political agenda and various initiatives to the Diet for action. One key concern was to renew support for the Emperor and the role of the Imperial Household in postwar public life. Two successful efforts related to this concern were the movements to restore National Foundation Day (*Kenkoku kinen no hi*; known as *Kigensetsu* in the prewar period), which was finally re-established in 1966, and the reign-name legalization movement, which was achieved with the passing of the Reign-Name Law (*Gengōhō*) in 1979.

In spite of these achievements, there were a number of equally important goals that were not reached during this same period. In addition to elevating the position of the Emperor and Imperial Household in national life, *Shinseiren* had clearly stated that its other high priorities were to revise the Constitution, to properly care for the enshrined *Shōwa* martyrs by renationalizing Yasukuni Shrine, and restore moral and patriotic education in the public schools. These were to become the focus of renewed attention after 1995.

## NEONATIONALISM IN THE POST-DISASTER CONTEXT

As many observers have noted, the “double disaster” of 1995—the Awaji-Hanshin earthquake in January and the Aum Shinrikyō subway sarin gas attack in March—created a sense of social crisis and a situation that emboldened neonationalistic leaders (Mullins 2012; 2015). While traumatic at the time, the scale of this pales in comparison with the March 11/2011 “triple disaster”—earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi plant—which brought devastation to the Tōhoku region and

overwhelmed the nation with a sense of loss. The religio-political right-wing has gained support for their restorationist vision and agenda in this seemingly precarious environment over the past two decades. During the administrations of eight Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) governments in the post-1995 context, one can document a renewed effort to pass legislation to restore and strengthen patriotic education in public schools, to promote “official” Yasukuni Shrine visits (*kōshiki sanpai*), and to revise the Constitution of Japan.

When considered in isolation, some of these developments may appear unrelated to religion—and they probably are without religious significance for many individuals whose lives are shaped by the new policies (in public schools, for example); however, when taken all together and seen in relation to the political agenda and goals of the Association of Shinto Shrines and its political arm, *Shinseiren*, they are clearly a part of a Shinto religious vision aimed at reshaping the whole of Japanese society and not just those individuals affiliated with Shinto institutions. Patriotic education, for example, may indeed be based on nonreligious foundations. In the case of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, however, an active member and chairperson of *Shinseiren*, who pushed through the revision of the Fundamental Education Law in 2006, it is clearly rooted in the religious beliefs and values promoted by the Association of Shinto Shrines.

One indicator of the neonationalistic resurgence in the post-disaster context may be seen in the revitalization of an older organization like *Shinseiren* and in the formation of new organizations. One of the newer groups that should be mentioned here is the *Nippon Kaigi* (“Japan Conference”), which was formed through a merger of *Nippon o Mamoru Kai* with another nationalistic group, *Nippon o Mamoru Kokumin Kaigi*, in 1997.

According to the group's publications and homepage, its mission is to rebuild a beautiful and independent Japan, which necessarily includes restoring proper respect for the Emperor and Japanese traditions, patriotic education, revision of the Constitution, and support for official visits (*kōshiki sanpai*) to Yasukuni Shrine. It claims a nationwide network of some 100,000 members, including some 100 Diet members who are associated with branches in local towns and communities from Hokkaidō to Okinawa. This organization has gained support from across the spectrum of Japanese society and includes prominent leaders from the business, legal, and academic worlds. While it is not a religious organization per se, some 20 out of 54 board members are religious leaders drawn from well-known Shintō institutions—Yasukuni Shrine, Meiji Shrine, and the Association of Shintō Shrines—as well as representatives from such new religions as Reiyūkai, Sūkyō Mahikari, Gedatsukai, and Kurozumikyō.

Here it must be recognized that this newer organization is essentially providing a broader base of support for the central concerns and agenda that have been pursued for decades by Shinseiren and its supporters in the LDP. The number of LDP politicians affiliated with this older Shintō political organization has increased significantly in post-disaster Japan. In 1984, there were only 44 Diet members claimed by this association, but this grew to 204 by late 2013, and to 268 in 2014, which represents 37 percent of the total Diet membership of 722. The percentage of Shinseiren members in the Abe Cabinet in 2012 had reached 14 (73.7%), and it has increased again to 16 out of 19 members (84.2%) in 2015.

Over the past two decades, religious and political leaders have renewed their efforts to restore key elements of the social order that preceded the Occupation period. While promotion of Yasukuni Shrine has proved controversial—both domestically and

internationally—and efforts to revise the Constitution have only been restarted since the return of the LDP and Prime Minister Abe came to power in late 2012, some restoration goals related to patriotic education have already been achieved through legislation passed by the Diet. Today there are new laws and regulations in place, which clearly reflect the agenda of the groups and political leaders mentioned above. Many critics claim that “coercion” has been brought back into public institutions as a result of these legislative victories. Given their significant social impact, they deserve more focused consideration here.

## PATRIOTIC EDUCATION

The restoration of patriotic education in post-disaster Japan is closely related to the legislation passed by the Diet in 1999, which made the *Kimigayo* (national anthem) and *Hinomaru* (national flag) the “official” symbols of Japan, and the revision of the Fundamental Education Law (*Kyōiku kihonhō*) in 2006, which reinserted patriotic moral education into public schools. Although widely accepted as Japan's national symbols from years of use, the *Kimigayo* and *Hinomaru* had never been officially approved as such by any government administration. It was in 1958 that the Ministry of Education first instructed (*gakushū shidōyōryō*) public schools that it was “desirable” for the *Hinomaru* to be raised and the *Kimigayo* sung at official school events (entrance and graduation ceremonies). Under these “soft” guidelines, however, compliance rates were not too impressive.

Some political leaders reasoned that the problems surrounding use of these symbols in public institutions could be resolved if they were “officially” recognized by passing legislation in the Diet. Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei expressed an interest in legislation to officially recognize these national symbols in 1974, but it would not be achieved for over two more decades. It was not until 1999, during the

administration of Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō, that the Diet would finally—after considerable debate—approve the flag and anthem as the official symbols of the nation. At the time this legislation was being debated in the Diet, Prime Minister Obuchi assured the public that no coercion would ever be involved in public institutions if the bill were approved. In spite of such assurances, public intellectuals and representatives of Christian churches, including various Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church, raised serious concerns about this legislation. Just four days before the legislation was passed, the Japan Catholic Council on Justice and Peace and several Protestant bodies issued a joint declaration addressed to the Prime Minister and representatives of the LDP and Kōmeitō—its coalition partner—to express their strong opposition to the legalization initiative. The declaration stated that if the legislation was passed, it would undoubtedly lead to coercion and a violation of the individual rights and freedoms—thought, conscience, belief—that are protected by the Constitution. In particular, it expressed concern for public school teachers who might be forced to provide leadership in the ritual use of the Hinomaru and Kimigayo against their will.

It turns out that these religious minorities had legitimate concerns. The action of the Diet strengthened the position of politicians and educators who felt it was their duty to have all teachers and staff lead students by example in singing the national anthem before the flag for important school ceremonies. Instructions were soon issued by the Ministry of Education for how these symbols should be integrated into the calendar and curriculum of public schools, particularly for official entrance and graduation ceremonies. The strict enforcement of these new policies soon followed in two major metropolitan public school systems under the authoritarian leadership of Ishihara Shintarō, the former governor of Tokyo, and, more recently, Hashimoto Tōru, the Mayor of Ōsaka.

Initially, there were many protests against these new policies by both teachers and students in various schools across the nation. Some members of the leftist teachers' union, Nikkyōso, argued that these symbols were unsuitable for use in the schools since they had been used for the mobilization of both teachers and students in wartime Japan. As Okada (2013, p. 11) observes, many union members actively resisted the efforts to reintroduce the flag and anthem back into the public schools and rallied under the catch-phrase “we will not send our students to the battlefield.” Even before the intensification of “guidance” from the Ministry of Education, a number of teachers had already been disciplined for failing to comply with the 1989 guidelines. The pressure on teachers to fall in line was intensified in the Tokyo schools from October 23, 2003, when the Tokyo Education Committee issued an order for all teachers and staff to participate in leading students in singing the Kimigayo before the Hinomaru for entrance and graduation ceremonies or face disciplinary action (the committee, of course, was under the direction of the well-known nationalist and hardliner Governor Ishihara).

Anticipating a range of disciplinary action for non-compliance to this order, 228 teachers launched a pre-emptive lawsuit (*yobō soshō*) in January 2004 against the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education to protect themselves. In their view, this educational policy was a clear violation of Article 19 of the Constitution, which protects freedom of conscience. The lawsuit asked the court to (1) clearly state that teachers had no duty or obligation to sing the national anthem, (2) instruct the Board that they should not follow through with the disciplinary action threatened in the October 23 statement, and (3) confirm that music teachers could not be compelled to provide piano accompaniment for the anthem at school ceremonies (Okada 2007, p. 14). The number of plaintiffs quickly grew to 401 teachers, and their concerns were represented by a group of



some 50 lawyers over the course of 14 court hearings. The teachers could clearly see what was coming under Ishihara's Board of Education. In March 2004, some 180 teachers in the Tokyo Public School system were reprimanded for failing to comply and properly guide their students in these patriotic events.

In 2006, a decision of the Tokyo District Court gave these teachers some temporary reassurance that their rights would be protected by the Constitution. On September 21, presiding judge Namba Kōichi found that the Tokyo School Board's directive was invalid. As Lawrence Repeta's helpful review of this case notes, Namba acknowledged that the flag and anthem had been used in the recent past as a "spiritual support" for Japanese imperialism and militarism, and these symbols have not yet "attained a status of political and religious neutrality among the people" (2007, p. 3). In this context, he concluded, it would be a violation of freedom of thought and conscience to force a teacher to sing or provide musical accompaniment for the anthem against their will.

### **"CIVIC DUTIES" VERSUS "RELIGIOUS RIGHTS"**

At least two Christian teachers were involved in this initial legal action and one (Okada) was called to provide testimony as a person of faith for why he opposed and refused the order to lead students in the anthem. In addition to appealing to Article 10 of the Fundamental Education Law, which prohibits the political intervention into education, and Article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of thought and conscience, Okada and other Christians regard forced participation as a violation of Article 20, which guarantees religious freedom: "No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite, or practice." For them, singing the anthem constitutes a religious act—ritual praise of the Emperor and his

reign—and to participate would violate their personal faith.

Given the history of Christian churches in wartime Japan, these teachers are concerned that they are again being forced to compromise their faith through participation in the civil religious rites at schools. Some teachers have reached back to the Tokugawa period in search of other parallels, and compared their experience of required participation in these patriotic rituals to what was expected of Kirishitan in the Tokugawa period: The followers of the "foreign" and evil religion (*jakyō*) were forced to step on a sacred object (*fumie*) to deny their Catholic faith in order to survive (Takahashi 1998, p. 177). For these religious minorities, the use of the flag and anthem in this way has become a humiliating public "test" of their identity and loyalty as Japanese.

Although various denominations and churches issued letters of concern to the Prime Minister and government officials over the legislation passed by the Diet and the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, churches have been rather slow to become active supporters of individual Christians struggling with legal action in the Courts. A support group for Christian teachers—Hinomaru Kimigayo Kyōsei Mondai ni Torikumu Kai—was finally formed in July 2008 by the Human Rights Committee of the Tokyo Diocese of the Anglican Church. This was initially to encourage two church members and teachers employed by public schools in Tokyo: Kishida Shizue, an elementary school music teacher and pianist; and Iguro Yutaka, a teacher in a Tokyo Toritsu High School. In February 2010 this was expanded into an ecumenical trans-denominational support group, which included various Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. These groups and other churches have been organizing special meetings in Tokyo and Ōsaka to raise the consciousness of Christians over the issues and to provide some moral

support for teachers still involved in prolonged lawsuits and hearings over disciplinary action.

For the teachers on the frontlines, however, this is undoubtedly perceived as “too little and too late.” At one of the support group meetings organized by the Human Rights Committee of the Tokyo Diocese of the Anglican Church in 2011, I heard several teachers express exasperation at the lack of support from their own denomination or congregation. In spite of some official statements and letters of support from denominational officials, the vast majority of church members tend to embrace a more private and pietistic faith and avoid engaging social and political issues. They regularly admonish the “radical” teachers to be good citizens. Japanese Christians are divided over what constitutes legitimate grounds for resistance to government or public school directives. Some regard the civic rites simply as “religiously neutral” patriotic expressions and find no problem with going along; they have little sympathy for the Christian teachers stirring up trouble and siding with the radical elements of the Teachers’ Union. Most other religious bodies, including Buddhist institutions and New Religions, regard these patriotic rituals as religiously neutral and have largely remained silent on the issue.

## REVISION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION LAW

It is not surprising that Governor Ishihara and the Tokyo School Board appealed the 2006 Tokyo District Court decision that supported the teachers. To the dismay of the plaintiffs, the Supreme Court ruled on 30 May 2011 that it was not a violation of the Constitution for a principal to instruct and require teachers and staff to stand and sing the Kimigayo in front of the national flag at school ceremonies. This Supreme Court decision is undoubtedly related to the revision of the Fundamental Education Law (*Kyōiku kihonhō*) by the Diet in 2006, which “restored” patriotic moral education as a

central component of public education and legitimized the use of the flag and anthem in public schools.

The movement to revise the education law can be traced back to discussions that began in the 1960s, but it was Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, a well-known nationalistic leader and member of both Shinseiren and Nippon Kaigi (at the time, 12 of the 18 members of Abe’s Cabinet were also members of the latter group), who finally pushed the legislation through the Diet. His tactics alienated many, however. In an effort to raise public support for revisions of the education law, for example, the government collected opinions and comments from both specialists and citizens at large, and even organized “Town Meetings” to discuss the proposed revision. It turns out that this was not really “democracy” in action. As Hardacre reports: “When it emerged in late 2006 that the government had paid agents to speak in support of the revision proposal at these Town Meetings, Prime Minister Abe and others in his cabinet apologized and returned their salaries to the public purse. The Prime Minister declared, however, that the revision itself was not the problem, and the government pressed on to promulgate it” (2011, pp. 207-208).

In spite of his downfall and resignation in September 2007 due to a series of scandals, corruption allegations, and ineffective cabinet reshuffles, Abe nevertheless achieved significant results during his term in office and left behind a more regulated school system with a particular type of moral and patriotic education in place. Of course, the revision of the Fundamental Education Law was only one part of his larger vision for Japan that he laid out in a book entitled *Utsukushii kuni e* [Toward a beautiful country] (2006), a popular volume published just three months after the revised law was passed by the Diet. While Abe and his supporters firmly believe that this has laid the foundation for a “beautiful Japan,” critics maintain that the individual rights

guaranteed by the Constitution have been undermined, and the revised law constitutes a radical shift in the educational system from one that seeks to nurture individual character to one aimed at cultivating individuals who will comply with the policies of the state.

While many may regard these patriotic rituals as religiously neutral, those promoting them are equally concerned to increase public support for Yasukuni Shrine, an institution registered as a religious corporation (*shūkyō hōjin*), by encouraging “official visits” (*kōshiki sanpai*) by government officials and through the development of educational materials for public schools. Shortly after the new Fundamental Education Law was passed by the Diet, an animated DVD entitled *Hokori* (“Pride”) was distributed to public schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Education in 2007. Produced by the *Nihon Seinen Kaigisho* as a part of the Ministry’s “Program for the Development of a New Educational System,” it was shown or scheduled for viewing in 93 different locations throughout Japan between February and June. This DVD contains a scene in which the spirit of a deceased soldier appears to a high school girl and invites her back to Yasukuni to remember those who died in defense of the homeland and for their love of country. The DVD as a whole essentially promotes the revisionist history as presented by *Yūshūkan*, the museum attached to Yasukuni Shrine. On May 17, 2007, Prime Minister Abe was questioned and criticized in the Diet by Ishii Ikuko, a member of the Communist Party, about this controversial DVD and his policies that allowed for it to be produced and distributed under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. This critical response appears to have been effective as public showings were apparently stopped and copies do not seem to be available.

It appears that disciplinary action against teachers in public schools is likely to continue and, perhaps, increase. On 5 June 2011—in an

action resembling that of the Tokyo Education Committee in 2003—the Osaka Prefectural Assembly passed the *Kimigayo jōrei*, an ordinance that requires all teachers and staff employed by public schools in its jurisdiction to stand and sing the *Kimigayo* at all official school ceremonies. This ordinance, which was pushed through the Assembly by Governor Hashimoto Tōru, had the strong support of both the *Osaka Ishin no Kai* and *Nippon Kaigi* (Japan Conference) members. Like Ishihara, the former governor of Tokyo, Hashimoto is another authoritarian figure and “enforcer,” a person who has little patience for those who disagree with his position. He also uses social media effectively to promote his views and belittle his opponents. During the time the *Kimigayo jōrei* was being debated in Osaka, media savvy Hashimoto “tweeted” the following message to his 1.18 million followers on Twitter:

What is beneficial for the students is more important than freedom of conscience for the stupid teachers (*baka kyōin*). The teachers at public schools are public servants of Japan. They make their living off of our taxes. If they don’t like the national flag and anthem, they should resign from their position. There is freedom not to stand and refrain from singing the national anthem, but only for citizens who are not public servants (*kōmuin*).

The local ordinance passed under Hashimoto’s leadership in Osaka, of course, simply reinforced the directives from the Ministry of Education, but it was soon followed with additional action that laid out more clearly the punishments for those who failed to comply. As a result of the hard line stance taken in Tokyo and Osaka, many teachers have since been disciplined, fined, suspended, or reassigned to schools that require a longer commute.

It is ironic that in pushing this agenda through the school system, the LDP politicians and their network of supporting groups are in fact going

against the expressed will of the Emperor, the very person who constitutes the *raison d'être* of the entire “restoration” enterprise. In 2004, when questioned by a member of the Tokyo Education Committee about the use of the flag and anthem in the schools, Emperor Akihito responded that it was preferable for it not to be a forced activity. As we have seen, however, neonationalists have continued to pursue a policy of coercion in public schools in spite of their expressed devotion to the Emperor. It is not just the issue of patriotic education that reveals the growing gap between the far right of the LDP and the Imperial Household. Emperor Hirohito’s own actions—avoidance of Yasukuni Shrine visits since the enshrinement of class A war criminals in 1978—and recent public statements by both Emperor Akihito and Crown Prince Naruhito, indicate both are concerned to remember the wartime suffering of Japan’s neighbors and share and a deep appreciation for the “Peace Constitution,” which puts them at odds with the larger neonationalistic agenda of Prime Minister Abe and his revisionist supporters. Sooner or later, this divide will have to be addressed.

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: POST-3.11 DEVELOPMENTS

The unprecedented triple disaster of 2011—earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident—shocked the nation and overwhelmed the leadership of the governing Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The DPJ was already in trouble, but the scale of this disaster and inadequate responses by the national government paved the way for the return of the LDP. After the three-year hiatus under the leadership of three successive DPJ Prime Ministers, the LDP made a comeback in December 2012, and Abe Shinzō began his second tenure as Prime Minister. Although his initial focus has been on revitalizing the Japanese economy, it was clear from the beginning that there was more to his agenda than “Abenomics.” Abe quickly renewed the

call for revision of the Constitution. As noted in many speeches, his homepage, and in his popular Utsukushii kuni e, he believes that Japan’s true independence and escape from the postwar regime will only be achieved when the postwar Constitution is revised (2006, pp. 28-29).

While revision of Article 9—the central pillar of the “peace Constitution”—is one key goal of Abe and his supporters, there are a number of proposed revisions recommended by the Liberal Democratic Party, which are a cause of serious concern for the leaders of a wide-range of religious groups. As we have seen, protest against the government’s initiatives for patriotic education was largely limited to the shrinking secular left, members of the Teachers’ Union, and a few religious minorities; opposition to the proposed revisions to the Constitution, however, will undoubtedly face more serious resistance. Given the impact of legalization of the flag and anthem in 1999 and the revision of the Fundamental Education Law in 2006, many more religious groups are troubled by the LDP’s proposed revision of Articles 20 and 89, which in their current form clearly define the separation of religion and state and protect religious freedom. The proposed changes in the current articles would have serious implications for the status and treatment of the controversial Yasukuni Shrine.

In its current form, Article 20 of the Constitution of Japan (1947) prohibits any state support, promotion, or coercion with respect to religious education or activities:

Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority.

No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice.

The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious



activity.

The draft proposal by the LDP suggests an additional phrase of qualification, that is, prohibiting any state support for religious activities that transcend “social ritual or custom” (*shakaiteki girei mata wa shūzokuteki kōi no han'i o koeru*). The language used here would clearly allow for some ritual activity in educational institutions redefined as a “social custom,” which approximates the strategy used by the government in relation to State Shintō until 1945. The same clause added to Article 89, which currently prohibits public funds being expended on or for religious institutions, would allow public money to be used in support of activities redefined as social ritual or customary practices.

Buddhist scholar and activist Hishiki Masaharu points out that the educational goal of nurturing “tolerance” in students will inevitably be subverted if things designated as “customs” are no longer subject to the constitutional principle of separation. It will create conditions that will allow “intolerance” to masquerade as “tolerance,” but coercion will become the new reality (2007, p. 62). If the revised law is ever approved, he explains, it will likely be used to identify such activities as *jichinsai* (land purification ceremony), as well as Yasukuni *sanpai* (official visits to the Shrine) as “customs” and outside of the application of the separation principle. Hishiki argues that if the ambiguous notion of religion embedded in this proposed revision is accepted, it will give the state the power to control the people, and the rights normally accorded to individuals—the right not to participate—will disappear (2007, pp. 64-65).

The Japanese Bishops in the Catholic Church are similarly concerned that this redefinition would provide a legal basis to again require children and teachers at schools, as well as employees at government institutions (*kōmuin*), to participate in *jinja sanpai* as a part of their

official duties. Tani Daiji, the former Bishop of Saitama, argues that the LDP proposal is reintroducing the notion of “nonreligious Shintō,” which will lead to a situation in which coercion replaces freedom of conscience. He recalls that during the war shrine visits were redefined as a “nonreligious” civic duty, a duty required of Japanese as well as the colonized peoples in Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan. Tani fears that shrine visits (*sanpai*) could again be treated like other official ceremonies at school events, which require standing before the Hinomaru flag and singing the national anthem, but students could be forced to participate regardless of conscience or personal religious commitment. Tani maintains that by redefining something as a “social ritual” or “custom” will allow religious activity and education to go on in public institutions. He also suggests that this revised article would be used to legitimize and legalize official visits (*kōshiki sanpai*) to Yasukuni Shrine—recategorized as a “social ritual” (*shakaiteki girei*) or “national ritual” (*kokuminteki girei*)—which is a strategy designed to eliminate lawsuits and legal conflict over visits to the shrine by the prime minister and other government officials (2007, pp. 20-25).

## CONCLUSION

Given the pluralistic nature of postwar Japanese society, it is not surprising the range of neonationalistic initiatives promoted by Shinseiren, Nippon Kaigi, and LDP leaders have been widely contested by many intellectuals, the teachers’ union, and a variety of religious leaders and groups. In the wake of the 1995 Aum incident, we observed a serious concern for protection from deviant new religions. Over the course of two decades, we have seen this evolve into a concern for protection from coercion in public institutions and forced participation in a revitalized civil religion. There is clearly a clash between those who recognize individual rights and freedoms

as fundamental to civil society and those who regard the rights of the individual to be secondary and subservient to the needs of the nation or group. In light of the impact of post-disaster legislation on the school system nationwide, one can appreciate the concerns of religious minorities and others who fear an expansion of coercion as political leaders and groups—guided by their essentialist understanding of Shintō and Japanese identity—seek to reshape public institutions.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the early history of this organization, see Shintō Seiji Renmei, ed. (1984). Information on current activities may be gleaned from its monthly magazine, *Kokoro*, and [website](#). For more detailed analysis of its membership and political agenda, see John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (2010, especially chapter 6), and Mullins (2012; 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Here I am paraphrasing the information widely available in Nippon Kaigi publications and on the official homepage. The membership figures are drawn from [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> For figures on Shinseiren membership and the Abe Cabinet, see "The Abe Cabinet: An Ideological Breakdown," 28 January 2013, prepared by the Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21 [Kodomo to Kyōkasho Zenkoku Netto 21], an NGO organized in 1998 to critically

engage the revisionist textbook movement (translated by Matthew Penny). This is available on both the [NGO homepage](#) and the [Japan Focus site](#); for recent figures on Shinseiren and an overview of how representative religious groups line-up in relation to Abe's political agenda, see "Abe Teikoku Shūkyō," *Shūkan Asahi* 11 April 2014, 21. The Shinseiren membership in Abe's current Cabinet for 2015 is based on data provided by [the Shinseiren site](#) and [the official government site](#).

<sup>4</sup> For the original Japanese record of Prime Minister Obuchi's explanation on 29 June 1999 see [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> There are a number of accounts and collections of documents regarding the lawsuit; see, for example, [Ryōshinteki 'Hinomaru-Kimigayo' Kyōhi](#), eds. (2004), the accounts and explanations by Okada (2007; 2013), one of the few Christian school teachers involved in this legal action, and the homepage of the support group for the teachers involved in the legal action.

<sup>6</sup> This comparison with the fumie ritual is also reported by Isomura Kentarō (*Asahi Shimbun*, 8 August 2009) with reference to the words of Kishida Shizue, a music teacher supported by the Anglican Church in her legal struggle against the Tokyo School Board.

<sup>7</sup> The initial debate between Ishii and Abe can be [viewed on Youtube](#). The Communist Party also produced some critical written statements about this DVD; see the article "[Shinryaku seitōka e 'sennō': Monbushō saiyō no 'Yasukuni DVD,'](#)" 18 May 2007 *Shinbun Akahata* (accessed 8-30-2011).

<sup>8</sup> In fact, six of the fourteen local representatives who were initially responsible for submitting this proposed ordinance belong to the Nippon Kaigi ("Japan Conference"), the neonationalist group organized in 1996, which also actively supports the renationalization of Yasukuni Shrine and revision of the Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> [Tweet](#) posted on 19 May 2011.

<sup>10</sup> The original Japanese is "Yahari, kyōsei ni naru to iu koto de nai koto ga nozomashii;" reported in the *Asahi Shinbun*, 28 October 2004. A spokesperson of the Imperial Household Agency commented later that he thought the Emperor was trying to say that "[it would be best if the flag was raised and the anthem sung spontaneously or voluntarily](#)".

<sup>11</sup> For example, see the [Emperor's 2015 New Year address](#).

<sup>12</sup> The latest version of the LDP proposal for Constitutional revision is available online at the [LDP home page](#).