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# Towards a Beautiful Japan: Right-Wing Religious Nationalism in Japan's LDP

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## **Towards a Beautiful Japan**

Right-Wing Religious Nationalism in Japan's LDP

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April 24, 2018

## Introduction

Coverage of Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's religious nationalist ties – largely focusing on the group known as Japan Conference (*Nippon Kaigi*) – has frequently taken a sensationalist tone. “The Religious Cult Secretly Running Japan,” blares a *Daily Beast* headline from 2016.<sup>1</sup> “Japan Reverts to Fascism,” warns *The National Review*.<sup>2</sup> “A Racist, Patriarchal Dream,” says *Jacobin*.<sup>3</sup> “The Return of Japan's Imperialists,” announces *France24*.<sup>4</sup> Little research has been done in the English language to counter, or even complicate these claims. Within Japan, although religious nationalist groups have existed for decades, they have generally faced little press coverage. Only in rare instances, for instance, when Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro claimed in a speech before the Shintō political group that Japan was a “sacred country centered around the Emperor,” have these groups been noticed by the media. However, the scandal surrounding the below-market-value sale of public land to a nationalist school run by a former member of Nippon Kaigi has led to a “Nippon Kaigi boom,” with the publishing of reams of books claiming to reveal the secrets of the “massive right-wing organization behind Abe,” or warning of “a return to pre-war times.”<sup>5</sup> Nippon Kaigi on the other hand, calls itself a grassroots group of moderate conservative patriots with no special influence or religious character<sup>6</sup> – and a

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<sup>1</sup> Adelstein, Jake, and Mari Yamamoto. “The Religious Cult Secretly Running Japan.” *The Daily Beast*, The Daily Beast Company, 10 July 2016, [www.thedailybeast.com/the-religious-cult-secretly-running-japan](http://www.thedailybeast.com/the-religious-cult-secretly-running-japan).

<sup>2</sup> Gelernter, Josh. “Japan Reverts to Fascism.” *National Review*, 18 July 2016, [www.nationalreview.com/2016/07/japans-new-fascism/](http://www.nationalreview.com/2016/07/japans-new-fascism/).

<sup>3</sup> Torio, Lisa. “Abe's Japan Is a Racist, Patriarchal Dream.” *Jacobin*, 28 Mar. 2017, [www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/abe-nippon-kaigi-japan-far-right](http://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/abe-nippon-kaigi-japan-far-right).

<sup>4</sup> Giomataris, Ophélie. “The Return of Japan's Imperialists.” *France 24*, 1 Mar. 2017, [www.france24.com/en/20170301-japan-nationalists-emporer-nippon-kaigi-japan-conference](http://www.france24.com/en/20170301-japan-nationalists-emporer-nippon-kaigi-japan-conference).

<sup>5</sup> Yamazaki, Masahiro, *Nippon Kaigi: Senzen Kaiki e no Jōnen*. Tokyo, Shueisha Shinsho, 2016

<sup>6</sup> Yamamura, Akiyoshi. *Nihon wo Dame ni Suru Riberaru no Shōtai*. Business-sha. 2017 and interview by author 7 July 2017

glance at the Japanese anonymous Internet would suggest that the historical revisionism and social conservatism trumpeted by the groups are commonly held positions.

But, cutting through the spin and looking at hard data, what is the actual political role played by Nippon Kaigi, its front groups, and the religious groups associated with it revealed to be? What are their ideological principles and from where do these principles stem? What are their policy priorities? To what extent do they influence policy making within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and within Japanese politics in general? Is the policy agenda they represent likely to be enacted, in full or in part, and is this agenda popular among the general public? To answer this question, I closely analyzed the policy positions of the Abe LDP and Japanese religious nationalists, drew from a wide array of public opinion polling data, and traveled to Japan to interview leadership of the LDP, Nippon Kaigi, and the religious groups that support them.<sup>7,8</sup>

The picture revealed is far more ambiguous than media coverage suggests. Many LDP politicians and especially members of the Abe Cabinet indeed hold close ties to conservative religious groups and rely on them as a base of support, and the policy platform advanced by the Abe LDP clearly reflects these ties. If the policy aims of these groups, many of which are being intensively propounded under Abe, are fully implemented, Japan would, abandoning the ideals of the post-war period, join the ranks of the so-called illiberal democracies. At the same time, membership in the new religions associated with Nippon Kaigi has continually declined in recent years, and the Shintō sphere is in an existential crisis of shrinking population and financial distress. Public opinion polls repeatedly suggest that most nationalist causes are somewhat unpopular –policies implemented in recent years have been forced through over intense public

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<sup>7</sup> All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership for funding this research.

opposition. Even the constitutional revision that is the key goal of right-wing groups in Japan is far from a sure thing. Right-wing religious nationalists play a role in the Abe coalition akin to certain special interest lobbyists in the United States – providing help to politicians aligned with their ideas in the form of policy proposals and intellectual ammunition, but the strength of this coalition is shaky to say the least. The LDP, let alone Japanese politics in general, could conceivably turn on a dime and leave these groups out in the cold.

### **The Ideology of Japan’s Religious Nationalists**

The groups I discuss in this thesis share similar ideologies and are religious to different degrees. Many are officially affiliated with each other. Other groups have no official connection but share overlapping membership or leadership. On a practical level, they all support the right wing of the LDP. Their intellectual leadership frequently appears in the right-wing media – such as the Internet network Japanese Culture Channel Sakura, the *Sankei Shinbun*, and magazines like *Seiron*, *WiLL*, and *Hamada*. For convenience I will refer to them collectively as “Nippon Kaigi” or as “right-wing religious nationalist groups.”

The ideology of Nippon Kaigi is often summarized as “reactionary” or “imperialist,” and connected to the system of “State Shintō” abolished by the Allied powers after World War II. These labels are not necessarily wrong, but they are far from precise. To properly understand the ideology of right-wing religious nationalists in Japan, it is necessary to understand the historical context in which their belief system exists.

Nippon Kaigi and, more generally, the nationalist clique surrounding Abe’s ideology derives from the religious ideology of pre-war Imperial Japan. The leadership of Nippon Kaigi is largely drawn from the leadership of Kyōha Shintō (known as Sect Shintō) new religions and

Shintō shrines.<sup>9</sup> These groups have widely differing beliefs, many of which are completely apolitical – but they hold in common a belief in the unique spiritual superiority of the Japanese people and the religious importance of the Emperor. This belief holds these groups together in a working relationship, drives much of their political activity, has its origin in what is now known as State Shintō.

A detailed description of the history and ideology of State Shintō, the nature of which is hotly contested, is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief summary is necessary to understand the basic principles of the religious nationalists in Japan today. Sophia University professor Shimazono Susumu, a leading authority on Japanese religion, defines State Shintō as a nationalist ideological system based on belief in the Emperor's (and by proxy the Japanese people's) descent from the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami. This heritage, known as *bansei-ikkei*, is posited as the source of the unique Japanese *kokutai*, a nebulous concept often translated literally as “national body.” The *kokutai* was seen as the spiritual and psychological basis of not only the Emperor and the Japanese state's sovereignty, but also the existence of the Japanese people as a nation. In order to preserve this *kokutai*, the rituals of Emperor worship, centered around the main Amaterasu shrine at Ise, must be placed at the center of state affairs, and all Japanese must participate. The *kokutai*, as the fundamental basis of the state, must not be compromised by any outside force or idea claiming to be superior.<sup>10</sup> Other scholars, generally members of the postwar Shintō establishment, limit the definition of State Shintō to mean the specific involvement of the pre-war Japanese state in Shintō shrines. This definition, however, is extremely lacking, as it fails to draw a significant ideological distinction between other forms of Ise-focused Emperor worship and that practiced in Shrine Shintō, focusing entirely on form

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>10</sup> Shimazono, Susumu. *Kokka Shintō to Nihonjin*, Iwanami Shinsho. 2010 57

rather than belief.<sup>11</sup> This paper uses the former, wider definition.

State Shintō began with the nationalist program of the *hanbatsu* oligarchs of Meiji Japan (1868-1912), who, using elements of traditional Shintō worship, ideas from the *kokugaku* school of thought, and influences from the West, built the new Japanese state around the idea of *saisei-itchi*, the concept that the political functioning of the state should be united with the spiritual functions of the emperor system. To this end, the Meiji government revolutionized Shrine Shintō, forcibly separating shrines from Buddhist influences, placing shrines under the direct control of the government, and directing shrine priests to teach a nationalist ideology (in what is known as the Great Promulgation Campaign). The authorities also utilized new religions (such as Kurozumikyō and Konkōkyō) that had sprung up during the turbulent late Edo period to spread the new ideology, co-opting these faiths, which were originally mostly based on a charismatic founder offering faith healing or other types of worldly salvation with a thin veneer of Buddhist or Shintō imagery, to fit the needs of the government.<sup>12</sup>

This campaign did not immediately succeed in replacing Buddhism as a sole religious creed in Japan, and indeed, from the end of the nineteenth century onward, the predominant government position was that Shintō was not a religion at all. Rather, as the core of the *kokutai*, it superseded the category of religion altogether. In this vein, the government placed Shintō in the center of the lives of Japanese citizens in ways that, although they might seem religious to Westerners, were not explicitly so. The most important of these were the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education and the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors, as well as the establishment of Yasukuni Shrine at the center of the national consciousness. The rescripts, especially the Rescript on Education, were venerated as holy objects and made “loyalty [to the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 86-90

<sup>12</sup> Hardacre, Helen. *Shintō And the State: 1868-1988*. Princeton University Press, 1991. 59

Emperor] ... into universal values that could not be questioned or subordinated to anything else.”<sup>13</sup> Yasukuni Shrine, similarly, coopted the old religious practice of venerating dead soldiers, regardless of whom or for what they were fighting, and became the national shrine for the deification of *eirei*, heroes who died for the Emperor. Yasukuni would become a central symbol of the state, hosting key events and even being inscribed on currency.

This ideology, however, should be distinguished from what Walter Skya calls “radical Shintō ultranationalism,” the ideology that dominated Japan immediately prior to and during World War II. The dominance of this ideology, influenced by thinkers like Minoda Muneki and Kakehi Katsuhiko, marked the shift from civilian, elite control of politics to a military dominated state – pushed forward by the so-called “government by assassination.” It entered the core of Japanese state ideology with the publication by the Education Ministry of *Kokutai no Hongi* (Cardinal Principles of the National Body) in 1937 and *Shinmin no Michi* (Path of Subjects). This ideology was a kind of *völkisch* fascism that endorsed unbridled expansionism and aggression.<sup>14</sup> Although mainstream right-wing religious nationalists, the ones in Abe’s camp, justify past expansionism and aggression and rely on ethnic chauvinist pride to support their ideas on a frequent basis, they have no desire for Japan to resume foreign expansion; and they are hesitant to emphasize *völkisch*, racialist ideas of the state, which threaten the political elite they are strongly tied to.

Japanese political scientist Kuno Osamu distinguished these ideologies by describing the Meiji period nationalism as a dichotomy between a presentation to the public of a carefully managed “exoteric” (*kenkyō*) ideology of Emperor worship and nationalism with an elite

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 121-123

<sup>14</sup> Skya, Walter. *Japan's Holy War: The Ideology of Radical Shintō Ultrnationalism*. Duke University Press, 2009.



consensus around an “esoteric” (*mikkyō*) ideology of Western-style nation building, science, and rule of law. According to Kuno, during the pre-war Showa period, the exoteric faith, having developed and expanded beyond the control of elites, overtook the esoteric faith and gained control of the country.<sup>15</sup> Nippon Kaigi desires a system more like the pre-Showa esoteric/exoteric system, rather than a fascist military dictatorship in the model of World War II Japan.

### **Post-War Right-Wing Activism and the Rise of Nippon Kaigi**

However, the aim of these groups is not merely a reactionary return to the political system of Meiji Japan. The postwar experience of these religious groups – particularly the religious group central to the founding of Nippon Kaigi, Seichō-No-Ie, is essential to understanding the ideology behind the Abe nationalists. Nippon Kaigi was formed in 1997 from the merger of two organizations, *Nippon wo Mamoru Kai* (the Committee to Protect Japan), made up of former Seicho-no-Ie followers and the leadership of Shintō shrines, and *Nippon wo Mamoru Kokumin Kaigi* (Citizens’ Meeting to Protect Japan), mostly made up of conservative business leaders and public intellectuals.<sup>16</sup> The goal of the group was to serve as a sort of clearing house for activism by conservative groups, which had up until that point coordinated their activities to a limited extent or not at all.

These groups’ political involvement stems from two major struggles– first, efforts by right-wing student groups to counter the large campus leftist movement in the 1960s, and second, the attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to restore various aspects of the Imperial cult, such as the National Foundation Day and the Imperial Era naming system for years. This second cause reflects a reactionary desire to restore the prewar system. However, the expressly anti-communist

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<sup>15</sup> Skya 133.

<sup>16</sup> Sonoda, Koji. *Nippon Kaigi and Grassroots Mobilization of Japan's Right Wing*. UJSP Occasional Papers, Harvard University. 2015

and anti-leftist tendency serves as a reaction to a postwar environment in which the Japanese left, now permitted to openly express its views and participate in elections, had gained considerable support. Millions had protested the US-Japan Security Treaty in 1960, and in the early 1970s, the Communist Party newspaper *Akahata* had over 6.5 million subscribers. A revolution bringing Japan into the Soviet Bloc was considered to be a real threat by the right wing. Nationalist religious groups found this threat to be especially terrifying, as the Japanese Communist Party and activist groups to its left, such as the *Zengakuren* and the *Chukakuha*, desired the abolition of the Emperor system.<sup>17</sup> In response to this, Taniguchi Masaharu, the founder of Seichō-no-Ie, who had been influential intellectually during the wartime years, created the *Nippon Seinen Kyogika* (Japan Young Mans' Conference, *Nisseikyo* for short) in 1970 out of student members who had succeeded during the previous years in expelling left wing protestors from Nagasaki University.<sup>18</sup> In 1972, Taniguchi founded *Nippon wo Mamoru Kai* with the cooperation of several other new religions.

Although not directly connected to Nippon Kaigi, the Unification Church of Reverend Sun-Myung Moon, which had found fertile ground in Japan for converts, also began intense anti-Communist activities during this period, and continues to ally with the LDP on conservative causes to this day.<sup>19</sup> Although Seicho-no-ie itself would distance itself from politics after the death of Taniguchi Masaharu, fundamentalists continued to carry Taniguchi's torch. *Nisseikyo* still exists and shares an office with Nippon Kaigi, and many of the most important figures on the hardline nationalist right in Abe's circle became active during this period.<sup>20</sup> The hardline

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<sup>17</sup> Yamazaki.

<sup>18</sup> Tawara, Yoshifumi. *Nippon Kaigi No Zenbo: Shirarezaru Kyodai Soshiki No Jittai*. Kadensha, 2016. 17

<sup>19</sup> Suzuki, Eito. "Tōitsu Kyōkai = Shōkyō Rengō -- Sono Uha Undō no Rekishi to Genzai" *Nihon no Ukeika Tettei Chōsa*. Ed. Tsukada Hotaka. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2017. 342-351. Print

<sup>20</sup> Nippon Kaigi head Kabashima Yuzo; Abe's closest parliamentary ally Eto Seichi; Meisei University Professor Takahashi Shiro; and Ito Tetsuo, head of the Japan Policy Institute, often called Abe's "brain." (Sonoda 29)

nationalist segment of Seicho-no-Ie no longer belongs to the group but continues to espouse Taniguchi Masaharu's nationalist philosophy. To this day, Nippon Kaigi members rail about the imminent threat of communism and the "Comintern" (despite the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943) to Japan.<sup>21,22,23</sup>

The fear of a leftist takeover cannot be understated and leads one to the deeper conspiratorial thinking of the groups in question. This conspiratorial strain cannot be underestimated. Members of Nippon Kaigi and associated religious groups, as well as officials in the LDP itself, emphasized this point frequently, one LDP official even pressing on me a book called *The Errors of Communism*, and these notions are a constant presence in the Japanese conservative media sphere. Japan is seen as constantly under attack by threats external and internal – and the threats do not merely pose a risk to Japan's security interests, but also the unique "spirit" (*seishin*) of the Japanese people. For instance, one conspiracy theory centers around the so-called "War Guilt Information Program," the idea, first propounded by literary critic Eto Jun, that the existence of pacifism and liberalism in Japan is the result of "brainwashing" by Allied censorship, and that the people of Japan are still psychologically enslaved by the United States.<sup>24</sup> A search on Sankei Shimbun's (a newspaper that is a center of conservative opinion and a key ally of Abe's) website for the term "WGIP" returns 63 hits since the year 2016.

### **Nippon Kaigi's Policy Goals**

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<sup>21</sup> Sugita, Mio. "'Hoikuen Ochita Nihon Shine' Ronsō wa Zentei ga Machigatteimasu. Nihon wo Otoshimetai Seiryoku no Shin no Nerai to wa..." *Sankei News.*, 4 July. 2016. Web. 27 Mar. 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Mizushima, Satoru, dir. *Sayoku No Honshitsu: Kyosanshugi Wa Shinda Ka*. Nippon Bunka Channel Sakura. Tokyo, 24 Feb. 2018. Web. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpR4wJivgPw>>.

<sup>23</sup> "Sekai No Shihaiso Wa Mina 'Comintern!'?" CGS Kawasoe Keiko/Sugita Mio: Joshi No Intelligence. 3 Dec. 2016. Channel Grand Strategy. Web. 29 Mar. 2018. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5w1ibuDQ8Y>>.

<sup>24</sup> Nogawa, Motokazu. "Rekishisen no Kessen Heiki, 'WGIP-ron' no Genzai ." *Nihon no Ukeika Tettei Chōsa*. Ed. Tsukada Hotaka. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2017. 256-275. Print.

Having outlined the ideological background of Nippon Kaigi, let us now summarize the policy aims of Japanese religious nationalists. On Nippon Kaigi's homepage, the organization defines its goals as follows:

- 1.) Moving the Japan of tomorrow towards its beautiful traditional character.
- 2.) A new Constitution suitable for a new era.
- 3.) A politics that protects the honor of the state and the lives of citizens.
- 4.) Building an education that nourishes "Japanese feeling"
- 5.) Increasing the nation's safety and contributing to the world's peace.
- 6.) In the spirit of co-prosperity, friendship with the world.

In the description of these goals on the website, it is apparent that these goals are synonymous with:

- 1.) Placing Shintō rituals, especially Emperor worship and Yasukuni Shrine, in a privileged position, as well as implementing socially conservative policies, such as opposition to feminism and gay rights.
- 2.) Constitutional revision
- 3.) Historical revisionism
- 4.) Removing liberal elements of the educational system (human rights, pacifism, and feminism)
- 5.) Strengthening the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and hawkish foreign policy<sup>25</sup>

All of these goals are currently important in Japanese religious nationalist activism, but we will focus on the issues of constitutional revision, historical revisionism, and education reform, as these are the issues on which the Abe Administration is working most actively.

The first and most obvious goal of religious nationalists is to amend the constitution. Revision of the Japanese Constitution has, at least in theory, been a key goal of the Japanese right wing since the ratification of the current constitution during the Occupation in 1947. The nature of the drafting of the constitution and its liberal, Western bent, led to its being labeled by the right as an invalid, forcibly imposed Constitution which ought to be replaced by an "independent constitution," or merely declared invalid and replaced by the old Meiji constitution from before the war. The importance that Japanese conservatives place on constitutional reform

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<sup>25</sup> "Nippon Kaigi ga Mezazu Mono" <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about/mokuteki>, retrieved 2 April 2018

however, stems not from an adherence to principles of constitutionalism and rule-of-law, but from a notion that a constitution is a symbol of the nation and important to the *kokutai*, a throwback to constitutional theories during the Meiji period. Revising the Constitution is frequently framed as part of *kunizukuri*, a word which literally means “nation building” but has its roots in the Shintō myth of Japan’s origin, in which the god Okuninushi builds the land of Japan and cedes it (*kuniyuzuri*) to the descendants of the sun goddess Amaterasu – the Japanese Imperial line. Nippon Kaigi policy chief and Japan Policy Research Center head Ito Tetsuo is unable to help revealing his views on the basic principles of popular sovereignty, and human rights in a pamphlet ostensibly meant to sell right-wing constitutional reform to the public:

“Certainly, from the standpoint of *tatema* [public stance as opposed to private thought], we do not deny the principle of popular sovereignty. However, we do not believe there is no room for debate on these principles. For instance, questions like what sovereignty is in the first place, whether the ‘people’ in the concept of popular sovereignty are the currently existing people, and whether the Emperor is one of the ‘people’... on the matter of human rights... we must ask whether human rights are really unlimited and how the state should limit them.”<sup>26</sup>

To examine the practical goals of Nippon Kaigi in constitutional revision, it will help to look at an example. The LDP outlined its ostensible plans for constitutional revision during its time in opposition in a 2012 draft constitution. The draft was a complete overhaul of the 1947 constitution. Notable changes in the draft include the establishment of a Japanese National Defense Army, the granting of emergency powers to the prime minister, the placement of the Emperor as head of state, and the comprehensive limiting of rights to those rights that “are not inconsistent with public interest and order,” while legislating obligations to go with the rights that already exist. This draft lines up neatly with the priorities espoused by Nippon Kaigi and the Shintō Seiji Renmei (the Association of Shintō Shrines’ political wing). The preamble seems

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<sup>26</sup> Tetsuo et. al, *Kore ga Wareraga Kenpo Kaisei Teian da*, 2017. p.190

ripped directly from the Nippon Kaigi homepage, extolling Japan as a country that “receives an Emperor [from the gods]” and has “pride in country and hometown,” and establishes the Constitution as a means of protecting the “good traditions” of Japan.<sup>27</sup> This restriction of rights in favor of tradition reflects the concerns held by Nippon Kaigi about “excessive rights-consciousness.” However, in the last year, the focus of efforts to revise the constitution has shifted specifically to the pacifist Article 9. Believing the idea of removing the pacifist elements of the Article to be a non-starter, Abe has proposed leaving them alone, while adding an additional clause to clarify the legality of the Self-Defense Forces.

The second goal of religious nationalists is to change Japan’s educational system from the postwar, liberal-leaning system into a patriotic education system. Nationalists blame a myriad of Japan’s problem on the educational system and the Japan Teachers Union (*Nikkyōso*). A report based on a trip taken in 2005 by six Nippon Kaigi-affiliated Diet Members to England with the goal of copying Margaret Thatcher’s educational reforms provides a window into the way of thinking in question.<sup>28</sup> (It has also been suggested that this trip shaped the educational policy adopted by the LDP in later years.<sup>29</sup>) The group identified the problems of the pre-Thatcher education as, first, being “student-centered,” leading to a fall in academic performance and the creation of an “irresponsible society of people who must rely on others,”<sup>30</sup> as well as being “masochistic” in referring to the past misdeeds of the British Empire. This education, they said, results in students who cannot “have enough pride to rebuild their country.”<sup>31</sup>

The report comes to several conclusions on the desirable steps to be taken in education. It

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<sup>27</sup> Liberal Democratic Party, “Nihon-koku Kenpo Kaisei Soan,” 2012.  
[https://jimin.ncss.nifty.com/pdf/news/policy/130250\\_1.pdf](https://jimin.ncss.nifty.com/pdf/news/policy/130250_1.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Eikoku Kyoiku Chosadan, and Terumasa Nakanishi. *Thatcher Kaikaku Ni Manabu: Kyoiku Seijoka He No Michi*. PHP Kenkyujo, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Tawara. 58

<sup>30</sup> Chosadan 24-27

<sup>31</sup> Chosadan 80

proposes completely overhauling the textbook approval system to ban “masochistic” textbooks, adding patriotism as a required theme in textbooks, enforcing rigid centralized standards for schools and grading teachers based on these standards, and reintroducing religion into the educational system with the goal of strengthening family structures.

The third goal, somewhat related to the second, is historical revisionism. Nippon Kaigi is extremely active in this arena. The position of Japanese religious nationalists is that World War II (the Greater East Asia War, in their parlance) was a righteous quest of liberation by the Japanese against the Western colonial powers. Japan’s attack on China and later on the United States were in self-defense, and Japanese soldiers behaved honorably. The Tokyo War Crime Trials of 1946 were “victor’s history” and claims by Asian countries of cruelty by Japanese soldiers are propaganda with no basis in fact. If any of the claims turn out to be true – well, whatever happened was acceptable by the standards of the time. The historical consensus about Japan’s actions during World War II is a form of “masochistic history” according to nationalists and is responsible for many of the problems in Japanese society.

Ultimately, the nationalist approach to history is not about a precise accounting of reality. It is, in their words, based on “feeling rather than logic.”<sup>32</sup> The idea that the noble Japanese army and Japanese people committed crimes is untrue because it is ideologically unacceptable. Religious nationalists want to replace the generally accepted narrative of the war with their own interpretation, not only in the Japanese education system, but in international discourse as well. To this end, they want the Japanese government to revoke its apologies for World War II atrocities (specifically the 1995 Maruyama Statement and 1993 Kono Statement). In practice, Nippon Kaigi actively challenges narratives about the Nanking Massacre and comfort women –

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<sup>32</sup> *Seiron SP Vol. 2: Tenno to no Kizuna ga Jikkan Dekiru 100 no Shiza*. 25 May 2017: 191. Print.

targeting China and Korea, while generally refraining from taking action on gaps in historical awareness with the United States.

As part of its revisionist project, Nippon Kaigi also endorses official visits by the Prime Minister to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. As the head of the Shintō Shrine Association and the Chief Priest of Yasukuni both sit on the board of Nippon Kaigi, this is unsurprising. Religious institutions, in Japan and globally, as a rule, desire state support through tax benefits and the like, but Shintō is unique within Japan in attempting to secure direct state financial support for its activities, in a return to the pre-war model. The former is not seriously controversial in Japan and is thus a weak incentive to support particular politicians, but the latter is stronger.

Nippon Kaigi attempts to fulfill these goals through several methods. The group has undertaken many ostensibly “grassroots” efforts to push its goals. Nippon Kaigi activists frequently tour Japan giving lectures and occasionally giving public speeches from propaganda trucks.<sup>33</sup> Notably, a Nippon Kaigi affiliate group, the Citizens' Association for Creating a Constitution for a Beautiful Japan, conducted a petition drive aimed at amending the Japanese Constitution, collecting 10 million signatures after three years of effort. The number of valid signatures is unclear, but all reports show that the primary means of collecting signatures was through Shintō shrines, who were required by the Association of Shintō Shrines to collect signatures. Despite this, Abe’s renewed commitment to develop a concrete proposal for revision in the near future appears to have stalled the petition collection.<sup>34</sup>

Nippon Kaigi and its associated organizations and activists also make efforts independent of the LDP to advance historical revisionism, publishing a truly astonishing array of books and

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<sup>33</sup> The religious nationalists discussed in this paper should not, however, be confused with the *uyoku dantai* right-wing groups frequently seen in Japan’s public spaces

<sup>34</sup> A visit to multiple shrines in Tokyo during New Year 2018 found no signatures being collected.



articles with a revisionist bent, as well as a history textbook which was adopted by the major cities of Yokohama and Osaka.<sup>35</sup> They also make legal efforts to silence speech both within and outside of Japan regarding the Nanjing Massacre and the “comfort women” who were forced into prostitution and sexual slavery during the war. These cases, including a suit against the city of Glendale, California for erecting a statue of comfort women<sup>36</sup> (the Japanese government even filed an amicus curiae brief supporting the revisionists)<sup>37</sup> and multiple lawsuits against the *Asahi Shimbun* for coverage of the Nanjing Massacre and comfort women – have had no successes.

Despite Nippon Kaigi’s self-assessment of itself as a grassroots group, the primary influence of right-wing religious nationalists in Japan is through its personal lobbying connections to politicians, and to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in particular. Nippon Kaigi primarily lobbies Diet members through parliamentary associations called *giin renmei*. There are dozens of *giin renmei*, but multiple sources confirmed that Nippon Kaigi’s is one of the most active, holding study sessions and discussion groups for parliamentarians. In addition to its own umbrella group, the Nippon Kaigi Diet Members’ Roundtable (*Nippon Kaigi Giin Kondankai*), Nippon Kaigi maintains orbiting groups focused on single issues. The Shintō Shrine Association also maintains its own active *giin renmei* aligned with Nippon Kaigi’s.

### **Japanese Public Opinion on Nationalist Policies**

The efforts of religious nationalists to influence public policy in Japan face a major problem, however: the policy goals pursued by religious nationalist groups are, at least according to popular opinion polls, unpopular among the public. In regard to every religious nationalist

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<sup>35</sup> Not the controversial and barely used *Tsukuru-kai* textbook, as is commonly believed, rather, a textbook published through the Sankei publisher Ikuhoshia designed by a group called the Organization for Reviving Japan’s Education (*Nihon Kyoiku Saisei Kiko*). This group is led by Yagi Hidetsugu, a professor at the right-wing Reitaku University who is associated with Nippon Kaigi.

<sup>36</sup> Michiko Gingery Et. Al V. City of Glendale. D.C. No. 2:14-cv-01291-PA-AJW. United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. 4 Aug. 2016. *FDSys*. U.S. Government Publishing Office, n.d. Web. 4 Apr. 2018.

<sup>37</sup> <http://gahtjp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Mera-Amicus-Brief.pdf>

policy goal, polling shows either ambivalence or opposition. Nippon Kaigi's socially conservative and religious views are intensely opposed, while their nationalistic foreign policy goals are either opposed by a majority of the public or split the public down the middle.

To begin with, Japanese people do not regard themselves as very religious. A 2009 Gallup poll found only that 29 percent of Japanese claim that religion is an important part of their daily lives.<sup>38</sup> The Japanese word for religion *shūkyō*, is often considered by Japanese people not to include beliefs like Shintō, however, so this poll definitely understates the prevalence of religious belief. NHK polls the Japanese public every five years about various issues of "Japanese consciousness,"<sup>39</sup> and results showed that in 2013, just 32 percent of respondents believed in the power of the Buddha, while only 40 percent believed in the Shintō *kami* (overlapping answers were possible). However, spirituality and magical thinking were not absent from the public consciousness. Concepts like fortune-telling, charms, and miracles were also included in the poll, and only 25 percent of respondents answered negatively to belief in any spiritual concepts.

All of this is not to suggest that the Japanese public is rigidly anti-nationalist. The NHK poll on public consciousness shows the following results for questions about nationalism:

	1983	1993	2003	2013
Do you agree with the following:				
Japanese people, when compared with other nationalities, have an extremely superior character.	71%	57%	51%	68%
Japan is a first-class country	57%	49%	36%	54%

<sup>38</sup> <http://news.gallup.com/poll/142727/religiosity-highest-world-poorest-nations.aspx>

<sup>39</sup> Daikyukai 'Nihonjin no ishiki' chosa (2013), NHK, <https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/summary/yoron/social/pdf/140520.pdf>

The data show a mild resurgence of nationalistic thought in Japan from lows in the 1990s and 2000s to levels similar to that of the 1980s. This resurgence has been linked to poor relations with Japan's neighbors China and Korea. In recent years, Japanese government statistics have shown public sentiment towards these countries reaching deep lows (see Figure 1). The public is not very receptive to complaints by neighbors of past aggression. Although a poll in 2006 showed most respondents believing that Japan's invasion of China was an act of aggression, and an *Asahi* poll from 2015 shows 60 percent of respondents supporting the 1995 Murayama Statement apologizing for past colonialism and aggression<sup>40</sup>, a 2015 *Yomiuri Shimbun* poll shows 81 percent of respondents believing that Japan has already apologized enough for World War II.<sup>41</sup> Polling in 2018 about Korean disapproval of the 2015 agreement on comfort women found 85 percent of respondents "not understanding" the Korean position and opposing compromise.<sup>42</sup> This may be taken to suggest that public sentiment in Japan would be receptive to conservative policies that emphasize the superiority of the Japanese people and ignore the concerns of East Asian neighbors, like historical revisionism and constitutional amendment.

However, it is apparent that the public is hesitant when faced with the idea of implementing these ideas in ways that would harm foreign relations or place Japanese soldiers at risk. Indeed, in the same government polling mentioned above, 77 percent of respondents considered improving relations with China "important" in 2017; 40 percent of those calling it "quite important," while 70 percent considered improving relations with South Korea important. Practically, this appears in the general hesitance to endorse visits to Yasukuni Shrine, with polls

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<sup>40</sup> <http://mansfieldfdn.org/program/research-education-and-communication/asian-opinion-poll-database/asahi-shinbun-regular-public-opinion-poll-02172015/>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/feature/opinion/koumoku/20150226-OYT8T50104.html>

<sup>42</sup> JNN, January 2018

in both 2004 and 2014 showing the public divided, with roughly 40 percent on each side of the question,<sup>43,44</sup> and most wanting Class A war criminals to be removed from the shrine.

Hawkish policies are unpopular among the Japanese public. The Abe administration's change in the interpretation of the Constitution to include "collective self-defense" was done amid the opposition of the majority of the population, with a *Kyodo News* poll showing 84 percent believing the move was done without significant explanation, and 60 percent opposing it outright.<sup>45</sup> In 2015, the government passed legislation through the Diet based on this interpretation, despite facing massive protests in the capital. Another *Kyodo News* poll, taken before the passing of the legislation showed the same roughly sixty percent of the population opposing the legislation.<sup>46</sup> The approval rating of the administration also dropped heavily. After the legislation was passed, however, the disapproval did appear to wane somewhat, with a TV *Asahi* poll showing 34 percent in favor, 43 percent opposed, with 23 percent unsure.<sup>47</sup> In 2017, a *Yomiuri Shinbun* poll (with an admittedly leading poll question) showed 56 percent in favor of collective self defense with 41 percent against.<sup>48</sup>

Revision of Article 9, too, is opposed by the public. NHK polling in 2017 found that, although 43 percent of respondents wished to revise the Constitution in general, 57 percent opposed revising Article 9. Eighty-two percent believed that Article 9 contributed to Japan's safety and peace.<sup>49</sup> Views on the addition of the Self-Defense Forces to Article 9 while preserving the pacifist elements are more ambiguous, with NHK polling in March 2018 showing

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.asahi.com/special/shijiritsu/TKY200404190343.html>

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXNASFS26023\\_W4A120C1PE8000/](https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXNASFS26023_W4A120C1PE8000/)

<sup>45</sup> Richards, Clint. "Polls Give Abe a Bump, But Not on Collective Self-Defense." *The Diplomat*. The Diplomat, 05 Aug. 2014. <<https://thediplomat.com/2014/08/polls-give-abe-a-bump-but-not-on-collective-self-defense/>>.

<sup>46</sup> *Kyodo News*, "Anpo Hosei wa Kenpo Ihan no Kaito ga 57% ni mo, *Kyodo Tsushin Yoron Chosa*." *J-CAST*, 22 June 2015, <<https://www.j-cast.com/2015/06/22238323.html>>

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst\\_archive/poll/201603/index.html](http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst_archive/poll/201603/index.html)

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/feature/opinion/koumoku/20170501-OYT8T50009.html>

<sup>49</sup> NHK, "Yoron Chosa: Nihonjin to Kenpo 2017" <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/special/kenpou70/yoron2017.html>

36 percent in favor and 23 percent opposed,<sup>50</sup> while TV Asahi polling in January 2018 showed 52 percent in favor and 34 percent opposed.<sup>51</sup>

On social issues, as well as foreign policy, public opinion does not favor religious nationalists. When it comes to feminism and gay rights, Japan has moved in a decidedly liberal direction. According to the NHK consciousness poll, the belief that a woman with children should be able to continue working has gone from being held by a mere 20 percent of respondents in 1973 and 45 percent in 1993 to a full 53 percent in 2013, and the belief that married women should not work is held by a mere 10 percent. A February 2018 government poll found 40 percent of respondents supportive of allowing women to keep their last names when marrying with only 20 percent opposed.<sup>52</sup> Nippon Kaigi considers this an important area of their activism. A 2015 poll by researchers<sup>53</sup> found 51 percent of respondents in favor of gay marriage.

Although public opinion is either ambiguous or opposed to most of Nippon Kaigi's policy, the strength of this opposition is debatable. A Mainichi Shimbun poll before the House of Councillors election in 2016, during which opposition parties emphasized the danger of constitutional revision in their campaign, showed only 22 percent of non-Abe-supporters polled considering constitutional revision the most important issue, tied for first with pensions. Among Abe supporters, only 8 percent considered constitutional revision particularly important.<sup>54</sup> This implies that neither Abe's base of popular support nor his opponents consider the same issues important that Nippon Kaigi does. A poll before the 2017 snap elections once again found limited interest in both constitutional revision and the JSDF as opposed to economic issues, with 11

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.nhk.or.jp/senkyo/shijiritsu/>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/201801/index.html>

<sup>52</sup> Jiji Press, "Fufu bessei yonin, 4waricho ni zoka: Kibosha wa shosu – naikakufu chosa", 10 February 2018

<sup>53</sup> Kamano, Saori, et. al. "Seiteki Minority Ni Tsuite No Ishiki -- 2015nen Zenkoku Chosa Houkokusho." *Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research -- Building Japan Queer Studies Research Group*, June 2016.

<sup>54</sup> <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20160530/k00/00m/010/039000c>

percent of voters saying they were concerned about the Constitution, and 7 percent being concerned most about collective self-defense.<sup>55</sup> It is possible that, especially in the context of a fractured political opposition, the LDP is not concerned about how unpopular these policies are. The only factor that appears to rein in LDP nationalism is foreign opposition. It is foreign pressure, especially from the United States, that has forced the administration to begrudgingly maintain the Kono and Murayama Statement and enabled the (beleaguered) 2015 agreement on the comfort women issue. Given Japan's complete dependence on American security support, this is unsurprising.

### **Nationalist Policy Initiatives of the Abe LDP**

Despite this, the influence that religious nationalists have on LDP policy making is indisputable. The Nippon Kaigi Diet Member Roundtable had 281 members as of 2016, 247 of whom were LDP members. This makes up roughly 60 percent of LDP Diet members, and 40 percent of all Diet members. In Prime Minister Abe's 2017 Cabinet, 75 percent of cabinet ministers and 67 percent of all cabinet members (including advisors, vice-ministers, etc. ) belonged to Nippon Kaigi, while a whopping nineteen out of twenty, 95 percent of cabinet ministers belonged to the Shintō Diet Members' association, only excepting the Transport Minister, who is a member of the Buddhist Komeito Party, a coalition partner of the LDP's.<sup>56</sup> In the latest cabinet shuffle as well, despite being portrayed by the media as a concession to the moderate wing of the LDP, the same 70 percent of cabinet ministers belonged to Nippon Kaigi.

Both the first Abe Administration in 2006-2007 and the second which began in 2012 have pursued policy directives coming from Nippon Kaigi. In 2006 (one year after the Nippon Kaigi trip to England), the Abe administration, in one of its first acts, pushed through a conservative

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<sup>55</sup> Mainichi Shinbun, "Shohi zozai 'hantai' 44% Nenkin/Iryo Jushi ga Saita. Mainichi Shinbun Chosa", 16 Oct 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21

revision of the Fundamental Law on Education, deleting the idea that education should encourage constitutional values of individualism and adding “love for country and homeland,” “moral education,” “respect for tradition,” “general religious knowledge,” and a “correct view of history” as goals of the education system.<sup>57</sup> The drafting of the new law appears to have originated in a proposal by the “Association to Demand a New Fundamental Law on Education,” whose executive director was Takahashi Shiro, policy committee member of Nippon Kaigi.<sup>58</sup>

Regarding historical issues, the Abe administration has followed a relentlessly revisionist line. Abe inaugurated his brief first administration by causing a fracas over the so-called ‘comfort women’ utilized by Japan’s army during World War II, claiming that there was no evidence that women were coerced. In the end, the hubbub forced Abe to apologize for his remarks. He chose to deliver this apology to President George W. Bush rather than to the Korean government.<sup>59</sup>

Back in power in 2012 after the LDP’s legislative victory, Abe and his government quickly returned to making revisionist moves, with the Prime Minister visiting Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013 (although, amid scolding from neighbors and allies, he has not visited since, sending donations or cabinet members instead), approving revisionist textbooks, and establishing committees to reconsider past apologies.

Most importantly, the Abe administration appears to be receiving its marching orders on its current core policy, constitutional revision, from Nippon Kaigi. The current plan to maintain both sections of Article 9 while adding the Self-Defense Forces in a third section is a novel

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<sup>57</sup> McNeill, David, and Adam Lebowitz. "Hammering down the educational nail: Abe revises the Fundamental Law of Education." *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 5.7 (2007).

<sup>58</sup> Ouchi, Hirokazu. "Kyoiku Kihon-ho 'kaitei' to sono go." *Nihon no Ukeika Tettei Chōsa*. Ed. Tsukada Hotaka. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2017. Print. 148-167 155.

<sup>59</sup> McGregor, Richard. *Asia's Reckoning: China, Japan, and the Fate of U.S. Power in the Pacific Century*. NY, NY: Viking, 2017. Print.

proposal, which appears nowhere until its publication in the Nippon Kaigi-affiliated Japan Policy Research Center's public proposal in 2016. Abe suddenly announced this new direction for constitutional revision to a meeting of the Citizens' Association for Creating a Constitution for a Beautiful Japan, mentioned above, in 2017 and has set about convincing his party that a shift away from the proposed deletion of the clause that renounces military power is a good idea. Nippon Kaigi has played a key role in this process, dedicating a meeting of its *giin renmei* in February 2018 to convincing parliamentarians that "deleting [the no-military clause] is a fair argument but unrealistic."<sup>60</sup>

The overlap in LDP policy and Nippon Kaigi's priorities is not absolute, of course. The LDP liberal wing still exists, although Koichi Kato's failed takeover attempt in 2000 and the failure of the Fukuda administration has made it smaller than it has ever been; there is spirited debate within the party on many issues. Proposals in support of socially liberal policies like civil partnerships and local voting rights for foreign permanent residents are raised within the LDP, although they are no longer adopted. On foreign policy, as well, the Abe administration has frequently shown restraint. The 2015 war anniversary statement, although lukewarm about war crimes, was far from the revisionist screed feared, in 2017 no cabinet members visited Yasukuni Shrine, and despite being urged by the right-wing media to not attend in response to continued South Korean complaints over the comfort women issue, Abe attended the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea.

One might raise the possibility that this apparent influence by Nippon Kaigi on LDP policy is really the reverse, a situation in which Nippon Kaigi and other right-wing groups are mobilized to support the LDP's policy decisions. This claim was made to the author by a high-

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<sup>60</sup> "Nippon Kaigi Kokkai Giin Kondankai no Benkyokai De Orita Kunio Motokusho '9-jo 2-ko Sakujo wa Seiron da ga Genzai no Seiji Jōsei de wa Higenjitsuteki.'" *Sankei Shimbun*. Sankei Shimbun Co., 27 Feb. 2018. Web.



ranking official in the LDP.<sup>61</sup> There *is* most likely a give and take on many issues, but the high emphasis put by Nippon Kaigi on mustering support within the LDP for conservative causes and the perfunctory nature of much of the “grassroots” conservative activism suggests that influence on policy is largely exercised by Nippon Kaigi on the LDP. There is a large, ostensibly independent, albeit deeply politically connected group of public intellectuals connected to Nippon Kaigi publishing ideas in the conservative media constantly, and it seems unlikely they are receiving direction on their proposals from politicians.

### **Religious Nationalists as an Electoral Base?**

The question left unanswered then, is *why* does Nippon Kaigi hold influence over the LDP, to the extent of encouraging the party to pursue unpopular policy priorities? The most obvious explanation would be that the religious groups that provide Nippon Kaigi’s base of support provide important electoral support to the LDP. However, a closer analysis reveals this to be unlikely to provide a full answer.

As discussed above, the two major bases of support for Nippon Kaigi are Shintō Shrines and a set of new religions. The Association of Shintō Shrines self-reports itself as having 74 million followers,<sup>62</sup> a full 60 percent of the population of Japan. However, this count is based on an estimate that includes people who visit shrines at New Year (*hatsumōde*) or buy amulets at shrines.<sup>63</sup> Most shrine-goers’ participation does not go beyond this and is a far cry from what can be considered membership in an organized religion. In reality, shrines have minimal power to mobilize large populations, as their involvement in the community goes little beyond performing rituals for people during certain life cycle events and providing a public space for festivals,

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<sup>61</sup> Interview by author 9 January, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2017 Religion Statistical Survey

<sup>63</sup> Tsukada, Hotaka. "Shukyō no Ukeika wa doko ni aruka." *Nihon no Ukeika Tettei Chōsa*. Ed. Tsukada Hotaka. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2017. Print. 361-382 366.

weddings, and the like. In meetings with shrine priests, I confirmed that aside from displaying posters and distributing political literature on premises, shrines do not actively participate in electioneering.<sup>64</sup> The only direct electoral mobilizing power that shrines have is among shrine priests and other employees. The number of shrine priests declines yearly, and there are now only 21,718 shrine priests nationwide, not even enough to staff Japan's over 80,000 shrines,<sup>65</sup> and although leadership of the Association of Shintō Shrines is united around conservative causes, the large number of shrines that do not participate in the Shrine Association and examples of fierce disputes between individual shrines and the Association over leadership and other issues show deep divisions even within this small group of people.<sup>66</sup>

My source in the LDP raised the idea that chief priests in major shrines are often important figures in the community. For instance, the chief priest of Terakuni Shrine in Kagoshima is also the head of the Shimazu *samurai* clan. I still think there is not enough evidence to make a claim that shrines have the ability to mobilize large numbers of voters. Despite the very visible role of shrines in Nippon Kaigi, it is difficult to say they have much effect during campaigns.

Religious sects, as opposed to Shintō shrines, have a clearer role in election politics. These religions usually have regular meetings, clear memberships, defined teachings, and, as stated above, a political ideology. They do in fact encourage their members to vote and volunteer for LDP candidates in elections. The membership of these religious groups, however, has declined consistently since the 1990s, during the same period Nippon Kaigi was formed and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 367 and interview by author December 22, 2017

<sup>65</sup> Agency for Cultural Affairs

<sup>66</sup> Major cases include the dispute between the Association and local supporters over the succession of women to the leadership of the major Usa Shrine in Oita Prefecture and Tomioka Hachiman Shrine in Tokyo. See series in *Weekly Diamond*.

gained influence. Reiyukai's membership, for instance, declined from 3 million in 1994 to 1.3 million in 2014. Gedatsu-kai fell from 224,000 to just 99,000 in this same time period.<sup>67</sup> This trend holds for the majority of the religious groups participating in Nippon Kaigi, and those that did not decline also did not increase their membership by much. We can test the effect of this decline on politics by comparing the number votes received by LDP candidates backed in the national block during House of Councillors elections in 1997 with 2013. This comparison is particularly pure as these candidates competed with other LDP candidates, backed by different groups, for votes based on name recognition and institutional support. The difference is stark. In 1977, the candidate backed by Seicho-no-Ie and Shintō Seiji Renmei received 1.1 million votes, coming in second among LDP candidates, while in 2013, Eto Seichi and Arimura Haruko, both backed by Nippon Kaigi new religions and Shintō Seiji Renmei, received only 200,000 votes apiece.<sup>68</sup> It is unreasonable to think that the LDP would increasingly rely on religious groups with precipitously declining memberships to provide an electoral base.

One might suggest that religious groups provide financial support to the LDP. Major shrines like Meiji and Yasukuni Shrines are notably wealthy, receiving large contributions from business. Political contributions in Japan are extremely complex and have yet to be significantly analyzed at the granular level, but a cursory look at the funding for the primary funding pipeline for the LDP, the *Kokumin Seiji Kyokai*, shows that almost all of the LDP's 20 billion annual yen in donations comes from business.<sup>69</sup> Searches for donations from shrines, new religions, and even individual priests on the (admittedly limited) Japan Center for Money and Politics database found only small donations, with the most noticeable going to Arimura Haruko, an officer of

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<sup>67</sup> Tsukada 371

<sup>68</sup> Nakakita, Koji. *Jiminto: Ikkyo no Jitsuzo*. Tokyo: Chuko Shinko, 2017. Print 210

<sup>69</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. 2017

Nippon Kaigi and Shintō Seiji Renmei. According to my source in the LDP almost all funding for the party (outside of party dues and public funding) comes from the Japan Business Federation and other business interests.<sup>70</sup> Due to the large numbers of contributions to individual politicians that are anonymized via fundraising events, contributions by religious groups cannot be completely ruled out – but they do not seem to be an important source of income for the LDP.

### **Japan’s Religious Nationalist Lobby: The Legislative Subsidy Model**

With the obvious factors of votes and money out, what influences are left? A model that seems to fit Nippon Kaigi well Nippon Kaigi was introduced by Richard Hall and Alan Deardorff in their 2006 paper “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” In this paper, they propose that American lobbyists do not primarily influence politicians by directly buying their votes or by persuading them of the correctness of their positions, but by providing “policy information, political intelligence and legislative labor” to “natural allies” in the legislature. Legislators have a limited amount of these resources which they need to utilize on multiple issues, and lobbyists, as specialists, have knowledge that legislators do not and the willingness to focus their time and effort on particular issues. In this model, the additional “subsidy” by lobbyists to legislators makes it “cheaper” in terms of effort for the legislator to make progress on the issue of concern; this reduction in cost encourages the legislator to focus on that issue as opposed to other issues. One corollary of this model is that lobbyists will spend more time helping their strongest allies and not waste time on legislators who are uncommitted or do not agree with them, as the subsidy would not increase the utility of advancing the policy desired. Another suggests that even if lobbyists are unable to assist in the legislator’s reelection through money or campaigning, politicians will still listen to them.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The *Keidanren* stopped urging its member businesses to donate in 2009 but resumed the practice in 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Hall, Richard L., and Alan V. Deardorff. “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” *The American Political Science*

LDP Diet members are certainly not all “natural allies” of Nippon Kaigi, but Prime Minister Abe and his close confidants have been involved in nationalist causes for many years. As noted above, his cabinet has a higher membership of nationalist Diet caucuses than the LDP at large and includes many officers of these caucuses. It has become almost a cliché to note that Prime Minister Abe has a strong desire to fully exonerate his grandfather, Kishi Nobusuke, from the label of war criminal through historical revision, and dreams of fulfilling Kishi’s long-delayed wish of amending the constitution. Finance Minister, former Prime Minister, and Abe number two Aso Taro, scion of a business dynasty that used forced labor during the war, also has an incentive to clear the name of his family. As for back-bench parliamentarians, the 2009 crushing defeat of the LDP ironically handed Abe the opportunity to nominate dozens of new right-wing candidates to office in 2012, remaking the party in his image. The LDP is more ideologically monochrome than it has ever been. According to leaders at several Nippon Kaigi-affiliated new religions whom I interviewed,<sup>72</sup> many Diet members are active believers in their faiths. It is difficult to gauge the validity of this statement, as it is not common for Diet members to talk publicly about their religion, but I confirmed through finance records that several Diet members paid for memberships in religious organizations like Gedatsu-kai and OISCA with campaign funds.

The service – namely fleshed out policy proposals – that Nippon Kaigi provides to the LDP is consistent with the legislative subsidy model and have become more necessary than ever for the party. The shift in the LDP most often cited from the change in 1994 from multi-member to single member districts is a decline in factionalism, but an additional loss was that of “*zoku-giin*,” parliamentarians who have a special interest group, frequently an industry group or

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Review, vol. 100, no. 1, 2006, pp. 69–84. JSTOR, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/27644332](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27644332).

<sup>72</sup> Interviews by author 22 June 2017 and 5 Jan 2018

government ministry, as their electoral base. These members were usually ex-bureaucrats or former industry executives. Their major purpose is to use their specialized knowledge and connections with industry to guide the policy making process as members of the LDP's Policy Research Committee, utilizing their ties to work closely with the bureaucracy, rejecting and amending proposals when necessary while causing as little conflict as possible. The shift in electoral law, however, removed the ability of the LDP to parcel out votes based on particular industry constituencies, instead requiring candidates to appeal to all segments of the base, losing out on specialized knowledge.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the LDP, ever since the 2001-2006 Koizumi administration, which overcame opposition within the party and the bureaucracy and implemented neo-liberal reforms, has drastically shifted in its approach to policy making, from "bureaucrat-led politics" to "Cabinet led politics." In practice, this meant a shift away from relying on the Policy Research Committee, which received policy suggestions from the bureaucracy via *zoku-giin*, to relying on special committees ruled by the Prime Minister and staffed with his close associates, especially when it comes to key policy objectives that are unpopular with the bureaucracy like inflationary monetary policy and participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership.<sup>74</sup> This, however, means a significant loss in assistance from the bureaucracy in crafting policy proposals. The loss of policy information and legislative labor on other policies combined with increased lobbying by religious nationalists gives the administration an incentive to work on issues favored by religious nationalists.

Aside from these legislative subsidies, religious nationalists also provide services that are further from the traditional sphere of lobbyists. The support of Shintō shrines provides a certain amount of 'traditional' legitimacy for the ruling party. Religious nationalists have also

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<sup>73</sup> Nakakita 121

<sup>74</sup> Nakakita 118

constructed a parallel academic and media sphere to counter the relatively liberal mainstream, providing a façade of legitimacy for nationalist policies. For instance, in response to an open letter by hundreds of Western Japanese Studies scholars condemning the Japanese government's actions on the comfort women issue, around one hundred scholars (most were honorary or former professors not currently working at a university) signed onto a letter written by Nippon Kaigi chairman Tadae Takubo condemning it.<sup>75</sup> A clear episode demonstrating this utility occurred when a reporter asked Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide about a survey showing that 90 percent of constitutional law scholars in Japan believe that collective self-defense is unconstitutional. To defend the government's position, Suga cited three scholars who believed the reinterpretation to be acceptable. The three scholars, Nagao Kazuhiro, Akira Momochi, and Nishi Osamu are all key members of Nippon Kaigi.<sup>76</sup> Religious nationalists provide an important source of opinion journalism supporting the ruling party's more extreme nationalist policies, providing support when even conservative standard-bearers like the *Yomiuri Shimbun* refuse to do so. Regardless of serious scandals or unpopular policy moves, *Sankei Shimbun* and right-wing opinion magazines like *Seiron*, *Hanada*, and *Will*, provide an inexhaustible reserve of partisan justifications for politicians. These parallel media and academic spheres may not convince the general public, but without them the LDP would have difficulty answering their critics at all, yet another example of the services provided by religious nationalists to the ruling party.

### Conclusion

This thesis has laid out the history and ideology of religious nationalists in Japan and analyzed the effect that these nationalists have on the policy decisions of the LDP. Far from

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<sup>75</sup> "Japanese Scholars' Reply to the American Scholars' Comfort Women Statement," 6 Aug, 2015, [http://eng.the-liberty.com/pdf/20150808\\_document.pdf](http://eng.the-liberty.com/pdf/20150808_document.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Tawara 7

“secretly running Japan,” these groups work with the LDP in a reciprocal fashion to advance common policy aims. These policy aims are deeply concerning to anyone who is concerned about the rule of law and the liberal world order, but do not stem from a rising popularity of these aims or of the groups that support them in society. The LDP’s present attention to nationalist policies is dependent on the power of a particular LDP ideological faction and the tacit consent of the United States. Rather than decrying illusory changes in society or secret ruling cliques, opponents of these aims would do better to think of concrete ways to change Japan’s political system to shift the policy incentives of the people in leadership; or to change those leaders.



## Appendix 1

## Nippon Kaigi Board Members Associated with Religious Groups (as of September 2017)

a: Shintō Shrine/Shintō New Religion b: Buddhist c: Other New Religion

Advisors

Name	Title
Kitashirakawa Michihisa	Association of Shintō Shrines (General Manager) <sub>a</sub>
Komatsu Kiyohisa	Ise Shrine Grand Priest <sub>a</sub>

Vice Chairman

Tanaka Tsunekiyo	Association of Shintō Shrines (President) <sub>a</sub>
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Representative Committee Member

Akimoto Kyotoku	Shinsei Bukkyodan Supreme Advisor <sub>b</sub>
Inayama Reiho	Nenpou Shinkyō Chief Priest <sub>b</sub>
Uchida Fumihiko	Shintō Seiji Renmei President <sub>a</sub>
Okada Ko'ou	Sukyo Mahikari <i>Oshienushi</i> <sub>c</sub>
Okano Seiho	Gedatsu Church President <sub>b</sub>
Ogushi Kazuo	Atsuta Shrine Chief Priest <sub>a</sub>
Ono Takashi	Tokyo Association of Shintō Shrines Head <sub>a</sub>
Ohori Kojitsu	Hieizan Enryakuji Representative Officer <sub>b</sub>
Sekiguchi Yoshikazu	Bussho-Gonenkai President <sub>b</sub>
Takagi Harunobu	Ise Shrine Assistant Grand Priest <sub>a</sub>
Tokugawa Yasuhisa	Yasukuni Shrine Head Priest <sub>a</sub>
Nakajima Seitarou	Meiji Shrine Head Priest <sub>a</sub>
Nakano Yoshiko	OISCA International (Ananaikyo) President <sub>a</sub>
Hiroike Mototaka	Morality Research Institute Board Chairman (Reitaku University) <sub>a</sub>
Hozumi Hidetane	Taiwa-Kyodan <i>Kyonushi</i> <sub>a</sub>
Maruyama Toshiaki	RINRI Institute of Ethics Chairman [PL Kyodan] <sub>c</sub>

Board Chairman

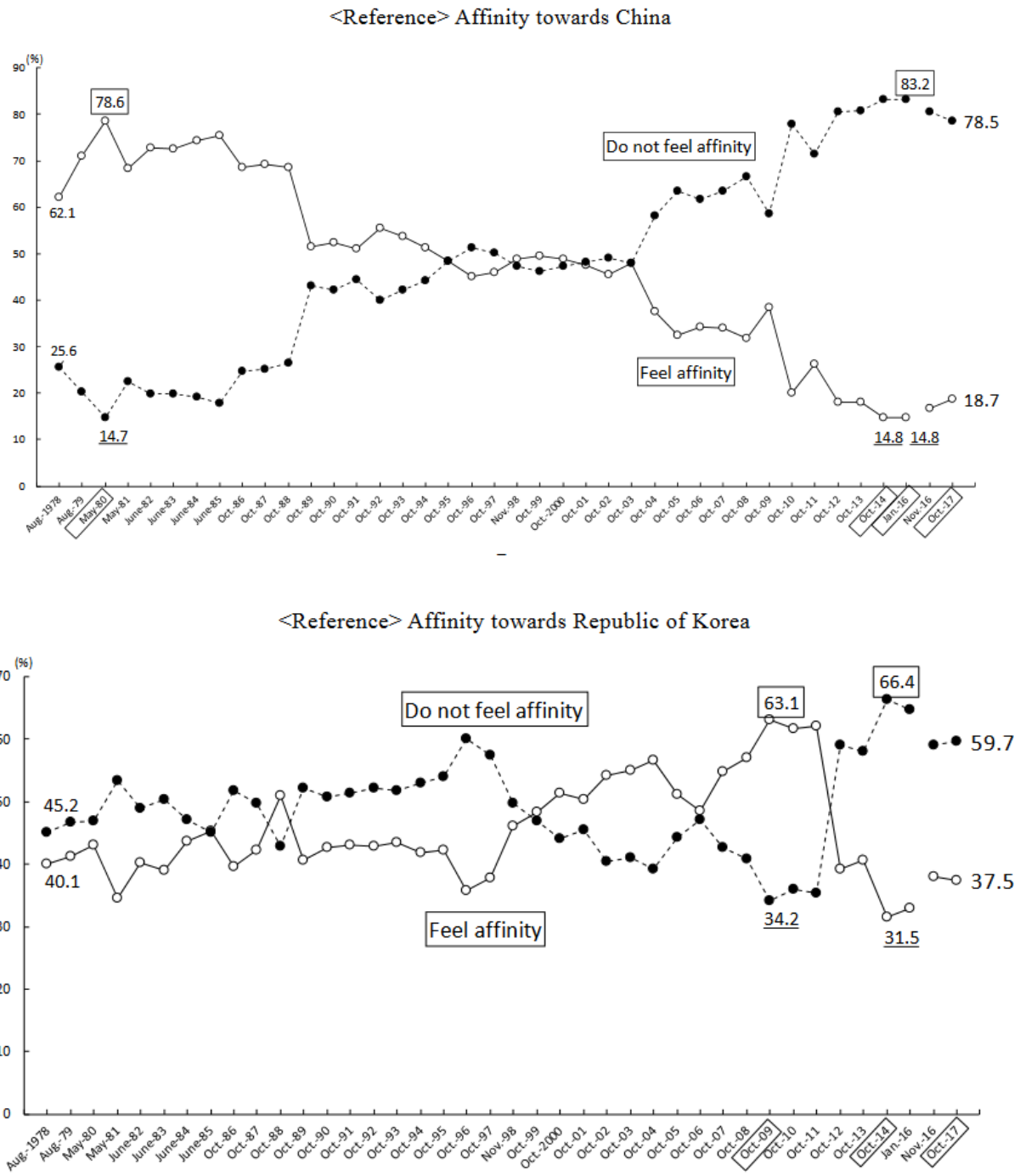
Amitani Michihiko	Meiji Shrine Worshippers' Association President <sub>a</sub>
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Source: <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about/yakuin> (Nippon Kaigi Officer List)

Other Religious Groups Associated with Nippon Kaigi (past officers, etc.)

Reiyukai	Tendai Buddhist	Nichiren Buddhist (Nichirenshu)
Kurozumikyo		

Figure 1: Japanese Attitudes Toward East Asian Neighbors<sup>77</sup>



<sup>77</sup> Public Relations Office, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. “Overview of the Public Opinion Survey on Diplomacy” December 2017. <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h29/h29-gaiko/summary.pdf>

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