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The Neo-Nationalist Response to the Aum Crisis A Return of Civil Religion and Coercion in the Public Sphere?

The 1995 social crisis in Japan—brought on in part by Aum Shinrikyō—created an environment in which the political interests and agendas of neo-nationalist leaders and groups found a more receptive audience. Most of their concerns and restoration initiatives had been envisioned by the Association of Shinto Shrines since the end of the Occupation and promoted by its political arm, the Shinto Seiji Renmei, since 1969. In the first few years after the Aum Affair, a number of new groups emerged—such as Nippon Kaigi—and joined forces with these older organizations. With the leadership of politicians and prime ministers from the Liberal Democratic Party, these groups have recorded significant progress toward the goal of reshaping public life and institutions over the course of a decade. Both secular and religious critics are concerned that the institutionalization of these neo-nationalist initiatives is seriously eroding individual freedoms. The public concern for “protection” from deviant new religions—initially generated by the Aum crisis—has evolved to include a concern for protection from civil religious obligations in public institutions.

KEYWORDS: nationalism—Association of Shinto Shrines—Yasukuni Shrine—Liberal Democratic Party—Shinto Seiji Renmei—civil religion—coercion—public sphere

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RECENT decades have seen a rise in religious nationalism around the world, and Japan is no exception. While nationalistic movements may be seen as one common reaction to the processes of modernization, globalization, and the weakening of traditional identities based on tribe and clan, there are other factors that have shaped these developments in each particular situation.¹ In *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Mark JUERGENSMEYER (1993, 2–6) provided a comparative study of some of the new expressions of religious nationalism that have emerged over the course of the past century. According to his analysis, religious nationalism developed in many contexts—postcolonial India, the Middle East, and elsewhere—due to a fundamental dissatisfaction with secular forms of nationalism, which were based “on Western models of a nationhood” and criticized for lacking moral or spiritual values. Although Japan is not the focus of Juergensmeyer’s study, he does mention Ōkawa Ryūhō’s 大川隆法 *Kōfuku no Kagaku* 幸福の科学 as a recent expression of religious nationalism due to its claim that “the Japanese are the new chosen people” (JUERGENSMEYER 1993, 146). In reality, however, it is the Shinto version of nationalism—a movement that emerged in response to a perceived inadequacy of the secular order imposed during the Occupation from 1945 to 1952—that resembles more closely the Islamic and Hindu expressions of nationalism, which were Juergensmeyer’s primary concern. While this new form of nationalism emerged as soon as the Occupation ended, the movement to restore Shinto influence in public life and institutions achieved only limited success for several decades. In this article I analyze the resurgence of neo-nationalism in the wake of the Aum Affair and review some of the recent “restoration” efforts by a variety of political leaders and movements.

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1. There is a vast and growing literature on this topic. One “classic” in the field is Benedict ANDERSON’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), which analyzed the cultural and religious roots of nationalism and the factors that shaped its emergence and transformation in different eras and sociopolitical contexts. On the more recent relationship between religious nationalism and globalization, see Catarina KINNVALL (2004).

It is widely recognized that two events in 1995 shook the nation and precipitated a sense of crisis among many Japanese: the Hanshin earthquake on 17 January, which caused major damage in the city of Kobe and surrounding areas, and the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system by members of Aum Shinrikyō on 20 March. In an earlier study, I examined the government's initial response to the Aum crisis, which included the Diet's approval—in less than a year—of changes in the law governing all religious bodies in Japan (*shūkyō hōjin hō* 宗教法人法) as well as new legislation that would allow the authorities to monitor Aum and its successor groups more closely (MULLINS 2001). In view of the tragic deaths, injuries, and widespread sense of insecurity that followed the Aum Shinrikyō gas attack, it is understandable that many Japanese expected the government to do more to protect them from dangerous religious groups. The Diet's hurried revision of the Religious Corporations Law on 8 December 1995 sought to address these public concerns. Helen HARDACRE (2003, 152) has suggested that the revision of this law may eventually be seen as a watershed moment: "Future researchers may come to regard the liberal period of 1945 to 1995 as a brief, foreign-dictated abnormality in Japan's long history of state monitoring of religion." Evidence presented below will indicate that the shift toward greater state regulation and control has not been limited to religious organizations.

Following the revision of the Religious Corporations Law, political leaders moved beyond the immediate concern to "protect" society from deviant religious movements and expressed a broader interest in the problematic nature of postwar Japanese society that allowed such a movement to emerge and attract young people in the first place.² This crisis situation, I will argue, emboldened neo-nationalist leaders and created an environment that allowed their concerns and initiatives to gain traction and achieve a degree of success that had been impossible in the preceding years. It is important to recognize that these contemporary developments are closely related to earlier phases of religious nationalism, particularly in the creation of an emperor-centric expression of State Shinto from the Meiji period until 1945,³ and in the postwar efforts to recover the ideals and institutions from that recent past. K. Peter TAKAYAMA (1988) has argued that some of these efforts—such as the movement to renationalize Yasukuni Shrine, develop more patriotic textbooks for public schools, and restore the Imperial Rescript on Education—represent an attempt to revitalize Japan's

2. It is worth remembering that the problems posed by Aum were somewhat exaggerated. At its peak the movement had managed to attract no more than ten thousand members, so the vast majority of young people found the level of commitment and demands of religious practice required by membership in such a group to be wholly unattractive.

3. The close relationship between Shinto and nationalism during this period is a well-documented phenomenon; representative studies include MURAKAMI (1970), HARDACRE (1989), DAVIS (1977), and SHIMAZONO (2010).

prewar civil religion. In this study, I extend Takayama's analysis to the post-Aum context, which represented a golden opportunity for neo-nationalists to advocate and implement a number of initiatives that had been unsuccessful in the period before Aum.

Religion and Nationalism in Postwar Japan

The term "neo-nationalism" is used here to refer to more recent forms of religious nationalism that have emerged in the postwar period to distinguish them from the earlier period. SHIMAZONO (2001) has identified three main forms of religious nationalism that have emerged in the postwar period that became particularly visible in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴ One important stream of religious nationalism is related to the *Shin shin shūkyō* 新新宗教, or New New Religions formed in the postwar period, which became prominent from the late 1970s (the fourth period of new religions in Shimazono's historical framework). Examples here include such groups as Mahikari 真光 (founded in 1959), World Mate ワールドメイト (founded in 1993), and Kōfuku no Kagaku (1986). Shimazono suggests that the appearance of a "nationalistic" orientation founded in these new religions is related in part to Japan's success and international status achieved as a global economic power (SHIMAZONO 2001, 116). These "spiritual nationalisms" regard Japan as the source and foundation of the highest form of religion. Mahikari, for example, emphasizes that Japan is the origin of the human race and claims that the Japanese language is the source of all the languages of the world (SHIMAZONO 2001, 101). Japan's destiny is to save the world from destruction. The period of Japan's economic and material prosperity is understood to be the prelude to the expansion of Japan's spiritual civilization (*reishu no bunmei* 霊主の文明), which Mahikari will bring to the world. Along similar lines, Ōkawa Ryuhō claims that even though the age of "ethnic" gods or ethnic religion (*minzoku shūkyō* 民族宗教) is over, Kōfuku no Kagaku is destined to bring harmony and unity to the world. More audacious claims are made by Fukami Tōshū 深見東州, the founder of World Mate, who explains that it is building the spiritual foundation for Japan to rule the world in the twenty-first century (SHIMAZONO 2001, 128).

Shimazono identifies a second stream of religious nationalism clustered around the *nihonjinron* literature and the "new spirituality movements."⁵ In the

4. SHIMAZONO provides a rather detailed treatment of religion and nationalism in the postwar period (2001, 88–137). I have only highlighted a few key points and changed the order of discussion here.

5. DAVIS (1992) has given considerable attention to *nihonjinron* and its parallels with prewar civil religion. "I would like to suggest," he writes, "that the blitz of books dealing with the essence of Japanese culture and society is, in reality, a groping for a new national self-identity in the face of increasing contact, competition, and friction with western countries." He goes on to explain

1980s and 1990s, he explains, there were many *nihonjinron* publications that extolled the virtues of Japan's spiritual traditions, particularly ancient Shinto and animism, and advocated their relevance for contemporary life. He notes that this vein of literature declined markedly after the 1995 Aum subway gas attack (SHIMAZONO 2001, 106). In Shimazono's assessment, these first two expressions of spiritual nationalism are of minimal political significance and are unlikely to have an impact on the "public sphere" for the foreseeable future.

The third form of religious nationalism considered by SHIMAZONO (2001, 93–94)—which is my primary concern here—are those movements that are focused on *recovering* or *restoring* the "public" role of Shinto. Individuals and groups associated with this form of nationalism maintain that Occupation policies, particularly those based on the Shinto Directive, and the postwar Constitution were based on "victor's justice" and unfairly reduced the social and public role of Shinto in Japanese life. The profound changes brought about by the Occupation authorities provide a good example of what DEMERATH (2007, 72–76) has designated as "imperialist secularization," which is the coercive and top-down removal of religion from public institutions by a foreign power. While many aspects of Shinto belief and ritual may have been forced out of the public sphere, it is clear that this did not transform the views of Shinto leaders regarding the legitimate role of Shinto in society. In fact, a study of the postwar period reveals that they were simply biding their time until the end of the Occupation and would quickly initiate efforts to restore what they saw as the rightful place of Shinto in Japanese society. In their view, the separation of religion and state has been too strictly enforced in the Japanese context and it was time to reinstate a "proper" relationship between the state and religion. In essence this meant the recovery of the framework that had guided Japan from the time of the Meiji Restoration until 1945: religious freedom (pluralism) would be allowed in the "private sphere," but the "public sphere" was to be defined and monopolized by State Shinto.

While Shimazono observes that Shinto-related movements became particularly visible in the 1990s, the efforts to "revive" or "recover" what had been destroyed during the Occupation can actually be traced back to the early 1950s. Ueda Kenji, the late Shinto scholar, elaborated this restorationist vision and agenda in an important article in 1979, arguing that the social status and power of the Shinto tradition had been completely transformed by the Shinto Directive and the postwar Constitution. The overall consequence of these Occupation reforms was that "*the public character of the Shinto shrine came to an end*" (UEDA 1979, 303–304; emphasis mine).

that "Many of the functions of the civil religion of pre-1945 Japan—the generation of national purpose, symbolic self-defense, value-consensus, etc.—are now being assumed by the symbols, values, and imagery produced by the literature of Japan theory" (DAVIS 1992, 268–69).

For those who identified with the State Shinto tradition and institutions, the forced secularization brought about by the Occupation policies was hard to accept. Ueda points out, in fact, that as soon as the San Francisco Peace Treaty was concluded in 1952, the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō 神社本庁) began to work actively on numerous fronts to “restore Shinto to its lost status and to revitalize the old tradition” (UEDA 1979, 304–305). While the association had initially been organized in early 1946 to enable Shinto shrines to survive as religious organizations during the Occupation, SHIMAZONO (2007, 706) argues that in the postwar period it has been “primarily active as a political force in Japan. Its political aim is to revive State Shinto by promoting nationalism and reverence for the emperor.”

This interpretation is supported by a Shinto account of the postwar period provided by JINJA SHINPŌSHA (1971). The authors explain that there was initially little resistance to the Occupation reforms carried out by the Japanese government and enacted because the priests and shrines associated with Jinja Honchō were essentially loyal to the emperor, which meant that they followed the emperor’s example and complied with the new policies and regulations. When the Occupation came to an end, however, many Shinto leaders found it impossible to passively accept the new order of things, which presupposed the destruction of ancient Japanese traditions, and began to initiate efforts to restore what had been eliminated by the Occupation (JINJA SHINPŌSHA 1971, 97).

In the following decades, the Jinja Honchō nurtured the development of a number of affiliated groups, such as the Association for the Reestablishment of National Foundation Day (1957), the League Promoting Ties between Politics and Shinto (Shintō Seiji Renmei 神道政治連盟, 1969), the Association for Rectification of the Relationship between Religion and State (Seikyō Kankei o Tadasu Kai 政教関係を正す会, 1971), and the Association to Preserve Japan (Nippon o Mamoru Kai 日本を守る会, 1974), which collaborated 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 Liberal Democratic Party (hereafter LDP) to bring their concerns and various initiatives to the Diet for action. Two early efforts that met with success were the movements to restore National Foundation Day (*Kenkoku kinen no hi* 建国記念の日; known as *Kigensetsu* 紀元節 in the prewar period), which was finally reestablished in 1966, and the reign-name legalization movement, which was achieved with the passing of the Reign-Name Law (Gengōhō 元号法) in 1979.⁶

In spite of these achievements, there were a number of equally important goals that were not achieved during this same period. Central among them were

6. See RUOFF (2001, 158–201) for a helpful analysis of these two successful restoration movements.

the attempts to renationalize Yasukuni Shrine. Leaders of the LDP presented six bills (*Yasukuni jinja hōan*) to the Diet from 1969 to 1974 in an effort to restore direct government support to the shrine. The bills were defeated each time and faced strong opposition from various Buddhist, Christian, and secular groups, who shared the common concern to preserve the freedom guaranteed by the postwar Constitution. The failed attempts to renationalize Yasukuni Shrine represent just one of the unfulfilled goals of the post-Occupation “restorationists.” Their other concerns—to restore the Imperial Rescript on Education, revise the Constitution, and legalize the national flag and anthem—were to become the focus of renewed attention after 1995.

The 1995 Social Crisis and Resurgence of Nationalism

A new opening was created for neo-nationalists and their initiatives when a number of events coalesced in 1995. First was the devastating Hanshin earthquake that struck the Osaka-Kobe area on 17 January. This was followed on 20 March by the sarin gas attack on several lines of the Tokyo subway system by members of Aum Shinrikyō. Finally, 1995 was the year that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, which naturally encouraged national reflection and debate about how Japan’s military history should be remembered, celebrated, and mourned. As it turns out, it was a year that began a decade of more serious debate and conflict over the meaning of the war, the nature of postwar Japanese society, and its future direction.⁷

People in Japan were understandably shaken after months of non-stop media coverage of the earthquake devastation and the arrests, trials, and debates about the human suffering caused by Aum’s efforts to bring about its apocalyptic vision. The disorienting events of early 1995, as YODA (2006, 20–25) has observed, raised serious concerns about established institutions: the disaster in the Osaka-Kobe area revealed the government’s “ineptitude in crisis management” and the disturbing attack on the Tokyo subway system by some of Asahara Shōkō’s closest disciples indicated that the police were unable to protect the public from deviant religious movements. Given that the sense of social order and stability was undermined in this way, it is not surprising that political and religious leaders, as well as the general public, were challenged to think more seriously about the nature of postwar Japanese society.

While the “Aum Affair” seemed to confirm for some that society would be better off without religion, these various incidents inspired others to think more seriously about the need for religious and moral education. In short, Aum sym-

7. I am hardly the first observer to link the neo-nationalist resurgence with the social crisis of 1995; see, for example, SERAPHIM (2006, 27), YODA (2006, 20–25), and HAROOTUNIAN (2006, 103).

bolized a much larger moral crisis in Japanese society. The response of Umehara Takeshi, the well-known philosopher, public intellectual, and popular author, provides a helpful illustration of this common reaction. He was so shaken by the Aum Affair that he found himself forced to reevaluate the whole educational philosophy and system that had guided postwar Japan. Within seven months of the Aum subway gas attack, he wrote and published a volume (UMEHARA 1995) in which he critically examines the failure of both schools and families—including himself as a father and teacher—to provide the ethical teaching and religious education that young people so clearly needed. It was this system of education, Umehara claims, which provided no moral education—or *kokoro no kyōiku*—that nurtured the young people who joined Aum and eventually committed the sarin gas attack and other acts of violence. For that reason, he concludes, it is not just these young people who bear the responsibility for this terrible crime: “We must also reflect deeply on our own culpability.”⁸

The concerns expressed by Umehara in late 1995, of course, were not entirely new. For some years the news media had been bombarding viewers with almost daily reports regarding widespread social problems that reflected a fundamental moral deficiency in young people: a steady increase in the number of children refusing to attend school, the problem of bullying in schools across the nation, the increase in suicides by children, and the problem of *enjo kōsai*—teenage girls engaging in sex with older men for compensation. A number of politicians raised their voices about the need to restore moral education and patriotism in public schools—something that had been removed by the Occupation policy of forced secularization—presumably to keep young people loyal and committed to the “system” and to vaccinate them against deviant religious groups like Aum in the future. This concern for “morality” was often expressed by politicians who were unable to recognize (or denied) the ethical concerns and problems related to Japan’s earlier history of empire-building and colonization. Among these concerns are the outstanding claims of some Asian neighbors for official recogni-

8. See especially pages 138–42. While Umehara shared with many other Japanese this sense of moral crisis, he did not embrace the solution advanced by the neo-nationalists considered below. He rejects the attempts to revive what he refers to as *Tennōkyō* and *shūshin kyōiku* of wartime Japan, as well as their view that the Imperial Rescript on Education represents authentic Japanese tradition. He argues that all of this was part of a manufactured system that does not truly represent the best of Japanese tradition. Rather, he draws on Buddhist ethical teachings and Shinto traditions that predated *Tennōkyō* (that is, State Shinto) in the development of his vision of moral education (UMEHARA 2010). It is also worth noting here that he has long been an opponent of attempts to reationalize Yasukuni Shrine and years ago argued for the establishment of an alternative—a religiously “neutral”—memorial site (see UMEHARA 1985). He also is a strong opponent of attempts to revise Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. While some may regard Umehara’s views as an example of “cultural nationalism,” his perspective must clearly be distinguished from the neo-nationalists associated with the Association of Shinto Shrines, Shinto Seiji Renmei, and many LDP politicians.

tion and compensation for their suffering at the hands of the Japanese military, particularly with regard to forced labor and the sexual exploitation of “comfort women” (*ianfu*) in the service of the troops.

Although Umehara provides a useful example of the widespread sense of crisis brought about by Aum, it is Kobayashi Yoshinori, the manga artist and author, who reveals most clearly the link between this crisis and resurgent nationalism. Kobayashi’s best-selling book series *ゴーマニズム宣言 Gōmanizumu sengen*—variously rendered in English as “My Arrogant Declarations” or “The Arrogant-ism Proclamations”—shows an increasingly nationalistic orientation after his engagement with Aum. Kobayashi was one of the few public figures brave enough to criticize Asahara and Aum long before the sarin subway gas attack and before their criminal activity had been actually confirmed by police investigation.

In *Shin Gomanizumu Sengen 1* (KOBAYASHI 1996), Kobayashi gives considerable attention to his conflict with Aum, which began in 1994 in connection with his public criticisms of the group and speculation about the fate of the lawyer Sakamoto and his family, who had disappeared in 1989 under suspicious circumstances (some observers suspected that the family had been eliminated by Aum operatives because of legal actions Sakamoto was pursuing against the group). The volume includes many unfavorable depictions of Asahara, critical references to an “irresponsible” religious studies scholar, Shimada Hiromi, who appeared to defend Aum as a legitimate religion, and also mentions the alleged assassination plan that targeted him for his critical stance towards the movement (KOBAYASHI 1996, 61–64, 172, 180–83, 187). There is also a section devoted to a conversation between Kobayashi and Egawa Shōko 江川紹子, a journalist who was also actively investigating Aum and writing about the group before their crimes were fully known (KOBAYASHI 1996, 67–78).⁹

Kobayashi admits that the Aum crisis had a serious impact on his orientation and subsequent work. In fact, he made a direct connection between his shift to the right and Aum Shinrikyō when interviewed by John Nathan and asked why he had become such an ardent nationalist from 1996: “Their guru, Shoko Asahara, taught a false history, which included an apocalypse that was due to arrive in 1999. In doing that, he created a discontinuity with history, and that disconnection allowed his followers to turn into monsters. It occurred to me that the rest of us Japanese are no different—we are all living in a present that is discon-

9. In the year preceding the subway gas attack, Aum’s lawyer initiated a lawsuit against Kobayashi for slandering the group through his writings and public statements, a legal action that was dropped in September 1995, just months after Aum’s deviant behavior became fully revealed (reported in the *Asahi Shinbun*, 15 September 1995, morning edition).

nected from history because we've been conditioned and brainwashed into reviling and rejecting our own past."¹⁰

Given this new self-understanding, it is not surprising to find that Kobayashi's manga since then have celebrated Japan's imperial past and provided an alternative account of many controversial issues surrounding the war, Yasukuni Shrine, the Imperial household, and moral education. His popular volumes include, for example, *Sensōron* (1998), *Shin Gōmanizumu sensōron* (2) (2001), *Yasukuniron* (2005), *Iwayuru A-Kyū Senpan* (The so-called Class A war criminals; 2006), *Shōwa Tennōron* (2010a), and *Shūshinron* (2010b). Kobayashi's influence has not been restricted to popular culture and manga, however. In 1996, he became a core member of the "Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform" (Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai 新しい歴史教科書をつくる会), a group which grew out of the "Study Group for a Liberal View of History" (Jiyūshugi Shikan Kenkyūkai 自由主義史観研究会), which had been organized the year before by Fujioka Nobukatsu, a University of Tokyo education professor, and Nishio Kanji, a specialist in German literature. Their primary concern was to provide textbooks that would cultivate in students a sense of national pride and patriotism and counter the "masochistic" historical narratives that were critical of Japan, which they felt had dominated postwar education.¹¹ Although Kobayashi subsequently left this group, his wide-ranging activities as a manga artist and public intellectual since 1995 clearly reveals the close connection between the sense of social crisis precipitated by Aum's violence and his embrace and advocacy of a neo-nationalistic agenda.

While the Hanshin earthquake and Aum incident may have been the precipitating events that led to the neo-nationalistic resurgence, the timing is also related to some profound economic and political changes during the preceding few years. First, the traumatic events of 1995 followed a decade of steady economic decline. Japan had been lauded as "number one" for its successful rebuilding of the postwar economy and rapid growth into the 1980s, but the "bubble economy" burst in the early 1990s and the nation faced a rapid decline of stock prices and land values. While Japan was riding high there had been limited time or interest in nationalistic concerns, but the crisis generated by the long recession and events of 1995 forced many Japanese to face these fundamental questions again. NATHAN (2004, 119) has captured this situation as follows: "During the 1970s and 1980s, while Japan's economy was flourishing, *identity was not an issue*. People were secure in their jobs; hard work led to affluence.... Since 1990, when the high-flying economy crashed, confidence and pride and even sense of

10. Quoted in NATHAN 2004, 133. For additional information on Kobayashi's conflict with Aum, see NATHAN 2004, 127–28.

11. See OGUMA and UENO (2003) for a detailed study of this group.

purpose have been eroded as the recession deepens.... *What remains is a deeply unsettling emptiness that has produced, yet again, an urgent need to feel identified. Japan's new nationalism is a manifestation of the need and a response to it*" (emphasis mine). Japan's economic problems have only worsened over the past decade, and today it faces even larger challenges: rebuilding the Tohoku region after the 11 March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and coping with the nuclear disaster in Fukushima.

Also contributing to the neo-nationalistic reaction were certain developments in the world of Japanese politics in the several years leading up to the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war. During the brief three-year interlude (1993–1996) to the postwar domination by the LDP, Prime Ministers Hosokawa Morihiro and Murayama Tomoichi both struggled to address calls for an official apology from the government in acknowledgement of the pain and suffering caused by Japan's military aggression and colonial rule. Shortly after becoming the head of the coalition government in August 1993, Hosokawa publicly admitted that Japan bore responsibility as the aggressor (*kagaisha*) for the invasion and colonization of its neighbors in Asia. This was followed by a similar apology from Prime Minister Murayama in 1995, in spite of the fact that the LDP was a part of the coalition government. Doi Takako, the former leader of the Socialist Party, who herself had pushed for an official apology for some years, has argued that the recent neo-nationalistic resurgence is in part a right-wing reaction to the public statements of Hosokawa and Murayama. According to Doi's (2007) analysis, these admissions of guilt were more than the conservative politicians and right-wing groups could endure. This interpretation finds support in a statement made by Ishihara Shintarō, an ardent nationalist and the governor of Tokyo, following a visit to Yasukuni Shrine in August 2001:

Hosokawa was a horrible prime minister who got in on a fluke and only lasted a year. But what I cannot forgive is the ignorance of history that allowed him to declare that our war in the Pacific was a war of aggression. As if the imperialism that drove Europe and the United States to colonize the rest of the world was acceptable and only our war was evil. I believe that the worst offense a government leader can commit is to sell his own country down the river. Hosokawa's remarks, and Murayama's sentimentalism about "painful repentance and heartfelt apologies," amounted to a desecration of our nation's history. I cannot forgive that.¹²

12. Quoted in NATHAN 2004, 170. Opinion polls at the time indicated that roughly 50 percent of Japanese agreed with Hosokawa, so Ishihara's critical reaction and perspective on the war should not be regarded as the mainstream view. In fact, survey research indicates that Japanese society is similarly divided over other controversial issues, such as prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine (see SEATON 2005, 288–89; 304).

The end of Murayama's coalition government and the improved political fortunes of the LDP, therefore, marked the beginning of a new round of neo-nationalistic initiatives.

Neo-Nationalism in the Post-Aum Context

As can be seen in the TABLE, the fifteen years since the 1995 social crisis have been a busy period for neo-nationalists. It is impossible to analyze in detail all of these more recent initiatives, but I would like to highlight a few of the key developments and consider how the problem posed by Aum was used by some to legitimize and support new legislation passed by the Diet with regard to public education.

One indicator of the neo-nationalistic resurgence in the post-Aum context may be seen in the revitalization of older movements and the formation of new organizations. Here it must be recognized that the newer movements that emerged after 1995 are essentially providing a broader base of support for the central concerns and agenda that have been pursued by the Association of Shinto Shrines since the end of the Occupation through its main political action group, the Shinto Seiji Renmei. Known today as the "Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership" (Shinseiren), it claims that the "spirit of Shinto" provides the foundation for its political vision and activities (神道精神を国政の基礎に).¹³ One of the newer groups that deserves mention here is the Nippon Kaigi 日本会議 ("Japan Conference"), which was formed through a merger with another nationalistic group, Nippon o Mamoru Kai, 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* 公式参拜) to Yasukuni Shrine. It claims a nationwide network of some 100,000 members, including some one hundred Diet members, who are associated with branches in local towns and communities from Hokkaido to Okinawa.¹⁴ It also boasts the ability to attract some 500,000 signatures in support of its causes.

An examination of the membership of the Nippon Kaigi board for 2011 reveals that it has attracted the support of leaders from many spheres of Japanese society—

13. See <http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/honcho/index4.html> (accessed 31 October 2011). For background on this group and a historical account of the first fifteen years of their activities, see SHINTŌ SEIJI RENMEI 1984. For additional information on Shinseiren membership, political agenda, and current activities, see BREEN and TEEUWEN (2010, especially chapter 6), MUL-LINS (2012), and the regular updates on the Shinseiren homepage: <http://www.sinseiren.org/>.

14. Here I am paraphrasing the information widely available in Nippon Kaigi publications and on the official homepage. The membership figures are drawn from: <http://nipponkaigi.net/gig.htm>.

YEAR	MOVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES
1995	“Study Group for a Liberal View of History” organized by Fujioka Nobukatsu and Nishio Kanji.
1996	“Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform” formed in association with the “Study Group for a Liberal View of History.”
1997	Nippon Kaigi established (building on two earlier groups, “Nihon o Mamoru Kai” and “Nihon o Mamoru Kokumin Kaigi”).
1998	Publication of Kobayashi Yoshinori’s <i>Sensōron</i> .
1999	Legal recognition of national flag (“Hinomaru” 日の丸) and anthem (“Kimigayo” 君が代). Ministry of Education issues guidelines and instructions for all public schools to sing the national anthem and use the flag for official events, such as entrance and graduation ceremonies.
2000	Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō’s 15 May address at the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of Shinto Seiji Renmei refers to Japan as a “divine nation” (<i>kami no kuni</i>) centered on the emperor.
2001	Prime Minister Koizumi Jun’ichirō’s Yasukuni <i>kōshiki sanpai</i> (which he did a number of times between 2001 and 2006).
2002	<i>Kokoro no nōto</i> , patriotic moral education texts distributed to elementary and junior high schools by the Ministry of Education.
2003	Under the direction of Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō, the Tokyo Education Committee issues an order for all teachers and staff in the public schools to participate in leading students in singing the “Kimigayo” for entrance and graduation ceremonies or face disciplinary action (23 October).
2004	Disciplinary action taken against 180 teachers of Tokyo public schools in March for failure to sing the national anthem and properly guide their students in official ceremonies before the national flag.
2005	LDP draft proposal for a new Constitution made public. Publication of Kobayashi Yoshinori’s <i>Yasukuniron</i> .
2006	Revision of Fundamental Education Law (<i>Kyōiku kihon hō</i>).
2007	Pro-Yasukuni anime DVD entitled <i>Hokori</i> (“Pride”), produced by Nihon Seinen Kaigisho for the Ministry of Education, distributed for viewing in 93 locations across Japan.
2008	Regulation banning school visits to Yasukuni Shrine and <i>gokoku jinja</i> ruled no longer valid by the Minister of Education (27 March). Ministry of Education provides orientation on new policy allowing school visits (June and July).
2011	On 30 May the Supreme Court ruled that it was constitutional for a principal to instruct teachers and staff to stand and sing the “Kimigayo” in front of the national flag at school ceremonies. On 4 August, the City of Yokohama Education Committee announces that from 2012 the textbooks prepared by the Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai will be used in 149 schools with an approximate student population of 80,000 students. On 5 June, the Osaka Prefectural Assembly passed the <i>Kimigayo jōrei</i> 君が代条例, an ordinance that requires all teachers and staff employed by public schools in its jurisdiction to stand for the singing of the “Kimigayo” at all official school ceremonies. Additional action by the assembly in September defined in more detail the punishment facing those employees who fail to comply.

TABLE. Post-Aum Neo-Nationalist Movements and “Restoration” Initiatives.

academic, legal, business, and religious—but the leaders of the Shinto world have a particularly prominent place and include representatives from Jinja Honchō, Shinto Seiji Renmei, Yasukuni Shrine, and Meiji Shrine. In addition, however, the organization also finds support and includes representation from other religious groups, such as Reiyūkai, Sūkyō Mahikari, Gedatsukai, and Kurozumikyō. This “ecumenical” association suggests that the ideals and activities of Nippon Kaigi transcend all sectarian forms of religion and represent what is best for the nation (for at least some members of these diverse religious groups).¹⁵

Another indicator of the neo-nationalist resurgence may be seen in the statements and actions of some prime ministers from the LDP. In a speech to Diet members at a Shinto-related (Shinseiren) political gathering on 15 May 2000, for example, Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō 森 喜朗 gave full expression to the civil religious vision and agenda that drives the Association of Shinto Shrines and other restorationist groups, stating that “Japan was a divine nation centered on the emperor.”¹⁶ Another example is the renewed attention and support given to Yasukuni Shrine by Koizumi Jun’ichirō 小泉純一郎, the prime minister who stirred public controversy by following through on his campaign promise to LDP supporters that he would visit the shrine in his “official” capacity if elected, which he did a number of times between 2001 and 2006.

More important than these symbolic actions and statements, however, is the actual achievement of several restoration goals through legislation passed by the Diet in the first decade after the Aum-related crisis. 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. In 1999, after considerable debate, the Diet finally approved the “Kimigayo” (national anthem) and “Hinomaru” (flag) as official symbols of the nation.¹⁷ At the time this legislation was being debated in the Diet, Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō 小淵恵三

15. This information has been gleaned from the Nippon Kaigi homepage: <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/> (accessed 7 August 2011).

16. The original Japanese is as follows: 日本の国、まさに天皇を中心としている神の国であるぞということを国民の皆さんにしっかりと承知していただく、そのために我々(=神政連関係議員)が頑張ってきた。 Regarding the critical reaction to Mori’s statement, see BREEN and TEEUWEN (2010, 201–202).

17. Even though the bill was passed by the Diet, it did not actually represent the view of the majority of Japanese on this issue. When the national flag and anthem legislation was being debated, for example, an opinion poll conducted by the *Mainichi Shinbun* (14 July 1999) found that 43 percent were in favor of official recognition of the “Hinomaru” as the national flag, while some 52 percent were opposed or in favor of a more careful debate and discussion; similarly, 36 percent were in favor of official recognition of “Kimigayo,” while some 58 percent were opposed or in favor of more serious debate.

stated that no coercion would be involved in public institutions and freedom of conscience would be protected if the bill was passed.¹⁸ As it turns out, however, it was the passing of this legislation in the Diet that 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.¹⁹ The Ministry of Education subsequently issued guidelines and instructions for all public schools to sing the national anthem and use the flag for official events, such as entrance and graduation ceremonies.

There were many protests against these new policies by both teachers and students in various schools across the nation, but the widespread resistance quickly subsided. A number of teachers, however, have continued to refuse to stand or lead students in what they regard to be oppressive patriotic rituals that will recreate an educational environment that too closely resembles that of wartime Japan.²⁰ The

18. Reference to Prime Minister Obuchi's position during the deliberations in the Diet was highlighted in the critical statement of opposition to the compulsory use of the "Hinomaru" and "Kimigayo" made by the National Christian Council in Japan on 27 May 2004: "After the national anthem and flag law was put forth in August 1999, the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education issued protocols for the "Hinomaru" and the "Kimigayo" at public school ceremonies in October 2003. In April 2004, it punished teachers who refused to sing and play the piano for the "Kimigayo" at the graduation ceremony of public schools in Tokyo. It even punished teachers whose students did not stand up to sing the "Kimigayo." *These acts of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government contradict the word of late-Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi who clarified that the national anthem and flag law will not be carried out by force.* They are violating freedom of thought and freedom of conscience (Article 19) and the freedom of religion (Article 20) as guaranteed in the Constitution. They are also violating the Article 14—freedom of thought, conscience and religion—of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted in 1989 and ratified by Japan in 1994. In an environment like this, we cannot expect that there will be respect for uniqueness of each child at school, which is essential for the growth of children. Punishment of teachers is oppressive and affects the children who are developing their own ideas about the anthem and flag" (author's emphasis; the National Christian Council statement is also available in the Japan Christian Activity Newsletter, No. 736, Spring/Summer 2004, 15–16; <http://www.jca.apc.org/ncc-j/english/jcan/2004%20Summer.pdf> (accessed 7 March 2012).

19. For additional historical background on the place of the "Hinomaru" and "Kimigayo" in postwar Japan, see CRIPPS (1996) and, more recently, TANAKA (2000). Tanaka's treatment includes an examination of the use of these symbols during the Occupation period and a survey of their reappearance and expanding use in schools and society. It was in 1958 that the Ministry of Education first instructed (*gakushū shidōyōryō* 学習指導要領) public schools that it was "desirable" for the "Hinomaru" flag 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. His study also includes the statistics reported by the Ministry of Education, which indicate the increase in the percentage of schools (elementary, junior high, high school) following the guidelines for use of the flag and anthem in 1985, 1992, and 1999 (TANAKA 2000, 242–45).

20. TAKAHASHI Seiju (2004, 177), a teacher in the Tokyo school system, has reached back to the Tokugawa period to find another parallel, comparing this policy to the one used by the

pressure on teachers to comply was intensified in the Tokyo schools from 23 October 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 Shintarō). Just five months later, 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. Many teachers have since been disciplined, fined, suspended, or reassigned to schools that require a longer commute.²¹ “Schools cannot legally punish students for refusing to stand or sing the anthem,” as Issac YOUNG has noted (2009, 166), “but educational authorities have punished teachers for failing to do so.” Today there are over seven hundred plaintiffs (teachers or staff) at various stages of appeal with district courts and the Supreme Court to either reverse or prevent future disciplinary action for non-compliance.

It appears that disciplinary action against teachers in public schools is likely to continue and, perhaps, increase. On 30 May 2011, the Supreme Court ruled that it was constitutional for a principal to instruct teachers and staff to stand and sing the “Kimigayo” in front of the national flag at school ceremonies. Furthermore, 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 local ordinance, of course, simply reinforces the directives from the Ministry of Education, but it was followed in September with additional action that laid out more clearly the punishments for those who fail to comply.²²

The increased pressure on teachers and staff to comply with the Ministry of Education’s instructions is no doubt related to the revision of the Fundamental Education Law (*Kyōiku kihon hō* 教育基本法), passed by the Diet on 28 April

authorities centuries ago to force *Kirishitan* to conform. Required participation in these patriotic rituals, he explains, “is like forcing teachers and staff to step on a *fumie* before students, and it is absolutely unforgivable.”

21. For a critical account of these developments, see the documentary *Fukiritsu Kimigayo* 不起立君が代 (Against coercion), which appeared in 2006.

22. This ordinance, which was pushed through the assembly by Osaka Governor Hashimoto Tōru, had the strong support of both the Osaka Ishin no Kai and Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference) members. 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 neo-nationalist group organized in 1996, which also actively supports the renationalization of Yasukuni Shrine and revision of the Constitution. On the recent developments in Osaka, see: <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T110604002911.htm> (accessed 20 November 2011).

2006, which “restored” patriotic moral education as a central component of public education.²³ 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 (twelve of the eighteen members of Abe’s cabinet were also members of the latter group), who finally pushed the legislation through the Diet.²⁴ This was only one part of his larger vision for Japan that he laid out in a book entitled *Utsukushii kuni e* (ABE 2006), a popular volume published just three months after the revised law was passed by the Diet.²⁵ In order to restore national pride and create a beautiful Japan, Abe believes that it is absolutely necessary to revise the laws and Constitution that were put in place during the Occupation period (ABE 2006, 28–29).

In light of our concerns in this study, it is important to point out that references to Aum reappeared in editorials and essays written in support of the movement to revise the Fundamental Education Law. Although almost a decade had passed, Aum was still being used to justify national policies and educational reform. Two years before the revision, for example, the Hiroshima Branch of Nippon Kaigi posted on its homepage comments by Hayashi Kakujō 林 覚乗, a Shingon Buddhist priest, who expressed his support for the new law in a talk on “the poverty of understanding of religion at educational institutions.” In his remarks he mentions that the young people who became involved with Aum, like those who were a part of another cult problem (*reikan shōhō* 靈感商法), shared a similar deficiency in proper religious education.²⁶ An editorial in the *Sankei*

23. It should be noted that the Ministry of Education was supporting the movement to restore patriotic moral education even before the Fundamental Education Law was revised. It approved the revisionist history textbook produced by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform in 2001, and it distributed the patriotic moral education text, *Kokoro no nōto*, to elementary and junior high schools nationwide in 2002. While it is difficult to measure the impact of the moral education texts, it is clear that the revisionist history texts have had limited influence on public education. “The nationalistic whitewashing of history in a government-approved textbook, lamentable as it may be,” as Jeff KINGSTON (2007, 315) notes, “must be balanced against its nearly universal rejection by school boards all over the country.” Less than 1 percent of junior high schools across the country, in fact, chose to adopt the text in 2001 and 2005. Even though the Yokohama Education Committee announced on 4 August 2011 its decision to use the textbooks from the 2012 academic year—it still represents a disappointing rate of adoption for the advocates of revisionist history.

24. See ŌSAKI Motoshi (2007) for a helpful historical overview of the movement to revise the education law, with particular reference to the problem of religious education.

25. As reported in *Jiji Tsūshin* 時事通信 (2 February 2007), this book went through nine printings and sold over half a million copies within a year of its release, making it the best-selling book out of some six hundred titles published by Bungei Shunjū since 1998.

26. The Japanese title of Hayashi’s original talk is *Shūkyō e no rikai ga toboshii kyōiku genba* 宗教への理解が乏しい教育現場. See <http://jp-pride.com/education/> (accessed 13 September 2011).

Shinbun—just days before the legislation was passed—similarly noted that the lack of religious education and proper cultivation of religious sentiment in the postwar curriculum is one reason young people had joined a “cult” like Aum.²⁷ An extended essay by Shinomiya Masaki 四宮正貴, a writer and active leader of Issui Kai 一水会, a right-wing group founded in 1972, also expressed strong support for the new law and the need to restore religious and moral education in the public schools. Shinomiya claims that the violence and mass murder brought on by Aum was a direct consequence of the failure to provide proper moral and religious education throughout the postwar period. The nurturing of a “correct religious spirit” (*tadashii shūkyō seishin* 正しい宗教精神) and provision of religious education is the way forward. “Religious education,” he explains, “is not the forced teaching of a particular religious organization. Rather, it is instruction into the national faith (*kokumin shinkō* 国民信仰) of Shinto and the religious spirit of Confucianism and Buddhism, which have been intertwined throughout Japan’s long history.”²⁸

While the revised Fundamental Education Law was passed during Abe’s term in office, he and his administration lost credibility and support before constitutional revision could be seriously pursued. Winkler points out that “a key problem faced by the Abe administration was the lack of enthusiasm on the part of local party members and the general populace towards many of its signature issues, including constitutional reform” (WINKLER 2011, 21). In spite of this lack of support, he pushed ahead with his agenda of educational and constitutional reform. 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 (2011, 207–208) 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.” Abe’s demise was not just because he overreached and used less than above-board tactics in promoting reforms, but was also due to unexpected problems related to the national pension program that came to light during this year.

In spite of his downfall, he nevertheless achieved significant results during his term in office and left behind a more regulated school system with a particular

27. 産経新聞社説、教育基本法改正「愛国心」はもつと素直に; *Sankei Shinbun* 14 April 2006.

28. Shinomiya’s essay, entitled “*Kyōiku kihon hō*” no kaisei ga kokumin seishin no kōhai o zesei suru hōto de aru 「教育基本法」の改正が国民精神の荒廃を是正する方途である, is available on his personal homepage: <http://www.max.hi-ho.ne.jp/m-shinomiya/> (accessed 11 September 2011; page 3).

type of moral and patriotic education in place. 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 are being violated by the strict enforcement of the revised Fundamental Education Law. In fact, they argue that the revised law has provided the basis for 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 (「人格の完成」をめざす教育から「国策に従う人間」).²⁹ Even though the plan to revise the Constitution has been derailed—or at least put on the back burner for the time being—the revision of the Fundamental Education Law alone is having a serious social impact.³⁰

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.³¹ As we have seen, however, neo-nationalists have continued to pursue a policy of coercion in public schools in spite of their expressed devotion

29. This viewpoint appears in a letter from the Chair of the Social Committee of the Japan Catholic Bishops' Conference to Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and Ibuki Bunmei 伊吹文明, the Minister of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, dated 2 November 2006. This letter is contained in the 2008 Yearbook edited by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (KATOKU RIKKU CHŪŌ KYŌGIKAI 2008, 298–301) and available online at: <http://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/jpn/doc/cbcj/o61102.htm> (accessed 15 March 2010). A comparison of the old and new laws—with the changes highlighted—is available on the homepage of the Ministry of Education: http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/kihon/about/o6121913/002.pdf (accessed 15 March 2010).

30. Public support for the “revisionists” has declined slightly after Abe and his LDP successors lost credibility and were overwhelmed by economic problems. The conservative *Yomiuri Shinbun* (4 April 2008), for example, which has long supported the movement to revise the Constitution, reported the results of a nationwide poll conducted in March 2008. While 42.5 percent supported the proposal to revise the Constitution, 43.1 percent were opposed. *While the anti-revisionists represent only a slight edge over the revisionists, it represents a significant shift in public opinion.* Since 1993, the percentage of pro-revisionists has been greater than those opposed, but the *Yomiuri* article states that the “pro-revisionists” declined by 3.7 percent and the “anti-revisionists” increased by 4 percent. Whether this is due to the “poor” performance of LDP politicians or the consciousness-raising efforts of the citizens' movements opposed to the revision of Article 9 is unclear (at the time there were some six thousand *Kyūjo o mamoru kai* 第九条を守る会 “groups” registered).

31. The original Japanese is 「やはり、強制になるということではないことが望ましい」; 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” (陛下の趣旨は、自発的に掲げる、あるいは歌うということが好ましいと言われたのだと思います). <http://www.asahi.com/edu/news/TKY200410280332.html> (accessed 10 November 2011).

to the emperor. Since Abe still denies that coercion played a role in the mobilization of “comfort women” during the last war, it is unlikely that he (or his supporters) will ever see “coercion” as a problem in public schools.

Conclusion

Given the pluralistic nature of postwar Japanese society, it is not surprising that these neo-nationalistic movements and legislative victories have been widely contested by many intellectuals, the teachers’ union (Nikykyōso 日教組), and a variety of religious leaders and groups. While a detailed consideration of their critical responses is beyond the scope of this study, it needs to be noted in closing that the public concern for protection from deviant groups like Aum, which characterized the beginning of the period we are concerned with here, has expanded to include a concern for protection from what many regard as “coercion” related to the imposition of civil-religious obligations in public institutions. At present, these patriotic rituals are only related to the flag and anthem, but there are fears among religious minorities that shrine visits (*sanpai*) could very well become a part of the activities promoted by public schools. While this may seem far-fetched to some observers, it is certainly what many neo-nationalists would like to see happen and there are worrying indicators that the path has been partially prepared for just such a development.

First, the revisions to the Constitution proposed by the LDP in 2005 would certainly make it possible. In its current form, Article 20 prohibits any state support, promotion, or coercion with respect to religious education or activities. 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 hani o koeru*).³² 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 Shinto until 1945.

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 (HISHIKI 2007, 62). It will create conditions that will allow “intolerance” to

32. The full proposal for Article 20 is as follows: 国および公共団体は、社会的儀礼又は習俗的行為の範囲を超える宗教教育その他の宗教的活動であつて、宗教的意義を有し、特定の宗教に対する援助、助長若しくは促進又は圧迫若しくは干渉となるようなものは行つてはならない。TSUJIMURA Shinobu (2007) provides the following English translation: “The state and public organizations shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activities that possess religious significance or will lead to support, promotion, fostering, coercion, or interference with a specific religion beyond the bounds of accepted social protocol or ethno-cultural practices.”

masquerade as “tolerance,” but coercion will become the new reality.³³ If the revised law is ever approved, he explains, it will likely be used to identify such activities as *jichinsai* 地鎮祭 (a Shinto ground breaking ceremony performed before new building construction begins) and Yasukuni *sanpai* as “customs” and outside of the application of separation principle (HISHIKI 2007, 64). Hishiki argues that if the ambiguous notion of religion (*bakuzen toshita shūkyō* 漠然とした宗教) embedded in this proposed revision is accepted, it will allow the state to have the power to control the people (*kuni ga nozomu yōna tōgō ga kanō ni naru* 国が望むような統合が可能になる), and the rights normally accorded to individuals—the right not to participate—will disappear (HISHIKI 2007, 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* 公務員), to participate in *jinja sanpai* as a part of their official duties.³⁴ Tani Daiji, the Bishop of Saitama, argues that the LDP proposal is reintroducing the notion of “nonreligious Shinto,” which will lead to a situation in which coercion replaces freedom of conscience. He points out that during the period of State Shinto, *jinja sanpai* was defined as a “nonreligious” civic duty that was required not only of the Japanese but also of the colonized peoples of Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan (TANI 2007, 20). Tani maintains that redefining something as a “social ritual” or “custom” will allow religious activity and education to go on in public institutions.³⁵ In short, Tani fears that *sanpai* could eventually be treated as the official ceremonies at school events that require standing before the “Hinomaru” flag and the singing of the national anthem, and that students could be forced to participate regardless of conscience or personal religious commitment (TANI 2007, 25).³⁶

While this may never happen, there are other ominous signs that are causing serious concern. Shortly after the new Fundamental Education Law was passed by the Diet, an animated DVD entitled *Hokori* 誇り (“Pride”) was distributed to

33. The original Japanese here is 習俗的なものは政教分離の対照から除くということになると、こうした非寛容が寛容の名で横行することになりかねません。

34. Some of the bishops’ official statements are contained in the KATORIKKU CHŪŌ KYŌGIKAI 2002; they are also available online: http://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/jpn/doc/doc_bsps.htm#syukyuo (accessed 10 November 2010); <http://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/jpn/doc/cbcj/061102.htm> (accessed 10 November 2010).

35. The original Japanese in Tani’s analysis is: 宗教的活動であろうとなかろうと、「社会的儀礼: 習俗的行為」という名目がつけばすべて、国、公共団体、公立学校などで行うことができるようになります。(TANI 2007, 34, author’s emphasis).

36. Tani also suggests that this revised article would also be used to legitimize and legalize official visits to Yasukuni Shrine—recategorized as a “social ritual” 社会的儀礼 or “national ritual” 国民的儀礼—a strategy designed to eliminate lawsuits and legal conflict over prime ministerial visits to the shrine (TANI 2007, 25).

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 ninety-three 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 17 May 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.³⁷ This critical response appears to have been effective—at least temporarily—as public showings were apparently stopped and copies do not seem to be available.

In this connection, it is also worth noting that the Ministry of Education announced on 27 March 2008 that regulations banning school visits to Yasukuni Shrine and other *gokoku jinja*—which had been stopped by GHQ in 1945 and forbidden by a Ministry of Education regulation in 1949—were no longer valid. The ministry explained that schools are now allowed to arrange such visits as a part of the educational program (as long as it does not promote a particular religion—one wonders how this will play out). Over the summer months of 2008, the ministry also distributed a document at the orientation meetings of boards of education, which stated this new policy. This news was happily reported on the homepage of Nippon Kaigi.³⁸

Takahashi Tetsuya, a professor at the University of Tokyo and one of the most ardent critics of the government, has argued that these neo-nationalist initiatives collectively represent an attempt to restore the "*triadic system*"—military, Yasukuni Shrine, and patriotic education—that characterized the Meiji State (TAKAHASHI 2008, 107). "Sixty years after the end of the Second World War," Takahashi writes, "a twenty-first-century Japanese government is seeking to reconstitute this system, albeit in a new form."³⁹ As we have seen, great head-

37. The initial debate between Ishii and Abe can be viewed on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4ewxDkZcsU> (accessed 15 March 2010). The Communist Party also produced some critical written statements about this DVD; see the article *Shinryaku seitōka e "sennō": Monbushō saiyō no "Yasukuni DVD" 侵略正当化へ"洗脳"—文科省採用の"靖国DVD"*; in *Shinbun Akahara* 18 May 2007. Available at http://www.jcp.or.jp/akahata/aiko7/2007-05-18/2007051803_01_o.html (accessed 30 August 2011).

38. See the 11 May 2008 report: <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/opinion/archives/817> (accessed 11 November 2011).

39. See TAKAHASHI's earlier studies (2004; 2005) for a more detailed analysis and critique of the neo-nationalistic agenda with regard to Yasukuni Shrine and education reform.

way was made in the restoration of patriotic education during this period. It may take another major social crisis before the LDP will be in a position to push through constitutional revision that would legitimize the place of the military and Yasukuni Shrine in contemporary society. With the ongoing economic crisis and the new challenges of recovering from the 11 March 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, it is unlikely that politicians and neo-nationalistic groups will be able to gain much support for constitutional revision in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, given the impact of the post-Aum 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 Shinto and Japanese identity—seek to reshape public institutions.

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