

“Revise the Peace Constitution, Restore Glory to Empire!”—Ultra-right Takes Initiative in Changing the Postwar State

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Collision Course with Asia

The Japanese state-remaking project with the reinstatement of the Japanese empire as a major pillar faces a crisis as it is causing serious deterioration of Japan’s relations with its Asian neighbors. As regards China, the problem drastically came into the open as “anti-Japan” demonstrations exploded and spread throughout China in April. The demonstrators were protesting against recent Japanese government actions justifying and glorifying what the Japanese Empire had done to neighboring Asian peoples. About simultaneously, the South Korean government also came out with renewed criticism of the current Japanese political stance in its new Japan policy guidelines. President Roh Moohyun, referring to recent Japanese government actions, said that it was a great tragedy for the whole world to have to live with those who glorify their past - one of aggression and victimization. He rightly pointed out that although Japan had apologized more than once, it recently began to nullify its apologies. (Frankfurter Allgemeine, interview, April 9) Given the worst imaginable relations with North Korea and absence of any warmth in Russo-Japanese relations, Japan now risks total isolation from all its neighbors.

Japan’s relationships with neighboring countries have deteriorated in the past few years as Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro began to pay official visits to the Shinto Yasukuni shrine as soon as he assumed power in 2001. Though no longer state-owned, this special Shinto shrine has never ceased to be the spiritual and political custodian of the continuity of the Japanese empire. Enshrined there as national heroes and Shinto deities are 2.5 million people, most of them military men, who had “dedicated their lives for the Japanese state” since the early Meiji period. Included among the enshrined are also Tojo Hideki and other war leaders of imperial Japan who were tried as class-A war criminals and hanged in 1947 by the Tokyo tribunal’s judgment. Characteristically, civilian victims of wars, like hundreds of thousands of civilians killed in the Battle of Okinawa, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, and the Tokyo bombings, are not enshrined there. As TAKAHASHI Tetsuya points out, the shrine is not a place for mourning. It is an institution to honor and glorify the war-dead soldiers, in the name of the state, so as to elevate the sorrows of the bereft into a cathartic

glee. The shrine takes a clear political position. It officially refuses to accept the legitimacy of the Tokyo tribunal, considers Japan's wars as just wars, and treats the imperial Japanese war leaders as martyrs. The Japanese government leaders' visits to the shrine of this nature therefore constitute a political act and a major diplomatic act, a grave act that demonstrates the rejection of the premises of the postwar Japanese state. Japan was reaccepted by the international community by signing the 1951 San Francisco peace treaty under whose article 11 Japan accepted the judgment of the Tokyo tribunal. All diplomatic relations of postwar Japan have been based on this commitment.

This being the case, China and Korea have a strong ground to protest against Japanese top politicians' visits to Yasukuni. China is particularly sensitive to the fact that war criminals responsible for the aggression of China, even including MATSUI Iwane, the general held responsible for the Nanjing massacre, are enshrined there. In 1985, then Prime Minister NAKASONE Yasuhiro, known as a rightist politician of theatrical style, paid an official visit to Yasukuni to show off his nationalist identity. But this action invited strong protest from China, Korea and other Asian countries and he had to abandon further visits to the shrine. After 1986, no Japanese prime minister made regular official visits to the shrine until Koizumi resumed the practice in 2001.

The prime minister's visit to the Shinto shrine has been opposed by many Japanese people too on another ground - violation of the constitutional ban on religious activities by the state. Several lawsuits have been filed to establish the unconstitutionality of Prime Minister's visits to the shrine. While the state argued for constitutionality of the act, it succeeded in none of the cases. Most of the court rulings positively established the unconstitutionality of the prime minister's visit to Yasukuni, including one by the Fukuoka district court in April 2004. Asked to react to the Fukuoka verdict, Koizumi simply said he could not understand what the court said at all.

Though it is symbolic of the whole problematic involved, Yasukuni is not the only issue involving the Japanese government's perception of history. The crisis in the Japan-China and Japan-South Korea relations in April was triggered by the Japanese government's approval on April 5 of the use of the ultra-rightist-made public junior high school textbooks of history and civics that implicitly and explicitly justify Imperial Japan's deeds. While the Chinese government lodged strong protest, thousands of Chinese people, many of them young, spontaneously took to the streets of Beijing on April 9 to articulate their protest against the condoned falsification of history by the Japanese government. They went to the Japanese embassy, reportedly threw plastic bottles, eggs, and stones, burning effigies of Koizumi, and otherwise expressed their anger on a whole range of Japan issues from treatment of history to the territorial dispute over the Tiaoyutai (Senkaku) Islands. They demanded that the Japanese government's approval given the rightist textbooks be withdrawn, opposed Japan's bid for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, protested against Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni shrine, and advocated boycott of Japanese goods. The major action was organized in Shanghai on April 16 with several tens of thousands directing their action against the Japanese consulate and some Japanese shops. The demonstration was generally non-violent though sporadic vandalization of Japanese restaurants and other Japan-linked edifices was reported. The anti-Japan action spread fast to other cities including Tianjin, Shenyang, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Xiamen, Hong Kong, and Chengdu. It is noted that a climate critical of the direction Japan was heading had been widespread in China before the street action took place. While Japan concentrates its diplomatic activities on the acquisition of permanent membership of the U.N. Security Council, a spontaneous campaign organized through internet had been going on for some time in China against Japan's bid. By the end of March, more than 20 million Chinese signed a petition opposing Japan's UN SC permanent membership status.

“Their Problem, not Ours”

Anyone with normal political sense would take this near breakdown of normal relations with China as a serious crisis and would feel that it should be immediately attended and remedied. Economically China has now replaced the United States as Japan's No. 1 trade partner on whose burgeoning market Japan's fragile economic recovery heavily depends. Moreover, the Koizumi government's dream of acquiring the U.N. Security Council permanent membership status is inconceivable without China's consent.

But strangely the mainstream Japanese politicians and media have acted as though there were nothing really serious about it. Instead of examining whether the neighbors' demands over the Yasukuni and textbook issues were legitimate or not, media presented the whole development as the problem of Chinese anti-Japan demonstrators having gone berserk, menacing the lives and security of Japanese in China. It was to them not a Japan problem but a China problem. Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka, while not even reacting to the Chinese government's position that Japan was politically responsible for causing this situation, defiantly demanded Chinese apology and compensation for material damage done to the premises of Japanese diplomatic missions and business edifices. In this prevailing discourse, Japan is presented as an innocent victim. Media, especially TV talk shows, have followed the same line, where rightist commentators would accuse the Chinese government of conducting “patriotic education” inculcating anti-Japan sentiments into the youth. Others knowingly comment that the demonstrating Chinese youth are in fact expressing their frustration with the Chinese government using Japan merely as the pretext. Totally absent from the prevailing discourse is serious examination of the legitimacy of the Chinese and other Asian protest over the history issues.

The early April situation must have been a crisis for the Chinese government too as spontaneous action of internet-informed young people crying “patriotism is innocent” could lead to the loss of official control on mass action. While the Chinese government made it clear to Japan that politically Japan was fully responsible for what happened, on the other hand it mobilized media and police forces to prevent any further spontaneous street action. Under heavy security force mobilization all over China, no major anti-Japan action occurred on May 4, the memorial day of the 1919 patriotic manifestation, when observers had anticipated culmination of anti-Japan action.

The demonstrations have subsided for now, but the crisis has not been settled at all. Koizumi himself, attending the Asian-African summit held in Indonesia in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Bandung conference, met with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao to “cultivate understanding” and in his public speech on April 22 repeated verbatim the official words of apology his predecessor MURAYAMA Tomiichi made in 1995, but this gesture turned out to be his usual sophistry of calling black white. His repetition of Murayama's “feelings of deep remorse” and “heartfelt apology” was instrumental only in pre-exonerating what he would later do. Asked at the House Budget Committee on May 16, Koizumi charged China with interfering in Japanese domestic affairs by asking him to stop visiting Yasukuni. In this statement, he made it clear that he would visit the shrine this year again. “Every country wants to mourn their war dead, and other countries should not interfere in the way of mourning,” he said, “I still don't understand why it's inexcusable to pay homage and express our gratitude for the war dead as a whole.” On this basis, he declared that he would “make an appropriate decision as to when to make a visit.” This came as an insult to China. The Chinese government expressed displeasure and Chinese vice-premier Wu Yi, visiting Japan to attend the Nagoya Expo, cancelled her scheduled meeting with Koizumi on May 23 as a gesture of protest. Three days later, Morioka Masahiro, an LDP representative serving as parliamentary secretary for health, labor, and welfare, made another provocative statement that class-A war criminals convicted by the Tokyo war crimes tribunal were

not criminals as the tribunal was a unilateral trial by the occupation forces that “concocted crimes such as crimes against humanity or crimes against peace.” On this ground Morioka fully supported Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni. This made China furious. The Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed “strong indignation” at this “outright challenge to international justice as well as the good sense of mankind” which “gravely hurt the feelings of the people who suffered under the brutal invasion of Japanese militarism.” Chief cabinet secretary Hosoda refused to problematize this case as not serious.

Japan’s relations with South Korea are acrimonious because of the Yasukuni, text book, and the territorial issues involving Dokdo (Takeshima) island. Koizumi and President Roh met in Seoul on June 21 but the summit brought the relations to the sourest ever level as Koizumi was adamant on the Yasukuni issue. In the post-summit press conference, Roh used this unusual expression: “We have reached an agreement at a minuscule level with regard to the history issue.”

By early June, however, it appears that some segments of ruling circles are beginning to wake up to see the serious danger of Koizumi-opted collision course with China and South Korea. Specifically Koizumi’s personal bigotry in Yasukuni visits has begun to be seen as a potentially serious problem harming Japan’s national interests. Big business having enormous stakes in the Chinese market is particularly alarmed; this is shown by the critical editorial tone of the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, the daily paper reflecting big business views. In fact, there are some indications of an open rift arising within the ruling groups. Lower House Speaker Kono Yohei, one of the very few doves in the LDP, alarmed by the total failure of Koizumi’s Asia diplomacy, on June 1 invited former prime ministers to advise Koizumi, and they collectively urged Koizumi to display more prudence in handling the Yasukuni issue. The notorious rightist ex-premier Nakasone surprised everyone by independently making a public statement to the same effect, talking proudly about his own “courage of deciding not to visit Yasukuni anymore in 1986.” Interestingly, the Yomiuri Shimbun, the most influential ultra-conservative newspaper, in its June 4 editorial advised Koizumi not to visit Yasukuni and proposed instead the construction of a secular state-run memorial for war-dead, a controversial project it had earlier been very much against. But there is as yet no clear political front of opposition to the Koizumi-Abe hardliner coalition on the Yasukuni issue. As the Asahi Shimbun (May 31) observed, though many intra-LDP critics of Koizumi as well as LDP’s coalition partner Komei Party were worried about Koizumi-provoked conflicts with China and South Korea, they were only grumbling and dared no action to settle the issue.

Though incredibly slowly, the impact of the Asian neighbors’ protest is making itself felt, awakening more people to the severity of the situation as far as the Yasukuni issue is concerned. According to a Kyodo opinion survey on May 27-28, 57.7% of the respondents said Koizumi should not visit Yasukuni this year, up 16.3 from December last year while those favored his Yasukuni visit decreased to 34.3%, down 16.7.

Rightists Take the Lead for the Revision of the Constitution

As for Koizumi himself, he is a lame duck as his term of office is expiring in summer next year. But the political climate he generated is ominous and is likely to stay beyond his time. The danger that I see in the current political climate of Japan, as is typically evinced by the Yasukuni-China/Korea development, is the loss of statesmanship and rational and responsible thinking on the part of the ruling groups of this country. Things appear to be moving on their own momentum in a wrong direction, in a fashion somewhat reminiscent of Japan in the 1930s. In that decade, the ultra-right and military clique manipulated public opinion to justify total aggression of China, Japan’s walkout from the League of Nations, and entry into alliance with Nazi Germany, an adventure that ruthlessly

sacrificed neighboring Asian peoples and eventually led to the war with America and the inevitable catastrophe. In such a climate, a “system of irresponsibility” as the late MARUYAMA Masao called the prewar system of rule, sets in where no political body would dare take the ultimate responsibility for the consequence while hardliners blaring out demagogic slogans would get the upper hand over those counseling more considerate approach. As the quality of politics deteriorates in this manner, what results often results by default rather than by design or calculation. I am afraid that some early signs of this symptom are discernible in the Japanese political dynamics of today.

Is this a temporary rightwing swing of the pendulum to be later swung back? I hope it is, but the danger is that the current rightist offensive aims to write their principles into a constitution they are now campaigning to make.

The rightist forces, the LDP mainstream as the core, have placed on their immediate agenda the abolition of the 1946 Constitution and its replacement by a new constitution of their own making. Though euphemistically called “amendment,” what they are proposing is an entirely new constitution that would change the nature of the postwar state. The LDP constitution drafting committee, in its gist of draft announced in April, states that “for the first time in history we are establishing a constitution made by the Japanese nationals and people (kokumin) themselves.”

The forces that promote this statehood-remaking drive is a coalition of composite rightist forces, ranging from storm trooper type, sometimes yakuza-related, ultra-rightist groups through a host of writers, commentators, and scholars, to top-ranking politicians such as Koizumi Junichiro himself and would-be next prime minister Abe Shintaro. The Japanese politics has been taken over by this grand coalition of the right to the same degree that the U.S. politics has been by neo-cons since 911. The Liberal Democratic Party, now dominated by hawkish groups, is of course the prime mover of the constitution-amending drive, but the rightist camp has its influential voices in all strategic positions throughout civil society. Notorious ultra-right politician, Ishihara Shintaro, sits as governor of Tokyo, appearing in TV very frequently, calling China “shina” (China’s derogatory appellation Japanese used before the war), openly insulting women, and agitating against foreigners as potential criminals. The alarming aspect of this is that whatever nasty, xenophobic, and misogynist statements he may make, he is pardoned and stays unpunished. The rightist coalition crosses party lines and finds its articulate promoters in the major opposition party, Democratic Party, as well as media, bureaucracy, education systems, and various other social institutions of influence. The most ominous aspect of Japanese politics since the emergence of the Koizumi administration is that a citadel of consensus, as it were, has been built in the midst of civil society to effectively manipulate and control political discourses by intimidation of dissent. Not that dissenters are arrested because of what they say. But people feel it safe to chime in with the mainstream media opinions or stay silent. In this silence and acquiescence, rightists, marginal for decades in political and intellectual arenas, have moved into the center stage, framing issues their ways for the entire society, and setting criteria of discussion in major political debates. Now rightist political journals such as Seiron and Shokun! occupy the most visible bookstore shelves, while liberal journals such as Sekai are hard to find. In this political climate, changing the postwar constitution is presented as though it were the only choice for Japan.

What kind of statehood then is the rightist coalition seeking to usher in? In order to answer this question, we need to understand what is the postwar state the rightists are set to change because the rightist logic and idiosyncrasies are in response to the peculiar make of the postwar Japanese state.

Schizophrenic Character of the Postwar State

The postwar Japanese state is a historical construction of complex nature. It was founded on not one but three principles that are mutually contradictory: imperial Americanism, constitutional pacifism, and imperial Japan's continuity.

The first is the American principle, free worldism if you like, or pledge of *semper fi* to the American Empire. The postwar Japanese state was a joint product of the U.S. occupation and the pro-American segment of the Japanese ruling groups, or SCAPpon as John Dower termed it. The U.S.-Japan security treaty, originally signed in 1951 in San Francisco concurrently with the peace treaty and revised in 1960, serves as the legal and institutional leverage to keep America inside the Japanese state with its supra-constitutional powers. Postwar Japan developed as a capitalist economy within the realm and domain prescribed by Washington, building its relationship with the rest of Asia as subordinate variables of the U.S. relations with Asia. In all senses, the United States of America has never been external to the postwar Japanese state but has been one of its chief constituent elements. In other words, postwar Japan has been organically integrated with the U.S. military and political domination of the world, particularly East Asia and the Pacific, offering bases and facilities, logistically and economically helping in U.S. wars from the Korean through Vietnam to the Iraq war. More importantly, Japan began to remilitarize by building up its armed forces as a supplementary force to the U.S. strategy. The point is that this was in outright violation of the peace clause of the constitution, a case dramatizing the incompatibility between the American principle and the principle of constitutional pacifism.

The second principle, constitutional pacifism, as all Japan observers may admit, is the most salient feature of postwar Japan. Ironically, it was the U.S. occupation that introduced this principle into the 1947 Constitution whose concept and first draft were made by the U.S. occupation. As is well known Article 9 of the constitution says that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained" and that "the right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." There is no room for misunderstanding this article and its requirements - total and complete demilitarization of the country. Demilitarization of Japan was one of the original purposes of American occupation to prevent Japan from reemerging as a military threat to America, but the Article 9 pacifism came to have its own life independent of American intentions. In fact it was reappropriated and remade by postwar Japanese social and political movements that represented a significant segment of war-wary Japanese population. In this process Article 9 came to be the backbone of the Constitution as embraced by the Japanese people throughout most of the postwar years so that it became as essential to the Japanese constitution as republicanism is to the French constitution and freedom to the U.S. constitution. Therefore, the constitution as a whole was represented as "Peace Constitution," other values of democracy, basic human rights, and some social rights being organized around the notion of peace as the core. This pacifism clashed head-on with the Americanist principle that always demanded Japan's increased military role.

For most of the postwar period, the incompatibility of the pro-American and pacifist principles underlay major political issues of postwar Japan. Largely the LDP represented the Americanist principle and the opposition forces, headed by the Socialist Party and trade union center Sohyo, promoting the pacifist principle. The antagonism between the two camps had moments of confrontation on issues such as the 1960 revision of the security treaty, the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 70s, and Okinawa's reversion to Japan in the 1970s. Obviously, Article 9 pacifism and Japan's military commitment to the American empire - the security treaty and Japan's own military buildup - were incompatible. In order to make the impossible possible, the LDP government has invented one acrobatic logic after another to plead for the constitutionality of military buildup and, in fact, has managed to create the world's third most expensive and highly technology-intensive

military force. But even so, the pacifist constitution placed certain restraints on Japan's military functions. The gap between the U.S. demand for Japan's increased military role and Japan's constitutional limits became unbridgeably large as Washington escalated its demand after the end of the Cold War and particularly under the Bush's post-911 strategy.

In the second half of the 1990s, Japan made a breakthrough toward full remilitarization by even sending ground troops to Iraq as part of the U.S.-led "coalition of the willing" and introducing a set of draconian legislation readying the country for battles in Japan's own territories. All this has brought Japan to the point where the war-oriented realities can no longer be legally justified unless the constitution is changed to suit to them. America now feels free to openly demand removal of Article 9. In April 2004, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told a visiting Japanese politician Nakagawa Hidenao, an LDP hardliner, that war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution was blocking the progress of the Japan-U.S. alliance and that if Japan wanted to be a permanent member of the U.N. security council, it needed to revise Article 9 so that it could play an increased military role. Though Armitage added all this was his personal opinion, it is obvious that the U.S. government wanted to deliver its clear message to Japan through this veteran Japan hand.

The pro-American principle is now asserting itself to crowd out the constitutional pacifist principle. This is certainly the major practical factor that propels the current drive for the change of the constitution centering on the deletion of the second paragraph of Article 9.

Third Principle - Glory of the Japanese Empire

But there is the third principle that complicates the situation. The third is the principle of continuity of the Japanese empire. Whether or not there was a break between the prewar Japanese state and the postwar state has in fact been an important intellectual issue of practical importance debated throughout the postwar years. I am with those who see continuity rather than break, but obviously it is not a simple continuity. The historical specificity of the postwar Japanese state, I would argue, lies in the particular way the continuity has been preserved in the state.

As is well known, the preoccupation of the Japanese ruling elite in accepting surrender to the allied powers was the protection and preservation of kokutai, which is translated as polity, but means something that they considered the essence of the Japanese statehood the loss of which would make Japan non-Japan. The essence, to them, was the Emperor (Tenno) system. They decided to surrender in the understanding that the enemy would not destroy the Emperor system. The U.S. occupation, particularly Supreme Commander Douglas MacArthur himself, strongly wanted to use the Emperor system to facilitate its rule over the enemy country. MacArthur used all his influence to absolve Hirohito of war crimes and succeeded in keeping him on the throne as Emperor. The political and moral survival of the top war leader Hirohito, who was even honored as "the symbol of the unity of the nation and state" in the new constitution, made it impossible for postwar Japan to fully destroy the continuity from the prewar state. When the top war leader was exonerated and admired as "peace maker" whose "holy decision" brought the end to the war, how can minor war criminals and their crimes be penalized? The continuity from the prewar empire was thus preserved in the postwar kokutai of Japan. As is often discussed, the postwar Japanese state, unlike the postwar German states, never openly negated the pre-1945 Empire.

However, the status of this third principle has been insecure compared with the other two since its presence had to be concealed from the external world, especially from Asian peoples who had suffered from Japanese imperial invasion and colonization. Openly declaring the continuity principle would destroy relationship with neighboring Asia as it involves justification and glorification of

imperial Japan's conquest of Asian neighbors since the Meiji period. Theoretically, this principle contradicted the pro-American principle too as it implies justification of the Pearl Harbor, and the rejection of the America-made "Pacific War view of history." But this aspect has long been conveniently covered up by both for pragmatic purposes of cooperation in the Cold War.

The embeddedness of this third principle in the Japanese state explains why throughout the postwar decades so many Japanese government leaders have made statements blatantly unrepentant of the past, like glorifying Japan's colonization of Korea, negating Nanjing massacre, and justifying war purposes, and had to take the blame for "a slip of tongue" and to resign.

This explains also why education and textbooks have chronically been a serious issue disputed with other Asian countries as well as between the Ministry of Education and the Japan Teachers' Union. The Ministry of Education for years served as one of the main custodians of the continuity principle in postwar Japan, as though it had taken on the mission to educate boys and girls in a spirit different than the postwar peace education being energetically promoted by the teachers' union. Attacking peace education as "deviation" and trying to water down self-critical views of modern Japanese history, the MOE used the textbook censorship system based on the "teaching guideline" to foist its message into history textbooks. The textbook issue has a long history since 1955 when then Democratic Party attacked the school history textbook for "leftwing deviation." In 1963, MOE turned down a history text book written by progressive historian Ienaga Saburo and Ienaga filed a lawsuit against this government intervention in 1965, which lasted for the subsequent 32 years.

The textbook issue became a keen diplomatic issue in 1982 when the press exposed that the MOE censors' pen changed the expression in the draft of a history textbook, "Japan's invasion of China" into "Japan's advance into China" (italic by the author). This invited strong protest from China and South Korea, and the government had to apologize and to introduce a guideline the MOE should follow to check whether text book expressions might cause international trouble or not. It is interesting to note that at that time this whole issue including the apology was understood merely as a matter of Japan's diplomatic convenience and not at all as a matter of how the Japanese state recognized what imperial Japan did in the past. The government position was, and has been, that apologies were because neighbors wanted them and not because Japan felt it had done something wrong. This was another way of preserving the imperial continuity principle but rather secretly. This double standard certainly kept postwar Japan a suspicious, untrustworthy country to the rest of Asia despite repeated verbal apologies.

The postwar Japanese statehood thus has been chronically suffering from a twisted nature where the three contradictory principles, each asserting itself at the sacrifice of the others, had somehow to coexist and compromise. As none of the three was able to abolish the others, the outcome has always been opportunistic behavior of the Japanese state. But under the surface the inter-principle (inter-social group) strife has always continued, tensions amongst the three factors pushing the state toward one solution or another.

Rightist Offensive — Revisionist View of History

What is happening now is an offensive of rightists to reinstate and legitimate this shady principle through the making of a new constitution. The offensive was launched on a full scale in the second half of the 1990s.

Looking back, the mid-1990s was the turning point for the Japanese situation. It was a period of empty hope for change in domestic politics, loss of the power of progressive social movement, and of false solutions. In 1993, the LDP government collapsed and a new non-LDP coalition government

headed by an extremely popular former aristocrat HOSOKAWA Morihiro stepped into power. Weary of the perennial rule by the LDP, this government was unusually popular and many felt that change could come. But the Hosokawa government lasted only for eight months. From 1993 through 1995, different combinations of parties were tested as the ruling coalition, including a Socialist-LDP coalition headed by Chairman Murayama Tomiichi of the Socialist Party.

In 1995, the 50th anniversary of Japan's defeat in WWII, a group of liberal parliamentarians and intellectuals took the initiative to produce a unanimous Diet statement critically evaluating the past and thus settling the past once and for all. But this idea met fierce resistance from within the LDP, and what emerged was a miserably empty declaration satisfying no side. That was why Prime Minister Murayama made a statement on behalf of Japan admitting that Japan "caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to Asian nations" and offered "sincere apologies." Also, by that time, the government had to admit the moral responsibility for the sexual slavery of Korean, Chinese and other Asian women (comfort women issue).

By now, it is clear that the mid-1990s solutions were fake solutions. In spite of Prime Minister Murayama's "apologies," most of the LDP leaders understood the apologies as merely a gesture to satisfy Asian neighbors. In the same period, the government had to admit, in the face of firm documented evidence, that the "comfort women" had been systematically recruited and organized by the Japanese military. The government said it was "morally responsible" but stuck to the position that there was no "legal responsibility" on this matter and that therefore the Japanese government would not pay compensations. For the aversion of the government's legal responsibility, the Murayama cabinet set up a non-governmental fund (Asian Women's Fund for short) to raise money from the public to compensate the victims of the sexual slavery. This hypocrisy enraged the surviving victims all over Asia, many of them refusing to receive the "consolation" money offered by the women's fund, but the fund sent organizers around Asia to force money into the victims' hands in order to give the appearance of settlement to the war crimes issue. In this brief period of "openings" other major long-dragging issues such as the Minamata mercury pollution were said "settled" in similar deceptive ways with no real redress for the victims. These "solutions" served only to bury the issues.

The rightwing offensive began after the old issues were thus buried. Characteristically, this offensive focused on the interpretation of modern Japanese history, promoting historical revisionism under the slogan of "rectification of the masochist view of history," meaning that the school-taught history of Japan, especially of modern Japan, exaggerated the dark sides of Japanese history like Nanjing massacre, "comfort women," and other war crimes. Because of inculcation of this negative history, they argued, the Japanese nationals (kokumin) lost their national pride, became ego-centered, and forgot the virtue of self-sacrifice and dedication to the "public" (state), and the Japanese traditions with the Emperor in the center as the basis of identity. The rightists renewed their campaign to minimize or even negate the Nanjing massacre, to present "comfort women" as "prostitutes working for money," and to otherwise erase or minimize Japan's war crimes. Their message was: "This is the truth of history hidden for long from your eyes!"

In 1995, FUJIOKA Nobukatsu, a leftist-turned rightist scholar, triggered an offensive in history education by publishing his book titled, "Liberalist view of history" ("Liberalist" as against Marxist). About simultaneously, a host of rightist intellectuals began to work together systematically and organized a national campaign demanding deletion of critical reference to "comfort women" in school textbooks. Rightist groups strewn all over the country worked on local assemblies to pass resolutions calling on the central government to delete references to "comfort women" from school textbooks. In 1997 rightist intellectuals including Fujioka organized the Society for Writing a New Textbook on History (Tsukuru-kai) to produce their own school textbooks and spread their use at public schools. In this climate Kobayashi Yoshinori, an iconoclast cartoonist popular among the

youth, came out with a series of political cartoon books reinstating the value of the state, praising wartime heroes, and adoring war. His books, especially "Discussing War," sold in millions of copies.

It was around this time that formal and informal coalitions of rightists from "grassroots conservatives" through local assembly politicians and to national Diet representatives sprang up to promote their grand strategy of fully reinstating the imperial continuity principle. On the LDP side, the party in 1993 set up an official history evaluation commission consisting of 105 Lower and Upper House representatives. On August 15 1995, the commission published a document titled, "Evaluation of the Greater East Asia War," that declared that the GEA War was a war of liberation of Asia as well as for Japan's defense and survival, that the stories of Nanjing massacre and "comfort women" were fictions, and that a national movement should be launched to rectify leftwing deviations of school textbooks and spread its view of history among the people. It is important to note that this "war evaluation" report was announced the same day Prime Minister Murayama made his statement of apology. Tsukuru-kai came into being with this LDP move as the pioneer.

In 1997, two largest rightist organizations, the National Conference to Defend Japan (Nihon-o mamoru kokumin kaigi) and the Society to Defend Japan (Nihon-o mamoru kai) merged to form a coalition called Japan Conference (Nihon kaigi) headed by former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court MIYOSHI Toru as president and with local branches in almost all prefectures. The National Conference consists mostly of rightist intellectuals while the Society has under its wing wealthy and tightly organized rightist religious organizations. Japan Conference promotes campaigns for the revision of the constitution and the Basic Education Law, supports and commends prime minister's visits to Yasukuni, opposes foreign residents' voting rights in local elections, supports dispatch of Japanese troops to Iraq, and upholds other rightist goals.

The crucial point is that Japan Conference has its powerful parliamentary contingent. The Japan Conference Caucus comprising 242 Lower and Upper House representatives has in its roster top-ranking LDP leaders who have assumed prominent government positions, such as former Prime Minister MORI Yoshiro, HIRANUMA Takeo, minister in charge of economic affairs more than once, and ABE Shinzo, LDP secretary general until recently. The caucus works to translate Japan Conference policies into official government policies in the three strategic areas: (1) history, education, and family system, (2) defense, diplomacy, and territorial issues, and (3) constitution, imperial household, and Yasukuni shrine. In 2004 Abe as LDP Secretary General issued an intra-party directive, practically urging all LDP chapters to work energetically for the adoption of the Tsukuru-kai textbooks by local boards of education. "LDP believes that history education is a crucial issue determining the essence of the future of the state," the directive said. Tawara Yoshibumi, a leading scholar/activist heading the national network on textbooks and children, called Abe a veritable ultra-right politician, whose prominence and influence in Japanese politics ought to have been problematized just as much a political scandal as the case of Jorg Haider of Austria.

Vision of Japan LDP Designs — Not an "Ordinary State"

The extremely alarming development is that the LDP's constitution-amending plan is being pushed forward precisely along this ultra-right line and on the initiative of the ultra-rightist forces. The party's plan is to complete its draft constitution by October this year and the party's subcommittees are now working to produce it. The party has disclosed four interim documents as its drafting process proceeded. Though some lip service is made to "basic ideas" of the current constitution, these documents unambiguously show that the projected "new shape of the nation" is one based on the justification of the Japanese imperial past basically along the ultra-right line. For instance, the "outline" worked out by chapter-to-chapter subcommittees of the LDP's Constitution Drafting

Committee disclosed in April, in the section detailing what is to be written in the preamble of the new constitution, reads:

The Japanese people have been working to bring prosperity to the nation in the spirit of harmony (wa) and laboring to make history always rallied around the Emperor as the symbol of the unity of the nation. The Japanese people have vigorously developed their nation by enduring a number of ordeals and overcoming a number of hardships such as the last war.

Read this carefully. Here “the last war” is perceived as nothing but a heart-warming story of the Japanese nation “enduring ordeals and overcoming hardships.” There is no room here for critical reflection of the past, nor is there the determination expressed in the preamble of the current constitution that the Japanese people “shall not allow the horrors of war to again visit us through the action of government.”

The basic tenet of the LDP-planned new constitution is the idea that the Emperor is the core of the Japanese nation and the source of Japanese identity. The LDP’s “tentative proposal” disclosed in December 2004 proposed that the Emperor be enhanced to the status of the head of the state and that the Shintoist rituals the Emperor conducts, now considered the imperial family’s private affair, be recognized as a “public affair” under the constitution. The Emperor himself being the highest Shintoist leader of state Shintoism, the Emperor system in the current constitution is already problematic as it contradicts the constitution’s secular statehood clause. In the LDP draft, this obstacle is proposed to be overcome by official recognition of a new version of state Shintoism.

The stress of the LDP-planned constitution, as seen from the several interim proposals and draft summaries so far disclosed by the LDP, is on the importance of “the public.” The “public” here means the state that is based on Emperor-centered “legacies and traditions.” Their new constitution, the “tentative proposal” says, should “rectify misguided individualism and let the people rediscover the correct meaning of the public (state and society).” It is characteristic that “public” (kokyo) is in fact a magical word used to decimate individual freedom. The “outline” (April 2005) argues that the “public welfare” used in the current constitution is ambiguous and therefore should be redefined as a concept that is synonymous with “security of the state and preservation of social order.” In the new constitution, the LDP suggests, “public welfare” should be replaced by “public interest” or “public order.”

As critics unanimously point out, and as the LDP drafters themselves admit, the LDP-promoted scheme intends to change the meaning of the constitution from a law that binds the conducts of the powers that be to a set of rules that binds and controls the people’s conducts and thoughts. The “tentative proposal” explains that in order to show this nature of the constitution, the LDP draft has introduced the concept of people’s “obligations” as differentiated from legal duties. “Legacies, traditions, and values” connected with the Emperor are to be put into the LDP constitution and it is to be the people’s obligation to respect and defend them. What is envisaged, therefore, is a state that imposes certain moral values on the people in the name of people’s obligations.

In this moral value approach, the LDP in the June 2004 “gist of discussion” document proposed to remove Article 24 of the current constitution that provides for sexual equality in marriage and family life. This clause, the LDP project team stated, “should be reviewed from the point of view of appreciating the family and community values.” Gender equality and “excesses” in sexual education at classrooms in fact are now under heavy attacks from the same rightist coalition that campaign on textbook issues. As women’s organizations immediately reacted vehemently against this blatant proposal, this particular reference to Article 24 was later dropped in the subsequent LDP documents on constitution drafting. But the idea remains. The April “outlines” suggested the people’s “obligation to maintain their family in a good shape through cooperation of man and his wife.” As

Saito Emiko points out, the LDP regards the family as an intermediary body linking individuals to the state so that individuals will fully serve the state. She quoted an LDP Diet representative as suggesting, "If you ask individuals to serve the state, it may sound far fetched. You can first tell them to serve the family and the community, and in that context you can ask them to serve the state." (Kato Katsunobu, LDP Constitution Amendment Project meeting, Oct. 31, 2004)

Critics from the peace movement side usually describe the current process as an attempt to remake Japan into a country capable of legitimately waging war. The movement against the revision of the Constitution, specifically against the change of Article 9, is conducted on this basis. While this approach is perfectly legitimate, we need to recognize that what is actually happening is something more than that. It is not just an "ordinary state" like France or Mexico or Thailand with legitimate regular armed forces that is emulated by the main forces promoting this process including the LDP. The state they want to introduce is a peculiar state based on the principle of Japan's imperial continuity as well as on the American empire principle.

The ongoing state remaking process represents a tactical alliance among two of the three contradictory principles, namely, the American empire principle and the Japanese empire principle for the convenience of battering to the ground, and preempt the ground long occupied by, their common sworn foe, the pacifist principle.

Despite the apparent strong thrust of the rightist movement, this state restructuring drive has the following three major weaknesses.

(1) The new Japanese state they are eager to introduce are to be based on two mutually contradictory principles for legitimation - the principle of Japanese imperial continuity and the principle of U.S. imperial domination. These two principles can work together to the extent that they enable Japan to have legitimate military forces but will have little in common beyond that point. The imperial continuity principle, however muffled, asserts that Japan had waged a just war and negates the legitimacy of the Tokyo war crimes tribunal and that is what the United States can never accept. The new statehood thus will still be enmeshed in irresolvable contradictions, this time without the convenient façade of constitutional pacifism.

(2) More importantly, the reaffirmation of the imperial continuity principle in the "new state" under the new constitution will totally destroy Japan's relations with the neighboring Asian countries. As said at the outset of this paper, this is already happening in dramatic ways even prior to the official proclamation of this principle in a new constitution. Japan of course cannot survive economically and politically if it sets itself on a collision course with the rest of Asia, China and Korea, in particular.

(3) Japan's full military-political commitment to the U.S. imperial strategy by changing the constitution is nothing but a foolish, untimely, and reckless bet at a time when the U.S. global scheme is crumbling and when the U.S. is increasingly isolated from the people around the world. Despite Japan's courting, Washington on its part will not fully trust it, a former enemy country that reaffirms legitimacy of the Greater East Asia War (and therefore Pearl Harbor).

For these reasons, we can say that in historical perspective the rightists' current state-remaking venture has no future. It is doomed from the start. But that does not mean its automatic collapse. Unless Japanese people block this attempt by upholding the peace principle of the constitution, generalize it and defeat the rightist scheme totally, the eerie metamorphosis of the postwar Japanese state into some grotesque creature will be completed. Fortunately, 60% or so of the Japanese public oppose revising Article 9 as most opinion polls show. The various political forces pushing for amending the constitution have their respective motivations and ideas with regard to their future images of Japan. Nor can the LDP dream to make its draft the final proposal to go to the national

referendum. Complex processes of politicking, maneuvering, and compromising are in store before they come up with some definite proposal.

Can the progressive movements build up to counter the full range of the rightist offensive? Can they do so based on the legacies of Japanese people and society favoring peace and justice? Is such a struggle a struggle of the people in Japan alone or is it to be part and parcel of the movement to introduce another Asia and another world? All these are emerging as pressing questions. In another paper, I will try to answer them by introducing what is happening in terms of people's movement and actions in the Japanese archipelago.

P.S.

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