

Abe Shinzō and Japanese Nationalism: What's Next?

Kevin M Doak
Georgetown University

In November 2020, a few months after Prime Minister Abe resigned, Yamagiwa Sumio published a short assessment of Abe's achievements, noting that "Abe's administration stabilized the political situation, and through Abenomics expanded employment and raised the value of the stock market. And his government seems to have strengthened the US-Japan Alliance through the Peace and Security Law. But on the key points that conservatives had placed their hopes—"escape from the Postwar Regime" (that is, escape from the fetters of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial view of history that Japan was a bad country, an invading state) and a revision of the constitution to make Japan into a country that could defend itself on its own, on these matters that were the heart of Abe's political vision, he was not able to produce any result."¹ Of course, in his own words, Abe himself noted when leaving office other successes (the restoration of the economy in Tōhoku, the creation of four million jobs and his globist (地球儀) foreign policy), even as he admitted some disappointments (the unresolved *ratchī mondai*, failure to sign a peace treaty with Russia, and inability to revise the constitution). When assessing Abe's nationalism, we should not ignore his globist foreign policy that showed him to be a responsible agent for peace and security in the region. But Yamagiwa notes there were more failures—leaving in place the Murayama and Kōno statements, and his failure to make a subsequent visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, the unresolved Northern Territories issue and adopting a servile attitude toward China, especially in regard to its "one belt, one road" strategy. Yamagiwa ends on an important note: "conservative politics will not leave the scene with Prime Minister Abe."² I would add, nationalism also did not leave the scene when Prime Minister Abe resigned. Or more accurately, the underlying issues driving a reconsideration of nationalism in Japan have not suddenly disappeared with the end of the Abe government.

At the same time, we must not overstate the importance of Prime Minister Abe for both Japanese conservative politics and for Japanese nationalism. One cannot question the fact that he has made tremendous, even unprecedented, contributions to both conservatism and nationalism in Japan. But any nationalism that is simply instigated from the top down, that is, any nationalism that is indoctrinated in the people by the State (or its officials) is not a healthy nationalism. Hence, Sakurai Yoshiko's point here is a very wise one: "We cannot simply forever ride the rail that Prime Minister Abe has laid down for us. It is important that the national people continue studying and that the nation as a whole has the strength of spirit to find the next Abe Shinzō and cultivate that new leader."³ In short, the cause and thus the solution of Japan's political (and cultural) problems lie at the level of the nation, not at the level of the State. That solution is not entirely dependent on political or media elites either. It must come from the people (*kokumin*) themselves.

Sakurai points to Fukuzawa Yukichi's *An Encouragement of Learning* (*Gakumon no susume*) and its exhortation to study in order to distinguish oneself at times of national uncertainty. As well she should. *An Encouragement of Learning* has been called "the first real work of nationalism [*kokuminshugi*] in Japan."⁴ And for good reason. In that book, Fukuzawa complained that "it can be said that Japan only has a government, but not yet a nation (*kokumin*)."⁵ The whole point of *An Encouragement of Learning* was to encourage study as a method of exploring the conditions for making the Japanese people a true nation (*kokumin*). For Fukuzawa, the purpose of study always was both for the development of the individual and at the same time, for the development of the nation (*kokumin*).

Now it cannot honestly be said that today Japan still does not have a nation. Rather, the problem today is what kind of nation does Japan have? From the early postwar period, Maruyama Masao identified the problem as the need to build up a healthy nationalism and his analysis "underlined his sharp distinction between the nation (*kokumin*) and the state (*kokka*)."⁶ In short, Maruyama's healthy nationalism was a continuation of Fukuzawa's project. And this is the same idea that Prime Minister Abe appealed to, when he called for a "healthy nationalism" (*kenzen na nashonarizumu*) in contemporary Japan. Of course, the left goes crazy when they hear this call for a "healthy nationalism." But why? Certainly they don't prefer a sick nationalism, do they? And I do hope the Japanese Left does not intend to embrace Maruyama's alternative to nationalism, which is statism (*kokkashugi*). I think there are two different reactions behind the Left's recoiling at the call for a healthy nationalism in Japan. One is their prior commitment to globalism. For some this means American domination of Japan's military, diplomatic and political institutions; for others on the Left, it means a withdrawal from the American umbrella in favor of the hegemony of communist China. There may still be a few naïve Japanese who think of globalism as a utopia: a "no place" where there is no national influence, neither America's, China's, nor Japan's. But in either case, globalism takes precedence over building a healthy Japanese nationalism. Globalism is a common problem that Japanese nationalism shares with American nationalism and an issue that we will look more closely at below. The other reason for the Left's reaction, one shared by Communist China, as well as by Leftists in the West and in South Korea, is that their preferred nationalism is an anti-imperialist *minzokushugi*. Here, the offense is not merely the modifier "healthy" but the conception of nationalism as *kokuminshugi*, a nationalism that historically has been associated with individual rights, capitalism, freedom of religion and a range of values that are opposed by the leftist *minzokushugisha* as vestiges of Western cultural colonialism.

1. *Conditions in the West Today*

To make a fair assessment of nationalism in Japan and what influence Abe had on Japanese nationalism, we have to follow the example of Fukuzawa and cast our eyes further afield. Just as Fukuzawa published *Conditions in the West* (『西洋の事情』) on the eve of the Meiji Restoration to guide his nation during those tumultuous times, we too might look beyond Japan to capture what nationalism has to offer Japan today. All too often, the Western media have emphasized Abe as a nationalist as though this means he is

some kind of atavistic throwback to the wartime period.⁷ If Abe advocates nationalism, then they conclude he must be looking to start a war with his neighboring countries once again. For the moment, let us set aside this gross misreading of nationalism as a form of militarist statism—precisely what Maruyama argued against. Rather we should take into consideration the current rise of nationalism in the West, the “Conditions in the West” (*Seiyō no jijō*) as they apply to nationalism today. Doing so should help us place Abe’s nationalism in a broader, comparative light and see that it is not a return to the militarism of another time.

The first thing to consider is that nationalism has been on the rise in the West during the entire 21st century, and even earlier. Consider Neil Farage, the leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party from 2006 and now the leader of the Brexit Party. His nationalism is, among other things, aimed at restoring a sense of autonomy to the British people over their own national affairs (i.e. Brexit). Or Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front and now the President of the National Rally Party in France. She also wants to restore greater autonomy to the French people, particularly by liberating France from the globalist influences of the European Union, NATO and the United States. In Austria, there was Jörg Haider (1950-2008) who led the Freedom Party and laid the foundations for the conservative, nationalist Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) Party. One could continue with other nationalist movements in Europe. But let me turn to Brazil, where President Jair Messias Bolsonaro represents a conservative, nationalist and populist brand of politics that is often compared to the movement led by former President Donald Trump in the U.S.A. And of course Trump remains the most famous and influential leader of a populist nationalist movement even today. Perhaps it is their shared nationalist vision, resistance to globalism and respect for the autonomy of their people that made the Trump-Abe relationship such a strong one during their times in office.

Even from this brief survey of the rise of nationalism in the West, it is clear that politics around the world have turned strongly toward a kind of populist nationalism that is, if not new, at least newly vigorous on the political scene. Why that is the case is the subject I will turn to next. But first, at a minimum, it should be evident that Abe Shinzō’s nationalism was not a return to an earlier prewar Japanese kind of militarism. Rather, his nationalism placed Japan squarely within the most interesting political developments of the early 21st century and, for all its anti-globalism, it shared a good deal with other nationalist movement around the world.

2. *An Encouragement of Learning about Nationalism Today*

Abe’s Understanding of Nationalism

One of the failures of many efforts to assess the nationalism of Abe Shinzō is that they often presume a highly abstract theory of nationalism which they impose onto Abe’s actual thought, regardless of whether it fits his own explicit writing on the subject of nationalism. In fact, I am still amazed at how little attention, especially outside of Japan, has been given to Abe’s extensive discussion on nationalism in the chapter on nationalism in his book *Utsukushii kuni e* (later revised as *Atarashii kuni e*). Here

especially we need to follow Fukuzawa's encouragement to study, and if we are to study nationalism as it relates to Abe, it seems to me that the first place we must begin is with this chapter where he outlines his own understanding of nationalism.

At the heart of the book is "Chapter 3: What is Nationalism?" Even a cursory reading of this chapter will reveal Abe's rejection of racism and ethnic nationalism. In the first place, he does not use the term "*minzokushugi*" for nationalism, but the loan word *nashonarizumu*. This is not merely an arbitrary choice. Substantively, he praises naturalized Japanese from Brazil and embraces as "one of us" anyone who is willing to place his loyalty under the Hi-no-maru flag, regardless of his country of origin. Sports provides the key metaphor for Abe in explaining nationalism that is democratic and nationalism that is not. He speaks of his fascination as a young boy watching the parades for the Tokyo Olympics, but this pride clearly comes from the performative excellence of those athletes who represented Japan—not from their blood but from what they would achieve as competitors in the games. He writes with pride also about naturalized Japanese like Alessandro "Alex" Santos who fought for Japan in World Cup soccer games. "Alex" and his fellow Brazilian-Japanese "Ramos" are embraced for what they are: fellow Japanese compatriots, men made Japanese by law, not by blood or ethnicity.

And finally, Abe directly rejects *minzokushugi* by pointing to the example of Australian Gold Medalist, Cathy Freeman, whose Australian national identity co-exists with her aboriginal identity. "Nationalism," Abe concludes, "can be translated in various ways, but if we dare to render it as *minzokushugi*, then Cathy Freeman would not be able to carry both banners [Australian and Aboriginal] without being ripped apart within by this nationalism."⁸ Throughout the book, Abe consistently renders the Japanese nation as *kokumin*, not as *minzoku*, a distinction made not only conceptually but also through his description of how democratic nationalism functions in practice and the implications it has for actual people.

Those who wish to know what concrete difference Abe's nationalism might make in particular policy issues are well-advised to read his book. But to appreciate how this renaissance of nationalism is deeply linked to the policies Abe sought to establish, one merely needs to read the concluding lines from *Toward a New Country*:

Thus, when we line up all the issues that Japan faces, not just the North Korean kidnapping issue, but even the territorial questions, the US-Japan relationship or even economic issues like the TPP, I believe they all come from the same root. Is this not the price we have had to pay for enjoying economic prosperity while kicking these problems down the road, without a clear consciousness that the life and treasure of the Japanese nation (*Nihon kokumin*) and the territory of Japan are to be protected by the Japanese government's own hands? Truly, "escape from the postwar regime" is still the most important theme for Japan, just as it was five years earlier when I was the prime minister.

During the last general election, the LDP raised the slogan, "Take Back Japan." This did not mean only to take back Japan from the Democratic Party

government. I'll go so far as to say that we are in a battle to take back the country of Japan from postwar history by the hands of the Japanese people (*Nihon kokumin*).⁹

One very specific policy implication of Abe's nationalism is clear in the revised Ainu New Law (アイヌ新法) that went into effect on May 24 2019. Yamagiwa complains that "considering the forced passage of the New Ainu Law and the Immigration Law (the revision of the Immigration Law) makes me painfully feel that if this is conservative politics, I will stop supporting conservative administrations."¹⁰ But once we take into consideration nationalism as Abe understands it, a unity under the Hi-no-maru national flag of people of different ethnicities, then there is nothing strange about the Ainu New Law from the conservative nationalist standpoint of Abe.

But a multi-ethnic nationalism does not mean that pride in Japanese ethnicity (*minzoku*) is forbidden. One of the sharpest minds ever to deal with this difficult problem of nationalism was the Japanese jurist Tanaka Kōtarō, and his views on this matter are worthy of our attention, not least because his conclusion strikes me as very similar to that of Abe Shinzō. In his magnum opus *A Theory of World Law* written in the early 1930s, Tanaka devoted over a hundred pages to the problem of "the concept of law and the concept of *minzoku*."¹¹ He recognized that the nation (*minzoku*) was an important social form of cultural identity, one that must not be dismissed. As he wrote, "each nation [*minzoku*] has its own special quality and through its special quality has its own share of the culture of humanity and has a mission to contribute to this culture. Not only must we regard as entirely proper man's love for the nation to which he belongs, so long as it does not prevent the accomplishment of this noble mission, but to have this kind of love is, like that for one's family, a command of nature and on top of that a necessary condition for man's own moral completion."¹² The problem for Tanaka was not something inherent in *minzoku* identity, but the mistaken notion that law (and all morality) were confined within a *minzoku* limit. He placed the principles of law above the nation only insofar as it needed to have moral legitimacy, and thus he strongly criticized Nazi jurisprudence that regarded those people not considered to be members of the German *minzoku* as subhuman, without any legal rights. Tanaka rejected this narrow *minzokushugi* and insisted that all human beings had certainly rights that were protected under the natural law. But so long as those rights were protected, there was no reason to deny others their cultural expression as members of a *minzoku* (nation).¹³ Nor did Tanaka believe that all laws had to be "above the nation," as the natural law is. So long as basic human rights were recognized, there was nothing wrong with laws that reflected national moral traditions, particularly in the area of public (or criminal) law. There are subtle differences between Tanaka's thought on nationalism and that of Abe, differences that surely reflect the historical and cultural differences between the 1930s and today. But in broad terms, both Tanaka and Abe see ethnic differences as contributing to human culture, and they both place the law and human rights above the limitations of ethnicity.

With this in mind, let us now reconsider Yamagiwa's complaint about the New Ainu Law. The essence of the revised New Ainu Law (May 24, 2019) is well-expressed in Article One. Article One states that the purpose of this law is "the realization of a society in which the Ainu people can live with pride in their ethnicity (*minzoku*) and which

respects that pride, and thereby contributes to the realization of a society where all members of the nation (*kokumin*) coexist with mutual respect for each other's personality and individuality."¹⁴ This statement is of course completely consistent with Abe's outline of a nationalism that recognizes Japanese people of various ethnic origins. It is also consistent with Tanaka's argument that law should not be an expression of a particular ethnic (*minzoku*) identity but should allow all ethnic nationalities (*minzoku*) to fulfill their own mission of contributing to world culture, even under a single State (*kokka*). Who could object to this vision of multi-national coexistence under the rule of law of a single constitutional State? One can imagine two different positions that might object to this law. First, neo-liberal cosmopolitans who reject any defense of ethnic particularity and simply reduce all people to individuals without cultural coloring. Second, extreme ethnic nationalists like the Nazi jurists that Tanaka argued against who held that there can only be one ethnic nation in one State (*ichi minzoku, ichi kokka ; ein Volk, ein Staat*). That Abe belongs to neither school of thought should be abundantly clear. But whether Abe's nationalism should be considered conservative requires further study below. So, let us continue in this "encouragement of learning" (*gakumon no susume*).

New Directions in the Understanding of Nationalism

I want to begin this review of new directions in the understanding of nationalism with conservative American writers for two reasons. First, I think there is a strategic advantage in emphasizing how American are increasingly turning to nationalism as a solution to their cultural, social and political problems, because some postwar Japanese have often looked to America as if it were by nature an antidote to nationalism. My second is that I am an American, and the discourse on nationalism in America is the one I am most familiar with. But from the short survey above of nationalist politicians around the world, it should be evident that it is not only America that is increasingly interested in nationalism. This section could easily be extended to incorporate the new appreciation of nationalism in Europe and other parts of the world. But I must keep in mind space limits for this article.

One of the leading examples of new directions in understanding nationalism in the United States comes from Yuval Levin. Levin is the editor of *National Affairs* which he founded in 2009 and is seen as the leader of reform conservatives ("reformicons") who seek to reconnect to middle-class and low-income voters. His focus is unusual for those who espouse nationalism. Rather than the state or the collective people, he emphasizes the spaces between the individual and the state: the intermediary institutions of family, communities and the market economy. His general argument can be seen from the title of his 2016 book, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism*. He argues that the "fractured republic" is the result of both liberals and conservatives looking back nostalgically to an earlier "golden era" which for liberals was the mid-20th century and for conservatives the Reagan years. This is a mistake, according to Levin. America has never had a perfect moment that we should return to in order to fix the nation's problems. What has been consistent in American history is individualism, and the challenge for a restored republic is how to incorporate what Levin calls "expressive individualism" ("a desire to pursue one's own path but also a yearning

for fulfillment through the definition and articulation of one’s own identity”¹⁵ into a restored social contract. Levin suggests that we can use the successes of a specialized economy to address the problems created by specialization. How? By relativizing the market economy. The market economy is only one “specialized” area of social life, and it needs to be counterbalanced by those intermediary institutions of family, community, charitable organizations, religious congregations, fraternal groups, and other organizations that are not dominated by the logic of the market but are based on a different set of moral principles. He points out that “economic debates are not the only ones worth having, and are usually not the ones that run the deepest or that do the most to shape our society.”¹⁶

I see remarkable congruence in Levin’s vision for a restored American republic and Abe’s call to “take back Japan,” especially when we understand Abe’s nationalism as both premised on individualism, respect for free market economy and also as an effort to balance the Yoshida Doctrine’s economism with social and moral visions that seek to restore the dignity of the individual and the nation. Indeed, I think Abe would strongly agree with Levin’s ultimate assessment of nationalism:

Nationalism can easily take toxic forms, especially in times of change and growing diversity and liberalization—cultural and economic. And it can suffocate the mediating institutions, as it did in America starting early in the twentieth century [and in Japan at the same time in *kokkashugi*]. But Americans [and Japanese] have always also had recourse to a more wholesome and constructive nationalism, because our nation is to an exceptional degree a credal nation with high expectations of itself. American [and Japanese] nationalism need not merely be a love of what our country has been (though it is that), but can at the same time also be a love of what our country ought to be—a love of the ideal that we have always held out before ourselves as the American [or Japanese] possibility, even if we have never fully realized it.¹⁷

In Abe’s kind of nationalism, we see a similar rejection of statism (*kokkashugi*) which ran roughshod over Japan’s intermediary institutions in the wartime years. But we also find a rejection of narrow nationalism (*minzokushugi*) that remains frozen in a nostalgia for the past and does not build on the individualism that postwar Japan shares with America. The key challenge for both Levin and Abe is how to articulate a moral vision that accepts “expressive individualism” without surrendering a sense of responsibility to the broader national people (*kokumin*).

Yoram Hazony directly addresses the moral vision of nationalism in his book, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (2018). Hazony, president of the Herzl Institute think tank in Jerusalem, is an Israeli citizen, not an American. But insofar as he has become a mainstay of the American right we can consider him broadly as part of these new approaches to American nationalism. For example Michael Anton, one of Trump’s senior advisers, drew on Hazony’s vision of nationalism in formulating what Anton described as “the Trump doctrine” in foreign affairs. And Hazony’s American organization, the Edmund Burke Foundation, sponsored a conference in 2019 that featured speeches from Senator Josh Hawley, Tucker Carlson, Peter Thiel, and then-National Security Adviser John Bolton—all important leaders in this new appreciation of nationalism in America.

Clearly, Hazony is an important influence on American thinking about nationalism, especially among conservatives.

One of the salient characteristics of Hazony's theory of nationalism is his avoidance of the previous distinction between civic and ethnic nationalisms in favor of a sense of the nation as a composite of tribes. His view of the nation is thus somewhere between the civic and ethnic models, with an implicit tendency in favor of the old ethnic nation model. However, he does allow for new tribes to merge with the dominant old tribe, giving his theory of the nation much of the assimilationist character of the civic nation without its individualism. But his main point transcends the ethnic and civic distinction in favor of an emphasis on the communal basis of a true nation. A nation, he writes, "is a form of community, a human collective recognizing itself as distinct from other human collectives . . . and when the tribes of a nation unite to establish a national state, they bring to this state the familiar and distinctive character of the nation, its language, laws, and religious traditions, its past history of anguish and triumph."¹⁸

To clarify the distinctiveness of the nation, Hazony juxtaposes it with empire. Nationalism properly understood is the polar opposite of imperialism, as imperialism is the effort by one State to eradicate the independence of other nations and national States. Imperialism ultimately tends toward the establishment of one universal standard of culture, legality, and polity for the entire world; in contrast, nationalism is the manifestation of a type of relativism that allows for a range of diverse cultural, legal and political institutions. Herein lies the "virtue" of nationalism, its protection of those particular communities in which people find their deepest meaning and loyalties.

Hazony helps explain what is at stake in Abe's "escape from the postwar regime." The postwar Japanese regime is very much a product of what Hazony describes as imperialism, as the postwar *pax Americana*'s purpose is "to remove decision-making from the hands of independent national governments and place it in the hands of international governments or bodies."¹⁹ When Abe calls for Japan to escape from the postwar regime, he is not preparing for a return to the militarism of Imperial Japan but merely seeking liberation from the imperial order of contemporary globalist forces that deny Japan its own full autonomy. This is neither an attack on America nor on China. It is merely an effort to claim what Hazony sees as the right of all peoples: a community of their own that represents their own historical and cultural traditions. And to pursue one's own nationalism is not hatred, Hazony concludes, or at least not any worse a form of hatred than one finds among advocates of "the old imperialist hatred of the different and diverse."²⁰ Thus he points out today that those who wish "to chart an independent course that is their own. . . [who are] holdouts against universal liberalism are to be found these days in America and Britain; in France, the Netherlands, and Denmark; in Czechia, Poland, Hungary, and Greece; in India and Japan."²¹ So, now we know why Abe is so often reviled as a dangerous nationalist. His nationalism, like many other emerging nationalisms around the world, is directed against the imperialism of the postwar globalist world order.

An even more recent study on nationalism that overlaps with key elements on Abe's nationalism is R. R. Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the*

Future of the West (2019). In terms strikingly reminiscent of Abe's call for "escape from the postwar regime," Reno opens his study of contemporary American nationalism with a critical reflection on "the postwar consensus" and a clarion call to overturn that postwar consensus. The postwar consensus began with a reflection on the nationalist forces that America had just prevailed over in the Second World War, and in the later words of President George H.W. Bush, it had declared a new vision, "a world of open borders, open trade, and most importantly, open minds."²² In place of what Reno calls "the strong gods" of nationalism and other forces that draw men's love and devotion, the postwar consensus substituted the "weak gods" of openness, diversity, a weakening of identity and a general emphasis on the imperative of being "anti" (eg., anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, anti-racism, etc.). Reno himself recognizes the legitimate rejection of imperialism, fascism and racism (as does Abe), but he also shows how an excessive emphasis on a negative, critical stance has weakened the strong gods that draw on a person's love and commitment: this anti-ism pulls apart the fabrics that unite us to one another in a social whole.

I find striking parallels here with what Abe rejects in "the postwar regime." When Reno notes that "a society lives on answers, not merely questions; convictions, not simply opinions",²³ I hear Abe's voice in the background. As I do when Reno writes that "if it is 'nationalist' to cherish self-government, then we should be nationalists. The strong god of self-government and sovereignty, which calls upon us to use our freedom and reason, is ennobling."²⁴ And especially when Reno invokes sports (as Abe did), to point out that "when seventy thousand football fans rise for the national anthem, their reverence is repaid with pride—pride in *their* country."²⁵ Reno's book shows how the recent turn to nationalism and populism around the word is a reckoning with a postwar regime that enshrined the atomized individual against the social whole, that put globalism ahead of the nation, and that left us all the more empty and hungry for meaning and purpose beyond our selves.

One last example from current American advocates for nationalism is Rich Lowry's book, *The Case for Nationalism: How It Made Us Powerful, United and Free* (2019). As editor of the *National Review*, Lowry represents an important voice in the American conservative movement. His book connects the growing social and cultural interest in nationalism to recent American political events, particularly President Trump and his embrace of nationalism in 2018. His argument that Trump's nationalism is not particularly radical might be applied directly to Abe's nationalism. And his rejection of the charge that nationalists are racists as nothing but a smear might also be applied to Abe's critics who have smeared Abe's nationalism in similar terms. But there is one argument in particular that Lowry makes that is significant for the current direction of nationalism, both in America and in Japan. He too rejects the distinction between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism, arguing that "no nation has ever been entirely civic."²⁶ Nor does he embrace ethnic nationalism. Lowry praises the contributions to American culture made by African-Americans and he encourages intermarriage among different racial and ethnic groups in America to help forge "one nation, one people." For Lowry, nationalism is ultimately neither civic nor ethnic but a cultural bond among people who see themselves as part of the same national community. And this cultural

bond is reinforced by rites and symbols, among which he emphasizes Thanksgiving Day. I could not help but think of the role of Yasukuni Shrine in reinforcing Japanese cultural nationalism and the controversy over Abe's refraining from visiting Yasukuni after his first visit. Japan too needs its rites and symbols to unite its people as a nation.

The rejection of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism that we found above (especially in Lowry but also in Levin and Hazony) is also found in contemporary Japanese writing on nationalism. The current trend among Japanese scholars of nationalism is to drop the traditional language of *minzokushugi* (ethnic nationalism) and *kokuminshugi* (civic nationalism) in favor of the English loan word *nashonarizumu*. There are many reasons for this shift, I believe. But fundamentally it reflects a growing acceptance of Tanaka Kōtarō's conclusion: that *minzoku* identity is not reprobate, nor does it have to lead to an exclusive *minzokushugi*; and the state is not morally corrupt by its nature but merely a tool that the nation can use for good or ill. Tanaka reminds us that the problems nationalism raises are not exhausted by social theories of civic or ethnic nationalism but go deeper into the heart of identity itself.

One important Japanese work on nationalism that thinks through and ultimately beyond this distinction between *minzokushugi* and *kokuminshugi* is Senzaki Akinaka's 2013 *Nashonarizumu no fukken* ("Restoring Nationalism"). Senzaki returns to the contributions to Japanese nationalism of prewar intellectuals like Fukuzawa Yukichi, Nakae Chōmin and Watsuji Tetsurō to illustrate the healthy function of nationalism, both as a social theory and as an understanding of the proper role of the state. Senzaki points to several major misunderstandings that still shape much of the discourse on nationalism. Firstly, nationalism is equated with totalitarianism and within this reduction one finds various allergic reactions to the State.²⁷ Secondly, nationalism is equated with religion, specifically the religion of the modern *Gesellschaft* society that rejects an earlier premodern religion as mere irrationality. The "irrational" premodern religion had created lines of continuity between ancestors and their descendants, but these lines of continuity were severed by the discontinuous claims of modern *Gesellschaft* society. To fill those needs for comfort, especially in the face of inevitable death, modern society replaced premodern religion with the concept of *kokumin*.²⁸ Notice that the form of nation emphasized in bourgeois *Gesellschaft* society is that of *kokumin*, the modern, civic form of nationalism that Marxists denounce as bourgeois, not the *minzoku* concept of nation that is implicitly invoked in the imagined premodern religious community of continuity. And of course since the *kokumin* is a concept that invested the national people in the State (*kokka*), both State and religion are reduced to mere illusions of collectivity 「共同幻想」 that must be rejected in the interests of the health of the individual. Or, as Senzaki concludes succinctly, for adherents to this theory like Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kōjin, the State is merely a burden.²⁹ Thirdly, nationalism is democracy. This third view is still mistaken in certain respects, but in contrast to the previous two erroneous views of nationalism, it sees nationalism not in a negative light but in a positive light. Yet, like the other two erroneous views, it draws on a modern rupture, emphasizing at times the Meiji Freedom and People's Rights Movement 「自由民権運動」 as a populist movement or especially as reflected in and defined by the later, and supposedly democratic, postwar Japanese society. Yet, in either case, in this theory one finds more populism than

nationalism, a populism that situates itself with the people below (民衆＝「下からの」) versus authority (the State) as the power from above (権力＝「上からの」).³⁰ In any event, as Senzaki powerfully shows, this “democracy” frequently leads not to nationalism per se but to a populist desire for a dictator to address the people’s disappointments with the inequalities they experience in their daily lives. Here, there is considerable overlap with Reno’s “postwar consensus,” although there also are some important differences between the two theories of nationalism.

Ultimately, Senzaki argues for an understanding of nationalism that connects people to place and to ancestors, a framework for understanding life and for making death meaningful (not merely in terms of wartime deaths as sacrifice for the State or the emperor, but more universally as death within and for a community of the living). The nation draws lines of continuity with those who went before as well as with those who will come after. Senzaki finds this community of the living, the dead and the not yet born invested in Yanagida Kunio’s notion of “the enduring folk” (常民). To avoid confusing this argument with the equation of nationalism and religion that Senzaki criticized, one must observe the important distinction he makes in framing this not as a religion (宗教) but simply as a matter of faith (信仰).³¹ For Senzaki, “religion” refers to an organized institutionalization of faith that was introduced with individualistic modern society, whereas “faith” is less institutional and thus is able to establish stronger lines of continuity with the national folk who lived in pre-modern times, who live today, and who will live in the future. There are certainly elements of Senzaki’s theory of nationalism that may be limited by particular characteristics of Japanese culture and society. But I also find an overriding commonality with the American theories of nationalism outlined above—especially in promoting nationalism as the antidote to a range of social dysfunctions that, if not unique to the postwar period, have certainly grown worse under the postwar regime of open borders, globalism and atomistic individualism.

3. The Hermeneutics of Continuity in the Nationalism in Post-Abe Japan and Post-Trump America

We have seen above that nationalism, particularly a populist, communitarian nationalism that seeks to protect the distinctive identity and interests of the nation against globalism, is growing around the world. In Japan, this kind of nationalism was and is frequently associated with Abe Shinzō and those close to him. But it is hardly “Abe’s nationalism.” Rather, Abe was an extraordinary national leader who recognized the importance of this democratic nationalism and was able to respond to it with multiple effective policies while in office. Whether or not Abe returns to office, this nationalism will continue to be a force to be reckoned with.

To grasp what is at stake in the future of nationalism in Japan, I think it is useful to draw on the distinction between a hermeneutics of discontinuity and a hermeneutics of continuity. Pope Benedict XVI introduced this distinction in 2005 while discussing the correct understanding of the Second Vatican Council. He rejected what he called a

“hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” that was quite popular in the media and instead advocated a “hermeneutics of reform in continuity” as the proper way to understand Vatican II.³² Pope Benedict’s distinction between a “hermeneutics of discontinuity” and a “hermeneutics of continuity” can be helpful in understanding contemporary nationalism in Japan. Postwar Japan was no less a divisive moment in Japanese history than the Second Vatican Council was for Catholics. Similarly, we find that many, especially in the media, have adopted a hermeneutics of discontinuity and rupture in their interpretation of the postwar period. According to this hermeneutics of discontinuity, postwar Japan marked a radical break with the politics, culture and ideas of the wartime period, ushering in a new era of individualism and democracy. Some even go so far as to outline a new, pacifist Japanese nationalism for the postwar period, one anchored in the Yoshida Doctrine of economism and a rejection of nuclear arms. The problem for those who seek to interpret Japanese nationalism from within this hermeneutic of discontinuity is the inevitable continuity with prewar Japanese identity in any imagination of the Japanese nation. At the same time, the problem for those who seek to interpret Japanese nationalism from a hermeneutic of continuity is the obvious changes in Japanese culture and society that have demonstrably taken place since the American Occupation. Both the hermeneutic of discontinuity and the hermeneutic of continuity face challenges in articulating a Japanese nationalism in the contemporary moment.

It has become abundantly clear, however, that it is the hermeneutics of discontinuity that is the more inadequate theory for democratic nationalism in Japan today. The main reason is the rise of an aggressive, communist China. When China was seen as either weak or benign, it was easy for Japanese leftists to portray Japan as a pacifist nation whose greatest threat was the United States and its wars, particularly in Korea and Vietnam. At that time, anti-Western nationalism in Japan could be mobilized in movements such as the US-Japan Security Treaty revision protests, and China was attractive as a counterweight to American hegemony in Japan and in the region. In this view, postwar Japanese nationalism was a pacifist nationalism that stood in sharp discontinuity with the militarism of imperial Japan. Now, however, that option of a pacifist Japan is no longer feasible (if it ever was). It is indisputable that the greatest threat to peace and autonomy in the region comes, not from the United States, but from an increasingly militarized communist China. In this context, the hermeneutics of continuity takes on renewed significance for Japanese nationalism. It offers an historical link to the origins of democratic nationalism in the Meiji period, as we saw above in Senzaki’s understanding of Japanese nationalism. And the hermeneutics of continuity has implications for the ongoing controversy over the role of Yasukuni Shrine in any healthy nationalism. What do the Japanese people owe to their ancestors who made the ultimate sacrifice for their nation? What is the responsibility of their political representatives, especially the Prime Minister, in this matter?

In this context, we cannot overlook the Meiji period’s keywords, *fukoku kyōhei*. Note that Meiji leaders were wise to link “rich nation” with “strong military.” The hermeneutics of discontinuity of postwar Japan sought to drive a wedge between these two principles, presuming Japan could become wealthy through economic relations (even

with communist China) without any need for a strong military. Perhaps the greatest task facing Japanese nationalism today is to work, through “the hermeneutics of reform in continuity” with its own history, to strengthen both Japan’s economy and its military and thereby serve the interests of the Japanese people. A good example is Prime Minister Abe’s elevating the Defense Agency to the cabinet level as the Ministry of Defense in 2006. On that score, Abe has already established a remarkable historical legacy of strengthening Japanese nationalism through this hermeneutic of reform in continuity. But there is still much left to do.

NOTES

¹ 山際澄夫著、「安倍首相とともに「保守政治」も去りぬ」『Hanada』(Nov. 2020), p. 23. 「安倍政権で政局は安定し、アベノミクスによって株価は上がり雇用は拡大した。平和安全法制によって日米同盟が強化されたように見える。だが、保守勢力が最も安倍政権に期待した「戦後レジームからの脱却」、つまり、「日本は侵略国家、悪い国」という東京裁判史観の呪縛から脱して、憲法も改正し、自分の国は自分の手で守る国になる、という安倍政治の核心部分ではまるで結果を出せていないのである。」

² 山際澄夫, p. 23. 「安倍首相とともに保守政治も去りぬ」

³ 櫻井よしこ, 「戦略家、安倍晋三獅子奮迅の働き」『Hanada』(Nov. 2020), p. 52. 「しかしいつまでも、安倍総理が敷いてくれたレール, 財産に甘えてばかりもいられません。国民も学び続けて、国民全体で次なる安倍晋三を発掘し、育てていくという気迫が大事です。」

⁴ 牧原徳夫著, 『客分と国民のあいだ：近代民衆の政治意識』（吉川弘文館, 1998）, p. 11. 「『学問のすすめ』は日本における国民主義の最初の本格的著作だった。」

⁵ 福沢諭吉著『学問のすすめ』岩波文庫, p. 41. 「日本にはただ政府ありて未だ国民あらずと言うも可なり。」

⁶ Rikki Kersten, *Democracy in Postwar Japan: Maruyama Masao and the Search for Autonomy* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 149.

⁷ An interesting comparison with how Abe was treated is how the media also excoriated Trump as a dangerous nationalist. See Rich Lowry, *The Case for Nationalism: How It Made Us Powerful, United, and Free* (Broadside Books, 2019), pp. 3-10.

⁸ 安倍晋三著, 『新しい国へ』（文藝春秋, 2013）, p. 102. 「ナショナリズムは、いろいろな言葉に訳されるが、それをあえて、民族主義と訳すれば、キャシー・フリーマンは、旗を二つ掲げることで、自分の中で分裂するナショナリズムに折り合いをつけようとしていたことになる。」

⁹ 安倍晋三著, 『新しい国へ』 p. 254. 「こうして日本が抱える課題を列挙してみると、拉致問題のみならず、領土問題、日米関係、あるいはTPPのような経済問題でさえ、その根っこはひとつのように思えます。すなわち日本国民の生命と財産及び日本の領土は、日本国政府が自らの手で守るという明確な意識のないまま、問題を先送りにし、経済的豊かさを享受してきたツケではないでしょうか。まさに「戦後レジームからの脱却」が日本にとって最大のテーマであることは、私が前回総理を務めていた五年前と何も変わっていないのです。

今回の総選挙で自民党は「日本を、取り戻す。」というスローガンを掲げています。

これは単に民主党政権から日本を取り戻すという意味ではありません。敢えて言うなら、これは戦後の歴史から、日本という国を日本国民の手に取り戻す戦いであります。

¹⁰ 山際澄夫, p. 23. 「「アイヌ新法」や移民法（入管法改正）などの強行可決を見て、これが保守政権なら保守の支持などやめたいと痛切に思ったほどだ。」

¹¹ 田中耕太郎著、「第三章：法概念と民族概念」『世界法の理論』第一巻、（岩波書店、1932）, pp. 154-270.

¹² 田中耕太郎著、『世界法の理論』第一巻, p. 265. 「各民族は其の特性を有し、其の特性に従い人類文化の一部を分担し、此れに貢献する使命を有している。此の貴き使命を遂行するに妨げとならぬ範囲内に於て人間が自己の所属する民族に対し愛着を有することは正当視せられなければならないのみならず、斯くの如き愛着を有することは家族に対する其れの如く自然の命令であり、且つ人間の自己の道徳的完成上必要の条件である。」

¹³ I discuss this aspect of Tanaka's thought on national identity in more depth in "State and Nation in Twentieth-Century Japan: Toward an Interpretive Framework," *Japan Forum* 23:4 (2011): 531-551; and in *Tanaka Kōtarō and World Law: Rethinking the Natural Law Outside the West* (PalgraveMacmillan, 2019)

¹⁴ 第一条 「。。。アイヌの人々が民族としての誇りを持って生活することができ、及びその誇りが尊重される社会の実現を図り、もって全ての国民が相互に人格と個性を尊重し合いながら共生する社会の実現に資することを目的とする。」

<https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=431AC0000000016>. Accessed March 10, 2021.

¹⁵ Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (Basic Books, 2016), p. 148.

¹⁶ Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, p. 146.

¹⁷ Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, p. 214.

¹⁸ Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (Basic Books, 2018), pp. 100-101.

¹⁹ Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism*, p. 4

²⁰ Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism*, p. 223.

²¹ Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism*, p. 222.

²² President George H.W. Bush, in an address to the United Nations General Assembly (October 1, 1990); cited in R.R. Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the Future of the West* (Regnery Gateway, 2019), p. 2.

²³ Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods*, p. 95.

²⁴ Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods*, p. 154.

²⁵ Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods*, p. 155.

²⁶ Lowry, *The Case for Nationalism*, p. 18.

²⁷ 先崎彰容著 『ナショナリズムの復権』（ちくま新書 2013）, p. 18.

²⁸ 先崎, p. 22.

²⁹ 先崎, p. 24. 『国家は「負担」以外の何ものでもない』

³⁰ 先崎, p. 26.

³¹ 先崎, p. 144, p. 151.

³² Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings," December 22 2005.

http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html