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The Global Rightist Turn, Nationalism and Japan

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“How does the wall keep us free?

The wall keeps out the enemy

And we build the wall to keep us free

That's why we build the wall

We build the wall to keep us free.”

“Why We Build the Wall”, song by Anaïs Mitchell, from her studio album *Hadestown* (Brooklyn Recording Studio, New York City, March 2010)

Abstract: This article looks at contemporary Japanese nationalism in the context of growing far-right movements within democratic societies around the world, notably in Europe and North America, and the general rejection of the “happy globalization” narrative that has shaped the international order since the end of the Cold War. Japan, which witnessed the birth of the “borderless world” metaphor in the 1990s, is now contributing in its own way to the early twenty-first century worldwide longing for strong borders and an aggressive military posture. The rise of ultra-conservatism in democratic societies cannot be reduced to a “Western problem”; by

taking into account the political transformation of a country such as Japan it is possible to consider a truly global phenomenon with far-reaching consequences.

Keywords: Narratives of globalization, Global far-right, Japanese neo-nationalism, Comparative nationalism, Identity politics, Pacific War legacies

The Demise of “Happy Globalization”

Walls – old and new, disassembled or reassembled – constitute a pictorial trope of how governments and societies have been making sense of global togetherness since the end of the Cold War. In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall epitomized the idea of the fall of all walls, an idea that was central to a new *Weltanschauung* which was powerful enough to produce an international and transnational rhetoric about a world without borders that would be shared by very different actors, from the global corporation to the global NGO, and across the planet, from Berlin to Washington and Tokyo. It led to a “happy globalization” vision that was all the more emotionally and practically efficient in that it was sustained by a discursive continuity rooted

in the West's engagement with *Perestroika* and embodied by American president Ronald Reagan's spectacular injunction declaimed in front of the Berlin Brandenburg Gate, in June 1987: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" Echoing its bombastic mood, the German tabloid *Bild* declared that it was "a speech that changed the world". If hardly a decisive game changer, it captured the dominant geopolitical spirit of the time. That spirit inspired governments to participate in a renewed agenda of international cooperation and encouraged a rising transnational civil society.

Yet the limits of the globalist consensus quickly emerged and soon after 1989, new "walls" – sometime called "barriers" or "fences" – were being erected: between Israel and the Gaza strip as early as 1994, between Mexico and the United States, following the Secure Fence Act of 2006, and in the wake of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and throughout the Middle East, others soon followed throughout Europe. Thirty years after the Brandenburg speech, the popular narrative of freedom arising from torn down walls has lost its appeal. As depicted in the Anais Mitchell song ("Why We Build the Wall"), the idea of freedom seems now to be intrinsically linked to a Three-Little-Pigs-like tale of construction of ever thicker and stronger barricades against a Big Bad Wolf impersonating a myriad of perceived threats, from undocumented workers to would-be terrorists.

US president Donald Trump, putative leader of this redefined "free world" entered the inter/national stage presenting himself as a wall-builder, visualizing a new America nestled in a web of real and metaphorical borders.

The pendulum swing from one Republican US president's discourse to another – from wall-demolisher Reagan to wall-builder Trump – is the most visible, and therefore describable, part of a movement whose depth and complexity are still puzzling most analysts, social scientists and political commentators alike. How can one define Trumpism beyond the outer features of one incessantly gesticulating larger than life character?¹ Is it populism, ur-fascism, (neo)nationalism, paleoconservatism? And how is it related to the general far-right movements of societies and governments that this decade has been witnessing, notably in the seemingly well-established democracies, not only in North America, but throughout Europe, Latin America and East Asia?² Addressing in depth the global dimensions of this issue is beyond the scope of the present article; but looking at the position of Japan in this context is a first step towards the necessary enterprise of connecting the dots of what appear to be similar movements of counter-reaction to the post-Cold War "happy globalization" within OECD countries and beyond. Regional differences, and Japan's specificity, notably its spearhead role in late twentieth century globalization, have to be taken

into account, lest one reduces the present situation to a “Western” problem.³ A Western-centric approach would be particularly paradoxical here as the general counter-reaction to globalization is as “global” as what it is reacting to. However the manifestations of that trend around the world are diverse, highlighting the many-faceted movement that has pushed forward leaders as different – yet by no means unrelated – as Donald Trump, Viktor Orban, Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Narendra Modi, Rodrigo Duterte, and Abe Shinzō.

Craving for the Nation?

Globalization fatigue is clearly an important vehicle for the rightist movements that have been increasingly visible since the beginning of the new millennium around the world, but other factors are also at play and vary from one region to another. The “anti-establishment” mood that has fed the rise to power of Donald Trump is also present in a number of European countries as well as at the continental level, where it is either directed against national elites or the so-called “Brussels technocrats” (an establishment of its own, whose members are not necessarily part of the national ones). That mood is not absent in East Asia – it accompanied Rodrigo Duterte’s trajectory in particular⁴ – but it has not been a major component of the development of rightist movements that this region has been witnessing since the early 2000s. At least until the rise and

fall of Park Geun-hye, “populism” was not an accurate characterization of South Korean politics: new far-rightist currents were nonetheless developing, notably in the digital public space as illustrated by the growing political influence of the ultra-conservative website *Ilbe*. Likewise in Japan, it was not an “anti-establishment” impetus that triggered the rightist turn of the new millennium, a political change that saw the establishment of *Nippon Kaigi*, the Japan Conference⁵, now the main non-party organization for the promotion of aggressive nationalism and the most influential Japanese political lobby, with deep ties to Prime Minister Abe and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.



A book titled the *Nippon Kaigi no Jinmyaku* published in 2016 detailing the expansive network of the organization that include prominent politicians and religious figures.

“Neo-nationalism” or the “rise of nationalism” are the terms that have been most often used to describe the currents that have appeared in Northeast Asia after a decade or so of confidence in a happy globalization.⁶ It was in Japan that the euphoric fall-of-all-walls narrative, reinforced by, among others, an “end-of-history” fantasy, had the strongest echo. In South Korea, the stubborn reality of the national division constituted a caveat for the reception of that narrative (while other realities were at play in North Korea). And although China’s “reform and opening policy”, launched a decade before the official end of the Cold War, contributed in very tangible ways to the interpenetration of the world’s economies, the actual endorsement of the “fall-of-all-walls” discourse would have been clearly at odds with Beijing politics. But in Japan this was the time when commentators such as Kenichi Ohmae and his “borderless world”⁷ vision would dominate a mainstream public debate where the obsolescence of the nation-state was actually envisioned. In the last decade of the 20th century, nationalism, even its mildest expressions — whether one calls it “banal” or “petit” nationalism⁸ — was not in vogue within the expanding group of self-defined liberal democratic societies, of which Japan had been a decades-old member.

The 1990s in Japan also witnessed the first parliamentary defeat of the Jimintō, the Liberal Democratic Party that had held power since 1955

with the help of Cold War geopolitics. The seemingly immutable conservative rules of the game started to change. In 1995, the Socialist prime minister Murayama Tomiichi commemorated the 50th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War with a speech that was the strongest invitation to self-reflection on Japanese colonialism and war ever given by a Japanese head of government. Two years earlier, the Conservative chief cabinet secretary Kōno Yōhei provided a statement on wartime sexual slavery that constituted a milestone in the recognition process of the Japanese state’s responsibility for crimes against humanity committed during the Pacific War. Yet a decade later a new mood prevailed: the openness about historical responsibility was undermined by an increasingly affirmative nationalism conveyed both by the Japanese government and the society at large. With the entry of “neo-nationalism”, gone were the days when the manifestations of the Japanese far right were confined to the ugly folklore of a few black trucks blaring in the streets of Tokyo. What happened, and what was at stake? The strengthening of rightist currents and their pervasiveness within Japanese mainstream politics reflected — as unfolding political transformations around the world have since shown — a much larger, global, trend. But in Japan, as well as in China and for some time in South Korea, “history”, rather than the “liberal establishment”, has been the locus of the growing malaise, and consequential tensions. The

rejection of foreignness within Northeast Asian societies has also been more decisively determined by historical controversies than actual border-related policies.

Histories of Lost Self

Fear of the “Other” mixed with a longing for a “pure Self” is a well-known nutrient for the steady growth of nationalism in its most extreme forms. Anti-immigrant discourses in Europe and in the United States provide ample space for the expression of xenophobia and, more generally, of angst towards everything foreign including, but not limited to, the human “Other”. In Japan, the recent increase in the flux of foreigners entering the country – still minimal compared to immigration in Western Europe and North America⁹ – has also inspired nationalist rhetoric, but mainly towards historical “adversaries”, echoing in some ways the development of anti-China and anti-Korea feelings in the Meiji era. Yet the discourse of nationalist trends that have become conspicuously visible on the Japanese mainstream political scene in the early 21st century seems less concerned with containment of the Other than the reinvention of Self through the rewriting of national history. That appeared clearly already in 1996 with the establishment of Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho Tsukuru Kai (or Tsukuru-kai) the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, which claimed to correct the “decline of national principles.”¹⁰ With historical revisionism at its core, the deployment of the

Tsukuru-kai network hinted at the strength and structure of the burgeoning neo-nationalism.



Joan of Arc and the French National Front- their May 1st as counter narrative to the International May Day.

History is often invoked and reinterpreted along romanticized lines in the making of far-right movements. The French National Front celebrates an iconic Joan of Arc “driving the English out of France” (*boutons l’Anglais hors de France*) representing the supposed “purity” of the nation and its professed immemorial will to keep foreigners away. From the recurrent references to the lost British empire in the pro-Brexit campaign to the longing for a White men-dominated “great America” in the Trumpist rhetoric, nostalgia for an embellished past is a common feature of extreme nationalist discourse in Western countries. But it is an element of the scenery rather than the scene itself. Historical controversies do exist in Europe and in North America (fed, in particular, by the major powers’ colonial and/or imperial past), but do not constitute a political resource comparable to what exists today in Japan or, for that matter, in South Korea or China, as a source of nationalist mobilization. The pledge to fight a “masochistic

view of history” – i.e. the “masochism” of acknowledging the war crimes committed by Imperial Japan during the Pacific War – has been at the heart of the movement that first appeared on the fringe of the Japanese political landscape and is now taking center stage. It has also revealed the strength of a civil society that is countering this trend.¹¹ In other words historical claims and controversies shaped from the start the very fabric of the search for a lost Self. The “appeal” of such an agenda – reclaiming the Nation by reclaiming History – is a crucial element of the efficiency of the networking of *Tsukuru-kai*, *Nippon Kaigi* and other historical revisionist lobbies within Japanese conservative political circles, notably at the parliamentary level.¹² Although our focus here has been on democratic societies in general and Japan in particular, one should also note the centrality of reified history in the new national discourse among Chinese governmental elites as illustrated by the repeated call to “never forget the century of humiliation”, a reference to the period of successive foreign invasions that stretches from the first Opium War in 1839 to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.¹³ The PRC’s entry into globalization and the subsequent weakening of the communist paradigm has transformed the political resource provided by “history”, leading to a renewed stress on China’s victimization at the hands of Japanese invaders during the Asia-Pacific War¹⁴.

Reclaiming 1945

The Japanese nationalist circles’ combat against the so-called “masochistic view of history” has centered on the legacy of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) and is also presented as the “Tokyo Trial view of history”. Here Japanese neo-nationalist movements converge with neo-Nazi movements in Europe but also, paradoxically, where they depart, as what 1945 meant in Japan and in Germany is comparable only up to a point. What was supposed to be the twin trial of Nuremberg in East Asia eventually differed from it in many ways. Although both trials were highly normative and set invaluable standards for the management of war and peace and the conduct of post-conflict actions,¹⁵ the IMTFE, because of certain of its decisions or, indeed, the non-decisions that it backed, created the conditions for an open-ended debate. At the top of the list of decisions with deep and long-term effects, was that of not holding the emperor accountable for war responsibility. The territories of the Japanese empire were liberated from Japanese colonial rule, including Korea and Taiwan, but crucial issues such as the brutal treatment of colonial subjects were pushed aside – revealing a legal/political framework in which the Allies’ ambivalence towards their own imperial record was at play. For these and other reasons, such as the absence of debate about the legality of the double atomic bombing, the IMTFE engendered

a feeling of incompleteness, defining a space that Japanese pursuers of an unapologetic nationalism promptly occupied.¹⁶

The sequence of events between the summer of 1945, when the United States obtained total surrender of the Japanese Imperial Army, and the winter of 1948, when it became clear that the work of the IMTFE would be constricted by Cold War geopolitics, produced conflicting narratives that continue to inform present day politics in the Asia-Pacific. A number of individuals who were arrested in 1945 for committing “crimes against peace” – class-A war crimes – were eventually neither brought to trial nor acquitted. Among and around them were true believers in ultra-nationalism for whom the opportunity created by the lack of ethical clarity of the late 1940s realpolitik was not an endgame: the rehabilitation of pre-War ideology was. Imperialism, and specifically given the emperor himself as the central figure projected by that ideology, it is not surprising that the search for lost imperial authority would become a lasting pattern of the neo-ultranationalist trend.

In 2005 the Nobel Literature Prize laureate Ōe Kenzaburō was sued for libel on the ground of an essay he had published decades earlier, in 1970, in which he supported the well-documented assessment that the Imperial Army had coerced hundreds of civilians on the islands of Okinawa to commit suicide at the end of the Pacific War.¹⁷ The plaintiffs were two former soldiers

posted in Okinawa in 1945, who quickly received the support of Jiyūshugi Shikan Kenkyūkai, the Study Group for a Liberal View of History, another revisionist association, as well as that of the writer Sono Ayako. The latter had written an essay a few years after Ōe’s publication, denouncing the “myth” of the forced mass suicides of Okinawan civilians during the Battle of Okinawa, asserting that those deaths had in fact been voluntary acts of “love” towards the emperor and the Japanese nation.¹⁸ Noteworthy here is not only the striking obsession with pre-war imperial thinking, but also the timing of the judicial attack on Ōe. Although the search for lost imperial authority has been on from the very moment Hirohito was de-sanctified during the US occupation, and that search had never ceased in the following decades as indicated by Sono’s publication, it is only since the beginning of the new millennium that the aggressive historical revisionism it generates has found the space in the Japanese political landscape to fully express itself. The appointment, in August 2016 of a hardline nationalist such as Inada Tomomi – who openly supported the lawsuit against Ōe ten years earlier – as Abe Shinzō’s new defense minister, illustrates how powerful that movement had become.

Datsu-A / “Leaving Asia”

Political wrangling and the magical-realist-like occurrences brought about by the complexities of geopolitics such as those of Northeast Asia in the

late 1940s can be abundantly illustrated by the mutations that took place in Japan during that decade. Consider the emperor's change of apparel, from uniformed head of a belligerent power to a suit symbolic of a peace-loving country, a change as instantaneous and stupefying as a clever *hikinuki* the onstage costume change technique in the kabuki theater. Along with this transformation came that of Japan's geo-cultural location that moved overnight from being the "roof of Asia" – *i.e.* the imperial power on the Asian continent, according to the *hakko ichiu* / "all the world under one roof" wartime vision – to becoming a member of the rising Pacific Community, *de facto* cut off from its continental neighbors, whose main, and for sometime only, partner was the occupying power, the United States. One lasting legacy of that transformation is the contrast between the roughly consensual discourse shared – despite increasing points of friction¹⁹ – by Japan and the US on the Pacific War, on the one hand, and the sheer lack of common narrative on this period among the Northeast Asian nations, on the other.

The debate over Japan's position within the region is a recurring one and the question whether the Japanese government was "leaving Asia" has been addressed more than once by conservative leaders, especially since Koizumi Junichirō's premiership at the start of the 2000s²⁰. The reference to the late 19th century *Datsu-A Nyū-Ō* / "Leave Asia and Join the West" slogan is

anachronistic yet significant. This slogan was coined by one of the leading figures of the Westernization movement of the Meiji era, Fukuzawa Yukichi, at a time when something like an East Asian system of international relations did exist. As historian Hamashita Takeshi has pointed out, the organizational structure centered around China, the Sino-centric system that the European imperial powers encountered in the early 19th century, was embattled yet retained a certain coherence across East Asia, being understood by contemporary elites not just as "their" world, but "the" world²¹. Today the region toward which Japan is turning its back is deeply divided. The violent turn that the Meiji government took in the later part of the 19th century, in the spirit of Fukuzawa's famous slogan, created indeed a disruption from which the region, along with other traumas, never fully recovered as political cooperation within Northeast Asia has been weak at best – the first and most brutal sign of this disruption being the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War, when China not only was defeated by its former vassal but forced to renounce its suzerainty over Korea.

Yet regionalism and, more to the point, a conception of East Asian solidarity in the form of Pan-Asianism did emerge from the shambles of the Sinocentric system at the end of the 19th century.²² That idea was supported by reformers including Okakura Tenshin in Japan, Kim Okkyun in Korea and Sun Yat-sen in China, and

expressed the vision of a common/regional response to the challenge of modernization that derived from European domination. The idea of the nation-state and of nationalism, that was part and parcel of the Western challenge, eventually became the main template for transformation, and as it grew stronger, it overshadowed the discourse and hopes conveyed by the regional vision (a trend not dissimilar, albeit in a different socio-historical context, to the rise of modern nationalism in Europe at the turn of the 20th century and the exhaustion of the late 19th century European ideal.²³)

The spirit of regional solidarity was re-invented and was briefly alive during the decade that followed the end of the Cold War. Or rather, one should say, the crumbling of the international bipolar order but not the end of the Cold War everywhere in the world, as important divisions in East Asia – North-South Korea, PRC-Taiwan – were not eliminated by the fall of the Berlin Wall and disintegration of the Soviet Union. It was precisely Kim Dae-jung, former dissident and president of South Korea who championed the idea of an East Asia Summit in 1999, hoping to create a vehicle for the end of the Korean War and normalization of relations between the two Koreas. The East Asia Summit eventually materialized in 2005: but by this time the mood for regional friendship was turning sour again and historical controversies in Northeast Asia soon flared up.

After 1989 the Northeast Asian version of the “Iron Curtain” did not disappear: there remains a dividing line running from the Taiwan Strait, to the 38th parallel on the Korean peninsula, up to the sea stretch between Hokkaido and the Kuril islands (Japan and Russia being still technically at war in the absence of a peace treaty following the Pacific War). Walls, whether made of water or of empty land, are now stronger and more contentious than ever, maintaining fault lines to which the territorial fights around the islets in the South China Sea, East China Sea and Sea of Japan/East Sea add complications. Less than two decades after Kim Dae-jung formulated his vision for regional cooperation, Northeast Asia looks dangerously fractured. The new “leaving Asia” mood in Japan shares with the late 19th century one, a deep uneasiness in Sino-Japanese relations and the illusion on Tokyo’s side that such a close and important neighbor as China can somehow be ignored. The nationalistic revival within which this mood is resurfacing is, however, far from being limited to Japan; the whole of Northeast Asia seems indeed to be engulfed by a particularly pernicious form of nationalism, with tangible negative impact on transnational exchanges, and leaving little, if any, room for regional cooperation.



Map of the Kuril Island chain detailing pre- and post-WWII boundaries.

The Assault of Nationalisms on Humanity

“Nationalism in East Asia is on a collision course”, remarked historian Hasegawa Tsuyoshi and political scientist Togo Kazuhiko in their edited volume on the “specter of memories of the past” that is presently haunting the region.²⁴ The authors argue that the nationalistic trends that have appeared in Northeast Asia are the result of the end of the Cold War and the subsequent search for a new source of political legitimacy in the PRC, South Korea and Japan – an argument that is convincing enough, although it is oblivious to the fact that the divisions that have been attributed to the Cold War (inter-Korean, inter-Chinese and Russo-Japanese) have not been resolved. It does not explain either why during the first decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist regimes

across Eastern Europe, regional dialogue was more common in Northeast Asia than the present nationalistic posturing. Here as elsewhere, a decade of optimistic, often zealous, globalism has been followed by a general move towards wall-building and mind-closing, and various expressions of fear of the Other. What sets Northeast Asia apart is indeed the weight of historical controversies that both reflect and amplify the new nationalism. The negative impact of those controversies on regional cooperation is hardly debatable. What should be acknowledged now is the particularly toxic dimension of these nationalistic currents from the perspective of inter-national coexistence, peace, and, more deeply, that of humanism.

The toxicity of the present nationalism in Northeast Asia is especially clear in the case of the unresolved issue of the so-called “comfort women” (*ianfu*), the official name used by Japan’s Imperial Army to designate the girls and women it used as sexual slaves during the Pacific War. The fact that the problem of the “comfort women” is a moral issue of global scope, as opposed to a local or national question, should be as indisputable as the fact that it refers to a crime against humanity. Yet the way this problem has been tackled by neo-nationalists on all sides, tends to obscure this fundamental dimension. The seeds of the confusion were actually planted at the very beginning, right after the end of the War. Although documentation on “comfort

women” was available to the IMTFE in 1946, the issue was not addressed during the Tokyo Trial. Nor were cases of mass rape raised at Nuremberg. Mass violence against women and gender-related violence were de facto not a priority of what was then called international justice and consequently not fully investigated. The Tokyo and Nuremberg Trials did put forward the notion of crime against humanity, but as a matter of fact, only half of the actual human population was taken into account in defining the said humanity.²⁵

From the beginning, there was confusion as to whether the plight of “comfort women” would be viewed as a crime against humanity or against citizens of specific nations. The only trial concerning “comfort women” that took place after the War was a local one: that of the Batavia Temporary Court Martial held by the Dutch authorities in 1948 which condemned Japanese officers for “forced prostitution” of Dutch women in Indonesia, whereas the much larger number of Indonesian women who were victims of the same crime were conspicuously ignored. This ambivalent legacy has been further complicated by rising nationalisms in Northeast Asia. When the “comfort women” issue emerged in the public sphere in the early 1990s, the contradiction between a globally oriented and a national(istic) definition of the identity of the victims was almost immediately at play. On the one hand, transnational citizen movements,

especially transnational feminism with Japanese feminists such as Matsui Yayoi and the Women’s Active Museum for War and Peace (WAM) playing a leading role, offered a global understanding of the problem. They highlighted the suffering and humiliation of girls and women, i.e. addressing this group of beings that constitutes one half of humanity. On the other hand, international state-to-state discussion, notably that in Japan, focused on national shame and tended to lose sight of the actual gendered victims.

Coming back to the present era of heightened nationalism, the notion of human dignity appears more than ever threatened by narrowly defined national pride. This is reflected in the deep ambivalence of the Korean states towards the reality of the suffering of individual “comfort women.”²⁶ Increasingly, the focus is put on national pride, as illustrated in April 2014 when the North Korean government called South Korean president Park Geun-hye the United States’ “dirty comfort woman” – an accusation of “selling out” the Korean nation to American interests that implicitly supported the Japanese revisionist argument that “comfort women” designated not victims of sexual slavery but contemptible prostitutes. In the PRC, the conflation, in official discourse, between the notion of “national humiliation” and the condemnation of the Rape of Nanking, where gendered mass violence also occurred, further

illustrates how obsession with national pride translates into loss of sight of human beings, human dignity and the universal individual that is part of humanity. The humiliation and suffering of individual victims of war crimes is arguably better recognized by Korean and Chinese nationalist rhetoric than by Japanese revisionism – which denies the reality of the crimes altogether – yet often in an alarmingly superficial manner. As Hasegawa Tsuyoshi and Togo Kazuhiko have argued,²⁷ the end of the international bipolar order in 1989 triggered the expression of people’s memories — especially memories pertaining to crimes against humanity — that had previously been silenced. But the acknowledgement of those memories was quickly caught within the conflicting logics of transnational/global versus national approaches.

The Tokyo Trial legacy is undeniably a mixed bag. As mentioned earlier, its contribution to the establishment of a progressive legal international framework for conflict and post-conflict management is tangible. But its shortcomings have a lasting effect that is equally tangible, maintaining a space of both vindication and contest. The international system that was produced at the same time, in the wake of World War Two, and centered around the United Nations, also had limitations, starting with the decision to give to five victorious states, the members of the Security Council who enjoyed veto power, the universal and exclusive right to

authorize or veto war. The representativeness of this institution (along with others such as the executive board of the IMF), is increasingly contested by countries that feel understandably under-represented, such as Brazil, India, Germany, Japan and South Africa. Yet the United Nations is the only international body that gathers (almost) all the countries of the world and whose fundamental hypothesis is the possibility of global cooperation. This hypothesis has always been hopeful, or as International Relations theory would put it, it derives from an idealist view of world order in the face of the selfish nature of states. But world politics can be more or less propitious for global cooperation, and the worldwide heightening of nationalism, including, and especially, within democratic societies is clearly a negative.

Japanese nationalism matters too

Japan’s participation in the general trend of rising nationalism and far-right leaning can be interpreted in multiple ways. Japan is among a very limited number of countries in the world that has taken pacifism seriously and indeed has made a pacifist contribution to international affairs. Therefore any break from this seventy year legacy could be interpreted as patent revisionism. Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, has called for the elimination of the “anti-war” article 9 of its Constitution. Reinterpretation of the fundamental law was approved by the Parliament in September 2015 over strong

resistance from opposition parties and Japanese citizen movements that revealed the depth of a decades-old pacifism, rooted at every level of society, from family and school to local communities. Yet what should be noted here from a global perspective is that the danger of ransacking this unique pacifist legacy comes both from within and outside Japan. Donald Trump's East Asia policy, however volatile, even incoherent, clearly points in the direction of a militarily more robust nation making greater financial and military contributions to US agendas throughout the world. In the beginning of the millennium the mere vision of Japanese naval vessels in the seas of Asia – whatever their actual purpose, including logistical support for NATO operations – was presented in European media as a troubling resurrection of Japan's imperial past. Fifteen years later, pleading for Japan (and Germany)'s right to wage war is not a radical opinion.²⁸ This new tolerance in the West for what politician Ozawa Ichirō famously called a “normal Japan,”²⁹ a nation with an army of its own unencumbered by constitutional restrictions, is part of US and European reinterpretation of the post-1945 era, i.e. the rationalization for a vision of global security cooperation. Western advocates of a “normal Japan” are not suggesting, for instance, that the term “enemy state” that still defines Japan in the United Nations Charter should be deleted. But nor are they expressing concern that the push for rearmament within Japan is directly linked with

the rise of ultra-nationalism. Indeed, with international attention focused on China and Korea, there is little indication in public discourse that the changing Japanese geopolitical landscape has any impact on the normative state of the world or indeed that it matters at all.

It took the pro-Brexit vote in the United Kingdom to launch a debate in Europe about the sweeping nationalist current on the continent: yet this current had been prospering and growing for several years, notably in Eastern Europe. It took the election of Donald Trump in the United States to trigger a global conversation on the deep rightist turn of democratic societies around the world; yet this transformation had been on full display in parts of Asia for more than a decade. The Trump's administration's attacks on the media, as several NGOs have rightly pointed out,³⁰ is indicative of declining standards of freedom that affect not just the United States, but more broadly the global state of democracy. The Abe Shinzō government has been attacking the media for a longer time. Even though this trend has been well documented by scholars,³¹ and even reported in the US and European press, it has not been widely perceived as a threat to democracy at a global level. Likewise the pressure of ultra-conservatism on universities in the United States and in Europe – to which arts and humanities are particularly vulnerable but entire institutions such as the Central European University of Budapest may be affected³² - is

commonly understood as a threat to academic liberties around the world. The significance of similar pressure on Japanese universities is not always comprehended.³³ One can only hope that Japan, along with other non-Western democracies will now be fully part of the picture.

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Notes

¹ As David Greenberg noted in *Politico* in the wake of Donald Trump's election, for months commentators have focused mainly on the man himself, pictured as "a clown, a showman, an opportunist, a faux conservative, a political naïf, and an egomaniac," but the set of ideas derived from his statements still needed to be located in the political trajectory of the United States: David Greenberg, "An Intellectual History of Trumpism", *Politico*, 11 December 2016. While this might take time, at least lexicological definitions have been suggested such as those found in the Collins English Dictionary: "1. The policies advocated ~~Donald~~ Trump, especially those involving a rejection of the current political establishment and ~~vigorous~~ vigorous pursuit of American national interests." A controversial or outrageous statement attributed (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/donald) Trump, especially (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/especially) those involving a rejection of the current political establishment and ~~vigorous~~ vigorous (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/vigorous) pursuit (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pursuit) of American national interests. As A controversial or outrageous (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/outrageous) statement attributed (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/attribute) to Donald Trump.

² Comparative discussion of both definition and description of these trends is just starting. See for example Carlos de la Torre (ed.), *The Promise and Perils of Populism. Global Perspectives*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2015.

³ See Jonathan Haidt, «How Nationalism Beats Globalism», *The American Interest*, vol. XII, n° 1, September/October 2016.

⁴ For an early acknowledgement of that trend see Kosuke Mizuno and Pasuk Phongpaichit (eds.), *Populism in Asia* (Singapore, NUS Press with Kyoto University, 2009).

⁵ See Uesugi Satoshi, « Nihon ni okeru 'shūkyō uyoku' no taitō to 'tsukuru kai' 'nippon kaigi' », *Sensō Sekinin Kenkyū* 39, 2003; David McNeill, « Nippon Kaigi and the Radical Conservative Project to Take Back Japan », *Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* December 14, 2015 (Volume 13, Issue 50, Number 4); Mizohata Sachie, « Nippon Kaigi: Empire, Contradiction, and Japan's Future », *Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* November 1, 2016 (Volume 14, Issue 21, Number 4).

⁶ See inter alia William Callahan, « Beyond Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism: Diasporic Chinese and Neo-Nationalism in China and Thailand », *International Organization*, Vol. 57, No. 3, Summer 2003; Suh Sung, « Japanese Neo-Nationalism and an Idea of an East Asian Community », *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, volume 6, issue 4, 2006; Nicola Liscutin, 'Surfing the neo-nationalist wave: a case study of Manga Kenkanryū' (2009) in Chris Berry, Nicola Liscutin, and Jonathan Mackintosh (eds) *Cultural Studies and Cultural Industries in Northeast Asia: What a Difference a Region Makes* (2009); Jeff Kingston (ed.), *Asian Nationalisms Reconsidered* (London, Routledge, 2015 and Jeff Kingston (ed.) Nationalism in Japan, *Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* Special Feature, October 15, 2016 (Volume 14, Issue 20, Number 3).

⁷ Kenichi Ohmae, *Borderless World* (London, Harper Collins, 1990).

⁸ Cf. Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, Sage, 1995); Kayama Rika, *Puchi Nashonarizumu Shōkōgun: Wakamono-tachi no Nipponshi* (Tokyo, Chūō kōron shinsha, 2002); Yuki Honda, « Review: Focusing in on Contemporary Japan's 'Youth' Nationalism », *Social Science Japan Journal* Vol. 10, n° 2, October 2007.

⁹ For contextualization of the Japanese experience with immigration, see Roger Goodman, Ceri Peach, Ayumi Takenaka and Paul White (eds), *Global Japan. The Experience of Japan's New Immigrants and Overseas Communities* (London, Routledge, 2003).

¹⁰ See David McNeill, « History Redux. Japan's Textbook Battle Reignites », *JPRI Working Paper* n°107, June 2005; Yoshiko Nozaki and Mark Selden, "Japanese Textbook Controversies, Nationalism, and Historical Memory: Intra- and Inter-national Conflicts," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 24-5-09, June 15, 2009 and Koide Reiko, "Critical New Stage in Japan's Textbook Controversy," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol. 12, Issue 13, No. 1, March 31, 2014.

¹¹ See for example Kamila Szczepanska, *The Politics of War Memory in Japan. Progressive Civil Society and Contestation of Memory of the Asia-Pacific War* (London, Routledge, 2014).

¹² For an analysis of the workings of this specific networking, see Yoojin Koo, “The Tsukurukai’s Networking with Politicians: Conservative Diet Members Groups in Japanese Interest Group Politics”, *Journal of East Asian Studies* n°12, April 2014.

¹³ William Callahan, «National Insecurities. Humiliation, Salvation and Chinese Nationalism», *Alternatives* n°29, 2004.

¹⁴ It is worth noting for example that it was only after Mao’s death that a memorial for the victims of the Nanjing Massacre was established, in 1985. Similar memorials, linked to the Second World War, were created much earlier – the French memorial for Jewish victims of the Holocaust was inaugurated in 1956.

¹⁵ For an analysis of the normative legacy of the Tokyo Trial, in the management of post-war former Yugoslavia see Neil Boister and Robert Cryer, *The Tokyo International Military Tribunal. A Reappraisal* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

¹⁶ The post-war exploitation of the Tokyo trial’s dissenting voices (in particular the Indian judge Radhabinod Pal) and of scholarly works on the shortcomings of the trial (notably Richard Minear’s *Victor’s Justice*) by the Japanese neo-nationalist current is significant in that regard. See Nariaki Nakazoto, *Neonationalist Mythology in Postwar Japan: Pal’s Dissenting Judgment at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal* Lanham, Lexington Books, 2016.

¹⁷ Ōe Kenzaburō *Okinawa itō*, Tokyo, Iwanami shinsho, 1970.

¹⁸ Sono Ayako, *Aru shinwa-no haikai* Tokyo, Bungei Shunjū, 1973.

¹⁹ Whereas critical thinking about Japan’s role in the Pacific War within the American intellectual and academic community and civil society is decades old, the US Administration and Congress’s expression of disapproval towards Japanese revisionism is relatively recent and became clearer as historical revisionism grew to the point of being integrated into Japan’s official political discourse. But as a Congressional report issued in early 2017 shows, the US position has been an exercise in compromise that could again be reshaped by the Trump Administration. See Congressional Research Service, “Japan-US Relations: Issues for Congress,” February 16, 2017.

²⁰ See Asan Special Forum, «Introduction: Five Pivots to Asia», *Asan Forum* January-February 2015, vol. 3, n° 1.

²¹ Hamashita Takeshi, *Chōkō shisutemu to kindai aji* Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1997.

²² See Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman, *Pan-Asianism. A Documentary History*, 2 volumes, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

²³ Benedict Anderson went as far as to argue that the East/West division is not relevant to characterize different forms of nationalism. See his “Western Nationalism and Eastern Nationalism. Is There a Difference that Matters?”, *New Left Review* 9, May-June 2001.

²⁴ Hasegawa Tsuyoshi and Togo Kazuhiko (eds.), *East Asia's Haunted Present. Historical Memories and the Resurgence of Nationalism*, Westport, Praeger, 2008.

²⁵ It was not until the 1990s and the war in the former Yugoslavia that the United Nations acknowledged the issue of war crimes against women as well as gender-related mass violence. Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted in 2000 is the first to provide a legal framework to prevent sexual violence during conflicts.

²⁶ See Yang Hyunah, “Re-memembering the Korean Military Comfort Women”, in Elaine Kim & Choi Chungmoo (eds), *Dangerous Women. Gender and Korean nationalism*, New York, Routledge, 1998.

²⁷ Hasegawa Tsuyoshi and Togo Kazuhiko (eds.), *East Asia's Haunted Present* *op. cit.*

²⁸ See for example John Hemmings, « Japan-UK Ties and the Quiet Revolution in Japanese Foreign Policy, *ISN ETH Zürich*, 6 February 2015; Barney Frank, « It's Time to Rearm Germany and Japan », *Politico. EU* 22 October 2015.

²⁹ See his best-seller: Ozawa Ichirō, *Nihon Kaizō Keikaku* Tokyo, Kodansha, 1993 (translated in English as *Blueprint For a New Japan*, New York, Kodansha International, 1994)

³⁰ Among others, see the report « Freedom of the Press 2017 » published by Freedom House, which states that « press freedom in the United States and across the world is at its lowest point in 13 years. »

³¹ David McNeill, “False Dawn: The Decline of Watchdog Journalism in Japan », *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* October 15, 2016, (Volume 14, Issue 20, Number 2); Jeff Kingston (ed), *Press Freedom in Contemporary Japan*, London, Routledge, 2017.

³² Valerie Strauss, « Why Americans should care that Hungary is trying to shut down a leading university, » *The Washington Post* 24 April 2017.

³³ The Abe's government decision in June 2015 to considerably reduce funding for humanities and social sciences triggered a strong protest from the Japanese academic community (see Sawa Takemitsu, the president of Shiga University's testimony: “Humanities under attack,” *The Japan Times* 23 August 2015) which in turn engendered some support abroad (see the French Conference of University Presidents' declaration of support: “Les SHS, enjeux de développement

économique, sociétal et culturel, » 8 October 2015) This was generally described in the media as a problem confined to Japan (see among others “Alarm Over Huge Cuts to Humanities and Social Sciences at Japanese Universities, » *Time magazine* 16 September 2015).