

## **Religion, Politics, and Constitutional Reform in Japan: How the Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō Have Thwarted Conservative Attempts to Revise the 1947 Constitution**

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Ever since the United States wrote a very liberal constitution for Japan in 1947, during the aftermath of World War II, conservative politicians have sought to amend the document. Their chief target is the so-called Peace Clause, Article 9, which prohibits Japan from actively waging war. Conservatives assert that Japan, as a major world power, should be able to have its own military. Until recently, however, the conservative ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has lacked the two-thirds vote necessary to amend the constitution; but the decline of progressive parties has encouraged the LDP to seek constitutional reform. Although the LDP's coalition partner, the Buddhist Sōka Gakkai-backed Kōmeitō, has modified its sponsor's support for "absolute pacifism," the party's strong support for Article 9 has thwarted the LDP's plans for constitutional reform. This development signals the important role that some of Japan's new religions play in maintaining Japanese pacifism.

### **Conservatives, Moderates, Liberals, Religious Organizations & Japan's Constitution**

Since the 1950s, many conservatives in Japan—including leading members of the country's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)—have sought to amend several progressive elements of the nation's 1947 American-authored constitution. Through the 1990s, progressive political parties—including the now virtually defunct Socialist Party—had enough votes in Japan's parliament to prevent the LDP from garnering the two-thirds majority it needed to amend the constitution. By the late 1990s, because the progressives had been in sharp decline, the LDP and its conservative allies felt that they had a much better chance to initiate constitutional reform. Still, many of their proposals have failed because of strong opposition from

religious organizations and their allies, especially the Buddhist Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 (*lit.*, “value creation society”) and its political ally, the Kōmeitō 公明党, known in English as the “Clean Government Party.”

The section of the current constitution causing greatest controversy is Article 9, which states that the Japanese people will “forever renounce” the threat or use of force to settle international disputes and will never maintain a military.<sup>1</sup> The LDP wants to rewrite Article 9 in order to recognize the existing Self-Defense Force (SDF) as a legitimate army and to restore “normalcy” to the Japanese state by reacquiring the sovereign right of collective security. As the debate grows in intensity, so does disagreement over what the goals of revising Article 9 should be. At one end of the spectrum are the conservatives: allied with hawkish officials in the LDP, they advocate Japan’s having the freedom to use the full extent of its potential military power to serve Japan’s national interests. At the other end are a growing number of moderates and liberals: they genuinely fear that the ruling conservatives might greatly expand Japan’s military potential if given a free hand to reinterpret the constitution.

Although pressure to enact this and other constitutional reforms is growing in intensity, changes to Article 9 in the near future are unlikely. The LDP has nowhere near the two-thirds majority it needs, especially in the Upper House, and has no prospect of attaining that power any time soon. Revision would require strict party unity, and the party remains somewhat divided over the issue. Many members of the leading opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan, support revisions to Article 9; but the LDP’s more pacifist-leaning coalition partner, the Kōmeitō,<sup>2</sup> which the LDP had to rely on for its Upper House majority before the 2007 election, strongly opposed any reforms that would permit collective security. The fact that the coalition lost its Upper House majority in 2007 further complicates LDP plans to revise Article 9.

The Kōmeitō’s position is dictated to some degree by the strong pacifist stance of its chief supporting organization, the Sōka Gakkai, whose current spiritual leader, Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作 (b. 1928), regards the preservation of Article 9 in its current form as a sacred article of faith. Many Kōmeitō leaders I have interviewed, all of them Sōka Gakkai members, share Ikeda’s support for the current version of Article 9. The involvement of the Kōmeitō and Sōka Gakkai in this process demonstrates the power that certain religious organizations and their supporters exert over Japanese politics, despite constitutional provisions calling for a clear separation of religion and state.

The Sōka Gakkai is by no means the only religious organization opposing reform of Article 9. Numerous new religious movements as well as a number of Buddhist and Christian organizations are also working hard to resist change. For example, the Christian group Mukyōkai 無協会 (*lit.*,

“nonchurch organization”), founded in 1901 by the early modern pacifist Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 (1861–1930), recently produced a document entitled “The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Peace Constitution,” which asserts that the constitution is a “precious jewel” given by God to all of humanity and that it is the will of Jesus to uphold it.<sup>3</sup>

Article 9 is not the only issue over which the Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō have apparently prevented LDP efforts at constitutional reform. The LDP has tried unsuccessfully to revise Article 24 of the constitution to eliminate specification of the “essential equality of the sexes.” According to Helen Hardacre, the LDP claimed that “imposed equality impinges on freedom of conscience and undermines traditional culture.”<sup>4</sup>

A third area of contention was the desire of the LDP to amend Japan’s 1947 Fundamental Law of Education to put more emphasis on the teaching of patriotism and moral values. Teaching patriotism has been largely taboo in Japan since the country’s defeat in World War II, and the powerful teachers’ union has long opposed it. Championed by former prime minister Abe Shinzō 安倍晋三 (b. 1954), the bill declared that the goal of education was to develop students’ “respect for the nation’s tradition and culture and fostering an attitude of love for the nation and the homeland that cultivated them.”<sup>5</sup> Citing declining education skills and deteriorating morality, Abe declared that his aim was “to nurture people with ambitions and create a country with dignity.”<sup>6</sup> Critics have charged that the bill to obligate Japanese schools to foster a higher degree of nationalism is a breach, in spirit at least, of the country’s postwar constitution, which emphasizes the renunciation of militarism and guarantees freedom of thought. The education “reform,” they say, is part of the government’s efforts to promote patriotism and remilitarize the country in preparation for aggression abroad. Critics of the government’s bill also say the revision would further damage ties with Asian neighbors such as China and South Korea, where Japan’s World War II-era aggression is bitterly remembered.

Many in Japan, however, have argued that the young should be taught national pride as the country takes a more active diplomatic and military role in the world. Members of the Kōmeitō were opposed to the LDP-proposed inclusion of “love of the nation” and other patriotic expressions in revising the Fundamental Law of Education, a law often dubbed an “educational constitution.” The bill ultimately passed in December 2006, but only after the Kōmeitō forced the LDP to water down considerably some of the bill’s more nationalistic and patriotic language.

In the remainder of this article, I focus on the Sōka Gakkai to demonstrate how its commitment to pacifism and its influence on the Kōmeitō has led to the LDP’s inability to implement any changes to Article 9 in order to transform Japan into a “normal” military and political actor in world politics.

## Japan & the Politics of Constitutional Reform

The LDP has long desired to alter certain sections of the “American constitution” to bring it more in line with what many of its prominent leaders say is the mainstream of Japanese history and culture; these leaders would like to allow Japan once again to exist as a “normal” nation in terms of its conduct of foreign relations.<sup>7</sup> Conservative reformers feel that the current constitution is an ever-present reminder of Japan’s humiliation after World War II and that the United States forced the Japanese to accept certain conditions that were not akin to Japanese tradition. Constitutional reform would supposedly bring the postwar era to an end and would permit a more traditionally oriented Japan to assert itself once again in world affairs. Opponents of revision, however “hear echoes of prewar fascism, militarism, a determination to ignore growing social inequalities, and a desire to roll back the progressive achievements of the postwar period.”<sup>8</sup>

The LDP would keep the renunciation of war clause in Article 9, but it would rewrite the second part of the article to include provisions for the “right of collective defense.” The right of collective security is at the heart of the LDP’s attempts to revise this article. The current provision allows Japan to defend itself against attack and is called “individual self-defense” (*kobetsu-teki jieiken* 個別的自衛権). By contrast, “collective self-defense” (*shūdan-teki jieiken* 集団的自衛権) refers to Japan’s defending an ally (principally the United States) against an attack by some other third party or country.<sup>9</sup> Such a revision, for example, would allow the Japanese military, which would be renamed from Self-Defense Force (*Jieitai* 自衛隊) to Self-Defense Army (*Jieigun* 自衛軍), to participate actively in such adventures as the war in Iraq. The LDP, noting polls indicating strong public support,<sup>10</sup> argues that the reality of the war on terrorism necessitates an active Japanese response that is now made difficult by the constraints of Article 9.<sup>11</sup>

## The Sōka Gakkai’s Self-Proclaimed Peace Movement

The Sōka Gakkai is the largest of Japan’s major postwar new religious movements, claiming a membership of nearly nine million households in Japan and over two million followers in nearly two hundred foreign nations and territories. Today it is an entirely lay Buddhist movement, having broken with its affiliated Nichiren Buddhist sect, Nichiren Shōshū 日蓮正宗, in the early 1990s. Sōka Gakkai was founded in the 1930s by Makiguchi Tsunesaburō 牧口常三郎 (1871–1944), an educator and writer who advocated educational reform, and was rebuilt in the late 1940s and early 1950s as a purely Buddhist movement by Makiguchi’s disciple Toda Jōsei 戸田城聖 (1900–1958). Makiguchi and Toda sharply opposed Japanese militarism during World War II and were imprisoned in 1943 on charges of blas-

phemy toward Shintō shrines and infringement of the Public Security Preservation Law. Makiguchi died from malnutrition in prison in 1944, but Toda survived and was released in July 1945.

The Sōka Gakkai follows its interpretation of the teachings of Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–82), a Buddhist monk and scholar whose writings show strong concern for the welfare of society as a whole and who believed that following the doctrines of the most fully developed form of Buddhism found in the *Lotus Sūtra*<sup>12</sup> would bring peace and prosperity to the nation as a whole. Adherents today “believe that through individual transformation, or ‘human revolution,’ they can work to transform society by applying their religious beliefs to their activities in daily life. Under the three-fold banner of peace, culture and education, they strive to promote harmony, tolerance and mutual understanding of all peoples.”<sup>13</sup>

Both Makiguchi and Toda fervently believed that Nichiren Buddhism holds the key to world peace. Toda saw Japan’s complete destruction in World War II as a fulfillment of Nichiren’s prophecy of what would happen to Japan when it abandoned Buddhism in favor of other religions, in this case, State Shintō. Both founders saw the potential for Japan’s rebirth as an ideal Buddhist land that could lead the world to a new era of absolute peace and harmony as depicted in Nichiren’s 1260 tract, the *Rishō Ankokuron* 立正安国論 (Treatise on Spreading Peace Throughout the Country by Establishing the True *Dharma*).<sup>14</sup> Toda praised Japan’s American-written postwar constitution for its advocacy of the freedom of religion and, in Article 9, the total renunciation of war and refusal to permit Japan to rearm or to maintain armed forces.

Since its postwar rebirth under Toda, the Sōka Gakkai has engaged in a wide range of social and political activities with the belief that all aspects of society would be improved if they had as their base the true and compassionate teachings of Buddhism. The Sōka Gakkai stresses that believers, through individual transformation (*ningen kakumei* 人間革命, “human revolution”), have the opportunity to transform society by basing their daily activities on their religious beliefs. Thus, the Sōka Gakkai claims that it entered politics starting in the 1950s “to challenge government corruption by bringing more ethical individuals into the political arena,” “to represent the voice of ordinary people,” and to protect “the freedom of religion.”<sup>15</sup>

Using the three-fold concepts of peace, culture, and education, the Sōka Gakkai states that it is promoting harmony, tolerance, and mutual understanding of all peoples. One of its most cherished efforts is an intensive peace movement that began in 1957 when Toda called for a ban on all atomic and nuclear weapons. Succeeding decades have seen a massive peace-education program that has included public exhibits on the horrors of war and environmental destruction, a massive project where Sōka Gakkai volunteers interviewed hundreds of survivors of World War II and pub-

lished their accounts in a multivolume series of books, and a constant stream of peace proposals by Ikeda. Ikeda has engaged with a wide array of world leaders, including Henry Kissinger, Nelson Mandela, Chou En-Lai, and Mikhail Gorbachev, in what he calls “dialogues for peace.” Sōka University in Tokyo, the crown jewel of the Sōka Gakkai’s extensive educational system, claims to have more international student exchanges than any other Japanese university, another aspect of the movement’s peace initiative.<sup>16</sup>

Ikeda has worked energetically to promote the Sōka Gakkai’s peace movement. He is a very strong supporter of the United Nations and has gone so far as to hold exhibitions at the UN on the horrors of war and to establish a Sōka Gakkai International NGO office at the UN. In 2006 he wrote that the United Nations “must serve as the key venue and focus for our efforts to address global issues. To strengthen and reform the UN, it is necessary to pay ever-greater attention to the voices of civil society and to build a solidarity of concerned citizens.”<sup>17</sup>

Ikeda originally outlined his view of an idealized Buddhist society in a 1970 speech at the thirty-third general meeting of the Sōka Gakkai. He listed three principles that he felt are at the heart of Nichiren’s message to the modern world: absolute pacifism, the sanctity of human life, and respect for human dignity: “These principles are universal to mankind, transcending the limits of religion, race, or ideology. . . . They derive from the essential nature of human existence. Everything starts from this humanism. . . . Our present task is to work to lay a broad foundation encompassing all aspects of society, not simply the realm of politics. And on that foundation, we should construct a vast new society and culture.”<sup>18</sup>

My impression after interviewing many hundreds of Sōka Gakkai members since the late 1960s is that a great many members strongly support the movement’s peace movement. They are strong advocates of pacifism and are generally united in their support for Article 9 of the constitution and the peacekeeping activities of the United Nations. Recent interviews with members have indicated strong opposition to the American invasion of Iraq and any Japanese support or involvement in this enterprise. I find that the deepest support for a pacifist Japan among Gakkai members comes from middle-aged to elderly women in the group’s Women’s Division, but broad support exists among other divisions as well. As one female member noted in an interview with me in 2006, “peace is at the heart of the Sōka Gakkai’s ideology and it is *not* something that we can modify in any way.” And Sōka Gakkai senior public information spokesman and vice president Terasaki Hirotsugu 寺崎広嗣 echoed to me that Sōka Gakkai stands for “absolute pacifism.”<sup>19</sup>

### **The Sōka Gakkai, the Kōmeitō & Politics**

Several of Japan's new religions have been active in postwar Japanese politics, but the Sōka Gakkai is the only one to have established a major political party. The Sōka Gakkai started fielding candidates to run in local elections in 1955 and in national elections a year later. It founded the Kōmeitō in 1964. Through its endorsement of the Kōmeitō, the Sōka Gakkai represents itself as a voice on behalf of millions of ordinary Japanese who otherwise might have opted out of Japan's maturing democracy. Through their espousal of a reformist agenda, the Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō, together with other progressive groups from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, attempted to bring public attention to a variety of social welfare issues, prevented the LDP from repeated attempts at amending Japan's pacifist constitution, and urged a more neutral course in foreign affairs. The Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō officially split in 1970,<sup>20</sup> but elective affinity between the two has remained, which the Sōka Gakkai, perhaps erroneously, likens to the relationship Christian groups or labor unions in Europe have with various political parties.

Over the years, the Sōka Gakkai has continuously updated its reformist social and political agendas and has remained an avid participant in both local and national politics. Through the Kōmeitō, it has reinvented itself and has moved from one political alliance to another to remain politically relevant. And, since 1999, the Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō have helped to bring political stability to Japan by forming a close working coalition with the LDP. The LDP gained an overall majority in the Lower House of Japan's parliament with a large victory in the 2005 elections; but the LDP still needs the votes of the Kōmeitō in the Upper House to achieve a majority. The votes of Kōmeitō supporters are also vital to LDP candidates running in constituencies where the Kōmeitō has agreed not to run its own candidates.

### **The Question of Absolute versus Conditional Pacifism**

Scholars who have studied the Sōka Gakkai and other religious groups in Japan have frequently asked whether they in fact support "absolute pacifism" or "conditional pacifism." It is clear that, although many followers of the Sōka Gakkai support the ideals of "absolute pacifism," their politically involved leaders have shifted to a more pragmatic, or "realistic," conditional stance. Robert Kisala, a leading scholar on Japan's new religions, has studied six new religious organizations—including the Sōka Gakkai and the Risshō Kōseiikai 立正佼成会 (another Nichiren-based new Japanese religious movement)—that have declared their fidelity to the concept of absolute pacifism.<sup>21</sup> What Kisala found is that there are varying views as to

what constitutes absolute pacifism, from a stance that absolutely rejects violence to another that accepts peace as an ultimate goal but which does not rule out the employment of force for “just means” along the way.

Kisala discovered a distinct correlation between these two quite different interpretations of pacifism and the social position of people who espouse them. Only those people willing to remain on the periphery of society can maintain the absolutist stance. When the movement shifts to the center in an effort to join mainstream society, the movement must come to terms with questions about issues such as national defense and social order.

Kisala analyzed two Buddhist groups that espoused a stance of absolute pacifism and which were able to maintain these values by withdrawing from activism and remaining on the isolated fringes of society. In the cases of the Sōka Gakkai and the Risshō Kōseikai, however, the absolute option has been withdrawn because the two have become mass movements, involving millions of followers. Yet the achievement of peace remains a strong demand, and both groups participate in the international peace movement. Kisala stressed that the Japanese are very dedicated to the preservation of their cherished “peace constitution” and have strongly resisted any attempts to revise it. But when it comes to the active carrying out of a program for peace, the notion remains a kind of romantic ideal that clashes with feelings of national superiority, resulting in little opposition to conservative “reinterpretations” of the constitution to permit extensive de facto rearmament.

Indeed, Kisala is correct in his assertion that the Sōka Gakkai has somewhat compromised its views on “absolute pacifism.” Because of its active support of the Kōmeitō’s struggle to achieve some degree of political power—the goal of any political party—the Kōmeitō and the Sōka Gakkai have had to make many political compromises. In its attempt to act as a centralist power broker, the Kōmeitō has developed some policies that are not entirely pacifistic. It has supported the U.S.–Japanese military alliance since the 1980s and was instrumental in helping the LDP pass the 1992 Peacekeeping Operations Bill, which allows overseas deployment of Japanese self-defense forces in UN-sponsored activities.

Acknowledging Ikeda’s and the Sōka Gakkai’s many peace-related activities, Kisala concludes that Ikeda’s “fundamental position should be more accurately described as one of multinationalism rather than pacifism,” since Ikeda “does not absolutely rule out the use of force.” Instead, Ikeda “recognizes the occasional need for the application of force in order to maintain order, although he would shift responsibility for the deployment of such force from the nation state to an international body such as the United Nations. . . . The combination of Japanese pacifism with multinational armed intervention is also reflected in the position of the general membership of the Sōka Gakkai.”<sup>22</sup>

Kisala stresses that a majority (52 percent) of Sōka Gakkai members he surveyed say that, in theory, although they support the concept of “absolute pacifism,” they admit that Japan has the right to self-defense. And even in a peaceful country like Japan, an armed police force is necessary to maintain law and order. Members, however, are more likely to support measures where the United Nations is involved, again reflecting the multinationalist leanings of the group’s leaders.

Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō leaders reflect Kisala’s findings in their words and deeds. Sōka Gakkai Vice President Terasaki admits that the Kōmeitō must “make painful choices” in its role as a ruling party. When it was part of the opposition, it could promote its ideology of pacifism and righteousness more easily. “The essence of a political party comes down to the ability to realize its policies. . . . I think this is the biggest reason why Kōmeitō teamed up with the LDP.”<sup>23</sup> Terasaki said the Sōka Gakkai believes the mission of the party remains the same as when it was launched: to gain influence in the political arena and promote pacifism and welfare.<sup>24</sup> In a 2006 interview with me, Terasaki noted that:

The Sōka Gakkai is a religious organization that seeks to help both the individual and society develop peace, harmony, and prosperity. Developing a truly peaceful world is one of our cherished goals . . . and we support absolute pacifism, which is a key concept of Buddhism. Unfortunately, we live in a world where many different individuals, groups, and nations are fighting for power. We believe in the idea of engaged Buddhism where we must play an active role in society to achieve better results. We have thus sponsored or supported a variety of organizations like Minon, which promotes cultural exchange. We realize the importance of politics, because he who controls the nation’s politics can control the destiny of the nation. In the past, political parties in Japan have had close ties with special interest groups, and the LDP has had close ties with a number of conservative religious groups over the years. Kōmeitō, on the other hand, represents the downtrodden. . . . There are elements in the LDP that want to move to the right, cutting back on welfare programs, rewriting the constitution to remove Article 9, and to rearm Japan, but Kōmeitō has prevented this from happening by acting as a kind of brake on the conservatives.<sup>25</sup>

Endō Otohiko 遠藤乙彦 (b. 1941), a veteran Kōmeitō Diet member and former Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Education, notes that “it’s a natural thing to link spirituality with politics. Mahayana Buddhism is not confined to inside yourself—it’s about action in society. So the idea of religious organizations getting involved in politics has a very strong basis in natural life. It’s not compromise, but application. Sometimes it seems like compromise, but Buddhist principles are very flexible.”<sup>26</sup>

## The Sōka Gakkai, the Kōmeitō & the Iraq War

Kisala's claim that the Sōka Gakkai's and the Kōmeitō's views on pacifism are more "conditional" than "absolute" is evident in their support of the LDP and the Japanese government's decision to deploy six hundred Japanese troops to Iraq for humanitarian work in 2004. Because of Article 9, Japanese troops were forbidden to engage in any military missions and, instead, were engaged in various construction and engineering projects. Many Sōka Gakkai members endorsed this mission, but others were very concerned that the Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō had violated their pledge to uphold pacifism by supporting this venture.

These feelings became evident in March 2004, when a group of Sōka Gakkai members brought a petition with the signatures of two thousand fellow members to the Kōmeitō party headquarters in Tokyo to protest the party's support for the LDP's decision to dispatch a contingent of the SDF to Iraq. According to Itō Yoshihiko 伊藤吉彦, a Sōka Gakkai member who organized the protest, "the party is acting against the principles of Sōka Gakkai, which strictly opposes war. Many Sōka Gakkai members do not consent to the party's stance. It is neglecting to serve as a pacifist force and is merely following in the LDP's footsteps."<sup>27</sup> The petitioners added that even though members of the SDF were participating in the Iraq War from a humanitarian perspective, their presence in the war itself "contravenes Article 9 of the constitution, which renounces the use of force as a means of settling international disputes."<sup>28</sup> The two thousand signatures might seem relatively insignificant when compared with Sōka Gakkai's membership, claimed to be about twelve million nationwide; but they are reflective of the opinions of the many ordinary members I have talked to in Japan and show a growing disparity between what many Sōka Gakkai members expect from their party (absolute pacifism) and the path Kōmeitō leaders are pursuing (conditional pacifism).

Kōmeitō leaders in the Diet apparently understand the situation in Iraq from a different perspective. Endō, for example, compares Iraq to a disaster area badly in need of foreign assistance in order to help locals return to a normal way of life: "Sending our troops to help reconstruct the country is simply a humanitarian gesture that fully complies with the Buddhist sense of compassion for the suffering of others."<sup>29</sup> Hamayotsu Toshiko 浜四津敏子 (b. 1945), Deputy Chair of the Kōmeitō and a member of the House of Councilors, justified her party's stand in 2004 as follows: "There is no argument regarding the purpose of the deployment of the Self Defense Force to Iraq; it is for the humanistic support to rebuild and not for war."<sup>30</sup> Two years later, she told me that "our cooperation with the LDP brings stability to the once-chaotic affairs of the Diet and gives us leverage to forestall the more right-wing members of the LDP who want to remilita-

rize the country. We are sending our troops to Iraq as a humanitarian gesture, nothing more. This action is fully in line with our party's sense of compassion for the suffering of others."<sup>31</sup> These comments again reflect the Sōka Gakkai's conditional pacifist and multinational leanings.

### **The Sōka Gakkai, the Kōmeitō & Article 9**

Although the Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō were willing to compromise with the LDP on the issue of Iraq, they have not been so obliging when it comes to the issue of Article 9. There are clear limits to the extent to which the Sōka Gakkai will compromise its pacifist stance. Maintaining Article 9 and the essence of Japan's "peace constitution" is very important. Terasaki stated in 2007 that his organization is an avid supporter of Article 9: "Article 9 upholds Japan's commitment to world peace and its role as an active participant in constructive programs to foster a more peaceful and humane world. Any change in Article 9 that would encourage Japan to advance as a major military power would run counter to the goals of the Sōka Gakkai movement. As a Buddhist organization we are deeply committed to the principles of pacifism and we cannot support any measures that would dilute this stand."<sup>32</sup>

Sōka Gakkai Vice President Maeda Kunishige 前田邦茂 stresses his opposition to any plan that might undermine the pacifist principles of Article 9: "The problem is how to deal with the issue of collective defense. We can never allow Japan to engage in collective defense, as it would pave the way for the nation to reinforce military alliances with other countries and send the SDF around the world."<sup>33</sup> Ikeda wrote in his January 2005 annual peace proclamation, "I have always said that Article 9 should be left untouched, and that is still my belief." Reflecting these words, Kanzaki Takenori 神崎武法 (b. 1943), then-leader of the Kōmeitō, stated that it was his party's position to uphold Article 9 without change.<sup>34</sup>

Kōmeitō Diet members Hamayotsu and Endō, when interviewed separately in March 2006, both urged amending Article 9 by adding another clause stating that it would be permissible to send Japanese SDF troops abroad on UN-sponsored peace and humanitarian missions. Endō told a group of Mary Baldwin students in May 2006 that

Article 9 is one of the most important sections of our constitution. It commits Japan to a path of nonviolence and non-belligerence. Thus far Japan has adhered very closely to this path, avoiding any major conflicts, maintaining good relations with its Asian neighbors despite their memories of Japanese aggression during the Pacific War, and actively supporting the United Nations. As a result, other nations, while they may be angry about Japan's actions in the past, no longer regard Japan as a threat to their peace and security, but this could well change if we abandon the true prin-

ciples of Article 9. Both the Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō have been at the forefront of promoting good relations with China since the 1960s. If we move away from our stance as a pacifistic country, we risk hurting our ties with China. Yes, we need to change Article 9, but in a way that states that our only military involvement will be in support of United Nations peace missions.

The opposition of the Kōmeitō has prevented the LDP from advancing any open advocacy of collective self-defense and rewriting of Article 9. Political scientist Richard Samuels, who has written extensively about Article 9 and prospects for its revision, has evaluated the situation as follows: “The dependence of the LDP on Kōmeitō is potentially debilitating for the revisionists. If Kōmeitō opposition forces the LDP to abandon a revision that clarifies (indeed stipulates) the right of collective self-defense, then it will have been a *huge* defeat for the revisionists” (original emphasis).<sup>35</sup>

The Sōka Gakkai’s strong stance on this aspect of pacifism has played an important role in preserving Article 9 and thus Japan’s role as a non-belligerent actor in world affairs. By stopping Japan from adopting a policy of collective security, the Sōka Gakkai may well have prevented Japan’s active participation in conflicts such as Iraq and any decision to change the name, mission, and size of its military. Helen Hardacre notes:

The leading political party was unable to proceed with its highest priority revision because of Kōmeitō opposition, which itself originates with Ikeda Daisaku. Had the LDP succeeded in committing the country to collective self-defense, Japan would undoubtedly have been drawn ever further into the “US imperium,” and thus Kōmeitō’s opposition on this point is highly consequential. . . . Interestingly, “augmenting the constitution” . . . is the Kōmeitō approach to the whole revision question. Essentially, this means an affirmation of the post-war constitution’s principles of popular sovereignty, universal human rights, and pacifism, to which a longer list of rights should be added. In fact, as the process goes on, the influence of the Kōmeitō seems to increase.<sup>36</sup>

## The Question of Yasukuni Shrine

Finally, another major issue concerning Japan’s peaceful relations with its neighbors in Asia concerns former prime minister Koizumi Junichirō’s 小泉純一郎 (b. 1942) six official visits to Tokyo’s Yasukuni 靖国 Shrine. The shrine honors 2.5 million war dead, including fourteen convicted as criminals by the 1948 Allied war tribunal. The shrine grounds also include a large museum and several other exhibits that praise the efforts of Japanese soldiers who fought to liberate Asia from the hold of Western imperialists.<sup>37</sup> No mention is made of the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers, including the murder of up to thirty million Chinese and twenty million

others in Southeast Asia, acts which are carefully described and documented in the Sōka Gakkai's lengthy series of books about World War II. When I visited the shrine in 2006, I saw an exhibit and purchased several books in the Yasukuni Shrine store that categorically deny the allegations surrounding the notorious 1937–38 "Rape of Nanjing."<sup>38</sup>

The Chinese and both Korean governments saw Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine as direct provocations, slaps in the face of the nations where Japan caused so much destruction and death. "Koizumi must shoulder the historical responsibility for damaging Sino-Japanese relations," the Chinese ambassador to Japan, Wang Yi 王毅 (b. 1953), said after Koizumi's shrine visit in late 2005.<sup>39</sup> Both the Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō have been openly critical of Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine and have joined the Democratic Party of Japan in calling for a new secular war memorial in Tokyo to help resolve the controversy. But as long as the LDP keeps pandering its many right-wing supporters in Japan, the visits to Yasukuni Shrine may continue. Fortunately, Abe, Koizumi's successor, although making a number of hawkish statements in early 2007, did not make any official trips to Yasukuni Shrine during his one-year term. Whether the Kōmeitō's stance had any effect is hard to say, but one wonders if Abe would have visited Yasukuni had his party been fully in control of the Diet.

This criticism of the head of Japan's coalition government is yet another reflection of the Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō's support for conditional pacifism and multinationalism. Both organizations see close relations with China and South Korea as essential components to the stability of East Asia.

### **What Will the Future Bring?**

Clearly, the Sōka Gakkai has strongly influenced the Kōmeitō's stance on the issue of Article 9, preventing the LDP from gaining any success in its efforts to enter the concept of "collective security" into Japan's postwar constitution. Since revision of this article was the focal point of the LDP's drive for constitutional reform, the Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō have influenced Japan's political process. Therefore, these examples demonstrate the importance and power that religious organizations can have in Japanese politics.

What remains to be seen is how the Sōka Gakkai and other religious organizations will deal with other contentious war-related issues still plaguing Japan. While on a March 2007 trip to Japan, I encountered many news articles and editorials on the ever-present comfort woman issue. The U.S. Congress was debating a non-binding resolution urging a formal apology by the Japanese government to the comfort women; and Abe, then prime minister, responded by wondering aloud whether these women were in fact not paid prostitutes. When I later visited South Korea on the same

trip, I encountered a number of young Korean women inflamed at the idea that Japan was still denying its past atrocities. The Sōka Gakkai, along with other organizations, has gone a long way in exposing the horror of Japan's invasion of the rest of Asia. Whether they will help Japan resolve the comfort women or Yasukuni Shrine issues remains to be seen.

What is clear is that the LDP's desire to "end the postwar era" through constitutional reform has failed. The Sōka Gakkai and other more moderate groups have ensured that many of the progressive features of the Occupation era (1945–52) will remain in force and that issues like comfort women, collective self-defense, and equality of the sexes will continue as hot political issues for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the Sōka Gakkai and the Kōmeitō's support for conditional pacifism have created limits as to what the conservatives in Japan are able to achieve.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See the introduction to H. Steven Green's scholarly note in this issue (p. 218) for the full text of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution.

<sup>2</sup>The Kōmeitō is today often referred to as "The New Kōmeitō" in various English newspapers and journals published in Japan. The Kōmeitō, founded in 1964, dissolved itself for a brief period in the mid-1990s, as did various other progressive opposition parties, to form the Shinshintō 新進党 ("New Frontier Party"). The Kōmeitō reorganized itself as the "New Kōmeitō" when the united party was dissolved in 1998.

<sup>3</sup>Helen Hardacre, "Constitutional Revision and Japanese Religions," *Japanese Studies* 25, no. 3 (2005): 235–37, 240.

<sup>4</sup>Purnendra Jain and Maureen Todhunter, *Report on the 2005 Japanese Studies Association of Australia Conference*, <http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/asian/05report.html> (accessed July 19, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Joe Lopez, "Japan's 'Education Reform' to Indoctrinate Nationalism," <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2007/jan2007/japa-j03.shtml> (posted January 3, 2007; accessed May 2, 2007).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>The Liberal Democrats and their conservative supporters would like to make four changes to the current constitution: (1) revise Article 9; (2) codify the duty of the people (*kokumin no sekimu* 国民の責務) to protect the nation's independence and security—as well as the family; (3) name the emperor, who is currently a symbol of the state, the head of state; and (4) codify environmental rights, rights of victims of crimes, and the rights to privacy, freedom of information, and protection from defamation or libel. See Hardacre, "Constitutional Revision," 236.

<sup>8</sup>Hardacre, "Constitutional Revision," 235

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 238

<sup>10</sup>A *Yomiuri Shimbun* (Tokyo) poll published on April 8, 2005, indicated 65 percent approval of the following statement: "Because a limit has been reached in applying interpretations of Article 9, it should be changed."

<sup>11</sup>A common theme is the LDP's argument that revision of Article 9 is critical to the defense of the nation. The United States is committed to the defense of Japan, but since Japan cannot commit itself to the defense of the United States, the reliability or strength of an American response to an attack on Japan by a third party cannot be

counted on. Therefore, the lack of reciprocity on so critical an issue could undermine the reliability of any defense of Japan.

<sup>12</sup>The *Lotus Sūtra* was probably compiled in Kashmir in the first century C.E., during the fourth Buddhist Council of the newly founded Mahayana sect of Buddhism. Historically enjoying a close relationship with the Nichiren school, the *Lotus Sūtra* was used to support the trend toward lay centrality in Japan during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—a trend continued by the Sōka Gakkai.

<sup>13</sup>Benjamin Dorman, “Religious Politics Japanese Style,” *Religion in the News* 9, no. 1 (2006): 3–5.

<sup>14</sup>*Risshō Ankokuuron* portrays Nichiren’s vision of the ideal society: If humankind were to embrace the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the world would enter a splendid new age of peace and prosperity based on humankind’s true compassion for the welfare of others and a heightened ability to better the life-conditions for all. Like other medieval Japanese religious figures, Nichiren believed in the idea of *mappō* 末法, which held that man would become increasingly evil and violent as time and society advanced after the death of the Buddha. Nichiren believed that adherence to the *Lotus Sūtra* would reverse the curse of *mappō*. According to Ikeda Daisaku, “the Sōka Gakkai’s mission is to achieve this goal of Nichiren. . . . To nurture and cultivate people’s lives with a philosophy of humanism, in the pursuit of lasting peace and happiness, is what it means to implement the Daishōnin’s [大聖人, that is, Nichiren’s] teaching of creating a peaceful society based on the tenets of his Buddhism. Herein lies the mission of the Sōka Gakkai.” See <http://www.gakkaionline.net/study/rar.html> (accessed May 6, 2007).

<sup>15</sup>These terms appeared in a January 2000 statement, “Sōka Gakkai’s Political Stance in Japan,” previously available at the Sōka Gakkai Web site (<http://www.sgi.org>).

<sup>16</sup>A separate Soka University in America (<http://www.soka.edu>), founded in 2001, is located in Aliso Viejo, California, and offers a wide range of both graduate and undergraduate degrees.

<sup>17</sup>Ikeda Daisaku, “Peace Proposals—A New Era of the People: Forging a Global Network of Robust Individuals,” <http://www.sgi.org/about/president/works/proposals/2006sum.html> (posted January 26, 2006; accessed July 19, 2007).

<sup>18</sup>Richard Seager, *Encountering the Dharma: Daisaku Ikeda, Sōka Gakkai and the Globalization of Buddhist Humanism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 98.

<sup>19</sup>Author’s interviews with Terasaki, Tokyo, March 23 and 30, 2006, and March 20, 2007.

<sup>20</sup>When established in 1964, the Kōmeitō was an official division of the Sōka Gakkai, but an embarrassing controversy erupted in 1969–70 when the Sōka Gakkai tried to stop the publication of a book critical of the organization and its political activities. Bad publicity obliged the Sōka Gakkai to disassociate itself from the Kōmeitō in May 1970. What this means is that elected Kōmeitō officials will resign from any official posts in the Sōka Gakkai, but Sōka Gakkai activities continue to support and influence the Kōmeitō. Virtually every elected Kōmeitō official is a member of Sōka Gakkai.

<sup>21</sup>Robert J. Kisala, *Prophets of Peace: Pacifism and Cultural Identity in Japan’s New Religions* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>23</sup>Author’s interview with Terasaki, Tokyo, March 30, 2006.

<sup>24</sup>Kajimoto Tetsushi, “Kōmeitō Torn Between LDP, Sōka Gakkai,” *Japan Times* (Tokyo), March 2, 2004.

<sup>25</sup>Author’s interview with Terasaki, Tokyo, March 30, 2006.

<sup>26</sup>John McQuaid, “A View of Religion in Japan,” *Global Affairs*, [http://www.japansociety.org/global\\_affairs/fellowship\\_essay.cfm?id\\_fellowship=666018121](http://www.japansociety.org/global_affairs/fellowship_essay.cfm?id_fellowship=666018121) (posted 2001; accessed July 19, 2007).

<sup>27</sup>Kajimoto, “Kōmeitō Torn.”

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Author’s interview with Endō, Tokyo, March 21, 2006.

<sup>30</sup>Letter to Kanzaki Takenori from Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō, Buddhist Anti-War Action Alliance, 2004, <http://groups.msn.com/BuddhistAnti-WarActionAlliance> (accessed July 19, 2007).

<sup>31</sup>Author’s interview with Hamayotsu, Tokyo, March 23, 2006.

<sup>32</sup>Author’s interview with Terasaki, Tokyo, March 20, 2007.

<sup>33</sup>Kajimoto, “Kōmeitō Torn.”

<sup>34</sup>Hardacre, “Constitutional Revision,” 240.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Hardacre, “Constitutional Revision,” 240.

<sup>37</sup>For a description of a recent display at the war relic-housing Yūshūkan 遊就館 War Memorial Museum, which adjoins Yasukuni Shrine and was originally built in 1882, see Paul Rodell’s “Southeast Asian Nationalism and the Russo-Japanese War: Re-examining Assumptions” in this issue, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup>Later that summer, I visited the Marco Polo Bridge on the outskirts of Beijing, where all-out war between Japan and China began in 1937. A large museum there serves as China’s official remembrance of the anti-fascist war against Japan—including, interestingly, a large, now aging, stone statue honoring American General Claire Chenault (1893–1958), “Hero of the Old Flying Tigers”—with many pictures and films depicting the horrors of the Nanjing massacre. The tone of the museum is decidedly anti-Japanese, as were the comments of so many Chinese, both young and old, that I met while in China.

<sup>39</sup>“Japanese PM Visits Yasukuni Shrine,” BBC News Report, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4348280.stm> (posted October 17, 2005; accessed July 19, 2007).