

# Parroting the U.S. Far-Right: Former Fringe Party Politician and Conspiracy Entrepreneur Yukihiisa Oikawa

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**Abstract:** *This article investigates the popular social media channels of former Happiness Realization Party official Yukihiisa Oikawa, who has built himself a profile as a media personality within the Japanese language conspiracy narrative realm. In our analysis, we put a particular focus on his statements concerning the Russo-Ukrainian war and examine them within the context of his larger ideological and political views. Using mixed quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis methods, we are able to trace radicalization and semantic shifts within his terminology, as well as investigate the connection between metapolitical communication strategies and the monetization of anti-media and conspiracist disinformation – a connection that is common for the political strategy of the global far-right.*

**Keywords:** *YouTube, Twitter/X, Social media, Corpus analysis, Happy Science, Happiness Realization Party, Japanese politics, U.S. Far-Right, Trumpism*

## Introduction

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, public discourse in Japan has mostly promoted an anti-war stance and portrayed the invasion as an act of aggression and a clear break of international law.<sup>1</sup> Debates on social media largely mirrored this attitude, but statements opposing this view began to emerge and spread, especially on the far-right spectrum of the online sphere. One place in which this occurred was the social media accounts associated with Happy Science (幸福の科学, *kōfuku no kagaku*, abbreviated HS), a new religious movement with ambitions to restructure the political, economic, and social order by means of a wide and diverse field of activities and institutions, including

the establishment of its own schools, a university, publishing and entertainment media houses, and a political party (Baffelli 2017, 139–141). While estimates of its membership range between a self-proclaimed 11 million to a more critical assessment of 13,000 (Winn 2022), its transdisciplinary and missionary style of participating in politics, publishing, and education has given it considerable visibility in the public sphere, making it the “leading new religion in late twentieth-century Japan” (Baffelli 2017, 139).

Among the associated YouTube channels, the one with the most followers was ‘the Wisdom Channel,’ a political commentary channel featuring Yukihiisa Oikawa (及川 幸久, Oikawa Yukihiisa), a former high-ranking official of Happy Science and its political arm, the Happiness Realization Party (幸福実現党, *Kōfuku Jitsugen-tō*, abbreviated HRP). To our surprise, Oikawa retired from his 20-year career with Happy Science in the middle of our research. Therefore, what had started as an analysis of the anti-media and pro-Russia claims of an official of a political fringe party and new religious movement needed to be reconsidered, and instead became an analysis of what is usually called a ‘conspiracy entrepreneur’ in existing research (cf. Birchall 2021). With our dataset covering the very time of his transition from one to the other, we were able to observe this process in situ. With Oikawa, we thus analyze the articulations of a spiritual writer and fringe party politician turning into a social media personality, increasingly establishing himself in a social media counter-public sphere. We argue that he is a representative example of the strategic connection between the monetization

<sup>1</sup> This was apart from some prominent examples in the political realm, cf. Kalashnikova and Schäfer (2024).

of anti-media and conspiracist disinformation, and metapolitical communication strategies, contributing to the internationalization of the far-right in Japan by disseminating pro-Putin and Trumpian worldviews.

## Happy Science and Yukihiisa Oikawa

Happy Science is a religious and spiritual movement founded in 1986 by Ryuhō Ōkawa (大川 隆法, Ōkawa Ryūhō), promoting a blend of religious teachings, self-help principles, and political ideologies. The organization's doctrine is based on the belief that its recently deceased founder and central figure Ōkawa was connected to, or a reincarnation of, various religious figures, including Buddha and Jesus Christ, and that he possessed special divine knowledge (Grillmayer 2013, HAPPY SCIENCE Official Website n.d.). The organization's political party, the Happiness Realization Party, runs on a conservative and nationalistic platform, including the revision of the constitutional "peace" article 9 and boosting military spending to attack North Korea, as well as to radically increase the birth rate in order to make Japan a globally leading country (for more information on HS and HRP cf. Baffelli 2010, Baffelli 2017, Demetriou 2009, Gilbert 2021, Hall 2023, Klein 2011).

Since the early 2010s, the organization has established personal ties with leading American conservative figures and organizations, proclaiming to be "on a mission to export American-style conservatism—the gospel of small government, low taxes, and free enterprise—to the Land of the Rising Sun" (Ball 2012). In the more recent past, officials of HS regularly appeared at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), one of the most powerful networks of conservative forces in the U.S., and apparently were instrumental in establishing its Japanese equivalent, the CPAC Japan (formerly J-CPAC) (Right Response Team 2019, Graziosi 2021, McKay 2021). Recently, the organization has positioned itself as a major pro-Trump mobilizer in Japan (Deck 2021), publishing spiritual books in support of Trump (Okawa 2020),<sup>2</sup> and, according

to HS statements, as an ally in a global anti-China network (Cho 2017). Moreover, HS also ran disinformation campaigns during the pandemic, claiming that it could defeat the coronavirus by purely spiritual means (Kestenbaum 2020, Deck 2021).

Yukihiisa Oikawa was a high-ranking official in both the religious and political organizations of HS, having served as the Head of International Department for Happy Science Europe (cf. Companies House. n.d.) and occupied the role of Director of the Foreign Affairs Bureau of the Happiness Realization Party (cf. NOBORDER 2020, The Happiness Realization Party n.d. -a). He also acted as an interpreter and networker maintaining ties with the aforementioned U.S.-based conservative networks (Ball 2012)<sup>3</sup> and has authored multiple books on various topics, including on Trump and world conspiracies, or "God, Trump and Putin," to use his own words (Oikawa 2022i; 2018).

Regarding his political ambitions, Oikawa repeatedly ran as a candidate for the HRP in House of Councillors elections for various districts at least since 2012, including Yokohama, Kinki, Nagano, and Tōkyō (cf. Asahi Shimbun 2013, 2016, NHK 2019, Senkyo Dotto Komu n.d.). In the 2022 elections, he ran on a "Trumpian" platform, mimicking Trump's slogan, with "Make Japan great again." (cf. The Happiness Realization Party n.d. -b). After over 20 years with HS, he stepped down from all his positions on July 15, 2023 (The Happiness Realization Party 2023), and, according to sources within HS, appears to focus on his activities as a social media influencer and public speaker (Okawa 2023). Besides his YouTube channel and Twitter/X<sup>4</sup> account, which are analyzed in this article, he also runs an interview-style Nico Nico Dōga Live Channel and appears at live events organized in the

3 Here the authors refer to him in a somewhat shortened form as "Yuki" Oikawa instead of his full first name, Yukihiisa. He appears to use the short form regularly on the international stage, as he refers to himself like this in his romanized name form on Twitter/X and also on YouTube.

4 Twitter was rebranded as X in 2023, and at a time when this research was still ongoing, both names were still commonly used for the platform. For reasons of coherence and understanding we will use the double name throughout this article, and refer to posts made on the platform as "tweets" in reference to the former name.

2 For a summary cf. Oikawa 2020a

name of his company, the Oikawa Yukihsa Institute. Since early 2024, he has also run his own publishing company named “WISDOM books.” However, after repeated bans for violating the terms of use, possibly by spreading conspiracy narratives and fake news, Oikawa was allegedly banned from YouTube and forfeited the possibility to create new channels under his name on the platform as of November 29, 2023,<sup>5</sup> leaving him only with Twitter/X and Nico Nico Dōga.

Ideologically, Oikawa’s positions overlap with many of those of the far-right in Japan. He supports history revisionist school textbooks, holds a strong anti-China/anti-Korea stance, and fuels distrust in the legacy media (cf. Oikawa 2013).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, he also spread disinformation related to vaccines (@oikawa\_yukihsa, July 30, 2023; September 21, 2023). However, Oikawa’s set of views is rather unique if compared to other far-right actors, as he displays a very favorable attitude towards the U.S. and appropriates views taken directly from the U.S. far-right, such as the view that progressive politicians in the U.S. are plotting the mass suicide of humanity by legalizing abortion, combined with conspiracy narratives about COVID-19, UFOs, and a messianic belief in both Ōkawa and Trump (Oikawa 2020b). His contributions to publications of HS and HRP can be best described as “conspiritualist,” combining New Age spiritual beliefs with conspiracy narratives (cf. Ward & Voas 2011). The fact that Oikawa also runs two other channels on YouTube, namely the Ufology channel “Official Sorakara,” bearing the motto: “A new program fact-checking the latest UFO, aliens, and apocalypse-related information linked to international politics from Oikawa’s perspective,” and “Oikawa Yukihsa the Mindpower Channel,” focusing on spiritual self-optimization, supports our hypothesis that Oikawa has built his former political

career and social media enterprise on conspiracist and spiritual content.

## Data and Analytical Framework

### Data and Methods

Our corpus-assisted discourse analytical approach entails both quantitative and qualitative methods. The former includes the compilation of four datasets which were processed into corpora for corpus-linguistic analysis (cf. table 1).<sup>7</sup> Corpus YT\_meta is composed of all titles, views, hashtags, and other metadata of all videos uploaded and published by Oikawa on his Oikawa Yukihsa Wisdom Channel between its launch and May 28, 2023. In line with the focus of our analysis on his views of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we extracted a list of all Ukraine-themed videos from this data, selected by keywords, and downloaded the Japanese subtitles for all 113 videos, of which 101 were published in the time span of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> This data was processed into Corpus YT\_sub for analysis. Corpus TW is a dataset of all tweets posted by Oikawa on his Twitter/X account until early November 2023.<sup>9</sup> Corpus TW\_ukr has been compiled by using a set of Ukraine-related keywords, resulting in a data set composed of all of his tweets on the topic.<sup>10</sup> All corpora were analyzed using the corpus analysis tool AntConc,<sup>11</sup> LDA topic modeling using the Gensim library and bespoke scripts to determine word frequencies, hashtags and links.<sup>12</sup> Qualitative analysis

7 Downloaded via the platforms’ public APIs, and after Twitter/X removed this function, completed manually.

8 Search terms: ウクライナ, ロシア, プーチン, ゼレンスキー, 露 (Ukraine, Russia, Putin, Zelensky, Russian).

9 While Twitter/X displays Oikawa’s tweet count as “6455 posts”, this number includes the comments, whereas the actual number of tweets is the full set of downloaded 4877 posts.

10 Keywords: ウクライナ, ロシア, プーチン, ゼレンスキー, 露 (Ukraine, Russia, Putin, Zelensky, Russian).

11 A freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordances and text analysis developed by Laurence Anthony <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>

12 Results in the topic models are filtered for nouns not specific to the topic, resulting in different keyword count for each topic. Topic and keyword output count were decided after initial trials to reach sensical results. As Oikawa relates similar master narratives with different details, a rough output produces almost always identical topics. In this set up, we reached telling results at a setting of 10 topics, 15 keywords per topic. If multiple topics were identical with different non-related nouns, they appear as one topic in the results.

5 On March 03, 2024 Oikawa announced that despite the earlier notification of being banned indefinitely, he was able to open a YouTube account with his content again, this time branded as “The Core” under the handle @THECORE409.

6 In his official candidate page for the Happiness Realization Party, he is introduced as someone who “counters the lies about the Nanjing Massacre and Comfort Women in English” (cf. Happiness Realization Party n.d.-b). He is also the producer of a movie which aims to “save the world from the CCP” (cf. Recielstudio n.d.).

| corpus name | data type           | data source                    | item count | size in tokens | first item date | last item date |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| YT_meta     | YT channel metadata | youtube.com/@oikawa_yukihisa1/ | 1,202      | 33,377         | 01.04.2017      | 28.05.2023     |
| YT_sub      | Video subtitles     | youtube.com/@oikawa_yukihisa1/ | 113        | 306,207        | 10.12.2019      | 03.06.2023     |
| TW          | Tweets              | twitter.com/oikawa_yukihisa    | 4,877      | 396,383        | 23.04.2019      | 05.11.2023     |
| TW_ukr      | Tweets              | twitter.com/oikawa_yukihisa    | 544        | 71,070         | 08.07.2019      | 04.11.2023     |

Table 1: Overview of analyzed corpora

included the annotation and in-depth analysis of a set of keyword-selected YouTube videos and tweets.

The selection of items by keywords yields considerable advantages, such as reducing analysis to a thematically focused corpus, but also disadvantages. Notably, the researchers depend on prior domain knowledge of the discourse to choose suitable keywords, and therefore are inevitably at risk of missing relevant items in codified, mistyped or otherwise distorted language. At the same time, choosing items based on keywords not in substantial relevance to the analysis also poses risk of result distortion. Additionally, the download and analysis of automatically generated YouTube subtitles is at the present stage not recommended for automated processing, as the voice recognition technology producing the subtitles yields no reliable results. Luckily, however, in the present case the subtitles were partly user-created and considerably supervised by the video author, and partly also available online for cross-checking.<sup>13</sup> As the downloaded subtitles included time-stamps we were also able to reliably recheck the videos manually in case of doubt. Additionally, topic modeling is a key technique in discovering thematic structures in text. However, the Gensim library's approach will produce results requiring substantial domain knowledge for interpretation, as it does not include built-in

<sup>13</sup> Blog with subtitles of the Wisdom Channel in the time span of May 2019 to July 2022 <https://ameblo.jp/c-ship111/>.

handling nuanced text differences. Also, the topic nodes produced will not be exhaustive, but rather provide insight into a limited number of detectable topics. While no quantitative approach is safe from such failure, we aimed at producing sound results by familiarizing ourselves with the corpora first, and afterwards by constant cross-checking of results.

### Theoretical Framework

We approach Oikawa's statements and social media strategy from the perspective of 'metapolitics,' a term originally coined by the French new right intellectual Alain de Benoist. The term refers to a discursive strategy aiming at the 'normalization' of far-right ideas via the 'pre-political' sphere of culture (cf. Schilk 2024). The new right describes this strategy over discursive hegemony also as 'Gramscianism from the right.' Disseminating conspiracy narratives and disinformation is a key mode of metapolitics, as it distorts trust in the media, science, and the political establishment by stating that the 'actual' truth is being withheld from public knowledge. This is often accompanied by a referral to 'alternative' sources where the 'real' facts can be obtained. The mass media is depicted as colluding with the academic and political elites.

While it seems counter-intuitive that a (former) politician would work on eroding trust in the political



Fig 1: Overview over the Wisdom Channel subscriber gain and estimated income. Source: socialblade.com (accessed: June 10, 2024)

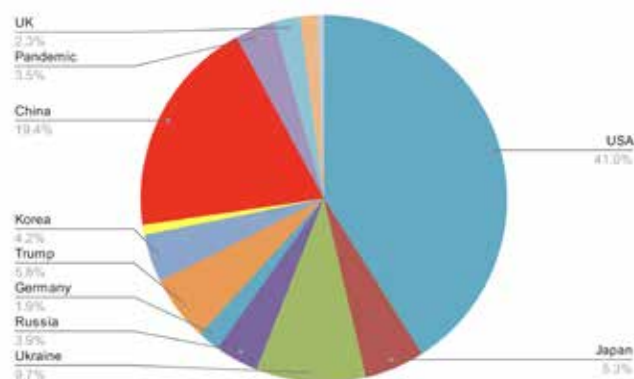
system, we argue that this simultaneity of different modes of articulation on political stages on the one hand, and social media platforms on the other, is a key feature of Oikawa's political style. By spreading conspiracy narratives and misinformation, facilitated by the algorithmic mechanisms of social media platforms, he is able to position himself as a political and 'anti-establishment' alternative, not unlike Trump. With his political aspirations coming to an end upon his withdrawal from HS and HRP, Oikawa can be described as a 'conspiracy theory entrepreneur,' promoting and benefiting from spreading conspiracy theories. Jaron Harambam characterizes such individuals as actors who exploit the growing mistrust in traditional institutions to gain influence and followers in a digitally mediated information landscape (cf. Harambam 2020). In a similar vein, Aaron Hyzen and Hilde Van den Bulck describe 'ideological entrepreneurs' who instrumentalize the affordances of digital media to expand their influence and push their narratives from the margins to the mainstream (Hyzen & Van den Bulck 2021), namely in order to establish hegemonial discourse, which is the pronounced goal of metapolitics (Schilk 2024, 341). We argue that it was Oikawa's metapolitical style of operating on conspiracist discursive fragments to disrupt trust in the political establishment

that opened doors and eventually facilitated his transition into a social media counter-sphere career.

## Analysis

### Quantitative Analysis of Oikawa's YouTube and Twitter Account

Oikawa's Wisdom Channel on YouTube was launched in January 2017 and had over 525,000 followers and 180,000,000 total views as of November 2023 (cf. fig 1). The most popular videos had more than 500,000 views and a more or less constant count of between 200 to 500 comments per video. The majority of Oikawa's videos feature him commenting on current news or timely topics, mostly related to international politics. In line with the motto of his channel, i.e. "Recent international news the mass media doesn't cover" (マスコミが伝えない最新国際ニュース, *masukomi ga tsutae-nai saishinkokusai nyūsu*), he presents himself as a well-informed commentator and English-speaking analyst with deep knowledge of the events behind the scenes. His videos and subtitles were only in Japanese until he started to add multi-language subtitles to his videos from December 2022.



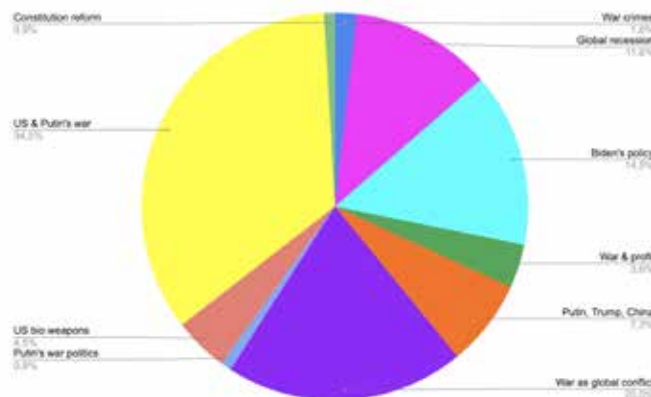
Graph 1: Most salient topics (based on video titles) in Corpus YT\_meta<sup>14</sup>

Coinciding with his parting from HS, he added an introduction in English to his main Wisdom Channel profile, apparently targeting non-Japanese audiences, and introduced himself as: “(...), specializing in the international affairs with the wide range of the issues from the ‘INJECTION’ to Ukraine-Russia war, U.S. politics. (...) He advocates the limited government, the lower tax, deregulations, and anti-globalism [sic]”.

Graph 1 shows the spread of the most salient topics, according to video titles in Corpus YT\_meta. Almost half of his videos in Corpus YT\_meta are related to the U.S., with China being another dominant focus. Interestingly, Japan only plays a minor role in his videos. During the pandemic and well into 2023, he published a large number of videos disseminating disinformation and conspiracy narratives regarding COVID-19 and vaccines, frequently referring to vaccine conspiracy ideologue Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Oikawa has commented broadly on the situation in Ukraine as well, with 101 videos published between early 2022 and early June 2023, dealing with either “Ukraine” and/or “Russia”. Our analysis with a LDA topic model on Corpus YT\_sub unveils various framings of the full-scale Russian invasion (cf. graph 2 & table 2). Looking at the nouns outlining each

<sup>14</sup> Some categories are aggregate: “China” also involves “Uyghur”, “Hongkong”, “Xi”, “Taiwan”; “Korea” involves “North Korea” and “South Korea.”



|    |                                                                                                          |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | War crimes (Russia, Ukraine, child, missile, prosecution, military, indictment)                          |
| 2  | Global recession (Russia, U.S., Ukraine, Japan, dollar, world, president)                                |
| 3  | Biden's policy (Russia, U.S., Ukraine, war, military, Biden, administration)                             |
| 4  | War & profit (Russia, Ukraine, price, Zelensky, world, maximum, theater)                                 |
| 5  | Putin, Trump & China (President, Ukraine, U.S., Russia, Putin, Trump, China, issues, administration)     |
| 6  | War as global conflict (Ukraine, U.S., Russia, president, war, Putin, administration, world)             |
| 7  | Putin's war politics (Russia, Ukraine, U.S., president, Putin, war, military)                            |
| 8  | U.S. bio weapons (Weapons, Russia, U.S., nuclear, biological, Ukraine, research, Putin)                  |
| 9  | U.S. & Putin's war (Ukraine, Russia, U.S., military, war, president, former, Putin)                      |
| 10 | Constitution reform (Constitution, President, Russia, amendment, Putin, term, territory, article, Japan) |

Graph 2 & Table 2: Topic spread and keywords from the LDA topic model trained on Corpus YT\_sub.<sup>15</sup>

topic node, we see that Oikawa presents the Russo-Ukrainian war from the perspective of U.S. involvement and salient conspiratorial and disinformation narratives (cf. Lai et al. 2024), such as the alleged existence of bio-weapon laboratories in Ukraine (cf. topos 8) or indicating a connection between war profits and Zelensky (cf. topos 4). Moreover, he also puts a strong focus on Putin (cf. topoi 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), draws comparisons between Trump's and Biden's stance towards Russia (cf. topoi 3, 5, 9), and depicts the Russo-Ukrainian war as a conflict of global dimensions (topoi 5, 6).

Oikawa's focus on the U.S. would also explain the salient collocation (words in close proximity to a certain term, indicating the context in which this term is used) of the word ‘war’ with other wars fought by the U.S., including ‘Iraq’ and ‘Vietnam’. However, since the U.S. is not a warrant party in this war, this framing rather hints to a narrative of a

<sup>15</sup> Topic number = 10, keywords per topic = 10, filtered for non-related nouns.

|                          |                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Top collocates for “war” | Ukraine, Russia, nuclear, crimes, Donbas, Iraq, proxy, invasion, Vietnam (ウクライナ, ロシア, 核, 犯罪, ドンバス, イラク, 代理, 侵略, ベトナム) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Table 3: Top collocates for “war” in Corpus YT\_sub.<sup>16</sup>

proxy war (7th in the list) between Russia and the U.S.

Moreover, Oikawa also employs conspiracy narratives proposed by the current Russian government, including the pretextual necessity to “denazify” Ukraine, or the alleged existence of biological weapon research facilities (cf. table 4). Another frequently employed conspiracy narrative revolves around the term ‘neocan,’ a word that is also used in connection to the notion of a proxy war, as we will see.

| lemma         | variations                                                                        | freq | top collocates                                                                                                            |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| nazi (ナチ)     | nazi, nazis, neonazi, denazification (ナチ, ナチス, ネオナチ, 非ナチ化)                        | 199  | government, elimination, existence, organization, emblem, dismantling, Germany, Jewish (政府, 排除, 存在, 組織, 紋章, 解体, ドイツ, ユダヤ) |
| bio (生物)      | biolab, biological weapons, biological weapon research lab (生物研究所, 生物兵器, 生物兵器研究所) | 117  | weapons, research, Ukraine, facility, U.S., chemical, facility, existence (兵器, 研究, フクライナ, 所, アメリカ, 化学, 施設, 存在)            |
| Neocan (ネオカン) | none                                                                              | 142  | U.S., strategy, controversy, purpose, hindrance, policy, ambitions (アメリカ, 戦略, 論争, 目的, 邪魔, 方針, 野望)                         |

Table 4: Conspiracy narrative fragments and their top collocates in Corpus YT\_sub.<sup>17</sup>

Oikawa’s current Twitter/X account is called “Yuki Oikawa – the wisdom news on X,” the motto (as of June 2024) is “World Peace and Prosperity / Revival of Spiritual Values / Friendship between Japan and Russia / Tax-Free Nation / Good Book,” and the bio describes him as “Owner of WISDOM BOOKS, an independent Japanese media and publishing company. Former YouTuber, author and international affairs analyst.” In the roughly four years after Oikawa tweeted for the first time from this account in April 2019, he has posted an average of 87 tweets per month, and a maximum of 330 tweets in November 2022. The majority of his posts introduce or reproduce content from other media platforms,

<sup>16</sup> Sorted by frequency, filtered for nouns, excluding repetitions. Collocation span 5L to 5R.

<sup>17</sup> Sorted by frequency, filtered for nouns, excluding repetitions. Collocation span 5L to 5R.

including links to his own videos on YouTube or live streams on the Japanese video platform Nico Nico Dōga as well as other platforms. Moreover, he also used Twitter/X as a campaign platform at the time he was running in elections for political office. His use of hashtags is almost exclusively related to his campaign for the Happiness Realization Party, with the top six hashtags being related to his 2022 campaign. During his ban from YouTube, Oikawa used Twitter/X as one of his main platforms, posting videos directly on Twitter/X in multiple language versions.

Oikawa’s key sources of information can be identified from an analysis of the metadata of his Twitter/X account (Corpus TW). Amongst the top ten media sources is only one Japanese website (news.yahoo.jp),<sup>18</sup> the others include U.S.-based right-wing media (such as *Fox News*), disinformation media (such as *The Epoch Times*), or alternative and conspiracy media outlets (such as *Breitbart* or *Becker News*), besides legacy media outlets, such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*. To put it differently, out of the top ten news domains linked by Oikawa, more than half are right-wing, notorious for spreading fake news, or known for allowing space for extremist views.

|                         |                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Most linked news        | foxnews.com, news.yahoo.co.jp, nytimes.com, theepochtimes.com, washingtonpost.com, beckernews.com, breitbart.com, newsmax.com, wsj.com, ft.com |
| Most mentioned hashtags | #MakeJapanGreatAgain, short form of #1, #OikawaYukihisa, #OikawaYukihisaforTokyodistrict (#MakeJapanGreatAgain, #ジャバグレ, #及川幸久, #東京選挙区は及川幸久)    |

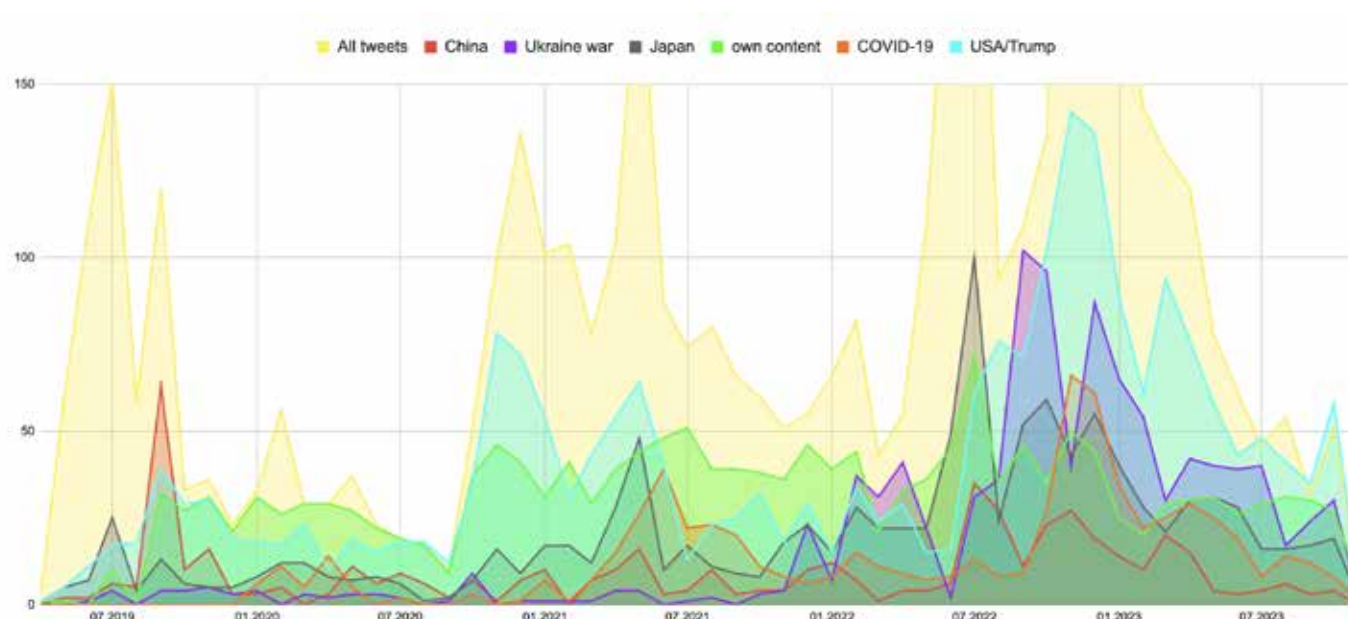
Table 5: Top news domains and hashtags in Corpus TW.<sup>19</sup>

### Qualitative Analysis: Far-right Conspiracy Narratives and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

In this section we analyze Oikawa’s views in depth by (a) looking into key conspiracy concepts, (b) explaining the most salient narrative frames, and (c) showing how Oikawa relates pro-Russian pro-

<sup>18</sup> The only Japanese site is the news aggregation platform *news.yahoo.jp*, which’s comment section is frequent target for Japanese Internet right-wingers trolling. The so-called *netto uyoku* are a certain type of right-wing Internet user, comparable to the U.S. alt-right.

<sup>19</sup> Sorted by frequency, filtered for nouns, excluding repetitions. Collocation span 5L to 5R.



Graph 3: Topical foci over time on Oikawa's recent Twitter/X account.

paganda narratives to his Japanese audience, either directly by paraphrasing Putin's views of the events, or indirectly by reproducing conspiratorial content from the aforementioned U.S. media outlets. This includes vilification of President Zelensky or Ukrainian refugees,<sup>20</sup> claiming that the war is in fact a proxy war that was instigated by the anti-Russian and imperialist West,<sup>21, 22</sup> the justification of Russian aggression as an act of self-defense against Ukrainian/EU "neonazis,"<sup>23, 24</sup> the allegation of a genocide of the Russian minority in Donbas committed by Ukraine, and the existence of U.S.-run bio-weapon labs on Ukrainian soil.<sup>25</sup> We will particularly describe Oikawa's (a) positioning as an anti-mainstream (social) media outlet and (b) idea of a global 'neocon' conspiracy.

### Media Criticism

Generally speaking, Oikawa's content follows a certain script. Usually, he starts either by citing information from a reliable source, adding his own conspiratorial interpretation, or by quoting from a

questionable source right from the start. He then complements this information with his own "explanation" (解説, *kaisetsu*), embedding the news item in his own narrative framework. Despite claiming to "fact-check the mass media that is fact-checking Putin" with regard to the war in Ukraine (Oikawa 2023b), he in fact frequently repeats the views and statements by the Kremlin, retelling them uncritically (cf. Oikawa 2023c). The underlying claim of all his content is, however, that the mass media is intentionally hiding and manipulating information and he uncovers the hidden truth. This anti-media and anti-establishment strategy is in line with that of far-right and conservative media outlets in the U.S., and the way the far-right in Japan describes the local mass media as anti-Japanese (反日, *han'nichi*) (cf. Ito 2019, Schäfer 2017, Schäfer 2022, Al Jazeera 2023). These attacks on the legacy media are usually staged as an act of self-defense, as the following video title suggests: "Trump debunks Climate Change... (...) This is the reality of the fake media: Underdog media takes the fight to CNN" (Oikawa 2021a). While attacking and vilifying other news sources, Oikawa presents himself as a reliable source and trustworthy provider of insider knowledge. When talking about Ukraine, he also adopts the Kremlin view of an alleged "global majority" standing

- 20 Oikawa 2022f.
- 21 Oikawa 2022b.
- 22 Oikawa 2022a.
- 23 Oikawa 2021b.
- 24 Oikawa 2022e.
- 25 Oikawa 2022f, Oikawa 2023d.



Fig. 2: Oikawa frames media reports that do not align with his framings as “Neocon media’s propaganda.”<sup>26</sup>

against the U.S. and its alleged proxies. He argues that, “the world” is now aware that the Biden administration in fact forced Putin to attack Ukraine, contrary to the views presented by the Japanese media (@oikawa\_yukihisa, January 12, 2023).

### *The Great ‘Neocon’ Conspiracy*

By looking at the key conspiracy concepts and terms employed by Oikawa over time, we were able to trace certain developments in the use of concepts, semantic shifts, and a tendency towards radicalization in his content. In Corpora YT\_meta and TW, we could identify an increasing use of conspiracist terms such as ‘deep state’, ‘globalists,’<sup>27</sup> and ‘neocons’ since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (cf. graph 4, coinciding with a general increase in posting activity cf. graph 3).<sup>28</sup> Before that, the terms were hardly used by Oikawa in the data we analyzed. The term ‘neocon’ was used only once by Oikawa before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Twitter,<sup>29</sup> and at that time in a more traditional sense

as reference to neoconservative U.S. politicians.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, however, Oikawa uses the term ‘neocon’ to insinuate conspiracy plots behind the war in Ukraine and Gaza, alluding to the activities of puppet masters of these “proxy wars” (@oikawa\_yukihisa, October 16, 2023).<sup>31</sup> In May 2020, he deploys the term ‘deep state’ for the first time, namely by referring to the trials against Michael Flynn as a “conspiracy of the deep state and Obama to dispose of Trump” (@oikawa\_yukihisa, May 15, 2020). Since then, Oikawa has used the term whenever U.S. domestic affairs did not go in favor of Trump, explaining the election of Biden, the charges pressed against Trump and former members of his administration, or U.S. support of Ukraine by the existence of a rogue ‘state within the state.’ Neither the term ‘deep state’ nor ‘neocon’ appeared in the content of an earlier Twitter/X account he ran during 2019.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, the term ‘globalism’ was already used in tweets on his earlier Twitter/X account, for instance when describing Brexit as ‘anti-globalist’ or Japan’s former prime minister Abe Shinzō at Davos as a ‘globalist’ (@oikawayukihisa, January 25, 2019). However, at that time, the term did not seem to imply any conspiratorial setup, but rather as a term to criticize liberal internationalism. Since December 2022, Oikawa has started to use the term ‘globalism’ in a more radical way in tweets posted from his new Twitter account (Corpus TW) — for instance, to claim that “the zionists use U.S. globalists in order to exterminate the Palestinians and expand their territory in the Arab world” (@oikawa\_yukihisa, October 15, 2023) or that the 2023 French pension reform strikes in fact were a “civil war of the people against the globalist government” (@oikawa\_yukihisa, May 05, 2023). In the case of

mention concerning the Afghan war, and also in the traditional sense.

<sup>30</sup> The term originally denotes the followers of a strain of conservative thought, founded at the time of the Vietnam war in response to a pacifist Democratic Party and leftist culture, and favors an interventionist approach to international affairs, and militaristic means to establishing democracy and peace. In leftist discourse, neocons were warmongering conservative “hawks”, influential people favoring warfare, who were also said to privately profit from war.

<sup>31</sup> A one-time mention in late 2019 in Corpus YT\_meta is also in relation to Russia and Ukraine.

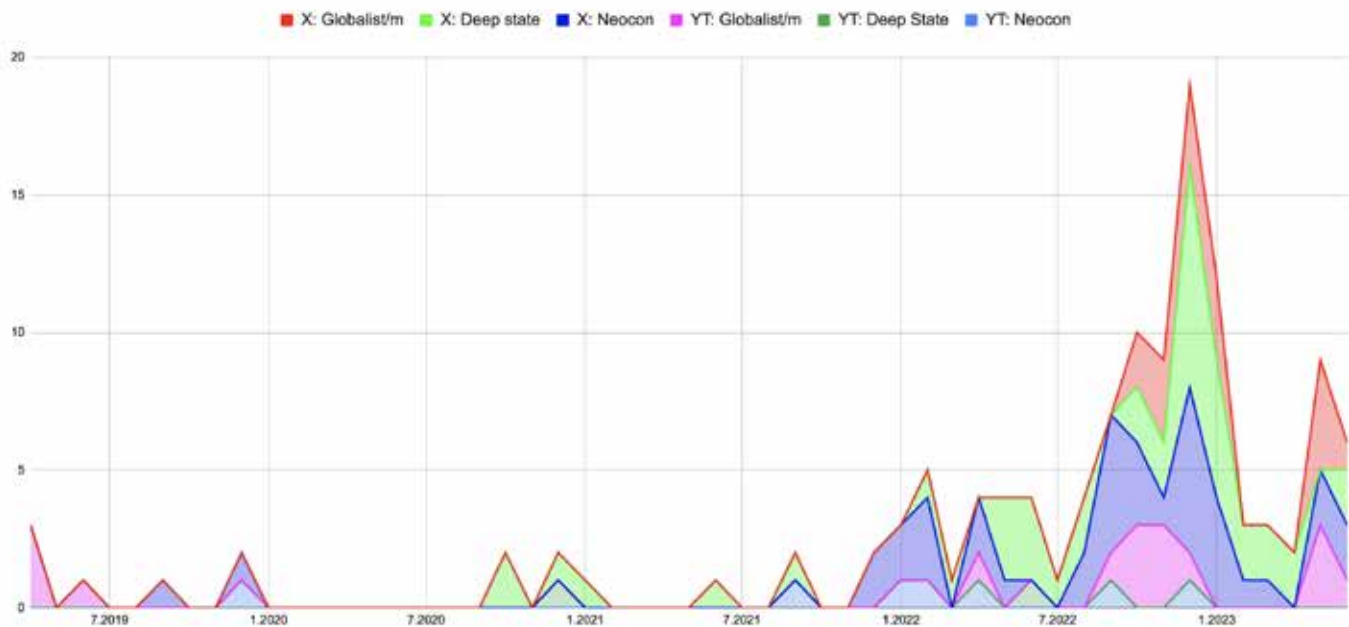
<sup>32</sup> This account consisted only of links and titles to videos, which were already part of Corpus YT\_meta and therefore did not contribute much to our findings (<https://www.twitter.com/oikawayukihisa>).

<sup>26</sup> Oikawa 2022h.

<sup>27</sup> For a structurally similar use of the term by another prominent proponent of the Japanese far-right, namely the manga author Kobayashi Yoshinori, cf. Poppe et al. 2023.

<sup>28</sup> The category “Globalism” includes both the term itself and “Globalist”. The category “Deep State” includes the term itself and “DS.” Terms not related to the meaning were left out.

<sup>29</sup> The one-time use is in reference to Republican party veteran John Bolton and his acquittal from Trump’s team. In Corpus YT\_meta there is one



Graph 4: Mention of key conspiracy terms over time in corpora YT\_meta & TW.

Japan, he mostly employs the term when referring to a newly introduced law to promote the understanding of gender identity diversity,<sup>33</sup> saying that “Biden and the globalists are behind it” and that it opens the door to child abuse (@oikawa\_yukihisa, June 12, 2023; June 16, 2023). According to Liam Stack (2016), the term ‘globalism’ has become the “the defining folklore and narrative for the racist right” after communism ceased to be a uniting “boogeyman to explain the various declines that the United States is perceived to be in” (Stack 2016). The term is commonly also connected to another trope of the far-right, namely the term of a “New World Order,” which refers to the idea of a large-scale conspiracy to establish a transnational socialist ‘global order’ (Levin 2018). Indeed, in a tweet from 2023, Oikawa defines ‘globalism’ as the universalist assumption of the existence of humanist collective values, which the “globalists” want to “impose on the entire world.” According to Oikawa, the aim is to create a “one-world government,” which would eventually lead to anti-libertarian “totalitarianism” and complete “denial of democratic rules and freedom of

<sup>33</sup> The Act on Enhancement of Public Understanding of Diversity in Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (性的指向及びジェンダーアイデンティティの多様性に関する国民の理解の増進に関する法律, *seitaki shikō oyobi jendāidentitit no tayōsei ni kansuru kokumin no rikai wo zōshin ni kansuru hōritsu*).

speech” (@oikawa\_yukihisa, January 14, 2023). It appears that, over time, Oikawa’s use of the term has more and more aligned with the use of the term by the U.S. far-right.

In contrast, Oikawa’s notion of the term ‘neocon’ is slightly more complex and twisted. Generally speaking, the term seems to be used by him to construct an insuperable antagonistic opposition to other political and ideological groups. In his use, the term does not refer to hawkish neoconservatism commonly associated with the administration of George W. Bush, as one would expect, but rather to denote the Biden administration and the Republican critics of Trump, such as John McCain.<sup>34</sup> To understand this, it is necessary to know that the term ‘neocon’ has been pejoratively used in the U.S. since Trump’s election in 2016 by the pro-Trump faction in the Republican party and by Trump himself to refer to the old party establishment in general (cf. Slisco 2023, Smith 2023). In the rhetoric of the term, anyone who did not embrace Trump’s non-interventionist or, to put it in Oikawa’s rhetoric, anti-‘globalist’ America First-campaign, would become an intervention-

<sup>34</sup> He also uses the Tea Party term ‘RINO’ (Republican in name only) as synonymous to Republican party Trump opposition, framing Anti-Trumpers as fake Republicans (@oikawa\_yukihisa, August 12, 2022)

ist ‘neocon,’ and therefore a warmonger. With the election of Biden, the word turned into a broadly used umbrella term for any politician considered to be in opposition to Trump. Tucker Carlson of Fox News, one of Oikawa’s most linked and frequently referenced sources, has used the term to refer to the Biden administration, and, as it seems, eventually anyone else within the Democratic Party (cf. Hains 2023, Carlson 2022a, Creitz 2020). Carlson employs the term to refer to anybody who is a corrupt politician in his view, including politicians as remote from conservatism as, for instance, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: “She’s a neocon, just like everybody else. She is a tool of the people with power” (Carlson 2022a). This notion of a corrupt ‘neocon’ political elite is thus a variation of Trump’s populist rhetoric of the ‘swamp,’ which he promised to ‘drain’ in his presidential campaign. Carlson himself, who is also frequently quoted in Kremlin propaganda outlets, has at least since 2017 taken a pro-Russian stance, in an antagonistic response to the “Russiagate” allegations against the Trump presidential campaign (cf. Gabbatt 2022, Pengelly 2022, Hjelmgaard 2023, Mills 2017, Audureau 2023). Not only does Carlson use the term ‘neocon’ in a ‘Trumpist’ way, his pro-Russian stance on Ukraine is also similar to the one presented by Oikawa:

*“The Biden administration is responsible, either directly or through proxies, for the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines and the environmental catastrophe and the economic collapse that will certainly follow. (...) Zelenskyy is not the independent leader of a democratic nation. No, not even close. That is a fiction. Zelenskyy is a client of the Biden administration, which runs his country, and ideologues within the Biden administration did not want a negotiated peace in Ukraine. They wanted all along and it’s very clear now a regime change war against Russia.” (Carlson 2022b)*

As an analysis of the frequency and context of Google searches via Google Trends indicates, the term ‘neocon’ (ネオコン, *neokon*) in Japanese was connected to the idea of a conspiracist U.S. elite be-

hind the Russian aggressions towards Ukraine even before the full invasion (see table 6 below). Before the Trump campaign, the term ‘neocon’ in Japanese was searched for in connection with “U.S.” or “meaning.” From 2016, the term was googled more frequently in relation to Trump, and, even more interesting, also in connection with the name Mutsuo Mabuchi (馬渕 睦夫, *Mabuchi Mutsuo*), who is a former Japanese ambassador to Ukraine and author of unequivocally conspiratorial books on the topic.<sup>35</sup> From 2020, ‘neocon’ was searched in association with the word ‘Ukraine’ and increasingly also with the term ‘neonazi,’ ‘George Soros,’ and ‘deep state,’ hinting not only at the prevalent contextual shift from Trump to Ukraine but also towards conspiracy narratives regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war. The peak of searches for the term was right at the beginning of the full invasion of Ukraine, from an average score of 6.8 per month in 2012–2022 to a score of 50 in February 2022 and a maximum of 100 in March 2022.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, searches for the Russian equivalent “неокон” (neokon) on the Russian search engine ‘yandex.ru’ also suddenly jumped to 3700 searches in March 2022 from a monthly average of 1070 between January 2018 and February 2022, suggesting a translingual use of the term in conspiratorial narratives regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war (cf. also Kravets & Toepfl 2021 and Toepfl et al. 2022 for yandex’ and Google’s role in pro-Russian disinformation campaigns).

| January 2012 - January 2015    | January 2016 - January 2020    | January 2020 - January 2024    |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>TOP</b> (normalized to 100) | <b>TOP</b> (normalized to 100) | <b>TOP</b> (normalized to 100) |
| U.S. neocon 100                | U.S. neocon 100                | Ukraine 100                    |
| Neocon meaning 93              | Neocon Trump 90                | Ukraine neocon 100             |
| <b>RISING</b> (increase rate)  | <b>RISING</b> (increase rate)  | <b>RISING</b> (increase rate)  |
| Neocon meaning 140 %           | Trump >5k%                     | Neocon neonazi >5k%            |
|                                | Neocon Trump >5k%              | Neocon deep state >5k%         |
|                                | Mutsuo Mabuchi >5k%            | George Soros >5k%              |

Table 6: Google Trends, top and rising related searches to the term ‘neocon’ in Japanese over time.

<sup>35</sup> Mabuchi has used the term at least since 2018 and also connected it discursively with Trump, Putin, ‘globalism,’ and “jewish finance capital” (Mabuchi 2018).

<sup>36</sup> Google Trends normalizes samples of search data to handle its large data volume. Data points are divided by total searches of geography and time range to compare relative popularity. The numbers are then scaled on a range of 0 to 100 based on a topic’s proportion to all searches on all topics.

The adoption of such a semantically flexible and floating term facilitates its redefinition along the lines of Oikawa's own ideological framing—a discursive metapolitical strategy that is very typical for the global far-right and has similarly been described for the aforementioned term 'anti-Japanese' (*han'nichi*).<sup>37</sup> One might argue that for Oikawa as well as Carlson, the term functions as an empty signifier in the sense of Jacques Lacan; namely, a word that lacks a specific or stable meaning on its own, and is thus potentially applicable to any political opponent, thereby creating the impression of a unified antagonistic front of political 'enemies.'

Accordingly, the term 'neocoon' enables Oikawa to connect his pro-Trump stance with the 'globalist' narrative of a proxy war, thus functioning as a discursive link between Putin's anti-Western propaganda and Oikawa's 'globalist' politicians. When Oikawa paraphrases Putin's statements, he equates what Putin calls "the so-called West," "true handlers in the West," "the elites", or just the "Anglo-Saxons" (Putin 2022) with 'neocons' (see fig. 3).<sup>38</sup> In doing so, Oikawa can align Putin's anti-Western statements with not only the conspiratorial narrative of a U.S.-led proxy warfare, but also with his claims on the fake conservatism of the opponents of Trump. In one of his videos Oikawa ponders on this as follows:

*"What is a neocon? It means neoconservative and is conservative, but it has characteristics that are the exact opposite of conservatism. (...). Then there is "globalism." It is the opposite of saying "America First" like Trump. (...) The "new deep state," that's the hallmark of big government. After all, it is about the military-industrial complex. (...) The most im*

37 Oikawa's use of the term 'neocoon' to identify a profit-driven manipulative elite is an appropriation of a discourse formerly spread among left-leaning globalization critics. An analogous argument has been put forward by Jeffrey Sachs, former director of The Earth Institute at Columbia University, a person identified with socialist thought. Using this term can be seen as a strategy straight from the metapolitical playbook of appropriating leftist language and thought, when discourses and terms formerly embedded in leftist thought and ideology, such as globalization critic, are re-embedded in right-wing discourse.

38 In a tweet series from October, 2022, he relates key points of Putin's address at the annexation ceremony of Ukrainian regions from September 30, 2022, and while he stays largely close to script, he just adds the phrase "especially the U.S. Neocons" to a sentence where he summarizes who Russia is fighting (@oikawa\_yukihisa, October 2, 2022).



Fig. 3-5: Oikawa identifies Putin's 'the West' with 'neocons,' but also the Biden administration and his supporters, the arms industry and politicians such as Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, Bush Jr, Dick Cheney, John McCain, but eventually, through logical inversion, everyone within the U.S. who is against Trump or Putin.

*portant thing for the neocons is to create a state of war, civil war, and mayhem (...)."* (Oikawa 2022a)

In his explanation, ‘neocons’ have started basically all wars since the Iraq war in order to create a war business and sell weapons (@oikawa\_yukihisa, May 05, 2023). The only two persons to put an end to their money-making scheme are Putin, who deployed the Russian military to Syria to support the Syrian regime, and Trump, with his non-interventionist ‘America First’ doctrine. In this sense, the ‘neocons’ are ‘anti-Putin’ and ‘anti-Trump’ (see fig. 4) and, as a consequence, Trump and Putin are thus ‘anti-neocon’ (Oikawa 2022a). By outlining the idea of a malicious and mysterious (global) elite that is only opposed by Putin and Trump, Oikawa creates an image of a “counter-elite” giving a “voice to the powerless around the world” by “fighting on their behalf,” a discursive strategy pursued by the Kremlin as well (Maynes 2022).

Accordingly, Oikawa simplistically frames the ‘proxy war’ in Ukraine as a bilateral conflict between ‘globalist’ ‘neocons’ and ‘anti-globalist’ ‘anti-neocons.’ In two of his YouTube videos, entitled “Ukraine crisis is a business created by the neocons! Unpopular Biden aims to use Ukraine to regain support” (Oikawa 2022a) and “Will Ukraine Peace talks be realized?” (Oikawa 2022j) can be paraphrased as follows:



Fig. 6: Oikawa claims that Putin was cornered into invading Ukraine, in front of a monitor reading “the long-term strategy of the neocons against Russia: Occupation of Russia, getting hands on the world’s largest energy resources.”

The Euromaidan protests were an undercover coup d’état attempt of neocons to assassinate civil pro-Russian factions in Ukraine by providing training and arms to civil groups favoring Ukraine’s NATO association.<sup>39</sup> The protests and neonazi usurpation of the Ukrainian government as well as the potential NATO accession of Ukraine were all part of a long-term strategy of the Biden administration and neocons which intends to “occupy Russia” in order to get their hands on its natural resources. The neocons have been working on this plan since the Yeltsin administration, but with Putin’s inauguration, their plan failed.

Oikawa’s simple Schmittian friend-enemy scheme of ‘neocons/globalists’ and ‘anti-neocons/anti-globalists’ forms the basis for various other positions proposed by him, all of which impute earnest motives to end the war solely to Putin, with all other international leaders attempting to manipulate or obstruct a conclusion of peace. Accordingly, he concludes that in fact, it wasn’t Russia that started and continued the war, but rather “the globalists” (Oikawa 2023a, Oikawa 2022c).



Fig. 7: Oikawa states that the U.S. strategic goal of the Minsk protocol was to instigate a proxy war between the U.S. and Russia (Oikawa 2023a).

<sup>39</sup> He uses the terms NATO and EU somewhat indiscriminately, first talking about NATO but then continuing to talk about the EuroMaidan protests as if corollary.

On the contrary, within this antagonistic logic, Oikawa is able to describe Ukrainian president Zelensky as 1) an opportunistic and powerless puppet of the West, motivated by personal profit, 2) an aggressive and ruthless warmonger, and 3) a make-believe Jew using his Jewishness to deflect from actual neonazi influence in the Ukrainian government (Oikawa 2022g, 2022f, 2022d, 2022j). It becomes clear from these videos that Oikawa's view of Zelensky is a one-to-one adoption of Kremlin propaganda. To Oikawa, the alleged Ukrainian neonazis are the “globalists,” and Zelensky is nothing but a “lying marionette” of these “globalists” (see fig. 8).



Fig. 8: Oikawa states “This is how Zelensky, the puppet of the globalists, or rather neonazis, is telling mostly lies” (Oikawa 2022j).

The sudden increase of the key conspiracy concepts at the time of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine seen in graph 4 is certainly related to his simultaneous book publication on the topic, which uses the example of the Russo-Ukraine war to outline these concepts as well. However, in order to understand his admiration for Putin and his earlier use of the term ‘globalism,’ we can learn a lot from his book “God, Trump, and Putin: Faith as the Winning Formula” from 2018, also with regard to Oikawa’s general view of the geopolitical situation. In this book, Oikawa proposes a strategic partnership between Japan and Russia against China, which would be based on shared conservative values. In Oikawa’s geopolitical vision for Japan, Japan needs to conclude a peace treaty with Russia and work towards an “encircle-

ment of China” to secure its geostrategic position. According to Oikawa, this is something that the Japanese mass media would not publicly speak about. Needless to say, Oikawa’s vision of a Japanese-Russian alliance against China has become obsolete with the even closer rapprochement of Putin with China since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For Oikawa, the new geopolitical situation required the semantically floating concept of ‘neocons’ to bridge this contradiction, without providing logical argument. A tweet from March 2023 reads:

*“Russia and Putin have never trusted China. However, it was the U.S. neocons who forced him to work with China. Essentially, the U.S. should have separated Russia and China, but it has done the opposite. The clock needs to be turned back.” (@oikawa\_yukihisa, March 20, 2023)*

Japanese politics should be modeled after Russia as well, according to Oikawa. His admiration for the Putin and Trump administrations becomes clear from the titles of two chapters from the book: “Did Trump win the presidential election thanks to the power of the conscious mind?”<sup>40</sup> and “Putin revived Russia’s economy with religion from the bottom up” (Oikawa 2018). Oikawa proposes that a very similar relationship between religion and politics should exist in Japan as it does in Russia and the U.S. It is on the basis of a de-secularized state that the three countries could form a strong union against communist and irreligious China. We have now arrived at the core of Oikawa’s worldview, which also explains his combined political and religious ambitions. Similar to the amalgamation of politics and religion in Putin’s Russia and Trump’s America, Oikawa saw in the political and spiritual activities of HRP and HS a way to create a similar constellation in Japan, one eventually leading to economic prosperity, national sovereignty, the rebirth of religious values, and strong leadership. In that regard, Oikawa’s views are very similar to Trump’s ‘America First’-doctrine and

40 The same term “the conscious mind” is used in the earlier name of the Wisdom Channel before initial banning, apparently a concept Oikawa tried to use as a brand, connecting spirituality and economic prosperity. The English term is Oikawa’s translation of the Japanese ‘潜在意識’ (*senzai ishiki*) which actually means “subconscious”.

Putin's fight against the 'hegemony of the neocolonial system of the West', which the latter considers as an assault on Russian national sovereignty and traditional values, such as the family and religious faith (Putin 2022).

If seen from this perspective, namely that a war-waging and profit-driven U.S. elite is allegedly working towards the establishment of a totalitarian world order and is aiming at destroying traditional values in Russia in order to extract the country's energy resources, Oikawa's views are perfectly compatible with Putin's geopolitical notion of the 'neocolonial system of the West.' The idea that Russia is in danger of being colonized by the West has a long history in Russia, bearing similarities with the conspiracy narrative of the 'global million,' which is particularly popular in the Russian-speaking world (Lanza 2023). According to this narrative, which was employed by Putin himself in public statements referring to the Russo-Ukrainian war as well, a cabal of global elites is plotting the amassment of wealth at the expense of the rest of humanity:

*"The West is ready to cross every line to preserve the neo-colonial system which allows it to live off the world, to plunder it thanks to the domination of the dollar and technology (...) I want to underscore again that their insatiability and determination to preserve their unfettered dominance are the real causes of the hybrid war that the collective West is waging against Russia. (...) Their hegemony has pronounced features of totalitarianism, despotism and apartheid. (...) They do not give a damn about the natural right of billions of people, the majority of humanity, to freedom and justice, the right to determine their own future. They have already moved on to the radical denial of moral, religious, and family values." (Putin 2022)*

In essence, the concept of 'neocon' enables Oikawa to uphold his diverse and at times contradictory ideological views, even after events took an accelerated dynamic with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Together with his simplistic friend-enemy

scheme, it allows him to even outright justify dictatorship and authoritarianism, as a tweet from February 2022 illustrates: "(...) Trump was more interested in dictatorship than democracy. Trump's role model is Putin, who gained his wealth through dictatorship. Anyway, globalists hate Trump and Putin" (@oikawa\_yukihisa, February 18, 2023).

## Discussion

The dissemination of disinformation and narratives via alternative and social media is one of the core political strategies of the global far-right, including in Japan. In this article, we analyzed the case of the popular YouTube channel and Twitter/X account of Yukihisa Oikawa, who stands out from the Japanese far-right, particularly in terms of a strategic appropriation of discourses and narratives from outside Japan. As we have argued, this includes an openly expressed Trumpist stance and the adoption of pro-Russian views, as well as the narrative of the existence of a conspiratorial 'deep state' and conspiratorial 'globalist' elite.

Until his parting from HS, Oikawa's social media strategy was very typical for that of right-wing "challenger parties" (De Vries et al. 2020), including the deployment of disinformation and conspiracy narratives as part of a metapolitical strategy. The core goal of this strategy is to erode trust in democratic institutions and attract voters disenchanted with the major parties, combined with the promise to offer emancipation from political and media deception by providing alternative facts and worldviews. After his parting from HS, Oikawa can be better described as "conspiracy theory entrepreneur" (Harambam 2020: 282), namely someone making "a living out of spreading (...) conspiracy theories in both the off- and online worlds" by monetizing conspiracy theories on social media and via publications. Supported by the affordances of platforms that can algorithmically prioritize questionable or attention-getting content, Oikawa was able to pursue a dual strategy: provide his geopolitical, political, and conspiratorial views to pursue his political goals and

build a small social media enterprise, monetizing misinformation at the same time.

Further, existing research into the far-right in Japan often treats the movement as geographically and politically isolated phenomenon, omitting discursive, strategic, or ideological similarities across the world and the existence of international networks. Under the radar of academic attention, however, certain actors associated with the Japanese far-right have already created tight discursive connections to the far-right in the U.S. (cf. Poppe 2022; Poppe et al. 2023). Oikawa must be considered a node in this online ecosystem, enriching the mostly nativist and anti-American Japanese far-right discourse (cf. Itō 2019, Yamaguchi 2013) with alternative pro-Trump worldviews and situating Japan in a global fight against an internationally operating malicious ‘globalist’ elite or ‘deep state.’ To put it differently, Oikawa might be considered as a proponent of a more internationalized and transnationally connected Japanese far-right that has outgrown the very idiosyncratic older versions of the Japanese right with their blatant anti-Korean and anti-China racism or the militaristic old far-right.

At first glance, the pro-Russian stance of Oikawa discussed in this article appeared to be part and parcel of his pro-Trump and conspiratorial geopolitical framing. However, as the developments after his separation from HS and HRP have shown, Oikawa maintains personal ties with Russia beyond the mere metapolitical or monetizable appropriation of Kremlin views. Oikawa, in November 2023, was invited to join a symposium entitled “The World Majority in New Realities: The Regional Dimension” at the Higher School of Economics (HSE University) in Moscow, addressing Russia’s role in what is envisaged by the organizers as a newly evolving Cold War divide. The symposium was chaired by political scientist Sergey Alexandrovich Karaganov, Head of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and Presidential Advisor to Putin, and mastermind behind the so-called “Karaganov Doctrine,” which aims at the protection of ethnic Russians outside

Russia. One of the key topics of the conference was the discussion of trans-regional and multilateral ties between Russia and countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa under banner of what is called a “New World Order.” At the conference, Oikawa gave a talk entitled “The Role of Japan and Russia in the Fight for the Non-Colonial World” in his capacity as “CEO [of] Yukihsa Oikawa Institute,” and not as a former official of HS or HRP (HSE University 2023). Prior to his visit to Moscow, his inviter Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa was featured in a live video by Oikawa; in turn, she conducted an interview with him, which was published with her employer, HSE University (@oikawa\_yukihsa, November 29, 2023, School of International Regional Studies 2023).

In this interview, he is introduced as “one of the three most prominent in Japan opposition and independent political analysts” [*sic*] (School of International Regional Studies 2023). Moreover, Oikawa was featured on the Japanese social media channels of the Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik after his visit to Moscow, commenting on the Russian-Ukrainian war (@sputnik\_jp, Feb 16, 2024).



*Fig. 9: Oikawa as depicted for an interview for HSE University, where he was introduced as one of Japan’s most prominent oppositional politicians and political analysts (School of International Regional Studies 2023).*

Given this background and his recent ties with Moscow, we conclude by arguing that Oikawa has undergone some form of repositioning. Coinciding with his parting from HS and HRP, his proximity to Russia has intensified, and a solidification of a conspiracist worldview and adaptation of Kremlin narratives can be traced throughout his media outlets. We suppose that he might be trying to position himself with a more pointed political focus as an alternative media personality from Japan with ties to international Trumpian or far-right networks in the U.S. and Russia, not unlike Tucker Carlson after his parting from FOX news and subsequent interview with Putin (The Kremlin 2024). This is a proximity between Russia and actors of the online ecosystem of the far-right that has also been documented for other countries, such as Germany (Beseler & Toepfl 2024). It is thus safe to say that Oikawa belongs to a pro-Russian far-right global network entertaining relations with actors in Russia that can range from personal ties and sponsored visits to even directly receiving financial resources for Russia's hidden disinformation operations (cf. e.g. Nikolskaya et al. 2023, Flade et al. 2024, Scherrer 2024).

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