

The Abe Legacy: A Compendium

Edited by David McNeill

Abstract: *On 8 July, Abe Shinzō was assassinated during a political rally in Nara. He was Japan's prime minister twice, first in 2006–2007 and then again from 2012 to 2020, when he resigned amid falling approval ratings and ill-health. While Abe's legacy is deeply disputed within Japan, abroad he has been widely praised as an unusually resolute, even transformative statesman who helped the country shake off the deadwood of the postwar era. In this compendium, David McNeill collects a series of short assessments of Abe's legacy in key areas by some of the journal's lead writers.*

Keywords: *Abe Shinzo, Abenomics, Unification Church, Korea, Political Assassinations*



Japan's Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.
Photo by [Anthony Quintano](#) (Creative Commons).

Abe Shinzo was Japan's prime minister twice, first in 2006–7, when he resigned amid falling approval ratings and ill-health. On his second spell in office from 2012 to 2020, he staked out positions on defence, economics, foreign policy, and historical issues that won him popularity on the political right but made him a controversial figure with many others. Even after leaving office in 2020 again complaining of ill-health, he continued to be a force in politics, leading the biggest faction in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and advocating increased military spending, among other stances. Before his death in July 2022, he suggested a NATO-style arrangement with America to 'share' nuclear weapons in Japan, as a hedge against aggression by nuclear-armed China, a proposal that angered many in the only country in the world to have suffered a nuclear attack. Nevertheless, he overcame years of lukewarm public support and multiple scandals to become the longest serving leader in Japan's history, overtaking his uncle, Sato Eisaku.

Abe's sheer resilience marks him as one of the country's most notable leaders but his legacy is deeply disputed. As Gavan McCormack points out in his contribution below, one striking feature of the debate since his murder has been the lack of clear public support for a tax-funded

state funeral. Abroad, however, he has been widely praised as an unusually resolute, even transformative statesman who helped Japan shake off the deadwood of the postwar era. Narendra Modi (2022), the current prime minister of India, called him ‘a towering global statesman and visionary’. For Hillary Clinton (2022), he was ‘champion of democracy’ and of women’s potential. *The Economist*, that great global bell-weather of economic and social liberalism, put him its cover three times, once in a Superman costume (The Economist 2013). *Bloomberg* spoke for many after his death when it opined that Abe had been unfairly maligned when all he wanted to do was make Japan ‘normal’ (Reidy 2022). ‘Abe sought a nation that could stand up for itself in a hostile part of the world, surrounded by three belligerent neighbors, rather than depending entirely for its security on its occasionally flaky ally in Washington.’

Our writers here critically explore Abe’s legacy. Koichi Nakano argues that Abe was, in fact, a loyal servant of Washington and his main achievement was to turn Japan into a more reliable military ally in America’s coming showdown with China. Did Abe improve the economic lot of most Japanese citizens? No, concludes Richard Katz. ‘The most basic task of a political leader is to leave his country better off than he found it—or, at least no worse. By this minimal goal ... Abe failed miserably.’ Despite becoming an unlikely ambassador for free trade, Abe’s reputation as a great global statesman is hugely overrated, argues Jeff Kingston. Though he worked to revive ties with Japan’s closest neighbours, his term in office saw worsening foreign relations, particularly with South Korea—hardly helped by his disputing the history of Japan’s misdeeds during the second World War. Abe’s record on relations with Russia suggests ‘credulity and a shallowness of strategic thinking’, insists James D. J. Brown. He was ‘either a poor judge of character or saw Putin for the dictator he is yet embraced him anyway. None of these are the

qualities of a great statesman.’

Moreover, Abe was a central figure in the movement to whitewash Japan’s wartime past, says Sven Saaler, ‘to revise previous statements acknowledging Japanese war responsibility, and to discredit and ridicule the victims of wartime atrocities.’ Any account of his career must include a legacy of advancing this revisionism and a deeply conservative and reactionary religio-political agenda, says Mark Mullins. It should also include his government’s sometimes toxic relationship with journalists and its attempts to marginalise critical voices, argue David McNeill and Hayashi Kaori. ‘Whatever else might be said of Abe’s term in office, he can hardly be called a friend of the free media,’ they conclude. Tomomi Yamaguchi says that LDP ties to the Unification Church may have hindered Japan’s progress on gender equality measures and LGBTQ+ rights. ‘Clearly, Abe as a politician with close ties to the Unification Church and other religious rightwing organisations bore a responsibility for this situation.’ Lee Young-chae laments the impact of Abe’s policies on ties with South Korea and predicts turbulent times ahead. Finally, Alexis Dudden posits that Abe’s legacy includes the ‘ongoing crises’ at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, despite his assurances that the crisis has been solved.

The Editor

David McNeill

Table of Contents

1. “, Gavan McCormack
2. “, Koichi Nakano
3. “, Mark R. Mullins
4. “, James D. J. Brown
5. “, Jeff Kingston
6. “, Richard Katz
7. “, Sven Saaler
8. “, David McNeill and Kaori Hayashi

9. “, Tomomi Yamaguchi
10. , Lee Young-chae
11. “, Alexis Dudden

Abe Shinzo: Contentious Candidate for a State Funeral

Gavan McCormack, The Australian National University

When former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo was shot and killed in front of an election rally in Nara on 8 July, two days before an Upper House election, shock waves spread quickly around the world. Following a private funeral, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio announced that a ‘state funeral’ for Abe would be conducted on 27 September. It would demonstrate that Japan would not ‘submit to terrorism’ and it would publicly recognise Abe’s long contribution to the country, especially as Prime Minister in 2006–2007 and 2012–20.

Some began to draw dark parallels with the assassinations (and attempted assassinations) of prime ministers and former prime ministers in pre-war Japan, of Hara Takashi in 1921, Hamaguchi Osachi in 1930, Inukai Tsuyoshi in 1932, Saito Makoto and Takahashi Korekiyo in 1936. Others recalled even more darkly the Aum Supreme Truth (*Aum Shinrikyo*) cult that attracted most attention and ended in disaster following the March 1995 sarin chemical attack on the Tokyo subway and the arrest, trial, and execution of its key members in following years. Might twenty-first century Japan be on the verge of going off the rails again now as it did with such consequences during other, troubled times?

Though regarded highly outside Japan, especially in Washington where Abe was appreciated as the most reliable (or obedient) of allies, within Japan such was the miasma of

scandal that thickened around his government that one expert could refer early in 2020 to his (then) more than seven years-long government as accomplishing little and failing nearly all of its policies, ‘a stain on Japan’s history’ (Shirai 2020). Such stern judgement was rare outside Japan, however, where it tended to be swallowed by a global wave of admiration and sympathy. Perhaps typical was former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull (2022), who said: ‘The world will miss Abe’s wisdom ... Shinzo Abe was sincere, authentic and warm. He was calm, considered, and wise.’ Expressions of sympathy came even from those far removed from Abe on the political spectrum, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, who had good reason to know Abe well since the two had met for high-level talks on no less than 27 occasions, far more than any other state leader. Putin expressed shock at the ‘irreparable loss’ of ‘an outstanding statesman’ (RT Russia 2022).

However, the decision to conduct a state funeral soon proved controversial. Successive polls between late July and early August left little doubt that the project did not have public support. They found respectively: 45 per cent of people in favour to 53 per cent opposed (Kyodo), 36 per cent to 50 per cent (NHK), 43 per cent to 50 per cent (*Kumamoto Nichinichi*), 23 per cent to 72 per cent (*Minami Nihon Shimbun*), 21 per cent to 75 per cent (*Nagasaki Shimbun*), 34 per cent to 65 per cent (*Ryukyu Shimpō*), 39 to 59 per cent (*Okinawa Times*) (Kihara 2022). Furthermore, opposition, if anything, was hardening, and was especially strong in the south and in Okinawa. Court proceedings were also launched by lawyers and scholars for an injunction to stop the funeral. Rebuffed at court of first instance, the matter was then referred to an appeals tribunal where it is still pending at the time of writing.

Attention began to focus on the connection between Abe and the far-right or ultra-rightist ‘Unification Church’ (*Toitsu Kyokai*), currently

known as ‘World Peace and Unification Family League’ or as ‘Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity’, or simply as the ‘Moonies’ after founder Korean-born Moon Son Myung (1920–2012). Moon—‘Reverend Moon’ as he evidently liked to be known—claimed that at the age of 16, atop a Korean mountain, he had received the commission from Jesus Christ to complete Christ’s mission and create a pure and perfect order on earth.

The Moon organisation, founded in South Korea in 1954 in the wake of the devastation of the Korean War (1950–53) spread to Japan from 1958 and to the United States from 1971. Church doctrine represented Korea as superior ‘Adam Nation’ to Japan as subordinate ‘Eve Nation’. The Church generated multiple offshoots. Among them, from 1973 a ‘Professors World Peace Academy’ conducted well-funded annual or biennial conferences, and in 1983 the Moon organisation founded the ‘International Journal on World Peace’ (Anderson 2000). In 1968, Moon, in conjunction with Taiwan’s Chiang Kai-shek and Japanese ultra-rightists Kodama Yoshio and Sasakawa Ryoichi, set up the International Federation for Victory over Communism. Abe’s grandfather, Kishi Nobusuke (1896–1987), Prime Minister from 1957 to 1960, was deeply involved in this process. With the anti-communist cause resonating positively in the United States and in Japan, from the 1960s the Church thrived (Uchida 2022).

The Church’s business empire also cast a wide net. Included within it at various times were not only the New Yorker Hotel in Manhattan, United Press International, New World Communications, *Washington Times* and other newspapers (in English, Korean, and Japanese), but also multiple grand infrastructural and/or theoretical initiatives such as the Japan–Korea Tunnel (the ‘International Highway Foundation’ project), a Bering Sea-spanning Japan–Russia linking tunnel, and from 1983, promotion of the

grand theoretical goal of the ‘unity of the sciences’. Probably the initiative for which the Church became best known was its conduct of mass weddings linking thousands of couples hitherto unknown to each other in grand ceremonies directed by Moon himself, who, inter alia, exhorted them, mysteriously, to recite together the Church’s family pledge at 5am every eighth day.

The Moon movement faltered slightly in the 1970s, with Washington being absorbed by the ‘Koreagate’ scandals arising from South Korean government attempts to influence US opinion. A Congressional investigation launched by Congressman Donald Fraser in 1976 helped shed light on the many facets of the Moon organisation, including association with South Korea’s Central Intelligence Organisation (KCIA) in ‘bribery, bank fraud, illegal kickbacks, and arms sales’ (on the Fraser investigation, see Committee on International Relations 1976). Surviving that scrutiny, less than a decade later Moon ran into trouble again. Tried and found guilty of tax evasion in a US court, he was imprisoned for 12 months in 1984–85. Again, however, the organisation recovered. Its anti-communist efforts were evidently thought of sufficient merit to compensate for its financial or tax peccadillos. By the time of the Abe assassination in 2022 the Church had a world-wide membership estimated variously at between one and ten million.

Abe’s killer, the 41-year-old former Maritime Self-Defense Forces member, Yamagami Tetsuya, declared after the event that he had decided to punish Abe because he believed him closely connected to this cult and therefore responsible for his own family’s immiseration when his (Yamagami’s) mother, believing Moon a divinely appointed Messiah, parent to humanity, donated the family’s hundred-million-yen (one million dollar-plus) savings to the Church. The Yamagami family went through bleak times. Tetsuya’s father

committed suicide in 1984. His mother, having given away the family wealth to the church, filed for bankruptcy in 2002. Tetsuya himself attempted to commit suicide in 2005, but survived, and his elder brother committed suicide in 2015.

Abe's grandfather, Kishi Nobusuke, had indeed been a close associate of the Church's founder, Moon, and Abe seems to have maintained that closeness. He delivered a keynote welcome message to the Universal Peace Federation (an offspring of the Church) for its September 2021 meeting (Abe 2022), stressing his special appreciation of the Church's 'family values'. He evidently found its patriarchal, conservative, sharply gender divided social principles a good match for his own party's commitment to revise the Japanese constitutional provisions on family and sexual equality (Abe 2022; Tanaka 2022).

Many other members of the ruling LDP and its governments likewise had Church connections, including Abe's younger brother, Kishi Nobuo, Minister of Defence from 2020 to 2022 but replaced in a cabinet reshuffle on 10 August after admitting that he had enjoyed the assistance of members of the Church in his election campaigns. Weeks after the assassination, Japanese media reported that the names of 106 Diet members appeared on Church membership lists, 82 of whom were LDP members (Kyodo 2022a). In the reorganised Kishida cabinet, nineteen of 54 members had Church connections (Mainichi Shimbun 2022). Furthermore, apart from the Church and the Nippon Kaigi, all but two members of that reshuffled Cabinet belonged also to the Shinto Politics League (essentially the national organisation of believers in Japan's pre-war and wartime State Shinto) (Nakano 2022a and 2022b).

The astonishing fact is, therefore, that at least from the late Abe Shinzo through the Suga Yoshihide and Kishida Fumio government periods (2019–22) Japan had a government that

was one half affiliated with the Korean-based Unification Church and one-half Japanese members of the Japanese ultra-nationalist Nippon Kaigi (often rendered as Nihon Kaigi, literally 'Japan Conference'). The former was syncretistic on a vaguely Christian frame. The latter was syncretistic Shinto, a nation-wide organization of believers in the superiority and purity of the Japanese people united around the emperor, much as in pre-war Japanese state Shinto (on Nippon Kaigi, see McCormack 2018: 29–30). The fact that the Unification Church and Nippon Kaigi doctrines were incompatible, not least in respect of the relative centrality they attributed to Korea or Japan, did not seem to bother those who professed one or other, or—like Abe himself—smiled upon both. Both religions extracted financial contributions from members (or sold them religious tokens and talismans), and both returned favours, the Unification Church on occasion sending unpaid volunteers—sometimes as many as one hundred of them—to assist in election campaigns for favoured LDP members (Honda 2022; Nakano 2022a and 2022b).

In other words, despite Abe and post-Abe era professions of universal, democratic, secular values, and despite Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution stating that '[t]he state and its organs shall refrain from religious education and any other religious activity,' over at least the past decade (2012–22) extremist religious cults tolerated or encouraged by Abe have weighed heavily in the institutions of state. Despite long being tied in a politically crucial alliance with the revivalist Buddhist Komeito party (on Komeito, see Hayat and Ashley 2021), the LDP brushed aside Article 20-grounded criticisms, and from Abe's rise to dominance of the party and state early in the 2000s, took further steps to bring its political party policies in line with Moon-ish and Nippon Kaigi religious principles.

If in 2022 the Kishida government proceeds as planned to host a late September grand public

spectacle in Abe's honour, with at least 6,400 official (state-funded) guests from around the world, it will mean substantial costs being met from the public purse without the parliamentary authorisation that is required by Article 85. It will also almost inevitably carry overtones of emperor-centred State Shinto despite that system's supposed liquidation and the introduction of citizen sovereignty following war's end in 1945.

As the Japan Democratic Lawyers Association (JDLA) and others have declared, a state funeral would amount to a state blessing for the Abe legacy, shifting attention away from its controversial and contested nature and from multiple unresolved Abe-era scandals. (for details on the Moritomo elementary school, Kake Gakuen Veterinary College, Grand Cherry Blossom-viewing party scandals, see McCormack 2018: 210–17). With Japanese lawyers, religious and civil organisations, and, apparently, a majority of Japan's people contesting the funeral project as a breach of the constitutionally guaranteed principles of freedom of thought and conscience (on the protest by religious leaders, including the Catholic archbishop of Tokyo and prominent Buddhists, Kyodo, 2022b), global leaders pondering their invitations to participate in the funeral events might think carefully as to whether they really want to endorse the Abe religious and political causes and the Abe commitment to revise the constitution so as to enable a smooth path for Japan to become a global great power, war-capable, emperor-centred state (JDLA 2022).

During the early twenty-first century decades, the rise of Aum Supreme Truth-like religious cults accomplished a degree of penetration of the state that Aum leaders three decades earlier could scarcely have imagined. The Abe assassination and looming funeral might have become occasion for a reform of Japanese institutions to bring them back in line with constitutional principle, but it seems, instead,

that the opposite process is underway, and rightists are using them to further subvert it (Nikkan Gendai 2022). Abe himself may be gone, but his successors in the LDP and government continue to lay siege to the Japanese constitution of 1947.

Gavan McCormack is Emeritus Professor at the The Australian National University, a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, a founding editor of the Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus, and author of many works on modern East Asia, including *The State of the Japanese State* (Reinassance Books, 2018). Much of his writing has been translated into Japanese, Korean, and Chinese.

Washington's Man in Japan

Koichi Nakano, Sophia University, Tokyo

Abe Shinzo's political legacy has been acutely contested since his untimely death. On the one hand, his admirers and followers are organising a rare state funeral precisely to honour and cement what they see as his achievements, most notably, awakening Japan from its long, pacifist slumber and turning it into a more reliable military ally of the United States in its coming showdown with China. However, all this could be irreparably tarnished by what his assassination brought to light—his (and his many associates') intimate and problematic political ties with the Unification Church (Yamaguchi 2022).

On the other hand, his critics (including this author) consider the fact that a defunct institution of Imperial Japan such as the state funeral is being revived to cover up for Abe's divisive authoritarian legacies (with the blessing of the United States no less) and the

fact that he may very well get away with it because of the divided opposition and muzzled media that he left behind (with the help of the Unification Church and other rightwing groups) are precisely his more significant legacies that need to be acknowledged and put to rest with him.

To both Abe's supporters and opponents alike, his single most significant political legacy is arguably the lifting of the ban on collective self-defence through the cabinet decision that provided a new interpretation of the relevant constitutional texts in July 2014 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014). When the security legislation was pushed through the Diet in summer 2015, massive protests were organised against what was contested as an unconstitutional move by an authoritarian government (Kingston 2015; Nakano 2021).

Since a cabinet decision in 1972, successive Japanese governments upheld the official view that Japan can exercise its right of individual self-defence, but not of collective self-defence—in other words, that it can minimally defend itself if attacked and if no diplomatic solutions can be found, but that it cannot take part in other countries' wars (Cabinet Legislation Bureau 1972). The government position has been that the state can defend itself in order for it to be able to guarantee the 'right to live in peace' (as per the preamble of Japan's Constitution) and 'the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' (Article 13) of the Japanese people in spite of the ban on war as a means of solving international dispute, war potential, and the right of belligerency (Article 9), but that it can only minimally do so when attacked because of the constraints set by Article 9. The 1972 cabinet decision specifically noted that right of collective self-defence is therefore banned by the constitution (Nakano 2022).

The 2014 cabinet decision superficially retained the same constitutional reasoning, but

claimed that such 'complex and significant national security challenges' as 'the shift in the global power balance, rapid progress of technological innovation, development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, and threats such as international terrorism' meant that 'when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness', Japan can exercise its right of collective self-defence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014). According to an NHK poll conducted with constitution law scholars nationwide in June 2015, 377 out of the 422 respondents considered the security legislation to be unconstitutional (Asaho 2015).

Abe's move was nevertheless welcomed in the United States. After all, it was the product of the joint work of the 'alliance managers' since at least the Iraq War. In his Congressional address entitled 'Toward an Alliance of Hope' in April 2015, even before the Diet deliberation of the security bills began, Abe vowed that:

We must make the vast seas stretching from the Pacific to the Indian Oceans seas of peace and freedom, where all follow the rule of law. For that very reason we must fortify the U.S.-Japan alliance ... In Japan we are working hard to enhance the legislative foundations for our security. Once in place, Japan will be much more able to provide a seamless response for all levels of crisis. These enhanced legislative foundations should make the cooperation between the U.S. military and Japan's Self Defense Forces even stronger, and the alliance still more solid, providing credible deterrence for the peace in the region. This reform is the first of its kind and a sweeping one in our post-war history. We

will achieve this by this coming summer. (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2015)

He did deliver as he promised then by sidelining domestic constitutional and democratic constraints, and it is for this that he will be long remembered by the supporters of an ever-stronger US-Japan military alliance.

Once the initial sympathy for Abe's tragic death subsided, as more emerged about his and his party's shady ties with the Unification Church (Kyodo News 2022a and 2022b), public opinion has turned rather more clearly hostile against the holding of a state funeral, with 47.3 per cent against and 30.5 per cent in favour in a recent Jiji poll, for example (Jiji Press 2022). Prime Minister Kishida vowed to gain greater understanding from the sceptical public in the weeks to come by emphasising that the 'high appreciation' of Abe expressed by foreign states was the foremost reason why the Japanese state, too, representing the whole nation, should mourn his death (Mainichi Shimbun 2022). Abe was, after all, first and foremost, Washington's Man in Japan.

Koichi Nakano teaches political science at Sophia University in Tokyo.

Abe and the Revival of Shinto Nationalism

Mark R. Mullins, University of Auckland

The pairing of religious fundamentalism and nationalism has become a rather familiar pattern in a number of modern societies. Just as former US President Donald Trump forged a stronger relationship between the Republican Party and the white Christian nationalists, and

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did the same for the Bharatiya Janata Party and Hindu nationalism, Abe Shinzo's legacy on the domestic front must surely include his role in strengthening the symbiotic relationship between Shinto nationalists and the LDP over the past two decades (for a more detailed treatment of this subject, see Mullins 2021).

The close connection between the LDP and the Shinto world, of course, did not appear with Abe. Conservative religious and political actors began to form a neo-nationalistic restoration movement soon after the Allied Occupation ended, launching collaborative efforts to push forward a political agenda that focused on restoring aspects of Japanese life and institutions that were destroyed and dismantled by the policies of the foreign occupiers from late 1945 to 1952. Their initial efforts can be traced back to the mid-1950s when the Japan Association of War-bereaved Families, with the support of Shinto leaders and some LDP politicians, actively lobbied for the restoration of state support to Yasukuni Shrine, the central shrine for memorialising all of the nation's war dead, which became increasingly controversial once it became known that class-A war criminals had been enshrined in 1978. Their proposal to renationalise the shrine was taken up in the Diet but ended in failure.

In the decade that followed, Shinto leaders associated with the National Association of Shrines (Jinja Honchō, hereafter NAS), the largest Shinto organisation with some 80,000 affiliated shrines across the country, expanded their restorationist agenda beyond Yasukuni. In 1969, the NAS formed its political arm, Shintō Seiji Renmei, which aimed at recruiting National Diet members to support its broader political agenda and restorationist vision, which included the re-nationalisation of Yasukuni, the restoration of patriotic and moral education in public schools, revision of the 1947 Constitution, and strengthening of support for the Emperor and Imperial Household. Known

today as Shinseiren, this political organisation had recruited some 44 Diet members to join its parliamentary association (Shintō Seiji Renmei Kokkai Giin Kondankai) by 1984.

This initiative languished for the next decade, but recruitment of Diet members to Shinseiren steadily increased in the post-disaster years of 1995 (the Great Hanshin earthquake) and 2011 (the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami). While other LDP prime ministers belonged to this Shinto political group—Obuchi Keizo, Mori Yoshiro, and Koizumi Junichiro, for example—it was under Abe that Shinseiren membership recorded the most significant growth.

The influence of Abe upon the ties between the Shinto shrine world and national politics became very apparent during his first term as prime minister in 2006 and 2007. It is important to recall that at this time he was not only the head of the LDP but also an active member of Shinseiren and the Japan Conference (Nippon Kaigi) that had been organised in 1997. Although the Japan Conference is not a ‘religious’ organisation, its board of representatives is heavily dominated by religious leaders—Shinto, Buddhist, and some New Religions—who share the core beliefs and political agenda of Shinseiren. Leaders of the Shinto world are prominent figures in this organisation and over 40 per cent of the 47 Japan Conference board members are affiliated with an organised religion or nongovernmental organisation founded by a religion, so this is a rather ecumenical association of religious groups that share the core values and political agenda of the NAS.

During his first term as prime minister in 2006, Abe successfully pushed through the revision of the Basic Law on Education (*Kyōiku kihon hō*), which provided the legal support for the compulsory use of the national flag and anthem in the official ceremonies held by public schools. While the restoration of financial

support for Yasukuni Shrine has not been achieved, over the years Abe has symbolically supported the shrine with ritual offerings on the occasion of the Spring and Fall Festivals and on 15 August, the memorial day for the end of World War II. Abe avoided an official visit to Yasukuni during his first term as prime minister given the political fallout that accompanied the multiple visits of his predecessor Koizumi Jun’ichirō between 2001 and 2006. In the end, he regretted that earlier decision and early in his second term made his way to the shrine for an official visit on 26 December 2013.

His leadership in these organisations only intensified when he began his second term in 2012. In the 1 February 2013 issue of *Kokoro*, the Shinseiren’s monthly magazine, Gotō Toshihiko, then chairperson of the organisation, heralded the return of the LDP under Prime Minister Abe, and expressed hope for the restoration movement since Abe shared the values of the Shinto world and was clearly dedicated to work for their restoration in public life and institutions.

Abe’s legacy includes both advancing the religio-political agenda of the Shinseiren and the Japan Conference, as well as increasing the number of Diet members affiliated with these organisations. The number of LDP politicians affiliated with Shinseiren steadily increased under Abe. By late 2013, it had grown to 204, and increased to 268 the following year. It reached 295 by the end of 2018, which represented over 40 per cent of the total Diet membership. Many of these Diet members also belonged to the Japan Conference, which is a part of a larger coalition that shares the restorationist agenda. These numbers are reflected in the composition of the successive Cabinets under Abe, which reveal a steady shift to the right and support for the restorationist agenda. In 2012, 14 (73.7 per cent) of cabinet members belonged to Shinseiren, which increased to 19 members (84.2 per cent) in

2014. By 2018, 94.7 per cent of the Cabinet belonged to Shinseiren and 73.7 per cent were also affiliated with the Japan Conference.

Although Abe was unable to achieve additional restorationist goals before his resignation in 2020, he left behind a political party with strong ties with the NAS and other conservative religious groups that share many of the same values and political agenda. Two prime ministers later we find a similar concentration of Diet members affiliated with Shinseiren and the Japan Conference in key Cabinet positions. The reshuffled Cabinet of Prime Minister Kishida Fumio post-Abe assassination looks quite familiar: 18 out of 19 members (94.7 per cent) belong to Shinseiren, 11 (57 per cent) belong to the Japan Conference, and the new information provided indicates that seven (36 per cent) are associated with the Unification Church (Shinbun Akahata 2022). Abe left behind a party dominated by these religious groups, and Prime Minister Kishida has lined-up—at least so far—in support of the restorationist agenda, including Abe's unrealised pet project of constitutional revision. While avoiding personal visits to Yasukuni Shrine, Kishida continues to offer symbolic support with ritual offerings according to the calendar of annual shrine festivals.

Although this political agenda may be promoted by NAS elites and many LDP politicians, there is considerable evidence that most shrine priests and parishioners are less than enthusiastic about their initiatives. Tsukada Hotaka, for example, estimates that less than 10 per cent of NAS shrines and priests actually support Shinseiren (Hotaka 2017: 374–75). Survey research similarly reveals that the vast majority of shrine parishioners and the general public are opposed to organised religions using their resources for political activities. While the symbiotic system of conservative religion and politics forged by Shinto elites and Abe may lack widespread support, it generated relatively

little public criticism and opposition over the past decade. With the recent revelations of the involvement of many LDP politicians with the controversial Unification Church following Abe's assassination, however, the calculus may have changed. Given the public outcry over these connections, it will be interesting to see if the political involvements of the NAS and other right-wing religious groups will also come under greater scrutiny in the year ahead.

Mark R. Mullins is Professor of Japanese Studies and Director of the Japan Studies Centre, New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland.

Abe and Russia: A Legacy of Failure

James D. J. Brown, Temple University, Tokyo

Japan's Abe Shinzō was often praised for his foreign policy achievements. For instance, following the former Japanese leader's death, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi eulogised Abe as 'a towering global statesman' who 'dedicated his life to making Japan and the world a better place' (India News 2022).

Whether Abe's broader foreign policy merits such high praise is open to debate. Yet, with regard to relations with Russia, there is no question that Abe's achievements, far from being towering, left a legacy of failure.

After returning to office in December 2012, Abe made relations with Russia a priority. He set out to charm Russian president Vladimir Putin, describing him as someone who is 'dear to me as a partner' (Tass 2018). Abe also invited Putin to his hometown in Yamaguchi, just one of 27 meetings between the two leaders.

Bilateral economic ties were also promoted. In

2016, Abe announced an eight-point economic cooperation plan with Russia and created a cabinet post to oversee it. This is the only ministerial position dedicated to developing relations with a single country.

Furthermore, Japan's national security strategy, which was adopted by Abe's government in December 2013, presented Russia, not as a threat, but as a partner with whom 'it is critical to advance cooperation ... in all areas, including security and energy' (Cabinet Secretariat 2013). Added to this, Japan began '2+2' meetings between the countries' foreign and defence ministers, a format usually reserved for partners with which Japan has particularly close relations.

Lastly, after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Abe administration introduced only token sanctions. Japan was also the only G7 country not to expel Russian officials following Moscow's attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal in Salisbury (United Kingdom) in March 2018 using a chemical weapon.

Perhaps these policies might have been justifiable if Japan gained something significant in return, yet this is not the case. Despite his pandering to Putin, Abe and Japan came away empty-handed, and, in several respects, worse off than before.

First, Abe made no progress toward resolving Japan's territorial dispute with Russia and concluding a peace treaty, which has remained unsigned since World War II. It was the hope of achieving a breakthrough on this issue, and thus securing his legacy, which had primarily driven Abe's decision to engage intensively with Putin.

Of course, no previous Japanese leader had solved this issue either, yet what makes Abe's lack of success distinctive is that it was preceded by unprecedented concessions. During a summit in Singapore in December 2018, Abe agreed to base peace treaty talks on

the Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration of 1956 (Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018). This was tantamount to giving up on the return of the two largest of the four disputed islands because the Joint Declaration makes no mention of these larger islands (which account for 93 per cent of the disputed territory). In a further concession, Abe promised Putin that he would not permit any US forces to be stationed on the two smaller islands if they were transferred to Japan (Asahi Shimbun 2018).

Reciprocity is a fundamental principle of diplomacy, but Abe offered these concessions without receiving prior guarantees. Unsurprisingly, Russia simply pocketed what Abe was offering and gave nothing in return. Indeed, in a painful slap in the face for Abe, Putin's regime revised the Russian Constitution in 2020 to explicitly ban territorial concessions. According to chair of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev following this legal change, the subject of transferring Russian territory to Japan has now disappeared entirely (RIA Novosti 2021).

Second, Abe's engagement with Putin failed to convert Russia into the hoped-for security partner. In fact, on Abe's watch, Russia enhanced its military capabilities in the vicinity of Japan, including by installing new anti-ship missiles on the disputed islands in 2016. Moscow's military cooperation with Beijing also accelerated, most worryingly with the commencement in 2019 of regular joint air patrols over the Sea of Japan by Russian and Chinese strategic bombers.

The Abe government assumed that Moscow would view Japan as an attractive security partner and would welcome the opportunity to reduce its dependence on Beijing. In reality, the Russian leadership, as recently expressed by Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, views Japan as a US 'vassal' that cannot be trusted to pursue its own interests (RIA Novosti 2022).

Third, a further mistake was Abe's policy of increasing Japan's imports of natural gas from Russia. This is consistent with broader failings of the Abe administration in the area of energy and the environment. Most conspicuously, Abe refused to adopt a policy for Japan to achieve carbon neutrality, leaving it to his successor, Suga Yoshihide, to belatedly make this pledge in October 2020.

With regard to Russia, Abe aggressively pushed for Japanese firms to increase investments in Russian gas projects. This culminated in the agreement in 2019 for Japan's Mitsui & Co and state-owned JOGMEC to take a 10 per cent stake in Russia's Arctic LNG-2 project. JOGMEC provided 75 per cent of the funding for this deal, breaking their usual limit of 50 per cent.

The result is a dilemma for the administration of Kishida Fumio. While Japan's current government has joined the G7 in introducing tougher sanctions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Abe's legacy has left it hamstrung in the area of energy, where Japan relies on Russia for 9 per cent of its gas imports. Japan's government has even been obliged to concede to Russia's effective nationalisation of Sakhalin-2 (another gas project) and to recommend that Japanese firms meekly apply to retain their stakes. Had Abe understood that reliance on Russian energy is a threat to energy security, and not a solution to energy insecurity, Japan would not be in such a vulnerable position.

Overall, while Abe may have had some foreign policy successes elsewhere, his record in dealing with Russia suggests credulity and a shallowness of strategic thinking. Abe was also either a poor judge of character or saw Putin for the dictator he is yet embraced him anyway. None of these are the qualities of a great statesman.

James D. J. Brown is associate professor of Political Science at Temple University, Japan Campus.

The Stumbling Statesman

Jeff Kingston, Temple University, Tokyo

Since Abe Shinzo was gunned down, advocates and critics have waged a vigorous battle in the mass media about his legacy. Domestically, except for zealots and the insentient, Abenomics is dismissed as welfare for the wealthy, a flawed program that accentuated income disparities, pushed more households to the margins and failed to lay the foundation for sustainable growth. Even Prime Minister Kishida Fumio was dismissive when he ran for LDP party president last autumn. Similarly, 'womenomics', Abe's effort to counter his negative reputation on gender due to downplaying the comfort women issue, proved to be more a PR branding strategy than a coherent set of policies, boosting female labour force participation but almost entirely in low paid and insecure dead-end jobs as non-regular workers. Abe's mixed legacy of missed opportunities and unfinished business also includes piffling corporate governance reforms.

Given there is little to crow about domestically, Abe's apologists insist he was a gifted statesman who left a rich legacy of achievements. He stood tall for free trade, rescuing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) after President Donald Trump pulled the plug, and sealed a free trade deal with the European Union. Yet beyond the nitty gritty of trade, did Abe offer a compelling vision?

The Free and Open Indo Pacific (FOIP), Abe's gambit to contain China, is backed by the United States, Australia, and India, but it is a vague concept where strategic overreach and

muddled thinking prevail. The core of FOIP is the security-focused Quad (the United States, Japan, Australia, and India), but it remains more aspirational than consequential. Back in 2007, an earlier incarnation called the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, was greeted with a collective regional yawn, and dropped off the radar screen after Abe's ignominious exit. The rest of Asia, despite concerns about China's hegemonic ambitions, remains ambivalent about FOIP, not wanting to publicly choose sides, while the Quad seems more like a case of 'same bed different dreams' than the architecture of a nascent NATO. Wonks are busy adding features on global warming and alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the Ukraine to boost buy-in, but mission creep has its pitfalls. For example, India's refusal to allow a Japanese humanitarian aid flight to land for refuelling is a useful reality check on what the Quad can deliver. The ostensible commitment to shared values does not necessarily translate into shared strategic perspectives let alone the sharp end of collective defence when borders are threatened and bullets are flying.

Michael Green, author of the recent *Line of Advantage: Japan's Grand Strategy in the Era of Abe Shinzō* (Columbia University Press, 2022), offers a very upbeat assessment of Abe's statecraft and his influence on US policy responses to China's hegemonic ambitions in Asia. He argues that Abe has been a transformational leader in terms of Japan's security policy and shaping the regional order. The 2015 US-Japan Defense Guidelines he signed greatly expands what Japan is committed to do militarily in support of the United States and strategic partners involved in conflicts anywhere in the world. Later that year, Abe gained Diet approval for collective self-defence (CSD) legislation that provides a legal basis for Japan to deliver on those commitments. However, public concerns about the risks of Japan getting dragged into some war at Washington's behest sparked the largest demonstrations since the 1960s while polls

indicated very low support for CSD.

One student asked Green (2022: 220) 'What if there was no Abe?' In his view, 'Without Abe, Japan would likely have continued moving forward with a contested "metaprocess" toward consolidation of a new grand strategy, but in the absence of Abe's sweeping legislative and institutional changes, that process would have taken longer and been much less effective.' Abe's greatest legacy, he argues, may be in transforming the nation's security posture from the minimalist Yoshida Doctrine to a more assertive role, predicting that, 'a generation of political leaders in Japan will now likely base their foreign policies on the coordinates set during Abe's tenure as prime minister.' Green is probably right on the coordinates, but Abe failed to win public support for the Abe Doctrine's more militarised foreign policy, raising doubts about the trajectory.

It once seemed that Putin's invasion of Ukraine made the public less sceptical about boosting Japan's military spending, especially given Xi Jinping's sabre-rattling over Taiwan, but various polls suggest that strong enthusiasm for doubling the defence budget as Abe advocated remains limited. The mass media tends to lump together the 'strongly support' respondents with those voicing lukewarm support in crafting misleading headlines trumpeting majority backing. Now, however, Abe's legacy has become radioactive due to his dynastic connections with the Moonies and Prime Minister Kishida has paid a price in plummeting poll numbers. This Moonie cloud looming over the LDP will make it difficult for Kishida to lead boldly in ramping up the Abe Doctrine, and makes reconciliation with South Korea, something Green sensibly advocates, more complicated.

In *The Iconoclast: Shinzo Abe and the New Japan* (2020), Tobias Harris delivers a devastating portrait of Abe Shinzo as prime minister (2006-7, 2012-20), interrogating the

PR hype to expose the extensive failings of Japan's longest-serving premier. Although Harris tacks back and forth between parroting the spin doctors' embellished version of Abe and offering his own withering criticisms, the latter are far more convincing. Despite flattering pundits and globe-trotting diplomacy, Harris (2020: 335) insists, 'in foreign policy too Abe's failings stand out.' In terms of diplomacy, Harris notes that Abe inherited problems with Russia, China, North Korea, and South Korea, and left office without making much headway on any of these challenges. Harris (2020: 308) also blames Abe's 'failure of strategic imagination' for exacerbating the impasse over history between Tokyo and Seoul.

For Abe-plomacy, it is especially awkward and damning that Abe met with Vladimir Putin 27 times, way more than any other leader in the world, fawning over an autocrat who gobbled up the Crimea in 2014. Abe failed to condemn or take any action against Russia for this egregious violation of a rules-based international order—a principle Abe enjoyed banging on about when convenient. In the end, Putin played him, making no concessions on the northern territories or signing a peace deal, leaving Abe looking in over his head, naïve rather than statesmanlike. He even spurned Abe's offer of a puppy. Putin's invasion of Ukraine further underscores the folly of Abe's wishful thinking.

What about Abe's much-trumpeted 'values diplomacy'? Aside from grandstanding and handwringing, this also can be filed under empty gestures. In 2020, hardcore conservatives in the LDP denounced Abe's 'weak-kneed' response to China's crackdown on Hong Kong's pro-democracy activists (Kingston 2020). As in the cases of Tibet and the jailing of hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs, Abe did not champion the values he preached. In response to democratic backsliding across Asia, Abe remained silent and cozied up to human-rights-violating

strongmen like Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Hun Sen in Cambodia, and India's Narendra Modi. And one wonders what values Abe's ambassador to Myanmar was promoting back in 2019 as a leading apologist for the military's ethnic-cleansing campaign targeting Rohingya. Touting values is not a bad idea, but Abe reinforced a sense that Japan is not prepared to sacrifice anything in support of them.

Harris also accuses Abe of being negligent on climate change. Instead of rallying support for a Green New Deal, Harris asserts that Abe made woefully inadequate commitments when Japan ratified the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Lamentably, Abe's government was also the leading financier of overseas coal fired power plants and announced plans to build some two dozen at home. In the 2018 Strategic Energy Plan, at a time when Japan was in the top four coal-using nations, the government was still projecting that coal would account for 26 per cent of energy by 2030 (Kumagai 2021). Regarding misplaced priorities, Harris (2020: 344) laments: 'What difference would constitutional revision make to future generations of Japanese in a world that has blown past two degrees of warming?' In the future, Abe's vacillation on the environment may be remembered as yet another of the missed opportunities that piled up on his watch, a shortcoming with the most potential impact on the world.

Jeff Kingston, *Professor of Asian Studies at Temple University Japan, is co-editor of Japan in the Heisei Era (1989–2019) (Routledge, 2022) and The Routledge Handbook of Trauma in East Asia (forthcoming with Routledge).*

Abe Left Japan's Economy Worse Than He

Found It

Richard Katz

The most basic task of a political leader is to leave his country better off than he found it—or at least no worse. By this minimal goal, former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo failed miserably. For years, voters bought his electoral tactic of announcing one lofty economic goal after another without offering the measures needed to achieve them. Today, however, Abe's failure is so widely recognised that current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida poses his 'new capitalism' agenda as a thinly veiled corrective to Abenomics.

Like so many of his predecessors, Abe promised to restore Japan's real (price-adjusted) gross domestic product (GDP) growth to 2 per cent per year. He did not even come close. Initially, it looked like Abenomics was working, with GDP rising at a 3.2 per cent annual pace from the fourth quarter of 2012 to the first quarter of 2014. This gave Abenomics unwarranted credibility. In reality, GDP enjoyed that temporary spurt mainly because that is what economies do after a long slump. When Abe returned to power, GDP was no higher than it had been seven years earlier and so enjoyed a cyclical uptick, just as in previous instances during the period since 1991 known as the three 'lost decades', when annual GDP growth averaged less than 0.7 per cent. Then, in April 2014, Abe put a damper on growth by hiking the consumption tax from 5 per cent to 8 per cent. In a healthy economy, this would have caused nothing more than a brief sag in growth. In Japan, by contrast, the hike suppressed growth for years, especially because it was followed by a second increase in 2019. As a result, from early 2014 to the end of 2019, i.e., before Covid-19 struck the economy, GDP grew at a barely visible annual 0.2 per cent pace, just one-tenth of the pace Abe had promised.

GDP growth is, of course, just a means to an

end: growth in living standards. Under Abe, the opposite happened. Living standards continued the decline that had begun in the mid-1990s. Among regular workers, real wages per hour fell 4 per cent from 2012 to 2018. Meanwhile, according to official data (Japanese Statistics Bureau Labour Force Survey 2020), 82 per cent of the growth in jobs consisted of low-paid non-regular jobs. This further lowered wages because, as of 2020, while the average regular worker earned ¥2,500 per hour, temporaries got just ¥1,660 and part-timers a stingy ¥1,050, according to government figures (Japan Macro Advisors 2020). Abe's response was to futilely ask companies to hike wages. To get real results, he could have enforced Japanese laws that require equal pay for equal work between men and women as well as between regular and non-regular workers, by mandating the Labour Ministry to investigate and prosecute violations of the law. But he chose not to do so.

At the same time, Abe continued the post-2000 trend of cutting government spending on social security for the aged. During his tenure, social security per senior fell another 8.6 per cent (Cabinet Office 2020). He also continued the policy of shifting the share of national income from people to corporations, by cutting the top income tax on companies from 38 per cent to 30 per cent while doubling the consumption tax to 10 per cent. Like his predecessors, Abe offered the 'trickle down' theory that corporations would use the tax cut to invest more and raise wages. In fact, as shown by data presented to a meeting of Kishida's Council on New Capitalism, between 2000 and 2020, the combined yearly profits of Japan's few thousand largest corporations almost doubled, but their compensation to all workers combined fell 0.4 per cent and their capital investment fell 5.3 per cent (Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research 2022).

When confronted by such facts, Abe's supporters point to the growth of female employment as a major achievement of his

‘womenomics’. However, that is little different from the experience in most rich countries: when men suffer from wage austerity, more wives join the labour force in order to maintain family incomes. Under Abe, 75 per cent of the growth in female employment was in low-paying, dead-end non-regular jobs. Abe himself admitted that his 2013 promise to raise the female share of company managers to 30 per cent in just seven years—a repeat of a goal Tokyo had set ten years earlier—was a flop. So, in 2015, he halved the goal to 15 per cent, a target still far on the horizon (Japan Times 2015; Mainichi 2020).

Abe’s defenders also point to the end of deflation. However, Abe had always claimed that achieving 2 per cent inflation—something the Bank of Japan governor said he could do in just two years (Reuters 2013)—would restore growth and it has not done so. So, when Tokyo failed even to come close to the 2 per cent inflation target, Abe’s supporters changed their mantra and now claim that just ending price declines is good enough. In any case, the way that Abe overcame inflation was yet another blow to living standards. Healthy inflation is a result of robust domestic demand. By contrast, 93 per cent of the price hikes during the Abe years stemmed from import-intensive products, like food, energy, apparel, and footwear (author calculations based on Consumer Price Index data, see Japan Statistics Bureau Consumer Price Index 2022). That’s because Abe’s campaign to weaken the yen raised the price of imports. This kind of inflation simply shifts income from Japanese consumers to foreign producers, while raising profits at Japan’s big multinational companies.

Abenomics would have helped Japan if Abe had truly pursued his promise of structural economic reforms, i.e., the ‘third arrow’ of the so-called three arrows of Abenomics. That, however, would have required stepping on powerful toes and, despite Abe’s unprecedented domination of the Diet, he

chose not to spend his political capital in pursuit of reform. Perhaps that is because he believed his own hype that conquering deflation would be a painless path to growth. To take just one example, consumers pay high food prices because the mammoth Japan Agriculture (JA) cooperative is immune from the Anti-Monopoly Law. Abe claimed to have initiated a drastic reform of the JA, but, in reality, he ignored the advice of his own advisory council to break up the cooperative. Instead, he worked out a deal that the head of JA, Akira Banzai, more or less admitted would not result in any substantial change (FCCJ 2015). Hollow measures like this were the hallmark of Abe’s ‘third arrow’ efforts.

There was one more thing Abe got wrong, but fortunately so in this case. Abe claimed that Abenomics was Japan’s ‘last chance’ to revive. In reality, countries have lots of ‘last chances’. Japan’s continued corrosion under Abe does not mean that it cannot revive; it merely means that Abe blew his opportunity.

Richard Katz is the author of a forthcoming book on restoring entrepreneurship in Japan and the publisher of a blog on Japan, accessible [here](#).

Abe Shinzo’s Historical Revisionism

Sven Saaler, Sophia University, Tokyo

Historical revisionism is a form of politics aiming at glorifying a nation’s past, cleansing it of its dark chapters such as war atrocities, human trafficking (such as slavery), and the impact of colonial rule and imperialism. In most cases, the movement is disconnected from academic history, but finds advocacy among right-wing politicians, journalists, and internet

activists. Historical revisionists are particularly keen to purge school curricula and textbooks from what they consider an ‘exaggerated’ emphasis on dark aspects of the national past, to censor museum exhibitions and memorials that exhibit critical views of that past, and to oppose official apologies for past injustices or to retract or revise previous statements.

Historical revisionism is a global phenomenon which has gained traction since the late 1990s and continues to grow (Evans 2001). It is related to the phenomenon of populist nationalism, with its obsession with a ‘Golden Past’ of national Greatness, to which the nation shall return (Smith 1997). It thus has a pronounced reactionary character.

Abe Shinzo emerged in the 1990s as a central figure in the movement to whitewash Japan’s wartime past, to revise previous statements acknowledging Japanese war responsibility, and to discredit and ridicule the victims of wartime atrocities (Saaler 2014, 2016, 2019). After being elected to the National Diet for the first time in 1993, he joined the Committee for the Re-Examination of History (*Rekishu Kentō Iinkai*), an internal committee of the LDP that challenged the war apologies made by prime minister Hosokawa Morihiro. In a 1995 book, the Committee claimed that:

[T]he Manchurian Incident, the China Incident and the Greater East Asian War ... were a fight for survival between the coloured races and the white race. Since the Russo-Japanese War [1905], the coloured races had all depended on Japan to be liberated from colonial rule. Since this would be a terrible blow, the whites united in order to suppress Japan. ... The Greater East Asian War was a glorious international contribution, a sacrifice without precedent in the history of mankind. (Committee for the Re-Examination of History 1995)

During his first term as prime minister

(2006–2007), Abe embarked on a policy he called ‘Overcoming the postwar regime’, which involved undoing the reforms undertaken during the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–52). The revision of the Basic Law on Education, which he achieved in 2007, was supposed to be the first step towards ‘Making Japan Great Again’—greatness here meaning a return to pre-1945 Japan. Notwithstanding a record-length second term as prime minister, from 2012 to 2020, Abe failed to achieve his other main objective—the revision of the 1946 Constitution, which he considered a legacy of the postwar occupation authorities.

Abe also continued to undermine apology statements made by previous prime ministers. In 2007, he issued a statement relativising the Kōno Statement of 1993—an apology referring to the contentious ‘comfort women’ issue (Morris-Suzuki 2007). Before returning to power in 2012, Abe vowed to replace the Murayama Statement, which had been upheld by every Japanese government since it was issued in 1995, with his own alternative statement. After soliciting advice from academic historians, who helped form an official advisory committee, he retained the Murayama Statement, but in 2015 added his own declaration to what now effectively amounts—in often contradictory ways—to Japan’s official position on its wartime legacy (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2015). Following the committee’s advice, Abe refrained from explicitly denying that Japan’s war in Asia and the Pacific was a ‘war of aggression’, as he had initially intended. Abe’s failure to replace the Murayama Statement with the claim that Japan’s war was *not* a war of aggression exposed the limitations of historical revisionist approaches in Japanese society.

In the absence of readily available figures, opinion polls suggest a shift in perceptions of the nation’s recent history among the broader public during Abe’s second term as prime

minister. In 2005 and 2006, respectively, the major dailies *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* asked whether Japan needed to do more to atone for its wartime past. The result in both cases was an overwhelming ‘Yes, Japan needs to do better.’ In 2015, however, after the debates surrounding the ‘Abe Statement’, in an *Asahi* poll a majority agreed with Abe’s assertion that Japan should *not* be forced to apologise further (*Asahi Shimbun*, 15 August 2015).

In another challenge to mainstream historical perceptions, Abe vowed to visit the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, which glorifies Japan’s wartime history and venerates not only fallen soldiers and sailors as deities, but also those convicted as war criminals in the Tokyo War Crimes Trial. After Abe visited the shrine in December 2013, international protests meant that he was forced to refrain from further visits until the end of his tenure as prime minister in 2020. Not only China, but also the United States publicly criticised Abe for his controversial visit to the shrine, threatening Japan’s international standing. In addition, Japan’s business leaders voiced concerns about a further deterioration of relations with China, which they saw as detrimental to Japan’s economic prospects. Beyond the Yasukuni issue, Abe supported attempts by historical revisionists throughout the country to censor historical exhibitions in museums (Saaler 2022).

In late 2015, to the surprise of many, Abe agreed to a deal with South Korea to solve the comfort women issue—previously a favoured site of controversy in what, since 2014, revisionists had begun to call the ‘history wars’ (Saaler 2022). In a joint statement, the foreign ministers of Japan and Korea agreed that, after further compensation was paid to former comfort women from Korea through a Japanese foundation, ‘this issue is resolved finally and irreversibly’ (MOFA 2015). Given that Abe had always insisted that most of the comfort women were recruited according to the laws of the day

rather than ‘by force’, this agreement was a giant step for him, but it also offended his hardcore nationalist supporters. For this group, the comfort women system had never existed, or, if it had, the numbers had been inflated by historians—or that comfort women were mostly prostitutes who knew very well what they were doing.

In sum, Abe’s attempts to replace existing apologies for Japan’s war responsibility and for Japanese war crimes, to revive prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, and to revise laws that he considered a product of the Allied Occupation of Japan had only limited success. His reactionary agenda to ‘Make Japan Great Again’ by returning to a prewar state of affairs has failed—for the time being, at least.

Sven Saaler is Professor of Modern Japanese History at Sophia University in Tokyo and a member of the Advisory Board of the National Institutes for the Humanities.

No Friend of the Free Media

David McNeill, The University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo

Kaori Hayashi, The University of Tokyo

Abe Shinzo’s relationship with the media came under scrutiny long before he became prime minister. On 29 January 2001, the then deputy chief cabinet secretary met with senior producers from NHK, Japan’s public broadcaster, to discuss an upcoming documentary on Japan’s war crimes. The documentary was subsequently eviscerated, triggering ‘deep and disturbing questions ... about the capacity of the Japanese media to maintain political independence,’ noted Tessa

Morris Suzuki (2006) in her detailed account of the NHK affair. Conservatives had for decades bemoaned bastions of 'leftist' journalism, particularly in NHK and *The Asahi Shimbun*, Japan's flagship liberal newspaper, and blamed them for masochistically raking over the past, and for contributing to the erosion of LDP influence. In 1993, for example, as the party cast around for scapegoats for its first loss of power since 1955, it settled on TV Asahi. Party strategists concluded they had underestimated the influence of a new breed of mouthy, unconventional anchors, particularly Kume Hiroshi of TV Asahi's News Station. TV Asahi's director of news seemed to confirm this when he boasted (in a private meeting) of his network's power to swing public opinion against the government (Berger 1995). The LDP took note.

There could have been little surprise, therefore, when Abe turned his attentions to the media on his return to office in December 2012. One of the new prime minister's first moves was to install four conservatives to NHK's 12-member board, including Hyakuta Naoki, a popular author with strongly revisionist views on World War II. Momii Katsuto, NHK's new president, had no broadcasting experience and quickly asserted that NHK's role was to reflect government policy on key issues in now notorious formulation 'when the government is saying right, we cannot say left'. Rarely confrontational, NHK pulled in its horns further (Lloyd Parry 2014). The LDP wrote to television bosses in 2014 demanding political impartiality. In 2016, the communications minister, Takaichi Sanae, threatened to close television stations that flouted rules on impartiality amid a major political row about the near simultaneous departure of three liberal TV anchors from the airwaves (The Economist 2016). All three, Furutachi Ichirō of TV Asahi's 'Hōdō Station', Kishii Shigetada of TBS, and Kuniya Hiroko, who had helmed NHK's investigative program 'Close-up Gendai' for two decades, were comparatively robust critics of the government.

A fierce domestic debate ensued about the extent of government 'pressure' exerted on the media. More notable was Abe's silence on the right of the media to report freely—whatever his problems with specific outlets—as we might expect from the elected leader of a democratic nation. Instead, there was bitter criticism of perceived media enemies. In 2014, after the *Asahi Shimbun* withdrew several articles on wartime *ianfu* or 'comfort women' (which used discredited source Yoshida Seiji), Abe and his base used the long-overdue retraction to improbably blame the newspaper for starting the entire comfort women controversy, including the 1993 Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yōhei Kōno that had acknowledged the Japanese military's role in herding the women into brothels and the 2007 US House Resolution 121, which called on Japan to 'formally acknowledge and apologize.' 'Many people were hurt, saddened and angered by the *Asahi's* false reports,' that 'damaged our honour around the world,' Abe said, blaming the messenger (ANNnewsCH 2014).

Unlike many of his predecessors, Abe knew how to work the media. Political commentator Chiki Ogiue (2017) revealed that Abe was in frequent contact with media executives, often dining at exclusive restaurants in Tokyo, or even at the offices of the *Yomiuri Shimbun*. He appeared regularly on television, particularly during his second cabinet, on popular 'variety shows' and was willing to be interviewed by sport newspapers (or tabloids), while shunning liberal rivals. He was photographed with entertainment stars and comedians. With the backing of conservative and popular media, he popularised the phrases 'Abenomics' and 'Promoting the Dynamic Engagement of All Citizens' (*ichiou-sou-katsuyaku*). He and cabinet members dramatically cut their exposure to open press conferences where they might face unscripted questions. The LDP effectively boycotted the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, Asia's oldest foreign press club, from 2014, after Yamatani

Eriko, Chairman of the National Public Safety Commission, was grilled there about her alleged links to a far-right pressure group. This happened partly because the club refuses to provide scripted questions. Concurrently, the government's global PR budget was dramatically expanded under Abe.

The Abe government also minted several laws, notably the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets (or the state secrets law), which took effect in 2014 and the Conspiracy Law of 2017, which were widely criticised for their potential to restrict the flow of information and harm freedom of expression. Though the secrecy law has yet to be seriously tested, theoretically it allows reporters to be charged with revealing state secrets, which are vaguely defined.

Did all this add up to historic repression of press freedom? In 2016, roughly halfway through Abe's tenure, Japan's ranking in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index fell 11 places to 72 (out of 180 countries), though the ranking is perennially slighted for being quixotic and unreliable (Japan currently ranks 71). Freedom House, an American thinktank, also noted reports of 'government pressure on media outlets to refrain from critical coverage' (Freedom House 2017). UN Rapporteur David Kaye warned of 'serious threats' to the independence of the media, and singled out self-censorship, declining media independence and a lack of 'professional solidarity' among media organisations (OHCHR 2016). 'A significant number of journalists I met feel intense pressure from the government, abetted by management, to conform their reporting to official policy preferences,' Kaye said after interviewing about 100 journalists and editors.

The official reaction to Kaye's report was hostile. Hagiuda Koichi, the deputy chief cabinet secretary, said his findings were based on 'hearsay' (The Economist 2017). A draft of his report was leaked to the right-leaning

Sankei Shimbun, which took offence at this finger wagging by a foreigner (The Economist 2017). A more confident response might have been to allow Japan's comparatively robust media freedoms to speak for themselves.

Despite this record, it was reliably asserted that Japan still had the freest media in Asia. True, Japan is hardly China. The mainstream media, in particular the mass circulation *Mainichi Shimbun*, have critically reported on LDP links to the Unification Church since Abe's assassination in July 2022 (though such links were ignored for years). The Internet is more or less unrestricted. The weekly media, led by *Shukan Bunshun*, claimed a string of political scalps during the Abe years. In 2020, *Bunshun* reignited one of the most serious scandals of Abe's tenure when it published a suicide note by an official who had been ordered to falsify Finance Ministry documents, apparently to protect Abe and his wife (Bunshun 2020). The so-called Moritomo scandal erupted in 2017 when the firm that ran Moritomo Gakuen, an ultra-nationalist kindergarten, bought a plot of public land in Osaka city for about 14 per cent of its value and began building a primary school to propagate right-wing ideas. It invoked the name of Abe when soliciting donations. Abe's wife, Akie was named honorary head teacher. Abe denied any involvement in the land sale and pledged to quit if anyone could prove otherwise. Few believed him, thanks to critical media scrutiny of his actions. Whatever else might be said of Abe's term in office, he can hardly be called a friend of the free media.

David McNeill is a former correspondent and now professor of communications at the University of the Sacred Heart in Tokyo.

Kaori Hayashi is a former journalist and now professor of media and journalism studies at the University of Tokyo.

Abe and the Unification Church: Opposing Gender Equality and LGBTQ+ Rights

Tomomi Yamaguchi, Montana State University

As is now well known, the only suspect in the murder of Abe Shinzo is Yamagami Tetsuya. It has been established that Yamagami held a grudge against the Unification Church (also known as The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification), a religion headquartered in South Korea and officially founded in 1954 by the late Sun Myun Moon. Yamagami considered killing the head of the church, Hak Ja Han, Moon's widow, but switched to Abe because he believed he had close ties with the religion, following his delivery of a recorded speech to an online event held in 2021, sponsored by an organisation related to the church, the Universal Peace Foundation (*Tenchū Heiwa Rengō*, UPF).

The video speech by Abe was delivered at an online international conference by the UPF, entitled 'Think Tank 2021: Toward Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula', held on 12 September 2021. UPF was founded in 2005, also by Moon. The Unification Church characterizes the UPF as one of its many 'friendly organisations', and claims that they are different organisations, but the close connection between the Church and the UPF is evident.

On 20 August 2022, NHK's 'Close-up Gendai' show aired an interview with the head of UPF Japan, Kajikuri Masayoshi, and reported that he had directly asked Abe to deliver his speech at the 2021 conference (NHK 2022a). Kajikuri admitted that some of UPF's activities are supported by donations from the Unification Church. Kajikuri is also the head of Church's other 'friendly organizations' that engage in political activities, such as the International Federation for Victory over Communism

(*Kokusai Shōkyō Rengō*, IFVOC) and the Federation for World Peace (*Sekai Heiwa Rengō*, FWP).

Kajikuri also explained the close connections between the Unification Church and three generations of the Abe family—that is, Abe's grandfather and former Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, Abe's father and politician Abe Shintaro, and Abe Shinzo himself. The Unification Church entered Japan in 1959, and officially became a religious corporation in 1964. The Church's Japanese headquarters was located next to Kishi's house in Tokyo and, when the organisation established the anti-communist IFVOC in 1968, Kishi became one of its founding members. Kishi and his party, the LDP, shared a common interest with the Unification Church when leftwing activism was at its peak in the late 1960s. In the NHK interview, Kajikuri said that his movement's connection to Abe had deepened after 2012 after he returned to power as the Prime Minister.

Since Abe's assassination, the major attention of the media has been on the Unification Church's connection to politicians. A survey by Kyodo, released on 31 August, showed that 117 LDP members of the Diet out of 594 who answered the survey had some ties to the Church, among whom 94 members, or almost 80 per cent, are from the LDP (Kyodo 2022). Another survey conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun*, released on 4 September, questioning Diet members, as well as prefectural governors and prefectural assembly members, showed that 447 respondents had some kind of connection to the Church, of whom 80% belong to the LDP (Asahi 2022).

These politicians include prominent members of the LDP: eight cabinet members, some in party leadership positions, such as the current chair of the LDP's Policy Research Council, Hagiuda Koichi, and Yamagiwa Daishiro, state minister for economic revitalisation. Abe

Shinzo's brother and former defence minister, Kishi Nobuo, admitted that he received help from the Unification Church in past elections. A new LDP member of the House of Councillors, Inoue Yoshiyuki, a former aide of Abe when he was prime minister, reportedly had the Church's help for his election campaign. While Inoue denied that this help was financial, he admitted that he was a 'supporting member' of the organisation.

Indeed, the official name-change of the Unification Church from 世界基督教統一神霊協会 (Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity), or 統一教会 (*Tōitsu Kyōkai*), to 世界平和統一家庭連合 (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification), or 家庭連合 (*Katei Rengō*) in 2015 may be regarded as a sign of dubious political ties. The Church applied for its name change to the Agency of Cultural Affairs under The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology in 1997, but lawyers fighting against the organisation's history of donation coercions demanded that the application be rejected. During the term of then Minister of Education and Science Shimomura Hakubun, however, also a member of the Abe faction, the application was accepted (NHK 2022b).

Political ties to the Church range from being interviewed in a publication of a 'friendly organisation' of the Church, attendance in the Church's or one of the related organisations' events, to being a member of the Church and its related organisations and receiving support for their election campaigns. The close relationships of Abe and politicians in the Abe faction of the LDP with the Unification Church in particular stand out. Abe's video speech at the UPF event was symbolic of these ties and his endorsement of its related organisations' activities.

This growing influence of the Unification Church on Japanese politics has had important implications for Japan's policies on gender

equality and LGBTQ+ rights. As the 'anti-communism' agenda of the Church lost its impact with the end of the cold war, the organisation shifted emphasis to family values. In practice, this meant a renewed attention to issues of gender and sexuality, such as blocking the introduction of separate surnames for married spouses, attacking sex education in schools, and resisting legalisation of same-sex marriage and partnerships. In his video speech, Abe also stated that he appreciated the family values promoted by the UPF, saying the family is the fundamental unit of society.

Abe opposed policies promoting gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. He led the LDP's backlash against feminism, as the chair of the LDP's 'Project Team to Investigate the Real Situations of Extreme Sex Education and Gender-free Education' established in 2005. During his first administration, his government passed the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education in 2006, which includes Article 10 on 'family education'. That paved the way for various policies that feminists and others have criticised as government intrusion into the private sphere because they impose state ideals family and parenting. His promotion of 'womenomics' when he returned to power in 2012 was an economic policy and had nothing to do with changing discriminatory laws and practices against women. He had always been against the introduction of separate surnames for married couples, and marriage equality.

Just like Abe, his former aide Inoue Yoshiyuki emphasised in his campaign speech the significance of 'family values', and he enthusiastically showed support for 'family education'. Inoue also made discriminatory remarks against LGBTQ+ people and proudly declared that he was against same-sex marriage.

My own research is on anti-feminist backlash in contemporary Japan. The Unification Church, along with other rightwing, often Nippon Kaigi-

related religious organisations, has been a significant factor in the movement (Yamaguchi 2018; Yamaguchi et al. 2012). The Church's leadership in the anti-LGBTQ+ movement particularly stands out. The involvement by the Church and a daily paper with close ties with the organisation, *Sekai Nippō* in the movement to block the passage of a local gender equality ordinance in Miyakonojo City, Miyazaki Prefecture, in 2003 was the key moment for the Church's deeper engagement in the anti-feminism and anti-LGBTQ+ movement; the Unification Church was particularly threatened by the ordinance's inclusion of the language of 'sexual orientation'.

The Unification Church was also against the so-called 'Partnership Ordinance' of Shibuya in 2015, which for the first time introduced same-sex partnership certificates (for residents of the ward). During an interview with me and my co-researcher in 2016, the Church's PR representatives said that they were particularly threatened by the ordinance because the Church's Japanese headquarters is in Shibuya ward. Since then, the Unification Church has opposed ordinances and measures introducing same-sex partnerships in other municipalities (see Endo 2022)—with apparently little success. Measures for same-sex partnerships had passed in 223 municipalities by June 2022, covering more than half of Japan's population (Marriage for All Japan 2022), despite the Church's resistance. Yet the LDP and the Church both oppose legislation allowing same-sex marriage, and the LDP has even blocked a bill to enhance understanding of LGBT. *Sekai Nippō* covers criticisms of LGBTQ+ rights extensively, by effectively utilising conservative, anti-LGBTQ+ discourses abroad—especially those of the United States—more than any other conservative media in Japan.

The other major policy interest of the Unification Church is the introduction of a law to support 'family education' (*Katei Kyōiku*

Shien Hō) and passing local ordinances in support of family education (*Katei Kyōiku Shien Jōrei*). The first such ordinance was passed in Kumamoto Prefecture in 2012. As of September 2022, a total of ten prefectures and six cities have passed similar ordinances. Along with other conservative groups, various organisations related to the Church, such as the Association for Ambassadors for Peace, IFVOC and FWP, have been playing a major role in the movement to pass local ordinances in other prefectures and cities, and to promote the movement for the national family education law.

The Unification Church is just one of the many conservative organizations opposing gender equality efforts and LGBTQ+ rights. Japanese politics and current policies are not just the results of influences from the Church. Obviously, other religious and rightwing organisations, such as Nippon Kaigi, have had a major impact, too. Still, the connection between the Unification Church and the LDP—particularly of the conservative Abe faction, and the possible influence that the Church may have on the policies supported by LDP politicians, may be one reason why Japan's progress on gender equality measures and LGBTQ+ rights has been so minimal—or even reversed—in recent years. Clearly, Abe as a politician with close ties to the Church and other religious rightwing organisations bore a responsibility for this situation, and the Church's impacts on LDP policies on gender and sexuality should be investigated further.

Tomomi Yamaguchi is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Montana State University. She is a cultural anthropologist and studies social movements in Japan, especially regarding feminist and right-wing movements.

Abe's Legacy: The View from the Republic of Korea

Lee Young-chaе, Keisen University

During Abe Shinzo's term in office, his hardline policy toward South Korea strengthened anti-Japanese sentiment in Korean society. Not for nothing has this period has been called the worst in Korea-Japan relations since diplomatic relations were normalised in 1965. The government of Kishida Fumio has inherited Abe's policies. Considering this situation, Abe's death and the reorganisation of Japan's conservative factions will have a major impact on bilateral ties between Japan and Korea.

What is the reason for this deterioration? Prime Minister Abe set out his political stall by making an official visit to Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013, which was opposed by both Korea and China. He tried to revise the Kōno statement expressing Japan's regret for the 'comfort women' affair. He initially opposed any diplomatic negotiations with South Korea on the issue of comfort women for the Japanese military, and later on the ruling on compensation for forced labour for Koreans by the South Korean Supreme Court in October 2018. Conservatives in Japan repeated the claim that all compensation issues were completely resolved through the normalisation of diplomatic relations in 1965.

Since the 1990s, the so-called historical revisionist line denying imperialist wars and the evils of colonial rule has been strengthened in Japan's conservative government. Previous conservative governments strengthened such historical revisionism only domestically out of diplomatic consideration for neighbouring countries. However, the Abe administration formalised the historical revisionist line in external foreign policy as well. This change has caused friction not only with South Korea and China, but also caused the international

community to criticise the Japanese government for denying its history of aggression in Asia.

Yoon Seok-yeol's conservative government took office in South Korea in May 2022 following the Moon Jae Inn government's economic policy failures. However, the government's approval ratings have since plunged due to its lack of political experience, unclear policy lines, poor communication with the people, confrontations with opposition parties, and other problems. The Yoon administration will struggle to recover its approval ratings at home. So, it will likely shore up its support by a tried and tested method: a hardline policy toward North Korea.

In order to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, the Yoon administration will implement a policy to induce North Korea's provocations by prioritising North Korea's abandonment of nuclear weapons over diplomatic dialogue. It will also try to improve relations with Japan. However, a tough North Korea policy will stimulate anxiety among foreign investors. In addition, resolving the history problem with Japan, including compensation for forced labour and the comfort system, will be difficult. In the end, there is a high possibility that the issue of historical compensation will be compromised in the name of strengthening security.

In Japan, the Kishida government also sees a golden opportunity to revise the constitution. The Ukrainian war is changing public opinion in favour of constitutional amendment. However, the decisive factor may be the crisis on the Korean Peninsula, including the North Korean nuclear issue. It can be predicted that the Kishida administration will try to use the Yoon Seok-yeol government's hardline policy against North Korea and the crisis on the Korean Peninsula to promote constitutional revision and Japan's arms build-up.

The Biden administration insists on strengthening the military alliance between

South Korea, the United States, and Japan. Although it is difficult for the United States to maintain hegemony in East Asia, the blockade of China will be strengthened. Military cooperation between South Korea and Japan is an essential element to confront China on behalf of the United States through military cooperation. The United States is taking a strong stance on the issue of improving relations between Korea and Japan, not for the purpose of resolving human rights issues but for ensuring military cooperation.

The conservative governments of Korea and Japan, in the absence of Abe, will take advantage of the domestic political situation to further strengthen military security. It will try to strengthen military cooperation by fostering the defence industry and further increasing exports. The result will accelerate the arms build-up and arms race in the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula, and the result could be a Ukrainian-type military conflict in East Asia.

The biggest tragedy left by Abe's legacy is that Japan has returned to a warring state and will bring a new war to East Asia. The most urgent task after Abe's death is for civil society in South Korea and Japan to work harder than ever to build human security through more substantial mutual understanding and solidarity and to oppose the escalation to war.

Lee Young Chae teaches peace studies and the history of Japanese colonialism and militarism at Keisen University in Tokyo. He is a seasoned commentator on Japan-Korea affairs and is centrally involved in exchanges of citizens' groups between the two countries.

He's Not the Emperor

Alexis Dudden

On 8 July 2022, at 11:30am (JST), Yamagami Tetsuya assassinated Abe Shinzo while I was shopping at Don Quijote in Shibuya.

Regardless of everything we will continue to learn, Yamagami shot the unarmed Abe, making the death detrimental to the ideas and hopes for open societies everywhere. Notwithstanding Abe and other leaders' surreal connections to the Moonies, let alone Yamagami's easy access to the Internet's do-it-yourself firearm production videos, the former prime minister's murder is forever political.

Furthermore, it is now complicated even to critique Abe, which fuels his backers within Japan and around the world and nowhere stronger than in Washington, DC. I have long disparaged Abe Shinzo as a voice for Japan, for Japan's regional relations, and for Japan's security relations with the United States. His private life is not my concern, yet the ill-advised plan for a 'state funeral' for him on 27 September has generated too much controversy to ignore (NHK 2022a): the personal is political.

Open disputes about terminology and translation for the proposed September event—the direct expression (国葬) or a non-standard word some supporters now push (国葬儀)—aim perhaps to circumvent overt problems of its constitutionality (NHK 2022b), and cascading opinion polls (Ito 2022) are best summed up with the observation: 'He's not the emperor' (Bunshun 2022).

Striking from the start was the on-demand hagiography, with pundits declaring it Japan's JFK moment (CNN 2022). With all due respect to the Abe family, it was not. People did not stop in their tracks, and workers at even at Abe's favoured Yasukuni Shrine continued hanging sponsorship lanterns for the upcoming summer festival (Akkz01 2022). Nonetheless, even the Kennedy family was roped in (Alvord

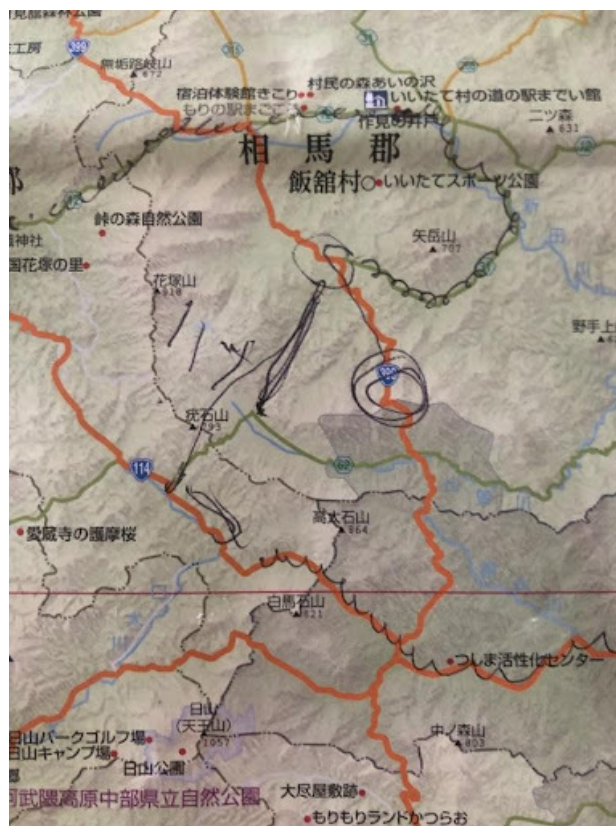
2022). Yet, and with all due respect to the Kennedy family, it is a false comparison (my mother refused to throw away the television set on which she watched JFK's 1963 shooting; I did with regret in 2005 after she died, carrying her memory with it, yet the set was beyond repair).

That said, the JFK moment hype is a false comparison unless Abe's backers succeed in transforming the former prime minister's death into something else, which is precisely the point of the proposed state funeral. Looked at historically, Japan's modern moment that was comparable to JFK's assassination remains the 3/11 Triple Disasters, with the ongoing crises at the Fukushima nuclear power plant most problematic for Japanese society now and moving forward.

So, on 11 July 2022, I took the train to Fukushima while the Abe family received visitors including US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen to his wake at Zozoji Temple in Tokyo prior to his formal funeral there the following day (Kyodo 2022). My intended drive from Fukushima station to the recently opened Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial in Futaba (Kingston 2022), however, did not work out as planned. In short, I ran out of safe driving time on this disaster tourism daytrip because the signs reading 'Road Impassable Due to High Levels of Radiation' have become even more arbitrarily placed than before, and, in some cases, give no warning until you are stuck. Fortunately, the helpful man standing watch in one spot of Route 399 drew on my map to guide me back down the mountain.



**Route 399, Fukushima, 11 July 2022.
Photo: Julian Gay.**



**Fukushima Prefecture Tourism Map.
Photo: Alexis Dudden.**

Moreover, in lieu of numerous ‘Radiation Removal in Progress’ fluttering signs in recent years, pink triangular strands of bunting surround condemned front yards and fields that lay fallow, suggesting more that a circus is coming to town than a region in crisis.



Route 114, Fukushima, 11 July 2022.
Photo: Julian Gay.

Driving Fukushima’s irradiated roads in light of even the mere suggestion of a state funeral for Abe Shinzo reveals the proposal as the bait and switch politics he and his backers have practiced each day since Abe’s return to power in 2012 (after the 3/11 Triple Disasters). Should an unconstitutional and unwanted ceremony with no legitimate name take place on September 27, and, personally worse, my tax dollars help dispatch Vice President Kamala Harris and Former President Barak Obama to this charade of thrones (Kawano 2022), I hope all involved add Fukushima’s roads to their itinerary: Madame Vice President, ‘I’m speaking’ here for a lot of people you and others in Washington refuse to hear (US Network Pool 2020).

Alexis Dudden is Professor of History at the University of Connecticut. Her most recent book, *Troubled Apologies* (Columbia University Press, 2008) interrogates the interplay between political apology and apologetic history among Japan, Korea, and the United States. She is currently working on a project examining Japan’s territorial disputes.

References

Introduction

Clinton, Hillary. 2022. [Tweet](#), 8 July.

Modi, Narendra. 2022. ‘“My Friend, Abe-san”: Modi’s Tribute to Shinzo Abe.’ *The Japan Times*, 12 July.

Reidy, Gearoid. 2022. ‘What the World Got Wrong About Shinzo Abe.’ *Bloomberg*, 13 July.

The Economist. 2013. ‘Abe’s Master Plan.’ *The Economist*, 18 May.

McCormack

Abe, Shinzo. 2022. ‘Tenchu heiwa rengo onrain shukai de no Abe Shinzo moto shusho no kicho koen.’ *Shukan kinyobi*, 22 July, 15. [Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s Keynote Address to the Universal Peace Foundation].

Anderson, Gordon L. 2000. ‘[History of PWPA](#).’ Professors World Peace Academy website, 20 November.

Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. 1976. ‘Activities of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency in the United States.’ In two parts, March and June. US Government Printing Office.

Fitrakis, Bob. 2012. 'Reverend Moon: Cult Leader, CIA Asset, and Bush Family Friend Is Dead.' *Free Press*, 4 September 2012.

Hayat, Moez and Ryan Ashley. 2021. 'The Hidden Power of Komeito on Japanese Politics.' *East Asian Forum*, 3 December.

Honda, Masakazu. 2022. 'Kokkai giin ni hyaku-nin ijo no hissho wo teikyo, senkyo undo de mo kazukazu no iho koi no "hansha" dantai [Antisocial Organisations Supply Over One Hundred Staff for Electoral Work on Behalf of Diet Members].' *Shukan Kinyobi*, 22 July, 14-15.

Japan Democratic Lawyers Association (JDLA). 2022. 'Abe Shinzo moto shusho no "kokuso" ni hantai suru [JDLA Opposes State Funeral for Former PM Abe].' 21 July.

Kihara, Satoru. 2022. 'Abe kokuso, naze jakunenso ga konna ni "sansei" ga oi no ka [Why Are There So Many of the Younger Generation Who "Support" the State Funeral].' *Ari no Hitokoto*, 13 August.

Kyodoa. 2022a. 'Kokkai giin 106 nin ni setten kyu toitsu-kyokai 8-wari ga jimin [80 Per Cent of Members of the Diet with Links to Unification Church Are LDP Members].' *Nikkan Gendai*, 23 July.

Kyodo. 2022b. '"Choi no kyosei" kokuso tekkai o, shukyosha dantai, tonai de hantai iken [Cancel Enforced State Mourning Funeral, Tokyo Meeting of Religious Groups Declare Opposition].' *Kyodo* 18 August.

Mainichi Shimbun. 2022. '19 out of 54 Members Including Vice-Ministers, or 26 if All Ministers Included, Have Former Unification Church Links.' *Mainichi Shimbun*, 12 August.

McCormack, Gavan. 2018. *The State of the Japanese State: Contested Identity, Direction and Role*, Folkestone: Renaissance Books.

Nakano, Masaharu. 2022a. 'Kishida shin naikaku ni wa shinseiren kanren 18 nin, Nippon kaigi kanren 11 nin [18 Members of New Kishida Cabinet Have Links with Shinto Politics League and 11 Are Linked to Nippon Kaigi].' *Nikkan Gendai*, 14 August.

Nakano, Masaharu. 2022b. "Toitsu kyokai, jiminto kankeishi [History of Relations between Unification Church and LDP].' *Sekai*, September 2022, 42-51.

RT Russia. 2022. 'Putin Sends Condolences to Shinzo Abe's Family.' *RT Russia*, 8 July.

Shirai, Satoshi. 2020. 'Abe seiken no 7 nen amari to wa, Nihon-shi jo no oten de aru [The Seven-Plus Years of Abe Government a Stain on Japan's History].' *Ronza*, 30 August.

Tanaka, Yuko. 2022. 'Ie chushinshugi o tsukinukeru [Pushing Ahead with Ie-Centredness].' *Shukan Kinyobi*, 29 July, 44-45.

Turnbull, Malcolm. 2022. 'The World Will Miss Abe's Wisdom.' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 July.

Uchida, Tatsuru. 2022. 'Abe Shinzo ansatsu jiken no imi [The Significance of the Abe Assassination].' *Shukan Kinyobi*, 22 July, 12-13.

Nakano

Asaho, Mizushima. 2015. 'NHK kenpo kenkyusha anketo no koto: goken iken no kecchaku wa tsuiteru [About the NHK Constitution Scholars' Survey: There Is Already a Conclusion to the Constitutionality Debate].' *Asaho*, 27 July.

Cabinet Legislation Bureau. 1972. 'Shudanteki jieiken to kenpo tono kankei [The Relationship between Collective Self-defence and the Constitution].' 14 October, reproduced at [this link](#) (p. 63).

Jiji Press. 2022. 'Abe shi kokuso "hantai" 47%

Kyotoitsukyokai kaimei “hitsuyo” 77% —Jiji yoron chosa [47% “Opposed” to Mr Abe’s State Funeral, 77% Deem a Clarification of the Ex-Unification Church Issue “Necessary”, According to Jiji Opinion Poll].’ *Jiji Press*, 11 August.

Kingston, Jeff. 2015. ‘SEALDs: Students Slam Abe’s Assault on Japan’s Constitution.’ *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 13(36/1).

Kyodo News. 2022a. ‘FOCUS: Unification Church Ties to Lawmakers Emerges as Major Political Issue.’ *Kyodo News*, 24 July.

Kyodo News. 2022b. ‘Over 100 Japan Lawmakers Had Links with Unification Church: Survey.’ *Kyodo News*, 13 August.

Mainichi Shinbun. 2022. ‘Kishida shusho, Abe shi no kokuso de “choi wo kuni zentai toshite shimesukoto ga tekisetsu” [Prime Minister Kishida on Mr Abe’s State Funeral: “It’s Appropriate to Mourn as a Country as a Whole].’ *Mainichi Shimbun*, 6 August.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2014. ‘Cabinet Decision on Development of Seamless Security Legislation to Ensure Japan’s Survival and Protect its People.’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan website, 1 July.

Nakano, Koichi. 2021. ‘Crisis of Constitutional Democracy and the New Civic Activism in Japan: From SEALDs to Civil Alliance.’ In *Japanese Constitutional Revisionism and Civic Activism*, edited by Helen Hardacre. Timothy S. George, Keigo Komamura, and Franziska Seraphim. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 39–59.

Nakano, Koichi. 2022. ‘The Politics of Unconstitutional Constitutional Amendment in Japan: The Case of the Pacifist Article 9.’ In *The Law and Politics of Unconstitutional Constitutional Amendments in Asia*, edited by Rehan Abeyratne and Ngoc Son Bui. Abingdon: Routledge, 23–45.

Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. 2015. ‘“Toward an Alliance of Hope”: Address to a Joint Meeting of the U.S. Congress by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.’ Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet website, 29 April.

Yamaguchi, Mari. 2022. ‘EXPLAINER: The Unification Church’s Ties to Japan’s Politics.’ *AP News*, 17 July.

Mullins

Tsukada, Hotaka. 2017. ‘Shūkyō no ukeika wa doko ni aru no ka [Where is the Rightward Shift in Religion]. In *Tettei kenshō Nihon no ukeika* [A Thorough Examination of Japan’s Rightward Shift], edited by Tsukada Hotaka. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 374–75.

Mullins, Mark R. 2021. *Yasukuni Fundamentalism: Japanese Religions and the Politics of Restoration*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press.

Shinbun Akahata. 2022. ‘Dai niji Kishida kaizō naikaku [Kishida’s Second Reshuffled Cabinet].’ *Shinbun Akahata*, 14 August.

Brown

Asahi Shimbun. 2018. ‘Hoppōryōdo ni beigun, Pu-chin-shi keikai [Putin on Guard against US Troops on the Northern Territories].’ *Asahi Shimbun*, 16 November.

Cabinet Secretariat. 2013. ‘National Security Strategy.’ Japan’s Cabinet Secretariat website, 17 December.

India News. 2022. ‘A Towering Global Statesman: PM Modi, Others Condole Shinzo Abe’s Death.’ *Hindustan Times*, 8 July.

Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2018. ‘Nichi-Ro shunō kaidan [Japan-Russia Summit].’

Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 14 November.

RIA Novosti. 2021. '[Medvedev prokomentiroval situatsiyu vokrug Kuril'skikh ostrovov](#) [Medvedev Comments on the Situation around the Kuril Islands],' *RIA Novosti*, 1 February.

RIA Novosti. 2022. '[Yaponiya staraetsya vozglavit' "mirovoe dvizhenie rusofobov," zayavil Patrushev](#) [Petrushev Declares that Japan Is Striving to Lead "the Global Movement of Russophobes"],' *RIA Novosti*, 19 August.

Tass. 2018. '[Sindzo Abe: prezident Putin mne dorog kak partner, s nim mozhno pogovorit' po dusham](#) [Shinzo Abe: President Putin Is Dear to Me as a Partner, I Can Speak with Him Heart-to-Heart].' *Tass*, 25 November.

Kingston

Green, Michael. 2022. *Line of Advantage: Japan's Grand Strategy in the Era of Abe Shinzō*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Harris, Tobias. 2020. *The Iconoclast: Shinzo Abe and the New Japan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kingston, Jeff. 2020. '[The Emptiness of Japan's Values Diplomacy in Asia](#).' *Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 18(19/1).

Kumagai, Takeo. 2021. '[Japan's Coal Power Share to Drop to 26% by 2030-31 on Regulatory Push: METI](#).' *S&P Global*, 9 April.

Katz

Cabinet Office. 2020. '[Transfers from General Government to Households \(Social Security Transfers\)](#).' Annual Report on National

Accounts for 2019.

Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan. 2015. '[Banzai, Green & Bancel: JA and International Group on Abe's JA Reform Plans](#).' *YouTube*, 12 February.

Japan Macro Advisors. 2020. '[Wages and Hours Worked](#).' Japan Macro Advisors website (no longer online).

Japan Times. 2015. '[Japan Drastically Lowers Its Goal for Female Managers in Government and Private Sector](#).' *Japan Times*, 25 December.

Japanese Statistics Bureau Labour Force Survey. 2020. '[Historical Data Table 9: Employed Person by Age Group \(Ten Year Group\) and Employee by Age Group \(Ten-Year Group\) and Type of Employment - Whole Japan](#).' Japanese Statistics Bureau website.

Japanese Statistics Bureau Consumer Price Index. 2022. '[2020-Base Consumer Price Index Monthly](#).' Japanese Statistics Bureau website.

Mainichi. 2020. '[Japan Gov't to Push Back 30% Target for Women in Leadership Positions by Up to 10 Years](#).' *Mainichi*, 26 June.

Reuters. 2013. '[BOJ Kuroda: Japan to See 2 pct Inflation Toward Fiscal 2015](#).' *Reuters*, 5 December.

Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research. 2022. '[Changing Corporate Behavior to Jump-Start the New Capitalism: The North Wind Versus the Sun](#).' Tokyo Foundation website, 10 March.

Saaler

Committee for the Re-Examination of History (ed.). 1995. *Daitōa sensō no sōkatsu* [Summary of the Greater East Asian War]. Tokyo: Tentensha.

- Evans, Richard. 2001. *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA). 2015. '[Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion](#).' Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan website, 28 December.
- Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. 2007. '[Japan's "Comfort Women"](#).' *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 5(3).
- Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. 2015. '[Statement by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe](#).' Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet website, 14 August.
- Saaler, Sven. 2014. 'Bad War or Good War? History and Politics in Post-War Japan.' In *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan*, edited by Jeff Kingston. London and New York, NY: Routledge, 137-148.
- Saaler, Sven. 2019. 'Japan.' In *The Palgrave Handbook of Conflict and History Education in the Post-Cold War Era*, edited by Luigi Cajania, Simone Lässig, and Maria Repoussi. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 321-33.
- Saaler, Sven. 2016. '[Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan](#).' *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 14(20/7).
- Saaler, Sven. 2022 (forthcoming). 'Demolition Men: The Unmaking of a Memorial Commemorating Wartime Forced Laborers in Gunma.' *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 20(16).
- Smith, Anthony. 1997. 'The "Golden Age" and National Renewal.' In *Myths and Nationhood*, edited by George Schopflin and Geoffrey Hosking. New York, NY: Routledge, 36-59.
- ANNnewsCH. 2014. '["Nihon no imēji kizutsuita" Abe sōri ga Asahishinbun hihan](#) ["Japan's Image Has Been Damaged," Abe Criticises *Asahi Shimbun*].' *YouTube*, 3 October.
- Berger, Paul M. 1995. '[Exploring the Intersection of Government, Politics and the News Media in Japan: The Tsubaki Hatsugen Incident](#).' The MIT Japan Program, Center for International Studies Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Freedom House. 2017. '[Freedom in the World 2017: Japan](#).' Freedom House website.
- Lloyd Parry, Richard. 2014. '[Japan's "BBC" Bans Any Reference to Wartime "Sex Slaves"](#).' *The Times*, 17 October.
- Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. 2006. '[Free Speech - Silenced Voices: The Japanese Media, the Comfort Women Tribunal, and the NHK Affair](#).' *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 4(12).
- Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations Human Rights (OHCHR). 2016. '[Japan: UN Rights Expert Warns of Serious Threats to the Independence of the Press](#).' OHCHR website, 19 April.
- Ogiue, Chiki. 2017. *Subete no Shimbun ha "Katayotte" iru. Hone to Suuji no media-ron* [All Newspapers are Biased: Media Theory of the Reality and Numbers]. Tokyo: Fusōsha.
- Shukan Bunshun. 2022. '[Moritomo yūshoku - Zaimushō - kōkai-sho zenbun "subete kōkai Sagawa kyokuchō no shijidesu"](#) [Moritomo Suicide: "All the Instructions Were Given by Director General Sagawa" (Ministry of Finance)].' *Shukan Bunshun*, 26 March.
- The Economist. 2016. '[Anchors Away](#).' *The Economist*, 20 February.
- The Economist. 2017. '[Japan Gives Short Shrift to a UN Rapporteur Looking into Press](#)

McNeill and Hayashi

Freedom.’ *The Economist*, 8 June.

Yamaguchi

Asahi Shimbun. 2022. ‘[Kyū Tōitsukyōkai to setten shitatameta giin, 8-wari ga Jimin kokkai giin kengi-ra Asahi chōsa](#) [80 Per Cent of the Assembly Members Who Admitted Connection to the Unification Church Are LDP Members: Survey by the Asahi on the Diet and Prefectural Assembly Members].’ *Asahi Shimbun*, 4 September.

Endo, Mameta. 2022. ‘[Tōitsukyōkai ga nobite kita han LGBT undō](#) [The Anti-LGBT Movement by the Unification Church].’ *Ronza*, 23 July.

Kyodo. 2022. ‘[Kyū Tōitsukyōkai to no, zenkokukai giin 712-ri ni kiite mita](#) [We Asked Questions on the Connection with the Unification Church to all 712 Diet Members].’ *47 News*, 31 August.

Marriage for All Japan. 2022. ‘[Nihon no pātonāshipu seido](#) [The Partnership System in Japan].’

NHK. 2022a. ‘[Kyū Tōitsukyōkai toppu ni tou kyōkai to seiji, Abe moto setsuzoku to no tsunagari](#) [Interviewing the Head of the Unification Church: On the Relationship between the Church, Politics, and Former Prime Minister Abe].’ *NHK*, 31 August.

NHK. 2022b. ‘[Kyū Tōitsukyōkai meishō henkō Shimomura moto monbu kagaku daijin no kakawari wa?](#) [The Name Change of the Former Unification Church: What Is the Relationship with Former Minister of Education and Science, Shimomura?].’ *NHK*, 15 August.

Yamaguchi, Tomomi. 2018. ‘[The Mainstreaming of Feminism and the Politics of Backlash in the 21st Century Japan](#).’ In *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, edited by Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker. Honolulu, HI:

University of Hawai’i Press: 68–86.

Yamaguchi, Tomomi, Saito Masami, and Ogiue Chiki. 2012. *Shakai undō no tomadoi feminizumu no ‘ushinawareta jidai’ to kusanone hoshu undo* [Social Movements at the Crossroads: Feminism’s ‘Lost Years’ and the Grassroots Conservative Movement]. Tokyo: Keiso Shobō.

Dudden

Akkz01. 2022. ‘[4K Mitama Matsuri Yasukuni Shrine 2022 Third Night Festival Tokyo Kudan](#).’ YouTube, 17 July.

Alvord, Kyler. 2022. ‘[Jack Schlossberg Recalls When Shinzo Abe and Mom Caroline Kennedy Were “Only 2 Guests” at His 23rd Birthday](#).’ *People*, 8 July.

Bunshun. 2022. ‘[Abe moto shushō no kokusō ankēto kekka happyō](#) [hantai] ga 79. 7-Pāsento de “sansei” no 4-bai ijō “zainin kikan ga nagai dake” “ten’nōde wanai” no koe mo [Former Prime Minister Abe’s State Funeral Survey Results: 79.7 Per Cent of Respondents Were “Opposed” to the Idea, More than Four Times as Many as “in Favour”].’ *Bunshun*, 13 August.

CNN. 2022. ‘[An Equivalent of JFK’s Assassination Day’: Adviser on Shinzo Abe’s Death](#).’ CNN, 8 July.

Ito, Nanae. 2022. ‘[30% Support State Funeral for Ex-PM Abe, 53% Opposed: Mainichi Poll](#).’ *Mainichi Shimbun*, 23 August.

Kawano, Mao. 2022. ‘[Harris, Obama among Hundreds from Overseas Expected at Abe Funeral](#).’ *Asia Nikkei*, 18 August.

Kingston, Jeff. 2022. ‘[Fukushima’s Dueling Museums](#).’ *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 20(12/2).

Kyodo. 2022. ‘[Mourners Farewell Slain Ex-PM](#)

Abe as Funeral Held at Tokyo Temple.' *Kyodo*, 12 July.

NHK. 2022a. 'Scholars and Others Begin Petition to Oppose Abe State Funeral.' *NHK*, 22 August.

NHK. 2022b. 'Lawyers Take Steps to Block Local Spending for Abe's State Funeral.' *NHK*, 19 August.

US Network Pool. 2020. "'I'm Speaking": Kamala Harris Reins in Mike Pence during VP Debate.' *The Guardian*, 8 October.

David McNeill is a professor at the Department of English Language, Communication and Cultures at Sacred Heart University in Tokyo. He was previously a correspondent for *The Independent* and *The Economist* newspapers and for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He is co-author of the book *Strong in the Rain* (with Lucy Birmingham) about the 2011 Tohoku disaster. He is an *Asia-Pacific Journal* editor. Follow David on Twitter [@DavidMcneill3](#) davidamcneill@gmail.com