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Research Article

Fighting the Cabal from the Diet: Sanseitō and the Role of Conspiracy as Political Ideology

Romeo Marcantuoni[1] and Robert A. Fahey[2]
[1]Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan and [2]Waseda Institute for Advanced Studies, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

Sanseitō is a fringe Japanese political party founded during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that has won several seats in the National Diet since 2022. Initially coming to prominence as a promoter of anti-vaccine narratives, the party has since promoted a conspiracist worldview that connects to more conventional right-wing nationalism and addresses a much broader range of issues and beliefs. In this article we outline the core tenets of this worldview and examine how attention to its construction as a participative political ideology sheds light on the party's political actions and motivations.

Keywords: Political Parties; Conspiracy Worldview; Conspiracy Theories; Party Competition; Japan

Introduction

This article analyzes Sanseitō (参政党; "The Party of Do-It-Yourself"), a relatively new Japanese political party which emerged during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and has grown to hold seats in both houses of the National Diet, as an example of what we term a "conspiracy party." We argue that, in contrast to the more common phenomenon of parties strategically deploying conspiracy narratives for political gain, Sanseitō has entirely shaped itself around a worldview that believes society to be under the control of powerful, obscure, and intentional forces. Furthermore, it has developed this worldview into a nascent but coherent political ideology that asks its members and supporters to "do their own research" and to "connect the dots"—to borrow common tropes of conspiratorial arguments—as they absorb the various media, lectures, and in-person events that the party provides. Sanseitō's worldview and its construction thus offers insights into how conspiracy beliefs can function in the political realm, a subject of no small significance given the risks that widespread conspiracy beliefs may undermine trust in democratic institutions themselves. In this study, we offer an analysis focused on the structure and appeal of Sanseitō's stated, party-level beliefs, focusing on how they inform and interact with its existence as a political party organization that must develop policy platforms and meaningful linkages with its base of support. We argue that Sanseitō presents a coherent model of political action that allows conspiratorial views to enter into the mainstream and that, while this model has emerged in the specific context of Japan's post-pandemic political landscape, it has relevance far beyond that context, as most of its features could easily be replicated elsewhere.[1]

Sanseitō won its first seat in the Upper House of the National Diet in 2022 on a platform of opposition to pandemic countermeasures, a position that it promoted through its YouTube channel and social media presence (Asahi Shimbun 2022). In 2023, Sanseitō won a hundred seats in various local assemblies around the country (Sanseitō 2023a) and built on these modest electoral successes by winning three seats in the Lower House of the National Diet in late 2024. In spite of its steady growth, Sanseitō largely escaped the media's attention until the 2025 Tokyo Assembly elections, at which the party's new "Japanese First" slogan (日本人ファースト) clearly resonated with some groups of voters, who sent three out of its four candidates to the assembly (Social Research Support Organization Chiki Lab 2025). These results, at an election widely seen as a bellwether for upcoming national elections, saw the party's rise being widely reported upon and scrutinized in traditional media, which both foregrounded and challenged the party's pivot to framing immigration as a key issue in the run-up to the Upper House election in July of the same year. Sanseitō's policy platform now focuses on skepticism toward vaccine safety and the medical industry, opposition to the green energy transition, concerns with the current state of children's education (and their own promotion of alternative, more

Corresponding author: Romeo Marcantuoni; Email: romeo.marcantuoni@gmail.com

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[1] An in-depth examination of the party's broader organizational structure and the mechanics of its rise in Japan's party environment is beyond the scope of this paper but will form the basis of future work on this topic.

nationalistic education and a non-mainstream view of Japanese history in response), and cracking down on the flow of overseas workers and capital into Japan. Primarily self-described as an "anti-globalist" party, Sanseitō uses its political activism and online media content to squarely point the finger at alleged foreign intervention by global elites, and the acquiescence of Japan's establishment to that elite agenda, as the primary cause of what it believes to be Japan's economic and social malaise. During the 2025 Upper House election, Sanseitō ran its most successful campaign to date, winning 14 new seats (for a total of 18 across both houses) and becoming the second-largest opposition party by national vote share (winning 12.55%, while the Democratic Party for the People won 12.88%). With this electoral success, not to mention the public funding it will bring for the party's greatly enlarged cohort of lawmakers, Sanseitō has arguably established a solid foothold in Japan's party landscape and has seemingly taken on an agenda-setting role in its media environment—at least for now.

The electoral breakthrough of a party whose claims and positions are premised on the belief that the world is in the grip of a powerful and threatening conspiracy raises important questions about the appeal and consequences of its broader worldview. Since the pandemic, several political parties have emerged to challenge the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)'s ownership over conservative policies and identity by calling attention to changes that they claim threaten Japan's national character (Fahey 2023; Fujikura 2024; Furuya 2024). These groups, which include Sanseitō as well as Nihon Hoshutō (日本保守党; "Japanese Conservative Party"), Mintsuku (みんなでつくる党; "The Collaborative Party"), the "NHK Party" (国民をNHKから守る党; "Party to Protect the People from NHK"[2]), and the ultra-fringe party Tsubasa no Tō (つばさの党; "Tsubasa Party"), argue that the LDP has strayed from its conservative values in ways characterized by issues such as the implementation of pandemic countermeasures, the passing of a law offering limited recognition to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans (LGBT), and the admission of increasing (albeit still relatively small) numbers of foreign workers to the country —all issues which these right-wing groups tacitly associate with the lack of a strong conservative successor to former prime minister Abe Shinzō after his death, with the party instead being led through this period by figures from its more moderate, centrist wing. Several of these parties embrace conspiracy narratives to some extent, but Sanseitō is notable as by far the most successful party to ride this wave; not only has it won a significant number of seats in the national Diet, but it has also built a large and thriving community of party members, cooperated with social movements protesting vaccines and the World Health Organization (WHO)-backed pandemic treaty, and built a popular alternative online news platform featuring a wide selection of conservative fringe media figures and personalities. Available public data show, for example, that Sanseitō collected a higher amount of individual donations in 2022 than any LDP faction, attesting to the outsized ability of the party to mobilize and monetize its supporters (Asahi Shimbun 2023; Jiji Press News 2023).

This article describes and analyzes the party's deliberate construction of a political worldview. It traces the official claims made by Sanseitō to reconstruct how they shape their appeals to the public and argues that this is best understood as an overt embrace of conspiracy, both as a political ideology and as a holistic belief system, about how the world is run and dominated. This is in marked contrast to other cases of parties and politicians who use conspiracy theories and narratives as a tool of politics, serving primarily instrumental goals (Bergmann 2018; 2024; de Jonge 2021a; Fahey 2021; Pirro and Taggart 2023). It is also in accord with the self-understanding of the party, which labels itself as anti-globalist. Indeed, while Sanseitō rejects terms such as "conspiracy theory," we argue that this belief system constitutes a conspiracy worldview insofar as these "global elites" are explicitly portrayed as a hidden force exerting intentional and effective control over world affairs. Through reference to primary documents published by the party, we show that "globalism" is to be understood here as a system of control that has been installed by massive corporations and financial interests (so-called global elites, globalists, and international finance capitalists) and forced onto individual nation states, including if not especially Japan, through unaccountable international institutions. This conspiratorial element in turn facilitates the participatory promise of the party, which impels supporters, members, and voters to do their own self-directed "research" through alternative media channels, within which the party and its fellow travelers are already deeply embedded.

We proceed with our argument in four parts. We begin with a brief review of the literature on the role of conspiracy theories in politics. We then go on to reconstruct Sanseitō's official worldview through its publicly accessible texts, YouTube videos, and political actions. Our intention here is to sketch the contours of a broader narrative rather than reproducing any particular claim in detail. The third section identifies the political role of this worldview in terms of the party's strategy and positioning. Finally, we briefly discuss the future viability and broader consequences of this form of political positioning. It remains to be seen whether Sanseitō will continue to grow or whether it will decline and fade out in future elections, as has been the trajectory for so many fringe parties in Japanese politics in the past. However, its successes so far suggest a model for political competition that deserves attention.

Conspiracy parties in an unstable world

In February 2024, during one of Sanseitō's regular press conferences, the party addressed a room of journalists concerning a recent academic paper whose Japanese summary had been posted on the web page of the University of Tokyo School of Engineering. Authored by four researchers from top Japanese universities, the paper used Japanese data from social media to understand the spread of anti-vaccine discourse and suggested, among other things, that Sanseitō had become an important nexus for the

[2] The NHK Party changed its name to the aforementioned Mintsuku but was later reformed by the original party leader Tachibana Takeshi following a schism in the group.

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"anti-vaxx" movement (Toriumi et al. 2024). This claim did not seem especially controversial. Throughout the development of its campaign infrastructure and local political apparatus, Sanseitō had doubled down on stances on vaccines that can reasonably be described as conspiratorial—claims that vaccines are unsafe and, moreover, that their use on the Japanese population serves the interests of a shadowy cabal of global elites.

At the aforementioned press briefing, Sanseitō decried terms used to characterize the party throughout the paper, including "right wing," "spiritual," and "conspiracy theories" (Toriumi et al. 2024: 2). They argued that the party "takes the position that for adults the decision should be left to the individual" and that it was only urging "careful judgment" with regards to inoculating children (Sanseitō 2024i). They continued:

> Furthermore, [the paper] also states that we used conspiracy theories, such as those pertaining to international Jewish capital, in our election campaigns. However, Sanseitō does not approve of the racist ideology, as it were, of pointing toward a particular ethnic group [and claiming] that they are pulling the world's strings (世界の黙幕). It is nevertheless widely known that international finance capitalists such as George Soros interfere in a country's politics and economy, profiting enormously. We believe that to dismiss this as a conspiracy theory is to cloud the pursuit of truth. (Sanseitō 2024i)

In its rebuttal, then, Sanseitō did not argue with the paper's description of its beliefs so much as it took umbrage with the characterization of such beliefs as "conspiracy theories." To argue that these are actually factual claims, it chose the example of financier and philanthropist George Soros, who has been the target of countless conspiracy theories in various countries in recent decades, many of them anti-Semitic in nature (Langer 2021; Plenta 2020). This rhetorical strategy of focusing on small, provable claims, to the exclusion of wider discussion about the beliefs being espoused—a variation on the fallacy of induction—is often employed by conspiracy theorists. It is well-documented that George Soros made a significant amount of money through trades such as short selling the British pound in the 1990s, just as it is clear that messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines can cause adverse health effects in a small number of cases. However, Sanseitō does not limit the claims made in its communications with members and supporters—be it in speeches or in the party's many published texts and videos—to such proven facts, instead framing such information as evidence for the larger agenda of a hidden and malevolent clique of global elites.

This incident exemplifies the holistic and participatory way in which conspiracy theories are politicized. It is well established that references to George Soros are used in various political contexts as a dog whistle for larger conspiracies—a reference that will be clearly understood by the party's supporters, while maintaining a facade of innocence, or at least deniability, to those who are not steeped in the party's esoteric lore. Conspiracy influencers, DiResta 2024 explains, "have their tropes and archetypes: the claims they make repeatedly, the villains and heroes they recurringly highlight, weaving them into a cinematic universe. Knowingly saying, for example, 'Soros' or 'Koch' conveys instantaneous meaning to their audience". References to these free-floating bits and pieces of a conspiracy invite the audience to connect the dots between the preponderance of so-called evidence circulated around social media and influencer networks, but the dog whistle itself can easily be walked back if confronted. To the believer willing to connect the dots, the meager evidence proffered is merely a hint toward a larger conspiracy and a greater role in the conspiracy narrative for the individual being invoked. The logic is circular; as Rice explains of Trump's similar invocation of Soros as the claimed culprit behind protests against his choice of Brett Kavanaugh for the Supreme Court, "the accumulative, ongoing actions that compose evidence are also what that evidence references" (Rice 2020: 61). Sanseitō, in focusing its defense on these specific and limited claims in this public statement, sought both to reassure its supporters of, and to distract its opponents from, the broader belief system it promotes—that the world is in the throes of conspiracy and that Sanseitō's task as a political party is to uncover the agents of this conspiracy and enable the public to fight back against them.

Sanseitō's rise has coincided with a period of strong research interest in conspiracy theories and their political role. Academic interest in the sociopolitical and psychological roles of conspiracy theories has risen significantly since the late 1990s, but researchers' focus on this field was further intensified in recent years by the violence seen in Washingtonm, DC, after the 2020 US presidential election, which was fueled by many participants' belief in "QAnon" conspiracy theories, as well as the conspiracy-driven rejection of COVID-19 vaccines by significant minorities of citizens in many parts of the world. While Japan did not witness widespread vaccine rejection—let alone political violence of the sort seen in the January 6 Capitol Riot—evidence from survey research shows that conspiracy beliefs are nonetheless widespread in Japan, to a similar degree as is seen in other developed countries (Fahey 2023; Hata 2022; Majima and Nakamura 2020). Despite the extensive literature on conspiracy beliefs, however, precisely defining conspiracy theories for the purposes of research has often proved challenging. The most concise definitions—such as that offered by Douglas et al. (2019: 4): "attempts to explain the ultimate causes of significant social and political events and circumstances with claims of secret plots by two or more powerful actors"—tend to ignore the fact that actual conspiracies meeting this minimal definition are relatively commonplace (for example, an attempt by a government department or police force to conceal unflattering or incriminating information would meet this definition), making such minimal definitions so broad as to label many citizens holding perfectly reasonable and well-informed expressions of distrust in political or other authorities as "conspiracy theorists". Other definitions (e.g., Levy 2007: 181–192; Uscinski 2019: 48) add that conspiracy theories involve the rejection of conventional understandings of events, favoring conspiratorial explanations that demand esoteric knowledge or complex explanations over well-established and generally more simple public narratives. This

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aspect of conspiracy beliefs has qualities similar to aspects of cult religions: Adherents believe themselves to understand profound but little-known truths about the organization and structure of the world and see themselves as elevated above ordinary individuals (often referred to with terms such as "sheep") who do not have access to this esoteric information and deep understanding. In line with this understanding, conspiracy beliefs have been shown to have an emotionally stabilizing quality owing to how they attribute agency and intentionality to chaotic events (Abalakina-Paap et al. 1999; Oliver and Wood 2014), although van Prooijen (2020) argues that this is ultimately undermined by the further anxiety about the world that such beliefs inevitably induce.

While cases exist where conspiracy theories have been employed by mainstream political actors as rhetorical tools, especially in attempts to raise negative sentiments about minority groups and other political opponents, the use of such beliefs is usually weighed against the potential costs and has consequently been relatively rare, notwithstanding a possible uptick in such cases in recent years. Explicit embrace of such radical ideas may mobilize other mainstream political actors and the mass media to institute a "cordon" around the party or actors responsible, "limiting their political and discursive opportunities" (de Jonge 2021b: Ch. 6). However, owing to the extent to which its unconventional and conspiratorial views are central to the party's identity and rhetoric, Sanseitō has been described quite explicitly by scholars and journalists as a "conspiracy theory party" (Chūnichi Shimbun 2022; Fahey 2023; Fujikura 2022; Hatakeyama and Fujikura 2023). We find Sanseitō to be of particular interest as a case study because it is arguably unique in the degree to which its conspiracy beliefs are integrated into the party. We therefore echo this categorization but also propose a distinction between parties who center conspiracy theories in their worldview and identity, presumably for reasons of genuine belief, and parties for whom conspiracy theories are a political tool deployed for reasons of strategic consideration in support of a worldview centered on other forms of belief or ideology; in the latter case the conspiracy beliefs themselves are rarely integral to the identity of the party (Bergmann 2018; de Jonge 2021a; Hannan 2024; Maly 2024). Other contemporary fringe parties known for mobilizing conspiracy theories, such as the Forum voor Democratie (FvD) in the Netherlands, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), have behaved like "Trojan horses" of sorts: They each started out presenting themselves as much less radical parties and only revealed the extent of their conspiracy belief positions after achieving some degree of electoral breakthrough (de Jonge 2021b: Ch. 6). Meanwhile, the conspiracy belief positions recently adopted by mainstream parties such as the US Republican Party (which has, for example, largely embraced conspiratorial beliefs about the outcome of the 2020 Presidential election) and the UK Conservative Party (which has alluded to anti-globalist conspiracy theories around "15 minute city" planning strategies) represent strategic positioning shaped in large part by internal power struggles, changing electoral considerations, and idiosyncratic beliefs and are generally expressed in the form of dog-whistle statements that conspiracy theory believers will understand to refer to their beliefs but which will likely not be understood as such by ordinary citizens, thus allowing the party to maintain a degree of deniability (Bergmann 2024; Pirro and Taggart 2023).

In contrast to the instrumental and strategic use of conspiracy beliefs and rhetoric seen in other parties, Sanseitō centers conspiratorial ideas across a wide swathe of its political positions, and while it is not above employing dog-whistle strategies to deal with confrontation or challenge over its beliefs (as referenced above), it is more often explicit in its expressions. Many of the political issues addressed by the party are prima facie attributed to the designs of a "global elite" or its surrogates—a worldview in line with "a theory of power, of its practices and representations in which plots, pacts, secrecy and concealment play a decisive and central part." (Giry and Tika 2020: 114). Indeed, Sanseitō's conspiracy narrative provides both the parameters of a struggle against an overwhelming enemy—a grand global conspiracy that has weakened and undermined the nation—and a set of behaviors and contexts through which the believer may reestablish a degree of control, promising a heroic arc that is backed up by a community offering encouragement and a national political party providing legitimacy. This approach is encapsulated by its 2024 Lower House election posters, which show a fierce-looking young man drawn in the style of Japanese animation grasping the Japanese flag and emblazoned with the slogan "Don't [underestimate/look down on] Japan!" (日本をなめるな), which can be read both as an address to those who have lost faith in Japan's economic revitalization and as a battle cry against the nation's purported oppressors. The role of such narratives in politics and of storytelling as something that state and non-state actors engage in for the purposes of, broadly speaking, shoring up a stable collective identity, providing interpretations of political reality, and delineating the bounds of reasonable action is well established (Bukh 2020; Shenhav 2015; Subotić 2016; 2019). In the case of conspiracy beliefs, narratives attempt to represent the totality of social life on the basis of a coherent, if dubious, set of epistemic assumptions and aesthetic conventions (Jameson 1988; Melley 2000; Rice 2020). Chief among these formal elements is a Manichean struggle of good against evil—a simplistic, black-and-white belief that "political events are the consequence of a contest between good people and malevolent people" (Oliver and Wood 2014: 953; Anker 2014; Crockford 2021). Individual conspiracy narratives nearly always posit the existence of some sort of ongoing threat (others such as flat-earth conspiracy theories are of questionable political use). They habitually emphasize and exaggerate dangers, imbuing the shadowy forces behind the conspiracy with near-impregnable authority and power.

This combination of a comprehensive narrative and a call to action against a vaguely defined threat makes the political expression of a conspiracy worldview something inherently dangerous to democratic values. On the surface, such beliefs appear to be anxiety-inducing and destabilizing to both personal and group identities (van Prooijen 2020;

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van Prooijen 2024). Moreover, engagement with conspiracy theories presupposes and reaffirms feelings of distrust of established institutions and narratives—they revolve around troubling "truths" that have been purposefully hidden from view (de León, Makhortykh, and Adam 2024). Van Prooijen (2024) argues that belief in conspiracy theories has a group-oriented component that plays out in "symbolic motivations for a positive social identity and the realistic motivations to prepare the [in]group for intergroup conflicts" (13). Consequently, non-normative political actions, up to and including violence, may seem justified to the conspiracy believer (Jungkunz, Fahey, and Hino 2024). Demelius and Szczepanska (2024) examine the conspiracy group YamatoQ —which also emerged in Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic, initially localizing QAnon-related and anti-vaccine narratives before moving toward more religious and cult-like messaging—and show an extreme example of how communities that form around conspiracy theories can fall into a cycle of radicalization, with the conspiracy beliefs becoming more extreme and esoteric while the community becomes more close-knit and insular. YamatoQ proposed setting up village communes for its believers, and 14 of its members were eventually arrested for breaking into vaccination clinics —a local, contemporary example of the "intergroup conflicts" to which van Prooijen (2024) refers being enacted in the real world.

In the next section, we will turn to the construction of this worldview in more detail, focusing in particular on the official rhetoric of its campaigns, Diet activities, and official publications, and the videos on its YouTube channel.

Sanseitō's conspiracy worldview

Origins in the conservative movement

Sanseitō was founded in 2020 by former Japan Restoration Party Diet member Matsuda Manabu (who became party leader), former local politician Kamiya Sōhei, former Japanese Communist Party secretary Shinohara Jōichirō, international politics analyst Watase Yūya, and the conservative YouTube influencer KAZUYA. Of the original founders, only Matsuda and Kamiya remain, and only Kamiya is currently a board member. Most of the founders operated independent YouTube channels promoting conservative perspectives on political topics, and this connection to influencer culture continues to inform the party's strategy, organization, and ideology. Indeed, Sanseitō appeared to have been set up initially as a political nexus for the online right and a relatively conventional right-wing digital party with an active YouTube channel. After some of its prominent early backers left, it fully embraced a more extreme position on the COVID-19 pandemic (see for example KAZUYA Channel 2021). Sanseitō consequently came to public prominence on this platform of vaccine skepticism, which has since been adopted more widely by the online conservative media ecosystem. It has subsequently come to be known more generally as a conspiracy theory party owing to its promotion of a broader conspiratorial worldview that touches on nearly all of Japan's major political debates.

Kamiya succeeded Matsuda as leader of the party in 2023, though he already had a high degree of influence over the party after many of the other founders left. Kamiya began his political career as a local assembly member in 2007 and unsuccessfully ran for national office as an LDP candidate in 2012. He started his own business and YouTube channel in 2013, diverting most of his attention to these until 2018, which is when he claims to have begun planning to start a new party (Kamiya 2022: 22). Many of the ideas and experiences he developed throughout his career became major pillars of the Sanseitō project, particularly his interest in education policy and in conservative online influencer strategies. Indeed, the centrality of YouTube is one of the most notable characteristics of Sanseitō. Its initial founders all ran or were deeply involved with YouTube channels. Both Kamiya and Matsuda continue to use their separate YouTube channels—ChannelGrandStrategy and Matsuda Policy Research Institute Channel (松田政策研究所チャンネル), respectively—to promote their views and policies (Figure 1). At times, the host of a video or those guests invited to speak on one channel may note that the conversation will be continued on the other, an important clue pointing toward the porous nature of party communication, which often flows beyond official party channels and into the personal communication channels of its senior members.

Kamiya began early attempts at organizing conservative politicians across the nation through an initiative called the Ryōma Project in 2010—its most notable member perhaps being the ultraconservative Sugita Mio, who went on to become an LDP lawmaker known for her off-color remarks on the "comfort women" issue and the rights of LGBT people. His YouTube channel was also established at a time when other conservatives were attempting similar moves to online content, including the nativist Channel Sakura and anti-South Korea writer Mihashi Takaaki (Hall 2021; Itō 2019). Conservative topics discussed in these communities have taken on conspiratorial overtones that long predate the formation of Sanseitō. Debates on the truth of Japanese military actions during the second Sino-Japanese war, the forceful recruitment of women for the military's "comfort women" stations, the purpose of US policy during the occupation, and other contentious topics are sometimes (though certainly not always) rendered through the lens of conspiracy narratives. It is, for instance, suggested that enemies of Japan coordinate to manufacture evidence of war crimes for the purpose of diminishing Japan's global standing or to acquire financial reparations. These stances have at times made their way into the political sphere but never as the core of a (successful) electoral party strategy (Hall 2023).

Sanseitō achieved its initial electoral successes by occupying a niche through its opposition to pandemic measures—what we call its primary policy innovation. The discourses we pay attention to in this article relate to the ways in which it has linked those issues to a variety of other political topics, including the extant conspiracy theories within the narratives of the broader online right-wing and—vice versa—linked those topics back to its platform.

Less immediately electorally relevant than its positioning on the pandemic, but still important to note owing to how it

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helps shape the party's identity for its members and leadership, is its official set of positive claims about the Japan it envisions. The party's constitution, for instance, describes a traditionally nativist ideology dedicated to "the defense of Japan's national interests and bringing about a great harmony (大諤和, *daichōwa*) in the world" (Sanseitō 2020). This is an ethnopluralist idea of the international system in which a fully sovereign Japan can project its own "inherent" values of tolerance and coexistence. The party constitution also outlines a nationalism based on the centrality of the institution of the emperor, Japan's autonomy, dedication to the advancement of humanity, and the development of "a model of the harmonious society using Japanese spirituality and tradition" (Sanseitō 2020). While these views are not innovative—being more or less derived from ideas that are in common circulation among Japan's nationalist right—they provide a baseline identity and vision for Sanseitō. Their overlap with the views of much more established nationalist actors gives a degree of familiarity and legitimacy to the recently established party. Sanseitō also offers its own unique additions to this vision. Its outspoken views on vaccines and other pandemic countermeasures shaped its public image as a strong proponent of bodily sovereignty—protecting citizens' bodies from external and often vaguely defined threats such as toxins and brainwashing—and freedom from the externalities caused by international companies. These elements come together as a future-oriented vision that connects to the panic that they purport the Japanese are experiencing over their perceived lack of agency in the face of globalized capitalism, offering as a salve a nationalist project that can prop Japan up against these forces.

Anti-globalism

The vision presented above relies on acceptance of a conspiracy worldview in which "globalism" is presented as the political and moral antithesis to the party's vision of "a great harmony" and a product of evil forces that keep virtuous people, or nations, from prevailing. This Manichean conflict provides the conspiracy worldview with an ordered reality, even as specific narratives within the belief system are preoccupied with ways in which that order is being undermined.

A description of who these elites are is available in Sanseitō's official platform publication, released before the 2024 Lower House election, which is written in a question (Q)-and-answer (A) format:

> Q31: What, concretely, is the meaning of the "global elite" and "international financial capitalists" that Sanseitō members talk about?
>
> A: The "global elite" is the general term used to denote those people who promote things that are outside of the authority of individual nations such as unified markets and international institutions in order to pursue economic profit. "International financial capitalists" refers to those who have made their wealth through trade and finance since the beginning of the modern era, moved the financial markets of the City and Wall Street, invest in global corporations, and have great influence over politics, academia, and the media through the power of their capital. (Kamiya 2024: 116–117)

Notably, this formulation has been changed since the party's previously published *Sanseitō Q&A Book* (Kamiya 2022). In that book, as noted by others (e.g., Fujikura 2022), the same question is asked instead about "that cabal" (あの勢力, *ano seiryoku*), which the answer explains refers to "a number of organisations centered on Jewish international finance capital" (ユダヤ系の国障金 蝠貫本を中心とする種数の組織, Kamiya 2022: 95). The party distanced itself from this formulation after facing criticism (*Nippon TV News* 2022). In the more recent publication, the section goes on to explain that global elites are, in sum, "those who have created a scheme to make it easier to do business by using money to effect political change and establish international institutions, which are then deployed to relax the regulations of the governments of each country" (Kamiya 2024: 118). Examples given of such global elites include the aforementioned George Soros and various corporations who support international institutions. For instance, Sanseitō describes amendments proposed to the International Health Regulations (IHR) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as potentially allowing the World Health Organization to force vaccines onto populations to the financial benefit of the companies that produce them (Kamiya 2024: 83–85). With a few exceptions, the exact identities of the global elites are rarely clear in these narratives, but the corporations and institutions involved are often named or otherwise strongly hinted at. Ideas such as "global standards" and "political correctness" are claimed to similarly serve a "global agenda" to homogenize and control other nations, suggesting an aspect of globalist control that is ideational, not merely economic or profit-motivated (Kamiya 2024: 88–90).

Although globalists are by definition not limited to particular nation states, Sanseitō weaves an anti-China narrative into its anti-globalist worldview by attributing similar motivations and modus operandi to both. In particular, it considers the real threat posed by China not to be military but rather a "silent invasion" perpetrated by financial means (Kamiya 2024: 199). In one YouTube video warning against the "purchasing spree" (爆貸い, *bakugai*) of Japanese land by Chinese capital, a prefectural assembly member and a party organizer give an overview of areas they suspect to have been bought for nefarious purposes (Sanseitō 2023b). The description the video gives of the efforts it took to find out who bought the land or the interests that the purchases serve ties in with other claims about globalists abusing international flows of capital, although in this case it is linked to state goals. Questions to the government about policies vis-a-vis Chinese capital and spy networks in Japan have taken up a sizeable portion of Sanseitō's activities in the National Diet. The party's emphasis on China as a totalitarian surveillance state also facilitates parallels with their anti-globalism narrative, as the purported goal of the globalists is likewise to turn the world into a highly micromanaged society.

The goal of the globalists in Sanseitō's worldview is to keep Japan weak to continue extracting profit and resources with minimal resistance. Explicit here is the claim that Japan is *already* a nation devitalized, despoiled, and made acquiescent, with its education system purposefully designed

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to ensure that Japanese citizens forget their historical legacy and do not feel pride for their nation. Sanseitō argues that, while the "global elite" operate on a massive scale, Japan features especially prominently in their plans for profit, claiming that globalists see Japan as an "economic plantation" (Kamiya 2024: 133–134) and treat its population as little more than "guinea pigs" (モルモット) (Seikei yukkuri channeru Sanseitō 2022). Sanseitō claims, for instance, that Japan is among the largest consumers of chemical substances in the world through imported foods, medication, and vaccines (Kamiya 2024: 32), and argues that the Japanese people are kept mostly ignorant of what is being done to their bodies and minds.

The narrative offered for how this targeted and insidious oppression of Japan and its citizens has been accomplished centers on the postwar settlement in which, it claims, a US-led occupation made Japan weak and subservient. Specifically, Sanseitō subscribes to the theory that the Japanese people have been taught a "masochistic" version of history as a result of occupation policy (Sanseitō 2024c. See also Kamiya 2019). However, Sanseitō claims that Japan's victimization by the forces of globalism began much earlier than that. The party explains almost every major historical event that had an impact on Japan, from the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century onwards, through the lens of globalism—including the 1853 arrival of US Navy Commodore Matthew Perry (who was "backed by international financial capital" (Yoshino and Kamiya 2022: 155)), the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), and the Pacific War (Kamiya 2024: 121–127). It claims that, during the US occupation of Japan, "international finance capitalists" installed their agents in positions of power while ousting those who refused to comply. Sanseitō's official rhetoric also attributes the recent rise in the strength of "international global capitalists" to a generational shift (Kamiya 2024: 138–140); as those leaders who were educated during the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–1926) eras grew old and passed away, Japan was left to be ruled by postwar generations who bought into the individualism and materialism that the occupation forces had sought to instill in the population (Kamiya 2024: 132–134). This, the party claims, was the design of the occupation forces—to impose a postwar education system that would make Japan into easy pickings for the global elites.

Much of this aligns closely with existing conspiratorial claims by other nativist movements, with the idea that Japan's education system is "masochistic" and undermines the nation's strength being a popular narrative even among mainstream right-wing groups (Hall 2021). As with many nationalist and nativist groups in Japan, discussions of history take up a large proportion of Sanseitō's texts, videos, and members-only lectures. Since the party recruits various authors and political figures to speak on these topics, not all views expressed through Sanseitō's media outlets necessarily reflect the official stance of the party. What is certain, however, is that much of the material presented is derived from outside the mainstream of historical research and that it usually serves the party's framing of Japan's history as a narrative of victimization by malicious forces.

Gender and family

A key differentiator of Sanseitō with previous conservative movements is the extent of the attention it gives to child rearing policy. It has also managed to successfully recruit and put forward younger women as candidates and public figures even as it criticizes practices of gender quotas and other pro-equality measures. The party often speaks out on the declining birthrate, criticizing the policies of the ruling coalition as counterproductive. This dovetails with its skepticism of vaccinations, which is a topic they often represent as an important issue for parents uncertain about whether or not to vaccinate their children and a question of parental rights for those who choose not to do so.

Social movement scholar Suzuki (2019) argues that Japan's women-centric conservative movements should be understood as a form of a women's movement because they are often drawn in by their legitimate grievances toward the low value of care work in contemporary society (308). She notes, for instance, that official government policy, particularly the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society enacted in 1999, resulted in a backlash from those who could not or chose not to conform to the new standards it set out for women as active participants in the workforce (Suzuki 2019: 19). Kamiya, in a passionate speech that was recorded and uploaded to YouTube, describes the M-curve (named for the shape of the curve in women's average incomes caused by the decline after they take time out of their careers for child rearing) as "a wondrous thing" (すばらしい) and claims that it is precisely because the government wishes to end the M-curve that women are struggling so hard to achieve their goals in life (Sanseitō 2024l).

Nevertheless, Sanseitō also engages in anti-feminist and gender-critical rhetoric, which is where its reliance on its conspiracy worldview—including aspects imported from conspiracy narratives overseas—returns to the fore. It has taken a strongly critical stance toward both the LGBT recognition law of 2023 and the debate on separate surnames for married couples, in both cases referencing what it claims is a global conspiracy to undermine family values. Sanseitō lawmaker Yoshikawa Rina has argued in the Diet that the introduction of separate surnames risks "destroying tradition and the fundament of society." She specifically notes that the debate is influenced by "critical race theory and the radical gender movement which both originate from Marxism," citing the conspiracy theory book *The Naked Communist* by W. Cleon Skousen (originally written in 1958 but recently rereleased) (Sanseitō 2024n). In this way, serious grievances are discursively tied back into a web of conspiracy theories as evidence or warrant for a broader belief.

Media distrust and alternatives

Similar to the conservative movements that preceded it, Sanseitō evinces a deep distrust of the media establishment. Anti-establishment media emerged in the 1990s and 2000s in print media, eventually evolving into a broader YouTube and social media ecosystem (Hall 2021; Itō 2019; see also Kajiwara 2024 for a primary account of the motivations behind anti-establishment conservative magazines). The mechanisms of

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Figure 1: Hayashi Chikatsu in conversation with Kamiya Sōhei. The text in the slide adapts the wording of the 1944 Hyde Park Aide-Mémoire, an agreement between President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill regarding the use of the atomic bomb on Japan (ChGrandStrategy 2024).

this in the case of Sanseitō are mostly the same as those already touched upon: The party claims that media corporations are subject to the financialized power of elites who seek to abuse the legitimacy and reach of the media to spread propaganda in favor of their agendas. While this is a similar construction to Sanseitō's narrative about many other institutions and organizations, we argue that it constitutes a distinct element of its worldview because it implies a particular idea of how knowledge functions. Sanseitō claims that resisting the globalist conspiracy requires countering the dominance of mass media, to which end it operates (and is itself part of) a media ecology of alternative sources of information. It encourages members to inform themselves by engaging with more and more media produced by the party and its allies, tying values of learning and research (within the conspiracist information ecology) to its participatory ethics. Part of the party's pitch to potential members is that "inputting Sanseitō's message will change your world" and "allow you to see the truth behind the mass media's false information (嘘情報)" (Sanseitō 2021). This message of "awakening" a slumbering people (see for instance Yoshino and Kamiya 2022) suggests an epistemic model that the "awakened" can use to deepen their knowledge. To Sanseitō, media distrust also reflects a desire for alternative epistemologies, or different ways of knowing and understanding the world.

A detailed account of the extent of this media ecology is beyond the scope of this article (moreover, some aspects of the party's media ecosystem are reserved for party members or attendees at events, both of which are vetted and thus not accessible to researchers); we attempt a more complete analysis of this in the context of party competition in an upcoming article. For now we note that the party offers membership perks of various sorts, many of which involve access to additional media not distributed to non-members. Members can also pay extra fees to access lectures conducted through online salons or attend in-person training programs. Perhaps its most important public media venue is its YouTube channel, which serves as a major gateway to the party for anyone interested in joining or supporting it. The content there is well scripted and professionally filmed, with regular guest appearances from well-known personalities from the broader conservative right-wing media ecosystem, and the channel is kept updated on a nearly daily basis. At its inception Sanseitō had a number of successful YouTube influencers in front-facing positions, but some have since left owing to conflicts over party direction. As noted above, both Kamiya and party president Matsuda Manabu had their own successful YouTube channels before joining the party and still operate them as unofficial extensions of the Sanseitō channel. A 2024 video on Kamiya's ChannelGrandStrategy, for instance, features writer Hayashi Chikatsu discussing the "plandemic," which he describes as the "third nuclear attack on Japan" (ChGrandStrategy 2024).

Many of the videos posted on the official channel similarly position themselves as revealing truths that the media refuses to report. In early 2024, the party took this position to its logical conclusion, creating its own news show by the name of *News from Akasaka*, which features, alongside Sanseitō's own politicians and candidates, guests from a variety of conservative right-wing organizations and publications, including regular writers for the *Sankei Shimbun* (and its English-language publication, *Japan Forward*), representatives from the Happiness Realization Party (see also Havenstein and Schäfer 2024), and commentators from overseas conservative outlets such as *Fox News* (Figure 2). The

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Figure 2: *News from Akasaka* episode featuring Oikawa Yukihisa discussing the WHO (Sanseitō 2024d).

presence of such guests arguably helps legitimize Sanseitō as a regular part of the conservative right-wing political spectrum, in spite of its radical conspiratorial views.

Sanseitō's distrust of the media establishment is an inseparable component of its worldview that is mobilized across every subject it addresses, but it plays a particularly large role in its narratives about health (including food, medication, and COVID-19 vaccines) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. On these topics, Sanseitō has largely followed the scripts adopted by conspiracy entrepreneurs in other countries (and in the case of the war in Ukraine, those favored by the Kremlin; Schäfer and Kalashnikova 2024). These are alternative interpretations of events that reinforce the belief that the real truth is either purposefully hidden by powerful actors or otherwise obscured owing to willful incompetence. For instance, in one *News from Akasaka* video, Kamiya reports on his efforts in the Diet to uncover the link between COVID-19 vaccines and reported adverse health effects:

> Kamiya: I raised this in [the Committee on Financial Affairs] previously, but the amount of compensation for vaccine after effects originally prepared by the government was 360 million yen. The actual amount that they decided to pay out was 39.4 billion yen. They paid 110 times more . . . . This means that the damages were one hundred times what was foreseen. I asked [the government] "how about you admit that this is not right?" But they don't want to admit that. So, a patient association was established, right? More than a 1,000 people suffering from after effects created an association, and we opened a Diet member caucus together and told the people at the Ministry of Labor and Health to properly recognise the side effects, or rather, after effects. There have only been two cases recognised as clearly caused by the jab (*ochūsha*).
>
> Host: Two cases?
>
> Kamiya: Yes. The others were determined to have been from unknown causes.
>
> Host: No way!
>
> Kamiya: Indeed (Sanseitō 2024e).

Here, Kamiya is drawing attention to the discrepancy caused by Japan's no-fault compensation system, in which compensation can be paid out to claimants without acknowledgment that the vaccine caused the symptoms in question (Japan has had this system in place since 1976; see Gordon and Reich 2021). Kamiya goes on to claim that the official government data do not match that gathered by a professor at Nagoya University, which suggests a disparity that Sanseitō is investigating. With regards to health issues more generally, Sanseitō's distrust of both the media and the medical and scientific establishment leads to a constant search for information on alternative health practices, mirroring the rise of conspiracy narratives in health and "wellness" circles documented in other countries (Baker 2022). Sanseitō's promotion, for instance, of a book detailing how to detox oneself from the effects of the mRNA vaccine (Sanseitō 2024j) is part of an identity of self-sufficiency and "doing your own research" that it promotes.

This section of the article attempted to make a case for understanding Sanseitō's particularistic claims—some of which are bounded up with legitimate grievances that arguably lack political representation elsewhere—as emerging from or systematically incorporated into a conspiracy worldview. We now move onto an analysis of how this worldview is leveraged by the party as a nascent political ideology.

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Conspiracy as political ideology

Sanseitō presents a rather unique model of political action. It began by leveraging the fairly narrow policy innovation of opposing pandemic measures, a policy for which there existed demand but that no mainstream party could easily adopt. More important, however, is that it has continued to grow in spite of the diminishing salience of COVID-19 in electoral politics. We therefore want to also highlight its other innovations by working from two observations that differentiate Sanseitō: (1) its attempts to expand the salience of its narrow set of owned policies through a nascent ideology and (2) the construction of a membership-oriented party capable of funding its ambitious political activities.

A holistic worldview

A consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic was the politicization of large swathes of voters into new anti-establishment positions (Fahey 2023). Sanseitō emerged in the first instance as a party that could capitalize on these new trends. It might stand to reason, then, that the decline of the salience of the pandemic would therefore lead to a decrease in support for the party, but quite to the contrary, there is much to suggest that the rise of COVID-19 denial or anti-vaccine positions in mainstream politics is a symptom of a larger shift in voters' relationship to political information that was accelerated by (rather than contingent on) the pandemic (DiResta 2024; Klein 2023; Rothschild 2021). The proliferation of conspiracy theories at a time of extreme insecurity and interest in alternative sources of information elevated the platforms of political actors who could successfully ride the wave. Indeed, Ico Maly has shown how political actors used the COVID-19 pandemic as a stepping stone to "infuse a metapolitical understanding of the current order as being liberal and bad for the people" (Maly 2024: 182), thereby linking a narrow political position to a larger belief about the political system by way of a symbiotic relationship with algorithmic technologies. In particular, as platforms seek to use their algorithms for profit, so do political actors develop strategies and ideas in tandem. To that end, conspiracy theories "provide alternative views and new hypotheses to understand reality and form the largely ungrabbable building blocks that facilitate communication among members of such newly and rapidly emerging groups," centered around the shared acknowledgment that "'the elites,' including scientists, politicians and journalists, are creating a fake world" (Maly 2024: 299). Considering long-term beliefs that Sanseitō's founders and collaborators have about Japanese politics and the conservative movement, and their similar use of social media channels, an analogous process occurred in the context of an emerging political party who could, by dint of its being outside of the establishment, successfully innovate an anti-pandemic policy position.

It is of existential importance for the party that it expands its appeal beyond its pandemic policies. Endō and Tabei have shown that pandemic policy was a heavily salient factor in party preference, and the only meaningfully salient policy area for Sanseitō in 2023 (Endō and Tabei 2024: 122–126). There is little reliable data before this point because Sanseitō was not recognized as an official party until after its 2022 election results, so few surveys included the party as an option for respondents. Other research has made the connection between anti-vaccination stances and party support clear in an alternative fashion, including the paper rebutted by Sanseitō in the press event described earlier in the article (Toriumi et al. 2024). It is likely that voters' stances on the pandemic continued to lead them to Sanseitō in the 2024 general election, but anti-establishment parties across the board, including the Japanese Conservative Party and Reiwa Shinsengumi, benefited from voters shifting away from the mainstream political parties (Mizushima 2024).

Regardless of the pandemic's likely drop in salience, Sanseitō remains staunchly dedicated to criticizing pandemic policy and the COVID-19 vaccines, even making it a key focus of its 2024 general election campaign. This anti-vaccine position is notably linked to the belief that Japan is uniquely victimized; its official policy platform for the election likened Japan to "the world's experimentation laboratory" (世界の実験場) (Sanseitō 2024h). Such claims mesh with its demand for an overhaul of the education system it sees as tainted by an occupation-era policy goal of "keeping the Japanese from having pride in their nation and regaining a strong country," (Sanseitō 2024h), which is being perpetuated in the present day by the same or similarly motivated actors. A final, more tenuous but nonetheless interesting link is made by its policy platform on constitutional reform. Sanseitō's policy at the time was in favor of reform in principle but opposed the LDP's plans for constitutional reform (which proposed the establishment of new emergency powers) owing to the fear that the World Health Organization could unilaterally call a state of emergency under the new powers (Sanseitō 2024h). The motivations for why the WHO would do so, how national sovereignty could be threatened in this way, and to what ultimate end all this would occur are left out of the platform but are explicated in more detail throughout the rest of the party's social media channels and its publications.

The party's questions in the committees of the National Diet also reflect a move from a niche, single-issue policy innovation to broader topics of education, gender equality, immigration, renewable energy, foreign capital, and security. Since the party has so far not shied away from expressing its conspiratorial views, it is notable that the Diet questions that are elaborated on its YouTube channel often have no direct relationship to a particular conspiracy narrative. In these sessions the party is careful to present itself as a party with broad appeal that is working in the interest of the people. In the context of a media ecosystem in which each piece of content is part of a wider web, it nevertheless serves to keep in mind how seemingly disparate policy positions can easily be mobilized as evidence of a conspiracy. We have seen so far that Sanseitō deploys narrow, provable claims to back its broader beliefs. As noted earlier with regards to Yoshikawa's invocation of a global Marxist plot against Japanese tradition or Chinese capital buying up land in service of some unspecified agenda, specific concerns are easily tied into an overarching conspiracy through which interest in one topic demands that one also pay attention to another topic.

The electoral potential of this strategy was evident in the 2025 Upper House election campaign. Sanseitō campaigned for

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Figure 3: Kamiya Sōhei and Oikawa Yukihisa supporting Sanseitō candidate Yoshikawa Rina. Yoshikawa was the party's candidate for the Tokyo 15th District by-election in April 2024 (Sanseitō 2024a). She now has a seat in the Lower House of the National Diet.

that election on its usual slate of policies, but its slogan of "Japanese First" placed particular focus on the party's anti-foreigner and anti-immigration platform, which stated that it would undo the "extreme acceptance of foreigners" (Sanseitō 2025). To some extent, it seemed as though it was moving away from the tapped-out issue of vaccine denial to instead occupy a position with a potentially broader electoral appeal. In doing so, the party was adopting a strategy more similar to European counterparts such as the German Alternative für Deutschland and the French Rassemblement National, capitalizing on a mixture of xenophobia with rising economic anxiety and insecurity due, in part, to the perception of China as a rising threat in the Asian region. The conspiratorial basis for these appeals was never far from the surface, however. They were explicitly connected in the speeches of the party candidates and leader to the transnational structure of globalism, with rising immigration being merely a symptom of the broader globalist conspiracy. To some degree, this made the immigration issue—which arose suddenly in the weeks before the election and seemed to leave many parties unsure of how to respond—into a natural fit for Sanseitō, who could slot it comfortably into a worldview that already blames foreign elites and globalization for the immiseration of the Japanese people. This consistent framing of the unexpectedly salient immigration issue also allowed for a relatively smooth transition back to its broader platform after the election.

The globalization of anti-globalism

While many of the conspiracy theories entertained by Sanseitō are derived from a longer history of domestic discourses, some of the most trafficked ones are transposed from other contexts, including many about COVID-19 and the aforementioned references to *The Naked Communist*. An anti-globalist worldview in conjunction with highly networked movements and parties abroad which posit similar ideas expands the imagined community of Sanseitō supporters beyond national borders, granting a sense of scale and clout to otherwise fringe groups. This conspiracy worldview may be particularly well suited to connecting a globalized right-wing identity even as each participating group retains a claim to being a national movement. As Maly (2024) notes, conspiracy theories bring about a "sharedness that allows members of [the different niches of the global right] to see themselves as kindred spirits, as victims of the system, of the elites" (299). Mello and Estre (2023) have also found similar usages of themes of globalism on social media across national contexts, where it is used consistently to refer to "a conspiracy uniting China, international organizations, Marxists, the political establishment, the media, feminists, LGBTQIA+ and anti-racists," suggesting that it is a discourse highly suited to populist politics that is sensitive to domestic contexts (150).

As noted by other articles in this series (Havenstein and Schäfer 2024; Schäfer and Kalashnikova 2024) and recent research (DiResta 2024; Maly 2018; 2024; Mansuy 2022), both "organic" and state-led conspiracy narratives support intentional and unintentional transnational alliances between different conspiracy entrepreneurs, right-wing populist political parties, and other fringe movements (Figures 3 and 4). Sanseitō has not, so far, developed strong international links to other parties, although it has fostered connections to some actors on an ad hoc basis, including through its participation in the Conservative Political Action

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Conference (CPAC) Japan events. Sanseitō politicians and candidates express affinity with the policies of parties such as FvD and AfD, as well as the US Republican party under Trump. Electoral successes on the part of anti-globalist parties abroad are remarked upon as "wind in the [party's] sails" (Sanseitō 2024k), while many videos on party-affiliated YouTube channels looked expectantly to a victory for Donald Trump in the 2024 US presidential election, praise the Trump-aligned Heritage Foundation for its remarks to the Davos conference (Sanseitō 2024f), and so on. This sense of an international community is often invoked by Sanseitō politicians in claims that their positions are already mainstream in other nations and that Japan is particularly behind on global political trends. They claim, for instance, that many EU states have already "become aware of the ludicrousness of the activities of the global elites" but that Japan remains behind the curve because its media is fully under the control of globalists (Kamiya 2024: 118–119). It presents these various overseas actors as proof of a worldwide wave of resistance against the forces of globalism that Sanseitō points toward as an extension of its own efforts.

Much of this importing work is done by specific "conspiracy entrepreneurs" (Harambam 2020) who are recruited by Sanseitō to make content, become candidates, hold lectures, or support campaigns. These individuals show up on different parts of the Japanese network of conservative social media channels to promote their fringe ideas on a variety of topics (often promoting a book at the same time), with publicly available expense reports revealing that in some cases they also receive payment for their service. In one video, Sanseitō candidate Yamanaka Sen repeats conspiracy narratives regarding the decision-making and motivations of Anthony Fauci, former Chief Medical Advisor to the US President. He begins by conveniently reimagining recent history to claim that Fauci, who was Trump's chief medical advisor, was actually purged by him alongside "those deeply enmeshed (*zubuzubu*) with the WHO and globalists" only to return under Biden. He continues:

> What I think he did that was criminally awful—at the time there were already 3,000 researchers around the world, working on ways to deal with this other than jabs . . . There were various countermeasures, like "iv-something-tin" and "chloro-something" (*Yamanaka self-censored the words "ivermectin" and "chloroquine"*) as well as lots of other drugs around the world that were said to be effective, but they kept saying that those things didn't work, that they were dangerous, or that they were conspiracy theories . . . (Sanseitō 2024m)

Yamanaka's statements here are broadly in line with common conspiracy narratives about COVID-19—i.e., that alternative cures and treatments were suppressed in favor of the vaccines. Later in the video, one of the hosts makes a direct comparison between Fauci's imagined role in the conspiracy and Japan's former chair of the Infectious Disease Panel, Omi Shigeru—a good example of the localization of international conspiracy theories that is common in these videos.

Conspiracy as community

Shared conspiracy beliefs can also provide a foundation and organizing principle for a community (Crockford 2021; Franks et al. 2017), and Sanseitō's specific modes of organizing as a political party are intended to leverage the advantages of this structure. Parties possess resources, institutionalize rituals, and give access to symbolic and material rewards through participation (Faucher-King 2005; Gaxie 2005; Scarrow 2015; Whiteley and Seyd 2002). Emphasizing these aspects is particularly important for a party that relies on a committed membership (for funding, volunteering, campaigning, etc.) and thus needs to convince a section of its supporters to do more than simply vote for its platform. Political parties only receive government funding after receiving a minimum percentage of votes or seats in the National Diet; funding has to come from elsewhere until that is achieved. Sanseitō began in 2020 with a tiered, monthly membership system akin to subscription services (unlike most other parties' yearly membership dues). According to the party's financial statements (which are released yearly on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication), its income from membership dues alone was 25.5 million, 32.8 million, 335 million, and 448 million yen, respectively, in its first 4 years. This is a very significant sum for a niche party, and these numbers also imply that, through this highly engaged membership, Sanseitō must also have access to a significant pool of volunteer labor.

In exchange for dues, Sanseitō members receive benefits depending on their tier. Some of them are real-life benefits—access to offline gatherings, for instance—but most are online (Figure 5). These include access to exclusive chat groups but most importantly to exclusive video and audio content. Indeed, while Sanseitō's extensive use of the internet to create and sustain is broadly in line with our understanding of contemporary digital parties (Gerbaudo 2019), it is intended to provide the party with an advantage in the traditional model of party competition, rather than to upset or revolutionize that model itself. It uses social media and online platforms to organize members, to train the more activist among them, and to mobilize them to discrete ends—leveraging a community motivated by its conspiracy worldview to overcome disadvantages in reach and organization that have historically dogged fringe political parties.

This cost/benefit analysis is incomplete without some interpretation of the party's pitch to its potential members. The cost of entry is, after all, quite high regardless of the benefits, especially if one keeps in mind the social costs associated with both joining a party and, moreover, joining one that many consider to have fringe beliefs. Party activism around the world has become increasingly disconnected from wider society, and the associated opportunity cost has grown as the skills and symbolic rewards attained within parties have come to hold less and less stock outside of them (Gaxie 2005). Conspiracy theory groups, however, have seen significant growth in recent years. Conspiracy narratives have a specific type of appeal with regard to participatory politics and potential influence over political institutions, as they can offer members who otherwise feel very disconnected from or even threatened by mainstream politics meaningful opportunities for political action.

Personal stories of awakening to the reality of the world and of the forces that control it (for instance, through self-

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Figure 4: Another conspiracist, Oikawa Yukihisa, is a frequent guest on *News from Akasaka* (Sanseitō 2024d). Sanseitō videos featuring Oikawa are some of the most viewed content on the channel.

Figure 5: The fifth edition of Sanseitō's DIY School program. The featured speaker claims that there is an explosion of excess deaths that cannot be attributed to COVID-19 nor aging and that the media is avoiding the topic. The speaker claims that his lecture will "impart the courage to take action" (Sanseitō 2024b).

education and the participatory politics that Sanseitō offers) are central components of a conspiracy worldview and a key pillar of how a community constructs itself as an in-group of fellow travelers (Crockford 2021; Franks et al. 2017). Sanseitō's name and slogan has always stressed the collaborative and participatory goals of the party ("There is no party we want to vote for, so let us make one from scratch ourselves," (投票したい政党がないから、乩分たちでゼロからつくる) (Sanseitō 2024g, 5)). Their membership recruitment page notes the many ways in which normal members can work for the advancement of the party, from helping candidates get elected to their active inclusion in the

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policy formation process (Sanseitō 2021), and their construction of Japan as a nation victimized by shadowy forces makes it easy for the "awakened" few to regard their contributions to the party—financial or otherwise—as important blows struck in a heroic battle. Sanseitō explicitly delves into the melodramatic—likening its politicians to superheroes and even titling its 2023 convention "hero's rising" [sic]. As institutions that face the challenge of pushing routine work onto excited volunteer supporters and members, political parties can benefit from narratives such as these that reinvest agency and purpose into mundane tasks (Chen 2012).

Sanseitō's innovation arguably lies in its efforts to bridge the gap between online conspiracy groups and mainstream political parties. It has crafted a professional and sleek public image, together with a (generally speaking) normative pitch to potential members, while encouraging their active participation in the party through its emphasis on access to exclusive knowledge and a conspiracy worldview that gives members a strong sense of being a community of shared purpose with an important common mission. This effectively makes Sanseitō into a kind of halfway house between mainstream political organizations and traditionally socially excluded conspiracy communities. The implications of this for political mobilization could be substantial, although it is difficult to speculate meaningfully on the extent of the impact of this approach at this early stage—further observation of survey data and election results will be required to make that assessment.

The rise of conspiracy politics

Sanseitō's most notable achievement is that it has successfully adapted its conspiracy worldview into a political project that is electorally viable. It speaks to its supporters as more than what we imagine to be the stereotypes of conspiracist loners: people who are distrustful of anyone and anything or "weird" individuals who are easily swayed by extremist claims of fringe influencers and personalities. Instead, they are asked to play an active role in a community that believes that collective political action is possible and meaningful. This makes Sanseitō into an example that defies several popular preconceptions regarding the social nature of the political fringe. It was aided in this by the fact that vaccine skepticism was already an acceptable political topic in Japan, albeit one with a very low ceiling of potential support.

The relative success of Sanseitō's model does not necessarily signal the concomitant rise of a politics of conspiracy. We have emphasized throughout this article the ways in which a conspiracy worldview may potentially answer emotional needs for stability and security. Conspiracy theories are particularly effective at achieving this under conditions of declining trust in mainstream media and the political establishment. Conspiracy worldviews of this kind are, however, accepted to a surprising degree within mainstream Japanese politics. Diet members from the ruling and opposition parties—some of whom have publicly asserted their own conspiracy beliefs—have shared the stage with Sanseitō politicians at events or participated in activities involving the party, implying that there is certainly no mainstream "cordon" around them despite their embrace of conspiracy theories. The willingness of lawmakers from other parties with similar views to participate in bipartisan anti-vaccine and anti-WHO activism suggests a nascent shift toward more overt conspiracy rhetoric that goes beyond Sanseitō itself. During the 2025 Upper House election, there was significant criticism of the newly prominent party from the media and some of its political rivals, and some of the coverage—in particular one of its candidates' appearances on a Russian propaganda station—almost certainly damaged its popularity (Nikkei Shimbun 2025). However, the media and rival parties showed equal fervor in their tacit acceptance of Sanseitō's framing of the election around immigration. Permitting a fringe party with extremist views to set the agenda during the run-up to a national election is largely a consequence of choices made by the media and establishment parties, which in this instance allowed Sanseitō's chosen narratives to dominate political debate in spite of polling data showing that most voters were much more concerned with economic and pocketbook issues than with immigration.

It is important to note that the broader implications of Sanseitō's rise are not unique to Japan. Conspiracy entrepreneurs could well use the same methods to gain prominence in different electoral contexts. In Japan, where the main hurdles are in terms of money, candidates, and media access, Sanseitō's strategy was perfectly suited to overcome these obstacles in the context of a decline in the popularity of the LDP. By way of contrast, this strategy may, for instance, be less workable in systems where the electoral thresholds exclude small parties from receiving seats. With establishment parties in most countries losing support, however, and with algorithmic media becoming a larger and larger part of people's information environments, the electoral advantages of these models are likely to increase over time.

Conclusion

We have argued that Sanseitō espouses a comprehensive political worldview premised on the claim that a global elite exerts massive control over the world in general and Japan in particular (Kamiya 2024: 116–119)—control that is *intentional*, *effective*, and *hidden*, and thus inherently conspiratorial. Rather than simply being a frightening message, this is also delivered as a participatory call to action. The party provides supporters with a variety of ways to engage with the organization and its extended network of far-right influencers, simultaneously socializing supporters into the party's worldview and acquiring funding to overcome the steep financial obstacles that challenger parties face in Japan's electoral system.

This account of Sanseitō differs from other research that has analyzed conspiracy theories through the lenses of populism and far-right radicalism, where such theories are generally used in more consciously strategic ways to achieve political gain. Instead, Sanseitō represents, in the first instance, a coherent *worldview* constructed on a foundation of

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conspiracy belief, with its policies and positions on specific issues being developed against this ideological backdrop of conspiracy. The rising profile and electoral success of a party overtly embracing conspiracy theories has arguably granted these views a degree of legitimacy, allowing ideas that had previously remained quite niche even among supporters of the far right to grow to encompass a larger coalition of anti-establishment voters. Its volunteers working on the ground to support its candidates, the images of their packed rallies, and their appearances on television contribute to their image as a "normal" party. Its success as a party that "says the quiet part out loud" in terms of conspiracy theories may embolden other challengers, or panicking establishment parties, to attempt to establish their own niche—thus further narrowing the already eroded domain of consensus reality shared among Japan's political actors and voters. While its recent successes are no doubt partly a symptom of an anti-establishment moment in global politics, demonstrating the success of such a party and such a strategy will have an influence on Japanese politics that will likely be long-lived regardless of the future electoral fortunes of Sanseitō itself.

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Romeo Marcantuoni is a doctoral candidate at Waseda University Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies and lecturer at several universities in Tokyo, Japan. His dissertation topic is on the emotional dimensions of opposition politics in contemporary Japan, and his research interests include Japanese party politics and the political role of conspiracy theories.

Dr. Robert A. Fahey is an adjunct researcher in political science at the Waseda Institute for Advanced Study in Tokyo, Japan. His research interests include populism, polarization, the effects of conspiracy theory belief, and Japanese politics.

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