Travelling Theory and its Consequences: José Ortega y Gasset and Radical Conservatism in Post-Cold War Japan

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Abstract
The last decade of the Cold War and the early years of the post-Cold War international order saw the emergence of a radical conservatism in Japan which has since taken root as a key ideological force in the country’s conservative political culture. This article traces the neglected but important influence of José Ortega y Grasset’s theory of the masses on this contemporary movement. However, in this journey across time, space, and culture, the theory of mass society has mutated. The article examines the ways in which Japanese radical conservative thinkers Susumu Nishibe and Keishi Saeki interpreted and applied Ortega’s work to critique the development of Japan’s contemporary political landscape. Radical conservatives transformed Ortega’s theory of the modern masses and his argument for elite liberalism into a critique of the liberal international order which favours reactionary nationalism. To understand this shift, the article examines the conceptualisations of modernisation and national identity as a necessary background to such theoretical and political appropriation.

Keywords
radical conservatism, José Ortega y Gasset, Japan, reactionary nationalism, travelling theory

Résumé
La dernière décennie de la guerre froide et les premières années de l’ordre international de l’après-guerre froide ont vu apparaître un conservatisme radical au Japon, qui s’est depuis ancré en tant que force idéologique majeure dans la culture politique conservatrice du pays. Cet article
retrace l’influence négligée mais considérable de la théorie de la société de masses de José Ortega y Gasset sur ce mouvement contemporain. Au cours de son voyage à travers le temps, l’espace et les cultures, cette théorie a toutefois évolué. L’article examine la façon dont les penseurs conservateurs radicaux japonais Susumu Nishibe et Keishi Saeki ont interprété et utilisé le travail d’Ortega pour critiquer le développement du paysage politique contemporain du Japon. Les conservateurs radicaux ont transformé la théorie d’Ortega et son argument sur le libéralisme d’élite en une critique de l’ordre international libéral favorisant le nationalisme réactionnaire. Pour comprendre ce glissement, l’article examine les conceptualisations de la modernisation et de l’identité nationale en tant que contexte nécessaire à une telle appropriation théorique et politique.

**Mots-clés**
Conservatisme radical, José Ortega y Gasset, Japon, nationalisme réactionnaire, théorie voyageuse

**Resumen**
La última década de la Guerra Fría y los primeros años del orden internacional posterior a la Guerra Fría vieron emerger un conservadurismo radical en Japón que desde entonces ha arraigado como una fuerza ideológica clave en la cultura política conservadora del país. Este artículo rastrea la escasamente considerada pero sin embargo importante influencia de la teoría de las masas de José Ortega y Gasset en este movimiento contemporáneo. Sin embargo, en este viaje a través del tiempo, el espacio y la cultura, la teoría de la sociedad de masas cambia. El artículo examina los caminos en los que los pensadores conservadores radicales Susumu Nishibe y Keishi Saeki interpretaron y aplicaron el trabajo de Ortega a la crítica del desarrollo del paisaje político contemporáneo de Japón. Los conservadores radicales transformaron la teoría de las masas modernas de Ortega y su argumento en favor de un liberalismo elitista en una crítica del orden liberal internacional que favorece el nacionalismo reaccionario. Para entender este giro, el artículo examina las conceptualizaciones de la modernización y la identidad nacional como un trasfondo necesario para esta apropiación teórica y política.

**Palabras clave**
conservadurismo radical, José Ortega y Gasset, Japón, nacionalismo reaccionario, teoría viajera

In 2012, Shinzo Abe re-took control of the government for the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) with the campaign slogan ‘Take Back Japan’ (Nihon wo, torimodosu). Since his return to premiership, conservative political culture has increasingly turned reactionary and authoritarian: the Abe government not only centralised policy

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1. All translations from the Japanese are by the author unless otherwise indicated. All names are presented with given name preceding family name.
making in the office of the prime minister and the cabinet, it has also been interventionist in the internal administration of the state broadcaster NHK (Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai) and has had a strong influence on what its international coverage does and does not report. Another notable example is the push towards constitutional revision, which has gained infamy in the debate over Article 9 of the constitution, the so-called ‘Peace Clause’ which prohibits Japan from using military force to resolve international disputes. Proposals go beyond changing Article 9: the stated purpose of reform is for the constitution to “exemplify a more Japanese form of Japan” implying that the current constitution is unrepresentative of the Japanese nation-state. The question thus emerges: for contemporary Japanese conservatives, from whom – or what – must Japan be reclaimed?

This article argues that these moves constitute a radical turn in Japanese conservatism since the end of the 1990s. In Japan, as elsewhere, conservatism is not a monolith. Most modern conservatives acknowledge that change in society is inevitable and seek to make changes ‘safe’ to the political community by prioritising what they consider natural and organic development. For radical conservatism, by contrast, the focus is not on rendering the mechanisms of change safe but rather on critiquing the perceived destruction of values like tradition, religion, nation, authority and social order brought on by change. For radical conservatives, contemporary institutions have put these values in danger; in order to protect them, it becomes necessary to take radical measures. According to radical conservatives, the Japanese are degenerating as a consequence of globalisation.

The central theoretical justification for their argument rests on the work of the Spanish political philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), with a particular emphasis on his theory of mass society. Using Ortega’s theoretical apparatus, contemporary Japanese radical conservatives argue that the inner life of the Japanese must be regulated in the face of the perceived social and political crisis of globalisation: it is traditional cultural nationalism, as a form of morality, which will restore order to society. However, there is a tension: in its context, Ortega’s theory of the masses was a critique of such reactionary nationalism. Rather, he sought the construction of a new national culture based around

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2. See for example, Kanishka Jayasuria, ‘Authoritarian Statism and the New Right in Asia’s Conservative Democracies’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48, no.4 (2018): 584-604.
3. We must remember, however, that this has not inhibited the formation (in 1954) and maintenance of the Self-Defense Forces, Japan’s de-facto standing military.
4. Kōji Nakakita, ‘Jimintō no Ukeika: Sono Gei’in wo Bunsekisuru’, in *Tettei Kenshō Nihon no Ukeika*, ed. Hotaka Tsukada (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō), 91.
5. Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 332.
6. Göran Dahl, *Radical Conservatism and the Future of Politics* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 2-3.
7. Hiroshi Kaihara, ‘Contemporary Conservative Thought in Japan: Conservative Views on Morality, History, and Social Issues’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 9, no.2 (2009): 341.
8. It is important to note that this is not in the pursuit of reviving militarist authoritarianism as some critics have alleged. Despite their reactionary aims, these contemporary radical conservatives do not advocate suspending civil liberties. Kaihara, ‘Contemporary Conservative Thought’, 340.
liberal civic values. In other words, radical conservatives appropriate an anti-reactionary schema towards the revival of, in their mind, a lost authentic culture.

The purpose of this article is threefold: the first is to unpick the differences and similarities between Ortega’s thinking and its appropriation by Japanese radical conservatives. The article unpacks the continuities in the theory while highlighting shifts in meaning which ultimately support divergent political ends. Famously, Edward Said noted that theories ‘travel’ not only across cultures and territories, but also across epistemic communities. The second purpose of the article is to demonstrate how theories can be (re)empowered with radical potential as they travel, as Sara Salem recently argued in the case of intersectional feminism. The interplay between theory as it travels and the intellectual lineages within which it is supplanted opens new political directions. The radical potential is a product of entangled intellectual lineages though, in this instance, it is radically reactionary. The third purpose of this article is to place the study of Japanese conservatism within the growing literature of the contemporary rise of the right internationally. The ideological shift that has taken place in Japanese conservatism in the 1990s has been widely noted by scholars. However, there has been little critical engagement with these ideological moves in International Studies literature. Since the end of the Cold War, similar radically conservative arguments have been mobilised across various geographical and cultural contexts. In the US and European contexts, radical conservatives have conceptualised liberal values as leading to the decay of ‘Judeo-Christian culture’. Elsewhere, reactionary national identities are constructed vis-à-vis an image of liberal values which are Western and therefore alien to the national culture. Beyond a

9. Alec Dinnin, ‘Disoriented Liberalism: Ortega y Gasset in the Ruins of Empire’, Political Theory 47, no.5 (October 2019): 636.
10. Edward Said, ‘Travelling Theory’, in World Literature in Theory, ed. David Damrosch (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 115.
11. Sara Salem, ‘Intersectionality and Its Discontents: Intersectionality as Travelling Theory’, European Journal of Women’s Studies 25, no.4 (2018): 414. Said later reconfigured his argument and notes the possibility that the reader of theory is a potential agent by ‘deliberately, programmatically, intransigently’ changing its meaning away from the original formulation. Edward Said, ‘travelling Theory Reconsidered’, in Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays (London: Granta, 2001), 438.
12. C.f. Kōichi Nakano, Ukeikasuru Nihon Seiji (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2015).
13. Notable exceptions include: Linus Hagström, ‘The “Abnormal” State: Identity, Norm/Exception and Japan’, European Journal of International Relations 21, no.1 (2015): 122-45; Karoline Postel-Vinay, ‘The Global Rightist Turn, Nationalism and Japan’, The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus 15, no.10 (2017); Shogo Suzuki, ‘Japanese Revisionists and the “Korea Threat”: Insights from Ontological Security’, Cambridge Review of International Affairs 9, no.2 (2009): 339-64.
14. Vibeke Schou Tjalve, ed., Geopolitical Amnesia: The Rise of the Right and the Crisis of Liberal Memory (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020), 6.
15. Nergis Canefe and Tanıl Bora, ‘The Intellectual Roots of Anti-European Sentiments in Turkish Politics: The Case of Radical Turkish Nationalism’, Turkish Studies 4, no.1 (2003): 127-48; and Chencen Zhang, ‘Right-wing Populism with Chinese Characteristics? Identity, Otherness and Global Imaginaries in Debating World Politics Online’, European Journal of International Relations 26, no.1 (2020): 88-125.
nationalism with a narrow domestic focus, these forces seek to fundamentally re-imagine the international political order in alignment with their reactionary nationalist values. This article situates the rise of radical conservatism in Japan as part and parcel of this wider trend.

Towards these ends, the first section begins by outlining Ortega’s theory of mass society within his contemporary political and ideological context. Ortega warns against the increasing influence of the masses in the political sphere which he sees as the force behind the rise of extremist politics across Europe, advocating instead for liberalism by creative elites. Turning then towards Japan, the next section demonstrates the fertile conceptual grounds into which Ortega’s theory travels. Utilising the concept of basso ostinato as a heuristic device, it argues that this theoretical structure is grafted on to a particular intellectual lineage which conceptualises social change in Japan as internalisation of foreign values and its solution as the (re)construction of national identity based on so-called traditional culture. The third section shows how, following on from this intellectual lineage, radical conservatism critiques contemporary globalisation using Ortega’s theory of the masses. In doing so, they appropriate his schema towards a justification of reactionary nationalist politics. The final section concludes by demonstrating how these radical conservative commentaries have justified reactionary political projects in Japan since the turn of the 21st century.

**Ortega’s Theory of the Masses and Elite Liberalism towards a New National Culture**

The philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) confronted political and social malaise in early 20th century Spain. Called the Desastre del 98, the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the United States in 1898 had profound economic, social, and political consequences. These imperial possessions had been vital for raw materials and markets of Spanish goods. The dispossession of its imperial territories came at a time when possession of colonies was considered the hallmark of power in European international society. Despite imperial decline in the 19th century, the retention of these territories had allowed Spanish elites to maintain a vision of Spain’s grandeur. Such a vision helped establish popular patriotism against the US when it declared war on Spain, despite widespread unpopularity of the war with Cuba. Little change was
enacted despite the depth of the consequence of the *Desastre*, however. Though the old elites espoused a new rhetoric of regeneration, the established structures of landed oligarchy and patronage networks remained largely intact.\textsuperscript{22}

For Ortega, these consequences of the *Desastre* did more than bring Spain’s long decline to a natural conclusion. It also reduced Spanish life to a “static” field by annihilating the final desiccated remnants of its national culture. And, just as importantly, it left no obvious way forward. . . The year 1898 “broke the consciousness” of Spain’s “historical continuity.”\textsuperscript{23}

In other words, the loss of empire through defeat barred Spain from its hitherto use of imperial history and international grandeur as the source of nationalism. The question of national identity plagued contemporary Spain. In the pursuit of ‘Spanishness’, many Catholics, rightists and militarists reasserted principles central to Spain’s imperial mythos: ‘hierarchy, authority, centralism, crusading Catholicism, and intolerance toward divisiveness in thought or society’.\textsuperscript{24} In the midst of the evident decline of the Restoration regime and an increasingly influential reactionary military,\textsuperscript{25} Ortega sought a different kind of national culture.

As the antidote, to Spain’s malaise, Ortega imagined culture would orient the country’s diverse ethnic, social and economic groups around shared civic values.\textsuperscript{26} These shared values would be newly created by a “new liberalism”\textsuperscript{27} based on cosmopolitan public discourse and artistic and intellectual pursuits by socially-minded, creative public intellectuals.\textsuperscript{28} Ortega tasked this new socially-minded culture of liberalism to construct and define the new nationalism that could overcome the ideological blow that the *Desastre* had struck to Spain. In 1923 Ortega founded the journal *Revista de Occidente* in pursuit of this liberal culture. A key construct in Ortega’s thought is the division of society in two: a minority of creatives and the average masses. In the first volume of the *Revista* he identifies his potential audience:

> There exists a large number of persons in Spain and Spanish America who take pleasure in a joyous and serene contemplation of ideas and art. It interests them as well to receive from time to time clear and thoughtful news of what is felt, done and suffered in the world . . . It is the vital curiosity that the individual of alert nerve feels for the vast germination of life around him, and it is the desire to live face to face with deep contemporary reality.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{22} Balfour, ‘Riot, Regeneration and Reaction’, 407.
\textsuperscript{23} Dinnin, ‘Disoriented Liberalism’, 629.
\textsuperscript{24} Blinkhorn, ‘Spain’, 17.
\textsuperscript{25} Balfour, ‘Riot, Regeneration and Reaction’, 421.
\textsuperscript{26} Dinnin, ‘Disoriented Liberalism’, 633.
\textsuperscript{27} “New” in contrast to the existent “liberal” group of intellectuals known as the Generation of ’98 who, according to Ortega, had not sufficiently considered the issue of ideology and its role in invigorating Spain. Blinkhorn, ‘Spain’, 14; Dinnin, ‘Disoriented Liberalism’, 625.
\textsuperscript{28} Ortega quoted in Dinnin, ‘Disoriented Liberalism’, 632.
\textsuperscript{29} Ortega quoted in Rockwell Gray, ‘Ortega y Gasset and Modern Culture’, *Salmagundi* 35, 6-7.
It was in such individuals of alert nerve that Ortega located the source of creativity, that is, the ability to construct the new national culture. In other words, for Ortega these new shared values could – and should – only be disseminated from ‘men of excellence’, a minority of (elite) creative thinkers and leaders.30

Ortega insisted on such an elitist structure because, according to him, there are ‘operations, activities, and functions’ in society which require ‘special gifts’ in order to be carried out properly – for example, ‘certain pleasures of an artistic and refined character, or again the functions of government and political judgement in public affairs’.31 The construction of a new nationalism untainted by imperial nostalgia would require a visionary instinct. Moreover, while Ortega aimed to generate new national values, he simultaneously sought to warn Spain against imminent disasters he saw unfolding with the rise of figures such as Hitler and Mussolini as well as movements like Syndicalism and socialism. Originally published in 1930, The Revolt of the Masses (Rebelión de las Masas) attributes the emergence of extremism on both the Right and the Left as a consequence of the rise of the masses to social and political power.32 ‘Mass’ has two meanings: as quantity, the majority of the populace is understood to be part of the masses. As quality, being part of the masses is a psychological characteristic defined by an averageness cutting across socioeconomic classes.33 The historic novelty in Ortega’s contemporary Spain was the increasing influence of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois classes. In these developments Ortega saw that the masses propelled sameness by democratising power, taste, and culture – in doing so, he feared, the masses sought to ‘obliterate distinctions of quality’.34 In his schematic, the masses must therefore be guided by a creatively and culturally superior minority.

This division of mass and elite itself is not a new phenomenon; however, what is unprecedented is the empowerment of the masses. Ortega traces the enormity of this shift as part and parcel of the development of universal political subjectivity in Europe. The 18th century gave rise to the idea of fundamental political rights which are common to every human being ‘by the mere fact of birth’, which were taken up throughout the 19th century. By the early 20th century, the ideals of universal rights of man had become reality in both legislation and in the minds of individuals. That is to say, every citizen understood oneself to have a political role – whether qualified or not. The consequences have not been entirely negative: it released the large multitudes of humanity from a mentality of servitude and replaced it with mastery over oneself.35 Now, finding life in the 20th century a sphere of practically limitless possibilities, safe, . . . the modern mass finds complete freedom as its natural, established condition, without any special cause for it. Nothing from outside incites it to recognise its limits to itself and, consequently, to refer at all times to authorities higher than itself.36

30. José Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses (New York: Norton, 1957), 63.
31. Ibid., 16.
32. Ibid., 11.
33. Ibid., 13-14.
34. Gray, ‘Ortega y Gasset’, 22.
35. Ortega, Revolt, 22-3.
36. Ibid., 61-2.
The mass no longer accepts an authority higher than itself to regulate it. Ortega is particularly scathing about ‘specialists’ and ‘men of science’ as representative of the newly empowered masses: according to him, the scientist knows only ‘his own tiny portion of the universe’. Yet, considering himself ‘learned’ these mass-men seek to impose their view of how the world ought to be on the world around them.38

It was the invasion of the masses into mechanisms of the State which Ortega found particularly problematic. For him, in a healthy society ‘room must be made for the leadership of a qualified minority’. Historically, the mass understood that the intellectually creative were better suited to solving public problems and that its own political role in a democracy should be constrained to granting or withholding political support and ‘being an echo, positive or negative, of the creative activity of others’. Arguing against the contemporarily held notion that the rise of movements like Fascism and Syndicalism indicated that the mass ‘has grown tired of politics and handed over the exercise of it to specialised persons’, for Ortega these demonstrated precisely the invasion of the masses into the political sphere. In what Ortega terms ‘hyperdemocracy, the mass has a direct hand in politics. It says to itself, “L’Etat, c’est moi,” which is a complete mistake. . . . But the mass-man does in fact believe he is the State, and he will tend more and more to set its machinery working on whatsoever pretext, to crush beneath it any creative minority which disturbs it – disturbs it in any order of things: in politics, in ideas, in industry. The result of this tendency will be fatal. Spontaneous social action will be broken up over and over again by State intervention; no new seed will be able to fructify. Society will have to live for the State, man for the governmental machine.

Once the mass holds the reins of power, it would seek to crush any difference of opinion from itself, and in so doing destroy any capacity for spontaneous creativity. For Ortega, the exchange of ideas and generation of new values is also what tempers the masses in a democracy, allowing minorities to be able to live and act as part of the same political body as the majority. His insistence, therefore, for the ‘intensive cultivation of elite minorities which would then become the nuclei for cultural renovation’ speaks to the dire consequences he anticipates should the possibility for diversity of opinion be precluded.

The liberalism Ortega espouses is necessarily elitist. His purpose is, however, to conserve the possibility of liberal discourse and enable the creation of new shared national values and overcome imperial nostalgia. The urgency of Ortega’s concern is brought to

37. Ibid., 112.
38. Ibid., 18.
39. Howard Nelson Tuttle, *The Crowd is Untruth: The Existential Critique of Mass Society in the Thought of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Ortega y Gasset* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 157.
40. Ortega, *Revolt*, 17; 71.
41. Ibid., 73.
42. Ibid., 120-21. Emphasis in original.
43. Ibid., 17.
44. Gray, ‘Ortega y Gasset’, 23.
45. Dinnin, ‘Disoriented Liberalism’, 633.
attention given subsequent Spanish developments where political forces continued to invoke imperial myths. Rightists in particular harked to the mythical principles of the conquistadores and the church-militants of the Counter-Reformation, culminating in the ‘Crusade’ of the Spanish Civil War. Even after the war, nostalgic ideas of empire continued to occupy the Franco regime in their cultural supremacist ideology of Hispanidad which sought to (re)establish Spain as the cultural and spiritual centre of the Spanish-speaking world. In mid-20th century Spain, political forces turned to defunct imperial symbols for reactionary ends rather than the creative construction of a new national culture through liberal means as advocated by Ortega. By the end of the century, however, Ortega’s own thoughts were appropriated towards the reactionary recuperation of traditional culture in Japan. To understand the ways the purpose and meaning of theory has shifted, the next section will look at the conceptual material available to Japanese radical conservatism which proved fertile ground to supplant Ortega’s theory.

**Basso Ostinato of Japanese Radical Conservatism**

In 1983 Japanese economist and radical conservative thinker Susumu Nishibe published a volume of essays entitled *Taishū e no Hangyaku* (Revolt against the masses). Needless to say, the half-century since the original publication of Ortega’s *Revolt of the Masses* had been one of social and political tumult not only in Spain but also in Japan. How was it that Ortega’s work was made to make sense as a justification towards reactionary political ends by Japanese radical conservatives in a context historically, culturally, and politically distinct from that of mid-20th century Spain? To understand how a set of ideas takes on new meanings and practical directions under different contexts in place and history, this section employs *basso ostinato* as a heuristic device. *Basso ostinato* was first conceptualised by the social theorist Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) to explain a pattern of thought he claimed was distinctly Japanese that had allowed the populace to follow extreme ideological policies of the pre-war and war-time militarist regime. In musicology, *basso ostinato* is a motif which persists unchanged beneath variations in the melody. Although the two are independent of each other, this obstinate bass can make subtle changes to the main theme as it repeats; however it is never fully subsumed into the melody. He argues that the ‘*basso ostinato* of Japanese intellectual history’ can be

46. Blinkhorn, ‘Spain’, 20-21.
47. Johannes Großman, ‘“Baroque Spain” as Metaphor: Hispanidad, Europeanism and Cold War Anti-Communism in Francoist Spain’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 91, no.5 (2014): 755-71.
48. See Susumu Nishibe, *Taishū e no Hangyaku* (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 2014 [1983]).
49. Rösch and Watanabe, ‘Approaching the Unsynthesizable’, 618.
50. In both Japanese public discourse and research community, Maruyama is most lauded as ‘the preeminent imaginer of democracy in postwar Japan’. Murayama’s work on democracy centred around how individuals could become autonomous actors able to resist the state. Andrew Barshay, ‘Democracy in Postwar Japan: Reflections on Maruyama Masa and Modernism’, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 18, no.2 (1992): 365-6.
51. Maruyama Masao, ‘The Structure of Matsurigoto: The Basso Ostinato of Japanese Political Life’, in *Themes and Theories in Modern Japanese History: Essays in Memory of Richard Storry*, eds. Sue Henny and Jean-Pierre Lehmann (London: Athlone Press, 1988): 27.
found by examining the subtle changes to ideologies which take place when they arrive from foreign origins. In looking at these transformations, Maruyama sought the pattern of conceptual undercurrents upon which the melody of the foreign theory was played.

The incorporation of *basso ostinato* of the so-called ‘destination’ into the melody of theory is largely unconscious – new ideas are grafted onto existing concepts at the moment of translation. The heuristic use of *basso ostinato* allows us to account for the ‘unsynthesizable’ epistemic gap in different contexts. In doing so, we can observe the ‘creative misunderstanding’ made to fill in this gap, such that ‘an idea becomes meaningful through textual appraisal by locals’. There is a long history of this in Japan: the idea of the ‘state’ imported from European political theory in the 19th century was grafted on to, and equivocated as, the administrative term *kuni* (‘country’ with the connotation of one’s homeland) used throughout the Edo era (1603-1868) which was itself introduced from China. *Kuni* therefore conceptualises the state as both an administrative unit and cultural homeland. In this way, we can understand differences in meaning of theory under different circumstances not as a mistake but as a consequence of *basso ostinato* subtly shifting the melody. What, then, is the *basso ostinato* within which Japanese radical conservatism is located?

In the wake of the Meiji Restoration which ended the feudal system of the Tokugawa shogunate, modernisation became a conscious project for the Japanese political and cultural elite. The need to pursue technological innovation was couched as progress to be undertaken through the active incorporation of Western political theories, systems and techniques. The eminent philosopher Yukichi Fukuzawa argued that in order for the country to develop politically, economically, and socially, it must actively open Japanese civilisation (*bunmei kaika*) to Western influence. It is widely agreed that Fukuzawa was a leading figure in actively promoting the values of the Enlightenment in Japan. According to radical conservatives, *bunmei kaika* assumed a spirit of nationalism uniting society – the civilising mission, then, was understood as the construction of a national civilisation. This was strategic in part: for Fukuzawa, modernising Japan into the ‘Western’ image was necessary to resist European and American imperial threats in the region. Despite Japan’s adoption of European social and political norms, however, its recognition by the league of Anglo-European powers as an equal did not follow. The ambivalence over the recognition of Japan’s modernisation – or westernisation – in international society soon led to the justification of Japan’s own colonial expansions in

52. Ibid., 28.
53. Rösch and Watanabe, ‘Approaching the Unsynthapsible’, 610; 616-7.
54. Atsuko Watanabe, *Japanese Geopolitics and the Western Imagination* (New York: Springer, 2019), 31.
55. Hiroshi Watanabe, *Nihon Seiji Shisōshi: 17-19 Seiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2010), 405, 410.
56. Susumu Nishibe, *Kokumin no Dōtoku* (Tokyo: Sankei Shimbun, 2000), 62.
57. Ken Yonehara, *Nihon Seijishisō* (Kyoto: Minerva Shobō, 2017), 56. Fukuzawa is often criticised for his *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation) and for his alleged authorship of the anonymously published editorial *Datsu-A Ron* (theory of escaping Asia). Critics argue these propose a hierarchy of races to justify Japanese imperialism. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that these texts became popularly read (and criticised) after the
Asia. For example, the establishment of a puppet state in Manchuria, orchestrated by the Japanese Empire’s Kwantung Army, was popular with the Japanese public and supported by political elites in Tokyo. According to the influential liberal intellectual Masamichi Rōyama – who in 1929 warned that the Manchurian question was an ‘inevitable catastrophe’ waiting to happen – these events were a consequence of European refusal to recognise Japanese influence in the territory.

As the colonial project expanded in the 1930s, the West was perceived to be in global decline. According to the radical conservative thinker Keishi Saeki, Japan was at an impasse: though the internalisation of modern European statehood led to Japan’s colonial success, quoting Oswald Spengler, Western modernity sowed the seeds of its own decline. As the most effectively westernised nation in Asia, what was Japan’s role in the face of modernity’s decline? In the wake of rapid domestic industrialisation and modernisation in architecture and infrastructure it struck as a concern in the everyday experience of the Japanese. With increasing tensions – and soon, war – with Chinese forces and still recovering from a bleak economic downturn, the drive to redefine, or at the very least question, the future of modernity was at the forefront of intellectual efforts. Though the political orientations of these thinkers were diverse, many converged in justifying Japan’s actions across Asia as potential for a new kind of political order that would escape malaise. Kiyoshi Miki called the coming age an ‘epoch of fusion’ (yūgō no jidai). In the concept of an East Asian Community Miki sought a new universalism marked by a culture of ‘cooperationism’ to replace the egoistic and inequitable culture of Western capitalism. Others sought Japanese cultural particularity over universalism. Radical nationalist thinkers like Ikki Kita and Shūmei Ōkawa critiqued capital as the source not only of social ills such as inequality, but also Japan’s spiritual decay. Kita advocated overthrowing Western-style political institutions in pursuit of a nostalgic communitarianism. Similarly, Ōkawa

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58. Felix Rösch and Atsuko Watanabe, ‘Introduction: Japan as Potential: Communicating Across Boundaries for a Global International Relations’, in Modern Japanese Political Thought and International Relations, eds. Felix Rösch and Atsuko Watanabe (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 6.

59. Yonehara, Nihon Seijishisō, 184.

60. Rōyama quoted in Yonehara, Nihon Seijishisō, 190; Cemil Aydin, ‘Japan’s Pan-Asianism and the Legitimacy of Imperial World Order, 1931–1945’, The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus 6, no.3 (2008): 6.

61. Aydin, ‘Japan’s Pan-Asianism’, 4.

62. Keishi Saeki, 20 Seiki to wa Nani dattanoka: Seiyō no Botsuraku to Gurōbarizumu (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo, 2015), 333–4.

63. Harry Harootunian, History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 126.

64. Lewis E. Harrington, ‘Miki Kiyoshi and the Shōwa Kenkyūkai: The Failure of World History’, positions: asia critique 17, no.1 (2009): 60.

65. Tetsuo Najita and Harry Harootunian, ‘Japan’s Revolt against the West’, in Modern Japanese Thought, ed. Bob T. Wakabayashi (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1998), 215-16.
sought to ‘cleanse’ the political order at home so Japan could lead Asia’s spiritual reawakening. For both, revolution in Japan would lead to the liberation of Asia from Western domination – by any means necessary. In 1939 Ōkawa declared that a ‘war to end wars’ led by Japan was a historical necessity for Asia to overcome inferiority vis-à-vis the West. It is the Kyoto School of philosophers’ (Kyoto Gakuha) proposal of a distinctly Japanese form of modernity with which radical conservatives identify. According to them, war against western powers represented the potential opening of a new historical epoch. Where Miki’s cooperativist culture would emerge from the fusion of Western modernity with Asiatic values, the Kyoto School philosophers argued that Japan had already made this synthesis. Japan, on a higher plane of human development, had a world historical mission to dismantle the old imperial international order based on Western values and construct an alternate world order founded on new moral principles. The modernisation needing to be ‘overcome’ was synonymous with westernisation.

Such a world-historical mission Japanese intellectuals assigned itself was rendered ideologically void as a consequence of the country’s defeat. Exhausted by war and marshalled into civic activity by years of total war mobilisation, the populace rallied around the promise of ‘Demilitarization and Democratization’. The broadly leftist forces who emerged from the war as intellectual heroes embraced the discourse of democratic revolution and poured intellectual energy into the construction of a new political subjectivity for this purpose. In doing so, ‘Postwar Japan was to be imagined anew . . . the post-imperial era was to be one, first and foremost, of democratization (minshuka) in all spheres’. Efforts to reconstitute Japan came not only from occupying US and Allied forces but also from a domestic reckoning. Despite these initial efforts, however, many conservative forces were re-instated in the US occupation’s policy reversals. These
resuscitated forces were able to make their reactionary ideology more palatable in the post-war environment by couching it in the internationalism of the Cold War. In so doing, fascist and imperial ideas of extraction came to underpin the elite power and protection of capitalist interests which characterised post-war conservative rule. Conservative continuities notwithstanding, according to radical conservatives the post-war values of democratisation, liberalism, and pacifism had the effect of creating a Japanese national consciousness which rejected its history and traditions as such.

It is not until the 1960s, they argue, that their intellectual lineage re-emerges. According to the new wave of conservative thought, Japan faced an onslaught of nihilism and alienation as a result of further (western) modernisation and industrialisation from the mid-1950s. An exemplar was the success of Taiyō no Kisetsu (Season of the Sun) published in 1956 by future right-wing Tokyo governor Shinatrō Ishihara, a novel marked by a sense of powerlessness, and loss of political direction, moral principles, and ideology. According to the cultural critic and New Right ideologue Jun Etō, the greatest value of Ishihara’s work lay in the futility of the protagonist’s pursuit of real, visceral experience through the body and bodily sensation – a reflection, he argued, of the state of Japanese society following occupation. For him, the country lived in a world of ‘pretend’ (gokko) where politics was make-believe played out by Japanese politicians, while the true political authority rested with the Americans. In Saeki’s reading of Etō, the tragedy of post-war Japan lay in its internalisation of foreign values such that the people could not see their part as puppets. They envision the role of conservativism as cutting against the grain to speak on behalf of tradition, national culture and identity; in novelist and ultranationalist Yukio Mishima they found such a figure. In Bunka Bœiron (Thoughts on the Defence of Culture) Mishima argues that without a (official) military, Japan could not shield its culture from external influence. He advocated a need for (violent) expulsion of the West

74. As Reto Hofmann has recently shown, the transwar connection of reactionary ideology was embodied in figures like Nobusuke Kishi who, despite his deep unpopularity with the populace, was highly influential in post-war politics and in many ways reiterated by a younger generation of conservatives including Yasuhiro Nakasone. Reto Hofmann, ‘The Conservative Imaginary: Moral Re-Armament and the Internationalism of the Japanese Right, 1945-1962’, Japan Forum 33, no.1 (2021): 77-102.

75. Keishi Saeki, Kokka ni tsuite no Kōsaku (Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha, 2001), 68.

76. To the contrary, the decade saw a dramatic uptick in civic participation: women were formally granted a political role with the post-war constitution and held political office. Popular distrust of the government led to a number of protests against the Japan-US security alliance and the construction of US military bases and the renewal of the security treaty in the late 1950s. See Nick Kapur, Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

77. Yumiko Iida, Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics (London: Routledge, 2002),128.

78. Jun Etō, “‘Gokko no Sekai ga Owatta Toki’, in Gendai e no Hangyaku Toshite no Hoshu, ed. Takeshi Nakajima (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2017 [1970]).

79. Saeki, Kokka, 127.

80. Susumu Nishibe, ‘Kunigara’ no Shisō (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1997), 36; Susumu Nishibe, Nihirizumu o Koete (Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1989), 13.

81. Yukio Mishima, ‘Bunka Bœiron’, Chūō Kōron 83, no. 7 (1968).
from Japan’s political and cultural body by reasserting a martial tradition. Failing that, it was the Japanese citizen’s moral duty to ‘return’ one’s spirit to the Emperor, the embodiment of all Japanese, through suicide – something Mishima himself achieved in his dramatic death by seppuku at the headquarters for the Japan Ground Self-Defense Forces in 1970. Mishima’s extreme views were ridiculed by wider society; Etō was a staunch critic of his work. Yet his work, life, and death would go on to influence various ethno-nationalist groups in the following decade. Although they eschew the violence of these right-wing groups (uyoku), post-Cold War radical conservatives consider themselves heirs to these vocal reactionary social critics.

This section has outlined the contours of radical conservatives’ intellectual lineage. The pattern or basso ostinato of this lineage conceptualises periods of social change as a consequence of the Japanese’s internalisation of foreign forces: contemporary social ills as the consequence of a nation poisoned by the foreign. Within this pattern of thought, there is no place for the negotiations and selective incorporation made by political thinkers and operators vis-à-vis their contemporary social realities. The idea of traditional culture is construed as transhistorical and monolithic. Japan’s unique culture must, therefore, be protected not only from foreign forces, but also from domestic traitors who have internalised external values. As we see in the following section, radical conservatives’ appropriation of Ortega must be understood as being woven into, and transformed by, this undercurrent.

**Mass Society in Japanese Radical Conservative Thought**

Radical conservatism emerged as a political and cultural force in Japan in the context of perceived social malaise in the 1990s resulting from shifting social, political, and intellectual landscapes. Japan’s long post-war economic growth as well as conservative political dominance took shape under the aegis of the US security apparatus during the Cold War. Post-war Japan’s foreign policy strategy foregrounded economic growth while off-loading military and security concerns to the US in a relationship described as ‘subordinate independence’. Conservative political elites of the newly-established LDP formed a broad consensus around this Yoshida doctrine, so-called after the first post-war prime minister Shigeru Yoshida, as a more palatable alternative to an extremist conservative faction which advocated for constitutional reform and re-militarisation which had stirred wide-scale protestation from the populace in the late 1950s.

While the growth of the Japanese economy was unquestioned for a time, in the 1970s increasing domestic and international attention was brought to its speed and duration. Japan’s relatively quick recovery from the 1971 Nixon and 1973 oil shocks supported
growing sentiments of Japanese success against perceived American decline.87 To explain its success, academic and popular discourse turned to cultural differences between Japan and the English-speaking world in general and the US in particular.88 However, as the strength of the Japanese economy reversed dependent relations with the US – Japan was now loaning surplus capital to cover US debts – writings on the political economy of Japan increasingly became a battleground between Japan-bashers and Japanese nationalists.89 Works like Shintarō Ishihara and Akio Morita’s ‘No’ to Ieru Nihon (The Japan that Can Say ‘No’) (1989) argued that Japan’s economic growth was due to cultural superiority and implied that Japan could and should reject US interests for the first time since defeat. In the 1985 Plaza Accord Japan, the US, West Germany, France and the UK agreed to appreciate the value of the yen against the dollar from 260 to 180 yen; in the second half of the 1980s the value of the yen doubled again.

Against this background, the 1990s was experienced by many as a shock that Saeki compares equal to Spain’s 1898 Desastre.90 In late 1991 the asset price bubble burst, abruptly ending decades of continuous high growth, increasing economic instability and youth underemployment, and severely weakening the legitimacy of the LDP.91 Adding to this sudden sense of insecurity, in 1995 a natural disaster was followed by a major terror attack.92 At the same time, the fall of the Soviet Union marked a departure from Cold War security relationships. Observers worried Japan was being left behind in the new order of US-led multilateralism. Ozawa Ichirō, for example, argued that Japan’s inability to militarily assist in the 1991 Gulf War demonstrated Japan’s ‘abnormality’ as a state.93 The conservative response to these domestic and international shocks varied. For some, strengthening Japan’s military structure was necessary to combat the rise of China in the region, including strengthening ties with the US.94 By contrast, radical conservatives responded by turning inward: the seemingly omnipresent social crisis was, as their argument goes, the result of the state’s weakness in its ability to protect Japanese culture from the invasion of foreign values.95 Radical conservatism seeks to defend cultural heterogeneity as such – albeit reactionary forms of cultural particularity – against the perception of homogenisation by forces of economic and cultural globalisation.

87. Ibid., 294.
88. Famously, Ezra Vogel’s Japan as Number One (1979) provided the “Japanese” style of management as a potential model for US firms.
89. Iida, Rethinking Identity, 195.
90. Keishi Saeki, ‘Amerikanizumu’ no Shūen (Tokyo: Chūōkōron Shinsha, 2014), 31.
91. Iida, Rethinking Identity, 218.
92. The Hanshin earthquake in January 1995 killed over 6,000 people and left over 300,000 homeless, and the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system two months later, which was carried out by the apocalyptic new religion group Aum Shinrikyō led to death and injuries of over 5,000 people. See Iida, Rethinking Identity, 213-18; 237-8.
93. See Hagström, ‘The “Abnormal” State’, 133.
94. Toshiya Takahashi, ‘Japanese Neo-Conservatism: Coping with China and North Korea’, Security Challenges 6, no.3 (2010): 25.
95. The closely related variation of this theme has been the trend of reactionary historical revisionism which emerged at this juncture, but with a specific focus on the historiography of the Second World War, which has had close intellectual and organisational links. For a critical engagement on this issue, see Hitomi Koyama, On the Persistence of the Japanese ‘History Problem’: Historicism and the International Politics of History (London: Routledge, 2018).
At the same time that Japan’s international economic success spurred on jingoistic sentiment, there emerged voices critiquing its domestic effects. According to the economist Yasusuke Murakami, Japan had entered an age of the ‘new middle mass’ which collapsed economic, cultural, and political differences between the lower and middle classes as a result of unprecedented affluence.96 While Ortega’s philosophies were hitherto a fringe scholarly interest, from this period radical conservative figures like Nishibe and Saeki used his theory of mass society centrally in their critiques of Japanese society.97 Using Ortega’s schema, Nishibe took Murakami’s idea further: according to him, mass society rendered Japanese culture into one of standardisation and uniformity, a ‘utopia of the masses’.98 Not only had affluence collapsed socio-economic classes, so too were cultural distinctions between the mass and the creative elite.99 This is crystallised in the emergence of the ‘salaryman’ who increasingly made up the bulk of industrial society.

Where in Ortega’s schema the mass were in revolt, radical conservatives argue that in contemporary Japanese politics the mass has fully established itself as the basis of political order. What Ortega called ‘hyperdemocracy’ – the capture of the State by the masses – had become the state of politics in contemporary Japan, pointing to the influence of public opinion polling in policymaking. As such, political decision-making and governance are premised not on the creativity of the elite but on gauging an average opinion among the masses. The result is a political system which amounts to bullying in the playground against those who might be critical of the mass.100 Though ‘crisis management is the paramount task of a leader’, the mass lacks understanding of the complexity of governance nor is it capable of taking responsibility or showing determination (kakugo) in the face of judgements on critical issues such as use of force and national security.101 For the mass, political decision making requires nothing more than gauging its own needs based on a ‘banal sense of the everyday’ (nichijō kankaku).102 Such an extreme framing demonstrates that radical conservatives assume a pork-barrel relationship in contemporary democracy: political decisions are made not for the public good as such, but rather in response to the whims and wants of the masses.

Japan finds itself in a societal crisis: the inescapable authority of the masses has, at the same time, progressively lost its historical traditions and cultural integrity. The era of economic globalisation since the end of the Cold War reshaped not only the flow of capital, but the interaction between different cultural societies across the world – it has ‘caused a globalisation at the level of culture and social structures’.103 This is not to suggest that there

96. Yasusuke Murakami, ‘The Age of New Middle Mass Politics: The Case of Japan’, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 8, no.1 (1982): 29-72.
97. Tomonori Kinoshita, ‘Keizaigaku ni Okeru Orutega’, *Kanazawa Gakuin Daigaku Ronsū Shakaikagaku hen* 11, no.2 (2015): 93.
98. Susumu Nishibe, ‘Japan as a Highly Developed Mass Society: An Appraisal’, *Journal of Japanese Studies* 8, no.1 (1982): 78.
99. Saeki, *20 Seiki*, 168.
100. Nishibe, *Kokumin*, 299.
101. Nishibe, *Bunmei no Teki*, 194.
102. Saeki, *20 Seiki*, 193.
103. Keishi Saeki, *Rinri to shite no Nashonarizumu: Gurūbarizumu no Kyomu wo Koete* (Tokyo: NTT Publishing, 2005), 194-6.
has been an emergence of a homogenous cosmopolitan global culture or society. Indeed, according to radical conservatives at the global level it is not possible to have a singular shared language, religion, history, customs, law, or culture—practices that bind a society.\textsuperscript{104} Culture distinguishes societies from others because they are rooted in locational and historical specificities. However, globalisation is increasing cultural hybridity:

It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a shared culture with its roots in a sense of specific place and history. As a result, there is a disassembling of collective identity based in a singular cultural coherency \textsuperscript{[bunkateki ikkansei]} . . . If we are to speak about the culture of a particular social collective, it must have its own distinct methods of distinguishing itself from others, and its own discourse \textsuperscript{[gohô]}. Whatever the collective may be, and though the differentiation may be arbitrary, it has, at the very least, a deified set of values and a symbolic structure that represents those values. . . . Collective identity is, then, a conscious commitment to those shared values.\textsuperscript{105}

Globalisation undercuts any sense of values which have traditionally given societies their unique identity and internal integrity. Non-national activities are therefore inherently non-ethical \textsuperscript{(murinriteki)}.\textsuperscript{106}

Those that have benefitted socially and economically under globalisation, according to radical conservatives, are management consultants, venture capitalists, journalists, television directors—those whose interests lie beyond the borders of any given state. Unlike Ortega’s true creative elites, the new cosmopolitan elite have little interest in public life \textsuperscript{(kôkyô)} and abandon cultural specificity in favour of their transnational alliances.\textsuperscript{107} Their insistence on progress of a global market both ignores and works against the distinctiveness of different societies and cultural contexts—thereby weakening the social ‘ethos’ that regulates and ties individuals to distinct societies.\textsuperscript{108} In the eyes of conservative theorists globalised mass society breaks down culture and the integrity of society and, by extension, the nation. Contemporary social and economic inequities are considered problems of moral and ethical values rather than the internal contradictions and failures of neoliberal globalisation.

Under these perceived conditions, the radical conservatives’ problematique can be articulated thus: first, social power has been thoroughly dominated by the masses—time cannot be unwound to eliminate the primacy of the masses. Second, contemporary globalisation has hollowed the traditional cultures and social values which structure societies; as a consequence, society as a social unit increasingly breaks down. According to Saeki, the corresponding sense of alienation and social ataxia has resulted in the rise of identitarian, ethnocentric and religious fundamentalism in the early 21st century.\textsuperscript{109} For

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{104} Nishibe, \textit{Kokumin}, 441.
\textsuperscript{105} Saeki, \textit{Rinri}, 198-9.
\textsuperscript{106} A note on translation: the word \textit{murinriteki} is an amalgamation of \textit{mu} (void) and \textit{rinriteki} (ethical), and the direct translation would be “void of ethics.” As the translation of “unethical” is \textit{hirinriteki}, here I take \textit{murinriteki} to mean non-ethical, that is outside of the realm of ethics.
\textsuperscript{107} Saeki, \textit{‘Amerikanizumu’}, 375.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 362-3.
\textsuperscript{109} Saeki, \textit{Rinri}, 261.
\end{flushleft}
him, alienation is not an economic issue, but equal to the loss of social ethos or ‘soul’ (tamashii), that is, ‘the ability to relate oneself to others (through action) in accordance with an ethical or normative consciousness’. For radical conservatives, the upshot is to cultivate cultural nationalism as a matter of public and political ethics. Nishibe explains:

On one side, nationalism deals with the issue of how one should present themselves to the public. On the other side, it is a space for inclusion in a group or community for the individual. In other words, nationalism is founded on the centralization of shared values within the masses, and individuals are able to locate their unique personality and maintain their personal sense of belonging.

Nationalism, they believe, can contain the masses by effectively attaching the individual to an imagined community, thereby ordering society around this shared identity and culture. To stabilise social mores and customs, nationalism must penetrate to the core – ‘a religious sense (shūkyōteki kankaku) must be germinated at the nucleus’. In other words, radical conservatives’ articulation of mass society in the post-Cold War era enables, indeed necessitates, implementation of nationalistic values into society. A society of the masses for them requires an intervention within the individuals as an issue of moral and spiritual urgency.

The Radical Conservative Project: Reactionary Nationalism as Morality

The conclusions reached by radical conservatives are a far cry from the elite liberalism championed by Ortega. The radical nature of their conservative values stems from a belief that established systems are beyond restoration. They share with contemporary radical conservative movements elsewhere in their call for ‘the creation of new institutions that will command the loyalty of individuals and bind them together into an organic whole to a greater extent than existing ones’. In this regard, radical conservative intellectuals are quick to criticise conservative political elites like prime ministers Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe despite their display of reactionary nationalist values. These leaders have been considered not conservative enough for their adherence to neoliberal economic policies believed to be progressing foreign and liberal ‘American’ values. The project that remains is to construct and implement a set of values to induce a sense of public accountability and responsibility in the masses. Where Ortega’s reasoning might lead to a protection of diversity of discourse in the interest of creativity as such, it is clear that the radical

110. Saeki, Kokka, 36-37.
111. Nishibe, Kokumin, 344.
112. Nishibe, Daisakkaku, 18.
113. Jean-François Drolet and Michael C. Williams, ‘America First: Paleoconservatism and the Ideological Battle for the American Right’, Journal of Political Ideologies 25, no.1 (2020): 31.
114. See Togo, ‘The Assertive Conservative Right’.
115. Christian G. Winkler, ‘Consistent Conservatism in Changing Times: An Analysis of Japanese Conservative Intellectuals’ Thought’, Social Science Japan Journal 15, no.1 (2012): 100-101.
conservative political agenda is diametrically opposed to such debate. Theirs is a project to make nationalist interventions in the inner lives of the Japanese.

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a concerted effort in conservative political culture to reframe education as a site of constructing a nationalism along reactionary traditional and cultural values. Following radical conservative thought, for them the state is responsible for culture and tradition – the people’s mores, in other words, are the remit of policy. Radical conservative intellectuals saw this movement as a vehicle to instate a programme of national moral and civics education: Nishibe Susumu and Saeki Keishi, alongside Yagi Hidetsugu, a professor of legal theory at Reitaku University and former chair of Tsukurukai, penned the civics textbook approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2001. According to the group, the purpose of their civics textbooks is to discuss and promote aikokushin (nationalism, or literally ‘love of one’s country’) as well as other traditional values such as nuclear family-centrism and the emperor as the ultimate political authority (ken’i) as opposed to a symbol. To be clear, evidence suggests that reactionary nationalism is not winning the hearts and minds of the Japanese educational public. The two revisionist civics textbooks published by Jiyūsha and Ikuhōsha for the Tsukurukai and its splinter group Kyōkasho Kaizen no Kai (Group for the Improvement of Textbooks), respectively, have been used only by a minority of middle schools – the former has been taken up by six private schools and the latter was read by around 6 percent of junior high school students in the years 2016-2019. Moreover, the use of the Ikuhōsha text has dropped off by about half for the school year 2021 while the Jiyūsha text failed to pass governmental screening.

116. This conservative offensive diverged from previous iterations as it was conducted not only top-down through governmental educational processes – such as textbook screenings – but also developed by civil society organisations. In 1997, various conservative opinion leaders formed the organisation Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho wo Tsukurukai (the Organisation for the Creation of New Textbooks, also known as Tsukurukai) with the explicit objective of creating textbooks which would educate nationalist sentiment into Japanese students. While the struggle over the politics of education was not new, the broad reach of this organisation into civil society and policy circles has signalled a turning point in the push for reactionary nationalist education promoted by conservatives. For details, see Caroline Rose, ‘The Battle for Hearts and Minds: Patriotic Education in Japan in the 1990s and Beyond’, in Nationalisms in Japan, ed. Naoko Shimazu (London: Routledge, 2006).

117. Kaihara, ‘Contemporary Conservative Thought’, 347-8.

118. ‘Kore ga “Tsukurukai” no Kyōkasho desu!’, Tsukurukai. Available at: http://www.tsukurukai.com/kokai/index.html. Last accessed 1 November 2020.

119. The first Tsukurukai textbooks approved in 2001 were published by Fusōsha, part of the Fujisankei Communications Group, which also owns the right-leaning newspaper Sankei. In 2007, Fusōsha dropped the Tsukurukai textbooks, and the group have published with Jiyūsha since.

120. Linus Hagström and Erik Isaksson, ‘Pacifist Identity, Civics Textbooks, and the Opposition to Japan’s Security Legislation’, The Journal of Japanese Studies 45, no.1 (2019): 54.

121. ‘Rekishi/Kōmin, Ikuhōsha ga kyūhen chūgaku kyōkasho, zenkai saitaku no hansū iiyō ga tashaban ni kirikae’, Asahi Shimbun, 11 October 2020. Available at: https://www.asahi.com/articles/DA3S14654658.html. Last accessed 17 November 2020.
Nevertheless, the Tsukurukai’s efforts to resubmit their text – which they dub ‘the civics textbook that will save Japan’122 – suggest that the conservatives’ nationalist educational project is long from being over. This is particularly so at the level of conservative political elites. In October 2006, amidst wide media coverage and condemnation of bullying in schools, Abe’s newly appointed cabinet established the Education Rebuilding Council ostensibly to combat the bullying issue. However, backed by conservative lobby groups,123 it was used to push through nationalist reforms to the 1947 Fundamental Laws of Education (FLE) later that year with minimal debate by legislators, the public, or the media.124 Article 2 of the 1947 FLE outlined the ‘principles of education’ (kyōiku no hōshin) as the promotion of individual freedom (vis-à-vis the state) through academic freedom (gakumon no jiyū) and by fostering a ‘spirit of individuality’ (jihatuteki na seishin). Under these acts, education was understood as means to ‘nurture well-rounded individuals’ (jinkaku no kansei) who would then ‘contribute to the creation and progress of culture’ (bunka no sōzō to hatten ni kōken suru). In the 2006 reforms, this article is replaced by various ‘aims of education’ (kyōiku no mokuhyō), such as: cultivating ‘a sense of morality’ (dōtokushin), ‘aesthetic sensibilities’ (yutaka na jōsō) and ‘love of one’s country and homeland’ (waga kuni to kyōdo wo aisuru).125 In other words, the 2006 FLE enables the state to stipulate what constitutes ‘well-roundedness’ and enforce their compliance. More recently, in 2015 the education ministry adopted a series of reforms which included upgrading moral education from a special non-subject class to a special subject (tokubetsu kyōka) from school years 2018 and 2019 for primary and middle schools respectively, in response to school bullying scandals.126 In addition, from school year 2022 the high school subject ‘contemporary society’ (gendai shakai) – which teaches social scientific concepts and contemporary social issues – will be replaced with civics education (called ‘public’ kōkyō).

As Robert Cox famously said, ‘theory is always for someone and for some purpose’.127 This article has demonstrated that the appropriation of Ortega’s theory towards reactionary ends has been possible not because of a misinterpretation but precisely because theory has been ‘decontextualised and recontextualised across diverse social and political situations’.128 The radical reactionary potential is made possible in the meeting, or entanglement, between a travelling theory and an intellectual lineage into which it is embedded. Tracing the basso ostinato around the question of modernisation in Japan, we see radical conservatives place themselves in a lineage of thought which

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122. Tsukurukai, ‘Kyōkasho’.
123. Such as the right-wing organisation Nippon Kaigi and the Atarashii Kyōiku Kihonhō wo Motomerukai established by radical conservative ideologues associated with the Tsukurukai. Hirokazu Ōuchi, ‘Kyōiku Kihonhō “Kaitei” to Sono Ato’, in Tettei Kenshō Nihon no Ukeika, ed. Hotaka Tsukada (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2017), 154; 157.
124. Ōuchi, ‘Kyōiku Kihonhō’, 160.
125. Ibid., 166.
126. Robert W. Cox, ‘Social Forces, States and world Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’, Millennium: Journal of International Studies 10, no.2 (1981): 128.
127. Atsuko Watanabe, Japanese Geopolitics, 74.
conceives moments of radical social change as an invasion of foreign values which have been internalised and perpetuated by domestic traitors. To think of these currents as the \textit{basso ostinato} for the post-Cold War cohort of radical conservative intellectuals is not to claim that these are the only ways in which Japanese thinkers, conservative and otherwise, have historically thought through modernity. Nor is the interest here to discuss the extent of historical accuracy in such conceptualisations. Rather, it has merely shown that these theoretical entanglements of the modern, culture, and morality provide a fertile ground into which conceptual frameworks can be implanted and shaped. Thinking about travelling theory in this way allows us to see the new, radical potential of theories and, perhaps more importantly, the political projects empowered as a consequence.

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