



“Liberal” and pacifism in postwar Japan—their given conditions and historical background



The Diet and Mt. Fuji at dusk. “In Japan, ‘liberal’ can be thought of as a word that refers to a position that is neither conservative nor communist.” “[...] what is ‘liberal’ in postwar Japan? How does it relate to security policy, which has been the main axis of conflict in Japanese party politics from the postwar period to the present, and to pacifism, which was enshrined in the postwar constitution?” The author approaches this question from the historical background of postwar Japan.

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What is “liberal”? Even in Europe and America, there is no agreed-upon definition. In terms of economic and social policies, it is sometimes used in Western Europe to mean “laissez-faire,” but in the United States it is also used to mean large government spending.¹ “Liberal” has different meanings depending on the history and political context of the country.

So what is “liberal” in postwar Japan? How does it relate to security policy, which has been the main axis of conflict in Japanese party politics from the postwar period to the present, and to pacifism, which was enshrined in the postwar constitution? This paper examines these two questions against the historical background of postwar Japan.

This paper has four parts. First, I will review the historical evolution of the term “liberal” in Japanese political coverage. Second, after confirming the given conditions of Japan’s postwar security environment, I will describe how pacifism was related to postwar constitutional defense. Third, I will describe the ideological acts of pacifism that were attempted under the given conditions. Finally, based on the above, I will consider implications for modern times.

¹ For example, political economist Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s “*Posuto Kogyo Keizai no Shakai-teki Kiso* (Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies)” (translated by Watanabe Masao and Watanabe Keiko, *Sakurai Shoten*, 2000, original publication 1999), page 140, is written by the author based on classical usage in Europe. He emphasizes that “liberal” is used to mean “laissez-faire,” and warns American readers not to misinterpret this point.

“Liberal” as “non-conservatives and non-communists”

The meaning of “liberal” as a political term varies from country to country. In Japan, “liberal” can be thought of as a word that refers to a position that is neither conservative nor communist. Let’s first examine how this word came to be used in Japanese political coverage.

The term “liberal” has been used in newspaper political coverage since the mid-1980s. Prior to that, the term “reformist” (*kakushin*) was used in Japanese party politics to refer to non-communist leftists. The term was used in the general sense of technological or organizational innovation, or as a term for right-wing movements during the war. The term was not used in newspapers to refer to the left wing until 1946.²

A newspaper reporter at the time recalls how “reformists” came to be used as a term for leftists. Although the date and time are unknown, it is said that the impetus came from Masuda Toshiro (1908–2002), who was deputy chief of the political department at the *Asahi shimbun* newspaper (later to become managing director), who raised the issue at an internal meeting. “Socialist and communist parties, labor unions, and certain cultural groups have been called ‘*shimpo-ha*’ (progressive) in the newspapers, but isn’t that something to think about? *Shimpo* means good. As a terminology for objective reporting, words based on such value judgments are not appropriate. So why not call them *kakushin* (reformers) in a different sense than before the war?”³ If true, the word was originally chosen as a kind of anti-communist sentiment.

Until the early 1950s, however, the term was used only in some election reports, and there are no reports of political parties calling themselves “reformists.” At that time, there was intense conflict between the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), and there was no incentive for either party to see itself as a single faction.

By the mid-1950s, however, there were examples of the SDPJ and *Sohyo* (General Council of Trade Unions of Japan [JCTU]) calling themselves “reformists.” In 1951, the SDPJ split into the Left, the Right Socialist Party of Japan, and the Japan Labor-Farmer Party over the ratification of the Japan-US Security Treaty and the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Therefore, it became necessary to refer to them collectively as the “Three Reformist Parties” and the “Reformist Camp.”⁴

However, this terminology in the 1950s did not include the JCP. This was probably because the SDPJ had strong anti-Communist sentiments and the JCP was a force that could be ignored. The JCP won 35 seats in the lower house in the 1949 general election, but its subsequent militant line saw its number of seats drastically reduced, and its number of seats in the Diet in the 1950s was very small. The use of the term “reformists” to include the JCP took root after the 1960s, when the number of JCP seats increased.⁵

² “*Kakushin-seiryoku de Shushu Sanpa: Ketsugi-an no Shushi* (Reconciliation with reformists forces: Purpose of the three-party resolution),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, December 17, 1946, morning edition, p. 1; “*Kiken no Zogen ga Kagi: Hoshu to Kakushin ga hobo hakuchū* (Increase or decrease in abstentions is the key; conservatives and reformists are almost on par),” *Yomiuri shimbun*, 1947, 4. Page 1 of the morning edition on the 14th of each month. We conducted a research by searching for articles on the terms “*kakushin* (reformists)” and “liberal” in the databases of the *Asahi shimbun*, *Yomiuri shimbun*, and *Mainichi shimbun*.

³ Kumakura Masaya, “*Asahi shimbun kisha no Shogen 8: Shimbun no Shinda Hibi* (Kumakura Masaya, *Asahi shimbun* reporter’s testimony 8: Dead days of newspapers),” *Asahi Sonorama*, 1982, p. 147. The quotation is from *Asahi Bunko edition* (1988), page 170.

⁴ For example, “*Kakushin-jinei no Toitsu Kodo: Sohyo no Moshire* (Unified Action of the Reformist Camp – Proposal of *Sohyo* (General Council of Trade Unions of Japan [JCTU]),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, December 9, 1954, morning edition, page 1. An earlier example of this is “*Sha, Kakushin-jinei tono Godo Teisho* (Joint proposal with Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) and reformist camp),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, December 28, 1949, p. 1, but this is not a self-proclaimed statement by the political party.

⁵ An early example is “*Sato Shin-shuhan: Kakushin-jinei no Hankyo* (Sato as a new prime minister: Reactions of the reformist camp),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, November 10, 1964, morning edition, page 2.

On the other hand, “liberal (*riberaru*)” was not used in political reporting until the mid-1980s. There was a usage to describe people, school spirit, etc. as “liberal (*riberaru*).” For example, older anti-communist liberal intellectuals such as the philosopher Watsuji Tesuro (1889–1960) and the lawyer Tanaka Kotaro (1890–1974) were sometimes called “old liberals (*orudo riberarisuto*).” Later, in the 1970s, the term was used in newspapers to describe American politics.

The term “liberal (*riberaru*)” began to be used in newspaper political coverage in 1986 with the same-day elections for the Lower and the Upper Houses. At that time, Eda Satsuki (1941–2021), the representative of the then-small Socialist Democratic Federation (SDF) political party, called for the unity of the “liberal (*riberaru*) group.”⁶

The predecessor of the SDF was the Socialist Citizen’s Federation, founded in 1977 by Eda Saburo (1907–77), a former secretary general of the SDPJ, and Kan Naoto (1946–), then a young politician. Eda submitted an opinion paper to the SDPJ convention calling for a “Kakushin and Chudo Rengo Seiken (coalition government of reformists and centrists)” excluding the JCP, but there were conflicts within the party and the group left the party. After Eda Saburo’s death, his son Satsuki became the head of the SDF. In 1986, Eda Satsuki even advocated a political alliance with the “liberal (*riberaru*) group in the Liberal Democratic Party (*Jiyu minshuto*, LDP).”⁷

Then the Soviet Union collapsed, and in December 1991, SDPJ leader Tanabe Makoto (1922–2015) made cooperation with “liberal forces (*riberaru na seiryoku*)” the party’s election policy. This is also an intention to cooperate with a part of the LDP that is not conservative, without the JCP. However, the newspaper report said, “What exactly is a political force that takes a liberal (*riberaru*) position?” which seems to have been an unfamiliar term in the political world at that time.⁸

However, in August 1993, the non-LDP government of Hosokawa Morihiro was formed, and the number of books and articles with “liberal (*riberaru*)” in the title increased.⁹ Moreover, after the dissolution of the SDPJ in January 1996, the first Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), founded in September of the same year, adopted the theme of “liberal (*riberaru*).” The word “liberal (*riberaru*)” used by these political parties meant non-conservative and non-communist.

From the above, we can see that (1) “reformists (*kakushin*)” was used in the 1950s to mean non-conservative and non-communist. However, (2) after the 1960s, the word “reformist” became established as a term that included the JCP, and (3) we can see how “liberal (*riberaru*)” came to be used in the 1980s to refer to political factions excluding the JCP. Although the words have changed, there is no general term for positions that are neither conservative nor communist, so the structure in which they were looking for it remained consistent.

⁶ “*Dojitsu-sen Do Tatakau: Kakuto Shuno ni Kiku 6: Kono Yohei-shi Eda Satsuki-shi* (How to fight the same-day election: Ask the leaders of each party 6: Mr. Kono Yohei, Mr. Eda Satsuki,” *Yomiuri shimbun*, June 10, 1986 morning edition, p. 2, “*Irei Dojitsu-sem e: Shin-jiku daihyo Kono Yohei-shi Kibishii Senkyo-sen wo Kakugo, Eda Satsuki-shi Yato-rengo e Nebarizuyoku* (Unprecedented same-day election: New Liberal Club representative Kono Yohei prepares for a tough campaign, Socialist Democratic Federation (SDF) representative Eda Satsuki persistently supports opposition alliance),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, June 8, 1986, morning edition, p. 2.

⁷ “*Jimin-riberaru-ha to Seisaku Rengo Mezaso: SDF Shokicho Kataru* (Let’s aim for a policy alliance with Liberal Democratic Party liberals: Socialist Democratic Federation (SDF) general secretary says),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, June 19, 1986 evening edition, p. 2.

⁸ “*Makkasa, Dorepa, Kenan no Kaidan Memo* (Memo from the meeting between MacArthur, Draper, and Kennan),” Otake Hideo (ed.), “*Sengo Nihon Boei Mondai Shiryō-shū* (Postwar Japanese Defense Issues Collection),” *Sanichi Shobo*, 1991–92, Volume 1.

⁹ Akedo Takahiro, “*Gendai ni okeru ‘riberal’ no Imeji no Henyo—‘Riberaru girai’ ni kansuru Kenkyū noto* (Transformation of the image of ‘liberal’ in modern Japan: Research notes on ‘hate of liberals,’)” *Gendai Shiso*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (February 2018 issue), searching for titles using the National Diet Library Search since 1990.

Given conditions in postwar Japan

Unlike in North America and Western Europe, the concept of “liberal” thus established in Japan tends to be discussed in terms of pacifism rather than economic policy. For example, a 1985 editorial in the *Asahi shimbun* stated: “The origins of the SDPJ lie in pacifism and democracy based on the tragic war experience, and since then it has secured the position of the main opposition party by winning the support of liberal (*riberaru*) people who are not dissatisfied with the conservative government. However, the SDPJ mistook support for its own party as support for socialism.”¹⁰ The argument that pacifism is the basis of “liberal” can be said to have taken root in the mid-1980s, when “liberal (*riberaru*)” began to be used as a term for party politics. This is also related to the defense of Japan’s postwar constitution, which enshrined pacifism.

However, there were some circumstances that led to this point. In Japan, “pacifism,” “constitutionalism,” and “anti-conservatism” were linked together especially in the 1950s. In order to understand the reason for this, it is necessary to look back at the given conditions in which Japan found itself after the war and its postwar history.

Japan underwent institutional reform under the sole occupation of the United States. It can be said that Japan is the only country of this kind. The southern part of the Korean peninsula and Micronesia were also occupied by the United States alone, but there was little institutional reform. Since these countries were not enemies of the United States, it would have been more rational to use local conservative influential figures to govern them rather than incur political and economic costs to reform their systems. Germany and Italy, which were enemy countries, were reformed after their occupation, but they were not occupied by the United States alone.¹¹ In this way, postwar Japan became a country whose relationship with the United States could not be ignored as a kind of given condition.

Occupation reform aimed to demilitarize military states that had disrupted the international order and to further democratize political and economic systems. In other words, the purpose of the reform was demilitarization and democratization. In February 1946, the General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ–SCAP, hereinafter GHQ) stepped forward to prepare the draft of the new Constitution of postwar Japan.

However, the directive from the American mainland did not include a complete ban on Japan’s military capabilities in the Constitution. Then who proposed the postwar Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which renounced war and prohibited the retention of military power? There are various theories about this, but Colonel Charles L. Kades (1906–96), the deputy chief of the Government Section at GHQ, stated in 1984 that “at that time, everyone was thinking the same thing about renunciation of war and pacifism, and it is difficult to say from whom or where this idea originated.”¹² Both the Japanese side and the occupation army had just experienced the devastation of war, and it is believed that their consensus was not to repeat the tragedy.

The Japanese government also did not object to the renunciation of war. The Japanese government opposed the provisions on the status of the emperor in the GHQ draft, had many reservations about local systems and human rights provisions, and engaged in intensive negotiations with the GHQ Government

¹⁰ “*Shakai-to wa Gaibu no Koe wo Kike* (The Socialist Democratic Federation (SDF) must listen to outside voices),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, March 27, 1985, morning edition, p. 5.

¹¹ Sodei Rinjiro and Takemae Eiji (eds.), “*Sengo Nihon no Genten—Senryo-shi no Genzai* (Origins of postwar Japan: Current occupation history),” *Yushisha*, 1992; Yui Daizaburo, Nakamura Masanori, and Toyoshita Narahiko (eds.), “*Senryo no Kokusai hikaku—Nihon, Ajia, Yoropa* (International comparison of occupation reforms: Japan, Asia, and Europe),” *Sanseido*, 1994.

¹² Takemae Eiji, “*Nihon-senryo—GHQ kokan no Shogen* (Japanese Occupation: Testimonies of GHQ High Officials),” *Chuokoronsha*, 1988, p. 60.

Section. However, Article 9 was not the subject of such negotiations.¹³

There are several possible reasons for this. First of all, on the Japanese side at that time, since the country was under occupation and disarmament was in progress, the reality was that there was no point in writing an arms clause in the new constitution. The Japanese government and politicians had little interest in armament, and the new constitutions drafted by each political party at that time did not have an armament clause.¹⁴ In the spring of 1946, when the five great powers of the Security Council were in agreement, the preamble to the Constitution read: “[...] we have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world.” As this description suggests, it was thought that there was no need or possibility for Japan to arm itself.

In those days, people had to eat first, and the slogan for the so-called May Day for food supplies in 1946 was “Meals before the Constitution.” Even in the first postwar election for the Lower House of Parliament, held in April 1946, the Constitution was not an issue and was not mentioned in the political views of most of the candidates.¹⁵

In the constitutional deliberations of the Imperial Diet [which lasted until May 3, 1947, when the new constitution came into force], the conservative politicians were unanimous in their support of the new constitution. A newspaper report in March 1946 stated, “Relieved by the broad framework for the continuation of the imperial system and capitalism, the business community gives its support to the proposed constitutional amendment,” and that they hoped “the new constitution would relieve some of the pressure from the radical forces led by the JCP.”¹⁶ Conversely, the SDPJ was criticized for the new constitution’s inadequate welfare provisions, but ultimately agreed with the proposal.

The JCP was the only party in the Imperial Diet to oppose the new constitution. This was because the constitution recognized the emperor and capitalism, but the JCP was also the only political party to write an arms clause in its own draft constitution. The JCP’s policy at the time was that Japan should join the socialist camp and fight, and that neutrality and disarmament were “opportunistic.”¹⁷

Nambara Shigeru (1889–1974), a member of the House of Peers in the Imperial Diet, questioned that this provision would prevent Japan from contributing troops to the United Nations forces and would become an obstacle to Japan’s accession to the UN. However, Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (1878–1967) and other conservative politicians voted in favor of the bill. In other words, at that point, it could be said that “constitutionalism” was actually “conservatism.”

Finally, Article 9 of the new Constitution was passed by the Imperial Diet with the addition of the phrase “to achieve the objectives of the preceding paragraph” between paragraph 1, which stipulated renunciation of war, and paragraph 2, which stipulated the prohibition of maintaining military forces. Ashida Hitoshi (1887–1959), on the subcommittee of the Committee on the Bill for Revision of the Imperial Constitution, made this amendment [so-called Ashida Amendment]. This could be interpreted as allowing the military

¹³ This process was discussed in Oguma Eiji, “*Senryo to Juyo—Nihonkoku Kenpo no Seitei-katei to sono Seikaku* (Occupation and acceptance: The process of establishing the Japanese Constitution and its characteristics),” *Ronkyu Jurist*, No. 34 (August 2020).

¹⁴ Koseki Shoichi, “*Nihonkoku Kenpo Kensho 1945–2000 Shiryo to Renten: 9-jo to Anzenhosho* (Japanese Constitution verification 1945–2000: Materials and issues: Article 9 and security),” Shogakukan Bunko, 2001, pp. 31–137.

¹⁵ The Research Commission on the Constitution conducted a sampling survey of the political opinions of 535 candidates published in the election bulletin, and found that 17.4% of the candidates mentioned the outline of the government’s constitutional amendment draft, while 16.1% did not mention the outline but mentioned constitutional amendment. Sato Tatsuo, revised by Sato Isao, “*Nihonkoku Kenpo Seiritsu-shi Dai San-kan* (History of the Establishment of the Constitution of Japan, Volume 3),” *Yuhikaku*, 1994, pp. 361–362.

¹⁶ “*Tenno-sei, Shihonshugi Sonzoku no Okina Waku ni Ando* (Relief at the large scale of continuation of the imperial system and capitalism),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, March 10, 1946, p. 1.

¹⁷ “Makkasa, Dorepa, Kenan no Kaidan Memo (Memo from the meeting between MacArthur, Draper, and Kennan),” Otake Hideo (ed.), “*Sengo Nihon Boei Mondai Shiryo-shu* (Postwar Japanese Defense Issues Collection),” *Sanichi Shobo*, 1991–92, Volume 1.

to renounce war but maintain military strength for self-defense, but GHQ did not object.¹⁸ The reason is unknown, but as mentioned above, at that time, few believed in the possibility of Japanese rearmament.

The reason for the change of this situation was the Cold War, and in 1948 the rearmament of Japan began to be considered within the US government. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, US forces in Japan were sent to the Korean Peninsula, and the National Police Reserve (NPR), the predecessor of the Self-Defense Forces, was organized in Japan.

However, there is no evidence that the Japanese government at that time considered the possibility of a military invasion of Japan from outside as a concrete scenario.¹⁹ Generally speaking, if there were an emergency in the Far East, it would most likely occur on the Korean peninsula and in Taiwan. Moreover, from a military point of view, it was difficult to imagine the existence of an enemy country that would invade Japan first. The concern for Japan was a communist civil war, which was called an indirect invasion. The establishment of the NPR was ordered by Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964), but this did not mean creating a powerful national defense force, but rather a police force to suppress civil wars.

It is true that the US government did not want to create a “military vacuum” in the Far East and expected Japan to strengthen its defenses. However, it did not specify what form a military invasion of Japan might take. In January 1951, the US Department of the Army analyzed that even if the Korean War escalated into an all-out war with communist forces, Japan would be able to cope by strengthening its NPR.²⁰ Later, at the Japan-US talks in October 1953, the US government suggested that an invasion from the north and south of the Japanese archipelago was possible and urged Japan to strengthen its defenses. However, the Japanese government regarded this as a negotiating “bluff” (threat) and accepted the actual possibility as unlikely.²¹

In addition, there has long been a belief on the American side that Japan would not need military equipment if the US secured a base on Okinawa. An air base on Okinawa would put the Korean Peninsula, China, and Vietnam within range of strategic bombers. To George F. Kennan (1904–2005), the State Department’s director of policy planning, who came to Tokyo in March 1948, MacArthur argued that Japan would not need troops if the US secured a base on Okinawa.²²

In other words, the front lines of the Cold War were the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, and Okinawa, and Japan was in the rear, where the possibility of direct invasion was low; this could also be said to be a given condition for postwar Japan.

Japan’s conservative politicians sometimes advocated rearmament based on a kind of national moral theory, but only a few were seriously concerned about the possibility of military invasion.²³ Nevertheless, many conservative politicians in the 1950s argued that the constitution should be revised, that rearmament should be carried out, and that issues such as gender equality and freedom of speech and the press should be reconsidered.

¹⁸ Oguma, supra, “*Senryo to Juyo—Nihonkoku Kenpo no Seitei-katei to sono Seikaku* (Occupation and acceptance: The process of establishing the Japanese Constitution and its characteristics).”

¹⁹ Kusunoki Ayako, “*Yoshida Shigeru to Anzenhosho-seisaku no Keisei—Nichibei no Koso to sono Sogosayo 1943–1952 nen* (Yoshida Shigeru and the Formation of Security Policy: Japan-US Concepts and Their Interactions, 1943–1952),” *Minerva Shobo*, 2009, Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 248.

²¹ Ikeda Shintaro, “*Nichibei-domei no Seiji-shi—Arison Chunichi-taishi to ‘1955-nen Taisei’ no Seiritsu* (Political History of the Japan-U.S. alliance: Ambassador Alison and the establishment of the 1955 system,)” *Kokusai Shoin*, 2004, p. 72.

²² “*Makkasa, Dorepa, Kenan no Kaidan Memo* (Memo from the meeting between MacArthur, Draper, and Kennan),” Otake Hideo (ed.), “*Sengo Nihon Boei Mondai Shiryo-shu* (Postwar Japanese Defense Issues Collection),” *Sanichi Shobo*, 1991–92, Volume 1.

²³ Otake Hideo, “*Saigunbi to Nashonarizumu—Hoshu, Riberaru, Shakaiminshushugisha no Boei-kan* (Rearmament and nationalism: Defense views of conservatives, liberals, and social democrats),” *Chuokoronsha*, 1988.

In other words, the pacifism of the Constitution was changed because of American policies and the wishes of pro-American conservatives, not because of urgent military reasons. This formed the context in which “pacifism,” “constitutionalism,” and “anti-conservatism” were linked in the 1950s.

Peace treaty and Japan-US Security Treaty

In 1951 during the Korean War, Japan signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Japan-US Security Treaty. This background also became a given condition for postwar Japan and influenced the nature of pacifism.

The United States declared in its 1941 Atlantic Charter that, unlike the Axis powers, it had no territorial ambitions. If the United States were to occupy Japan forever, it could become perfect propaganda material for the Soviet Union. There was also concern that dissatisfaction with the prolonged occupation would increase anti-American sentiment in Japan. By mid-1949, the State Department, which handles foreign affairs for the United States, was considering signing a peace treaty to officially end the war, end the occupation, and make Japan independent.

But the US military was against it. One reason was that they wanted to secure bases in Japan and Okinawa. Yoshida Shigeru then proposed to the United States that the US military presence in Japan could be requested by the Japanese side just before the Korean War.²⁴ Yoshida probably wanted to promote a peace treaty and end the occupation quickly.

As a result, the Japan-US Security Treaty was concluded at the same time as the peace treaty. This was more of a base provision treaty than a mutual defense treaty. Since Japan has no military and cannot protect the United States, a mutual defense treaty cannot be concluded. Furthermore, the Mutual Defense Treaty does not provide a reason for the presence of US military bases in Japan. The Japan-US Security Treaty of 1951 justified the continued presence of US troops even after the occupation ended and Japan became an independent country. It stated that the US military could be stationed in Japan for “the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East.” It also states that the stationed US forces may respond to “armed attacks from” outside powers, but the obligation to defend Japan is not clearly stated. On the other hand, it was said that it could also be used to put down “internal riots and disturbances” by the communists. It can be said that priority was given to securing the naval bases in Yokosuka and the air bases in Okinawa for the sake of stability in the “Far East.”

The Japanese response was not positive. In a public opinion poll in November 1950, the majority of the people were against providing bases for the US military.²⁵ The conventional wisdom at the time was that having foreign troops stationed there was like being a colonial state, and some thought it was similar to “Manchukuo,” where the Japanese military secured bases in the 1930s.²⁶ The Foreign Ministry and Yoshida Shigeru considered other options, but it seems that the international environment and the US attitude left them no other choice.

This also became a given condition for postwar Japan. Japan underwent demilitarization and democratization under the sole occupation of the United States. And although it is unlikely that Japan would be directly invaded, the only way Japan could gain independence was through the presence of US

²⁴ There is a wealth of research on the negotiations within the United States and between Japan and the United States during this period, and Kusunoki’s “*Yoshida Shigeru to Anzenhoshō-seisaku no Keisei* (Yoshida Shigeru and the Formation of Security Policy),” cited above, can be said to be one of the achievements.

²⁵ “*Kowa to Nihon Saibusō* (Peace and the Re-Armament of Japan),” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, November 15, 1950, morning edition, p. 1. 37.5% opposed, 29.9% in favor, and 32.6% don’t know.

²⁶ Oguma, supra, “*Minshū to ‘aikoku* (Democracy and patriots),” Chapter 11.

troops. Japanese politics and pacifism were both formed under these given conditions.

Pacifism and constitutionalism linked to “anti-conservatives”

Article 9 of the Constitution began to attract attention after the start of the Korean War and the directive to establish the NPR. Public opinion at that time was sensitive and the results varied depending on the question. When asked whether they agreed that an independent country needed an army, 71% of the respondents agreed.²⁷ However, when asked if they favored rebuilding the “national defense force,” 47.3% favored it and only 10.8% favored conscription.²⁸ Although the country recognizes that it has an army, it can be said that the national mood was not in favor of returning to the prewar situation.

These national sentiments were also reflected in public opinion on the Constitution. Public opinion polls during the Korean War showed that many people were in favor of amending the Constitution. However, opposition to constitutional amendment increased in the mid-1950s and reversed in the late 1950s.²⁹ The end of the Korean War and the easing of tensions may have been one factor, but another was a backlash against conservative politicians.

When the occupation ended in April 1952, conservative politicians who had been expelled from public office returned in large numbers. In the Lower House election held in October of the same year, they accounted for 30% of the winners.³⁰ In 1953, the ruling Liberal Party created a diet committee to study constitutional reform, chaired by Kishi Nobusuke (1896–1987), and created a reform outline oriented toward a return to the prewar period. First, the Emperor was defined as the “head of state” and given the right to suspend the Diet. The Upper House was composed of nominated and indirectly elected members, and the public election system for prefectural governors was abolished. The national review system of the judges of the Supreme Court was abolished, and the Cabinet Civilian Regulations were also abolished. Furthermore, it was argued that the law restricts fundamental human rights, and Article 21 (Freedom of assembly and association as well as speech), Article 24 (equality of the sexes), Article 28 (right of workers), Article 38 (right to remain silent) and other issues were cited as issues.³¹ In 1955, conservative parties came together to form the LDP, which advocated the “establishment of self-imposed constitution.”

However, in response to this situation, opinions were expressed in favor of the Constitution, mainly from the younger generation and women. This was not necessarily a defense of Article 9 alone; some were critical of Article 9 but opposed to amending Article 24.³² It can be said that freedom of speech and the press, as well as gender equality, were supported by many people in Japan.

Under these circumstances, in 1950, “constitutionalism,” “pacifism,” and “anti-conservatives” were linked. A context was established in which constitutional revision meant a return to the prewar era, and the constitutionalism that opposed it was pacifism, but it was also a defense of broader human rights and democracy.

²⁷ “*Kowa Joyaku wo Do omou?* (What do you think about the peace treaty?), Headquarters opinion poll,” *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, September 20, 1951, morning edition, page 1.

²⁸ “*Saigunbi Doarubeki?* (What should rearmament be like?) Headquarters National Opinion Survey,” *Yomiuri shimbun*, March 26, 1951, morning edition, p. 1.

²⁹ [Sakaiya Shiro](#), “*Kenpo to Yoron—Sengo Nihonjin wa Kenpo to Domukiattekitanoka* (The Constitution and Public Opinion—How have postwar Japanese people faced the Constitution?)” *Chikuma Shobo*, 2017.

³⁰ Ishikawa Masumi, “*Sengo Seiji-shi* (Postwar Political History),” *Iwanami Shoten*, 1995, p. 64.

³¹ Liberal Party Constitutional Research Group, “*Nihonkoku Kenpo Kaisei-an yoko narabini Setsumeisho* (Summary and Explanation of the Japanese Constitution Amendment Bill.)” Watanabe Osamu (ed.), “*Kenpo Kaisei no Soten* (Issues in Constitutional Amendments),” *Junposha*, 2002, pp. 502–518.

³² “*Kenpo Watashitachi wa ko omo* (This is what we think about the Constitution),” Hirabayashi Taiko’s opinion in the May 2, 1955 morning edition of the *Mainichi shimbun*, etc.

Under such circumstances, the JCP and SDPJ, which were initially critical of the constitution, began to advocate constitutionalism in the context of opposing conservative parties.³³ In January 1954, the SDPJ factions, without the JCP, formed the National Federation for Upholding the Constitution (NUFC). This was around the same time that the term “reformists (*kakushin*)” began to be used as a self-styled term for political party sides.

As a result, the SDPJ held more than one-third of the parliamentary seats, and the LDP remained unable to propose constitutional amendments. As stated in the aforementioned 1985 editorial in the *Asahi shimbun*, this was not due to support for socialism, but support for “anti-conservatives” in a broader sense.

Looking at the number of votes received in general elections since 1952, while the population and the number of voters have increased, the total number of votes received by the conservative parties and the LDP, which was created with the merger of the conservative parties in 1955, remained at about 24 million, almost unchanged until 1969. In contrast, the total number of votes received by opposition reformist (*kakushin*) parties and abstentions increased in parallel.³⁴ This gave the impression that older voters continued to vote for local conservative politicians, while younger new voters either joined the opposition party or abstained. The idea that the younger generation supports “reformists” and constitutionalism is formed during this period.

The 1960 Anpo Protests and “security myth”

The subsequent movement against the revision of the Security Treaty in 1960 (1960 Anpo Protests) gave an impression of the persistence of pacifism. However, this movement was motivated more by opposition to Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke than by opposition to the treaty revision.

It is true that the Security Treaty became a problem right after its conclusion. However, diplomacy and defense are far from everyday life, and normally would not attract the attention of the general public. The 1960 Security Treaty revisions were initially met with little interest, with some in the protest movement even suggesting the slogan, “If the Security Treaty is revised, tofu will cost 5 yen more.”³⁵

The revision of the Security Treaty itself had some improvements. First, the clause that allowed the US military to be dispatched to suppress Japan’s “internal riots and disturbances” was removed. The treaty was extended every 10 years, and the terms of the treaty made it possible for Japan to request denunciation. Furthermore, it stipulated that an armed attack on the territory of Japan’s administration would be dealt with as a common danger between Japan and the United States, and could be read as imposing an obligation on the US military to defend Japan. Since it cannot be a mutual defense treaty as long as the Self-Defense Forces cannot be deployed overseas, it can be said that the Kishi Nobusuke administration, which negotiated the deal, tried to get it closer to a treaty on equal footing.

However, this provision could also be read to mean that Japan would be involved in a war if US military bases in Japan’s administrative territory were attacked. If there is a contingency, it would be against the Korean peninsula or Taiwan first, and if Japan is attacked, it would be against US military bases operating from Japan in the Far East. In this case, revising the treaty would be more likely to endanger Japan. Against this background of concern, the opposition parties opposed the treaty, but Prime Minister Kishi decided to ratify it by introducing a police force into the Diet and removing the SDPJ members. And he did it in front

³³ Oguma, supra, “*Minshu*’to *’aikoku* (Democracy and patriots),” Chapter 11.

³⁴ Oguma Eiji, “‘3:2:5’ no Kozo—*Gendai Nihon no Tokuhyo Kozo to ‘Burokku Kizoku Ishiki’* (The composition of 3:2:5—Vote structure in modern Japan and the sense of belonging to a block),” *Sekai*, No. 903 (January 2018 issue).

³⁵ Shimizu Ikutaro, “*Anpo no Nisshi (Security Diary)*,” Shimizu Ikutaro’s Collected Works, *Kodansha*, 1992–93, Vol. 14, p. 451. This incident is said to have taken place on July 7, 1959 at the Security Issues Study Group.

of a television broadcast. The Kishi administration's approval rating dropped to 12% as protests rapidly expanded after the Kishi administration's heavy-handed methods, which were typical of prewar politicians.³⁶

However, it cannot be concluded that this was because the people had a strong interest in the contents of the security treaty. Kishi was a cabinet minister at the time of the war between Japan and the United States, and was imprisoned as a Class A war criminal after the war. However, Kishi returned to politics after his expulsion was overturned and drafted the prewar-oriented constitutional amendment mentioned above. Many people protested, feeling that it was unacceptable and dangerous for him to force through military-related treaties.³⁷

As a result, ratification of the Security Treaty was approved, but Kishi resigned. Kishi had even considered amending the constitution after the security treaty, but this movement eventually blocked that idea, and the LDP subsequently became cautious about amending the constitution. The wave of protests subsided after Kishi's resignation, but that's no surprise. For many of those involved in the movement, the Security Treaty itself was not a major concern, and Kishi's resignation may have served their purpose.

Later, however, there remained an "Anti-security treaty myth" among reformist political parties and the student movement, the idea that if you said "US-Japan security treaty," it would attract public attention. Thus, in the 1960s, opposition to the Security Treaty was associated with "constitutionalism," "pacifism," and "anti-conservatism." This coincided with the period when the JCP abandoned its militant line and expanded its party, and "reformists" became a term that included the JCP.

In this way, in the 1950s and 1960s, a series of connections were formed in Japan that came to be known as "reformist" and "liberal" values. The generation that internalized this most was the one whose personality was formed during this period. Specifically, it is thought to have ranged from the generation including writer Oe Kenzaburo (1935–2023) and novelist Oda Makoto (1932–2007), who were in their early teens at the end of the war, to the "baby boom generation" born after the war.

Although the foundations of Japan's social security system were realized during the Kishi cabinet, there are no newspaper reports from the same period that describe Kishi as "liberal (*riberaru*)" for this reason. The concept of "liberal," which refers to the size of government expenditures such as social security, came to Japan in the 1970s through American political reporting. Even today, however, it is difficult to say that it has caught on outside a small group of knowledgeable people.

Under the LDP, which was reluctant to change the constitution, postwar Japanese pacifism became firmly established as a policy, although it was not perfect. The year 1976 marked a turning point in its institutionalization. Japan had signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1969, but it was not ratified by the Diet until 1976. This was the year after the end of the Vietnam War, and it was the time of the Miki Takeo (1907–88) Cabinet. In the same year, the cabinet approved the principle of keeping defense spending below 1% of GNP, and the government's unified position was on three basic rules for arms exports. Through this institutionalization, it is believed that the discourse that the backbone of "liberalism" was pacifism was established in the 1980s.

Postwar Japan's pacifism ideology

Based on the above, I will list two ideological acts of pacifism in postwar Japan and examine their

³⁶ "Kishi-naikaku wo do omoka (What do you think of the Kishi Cabinet?)," *Asahi shimbun*, Tokyo edition, June 3, 1960, morning edition, page 1. The Kishi Cabinet's approval rating indicates that it would be better if it continued.

³⁷ Oguma, supra, "'Minshu' to 'aikoku' (Democracy and patriots)," Chapter 12.

ideological implications. The first is the Peace Study Group (Heiwa Mondai Danwa-Kai), and the second is the anti-Vietnam War movement.

The Peace Study Group, an intellectual group, issued three statements between 1949 and 1950. The group discussed total peace including the Eastern bloc countries, demilitarization, and pacifism in the constitution, which caused a great stir. This group included people close to the left wing of the SDPJ as well as anti-communist liberals such as Abe Yoshishige (1883–1966), who was minister of education in the Shidehara Kijuro cabinet, and Tanaka Kotaro (1890–1974), who became chief justice of the Supreme Court. However, they were opposed to a peace treaty only with the Western bloc countries that would leave the US military bases in place in Japan.

According to the recollections of Shimizu Ikutaro (1907–88), a member of the Group, one of the reasons was distrust of the United States. For the Japanese at the time, the United States had been their enemy until about five years earlier. From the Japanese point of view, there is no telling when the United States would leave Japan alone and withdraw for its own convenience. However, it would be dangerous to leave the US military bases in Japan, a situation that would invite the hostility of the Soviet Union, without concluding a peace treaty with the Soviet Union. According to Shimizu, these judgments led to opposition to a peace treaty only with the Western bloc countries with the US military bases left in place and the expression of hope for an overall peace treaty that included the Soviet Union.³⁸

Nambara Shigeru also argued that the ideal of non-militarization proclaimed in the Constitution could not be easily abandoned.³⁹ As mentioned above, he was the person who criticized Article 9 in the 1946 Imperial Diet. Nambara argued that the “opportunism” of changing a constitution that had been adopted in spite of such criticism in just a few years was morally corrupt.

So, is it possible to not allow the US military to be stationed and still be unarmed? This was discussed in the Group’s third statement, “*Mitabi Heiwa ni Tsuite* (Third Statement on Peace).” In the first chapter of this statement, which was written by a political scientist, Maruyama Masao (1914–96), there is a passage that reads, “An atomic war teaches one paradoxical truth: to be most realistic, one must be idealistic.” In the age of nuclear war, there can be no winners, war has lost its meaning as a political tool, and armed security has become “easy optimism.”⁴⁰ Therefore, he argued that the idealism of being unarmed and neutral was actually the most realistic.

In fact, when the Peace Study Group issued this statement in November 1950, Yoshida Shigeru was discussing with foreign affairs officials and experts the idea of “demilitarizing” the Korean peninsula and Japan as an option.⁴¹ There are actual examples of demilitarized zones or neutral countries created as buffer zones in the middle of powerful nations. Since some of the members of the Group were close to the government, they may have been informed that such a proposal was being considered.

If we dare to expand the meaning of this statement, it also argues for a change in the meaning of state armament. After the use of the atomic bomb, we entered an era in which a nation’s armament with conventional military power did not mean security or independence. Nuclear weapons require costs and

³⁸ Shimizu Ikutaro, “*Heiwa Mondai Danwa-Kai* (Peace Study Group),” Shimizu Ikutaro Collected Works, *Kodansha*, 1992–93, Volume 14, pp. 335–336.

³⁹ Nambara Shigeru, “*Heiwa ka Senso ka—Nihon Saiken no Seishinteki Konran* (Peace or War?—The spiritual turmoil of Japan’s reconstruction),” in Nambara Shigeru’s Collected Works, *Iwanami Shoten*, 1973, Volume 7. Nambara was invited to a peace issue discussion, but declined because he was busy with work at the University of Tokyo.

⁴⁰ The three statements are reprinted in Volume 1 of “*Sengo Nihon Boei Mondai Shiryo-shu* (Postwar Japanese Defense Issues Collection),” edited by Otake and cited above.

⁴¹ Kusunoki, *supra*, “*Yoshida Shigeru to Anzenhosho-seisaku no Keisei* (Yoshida Shigeru and the Formation of Security Policy),” pp. 195–207.

technological capabilities, and the number of countries that can produce them is limited. When that happens, there are two options: enter a collective security system centered on nuclear-armed states, or become unarmed and neutral. And if nuclear-armed states are in conflict and joining either camp would be risky, unarmed neutrality becomes the logical conclusion.

This argument is partly true today. Apart from nuclear weapons, in modern times, a country that does not have a satellite positioning system cannot operate its own military. Since 2022, the Ukrainian military has also been provided with satellite information by the United States. There are only a limited number of countries that have the technology and economic power to obtain satellite information comparable to that of the United States. The idea that military armament is a condition for becoming an independent country is an inertia of pre-1945 thinking and can be said to have no basis in reality.

In addition, armed neutrality could be considered as an option contrary to the statement of the Peace Study Group. However, there is no evidence that this has been considered at the level of the Japanese government. At the level of independent thinkers, the novelist Mishima Yukio (1925–70)’s suicide note in 1970 denounced Japan’s signing of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).⁴² Few people supported Mishima’s policy of arming Japan with nuclear weapons and abolishing the Japan-US Security Treaty.

A second example of an ideological act of pacifism is *Beheiren* (*Betonamu ni Heiwa o! Shimin Rengo* [Citizens’ League for Peace in Vietnam]), founded in 1965. Memories of the air raids were still fresh, and in a 1965 opinion poll, 75% of the people opposed the bombing of the North by the United States.⁴³ As the 2023 Gaza conflict showed, Japanese people tend to sympathize with the side being bombed. During the Vietnam War, there was also sympathy for fellow Asians killed by the US military and criticism of the Japanese government for providing bases to the US military for the Vietnam War.⁴⁴

In this context, Beheiren campaigned against the Vietnam War, which was also criticized. The idea is that if Vietnam becomes communist, the Vietnamese people will suffer from oppression. The gist of the response from philosopher Tsurumi Shunsuke (1922–2015), who was a co-founder of the movement, to the criticism was as follows.⁴⁵ Nobody can guarantee the world will get better if Vietnam becomes communist, and it may get worse if the United States withdraws. But even if you intervene based on certain values, your judgment may be wrong. People are not perfect and can always make mistakes. If you make a wrong decision and kill someone, you can’t take it back. Therefore, don’t kill them first before discussing who is right. Therefore, America should stop bombing the North, and Japan should not cooperate with it. This can be said to be an anti-war argument typical of a skeptical philosopher.

What can we learn from postwar pacifism?

This paper examined (1) the terms “liberal (*riberaru*)” and “reformist (*kakushin*),” (2) the given conditions and historical circumstances of postwar Japan, and (3) the ideological acts of pacifism. Finally, based on the above, I consider implications for modern times.

⁴² Mishima Yukio, “*Geki* (An appeal),” included in “Mishima Yukio Complete Works,” *Shinchosha*, 2000–06, Volume 36. However, Mishima’s original text misspelled it as a “核停条約.” (The correct name is “核不拡散条約” [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons])

⁴³ “*Betonamu Senso e Fukai Kanshin: Yoronchosa shoho* (Deep Interest in the Vietnam War: Detailed Public Opinion Survey Report),” Tokyo edition of *Asahi shimbun*, morning edition, August 24, 1965, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Oguma, *supra*, “*Minshu*’to ‘aikoku’ (Democracy and patriots),” Chapter 13.

⁴⁵ Tsurumi Shunsuke’s “*Suwarikomi made* (Sitting Down)” first appeared in *Asahi Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 34 (August 14, 1966), included in Tsurumi Shunsuke’s *Collected Works, Chikuma Shobo*, 1975–76, Volume 5.

The given conditions in postwar Japan were as follows. The possibility of a direct invasion of Japan is low; if an emergency were to occur in the Far East, it would be on the Korean peninsula or Taiwan, and if Japan were to be attacked, US military bases would be the first targets. However, Japan could not be granted independence without allowing the presence of US military bases, and concentrating the burden of bases on Okinawa made it possible to keep the mainland relatively lightly armed. These are geopolitical conditions that have not fundamentally changed in modern times.

Under these given conditions, postwar Japanese pacifism left behind several ideological acts. One is the recognition that after 1945 we entered an era in which arming a nation no longer meant independence or security. The other is the argument that since human beings have limited predictive ability, we should not be complicit in killing people based on temporary situational or value judgments. These are insights and assertions worthy of consideration even in the modern era.

In light of the above, the discussion of defense issues in contemporary Japan is somewhat frivolous and overly abstract. It makes little sense to talk about “threat” in the abstract without taking into account the conditions in which Japan finds itself. Moreover, if a country really felt threatened, it would refrain from saying or doing anything that would provoke the other country, and those who make such statements can easily be said to be frivolous. Some scholars of American diplomacy point out that allies who engage in provocative actions or words based on the assumption of American support are a moral hazard.⁴⁶

At the same time, this paper has shown that constitutionalism and pacifism took root in postwar Japan in a specific historical context. Initially, defense and diplomacy were not issues that attracted widespread interest. Constitutionalism and pacifism were supported not for their own sake, but as a reaction to the conservative politics of the time. In the context of the time, the sense of crisis that there was a danger of returning to an era where there was no freedom of speech and men and women were unequal was synonymous with constitutionalism and pacifism. Of course, it was also a time when memories of the war were vivid, but that was not the only factor.

The word “liberal” itself carries only the meaning of tolerance toward orthodox norms. Indeed, as a political term, it is associated with anti-conservatism and anti-authoritarianism. However, what is conservative and what is authoritarian depends on the historical context of the society. In societies where aristocratic economic monopolies and regulations are strong, “liberal” may be associated with laissez-faire economic policies. On the other hand, in a society where laissez-faire is a traditional (conservative) value, the term “liberal” may become established for government provision of social security. Furthermore, if a society has a history of government fiscal spending and social security policies being implemented in times of war, there may be no need for “liberal” to be associated with pacifism. In postwar Japan, however, “liberal” as anti-authoritarian and anti-conservative has been integrated with pacifism and defense of the Constitution.

That may be true in history, but what about modern Japan? Nowadays, for example, there are few people who view the [revision of security-related documents](#) with a sense of crisis that it will lead to gender inequality. This is a happy thing, and it means that the democratization of postwar Japan has taken root. Of course, it is important not to rely too much on the achievements of past democratization and to strive to maintain them. However, it is natural that modern people do not share the historical context of postwar Japan, and we cannot blame them for that. If some left-wing political parties in Japan expect that only mentioning “security treaty” will attract attention, this could be the result of past inertia and would also be

⁴⁶ Barry R. Posen, Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No.1 (JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2013), pp.116-128.

simplistic.

What we should learn from postwar Japan's pacifism is that it seriously considered "what Japan should do." Rather than discussing the international situation or "liberal" in abstract terms, people were thinking about what they should do as people living in Japan. Rather than just copying postwar Japan's pacifism, we should think about what we would do in today's Japan. That can be the way to make use of that spirit.

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