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„On Japanese National Identity: Change or Persistence In
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PLEDGE OF HONESTY

“On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorised assistance on it”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. K. S.', written in a cursive style.

Abstracts

Due to both internal and external reasons, Japan faces many uncertainties on several levels. These range from economic woes in the wake of the bursting of the Heisei Bubble in the early 1990s, which previously had allowed Japan to enjoy rapid economic growth, to internal disagreements over security issues and the problems stemming from shocks in the wake of catastrophes, such as earthquakes. It is precisely because of these issues that political actors and intellectual elites, forming think tanks and pressure groups, attempted to “remedy” these perceived “ailments” Japan faces today, thereby trying to influence dominant Japanese national identity representations. This master thesis critically examines how Japanese national identity changed or persisted in the face of such (exogenous and endogenous) shocks to the system. This examination investigates the interplay between Japanese elites and masses, and analyses the role of discursive practice, human agency, interpretation, nationalism and *nihonjinron* (a discursive practice surmising Japan being a country of “unique uniqueness”). The thesis combines a constructivist and ethno-symbolist approach applied to a qualitative study of two cases. The cases studied are the discourses surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine, with its history and function firmly rooted in Japan’s colonial and imperialist past, as well as the triple catastrophe of Fukushima that hit Japan in March 2011. This thesis found that despite ample opportunities for change, Japanese national identity largely persisted in the face of these shocks and catastrophes.

Diese Masterarbeit analysiert, ob und inwiefern sich die japanische nationale Identität angesichts von Naturkatastrophen oder politischen Schocks im Laufe der letzten Jahrzehnte verändert haben könnte, und geht weiters auf mögliche Ursachen von potenziellen Veränderungen ein. Ein konstruktivistischer und ein ethno-symbolischer Ansatz wurde kombiniert. Mittels dieses Ansatzes wurden diskursive Praktiken, menschliches Handeln, Interpretation, Nationalismus, und speziell *Nihonjinron* („der Japaner-Diskurs“) als beeinflussende Faktoren untersucht. Diese Masterarbeit bezieht sich in dieser Hinsicht vor allem auf zwei Fallstudien. Die erste Fallstudie bearbeitet die mit dem Yasukuni Schrein verbundenen Diskurse, während sich die zweite Fallstudie mit den Diskursen zu der Dreifachkatastrophe von Fukushima im März 2011 befasst. Schlussendlich wird darauf eingegangen, warum sich die japanische nationale Identität, trotz der in den Fallstudien untersuchten Ereignisse, nicht verändert hat.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Irrespective of country, national identities are never set in stone. Neither are nations, nor their societies eternally preserved in amber (Arudou 2010). This is also true for Japan. But what are the underlying factors that bring about change within a nation?

Japan today is in a state of flux, facing uncertainties and subsequent shocks to its system on several levels. On the international level, Japan's loss of its economic hegemonic status in Asia gave way to the economic rise of China, which quickly became a threat to the security interests of not only Japan, but also the United States. Since 1945, as part of Japan's US-imposed constitution that pre-emptively prohibits Japan re-arming militarily, Japan has looked to the United States as a guarantor of its security. Yet, with the advent of the Trump administration, characterised by high turnover within the administration itself, as well as President Trump's often erratic behaviour, Japan's leadership is hard-pressed to continue relying on the US.

On the domestic level, Japan enjoyed almost unparalleled economic growth in the wake of its post-war policies geared toward recovery after the disastrous results of World War II. This economic boom quickly became the envy of many other nations, and a source of pride for the Japanese themselves. Both within Japan as well as outside, explanations were sought and found in Japan's supposed "cultural uniqueness" (Hein 2008, 447). Yet economic growth is never an infinite phenomenon, and so, due to speculative practices, the economic bubble burst in the early 1990's, leaving not only the Japanese populace perplexed as to what had happened, but its leadership in a state of prolonged uncertainty as to what the remedy should be. This almost three decades long recession underlying the uncertainty of the political leadership surely contributed to the desire of a return to "normalcy" by the populace and was arguably what led to the re-election of current Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzô in 2012, whose campaign program was built on promises of economic recovery based on quantitative and qualitative easing of money, a program dubbed "Abenomics" (Inoguchi 2014, 102).

Put simply, Japan's environment has been changing. However, besides the above-mentioned difficulties the Japanese must address, Japan is also habitually confronted with

yet another dimension of danger to its security, namely that of natural catastrophes. Due to its geological location as part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, the most active earthquake belt in the world, Japan experiences roughly 1,500 earthquakes on average per year (Russell 2018), so the people of Japan should be relatively accustomed to these events. Yet, as the case of the triple catastrophe that hit the country in March 2011 proved, of particular concern to Japan are earthquakes of such magnitude that they shake not only the ground for the duration of the event, but also the nation itself to its very core, long after the initial geological shock has subsided.

It would only be logical, then, that shocks of such magnitude engender changes in the system. Catastrophes are, after all, sudden upheavals (Puleo and Sivak 2013, 458) to domestic orders, be they social or political, and the subsequent shocks should be analysed not only in terms of their effects on, for example, the economic capabilities of the nation in which these crises took place, but as events that are commonly interpreted by the people within that nation as necessitating change (Widmaier, Blyth and Seabrooke 2007, 748). If this premise of causal linkage between catastrophe and change is accepted, the question is then, how far-reaching such changes would be, and which dimensions of a nation would be affected. One answer could then be given by focusing on the material extent of the damage caused, as well as by dissecting the contributing factors that exert pressure on the system to change, meaning the greater the destruction, the greater the impetus for change within that system. Yet such an endeavour would only provide half a satisfactory answer, as by focusing merely on the material dimension, other crucial aspects, such as agency, meaning, interpretation, and perhaps most fundamentally, the issue of identity and its ties to the nation that faces upheavals, are ignored. Therefore, in order to fully grasp the extent of causes and consequences of change, or resistance to it, particularly with regards to national identity, these vital aspects must not be neglected. This leads to several important questions: how do nations change or persist in their national identities? And what are the underlying factors that would bring about, or fail to bring about, changes in national identity? Should catastrophes, as shocks to the national system are wont to do, not automatically engender change?

Questions relating to national identity are nothing new to Japan. In fact, the question of what it means to be Japanese has been a decades long obsession for the Japanese, so much so, that Florian Coulmas likened it to a national pastime (Coulmas 2001). It was

this obsession, then, that birthed an entire literary genre within Japan, namely that of *nihonjinron*. Simply translating to “discourse on the Japanese”, the ubiquitous nature of *nihonjinron* has provided the Japanese not only with a framework to contextualise their understanding of themselves and their identity as “Japanese” in relation to other nations, particularly the West, it also facilitated the propagation of particular traits of Japanese national identity as especially desirable.

With these considerations in mind, a number of political actors, such as politicians, intellectual elites, interest- and pressure groups forming think-tanks, hailing from a variety of political and ideological backgrounds have started to lament what to them seems a lack of “clear” direction the nation should be heading in, without necessarily agreeing on what the “right” path to take is in the aftermath of catastrophes and shocks. These ensuing discourses and debates are not, however, merely limited to intellectual elites or politicians but also amplified by the Japanese populace at large, as the increasing number of people participating and engaging in political discourse in the wake of catastrophes, such as Fukushima, shows. It seems that, when it comes to the direction the country is headed, particularly in the aftermath of catastrophes, everyone has an opinion on the matter, one that is intrinsically tied to their understanding of themselves and their nation.

1.1. Research question and hypothesis

In order to closely examine the problems outlined in the introduction, a combination of a constructivist and ethno-symbolist approach shall be proposed to explore the central research question of this thesis: How do nations produce and reproduce their identity?

While the research question is generally situated in the broader topic of national identity, which has been written on extensively in the literature on nations and nationalism, the focus of this thesis rests on issues of change to, or persistence of national identities. The methodological choice of analysis rests on two cases found in Japan, namely the catastrophe that devastated the Japanese region of Tohoku in March 2011, and the disputes arising from the Yasukuni Shinto shrine located in Tokyo.

The central hypothesis of this thesis is as follows: Despite plenty of opportunities for change with regards to national identity that have presented themselves in the face of both

natural and political shocks, political actors, intellectual elites, and interest groups have largely prevented significant changes of Japanese national identity, by way of instrumentalising history, cultural practice and catastrophe, both in rhetoric and in action. They have done so by employing means and methods firmly rooted in cultural nationalism. By dissecting the means and methods employed in the shaping of national identity and looking at how that relates to the context created by *nihonjinron*, a causal mechanism is unearthed that helps trace the process of how, and why, at specific points in time, the social construct of Japanese national identity was shaped, internalised and reshaped in the face of pressure to the system.

This endeavour of critically analysing the shaping and prescribing of national identities is important for two interlinked reasons. Firstly, there is never merely one single identity an individual assumes, but rather multiple different elements of identity never carved in stone. As Ted Hopf points out, identities are subject to change, depending on who an actor, be it an individual or a state, is interacting with (Hopf 2016, 9). In this regard, the identity of a nation, and by extension that nation's populace, is always dependent on the other nation (or nationals of that other nation) they are interacting with. This may be due to differing perceptions of status or power vis-à-vis that other actor but are undoubtedly also due to the intent underlying the interaction itself.

These assumptions of malleability and intent are then at the heart of the second observation. Discourses surrounding the meaning of particular elements of national identities are fabricated, whether intentionally or not, by intellectual elites and politicians. These discourses are then perpetuated and internalised by the populace itself. In this regard, internalisation and perpetuation of highlighted elements of identity over time stand a good chance to become considered not only as “normal”, but even as “natural”, meaning “it goes without saying” that a particular trait of national identity is inherent to “us” and our understanding of who “we” are as a nation. This is precisely why claims staked on “true” or “natural” elements of national identity are so insidiously deceptive, because they eschew critical reflection and introspection with regards to how and why we act and think the way we do. These elements will ultimately be simply taken for granted, which is why the process of shaping and prescribing of national identities as an elite national project lends itself very well to abuse and manipulation, particularly in the aftermath of severe shocks, when people are most vulnerable. For this very reason it is of

fundamental importance to closely examine not only the impact of pressure and shock on a national system and its national identity, but also to dissect the underlying political machinations that allow for the manipulation thereof, and to which degree those political machinations will be accepted by the public at large, and why.

1.2. The literature

Throughout the decades, much scholarly attention, stemming from various disciplines, was directed at the formation of nations, nationalist ideologies, and the role of national identities therein. For example, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Anthony Smith, or Rogers Brubaker have all written extensively on the topic of nationalism and its key constitutive factors. However, despite vast amounts of research, nationalism is, as Penney and Wakefield point out, notoriously difficult to define (Penney and Wakefield 2008/2009, 538). This notion becomes evident when delving into the writings of those scholars mentioned above, as they all seem to disagree on certain fundamental characteristics.

Perhaps most famously, Benedict Anderson stressed the importance of considering nations as “imagined communities”. He emphasised the notion of nations as a social construct and posited that national identification with these imagined communities was mainly facilitated by the advent of print media (Westin 2010, 15). In this regard, Anderson stands alongside other modernists like Eric Hobsbawm, who repeatedly stressed nationalism’s nature as something inherently modern (Calhoun 1993, 214). Among the many writings of Hobsbawm, of interest to the author was his major address at a plenary session at the American Anthropological Association in 1991, which was published the following year in the article “Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe today”. Despite its brevity and focus on Europe, rather than Japan, Hobsbawm’s authoritative view on the matter of nationalism, his clear distinction between the concepts of nationalism and ethnicity, and their concise definitions, were drawn on to bolster the theoretical framework. Craig Calhoun’s “Nationalism and Ethnicity” approaches the same issues as Hobsbawm, but focuses more on issues such as the question of modernity, history, origin myths, language and discourse, as they pertain to the study of nationalism and the role ethnicity plays therein, yet ultimately arrives at a less clearly delineated

understanding of these two concepts (Calhoun 1993, 235) than Hobsbawm. Rogers Brubaker argues persuasively for a somewhat different approach to the subject matter at hand; by reframing the question, away from a mere “what is a nation” (Brubaker 2004, 115), to “how does the category of nation work?” (Brubaker 2004, 116), he shifts the focus of a more common understanding of nations as entities or communities to the idea of thinking of them as more akin to terms and categories, and nationalism as language and political idiom. He thereby moves nationalism more in a constructivist direction. This view is then fundamentally at odds with that of other scholars, like Geertz (Westin 2010, 13), who proposed a more primordial view of nations, whereby modern nations are based on certain ethnic identities, themselves being understood as ancient, natural and prior to any sort of political mobilisation, as Calhoun points out (Calhoun 1993, 214); with its most extreme interpretation positing that ethnicity must be explained in terms of human genetics (Westin 2010, 13). Finally, Anthony Smith has written extensively on nationalism, yet central to this thesis is his book “Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach”, in which he argues for an ethno-symbolist approach to the study of nations and nationalism. This approach assumes somewhat of a middle ground between the modernist, constructivist, and primordialist divide, while ultimately positing different understandings regarding certain key issues, such as *ethnies*, nations, elites and masses, conflict and reinterpretation, and *la longue durée* (Smith 2009, 14), and the role symbols, traditions, memories, values and myths play in explaining the cause and shape of nations and nationalist movements (Smith 2009, 135).

The different positions of these scholars lead then to several key questions, if one tries to define nationalism, such as whether ““nationhood” [can] be taken as the prior basis for nationalist claims? Is self-determination, for example, a political right accorded to all true nations?” (Calhoun 1993, 214), or, alternatively, how does ethnicity factor into nationhood, and does nationhood explain nationalism? (Calhoun 1993, 214). How does patriotism factor into nationalism? Since these terms are arguably often used interchangeably, are they really the same? How much does language or the interplay between elites and the masses factor into nationalism? Is the nation prior to nationalism? The list goes on.

Hobsbawm, attempting to answer some of these questions, differentiates between nationalism and ethnicity. Nationalism, for him, is a recent political programme, positing

that groups, here defined as nations, have the right, and thereby the goal, to form territorial states (Hobsbawm and Kertzer 1992, 4). These territorial states possess clearly defined borders, and exercise sovereign control over a homogeneous population that forms the essential body of citizens; in this sense, this political programme assumes “the nation” as a given (Hobsbawm and Kertzer 1992, 4). Ethnicity, however, is not a political concept, but may very well assume political functions, and therefore may find itself associated with nationalist programmes (Hobsbawm and Kertzer 1992, 4). According to Hobsbawm, “Ethnicity [...] is a readily definable way of expressing a *real* sense of group identity which links the members of “we” because it emphasises their differences from “them”” (Hobsbawm and Kertzer 1992, 4). It is precisely because of this “real sense of group identity”, why nationalism often lays claim to identification with ethnicity, as it provides the historical pedigree of a nation, that it normally sorely lacks (Hobsbawm and Kertzer 1992, 4).

While agreeing in general with modernists that nations are historical communities, Smith critiques the modernist position that nationalism is both historically and sociologically prior to the nation, and the resulting implication that if nationalism was indeed a modern product, then nations could be dated no earlier than the late eighteenth century, as it is nationalists who bring a nation into existence by mobilising its members in order to foster national cohesion (Smith 2009, 43). Simultaneously, he does not confirm primordialist claims of nations possessing “essences”, but rather argues for nations to be understood “as forms of community and movement, located in specific contexts of space and time, with their members viewing them as resources and vehicles for their own interests and visions, and as intimate social bonds and cultural solidarities.” (Smith 2009, 14). Nationalism, on the other hand, is described by Smith as being simultaneously an elite and a mass ideological movement: “an ideological movement of elites that places ‘the people’ and its memories, myths, symbols and traditions at the centre of its concerns, and a popular movement that seeks expression and action through the ideals and goals of nationalist elites.” (Smith 2009, 74).

Brubaker offers yet another different approach to nationalism and nationhood, as he persuasively argues for a reframing of key questions, away from a pure focus on what a nation or nationalism is, toward “how does the category “nation” work?” (Brubaker 2004, 115-116). By putting the question like this, he arrives at an understanding of nationhood

as a political claim, rather than an ethnocultural fact (Brubaker 2004, 115). Brubaker considers “nation” as more of a categorising term, whereas nationalism is part of a particular language or political idiom, a certain way of using that particular word or category (Brubaker 2004, 116). In that sense, nationhood becomes a tool to “change the way people see themselves, to mobilize loyalties, kindle energies, and articulate demands.” (Brubaker 2004, 116), and nationalism provides the particular language that facilitates the use of the tool that is nationhood.

Going beyond popular assumptions of requirements like a shared set of language, history, ancestry, culture, and most importantly, a nation, Takekawa proposes a more nuanced understanding of nationalism by stressing that nationalism isn’t necessarily the nationalism of the nation, but should rather be thought of as a site of contestation between different representations of the nation that negotiate with each other (Takekawa 2007, 61). Particularly this last notion of negotiating with each other is echoed by Penney and Wakefield, as they concur that nationalism is a series of complexes consisting of beliefs, assumptions, practices, representations and habits, that serve to reinforce the concept of a nation in a mundane way (Penney and Wakefield 2008/2009, 538). Nationalism is the “endemic condition and thus a constant backdrop for a wide variety of discourse and behaviour.” (Penney and Wakefield 2008/2009, 538).

Staying briefly on the topic of nationalism, but moving it more in the direction of Japan, two more contributions shall be mentioned. Tai Eika’s “Rethinking Culture, National Culture, and Japanese Culture” puts *nihonjinron*, the explanatory vehicle chosen for this thesis (see section 1.3), into the broader context of Japanese national culture, nationalism and education, especially as they relate to nation building and colonisation, therefore rooting the topic in Japanese history. By providing a theoretical overview of these concepts first and then progressing to a nuanced inspection on their interrelated nature, her arguing on the issues of nationalism and national culture are both succinct and persuasive. Laura Hein’s “The Cultural Career of the Japanese Economy: developmental and cultural nationalisms in historical perspective” focuses on the state of Japanese economic development at specific points in time during Japan’s modern history, and then analyses those findings by comparing them to the status of cultural and developmental nationalism that were dominant at those specific points in time. She traces the patterns of development of nationalism in Japan, as well as teasing out valuable information on the

state of mind of the Japanese populace at those specific points. One rather negative remark must be made however, as Hein does not provide any definitions as to what developmental and cultural nationalisms are; it seems the reader is expected to be knowledgeable on those issues. Nevertheless, by tracing the historical development as outlined above, descriptive data are presented.

The concept of national identity has been increasingly gaining attention by various scholarly disciplines throughout the past few decades. Placing the concept in a psychological perspective, Peter Burke defines identity somewhat simply as what it means to be who one is, and thereby includes constitutive factors such as being “American, spouse, or “honest.”” (Burke 2006, 82). Following a constructivist perspective, Ted Hopf links identity and its study to the importance of analysing how an action does or does not reproduce both the actor and the structure (Hopf 1998, 172). In order to instil some sense of predictability and order (Hopf 1998, 174), he writes in “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory”, identities serve the distinct function of informing us about ourselves and others, thereby pointing to a set of characteristic preferences and interests with regards to choices of action in particular domains, and with regards to particular actors (Hopf 1998, 175). This understanding of identity can then be extrapolated to the identity of states themselves, as a “state understands others according to the identity it attributes to them, while simultaneously reproducing its own identity through daily social practice.” (Hopf 1998, 175).

Hopf further ventured into the exploration of a constructivist approach to the concept of national identity, by co-authoring the book “Making Identity Count. Building a National Identity Database”, with Bentley B. Allan. Published in 2016, they explore the concept of national identity in several countries around the world, including Japan. By building a quantitative database to be used by constructivist scholars, they attempt to remedy one of the main methodological drawbacks of constructivist analysis, namely its habitual timidity towards quantitative, large-*n* research, as constructivists usually consider the variables of interest as not easily quantifiable (Hopf 2016, 8). This is usually to do with interpretivists emphasising validity, whereas quantitative methods usually trade validity for reliability (Allan 2016, 27). While the endeavour of bridging the gap between these two scholarly approaches to methodology is certainly much needed, it is only of secondary importance here, as this thesis is a purely qualitative endeavour. Of primary

importance is Hopf's and Allan's contributions to the concepts and succinct definition of national identity, such as Allan describing national identity as a "constellation of categories that define the nation or what it means to be a member of a nation." (Allan 2016, 28).

David Rear, by drawing on Laclau and Mouffe, concurs with Hopf on the point of the power of discursive practice with regards to national identity, by indicating that various forms of discourses compete for hegemony, and that, through this ongoing struggle, perceptions of society and identity are never set in stone, but always open to representation, as meanings are constantly reconfigured and altered (Rear 2017, 4). Rear's contributions to the discussion of Discourse Theory as developed by Laclau and Mouffe offer unique and fascinating insights into the matter. Rear's two writings, "A Critical Analysis of Japanese Identity Discourse: Alternatives to the Hegemony of *Nihonjinron*", as well as "Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction and Comparison" both draw on discourse theory as a method of closely examining how key lexical concepts, also referred to as "nodal points" have in various forms of discourses contributed to the myth of Japanese uniqueness. By offering several examples of what these nodal points might be, his in-depth dissection of discursive concepts and how they interrelate to each other in the pursuit of construction of meaning with regards to identity creation, both of his articles have proven tremendously helpful.

Concerning the underlying causes of identity change and persistence, Burke categorised three broad factors. The first change in identity is dependent on a change in the meaning of the environment, such as a disturbance in the model that persists and is not easily countered without adapting (Burke 2006, 84); something akin to a socialisation effect (Burke 2006, 93). The second possibility for change stems from the simultaneous activation of different, conflicting identities within an individual, resulting in a renegotiation and reordering in importance of these different identities (Burke 2006, 85). The third and last possibility for changes in identity that Burke foresees is what he calls disturbances in the situation, meaning events that are beyond the control of individuals, such as fires or plane crashes (Burke 2006, 94). Particularly this last notion of change brought about by crises is echoed by Widmaier, Blyth and Seabrooke, as they define a crisis itself as an event which is intersubjectively interpreted as necessitating change, as

crises stir discussions over ways of life or deepest beliefs (Widmaier, Blyth and Seabrooke 2007, 748), two aspects where national identity is certainly concerned. However, inherent to change is the dimension of time. As Burke argues, identity change is certainly possible, but usually occurs only slowly in the face of persistent pressure to change (Burke 2006, 93). This is certainly understandable, if one considers that the inherent persistence of identity also serves as a stabilising mechanism (Burke 2006, 93).

McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow argue for identity change as core elements inherent to all forms of political contestation (McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow 2000, 56). Jennifer Todd, on the other hand, argues along similar lines to Burke by positing that identity change is inertial, meaning that imposed socio-political changes with correlative changes in social practices fail, at least initially, to influence national identity (Todd 2005, 430). However, political or identity entrepreneurs can then help identity change along, by employing brokerage, rhetoric, capitalising on opportunity, or through the manipulation of fear (Todd 2005, 431). Yet Todd also warns of overestimating the roles of charismatic orators, by maintaining that if identity change was merely thought of in terms of multiple, free-floating macro categories that an individual may choose to ignore or focus on, depending on charismatic leaders or influencers, identity would become epiphenomenal, no more than interactional change (Todd 2005, 433). She essentially preconditions the analysis of identity change on the realisation that identity facilitates a sort of social embeddedness or personal anchorage, which allows for change or persistence to occur out of phase with other variables, or to affect them in return (Todd 2005, 433). Todd ultimately sees both identity formation and change as a continuous process that requires time and intentionality, as it takes place either by incorporating new elements of embodied meaning and value, done so by choosing to emphasise certain practices or relations, so that in time these meanings embedded in these practices become an integral part of the self, or alternatively, identity change may be achieved by rearranging old elements of embodied meaning and value (Todd 2005, 437). In that sense, certain similarities arise between Burke and Todd. Yet Todd also acknowledges that the choice of combination of these elements are somewhat constrained, firstly by socially entrenched symbolic codes and subsequent social pressures not to violate these codes, and secondly by personal history, meaning certain dispositions laid down so early in infancy, they prove very difficult to change (Todd 2005, 437).

Finally, Smith briefly addressed the possibility of change or persistence within a nation, as well, but frames the analysis of change or persistence of national identities within the context created by the cultural elements of symbol, myth, memory, value, ritual, and tradition (Smith 2009, 25). These play a vital role in shaping social structures and cultures, whereby social cohesion and common consciousness is created, even in periods of crisis or rapid change (Smith 2009, 25). These shared national symbols are paramount in the rites and ceremonies of public culture, which help sustain and create a sense of national identity (Smith 2009, 25). While granting that material effects influence change, as well, Smith effectively posits that changes in national identity ultimately depend on the prevalence of these cultural resources in any given national community, meaning the more of them exist within a nation, the stronger and more widely diffused a national identity will be, with the inverse being true, too (Smith 2009, 25). In that sense, it could be argued that national identity change is dependent on the strength and prevalence (or lack thereof) of national symbols that facilitate unity and social cohesion. Like Todd, Smith also focused on the roles of political or intellectual elites in forging elite projects, i.e. building a nation and national identity. By making use of the cultural resources available to them, these elites propagate certain understandings of nations and national identities, yet instead of claiming these versions of national identity as simply invented, Smith insists on what he sees as a two-way process, whereby the acceptance, rejection or even reshaping of these proposed versions of nationhood and national identity depend on some prior resonance among a major portion of the masses (Smith 2009, 31-32), thereby conditioning the resonance on the premise of them being “on the same wavelength” (Smith 2009, 31).

1.3. Theoretical framework

The various scholarly writings on the major topics of this thesis have been discussed above in the literature review. Issues pertaining to their applicability and their definition as used in this thesis shall now be addressed. A few remarks regarding constructivism as a tool for writing International Relations (IR) theory and possible ways to combine it with an ethno-symbolist approach are made, as well.

Constructivist approaches, as they pertain to the field of IR theory might differ in many aspects, thereby creating different sub-sets of constructivist schools of thought. The two strands of constructivism most applicable to this thesis would then be conventional and interpretivist. The main differences between these two strands are in how they phrase their questions and the tools employed to answer them (conventional positivist / scientific realist “why” question and interpretivist “how possible” question, respectively)¹. While both would offer great insights into the matter, an interpretivist approach was ultimately opted for, due to the central tenet of interpretivism, namely “the commitment to the inductive, interpretive analysis of shared webs of meaning that individuals draw on to create meaning and form their identities.” (Allan, 2016, 43-44). Yet despite these epistemological differences, constructivists share a set of unifying beliefs, such as the emphasis placed on the socially constructed nature of our surroundings, and therefore, the assumption that the shape those surroundings assume, ultimately depends on the relevant actors engaged in shaping it.

The difficulties encountered when attempting to clearly define nationalism have already been addressed. However, placing nationalism in a constructivist and ethno-symbolist framework, seems the most sensible choice to the author for the purposes of this thesis. By drawing on “inherent” historical sources, such as myths, traditions, memories and values, nationalism allows for the construction of a “defining other”, onto which an identity, stemming from preconceived ideas of what that other “is”, is projected “from outside”. This essentially constitutes a negotiation process that is itself premised on some prior “agreement” between elites and the people. Thus, nationalism allows to position oneself against a constructed “other”, whereby an identity “from within” is created.

National identities, on the other hand, are understood as group identity on a broader level. By placing individuals in groups, arbitrarily or not, the identities of members of the group shift from the personal to the group level (Allan 2016, 28). Further, Hopf’s observations on the power of practice and interests as influencing factors on national identities merit further explanation. According to Hopf, the power of practice must be understood mainly as discursive (i.e. the power of knowledge, ideas, ideology, culture, and language (Hopf 1998, 177)), at the centre of which lies the concept of intersubjective meaning, called so, because it is of more collective permanence, rather than being limited

¹ “Theories of International Relations” lecture notes.

to individual beliefs (Widmaier, Blyth and Seabrooke 2007, 750). Practice is powerful, because it fixes the meanings of actions of both the members of a community, as well as those of others, thereby facilitating a shared understanding of boundaries (Hopf 1998, 178). Practice also helps to reproduce and simultaneously police an intersubjective reality pertaining to an entire (international) community, as well as the multitude of communities of identity found therein (Hopf 1998, 179). In short, national identities are here defined essentially as group identities on a broader level, constituted by societal discourses that constrain, shape, and in turn are themselves shaped, by individuals who draw on shared knowledge to form their personal identities (Allan 2016, 28). This would be one definition of national identity to apply to the study of the construction and reconstruction of national identity. But what about agency?

As explained in the literature review, Smith addressed the issue of elite national projects and the interplay between elites and the people; yet in premising the survival of elite national projects grounded in cultural resources on their resonance within the people, Smith, whether deliberately or not, links these issues to human agency, which could be understood as already a constructivist argument in itself. This, then, is the first indication of the possibility of combining the constructivist and ethno-symbolist approach. A second indicator may be found when looking at the two approaches themselves, as done by Smith. Despite having critiqued several key suppositions of modernists (see literature review), Smith remarked that the ethno-symbolic approach to the study of nationalism is not intended to supersede standard modernist accounts, but is rather designed to supplement and, if need be, amend the predominantly political and economic models as offered by modernists, by adding the oft-overlooked cultural and symbolic dimensions to the focus of analysis (Smith 2009, 40). Essentially, by introducing the historical dimension, an ethno-symbolic undertaking aims to continue where conventional accounts end. Alternatively, this could be also be understood along the following lines, if one were to consider not agency, but identity: if identity was thought of as layered, then both constructivists and modernists deal with certain layers of identity, yet do not venture too far into the multitude of layers of identity. Smith, on the other hand, does not inform his readers where these ethno-symbols as constitutive factors of national identity come from; yet following a constructivist ontology, it stands to reason to consider the ethnic core of national identity as constructed as well, rather than as primordial; it is merely deep-seated. Therefore, these two approaches should not come into conflict with each other. It is for

these reasons that a constructivist and ethno-symbolist approach were deemed compatible, and why the definition of national identity as used in this thesis was influenced by *both* an ethno-symbolist approach, where agency does play a seminal role, *and* a constructivist undertaking, where the focus rests on the power of discursive practice.

The constitutive factors making (national) identity change permissible have already been clarified. Yet Smith's approach to analysing change or persistence and the role of charismatic elites therein merit further explanation. Elites, intellectuals, and artists play a seminal role in developing the ideologies of nationalism, as they rediscover, reinterpret, and curate already existing ethnic symbols, memories and myths, values and traditions, out of which they forge not only nationalist ideologies, but also narratives of the nation (Smith 2009, 85). The success or failure thereof depend, as already clarified, on the agency of the people, yet that is not to say that these elites cannot help certain desirable traits of the nation and national identity along. Music and visual arts have always played a significant role in the realisation and interpretation of the national idea (Smith 2009, 86), yet are far from the only methods which can be employed to do so. Myths of ancestry, such as ethnic-genealogical myths, are instrumental, as they translate the process of self-definition into symbolic terms by way of providing a sense of dignity, security and continuity for successive generations of a nation's members (Smith 2009, 91-92). This is similar to myths of election, whereby elites proclaim the values of the community and emphasise the uniqueness of a nation's heritage, such as Nature selecting a nation to be the bearers of "irreplaceable cultural values" (Smith 2009, 93). Further, the sanctification of the homeland, where ancestral and communal heroes lived, were laid to rest, and are commemorated in public ceremonies, help foster personal attachments and memories to the nation (Smith 2009, 95), which is closely related to the notion of a golden past, where the "true" and "primeval" nature of a nation is argued to be, which is placed in opposition to modern corruptions (Smith 2009, 96). Finally, the idea of destiny through sacrifice needs to be mentioned, as ideas of regular blood sacrifice of the young, based on the ideal of public sacrifice, serve as an essential component in the preservation of the nation, because they generate the desire of emulating ancestral heroes, and in that way serve political solidarity (Smith 2009, 97).

These cultural resources are key constitutive factors regarding the formation or persistence of a nation, and therefore, by extension, also exert huge influence over

dominant national identity representations within a nation. Certainly, elites cannot simply invent traditions and myths, there needs to be some sort of prior resonance; agency does, as previously explained, play a key role in facilitating change. Yet, just as Todd and Burke both point to the issue of temporal inertia inherent to identity change, it would appear only logical to consider the prevalence and instrumentalisation of these cultural resources as equally important factors to keep in mind when examining the change of or persistence in national identity. Change has already been discussed, but to persist in national identity means to make and remake a particular notion of national identity, done so by way of practice and by way of drawing on cultural resources that seem “true”. Which leads to the final concept that needs explaining.

Translating simply to “discourse on the Japanese”, the concept of *nihonjinron* is inherently more insidious in nature than the name suggests. Firmly rooted in the propaganda of World War II - era Japan (Shepherd 1991, 187), it is a form of cultural nationalism (Tai 2003, 14), which, according to Albert Breton, is principally limited to activities such as writing novels, songs, essays about the fatherland, giving specific attention to the strength and energy that can be derived from these texts, while usually glorifying the past (Breton 1964, 376). It helps shape the political and historical writings and discourses, meaning it facilitates the development of a frame of mind able to appreciate inherently national things, simply because they are national (Breton 1964, 376). In this sense, cultural nationalists seek the moral regeneration of their community, with the intent to create a self-sustaining and solitary nation (Smith 2009, 66).

David Rear characterises *nihonjinron* as a way of thinking that sees Japan “as a homogeneous nation built on a unique set of collectivist and harmonious social values, unlike those in other cultures.” (Rear 2017, 2). Tai Eika, echoing Befu Harumi, seemingly agrees by describing *nihonjinron* as a way of thinking that ascribes to the Japanese people unique qualities due to the culture and society they live in, and further states that the assumption of a homogeneous culture found in *nihonjinron* is often followed by the assertion that these unique features cannot be fully comprehended or understood by non-Japanese (Tai 2003, 13), thereby neatly placing it outside the reach of those who would most likely criticise such a mode of thinking. Further, *nihonjinron* facilitates an “essentialized way of thinking and talking about Japanese people and culture, i.e., taking observable cultural differences only as surface manifestations of an underlying Japanese

essence rather than as fundamental features of Japanese society in themselves.” (Tai 2003, 14). By being descriptive, it is intended to shape not only the behaviour, but the values of the Japanese, and in order to feel as “true” Japanese, many feel compelled to practice what *nihonjinron* prescribes as “Japanese” (Tai 2003, 14).

Nihonjinron can therefore be likened to an imaginary receptacle that can assume any shape, can be filled with as much or as little content as the author engaged in this practice requires. It relates to not only the Japanese, but also the rest of the world, specifically the “West” (i.e. America), as it is against this “other” that Japanese (national) identity is created (Hein 2008, 449). *Nihonjinron*, therefore, is profoundly un-scientific, since it presupposes typical Japanese cultural traits (such as a unique, isolated country with a homogeneous nation) without any scientifically sound comparative analysis, upon which it then builds assertions to prove exactly what it set out to do. By engaging in *nihonjinron* and making claims on what constitutes as “Japanese” or not, intellectual elites are provided with a tool to prescribe behaviour they would like to see, to the nation at large (Tai 2003, 15). However, it is important to mention that the inherent value *nihonjinron* puts on “being Japanese”, was not always the same throughout Japan’s history, as it always reflects the Japanese mindset at specific points in time. For example, after Japan’s defeat in World War II, being Japanese was viewed by the Japanese themselves as something inherently negative, while during Japan’s march towards economic hegemony in Asia until the bursting of the Heisei bubble, Japanese nationality was seen as worthy of pride, as something thoroughly positive (Hein 2008, 448).

How, then, is *nihonjinron* able to prescribe behaviour to an entire nation, albeit to varying degrees? Rear, by drawing on Laclau and Mouffe’s Discourse Theory, sees *nihonjinron* as a chain of interrelated discourses centred on certain key lexical concepts, or nodal points, which structure a web of discourses around them (Rear 2017, 2). These nodal points can be simple words or kanji (Chinese characters in Japanese) carrying a certain meaning, but as Rear indicates, can also be open to different ascriptions of meaning, which then turns them into “floating signifiers” (Rear 2017, 5). This floating signifier is basically an empty sign that, as an object for struggle, might be appropriated by competing discourses with the intent to fill it with meaning corresponding to their values (Rear 2017, 5). A myth then is a floating signifier that refers to society as a unified whole, and a myth having achieved hegemony has become a social imaginary (Rear 2017,

5). This social imaginary usually structures social practices, but by becoming hegemonic, it does so whilst appearing completely natural to such a degree that members of a society fail to notice that they are the result of political hegemonic practices; in that sense, discourses become “common sense”, meaning their origins and intrinsic contingency are forgotten (Rear n.d., 8). However, it should be noted that Laclau and Mouffe ultimately reject the idea of permanently fixing one single meaning to a signifier, as signs are through the use of language themselves always subject to change, always in flux, always the site of negotiation to attribute a certain meaning to these signs (Rear n.d., 5).

Signifiers that have their meaning temporarily fixed are considered as moments (Rear n.d., 7). In that sense, even though a signifier can become so ingrained in society as to become hegemonic, it does not need to remain so, as Rear, by drawing on Mouffe, points out that “every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which attempt to disarticulate it in order to install another form of hegemony.” (Rear n.d., 8). Given these considerations, *nihonjinron* can be perceived as a social imaginary constituted through an interweaving of several nodal points into a chain of signification (Rear 2017, 6-7). This is why *nihonjinron* was chosen as an explanatory vehicle for this thesis, by which the cases outlined in the next two chapters shall be analysed; it appears to be the most sensible way of examining the dissemination of Japanese myths, symbols, and national ideas in order to better understand the opportunities they provide to instrumentalise and politicise shock and catastrophe.

One final remark about the validity and shortcomings regarding the application of discourse theory is in order. As Rear noted, several scholars have argued that, by emphasising the contingent nature of discourses, Laclau and Mouffe overestimate the capability of social groups, whoever they are, to engender change through the re-articulation of elements into new social structures and orders (Rear n.d., 12). These criticisms are certainly worth noting, yet since this thesis is more concerned with closely analysing both how national identities are subject to change in the aftermath of political and natural catastrophes, and the role of elites and the populace therein, using discourse theory as a basis for the concept of *nihonjinron* was expected to yield sufficient insight into the matter, meriting its application.

1.4. Methodology

The problem with a constructivist approach to methodology is, as Vincent Pouliot points out, that “constructivists have yet to devise a distinct *modus operandi* designed for the study of the social construction of meaningful realities.” (Pouliot 2007, 359), but he luckily further proceeds by maintaining that constructivism doesn’t need brand new methods (Pouliot 2007, 360). Therefore, in order to fulfil the partial requirement of an interdisciplinary approach to the thesis, the understandings derived from a constructivist approach were combined with an ethno-symbolist analysis, bringing into focus the historical dimension usually absent from a purely modernist or post-modernist perspective.

But why the methodological choice of analysing national identity through the lens of catastrophe and shock? As David Alexander remarked, through the “subtle interplay of progress and setback, catastrophe opens a window upon the inner workings of society” (Alexander 2000, v), a notion seemingly shared by Puleo and Sivak, as they state that the parameters of the catastrophes are not the only important issues to consider, similarly crucial are the human reactions to them, and the interaction of multiple processes (Puleo and Sivak 2013, 459).

Several cases throughout Japan’s history would prove excellent case studies to further analyse the above outlined hypothesis against the concepts described in the theoretical framework; yet the two cases examined in this thesis are the Yasukuni Shrine disputes in chapter 2, and the triple disaster of Fukushima in March 2011 in chapter 3. These cases have been chosen not only due to the abundance of discourses surrounding them pertaining to questions of the formation of national identities, but specifically because, upon closer inspection, the conclusions drawn from these two cases do not necessarily conform to the oft-reiterated notion of catastrophe and shock causing changes with regards to national identity. As both are linked to disasters at two different points in Japanese history, one pre- and one post-World War II, while simultaneously offering insight into the effects of pressures stemming from exogenous and endogenous shocks to a system, they provide an excellent opportunity to analyse the patterns of potential change or persistence pertaining to national identity representations within a country that is supposedly “uniquely unique”.

Yet thorough analysis of every facet of either of these cases is far beyond the reach of this thesis. Therefore, the focus was intentionally put on a few key moments/concepts in the discourses relating to changes or persistence concerning Japanese national identity in the aftermath of shocks to the national system. They were chosen for their representative nature of what was at stake in specific points in time concerning these cases, one universally followed, the other one mostly restricted to Japan and its immediate neighbourhood in Asia.

Hence, this thesis is primarily reliant on a qualitative study of the two selected cases, supported by scholarly literature, as well as by pertinent documents. The reliance on questionnaires as part of the methodology was opted against, for the following reasons. The issue of language barrier is certainly worth noting, yet a lack of relevant contacts to a significant enough number of people (whose insight might prove useful), necessary to provide any sort of quantitative data was the main point of concern. The same concerns applied to interviews. Further, it must be pointed out that the method of deriving any useful and empirically relevant data by way of conducting an interview is prone to certain pitfalls as well, such as misunderstandings, faulty memory or personal bias towards the subject at hand. As such, the documents used entail newspaper articles, government records and speeches, websites, etc. It should be noted that, where available, the original documents were used, but due to time constraints, as well as the language barrier, not every document could be obtained or used in its original form. In those cases, the thesis relies on secondary sources dealing with them, such as some of the (scholarly) articles having already translated most of it. Other tools employed for translating were (web-based) dictionaries, such as jisho.org, or the author's own (limited) understanding of Japanese. Accordingly, any mistakes with regards to translation, if not taken from secondary sources, remain with the author.

One final remark must be made regarding the use of both Japanese names and terms in this thesis. With regards to names, these will be displayed in the traditional Japanese way, in the order of surname and then given name. For example, prime minister Abe's name will be stated as Abe Shinzô, rather than Shinzo Abe. As Japanese terms usually have several meanings depending on different readings, these will be displayed in the following order: *reading* and ("translation") upon first appearance. For example: *ie* ("house" or "family").

Chapter 2 – The Yasukuni Problem

The Yasukuni problem is nothing new to Japan. Because of its history rooted in Japan's embracing of overtly authoritarian, nationalist and imperialist features of governance, the shrine holds a special place in the hearts of nationalists and conservatives alike. Specifically, one issue with the Yasukuni Shrine is the enshrinement of 14 class A war criminals among some other 2.5 million war dead (Ryu 2007, 710). The prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine have contributed to a deterioration of bilateral relations between Japan and two of its most important Asian neighbours, namely China and South Korea, simply because of Japan's continual shifting, but as of late rather unapologetic stance on some of the atrocities committed by Japanese military in the lead up to and during World War II, such as the rape of Nanking, the annexation of Korea, the installation of the puppet state of Manchukuo in mainland China, as well as the abduction of Korean women to serve the military as "comfort women", to name but a few. As such, prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine, with its enshrinement of war criminals, are seen as tantamount to tacit approval, if not outright denial of past transgressions by Japanese leadership. These issues shall be explored in this chapter.

2.1. The history of Yasukuni Shrine

Upon visiting the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, it appears ancient. As William Sturgeon describes it, the "dark wood of the overwhelming main gates, with their giant glinting gold Chrysanthemum seals, harkens to the numerous and ancient shrines of the former capital of Kyoto and to the shrine's Imperial connections. Large Japanese flags, the *hinomaru*, flap in the wind on either side of the gate. Compared to the rest of Tokyo, constantly reinventing itself through repeated demolition and reconstruction, the Yasukuni Shrine is outright ancient in appearance." (Sturgeon 2006, 19). Yet, despite the shrine's apparent antiquity, it is a novel invention, as its roots are in the nineteenth century (Sturgeon 2006, 20). During the nineteenth century, Japan fundamentally changed within but a few decades. At its start, the functions and powers of the emperor were merely symbolic in nature; the actual governing of the nation had been for some

centuries firmly in the hands of the Tokugawa Shogunate. At the start of the 20th century, the emperor reigned supreme and the Shogunate was no more.

During the 19th century, Japan was enveloped in a series of civil unrest, the impetus behind which was twofold. The arrival of the American Commodore Matthew Perry and his black ships, who forced the opening of the country by way of threatening military conflict with the US, in order to sign several treaties that aimed at the establishment of trade with the United States, provided external pressure, and the growing resentment between the adherents of Japan's two dominant religions, Shintoism and Buddhism, provided pressure from within (Sturgeon 2006, 21).

Upon Perry's arrival in Japan, the Shogunate was undecided as to whether to acquiesce to Perry's demands, and for the first time in over 250 years, consulted the emperor on an important problem of national policy, a move seen by many as a sign of weakness, that, together with the eventual signing of the trade treaties, spelled the end of the Shogunate (Sturgeon 2006, 23).

Internally, those already opposed to the Shogunate, grew even more resentful with the Tokugawa's bending to foreign will. Several clans used the opportunity provided them by banding together under the parole of *sonnô jôi* ("honour the emperor and expel the barbarians"), yet their desire was not independence per se, rather, they sought to unite Japan under the emperor as leader of the nation under their control (Sturgeon 2006, 25).

Although Shintoism as a religion is nowadays generally perceived as an ancient tradition native to Japan that is based on animism, i.e. the veneration of *kami* ("deities"), which live in all natural things, such as rivers, trees, animals, humans, and even rocks, the reality is that the genesis of Shintoism is generally placed in the Edo period (1603 – 1868), as from "the perspective of the religious system, we have already seen that Shinto of the middle ages was indistinguishable from Buddhism in terms of *constituents*, *network* and *substance*. In the early modern period, however, Shinto gradually re-defines itself in contradistinction to Buddhism" (Sturgeon 2006, 27). Buddhism, itself imported from India via mainland China, on the other hand, had been the dominant faith throughout most of Japan's history since the 6th century. Thus, Shinto was placed in only a minor role, itself only thought of as a divergent form of Buddhism, with *kami* merely being "manifestations of the Buddha" (Breen and Teeuwen 2000, 4). Further, Buddhism

enjoyed the patronage of the elite families at the time, including the Shogunate and the imperial family, and as such, Buddhist temples were wielding both coercive and administrative power (Nelson 2003, 447). Shinto, then, provided those opposing the Shogunate with a tool to form the ideology of their rebellion, one that would see the emperor be reinstated and the Shogunate, along with their Buddhist temples, be abolished. The rebellion that instigated the Boshin civil war ultimately proved successful and the emperor was reinstated as the head of the newly formed Meiji government. Yet while numerous samurai and soldiers fighting on both sides perished, those that fought for the re-instatement of the emperor were, upon request by their surviving comrades, venerated by the emperor, by way of sponsoring memorial rituals for the soldiers (Nelson 2003, 446). This culminated in the establishing of several shrines dedicated to the war dead (Sturgeon 2006, 29-30). Among these newly created Shinto Shrines was Tokyo Shokonsha, built in 1869 (Sturgeon 2006, 30), a year after the inauguration of the Meiji Emperor. Due to the need to concentrate power in the new capital of Tokyo, the spirits of the war dead from around the nation were brought together to be venerated within this single shrine, where, under the patronage of the emperor himself, Tokyo Shokonsha, now renamed Yasukuni Shrine became the main shrine for Japan's war dead (Sturgeon 2006, 31).

2.2. The dual function of Yasukuni Shrine

In the early beginnings of Yasukuni Shrine, its main function as part of veneration of the war dead was their pacifying (Sturgeon 2006, 31). When looking at the deceased in Japan, several categories of the dead are noticeable, particularly with regards to membership of a family. Here a distinction is made based on time passed since their demise, between the ancestors, whose names are long forgotten, and the recently dead (Hendry 2013, 24). Within the context of veneration, a few more categories are introduced. For example, the recently dead are considered as such until one hundred days have passed, after which they become "old" dead, and, if properly cared for over a period of 30 years, they finally become the "settled", or "ancestral" dead (Sturgeon 2006, 32).

It is here, that the need for pacification and veneration becomes apparent. Under Shinto reasoning, the dead require special care in order to become "settled", particularly if the

death was an “untimely” one, such as falling in battle (Sturgeon 2006, 32). A death in battle, meaning a bad death, a sudden, violent and often painful one, produced “the most unsettled spirits that need to be placated in order to remove their emitting dangerous or deadly retribution [...]. This belief creates an incongruity regarding the spirits of soldiers who died in action.” (Van Bremen 2005, 27). It was this deeply held fear of the vengeful dead that, if not properly cared for, would return to haunt the living that necessitated their veneration, and the recognition of their ultimate sacrifice for the nation and for the emperor. By giving them special status as *kami*, as per Shinto belief and ritual, it was commonly believed that the dead were not only sufficiently cared for, but would also, as Nelson noted, ensure good harvests, healthy children, successful livelihoods, and, perhaps most importantly, successful military campaigns (Nelson 2003, 449). Given these considerations, the meaning of Yasukuni, as it translates to “peaceful country”, is not surprising.

As previously mentioned, the Boshin civil war abolished the last vestiges of feudal Japan and reintroduced the emperor to the centre of statehood. Yet after years of civil war and over 250 years of self-imposed isolation under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the new Japanese political and intellectual elite found themselves confronted with not only the need to consolidate their own power via the emperor, they also had to contend with new foreign powers in their own country, as well as in the international arena. To that end, these elites availed themselves of two newly created methods; firstly, State Shinto became the new political and religious ideology of the Meiji State, and secondly, they invented a concept called “*tennosei*”, which became Japan’s new imperial system (Ryu 2007, 708). Yasukuni, due to its nature, was placed in the centre of both.

Yasukuni Shrine became the national epicentre of state-rites for dead soldiers, as early on, the veneration of the war dead was instrumentalised as a tool by which the instilment of patriotic sentiments could be guaranteed, first for the loyalist rebels during the Boshin war, then the Meiji State and beyond (Sturgeon 2006, 36). In order to strengthen the concept of the emperor as the head of state, the political elites implemented several institutional changes. For example, the Meiji constitution placed the emperor at the centre, and by extension, the very heart of Japan. It further emphasised his divine ancestry, by establishing a direct, unbroken lineage to Jimmu, the mythological founder and first emperor of Japan, who was revered as a grandson of the Sun goddess Amaterasu. This

established his rule by divine right, and the people of Japan were placed in the role of his children, being both subjects and relatives to the emperor. This endeavour transformed the whole nation of Japan into one of divine origin. By the 1930s, Yasukuni Shrine became a central pillar of the state, as it tied the people, the state and the emperor into one single body, that of *kokutai*. This allowed for the creation of a fully patriotic nation state in which the state could ask and compel the people as subjects of the emperor, to die for whatever cause the state deemed necessary (Sturgeon 2006, 40). Every Japanese male was, through changes in the educational system, told that, if need be, he had to repay his country with his raw blood (Sturgeon 2006, 39); the reward, however, was to be enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine, under the patronage of the emperor himself. As such, in exchange for their lives, soldiers were rewarded with veneration by the emperor, and, ultimately, godhood as *kami*.

This veneration by the emperor of their fallen sons and brothers allowed for some degree of consolation to the bereaved families (Nelson 2003, 452), yet also deepened the divide between the dead and the living. After deification at Yasukuni Shrine, the newly divine spirits now belonged firmly to the state, and no longer to their families (Nelson 2003, 452). As Hardacre neatly summarised, the “nationwide orchestration of ritual was an attempt at the most daring social engineering. Here was a plan to use religion to unify the people in a single cult, headed by the emperor as head priest, focused upon his ancestors (and later the war dead), who had also been declared national deities” (Hardacre 1989, 32-33). At the end of World War II, 2.5 million war dead were enshrined at Yasukuni, of which roughly 87 percent fell during World War II (Sturgeon 2006, 41).

Apart from the origin of Yasukuni shrine as a tool for both the veneration of the war dead and the creation of State Shinto, the late Tokugawa and subsequent Meiji period are important for another reason, as well. The mode of thinking that would ultimately become codified as *nihonjinron* is arguably found in the late Tokugawa period. During the infant stages of the rebellion that sought to dispose of the Shogunate, *kokugaku* (“national learning”) became a central tenet of the rebel leaders (Sturgeon 2006, 25). In order to define themselves, and Japan, intellectuals of that era began to look inward, and “strove to “recover” an idealized, pure mentality and world view ascribed to the ancient Japanese, to return to the thought and consciousness of the ancients before the country became (as these writers understood the situation) “polluted” by contact with foreign culture and

religion. Buddhism was attacked as the agency most to blame for Japan's loss of its original way of life" (Hardacre 1989, 16). Several characteristics of *nihonjinron* are already discernible here, as the notion of an "essential, Japanese" nature is contrasted to the West, while the main culprit that allowed for Japan to be enfeebled and humiliated was found to be in a religion not native to Japan, practised by undesired tyrants, whereas the perceived "truly Japanese" religion became the rallying cry for those working towards the ousting of foreign forces.

After Japan surrendered in September 1945, and was subsequently placed under foreign administration, the occupying forces of the United States implemented numerous constitutional changes in order to prevent a re-nationalisation of Japan. By way of secularisation, State Shinto was one of their main targets.

2.3. The survival of State Shinto and the problem with secularisation

State Shinto, as established during the embracing of overtly authoritarian and nationalist tendencies by Japan, is still the major ideological source of contemporary nationalist movements in Japan today (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 210). The term is understood as "Shinto-inspired ideas and practices that are mainly propagated by agencies of the Japanese state or government in connection with attempts to integrate the nation and to strengthen the sense of national loyalty – and which are accepted by many of the Japanese people." (Shimazono 2007, 700).

Jinja Honchō (Association of Shinto Shrines) is perhaps the best indicator that State Shinto, as described above, survived the occupying forces. The association owes its existence to the 1945 Shinto Directive issued by the American occupying forces, which banned the official management of Shinto places of worship from the official to the private realm (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 211). It did so by relieving the Japanese of any compulsion to believe in or practice any state-sponsored form of religion or having to financially support such a religion (Sturgeon 2006, 47). In order to firmly establish the ideals of democracy in post-war Japan, several provisions with regards to the emperor and secularisation were enshrined in the Japanese constitution of 1947. Article 1 emphasises the role of the emperor as a symbol of the state and of unity of the people, rather than the actual head of state with governing powers, Article 9 forever renounces war as a

sovereign right, and Article 20 essentially safeguards the ideals of secularisation, that is to say, the separation of church and state, as described above (Constitution of Japan 1947).

At first sight, particularly the issues relating to secularisation seem to be paradoxical with regards to the survival of State Shinto, yet its ideological heirs have found a way to challenge the constitutional division. When it comes to beliefs native to Japan, many nationalist ideologues have repeatedly stressed the need for distinguishing between customs and religion. According to them, Shinto was only placed in the category of “religion” by the American occupying forces but should rather be understood as belonging to the realm of customs (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 209). Indeed, as Sturgeon notes, part of the impetus behind the implementation of the relevant provisions in the constitution was the “blasphemous” notion of “the emperor worship”, which to the Christian American occupants constituted the entirety of Shinto (Sturgeon 2006, 45). Since that time, Yasukuni Shrine, along with other Shinto Shrines, was a private religious institution (Sturgeon 2006, 47).

However, by characterising the necessary constitutive elements of religion as a founder, holy texts, commandments, followers, and proselytization, these nationalist ideologues argue for Shinto to be understood as a national custom native to Japan, rather than as a religion, as Shinto possesses none of these (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 209). Even the worship of *kami*, itself an indicator of religious beliefs, must, as per their understanding, not be confused with that of God, as *kami* are deified ancestors deserving of veneration, and thereby not akin to the absolute, omnipotent God of Christianity or Islam (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 209). Essentially, by contrasting Shinto to dominant religions, proponents of Jinja Honchô arrive at, and argue for, an understanding of Shinto as an integral part of Japanese everyday life, that has nothing in common with other religious movements. Former Prime Minister Mori Yoshirô, himself a prominent member of these nationalist circles, summarised their mindset best when stating that Shinto shrines are a bit like the “homelands of our hearts” (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 220).

It is precisely this emphasis on the “private” nature, that allowed for the continuity of Shinto ceremonies being conducted as state ceremonies. The emperor, as part of his symbolic character of the unity of the people, still conducts Shinto ceremonies in accordance with nature and the seasons, and the prime minister, other ministers, members of parliament, judges and officials of the Imperial Household Agency are usually invited

to participate in these ceremonies, yet these are officially treated as internal affairs of the imperial court (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 211). Further emphasising the still remaining ties between a significant number of politicians and pre-war State Shinto is their participation in the religious ceremony conducted at Yasukuni Shrine every year on August 15, the anniversary of Japan's defeat, for the sake of the war dead, as these politicians have formed the Association of Diet Members for Worshipping at Yasukuni Shrine Together (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 213). But it is not simply these nationalist ideologues who gather at the shrine on the anniversary of Japan's defeat; the coincidental date of the Buddhist holiday *obon*, where all of Japan celebrates and acknowledges a family's relationship to its ancestral spirits in mid-August, also works in favour of Yasukuni Shrine, as Nelson remarked, since this festival is "coupled with a homeland nostalgia that evokes the cultural and spiritual essences of what it means to be Japanese." (Nelson 2003, 459).

Besides Jinja Honchô, Nippon Kaigi ("Japan Conference") constitutes the largest confederation of nationalist circles and organisations in contemporary Japan, itself being the result of a merger of two older nationalist organisations (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 215). Yet of the two organisations, Nippon Kaigi wields the most political influence and power, as it maintains close ties to the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan. As Shibuichi noted, local group branches of these nationalist circles often overlap with that of local LDP branches, which itself is a catchall party composed of conservative centrists and rightist politicians (Shibuichi 2005, 201). In February 2015, fifteen out of nineteen members of the Abe cabinet were members of Nippon Kaigi, including Abe himself, causing several newspapers to dub the Abe administration the "Nippon Kaigi cabinet" (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 215).

Nippon Kaigi, along with Jinja Honchô (considered the backbone of Nippon Kaigi) can therefore be called the main ideological heirs of State Shinto, as these organisations are all concerned with rebuilding a Japan that is centred on what they consider the essential constitutive element of the nation, namely the imperial house (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 215-216). Via their insistence on the celebration of National Foundation Day, the mythological founding of Japan roughly a millennium before actual historic documents are placing it, they seek to emphasise the notion of a nation still rooted in pre-war nationalism and, via the emperor, one that is of divine origin, all for the purpose of

restoring national pride among the Japanese (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 216). This becomes evident when looking at the importance Jinja Honchô puts on the cult around the emperor as symbolised by Ise Shrine. The deity venerated here is the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, the supposed ancestress of every Japanese emperor, yet, as Guthmann remarked, on the website of Jinja Honchô, this mythological lineage is presented as fact, both in English and Japanese (Jinja Honcho Website, Guthmann and Rots 2017, 211). In a sense, to these organisations, the emperor *is* the ultimate symbol of what it means to be “Japanese” (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 219). This belief in divine ancestry and the need to instil pride in the people of Japan is also the prerequisite for all politicians who wish to join the Diet organisation of Nippon Kaigi (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 219). Hence, the need for constitutional revisionism arises.

To this day, not a single word of the 1947 Constitution has been changed (Tamamoto 2001, 37), and yet, as Hughes remarks, right wing politicians, chiefly among them Abe, have long striven to implement certain constitutional changes, particularly aimed at the revision of “the externally imposed reforms of the demilitarisation of the Occupation [that] have created a burden of history that has robbed Japan of its true national identity and vitality. Hence, for Abe and his supporters it is only by unburdening itself from this so-called masochistic [...] history and by escape from the post-war [...] regime – which can be viewed essentially as a regime of defeat – that Japan can start to rehabilitate its national strength and autonomy.” (Hughes 2015, 11-12). In April 2012, Abe helped influence a draft for a revised constitution, that shows certain similarities to those constitutional changes as envisioned by the nationalist circles described above, as particular emphasis was put on pre-war Japanese national identity, by way of instilling renewed regard for the nation and the family, the emperor being restored as the head of the state, and the flag and anthem being officially prescribed for the first time as the national flag and national anthem (Hughes 2015, 13). Yet of particular interest to the Abe administration is the constitutional revision of Article 9 (the aforementioned peace clause), as this would allow Japan to establish the rights of individual and collective self-defence, and the transformation of the Japanese Self Defence Forces (JSDF) into a National Defence Force, thereby finally restoring the nation’s ability to function as a not only a sovereign state (Hughes 2015, 14), but, as Tamamoto remarked, shed its image of a “half-state” (Tamamoto 2001, 38).

2.4. Rewriting history

The link between nationalism and war is obvious to every student of history, and, as Selden remarked, the same is true for war memory as fuel for nationalist historical legacies (Selden 2008, 71). Indeed, there seems no shortage of conflicts and wars, serving the “architects of citizenship and nationhood [...] to build modern myths about submerging individual suffering and loss to greater causes.” (Nelson 2003, 443). Yet while the creation of these myths is usually built on heroic victories in war, one question remains: what should the living tell the dead in the face of defeat? (Sturgeon 2006, 50).

2.4.1. Yûshûkan and the framing of war memory

On the premises of Yasukuni Shrine, the Yûshûkan is situated. Built in 1882, the exhibition hall was erected to display war memorabilia, including weaponry used by the war dead in China and against Russia (Sturgeon 2006, 40). During the 1930s, and in the lead up to the Pacific War, by encouraging visitors to Yûshûkan to fire genuine (albeit modified) rifles and, after donning tear gas masks, to participate in actual tear gas drills, this museum played an important role in reinforcing nationhood, explaining and promoting modern military warfare, all with the express purpose of inspiring visitors to join the military of the Japanese imperial army (Sturgeon 2006, 41).

Even after Japan’s defeat, the Yûshûkan remained a testament to imperial Japanese aggression. To this day, visitors to the museum are ushered through corridors of displays valorising the military exploits of the Meiji, Taisho, and Shôwa periods, with the accompanying narratives of the exhibits being “actively evangelical, extolling the commitment, loyalty, bravery, and self-sacrifice of those who died in service to the nation and emperor.” (Nelson 2003, 454). On display are a variety of the personal effects of the war dead enshrined at Yasukuni, such as pictures of the dead, bloodstained uniforms, last letters of farewell and helmets, all accompanied by patriotic songs softly playing in the background (Nelson 2003, 454). As one Yomiuri Shimbun editor put it, the museum praises militarism, and children going through that memorial come out believing that Japan actually won the war (Selden 2008, 72). The essential feature of Yûshûkan, in that respect, both before and after World War II, is therefore not to strictly portray an accurate account of Japanese and Asian history. Rather, the individuals commemorated here, all

casualties and all enshrined as divine spirits, serve to reaffirm the spiritual bond between the Japanese family and its nation, one that survives even death (Nelson 2003, 454).

John Nelson's account of his visit to the museum, as well as subsequent interviews of other visitors upon exiting the Yûshûkan are telling with regards to the lasting impression of the war memorabilia on display. He states:

“A number of people with whom I spoke upon exiting the museum felt the least they could do is to honour the spirits of the war dead enshrined at Yasukuni. As a man in his late twenties put it: “I read about the situation when the enemy's aircraft carriers were attacked by kamikaze, but right now I can't imagine how they could do it. Personally, I don't have that kind of courage. But, on the other hand, I would like to know more about the young people's thoughts and feelings at the time [...]” (Nelson 2003, 456).

Precisely this desire to know more is why nationalist religious groups and politicians have laboured towards a certain frame of understanding Yasukuni Shrine. By repeatedly stressing the notion that Japan's survival was due only to these people enshrined at Yasukuni and valorised at Yûshûkan for sacrificing their lives and being willing to take the directive of repaying the nation with their “raw blood”, these politicians and interest groups, such as Nippon Kaigi and Jinja Honchô, have transformed curiosity and empathy into activism and patronage, all within a more broadly encompassing redemptive tale about the war, its legacy, and shaping of social memory among the Japanese (Nelson 2003, 456). Upon visiting the homepage of the Yûshûkan, messages such as “This name [Yûshûkan] reflects the purpose of the museum as a place to become familiar with the stories of those who sacrificed their precious lives for their country, and learn from them.” (Yasukuni Jinja Yushukan Museum website) show the intent to promote a certain message of a war that is characterised by both self-defence and to free Asia from colonisation, while emphasising that the Japanese occupation also did some good for the colonised (Sturgeon 2006, 88). This view of a “just” war is shared between right wing factions and many in the ruling LDP in their intent to rewrite history (Sturgeon 2006, 81).

It is then perhaps not surprising that nowhere in Yûshûkan any mention is made of the less heroic acts of imperial Japan. The abduction of Korean women to serve as *ianfu* (“comfort women”, a euphemism for sexual slavery) to the soldiers of the imperial army,

acts of aggression, invasion, and mass murder toward Japan's neighbours, such as China (the Nanking massacre) and Korea, are not addressed, and glaring in their absence (Selden 2008, 72). These, then, are the issues typically raised both internationally and domestically, whenever a Japanese prime minister visits Yasukuni Shrine, regardless of whether in an official capacity, or a private one.

2.4.2. Domestic and international issues of prime ministerial visits

In the wake of Japan's surrender, numerous high-ranking military and political officials were convicted of war crimes to varying degrees, several of whom were either sentenced to death, or imprisoned for life, but in exchange for Japan's signing of the peace treaty of 1951 with the United States, which granted the US basing rights in Japan and put the country under the security umbrella of the US, it also gave Japan the power to grant clemency, pardon, and reduce sentences of those convicted by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Sturgeon 2006, 69). As Sturgeon notes, within months of the treaty coming into force, more than 40 million people petitioned for the release of those convicted, resulting in the government pardoning the war criminals throughout the 1950s (Sturgeon 2006, 69). Those who were not executed prior to their pardoning were paid back their salaries and even allowed to hold public office, since they had not been tried under Japanese domestic law, which meant that they should not be treated as ordinary, home-style criminals (Sturgeon 2006, 70). Those that were executed, however, were allowed enshrinement in 1978 at the behest of the chief priest of Yasukuni Shrine, himself a former Imperial Navy Lieutenant Commander, who rejected the verdict of the Tokyo Trials, on the grounds that their "deaths" were incurred in the line of duty (Sturgeon 2006, 70-72). It should be noted, however, that this enshrinement was made in secret, and only became public a year later, when the late emperor Hirohito stopped visiting the shrine (Tamamoto 2001, 36). This framing of war crimes and those guilty thereof by way of a simple shift in historical perspective is echoed by several veterans and members of the nationalist circles described above, as Nelson noted, when quoting another former navy officer, who stated with regards to Yasukuni Shrine: "I know there are class-A war criminals enshrined here, [...] but they had to follow the national policy at that time. In a wide perspective, they might also have been victims of the war" (Nelson 2003, 454).

In 1995, the Japanese parliament under the Murayama administration considered passing a resolution of peace and apology, acknowledging war time responsibility for the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II (Tamamoto 2001, 35), only to be met with fierce opposition from an alliance of LDP politicians and other nationalist pressure groups, chiefly among them Jinja Honchô, who managed to collect over five million signatures in opposition to the resolution (Nelson 2003, 456-457). Besides the differences in perceptions of history, at issue was the wording of the apology, proposed by the then-ruling Democratic Party of Japan. The statement ultimately ended up somewhere in the middle, as some parts of it stated here show:

“[...] Solemnly reflecting upon many instances of colonial rule and acts of aggression in the modern history of the world, and recognizing that Japan carried out those acts in the past, [...] the Members of this House express a sense of deep remorse. We must transcend differences over historical views of the past war and learn humbly the lessons of history so as to build a peaceful international society. [...]” (Murayama statement, Sturgeon 2006, 74).

It would be understandable if this statement pleased none, while infuriating many. Issues such as colonial rule and acts of aggression are placed in the larger context of “modern” colonialism and similar acts of aggression by other, (i.e. western) powers, while simultaneously missing the term for “apology” (Sturgeon 2006, 75). Instead, phrases such as “We must transcend differences over historical views...” seem to hint at the historical revisionism as intended by Nippon Kaigi and Jinja Honchô, since “we” obviously includes the critics of Japan’s imperial past, as well, implying a desire for a transcendence of different historical perceptions on *their* part. On the other hand, the LDP issued their own statement mere hours after the Murayama statement, in which they acknowledged the need to learn from history, yet offered no apology, rather opting for the use of the word *hansei* (“reflection” or “regret”), and instead expressed gratitude to the nation’s war dead for their sacrifice, upon which Japan’s modern prosperity was built (Nelson 2003, 457). According to Nelson, their reasoning was that, since the war was fought in the emperor’s name, it would be unthinkable to apologise, because of the chain of associations such an acknowledgement would initiate, therefore, individuals could apologise, but not the nation (Nelson 2003, 457).

Since 1945, several prime ministers have visited Yasukuni Shrine. After the issuing of the Shinto directive and the subsequent secularisation as per the constitution, official visits of prime ministers would violate Article 20, therefore, the nature of these visits was often purported to be of a strictly private nature, as it is possible to visit due to one's religious convictions as part of religious freedom (Sturgeon 2006, 56). However, regardless of whether these visits were done in an official capacity or not, the problem is distinguishing intentions from actions in their attempts to visit "privately" in what is a very public place (Sturgeon 2006, 56). Yet several conservative prime ministers, chiefly among them Nakasone Yasuhiro, Koizumi Jun'ichiro, and the incumbent Abe Shinzō, have all visited Yasukuni, due to various reasons and in various capacities.

Nakasone attempted to dilute post-war Japanese secularisation as imposed by the constitution, and visited in an official capacity on August 15, 1985, the anniversary of Japan's defeat, with the intent to establish the identity of the nation-state (Shibuichi 2005, 206). While doing so partly due to strong pressure stemming from nationalist groups, as well as his personal experiences as a naval officer during the pacific war (Shibuichi 2005, 206), the resulting criticism from China, South Korea, and the domestic opposition was such that he refrained from visiting the shrine for the remainder of his term (Shibuichi 2005, 207). Ironically, this decision did not improve matters for Nakasone, as he now received death threats from ultranationalist pressure groups, having been branded a "traitor" that bowed to foreign influence (Shibuichi 2005, 208-209).

Koizumi visited a total of six times from 2001 to 2006 (Japan Times, 2006), and only once on August 15, a fact that did not spare him the criticism stemming from China and Korea, yet critique coming from opposing political parties was surprisingly subdued, perhaps partly due to the absence of a unified left front at the time (Shibuichi 2005, 210). The reasons for Koizumi's repeated visits, however, are somewhat different from those of Nakasone, not least because Koizumi, being born in 1942, belonged to the post-war generation (Shibuichi 2005, 211). Tamamoto notes, how Koizumi's resolve to visit Yasukuni grew, after visiting a war museum (it is unclear whether this was the Yûshûkan), where he read the letters of kamikaze pilots on display there, and "wept, as happens with many visitors. Their tears of pity for lives lost are intimate and personal, and have little to do with country, honour, and duty, the usual message of war memorials." (Tamamoto 2001, 35).

It is unclear whether Koizumi's visit was as emotionally charged as described by Tamamoto, yet his subsequent explanations for his visits show a certain familiar way of thinking. In October 2005, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tendered a statement regarding the basic position of Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, which states that "Prime Minister Koizumi is of the firm conviction that Japan's present peace and prosperity are founded on the noble sacrifices made by those who lost their lives in the war. He visits Yasukuni Shrine to mourn and to offer his respect and thanks [...]. He makes the visits as an individual citizen, not in an official capacity." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan Statement, October 2005). He reiterated this stance personally a few months later, when he proclaimed during a press conference that to him, it was "inapprehensible that critics and intellectuals, who usually despise political involvement to the freedom of mind and a matter of one's heart, criticize my visits to Yasukuni Shrine. The approach foreign governments have taken to try to intervene in a matter of the heart and make the Yasukuni Shrine issue into a diplomatic issue also goes beyond my understanding. It is guaranteed under the Constitution that no one may infringe upon the freedom of mind and a matter of one's heart." (Koizumi 2006).

The incumbent Abe, since taking office for a second time, visited once in 2013, having refrained from ever since (Nikkei Asian Review, 2018). The reasoning behind his visit was like that of Koizumi. He stated that "Today, I paid a visit to Yasukuni Shrine and expressed my sincere condolences, paid my respects and prayed for the souls of all those who had fought for the country and made ultimate sacrifices. [...] The peace and prosperity Japan enjoys today is not created only by those who are living today. [...]" (Abe 2013).

Among the multitude of visits to the shrine, the visits of these three prime ministers have thus far caused the greatest outrage, both domestically from the left, and abroad, predominantly in China and South Korea (Hiwatari 2006, 24), while simultaneously leading to a deterioration of bilateral relations with these countries and Japan. In the wake of these visits, Korean and Chinese mass media have regularly condemned Japan and its leadership, and in both countries several public anti-Japanese demonstrations have been staged (Shibuichi 2005, 205). In this light, some have even suggested that not only does Japanese nationalist identity depend on Yasukuni shrine, but also that of China, having

struggled not only against the Japanese invaders enshrined there, but also repeatedly against prime ministerial visits (Shibuichi 2005, 205).

This, then, is the international face of the Yasukuni problem and prime ministerial visits. Outside Japan, it is a symbol for Japan's lack of atonement for the war, and the absence of reconciliation with the Asian victims of the Japanese empire (Tamamoto 2001, 34), as the enshrinement of 14 class A war criminals, along with a lack of sincere apologies for Japan's past behaviour, shows. The Prime ministerial visits are controversial, because of the message they send to the victims of Japan's imperial aggression, one that demonstrates a severe lack of accepting responsibility and of repentance. This is perhaps best encapsulated by the fact that even among the rightist intellectuals, many do not deny that Japanese soldiers killed many in Nanking, but, as Shibuichi points out, they argue that Japan was "less" guilty than critics claim (Shibuichi 2005, 203). Indeed, any acceptance of the position of critics regarding Japan's culpability in imperialism, be they left wing politicians, Chinese, or Korean, would essentially be tantamount to admitting that Japanese imperialism was a mistake (Shibuichi 2005, 199-200), and therefore, by extension, the will of the emperor faulty, and the death of their relatives in vain. This is precisely the underlying reason why, to them, the "debate over what really happened is still under way." (Sturgeon 2006, 81).

Chapter 3 – The Triple Catastrophe of Fukushima

At the time of writing, a little over eight years have passed since Japan found itself at the centre of international attention in March 2011, as the country was hit in quick succession by an earthquake and a subsequent tsunami, which in turn culminated in a nuclear crisis, thereby accounting for the three disasters that gave the triple catastrophe its name. Yet while all these incidents have occurred also elsewhere in the world, the root causes of the nuclear catastrophe, as well as the response and proposed remedy to the triple catastrophe, can be linked to the perceived notions of “unique” Japan, as this chapter will show.

3.1. “3.11”

Starting at precisely 2:46 pm on March 11, 2011, and lasting for about 6 minutes, a 9.0 magnitude undersea earthquake marked the beginning of the complex catastrophe that would eventually be simply known as 3.11 (Kingston 2012, 1). The strength of the earthquake was such that it moved Japan 2.4 metres closer to the United States, while the axis of the earth itself shifted by nearly 25 cm (Samuels 2013, 97), making the quake not only the strongest to ever hit Japan, but also ranking among the most powerful to ever be recorded (Kingston 2012, 1). The earthquake triggered a massive tsunami reaching the height of more than 20 metres (Yamamura et al. 2015, 921), that “battered and inundated coastal villages along 500 km of coastline and in some areas wreaked destruction as far as 5 km inland.” (Kingston 2012, 1) of the Tohoku region in northern Japan. The tsunami not only caused massive damage to the infrastructure and destroyed the livelihood of most of the Japanese unlucky enough to inhabit region, it also resulted in huge loss of life, as over 20,000 people were washed away into the ocean (Samuels 2013, 97), close to 6,000 were injured, 4,282 people were reported missing, and the total loss of life was estimated at about 15,760 people dead, not to mention the displacement of close to 600,000 people due to the devastated infrastructure (Kingston 2012, 1).

Yet while the destruction caused by the earthquake and tsunami were devastating enough on their own, the situation the Japanese found themselves in was exacerbated only

further by the additional dimension of the eventual nuclear meltdown in Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. As a direct result of the tsunami hitting the plant, the systems designed to cool the reactor either malfunctioned or were severely damaged, causing meltdowns and hydrogen explosions at three of the four reactors in use at the time, and spreading radioactive contamination, which led to the establishing of an evacuation zone of a 20 km radius (Kingston 2012, 1). Simply put, 3.11 was the biggest crisis that Japan had to face since its defeat in World War II (Kingston 2012, 2).

These sets of data were not immediately available in the hours, days or even weeks after the disaster, of course. The confusion, anger and perceived betrayal by the people of Japan was so widespread that in the aftermath of 3.11, the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission (hereafter NAIIC), under the chairmanship of Kurokawa Kiyoshi, was installed and tasked with the arduous endeavour of trying to make sense of not only what had happened, but also with examining the institutional framework that had failed so spectacularly when it needed to work the most (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 47).

3.2. The man-made disaster

Several months after NAIIC began its investigations, the commission tendered its thorough, close to 600-page report, based on roughly 900 hours of interviews conducted with more than a thousand people and on the conduction of surveys with the participation of more than 10,000 evacuees and 2,400 plant workers (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 51). This report was eventually made available to the non-Japanese speaking public in an abbreviated, 88-page executive summary, whereas the non-abbreviated version is only available in Japanese. The report's conclusion was that the nuclear catastrophe, even if having been caused by natural circumstances, was undoubtedly due to human neglect, poor design choices, environmental flux and regulatory flaws (Nakamura and Kikuchi 2011, 894), thereby accounting for the verdict of a man-made, rather than a natural disaster. The report clearly faulted the organisational and regulatory system that facilitated flawed decision making and misguided action (The National Diet of Japan Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission Executive Summary 2012, 16).

Upon examining the main regulatory bodies tasked with the development and enforcement of nuclear safety standards in order to protect the public, NAIIC found that both the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC), and the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), had failed the Japanese public in their responsibilities, on two levels. Firstly, on the level of profit-oriented business concerns, they feared that new regulatory requirements, such as keeping the equipment up to date, would interfere with business and might even weaken their positions in future lawsuits (The National Diet of Japan Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission Executive Summary 2012, 17). Secondly, on an institutional level, these agencies were hampered in their task from the very beginning due to a lack of necessary independence. NISA, the main nuclear regulatory agency, had been established as part of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which actively promoted the nuclear power industry, whereas NSC, tasked with creating nuclear safety guidelines, belonged to the Science and Technology Agency, itself an organisation designed to help promote the nuclear industry in Japan (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 51-52).

The report further detailed that NSC had neglected to establish legally obligatory safety regulations, while NISA, by failing to enforce adherence by companies to nuclear safety regulations, essentially permitted the operators of nuclear power plants to voluntarily choose whether or not to apply countermeasures (such as the use of up-to-date technology) against severe accidents, including external events (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 52). TEPCO, on the other hand, had been aware of the risk a potential tsunami posed to the power plant, since 2006, yet had chosen to ignore the danger, while NISA, knowing of TEPCOs neglect, in turn failed to provide specific instructions to remedy the situation, as the probability of such a critical event was deemed as “unlikely” (The National Diet of Japan Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission Executive Summary 2012, 16).

Yet as inefficient as the legal framework was, so too was the technology used in these nuclear power plants. The technical equipment at the TEPCO operated Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, which started operations in 1971 (Nakamura and Kikuchi 2011, 896), was outdated, and the building housing the coolant system was among the first structures to collapse when hit by the tsunami. This meant the severing of the electricity needed to further cool the nuclear rods in the reactors, eventually causing them

to melt down, and allowed for the accumulation of hydrogen gas which caused several explosions, leading to the release of nuclear particles into the air (Nakamura and Kikuchi 2011, 895).

In short, both the legal framework, as well as the technological safety mechanisms designed to prevent catastrophes like 3.11 from happening, were curtailed by those agencies tasked to design and oversee their proper implementation because of collusion. These agencies put the business interests of the nuclear industry above the security interests of the people of Japan, the reasons for which shall be explained here.

Several signs point towards a close relationship between public officials and the nuclear industry in Japan. The institutional set-up of regulatory and supervisory bodies as part of entities designed to further the nuclear industry, rather than as independent agencies, is an indicator certainly worth noting. That the faulty technology being used by TEPCO was not public knowledge prior to the events of 3.11, but instead kept a secret, points to another problem. Rather than admitting to troubles having occurred at the nuclear plant prior to 3.11, TEPCO falsified reports about safety incidents in one of their plants over a long period of time, demonstrating a lack of both governmental integrity and desire to firmly regulate these leading power industries (Nakamura and Kikuchi 2011, 897). Another indicator of their close relationship is a notorious practice called *amakudari* (“descent from heaven”), essentially constituting a postretirement job transfer for high ranking government officials, such as from METI, to an executive position in one of the major power companies (Nakamura and Kikuchi 2011, 897). One last sign pointing towards their relationship shall be mentioned: it was TEPCO and its staff members, rather than government officials that, in the immediate aftermath of the fiasco, held the first press conferences and provided the first set of information to the public. During these initial press conferences, the company played down the extent of the calamity, such as avoiding the use of the term “meltdown” (to which they admitted only much later), and government officials, when addressing the situation publicly, tended to echo the information provided by TEPCO (Nakamura and Kikuchi 2011, 897). In an interview with the German journal “Der Spiegel” in early October 2015, then-Prime Minister Kan Naoto admitted to how truncated the communications between the government and TEPCO were at times, when stating that he was made aware of some key developments

only by watching them on the news, rather than being informed either by TEPCO officials, or members of his own government (Wagner 2015).

3.2.1. “The nail that sticks out gets hammered”

Close ties between branches of government, industry and bureaucracy are, however, nothing new to Japan. Their tightly knit relationship, dubbed the “iron triangle”, contributed significantly to the country’s post-war economic recovery, as it allowed for the defeated, enfeebled country to pool its remaining resources and energy into one coordinated national effort (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 57). The iron triangle’s success was such that not only did Japan’s post-war rebirth eventually place Japan at the global top in terms of economic growth, it also instilled a new sense of pride (along with arrogance and complacency) within the Japanese people, as they surpassed the west (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 57). Yet when addressing the nuclear catastrophe of 3.11, David Pilling comments on the shortcomings of mindset. He states that “the accident exposed in a flash – quite literally – some of the worst traits of ‘old Japan,’ with its elitist and secretive bureaucratic culture. That culture had served Japan reasonably well in the post-war years when it was driving economic catch-up. But it was deeply flawed.” (Pilling 2014, 260).

Traditionally, Japanese companies worked together in a system by maintaining close horizontal and vertical ties, while within a company, the salarymen, as long as they toed the company line and neatly fitted into the established seniority-based hierarchy, were rewarded with stability as provided by lifetime employment (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 58). The lifetime employment model and seniority system (based not on age of the employee, but on time spent with the company) incentivised employees to spend most of their working life within the structure of the company they were working for (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 60). While this system, particularly the aspect of a lifetime employment within one firm is nowadays not strictly a given anymore, many Japanese still labour with these considerations in mind. A lot of emphasis is still put on nurturing and cultivating this collectivist mindset of placing the group above the individual, as shown by the fact that this peer pressure to conform is still taught as early as kindergarten (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 60).

It is worth noting that the nature of the lifetime employment model and seniority system is closely modelled on the *Ie*-system. The *ie* (“Family, House”), however, is not necessarily a unit that easily translates to what might be called a “common” family, as it also translates to “house”, thereby being in essence more closely related to a European aristocrat understanding of family that stresses continuity and ancestry with a clearly established head of house (Hendry 2013, 24-25). Under the occupation forces, the *Ie*-system as practiced in pre-war Japan was abolished (Hendry 2013, 27), yet the mindset behind it survived, as can be seen when looking at the close ties between companies and industries (similar to different branch families), as well as the employees within a given company, seen as the children, via the lifetime employment system. As such, both systems work towards linking the Japanese society firmly to the Confucian ideology of the natural order of things, by encouraging people to submit the self for the sake and well-being of the group, albeit in different contexts. The *Ie*-system is a private continuation of the notion that historically allowed the emperor to rule the nation (the “family”) as the head (or “father”) (see chapter 2), while the model of lifetime employment incentivises individuals to sacrifice their freedom for the safety and stability that comes with conforming to a company-centred point of view. Both share the essential aspect of subjecting the self to the group. In that sense, the public life within a company can be thought of as a natural continuation of the private surroundings of the family. The history of these systems being rooted in pre-war Japan is then the reason for their proclivity to be featured as positive examples of “typical” or “traditional” Japanese elements, meaning within the context of *nihonjinron*.

Several examples point to this notion, such as the significance being placed on the (fictitious) parent-child relationship *oyabun kobun*, (meaning “the boss and his following”) in *nihonjinron* literature (Hein 2014, 4). While the word *oyabun* (親分) translates to “boss” or “chief”, the first kanji (親) used here means “parent”; *kobun* (子分), on the other hand, either translates to “follower” or “retainer”. However, the first kanji used here (子) relates to the family as well, as its primary meaning is that of “child”. *Oyabun kobun*, then, is used in both the context of the family, as well as in the context of the firm or company one is working in, thereby implicitly equating them.

Going one step further, under *nihonjinron*, even the Japanese term being used for *self* (*jibun*) is then also put in contrast to a western understanding of *self*. *Jibun* directly

translates to “part of the self”, thereby simultaneously stressing the relative nature of an individual as belonging to the group, while also highlighting the importance of the collective (Hein 2014, 4). One particular Japanese proverb seemingly encapsulates this collectivist mindset as propagated by Nihonjinron perfectly: “*deru kui wa utareru*”, which roughly translates to “the pole that sticks out gets driven into the ground” (Hein 2014, 4), or perhaps more bluntly: “the nail that sticks out gets hammered”.

The downside of this collectivist mindset was, as Kurokawa and Ninomiya noted, the curtailed possibility of voicing dissent within the confines of corporate structure, as the “norms and institutional pressures can function as binding mechanisms that inhibit employees from stepping out of line with the company’s direction and views.” (Kurokawa and Ninomiya 2018, 61).

Ironically, it was precisely this kind of unwanted dissent within corporate structure that mitigated the nuclear disaster somewhat. Yoshida Masao, manager of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant at the time when the disaster unfolded, disobeyed his superiors when refusing to follow their order to stop pumping seawater into the damaged nuclear reactors after the collapse of the coolant system (McCurry 2013a) as TEPCO feared this measure would render them commercially useless (McCurry 2013a).

In the preface of the NAIIC report, Kurokawa declared that the “fundamental causes [of 3.11] are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to ‘sticking with the program’, our groupism; and our insularity.” (Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission Executive Summary 2012, 9). It is worth noting, that these traits have been historically characterised within the context of nihonjinron as something that made Japan unique, albeit not necessarily bearing any positive connotation (as described in the introductory chapter). Yet as a result of economic dominance, these traits turned Japanese national identity into something worthy of pride again, as they were imagined to be the fundamental reason Japan could recover at all. Given these explanations, perhaps it is not quite as baffling anymore why these close ties, (as well as the resulting collusion) between government and industry exist, and how they ultimately led to the man-made disaster of 3.11. It was precisely this strict understanding of one’s place within the context of a larger whole that, under the guise of the iron triangle, only a few decades earlier allowed for the economic growth that made Japan the envy of the

world. Within this context, the resulting lessons learned were that it was not only reasonable for the close ties characterising pre-war Japan, to be upheld and maintained, both within the public and private life, but also that to rely on them *payed off*. By equating familial and economic ties while simultaneously emphasising the resulting success, those engaged in nihonjinron sought to instil a new sense of pride in the Japanese people, as it was the “uniqueness” of those familial ties inherent to Japan, that allowed for economic recovery in the first place by way of their projection onto the businesses that came to dominate not only Asia, but even surpassed the West.

3.3. The discourse

In the days after the disastrous events took place, the Japanese people were understandably in shock. In the weeks and months that followed 3.11, when the dust began to settle, and the situation could be assessed a little clearer, a new form of discourse began to take shape. The media, politicians and the people alike began to heatedly engage in seeking and attributing blame, and both TEPCO, as well as the Government of Kan Naoto were found to be suitable candidates.

3.3.1. Seeking blame amidst the “unimaginable”

Barely a month after 3.11, in an editorial published by Asahi Shimbun, one of Japan’s biggest newspapers, staff writer Soga Takeshi lamented that the “political leaders have yet to offer a single convincing statement about the disaster that strikes an emotional cord in the hearts of the people.” (Soga 2011). Rather, he declared that while the nation was waiting to hear the voice of a great orator, the politicians and bureaucrats were fighting amongst themselves, a view shared by many across the political spectrum (Samuels 2013, 100). This lack of, and yearning for, a “great orator”, was likely directed at the then DPJ leader and prime minister, Kan Naoto, who quickly found himself at the centre of national discontent. In other newspapers, Kan was criticised by the Yomiuri Shimbun for not showing enough leadership (Samuels 2013, 101), or for not showing his face by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Samuels 2013, 101). Put briefly, Kan and his government were perceived as “amateurs”, without command authority or crisis management skills, and

thus were unable to shake criticism, regardless of how much or little they interfered with both rescue and relief operations (Samuels 2013, 101-102).

Unsurprisingly, criticism directed against the government also came from political opponents of the Kan Administration, particularly from members of the LDP. For example, Abe Shinzô contributed by penning an article entitled “*watakushi nara kou yaru*” (“here is what I would do, if it were me”), in which he thoroughly criticised Kan for his lack of leadership skills, by calling him an “emperor with no clothes” (Samuels 2013, 102). Other LDP politicians also accused Kan of lacking leadership, ultimately proposing an (unsuccessful) no-confidence resolution to bring down his government (Duus 2012, 176).

Samuels summarised the cacophonous nature of the criticism Kan faced in the aftermath of 3.11 best, when pointing out that the “critiques of leadership were inconsistent: too much consultation versus too little, too much on-site presence versus too much distance, too much elite direction versus too little, too much political control of the bureaucrats versus too little, too much “presidentialism” versus too little, too much micromanagement versus too much detachment, too much speed versus too much lethargy, too many snap decisions versus too much caution. But the critiques were relentless, and the Japanese public accepted them.” (Samuels 2013, 102). In the face of these relentless barrages of critique, Kan eventually resigned in 2012, having lost most of his popularity. Whether deservedly or not, Kan found himself in the epicentre of blame, yet he was not to remain alone. TEPCO, much to their chagrin, joined Kan in the spotlight.

In Japanese, several terms exist to refer to risk, such as *osore*, *abunasa*, *kiken*, or, borrowed from the English term risk, *risuku*, to name but a few; yet rather than relying on these terms to explain the events of 3.11 and the dangers inherent to the use of nuclear power to the public, a far more blurry term came to dominate the discourse, namely that of *sôteigai* (Samuels 2013, 104). *Sôteigai* accurately translates to “outside of what can be imagined”, or simply “unimaginable”, and it was for this very reason that when the intensity of criticism directed at TEPCO increased, they employed the concept of “unimaginable” as a foil of defence (Samuels 2013, 104). For instance, in the eyes of TEPCO’s then-vice president Fujimoto Takashi, it was not TEPCO’s responsibility to anticipate a natural catastrophe of such magnitude, rather, he saw it as the failure of the

nation at large, as the government would not burden ratepayers to prepare for disasters that occur only once every few hundred years, and therefore lay outside what the nation had foreseen, while others at TEPCO called 3.11 simply an “unforeseeable accident” (Samuels 2013, 104).

By stressing what they deemed an “unforeseeable accident” that occurred only once every few hundred years, TEPCO attempted to exonerate themselves from any responsibility for the nuclear disaster of 3.11, while simultaneously trying to make the public responsible. Yet even the ambiguous nature of the term *sôteigai* did not help absolve TEPCO (or the government) in the eyes of the people, as critics protested the misappropriation of the term by the nuclear power industry and its allies in business and government (Samuels 2013, 105). Yet *sôteigai* was also picked up by others with their own agendas to promote. For example, on the three-month anniversary of 3.11, the Mainichi Shimbun published an article, containing some 300-odd photographs depicting the relief and rescue services, as performed by the Japanese Self Defence Forces (JSDF), bearing the caption “The SDF has no word for “unimaginable.” It is an organization that must immediately confront any nation or entity that attacks Japan’s sovereignty.” (Samuels 2013, 107). The more conservative Yomiuri Shimbun joined the fray by emphasising the same message as published by Mainichi Shimbun, as they stated that “when the existence of the nation is at stake, we cannot put up with excuses about ‘unimagined’ [threats].” (Samuels 2013, 108).

Within the multitude of discourses surrounding 3.11, employing *sôteigai* as a tool might have become a saving grace for TEPCO, allowing them to avoid further public embarrassment. Precisely due to its ambiguous nature, as it introduced the dimension of the “unimaginable” to a very real catastrophe that perplexed the Japanese people at large, it might have become the floating signifier turned myth TEPCO needed it to be, and yet it did not. One possible explanation for its failure is likely due to reports surfacing, detailing TEPCO’s mismanagement of its nuclear plants long before the earthquake, as well as the issues relating to collusion between the government and the nuclear industries (see section 3.2). In that sense, even if the havoc wrought by the triple catastrophe might have been “unimaginable”, TEPCO appeared wholly unprepared, due to neglect to modernise and because of putting its business interests above the well-being of the people of Japan. Had TEPCO been prepared, *sôteigai* as a term might have worked in the manner they

intended. As it stands, however, it mostly emboldened their critics, who appropriated the term for themselves.

3.3.2. Bringing a stagnant nation back on track

Other than “unimaginable”, the triple catastrophe was also widely perceived as a sort of Schumpeterian moment of “creative destruction”, and the desire for a rebirth (*saisei*) or renewal/reform (*kaikaku*) that would remedy the ailments of a “stagnant nation” was omnipresent across the political spectrum (Samuels 2013, 98).

On the right, voices decrying modernity while simultaneously advocating a return to Japan’s traditions could be heard. Governor of Tokyo and renowned nationalist, Ishihara Shintarô, who already had shocked critics in the 1950s with his novels condemning his self-indulgent generation, attributed blame for the Tohoku disaster not to TEPCO, but aimed at something greater, by boldly stating that Japan’s identity is “greed”, and that Japan “should avail of this tsunami to wash away the greed. I think that it is divine punishment.” (Duus 2012, 176). As insensitive as Ishihara’s remarks might have been to the victims, it was not first time the term “divine punishment” was used as an explanatory vehicle in the wake of disaster in Japan’s modern history. Indeed, after the fires caused by the great Kanto earthquake of 1923 which burned most of Tokyo and its surroundings to ash, the terms *tenken* and *tenbatsu*, (“divine punishment” or “punishment from the heavens”) were used to criticise precisely the same kind of “hedonistic” and “greedy” behaviour that supposedly made Tokyo deserving of this sort of punishment (Schencking 2008, 297). Ishihara’s remarks some 90 years later were nothing new.

The historic parallels between the two catastrophes of 1923 and 2011 were also not lost on other observers, even outside Japan. In an article published by the LA Times entitled “Japanese see disaster as opportunity for broad change”, the authors state that several voices are yearning for a Japan that “can emerge from the rubble stronger, as it did after the great 1923 earthquake and the devastation of World War II.” (Makinen and Lee, 2011). One political commentator stated Japan needed a modern Gotô Shinpei (Makinen and Lee, 2011). Amid the destruction of 1923, then-mayor of Tokyo, Gotô offered his reconstruction plans to the imperial administration, by arguing that an essential feature of the new capital to be built must be the creation of impressive government buildings which

were to be linked by a network of wide imperial avenues, while also emphasising the need for greenbelts and small parks (Schencking 2008, 314). He further proposed the government should buy all the devastated terrain so that a new, state directed, imperial capital could be developed without opposition from the public (Schencking 2008, 314).

Proponents of Japanese essentialism, such as the philosopher and special advisor to the Reconstruction Design Council, Umehara Takeshi, also voiced their desires and criticism (Samuels 2013, 99). After 3.11, Umehara penned an article entitled “*“Bunmeisai” wo norikoe jihi no seishin minagiru kokka ni*” (“After overcoming the “civilizational disaster” – towards a state full of dignity of spirit”), in which he emphasised the importance of returning to a more “traditional/ancient way of Japanese thinking” (*nihon korai no shisô*), while simultaneously abandoning a modern civilisation that has become dangerous due to its reliance on technology (Gebhardt). He argued that it was “arrogant” to believe humans could harness the power of the atom, adding that “[c]ompared to the Western view that humans can conquer nature, we Japanese believe that all animals and plants and minerals are Buddhas.” (Samuels 2013, 100). Echoing Ishihara’s sentiments, he advocated the abandonment of “excessive consumption” (Samuels 2013, 100), and proposed a return to worshipping the sun, both in terms of technology, as well as spiritually (Gebhardt).

It was not, however, merely the right who demonstrated a kind of thinking geared towards change. On the left, people also yearned for a “rebirth” of Japan, yet theirs was diametrically opposed to the demands on the right. Groups of activists remarked that 3.11 would put an end to the “spell of deceit” engineered by Tokyo elites, and that it marked the beginning of a new chapter of transparency in Japanese history (Samuels 2013, 98).

Regardless of whether the demand was one of return to a glorified past, by looking inward and reaching a “new”, (despite being an old) understanding of what it meant to be Japanese, or working towards the end of the “spell of deceit”, both ends of the spectrum shared an undercurrent of anxiety that the disaster could further weaken a society that many thought had already lost its vision (Duus 2012, 179). In that sense, the discourse of catastrophe that was intensely focused on seeking out and creating villains, on attributing blame, can therefore be understood as a society fearing for its survival. Given these considerations, this struggle for survival then must be placed within the context of a society already lamenting its “lost decades”, and one unsure whether 3.11 would further strain the societal ties that were already seen as eroding. As such, the catastrophe not only

posed a very real threat to the lives of tens of thousands of Japanese, it also posed an imaginary one to the societal fabric of Japan.

3.3.3. *Kizuna* – the “bonds” that tie

Each year, the Japanese Kanji Proficiency Society elects a single kanji to represent the both the mood and “quality” of the year. For instance, in the aftermath of previous earthquakes, such as the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, the kanji chosen was directly linked to the earthquake itself (*shin*, “quake”). In 2011, the association instead opted for the kanji *kizuna* (絆), after 60,000 Japanese voted in a national poll for it to become “Kanji of the Year” (BBC News 2011).

As so many other Chinese characters in Japanese, the kanji chosen in 2011 has several meanings that are dependent on reading and pronunciation of the sign. When looking the kanji up in a dictionary, different readings and their corresponding meanings are listed. *Kizuna*, being but one of several possible ways to make use of the kanji, refers to either a shackle, a bond, a connection, or a leash. However, an alternative reading is *hodashi*, and here the more overtly negative connotation is made apparent, as *hodashi* translates to a shackle, to confinement, or even to bondage. This negative meaning of the kanji is even further emphasised by looking at the verb *hodasu* (“to bind”, “to shackle” or “to force”). And yet, despite the overwhelmingly negative meanings of the kanji, it was the familial ties and, most importantly, the societal bonds that came to dominate the post-3.11 discourse.

On the surface, the choice of *kizuna* (and not *hodashi*) makes sense, as prior to 3.11, *kizuna* was not as commonly used, as its main purpose was to describe familial ties, which, if being cut, would spell the end of the family (Tagsold 2012, 313). Other uses of *kizuna* before its explosion in popularity in the wake of the catastrophe were limited to feudal ties and customer relationships (Tagsold 2013, 313). 3.11 then provided the catalyst for the imbuing of a different meaning of *kizuna* through a variety of possibilities.

Even before 3.11, *kizuna* used to be more popular within the DPJ than elsewhere. One former DPJ prime minister (unsuccessfully) attempted to nominate *kizuna* as “Kanji of the Year” in 2009, as it was symbolic of the core of his desired form of politics, aiming at

the Japanese society being filled with *kizuna*, while another representative of the DPJ to the upper house of the Japanese diet demanded that Japan be able to “perform” *kizuna* (Tagsold 2013, 315). Perhaps most famously, Kan made use of *kizuna* both before and after the tsunami hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. One and a half months prior to 3.11, in a speech given at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, Kan proposed his understanding of *kizuna*. Entitled “Opening Japan and Reinventing KIZUNA”, he remarked that in “the course of opening up a nation and introducing new economic and social systems, there will always be people who are left behind the pace of change. In our transition to new systems, the traditional social, regional, and familial ties that once assisted these people may weaken. [...] I believe it is necessary to create new “Kizuna,” or interpersonal bonds, in order to avoid such situation[s].” (Kan Naoto January, 2011). One month after 3.11, Kan wrote a statement addressed to the international community, entitled “Kizuna – the Bonds of Friendship”, in which he thanked other nations for their well-wishes, their help, and, most importantly, their donations, and concluded by vowing that “Japan will recover, become vibrant again, and become an even more marvelous [*sic*] country. In living up to the cordial encouragement and solidarity extended to us by the international community, I consider walking down the road to such a rebirth to be incumbent on us [...]” (Kan April, 2011).

The use of rebirth and the desire for Japan to become a “marvellous” country in this context are telling, echoing the widely shared eagerness for putting Japan “back on track”, as discussed previously, yet it also betrays the wish for imposing a certain identity representation from above, namely one that does not forget nor ignore the importance of “traditional social, regional, and familial ties” as quintessential aspects of a collectivist society. In short, even before tens of thousands of Japanese citizens voted for *kizuna* to become the Kanji of the Year 2011, the DPJ defined *kizuna* as a concept by which to keep an evolving, liberal society in check, and to not completely subordinate “familial ties” to individual serendipity (Tagsold 2013, 315). On the other side of the political spectrum, LDP politicians also appropriated *kizuna* by publishing an eight-point programme in April 2011 entitled “Let us recreate Japan through the power of *kizuna*” (Tagsold 2013, 316).

Even outside the political elite sphere, *kizuna* assumed a wide variety of different functions. Donations and fundraisers of varying size and scope were organised, both

internationally and domestically, yet all contributed to the new meaning, as Tagsold remarked by pointing out that putting donations under the banner of *kizuna* reinforced the importance of selfless acts of giving and caring for others (Tagsold 2013, 316). However, making use of *kizuna* for donations was also often criticised, as many keen observers noticed the inherent possibility it presented to the government, traditionally responsible for providing the funds to rebuild in the wake of disasters, to at least partially transfer some of the burden onto the immediate neighbourhoods and communities of those affected (often themselves victims of the destruction wrought by 3.11), all under the guise of the “familial bonds” as prescribed by donations due to *kizuna* (Tagsold 2013, 321).

Prior to the triple catastrophe, *kizuna* was barely used; afterwards, it was everywhere. Which begs the question, why was a kanji with more overtly negative connotations than strictly positive meanings able to deeply ingrain itself within the discourse of crisis and recovery? As simple an answer as it may be, according to Tagsold, the values of the Japanese simply changed after the triple catastrophe of 2011 - back to where they used to be, as *kizuna* was at the centre of a nostalgic imagining of community characterised and carried by warm, intense and selfless connections (Tagsold 2013, 319). Even before 3.11, terms like *muen shakai* (“society without relations”) or *kozoku* (“orphaned families”) were gaining momentum, both essentially decrying the perceived disintegration of societal ties and bonds (Tagsold 2013, 319), as enjoyed in a more idealised, nostalgic past. In that sense, the semantic blur of the term *kizuna* was ripe to be appropriated.

Within political dimensions, *kizuna* provided the state with a framework in which it could contextualise its desires for a future Japan, one that in its endeavour to make use of the moment of “creative destruction” provided for by 3.11 would forge its future by looking to its past, as described above. In order to remake Japan in the wake of a “modern” catastrophe, the need for strengthening familial ties and societal bonds of an idealised past was felt across all strata of society. This, however, necessitated the emphasis of selflessness and self-sacrifice by the individual on behalf of the populace. As Tagsold neatly put it, both LDP and DPJ politicians introduced *kizuna* as a moral fabric that secured the individual responsibility of the family, the neighbourhood or the regional community (Tagsold 2013, 321). The government could then capitalise on the population’s desire for *kizuna* to silently remove themselves from being solely

responsible for paying, as through *kizuna*, paying and caring for the victims was put in the realm of the community, here to be understood as an extension of the family.

The importance of subduing the self for the sake of the group, and by extension, the nation, was also reiterated by the media coverage of the triple catastrophe via two relevant examples. Endô Miki, a 24-year-old emergency worker, had broadcast repeated tsunami warnings, until she herself was washed away from her post (Samuels 2013, 112). She is credited with saving over 700 lives, earning her the celebration of a famous right-wing cartoonist, being immortalised in dozens of YouTube videos, hundreds of blogs, as well as being lauded by Prime Minister Kan's successor, Noda Yoshihiko, who praised her "determination to fulfil a public duty in the midst of a crisis" (Samuels 2013, 112).

The TEPCO workers, dubbed the "Fukushima Fifty", provide the second relevant example. Tasked with trying to prevent further damage and meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi plant (The Economist 2012), they were, due to the probable fatality of their mission, likened to kamikaze pilots (McCurry 2013b). Yet while hailed as heroes for battling an "unseen enemy", as the Asahi Shimbun reported (Samuels 2013, 112), their number was likely more in the hundreds, and, contrary to being "samurai salarymen" of legend, or even volunteers at all, most of them were low-paid and exploited contract workers deprived of any alternative (Samuels 2013, 112-113).

Unfortunately, Endô Miki did not survive; yet her passing arguably rendered her sacrifice ripe for the political appropriation by way of constructing the persona of a hero. On the other hand, the majority of the "Fukushima Fifty" did survive their "suicide mission". However, most of them wish to remain anonymous, fearful of being shunned by the public, due to concerns of radioactive contamination being spread (The Economist 2012). A conservative vice governor of Tokyo perhaps encapsulated the usefulness of the "Fukushima Fifty" best by stating how welcome it was that the plant workers had shattered the post-war taboo against living and dying for others (Samuels 2013, 113). In that sense, it seems that the value of "heroes" to the public and media lay in their self-sacrifice, which could be instrumentalised for the creation of a certain narrative, yet the actual people behind the moniker found themselves ousted and shunned.

Further proof of the artificially constructed, rather than authentic nature of *kizuna* can be obtained when looking at the shallow local identities within the different communities

of the Tohoku region, where the disaster struck hardest. Many of the region's municipalities were newly created in the early 2000s, by merging several smaller towns and villages, leading to few residents of these new municipalities feeling true allegiance to their newly constructed localities (Samuels 2013, 109). Rather, in the aftermath of 3.11, when most of the residents of Tohoku were forced to evacuate and to seek refuge in temporary shelters, people were distrustful of their new neighbours, undercutting the ideals of a community being connected by bonds that sustained solidarity through a common struggle, as was being spun by the media and politicians, which were used to project the ideals of what it meant to be Japanese (Samuels 2013, 108-109).

As ubiquitous as *kizuna* and its adherents were in the months after the catastrophe, both could not always escape criticism. Apart from issues pertaining to donations under the banner of *kizuna* (as mentioned above), some critics concluded that, even if *kizuna* had not offered the state a neat way out of accepting responsibility, it would still be incapable of properly addressing the multitude of social problems it tried to address, causing psychologist Saitô Tamaki to demand the use of *rentai* (“solidarity”), rather than of *kizuna* (Tagsold 2012, 322). Solidarity, so the logic goes, would address free individuals, whereas *kizuna* addressed private, and thereby closed networks (Tagsold 2012, 323). However, the Japanese term for solidarity is taken from Western national philosophy, and while solidarity has a long and complex history there, it never found as big an audience in Japan as it did in the West (Tagsold, 2012, 323). *Kizuna*, on the other hand, was a much more readily available social referent, as it was also used in songs, anime, manga and videogames (Samuels 2013, 110).

Within post-3.11 discourse, *kizuna* became all-encompassing, as it managed to address deeply ingrained fears and desires within the people of Japan, while simultaneously presenting the supposed solution. In framing both the “sickness” and “antidote” in a certain way, *kizuna* became the tool that would facilitate the prescription of a certain identity representation because it could easily be internalised and therefore reproduced, due to its blurry nature. By anchoring the discourse in the context of familial bonds under threat, whose survival necessitated self-sacrifice, and extrapolating that onto the entire nation, *kizuna* became the quintessential floating signifier turned myth as described by Laclau and Mouffe, if only for some time. Through *kizuna*, Japan looked to its past in order to save its future.

Chapter 4 – Comparison and conclusion

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, the constructivist understanding of several key concepts was introduced, and added to by combining them with an ethno-symbolist approach. Firstly, national identity was defined as layered, and influenced by societal discourses, which influence, shape, and restrain the actions of individuals by way of practice. By combining this constructivist understanding with an ethno-symbolist approach, national identity is further influenced by the cultural resources inherent to the nation within which they take place yet are also dependent on resonance within the people at large. Secondly, nationalism was defined as a tool for identity creation requiring a defining other; shaped and defined by the interplay of elites and masses. Lastly, *nihonjinron* was specified as a tool which serves to ascribe certain identity representations to the Japanese at large, while simultaneously, at least in theory, placing those prescribed identities neatly out of reach of criticism stemming from outside Japan.

Both case studies analysed in chapters 2 and 3 show certain similarities in those regards, proving that, regardless of how enticing it might appear, viewing Japan (or any nation, for that matter), as a monolith is more detrimental to the study of nationalism and national identities than it is helpful. Contrary to what proponents of *nihonjinron* might claim, Japan is not unique, neither in its instrumentalisation of history and catastrophe, nor is the idealisation of a romanticised “golden” past to strengthen future nationalist sentiment limited to Japan. Such tendencies are noticeable throughout the world, as is nationalism’s claim to ethnicity. Indeed, nationalists repeatedly fall back on old, but reliable methods of constructing a national identity, that is defined partly by how that nation perceives others, which is to say, by relying on a defining other.

In the case of Yasukuni Shrine that other was largely Japan’s Asian neighbours, such as China and South Korea, at whose expense a busy cabal of nationalist ideologues with close ties to the ruling Abe administration could fabricate a certain identity representation that is intensely focused on pre-war notions of Japanese imperialism and State Shinto. In that sense, historical revisionism, as embodied by the framing of war memory in the Yûshûkan museum and the need to portray prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni in a certain light that emphasised their “private” nature, was the tool these ideologues availed

themselves of in their endeavour to prescribe their desired national identity to the people of Japan. This is perhaps best encapsulated by Prime Minister Koizumi's repeated insistence that his visits were a "matter of the heart", and a private affair. Rear noted that the term "heart" is usually of special significance to the proponents of *nihonjinron*, as it structures a discourse based on moral conservatism and serves as an example par excellence of the Japanese ethos (Rear 2017, 3). Therefore, particularly the repeated insistence on the phrase "a matter of the heart", as well as the understanding of Shinto shrines essentially being "a bit like the homelands of our hearts", as described in chapter 2, demonstrates the understanding of Japan these ideologues wished to project onto the populace, namely that the Shrine and corresponding religious practices, such as pacifying and venerating the war dead, are inextricably linked to the very soul of Japan, thereby reinforcing the idea of the Japanese nation as one rooted in harmonious social values. Coupled with persistent claims of Japan's current peace and prosperity being largely due to the noble sacrifice of the war dead, this essentially construed criticisms of Yasukuni Shrine visits by foreign nations as criticisms of Japan mourning its dead and by extension as interference in the domestic affairs of Japan. Framing the discourse in this way further blurred the topics of war crimes and differences in views on history, and in the end was used to further the nationalist agendas of *Nippon Kaigi* and *Jinja Honchō*. These ideologues turned the practice of veneration and pacification of the war dead according to Shinto belief into a tool that served to reinforce the perceived instrumentalisation of the Yasukuni issue by other nations, rather than at the hands of Japanese nationalists themselves. The fact that Shinto is still practised throughout Japan provided the prior resonance needed for the people to largely accept that notion, or at the very least, to not outright reject it. The reasons for doing so were mostly rooted in wishes for constitutional amendment, specifically aimed at Article 9 and Article 20, which, in their eyes, would allow Japan to shed its US imposed nature as a "half-state", and thereby become a great power again.

This desire to become "great again" was also echoed in the wake of the triple catastrophe that hit Japan in March 2011. As the discourse surrounding the Schumpeterian moment of "creative destruction" has shown, demands for a rebirth of Japan stemmed from both sides. Without necessarily agreeing on what such a rebirth should entail, both sides lamented the erosion of societal ties and familial bonds but could yet again not agree on their underlying factors. The left blamed the "spell of deceit"

engineered by powerful elites, at the centre of which they saw the representatives of the “iron triangle”, as embodied by TEPCO and the government. On the right, these perceptions of Japan’s societal disintegration were shared, yet according to them, the “hedonism” and “greed” eating away at the heart of Japan necessitated the “divine punishment” in the form of 3.11. Essentially, both the left and the right agreed on the vilification of TEPCO and the Kan administration, who provided the “defining other” in this case, against which they could clearly demarcate their own (group) identities, while simultaneously reinforcing them. The feeble attempts of those criticised to avoid blame by way of stressing the “unimaginable” nature of catastrophes did not mitigate the harsh criticism received for not only appearing wholly unprepared, but outright selfish, as particularly TEPCO and the supervisory bodies were putting business interests above those of security of the people of Japan. As such, TEPCO’s attempts only empowered its critics on both sides of the political spectrum.

This shared fear of a society that lost its way was the reason why, among the multitude of terms framing the disaster of 3.11, the term *kizuna* was readily accepted by the public, thereby becoming the quintessential floating signifier that gained widespread dominance. It addressed deeply innate desires of a society standing on the precipice of its doom, both literally and figuratively. *Kizuna*’s semantic blur allowed for the appropriation of and internalisation by all participants to the discourse, precisely because they all shared the fear of the end of societal bonds and could then *act on* that within the framework of *kizuna*. Hence, because *kizuna* addressed the fears of the disintegration of a collectivist society, which was the resonance needed, it could be appropriated by all those whose lives were influenced by the catastrophe. Even those critical of the use of *kizuna* could not escape its shadow, as their dissatisfaction was still voiced within the context of *kizuna* itself. In that sense, *kizuna*, true to its name, allowed for the formation of microcosms of groups, ordered according to their individual identities in opposition to each other, and shackled together not only in political activism that ironically contributed to the erosion of societal unity (as others were vilified), but also firmly in particular notions of a better past, to which a return was perceived as necessary.

As stated in the introductory chapter, both discourse and practice are of fundamental importance to create or to maintain a dominant national identity representation. Both cases examined share a certain proclivity to shape both discourse and practice in such a

way that, by way of national identity, political goals could be achieved, and, in both cases, *nihonjinron* provided the fertile ground. When addressing the phenomenon of *nihonjinron* in Joy Hendry's "Understanding Japanese Society", Befu Harumi is quoted as remarking that *nihonjinron* served as a means to fill the "symbolic vacuum" left behind, when other traditional national symbols, such as the flag, had become tainted by association of Japan's role in World War II (Hendry 2013, 18). Indeed, as Tamamoto points out, flag waving "is not an effective tactic in Japan; more often than not, it leaves the public cold." (Tamamoto 2001, 33). It is perhaps for this reason, why nationalists saw the need to instil a renewed sense of pride in the people of Japan, and why the need for selflessness and self-sacrifice as a fundamental aspect of Japanese national identity was highlighted. In both cases, the discourse was framed in such a way that the survival of a collectivist society seemed to be at stake. In the wake of 3.11, *kizuna* became the social referent to highlight the importance of familial ties that were under threat, whereas according to nationalist ideologues, it was the veneration of the war dead that served as the necessary reminder to return to the Confucian notion of natural order. These ideas were anchored in and reproduced by the *Ie*-system, which itself was a product of State Shinto as practiced throughout Japan's period of emperor worship until the end of World War II, and afterwards served as the structural basis for Japanese industries, businesses, and the role of employees within. These notions of collectivist ideals could therefore, by way of being practised daily, be internalised and reproduced throughout the decades.

Drawing on Benedict Anderson, Tamamoto remarked that a "tomb of an unknown soldier is a key artefact of nationalism – its anonymity is crucial in constructing the spirit of sacrifice to an abstraction called the state – and finding a name would certainly be at odds with the nationalist mystique." (Tamamoto 2001, 35). That remark was directed at the Yasukuni Shrine, yet, as Nelson rightfully stated, this mentality entirely misses the point provided by both the shrine and the museum (Nelson 2003, 454). Indeed, both serve to celebrate a community of *named* idealistic heroes that stands in stark contrast to contemporary Japan that is characterised as materialistic and selfish (Nelson 2003, 455). As previously elaborated, in the eyes of those ideological heirs of State Shinto, it was the selflessness and self-sacrifice of the war dead venerated at Yasukuni Shrine that allowed for the current peace and prosperity enjoyed by Japan. Here, the practice of veneration and pacification of the spirits of the war dead as per Shinto tradition were equated to the protection and subsequent survival of Japan. As one conservative former professor at

Kyoto University neatly summarised, “protecting Japan, ultimately, means protecting the shape of the country symbolized by the Imperial House and by Shinto shrines. It should be understood that, if those are no longer protected, that would mean the end of Japan.” (Guthmann and Rots 2017, 217). Similar notions of selflessness and subsequent implications regarding the survival of the Japanese society were also hailed as desirable in the wake of 3.11. Here, the likes of Endô Miki were celebrated for their death for others, while those who survived their ordeal feared ostracization and exclusion. This indicates that one of the essential elements in the creation of heroes is not necessarily their anonymity, but rather their act of dying for others that allows the creation of not only the persona of hero, but perhaps more importantly, that of role model worthy of emulation.

As explained in the introductory chapter, Puleo and Sivak, and Widmaier, Blyth and Seabrooke argued for shock and crises to necessitate change within a given system. Which brings us to the question of whether Japanese national identity changed or persisted in the face of the multitude of pressures bearing onto the system in the aftermath of shock and catastrophe, as described in chapters 2 and 3.

Smith premised the possibility of change within a nation, and by extension to national identity, on the prevalence, and public resonance of cultural resources made use of within that nation. Contrasting the various kinds of cultural resources, as elaborated by Smith, to the case studies in the previous chapters, the prevalence of myths of ancestry and election, of the sanctification of the homeland, of glorifying the past, and of the idea of destiny through sacrifice are easily discernible in Japan. Likewise is the public acceptance thereof, albeit in varying degrees (as can be seen, for example, when considering the success of the idea of venerating the war dead as per Shinto tradition, the large participation of the Japanese people at the *obon* festival, or the explosion of popularity of *kizuna*, while *sôteigai* failed miserably). Secondly, true change, irrespective of identity category, requires both time and intentionality, as described by both Todd and Burke. However, given the fact that 3.11 occurred a mere 8 years ago, it is difficult to claim that sufficient time has passed to facilitate proper change. Further, the disputes regarding the shrine are almost two decades old, which might provide sufficient time for change, but, as was elaborated in chapter 2, nationalist elites have largely prevented that possibility by way of reframing the discourse. Regarding the element of intentionality; intent was undoubtedly

present, but mainly directed towards returning to a simpler time, both in rhetoric and practice, stemming from all sides to the discourse. All these factors indicate that instead of changing, Japanese national identity has largely persisted, despite the pressures to change imposed by foreign nations and provided by natural catastrophes. On the face of it, one might claim that, among other things, the perceived need to return to a more idealised past could already be construed as change of Japanese national identity, yet that is to ignore that among the multitude of possible reactions within a society to such events as analysed, it was rather a shift in *focus* on something that was *already present before*. Smith's model of ethno-symbolism is, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, one based on the idea of nations possessing a deep-seated, ethnic core, constructed and maintained by the interplay of elites and masses. This core is rather resistant to change, and it is here that national identity is housed. Precisely because of its deep-seated nature, the likelihood of reproduction, which is to say, the persistence of national identity, should be rather high. This is not to say that national identities can never change, they certainly can, but for the reasons outlined in this thesis, it is rather safe to say that the Japanese largely persisted in their national identity, by way of practice, and by way of discourse.

Lastly, as the two case studies have shown, traditional symbols of nationalism native to other nations, such as flag and anthem, are not strictly needed as tools to foster an understanding of nationalism within a country whose national identity is supposedly "uniquely unique". Indeed, if one were to grant certain idiosyncrasies to nations that are dependent on their culture, in the case of Japan it would be the obsession of certain Japanese with their national identity to such a degree, that it birthed an entire literary genre designed to explain what does, and does not, belong. Which leaves but one last question. How much power does *nihonjinron* still exert?

Nationalism was often thought to be finished, and yet it came back with a vengeance in recent decades. Similarly, it was perhaps naïve to think that *nihonjinron*, itself a form of cultural nationalism, was on the decline as well. Indeed, this mode of thinking still casts a long shadow, partly because in the past it loomed so large, and because it was so prevalent in the minds of those consuming this literary subgenre. To this day, it is difficult to adequately address the issue of Japanese national identity without *nihonjinron*, in one form or another, entering the fray. While some may have instrumentalised the discourse with the specific intent to prescribe one particular identity among various

(contesting) national identities to the population at large, and made use of *nihonjinron*'s characteristics, others may have simply found these discourses inescapable and, therefore, themselves trapped within it, perhaps without being actively aware of it. In that sense, it could be argued that even those who instrumentalised the Shrine and the triple catastrophe were, to some degree, themselves a product of the trappings of the discourses, and, by extension, of *nihonjinron*. As Smith observed, in the field of nations and nationalism, what counts is not what is, but what is felt to be (Smith 2009, 100), and *nihonjinron* has a long history of establishing the "true" nature of Japanese national identity based on what its authors felt and thought. Indeed, if practice and discourse truly are constitutive elements of national identity, *nihonjinron* is both. Hence, it stands to reason that nationalism and *nihonjinron* are far from over in Japan.

In closing, both cases chosen provided invaluable insight into the central theme of how a nation produces and reproduces its national identity, by way of framing discourse and making use of history and catastrophe. And yet, the cases and accompanying discourses are undoubtedly but a fraction of possibilities with regards to the analysis of national identity, their formation, their change, and their persistence, even within Japan. As such, this thesis must not be regarded as the definitive answer to the matter, but merely one possible interpretation among many. Other issues would certainly provide further fascinating aspects to explore with regards to national identity and are certainly worth looking at.

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