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## Plucked from History: The Removal of the Japanese Flag, Anthem, and Imperial System from its Wartime Context

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Seattle University

**Plucked from History:  
The Removal of the Japanese Flag, Anthem, and Imperial System from its Wartime Context**

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Departmental Honors in International Studies

By  
Andrew Masaru Orita

June 2018

This honors thesis by Andrew Masaru Orita is approved

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Cosgrove

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### Abstract

The Japanese state is represented by its flag, the national anthem, and the emperor. Literature on the history of these symbols, including their use by the fascist Japanese Empire during the Second World War, is extensive, however, information on the impact of these symbols after the war is sparse, especially in English. As an outlier among former Axis nations, Japan continues to use the flag, anthem, and imperial system as national symbols similarly to the way they were used during the war. This paper seeks to understand how these symbols became acceptable in a nominally peaceful and democratic state. Extensive historical context from before the war to the present is provided, giving support to a tracking of policy positions towards the flag (*hinomaru*), the anthem (*kimigayo*), and the imperial system under the U.S. occupation of Japan between 1945 and 1952.

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources in both English and Japanese, this study concludes that the U.S. government, in creating a Japanese state and people who would support democracy and U.S. military policy in the face of the Cold War, retained the symbols of the flag, anthem, and emperor because they were already part of a wartime united Japanese national identity. To this end, the U.S. removed these symbols from their wartime context in Asia and from contemporary Japanese history altogether to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance. As a result, Japanese born after the war have been far less exposed to the true history of their flag, anthem, and imperial system, therefore establishing a falsely constructed popular consensus that these symbols can be justifiably used to represent the current Japanese state despite protests from their Asian neighbors who suffered under Japanese imperialism.

*Keywords:* *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, imperial system, national symbols, occupation

## **Plucked from History: The Removal of the Japanese Flag, Anthem, and Imperial System from its Wartime Context**

The construction of a national identity is central to any nation wanting to be recognized in the current world order shaped by Western<sup>1</sup> political traditions, which includes the institutionalization of a flag and an anthem as national symbols (Ghenea, 2015, p. 18). As a result of these influences, Japan, having been exposed to these Western constructions for centuries, developed its own national identity along these lines. A newly Westernized Japanese government then appropriated the existing rising sun flag or *hinomaru* (日の丸), considered one of the most important symbols of early Japanese statehood (Field, 19991, p. 69), and the poem *kimigayo*, which was transformed into a national anthem. These symbols, having become national symbols abroad due to Japanese foreign trade and diplomatic missions, were later co-opted by the fascist regime that took hold in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century alongside an imperial system that, also inspired by Western traditions of leadership, had “transform[ed] [the emperor] into a monarch in Western military costume” (Field, 1991, p.25). Tied to a glorification of the emperor and the spread of Japanese colonialism, the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system reigned over years of colonial subjugation and criminal activities in the Asia-Pacific region. Today, despite the direct connection these symbols have to the war, all three remain the national flag, anthem, and head of state, respectively. How this has come to be, especially when comparing how a Germany flying the swastika would be perceived today, has not been well explored in the existing literature, partially due to the success of U.S. efforts during the occupation of Japan to reframe the symbols for a democratic and peaceful society. As generations who remember how these symbols were used during the war begin to die off, there is a concern that future generations will forget the association between these symbols and the

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<sup>1</sup> The primary Western powers that Japan was in contact with leading up to the Meiji Restoration included The Netherlands, Portugal, The United Kingdom, the United States, Russia, Germany, and France (Palmer & Hein, 2016)

atrocities caused by the Japanese Empire, galvanizing right-wing politicians aiming to remilitarize Japan under these symbols. In this paper I argue that this campaign to reshape the symbols of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system has its origins in U.S. occupational policy that sought to utilize these wartime symbols to rally the Japanese people in support of American ideological and military goals in the Asia Pacific region during the Cold War. Further, I argue that in doing so, these symbols have been successfully removed from their historical origins and their wartime context in Asia, allowing them to become politically justified representations of a peaceful, democratic Japanese state. This paper will briefly review the historical literature to provide context for an in-depth analysis of U.S. occupational policy towards the symbols of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system. This will be followed by an exploration of the impact that occupational policy had towards the eventual enshrinement of the flag and the anthem into Japanese law in 1999, concluding with a summation on how the processes of historical revisionism and the legal status of the symbols have supported the justification of contemporary Japanese right-wing political goals.

### **Literature Review**

Among scholars who focus on Japanese political history, there is a common recognition of a contradiction between the liberal ideals of the Japanese constitution and the fascist-era structures that remain central to the Japanese national identity. In short, the central symbolic tenants of the Japanese national identity, meant to embody a peaceful, democratic state, are the same ones that were used to represent an empire that terrorized Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and no reconciliation on that fact has been undertaken since the war's end. Objectively, the existence of an imperial family and the perpetuation of imperial era names on official government documents is antithetical to democracy (Field, 1991, p. 154). Further, the national flag and the national anthem are both closely tied with the fascist regime that ruled prior to and during the Second World War. Literature in both English and Japanese detail the historical

origins of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system and how they were affected during the American occupation of Japan. However, many do not analyze in depth how these symbols came to be reborn and what consequences that process has had on contemporary Japanese and Asian politics. To provide context for this study, literature on the general function of symbols within propaganda and national identity will be introduced, followed by literature detailing the historical context for each of the three chosen symbols for this study.

### ***Defining Symbols***

In understanding the place of symbols in political propaganda and national identity, it is important to have a theoretical understanding of symbols themselves. Charles A. Fleming discussed how propaganda campaigns that use symbols target the public at a psychological level in his article *Understanding Propaganda from a General Semantics Perspective*. Speaking specifically to how people perceive the association between a national flag and an organization, propagandists undertake a process called transferring, which he described as: "...carr[ying] positive qualities of someone or something over to whatever the propagandist is promoting" (1995, p. 6). The success of this model rests on the public refraining from questioning whether the association between the symbol and the organization that uses it is merited (Fleming, 1995, p. 7). In other words, a symbol succeeds as a representation of an organization and its goals when the public believes that the connection between the two is justified (through history, ideology, etc.) and when the public treats the organization with the same level of respect they would treat the symbol.

Boris Petrović elaborated further on the topic of symbology as a propaganda tool in his article *Visual Language of World War I Propaganda on a Symbolic Plane: How a Visual Symbol is Created*. While his research focused on how religious figures were used as symbols during World War I, Petrović suggested that a general pattern exists when well-known images and icons are co-opted for political purposes. He argued that "[i]t is the very function of archetypes,

in which both the icons and the posters deal in – to be universally recognizable, to stir the emotions of the audience, to be impactful” (2016, p. 38). In line with this, the politically westernized Japanese Empire saw the national flag, anthem, and imperial system as archetypal symbols of their nation. Petrović continued by arguing that using symbols as propaganda allows the ideology of the user to connect itself to the historical meaning of the symbol (Petrović, 2016, p. 38). In this sense, symbols that already have a place in the national consciousness are apt to be used for propaganda, as the user can equate and transfer existing popular support for the chosen symbol to their ideology and goals.

Michael Billig developed on this base theory of symbols in his theory of banal nationalism in his book *Banal Nationalism*. He described this version of nationalism<sup>2</sup> as the “...ideological pattern in which ‘our’ nationalism (that of established nations...) is forgotten [and] it ceases to appear as nationalism, disappearing into the ‘natural’ environment of ‘societies’” (1995, p. 38). He continued, arguing that the symbols used to support the formation of a nation state through the construction of a sovereign national identity remain even when the process of nation building is complete (Billig, 1995, p. 41). As a result, these symbols become manifestations of the history that led to the nation’s establishment, being used during national celebrations and other events “...in actions which preserve collective memory without the conscious activity of individuals remembering” (Billig, 1995, 42). However, Billig noted that this collective memory is not necessarily constant, stating that “...national histories are continually being re-written, and the re-writing reflects current balances of hegemony” (Billig, 1995, p. 71). In the case of Japan, a nation whose national identity was reformed during U.S. occupation, the decades that have passed since then have presented an opportunity for the collective memory that is embodied in the symbols of the flag, anthem, and imperial system to be changed. In

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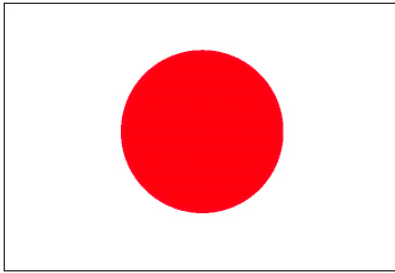
<sup>2</sup> Billig defines nationalism (for the purpose of his analysis) as “...the ideology that creates and maintains nation states” (Billig, 1995, p. 19)



analyzing that point for the purpose of this paper, it is important to understand the origins of the symbols that make up the Japanese national identity.

### ***The National Flag***

The rising sun flag has three contemporary connotations: the current national flag, the current Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) flag, and the current Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) flag, displayed in Figures 1, 2, and 3 respectively. This paper will focus on the current national flag.



*Figure 1.* The current Japanese national flag. Retrieved from <https://www.japan.go.jp/japan/flagandanthem/>



*Figure 2.* The current Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force flag. Retrieved from <https://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/shiritai/flag/index.html>



Figure 3. The current Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force flag. Retrieved from

<https://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/shiritai/flag/index.html>

Yasutaka Teruoka described the origins of the national flag in his book, *Hinomaru, Kimigayo no naritachi* [the origins of the Rising Sun Flag and the National Anthem], stating that its use as a non-military naval insignia starting in 1870 created an association between it and Japan, leading to the government adopting it as the Japanese national flag in the same year (Teruoka, 1991, p. 41). However, it was not until its use leading to and during the Second World War in occupied territories as a replacement for the local flag and as a banner leading the military that the national flag gained its direct association with Japanese militarism and fascism (Teruoka, 1991, p. 41).

After Japan's loss in the Second World War, the U.S. Occupational Government (also known as General Headquarters or GHQ) outlawed the national flag (Bix, 200, pp. 551-552). Between the outlawing of the flag in 1945 and the implementation of the Act on National Flag and Anthem in 1999, Japan had no national flag. Until 1999, the flag as it appears today (aside from a slight change in color) was informally used in the same capacity that a legal national flag would have served. Further, as Norma Fields noted in her book, *In the Realm of the Dying Emperor*, the fact that Japan had no national flag was not well known among the Japanese public, describing that: "Most citizens [did] not know that the Rising Sun [had] never been designated the national flag, just as few remark upon Japan's distinction among the Axis powers in not taking steps to alter its national symbols after the war" (1991, p. 53).

### ***The National Anthem***

Teruoka also described the origins of the Japanese national anthem, *kimigayo* (君が代), in his book. He presented its origins as coming from a style of Japanese poetry known as *waka*, the specific poem that the anthem came from having been written in 1013 (Teruoka, 1991, p. 44). Like the flag, exposure to the Western concepts of national identity pushed the Japanese government to institute a national anthem (Teruoka, 1991, 56). The anthem, accompanied by a composition by Hayashi Hiromori, came into official use in 1888 by the navy, schools, and on public holidays. Yet, like the flag, it was not a legally established symbol of Japan (Teruoka, 1991, pp. 59-60). Unlike the *hinomaru*, however, the anthem was never officially outlawed by GHQ during occupation (Bix, 2000, pp. 551-552). This was partially because it had never been fully enshrined into law in the first place.

However, from as early as 1950 there had been efforts to replace the anthem. Nobumasa Tanaka detailed in his book, *Hinomaru, kimigayo no sengoshi* [The Postwar History of the Flag and the Anthem], that a new composition, titled *midori no sanga* (緑の山河), spoke of Japan in a markedly postwar sense, highlighting the emergence of a democratic and peaceful Japan (2000, pp. 46-47). Ultimately, this new proposal was not able to stir the same level of emotion in the Japanese people, possibly because *kimigayo*, while outlawed, was never actively purged from the Japanese national identity, leaving many Japanese to continue to see it as their anthem. As a result, no replacement anthem was ever adopted, allowing *kimigayo* to remain in use, later being made the official national anthem in 1999 (Tanaka, 2000, p. 53).

### ***The Imperial System***

According to Japanese mythology, the imperial system has existed for thousands of years, but its current iteration as a modern, Westernized system of monarchy has only been in

place since the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Masako Shibata described in her book, *Japan and Germany under the U.S. Occupation: A Comparative Analysis of the Post-War Education Reform*, that during the early years after Emperor Meiji was established as the head of state, the government introduced pro-imperial ideology into the education system via two monikers: *fukoku-kyōhei* (富国強兵), meaning “enrich the nation and strengthen the military” and *sonno-joi* (尊王攘夷), meaning “expel the barbarians and revere the emperor,” to instill allegiance to the emperor among the public (Shibata, 2005, p. 8).

During the Second World War, as Herbert P. Bix detailed in his book *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, Emperor Hirohito reaped the benefits of a public educated to believe the emperor was divine, as the hegemonic ideology (albeit right-wing even during the war) was that “Japan was a ‘peer-less nation’ led by a divine, precious, august ruler” (Bix, 2000, p. 289). Bix noted that, even after Japan lost the war and occupation began in a politically purged Japan, “...most Japanese politicians, with the notable exception of the Communists and a few iconoclasts, however, still held the monarchy in reverential awe” (Bix, 2000, p. 570). In response to this lingering sentiment, the U.S. policy towards the emperor developed to position him as a constitutional, symbolic monarch who would be a spiritual center for the Japanese people through the process of democratization (Bix, 2000, p. 579)

## **Methods**

Research for this project was conducted through analysis of primary and secondary sources in both English in Japanese. Scholarly articles were sourced in English only, while books, government reports, and news articles in both languages were used.

## **Construction of a Wartime National Identity through Symbols**

Part of the rationale behind introducing these symbols as being representative of a westernized Japan came from the statesman Itou Hirobumi's perception of Japan at the time, in which he "...lamented the absence of an indigenous belief system adequate to providing the psychic fuel and discipline necessary to hurtle [Japanese] society into a Western-style modernity overnight" (Field, 1991, p. 25). This shows that Japan, exposed to the threat of Western encroachment like that seen in China during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, felt the need to adapt to Western norms of governance and national identity in order to fit into the greater world order on equal terms. Therefore, the Meiji restoration re-imagined the existing imperial system along Western lines by 'restoring' the emperor and the court as the main governing body of the country and as the head of state, together with the flag and anthem that would both be central to the emerging imperial Japanese national identity.

As a result, one of the key reasons why the symbols of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system were retained and used by GHQ and the sovereign Japanese state was that they had been part of the Japanese educational curriculum and, in turn, the central (and official) symbols of the Japanese national identity for decades. Field illustrated the value in using symbols perpetuated through education for political purposes, stating that "[c]lassrooms are sites for ensuring cooperation in the future. Police enforce it in the present" (Field, 1991, p. 187). The *hinomaru* and *kimigayo* were made part of the Japanese school curriculum in 1893 during a period of larger educational reform (Itoh, 2001, para. 9). Additionally, many schools had shrine-like *hōanden* (奉安殿) that housed portraits of the imperial family, towards which students were made to bow as they entered school property (Field, 1991, p. 158). These policies also sought to unify the Japanese state around the idea of a national family or *kokka* (国家) that placed the emperor on the top as father of the nation with the Japanese public, functioning within the entrenched social hierarchy of family as children, revering him as such (Muta, 1996, p. 107).

The success of these symbols becoming part of the publicly believed Japanese national identity is clear in the ability of adults raised during that time to remember specific exercises taught to them during elementary school. One poignant example of this is the Imperial Rescript<sup>3</sup>, which was a declaration of the national ideology that students were made to memorize beginning in 1890 (Field, 1991, p. 69). Even in old age, many adults were still able to recite the rescript (Field, 1991, p. 70). The spread of imperialist ideology, however, was not limited to the classroom. There existed education units in the Japanese Imperial Army whose job it was to maintain the belief among soldiers that they must die for the emperor (Field, 1991, p. 178). Given the lingering effects of the education system and its breadth before GHQ purged it of militarist and ultra-nationalist sentiment during occupation (The General Staff of General MacArthur, 1966, p. 80), the adult population in the immediate postwar era was one imbued with god-like admiration for the emperor and deep respect for the *hinomaru* and *kimigayo*, staples of the Japanese imperial national identity, presenting an opportunity for GHQ to use that sentiment to their benefit.

## **U.S. Occupational Policy and the Japanese Response**

### ***Early Days of Occupation and the Emperor Problem***

The original U.S. occupational policy was “to prevent Japan from again becoming a menace to the United States or to the peace and security of the world” and “to bring about the eventual establishment of a peaceful and responsible government which will respect the rights

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<sup>3</sup> The Imperial Rescript was established by Emperor Meiji in 1879 as an “official statement of national morality” (Nolte & Hajime, 1983, p. 284). This national morality was developed to “illuminate a fore fundamental unity” for the Japanese people, that being that “the authority of the Emperor was to be used to guide his subjects’ social behaviors outside the structure of the constitution and the law” (Nolte & Hajime, 1983, pp. 284-205).

While inherently peaceful, though it promoted a deification of the emperor, it was noted that “by the 1930s, its assertion of Japanese virtues had become welded to a paradigm which scorned other nations as morally inferior” (Nolte & Hajime, 1983, p. 284). To this extend the Imperial Rescript served a purpose during the war to support via education that the Japanese were justified in their colonial activities since they were imposing superior Japanese rule on the inferior peoples of Asia.

of other states and will support the objectives of the United States as reflected in the ideals and principles of the Charter of the United Nations” (U.S. Department of State, 1946, p. 10). In short, GHQ sought to demilitarize and democratize Japan in a way that established them as an American ally. In doing so, GHQ had to devise a strategy to utilize existing political structures to support the transition from fascism to democracy. General MacArthur, the head of GHQ, regarded that, on the occasion of Emperor Hirohito’s public broadcast of surrender, “[t]he Japanese received the victors submissively following the Emperor’s mandate” (The General Staff of General MacArthur, 1966, p. 51). While all three symbols of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system had the potential to rally the Japanese around the American cause, GHQ found the greatest potential in the emperor.

U.S. occupational policy adviser Edwin Reischauer believed that retaining the emperor and the imperial system held two benefits for GHQ’s mission: it would lessen Japanese communist influence domestically and would prevent either the USSR or China from establishing themselves as new regional powers by avoiding a power vacuum during the transition from empire to nation-state (Shibata, 2005, p. 64). Reischauer’s personal position on the matter became the official U.S. stance, as the occupation strategy paper presented to President Truman in 1949 explicitly stated that occupational policy must “...make every effort to see that the political and economic progress in Japan is such as to demonstrate the advantages of close association with the United States and our ability as a democracy to deal with the [development and security] problems in Asia.” (Cha, 2007, p. 115). As a result, the process of political and structural purging after the end of World War II was, compared to Germany, less severe. While many of the top military and government officials (except, controversially, the emperor himself) were tried and sentenced in an international tribunal, much of the wartime bureaucratic system remained intact to preserve a functioning government that GHQ could mold (Dujarric, 2013, para. 5).

Another key actor in the development of GHQ policy that preferred the preservation of the symbols, specifically the emperor, was Joseph Grew. The former ambassador to Japan, he led the 'Japan group' in the State Department (as opposed to the 'China group') that sought to "...avoid direct criticism of the emperor while debunking 'emperor worship,' the doctrines of State Shinto, and the kokutai<sup>4</sup> myth" (Moore & Robinson, 2002, p. 23-24). However, all the policy proposals from both Reischauer and Grew fell upon the discretion of General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers. MacArthur, while sharing the same position towards the emperor as Grew, had his own goals for occupation, specifically that "...of advancing Christianity in Japan and his conviction that the emperor would cooperate in that effort" (Moore & Robinson, 2002, 38). Therefore, MacArthur's role in saving the symbols of the imperial Japanese national identity, especially the emperor, should be seen both as an exercise of his goals and as key to the survival of the symbols. In 1946, the Australians sought to convict the emperor of war crimes, but it was MacArthur's pleas to Washington that were able to pressure the Australians (via the British) to give up their claim (Moore & Robinson, 2002, 48). As a result, MacArthur is seen by historians as having "...played a key role in saving Emperor Hirohito from forced abdication and a humiliating international trial for war crimes" ((Moore & Robinson, 2002, 49).

### ***The Imperial "Victory Tours"***

The three symbols of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system were all part of the former Imperial state structure and were later manipulated to rally the Japanese people around U.S. occupational policy goals. The specific U.S. policy concerning the emperor, codenamed Operation Blacklist, was designed to separate Emperor Hirohito from militarists,

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<sup>4</sup> Kokutai (国体) was a Japanese political ideology that rejected the earlier system of constitutional monarchy in favor of a "...theory that the Emperor was the essence of the State and that all Japanese people held a relationship to the Kami [gods] of Shinto religion and to the Emperor through the Kami" (Goodman, 2071, p. 22)



turn him into a constitutional monarch, and have him remain a center point for the spiritual transition from fascism to democracy since "...the emperor was crucial to ensuring control over the population" (Bix, 2000, p. 545). This plan was partially in response to a growing discourse between the Allied powers who participated in the Pacific War and within Japanese politics itself, especially among Japanese Christian elites, one being Prime Minister Katayama Tetsu, who supported MacArthur's position of not indicting the emperor (Moore & Robinson, 2002, p. 39), over the war responsibility of the emperor. GHQ, having "...come around [to the emperor] once he had demonstrated... his incredible power to secure a smooth surrender of millions of Japanese troops throughout the Asia-Pacific region," strongly advocated for the retention of the emperor (Bix, 1992, p. 316). During the Tokyo Trials, an international tribunal that convicted several high-ranking Japanese military and government officials for war crimes, GHQ and Japanese moderates and conservatives pushed the narrative that the emperor was passive during the war, while other Allied nations, specifically Australia, continued efforts to indict the emperor and hold him equally responsible for Japanese atrocities that occurred during the war (Bix, 1992, p. 322). Domestically, the Japanese Communist Party openly blamed the emperor for the war (Bix, 1992, 305). MacArthur, in response, stated that "no specific and tangible evidence has been uncovered with regard to the emperor's exact activities which might connect him with the political decisions of the Japanese Empire during the last decade" (Bix, 1992, 332), cementing the U.S. and larger Allied position that the emperor was not to be seen as a war criminal, rather as a symbol of an institution, perverted by militarism, that still held the spiritual influence necessary to unify the Japanese people around democracy.

To that end, GHQ sent the emperor out on a series of tours in 1947 meant to bring the ephemeral figure of the emperor down to earth, showing that he was a human being on par with his subjects. However, journalists covering these events noted that these visits appeared like "victory tours" where "the banned sun flag flew from the rooftops and was waved by thousands

of cheering welcomers” (Bix, 2000, p. 625). Further, those who waited to see the emperor continued to greet him with the *banzai* (万歳) chant, similar to “long live the king,” and treated him with the same adoration they had when he was the absolute leader of the nation (Bix, 2000, p. 629). The emperor’s visit to Hiroshima is one of the most reflective instances of how central the emperor remained to the national consciousness after the war, as there was an “organized widespread display of the flag” even as the tour coincided with the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor (Bix, 2000, p. 631). It appeared that, despite the potential the emperor and the associated symbol of the flag had to unite the nation around democratic principles, these tours and the lack of enforcement of the flag ban increased “the power and influence of the Imperial tradition,” instead of democratizing the monarchy (Bix, 2000, p. 631). However, the emperor’s support for GHQ policy goals towards demilitarization and democratization was justification enough for the U.S. to conduct occupational policy through the emperor and the other symbols of the wartime Japanese national identity.

### ***Censorship***

While policy towards the de-deification of the emperor and the banning of the *hinomaru* lacked teeth, GHQ, in partnership with the postwar Japanese government, conducted a widespread censorship campaign that supported the U.S. perception of the war in the Japanese media. The Civilian Censorship Detachment oversaw efforts to prevent any press that “might invite mistrust or resentment of [GHQ and Allied forces]” (The General Staff of General MacArthur, 1966, 236). This process, together with GHQ’s larger goals involving the emperor, created a narrative that separated the emperor from those convicted from his former cabinet by the international tribunal to shape the emperor into a new symbol for Japanese spiritual unity towards democracy, void of any war responsibility (Bix, 1992, pp. 331-332). However, even the narrative of the emperor as no longer a deity lacked consistency, allowing the wartime perception of the emperor to persist. This is best seen in the policies used when referring to the

emperor in newspapers during occupation. Before and during the war, specific honorifics, a grammatical feature common in some Asian languages including Japanese, were reserved for members of the imperial family (Akimoto-Sugimori, 2013, p. 177). Censorship guidelines after the war then sought to target two main propagandic issues: “Divine Descent Nation Propoganda” and “Nationalist Propaganda” (Akimoto-Sugimori, 2013, p. 180). Since referring to the emperor in a god-like fashion via honorifics is representative of both, editors had to readjust and censor themselves when writing about the activities of the imperial family after the war (Akimoto-Sugimori, 2013, p. 182). However, because the decision of what was considered propaganda or not was subjective, the level to which honorific language was reduced was irregular between each individual editor (Akimoto-Sugimori, 2013, p. 190). Specifically, while some individual censors believed that imperial honorifics were deleted in all types of media (Akimoto-Sugimori, 2013, p. 182), many articles that passed censorship regulations still retained the imperial honorifics of *o/go* (both written as 御) and *sasu/tamau* (さす・たまう), the former of which, when using the Chinese character, harks back to the way the actions of the Imperial family were detailed during the war in print media (Akimoto-Sugimori, 2013, p. 184). The lack of consensus among editors reflects a low level of concern on the part of GHQ to enforce the de-deification policy towards the emperor, in part because the legacy of the god-emperor perception was central to the image of the emperor GHQ used to guide the Japanese to democracy.

### ***Occupation Policy Shift***

The advancement of the Cold War, especially in Korea, prompted the U.S. to change course in how Japan would be crafted as a regional ally. Initially, the policy was to disarm Japan and prevent it from waging war (a value currently enshrined in the Japanese Constitution). However, in 1948 the National Security Council approved “the shift in U.S. occupation policy from political democratization to economic reconstruction and remilitarization” (Bix, 2000, p.

635). This shift was coined as the beta strategy of occupation; as opposed to an alpha strategy of complete disarmament and a gamma strategy of immediate rearmament, the beta strategy “sought to craft and temper Japan’s postwar recovery in the context of the [U.S.] alliance” (Cha, 2007, p. 116). As a result, GHQ was asked to assist Japan in not only developing “appropriate military forces” but also in developing “low-cost military material for use in Japan and in other noncommunist countries in Asia” (Cha, 2007, p. 116). These efforts required mass mobilization of the former Japanese war machine. GHQ saw that the symbols of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system were best suited to support this revitalization.

Like before the policy shift, GHQ continued to promote information that separated not only national symbols from their wartime connections, but Japan as a state from its fascist past. Part of this process came from a unilateral occupation of Japan by the Americans as opposed to a partitioned occupation by all the allied forces (China, specifically). This allowed the U.S. to emphasize the 1941-1945 war between Japan and the U.S. over the longer war between Japan and Asia that started in 1931 (Conrad, 2003, p. 91). As a result, the imperialist occupation of Asia – where the *hinomaru* and *kimigayo* supplanted any existing national symbology and the emperor was made the ultimate leader – was pushed to the sidelines to the point that the terminology in Japanese for the war shifted from the Great East Asian War (大東亞戦争) to the Pacific War (太平洋戦争) (Conrad, 2003, p. 91). This repainting of Japan battling with a great Western power, instead of several Asian powers, was part of a larger ideological shift known as *datsu-a* (脱亜) or de-Asianization. This process, originally coined during the Meiji Restoration, aimed to place Japan’s history within the greater context of Western history, taking it out of any Asian context, to support the newly formed alliance between Japan and the U.S., but more broadly with the noncommunist West (Conrad, 2003, p. 92).

After the policy shift in 1948, the emperor's own disposition became a tool to unite the people around him towards supporting the new U.S. policy goals. In bringing the emperor down from being a deity to a human being, the postwar Japanese public were able to sympathize with him. This allowed for a sort of continued deification of the emperor as a representation of the Japanese people, as "the affirmative sense of having worked hard and suffered harshly together with the emperor" permeated the mindset of many who would work to advance the U.S. Cold War strategic plans in Japan (Bix, 2000, pp. 638-639).

### **Constructing A Post-Occupational National Identity**

The end of occupation in 1952 allowed the Japanese government to take full control over the aspects of society that GHQ had been shaping to support U.S. interests. The potency of the American effort to reinstate the symbols of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system showed in their continued and increased use after occupation ended. Starting in 1952, the National Memorial Service for War Dead (全国戦没者追悼式) was instituted where, upon the arrival of the emperor, *kimigayo* was played (Bix, 2000, pp. 652-653). Additionally, the use of the *hinomaru* and *kimigayo* to celebrate national holidays was stated as desirable (望ましい) from 1950 onwards, with additional government decrees expanding the desired (implying expected) use of the flag and the anthem during public events (Teruoka, 1991, p. 5). While these policies were instituted during a period of sovereignty in Japanese governance, treaties between the U.S. and Japan maintained the de-Asianization of Japan's political activities, allowing an independent Japan to use these symbols without accountability to other Asian nations in the region, like South Korea and the Philippines, who were also under the U.S. defense umbrella. The next section will analyze the nature of the Treaty of San Francisco, specifically as it relates to de-Asianization, and the political influence of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and imperial system in post-occupation Japan.

### ***The Treaty of San Francisco***

The Treaty of San Francisco, signed in 1951 and ratified in 1952, officially ended the occupation of Japan and established the State of Japan as a sovereign nation. However, while several nations were joint signatories, the nations that were excluded from the treaty process reflect the continued de-Asianization of not only Japan's past, but its present. Notably, the United States barred representatives from both North and South Korea and those from the People's Republic China and the Republic of China from the treaty negotiations due to both a lack of consensus over which governments represented the people of Korea and China and a fear of increased communist influence in the proceedings (Price, 2001, p. 56). Yukiko Koshiro, a scholar on American-East Asian relations, stated that the exclusion of these nations from the treaty of San Francisco allowed Japan to "preserve – and resume under the Cold War sanction of the United States – its presumption of superiority over other Asians. Also, Japan's racist wartime ideology, which had propelled atrocities against Asian soldiers and civilians alike, escaped scrutiny and condemnation" (Price, 2001, p. 45). This separation of Japan from its responsibility during the war with Asia was further cemented through the legal determination of war responsibility as stated in the treaty, which established Japan's liability for damages to Allied property as only being viable from December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 (Pearl Harbor) onward (Price, 2001, p. 37). This period of time omits the wars in China starting in 1931 and the occupation of Korea and Taiwan that had been in effect for decades preceding the Second World War, ultimately shielding Japan from any legal responsibility and responsibility for reparations (in the eyes of the signatories) for the atrocities that occurred in these colonized territories. This, in part, gave a degree of international support to the retention of Japan's wartime national symbols as being unassociated with war crimes in Asia.

### ***Impact of the 1999 Act on National Flag and Anthem***

1999, the year the Act on National Flag and Anthem was passed, marked a pivotal moment for the *hinomaru* and *kimigayo*. The persistence of the government to implement the flag and anthem back into schools as they had been during the Meiji era and the war, part of a larger conservative agenda under the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), demonstrated that the government was "...concerned with regaining Japan's national confidence and identity, lost in the defeat in World War II" (Itoh, 2001, para. 35). At the time the bill was submitted to the National Diet, Japan's legislature, the public was largely supportive of the measure, with roughly 70 percent of the Japanese population in support of their reinstatement as the national flag and anthem (Itoh, 2001, para. 12). This high level of support came in part from about 60 percent believing, at the time, that the *hinomaru* and *kimigayo* were already the legal national flag and anthem (Itoh, 2001, para. 13). The public support for the bill emboldened the right in Japanese politics, specifically Nippon Kaigi (日本会議), a right-wing political lobby whose membership includes many members of the LDP, including current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who were the main drivers behind the 1999 act's submission to the Diet (Pletnia, 2017, p. 179).

In the years following the act's adoption, the LDP looked to solidify the symbols as part of the Japanese national identity through the constitution, as they developed a new draft of the document in 2012 that "...adapt[ed] wording that put the emperor in the place of sovereign and introduce[d] a new article that officially declare[d] *nisshōki* [another term for the *hinomaru*] and *kimigayo* as flag and anthem" (Pletnia, 2017, 185). In doing so, it is argued by Maciej Pletnia in his article *Back to the Past: Analysis of the Amendments Regarding Emperor and the National Symbols in the LDP 2012 Constitutional Draft* that "[t]he authors of the draft may have intended to present contemporary Japan as a symbolic continuation of the pre-war state" (Pletnia, 2017, p. 185) and that there was "...a desire to reinterpret the country's past and thereby reconstruct its collective memory" (Pletnia, 2017, p. 191-192). These strong positions taken by the Japanese right in reinstating these symbols as a way to connect the current Japanese state

with the former Japanese empire and its predecessor states by “...present[ing] the flag and anthem as positive symbols of Japan’s success while forgetting their negative connotations” (Pletnia, 2017, p. 190) shows that the 1999 act and its public support has emboldened their ideology. In short, the act has helped legitimize these symbols as official representations of the Japanese national identity and, in using them to support their political goals, legitimize policies, like remilitarization and historical revisionism, among the Japanese right that may be seen by some as antithetical to Japan’s commitment to peace and democracy.

In recent years, however, the Japanese government has begun to face criticism on its use of the flag, anthem, and the imperial system as tools in the government’s campaign of historical revisionism. This has come primarily from China and South Korea, but domestic criticism has also increased. This rise in condemnation has emerged for a specific reason – the wartime generation is beginning to die out (Conrad, 2003, p. 95). The fear of the Japanese version of history becoming the hegemonic view on these symbols and on Japanese history in general is pushing new generations of activists to protest the flag, anthem, and the emperor. This fear is perpetuated by the U.S. holding bilateral security treaties and agreements with Japan and its neighbors instead of a wider Asia-Pacific alliance, diplomatically defending Japan from its critics. This has allowed Japan to “...appear so confident of Washington’s backing that it willfully disregards Allied prisoner of war suffering during the Second World War, just as it dismisses the pain endured by the Koreans [and other colonized Asian peoples]” (Dudden, 2019, para. 7). A specific instance of this is found in a conservative South Korean politician who, in 2019, proposed that the rising sun flag used by the Maritime Self-Defense Force (see Figure 2) should be banned in public spaces in South Korea (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2013, para. 1). Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga remarked that “[c]laims that the flag is an expression of political assertions or a symbol of militarism are absolutely false. It appears to me that this is a large misunderstanding” (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet,



2013, para. 2). The press release of this statement, available in English, Korean, and Japanese, is attached to a short presentation that shows the rising sun flag's historical context (omitting any mention of colonization and the Second World War) and instances of its use by the JMSDF at ports in China and South Korea, both of which are formerly occupied territories (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019). The information campaign being conducted by the Japanese government, once limited to the domestic sphere, has now begun to branch out internationally to substantiate the Japanese claim that the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system are justifiable national symbols for a liberal, peaceful Japan.

## Conclusion

The symbols of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system are all factually representative of a period in Japanese history where they reigned over colonial invasions and atrocities throughout the Asia Pacific region. However, within the Western expectations of national identity, having these symbols remains a necessity for the Japanese state. Without a flag, some argue, the Japanese people would be seen in the West as simply Asian (Teruoka, 1991, p. 42). These symbols had existed before the Second World War and are objectively non-militarist in nature. The short number of years during which they represented the Japanese imperialist regime have, however, irreversibly poisoned them (Teruoka, 1991, p. 42). Regardless, the U.S. government believed that the benefits of using these symbols to unite the Japanese people towards democracy and later Cold War military support during occupation outweighed the consequences of stripping these symbols of their wartime associations. Once Japan gained independence over its domestic governance in 1952, the symbols came back into use similarly to the way they had been used during the war. While some may argue that the sovereignty of the Japanese state implies that the development of the symbols into a national identity after 1952 were not under the influence of the U.S., the Japanese government was able to disregard their militarist and imperialist implications thanks to a structure of U.S. diplomatic

support, one avenue being the Treaty of San Francisco, that, together with U.S.-Japan defense treaties, continues to protect the Japanese position from critics in the Asia-Pacific region that were previously under Japanese imperial rule. As a result, in addition to the passing of the 1999 Act, right-wing politics in Japan have become emboldened in their efforts to remilitarize Japan and reshape Japanese history. Today, the scrutinization of these symbols is increasing as those who remember what the flag, anthem, and emperor stood for during the war are beginning to die off (Conrad, 2003, p. 95). New generations of activists, both in and outside Japan, are now responsible for holding the Japanese state accountable for their continued use and support of these symbols. This prompts the possibility of future research that examines how the current young generations in Japan, who can access historical information via the internet (i.e. outside of the government-sponsored education curriculum) perceive these symbols in order to determine whether the campaign to erase the history of the *hinomaru*, *kimigayo*, and the imperial system has been successful.

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