

KNOW YOUR VISITING JAPANESE POLITICIANS **And the Conservative Nationalist Groups They Join**

Golden Week
April 2007
Revised July 2007
An Asia Policy Point Brief

During Golden Week 2007 the following Japanese politicians were visiting Washington.

Many are members of various conservative nationalist parliamentary groups. Below, we have identified, where possible, what groups each Diet member has joined. This document is by no means definitive as confirming a group membership is difficult. We have included descriptions of each group and their party affiliations at the end of this document along with a brief explanation of Japan's major political parties.

Cabinet Members

☐ **Shinzo Abe**

Prime Minister

Party:

LDP, Yamaguchi 4th, 5 terms

Website: <http://tokyo.s-abe.or.jp/>

Memberships: History (Deputy Chief Secretary), Education (former Secretary General), Multi-partisan History, Shinto (Secretary General), Bright (Acting Secretary General), Constitution, Yasukuni, Yasukuni supporters (Founder)

Mr. Abe has been at the core of the conservative nationalist movement at least since 1995, when he opposed the 1995 Parliament resolution of apology for the Greater East Asian War as an effort for reconciliation with Japan's Asian neighbors. Well-known to admire his grandfather, former PM Kishi, who was classified as a Class A war criminal by the IMTFE (Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal). Mr. Abe refers to the pre-war days as "the era of glory," denounced the present Constitution as a "binding curse from the period immediately after the war," which "casts a bad influence on the Japanese mind," claimed Japan's war was completely different from the German aggression, and has voiced support for Japan's decision to start the war.

"I express my sympathy toward the comfort women and apologize for the situation they found themselves in. ... I apologize here and now as prime minister." 3/26/2007 (Associated Press)

"[The US resolution] lacks the accurate understanding over facts related to the comfort women issue, particularly of the efforts made by GOJ"

"[The GOJ] has not come across anything recorded that directly shows so-called "coercion" committed by the military or constituted authorities in the materials it had found prior to the day when the research results [and the Kono Statement] were delivered."

“The Kono Statement is not a Cabinet decision, but something that the subsequent Cabinets have sustained.”

“The basic stance of the GOJ is that it keeps to the Statement; has no plan to make the content of the Statement into a cabinet decision.”

3/16/2007 (Cabinet-adopted reply to a Parliamentary query by Rep Tsujimoto)

“There is no evidence to prove there was coercion, nothing to support it.” 3/3/2007
(*International Herald Tribune*)

“Korea is full of whorehouses.” (*Rekishu Kyokasyo e-no Gimon* (questions about history textbooks), Tendensha, 1997)

☐ **Taro Aso**

Foreign Minister

Party:

LDP, Fukuoka 8th, 9 terms

Website: <http://www.aso-taro.jp/>

Memberships: Japan League (special adviser), Shinto, Promote (Adviser), Constitution

197 Australian and 101 British POWs as well as more than 12,000 Koreans were forced to work in hellish conditions in the Aso family coal mine in 1945. The Aso family has never admitted that their company used Allied POW labor. Nor has it given any compensation to the victims. Although Mr. Aso was only four years old when World War II ended, he has maintained close connections with the 134-year old family firm, now called the Aso Group. He headed the company from 1973 until 1979, prior to his entry into politics. *“We feel it is quite different from the facts and if we pursue all the differences, since they are all out there, I have a bad feeling that such an attitude would cause synergies, and bring about bigger fusses, which I’m afraid would not be constructive.”* 3/9/2007

“This Resolution has no binding force, and from our viewpoint it is not based on objective facts at all. The Japanese Government does not take any measures regarding the comfort women issue based on this resolution. We simply view this as regrettable.” 2/19/2007

“Japan is doing what the Americans cannot... We wouldn’t be if we were blue-eyed blonde... Fortunately we are yellow-faced, and we have never exploited them or fired machine guns there [i.e., in the Middle East].” 3/21/2007

“The operations [by the US] after the occupation [of Iraq] started have been extremely childish.” 2/23/2007

Diet Members

- ☐ **Yutaka Fukushima** Member, House of Representatives
Party: Komei, Osaka 6th, 5 terms
Website: <http://www.fukushima-y.com/>
- ☐ **Hiroshi Imazu** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Hokkaido 6th, 4 terms
Website: <http://www.hiroshi-i.net/>
Memberships: Correct Japan, Yasukuni Supporters (Head)
- ☐ **Kiichi Inoue** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Hyogo 4th, 7 terms
Website: N/A
Memberships: Constitution
- ☐ **Shigeru Ishiba** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Tottori 1st, 7 terms
Website: <http://www.ishiba.com/>
Memberships: Abduction (Head), Constitution, Shinto, Yasukuni
- ☐ **Katsuyuki Kawai** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Hiroshima 3rd, 3 terms
Website: <http://kawai.fine.to/katsu/>
- ☐ **Shuji Kira** Member, House of Representatives
Party: DPJ, Ooita 1st, 2 terms
Website: <http://www.kirashuji.com/>
- ☐ **Takeshi Maeda** Member, House of Councilors
Party: DPJ, Proportional, 5 terms
Website: <http://www.maetake.com/index2.htm>
Memberships: Yasukuni
- ☐ **Seiji Maehara** Member, House of Representatives
Party: DPJ, Kyoto 2nd, 5 terms
Website: <http://www.maehara21.com/>
- ☐ **Iwao Matsuda** Member, House of Councilors
Party: LDP, Gifu, 5 terms
Website: <http://www.imatsuda.com/>
Memberships: Japan League, Shinto, Yasukuni

- ☐ **Asahiko Mihara** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Fukuoka 9th, 5 terms
Website: <http://www.mihara.gr.jp/>
Memberships: Japan League, Constitution, Shinto, Yasukuni
- ☐ **Akihisa (Aki) Nagashima** Member, House of Representatives
Website: <http://www.nagashima21.net/> DPJ, Tokyo Proportional, 2 terms
Blog: <http://blog.goo.ne.jp/nagashima21/>
Memberships: Nanjing Only (founder), Japan League
N.B.: Former research assistant to Dr. Michael Green (former NSC Asia Director) at the Council on Foreign Relations.
- ☐ **Kosaburo Nishime** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Okinawa 4th, 2 terms
Website: <http://www.nishime-k.jp/>
- ☐ **Yasutoshi Nishimura** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Hyogo 9th, 2 terms
Website: <http://www.yasutoshi.jp/>
Memberships: Yasukuni Supporters, Shinto, Multi-partisan Education (Secretariat), Abduction, Yasukuni, Japan League
- ☐ **Fukushiro Nukaga** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Ibaragi 2nd, 8 terms
Website: <http://www.nukaga-fukushiro.jp/>
Memberships: Constitution
- ☐ **Yoshinori Ohno** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Kagawa 3rd, 7 terms
Website: <http://www.e-ohno.com/>
Memberships: Constitution, Shinto, Yasukuni
- ☐ **Tadamori Oshima** Member, House of Representatives
Party: LDP, Aomori 3rd, 8 terms
Website: <http://www.morry.jp/top.html>
Memberships: Japan League, Shinto
- ☐ **Shigeki Sato** Member, House of Representatives
Party: Komeito, Kinki Proportional, 5 terms
Website: <http://homepage3.nifty.com/shigeki-ful/>
- ☐ **Yoshinori Suematsu** Member, House of Representatives
Party: DPJ, Tokyo 19th, 4 terms
Website: <http://www.y-sue.net/>

☐ **Seiken Sugiura**

Party:

Website: <http://www.seiken-s.jp/>

Memberships: Yasukuni

Member, House of Representatives

LDP, Aichi 12th, 6 terms

☐ **Naokazu Takemoto**

Party:

Website: <http://www.takemotonaokazu.com/>

Memberships: Japan League, Shinto

Member, House of Representatives

LDP, Osaka 15th, 4 terms

☐ **Kotaro Tamura**

Party:

Website: <http://www.apionet.or.jp/~koutaro/>

Memberships: Shinto

Member, House of Councilors

Parliamentary Secretary of Cabinet Office

LDP, Tottori, 2 terms

☐ **Isamu Ueda**

Party:

Website: <http://www.isamu-u.com/>

Member, House of Representatives

Komeito, Kanagawa 6th, 5 terms

☐ **Kozo Yamamoto**

Party:

Website: www.yamamotokocho.com/

Memberships: Yasukuni, Constitution

Member, House of Representatives

Vice Minister of METI

LDP, Kyushu proportional, 4 terms

☐ **Akiko Yamanaka**

Party:

Website: <http://www.globalnet-akiko.jp/> (J)

http://www.globalnet-akiko.jp/en/profile_opinion.html (E)

Memberships: Yasukuni

Member, House of Representatives

LDP, Chiba 2nd, 2 terms

MAJOR CONSERVATIVE NATIONALIST PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS

源

A. Diet Member s' Group for the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership [*Shinto Seiji Renmei Kokkai Giin Kondan-kai*, 神道政治連盟国会議員懇談会] LDP, “**Shinto**”

Established in 1970 to work closely with the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership, this League aims to reconstruct the State of Japan with the Emperor and Shintoism at its core. Advocates eliminating “controversial” subjects from textbooks [e.g., facts of and reference to Japan’s aggression in history, gender mainstreaming efforts in ethics, etc.]; opposes the legislative effort to allow married couples to keep their original surnames, denounces gender equality, and promotes the “traditional” values. Former Prime Minister Mori’s speech about Japan being *a country of gods with the emperor at the center* was made at the 30th anniversary celebration of this parliamentary group.

The present Minister of Education Bunmei Ibuki is Chief Secretary of the group. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is its Secretary General.

Membership: 223 of the LDP Diet Members belong to this group (as of Sept 29, 2006).

Website: http://www.sinseiren.org/index_frame.html

B. Committee to Review History [*Rekishi Kento Iinkai*, 歴史検討委員会] LDP, “**History**”

Established in 1993 to produce an official LDP overview of the Greater East Asia War (i.e., the Pacific War). Their overview (published on Aug. 15, 1995) contradicts the content of the Murayama Statement released on the same day, in which the then PM Murayama expressed “the feeling of remorse” over Japan’s war of aggression and colonial rule at memorial events marking the 50th Anniversary of the end of WWII.

The Committee’s conclusions included: that the Greater East Asian War was a war of self-defense and the liberation of Asia; the Nanking Massacre and the “comfort women” were not factual; and there was no war responsibility nor were there war criminals among Japan’s top leaders. It also called for a “new struggle” to delete from textbooks references they found objectionable and a “national movement” to fix their views about the war and history in the public consciousness, which led to various movements within and outside the LDP over history education. The Committee report provided the blueprint for the establishment of the *Tsukurukai*, the group that produced the controversial “New History Textbook” of 2001.

Mr. Abe (present Prime Minister) and Mr. Shoichi Nakagawa (present Chair of LDP’s Policy Affairs Research Council) were both members of the Committee from its founding.

Website: N/A

C. Diet Members' League for the 50th Anniversary after the WWII/ Diet Members' League for a "Bright Japan" [*Shusen 50 Shunen Kokkai Giin Renmei*/"*Akarui Nippon*" *Kokkai Giin Renmei*, 終戦 50 周年国会議員連盟・「明るい日本」国会議員連盟] LDP, "Bright"

Established in 1994 originally to halt efforts to produce a Diet resolution announcing remorse for Japan's war of aggression as a part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Joined by a variety of rightist groups including the Yasukuni Shrine group, the 50th Anniversary (1995) League had slogans such as "Japan was not an aggressor"; "Adopt a resolution to make Japan's sacred war dead happy." The group failed to halt the adoption of the Diet resolution expressing reflection and remorse.

The 50th Anniversary League restructured itself in 1996 into the "Diet Members' League for 'Bright Japan'" with Mr. Abe still as the Acting Secretary General. The Bright Japan League played a central role that year in efforts to delete references to "comfort women" and the Nanjing Massacre from history textbooks.

Membership: 161 Diet Members. Current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the Acting Secretary General.

Website: N/A

D. Diet Members' League to Consider Japan's Future and History Education [*Nippon no Zento to Rekishi Kyoiku wo Kangaeru Giin no Kai*, 日本の前途と歴史教育を考える議員の会] LDP, "Education"

Established in 1997 as the "Young Diet Members' League to Consider Japan's Future and History Education" by Shinzo Abe, Shoichi Nakagawa, Hakubun Shimomura (the current Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary) and about 100 other Diet Members. Pressured textbook publishers and authors over references to Japan's aggression, "comfort women," and other issues regarding the war; condemned Mr. Yohei Kono for having "accepted 'coercion' in his 1993 "Kono Statement" as "without solid grounds but only as demanded by some others." Several of its members, including current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (then Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary) and Mr. Shimomura advised NHK (Japan's national broadcaster) to reconsider the program content of a TV documentary on the issue of responsibility for "comfort women." These actions led to a January 2007 court decision denouncing the interference of members of the Education League in free operation of NHK and the free speech rights of the program's creators.

In December 2006, the Education League set up a subcommittee to examine the comfort women issue (Chairperson: Yasuhide Nakayama) to promote amendments to or a withdrawal from the Kono Statement. The Education League criticizes the GOJ also for not asserting to the world that there was "no coercion in the narrow sense" exerted by the Japanese Imperial Army or Japanese government officials in the abductions and entrapments of the comfort women.

E. Diet Members' Gathering for the Japan League [*Nippon Kaigi Kokkai Giin Kondankai*, 日本会議国会議員懇談会] Multi-partisan, “**Japan League**”

The Diet Members' Gathering for the Japan League (Diet Members' for the Japan League), was set up in 1997. It is the largest organization demanding the revision of the constitution. The Japan League, often called the “Japan Conference” in English, denies that World War II was a war of aggression; it downplays the Nanjing Massacre; wants education reform with a strong central control and an education curriculum based on patriotic values; and rejects a gender-blind society. Diet Members' for the Japan League was established to support and work with Japan League.

The Diet Members for the Japan League has three main political objectives: 1) history/education/family issues; 2) defense/diplomacy/territory issues (headed by current PM Shinzo Abe in 2002); and 3) Constitution/Imperial Family/Yasukuni Shrine. It has succeeded in producing a textbook on morality, *Notebook for Heart*.

Shoichi Nakagawa is the Acting Chair, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is the Deputy Chief Secretary, Hakubun Shimomura is the Secretary General and Foreign Minister Taro Aso is a Special Adviser (as of July 2006)

Membership: 235 Diet members (25 from the DPJ) (as of July 2005).

Website: <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/> (J),
[http://www.nipponkaigi.org/reidai02/newpage\(E\)1.htm](http://www.nipponkaigi.org/reidai02/newpage(E)1.htm) (E)

F. Committee To Promote The Revision Of Basic Education Act [*Kyoiku Kihonho Kaisei Sokushin Iinkai*, 教育基本法改正促進委員会] Multi-partisan, “**Promote**”

DISBANDED. Sharing members with The Diet Members' Gathering for Japan League, this committee demands education reform including the strengthening patriotism; a values education system based on Shintoism; education based on traditional family values emphasizing gender differences. Under the Abe leadership, the Basic Education Act was replaced in December 2006 accordingly.

Established in 2004 with 318 Diet Members including 274 from the LDP and 40 from the DPJ, with Taro Aso and Shoichi Nakagawa as Advisors and Hakubun Shimomura as Acting Chair.

Website: N/A

G. Diet Members' League to Promote Research on the Constitution [*Kenpo Chosa Suishin Giin Renmei*, 憲法調査推進議員連盟] Multi-partisan, “**Constitution**”

Established in 1997 to promote the revision of the Constitution. Advocates free discussion over the Constitution led the establishment of the Parliamentary “Research Commission on the Constitution.” Although the Constitution League’s official statements do not refer to revising the Constitution, the activities of the members show that their main focus is making the Self-Defense Forces the official military, with other focal points including promoting conventional gender roles and controls over free speech and freedom of assembly. The members

include former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, former Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata and former Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu.

Former Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama, who is the Chair of the Constitution League, is simultaneously the head of the Parliamentary Commission on the Constitution—a seeming conflict of interest.

Website: <http://www1.sphere.ne.jp/KENPOU/>

H. Committee to Build a Correct Japan [*Tadashii Nippon wo Tsukuru Kai*, 正しい日本を創る会] Multi-partisan, “Correct Japan”

Calls for a “correct” view of Japan’s history departing from “distorted Tokyo Trial view.” Advocates a new constitution and education reforms providing for more governmental controls and greater emphasis on patriotic values; supports official visits to Yasukuni by the Prime Minister and denounces criticism against visits to Yasukuni as interference in a purely domestic affair; advocates admiration for the Imperial Family as unique and purely patriarchal entity in the world (it opposes the alteration of the Imperial House law to allow the possibility of reigning empresses); promotes conventional gender roles.

Website: <http://www.tadashii-nippon.org/index.html>

I. Parliamentary League to Worship Together at the Yasukuni Shrine [*Minna de Yasukuni Jinja wo Sanpai-suru Kokkai Giin no Kai*, みんなで靖国神社を参拝する国会議員の会], Multi-partisan, “Yasukuni”

Established in April 1997 with the purpose of encouraging collective worship by Diet members at Yasukuni Shrine in order “to express respect and gratitude to the enshrined spirits of the fallen heroes who sacrificed their lives for the sake of national affairs,” particularly on the Shrine’s special days (namely, spring and autumn special ceremonies and August 15). Supports the formal/official worship by the Prime Minister.

Membership: 186 Representatives and 84 Councilors (as of June 8, 2005)

Recent actions: 101 members paid formal visits to Yasukuni Shrine on Oct 18, 2005, and 39 members on Apr 23, 2007.

Website: N/A

J. Group Of Young Diet Members Who Wish For Peace, Address On True National Interests And Support Visits To Yasukuni Shrine [*Heiwa wo Negai Shin no Kokueki wo Kangae Yasukuni Sanpai wo Shijisuru Wakate Kokkai Giin no Kai*, 平和を願い真の国益を考え靖国参拝を支持する若手国会議員の会] LDP, “Yasukuni Supporters”

Established in 2005 to support the then PM Koizumi’s worship visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Membership: 118 members, about one third of all LDP Diet Members.

Website: N/A

K. Group to Examine the Truth about the Comfort Women Issue and the Nanjing

Incident [*Ianfu Mondai to Nankin Jiken no Shinjitsu wo Kensho-suru Kai*, 慰安婦問題と南京事件の真実を検証する会] DPJ, “Nanjing”

Established on March 9, 2007 in response to House Resolution 121 and the 70th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre “when many anti-Japanese propaganda movies will be circulated.” Criticizes the view of seeing pre-war Japan as the aggressor in World War II, calling it the “so-called Tokyo Trial View”; intends to review the 1993 Kono Statement.

Website: N/A

L. Group to Consider the History Textbook Issue [*Rekishi Kyokasyo Mondai wo Kangaeru Kai*, 歴史教科書問題を考える会] Multi-partisan, “Multi-partisan education”

Set up in 2001 to enable the LDP’s League to Consider Japan’s Future and History Education to cooperate with like-minded DPJ members. Shoichi Nakagawa was the Chair of this group. Pressed high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Education to include in textbooks assertions denying the Nanjing Massacre. Advocates the elimination of “taking into account the views of the neighboring Asian countries” as a criteria for the screening of textbooks. Pressured the Ministry of Education to eliminate the input of ordinary citizens in textbook screening, resulting in the Ministry’s 2002 order asking local education authorities to work closely with local police authorities in case citizens’ groups attempt to offer suggestions on textbooks.

Website: N/A

K. Diet Members’ Group to Examine the Nanking Incident [*Nankin Jiken wo Kensho-suru Kai*, 南京事件を検証する会] Multi-partisan, “Nanking Only”

LDP (14) and DPJ (8) Diet Members formed a bipartisan committee drawing largely from members of *Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform* and *Japan’s Scholarly Society on Nanking*. The committee held its first meeting February 26, 2007, with Tomomi Inada and Jin Matsubara attending among others. Matsubara summed up his position: “Using documents we need to make the Diet members aware that the massacre has no factual basis.”

Website: N/A

JAPANESE PARTY DESCRIPTIONS

THUMBNAIL DESCRIPTIONS

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

The dominant ruling party since 1955, with a brief interlude out of power in 1993-94. It is a conservative, largely pro-U.S. party with a highly variable collection of politicians of various ideologies, from right wing to moderate liberals.

Website: <http://www.jimin.jp/index.html> (J), <http://www.jimin.jp/jimin/english/index.html> (E)

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)

Established in 1998 by politicians who had deserted the LDP, together with members from older opposition parties such as the Socialist Party. It is led by Ichiro Ozawa. Ideologically diffuse, it has suffered from a succession of leadership crises and electoral failures, reducing its relevance.

Website: <http://www.dpj.or.jp/> (J), <http://www.dpj.or.jp/english/> (E)

New Komei Party

The coalition partner of the LDP in the current government. With the power base mostly in Soka Gakkai, a Buddhist-based sect, this party tends to take position in common with its coalition ally the LDP. On some issues, particularly related to the war and relations with continental Asia, it can stymie LDP efforts. The traditional backdoor to the leadership of the People's Republic of China.

Website: <http://www.komei.or.jp/> (J), <http://www.komei.or.jp/en/index.html> (E)

MORE DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS

The LDP - the Liberal Democratic Party

Founded in 1955 by the union of the two main center right parties, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has dominated Japanese politics since its founding, ruling Japan either by itself or in coalition for 51 of the last 52 years.

Members of the LDP on the whole tend to be conservative in social issues, with strong ties to big business. In economics, however, it has strong socialist-collectivist tendencies in terms of redistribution of government revenues and personal taxation.

LDP politicians tend to have strong patron-client relations with small- and medium-sized industries in their districts, with the LDP members seeking to protect and nurture their clients through ant-competitive regulation and financial subsidies from the central government.

Long considered a rural-based party, the LDP gained huge numbers of seats in the urban districts in the 2005 House of Representatives elections due to Junichiro Koizumi's masterful recasting of "his" LDP as the party of economic and political reform.

Due to its large size, its great variety of clients and its tendency to frequently rotate party leadership and government posts, the LDP is divided into a myriad of many small divisions called, depending on their functions, factions, tribes, groups, study groups and leagues (*renmei*).

Factions are crucial in the selection process for a prime minister and thus can be considered the most important organizational unit of party action. The last five prime ministers have been drawn from just the two largest factions—*Heiseikai Kenkyu Kai* (called the “Tsushima Faction”) which produced Prime Minister Hashimoto and Obuchi and the *Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyu Kai* (the “Machimura faction”), which produced Prime Ministers Mori, Koizumi and Abe.

Factions have weak ideological platforms. Like-minded politicians tend to meet and plan ideology-based actions in cross-faction study groups and leagues. Many of the issues surrounding Japan’s memory of World War II have been discussed and handled by these cross-factional groupings.

The DPJ - the Democratic Party of Japan

The main opposition party in Japan, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is the latest iteration of a chaotic, ever-shifting collective of anti-LDP forces. The various elements making up the party have been in a state of flux since 1993, when ambitious elements of the former Tanaka faction of the LDP split off from the LDP and joined the opposition, resulting in the brief formation of the first non-LDP governments since 1955.

The Democratic Party was formally founded in 1998. Over the years it has swallowed up a set of smaller political groupings and parties, most recently the Liberal Party in 2003. Due its numerous antecedents, the DPJ’s ideological breadth is wide, from hyper-pacifist former Socialists to pro-rearmament nationalists. A frequent criticism of the DPJ is that the party stands for nothing except opposition to the LDP.

Over the past several years the DPJ has suffered from repeated leadership crises. Its current leader, Ichiro Ozawa, is the former leader of the Liberal Party. He is a strong party organizer, but cuts a poor public figure and has been dogged since his inauguration by serious health problems.

DPJ politicians once wore the mantle of the protectors of the urban and suburban areas, where 75 percent of Japan's population lives. However, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s recasting of the LDP as the party of economic and political reform robbed the DPJ of its constituency. As a consequence, the DPJ suffered a humiliating defeat in the September 2005 House of Representatives election.

Since Shinzo Abe’s election as LDP party president and prime minister last year, the repeated missteps of his Cabinet have allowed the DPJ to recapture some of its former allure to the non-aligned voter. The DPJ did fairly well in the recent local assembly elections and hopes for a major upset in the July 29 House of Councillors’ election.

The DPJ leadership tends to be less defensive about Japan's wartime behavior than the current LDP leadership. The leadership's more liberal and self-critical stance is undermined, however, by the presence in the DPJ ranks of some of the most extreme nationalists in the Diet,

The New Komeito (the Komeito)

The New Komeito (the Komeito) is third largest party of the Diet and the coalition partner of the LDP in government since 1999. It is the political wing of the Soka Gakkai, Japan's largest new religious group. Officially, the party is independent of the religious corporation.

Nominally a sect of the Nichiren Buddhism, the Soka Gakkai is a part-missionary movement, part-self-help organization founded in 1930. The pre-1945 Imperial Japanese government imprisoned both the founder and second leader of Soka Gakkai for their refusal to acknowledge State Shinto as the official religion of Japan. The founder starved to death in prison. The second leader, upon his release from prison in 1945, reestablished the sect.

Since the second leader's death in 1958, the Soka Gakkai has been led by Daisaku Ikeda. Ikeda is the purported author of hundreds of books and the possessor of dozens of honorary doctorates from universities around the world. He is often portrayed in the scandal magazines as wielding a dark, unseen hand in Japanese political life. Under Ikeda the Soka Gakkai has become an international movement with over 12 million members worldwide. In Japan, the Soka Gakkai functions as a vast unregulated micro-finance lender, attracting followers through its ability to extend credit and financing to persons ineligible for bank loans.

Members of the Soka Gakkai vote for the Komeito, providing the party with an 8 million vote base for every election. Followers see voting as a religious duty; their participation rates in elections are said to exceed 90 percent.

This unshakeable base of support makes the Komeito the coalition partner of choice. It cooperated with the opposition in forming the non-LDP government of 1993, formed a three-way coalition with the LDP, itself and Ichiro Ozawa's Liberals in 1999 and has been the sole coalition partner of the LDP since 2003.

The Soka Gakkai-Komeito has been the backdoor to relations with the People's Republic of China, with the Soka Gakkai's Buddhist heritage serving as a purported cultural-historical bridge between the peoples of Japan and China. During his April visit to Japan, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiaba took time out for a private meeting with Soka Gakkai President Ikeda.

The death of the Soka Gakkai's founder while in Imperial state custody gives the Komeito moral leverage over the conservatives in the LDP. When the LDP released its draft of the new, more patriotic Basic Law on Education, the product of 75 meetings of LDP politicians and experts, the Komeito forced the LDP to rewrite the entire text, eliminating the sections the Komeito found too reminiscent of the pre-1945 education regulations.

In the handling of Japan's wartime legacy, the Komeito is a wild card. From the Imperial government's suppression of the Soka Gakkai, the Komeito should oppose any hint of nostalgia or affection for the pre-1945 Imperial state. In practice, however, Komeito leaders calibrate their opposition to reactionary revisionist legislation in return for legislative and budgetary concessions beneficial to the interests of Komeito voters.

Prepared by

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