

The Conservative Imaginary:

Moral Re-Armament and the Transwar Politics of the Japanese Right

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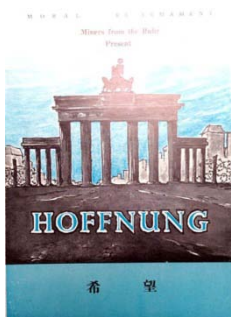


Premier Kishi and the Colwell Brothers of Hollywood. "These Americans," he said, "have made a deep impression in Japan."

"... not Left, not Right, but straight "

The Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Nobusuke Kishi, visited nine nations of South-East Asia and the Pacific, where he apologised publicly for Japan's actions during the war. His journey was described by the *Washington Evening Star* as "one of the most unusual missions ever undertaken by a statesman of his rank." After returning to Japan he wrote: "I was impressed by the effectiveness of MRA in creating unity between peoples who have been divided. I have myself experienced the power of honest apology in healing the hurts of the past. We need the statesmanship of the humble heart in order to bring sanity and peace to the affairs of men. If we in Asia can achieve unity based on...

The origins of political conservatism in Japan are mired in Occupation history, with scholars emphasizing its emergence as a postwar development determined by the alliance between Washington and Japanese elites. This paper re-examines Japanese conservatism as a transwar and transnational project. It focuses on the involvement of three prime ministers—Nakasone Yasuhiro, Hatoyama Ichirō, and Kishi Nobusuke—in the Moral Re-Armament movement (MRA), an international religious organization that caught the attention of politicians, industrialists, and union leaders around the world in the 1940s and 1950s. It shows that MRA helped Japanese elites to reformulate older notions of state power, national community, and Asian regionalism into Cold War internationalism—what I call the conservative imaginary. In so doing, the paper sheds new light on the negotiated transition from prewar fascism and imperialism to postwar democracy, and helps to explain the political culture of important sections of the Japanese ruling classes up to the present.



Reto Hofmann (PhD, Columbia University) is lecturer in history at the University of Melbourne and, currently, holds a JSPS Fellowship at Waseda University. He specializes in modern Japanese political and cultural history. His first monograph, *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915-1952* was published by Cornell University Press in 2015. He is working on international history of Japanese

conservatism in the middle of the twentieth century.

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