

# Conspiracy theories and the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan: the rise, radicalization, and fall (?) of YamatoQ-kai

Yoko Demelius\* and Kamila Szczepanska

Centre for East Asian Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, FI-20014, University of Turku, Finland

\*Corresponding author. Centre for East Asian Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, FI-20014 University of Turku, Finland.

E-mail: [yoko.demelius@utu.fi](mailto:yoko.demelius@utu.fi)

E-mail: [kamila.szczepanska@utu.fi](mailto:kamila.szczepanska@utu.fi)

This article investigates how conspiracy theories, spirituality, and resistance against pandemic-mitigation measures became intertwined during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis in Japan. Utilizing selected concepts from social movement theories (SMT), this case study-driven exploratory analysis focuses on the activities of YamatoQ-kai, a civil society organization that originated in a group of conspiracy-theory influencers and whose activities included the dissemination of an anti-immunization agenda. By analysing online posts on the organization's homepage and journalistic reports on the organization, the article illuminates the underlying implications of the conspiracy theorists' activism and demonstrates how the group adopted QAnon's conspiracy rhetoric whilst taking a Japanized form. Second, it explains YamatoQ's pivotal place amongst the Japanese societal actors espousing vaccine-hesitant attitudes. Finally, it shows how the group—as an unconventional case of conspiratorship—created tangible experiences for followers and demonstrates the affective impact of group solidarity. In this way, the article's findings contribute to closing the research gaps in scholarship on conspiracy theories, vaccine scepticism, and conspiratorship.

**KEYWORDS:** conspiracy theories; QAnon; anti-vaccination activism; YamatoQ-kai; COVID-19.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2020, a study published in *The Lancet* (Figueiredo et al., 2020) placed Japan among the countries with the lowest levels of trust in vaccines. The country has previously witnessed vaccine hesitancy and backlash relating to immunization against measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), human papillomavirus (HPV), and influenza (Kuwabara and Ching 2014). Scholars have investigated the implications of this 'vaccine gap' that sets Japan apart from other developed countries (Saitoh and Okabe 2012). Having said that, a vaccination rate of almost 80 per cent (initial vaccination protocol) was reached during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in Japan (Digital Agency 2023), compared to a rate of nearly 70 per cent in the USA as of May 2023 (Digital Agency 2023; Our World in Data 2024).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> However, motivations for vaccination varied (see Osaki 2021). So-called 'regret movements' and organizations advocating compensation for vaccine-related damages including allergic reactions and deaths have demanded state responses, and over 150 deaths had been identified as 'drug-induced' by 21 August 2023 (NHK News Web 2023a,b).

In the context of the COVID-19 infodemic<sup>2</sup> of the last few years, Japan's government has identified emerging problems related to the proliferation of mis/disinformation in the digital environment leading to vaccine hesitancy ([Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2020](#)). This exploratory analysis utilizes the case of YamatoQ-kai (henceforth 'YamatoQ')—an entity that originated with a group of conspiracy-theory influencers and later transformed into a civil society organization and whose primary activities include the dissemination of an anti-immunization agenda through the appropriation of US-born QAnon's conspiracy rhetoric—to investigate how conspiracy theories, spirituality, and resistance to pandemic-mitigation measures became intertwined during the COVID-19 crisis in Japan. Although the organization's activities did not have significant impact on the lowering of vaccination rates in Japan, an investigation of YamatoQ will clarify how conspiracy theory-fuelled activism developed and functioned.

Drawing on online documents published by YamatoQ as our primary data sources, supplemented by journalistic reports on the group, we discuss how YamatoQ developed the organizational profile that contributed to its successful institutionalization in the offline world. We emphasize some notable organizational characteristics of YamatoQ, including its demarcated leadership structure and status as a registered non-profit organization (NPO), which clearly differentiate YamatoQ from other forms of QAnon-inspired activism. Next, we explain how the group constructed its message and disseminated it amongst the general public and explore the consequences of the group's activism. We analyse how QAnon-related claims were framed for broader consumption by a Japanese audience, 'domesticated' by the introduction of elements of Japanese spirituality and culture and linked to an anti-immunization agenda. We explore the tactical choices made by YamatoQ and how these were deployed to propagate anti-vaccination views rooted in conspiracy theories. We then illuminate the outcomes of YamatoQ's adoption of more radical tactical measures, showing how these precipitated transformations in the group's profile and activism. These measures include efforts to introduce ideological elements from a more traditional far-right repertoire—a development enabled by a temporary leadership vacuum after the arrests of the group's key members.

By clarifying these understudied aspects of the agency, resources, narratives, and modus operandi of YamatoQ and illuminating the strategic dimensions of its operations, this article contributes to studies of conspiracy theories, vaccine scepticism, and conspiratoriality in the Japanese setting. The article's findings can further serve a comparative purpose by offering empirical insights from an East Asian case.

The existing scholarship identifies various issues that would benefit from further exploration, such as the influence of conspiracy theories in fostering anti-science movements (e.g. anti-vaccination and anti-5G activism), the links between online and offline actions fuelled by conspiracy theories, and significantly, the 'specific cultural contexts in which conspiracy theories are consumed, produced, and shared' ([Harambam and Aupers 2020](#): 8). Regarding the latter issue, explorations of 'conspiracy culture' and 'its contemporary manifestations' in different local and regional settings ([Butter and Knight 2020b](#): 7) are necessary to transcend the dominant focus on American and European frames of reference and examples ([Butter and Knight 2020a](#): 34, 38–39). In the case of Japan, the extant literature on conspiracy theories is limited (e.g. [Tsuji 2018](#); [Marrow 2022](#); [Fahey 2021](#); [Hata 2022](#)). The most recent examples of internationally significant conspiracy theories—such as QAnon in Japan and the engagement of its adherents in pro-Trump and anti-COVID-19-restriction protests—have been noted in the literature, but the more recent and institutionalized manifestations of this trend remain underexplored (e.g. [Zimmermann 2020](#); [Alt 2021](#); [Fujiwara 2022b](#)). Hence, through its exploration of the links between the conspiracy theories and anti-vaccination claims promoted by YamatoQ, this article offers new empirical knowledge drawn from a non-standard-WEIRD<sup>3</sup> country case. It provides a scholarly exploration of this Japanese offshoot of QAnon (including its role in spreading conspiracy claims and misinformation), the domestication of imported conspiracy theories into Japan, and the transition of conspiracy-fuelled activism from the online to the offline world. In this manner, the article contributes to closing the above-mentioned research gaps.

<sup>2</sup> The term enables us to capture 'the perils of misinformation phenomena during the management of disease outbreaks' ([Cinelli et al., 2020](#); see also [WHO 2020](#)).

<sup>3</sup> Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic.

Second, the manuscript contributes to scholarly discussion of vaccine scepticism and anti-vaccination activism in Japan. As noted earlier, studies addressing the subject of vaccine scepticism in Japan in its historical context have explored previous instances of—and reasons for—vaccine hesitancy and backlash in relation to immunization, as well as their consequences for public health (e.g. [Kuwabara and Ching 2014](#); [Okuhara et al., 2019](#)). A recent contribution by [Gordon and Reich \(2021\)](#) challenges sweeping assumptions about vaccine mistrust in Japan, offering insights into the fluctuations in confidence regarding different vaccination programmes since the post-war period. Significantly, however, the extant scholarly literature on vaccine hesitancy, vaccination intent, and preferences in the context of COVID-19 in Japan is characterized prevalently by quantitative, survey-driven inquiries, published in medical science and health-related journals (e.g. [Machida et al., 2021](#); [Nomura et al., 2021](#); [Kawata and Nakabayashi 2021](#)). There is a need for further exploration of the operations and activism of openly anti-vaccination actors, as well as the place and role of these actors in the broader landscape of agents advocating for vaccine hesitancy. The present article clarifies the significance of anti-vaccination attitudes in YamatoQ's discursive frames and its increasingly antagonistic tactical choices and elucidates the points of convergence between the group and other societal actors who object to immunization. In this manner, the presented research illuminates the specific *modus operandi* of this anti-vaccination group, and these empirical findings will lend themselves to future comparative explorations of the activism of other vaccine-hesitant actors in Japan.

Finally, this article contributes to studies of conspirituality, a topic rarely explored outside of the Western milieu. 'Conspirituality' is the politico-spiritual philosophy of an online New Age movement motivated by (1) conspiracist beliefs in covert controls over the political and social order and (2) a quest for spiritual guidance to reach a new and awakened paradigm, liberated from such controls ([Ward and Voas 2011](#): 104).<sup>4</sup> The ideological flexibility of conspirituality ([Dyrendal 2016](#): 205) was notable in times of uncertainty during the pandemic, which represented a rupture in socio-political stability and thus offered a 'window of opportunity' for radical and desperate innovations ([Geels 2011](#) in [Cassegård 2022](#): 2). Furthermore, whereas the intersection between wellness culture, conspiracy theories, and New Age spirituality is well-documented (e.g. [Baker 2022](#): 14), institutionalized forms of conspirituality remain understudied. As seen with YamatoQ, which has accommodated actors with different motives throughout its existence, conspirituality is characterized by highly adaptable narratives in which 'ideas are disembedded from one context and re-embedded in another, lending ideological flexibility in selective adoption' ([Dyrendal 2016](#): 205). This article elucidates the group's claims regarding spiritual awakening and the special qualities of Japanese people, which were intertwined with QAnon ideas and other conspiratorial assertions, as well as activities promoting alternative lifestyles to members of the group. Thus, the present study not only contributes to the research on conspirituality in a non-Western context, but it also advances knowledge of the institutionalized organization fuelled by conspirituality regarding events caused by unseen forces and governmental mitigation measures.

Before this critical exploration of the profile and activism of YamatoQ, the next section delineates our methodological approach, which uses concepts from social movement theory (SMT) to analyse conspiracy theories.

## 2. SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY AND RESEARCH INTO CONSPIRACY-THEORY ACTIVISM

[Bertuzzi \(2021\)](#) argues that the deployment of concepts from the toolkit of social movement scholars would be a positive contribution to research on conspiracy theories and mobilization and on the economic and material conditions relevant to public contention rooted in—or otherwise linked

<sup>4</sup> In scholarly enquiries into conspiracy theories that take a spiritual perspective, a narrowly defined concept of 'spirituality' prevails. [Wood and Douglas \(2018\)](#) recognize the isomorphic relationships between religions and conspiracy theories but argue that 'social cohesion and shared ritual are a primary feature of religious belief systems', distinguishing the latter from conspiracy theories (2018: 100). [Keeley \(2018\)](#) assumes that conspiracy theories are secular and differ from the religious belief in Providence in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic epistemology (74–79). Alternatively, studies on 'alt. health influencers' ([Baker and Rojek 2020](#); [Baker 2022](#)) have found that a combination of the online accessibility of the lifestyle of health influencers and their anti-establishment stance is the key to the influencers' authority over the population.

to—conspiracy theories. These concepts could be applied to explore ‘who the main mobilizers are, how people are mobilized in terms of information and networks, and why they take to the streets’ (2021: 9). This conceptual proposal constitutes a novel application of SMT notions, and its potential will be investigated in this manuscript.

For Bertuzzi (2021: 8), the concept of frames has particular promise for analysis of conspiracy theories and their role in mobilizing participants for contentious action. In SMT, the notion of frames came to denote ‘[...] relatively coherent sets of action-oriented beliefs and meanings that legitimize and inspire social movement campaigns and activities’, and it ‘[...] focus[es] attention, articulate[s], and elaborate[s] the elements within the frame, and often transform[s] the meanings associated with the objects of attention’ (Snow, Vliegendhart and Ketelaars 2019: 395). Frames offer concrete interpretations, meanings, and understandings of specific social objects and phenomena to achieve the strategic purpose of mobilizing support (Lindekilde 2014: 206). The extent to which a particular frame will ultimately mobilize support for action, however, depends on its ability to complete diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational tasks. Diagnostic framing defines the nature of the problem and clarifies where the responsibility for the undesirable state of affairs lies. Prognostic framing focuses on proposing solutions and remedial measures to be undertaken. Motivational framing presents pressing motives for undertaking action, often highlighting the seriousness of the situation and the moral imperative to act and ‘the enhancement or elevation of one’s status’ (Snow, Vliegendhart and Ketelaars 2019: 396–397). In this article, we utilize the abovementioned concepts to explain how YamatoQ crafted their message and engaged supporters by linking elements appropriated from the QAnon conspiracy theory, spiritual claims, and anti-vaccination misinformation to contest the reality of the COVID-19 public health crisis and negatively frame the pandemic-mitigation measures and epistemic authorities that led the response (cf. Saunders and Roth 2019).

Furthermore, the theoretical insights provided by resource mobilization theory are applied to explain how YamatoQ emerged and developed. Saunders and Roth (2019: 140) underscore that, according to this strand of SMT, ‘good leaders and money are important’. This highlights the crucial nature of resources for the commencement and continuation of collective action. This theoretical approach offers topologies of different resources—moral (e.g. legitimacy), cultural (e.g. specialized knowledge, organizational know-how, operational), social-organizational (e.g. access to social networks/organizations), human and material (e.g. money, equipment)—and the mechanisms by which they can be accessed (aggregation, self-production, co-optation/appropriation, and patronage; Edwards and McCarthy 2008). Analytical concepts from resource mobilization theory are applied to explain how YamatoQ developed (cf. Saunders and Roth 2019). The importance of specific actors as mobilizers and/or institutional leaders in conspiracy theory-inspired activism is explained by the notion of ‘conspiracy theory entrepreneurs’. Champion-Vincent (2015: 61) understands conspiracy theory entrepreneurs to be ‘those conspiracy theorists who earn money from denouncing the existing order and from their revelations about the organizations and evil individuals who [...] hide behind the scenes’. This concept draws attention to the presence of mercantile and monetary concerns in the activities of conspiracy theorists. In this article, this notion allows us to capture the roles of the internet and of YouTube personalities in the production of the frames and operations of YamatoQ.

Finally, the notions of tactics and political opportunity structure (POS) may be useful for, first, capturing and analysing the specific measures employed by conspiracy theory actors to pursue their aims (i.e. the action-oriented element of their activism), and second, analysing the relevance of the political environment for their emergence and development. In this manuscript, the concept of outsider tactics is important. Whereas insider tactics are those measures by which actors endeavour to ‘exert influence within the confines of institutionalized political system’, outsider tactics denote actions intended to ‘exert influence through other mechanisms (e.g. protest, grassroots lobbying etc.)’ (Soule et al., 1999: 243 in Kolb 2007: 47). The notion of POS captures a wide range of factors that shape both the prospects for mobilization and the potential (political) outcomes of activism (see Kriesi 1995; Kolb 2007). It helps to elucidate the ‘the presence or absence of political alliances, divisions within the elite, tolerance of the polity to protest and repression or facilitation by the state’ (Saunders and Roth 2019: 143). In the case of conspiracy-theory-rooted activisms, examples from the USA and Brazil

demonstrate the significance of support from populist leaders and political figures for legitimizing and amplifying conspiracy theory claims. On the other hand, we demonstrate that the state authorities responded to YamatoQ's activities with the 'repression' encompassed by POS and that this reaction affected the further development and course of the group.

Overall, by applying selected SMT concepts to analyse the case of YamatoQ and its activities, this article contributes to the assessment of how far those theoretical notions and approaches can be utilized to further our understanding of conspiracy theory-fuelled activism.

The approach used in this article is informed by a case study research strategy. YamatoQ—our chosen research case—was by no means the only entity to espouse anti-vaccination views in Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Japan's landscape of anti-vaccination or vaccine-hesitant advocacy included both discourse from medical experts and victim-relief litigation initiatives from legal experts (Utsumi 2021; JPHMA 2022). Furthermore, this group was not the only actor to draw on conspiracy theories or utilize QAnon rhetoric. However, YamatoQ's ability to attract public attention via online channels, to successfully 'domesticate' QAnon ideology by linking some of the latter's main tenets to Japanese cultural and spiritual elements, and to create a viable organization in a short span of time, mobilizing adherents across Japan for the purpose of street protests, make this particular organization a fruitful research case for exploring the interconnectedness of conspiracy theory-fuelled anti-vaccination activism. Furthermore, YamatoQ's institutionalized organizational form distinguished it from other QAnon-inspired groups and activists in Japan (and abroad) whose operations largely took place in the online sphere, giving the group a more tangible footprint in the offline world. Finally, the group's embrace of 'radical' measures has invited backlash from state agencies, which provides an opportunity to consider the authorities' position on the acceptable limits on free expression of anti-vaccination sentiments.

In terms of data sources, this article draws on online content posted on two homepages (yamatoq.info and yamatoq.net) between January 2022 and March 2023 that carried documentary and visual materials either produced or shared by YamatoQ. We also utilize journalistic reports as secondary source material. With content analysis of these documentary sources, we illuminate the underlying implications of the conspiracy theorists' activism and show how the group adopted QAnon's claims while taking a Japanized form to establish itself as a premier anti-vaccine organization in the country.

### 3. WHO IS YAMATOQ? CONSPIRACY THEORY ENTREPRENEURS AND THE SHIFT TO THE OFFLINE WORLD

The main tenets of the QAnon ideology were transplanted into Japan via Twitter by a person named 'Eri Okabayashi', who translated QAnon materials for the benefit of the Japanese public. Extant reports tentatively suggest the existence of divisions and splinter groups amongst Japanese QAnon adherents, who differ in their respective approaches to key figures such as Donald Trump and Michael Flynn (e.g. J-Anon and QArmyJapanFlynn; see Zimmerman 2020; Alt 2021; Silverman 2021; Fujiwara 2022b: 190–191). Due to the dubious nature of QAnon's claims and the subsequent purge of QAnon-related content and accounts from social media platforms—which restricted supporters' attempts to spread QAnon's message in Japan—observers surmised that the dissemination of this conspiracy theory in the country would be halted (Alt 2021). Nevertheless, 'Eri's' continued presence and activism on social media channels (Fujiwara 2022b: 189) and the emergence of YamatoQ (神真都Q) towards the end of 2021 seemed to temper the earlier expectations that QAnon would not gain a solid foothold.

YamatoQ is a self-proclaimed Japanese representation of QAnon (Amamiya 2022), or the 'Japanese version of QAnon' (Fujita 2022: 2), operating separately from other QAnon-influenced conspiracy theorists in Japan (including QArmy Japan Flynn [QAJF], which saw the Japanese QAnon sympathizers gathered around the previously mentioned 'Eri Okabayashi'<sup>5</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> QAJF has been active in Japan since 2019 (Amamiya 2023: 95). Eri closely follows QAnon's scriptural participatory practice to decipher Q's posts, known as 'Qdrops' (Marwick and Partin 2022). For this reason, QAJF is perceived to be more 'authentic' than YamatoQ which does not participate in online scriptural practice (Amamiya 2023: 95).

The original form of YamatoQ was initially led by conspiracy theorists and YouTubers, including ‘Ichibei’, ‘Ko’, and ‘+1°C’, among the others—though, in the end, the latter was ousted from the group due to internal conflicts (Amamiya 2022). YamatoQ subsequently began disseminating anti-vaccine claims in the name of ‘protecting children’ (YamatoQ 2022c), and the QAnon-inspired views of the influencers further invigorated the group’s online followers in the latter half of 2021 (Amamiya 2022; Fujiwara 2022b: 196–197). In Autumn 2021, the group put out a call on Twitter for supporters to participate in ‘the decisive final battle’ to unite its followers for a common mission. It named the group YamatoQ (大和Q)<sup>6</sup> (Amamiya 2022; Fujiwara 2022b) and nominated ‘Okamoto Ichibei’ (legal name: Kuramoto Hiroyuki) as its executive leader. It then launched the ‘Yamato Awakening Project’ on Twitter and in LINE’s open-chatroom to disseminate missionary messages to ‘awake[n] 37% of Yamato people (i.e., the Japanese population)’ (Amamiya 2022), referring to those who ‘possess YAP genes (sacred genes from ancient alien beings),’<sup>7</sup> who it expected to win the battle against darkness (Amamiya 2022; YamatoQ 2022q).

Okamoto Ichibei (henceforth ‘Ichibei’) is a former actor in V-Cinema (direct-to-video genre productions) who turned to YouTube content production during the COVID-19 pandemic (Okamoto and JOSTAR 2021: 226–229). His adoption of QAnon-inspired claims in 2021—including claims about AI-powered clones and imposters that he calls ‘rubber people’ (*gomu ningen*)<sup>8</sup>—boosted his visibility and income, improving his financial circumstances (Okamoto and JOSTAR 2021: 233, 239–241; Teh 2022). The public’s demand for content about ‘rubber people’ and the audience-driven branding process that made him ‘an “expert in rubber”’ (Okamoto and JOSTAR 2021: 225) contributed to his accelerated production of conspiratorial discourse. As Ichibei admitted elsewhere (Yoshida, JOSTAR and Okamoto 2022: 114), his desire for fame and money was the driver when he initially gained visibility as a YouTuber. However, within eight months, his mission had developed into ‘promoting the awakening process and enlarging the number of [his] like-minded supporters, calling for anti-vaccination [actions], and expanding the friends’ circles’<sup>9</sup> (Yoshida, JOSTAR and Okamoto 2022: 112–113). When the government announced the arrival of digitalized vaccination certificates<sup>10</sup> (*wakuchin pasupōto*), Ichibei implied that he was planning to launch an anti-vaccination movement and needed 144,000<sup>11</sup> people to be awakened if they were to achieve substantial change. He said that a social movement ‘will inevitably require a sizable, riot-like movement—beyond a demonstration’ (Yoshida, JOSTAR and Okamoto 2022: 113). Domestic observers of YamatoQ have suggested that the organization’s success in attracting followers from across the nation in a short time is largely owed to Ichibei’s showmanship and his storytelling ability as an ex-actor (Amamiya 2022; Kokutaigojjuku 2022). Additionally, YamatoQ has benefitted from the involvement of activists who were disseminating information about the dangers of the coronavirus vaccine (e.g. in Osaka) prior to the group’s establishment and who considered the group a useful vehicle for reaching a broader audience with their message (YamatoQ 2022e).

In late autumn 2021, YamatoQ changed the Kanji notation of its name from ‘大和Q’ to the more attention-grabbing ‘神真都Q’, symbolizing the need for missionary spirituality to save the ‘chosen people’, allowing them to realize the truth and return to the New Earth (Amamiya 2022; YamatoQ 2022q).<sup>12</sup> By December 2021, nationwide LINE open chatrooms were established for all

<sup>6</sup> The group’s name was briefly given as 大和Q at the time of inception, before it was changed to the present form (see footnote 12).

<sup>7</sup> According to Saito (2023), the link between YAP genes and Japanese people is indicated in Takayama (2012), and it is one of the manifestations of the Japanized form of reptilian conspiracy theories.

<sup>8</sup> Claims of clones and/or imposters replacing celebrities, politicians, and other elites who have been arrested or killed (or otherwise died) have been part of an eclectic repertoire of assertions circulating amongst QAnon supporters (Jutel 2023: 67). According to Amamiya (2023: 79), Ichibei also states that politicians and celebrities who are deprived of ‘adrenochrome’—a chemical property extracted from human brains and which, when consumed, provides youthfulness to the consumer—wear rubber masks to hide their deformed faces. For a discussion of a conspiracy theory regarding the replacement of political leader by a clone in a non-Western context, see Gagliardone et al. (2023).

<sup>9</sup> Here, ‘friends’ denotes followers and wider audiences.

<sup>10</sup> A digitalized vaccine certificate has been available since 20 December 2021 ([https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/vaccine\\_certificate.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/vaccine_certificate.html)).

<sup>11</sup> According to Ichibei, this number coincides with the number of pyramids on Earth (Yoshida, JOSTAR and Okamoto 2022: 113).

<sup>12</sup> The notation uses characters phonetically matching the term *Yamato Minzoku*, which refers to ‘Japanese’ ethnicity, a highly contested notion that lacks an agreed definition (Okamoto 2011). The use of the term *Yamato* (Japan) can be inferred from the nationalistic sentiment expressed in the organization’s documents. The new Kanji notation 神 refers to ‘God’ and 真 denotes ‘true’ or ‘authentic’, whilst 都 signifies ‘capital’.

the prefectures in Japan (Fujiwara 2022b: 197), and this spun out into multiple regional sub-groups (Amamiya 2022; Fujiwara 2022b: 197; YamatoQ 2022u). The first street demonstration took place in Tokyo in January 2022 (YamatoQ 2022c).

A distinct characteristic of YamatoQ which differentiates it from other clusters of QAnon supporters—both in Japan and in the broader QAnon movement in the USA—is its formation of an institutionalized structure with clearly demarcated leadership. Shortly after its launch, YamatoQ began collecting membership fees and formalized its membership application process. Since March 2022, members have been required to provide their personal information, a photograph, and a copy of an official ID (Amamiya 2022; Kokutaigojijuku 2022).<sup>13</sup> The same month, the number of online supporters surpassed 13,000 (see Fujiwara 2022b: 197), with numbers rising continuously. YamatoQ's own records speak of 3,100 or more registered members (YamatoQ 2023e). As the videos and photos on the organization's webpages indicate, YamatoQ's logo went through several iterations before settling on today's form (see YamatoQ 2022b). The organization has had professionally made banners, membership cards, and even a theme song, and such paraphernalia plays an important role in boosting the collective group identity (YamatoQ 2022d,s, 2023a; see also Miller-Idriss and Graefe-Geusch 2021). YamatoQ continuously runs campaigns, inviting donations in the form of money transfers to the representative director's personal account or via registered postal cash envelopes addressed to the headquarters (YamatoQ 2022i, 2023f). The initial placement of regional chapters in all prefectures achieved the effective consolidation of the ideology, and branch leaders were given the task of maintaining group cohesion. In the context of conspiratoriality, access to micro-celebrities such as Ichibei and the director-cum-social media influencer Murai Daisuke—as well as the regional leaders, to a degree—appeals to the group members and provides an impression of authenticity and fostered intimacy (see Baker 2022; Hiro 2022). As a final step in laying the groundwork for the institutionalization of the group, YamatoQ was established as an *ippan shadan hōjin* ('general incorporated association') in March 2022, joining the ranks of Japanese NPOs and acquiring official legal status. In July 2022, three months after one of the chief members was arrested, YamatoQ moved its head office from Tokyo to Shizuoka prefecture (National Tax Agency 2023a), following internal disputes in the organization.

The steps discussed above describe the successful and surprisingly efficient transition of conspiracy-theory fuelled activism from the online realm into the offline world. This resulted in the establishment of a viable organization that—prior to the legal problems of its leaders—could mobilize a notable number of participants for the purposes of anti-vaccination protests across the country. Ichibei's skills, appeal, and specialized knowledge as a YouTube persona constituted important cultural resources for YamatoQ, allowing the latter to build its support base. Additionally, the adept use of online communication tools, the swift establishment of local chapters, and the subsequent registration as an NPO further testify to the presence of organizational know-how within the group. Practical and materialistic concerns played an important role in Ichibei's decision to embrace conspiracy theory claims, irrespective of his own belief in the ideas and misinformation that he was disseminating. Consequently, as a conspiracy theory entrepreneur, Ichibei was of crucial importance as a mobilizer and leader.

Having said that, whether the primary objectives of YamatoQ were commercial is difficult to state with any certainty. However, YamatoQ's drive to secure income streams from membership fees and donations from sympathizers—that is, the self-production of resources—has been necessary for expanding the organization, which points towards the presence of mercantile interests. The arrest of Daisuke Murai—the Twitter influencer (Teh 2022) and representative director of YamatoQ—in November 2022 on charges of allegedly misappropriating unemployment benefits and syphoning off funds from donations made to YamatoQ to cover his private expenses (Yomiuri Shimbun 2022)

<sup>13</sup> The organization's intention to gather members' residential addresses was evident from its stated criteria for acceptable photo IDs. Specifically, acceptable IDs included driver's licenses, health insurance cards, and the official 'My Number' IDs, but they did not include passports, which do not indicate the holder's residential address (YamatoQ 2022h, April 2022).

further strengthens the argument that, at least for some members of the leadership circle, YamatoQ has been a vehicle for garnering a public image and financial gain.

#### 4. FRAMING THE PANDEMIC AND MITIGATION MEASURES: DOMESTICATING QANON WITH JAPANESE SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL ELEMENTS

As it became consolidated into a group, YamatoQ perfected its original conspiracy theory-informed frame, which had appropriated QAnon claims regarding the Deep State, saving children, and Donald Trump as a saviour. This involved the addition of an assemblage of supernatural beliefs and pre-existing Japanese-style occult narratives, with a Japanese nationalist twist and intertwined with anti-vaccination claims. Overall, the eclectic frame-construct utilized various elements to fulfil diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational functions.

First, a selection of assertions adopted from anti-vaccination and QAnon claims were employed to diagnose the problematic nature of pandemic suppression and immunization efforts and to assign responsibility to specific actors and groups. According to the reasoning presented by YamatoQ, COVID-19 was to be viewed in relation to a broader population reduction plan pursued by political and economic elites. It described the pandemic as the ‘corona scam/fraud’ and a ‘great crime’ perpetrated by a broad alliance of international organizations, global media, large tech companies, and the state(s). The vaccines were said to contain pathogens that harm the human body and described as ‘poisonous’ and ‘toxic’. The negative effects of vaccines produced by large pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer are said to be revealed by whistle-blowers and the mass media accused of not covering the subject. YamatoQ further alleges that the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare does not report the full extent of the deaths in Japan caused by the COVID-19 ‘fraud’ (YamatoQ 2022m). Furthermore, the pandemic fraud is portrayed as fostering division and isolation, severing the connections between people and paving the way for forced inoculation and subsequent population reduction (YamatoQ 2022m). Interestingly, this overview of YamatoQ’s views on COVID-19 was provided by the group in the context of its robust rebuff of the questioning of its own gathering of personal information.<sup>14</sup> Sympathizers were invited to reflect on their own acceptance of personal information gathering—including when receiving the vaccine—by institutions characterized as the Deep State (YamatoQ 2022m,q). In this way, YamatoQ positioned itself in direct opposition to the epistemic authorities and the state, accusing them of manufacturing the public health crisis and ascribing to them ulterior motives aimed at controlling and abusing affected populations. As such, the group demonstrated an anti-establishment stance.

Second, the motivational elements of YamatoQ’s frame comprised two categories: first, the elements of QAnon’s messaging focussing on children, and second, spiritualist claims underlining the ‘special’ qualities and role of the Japanese people. In the case of the former, the need to protect children is the *raison d’être* of the organization and a triggering factor for its activities. The shielding of children from broadly defined malevolent powers features prominently amongst the rationales for YamatoQ’s activism (YamatoQ 2022n). This includes defending children against the harmful effects of vaccines and the broader COVID-19 ‘scam’.

As for the spiritual claims, a section of YamatoQ’s webpage is dedicated to the sacred words of the protective deity, Ryūjin Tennō (Dragon God),<sup>15</sup> which have been shared with YamatoQ by Kō

<sup>14</sup> As noted earlier, YamatoQ asked potential members to provide sensitive personal data when applying to join the group. Furthermore, those interested in participating in YamatoQ’s demonstrations were asked to register their personal details by completing and signing a special form, which included a declaration that the potential participant did not belong to any unsavoury organizations and would conduct themselves appropriately (for a recent version of the form, see <https://www.yamatoq.net/全国同時デモ/デモ参加申請書>).

<sup>15</sup> According to an analysis of reptilian conspiracy theories, YamatoQ adopts Ryūjin Tennō as the authentic deity, and the followers of YamatoQ are *Yamato Minzoku*, who carry the same YAP genes as Ryūjin Tennō (Saito 2023: 71). YamatoQ posits that modern emperors since the Meiji period have been replaced and controlled by the ‘dark’ (Saito 2023: 71). Saito argues that the influence of the West since the Meiji period has been significant in various Japanese conspiracy theories and in occult literature related to reptilians (Saito 2023: 68).

(甲)—a persona portrayed as the ‘World Commander’ heading the ‘WhitehatQ Army’<sup>16</sup> to fight evil and a messenger (YamatoQ 2022q). The sacred words concern the notion of awakening to the truth and from the control of evil, which has brainwashed humanity and ruled all aspects of the Earth (YamatoQ 2022o,q). Earlier YamatoQ webpages posted inconsistent collections of spiritual concepts and ideology in text format, including a series of 22 smartphone screenshots (YamatoQ 2022q). This was indicative of the group’s rapid growth from online social networking services such as Twitter and LINE.

YamatoQ’s spiritual teaching notes that ‘the time has finally come to raise our consciousness to higher paradigms’, which will help them to ‘return to the New Earth’<sup>17</sup> in the ‘Galactic Federation’<sup>18</sup> that supports the project to salvage good spirits and lives’ (YamatoQ 2022q). This resonates with the notion of conspiratorism, where consciousness or awareness of a newly awakened paradigm provides liberation from the control of the existing political and social order (Ward and Voas 2011: 104).

Significantly, when referring to the Japanese people, the focus is on the indigenous ethnicity of ‘Yamato Minzoku’, or the Yamato people, rather than the state, and the YAP gene that is supposedly found in only virtuous ancient people from the Galactic Federation and the Dragon God (*Ryūjin*). YamatoQ argues that Yamato people who carry the special gene must spiritually elevate themselves to a higher paradigm to stand up against evil (Amamiya 2022; YamatoQ 2022q).

In short, to mobilize potential sympathizers, YamatoQ emphasizes the need to protect the young and vulnerable members of society, evoking a moral imperative to act to counter the perceived threat to their wellbeing. At the same time, the underlining of the unique qualities of indigenous Japanese people elevates the status of participants and affords them a place in a larger awakening mission.

Finally, in terms of prognostic framing, the collective activities of the group are presented as defensive measures and as the expression of opposition to objectionable policies and QAnon-defined evils (YamatoQ 2022n,q). Moreover, YamatoQ positions itself as taking action to restore the original character of Japan and Japanese culture, which was allegedly lost as a result of suppression by the Deep State (YamatoQ 2022q). Here, the group underlines the importance of horizontal connections between people and mutual help, understood as integral to the original character of Japan (YamatoQ 2022n,r). As will be discussed in the next section, this demonstration of resistance to the ‘fraudulent’ crisis and to pandemic-mitigation measures such as immunization—through street protest—has been the most important of YamatoQ’s actions. Furthermore, appeals to ‘conscientious’ health care professionals to question the practice of inoculation of children are also considered vital (YamatoQ 2022f).

On a more mundane level, to facilitate the awakening process, a leading member of YamatoQ offers dietary advice, encouraging a plant-based diet and the consumption of less meat (YamatoQ 2022q). Claims that vaccines are ‘poison’ are thus situated in the context of efforts to promote health consciousness and a ‘correct diet’. Disapproval of food additives, pesticides, and other chemicals is prevalent in YamatoQ’s narratives, and the prescribed ‘correct diet’—with its list of preferred food items—is intended to ‘increase [the] immune system’ and contribute ‘to detoxification’ (YamatoQ 2022q). In February 2022, strategies designed to counteract the poisonous vaccines and adverse control of the Deep State were consolidated into a collective migration plan, the ‘Eden Village Project’, which proposed safe haven communes in rural areas of Kumamoto, Yamaguchi, Kyoto, Miyagi, Nagano, Akita,

<sup>16</sup> In QAnon terminology, ‘white hats’ describes supporters of (former US president) Donald Trump, who are ‘fighting against the Deep State and global elites’ (Birchall and Knight 2023: 341). Their opponents are dubbed ‘black hats’ and linked to the Deep State. In general terms, ‘white hats’ are alleged to be a force for good in the world.

<sup>17</sup> According to the publication of the original core members and establishers of YamatoQ, in the spiritual world, the paradigm is now shifting to the Wind Period, and the ‘Ascension Era’ is set to arrive (Yoshida, JOSTAR and Okamoto 2022: 186–188). The ‘New Earth’ here refers to the Earth’s transition into the new five-dimensional world as the New Earth ‘Ars’ (Yoshida, JOSTAR and Okamoto 2022: 187).

<sup>18</sup> Ichibei claims to have learned about the existence of aliens from the Galactic Federation, which shared the knowledge of saving the Earth (Yoshida, JOSTAR and Okamoto 2022: 120–121). He believes that being an online influencer and possessing the YAP gene led to his privileged role and learning about the plan to save the Earth (Yoshida, JOSTAR and Okamoto 2022: 120–121). Much of YamatoQ’s spiritual rhetoric resonates with the New Age spiritual attachment indicated in Granqvist and Hagekull (2001). Robertson and Amarasingam, 2022: 202) also discuss efforts to merge claims relating to the extra-terrestrial ‘Galactic Federation’ with other explanations circulating among QAnon adherents—efforts which testify to the existence of internal contestation within the ranks of QAnon supporters.

and Iwate prefectures ([Asahi Shimbun 2022b](#); [YamatoQ 2022r](#)). The plan incorporated YamatoQ's narratives of spirituality, alternative lifestyles, healing-energy paraphernalia, the romanticization of the ancient Earth, and 'healthy diet', hence strongly echoing the New Age movement ([O'Neil 2001](#); [Calado 2015](#)). Overall, on the prognostic front, YamatoQ endorsed engagement in collective protests by its members and supporters and promoted alternative lifestyles underpinned by shared values said to offer remedial measures against the overreach of the Deep State.

## 5. TACTICAL CHOICES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES: FROM NATIONAL DEMONSTRATIONS TO UNLAWFUL INVASIONS AND ARRESTS

YamatoQ's primary tactical measure has been the organization of demonstrations across Japan. These initiatives commenced on 9 January 2022 ([YamatoQ 2022c](#)) with an event in Tokyo that allegedly attracted more than 1,000 participants ([Fujiwara 2022b](#): 198).<sup>19</sup> Since then, supporters and sympathizers of YamatoQ have engaged in protests in multiple prefectures across Japan under the banner of so-called 'national simultaneous demonstrations', the 21st cycle of which was planned to take place in June 2023 ([YamatoQ 2023k](#)). The abundant video and photo coverage of the demonstrations and assembly suggests that most participants are either middle-aged or elderly, and more than half are women.<sup>20</sup> Here, anxiety about vaccination is enumerated as a factor galvanizing participation rates among the abovementioned age groups (see [Fujiwara 2022b](#): 198–199; [YamatoQ 2022a](#)).

Additionally, in April 2022, a whole new section of the webpage was dedicated to the future development of the abovementioned YamatoQ Villages, providing information on regional activities, seminars, and possible land purchases. It claimed that the project would 'protect against food shortage' and 'secure a living space and community for people who have lost housing and jobs'. This is nestled within YamatoQ's larger mission 'to make a world in which our offspring can live peacefully and happily' ([YamatoQ 2022r](#)).

Projects such as the Eden Village and the protests—at which there are opportunities to meet micro-celebrities, such as Ichibei ([Amamiya 2022](#); [Kokutaigojijuku 2022](#)) and Murai—play an important role in nurturing the organization's conspiratorial appeal and the affective side of its members' experiences. Video diaries and photos on the webpage provide evidence of the lifestyle and spiritual solidarity within the organization. Colourful and elaborate banner-flags and placards depicting YamatoQ's logos with the Dragon God—and messages such as 'Trump 2024', 'We are Q', 'Corona is a hoax!', and 'Vaccines are a murderous weapon!'—are seen amongst the demonstration crowds and in post-demonstration group photos shared by regional chapters across the country ([YamatoQ 2022t](#), [2023a](#)).

Eventually, YamatoQ's protest repertoire began to include entering medical facilities to challenge the vaccination process. For example, Ichibei and four other YamatoQ members were arrested for obstructing vaccination proceedings at three venues in Tokyo in March and April 2022. These venues included large public facilities and a health care clinic located in Shibuya ward that were then conducting vaccinations of children ([Asahi Shimbun 2022a](#)). Additionally, in Shizuoka prefecture, eight members of YamatoQ were arrested for invading vaccination venues multiple times during March and April 2022, attempting to stop vaccination procedures and insisting that 'vaccination is a murderous act' ([Shizuoka Shimbun 2022](#)). YamatoQ decried the Tokyo arrests of its members as 'unjust' ([YamatoQ 2022p](#)).

After the arrests of the leading members in Tokyo, news reports indicated that YamatoQ had amassed several hundred thousand US dollars' worth of donations, presumably used for land purchases ([Asahi Shimbun 2022b](#)). However, in March 2022, YamatoQ's webpage suggested that the money

<sup>19</sup> The presence of the YouTube producer JOSTAR at the demonstration seemed to—at least initially—indicate his support for YamatoQ's activism (<https://note.com/caffelover/n/n1876fe9fcd20>).

<sup>20</sup> Those who held anti-mask campaigns and submitted petitions to eliminate COVID-19-related restrictions at schools to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and a prefectural education board at the beginning of 2023 were women ([YamatoQ 2023a,c,d](#)).

would also be used to build a statue of Donald Trump (YamatoQ 2022i). As many investigative journalists observed (e.g. Amamiya 2022; Fujita 2022), the YamatoQ Eden Villages had strong parallels with the communes of the religious terrorist group Aum Shinrikyo, which became radicalized through isolation and dictatorial centralization by the sect leader (Shimazono 2001; Fujita 2015). Such parallels are strengthened by the fact that the Public Security Bureau (PSB) of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department involved in the investigation of YamatoQ's affairs (Yokota 2022) was also responsible for investigating Aum Shinrikyo in the wake of the Tokyo sarin gas attack in 1995 (Amamiya 2022; Fujita 2022).

In summary, the tactical choices of YamatoQ—including a primary focus on street protests—fall squarely under the heading of outsider tactics. As Wright (2021) explains, the initial phase of the pandemic was handled by social coercion and ethnonationalist appeals by the state to offset the embodied low trust in the government. However, the lack of master narratives and the continuous uncertainties provided a foundation for the emergence of alternative voices and actors.<sup>21</sup> YamatoQ's portrayal of authorities and experts as parts of the Deep State limited the possibility of more collaborative approaches and may have motivated the group's decision to move away from attempting to 'appeal' to medical professionals from afar and towards more direct and disruptive efforts to 'educate' them about the dangers of immunization by challenging their work in vaccination venues. Furthermore, with the local and national authorities prioritizing pandemic-mitigation measures informed by epistemic experts, a lack of allies in established political circles translated into a relative dearth of access openings for societal actors who were espousing aggressively anti-vaccination views steeped in imported conspiracy-theory claims, even if the latter had been predisposed to engage in a dialogue.

Hence, the characteristics of the POS—beyond providing official status as a registered entity and facilitating a general permissiveness towards expression of contentious sentiments through (peaceful) street protests—were not conducive to YamatoQ's activism. Moreover, the shift towards more aggressive tactics constituted a marked escalation in the group's modus operandi and provoked a backlash by the authorities. The involvement of the PSB suggests that YamatoQ's activities were deemed a threat to public security, with the uncomfortable parallels drawn between YamatoQ and Aum Shinrikyo possibly playing a role in that process. However, even when the POS grew more unfavourable, the organization was not banned and did not lose its status as a general incorporated association. This suggests that even when YamatoQ encountered the limits of the Japanese polity's tolerance of certain forms of protest activism, the authorities opted for a targeted approach—rather than outright repression—and brought charges against behaviour that could be construed as criminal.

## 6. YAMATOQ AND THE FAR-RIGHT: RECOVERY FROM CRISIS THROUGH A FRIENDLY TAKEOVER?

The legal woes of YamatoQ continued with the arrest in early November 2022 of the second leading figure—the representative Director Murai—on charges of misappropriating public welfare assistance payments. The police investigation also revealed that Murai had mismanaged donations made by sympathizers to YamatoQ, which he had used to cover his own personal expenses (Yomiuri Shimbun 2022). The court proceedings against the five YamatoQ members arrested in April, including Ichibei, ultimately resulted in admissions of guilt by the defendants, and suspended sentences were handed down for all involved in December 2022 (Fujiwara 2022a).

The legal predicaments of YamatoQ's members and internal strife within the organization—including accusations against Murai of financial irregularities (see YamatoQ 2022e)—negatively affected the group but did not ultimately result in its dissolution. National demonstrations are still being

<sup>21</sup> The Japanese government largely relied on the population's 'self-restraint' to prevent excessive mobilization during the pandemic (Wright 2021). Furthermore, policymakers collaborated with experts to craft policy responses to the pandemic and, as observed by Grivaud (2023), often used epistemic experts as a firewall against criticism and for the purpose of risk communication. However, differences of opinion did emerge, as in July 2020, for instance, in the case of the 'GoTo Travel' campaign initiated by the Suga administration to stimulate the national economy.

held in multiple locations in Japan, albeit with notably fewer participants (YamatoQ 2022t, 2023a). Before the arrest of Director Murai in November 2022, he and the organization had changed their addresses multiple times: after the initial arrests of Tokyo members in April, the Osaka office was established in June, while the head office moved from Tokyo to Shizuoka in July (with two new council members added and one removed), and the director's address changed from Osaka to Shizuoka in September 2022 (National Tax Agency 2023a). In the meantime, it was revealed that, in June 2022, Murai had established a new company called 'Yamato COMPANY Incorporated', which shared the same address as the Osaka office of the NPO (National Tax Agency 2023b), providing further evidence of the significance of monetary and entrepreneurial concerns for YamatoQ's leading figures.

Despite the institutional turmoil, YamatoQ has remained a viable organization, though the absence of the two key figures—Ichibei and Murai—has raised questions about a leadership vacuum and the future directions of its activities. As explained below, efforts to fill this leadership void have been undertaken by individuals operating on the fringes of the Japanese far-right.

A brief post on YamatoQ's website towards the end of 2022 indicated that the organization would henceforth be focussing on two issues: first, anti-vaccine and anti-mask activism, and second, the dissemination of 'true constitution protection theory' (真正護憲論) (YamatoQ 2022l). The latter is a new addition to YamatoQ's aims and seems to represent an incorporation of ideological elements disseminated by two legal practitioners—Kihara Kuniya and Minamide Kikuji—who have, since 2021, been leading figures in a small far-right political party known as *Sokokusaiseidōmei* (Motherland Restoration Alliance). The latter's ideology includes a call for the revival of Imperial Japan's constitution and the abrogation of the GHQ-led post-war Japanese constitution (Kokutaigojijuku 2022; Sokokusaiseidōmei 2022). Both legal practitioners espouse anti-vaccination views, and Kihara was a candidate for the House of Councillors in the summer 2022 election. Both Kihara and Minamide appeared at several YamatoQ demonstrations in the Kansai region, and Kihara was an active speaker during the demonstrations, calling for anti-vaccine and anti-mask stances in the public space (YamatoQ 2022a,j,k,t). Minamide is the legal representative of the arrested Director Murai (YamatoQ 2022g) and handles YamatoQ's legal matters. He is also the head of a far-right organization (Kokutaigojijuku 2022). In a December 2022 announcement on YamatoQ's homepage regarding its new two objectives, Minamide introduced a new counsellor, Shimizu Yusuke (YamatoQ 2022l). Shimizu is known as a radical far-right activist (see *Shinshūmikumikai* 2012). He was also named as an executive representative (YamatoQ 2023g,i), indicating a considerable promotion in a rather short period of time, and assumed to be a strong organizational ally of Minamide (YamatoQ 2022l).<sup>22</sup>

Minamide advocates against vaccination from a contemporary anti-science perspective, defining vaccines as 'environmental and chemical disasters', along with antibiotics, food additives, and psychoactive drugs. Furthermore, Minamide seems to have developed his own conspiratorial discussion regarding how the global pharmaceutical industry and the current Japanese government control wealth and benefit from administering vaccines for population control (JPHMA 2022). In February 2022, Minamide filed a criminal accusation at the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office against the Suga and Kishida administrations and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare for the nationwide campaign of 'murderous vaccines' (JPHMA 2022). The two areas of interest in Minamide's legal career, coinciding with the general ideologies of YamatoQ, are (1) protecting the interests of children and families against the state and (2) anti-vaccination efforts.

The presence of legal professionals at the helm of the group might have led to the expansion of its tactical repertoire to include litigation measures. A threat of legal action against an academic demonstrates the group's readiness to dispute its categorization by opponents as conspiratorial, to reject allegations of extreme behaviour, and to push back against what it defines as 'baseless, arbitrary claims' (YamatoQ 2023g: 2; see also 2023h,i). Such measures—reminiscent of 'cease and desist' letters and

<sup>22</sup> According to YamatoQ's webpage, Shimizu is acquainted with Executive Director Murai and has served as the head of 'the countermeasure council of problems related to child consultation centres' (YamatoQ 2022l). The lawyer Minamide works on cases related to Japan's child consultation centres and claims that these centres kidnap children from their parents (Minamide and Mizuoka 2016). Shimizu has been held in an Osaka detention centre after his arrest on suspicion of fraud (Takada 2023).

SLAPP practices—can be seen as aiming to discourage criticism of the group. Finally, a new round of calls for donations to support litigation attempts against defamatory allegations against the organization began in early 2023 (YamatoQ 2023b).

Overall, while the origins of YamatoQ are to be found in social media and amongst YouTube entrepreneurs, in the wake of their departure and after a period of relative turmoil, prominent positions in the group have been taken by new actors who—while retaining some of the focal points of the organizations’ initial activism (i.e. the protection of children and the anti-vaccination focus)—have tried to modify the organization’s *raison d’être* and begun using the group as a platform to advance their own messages. These recent developments suggest certain parallels between Japan and the USA in terms of efforts by new actors to advertise their ideological messages to QAnon supporters and to persuade the latter to embrace these new messages in times of uncertainty. Analysing the aftermath in the broader QAnon community of the failed ‘January 6 insurrection’, Bloom and Moskalenko (2021: 115–116) observe that some QAnon supporters began to doubt the conspiracy theory claims but were not yet ready to abandon their beliefs. This was perceived as a ‘unique recruitment opportunity’ by other established far-right players to bring those ‘doubters’ into their own fold. In the case of YamatoQ, it seems that the far-right actors are attempting to appropriate the organization by leveraging points of common interest—such as anti-establishment and anti-vaccination stances—whilst, at the same time, navigating the organization to align with a far-right political agenda and attempting to overlay Sokokusaiseidōmei’s political ideology on YamatoQ’s operations. In short, the momentum is being used to execute a ‘friendly takeover’. However, it is unclear whether such efforts to reconstruct the diagnostic, motivational, and prognostic frames—and the accompanying shift in tactical repertoire—will be accepted by YamatoQ members, especially if QAnon-related content were to be abandoned and replaced by more traditional far-right claims. In June 2023, the two lawyers who were espousing far-right ideology, Minamide and Kihara, were dismissed from their YamatoQ-related legal duties (YamatoQ 2023j).

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored the activism of YamatoQ-kai—a Japanese group informed by US-born QAnon ideology—to elucidate the intertwining of conspiracy theories, spiritual claims, and anti-vaccination attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. Methodologically, the manuscript drew on conceptual tools from social movement theory to investigate the potential of these notions to contribute to analyses of conspiracy theory-informed activism. The article showed that access to cultural, human, and material resources—‘capable’ institutional leaders in the form of popular and internet-savvy conspiracy-theory entrepreneurs, as well as financial means via membership fees and substantial donations—played a crucial role in establishing YamatoQ as a viable organization in the offline world and building its support base. Second, the notions of frames (diagnostic, motivational, and prognostic) supported this analysis of how YamatoQ managed to successfully domesticate QAnon’s conspiratorial claims; mobilize support for action in the name of protecting children and by underlining the unique qualities of the Japanese people, endowing them with an elevated role in a larger ‘awakening’ mission; and conceptualize the preferable forms of resistance. Finally, the concepts of outsider tactics and POS explain YamatoQ’s focus on street protests and more direct forms of intervention in the work of vaccination venues and clarify the reaction of the authorities to the group’s radicalization. In summary, the article demonstrates that SMT concepts offer promising prospects for research into conspiracy theories and the actors/activists who engage in their production and dissemination in Japan and beyond.

In addition to providing support for the methodological recommendations of Bertuzzi (2021), the findings of this article contribute to research on the production and circulation of conspiracy theories in contemporary Japan—a theme absent from recent (comparative) studies of conspiracy theories (e.g. Butter and Knight [eds.] 2023). Although Japan is not considered to be strongly affected by either anti-science views or conspiracy beliefs (Dentsu Group 2021; Kirk 2022), the rapid emergence, expansion, and ongoing operations of YamatoQ testify to the potential for the growth of

conspiracy beliefs, precipitated by the social risks and insecurities brought on by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other traumatic socio-political events (cf. Fahey 2022). Although this particular national iteration of the QAnon conspiracy theory did not constitute a challenge to democratic processes in Japan—despite its clear anti-establishment character—its institutionalized form, which allowed for the generation of notable financial resources, and its efforts to bring litigation against those considered a threat may pose a challenge to social actors seeking to investigate and tackle the challenge of conspiracy theory-fuelled activism in Japan.

Furthermore, this article demonstrated that, occupying a conspicuous place among conspiracy-theory communities in Japan, YamatoQ has taken a decidedly anti-vaccination and anti-mask approach, which has strengthened the ranks of Japanese societal actors espousing vaccine-hesitant attitudes. Moreover, anti-vaccination claims can be a significant point of convergence for actors who do not otherwise subscribe to QAnon conspiracy beliefs, thus opening up the prospects for collaboration. Overall, the emergence and ongoing operations of YamatoQ constitute a new sub-chapter in the complex history of vaccination efforts in Japan, with the group's activism contributing to the spread of vaccine-related mis- and disinformation in both the online and offline worlds.

Finally, this article discussed an institutionalized form of a non-Western conspiratorial manifestation. The ideological flexibility of the conspiratoriality that characterizes YamatoQ allows the group to accommodate actors with a variety of interests and a wide range of conspiratorial repertoires, facilitated by its movement from the online into the offline domain. Contrasting with conventional cases of conspiratoriality, where the vast majority of exchanges take place online (cf. Baker 2022), YamatoQ created tangible experiences for followers and provided the affective impact of group solidarity, exploiting the appeal of micro-celebrities in a physical setting and the organization's paraphernalia. Recently, YamatoQ's webpage has intensified its content relating to conspiratorial elements to unite YamatoQ members, reflecting a strengthening of the conspiratorial leadership of the organization (YamatoQ 2024).

Significantly, YamatoQ offers us a rare case of institutionalized conspiracy theorists, which are often a difficult-to-sample population (Bertuzzi 2021: 10). It is evident that YamatoQ has been led and represented by an amalgamation of different interest groups throughout its existence: conspiracy-theory influencers, entrepreneurial individuals, anti-vaccination advocates concerned for the safety of children, right-wing political activists, and the recently revamped leadership that is increasingly leaning towards a conspiratorial narrative. However, given the group's broad anti-science and anti-establishment stance, it remains difficult to access in the field (see Bertuzzi 2021: 10). Consequently, we recognize that the present study suffers from a lack of data on the actors' perspectives, which could only be obtained via fieldwork methods such as participant observations and interviews. Given the human costs incurred by YamatoQ's activities, there is a clear need for further investigation of the consequences suffered by the group's affiliates and their families—including termination of employment, loss of income, and family breakups (e.g. Bunshun 2022; Asahi Shimbun 2023). Capturing the experiential side of the data on such a radicalization process 'to claim [the group's] own space [and] its own power' (Robertson, Asprem and Dyrendal 2018: 3) would require in-depth fieldwork and interviews, which would augment our understanding of conspiracy theorists, their activities, and the aftermath of their activism in Japan.

To offset the limitations and methodological challenges of the current work, we note that one option for a future research opportunity may be to reach out to individuals who have previously been active in anti-vaccination organizations such as YamatoQ. In the context of the subsiding of the global pandemic and consequent reduction of governmental restrictions, we estimate that in-depth fieldwork on former anti-vaccination activists could compensate for the methodological limitations faced in the present study.

## REFERENCES

- Alt, M. (2021) 'Why QAnon Flopped in Japan', *The New York Times*, 26 Mar. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/26/opinion/qanon-japan-janon.html>, accessed 2 Apr. 2023.
- Amamiya, J. (2022) 'YamatoQ towa nanika (What is YamatoQ?)', 20 Jan. <https://note.com/caffelover/n/n97b5ec8fa92b>, accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Amamiya, J. (2023) 'YamatoQ to inbōrondantai to konsupirichuariti (YamatoQ, Conspiracy Theory Organisation, and Conspiratoriality)', in S. Yokoyama et al. (ed.) *Konsupirichuariti Nyūmon: Supirichuaru Na Hito Wa Inbōron*

- o *Shinjiyasuika (Introduction to Conspiratoriality: Do Spiritual People Tend to Believe Conspiracy Theories?* Osaka: Sogensha.
- Asahi Shimbun. (2022a) “‘Hanwakuchin’ YamatoQ daihyō o saitaiho: Kodomomuke sesshukaijō shinnyūyōgi (‘Anti-vaccination’ YamatoQ Representative Gets Re-arrested: Suspected Trespass in a Children’s Vaccination Venue); 2 Jun. <https://digital.asahi.com/articles/ASQ6271VYQ62UTIL00V.html> accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Asahi Shimbun. (2022b) ‘YamatoQ Group Building “Eden” Communities in the Countryside’, 22 Jun. <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14651164>, accessed 4 Apr. 2023.
- Asahi Shimbun. (2023) “‘Wakuchin utsuna’ YamatoQ ni namerikonda chichi: jikengo ni hasshita kotobawa (‘Don’t get vaccinated’ My Father Who Became Obsessed with YamatoQ: The Utterance After the Incident)’, 20 Feb. [https://digital.asahi.com/articles/ASR2K3T10R2BUTPB00M.html?iref=pc\\_ss\\_date\\_article](https://digital.asahi.com/articles/ASR2K3T10R2BUTPB00M.html?iref=pc_ss_date_article), accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Baker, S. A. (2022) ‘Alt Health Influencers: How Wellness Culture and Web Culture have been Weaponised to Promote Conspiracy Theories and Far-Right Extremism During the COVID-19 Pandemic’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25: 3–24.
- Baker, S. A., and Rojek, C. (2020) *Lifestyle Gurus: Constructing Authority and Influence Online*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bertuzzi, N. (2021) ‘Conspiracy Theories and Social Movements Studies: A Research Agenda’, *Sociology Compass*, 15: 1–16.
- Birchall, C., and Knight, P. (2023) ‘A Perfect Storm: Covid-19 Conspiracy Theories in the United States’, in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds) *Covid Conspiracy Theories in Global Perspectives*, pp. 335–350. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bloom, M., and Moskalenko, S. (2021) *Pastels and Paedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bunshun. (2022) ‘Otto ni inbōronshūdan ni ubawareta tsuma no dōkoku: “YamatoQ” o jikokōteikan ga erareru “ibasho” ni shiteshimatta hitobito (Lamentation of Wife Who Lost Her Husband to a Conspiracy Theory Group: The People Who Made “YamatoQ” as a Place of Self-Affirmation)’, 9 May. <https://bunshun.jp/articles/-/54178>, accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Butter, M., and Knight, P. (2020a) ‘Conspiracy Theory in Historical, Cultural and Literary Studies’, in M. Butter and P. Knight (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*, pp. 28–42. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butter, M., and Knight, P. (2020b) ‘General Introduction’, in P. Butter and P. Knight (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*, pp. 1–8. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butter, M., and Knight, P. eds (2023) *COVID Conspiracy Theories in Global Perspective*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Calado, V. H. (2015) ‘Food, New Age and Holistic Health’, *Demetra: Alimentação, Nutrição & Saúde*, 10: 693–704.
- Campion-Vincent, V. (2015) ‘Remarks on Conspiracy Theory Entrepreneurs’, *Diogenes*, 62: 64–70.
- Cassegård, C. (2022) ‘The Recovery of Protest in Japan: From the “Ice Age” to the Post-2011 Movements’, *Social Movement Studies*, 22: 751–766.
- Cinelli, M., Quattrocioni, W., and Galeazzi, A. (2020) ‘The COVID-19 Social Media Infodemic’, *Science Reports*, 10. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-73510-5#citeas>, accessed 25 Aug. 2023.
- Dentsu Group. (2021) ‘Dentsu Institute and Doshisha University Announce 9 Distinctive Trends in Japan Revealed by Analysis of the World Values Survey’, 22 Mar. <https://www.group.dentsu.com/en/news/release/000415.html>, accessed 2 Apr. 2023.
- Digital Agency. (2023) ‘Shingata korona wakuchin no sesshujōkyō (The Situations of COVID-19 Vaccination Rates)’: <https://info.vrs.digital.go.jp/dashboard>, accessed 9 Sep. 2023.
- Dyrendal, A. (2016) ‘Conspiracy Theories and New Religious Movements’, in J. R. Lewis and I. B. Tollefsen (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements Volume II*, pp. 198–209. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Edwards, B., and McCarthy, J. D. (2008) ‘Resources and Social Movement Mobilisation’, in D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, and H. Kriesi (eds) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, pp. 116–152. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Fahey, R. (2021) ‘Nihon ni okeru popyurizumu to inbōron no shinnen (Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories in Japan)’, *Yoron – Journal of the Japanese Association for Public Opinion Research*, 127: 11–21.
- Fahey, R. (2022) ‘Conspiracy Theory Communities on Social Media in Japan’, 1 Dec. [https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/focus/en/events/z0707\\_00003.html](https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/focus/en/events/z0707_00003.html), accessed 2 Apr. 2023.
- Figueiredo, Al de et al. (2020) ‘Mapping Global Trends in Vaccine Confidence and Investigating Barriers to Vaccine Uptake: A Large-scale Retrospective Temporal Modelling Study’, *The Lancet*, 396: 898–908.
- Fujita, S. (2015) “‘Asaharagensetsu no kaidoku” (Deciphering Hasahara’s Discourse)”, in S. Inoue (ed.) *Aum Shinrikyo o kenshō suru: Sono uchi to soto no kyōkaisen (Examining Aum Shinrikyo: The Borderline Between Inside and Outside)*. Tokyo: Shunjusha.
- Fujita, S. (2022) ‘Supirichuaru inbōdantai yamatoQ (The Spiritual Conspiracy Group YamatoQ)’, *The Bukkyo Times Weekly*, 2935: 2.
- Fujiwara, G. (2022a) ‘Anti-vaxxers Given Suspended Sentences for Disrupting Clinics’, *Asahi Shimbun*, 22 Dec. <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14799361>, accessed 4 Apr. 2023.

- Fujiwara, G. (2022b) *Q o ou: inbōron shūdan no shōtai (Following Q: The True Character of Conspiracy Theory Group)*. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Shuppan.
- Gasgliardone, I. et al. (2023) 'Clones and Zombies: Rethinking Conspiracy Theories and the Digital Public Sphere through a (Post)-colonial Perspective'. *Information Communication and Society*.
- Gordon, A., and Reich Michael, R. (2021) 'The Puzzle of Vaccine Hesitancy in Japan', *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, 2: 411–436.
- Granqvist, P., and Berit, H. (2001) 'Seeking Security in the New Age: On Attachment and Emotional Compensation', *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40: 527–545.
- Grivaud, A. (2023 forthcoming) 'Le rôle des experts dans les politiques de lutte contre la COVID-19 au Japon', in C. Premat, J.-M. De Waele, and M. Perottino (eds) *Comparing the Place of Experts during the First Waves of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press.
- Harambam, J., and Aupers, S. (2020) 'Conspiracy Theories', in G. Ritzer and C. Rojek (eds) *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology*.
- Hata, M. (2022) *Inbōron: minshushugi o yurugasu mekanizumu (Conspiracy Theories: The Mechanism That Shakes Democracy)*. Tokyo: Chuokoron.
- Hiro, K. (2022) 'YamatoQ wa shinjanitotte ainiikeru aidoru nanokamoshirenai (YamatoQ May Be the Idol that One Can Meet)', 20 Mar. <https://note.com/mostsouthguitar/n/naff06e63357a>, accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- JPHMA. (2022) 'Messēji "hanwakuchin no waga tōsōshi" Minamide Kikuo (Message: My History of Struggle Against Vaccines—Minamide Kikuo)'. <https://jphma.org/congress/message/341/>, accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Jutel, O. (2023) 'The Horror of Communication', *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 28: 53–71.
- Kawata, K., and Masaki, N. (2021) 'Determinants of COVID-19 Vaccine Preference: A Survey Study in Japan', *SSM Population Health*, 15:1–9.
- Keeley, B. L. (2018) 'Is a Belief in Providence the Same as a Belief in Conspiracy?' In A. Dyrendal et al. (ed.) *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, pp. 70–86. Leiden: BRILL.
- Kirk, I. (2022) 'What Conspiracy Theories Did People Around the World Believe in 2021?' 8 Feb. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2022/02/08/what-conspiracy-theories-did-people-around-world-b>, accessed 2 Apr. 2023.
- Kokutaigojijuku. (2022) 'Sfun de wakarū! Shinsei gokenron (Shinmukōron)'. [https://kokutaigoji.com/reports/ref/ref\\_mukofaq.html](https://kokutaigoji.com/reports/ref/ref_mukofaq.html), accessed 2 Apr. 2023.
- Kolb, F. (2007) *Protest and Opportunities: The Political Outcomes of Social Movements*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag.
- Kriesi, H. (1995) 'The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movement: The Impact on Their Mobilisation', in J. Craig Jenkins and B. Klandermans (eds) *The Politics of Social Protest. Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements*, pp. 167–198. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kuwabara, N., and Ching Michael, S. L. (2014) 'A Review of Factors Affecting Vaccine Preventable Disease in Japan', *Hawai'i Journal of Medicine & Public Health*, 73: 376–381.
- Lindekilde, L. (2014) 'Discourse and Frame Analysis: In-depth Analysis of Qualitative Data in Social Movement Research', in D. D. Porta (ed.) *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, pp. 195–227. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Machida, M. et al. (2021) 'Trends in COVID-19 Vaccination Intent from Pre- to Post-COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution and Their Associations with the 5C Psychological Antecedents of Vaccination by Sex and Age in Japan', *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics*, 17: 3954–3962.
- Marrow, A. (2023) 'Conceptualising Secret Societies and Conspiracy Theories in Imperial Japan: From Countering Socialism to Rescuing Jewish Refugees', in F. Piraino, M. Pasi, and E. Aspren (eds) *Religious Dimensions of Conspiracy Theories: Comparing and Connecting Old and New Trends*, pp. 84–104. London and New York: Routledge.
- Marwick, A. E., and Partin, W. C. (2022) 'Constructing Alternative Facts: Populist Expertise and the QAnon Conspiracy', *New Media & Society*, 0: 1–21.
- Miller-Idriss, C., and Graefe-Geusch, A. (2021) 'Studying the Peripheries: Iconography and Embodiment in Far Right Youth Subcultures', in S. D. Ashe, J. Busher, G. Macklin, and A. Winter (eds) *Researching the Far Right: Theory, Method and Practice*, pp. 323–335. London and New York: Routledge.
- Minamide, K., and Mizuoka, F. (2016) *Jisouriken: 'kodomogyakutai boushi' no nade nasareru jidōsoudanjo no jinkenjūrin to kokumintōsei (Rights of Child Consultation Centers: An Infringement of Human Rights and Control of Citizens Under the Name of 'Protecting Children')*. Tokyo: Hassakusha.
- Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. (2020) 'Intānettojō no Feikunyūsu ya Gijōhōeno Taisaku'. [https://www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_sosiki/joho\\_tsusin/d\\_syohi/ihoyugai\\_05.html](https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_sosiki/joho_tsusin/d_syohi/ihoyugai_05.html), accessed 2 Apr. 2023.
- National Tax Agency. (2023a) 'Hōjin shōmeisho: Ippan shadan hōjin YamatoQ-kai (Certificate of incorporation: General Incorporate Association YamatoQ-kai)', 27 Jan.
- National Tax Agency. (2023b) 'Hōjin shōmeisho: Yamato COMPANY kabushikikaisha (Certificate of incorporation: Yamato COMPANY Incorporated)', 10 Mar.

- NHK News Web. (2023a) 'Korona sesshugo no kenkouhigai uttaerudantai "kyūsai o jinsokuni" (Organisation Which Advocates Post Corona-Vaccination Drug-induced Health Damages Asking for "Swift Support")', 25 Jul. <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20230725/k10014140901000.html>, accessed 24 Aug. 2023.
- NHK News Web. (2023b) 'Korona wakuchin sesshugoni shibou aratani 9nin ni shibou ichijikin nado shikyū e (Additional 9 People Granted Immediate Compensation After Corona Vaccination-related Deaths)', 21 Aug. <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20230821/k10014169751000.html>, accessed 24 Aug. 2023.
- Nomura, S. et al. (2021) 'Reasons for Being Unsure or Unwilling Regarding Intention to Take COVID-19 Vaccine Among Japanese People: A Large Cross-sectional National Survey', *The Lancet Regional Health Western Pacific*, 14: 100215–100223.
- O'Neil, D. J. (2001) 'The New Age Movement and Its Societal Implications', *International Journal of Social Economics*, 28: 456–475.
- Okamoto, I., and JOSTAR. (2021) 'Ichibei Okamoto', in *Sekai kaibutsu DaisakusenQ: Yonaoshi YouTuber JOSTAR ga yami o mukautsu!* (World's Monsters Great Strategies Q: The World Reform YouTuber JOSTAR Meets Dark Enemies!), pp. 224–243. Tokyo: Voice.
- Okamoto, M. (2011) 'Nihonjinnaibu no minzokuishiki to gaibnen no konran (Ethnic Identities Within Japanese Nationals)', *Journal of the Faculty of Integrated Human Studies and Social Sciences, Fukuoka Prefectural University*, 19: 77–98.
- Okuhara, T. et al. (2019) 'Newspaper Coverage Before and After the HPV Vaccination Crisis Began in Japan: A Text Mining Analysis', *BMC Public Health*, 9: 1–15.
- Osaki, T. (2021) 'Talk of "Vaccination Harassment" puts Japan Inc. in a Tough Spot', *The Japan Times*, 12 Jul. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/07/12/national/social-issues/japan-vaccine-harassment/>, accessed 26 Aug. 2023.
- Our World in Data. (2024) 'United States: What Share of the Population Has Completed the Initial Vaccination Protocol? [Chart: Comparison with Japan and UK]'. <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/unused-1/country=USA~GBR~JPN#what-share-of-the-population-has-completed-the-initial-vaccination-protocol>, accessed 18 Jan. 2024.
- Robertson, D. G., and Amarasingam, A. (2022) 'How Conspiracy Theorists Argue: Epistemic Capital in the QAnon Social Media Sphere', *Popular Communication*, 20: 193–207.
- Robertson, D. G., Aspren, E., and Dyrendal, A. (2018) 'Introducing the Field: Conspiracy Theory in, About, and as Religion', in A. Dyrendal et al. (ed.) *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, pp. 1–18. Leiden: BRILL.
- Saito, C. (2023) 'Nihon ni okeru reputirian inbōron juyō to sono yakuwari: ootaryū kara yamatoQmade (The Acceptance of Reptilian Conspiracy Theories in Japan and Their Role: From Ryu Ota to Yamato Q)', *Toshibunkakenkyū*, 25: 66–77.
- Saitoh, A., and Nobuhiko, O. (2012) 'Current Issues with the Immunization Program in Japan: Can We Fill the "Vaccine Gap"?' *Vaccine*, 30: 4752–4756.
- Saunders, C., and Roth, S. (2019) 'NGOs and Social Movement Theory', in T. Davies (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of NGOs and International Relations*, pp. 128–152. London and New York.
- Shimazono, S. (2001) *Postmodern no shinshūkyō: gendaimihon no seishinjōtai no teiryū (Postmodern New Religions: The Undercurrent of Spiritual State in Contemporary Japan)*. Tokyo: Tokyodo.
- Shinshūmikumikai. (2012) '12/23 Hantenren no demo ni kauntā 1 (23 December The Counter Demonstration Against the Association of the Anti-Imperial System Part 1)', *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wW1QGEBeowM>, accessed 30 Aug. 2023.
- Shizuoka Shimibun. (2022) 'Hanwakuchindantai "YamatoQ-kai" menbāka, koronawakuchinkaijō ni shinyūyōgi Yizushonado 8nin taiho (The Anti-vaccination Organisation YamatoQ-kai Members? Yaizu Police Station Among Others Arrest 8 Persons)', 2 Dec. <https://www.at-s.com/news/article/shizuoka/1158329.html>, accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Silverman, A. (2021) 'QAnon Is Alive and Well in Japan', *The Diplomat*, 29 Jan. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/qanon-is-alive-and-well-in-japan/>, accessed 31 Mar. 2023.
- Snow, D. A., Vliegthart, R., and Ketelaars, P. (2019) 'The Framing Perspective on Social Movements: Its Conceptual Roots and Architecture', in D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, H. Kriesi, and H. J. McCammon (eds) *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, pp. 392–410. Wiley Blackwell.
- Sokokusaiseidōmei. (2022) 'Sokokusaiseidōmei (Motherland Restoration Alliance)'. <https://sokokusaisei.jp/>, accessed 2 Apr. 2023.
- Takada, A. (2023) 'Hanwakuchin dantai "YamatoQ-kai" sōdanyaku: sagi de taiho, kōsokuchū (The Anti-vaccination Organisation "YamatoQ-kai" Counselor: Arrested and Being Detained)', *Nissho Shimibun*, 16 Jan. <https://www.nissho.biz/post/0501161354>, accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Takayama, N. (2012) *Nihonjin wa drakoninan 'YAP (-) idenshi' chokkei, dakara [chōsakugen] saserareru (Japanese People are Drakonian YAP (-) Gene's Direct Descent! Thus, They will be the Target of [Hyperelimination])*. Tokyo: Hikarurando.

- Teh, C. (2022) 'Ardent Followers of QAnon are Pouring Into the Streets in Japan. Behind them is Ichibei Okamoto—A Trump-loving YouTuber Pushing Baseless Conspiracy Theories to Thousands', *Insider*, 21 Jul. <https://www.insider.com/meet-one-of-japans-top-qanon-influencers-ichibei-okamoto-2022-6>, accessed 31 Mar. 2023.
- Tsuji, R. (2018) 'The Role of Conspiracy Theory in the Aum Shinrikyo Incident', in A. Dyrendal et al. (ed.) *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, pp. 389–406. Leiden: BRILL.
- Utsumi, S. (2021) *Ishi ga oshieru shingatakorona no shōtai: hontō wa kowakunai koronairūsu to hontōni kowai koronawakuchin (A Medical Doctor Teaching the Identity of Coronavirus: Not Really Scary Coronavirus and Really Scary Corona Vaccines)*. Tokyo: Yusabul.
- Ward, C., and Voas, D. (2011) 'The Emergence of Conspiratoriness', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 26: 103–121.
- Wood, M., and Douglas, K. (2018) 'Are Conspiracy Theories a Surrogate for God?' in A. Dyrendal et al. (ed.) *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, pp. 87–105. Leiden: BRILL.
- World Health Organization. (2020) 'Director-General's Remarks at the Media Briefing on 2019 Novel Coronavirus on 8 February 2020'. <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/director-general-s-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-2019-novel-coronavirus--8-february-2020>, accessed 28 Aug. 2023.
- Wright, J. (2021) 'Overcoming Political Distrust: The Role of "Self-restraint" in Japan's Public Health Response to COVID-19', *Japan Forum*, 33: 453–475.
- Yomiuri Shimbun. (2022) 'Inbōronrufu de sandōshakyūzō, kifu7200man yen atsume ichibu shitekiryūyō—zenkoku de hanwakuchindemo (Rapid Increase of Supporters Due to Conspiracy Theory Dissemination, Collecting Donations Worth of 72 Million Yen, Partially for Private Use—Nation-Wide Anti-vaccination Demonstrations)', *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 4 Dec. <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/national/20221204-OYT1T50044/>, accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Yokota, M. (2022) "'Keisatsu wa hachūrigata uchūjin" hanwakuchindantai YamatoQ shirimetsuretsuna shuchō no kazukazu ("The Police is Reptilians" The Anti-vaccination Organisation YamatoQ's Incoherent Claims)', *The Diamond Online*, 14 Jun. <https://diamond.jp/articles/-/304651>, accessed 5 Apr. 2023.
- Yoshida, K., JOSTAR, and Okamoto, I. (2022) *Gingarengō GOMQ: Uchū no kakusei purojekutoshidō--asenshonjidai o jiyūjizaini asobitsukuse! (The Galactic Federation GOMQ: The Space Awakening Project Commencing—Let's Play Freely in the Ascension Era!)*. Tokyo: Voice.
- Zimmerman, M. (2020) 'QAnon's Rise in Japan Shows Conspiracy Theory's Global Spread', *Blomberg*, 29 Nov. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-29/qanon-s-rise-in-japan-shows-conspiracy-theory-s-global-spread>, accessed 2 Apr. 2023.

### YAMATOQ-KAI WEBSITE SOURCES

- YamatoQ. (2022a) 'Dai jūnikai YamatoQ issei demo ga kaisai saremashita (The 12th National Simultaneous Demonstration Took Place)', 18 Sep. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B/%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B2022918%E5%85%A8%E5%9B%BD%E4%B8%80%E6%96%89%E3%83%87%E3%83%A2>, accessed 31 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022b) 'Fairu okiba (Additional Materials)', 29 Mar. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220329172817/https://yamatoq.info/%e3%83%95%e3%82%a1%e3%82%a4%e3%83%ab%e7%bd%ae%e3%81%8d%e5%a0%b4/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022c) 'Homepage', 2 Feb. <https://web.archive.org/web/2022020101053/https://yamatoq.info/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022d) 'Huri gakkkyoku (Free Theme Song)', 22 May. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220522083640/https://yamatoq.info/%e3%83%95%e3%83%aa%e3%83%bc%e6%a5%bd%e6%9b%b2/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022e) 'Ippan shadan hōjin YamatoQ-kai riji Kyogoku Mitsuharu karano seimei (The Statement from the Council Member of NPO YamatoQ-kai, Kyogoku Mitsuharu)', 19 Aug. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220819115946/https://yamatoq.info/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022f) 'Iryō jūjisha no katagata e (To Medical Practitioners)', 2 Feb. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220202152915/https://yamatoq.info/%E3%83%86%E3%82%B9%E3%83%884/>, accessed 31 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022g) 'Junkōkoku mōshitatesho (Pleading for Quasi-appeal)', 21 Nov. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%83%9B%E3%83%BC%E3%83%A0>, accessed 21 Nov. 2022, file subsequently removed.
- YamatoQ. (2022h) 'Kaiin mōshikomi (Membership Application)', 8 Apr. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220408162646/https://yamatoq.info/%E7%A5%9E%E7%9C%9F%E9%83%BD%EF%BD%91%E4%BC%9A/%E4%BC%9A%E5%93%A1%E7%94%B3%E8%BE%BC/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022i) 'Kifukin uketsuke (Donations Acceptance)', 15 Jun. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220615063501/https://yamatoq.info/%E5%AF%84%E4%BB%98%E9%87%91%E5%8F%97%E4%BB%98/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.

- YamatoQ. (2022j) 'Kihara bengoshi Kobe Motomachi de seigi wo kataru (The Lawyer Kihara Speaks Justice in Kobe Motomachi)'; 4 Aug. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220808175940/https://yamatoq.info/2022/06/10/%E6%9C%A8%E5%8E%9F%E5%BC%81%E8%AD%B7%E5%A3%AB-%E7%A5%9E%E6%88%B8%E5%85%83%E7%94%BA%E3%81%A7%E6%AD%A3%E7%BE%A9%E3%82%92%E8%AA%9E%E3%82%8B/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022k) 'Kihara bengoshi tamashi no sakebi (The Lawyer Kihara's Cry of the Soul)'; 3 Aug. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220803232548/https://yamatoq.info/2022/05/24/%E6%9C%A8%E5%8E%9F%E5%BC%81%E8%AD%B7%E5%A3%AB-%E9%AD%82%E3%81%AE%E5%8F%AB%E3%81%B3%EF%BC%81/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022l) 'Oshirase (News)'; 22 Dec. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B/20221220-%E5%8D%97%E5%87%BA%E5%BC%81%E8%AD%B7%E5%A3%AB%E3%82%88%E3%82%8A/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2022.
- YamatoQ. (2022m) 'Rūru bukku (YamatoQ-kai katsudō ni okeru chūi jikō) (Rule Book: Important Points Regarding YamatoQ's Activities)'; 25 Feb. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220408163640/https://yamatoq.info/%e3%83%ab%e3%83%bc%e3%83%ab%e3%83%96%e3%83%83%e3%82%af/%e3%83%ab%e3%83%bc%e3%83%ab%e3%83%96%e3%83%83%e3%82%af%ef%bc%88%e7%a5%9e%e7%9c%9f%e9%83%bd%ef%bd%91%e4%bc%9a%e6%b4%bb%e5%8b%95%e3%81%ab%e3%81%8a%e3%81%91%e3%82%8b%e6%b3%a8%e6%84%8f%e4%ba%8b%e9%a0%85/>, accessed 29 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022n) 'Rūru bukku (YamatoQ-kai kessei sengen) (The Rule Book: 'YamatoQ' Founding Declaration)', (via Internet Archive Wayback Machine). <https://web.archive.org/web/20220408163349/https://yamatoq.info/%E3%83%AB%E3%83%BC%E3%83%AB%E3%83%96%E3%83%83%E3%82%AF/%E3%83%AB%E3%83%BC%E3%83%AB%E3%83%96%E3%83%83%E3%82%AF%EF%BC%88%E7%A5%9E%E7%9C%9F%E9%83%BD%EF%BD%91%E4%BC%9A%E7%B5%90%E6%88%90%E5%AE%A3%E8%A8%80%EF%BC%89/> accessed 29 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022o) 'Ryūjin tennōsama (Dragon God)'; 29 Mar. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220329164918/https://yamatoq.info/%e9%be%8d%e7%a5%9e%e5%a4%a9%e7%8e%8b%e6%a7%98/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022p) '(Shomei) Shigatsu nanoka ni okeru futō taiho ni kōgi shimasu (Signature)'; We protest against unjust arrests that occurred on 7 April, 7 Apr. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220408161736/https://yamatoq.info/2022%E5%B9%B404%E6%9C%8807%E6%97%A5%E3%81%AB%E3%81%8A%E3%81%91%E3%82%8B%E4%B8%8D%E5%BD%93%E9%80%AE%E6%8D%95%E3%81%B8%E3%81%AE%E5%8F%8D%E5%AF%BE%E7%BD%B2%E5%90%8D/>, accessed 31 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022q) 'YamatoQ'; 4 Feb. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220204153830/https://yamatoq.info/%E3%83%86%E3%82%B9%E3%83%882/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022r) 'YamatoQ mura (YamatoQ Village)'; 29 Apr. [https://village.yamatoq.info/](https://web.archive.org/web/20220429021702/https://village.yamatoq.info/), accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022s) 'Zenkoku dōji demo (National Simultaneous Demonstrations)'; 2 Apr. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220402104718/https://yamatoq.info/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022t) 'Zenkoku issei demo no yōsu (The Circumstance of National Simultaneous Demonstration)'; 7 Aug. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B/87%E5%85%A8%E5%9B%BD%E4%B8%80%E6%96%89%E3%83%87%E3%83%A2%E3%81%AE%E6%A7%98%E5%AD%90/>, accessed 31 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2022u) 'Zenkoku LINE ōpun chatto (The Nation-wide LINE Open Chatrooms)'; 4 Feb. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220204153707/https://yamatoq.info/%E3%83%86%E3%82%B9%E3%83%883/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2023a) 'Dai ikkai YamatoQ zenkoku kesshū demo in Kyoto (The First YamatoQ National Rally in Kyoto)'; 18 Mar. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E5%85%A8%E5%9B%BD%E5%90%8C%E6%99%82%E3%83%87%E3%83%A2/%E7%AC%AC1%E5%9B%9E%E5%85%A8%E5%9B%BD%E7%B5%90%E9%9B%86%E3%83%87%E3%83%A2%E3%81%AE%E6%A7%98%E5%AD%90/>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2023b) 'Dai nidan no hangeki ni tsuite (Regarding the Second Stage of Counterattack)'; 16 Mar. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%83%9B%E3%83%BC%E3%83%A0/>, accessed 17 Mar. 2023, file subsequently removed.
- YamatoQ. (2023c) '2/13 Hyogo Third Ai-tai ga kenkyōikuiinkai e gyōseikōshō o okonaimashita (Hyogo Third Ai-branch Conducted Administrative Negotiations with the Prefectural Education Board)'. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B/%E9%81%8E%E5%8E%BB%E3%81%AE%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B/20230217-%E5%85%B5%E5%BA%ABthird%E6%84%9B%E9%9A%8A%E7%9C%8C%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E5%A7%94%E5%93%A1%E4%BC%9A%E3%81%B8%E8%A1%8C%E6%94%BF%E4%BA%A4%E6%B8%89/>, accessed 26 Aug. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2023d) '2/17 Monbukagakushō ni tangansho o todokemashita (We Submitted a Petition to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science)'; 18 Feb. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B/%E9%81%8E%E5%8E%BB%E3%81%AE%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89/>

- E3%81%9B/20230218-%E6%96%87%E9%83%A8%E7%A7%91%E5%AD%A6%E7%9C%81%E3%81%B8%E5%98%86%E9%A1%98%E6%9B%B8%E3%82%92%E5%B1%8A%E3%81%91%E3%81%BE%E3%81%97%E3%81%9F, accessed 26 Aug. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2023e) 'Kaiin kōshin tetsuzuki (Membership Renewal Procedure)', non-dated. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E7%A5%9E%E7%9C%9F%E9%83%BD%E4%BC%9A%E3%81%AB%E3%81%A4%E3%81%84%E3%81%A6/%E4%BC%9A%E5%93%A1%E6%9B%B4%E6%96%B0%E6%89%8B%E7%B6%9A%E3%81%8D>, accessed 31 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2023f) 'Kifukin uketsuke (Request for Donation)', 30 Mar. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E7%A5%9E%E7%9C%9F%E9%83%BD%E4%BC%9A%E3%81%AB%E3%81%A4%E3%81%84%E3%81%A6/%E5%AF%84%E4%BB%98%E9%87%91%E5%8F%97%E4%BB%98>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2023g) 'Kōkai shitsumonjo ken tsūkokucho (Open Letter and Notice)', 19 Jan. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%83%9B%E3%83%BC%E3%83%A0>, accessed 24 Jan. 2023, file subsequently removed.
- YamatoQ. (2023h) 'Kokusojō (A Written Complaint)', 24 Feb. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y3oOQaYOkVp\\_cOWasPJa6vo7DeZKE0r/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y3oOQaYOkVp_cOWasPJa6vo7DeZKE0r/view), accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2023i) 'Saishūsūkokucho (The Last Notice)', 27 Jan. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B/2003127%E6%9C%80%E7%B5%82%E9%80%9A%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8>, accessed 30 Mar. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2023j) 'YamatoQ kaiin no minasama e, Oshirase (Announcement to YamatoQ Members, News)', 1 Aug. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%81%8A%E7%9F%A5%E3%82%89%E3%81%9B/%E4%BC%9A%E5%93%A1%E3%81%AE%E7%9A%86%E6%A7%98%E3%81%B8>, accessed 17 Jan. 2024.
- YamatoQ. (2023k) 'YamatoQ zenkoku dōji demo (YamatoQ National Simultaneous Demonstrations)', non-dated, <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%83%9B%E3%83%BC%E3%83%A0>, accessed 2 Apr. 2023.
- YamatoQ. (2024) 'Home', YamatoQ Webpage. <https://www.yamatoq.net/%E3%83%9B%E3%83%BC%E3%83%A0>, accessed 17 Jan. 2024.