

The Pacifism of the Constitution of Japan

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The principle of Pacifism is one of three major principles of the Constitution of Japan, along with popular sovereignty and respecting human rights.

The Constitution of Japan, which was enacted after World War II, stands on the principles of constitutionalism and “respect for the individuals.” These are the wisdom of mankind, gained through blood and tears, and like many constitutions, our Constitution inherits these assets that mankind has created.

However, the Constitution of Japan has its own uniqueness that differs from modern Western constitutions. It guarantees the “right to live in peace” and adopts the positive non-violent pacifist principles (Preamble, Article 9) ※. A state naturally should bear the role to protect the lives and property of its citizens, but the Constitution has decided to protect the people not through the use of brute force, but through non-violent means on the basis of rational considerations, including diplomacy and non-military international contributions. It is impossible to protect the lives and property of the people by military force as a practical matter. Furthermore, military intervention, if done for “humanitarian” or “liberal” purposes, would only lead to hatred and violence, and would never be a true contribution.

The Constitution of Japan further developed the principle of “respect for the individuals,” which is shared by Western constitutions, and guaranteed the “right to live in peace,” because respect for each person as an individual requires that each person’s life be cherishingly protected and that he or she be able to live in peace and free from fear and want. It is worth proclaiming this as a right. Fundamentally, the Constitution takes the assumption that war is the greatest violation of human rights and the most destructive to the global environment, and therefore cannot be allowed to happen.

(Translated by Hotaka Mochizuki)

※Positive

The second paragraph of the Preamble suggests that Pacifism has not only been imposed by the Potsdam Declaration of 1945 (which stated that “The Japanese military forces … being completely disarmed”), but it has also been positively chosen “to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world.”