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Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine

JOHN NELSON

"Memory believes before knowing remembers."
William Faulkner (*Light in August*, 1968, 111)

For architects of citizenship and nationhood, there is no shortage of conflicts and wars from which to build modern myths about submerging individual suffering and loss to greater causes. The grief, anger, and despair of individuals can be integrated over time into collectively shared assumptions about the indebtedness of the living to their heroic compatriots and ancestors. To remember these conflicts and those who (depending on the political context) either "lost" or "gave" their lives has been throughout recent history a vital act of citizenship, both "affirming the community at large and asserting its moral character" (Winter 1995, 85). Certainly from an American perspective, national identity remains "inexorably intertwined with the commemoration and memory of past wars" (Piehler 1995, 3). This observation applies even more intensely elsewhere in the world (e.g., Russia, China, France, Japan) where the loss of combatant and civilian life has been far greater.[1]

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[1]An anonymous reader of this article notes that France is "overrun" with sites of memory and museums offering new ways of memorializing its twentieth-century wars: "With the gross

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Victory in a war makes one's personal loss resonate more easily with master narratives concerning patriotism, righteousness, and the value of sacrifice to the nation. What happens, however, to deeply instilled cultural epistemologies when the nation's noble cause—perhaps having claimed the life of one's own father, brother, or relative—goes down in defeat? Goals and policies that were once thought to be guided by destiny are revealed to be little more than resource-grabbing colonization wrought by rapacious military force and terror. Does this now mean the participants' suffering and death was for nothing or, according to postwar international tribunals, for a criminal cause? How are they, as well as the leaders, policies, laws, and cultural values responsible for their deaths and accompanying misery, to be remembered and reconciled?

Enter social memory upon the floodlit stage of commemorative politics. This article attempts to bring together a variety of perspectives on social memory and forgetting, not as theoretical codes to interpret but as yardsticks for measuring highly emotional and contentious arenas associated with the loss of life in a military defeat. Contemporary Japan provides a particularly significant area of study, in which the agency of departed spirits, coupled with the coercive and psychological pull of mortuary traditions, helps the state continue to justify religious veneration for the military dead. I hope to show how these commemorative rituals help to redeem both the nation and individuals from accusatory judgments associated with Japan's actions in World War II, how they bolster a sense of pride in being Japanese, and how they resist domestic and international pressures for apology and restitution.

During the summer of 1995, international attention focused on the causes and effects of the cataclysm of World War II, in which the death toll alone is estimated to be over twenty million combatants and twenty-five million civilians (Snyder 1993). Projects of remembrance fifty years later seemed almost as numerous. Sponsoring agencies, municipalities, and political patrons of every sort selected and emphasized historical events and themes from this fifty-year-old story in order to convey to popular audiences (most of whom, like those in the sponsoring agencies, had no direct experience of the war) what they considered most significant and enduring. In assessing these projects, it is easy to let our critiques about "invented traditions" or ideologies of memory obscure the personal as we assess the political and institutional. Yet, regardless of the manipulative politics involved, we must account for and acknowledge the struggle of individuals and the considerable agency that they exert, as they grope for ways to keep the memory of loved ones secure against the threats of pain, forgetfulness, or, worse, condemnation.

Processes involved in the construction of social memories serve to create a kind of "mapping" (Connerton 1989, 37) especially relevant for navigating sociopolitical terrains contorted by pain, suffering, and loss. When individuals and organizations align themselves within a particular rendition of the past, they gain a positive sense of ownership and control. Routes of memory that were previously considered off-

incompetence that caused untold loss of life in WWI, the question of collaboration with the Nazis in WWII, torture and murder in Algeria, [and] the loss in Vietnam, France's wars are hardly less problematic for that nation than the Second World War was for Japan." It would be difficult to assess comparatively just how and in what areas a war is more "problematic" for one country than others, yet Japan's war commemorations are burdened heavily by its defeat and unconditional surrender, the international condemnation of Japan's military actions, reparations paid to many nations, and, of course, the widespread destruction and death (caused by both conventional and nuclear weapons) in its major cities.

limits, because of the pain associated with the death of loved ones in a losing war, now gain resolution and become viable landscapes of meaning.[2]

Some of the most critical ways that shape the meaning of individual memories are those institutional, organizational, and political entities and processes imbued with (and often afforded an excess of) religious legitimacy. Although religious orientations may, of course, be explicitly doctrinal, more recent studies have shown how they may also be diffuse networks of power relations that act on and often bypass individual consciousness and are promoted through everyday sociocultural practices (Bell 1992; Fernandez 1986).

Throughout the anthropological and historical record, we find an abundance of social groups in which the positioning of identity and morality within a religiously oriented universe is conditioned by a mediated relationship with guardian and/or ancestral spirits. Whether these are Christian saints or the founder of a lineage, exalted Buddhas or irascible Shinto deities (known as *kami*), whether these spirits are benignly ancestral or (if unpropitiated) vengeful and possibly demonic, it is rare indeed to find societies that do not at some level and in some way promote a "nostalgic aura of sanctuary" (Friedman 1992, 847) *if* these spirits can be properly managed and controlled. The interventionist and reactionary agency afforded these spirits empowers them both to sanctify and to legitimate present-day social and political orderings or to challenge and, in some cases, to disrupt them. At an abstract level, the spirits of the founding fathers and mothers of the nation are ever present as guides and coercive examples for present-day correct policy and behavior. In specific cases, however, such as we find in contemporary Japan, these spirits are more intimate and personal. The way that they are referenced through social memory and commemorative rituals interacts not only with traditional religious values but also, as we shall see, with the nation's highest political leaders and their networks of alliance and power.

The Politics and History of Commemorating the War Dead

Since the end of World War II, diverse interpretations over how to represent, acknowledge, and atone for Japan's aggressive exploits throughout Asia and the Pacific have occasioned as much controversy and conflict as they have closure. Nowhere is this more evident than among groups and individuals promoting emperor veneration, recognition of the "rising sun" flag, nationalistic attempts to revise the history

[2]Borrowing from Kenelm Burridge (1969), Catherine Bell suggests that a kind of personal redemption is at work in these politically charged, personally empowering movements to reclaim the past (1992, 84). Bell takes pains to point out that this may not be an explicit ideology or doctrine to which individuals or institutions adhere. Rather, it is a strategic and practical orientation for acting, involving both accommodation and resistance to externally imposed conditions and accepted cultural meanings (see also Roseman 1996, 837). Through commemorations, rituals, or daily practices imbued with the aura of new meanings, this stance encourages certain actions to be seen as efficacious within that ordering (Bell 1992, 84). For example, Burridge asserts that people's understanding of the place, purpose, and implications of commemorating the military dead empowers them to "discharge their obligations in relation to the moral imperatives of the community" to which they now ascribe (quoted in Bell 1992, 84). Although a more fully developed ideology may be "subtle and delayed," it is also "ultimately vindicating in that it provides a type of closure of effort and result, attempt and reward, belief and fulfillment" (Bell, personal communication, October 1996).

curriculum for middle-school students, and, more recently, the deployment of Japan's Ground Self-Defense forces overseas. All continue to rally for inspiration as well as legitimization around one of Japanese society's most formidable and intimidating institutions: Yasukuni Shinto Shrine.

In many ways, Yasukuni is like other Shinto shrines in Japan, which honor their principal deities with seasonal festivals and entertainments and offer a multitude of rituals that are thought to benefit both individual and community. What puts Yasukuni in a class all its own is its claim on the souls of Japan's 2.46 million war dead. Here, the souls of the dead are not only enshrined and propitiated but also valorized and fetishized. Although the shrine continues to make national and international news each time high-ranking government officials come to pay their respects, there has been little analysis regarding the audiences to whom these visits play, the general context of Yasukuni Shrine within Japanese political and social life, or the cult of the war dead that the shrine promotes through its rituals, numerous publications, affiliated groups, and, last but not least, the leading war memorabilia museum in all Japan (see Eto and Kobori 1986; Kristof 1995; Iwai 1988).

How did the Yasukuni situation develop? One might assume that state support of Shinto ended with Japan's defeat, codified by various directives prohibiting further cooperation.[3] In assessing Yasukuni Shrine and its affiliated groups, we must, of course, understand their political agendas and the ways that the military dead are thought essential to preserving the nation. But if we broaden the social and historical context and deepen our awareness of underlying cultural codes regarding death, we will be able to appreciate the influence of these factors regarding Japan's inability to come to terms with its aggression during and responsibility for the Pacific War, as well as the ways in which the war is both remembered and obscured from memory.

Yasukuni Shrine originated in 1862 during a time of civil conflict between a slowly deteriorating shogunate and an insurrection led by forces from western Japan. The leaders of the rebellious forces (who, by 1862, controlled the imperial city of Kyoto) asked the reigning emperor of that time, Kōmei, to sponsor a ritual for those soldiers who had died fighting against the Tokugawa shogunate. The first "modern," custom-made ritual for the military dead (*irei-no-saigi*) was conducted by both Buddhist and Shinto priests at Kyoto Higashiyama *ryōzan* (spirit mountain) in December 1862 (Takaishi 1990, 10).

After solidifying power during the next four years, the fledgling nation's new leaders ordered in 1867 a "hall for inviting spirits" (*shōkon-jo*) to be built in every region under their control.[4] This was in addition to the yearly memorial services held

[3]A Supreme Court decision rendered on 2 April 1997 finally called into question the use of tax revenue for ritual offerings (*tamagushi*) made by politicians at regional nation-protecting shrines (*gokoku jinja*). The case involved offerings presented on behalf of the governor and administration of Ehime Prefecture. Although the amount at issue was small (¥166,000, or U.S.$1,400), a coalition of private citizens sued the governor and prefecture, with appeals reaching the Japanese Supreme Court. In a landmark decision, one remedying nearly thirty years of oftentimes tortured logic that justified shrines as "nonreligious" and thus able to receive these offerings (see O'Brien 1996), the Supreme Court ruled thirteen to two that the practice was illegal, prohibited by the postwar constitution. For the first time, although by implication rather than direct involvement, Yasukuni Shrine stood revealed as a religious institution that had received special favors and attention from the Japanese government (see Nelson 1999).

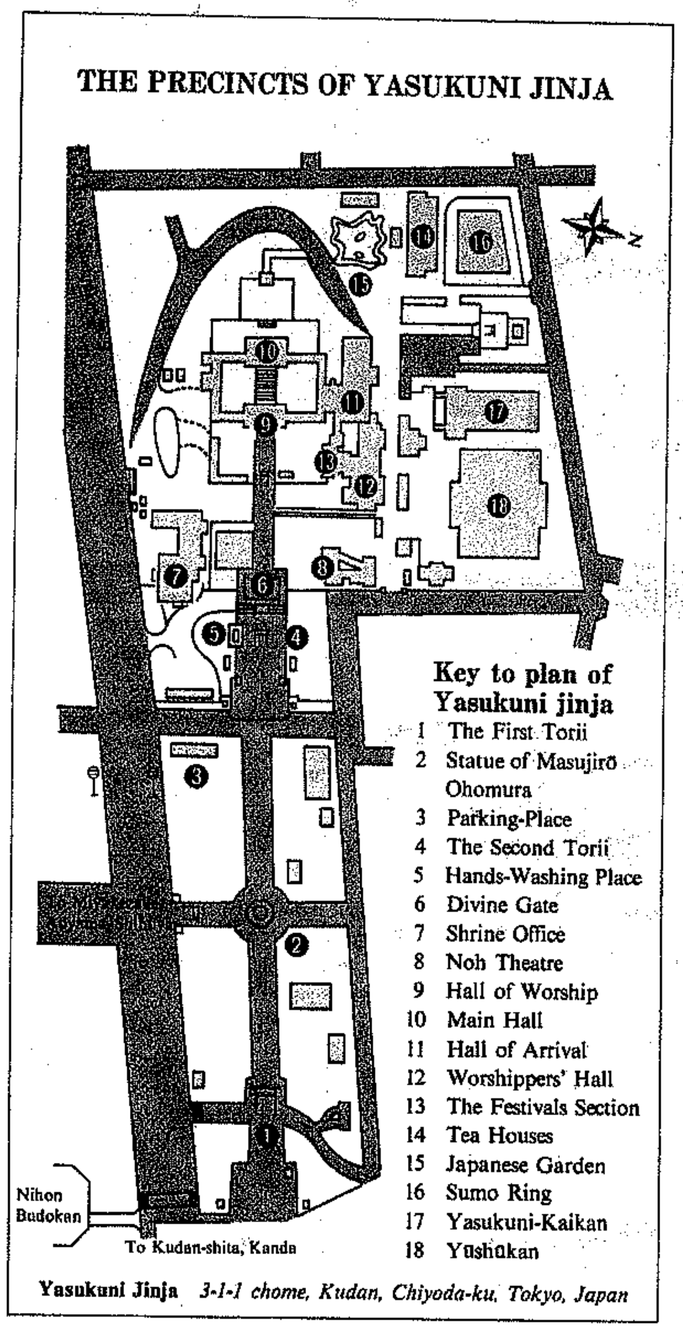
[4]For readers unfamiliar with the Shinto ritual process, deities are always "invited" to participate in rituals held in their honor. Although it is common to assume particular deities reside at shrines, priests consistently inform me of the difficulty and danger involved in managing a prolonged presence; thus, the deities are called on to participate and then invited to depart at the end of the proceedings (see Nelson 1996, 2000). To my knowledge, Yasukuni Shrine is exceptional in that the spirits are thought to be continually housed at the shrine. From a priestly perspective, this creates a rather volatile spiritual dynamic that requires constant vigilance and ritual propitiation (see the shrine's website at http://www.yasukuni.or.jp).

[5]See James Ketelaar's discussion about the official pronouncement made by the new Meiji government: "In restoring Imperial rule, which began with the emperor Jimmu's founding of the nation, all things have been renewed. The Ministry of Rites will once again be established, and we will thereby return to the practice of the unification of rite and rule" (1990, 92).

at Buddhist temples in honor of soldiers who had died since 1853, the year the rebellion first took flight. Buddhism, however, was in eclipse among the new elite: throughout the roughly 250 years of the Tokugawa period, Buddhist priests and temples had served as extensions of the shogunate's administrative and coercive powers, and it was deemed inappropriate for a rapidly modernizing state. For a brief and volatile period (1854–60), some temples were ransacked, priceless statues and icons were vandalized or destroyed, and priests were stripped of their duties and titles in communities that their predecessors had served for centuries (see Ketelaar 1990).

Shrines dedicated to kami veneration suffered no such fate. Because a radical break with the immediate Tokugawa past motivated much revolutionary policy, the new Meiji government announced in 1868 that it would follow the ancient principle of *saisei-itchi*, or "a unity of governmental and ritual affairs."[5] After all, the Meiji leaders argued, were not *all* of the colonizing policies of the imperial powers (Britain, France, Holland, the United States, Russia) driven by the powerful spiritual engine of Christianity? If Japan were to compete and stave off encroachments on its territorial sovereignty, it could only adopt the rules of a game already in play. As a result, the imperial court was overhauled, the Meiji emperor elevated to the status of a living kami, and a revamped "Shinto" was made an important institutional vehicle through which villages (each having one or more shrines) could be linked to state agendas—in much the same way that the previous regime had done with local temples.

Chief among advocates for this revitalization of ritual affairs syncretizing politics and religion was Ōmura Masujirō, leader of the acclaimed Chōshū infantry, which suffered heavy losses during the civil wars (Takaishi 1990, 13). As a way of honoring and appeasing the spirits of his soldiers who had helped create the new nation, the memorials he had observed at Buddhist temples were now to be centralized at an equally new Shinto shrine in Tokyo. Just north of what would become the imperial palace grounds, this location for the Tokyo Shōkonsha (literally, "that place to which the divine spirits [of those who have made the great sacrifice] are invited") in 1869 was favored by Ōmura for many reasons. First, the area known as Kudan Hill won out over the location at Ueno favored by Kido Kōin because the latter site had seen several bloody skirmishes, rendering it a *bokon no chi*, or "place with lingering, unhappy spirits." The Kudan area was the perfect space to start an institution that would symbolize the future for a new "spirit of the land" (*chirei*) (Tsubouchi 1999, 42). Second, not only was Kudan Hill one of the higher elevations in the city, it also marked a division between two distinct cultures associated with the feudal era: the *shitamachi*, or "lower city," where commoners lived in cramped conditions and the *yamanote* region of upper-class officials and samurai. Constructing the shrine in this area would help promote the new government's nation-building agendas by blurring status distinctions among residents via communal activities at the shrine (Tsubouchi 1999, 49–50). Although Ōmura was assassinated shortly after the shrine's initial construction, he is revered as the founder of Japan's Imperial Army. His huge bronze statue towers atop a pedestal at the shrine's northern entrance (see no. 2 on the map).



Map. Yasukuni Shrine (*Yasukuni Jinja shamusho* n.d.).

By 1890 (and before any of Japan's wars of colonization), the shrine had become one of Tokyo's premier public plazas and meeting spots. Its distinctive "lighthouse" lantern (*tōmyōdai*), its giant *torii* gateways, and its expansive grounds became known to the general populace through periodic festivals, sumo matches, noh performances, and exhibitions of every kind—all within precincts made sacred by the spirits of the military dead. Early in the shrine's development in 1872, a French circus entertained rather small crowds on its grounds. The shrine's sponsorship of periodic horse races also began in this year, with the later Taishō emperor (r. 1912–26) recalling fondly how he used to attend these competitions as a child (Tsubouchi 1999, 68–70). Shrine administrators booked an Italian circus in 1890 so as to further capitalize on record crowds already attending the shrine's annual festival (*reitai-sai*).

This brief history of the development of the shrine should indicate that it clearly had a notable presence among the general public well before it came to be so instrumental to the state. Also during the early years of the Meiji government, a decision to institutionalize state-sponsored spirit enshrinement at this particular location helped create what can only be called a new religion. Drawing upon long-standing traditions that linked state policies to religious practices and leaders, and privileging selected symbols, myths, and institutional trappings of a broadly and newly defined "Shinto" tradition, emphasis was shifted in fundamental, strategic, and even radical ways.

The first innovation was to associate spirits of the dead with a tradition known for trying to avoid the contamination of death. Shinto ritual practices considered the impurity of death and the danger associated with unstable spirits of the dead as a prime source of defilement (*kegare*) for human beings and their communities. Priests and rituals emphasized instead the life-bestowing, generative, and beneficent vitality of kami, which were usually highly local and clan-specific deities or numinous entities thought to ensure (if treated properly) good harvests, healthy children, successful livelihoods, and victorious military campaigns (see Brown 1993, 10–12; Nelson 1996). For centuries, kami had been positioned alongside Buddhist bodhisattvas and other deities which took care of those immediately dangerous sides of life such as sickness and the fate of one's soul at death. Together these interactive traditions provided complementary and pragmatic resources of great utility to generations of Japanese leaders and commoners.

One of Japan's leading researchers on death, the late Gorai Shigeru, asserted that every death creates an unquiet spirit that must be sublimated, controlled, and made into a benign and, in a best-case scenario, a benevolent spirit (kami, or in the Buddhist vocabulary, *hotoke*) as soon as possible (1994, 105).[6] The death of soldiers creates special problems within this cultural tradition. Military casualties caused by war's untimely and violent circumstances take the lives of vibrant young men or women in their prime. In this context, a heightened threat emerges: that of "unquiet spirits" (*onryō*)

[6]I would like to make a cross-cultural comparison here regarding views of the dead in traditional Chinese and Japanese societies. Influenced by Confucian, Daoist, and "folk" traditions, many Chinese see the dead as spirits that can return to the world at certain times of the year or if proper rituals are not performed. The Japanese, on the other hand, labor to convert unstable spirits into buddhas or kami, yet like the Chinese, they hold that the dead can return to this world (as at midsummer Bon and on death anniversaries) and assume agency to affect the living. As Kaji Nobuyuki notes, "[w]hile it should not be possible for the spirit of someone who has gone on to nirvana to come back in response to a summons, the Japanese complacently believe it happens" (1996, 75). Without this kind of agency on the part of the departed spirits, the Yasukuni issue could possibly lose some of its salient emotional pull.

which transcend the bonds of loyalty or kin. These spirits—confused, lost, and neglected—are thought to seek retribution from the nation (once they find their way back to Japan) instead of those now distant enemy soldiers actually responsible for their deaths. Although ancestral veneration was by and large exclusivistic—worshipping the souls of individuals through kin, occupational, or territorial affiliations (Smith 1974)—one might argue that some acknowledgment was required in exceptional situations to propitiate and quiet *all* of the spirits of the dead, friend and foe alike, before focusing more intently on those closer to home. One perspective might consider this a deeply Buddhist, humanistic sympathy about the death of a human being, but it can also be seen as a pragmatic design which attempts to alleviate a fear of spirit reprisal (Murakami 1974, 53).

The second innovation of Meiji-period spirit veneration reconfigured this same tradition. For the first time, only "our" spirits, and only "heroic" ones at that, would be honored and invited to the shōkon-jo. Those of the enemy were simply ignored by the military leaders who, instead of priests, served in the rituals as celebrants (*hyōbu-shō*). In addition, rather than a clan or family leader sponsoring the service, the agent initiating the ritual was now the nation-state. The country as a whole was embodied in the emperor who served both as patron behind and benefactor of the self-sacrifice of the "heroes" (Ōe 1992, 53). When the general public came to pay tribute to these spirits and acknowledge their noble deeds, the common person would be led directly to the nation (Murakami 1974, 111; Antoni 1988).[7] Thus, the shōkon-jo can be thought of as a kind of crucible wherein unstable spiritual entities with negative potential could be purified, soothed, and transformed into kami that are both benevolent and fundamental to the nation.

When the inner sanctuary of the Tokyo Shōkonsha was constructed and periodic rituals for the spirits of the dead began to be performed regularly, the shrine came under the control of the army and navy ministries in 1872 (the same year that the French circus performed). By the end of the Second World War, the shōkonsha was controlled by the Internal Affairs Ministry (Naimusho), and its priests held rank equivalent to a colonel within the armed forces. Two years later in 1874, the Meiji emperor attended the shrine for a major ritual, another significant departure from established custom. For possibly the first time in Japanese history, an emperor paid respects to the spirits of commoners who were said to have died for his and the nation's sake. The young emperor, however, only twenty-two at this time, also benefited from and gained legitimacy through this act of acknowledgement.[8] Japanese politicians and patriots have been following his lead ever since.

With the new government centralizing its administrative powers in Tokyo, it announced in 1875 that all spirits of the military dead, until then cared for at the

[7]Rather than using terms that evoke the military nature of the conflict in which these individuals died, the word frequently used was *kokujijunansha*, translated roughly as "national martyrs" (see Murakami 1974, i). During my tour of the shrine's museum, the young priest guiding me said that "the sacrifice of individuals established the nation." Klaus Antoni argues that, based upon folk traditions regarding vengeful spirits, the country must be protected *from* these spirits rather than *by* them (1988, 133), but I prefer to see *both* of these conditions as essential to the shrine's rituals and institutional positioning. In fact, I would suggest that virtually any kami at a Shinto shrine in Japan has this dual propensity, evidenced in its *nigimitama* (benevolent spirit force) and *aramitama* ("rough" or violent spirit force). Only through carefully conducted rituals, some of which must involve (symbolically at least) the entire populace, can appropriate offerings, sentiments (primarily gratitude and acknowledgment), and activities keep the aramitama in check.

[8]I am grateful to Carl Freire for bringing this reciprocity of empowerment to my attention.

regional shrines established earlier in 1867, would be brought to Tokyo and unified at the shōkonsha. Principal rituals of commemoration were to be held on 6 May and 6 November, honoring the 10,880 individuals then officially recognized as kami. On 4 June 1879, the Meiji emperor announced that the Tokyo Shōkonsha (the shrine to which "spirits are invited") would henceforth be known as "Yasukuni" (the shrine of the "peaceful country"). The reasoning was that, owing to the "meritorious services of the spirits of the deities worshiped," the nation enjoys peace and security (*Yasukuni Jinja shamusho* n.d.). The title change is significant, as Eric Wolf reminds us, because "the ability to bestow meanings—to 'name' things, acts, and ideas—is a source of power." Once they are named, however, considerable power is required to "keep the meanings so generated in place—names must, as the Chinese say, be 'rectified'" (Wolf 1982, 388).

A series of armed conflicts and wars kept Yasukuni Shrine as a key referent for the new nation's growing military and the accompanying obligations of citizenship. As Japan modernized and expanded its overseas interests (following models of colonial imperialism supplied by England, Spain, France, Holland, and the United States), a spiraling number of conscripts were channeled into the military (most dramatically 103,784 in 1912 and 136,000 in 1929 [Tanaka 1996, 210]). The lives of those who became soldiers, then war casualties, and ultimately "heroic spirits" helped to lessen dissonance between the "peaceful nation" celebrated in the name of the shrine with those state policies hungry for new territory and resources.

Patriotism, Resistance, and Redemption at Yasukuni Shrine

The political and institutional contexts for Yasukuni's development should be clear by now, but what of the internal process by which spirits were enshrined (*gōshi*)? The priests whom I interviewed were unwilling to supply this information, but according to a 1941 article written exclusively for army officers by the head priest of Yasukuni, we learn how human spirits (*jinrei*) become divine spirits (*shinrei*) belonging to the shrine and, by extension, its key patron and sponsor, the state.

The author of this article, Suzuki Takao, was troubled by the intimacy that commoners felt toward the shrine once their sons or relatives were made deities. He wanted officers to impart to their consignees (and they to their relatives) the basic process of enshrinement. Within the shrine are several distinct areas, each characterized by the specific activity of spirit transformation occurring there. The shōkon-jo (within the *honden*, or "inner sanctuary"; see no. 10 on the map, labeled "Main Hall") is still a vital part of this process because here human spirits are first invited to the shrine. A ritual called the *hōkoku-sai* announces to the spirits that they will be combined with other spirits within the shrine. Finally, they are moved to the *reijibo hōanden*, literally the "sanctuary of enshrined spirits," and worshipped there for the first time as kami of the shrine and nation. The priest writes:

> You really have to think about this [process] and understand it. A person who has lost a son cannot think about him as separate and their own; you have to make them understand that their son has become a kami. Bereaved families are wrong to feel intimacy to the shrine and behave in casual and inappropriate ways. To equate the human spirits (jinrei) with the divine spirits (shinrei) shows a wrong orientation:

these spirits now belong to the nation (*kokka*). The only will that survives is that of the nation-state.

(Ōe 1984, 136)

In practice, however, we find considerable variations with this all-spirits-are-one ideology. Even within the shrine, there are two categories of spirits: those of imperial lineage and those of commoners (Nojiri Jirō, comments during tour of Yūshūkan Museum, 13 August 1995). Both are considered to be the heroic war dead (*senshisha* or *eirei*) but commoners are clearly subordinate to those spirits of imperial descent. All the same, despite the unprecedented situation of, for example, the deceased son of a poor farmer receiving tribute from the emperor, enshrinement alone was not always sufficient to sustain ceremonial propriety along class lines.

A struggle ensued over possession of the spirits of the dead between bereaved family members and what I have called the state's new religion. Following the reasoning of the chief priest just mentioned, worshipping the spirit of one's own son could be done correctly only at Yasukuni Shrine. Letters written from the front lines before death in battle, especially those from kamikaze pilots, instruct their descendents to come to Yasukuni to visit their spirits. Speaking to his young daughter, a pilot writes, "[i]f you wonder what I look like in the future, tell your mother so and ask to come to Yasukuni Shrine. . ." (Matsuo 2000). Similarly, from the pilot Matsuo Isao to his parents: "Thank you . . . for the twenty-three years during which you have cared for me and inspired me. I hope that my present deed will in some small way repay what you have done for me. Think well of me and know that your Isao died for our country. This is my last wish, and there is nothing else that I desire. I shall return in spirit and look forward to your visit at the Yasukuni Shrine" (Matsuo 2000).[9]

To families in any region outside the Tokyo area, the enshrinement of their loved ones and the accompanying rituals conducted in their honor must have been ennobling on the one hand—linking families to a community of military heroes venerated by the emperor and nation—but agonizing on the other. One could still pay respects to the departed spirit at the household Buddhist altar, but the emphasis was different and occurred away from the national stage where the spotlight shone so brightly.

Nevertheless, the tension between obligatory enshrinement and the older traditions venerating ancestors at home or at local temples is obvious in this popular song of the early 1940s (approved by the authorities, of course) with its politically correct way to mourn the spirit of one's own child:

Ryōtei awasete, hizamazuki,	[Mother came to Yasukuni from the country],
ogamu hazumi no nembutsu,	kneeled down and started to pray
hatto kizuite, urotaeru,	the prayer to Amida Buddha,
"Segare, yuruse yo,	but realizing her error said,
inakamono."	"Son, please forgive this country person."

(Tsunoda 1977, 60–63)

[9]Two letters from kamikaze pilots can be found prominently displayed and discussed in Kanji et al. 2001, sponsored by the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform. Coming at the end of a problematic discussion on the war in the Pacific, they help sway young readers toward feelings of victimization and even revenge for what is termed the "indiscriminate bombing" of the Japanese homeland by Allied planes in 1944 and 1945. One letter speaks openly of crashing his plane into the main ship of an enemy fleet to avenge the destruction that was occurring in Japan, while the other employs poetry to convey the writer's desire to become both a blooming mountain cherry tree and a demon (*oni*) protecting the nation (see Nelson 2002 for a translation of these poems and an overview of the textbook; 2000b for an assessment of the controversy).

Another popular song carried a poignant protest, yet was subtle enough in its carefully worded challenge to escape suspicion from patriotic neighbors or the feared "special police" (*kenpei-tai*):

Yasukuni no miya ni	Your spirit is settled in Yasukuni
shizumaru mo, oriori kaere	but sometimes it returns home
haha no yumeji ni.	in your mother's dreams.

(Tsunoda 1977, 60–63)

As the war progressed and increasingly frequent enshrinement rituals mirrored mounting losses at the front, the patriotic pressure to conceal personal feelings could not always be managed. Tsunoda Saburō, a writer who lost two brothers in the war and became a Christian minister afterwards, reports a radio announcer confiding to him that, during broadcasts from Yasukuni on the occasion of spirit enshrinement ceremonies, anguished cries were difficult to shield from the microphone. With the central walkway flanked on both sides by the relatives of those being enshrined, cries of "Murderer!" (*Hitogoroshi!*) and "Give me back my child!" (*Waga-ko kaese!*) were often hurled at the procession of priests and military officials solemnly approaching the inner sanctuary. Although exclamations like these were clearly seditious, orders to the special police on duty followed a hands-off policy, deferring to the families' grief rather than to what had become the norm of stoic patriotism (Tsunoda 1977, 51).[10]

In a high-profile case over enshrinement and religious freedom argued before the Japanese Supreme Court in 1988,[11] attorney Kumano Katsuyuki compared the coercive policies and ideologies of state Shinto during the war years to an internal combustion engine designed to run on fuel provided by the youth of Japan. Conscription into the military became the "compression" of this cycle, providing docile bodies for the "combustion" of many military conflicts around Asia. Finally and most critically, the violence of the combustion phase and the "exhaust" that it produced was mitigated and celebrated by enshrinement at Yasukuni and at local war memorial sites (O'Brien 1996, 131). Chapters in textbooks of the 1940s even dealt with topics such as how to regard one's elder brother after he becomes a "glorious spirit" enshrined at Yasukuni (Wada 1974, 53).

[10]We can even find resistance among the so-called kamikaze squadron pilots (the preferred term is either *shinpū* or *tokkōtai*, both abbreviations of *shinpū tokubetsu kōgekitai*, the official term for these special attack forces). Writing to a journalist shortly before his final mission in 1945, Lieutenant Uehara Ryōji, a graduate of Keiō University, said he was honored to have been chosen to participate in the tokkōtai but believed that the victory of democracy over fascism was obvious: "Tomorrow, one believer in democracy will leave this world. He may look lonely, but his heart is filled with satisfaction" (Sasaki 1996, 186). Other writings from Uehara indicate that his satisfaction may have stemmed from his belief that he would go to the Pure Land (of Amida Buddha) and meet up with his brother and the girl he loved, rather than go on the forced march of military souls to Yasukuni.

[11]The Nakaya case became an important benchmark in testing the legality of what Helen Hardacre calls "spirit-apotheosis" ceremonies (1989, 153), in which a spirit is enshrined within regional, nation-protecting shrines. This can be done independently of Yasukuni Shrine, just as Catholic communities in Europe might venerate local saints not recognized by the Vatican in Rome. After Mr. Nakaya's 1973 death in an automobile accident while on duty in the Self-Defense forces, a regional veterans' association wanted to enshrine his spirit over the protests of his Christian wife. Eventually, a ruling by the Japanese Supreme Court in 1988 came out in favor of the "religious human rights" of the veterans' association, and Nakaya became a nation-protecting spirit (Hardacre 1989, 157; see also O'Brien 1996; Field 1991).

To many in those parts of Asia once occupied by Japanese forces, the veneration of all those killed while in military service, including class-A war criminals[12] executed after the war (such as Tōjō Hideki, enshrined in 1979), glorifies Japan's late-nineteenth- and mid-twentieth-century conflicts (Sakamoto 1994). Yet from a perspective shared by many veterans and bereaved family members, the degree of guilt and compliance of all of those once in the military or who supported the nation's cause is rendered less problematic by a simple shift in historical perspective: "I know there are class-A war criminals enshrined here," said one former navy officer, "but they had to follow the national policy at that time. In a wide perspective, they might also have been victims of the war" ("Pilgrimage Marks Surrender: Relatives of War Dead Visit Controversial Yasukuni," *Japan Times*, 16 August 1996, p. 2).

Yūshūkan: The Museum of Memory and Repose

Nowhere does the sanctimonious perspective of victimization gain a louder voice than at the shrine's war memorabilia museum, the Yūshūkan. Located some fifty meters to the west of the shrine's central walkway (see no. 18 on the map), the building itself is an impressive example of European-style architecture. What catches one's eye on approach, however, is the area in front of the museum where, on what is designated as "sacred ground," a vintage machine gun, howitzer, torpedo, and a tank stand. Closest to the museum's stately entrance is a statue of "Mother" surrounded by the children she bravely raised in the absence (or loss) of her husband.

The museum's alignment of personal valor and sacrifice within a sacralized martial context is evident from these exterior displays alone. Once inside, a visitor travels through the military exploits of the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa periods (see the museum link within Yasukuni's website, http://www.yasukuni.or.jp). The narratives that accompany the exhibits are actively evangelical, extolling the commitment, loyalty, bravery, and self-sacrifice of those who died in service to the nation and emperor. Here, as patriotic songs emote softly in the background, the shrine and nation's anonymous spirits once again become tangible human beings. Murakami Shigeyoshi, in his otherwise excellent account of Yasukuni, follows the shrine's policy of stating that the war dead have no personality or individuality (1974, 3), thus missing entirely the complementary role that is provided by the museum. Displayed within well-lit glass cases, the faces of the war dead look out hauntingly at the visitor from photographs, accompanied by detailed life stories, the circumstances of their "heroic" deaths, and a variety of personal effects (helmets, blood-stained uniforms, field pouches, letters, and so on). Whether the dead are commanders, soldiers, pilots, sailors, or field nurses—all casualties and all enshrined as divine spirits—what is stressed repeatedly is the spiritual bond between the Japanese family and its nation, one that even survives the finality of death.

In 1995, fifty years after the war, the Yūshūkan's exhibits were designed so that a visitor's last impression came from a display of (what is usually called in English) the military's "suicide squads." Ranging from kamikaze pilots to one-man speedboat bombs to the bizarre bomb-on-a-pole divers sabotaging harbor-bound ships, the

[12]Class-A war criminals were the top leaders who, at the Tokyo and Nuremberg war tribunals, were charged with crimes against humanity and were held personally responsible for actions carried out under their authority.

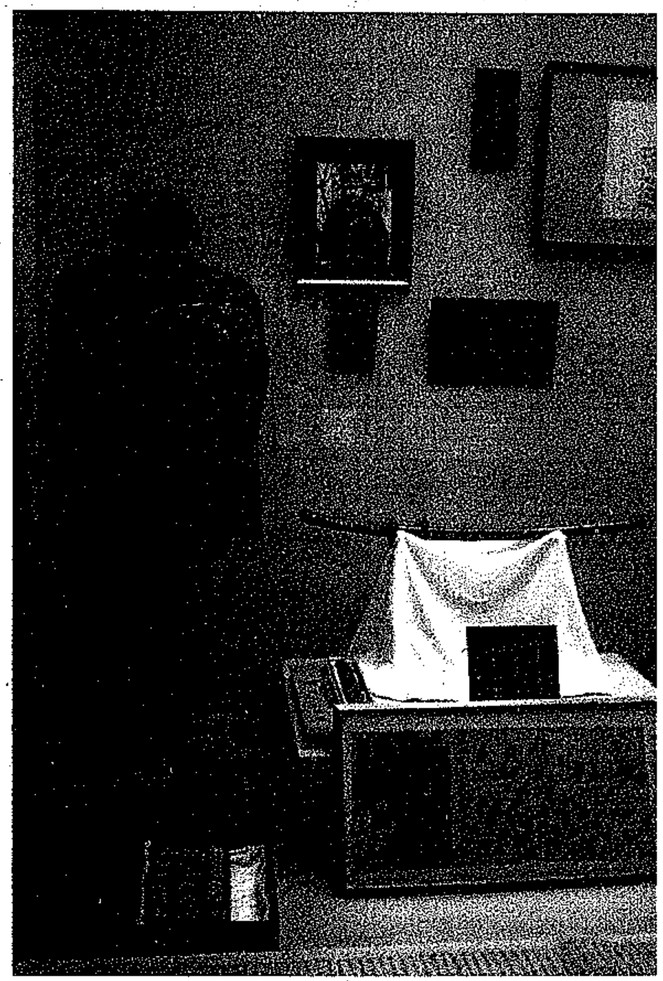


Figure 1. Display at Yasukuni's Yūshūkan museum. Photo from author's collection.

technology of destruction and personal sacrifice that was required references the obligatory relationship of citizens to their nation and emperor. The museum, shrine, and conservative politicians argue that Japan has survived intact precisely because of these individuals who were so willing to take literally the imperial directive to "offer yourself courageously [should emergency arise]" (Hardacre 1989, 122). The priest guiding me through the museum noted, "[t]hat is the problem with using the English word 'suicide' to describe these actions. These people were not desperate or mentally unbalanced; they freely surrendered their lives that the nation might live" (Nojiri, tour comments, 1995). The photographs of young men juxtaposed with the one-man submarines, light weaponry, and fighter planes displayed within the museum's rotunda (used "with love and care" by the "deities of the shrine," according to a shrine brochure [Buruma 1994, 222]), celebrates a community of idealistic heroes and heroines, one standing in stark contrast to the selfishness and materialism of contemporary Japan that awaits just outside the shrine's precincts (see fig. 1).

A number of people with whom I spoke upon exiting the museum felt the least they could do is to honor the spirits of the war dead enshrined at Yasukuni. As a man in his late twenties put it: "I read about the situation when the enemy's aircraft carriers were attacked by kamikaze, but right now I can't imagine how they could do it. Personally, I don't have that kind of courage. But, on the other hand, I would like to know more about the young people's thoughts and feelings of that time" (Nelson 1997). This feeling to acknowledge more fully the sacrifices of the military dead and educate oneself about the circumstances of the time is precisely what can lead a motivated individual to encounter other parts of the Yasukuni community. In this regard, an array of political action groups labors to convert curiosity and empathy into activism and patronage, subsumed within a more broadly encompassing redemptive process about the war, its legacy, and the shaping of social memory among the Japanese people.

Moral Communities of Memory

Since at least 1967, postwar Japanese governments have been engaged in promoting and acknowledging this sanctified and richly symbolic community of spirits despite constitutional injunctions prohibiting these attentions. Article 20 of the constitution stipulates that a representative of the state cannot pay tribute at a religious institution without violating the principle of separation of religion and state (Hardacre 1989, 144). All the same, every year on or before 15 August (the day of Japan's surrender), a number of prime ministers, members of the cabinet, and elected officials have paid their respects at the shrine, despite the international and regional uproar that these visits cause. On 22 April 1975, Prime Minister Miki Takeo became the first postwar prime minister to visit Yasukuni; after that, Prime Ministers Fukuda Takeo, Ōhira Masayoshi, Suzuki Zenkō, Nakasone Yasuhiro, Hashimoto Ryūtarō, and, most recently, Koizumi Junichirō, have followed. Not only do their visits flaunt constitutional restrictions, but they evoke prewar days when the shrine was a state-sponsored institution and received visits from Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa emperors (seventy-two times in all); members of the Imperial family (over one thousand visits); and top governmental and military leaders (Nojiri, tour comments, 1995).

Worship at Yasukuni is thus never "simply" personal as some politicians occasionally claim as they sidestep the constitution.[13] In 1990, as had been attempted numerous times before, then Socialist Party chairperson Doi Takako proposed a binding referendum to acknowledge the nation's wartime responsibility. Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi's coalition government tried to pass the resolution in time for the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, only to meet considerable opposition from an alliance that joined leading Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

[13]In 1995 eight cabinet ministers used state-provided transportation to go to Yasukuni and six registered at the shrine using their official titles, despite then Prime Minister Murayama's plea that they distance themselves from activities at the shrine. The ministries that they represented were some of the most vital organs in the governmental body: International Trade and Industry, Transportation, Construction, Home Affairs, Management and Coordination, Environment, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and Defense. The education minister would have also attended had he not been embroiled in controversy over a remark made on 3 August to the effect that whether or not the war was one of aggression "depended on one's way of thinking" ("Conflicting Messages of Apology and Praise," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 15 August 1995, p. 1).

politicians with the Central Association of Shinto Shrines, the Bereaved Families' Association (Izoku-kai), and numerous veterans' organizations. The apology was finally issued from the prime minister's office without Diet approval. Even without consensus, phrases such as "acts of aggression" and "colonial rule" were edited out at the insistence of right-wing politicians (Green 2001, 95–96). Forces opposed to the apology from outside the government, spearheaded by people such as Mori Yoshinari, the assistant head priest at Meiji Jingū (where the spirit of the Meiji emperor is enshrined) and endorsed by 70 percent of LDP members in the Diet, collected more than five million signatures ("The Japan that Cannot Say Sorry" 1995, 31). Their reasoning was that, since the war was fought in the emperor's name, to apologize for it would be unthinkable because of the chain of associations that this one acknowledgment would initiate. To use their own words, "individuals can apologize, but not nations" (Nelson 1997). The anti-apology coalition was also present at the mass rally for the Asian Symbiosis Festival in Tokyo on 29 May 1995, which "thanked the war dead and praised Japan for its contribution to the independence of Asian countries" (McCormack 1996, 274).

Further subverting the (Social Democratic) prime minister's efforts to pass the apology referendum, a number of LDP cabinet officials not only visited Yasukuni Shrine, but the party issued its own statement one hour after the prime minister's highly anticipated press conference during which he issued the first official apology for the considerable suffering that Japan had caused to its Asian neighbors. The LDP statement, while acknowledging the need to learn from the "lessons of history," conveyed no direct apology (using instead the word *hansei* [to reflect upon past actions]), nor did it raise issues of compensation or mention aggression in any way. Echoing the Meiji emperor's words when he gave Yasukuni its name, the LDP statement expressed gratitude to the nation's "war heroes, upon whose sacrifice Japan's modern prosperity was built" ("Conflicting Messages of Apology and Praise" 1995, 1).

When looking for key players and strategists in the 1995 commemoration and apology controversy and in the ways social memory is engaged at the highest levels of state, we find one of Japan's former prime ministers, Hashimoto Ryūtarō (1996–98), standing head and shoulders above the crowd. During that summer, he was already positioned to assume the post of prime minister, moving from powerful positions as head of the International Trade and Industry Ministry and as LDP party chairman. Often overlooked, however, was his third position: chairman of the Bereaved Families' Association. Hashimoto's 1995 visit to Yasukuni played to a predictable crush of reporters and television cameras (see Nelson 1997), but this was nothing compared to the media attention given to his visit in July 1996 after becoming prime minister.

Well known for his intransigent style and tough talk in Japan and for a 1994 statement that the question of Japan's aggression in the war was a matter of "delicate definitions," he answered a reporter's question about the legality of the 1996 visit with the following statement: "Why should it matter any more? Surely it is time to stop letting that sort of thing [Yasukuni visitation and worship] complicate our international relations. Will you ask the same question if I should attend a Christian-style wedding ceremony? I also observe Buddhist rituals when I take part in funerals at temples. . ." ("Hashimoto Visits Yasukuni," *Japan Times*, 30 July 1996, p. 4). By playing the "religion card," he referenced the pragmatism of religious practices in Japan, where specific situations take primacy over fuzzy doctrinal or theological boundaries. His visit also fulfilled a vow to the Bereaved Families' Association and was the first official visit by a prime minister since Nakasone's controversial visits in

1983 and 1985 (Nojiri, tour comments, 1995).[14] A former governor of Ehime Prefecture, Shiraishi Haruki, noted with surprising candor that there is no cheaper, more effective campaign strategy than to profess sympathy for and promote the interests of the Bereaved Families' Association (Kitahara 1993; see also Morioka 1987, Nelson 1999). What he is really pointing to is how a politician can easily exploit the continuing emotional and psychic pull that is exerted by the spirits of the war dead through the medium of Yasukuni Shrine and other memorials.

The recent uproar over Prime Minister Koizumi's August 2001, March 2002, and January 2003 visits provides another case study in this ongoing relationship between religion and the state. Koizumi announced on 15 May 2001 (a little over one month after being named prime minister): "No matter if I will come under criticism from other nations, I must pay my respects to those who were forced to go to war for their families and for the country . . . and make it clear that [Japan] will never again wage war" ("Koizumi Says He Will Visit Yasukuni Shrine on August 15," *Japan Times* 15 May 2001, p. 1). On 11 July, he followed a familiar tradition, one referencing official social memory about the war, by explaining that "I need to make a visit as prime minister because Japan's return to prosperity was helped by the sacrifices of our soldiers" ("Koizumi to Honor War Dead," *Mainichi Shimbun*, 11 July 2001, p. 4). Coming at a time of considerable controversy over a proposed textbook for middle-school students long on nationalistic pride and revisionist views of history (see Nelson 2002), criticism from both domestic and international sources grew so heated that Koizumi fulfilled his vow with a "surprise" visit on 13 August. By doing so, however, he appeared to irritate everyone. His conservative backers felt as though he capitulated to foreign demands to abandon the official visit on 15 August, his foreign and domestic critics were furious that the visit occurred at all, and even the priests at Yasukuni were angry that he did not follow standard ritual protocol by permitting a purification as well as making the proper number of claps and bows appropriate to venerating deities at a shrine (Karasaki 2001, 8). Finally, in what will prove to be a very interesting case testing legal precedents set by the Supreme Court in 1997, the prime minister was sued in October 2001 by a group of 639 plaintiffs for violating constitutional restrictions on the separation of religion and the state ("Prime Minister Sued for Shrine Trip," *Mainichi Shimbun*, 1 November 2001, p. 2). Koizumi's visit, as well as Hashimoto's in 1996, verifies that, despite the controversies year in and year out, Yasukuni Shrine receives greater deference and tribute from members of the LDP elite than does the nation's constitution.[15]

[14]To those Asian nations once occupied by the Japanese military, Hashimoto's visit was, in the words of one Chinese editor, "gratuitously offensive" ("Hashimoto's Provocative Visit," *Japan Times*, 30 July 1996, p. 16). Such is the coercive pressure on politicians to pay official visits to Yasukuni that one scholar, Ōe Shinobu, likens it to a seventeenth-century test of faith which forced individuals to step on an image of Jesus or Mary to prove that they were not Christian (a practice called *fumie*). Official visits to Yasukuni have become a similar test of loyalty and allegiance for many ambitious LDP politicians (Ōe 1984, 9).

[15]Koizumi received a green light for his "surprise" visit on 13 August from the head of the Bereaved Families' Association, the Izoku-kai. The reasoning was simple: the Buddhist holiday of *obon* runs from 13 to 16 August, and so any acknowledgment to the departed spirits during this period was acceptable to the Izoku-kai constituency. The advice came from the deputy president of the Izoku-kai, Koga Makoto, formerly the secretary general of the LDP. Koga also attended a delegation to China in early August, led by former LDP Secretary General Hiromu Nonaka, to explain to the Chinese leaders the rationale and importance of Koizumi's visit ("Koga Guided Koizumi's Decision on Yasukuni Worship Date, Method," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 10 August 2001, p. 1).

Performers and Patrons for the "Circus" of 15 August Commemorations

On 15 August every year, Yasukuni braces for (and, I think, embraces) what the head priest described to me as "our annual circus." The added resonance of the Buddhist holiday *obon* also works in the shrine's favor: a time at the end of summer vacation to acknowledge a family's relationship to its ancestral spirits, coupled with a homeland nostalgia that evokes the cultural and spiritual essences of what it means to be Japanese. As we noted earlier in this discussion, calling 15 August a "circus" evokes the shrine's history and status as a place of spectacle—from its huge festivals to its tradition in the years before 1945 of hosting pageants and parades to its sumo matches.

This is the day when most cabinet ministers and other politicians pay their respects (usually in mid to late afternoon), when media from all over the world come to verify how militaristic the Japanese still are by filming aging veterans in uniform marching raggedly to bugle calls and barked commands, and when the trucks of right-wing groups equipped with stadium speakers converge on the shrine blasting patriotic music and slogans. (The portrait of right-wing paramilitary members seen in fig. 2, standing before the central hall of worship, includes a range of fashion, ages, and genders.)

These are sideshows compared to the main event, when over eighty organizations, from the Society Honoring the Glorious War Dead (Eirei ni kotaeru kai) to the Bereaved Families' Association, file in and out of the shrine's inner sanctuary for private services to commemorate particular communities of war dead. Protests from opposition groups also occur on this day, but these groups are not allowed on the shrine's precincts. They must position themselves at the shrine's public entrances or attempt to badger ritual proceedings using loudspeakers from the rooftop of a nearby university (Nelson 1997).[16] Shrine administrators attempt to ignore all criticism from organizations such as the Japanese Christian Church or the Communist Party that contest or seek to undo, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, the "conditions of felicity" (1991, 116) that legitimate the shrine's sacralizing performances.

A juxtaposition of somber and festive moods composes the atmosphere of the day, but I was duly impressed by the number of special-interest organizations that were permitted by the shrine to congregate along its wide central approach (beginning at no. 1 on the map). Each organization dispensed information related to "new" historical perspectives about the war in the form of books, biographies, pamphlets, newsletters, and so forth, with one group showing its colors via original paintings of battle scenes by veterans. The visitors' center (see no. 11 on map, labeled "Hall of Arrival"), where

[16]Kobayashi Takasuke lists a number of religious groups that have traditionally opposed any kind of Yasukuni-centered movement (1979, 108–10): the United Shinshū Association; Rinzai shū, Myōshinji wing of the Rinzai Zen, and sectarian Buddhist groups including Nichiren, Jōdō, and Tendai; sect Shinto groups such as Ōmoto-kyō and Tenri-kyō; newer religious organizations such as P. L. Kyodan and Risshō-kōsei-kai; Japanese Christian and Catholic Churches; Lutheran and Japan Baptist Churches; the YWCA; plus the Japan Association of Religious Leaders. An anonymous reader has also pointed out the opposition of one of the oldest secular and politically active groups, the Hahaoya Taikai (Mothers' Congress), formed in the 1950s (see also Sakurai and Ohama 1991). At the 1995 commemoration, the shrine countered an amplified tirade from the roof of a nearby Hōsei University building with equally ear-splitting (although appropriately somber) patriotic music.

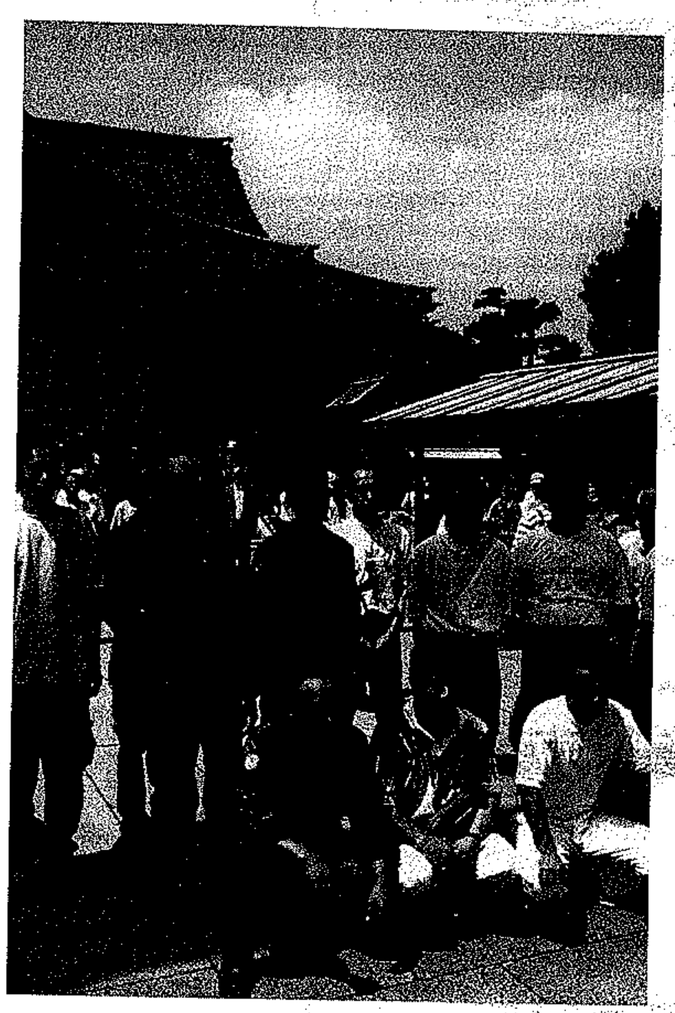


Figure 2. Right-wing paramilitary members posing at Yasukuni shrine. Photo from author's collection.

groups assemble before entering the inner shrine for memorial rituals, also offered an abundance of free literature from supporting groups as well as the shrine itself.[17]

Foremost among these memorializing communities is the Bereaved Families' Association. Founded in 1947 (as the Nihon Izoku Kōsei Renmei, or "Association for the Welfare of Families of War Casualties") for the express intent of repatriating

[17]As a representative, but by no means exhaustive, list, here are a few of the groups permitted to affiliate themselves with the shrine: Citizens' Council to Preserve Japan (Nihon o mamoru kokumin kaigi, now called Nihon kaigi), the Association of Believers in the Marvelously Revealed Teaching of the True Buddha (Hongei myōshu kaiken doshikai), the Association to Awaken the Japanese Public (Nihon minzoku kakusei no kai), the All-Japan Alliance of War Comrades (Zenkoku senyū rengōkai), the Memorial Foundation of the Sacred and Virtuous Shōwa Emperor (Shōwa seitoku kinen zaidan), the Association of the Japanese Homeland (Sōkoku Nihon no kai), the All-Japan Association of Navy Veterans (Kaikokai Zenkoku rengōkai), and the Association for the Promotion of the National Flag and Anthem (Kokki kokka suishinkai).

remains and securing pensions for families who lost relatives, the group has become more policy oriented since 1956.[18] Although ostensibly a private organization, the Bereaved Families' Association has occupied since 1957 a building owned by the Welfare Ministry and leased to the group free of charge (Hammond 1995). That was roughly the same time that the leadership of the 1,300,000-household Izoku-kai began calling on the emperor, the prime minister, and his cabinet, as well as generals from the Self-Defense forces, to attend Yasukuni's spring and fall festivals, just as they did before the war. In 1969, working in close concert with the Izoku-kai and the Central Association of Shinto Shrines, the LDP introduced a bill (Yasukuni hōan) to grant state support to the shrine once more, specifying that, although the shrine's purpose was to offer rites for the souls of the war dead, its service to the nation should place it above being classified as a religious institution, which would then permit official visitations from the emperor and prime minister (see Murakami 1974; O'Brien 1996). Although this bill was defeated five times (1969–72 and 1974), the Izoku-kai has not changed its goals but, rather, has developed new tactics and working relationships in the 1980s to further these and other agendas.[19]

Another key organization in league with Yasukuni Shrine and listed as a suborganization within the Central Association of Shinto Shrines is the Shinto seiji renmei (League promoting ties between politics and Shinto, usually abbreviated as Shinseiren). Started in 1967 to help facilitate passage of the Yasukuni hōan legislation, the Shinseiren is anything but secretive about its agenda. The first goal is to respect and honor the imperial household. Next, it wants to "correct" the relationship between politics and religion. Within the Shinseiren, the Group for Correct Government

[18]Murakami notes several turning points for increased interest in reviving what he sees as a kind of postwar state Shinto (1974, 209–10). In each example, the Izoku-kai played significant roles. The first was the fifty-ninth periodic rebuilding of the Ise Grand Shrines in 1953 (the year that the occupation ended), which awoke and helped focus the fervor of the Central Association of Shinto Shrines, religious lay groups, and the right wing. As a by-product of this event, the Izoku-kai increased its organizational capacities. In 1955 the chief priests of all nation-protecting shrines had a meeting at Yasukuni to devise plans for the shrine becoming a public rather than religious institution, which was supported in 1956 by an Izoku-kai conference. In 1962 the emperor attended an Izoku-kai meeting, a precursor to his participation in a huge commemoration ritual for the war dead in 1963 on the grounds of Yasukuni (Large 1992, 173). Norma Field notes another landmark piece of legislation, the reign-name law of 1979, in which the years are known by the reign name of the current emperor: "Sovereignty may reside with the people," she writes, "but time is measured by the lives of emperors" (1991, 154; see also Ruoff 2001).

[19]One of these vital relationships is with the Central Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō), whose overt business is to manage Japan's eighty-thousand-plus shrines and to certify priestly promotions, from the most junior to the most senior head priest. At the level of appearances, Yasukuni Shrine is not a formal member of the Jinja Honchō because of Yasukuni's advocacy of renewed state support for its religious activities (Murakami 1970, 219). Nevertheless, all priestly appointments are made with the tacit coordination of the Jinja Honchō, and I believe nothing happens at the shrine without its acquiescence and consultation. Through its weekly newspaper, the *Jinja Shinpō*, the Central Association attempts to orchestrate not only the religious and social agendas of shrine Shinto institutions nationwide but also to direct national shrine policy so as to support political conservatism and the continuity and stability that it promises (Creemers 1968). These policies aim to protect the interests of the overall shrine community, especially regarding proposed revisions in the Religious Juridical Persons Law which would compel religious institutions to reveal their finances publicly. Aum Shinri Kyō (Supreme truth) and the sarin gas attacks in 1995 can be partially blamed for this, but without Aum and the tangible threat to the national polity that it provided, neoconservative organizations such as the Jinja Honchō would not have gained the support from politicians and the general public that they did.

(Seikyō kankei o tadasu-kai) works to "enlighten" (*keimo suru*) members of the national Diet, national media organizations, lawyers, and local politicians (Shinseiren 1995). Like the other organizations, the Shinseiren also wants to create war memorials at shrines nationwide (in addition to the already extant memorials at nation-protecting shrines) to serve as unofficial but symbolically powerful extensions of Yasukuni Shrine. Additionally, it believes that the Day of National Founding on 11 February (*kenkoku kinen-bi*) should be an occasion complete with ceremonies attended by politicians at Yasukuni Shrine (similar to the pre-1945 ceremony called *kigensetsu* [Ruoff 2001]). Finally, it wants to create a new and specifically Japanese constitution, "correct" the national educational curriculum, and promote prosperity and happiness among the Japanese people by contributing to the peaceful coexistence of the Japanese with other peoples in the world (Shinseiren 1995; see also Nelson 2000a).

Of course, cooperation among the Shinseiren and elected officials and bureaucrats is essential to further these objectives. Rather than leave this to chance, another suborganization, the Shinseiren Kokkaigin Kondankai, which is basically all of those Diet members who publicly subscribe to the above-mentioned agenda, nurtures these connections. Representing both the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors, the Kokkaigin Kondankai boasts of having over 135 members in this group who are, according to its December 1993 publication, the "pipeline for realizing our goals" (Shinseiren 1993).

It should come as no surprise that Japan's recent prime minister, Mori Yoshirō, was addressing Shinseiren's thirtieth anniversary celebration on 15 May 2000 when he delivered his controversial remarks (for which he apologized but which he never retracted) that Japan is a divine nation with the emperor at its center. His late predecessor, Obuchi Keizō, had set the tone for bold statements of this nature, suggesting to *Time* magazine that Emperor Hirohito should be nominated as person of the century (Symonds 1999).

Until his selection as foreign minister for the Hashimoto cabinet, Obuchi chaired the Association of Diet Members Willing to Visit Yasukuni Shrine. Once in power, he named to his own cabinet three individuals who, like himself, were intimately associated with the movement to reposition the shrine within the nation's political consciousness: one served as chair of the Shinseiren, another as its secretary general, and a third as vice chair of the Izoku-kai. After the solid victory of legislation recognizing the rising sun flag and *kimigayo* anthem as Japan's official anthem, Obuchi attempted to address the Yasukuni issue. In August 1999, Chief Cabinet Secretary Nonaka Hiromu formally proposed to enshrine separately the souls of war criminals from the other military dead so that Yasukuni could once again be made a semigovernmental body ("Bid to Exorcise Yasukuni Slammed," *Mainichi Shimbun*, 8 August 1999, p. 1 [accessed 12 March 2003 at www.mainichi.co.jp/English/news/archive/199908/08/news01.html]).

This proposal met with considerable opposition and was subsequently shelved, but we should not take this outcome as a final defeat. It was instead a repackaging of by now familiar objectives that can be traced back to the early 1950s. The proponents of these ideas are still active and motivated, and of course the Yasukuni priests (as well as shrine administrators at the Central Association of Shinto Shrines and conservative priests around the country) are ready and willing to permit affiliations with the shrine. If anything, new organizations (such as the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform) and momentum (such as efforts to initiate constitutional reform, the emergency military preparedness bill [*yūji kanren hōan*], and even hosting

and winning a preliminary game in the 2002 World Cup) have grown that will further reshape the terrain of social memory and cultural identity within national contexts.

Commemorative Politics to Come

One could assume logically that institutions such as Yasukuni Shrine or organizations such as the Bereaved Families' Association and others listed above should have developed a more critical attitude toward state wartime policies. The staggering civilian and military losses alone, not to mention the destruction of Japan's major cities, would seem to warrant a detailed reevaluation of how the nation's defeat and the suffering of its people came about. We have seen, however—through the intervention of spirit-calming rituals and a social memory of redemption centered on Yasukuni—how the loss and human cost of a war does not necessarily engender a widespread distrust of those policies and institutions responsible. More generally, the historical record regarding the Pacific War is decidedly *not* determinative in shaping crucial emotional, psychological, political, or religious referents needed to provide meaning about the war and its consequences. Individuals can and will believe what they want or, perhaps more accurately, what they need.

Yasukuni's rituals of enshrinement, its commemorative events, and its sanctuaries holding the military dead help recontextualize social memories and attitudes that redeem those who participated in the war and who supported the ideology behind its initial goals (including liberation from colonial powers and a vast coprosperity economic sphere). This discussion has also noted how the shrine's religious practices summon loyalties to an imperially sanctioned nation-state and tweak culturally specific emotions and beliefs about agency and the spirits of the military dead.

Casting our gaze outward, we can recognize the Yasukuni visage in other global contexts in which religious traditions are rendered serviceable to agendas of empowerment. The Christian Coalition in the United States, Hindu nationalists in India, Islamic fundamentalism worldwide, or highly vocal war veterans groups in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia infuse their positions with a blend of righteousness, victimization, and a higher calling legitimized by religious values. Although advocated by a relatively small percentage of the overall population, the trenchant positions of these groups are portrayed as representing the heart and soul of the contemporary nation. When their timing and tactics are right, they often succeed in stealing the media spotlight and reaching international audiences.

To categorize this defining and defending of values as backward-looking nationalism or religious fundamentalism, however, clouds our understanding of a vigorous interaction with the present. In a religious sense, Lionel Caplan believes that all "fundamentalisms" are process oriented: they are consistently engaged with their conceptual adversaries and draw from them key unifying paradigms (1987, 5). Conversely, wrapping these groups with the generic flag of "nationalism" does not really work either, as this label obscures more than it reveals about target audiences for their messages, the complex interplay of symbols and their referents, and the cultural systems that preceded their self-consciously held political ideologies (see Anderson 1983, 19).

Because disciplinary predispositions (and audience expectations) influence methodology and theory, researchers often privilege politics, economics, or social conflict as the primary factors that engage individuals in projects of self-definition,

boundary maintenance, and cultural identity. Although these approaches are all complementary to my analysis here, I would feel less than honest in saying that any method or theory helps me understand fully the anguish which results from the loss of relatives, neighbors, and colleagues in a war. Should the tears I saw streaming down the faces of men and women as they left Yasukuni Shrine's war museum serve as data verifying the coerced complicity of individuals in shrine and state agendas? Or, would a young mother joking with her children upon exiting the same museum a mere five minutes later suggest other conclusions? Even with the fields of meanings, memories, rituals, and shrine affiliations positioned as I have suggested, the propagation of their messages is always a matter of conjecture. Individuals visiting the shrine (and bypassing the siren song of the Yūshūkan museum) can simply pay their respects as they might at any other Shinto institution. In addition, because no overt proselytizing occurs, they might also manage to stay clear of the essentializing webs of Yasukuni's religio-political network (see Gerholm 1988).

The active process of gazing upon a twentieth-century past knotted with destruction and death (as well as accomplishment and success) encompasses some of the most long-standing and resilient symbols, values, and institutions in Japan, all dependent upon which perspective of memory one chooses or is led into. In the example of Yasukuni Shrine, individuals can redeem painful personal memories from historical reckoning, affiliate with the some of the most active and powerful special-interest groups in the country, and have all of the above sacralized through ritual practices and events. Simply mention the imperial household or the "glorious war dead" and the discourse further transforms into a moralistic fortress protected by those same "divine" spirits. It is a neatly self-justifying and highly interwoven compact that has so far escaped any serious legal challenge.

The codependent relationship between social memory and the values and practices shaping its application is dynamic and in constant realignment as new political situations develop in Japan and around the world. Until the individuals and organizations affiliated with Yasukuni Shrine discover alternatives of an equally empowering or emotionally satisfying scope, we should not be surprised that the shrine continues to provide solace and legitimacy through its seductive embrace of nation, social memory, and the moral certitude of ritual practices.

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