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# Japan's Yasukuni Shrine
## — Stimulus for International Conflict —

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## I. Introduction

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Koizumi from April 2001 to September 2006, Japan's economy improved, but relations with its neighbors (and largest trading partner, China) deteriorated. Relations between China and Japan are certainly at their worst in decades, some even argue their worst ever in the post-war era (Marguand, 2005). A primary cause of deteriorating relations has been Prime Minister Koizumi's annual visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in central Tokyo. Why are these visits so controversial and damaging to Japan's foreign relations? Is it the visit to the shrine that is controversial, or is it something else?

This paper will outline why the shrine and high level visits are so controversial. (1) This analysis is based upon the understanding that the Yasukuni Shrine and the controversies surrounding prime ministerial visits there are defined by various paradoxes that have defined the shrine since its inception, and have been compounded by layering of further paradoxes throughout the shrine's history. These paradoxes lead to the modern simultaneous pacification, praise, and provocation of Japan's war dead, war heroes, and war victims. Because of these paradoxes and cross-purposes, visits to the shrine are

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immensely complex to analyze. This paper seeks to outline the conflict surrounding the shrine by analyzing the actions of the Japanese state in the postwar period that demonstrate a lack of contrition vis-à-vis Japan's neighbors. This paper will argue why that although the government of Japan has apologized numerous times for its actions during World War Two, its relationship with the shrine in the modern context demonstrates that it is not acting very sorry. It is this gap between word and action that is the stimulus for the international conflict.

## II. The State's Shrine: Four Acts

Shortly after the end of World War Two it was not uncommon for Japanese prime ministers to visit Yasukuni Shrine. Nearly all prime ministers from 1951 to 1985 visited the shrine annually, sometimes twice annually. Actually, only two prime ministers in this period did not visit Yasukuni, and one of them was prime minister for a mere 62 days. They were able to visit the shrine unfettered, and with minimal conflict. What conflict there was remained primarily a domestic political question.

However, the visits by the prime minister began to become an international issue from the mid 1970s and had become a full-blown problem the late 1980s. Specifically, after the 14 Class "A" war criminals were enshrined in 1978, visits to the Shrine raised eyebrows, especially in China. By the time Prime Minister Koizumi visited the shrine in 2001, the visits had become a genuine international issue. The Shrine visits represented in a visible way many Japanese policies that demonstrated a lack of contrition for the war.

This lacking contrition is demonstrated through four perspectives. First, the government of Japan has determined who is eligible for enshrinement at Yasukuni, and until 1987 provided the names to the shrine. Second, the 28 Class A War Criminals, 14 of who are enshrined at the Yasukuni Shrine were pardoned and decriminalized less than a decade after the war. Third, the Japanese Diet has responded to all positive moves towards reconciliation with legislation or actions that undermine the positive effects of those actions. Fourth, visits to the shrine

by government leaders demonstrate an endorsement of both the preceding actions as well as a tacit approval of the revisionist view of history portrayed at the Yasukuni War Museum, the Yushukan. Together, these four characteristics of postwar Japanese political behavior allow visits to the shrine to be an international issue.

## 1. Deciding Who to Enshrine

"No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist," says Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, "than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times" (Anderson, 1991:9). These cenotaphs for the war dead – Denmark's *Landsoldaten* monument, Britain's Tomb in Westminster Abbey, France's Arc de Triomphe, America's tomb of the unknown at Arlington National Cemetery – all represent the sacrifice individual soldiers have made for the sake of "the State."

As Tamamoto Masaru notes in the modern context, "A tomb of an unknown soldier is a key artifact of nationalism-its anonymity is crucial in constructing the spirit of sacrifice to an abstraction called the state-and finding a name would certainly be at odds with the nationalist mystique" (Tamamoto, 2001). Yasukuni Shrine is not a tomb for the unknown, but a shrine for the named. Currently there are 2,466,532 people named at Yasukuni Shrine, and every autumn additional souls are enshrined. It includes everyone who has died for the emperor, what Emiko Ohnuky Tierney describes as *pro patria mori* (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002:7). It includes only those deaths between the years of 1853, the year Commodore Perry arrived in Tokyo Bay, and 1951, the year Japan signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty.

However, Yasukuni Shrine is exclusive in who it recognizes for their service to the country. Bremen specifically notes that *gunpu*, that is military porters, camp followers, and laborers are excluded (Bremen, 2005:30). So too are the unknown soldiers; their remains cannot be handed over to their relatives and

their spirits cannot be enshrined in Yasukuni Shrine. Although the shrine contains the spirits of some non-soldiers and even non-Japanese who died for the Emperor, it does not include civilian victims of the war (such as the victims of the fire bombings of Tokyo, or the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), or the enemies or victims of Japan's wars – including the ancestors of Yasukuni's current Chief Priest, Nambu Toshiaki, who fought against the emperor in Japan's Boshin Civil Wars. Yasukuni contains only the spirits of those who died for the country in war, and who can also be *named.*

Therefore, there is a division in the remembrance of the war dead in Japan. Nearly 2.5 million souls are remembered at Yasukuni Shrine, while little more than an another 2 million are remembered a short distance away at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, just across the moat from the Imperial Palace, a short walk from Yasukuni Shrine, and within view of the Budokan where annual remembrances are held. Although remains of unknown soldiers and civilians killed were repatriated from the end of the war, not all of them were identifiable. Unidentifiable remains and thus spirits without a name, cannot be enshrined at Yasukuni; they rest at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery.

The All Japan Society for the Establishment of a Communal Crypt for the Unknown War Dead, in conjunction with other bereavement societies, first requested that some facility for those who could not be enshrined at Yasukuni be built in 1953. Returned human remains were kept in Government offices until this. Finished in July 1958, the cemetery now holds the remains of unnamed deceased servicemen, as well as unknown victims, both military and civilian. As Bremen notes, while the souls at Yasukuni receive petitions, the souls at Chidorigafuchi receive requiem rites.

Not only does the Shrine require names to enshrine someone, but also other basic information such as the date and place of birth, and the date and circumstances of their death. In order to acquire this information on the nearly 2.5 million individuals enshrined at Yasukuni requires the assistance of the Ministry of Health. As Hardacre noted, "Yasukuni Shrine made a private request to the Ministry of [Health and] Welfare for aid in collecting this information, and

the ministry transmitted these data on thousands of war dead, free of charge" (1989:148). She went on to note that this same request by Perfect Liberty Kyodan was denied. Yasukuni stood apart, and until 1987 received this exceptional sponsorship by the state.

Although final decision of who to enshrine at Yasukuni is determined by the Chief Priest at the Shrine, deciding upon which names qualify as war dead is decided upon by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. Although the Ministry is not directly involved in enshrinement at Yasukuni, its decisions have determined which war dead are at Yasukuni and which are at Chidorigafuchi.

## 2. Decriminalizing Criminals

On September 8, 1951 Japan signed the Treaty of Peace with the United States and other Allied powers. The same day this treaty was signed, so too was Japan's new security agreement with the United States. The treaty allowed Japan to put the war behind it. However, there was a condition for Japan in accepting the treaty. According to Article 11 of the treaty, Japan had to accept the results of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. In particular, according to Article 11 of the treaty,

> Japan accepts the judgments of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East and of other Allied War Crimes Courts both within and outside Japan, and will carry out the sentences imposed thereby upon Japanese nationals imprisoned in Japan ("Treaty of Peace," 1951).

Those trials resulted in the conviction of 28 individuals as Class "A" War Criminals. Several thousand more were convicted in similar courts throughout Asia, especially for class "B" and class "C" war criminals. Seven of the Class "A" war criminals were sentenced to death, and hung at Sugamo Prison on December 23, 1948 — the Crown Prince's Birthday.

In exchange for signing the peace treaty and accepting the results of the war trials, Japan agreed to sign the security agreement with the U.S. This deal,

as Tamamoto Masaru calls it, provided Japan a security umbrella in exchange for U.S. basing rights in Japan. Further, "The United States acted as Japan's buffer to international power politics, while Japan happily pursued the life of economism. In this way, the security treaty became Japan's highest source of authority, the functional successor to the prewar emperor, 'sacred and inviolate" (Tamamoto, 2006:4). By signing this treaty, Japan relieved itself of the need to address the war and war atrocities. It should also be noted that the Chinese signatory was the Republic of China (Taiwan), not the People's Republic of China.

However, the second half of Article 11 of the treaty gave Japan a tremendous opportunity. Again, according to the treaty, Japan had the power to,

> Grant clemency, to reduce sentences and to parole with respect to such prisoners may not be exercised except on the decision of the Government or Governments which imposed the sentence in each instance, and on recommendation of Japan. In the case of persons sentenced by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, such power may not be exercised except on the decision of a majority of the Governments represented on the Tribunal, and on the recommendation of Japan ("Treaty of Peace," 1951).

Within months of the treaty coming into force, more than 40 million people petitioned for the release of the Class "A" war criminals being held in prison, many for life sentences. In 1953, both houses of the Diet adopted resolutions calling for their release. As per the provisions in the treaty, Japan pardoned the war criminals in the 1950s. Again, it is important to note that because relations between the People's Republic of China had not yet been restored, this permission was granted by the Republic of China (Taiwan).

*The Yomiuri Shimbun* also notes that the war criminals were not banned from seeking higher political office. Of the convicted war criminals, Shigemitsu Mamoru, who signed the instruments of surrender aboard the USS Missouri, later served as deputy prime minister and foreign minister under Hatoyama Ichiro. Kaya Okinori later served as justice minister under Ikeda Hayato. Kishi

Nobusuke, arrested but not convicted as a war criminal, served as prime minister from February 1957 to June 1958. In September 2006, his grandson, Abe Shinzo, was elected Prime Minister of Japan.

Not only were the former Class "A" war criminals allowed to seek political office, but also in 1953, a law was passed that extended pension and compensation benefits to these war criminals. According to Herbert Bix, the government not only allowed them to serve as politicians and allow them pensions, but also paid back their salaries and restored their retirement pensions, "on the grounds that they had not been tried under Japanese domestic law and therefore should not be treated as ordinary, standard, home-style criminals" (Bix, 2000).

Furthermore, the executions and deaths in prison of the 14 Class "A" war criminals before the signing of the treaty were determined to be "deaths incurred in the line of duty," thereby qualifying these war criminals for enshrinement at Yasukuni Shrine (*The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2005). In 1966 the list of war dead assembled by the Ministry of Health and Welfare and provided to Yasukuni Shrine included the names of the 14 Class "A" War Criminals who died before 1951 in Sugamo Prison, either in their cells or on the gallows. Recently Watanabe Tsuneo, Chairman of the Yomiuri Shimbun Group, quoting *The Tokyo Shimbun*, noted that many former military officers worked in the War Victims Relief Bureau of the Ministry of Health and Welfare (Wakamiya and Watanabe, 2006). These men saw to it that the war criminals were provided with the same treatment as all others who died before the end of the occupation.

According to Vice Chief Priest Yamaguchi, [2] the head priest at Yasukuni Shrine makes the final decision as to who is to be enshrined. Although the Shrine had received the necessary information to enshrine the 14 in 1966, Chief Priest at that time, Tsukuba Fujimaro, a former member of a branch of the Imperial family, deferred their enshrinement.

As noted by both Wakamiya Yoshibumi, Chairman of the Asahi Shimbun's editorial board, and as expressed by Vice Chief Priest Yamaguchi, the shrine deferred enshrining the 14 Class "A" War Criminals, knowing that it would be

controversial (Wakamiya and Watanabe, 2006). As noted above, it was during this period that the *Nihon Izokukai* was pushing for and the LDP was seeking to restore support for the Yasukuni Shrine with the multiple submissions of the Bill for the National Establishment of Yasukuni Shrine (*Yasukuni Jinja hôan*). Negative publicity that would surely result from enshrining these 14 men would not help that cause.

After the bill before the Diet was rejected five times, and after the sudden death of Chief Priest Fujimaro Tsukuba, a former Imperial Navy Lieutenant Commander, Matsudaira Nagayoshi, "who totally rejected the verdict of the Tokyo war trials," became the next Chief Priest of the Shrine. He assured that the 14 were enshrined in 1978. This secret enshrinement became known a year later.

So while the visits to the shrine by the prime ministers throughout the 1950s to the 1970s was not controversial, and only somewhat within the public consciousness, behind the scenes the acceptance of the Tokyo War Trials was being questioned. As Herbert Bix again noted, this "double standard" of external acceptance but internal denial "both in the actual treatment of those convicted of war crimes, and as a framework for thinking about the lost war, first formed as the occupation ended, then spread through Japanese society during and after the Korean War" (Bix, 2000). To this day, the discussion of the decisions made not by Yasukuni Shrine, but by the Ministry of Health and Welfare demonstrate this double standard. The systematic refusal of the verdicts of the Tokyo Trials, and the ultimate enshrinement of these particular "war dead", create a symbolic rejection of the Tokyo Trials at Yasukuni Shrine.

### 3. Apologies and the Next Year law

Since 1965, Japan has apologized numerous times for the war, atrocities committed during the war, and for the overall suffering at the hands of the Japanese. They have specifically admitted the hiring of women to serve as "comfort women" and have acknowledged other atrocities. Notable apologies include Foreign Minister Shiina Etsusaburo's statement upon signing the

normalization treaty with the Republic of Korea in 1965. Then, he said, "We feel great regret and deep remorse over the unhappy phase in the long history of relations between the two countries" (Wakamiya, 2006).

Further apologies and statements of remorse have followed throughout the years. Most notably, the Diet passed a resolution in 1995 offering Japan's apology. Specifically, the Diet declared, "this House offers its sincere condolences to those who fell in action and victims of wars and similar actions all over the world. Solemnly reflecting upon many instances of colonial rule and acts of aggression in the modern history of the world, and recognizing that Japan carried out those acts in the past, inflicting pain and suffering upon the peoples of other countries, especially in Asia, the Members of this House express a sense of deep remorse." However, it must be noted that the Diet offered this statement during the only time the Liberal Democratic Party hasn't been the ruling party in Japan in nearly sixty years, and was met by a massive walkout by members of the LDP.

However, in recent years, Prime Minister Koizumi has taken the opportunity every August to proclaim Japan's commitment both to peace, and declares Japan's intent to be a member of the international community. Specifically, in 2004 he declared, "I will exert all my efforts so that Japan will gain further trust from the world as a country that treasures peace" (Koizumi, 2004). The Prime Minister did not, however, go so far as to offer a new apology, and when other recent apologies have been offered, they have been modeled on the 1995 Murayama statement.

Although expressions of regret were shared throughout the decades, China and Korea remain skeptical. The language of the apologies is often passive, and uses the personal pronoun, "I." For Japan's critics, this is evidence that the apologies are only the speaker's statement, and do not represent the view of Japan as a nation. Iris Chang, author of The Rape of Nanking, The Forgotten Holocaust of World War Two, noted in an interview on *NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer, an American public broadcasting program, that, "these types of wording and the vagueness of these expressions that Chinese people, I think, are

infuriated" (Farnsworth, 1998). Further, The Global Alliance for Preserving the History of WWII in Asia, an NGO registered in the United States, notes, "While Japan considers itself to have apologized repeatedly, human rights activists and victims of its past atrocities charge that it has not offered an unambiguous and acceptable apology. According to the latter, had Japan sincerely accepted responsibility for its wartime atrocities, it would have offered an apology that is accompanied by, among other things, timely compensations and reparations" ("Has Japan," 2001).

Further, as Wakamiya Yoshibumi notes, "the 'apologies' scarcely deserve to be known by that term. The carefully calibrated expressions of regret have repeatedly failed the basic test of sincerity not only because they are bureaucratic formulations intended to deny responsibility as much as concede it, but because they lack the natural accompaniment of apology – restitution, for example payment to victims of atrocities and human rights violations" (Wakamiya, 2006).

Furthermore, every time Japan does apologize, the government and vocal rightist elements demonstrate the opposite point of view. Wakamiya Yoshibumi calls this the Law of Next Year (*Yokunen horitsu*). As he explains, after every significant event that can be seen as a sign of reconciliation between Japan and either China and/or Korea, it follows the next year with some act that belies the message sent by the act of reconciliation.

For example, Japan signed the Japan-South Korea Basic Treaty in 1965, but in 1966 February 11 was designated as National Foundation Day, which restored the prewar *Kigensetsu* holiday. Again in 1978, reconciliation was achieved with China by signing the Japan-China Peace and Friendship Treaty. However, the Japanese Era Law was adopted in 1979, requiring all officials to utilize the Japanese Imperial calendar. Furthermore, in 1998 both South Korea President Kim Dae Jung and Chinas President Jiang Zemin visited Japan. However, in 1999 the National Flag and Anthem Law was passed, giving official status to the two pre-war images. This "double face" of postwar Japanese politics, as Wakamiya calls it, "is symbolized by these two contradictory trends that have continued to exist as opposite sides of the same coin" (Wakamiya, 2006).

## 4. Rewriting History

Although relatively small in size, the grounds of the Yasukuni Shrine contain a myriad of different spaces for the benefit of the *kami* who are enshrined there. In addition to the main shrine building, and the gathering hall attached to it, there is a Noh Theater, a *kai* pond, and a sumo-wrestling ring. All of these are built, and used, for the pleasure of the *kami* enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine. In the Meiji period, fireworks and a European circus were brought to the shrine, also for the benefit of the *kami*. According to Vice-Chief Priest Yamaguchi, [3] everything at Yasukuni is done for the benefit of these *kami*.

This includes the Yushukan War Museum on the north edge of the precincts. As John Breen described the museum, it is "an integral component of the shrine complex and participants in the autumn and spring rites are actively encouraged to visit" (Breen, 2004:91). This too is not simply a museum about the shrine, but a museum for the *kami*.

During the Meiji period, the shrine served two purposes. First, it was a place to display artifacts and souvenirs that had belonged to the *Kami*. Second, it was a rallying point for Japan's overseas campaigns and a place to praise the actions of Japan's Imperial Army and Navy. According to Yoshida Takashi the Yushukan museum, in its current form, also has two goals. Just like the shrine itself, the first goal of the museum is to "honor and comfort" the *kami* enshrined at Yasukuni. However, the museum also serves as a public outreach for the shrine, demonstrating what is often called the "true" history of Japan. Visiting the Yushukan portion of the Yasukuni Shrine Homepage, one is confronted (in either Japanese or English) the words: "The Truth of Modern Japanese History Is Now Restored. These Profound Emotions That We Wish to Convey to the Generation that Does Not Know War." This text is superimposed over line drawings of World War Two fighter planes scanning across the screen.

This new purpose for the Yushukan War Museum, the only of its kind in Japan, has in many ways returned to where it was during the 1930's. While it no longer serves as a place of state propaganda in order to encourage Japan's youth to join the military, and perhaps join the honorable *Kami* at the shrine, it does

now have a public outreach purpose, in addition to comforting the *Kami*. Yet another paradox.

This too has changed in the postwar era. During the occupation, the Americans forced the Yasukuni Shrine to close the Yushukan Museum. In 1961, a limited number of artifacts belonging to the *Kami* were once again displayed in the Yushukan building, which did survive the war. As Yoshida again noted, the museum, "remained trivial in scale compared to its predecessor" (Yoshida, 2005).

In 1985-86, the *Yushukan and Kokubokan* were restored and expanded greatly, and reopened as the Yasukuni Museum. To celebrate the 130th anniversary of the Shrine in 1999, the Shrine expanded and renovated the museum, reopening in 2001. This new space allowed for the first train to run on the Thailand-Burma railway and a full-scale zero fighter to be brought indoors, and also added space for temporary exhibits, a theater, gift shop, and cafe.

However, the narrative told in the museum was reworked. As noted by *The New York Times*, the impression given to reporter Howard French was, "Japan sacrificed its blood and treasure throughout the 20th century not to conquer other Asian countries but to fight for their independence" (French, 2002). Again, according to French, when he visited the museum with Nagae Taro, a historian from the National Institute of Defense Studies who edited the displays, each display that whitewashed atrocities committed by Japan — Sex slaves, Unit 731, Nanjing, etc.— was met with silence. Nagae said, according to French, "The debate over what really happened is still under way. Therefore we shouldn't take this matter up in a museum" (French, 2002).

The Yushukan museum is only a part of the Yasukuni Shrine, and just as it always has, the shrine has a dual role of both pacifying the spirits of the war dead, and also promoting a message — a message of just war that is shared between the *Izokukai*, right wing factions, and many in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. In short, it is an attempt to rewrite history, ignoring the victim. While the shrine tends to stay out of politics, it is clearly the object of much political wrangling by a number of groups within Japan.

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Together, the unapologetic denial of the Tokyo war Trials demonstrated by the governments disassembly of that regime of justice, no matter how farcical it may have been anyway (*The Yomiuri Shimbun* and *The Asahi Shimbun*, 2005), in addition to the government's support of the Yasukuni Shrine through obscure and behind the scenes ways, in addition to the overt message sent by the museum at Yasukuni presents a strong message to the world, whether true or not, that Japan is unapologetic about its responsibility in World War Two. Further, as apologies have been what some consider half-hearted, and the results of which have been undermined by what Wakamiya calls the "Next Year Law," the apologies that have been offered are ineffective for the intended audiences.

It is not that the Prime minister visits the shrine that is so controversial; it is the message that this visit sends that is controversial. It is part of a pattern of actions that demonstrate to the victims of Japan's aggression a lack of remorse by the State in Japan. Together, the visits and covert government connections to the shrine demonstrate support for and promotion of the revisionist message sent by the supporters of Yasukuni and its museum onto the international stage.

## III. Perception of the Acts

A number of scholars and journalists have attempted to identify the meaning of Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Within Japan, the visits are seen as a religious act, or simply paying respect to the dead. In this way, they compare the shrine to Arlington National Cemetery, the Arc de Triomphe, or other military war memorials to the dead. However, outside of Japan, visits to the shrine are seen in a much different light. The Prime Minister's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine are symbolic of many other greater issues between Japan, its neighbors in Asia, and the United States. It is for this reason: there is a cognitive gap of understanding between Japan and these nations. When the Prime Minister visits the Yasukuni Shrine, it is not only a domestic issue that still needs to be resolved, but also an international issue of

genuine concern for it speaks to Japan's intentions. What is the message? Is Yasukuni a domestic place of peace or an international place of conflict?

**1. Place of Peace**

The Yasukuni Shrine has often been compared to America's Arlington National Cemetery, across the Potomac River from Washington D.C. Specifically, Watanabe Minoru of the *Nippon Kaigi* (Japan Conference), declares that, "Worship to the Arlington Cemetery and worship to Yasukuni Jinja are homogeneous. It is a manner carried out by the State to the dead, and is a behavior to respect a soul" (Watanabe, 2006). However, there are many differences between the two. Namely, Arlington National Cemetery is one of only two cemeteries in the United States not managed by the Department of Veteran Affairs, but the Department of the Army (United States Veterans Administration, 2006). While Yasukuni Shrine was also managed by the Military prior to the end of World War Two, it is now a private *religious* institution.

From its inception, Yasukuni Shrine has been a Shinto Shrine. However, from the day Yasukuni Shrine was named, it has also served as a state shrine for the war dead. Yasukuni Shrine straddles this paradox between being a religious site and a place of extreme nationalism under State Shinto. This paradox is absent at Arlington National Cemetery, where faith and nationality are open to all. It is also absent at Westminster Abbey where there is no separation of church and state.

This paradox between being a Shinto Shrine and a State Shrine remained after Japan's surrender, when the Shrine was separated from the state first by the Shinto Directive issued by American occupation forces, and later when this separation was made permanent by Japan's 1947 Constitution. The Japanese debate over the Yasukuni Problem has been dominated by this debate over articles 20 and 89 of the Constitution. By carrying out this separation of Church and State, Japan is maintaining its commitments set forth in the Potsdam Declaration, the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and its own Constitution.

John Dower has called Article 9 Japan's apology for the war (Junkerman,

2005). Further, Social Democrat Fukushima Mizuho has said, "The Constitution is Japan's public pledge not only to ourselves but to the people who died in the war and to the people of Asia and the world" (Fukushima, 2006).

Although Article 9 is the most commonly referred apology, Articles 20 and 89 of the Constitution, which not only guarantee individual religious freedom, also serve as a commitment from Japan not to revert again to war. Article 9 promises not to maintain a military while articles 20 and 89 commit Japan not to revert to the nationalist ideology espoused by State Shinto, oftentimes at Yasukuni Shrine.

There are two sides to this promise though. On one hand, the state must refrain from supporting any one religious and individuals may choose to worship and support in shrine as they see fit. This is certainly the case at Yasukuni Shrine too. Many in Japan seek only to respect the war dead, often in very personal ways. When I visited the shrine in 2005, this was made obvious to me when I talked to a family who was there for the first time; they were there to pay respects to their husband, father, and grandfather. Likewise, Vice-Chief Priest Yamaguchi Tatebumi pointed out to me the following.

> Yasukuni shrine is a place for faith, a place to comfort the soul of those that gave their lives up for the nation. That is why we are here to serve at the shrine. I would like the people in the world to know that. It is not a place for politics! (4)

* * *

However, the shrine has become a pawn of national and international politics. While the Constitution has held strong in the post war era, the International Military Tribunal of the Far East, the Government of Japan and its policies have undermined the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and Japan's peace treaties with the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea. The Japanese Government, as seen earlier in this paper, has undermined the letter and spirit of these legal instruments. As Mark Staples pointed out, "The Yasukuni problem represents the unresolved issue of war responsibility in

Japan." [5]

## 2. Place of Conflict

Many in Asia fear that with the removal of the "cork in the bottle," as one American General once referred to America's purpose of being in Japan, it will revert to militarism and pose a threat again to the rest of Asia. In interviews at the Chinese and South Korean embassies, diplomats that I interviewed also expressed this concern to me. In particular, Mr. Liu at the Chinese Embassy noted that the Chinese trust the Japanese people, but strongly distrust the current leadership that seeks to reform the Constitution to remove the constraints of Article 9, and upgrade the Defense agency to the Ministry level.

From a security perspective, China has a number of reasons to be suspicious of Japan. Yoshikawa Yukie points out several reasons why China should have reason not to trust Japan. She notes the US-Japan security alliance, especially regarding recent changes vis-à-vis missile defense, military transformation, and Japan's Heisei Military Modernization. She also notes pro Taiwan sentiments in Japan as a concern for the PRC. However, for China it is Japan's attitude towards its history that is most disturbing. This is not to say the Chinese aren't also using the Yasukuni issue for its own purposes. However, actions of the Japanese State make their endeavor easier. As Yoshikawa further noted, "However, Japanese leaders have not been consistent regarding the history question. Some politicians still make remarks that the past war was fought in self defense or to set Asia free from colonization or that the Japanese occupation also did some good for the local people." [6]

A number of other interview subjects also referred to the importance of trust. Paul Chamberlin noted that this and other issues such as the dispute over history textbooks, "damages Japan's ability to gain respect and trust from other Asian countries including Korea and China." [7] Speaking in his personal capacity, a Korean diplomat also noted "Koreans can accept [apologies] only when their real behaviors are based upon true sorrowful feelings." [8]

But this is not just a concern between Japan and China. Both Robyn Lim [9]

and Mark Staples [10] have pointed out that this points to the United States. Mark Staples pointed out to me that, "It is very hard to accept the notion that Yasukuni is an internal Japanese problem when the issue centers on a past war between the US and Japan." He goes on to say that while this remains an unresolved issue, and Japan continues to subscribe to and promote what he calls the "Just War" view of history, it will be very difficult for the two allies to strengthen the alliance, transform the US base structure in Japan, and improve bilateral interoperability between the two countries.

In brief, the prime minister's and other government official's visits to the Shrine demonstrate a questionable lack of repentance for the war, as pointed out by Paul Chamberlin. As he said, "Government official visitations to Yasukuni send a signal to victims of Japanese aggression in the first half of the 20th century that Japan sees no problem with that behavior. It is a significant problem." [11] Visiting the Shrine, especially in an official capacity, demonstrates an acceptance of this point of view held by many rightists in Japan and articulated in Yasukuni's Yushukan War Museum. This lack of repentance is further articulated in what Wakamiya Yoshibumi calls the "Law of Next Year," or a cycle of reconciliation and repudiation.

### 3. The Way Out

The Yasukuni Shrine is at its heart a paradox between the need to mourn for the dead and a need to resolve both current and historical conflicts. It has always served a dual role as a place to mourn the dead, and to praise them for their sacrifice to the country, even once the Shrine was divorced from the state. By visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, Prime Minister Koizumi endorsed and promoted a point of view that rejects Japan's responsibility for the war against China and the Pacific War. Although Japan has a peace constitution, and has not fought in any war for over sixty years, its lack of remorse gives Japan's neighbors reason to pause and consider Japan's intentions. This concept of threat perception is explained by Jennifer Lind.

A state's failure to atone for past violence provokes hatred, anger, and wounded pride among its former victims. These emotions distort the process of threat assessment. Fear and antipathy lead countries to infer malign intentions from ambiguous behavior" (Lind, 2003:7).

Japan's ambiguous behavior vis-à-vis Yasukuni Shrine is further compounded by other actions, including recent security legislation under Koizumi and attempts to revise the Basic Law of on Education and a revision of the Constitution, including Article 9, under Abe Shinzo. A Brookings Institution Report says it well: "Article Nine is the backbone for an attractive Japanese national identity that stands foursquare for peace and non-proliferation-two highly admirable values. It is, moreover, a potential "soft power" resource-even if it has never been wielded to great effect" (Samuels, 2004).

The Yasukuni Shrine problem is a problem of perception. It is a difference in understanding of the shrine's history and purpose, and Japan's response to the shrine in the postwar era. Although Japan has apologized for the war, its actions have demonstrated a lack of remorse through not only Japan's undermining of Article 9, but also its undermining of the Potsdam Declaration, the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and its agreements with China, Korea, the United States, and others. Because of the cold war and Japan's economism throughout the post cold war era, this was forgiven. But, it is no longer being ignored. In short, Japan needs a voice and a purpose in which to explain this place, Yasukuni Shrine, in both word and action. Only then can Yasukuni live up to its name and be a place of peace, and only then can Japan achieve reconciliation.

## Notes

(1) This paper is based on and drawn from a more in depth analysis titled: "Japan's Yasukuni Shrine: Place of Peace or Place of Conflict?" This thesis was submitted as part of my requirements for a Master of Arts (June 2006) at International Christian University, and has also been published by www.Dissertation.com, August 2006.

(2) Interview with Tatebumi Yamaguchi, Vice-Chief Priest at Yasukuni Shrine, interviewed on April 19, 2006, at the offices of Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, Japan.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Interview with Mark Staples, Captain in United States Navy (Ret.), interviewed on March 24, 2006, at a café in Yurakucho in Tokyo, Japan.

(6) Interview with Yukie Yoshikawa, Research Assistant at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, interviewed on March 19, 2006, by email.

(7) Interview with Paul Chamberlain, Professor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, USA, interviewed on April 14, 2006 by email.

(8) Interview with an anonymous official, Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Tokyo, interviewed on March 29, 2006, at the Embassy, Tokyo, Japan. Spoke in their personal capacity.

(9) Interview with Robyn Lim, Professor at Nanzan University, Nagoya, interviewed on March 27, 2006, by telephone.

(10) Interview with Mark Staples, Captain in United States Navy (Ret.), interviewed on March 24, 2006, at a café in Yurakucho in Tokyo, Japan.

(11) Interview with Paul Chamberlain, Professor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, USA, interviewed on April 14, 2006 by email.

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## Japan's Yasukuni Shrine
## — Stimulus for International Conflict —

〈Summary〉

William Daniel Sturgeon

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo annually during his time as Prime Minister, a total of six times. Each visit resulted in protests by Japan's neighbors, specifically China and South Korea. Koizumi could not understand why there was such a conflict, and many conservatives in Japan lament that they cannot openly visit the shrine. Why is it that these visits are so controversial?

There is a deeper history to these visits, rooted in the meaning of the Shrine itself, but most importantly in how the Japanese government has treated its war criminals vis-à-vis the shrine. This paper outlines four arguments why Japan's neighbors can be upset. First is the way Japan's War Dead are honored, or more specifically who is determined to be war dead and who is not. Second is the manner in which Japan's 28 Class A war criminals were decriminalized following the war, including the enshrinement of 14 of them as "Martyrs of the State." Third is the manner in which the Japanese Diet responded to each action of reconciliation in Japan with reciprocal conservative legislation. Finally, this paper argues that visits to the shrine, where all of these actions are manifested in real space, represent a tacit endorsement by the state of a revision of Japanese history and denial of the Tokyo Trials.

Together, these four arguments outline some of the controversies surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine and the visits by Japan's head of government. Each of these areas are ripe for further research, and individually they also illustrate a mindset surrounding the shrine, and clearly demonstrate how complex the controversies surrounding the shrine are. This paper provides a

clarification for why Japan's neighbors can find visits to the Yasukuni Shrine so controversial, and also illustrate why visits to the shrine are controversial within Japan itself. This understanding, it is hoped, will provide a solid foundation for future reconciliation between the Japanese government and its neighbors, specifically the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea.

NOTE: This paper is an abstract of a longer thesis, submitted as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Public Administration at International Christian University submitted May 15, 2006. The thesis provides this same argument, but also outlines the history of the shrine, with a full explanation noting the shrines dual nature as a religious entity serving a state purpose as well as the controversy in Japan spawned by the Shinto Directive of 1945 and Article 20 of Japan's 1947 Constitution, especially the official or non-official nature of prime ministerial visits to the shrine. The thesis is available both in the ICU Library, and has also been published through dissertation.com (ISBN: 1581123345).