
Legacies of Empire
The Yasukuni Shrine Controversy

Japan appears to have reached a crossroads today, such as it has not experienced since 1945. The Japanese government under Prime Minister Koizumi and his successor Abe Shinzō has set a revisionist politics in motion which, if realized, will usher in a new kind of pre-war situation. The possibilities that were contained within the settlement at the end of the Second World War and within Japan's post-war condition seem to be receding fast over the horizon. Instead, we are faced with the real danger of new wars. This imminent turning point calls for an urgent and fundamental re-examination of the negative legacies of the Japanese empire that continue to affect contemporary Japan. This chapter attempts such a re-examination by focusing on the Yasukuni shrine and the controversy it has generated.

The nineteenth-century Meiji State created three essential institutions: the military, the Yasukuni shrine, and patriotic education. For a modern nation-state to be able to use war as a means of national policy, it has to do more than just maintain an army. It has to create a national consciousness such that people feel a strong sense of belonging to the nation, and are therefore willing to offer up their lives for the nation. To foster such national spirit among the people, the Meiji state established the Yasukuni shrine as the central locus of a national religion, and along with the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890, it implemented a system of patriotic education that had at its core the cultivation of precisely this willingness "to offer up one's life for the emperor and the country." The "Japanese Empire" and its militaristic state were built upon this triadic base.

This system, based on the trinity of the military, Yasukuni shrine,

and patriotic education, appeared to be dismantled in 1945 with Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War. But I emphasise, that it *appeared* to be, for it continued to exist in an ambiguous form throughout the post-war era and it seems now to be reconstituted. Advocating a politics of "breakaway from the post-war regime" (*sengo rejime kara no dakkyaku*), the current Prime Minister Abe Shinzō has set a clear agenda for his premiership. Already, he has succeeded in revising the Fundamental Law of Education, which is designed to reinstate patriotic education. On the strength of that wave, he is planning to tackle the revision of Article 9, that is, the "no-war" principle of the post-war democratic constitution. According to the plans of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), this would make the Self-Defence Forces formally into an army to be deployed for purposes of self-defence, the maintenance of international peace as well as the upkeep of an ill-defined "public order." But whatever euphemism is used, this is nothing other than the revival of the Japanese military.

As for the Yasukuni shrine, despite intense criticism from within Japan and neighbouring China and Korea, Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō officially visited Yasukuni every year for his six years in office, thereby establishing a record of "real achievement." Moreover, the plans of the LDP for a revision of the Constitution include a proposal to amend the constitutional principle of the separation of state and religious institutions. This amendment would permit official, prime-ministerial visits to Yasukuni to participate in public ceremonies of mourning the war dead. Most ominous of all is the scenario whereby Yasukuni will be nationalised again, making it possible for the Emperor to pay visits to the Shrine. This plan has been voiced publicly by a number of influential politicians.

The triadic system of a Japanese military, the national shrine of Yasukuni, and patriotic education was established, as mentioned earlier, by the nineteenth-century government with war in mind. Sixty years after the end of the Second World War, a twenty-first-century Japanese government is seeking to reconstitute this system, albeit in a new form.

It should be added that these revisions are pursued within the framework of the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the redefinition of the US-Japan Security Treaty which followed the end of the Cold War.

Whether it is Japan's remilitarization, the reinstatement of patriotic education, or the re-nationalization of Yasukuni shrine, all of this can only be attempted with the implicit consent of the United States. In that sense the post-war condition has not ended. Under the post-war settlement, the emperor system was allowed to continue in the form of a constitutionally defined symbolic role of the emperor. In return, Japan's military strength was constrained through the "no war" clause of Article 9, while Okinawa was offered up as a permanent military base serving US geopolitical and military strategy. The Japanese government came to perceive these arrangements in terms of the mutual benefits they would bring. The current reconstitution of the triadic system can thus be understood as a part of the global strategy of the US-Japan alliance and the reorganization of US bases in Japan.

In recent years, Yasukuni has become one of the biggest issues influencing Japan-China and Japan-Korea relations and has come to symbolize the frictions that derive from differences in historical consciousness between these nations. It has also received increasing attention in Europe and America. It seems, however, that reports and debates about the Yasukuni issue, whether within or without Japan, have so far failed to get to the heart of the matter. The Yasukuni issue is a complex problem that can be examined from various angles; and the angle chosen for analysis reveals a good deal about the historical consciousness of the discussant. In this chapter, I shall examine the Yasukuni shrine issue in terms of the continuing negative legacy of the Japanese empire.

On 20 July 2006, the *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* (the Japanese equivalent of the *Financial Times*) scooped its rivals by publishing on its front page the contents of a memorandum written in 1988 by the Grand Steward of the Imperial Household Agency, Tomita Tomohiko. In these notes, Tomita records that the Shōwa tennō (Emperor Hirohito as he is known abroad) had expressed in a conversation with him strong feelings of displeasure that Class-A war criminals were enshrined at Yasukuni shrine and that for this reason he had stopped visiting it.¹ Hirohito had, of course, visited Yasukuni regularly before

1. "A-kyū senpan Yasukuni gōshi; Shōwa tennō ga fukaikan; sanpai chūshi; 'Sore ga

and during the war. And even after Japan's defeat in 1945 he had come to the Yasukuni shrine, but his eighth visit since the end of the war in 1975 was to be the last. If Tomita's notes are to be believed, the Emperor ceased to worship at the shrine because in 1978, Yasukuni shrine decided to enshrine those fourteen men executed for Class-A war crimes as "glorious spirits."

In the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, commonly known as the Tokyo Tribunal, the top twenty-eight leaders of the war effort were tried and convicted on charges of committing "crimes against peace," that is crimes of planning and executing a war of aggression. From among these twenty-eight, seven, including Prime Minister Tōjō were hanged, and another seven died in prison. After the occupation, the Ministry of Health and Welfare determined that these fourteen executed war criminals were equivalent to "ordinary" war dead and they were, therefore, designated as having "died in the line of duty." Yasukuni shrine took the matter further and declared that these fourteen had "laid down their lives for national duty" and should thus be worshipped as "martyrs of the Shōwa era."

The forerunner of the Yasukuni shrine was the Tokyo Shōkonsha, the Tokyo Shrine to the war dead, which was established in 1869, a year after the Meiji Restoration. Its function was, initially, to honour those men of the victorious Restoration forces who had fought against the preceding Tokugawa regime and had given their lives in these battles to establish the new imperial state. The shrine was built, it is said, at the "divine behest" of the Meiji Emperor who wished those loyal men to be honoured in death. In 1879, it was renamed Yasukuni shrine. All soldiers who died in wars since then were enshrined at Yasukuni, beginning with the first overseas deployment of Japan's modern military forces in the Taiwan Expedition of 1874, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, the First World War, the Manchurian Incident of 1931, the Japanese War in China starting in 1937 and, finally, the Asia-Pacific War of 1941–1945. All soldiers and civilians in military service who lost their lives in those external battles in which the Japanese empire

watashi no kokora da': Moto Kunaichō chōkan," *Nihon keizai shinbun*, 20 July 2006.

engaged—2,460,000 war dead in total—were enshrined and worshipped as “glorious spirits” in the Yasukuni shrine.

During the period of the “Empire of Japan,” the emperor was not only the sovereign, he also had a religious role as he was considered to be a “living god,” that is, the incarnation of Japan’s ancestral deity. At the same time, he was the supreme commander of Japan’s armed forces. The Japanese people, including the peoples of Japan’s colonies, were his subjects and as such were expected to adhere to “national morality,” which demanded that “in times of crisis of the Japanese state, the subjects offer up their lives to protect the emperor and the nation.” Soldiers who perished in the imperial wars, that is, the “sacred wars” fought by the Empire, were regarded as having practised “national morality” and were thus considered to epitomize national subject-hood. They would therefore be enshrined as “nation-protecting deities” at Yasukuni shrine, where they were revered and honoured by Prime ministers, Army and Navy ministers, and even the emperor himself. This system was essential and instrumental in raising the morale of the Japanese military, and in the spiritual mobilisation of the entire populace for war.

Upon Japan’s defeat in 1945, Yasukuni shrine was declared to be “a symbol of Japanese militarism,” a “war shrine” and a “shrine of military aggression” in order to neutralise its influence. With the Shinto Directive issued by the GHQ of the occupying forces in December 1945, Yasukuni, like all other shrines, was separated from the state. In line with the new post-war Constitution of 1946 that stipulated specifically the principle of the separation of state and religion, it was then turned, like Christian churches or Buddhist temples, into a private religious entity.

When the Tomita memorandum was published in July 2006, the debate over Yasukuni was poised to reach its climax in Japan, China, and Korea. For it was seen as highly likely that Prime Minister Koizumi would again pay his respects at Yasukuni shrine on 15 August, the anniversary of Japan’s surrender and the end of the war. In China, the date is celebrated as anniversary of the victorious resistance against Japan, and in Korea as the day of liberation from Japanese colonial rule. After becoming Prime Minister in 2001, Koizumi visited Yasukuni

shrine every year, so that in all, he visited six times. In the process, the Yasukuni issue became the biggest diplomatic problem undermining Japan's relations with China and Korea.

In 1985, when then Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro visited Yasukuni shrine "officially," the Chinese government filed a formal protest with the Japanese government. The criticism of the Chinese, consistently repeated ever since, was that a Japanese prime minister visiting a shrine in which Class A war criminals were worshipped raised doubts about the Japanese government's recognition of war responsibility. The Chinese went on to say that the Prime Minister's patronage of the shrine also grievously wounded the feelings of those Asian people who had been the victims of Japan's aggressive war. In acknowledgement of the Chinese government's criticism, Prime Minister Nakasone subsequently ceased visiting Yasukuni shrine. However, Prime Minister Koizumi rejected the Chinese and Korean criticism as "interference in Japan's domestic affairs," and instead presented his actions as a show of strength: he wanted to impress on the Japanese people the image of a leader who was not going to be swayed by foreign opinion. This strongman image proved also useful for maintaining Koizumi's public approval ratings. Prime Minister Koizumi did indeed visit the Yasukuni shrine on 15 August, the day of war's end, inciting, as was to be expected, vigorous protests by the Chinese and Korean governments. Subsequently, Chinese and Korean leaders refused on several occasions to attend summit meetings with Koizumi, and intergovernmental relations between Japan and China, Japan and Korea hit rock-bottom. Since Koizumi handed over power to his successor as prime minister, Abe Shinzō, Japan's relations with its neighbours have enjoyed a period of brief tranquillity.

Insofar as the Yasukuni question is considered a diplomatic issue, one that is harming Japan's relationships with China and Korea, the problem is typically narrowed down to the question of the enshrinement and worship of Class A war criminals. The majority of Japanese media and politicians approach the problem from this perspective. Politicians taking Chinese and Korean protests seriously have hence thought of ways to get around the problem and proposed, for example, the removal of those Class A war criminals from the Yasukuni

registers. Japanese commentators supporting friendly relations with Asian neighbours have made similar suggestions.

The Tomita memorandum has been used in similar ways: on the one side, those who support Yasukuni and prime ministerial visits to the shrine, have sought to downplay and contest the value of the memorandum as evidence, but these attempts have largely failed. On the other side, newspapers such as the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, who opposed the official visits of Prime Minister Koizumi to Yasukuni, have used the Tomita memorandum to strengthen their own stance by arguing that “since the Shōwa Emperor ceased visiting Yasukuni because of the enshrinement of leading war criminals, Koizumi should not, of course, have visited the shrine either.” Of note was also the positive tenor with which the principal South Korean media, eager to see an end to Koizumi’s Yasukuni visits, presented the Tomita memo. Thus, the memo raised various questions of historical consciousness as regards Yasukuni shrine, and it is to these that I shall turn.

First, when a Japanese prime minister goes in his official capacity to Yasukuni shrine where Class A war criminals are honoured as glorious spirits, it inevitably invites the interpretation that the state of Japan is denying its war responsibility. Of course, none of the Japanese prime ministers who visited Yasukuni has ever publicly denied that Japan has a responsibility for the Pacific war. Prime Minister Koizumi himself affirmed the official position laid out in the statement made by Prime Minister Murayama in 1995, in which he spoke of his “deep sense of remorse” and expressed his “heartfelt apology” for Japan having adopted a “mistaken state policy in the not too distant past.”² Japan, Murayama stated, had caused through colonial rule and invasion extreme distress and suffering to the people of neighbouring countries, especially those in Asia.

On the one hand, prime ministers have not denied publicly Japan’s war responsibility, but, on the other hand, the Yasukuni shrine which they have patronised states officially that the “recent great war” was

2. The full statement of Prime Minister Murayama is available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/pm/murayama/9508.html>

not a war of aggression, but a “war of self-defence,” in which the very survival of Japan was at stake and which aimed, moreover, at liberating Asia from European and American colonial oppression. Accordingly, the charges of “war crimes” whether of Class A, B or C were false indictments imposed unilaterally by the Allied victors of the Second World War. In other words, for Yasukuni shrine, these judgements of the Tokyo Tribunal were nothing but examples of victor’s justice.³ As a matter of fact, Yasukuni shrine has never been merely a place of mourning the war dead; it has always functioned as an apparatus of celebration, one that transfigures the war dead into a sacred, divine existence by enshrining them as “glorious spirits” and eulogizing their meritorious deeds. In order to celebrate dead soldiers as “glorious spirits,” the war cannot, of course, be described as a war of aggression and invasion. Given this specific function of Yasukuni, it is unsurprising that the official visits of successive prime ministers generate mistrust in the Japanese state’s recognition of its war responsibility.

If one reduces the problem of the recognition of history and war responsibility to the issue of the enshrinement of Class A war criminals at Yasukuni, this constitutes a serious diminution of the problem. If it was, indeed, only a question of the enshrinement of Class A war criminals, then the problem could be solved by simply removing those war criminals from Yasukuni’s register of deities. To be sure, the government of China, looking for ways of improving diplomatic ties, seemed to hint that this could be the solution to the problem.⁴ However, if the Japanese government and media regard official visits of prime ministers or even the emperor to Yasukuni as unproblematic once the Class A war criminals are removed, and thereby implicitly accepted Yasukuni’s ideology of celebrating the war dead as “glorious spirits,” then this constitutes, either consciously or unconsciously, an

3. See *Yasukuni daihyakka* (Yasukuni Encyclopedia), undated pamphlet distributed by Yasukuni shrine.

4. In July 2001, immediately before Prime Minister Koizumi made his first “official” visit to Yasukuni, the Chinese Ambassador to Japan stated that “if the Prime Minister paid his respects to the war dead in general, there would be no problem. What renders his visit to Yasukuni problematic is the enshrinement there of the Class A war criminals.”

act of denial of history.

A second aspect of the denial of history derives from the concept of “Class A war crimes.” Class A war criminals are those judged by the Tokyo Tribunal to have been responsible for leading Japan into the war of aggression against China, starting with the Manchurian Incident in 1931, and the Pacific War of 1941. The Tribunal judgements took into account the preparations for the invasion of Manchuria, which began in 1928, and so the period covered by the Tribunal extends from 1928 to the surrender of Japan in August 1945. This means that the Tokyo Tribunal’s framework for “Class-A war crimes” does not cover, and in fact ignores, Japan’s history of invading Asia prior to the Manchurian Incident. By 1928, Japan had already established a large colonial empire that included Taiwan and Korea. But, of course, there were several colonial powers—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Holland—among the Allies that formed the Tokyo Tribunal, and they apparently had neither the desire nor the legitimacy to indict Japan for its colonial rule.

However, among the war dead enshrined at Yasukuni are the military personnel who died in *all* of Japan’s invasions of Asia since the Taiwan Expedition of 1874. Japan established its colonial rule over Taiwan by suppressing with military force both the resistance movement of Sino-Taiwanese and indigenous Taiwanese people. Likewise in Korea, Japan since the Kanghwa Island incident of 1875 continued to deploy military force against Korean resistance for the purpose of solidifying, in 1910, its colonial occupation. Japanese soldiers and civilian military personnel who died in those military campaigns designed to establish and maintain Japan’s colonial rule, and the military suppression of resistance movements in those colonies, are venerated at Yasukuni. These “glorious spirits” are worshipped for giving their lives to the “sacred” mission of expanding the Japanese empire and the Emperor’s divine rule. Thus, Yasukuni shrine forms an inseparable unity with the imperialism and colonialism of the modern Japanese nation-state. Given that Yasukuni is inseparable from Japan’s modern colonialism, and given that these war dead continue to be honoured publicly in the same way as the executed Class A war criminals, the extent of the denial of Japan’s responsibility for

its colonial rule becomes fairly obvious.

It is not just the right-wing revisionists who ignore or deny Japan's responsibilities prior to the invasion of China in 1931, that is, the responsibility for Japan's colonialism. Notably, there are also progressive intellectuals and journalists who are in a similar state of denial even though they otherwise recognise fully Japan's responsibility for Class A war crimes. In their historical narrative, the grandeur of the Meiji state in achieving Japan's equal standing *vis-à-vis* the powerful Western nation-states is highlighted, while the Shōwa Empire is seen as Japan gone wrong. Likewise, the Japanese military is depicted as upstanding as far as the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese wars were concerned, but regarded as degrading into an ill-behaved army ever since the invasion of China. This type of historical consciousness is fairly widespread among Japanese liberals.⁵

Narrowing the problem to the enshrinement of Class A war criminals means also that the scope of Japan's war responsibility since the Manchurian Incident goes unrecognized, and leads to a third kind of denial of the past. Insofar as the alleged decision of the Shōwa Emperor to stop visiting Yasukuni is highlighted positively, the impression is strengthened that the blame for Japan's past aggression lies exclusively with the Class A war criminals. This perception is consonant with the political stratagem of the United States that granted the emperor immunity in the Tokyo Tribunal proceedings. Even though the Shōwa emperor was the supreme power throughout the war period and, more importantly, the supreme commander of the Japanese imperial forces and as such undeniably responsible for Japan's acts of aggression, he was nevertheless allowed to evade prosecution. Moreover, by redefining, in Article 1 of the post-war Constitution, the emperor as the symbol of the democratic Japanese nation and the unity of its people, the emperor system retained its exalted position. Meanwhile the Occupation forces used the figure of the emperor in accordance with American Cold War thinking, to thwart Japan from possibly turning Communist. Thus, by emphasizing the issue of the enshrinement of Class A war criminals, the emperor's war responsibil-

5. Shiba Ryōtarō exemplified this trend. See, for example, Shiba, *Meiji to iu kokka*.

ity, which had been covered up by the United States and the Tokyo Tribunal, came to be denied altogether.

But the crucial issue of Japan's war responsibility post-1928 is not just minimized in terms of the emperor's role. Rather, the war responsibility of other elite figures at the time as well as the mass media, intellectuals, religious leaders, and educators—that is, the war responsibility of all levels of society—is thereby denied. If the Yasukuni shrine problem were to be regarded as resolved by simply removing Class A war criminals from the shrine's register, the questions of responsibility for pre-1928 military campaigns and, indeed, for Yasukuni shrine itself would be stifled and allowed to be forgotten.

As I have endeavoured to explain how the Tokyo Tribunal gave rise to the perception that the Class A war criminals were scapegoats, whereas the emperor and the Japanese people not only escaped prosecution but were freed, as it were, from their responsibility for the war. Moreover, the war crimes committed by the Allied forces during the Second World War were not examined, which constitutes an important problem at the heart of the institution of the Tokyo Tribunal itself. The question of an unaddressed colonial past is not one to be asked of Japan alone. Take, for example, France's stance on the complicity of the Vichy regime in the persecution of Jews. Only in 1995, half a century after the end of the war, did President Chirac acknowledge France's responsibility and arranged for restitution. However, to this day, the French government has failed to recognise officially France's responsibility for the atrocities committed during its colonial rule of Algeria and to arrange for restitution. I raise this example not to point the finger at particular nations or governments, but to suggest that the working through of the legacies of imperialism and colonialism is a tricky task shared by several nations.

It is not only that Yasukuni denies the aggressiveness of Japan's war and the nation's war responsibility, but it has also served to alter the very nature of "death in battle" by casting it as a story of "glorious death"; in the process, it counterfeits history. That is to say, the bloody and merciless reality of soldiers dying on the battlefield is rewritten at Yasukuni into a sanctified narrative of noble, heroic, and thus "glorious death." Three cases will serve to exemplify how this his-

tory has been counterfeited.

The first and most obvious case is that of Korean and Taiwanese recruits to the Imperial Japanese army. Currently, close to 50,000 former colonial subjects who died in battle are enshrined at Yasukuni, of whom some 20,000 were Koreans mobilized for the Japanese war effort and around 20,000 were Taiwanese. Needless to say, Japan implemented its imperial education also in the colonies, in order that Korean and Taiwanese subjects might internalize absolute loyalty to the emperor and a willingness to offer up their lives for the sake of the imperial state. When the Enlistment Act was enforced in 1944, many Koreans and Taiwanese were forcibly drafted, but there were also those who enlisted voluntarily for military service because they hoped in this way to escape the ethnic and racial discrimination they had had to endure as colonial subjects. In other words, there is no evidence at all that their decision to enlist had anything to do with belief in the promises made by the Yasukuni ideology.

In 1978, well after the liberation from colonial rule, a Taiwanese bereaved family demanded for the first time that their war dead should be withdrawn from the enshrinement registers of Yasukuni. Korean bereaved families followed their example and put forward similar demands. A number of lawsuits were filed against the Yasukuni shrine and the Japanese government, which had provided it with the list of fallen soldiers in the first place. The representatives of these bereaved organisations have argued that “not only did we suffer the injuries of invasion and colonialism, but to be enshrined in a shrine that symbolizes more than anything the militarism of the perpetrator nation is an unbearable act of humiliation.” Yasukuni shrine has consistently rejected all of these demands, arguing that:

since they were Japanese at the time of their death in battle, they don't stop being Japanese after death. They fought and died in battle, believing they would be honoured through their enshrinement as Japanese soldiers when they died. For that reason, Yasukuni cannot withdraw their spirits. It is only natural that these men who helped the war effort in the same manner and spirit as mainland Japanese, and fought alongside Japanese soldiers, are honoured as glorious

spirits at Yasukuni.⁶

What becomes apparent in the Yasukuni shrine's argument is that the coercive force of the colonial rule and the Enlistment Act is ignored, in order to counterfeit a historical record of "voluntary, glorious death in battle."

The second example is that of Okinawa's civilian war dead. Situated between Japan and China, the islands of Okinawa originally made up the independent kingdom of Ryukyu, but in 1879 the Meiji government eliminated the kingdom by the use of military force and established, in its place, Okinawa prefecture. Okinawa, along with Hokkaido and its indigenous population of Ainu, were the first targets of modern Japan's colonial enterprise. They are usually distinguished from Korea and Taiwan and termed "domestic colonies," but the assimilation policy which the Japanese colonial government employed was no less forceful in these regions than the one imposed on Taiwan and Korea. In the closing days of the Pacific War, the Japanese army embroiled, in the name of the "unity of army and civilians," non-combatant Okinawans in the savage battle against the American forces as they landed. All this was in the name of the "unity of army and civilians." As many as 100,000 Okinawan civilians lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa: some were executed for allegedly spying on the Japanese military; others were forced to commit mass suicide because surrendering and being taken as a prisoner of war were forbidden, and not a small number fell victim to the military actions of the Japanese army, who were supposedly friendly troops.⁷

The majority of Okinawan civilians who perished in this way are enshrined at Yasukuni. But how is it that civilians are enshrined at Yasukuni, which is dedicated to military personnel and civilian military employees? The answer is that in 1958, the families of those who

6. *Asahi Shinbun* (morning edition), 18 April 1978.

7. For contrasting views on Okinawa and Yasukuni, see the chapters of Nitta Hitoshi and John Breen in *Yasukuni, the War Dead and the Struggle for Japan's Past*, ed. John Breen, Hurst & Company, 2007.

had “participated in the war at the request of the army” became eligible for survivors’ pensions and other benefits under the Law for Relief of War Victims and Survivors. The Japanese administration subsequently encouraged applications from the bereaved families of the Okinawan civilian war dead, since with the change in legislation they were now eligible to receive survivor’s pensions. Yasukuni then decided to enshrine these war dead, who had “participated in the war at the request of the army,” under the category of civilian military employees. As a result, the residents of Okinawa who were, as a matter of fact, victims of the war waged by Japan, ended up being enshrined as collaborators of the Japanese forces.⁸ Even children who died in the forced mass suicides thus came to be enshrined in Yasukuni’s pantheon of “glorious spirits” for having sacrificed their lives for the sake of the nation. This too we may term a case of “historical fabrication,” since it conceals the military’s responsibility for the atrocious realities of the Battle of Okinawa, and for the huge number of civilian deaths to which it gave rise.

My third example relates to Japan’s own war dead and the way in which Yasukuni ideology has sought to cancel out the violent nature of death in war by re-imagining it as “glorious death.” Of the 2,460,000 war dead enshrined in Yasukuni, over two million – the great majority – died in the Asia-Pacific War. However, sixty per cent of that number did not die from conflict on the battlefield, but in a broad sense suffered death caused by starvation.⁹ The Japanese military sent large numbers of soldiers to New Guinea and other areas of the South Pacific knowing full well that there was a serious problem with providing adequate supplies of food and water to these troops. Marching through the jungles, the troops ran out of provisions and many starved to death, their corpses abandoned, and left to rot until nothing but skeletons remained. The indescribable misery and cruelty characterizing death in war is converted by Yasukuni shrine into the death of brave soldiers confronting the enemy, and dying in the hero-

8 See also “Okinawa to Yasukuni (3)” in *Okinawa Times*, 15 September 2005.

9 On death through starvation in the Pacific War, see Fujiwara Akira, *Gashi shita eiyūtaichi*. Aoki Shoten, 2001.

ic mission of protecting the imperial state. Yet it was not just the horrific reality of death by starvation, but also the wretchedness of death in action that is rendered invisible by the transfiguration of the war dead into “glorious spirits.” The violence of dying in battle, the bloodiness, the putrefaction of corpses, all of that is effaced by the Yasukuni narrative and, in their place, death in war is sublimated within the realm of the sacred, divine.

The significance of the ideology and practice of Yasukuni lies thus also in the management of the feelings of the bereaved families. For if the grief and pain of the bereaved families were to be left unaddressed, those feelings could potentially turn into doubts, criticism or even anger towards Japan’s leaders who were responsible for waging war. So the special ceremonies of honouring the war dead, which were regularly conducted at Yasukuni during the war, and in which the emperor himself participated, served the purpose of what I have called “the alchemy of emotion,” whereby the grief of the bereaved families was to be converted into feelings of joy. An article in the January 1944 issue of the magazine *Shufu no tomo* (“The housewife’s companion”) illustrates how this “alchemy of emotion” was achieved.¹⁰ The article featured the case of Tsutsui Matsu, a woman from Kōchi Prefecture who lost three of her four sons to the war effort. She described her feelings, on receiving the news that her eldest and her second son had both died in battle, how she was driven to despair thinking how cruel the war was, and how tragic the loss of her sons’ lives. But when she, as mother to her sons, was invited to the state ceremony where the spirits of her sons were enshrined, and when she witnessed the visit on that occasion by the Emperor, she “experienced enlightenment.” “It was as if she had been struck by a bolt of electricity.” Her thoughts were these: “The Emperor himself has favoured us with his visit precisely because [my sons] died for their country. It is such a blessing. Well done, my sons!” Her pain vanished, and from then on, she felt nothing but happiness and pride.

10. *Shufu no tomo*, January 1944, pp. 94–97. On the dynamics of emotional alchemy, see Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai*, pp. 43–45.

In this way, Yasukuni rites and the imperial presence played a crucial role in generating a positive attitude towards the war among the population as a whole. It was through a similar process that the deaths of military personnel and civilian military employees were, regardless of the actual historical circumstances, sublimated and rendered sacred as acts of self-sacrifice, of patriotic devotion.

The Tomita memorandum published in July 2006 was, as mentioned earlier, used by those criticizing Prime Minister Koizumi for his repeated official visits to Yasukuni shrine. In the medium to long-term future it is perfectly possible that this memorandum may be used for entirely different ends, namely to revive official visits to Yasukuni shrine by the emperor. Some leading political and intellectual figures argue that the current “abnormal” situation, created when the Shōwa Emperor ceased his visits, should be “corrected” so that in future not only prime ministers but also the emperor himself can worship at Yasukuni. For example, in summer 2006, Foreign Minister Aso Tarō and other influential politicians suggested that Yasukuni shrine should be nationalised again, in order to pave the way for imperial visits.¹¹ Such a proposal by high-ranking, influential politicians ought not to be taken lightly. Between 1969 and 1974, the plan to re-nationalize Yasukuni shrine was presented to the Diet every year, in an LDP bill for the state protection of Yasukuni. At that time, opposition to these plans was strong, as it was feared that this might be seen as direct indication of a revived militarism. Consequently, the bill was never passed. Today, thirty years later, leading LDP politicians are again pushing for a re-nationalization of Yasukuni shrine to allow for the establishment of official visits by the prime minister and, crucially, the emperor. They suggest this can be achieved by removing Class A war criminals and finding an understanding with China and Korea for the re-nationalization of the shrine.

As I have laid out in this chapter, the triadic system of a full-fledged military, patriotic education, and a nationalized Yasukuni Shrine, now stands a very good chance of being revived, in the following way. First, revision of Article 9 of the Constitution which will

11. *Asahi* (morning edn), 8 August 2006.

pave the way for the establishment of a military that is officially recognized as an army; second, revision of the Fundamental Law of Education already effected in December 2006, building in patriotic education and, third, the possibility of re-nationalizing Yasukuni shrine. This would mean that in future, if soldiers of the Self-Defence Forces or a new, full-fledged Japanese military died in military missions abroad—for instance in Iraq—they might be enshrined at Yasukuni and, if the shrine is renationalised, they could then be worshipped by both the prime minister and the emperor. Moreover, this scenario could possibly be realized without any objections coming from China and Korea.

Today Japan faces the risk of losing the opportunities it was afforded by the “post-war” settlement. The danger of those opportunities vanishing before our eyes is symbolized by the slogan of Prime Minister Abe to “break free from the post-war regime.” He argues that without a revision of the post-war Constitution as put into place by the American Occupation, the Japanese people will never be psychologically free of their “Occupation mentality.” I believe the opposite to be true, namely that the possibilities seen at the end of the war still await full realisation. This in turn can only happen through a further consolidation of the principles embodied in the post-war Constitution and the Fundamental Law of Education as they were originally formulated. Japan is truly standing at a crossroads and, in view of the hugely influential arguments put forward by conservative politicians, there is little reason for optimism. However, there are numerous citizen movements across Japan which have formed in protest against these political currents and which work tirelessly for strengthening of the principles and ideas of the post-war Constitution.

Popular resistance against a revision of the post-war democratic Constitution, especially its Article 9, is strong, and over six thousand citizen groups are now actively protesting against the LDP plans. As for Yasukuni shrine, there are seven ongoing lawsuits filed by citizen groups that charge that former Prime Minister Koizumi’s visits to the shrine violated the separation of state and religion as stipulated by the Constitution. The Japanese judiciary is notoriously reluctant to pass judgements when it comes to violations of the Constitution. Howev-

er, two decisions supporting these charges have been handed down from the Osaka High Court and the Fukuoka District Court respectively, stating that Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni were indeed a violation of the Constitution. Finally, there are also several citizen groups which challenge the Yasukuni ideology itself, that is, the efforts by the shrine to transfigure death on the battlefield into the death of "heroic martyrs."

As mentioned earlier, bereaved families of the Korean and Taiwanese who fought and died for Japan have begun to protest Yasukuni's enshrinement of their war dead. But the first movement for the removal of the war dead from Yasukuni took place as early as 1968. The investigator was a Japanese Protestant priest whose two older brothers had died in the war. He opposed his siblings' enshrinement at Yasukuni on religious grounds, saying that he wished to commemorate them in accordance with his own Christian faith. Yasukuni shrine rejected his request for removal. Subsequently, numerous bereaved families demanded, on religious or other grounds, that the enshrinement of their war dead be revoked; since then some of them have filed lawsuits. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean bereaved families have begun to achieve a degree of cooperation in their protest movements and lawsuits against Yasukuni shrine and the Japanese government. In other words, we see emerging today trans-national collaboration among bereaved families of both the colonized nations and the colonizing nation to protest Yasukuni ideology and what it represents.

A fascinating example of such cooperation is featured in the 2005 film *Annyong Sayonara* ("Hello, Goodbye")¹²—a Korean-Japanese co-production—which documents the experiences of Lee Hee Ja, a 62-year-old Korean woman, trying to have her father's name removed from Yasukuni's register of "glorious spirits." She is helped in her pursuit by Masaki Furukawa, a former Kobe municipal employee, who

12. The 2005 documentary *Annyong Sayonara* was co-directed by the Korean veteran documentary filmmaker Kim Tae Il and Japanese filmmaker Katō Kumiko. It won the Woonpa Award at the 10th Pusan International Film Festival in 2005, and the Seoul Independent Film Festival 2005 Grand Prize for best documentary.

dedicates every free minute of his life to supporting Korean victims of Japanese colonial rule and their families in their struggle to gain justice. He is joined by members of various Japanese citizen groups. While the film leaves the question of the Yasukuni problem inevitably unanswered, its moving portrayal of the process towards historical awareness, mutual understanding, and reconciliation between individuals like the Korean woman Lee Hee Ja and her Japanese supporters, conveys a strong sense of hope.