

**Japan's Yasukuni Shrine: Place of Peace or Place of Conflict?
Regional Politics of History and Memory in East Asia**

by

William Daniel Sturgeon

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平和と紛争の衝突空間としての靖国神社

—歴史と記憶をめぐる東アジア地域政治—

Division of Public Administration
International Christian University Graduate School

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ウィリアム・ダニエル・スタージョン

Abstract

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has visited the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo five times in the last five years. As a result, Japan's relations with China and Korea are the worst they have been since the end of World War Two. However, Prime Minister Koizumi has accused the two of meddling in Japan's internal affairs - he does not see this as an international issue. For China, Korea, and others the fact that the shrine also includes 14 Class A War Criminals makes the Prime Minister's visits to the Shrine, official or not, an issue of international concern.

Why is there such a rift not only between Japan and its neighbors but also between the way Koizumi sees his visits and the way in which China, Korea, and other countries perceive these visits? What do the visits mean? The purpose of this study is to answer these questions by outlining the political history of the shrine from its founding in the nineteenth century through to the present.

Conclusions of this research are based upon both an in depth analysis of the available literature as well as extensive interviews with diplomats from China, Korea, and Australia as well as with military officers, government officials, professors of international relations from each of the

countries involved, as well as with Shinto Priests, including the Vice-Chief Priest of Yasukuni Shrine.

This thesis has three arguments. First, this thesis argues that the Yasukuni Shrine is caught in a paradox of its legacy - a religious shrine and a state memorial to the war dead left untouched from before the war, in a country that since the end of World War Two has had a separation of Church and State. Second, this thesis argues that the domestic politics vis-à-vis Yasukuni are defined by this paradox, with an ill-fitting policy of separation of church and state without resolution of the need to recognize the war dead. Third, this thesis argues that by visiting the Shrine, along with various policies of the Government of Japan that have endorsed and supported the shrine since Japan signed the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, Koizumi demonstrates to Japan's neighbors that it is hollowing out Japan's post war reconciliation. While Japan has officially apologized for its actions during World War Two, for Japan's neighbors, visiting the shrine is a visible sign that Japan does not wish to act very sorry.

This thesis adds to the debate over Yasukuni Shrine and the "Yasukuni Problem" by attempting to reconcile international and domestic perspectives on this place, what is both a place of peace and a place of conflict.

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At International Christian University, a number of faculty and staff have been wonderful in offering me an extremely broad education in peace studies. In particular, I must recognize my advisor Wilhelm Vosse, as well as Professors Mori Katsuhiko and Chiba Shin. All have been great advisors, from early on. Additionally, Gavan McCormack was a superb mentor in my understanding of the complex issues surrounding Yasukuni. I must also thank Jackie Wasilewski for teaching me that it is OK to see the world as a jumbled, yet organized mess.

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Finally, I must thank my parents and my parents-in-law, who supported Akiho and I through these two years of study in Tokyo. Having their love and support for both of us took off some of the strain, and allowed this thesis to be completed.

Dedication

Akiho, had I not married you, I would not have married Japan - a country I now call home, and a place I have come to love. This thesis is dedicated to you for all the support you have given to me - for all the late nights out talking with people in Tokyo, the delayed dinners, the numerous cups of coffee, and bountiful patience you exhibited on my behalf. Perhaps this thesis, as a small offering to Japan, will allow her to overcome this terribly difficult conflict. Thank you very much.

* * *

明穂、もし君と結婚していなかったら、この日本と「結婚」することもなかっただろう。今や日本は、私が家と呼ぶ場所、そして愛する場所となった。この論文を君と君が私のためにしてくれた全てのことに捧げたい。夜遅くまでの東京都心での取材、遅くなってしまった夕食、数え切れないくらいのコーヒー、そして私のためにさせてしまったたくさんの我慢。この論文が、私からの小さな贈り物として、この悲惨で困難な対立の解決に役立ってくれることを願っている。本当にありがとう。

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the winter of 2000, while interviewing for the Japan Exchange Teaching Program, I was asked, "Who is the Prime Minister of Japan?" I knew I would be asked this question, but couldn't remember who it was. Obuchi Keizo was the Prime Minister of Japan at that time; not necessarily one of Japan's most memorable Prime Ministers. BusinessWeek magazine described Prime Minister Obuchi midway through his term by saying, "After ten months in office, polls say, his government has the support of 50.2% of voters -- high by Japanese standards, and amazing for the colorless Obuchi" (Neff 1999). Colorless is an appropriate description for most Japanese Prime Ministers.

Obuchi's successor was not much better. The editor of the Economist, Bill Emmott, writing about the next Prime Minister Mori, said, "Having a leader so obviously incompetent is not only embarrassing but actually very dangerous. It opens up the possibility of far more extremist politicians coming onto the scene" (Muramatsu 2001). Some would say that this prediction came true in 2001 when Koizumi Junichiro was elected Prime Minister. After five years in office, as of the submission of this thesis, he is now the third-longest serving Prime Minister

in Japan since the post-war occupation (Nakata 2006). Today, it is much more likely someone inside or outside of Japan will know Koizumi's name.

From the beginning of Koizumi's campaign he was somewhat of a rock star. Unlike his predecessors, he was born after the end of World War Two. His wavy hair, eccentricity, and reform mindedness put him ahead in the 2001 election. Shortly after his election, approval ratings for the young Prime Minister shot up to 87.1% (Tett 2001). However, there were clouds on the horizon. His appointment of the brash Tanaka Makiko as Foreign Minister, and disputes over textbooks, a problem he inherited, did not bode well for relations between Japan and its neighbors.

In February 2001, shortly before he was elected Prime Minister, Koizumi Junichiro visited the *Chiran Tokko Heiwa Kaikan* (Peace Museum for Kamikaze Pilots) in Kagoshima Prefecture. The letters of the doomed pilots to their mothers left him crying. In April 2001, he notified the *Nihon Izokukai* (Japan Association for the Bereaved Families of the War Dead) that if elected Prime Minister, he would make an annual visit to the Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo on August 15, the anniversary of the end of the war. He was elected Prime Minister and has kept his promise to visit the Shrine every year (although he hasn't yet visited on August 15). It is possible that he will

visit the shrine one last time before stepping down as Prime Minister in September 2006. Some fear he will visit on this year's anniversary, just before he steps down as Prime Minister as is required by party rules. Like previous visits, this would surely garner intense protests throughout Asia. Because of the five visits to date, political relations between Japan and especially two of its neighbors, South Korea and the People's Republic of China, are frigid at best.

When Koizumi first visited the Yasukuni Shrine in 2001, the region protested. Japanese Ambassadors in Beijing and Seoul were summoned to ministries of foreign affairs to hear official protests. In December 2005, during the East Asian Summit, President Roh Moo Hyun of South Korea and Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao refused to officially meet with Koizumi. In November 2005, a month after Koizumi's visit, President Roh of South Korea lambasted Koizumi at a very brief meeting at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Pusan, but has refused to meet since, claiming the twenty-minute interview scheduled at the last minute was only a brief reprieve in Korea's boycott against Koizumi (Lee 2005). Singapore and Taiwan have also expressed their displeasure with these visits (Onishi 2005). Additionally, the United States is watching closely. Michael Green, a former Security Council official, said in an interview with the Mainichi Shimbun that Japan must

solve this issue or risk being isolated in East Asia (Kuhn 2006).

The protests have not been only among diplomats. In 2001, on the streets of Seoul, protesters gathered to denounce the Prime Minister's visit to the shrine. Japanese flags were burned in the streets and twenty young men severed the ends of their fingers and mailed them to the Japanese Embassy in protest (Garner 2001). In Beijing students gathered in front of the Japanese Embassy and burned drawings of the *hinomaru*, the Japanese national flag. In Australia, the Returned Services League protested (Lunn 2001). Even Koizumi's supporters were upset - by visiting on August 13 he broke his promise to visit the shrine on August 15, the anniversary of the end of the war (McNeill 2005).

Diplomatically and politically, the situation is extremely poor, and of great concern for international relations. Prof. Emeritus Ezra Vogel of Harvard described the current situation on America's National Public Radio by saying,

The public, on both sides now, has very strong hostility towards the other. On Chinese internet, one can see constant criticisms of Japan, very vehement. Japanese public opinion toward China is as bad as it's ever been. We now have, in the latest polls, 68 percent of the Japanese say they have no feeling of kinship toward China (Conan 2006).

Prime Minister Koizumi insists on visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, despite these international ramifications. House of Representatives member Koichi Kato describes Koizumi as a politician "who depends much on emotion and intuition instead of logic and reason when making decisions" (Yoshida 2005). Alternatively, at his new years press conference, January 2006, in direct response to questions regarding his visits, Koizumi said, "The approach foreign governments have taken to try to intervene in a matter of the heart and make the Yasukuni Shrine issue into a diplomatic issue also goes beyond my understanding" (Koizumi 2006). It is clear: Koizumi follows his heart to Yasukuni.

While he can understand the domestic political advantages visiting the shrine provides he does not see this action as an international issue. Koizumi refuses to recognize that the protests in the streets and among Foreign Ministries demonstrate a clear and present danger to the international relations between Japan and its neighbors. Not only do the visits raise concerns among Japan's neighbors, or "hurt their feelings," (China Daily, 2006) the tensions are an unnecessary burden for a region rife with genuine security concerns.

In April of 2006 Japan and Korea clashed over the naming of seabed features in an area of disputed seafloor adjacent to the disputed island of Dokdo/Takeshima - occupied by South

Korea for fifty years, but claimed by Japan (Choe 2006). A similar dispute brews between Okinawa and the mainland of China where, because of an other island dispute, the two energy hungry nations are fighting over gas and oil deposits (Mainichi Daily News, 2006). There too, the naval forces of both countries rattled their sabers. The only neighbor with which Japan can claim good relations is Russia, and they have yet to sign a peace treaty ending World War Two (Blagov 2005). In all of these cases, the security situation has been compounded over the last five years by the tensions brought about by visits to Yasukuni.

The problem is not likely to go away on its own. In spring of 2006, Foreign Minister Aso Taro implied that sitting Emperor Akihito should visit the shrine (Sanchanta 2006). The statement was retracted, but this is the same minister who has specifically identified China as a threat to Japan's security.

Before the end of this year is out, relations between Japan and its neighbors may sour further. As noted above, Koizumi may visit the Shrine again in 2006. There is much speculation about Koizumi's successor and whether they will visit the shrine. Both Foreign Minister Aso Taro and Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzo are possible successors to Koizumi, both as Prime Minister and visitors to Yasukuni Shrine. The deep political freeze between Japan and its

neighbors will take time to thaw, and only if this dispute can be resolved.

A.) The Literature

Few authors have looked specifically at this issue, the "Yasukuni Mondai," the so-called Yasukuni Problem. The primary work on this subject, in either Japanese or English, is currently Takahashi Tetsuya's 靖国問題 or Yasukuni Problem (Takahashi 2005). He looks at the Yasukuni Problem by trying to go beyond the politics. He investigates the problem from several perspectives, including its religious, philosophical, historical, and cultural perspectives. However, in the English language there are no comprehensive works on Yasukuni Shrine, either political or historical, and none look at the international politics of this problem of international relations.

Many authors have highlighted aspects of the Yasukuni Problem, but without focusing on the problem itself. The closest example is the work being conducted by Jennifer Lind, Post-Doctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor, Christopher H. Browne Center for International Politics at the University of Pennsylvania. She is looking at international security relations, memory of war, and apologies in international relations. Her paper, Pacifism or Passing the

Buck and her PhD dissertation, Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics, have greatly informed this thesis (Lind 2003; Lind 2004).

Most other studies that include Yasukuni look at it as a domestic political question. Daiki Shibuichi has analyzed the role of the *uyoku* or the rightists in Japanese identity politics (Shibuichi 2005). John Breen has also looked at the role of the rightists and other supporters of the Shrine (Breen 2004). Likewise, Brian Masshardt, doctoral candidate at the University of Hawaii, is currently completing his Doctoral Dissertation on the actors involved in the support of Yasukuni Shrine, specifically rightist elements, but this work is still forthcoming.

Masaru Tamamoto sees Yasukuni in the light of identity politics inside Japan (Tamamoto 2001). Continuing this analysis on identity, John Nathan has looked at Japanese identity crisis as well (Nathan 2004). Along this vein of Japanese identity, Joshua Safier also analyzed how the role of the Yasukuni problem in the 1980s affected Japanese nationalism (Safier 1997).

As Yasukuni is a Shinto Shrine at heart, a number of scholars have analyzed the meaning of Shinto, and the worship of the dead in Japan from a religious/anthropological perspective. The primary work in relation to Yasukuni is Helen

Hardacre's work on Shinto and the State (Hardacre 1989). More recently, Brian Bocking (Bocking 2004) has analyzed the meaning of Shinto, looking at the interrelation between Shinto and other religious traditions in Japan. John Breen along with Mark Teeuwen have looked at the history of Shinto as a religion (Breen 2000; Teeuwen 2003). John Nelson has carefully analyzed the anthropology of several Shinto Shrines in Japan (Nelson 2000). More specifically, Breen (Breen 2005; Breen 2004) and Nelson (Nelson 2003) have carefully analyzed Yasukuni Shrine in light of this history and sociology of Shinto. Again, these do not address the Yasukuni Problem as a problem of international relations.

Yasukuni shrine is typically treated as a minor topic in the analysis of broader themes. Historians Umehara Takeshi, Herbert Bix, Carol Gluck, Fujitani Takashi, Laura Hein, and Mark Selden (Umehara 2004; Umehara 2005; Bix 2005; Gluck 1985; Fujitani 1998; Hein 1999) have all written on issues related to Yasukuni, but not on Yasukuni shrine specifically.

A number of other scholars have looked at Yasukuni Shrine as it relates to nationalism. In particular, Fujitani Takashi has analyzed the role of the Japanese monarchy and nationalism (Fujitani, 1998). Likewise, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's work on Nationalism looks very closely at the role Yasukuni has played, especially through the symbolism of the Cherry trees, as well