Religion in Modern Asia: Tradition, State and Society

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Introduction

When we think of “religion” (or, more particularly, “religious tradition”), we seldom associate it with terms like “modernity,” except in contrast. At least in common parlance, a “religious” person or a “traditional” practice is more commonly seen as threatened by — or at least in tension with — the unrelenting pace of change that characterizes the modern world. Indeed, for many years, scholarly consensus seemed to be that modernization and secularization always proceeded hand in hand. Not everyone welcomed this process, but many agreed that one of the defining features of the modern era would be an irreversible weakening of the authority of tradition and the influence of religious worldviews, values and practices.

Instead of falling into terminal decline, however, religion continues to be one of the central forces shaping the modern world. Despite significant changes in their political roles around the world, for instance, religious institutions (from churches and shrines to religiously-affiliated foundations) continue to wield considerable influence as political agents. Similarly, religious belonging (whether understood in terms of formal sectarian membership or as a more-or-less coherent set of shared ideals) is often affirmed as a touchstone of national identity and social coherence in the face of global diversity. And religious symbols continue to shape how we view the world, even when we lose sight of their traditional origins.

To be sure, religious ideas and institutions have undergone considerable change since the beginnings of the modern era. Many facets of the contemporary world — including nationalism, global capitalism, and rapid technological change to name a few — continue to pose new challenges to old ways of thinking and acting. Rather than a threat to religious traditions as such, however, we should perhaps understand modern history as a new context (or confluence of contexts) for what these traditions have, in fact, always done: presenting authoritative resources and precedents from the past that each generation uses to understand and respond to the challenges of a changing world. Indeed, claims for the unchanging character of religious institutions or the unalterable verities of doctrine often turn out to have their own histories, unfolding in contexts that themselves continue to change over time.

The articles collected in this volume explore some of the ways in which religious traditions have shaped, and been shaped by, the history of the modern Asia Pacific, from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. Although much of the focus is on Japanese history, the issues that they address are by no means limited to Japan, but rather bear on the larger experience of the region and the world. Part I (“Imagining a Usable Past”) lays the foundation for discussion, by considering some of the ways in which elements of religious tradition (from doctrines and symbols to institutions) have been interpreted and applied to the challenges of the modern world, from war and social inequality to capitalism and the formation of modern nation states. The appropriation of these traditional resources, we will see, is often selective, and seldom goes without being contested by others, who may apply the same traditional authorities to different ends. Part II (“Imagining Community in a Changing World”) continues this analysis by examining the ways in which modern evocations of religious belonging have taken place in the context of national and international politics, from imperial cosmopolitanism and religious nationalism to the rivalries of the Cold War and global capitalism.
Part I – Imagining a Usable Past

Tradition (from the Latin *tradicio*) literally means something handed down, a legacy from prior generations bestowed on the present. Yet the history of any tradition is as much about the needs of the present as it is about the authority of the past. When we seek answers in the precedents and mandates of antiquity, we often do so in order to address problems our ancestors and founding fathers could not have foreseen. In this respect, each generation could be said to imagine the past even as they look to it for guidance, raising some elements of tradition to prominence and allowing others to fall into obscurity. As Brian Cumings insightfully notes in his discussion of North Korean politics, “We all, consciously or not, live within and search for a usable past.” The historian’s perspective permits us to explore the transformations undergone by traditions even as they are called upon as touchstones of stability in a changing world.

If our engagement with tradition can be viewed as an act of imagination, it is one where conflicting interpretations are possible, even likely. Two articles by Brian Victoria, for example, discuss the ways in which Buddhist (and, to a lesser extent, Shinto) doctrines have been applied to the traumatic experience of war, social inequality and disaster in Japan, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. He notes that, while some have used the Buddhist imagery of karmic cause-and-effect to justify human suffering (and the social and political policies that so often create it), others have emphasized the Buddhist virtue of compassion to call for change in those very policies. In a similar fashion, Yoneyama Shoko describes the ways in which Ogata Masato and others have drawn on folk religious ideas to offer a damning critique of the dehumanizing commercialism of government responses to the ecological catastrophes at Minamata (where the devastating consequences of mercury poisoning were first identified in 1956) and Fukushima (where the 2011 failure of a nuclear plant continues to pose a threat to the health and safety of the region).

Perhaps the most obvious examples of the appropriation and contestation of traditional authorities can be found in the history of propaganda. As Byron Earhart notes, for example, the striking geography and religious history of Mount Fuji made it a prime symbol for the political imagination of Japan as a modern nation-state in the late nineteenth century. Especially during the Second World War, both the Japanese and the Allies used images of Fuji as an evocative synecdoche for the Japanese homeland, encouraging Japanese soldiers either to rise in defense of the motherland (and the expansion of her sphere of political influence) or to abandon their imperial ambitions in the Pacific and return to hearth and home. In a similar fashion, Saeyoung Park describes the symbolic appropriation (and ultimate transformation) of the Hyŏnch’uns’a, a Confucian shrine honoring the sixteenth-century admiral Yi Sunsin, whose defeat of Japanese invaders was employed as a symbol for South Korean national identity after the expulsion of the Japanese occupation in World War II.

In the West — especially in the U.S., where “a wall of separation between Church and State” has been a foundational element of the national political tradition since Thomas Jefferson’s 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists — it is easy to dismiss such political evocations of religious symbols and institutions as inauthentic or even illegitimate. Yet it is important to remember the long (and continuing) history of mutual influence between religious traditions and the political imagination. The appropriation and contestation of
traditional authorities has been (and continues to be) one of the central dynamics in social life, and appears to resist efforts to contain it within one or another narrow sphere of human experience.
In 2012, Kim Jong-il, the “beloved leader” of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, died. As power passed to his son Kim Jong-un (the third generation of the Kim family to exercise dominion over the now impoverished nation), intelligence analysts and media pundits began their inevitable cycle of conjecture, anticipating power struggles and the possibility for a fundamental political realignment in the region. In this essay, Brian Cumings suggests something of the short-sightedness of these speculations, and argues that any effort to understand the political transition in North Korea must take into account long-standing patterns in religion, culture and politics. These patterns represent, not some unchanging template — Kim Jong-un's notable departure from the Confucian mourning ritual observed by his father suggests as much — but a repertoire of authoritative symbols, the materials out of which the regime will construct a “usable past” by which to characterize and respond to the challenges of the present. Awareness of the traditional repertoire that makes up this “usable past” may not allow us to predict with certainty how individuals and societies will behave, but it will certainly help us to understand why they behaved as they did.
“North Korea’s Dynastic Succession”
Bruce Cumings

Introduced by Ruediger Frank

Historians rightfully insist on learning from history. Indeed, history tends to repeat itself — just as mankind stubbornly tends to ignore that fact. Bruce Cumings’ historical take on the succession issue in the DPRK is thus an important and welcome addition to the many different voices that have tried to make sense of what is happening and to provide a glimpse into the future. However, as an economist I know the risks of applying, implicitly or explicitly, the ceteris paribus condition (all other things being equal). Karl Marx, a classical economist but also a historian, saw history repeating itself in the form of a spiral. Developments tend to appear like a repetitive circle if viewed from the top, but vertical change becomes visible if seen from the side. If we try to understand the nature of Kim Jong-un’s leadership, we cannot do so without a long-term understanding of the North Korean system. But we should also consider the many differences between the years 1994 and 2012. The world has changed, North Korea has changed, and even the process of preparation for succession differed. We have yet to see whether the long-term systemic currents will dominate, or whether the many details that differ in Kim Jong-un’s case will substantially shape the outcome of the political process in Pyongyang. True, doomsayers were wrong in 1994, and we are able to explain why. But at least some of the reasons for their wrong assessment are gone, opening the possibility that they might be right in 2012. Or they might be wrong again—for new reasons. RF

I was in Singapore when Kim Jong-il died on 17 December, so I was reading from a salutary distance what passed for expert American commentary. “North Korea as we know it is over,” according to a piece in The New York Times written by a specialist who had served in the George W. Bush administration; the country would come apart within weeks or months. Another asked how could the callow son grapple with octogenarian leaders in the army—wouldn’t there be a coup? Might Kim Jong-un “lash out” to prove his toughness to the military? Others worried that a collapse might require US Marines on Okinawa to swoop in to corral loose nukes (a key mission for several years).

The Obama administration fretted about a power struggle, something Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had spoken of after Kim’s stroke three years earlier. The model seemed to be the USSR after Stalin died, or China after Mao. They ignored what happened when Kim Il-sung died in 1994—which was nothing.

My first visit to North Korea was in 1981. I flew from Beijing and hoped to go out through the Soviet Union on the Trans-Siberian railway. Consular officials said I should obtain a visa at the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang. When I got there, a friendly (read KGB) counselor offered me cognac and inquired what I might be doing in Pyongyang. Then he asked what I thought of Kim Jong-il, who had just been officially designated as successor to Kim Il-sung at the 6th Party Congress in 1980. “Well, he doesn’t have his father’s charisma,” I said; “He’s diminutive, pear-shaped, homely. Looks like his mother.” The counselor replied: “Oh, you Americans, always thinking about personality. Don’t you know they have a bureaucratic bloc behind him, they all rise or fall with him—these people really know how to do this. You should come back in 2020 and see his son take power.”
It was the best prediction I’ve ever heard about this communist state-cum-dynasty, even if Kim Jong-il’s heart attack at 69 hastened the succession to Kim Jong-un by a few years. North Korea has known only millennia of monarchy and then a century of dictatorship—Japanese from 1910-1945 (in the late stages of colonial rule Koreans had to worship the Japanese emperor), and then for the past 66 years the hegemony of the Kim family.

On the grandson’s birthday, 8 January (his birth year, 1983 or 1984, still seems to be a secret), Pyongyang television ran an hour-long documentary attributing to him every North Korean virtue and identifying him with every place or monument visited by Kim Il-sung, but especially White Head Mountain, the vast volcanic peak on the Sino-Korean border, mythical fount of the Korean people, site of some of Kim’s anti-Japanese guerrilla battles in the 1930s and purported birthplace of Kim Jong-il in 1942. Most interesting, though, was Jong-un’s body language: tall, hefty, grinning, he already looked like a politician, at home with his sudden role as “beloved successor”. Gone was the dour, dyspeptic, cynical, ill-at-ease Kim Jong-il, swaddled in a puffy ski jacket, his face hidden behind sunglasses. Jong-un, in looks and style, is the spitting image of his grandfather when he came to power in the late 1940s; he even shaves his sideburns up high (the documentary showed photos of Kim Il-sung with the same haircut). It was as if his DNA had passed uncontaminated to the grandson (as no doubt the regime wants its people to believe).

Korean culture is steeped in the ceremony, ritual, literature, poetry, folklore and gossip of royal families—especially which son will succeed the king. Many did so at a young age. The greatest of the kings, Sejong, under whom the unique Korean writing system was promulgated, took office in 1418 at the age of 21, assisted by the regency of his father. Like Jong-un, he was the third son: the eldest son was banished from Seoul for rudeness, the middle son became a Buddhist monk. Kim Jong-nam, Kim Jong-il’s first son, was caught entering Japan under a pseudonym (hoping to visit Disneyland, it is said), and lives in Macao. Almost nothing is known about the middle son. Neither appeared at their father’s funeral.

**Honour matters**

Asians dislike anything that damages or threatens their dignity, their honour. In North Korean eyes, the prestige of the nation is bound up with the image of the leader. On the way in from the airport in 1981, as we sped by Kim Il-sung billboards, my friendly guide had one solemn admonition: please do not insult our leader. (I hadn’t planned to.) The leader’s ideology, then and
now, waschuch’e, which means to put Korea first. The scholar Gari Ledyard has written that the second character used in writing chuch’e, when joined to the word for nation—kukch’e—was classically used to mean national dignity. Ledyard writes: “The kukch’e can be hurt, it can be embarrassed, it can be insulted, it can be sullied. The members of the society must behave in such a way that thekukch’e will not be lost. This sense of the word resonates with emotions and ethics that spring from deep sources in the traditional psyche.” In North Korea this idea is alive and well—often displayed in overweening pride and grandiose monuments, but at bottom, in an insistence on national dignity.

The penultimate Korean king, Kojong, was just 11 when he took the throne in 1864, guided by his father—a powerful regent known as the Taewon’gun—until he reached maturity. During his regency, his father reenergised the dominant ideology (neo-Confucianism), practiced a strict seclusion policy against several empires knocking at the door, and fought serious wars against both France (1866) and the US (1871); two years later the new Meiji leadership in Japan came close to invading Korea. This was the Hermit Kingdom at its height; and kukch’ewas a prominent concept under the Taewon’gun.

But when Kojong came of age he sought modern reforms, signed unequal treaties opening Korea to commerce and tried to play the imperial powers off against each other. It worked for 25 years, and then it didn’t; opening up merely staved off the predictable end—the obliteration of Korean sovereignty in 1910. At the Revolutionary Museum in Pyongyang, fronted by a 60-foot statue of Kim Il-sung, visitors encounter a paean of praise to the Taewon’gun, stone monuments from his era meant to ward off foreign barbarians, and tributes to Korean “victories” against the French and the Americans.

During the recent funeral procession, Kim Jong-il’s brother-in-law, Chang Song-t’aek, walked behind Kim Jong-un. Chang, 65, has long been entrusted with command of the most sensitive security agencies. Behind him was Kim Ki-nam, now in his eighties, who was a close associate of Kim Il-sung. Three generations walked solemnly alongside the vintage 1970s armoured Lincoln Continental carrying the coffin of Kim Jong-il, while strolling on the other side of the limousine were top commanders of the military. North Korea is modern history’s most amazing garrison state, with the fourth largest army in the world.

**Mourning ritual**

The rituals were very similar to those when Kim Il-sung died. Pundits and officials had said the same then: Newsweek ran a cover story, “The Headless Beast” (18 July 1994), the US military commander in the South said the North would “implode or explode”, and the imminent collapse of the regime became a CIA mantra. Almost two decades later, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is still here. And in a few more years, it will have been in existence for as long as the Soviet Union. Yet a few months before Kim Il-sung’s death, I heard a US scholar of North Korea tell a conference that when Kim died, the people would rise up and overthrow the regime. Instead the masses wept in the streets—just as they did when King Kojong died in 1919, touching off a nationwide uprising against the Japanese.
After his father died, Kim Jong-il disappeared, causing rumours of power struggles. He was doing what the heir-apparent prince was supposed to do under the ancient regime: mourn his father for three years. By the 50th anniversary of the DPRK’s founding in 1998, it was clear that Kim Jong-il was in full charge, and he launched its first long-range missile to mark the moment. He often said that communism had fallen in the West because of the dilution and erosion of ideological purity. North Korea has turned Marx on his head—or put Hegel back on his feet—by arguing that “ideas determine everything”, a formulation the Taewon’gun’s neo-Confucian scribes would have liked.

Will Kim Jong-un follow the same mourning ritual? So far he has not. He has visited military units and appeared in public. It is in his interest to lay low and gain experience while the old guard runs the country. With US and South Korean presidential elections later in the year (the current South Korean president, a hardliner whom the North loathes, cannot run again), top leader Hu Jin-tao stepping down in China and Putin’s election now less of a certainty in Russia, biding his time is smart. He has become the face of the regime, hoped to be more agreeable to the public than that of his father.

My Soviet informant was right: I had been wrong about the significance of bodily appearances. Whatever he looks like, the king can do no wrong: he can even hit eagles on his first golf round (as Kim Jong-il was claimed to have done). In a classic European text, The King’s Two Bodies (Princeton, 1957), Ernst Kantorowicz wrote that there were two kings: the frail, human and mortal vessel who happens to be king, and the perfect eternal king who endures forever as the symbol of the monarchy. The Koreans made the dead Kim Il-sung president for eternity, all imperfections erased, and now his elaborate mausoleum is the most important edifice in the country. Will Jong-un’s face, so similar to his, make people quickly forget about Kim Jong-il, whose 17-year reign brought flood, drought, famine, the effective collapse of the economy, and
mass starvation leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths? He had one singular, if dubious achievement: the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

We all, consciously or not, live within and search for a usable past. Kim Jong-un may not yet be 30, but if my Soviet interlocutor is right, we are going to see his face for a long, long time.

Bruce Cumings article appeared in Le Monde Diplomatique (English edition) on February 7, 2012.

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Ruediger Frank is Professor of East Asian Economy and Society at the University of Vienna, Vice Head of Department, and an Asia-Pacific Journal associate. His latest books include (with S. Burghart, eds.): Driving Forces of Socialist Transformation: North Korea and the Experience of Europe and East Asia, and Korea 2011: Politics, Economy, and Society.
In his Sociology of Religion, Max Weber suggested that one of the significant social impacts of religious ideas was to be found in what he called “the problem of theodicy,” the effort to reconcile a vision of cosmic order with the suffering, injustice and waste that marks so much of human experience. Among these religious responses to the problem of evil, he included the doctrine of karmic cause and effect, a notion that has since become commonplace in Western popular discourse. As the following piece by Brian Victoria suggests, karma theory has often been used by those in positions of authority, not simply to explain, but to justify social inequality and oppression. In his survey of twentieth-century Japanese writings on karma and society, Victoria describes some of the ways in which Buddhist doctrines like karma were placed explicitly in service to the state. The idea that our experiences in this life are the result of our actions in a past life was put to use, not only to dismiss calls to social and economic equality, but to redirect responsibility for the death and devastation caused by war from political leaders to the victims themselves. As he notes, however, dissenting voices have argued for a very different view, one more in keeping with Buddhist injunctions to compassion.
Karma, War and Inequality in Twentieth Century Japan
Brian Victoria

Introduction

While “karma” is used so often in the West today that it has become almost a household word, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the socio-political role played by karma in Asian societies, past or present. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the very idea of karma having a socio-political role will come as a surprise to many. That is to say, how could an ethical concept like karma, commonly associated with the good or bad effects of an individual’s acts, play a role in collective entities like society and politics?

This article examines the socio-political use of karma in twentieth-century Japan, beginning with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. In doing so, however, it is important to realize that Meiji Buddhist leaders did not suddenly concoct a new interpretation of karma, for what they wrote had ample precedent in East Asian Buddhism. For example, at the conclusion of one of the most famous and influential Mahayana scriptures, the *Lotus Sutra*, we learn:

> Whoever in future ages shall receive and keep, read and recite this sutra, such persons will no longer be greedily attached to clothes, bed things, drink, food, and things for the support of life; whatever they wish will never be in vain, and in the present life they will obtain their blessed reward. Suppose anyone slights and slanders them, saying “You are only madmen, pursuing this course in vain with never a thing to be gained.” The doom for such a sin as this is blindness generation after generation… if anyone sees those who receive and keep this sutra, and proclaims their errors and sins, whether true or false, such a one in the present life will be smitten with leprosy. If he ridicules them, generation after generation his teeth will be sparse and missing, his hands and feet contorted, his eyes squint, his body stinking and filthy with evil scabs and bloody pus, dropsical and short of breath, and [with] every evil disease.¹

Such, then, is the karmic fate of those who dare to criticize followers of the *Lotus Sutra*. And since their blindness, etc. will last “generation after generation,” it is clear that the blind, lepers, and physically deformed of this world have only themselves to blame for their afflictions. They had it coming!

In light of this understanding of karma, it is no wonder that when wedded to the Confucian-inflected familialism of East Asian countries, physical impairment has long been a source of shame not only for impaired individuals but for their entire family. Over the centuries, how many such individuals and families have had to endure discrimination, ridicule, isolation, harsh treatment and worse because of the alleged “evil” they committed in past lives?

Nor should we think that the above interpretation represents some uniquely Mahayanan aberration or an understanding of karma that can safely be understood (or dismissed) as a relic of Buddhism’s feudal past.

I vividly recall a conversation with a senior Thai monk during the 2001 conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Bangkok. I asked the Venerable, “Why don’t Thai Buddhist leaders speak out against the rampant sexual slavery imposed on children in Bangkok and other Thai cities?” He replied, “You must understand that these girls did something
evil in their past lives, perhaps committing adultery. That is why they ended up as prostitutes in this life. Of course, there is hope for them in their future lives.”

At-risk street children in Bangkok

What I am about to describe as the socio-political use of karma in twentieth century Japan is nothing new, whether in Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism, past or present. Ultimately, this raises the critically important question of how Buddhism can hope to play a constructive, let alone compassionate, role in contemporary society if it cannot confront and overcome this understanding of karma.

Civilian Usage

Although the reactionary civilian and military use of karma went hand in hand in post Meiji Japan, I will first address the civilian, or at least non-military–related use of karma, before going on to explore its military use.

Shimaji Mokurai

Since the middle of the Meiji period, institutional Buddhist leaders of all sects employed the doctrine of karma in their ideological struggle against Western liberalism and individualism, not to mention anarchism, socialism, and communism. As early as 1879, for example, the noted Shin sect priest and scholar Shimaji Mokurai (1838-1911) wrote an essay entitled “Differentiation [Is] Equality” (Sabetsu Byodo). Shimaji asserted that distinctions in social standing and wealth were as permanent as differences in age, sex, and language. Thus, those struggling for social equality, most especially socialists and the like, were fatally flawed because they emphasized only social and economic equality. That is to say, socialists failed to understand the basic Mahayana Buddhist teaching that “differentiation is identical with equality” (sabetsu soku byodo). Socialism and the like were regarded as imports from a West that threatened Japan’s existence not only externally, through force of arms, but internally, through ideological subversion. Another outspoken proponent of this viewpoint was Lt. General (and Viscount) Torio Tokuan (1847-1905). General Torio was the founder of the Yuima-kai (Skt. Vimalakirti), a lay society
established in 1881 to promote Zen practice among Japan’s military leaders. Headquartered at the Rinzai Zen monastery of Shokokuji in Kyoto, this society actively pursued its nationalist and militarist mission on an ever-expanding scale up through Japan’s defeat in 1945.

Shokokuji

Torio’s perspective is well illustrated by the following excerpt from a newspaper editorial he wrote for The Japan Daily Mail in 1890:

The adoption of the [Occidental] principles of liberty and equality in Japan would vitiate the good and peaceful customs of our country, render the general disposition of the people harsh and unfeeling, and prove finally a source of calamity to the masses… Though at first sight Occidental civilization presents an attractive appearance, adapted as it is to the gratification of selfish desires, yet, since its basis is the hypothesis that men’s wishes constitute natural laws, it must ultimately end in disappointment and demoralization… Occidental nations have become what they are after passing through conflicts and vicissitudes of the most serious kind… Perpetual disturbance is their doom. Peaceful equality can never be attained until built up among the ruins of annihilated Western States and the ashes of extinct Western peoples.”3 [Italics mine]

In 1911, Toyota Dokutan (1840-1917), administrative head of the Myoshinji branch of the Rinzai Zen sect, condemned Japanese socialists and anarchists as follows:

The essence of the Rinzai sect since its founding in this country has been to protect the nation through the spread of Zen. It is for this reason that in front of the central Buddha image in our sect’s temples we have reverently placed a memorial tablet inscribed with the words “May the current emperor live for ten thousand years,” thereby making our temples training centers for pacifying and preserving our country… We make certain that adherents of our sect always keep in mind love of country and absolute loyalty [to the emperor]… that they don’t ignore the doctrine of karma or fall into the trap of believing in the heretical idea of “evil equality” [as advocated by socialists, et al.].4

As Dokutan clearly indicates, underlying the above comments was an interpretation of karma which held that differences in social and economic status were not the result of either social injustice or economic exploitation but were, instead, solely the reward (or punishment) for an individual’s past actions in either this life or past lives.
Dissenting Opinions

Not all Meiji era Buddhists accepted this reactionary understanding of karma, for although few in number, there were those who embraced both Buddhism and various left wing ideologies. One of these was a Soto Zen priest and anarcho-communist by the name of Uchiyama Gudo (1874-1911). A pamphlet he addressed to tenant farmers in 1909 contained the following paragraph:

Is this [your poverty] the result, as Buddhists maintain, of the retribution due you because of your evil deeds in the past? Listen friends, if, having now entered the twentieth century, you were to be deceived by superstitions like this, you would still be [no better than] oxen or horses. Would this please you?[^5]

[^5]: Perhaps the most famous ‘dissident’ of that era, at least in the West, was D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966). In *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, published in 1907, Suzuki dismissed advocates of the traditional understanding of karma as no more than “pseudo-Buddhists.” Suzuki continued:

> No, the doctrine of karma certainly must not be understood to explain the cause of our social and economical imperfections. The region where the law of karma is made to work supreme is our moral world, and cannot be made to extend also over our economic field. Poverty is not necessarily the consequence of evil deeds, nor is plenitude that of good acts. Whether a person is affluent or needy is mostly determined by the principle of economy as far as our present social system is concerned.[^6]

[^6]: Suzuki’s words raise the interesting question of whether, like Gudo, his break with the traditional understanding of karma, regardless of sect, came as a result of the influence of socialism. One indication of such influence is contained in a second passage in the same book:

> As long as we live under the present state of things, it is impossible to escape the curse of social injustice and economic inequality. Some people must be born rich and noble and enjoy a superabundance of material wealth, while others must groan under the unbearable burden imposed upon them by a cruel society.

> Unless we make a radical change in our present social organization, we cannot expect every one of us to enjoy an equal opportunity and a fair chance. Unless we have a *certain form of socialism installed* that is liberal and rational and systematic, there must be some who are economically more favored than others.[^7] [Italics mine]
Further indication of socialist influence is contained in the following two passages from letters Suzuki wrote while in the U.S. to his good friend, Yamamoto Ryokichi (1871-1942). On January 6, 1901 Suzuki wrote:

Recently I have had a desire to study socialism, for I am sympathetic to its views on social justice and equality of opportunity. Present-day society (including Japan, of course) must be reformed from the ground up. I’ll share more of my thoughts in future letters.\(^8\)

True to his word, on January 14, 1901 Suzuki wrote Yamamoto:

In recent days I have become a socialist sympathizer to an extreme degree. However, my socialism is not based on economics but religion. This said, I am unable to publicly advocate this doctrine to the common people because they are so universally querulous and illiterate and therefore unprepared to listen to what I have to say. However, basing myself on socialism, I intend to gradually incline people to my way of thinking though I also believe I need to study some sociology.\(^9\)

In addition to introducing us to an almost completely unknown side of Suzuki, the above quotes, together with that of Gudo, raise the even more intriguing question of whether it was then possible to oppose the popular understanding of karma without having first been introduced to socialism, with its understanding of social injustice as stemming from a class-based society in which the ruling classes insure their ongoing wealth and power through the creation and maintenance of unjust social structures rather than the individual morality of members of the working class. For reasons of space, this is a question that cannot be addressed here.

Before leaving Suzuki, it should be noted that his use of the word, “pseudo-Buddhist” is far more controversial than it might first appear. This is because Suzuki’s own Rinzai Zen master, Shaku Soen (1859-1919), clearly belonged to those Suzuki viewed as promoting a socially reactionary view of karma. This is revealed by the following passage in an address Soen delivered to the World’s Parliament of Religions in September 1893 entitled “The Law of Cause and Effect, As Taught by the Buddha”:

We are here enjoying or suffering the effect of what we have done in our past lives…We are born in a world of variety; some are poor and unfortunate, others are wealthy and happy. This state of variety will be repeated again and again in our future lives. But to whom shall we complain of our misery? To none but ourselves!\(^{10}\)

Suzuki had to be aware of this passage since it was he who translated the address into English. Given that his own master was among them, it is hardly surprising that Suzuki chose not to name those whom he considered to be pseudo-Buddhists. To have publicly criticized his master was simply unthinkable in the deeply Confucian-tinged Japanese Buddhism of that day (and is so even now, for that matter).
Transitional Usage

Finally, in what might be called a transitional use of karma, we have a military man employing this doctrine to convince his conscripted subordinates that social inequality is nothing to be concerned about, at least in the long term. I refer to Imperial Army General Imamura Hitoshi (1886-1968), who went on to become one of the Imperial Army’s outstanding strategists. As a young officer, Imamura chanced to meet Soto Zen priest Omori Zenkai (1871-1947). Zenkai was no ordinary priest; for over his long career he served as a professor, dean, and finally president of Soto Zen sect-affiliated Komazawa University from 1934-37; administrative head of the Soto sect in 1940-41; and then as chief abbot of both of the Soto sect’s head temples, Sojiji and Eiheiji.

In 1921 Imamura approached Zenkai with a problem that had been bothering him for some time. Imamura was worried about the demands for democracy and workers’ rights that had been growing in Japan since the end of World War I. According to Imamura, this new democratic way of thinking was even finding its way into the military as evidenced by the fact that lower ranking soldiers had begun to question their superiors about things they found unreasonable in military life and society as a whole. What, Imamura wanted to know, would Zenkai say to soldiers who asked why it was that some Japanese children were born into rich families where they had plenty while “poor children don’t have enough to eat and are unable to seek medical treatment when they get sick”?11
Zenkai thought about this question for a moment and then recited a verse from an unnamed Buddhist sutra:

The sun in the heavens has no self,  
Flowers and branches have their order.  

In other words, natural phenomena like the sun play no favorites, providing life-giving warmth to all without distinction. Despite this, not all buds on a tree blossom at the same time. That is to say, the buds on the branches on the south side of the tree blossom before those on the north side.

Zenkai claimed the same could be said about human society. If everyone will but wait and work diligently, good fortune will eventually come their way. In fact, Zenkai claimed to have proof of this. He recalled having once trained at a temple that had records on its parishioners going back four hundred years. Looking through these records, he discovered that in cycles of approximately one hundred years, families that had been tenant farmers became small landholders; small landholders became large landowners; and large landholders fell into tenancy. Explain to your soldiers, Zenkai said, “Adversity improves one’s character, while a life of ease tends to make one negligent.”

Imamura was quite taken with Zenkai’s explanation and subsequently often used it in instructing his military subordinates. For example, in 1926 Imamura, then a Lt. Colonel, was sent to Korea, which was a Japanese colony. While there he became concerned about what he regarded as the luxurious lifestyle led by some of his officers and senior enlisted personnel. This lifestyle was made possible because, being stationed outside of Japan proper, higher-ranking personnel were entitled to salary supplements.

Using Zenkai’s words, Imamura warned them that by using their money to purchase luxuries for themselves, instead of saving it for such things as their children’s education, they were denying their children “the chance to blossom.” Imamura noted with satisfaction that a number of his subordinates took his advice to heart and expressed gratitude to him for having shared Zenkai’s teaching. This led Imamura to conclude, “I was overjoyed that the Buddhist virtue of Zen Master Omori had reached from Japan all the way to a rural regiment stationed in Korea.”

If Imamura was “overjoyed” by Zenkai’s explanation, one cannot but wonder how much comfort Japan’s then poor children who “don’t have enough to eat” would have found in the Zen master’s words?

**Military Usage**

Buddhist chaplains accompanied Japanese troops to the battlefield as early as the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5. Their job was not only to give ‘morale-building’ talks but also to conduct funerals for those who fell in battle, as well as to notify the relatives of the deceased in Japan itself. Even in times of peace the need for chaplains was recognized, with the Nishi (West) Honganji branch of the True Pure Land sect (Jodo-Shinshu), for example, dispatching forty-six priests to more than forty military bases throughout Japan as early as 1902.

In the same year, Nishi Honganji produced a booklet entitled Bushido as part of a series called “Lectures on Spirit” (Seishin Kowa). The connection between the two events is clear in that it was Otani Koen (1850-1903), an aristocrat and the branch’s administrative head, who both
dispatched the military chaplains and contributed a foreword to the booklet. Koen explained that its purpose was “to clarify the spirit of military evangelization.”

As its title suggests, Nishi Honganji intended this booklet to provide the doctrinal basis for its outreach to the military. That this outreach had a broader focus than the soldiers themselves can be seen from the inclusion of a concluding chapter entitled “To the Parents and Family of Military Men.” Although in 1902 Japan was at peace, there was an increasing awareness of the possibility of war with Russia. Thus, sectarian leaders like Koen realized that soldiers’ parents and family members would be concerned that their loved ones might die in battle.

The booklet’s author was Sato Gan’ei (1847-1905), a military chaplain as well as clerical head of a second lay-oriented Yuima-kai, this one associated with Nishi Honganji. The military character of this association is clear in that three high-ranking Imperial Army officers were members, each contributing a calligraphic endorsement to the booklet. One of the three, Lt. General Oshima Ken’ichi (1858-1947), later served as Minister of War in two cabinets and Privy Counselor during the Asia-Pacific War.

In his introduction, Gan’ei explained that the purpose of religion in Japan was “to be an instrument of the state and an instrument of the Imperial Household.” More specifically, the government had granted Buddhism permission to propagate the faith in order “to ensure that citizens fulfill their duties [to the state] while at the same time preserving social order and stability.” Gan’ei claimed that religionists like him had been charged with making sure this important task was accomplished.

Yet, what did karma have to do with this? Gan’ei explained the military relevance of this doctrine as follows:

Everything depends on karma. There are those who, victorious in battle, return home strong and fit only to die soon afterwards. On the other hand, there are those who are scheduled to enter the military yet die before they do so. If it is their karmic destiny, bullets will not strike them, and they will not die. Conversely, should it be their karmic destiny, then even if they are not in the military, they may still die from gunfire. Therefore there is definitely no point in worrying about this. Or, expressed differently, even if you do worry about it, nothing will change.

As the preceding quotation reveals, there can be no question here of soldiers dying because of the mistaken decisions made by their political or military leader(s). As Gan’ei tirelessly pointed out, the Imperial military was under the direct control of its commander-in-chief, His Majesty the Emperor, whose “bountiful benevolence cannot fail but bring tears of gratitude to the eyes of all parents and family members.”

Thus, a soldier’s death is attributable solely to the karma of that particular soldier. In short, like the physically impaired in the Lotus Sutra, he had it coming to him, and there was nothing that the soldier or his loved ones, let alone his military superiors or even the emperor, could do to change that.
Returning to Soen once again, we find this renowned abbot of Kamakura’s Engakuji monastery actively involved in assuaging the grief of those left behind as a result of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. Soen was better acquainted with the realities of war than most; he had personally gone to the battlefield as a chaplain attached to the headquarters of the First Army Division commanded by His Imperial Highness Prince (and General) Fushiminomiya Sadanaru (1858-1925). In a book published in 1906 entitled *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot*, Soen explained his motivation for having become a chaplain:

> I wished to have my faith tested by going through the greatest horrors of life, but I also wished to inspire, if I could, our valiant soldiers with the ennobling thoughts of the Buddha, so as to enable them to die on the battlefield with the confidence that the task in which they are engaged is great and noble. I wished to convince them of the truths that this war is not a mere slaughter of their fellow-beings, but that they are combating an evil, and that, at the same time, corporeal annihilation really means a rebirth of [the] soul, not in heaven, indeed, but here among ourselves.  

While these words were clearly meant for soldiers, not their families, we find yet another invocation of karma to assuage the fear of death. Soen found a positive element in this doctrine that Gan’ei had overlooked, i.e. the certainty that death would lead to subsequent rebirth in human form, not as punishment for past misconduct, but as a reward for the soldier’s sacrifice in combating evil. Soen explained the significance of this process as follows:

> There is but one great spirit, and we individuals are its temporal manifestations. We are eternal when we do the will of the great spirit; we are doomed when we protest against it in our egotism and ignorance. We obey, and we live. We defy, and we are thrown into the fire that quencheth not. Our bodily existences are like the sheaths of the bamboo sprout. For the growth of the plant it is necessary to cast off one sheath after another. It is not that the body-sheath is negligible, but that the spirit-plant is more essential and its wholesome growth of paramount importance. Let us, therefore, not absolutely cling to bodily existence, but when necessary, sacrifice it for something better. For this is the way in which the spirituality of our being asserts itself.

In promising soldiers the possibility of life “eternal,” Soen sounds almost Christian in his approach. However, Soen did not place the war dead in a Christian heaven, but asserted, true to the traditional understanding of karma, that “what we actually see around us is that the departed spirits are abiding right among ourselves.” Needless to say, this was an attractive possibility not only to soldiers facing death on the battlefield but to their family members as well. Yet, Soen
was clearly not overly concerned about consoling the war bereaved, for he concludes his discussion by noting:

As for us who are left behind, no superfluous words are in place, only we must not disgrace the honor and spirit of the dead who have solemnly bequeathed to us their work to perfect. Mere lamentation not only bears no fruit, it is a product of egoism, and has to be shunned by every enlightened mind and heart.”

In describing lamentation at the time of death of a loved one as “a product of egoism,” Soen is taking an impeccably Buddhist position. Yet, one cannot help but wonder if he would have dared direct those words to the families of soldiers who had just received notification of their loved one’s death. After all, as Soen would be the first to admit, not all Japanese were possessed of an “enlightened mind and heart.” Who would address the spiritual needs of the ‘unenlightened’?

Yamada Reirin

In Soto Zen scholar-priest Yamada Reirin (1889-1979), we find a somewhat ‘softer’ Zen voice addressing the question of war bereavement. In postwar years Reirin served as the abbot of Zenshuji temple in Los Angeles, president of Komazawa University, and the seventy-fifth head of Eiheiji monastery. Reirin’s wartime comments are included in a 1942 book entitled Evening Talks on Zen Studies (Zengaku Yawa). Together with his praise for the imperial military’s “wonderful fruits of battle,” Reirin, like both Gan’ei and Soen before him, found the key to Buddhist consolation in the doctrine of karma.

As the following passage reveals, Reirin sought to offer karmic hope not so much to soldiers on the battlefield as to the families they left behind:

The true form of the heroic spirits [of the dead] is the good karmic power that has resulted from their loyalty, bravery, and nobility of character. This will never perish… The body and mind produced by this karmic power cannot be other than what has existed up to the present… The loyal, brave, noble, and heroic spirits of those officers and men who have died shouting, “May the emperor live ten thousand years!” will be reborn right here in this country. It is only natural that this should occur.

Whereas Soen had gone to the battlefield to inspire soldiers to willingly sacrifice their lives in a cause that was “great and noble,” Reirin, writing for a home audience, hoped to console grieving family members with the thought that every baby born in Japan was potentially their lost loved one.

Reirin did deny, however, that the bereaved would ever recognize which particular child was theirs. Yet there could be no doubt that the “good karmic power” (zengoriki) the heroic spirit had acquired through death on the battlefield would result in rebirth in Japan. That much was “absolutely certain” (hitsujo). Given this, what need was there for grief?
Tomomatsu Entai

Perhaps the most ambitious Buddhist attempt to console grieving survivors was provided by Tomomatsu Entai (1895-1973), a noted Pure Land sect scholar-priest. Entai’s comments were contained in an eighty-two-page booklet published on 25 December 1941, only days after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. Entitled *A Reader for Bereaved Families* (*Izoku Tokuhon*), the booklet was published by the Imperial Army’s “Military Relief Department” (*Juppei-bu*).

The Buddhist character of the booklet is clear from its subtitle: “Turning Illusion into Enlightenment (*Tenmei Kaigo*)”. Section headings reveal a similar influence, e.g. “Turning the Mind,” “Nirvana,” and, of course, “Karma.” This does not mean, however, that there was no Shinto influence, for according to Entai, “Following their death in battle, your children or husbands are no longer ordinary human beings but have, at a single bound, become [Shinto] gods and Buddhas…”

Similarly, there were the inevitable references to Japan’s divine emperor. Entai reinforced conclusions that had a profound effect on the way the Japanese people viewed the war at the time and even today:

> There are those who say that it is no more than chance that someone dies on the battlefield, or becomes a widow early in life, or becomes an orphan without having seen their father’s face. However, there is not so much as a single bullet flying from the enemy that happens by chance. It is definitely the work of karma, for it is karma that makes it strike home… Your husband died because of his karma… It was the inevitability of karma that caused your husband’s death. In other words, your husband was only meant to live for as long as he did. In those bereaved who have recovered their composure, one sees the realization that their husband’s death was due to the consistent working of karma. No one was to blame [for his death] nor was anyone in the wrong. No one bears responsibility for what happened, for it was simply his karma to die.

Even today the world struggles to understand why many Japanese have had such enormous difficulty in coming to grips with their war responsibility. At least part of the explanation is to be found in the doctrine of karma as formulated by the likes of Entai, who asserted that “no one was to blame nor was anyone in the wrong.”

On the surface, karma appears to place a premium on the ethical behavior of the individual. Yet, when it comes to evaluating the behavior of a society’s leaders who decide on war or peace, it
has almost nothing to say. Instead, individuals get no more or less than what they deserve. How could the war responsibility of Japanese leaders be determined in the face of the “consistent working of karma”?

Conclusion

In An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics, Peter Harvey claims that in Buddhism karma is not a fatalistic concept. If this is true, one is forced to ask, who forgot to inform millions of Buddhists down through the ages how karma actually worked, not least of all in modern Japan? Did all of these Buddhists ‘get it wrong’? Or is this simply one of the ‘subtleties’ of Buddhist doctrine that somehow got ‘lost along the way’?

One would like to believe that Harvey is right in his interpretation, and, at least in theory, he is. That is to say, a close reading of Buddhist texts reveals that karma is only one of five rules or processes (Skt., niyama), that cause effects. The five are: 1) Karma Niyama—Consequences of one’s actions; 2) Dharma Niyama—Laws of nature; 3) Utu Niyama—Seasonal changes and climate; 4) Bija Niyama—Genetic inheritance; and 5) Citta Niyama—Processes of consciousness. Thus it is clearly mistaken to claim that all occurrences are no more or less than the result of karma. Similarly, the Theravadan school of Buddhism has long held that it is a “wrong view” (Pali, pubbekatahetuvada) to hold that all happiness and suffering are determined by previous karma.

Further, a growing number of contemporary Buddhist leaders frankly admit that the traditional attribution of all misfortune to an individual’s karma is both inadequate and unjust, not least of all because it leads to social apathy and a lack of social engagement. This in turn has led to an awareness of what these leaders identify as either “collective karma” or “social karma.”

The noted Thai Buddhist scholar, Ven. Dhamma-pitaka, for example, points to government corruption, drugs, environmental degradation and authoritarianism as examples of social karma. He criticizes authoritarianism as resulting from the desire to subordinate others in order to profit oneself, desires that Buddhism has long sought to eliminate. Controversially, however, Dhamma-pitaka claims that because an authoritarian system cannot be maintained by just one person, “Everyone is karmically responsible.” Unfortunately, this sounds suspiciously like a collective version of “blame the victim(s).”

Be that as it may, in an era when socially oppressive, if not fanatical, aspects of religion are all too visible, a bleak future awaits Buddhism should its leaders fail to disavow the traditional understanding of karma as a rationale for oppression and social discrimination.

Or as Uchiyama Gudo so insightfully expressed it:

Listen friends, if, having now entered the twentieth century, you were to be deceived by superstitions like this, you would still be [no better than] oxen or horses. Would this please you?

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Notes


2 For further discussion, see Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997), pp. 41-42.

3 Quoted in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 199.

4 Ibid., p. 50.

5 Ibid., p. 43.


7 Ibid., p. 191.


9 Ibid., p. 206.


12 Ibid., p. 111.

13 Ibid., p. 111.

14 Ibid., p. 112.

15 Ibid., pp. 150-162.

16 Ibid., p. 150.

17 Ibid., p. 151.

18 Ibid., p. 153.

19 Ibid., p. 153.


21 Ibid., pp. 27-28.

22 Ibid., p. 28.

23 Ibid., p. 28.

24 Ibid., p. 132.

25 Quoted in Victoria, *Zen War Stories*, p. 156.

26 Ibid., p. 159.

Despite its far-reaching influence (for better and for worse), the doctrine of karmic cause-and-effect is hardly the only religious resource on which modern Japanese have drawn to grapple with suffering and evil. Reflecting on the devastating aftermath of the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear catastrophe in and around Fukushima, Brian Victoria describes some of the religious ideas and practices that have continued to shape Japanese responses to disaster. Buddhist temples hold a virtual monopoly on the Japanese funeral industry, but Buddhist doctrine – which affirms suffering as a feature of all experience – also offers a framework within which to make sense of pain and loss. Yet, as he notes, the Buddhist tradition is not alone in this respect. Not only do Shinto shrines join Buddhist temples in offering protective rituals and amulets designed to avert catastrophe, but Shinto religious ideas provide a framework for understanding and reacting to disaster, if not always in the most socially progressive fashion. He finds that, like the Buddhist law of karma, the Shinto notion of ritual impurity (tsumi) has led to regrettable cases of discrimination, as those exposed to the “pollution” of radiation are shunned by society. Yet these unfortunate instances are matched by inspiring stories of those, like the abbot of Joenji temple in Fukushima, whose religious commitments have led him to compassionate service.
“Buddhism and Disasters: From World War II to Fukushima”

Brian Victoria

It is safe to say that in considering the events of March 11, 2011 including the ongoing disaster at the Dai-ichi Fukushima nuclear power plant, Buddhism is not the first thing that comes to mind. Yet, as suggested by the preceding iconic poster, Buddhism’s connection to calamities in Japan has a long history, beginning with its introduction to the country in the sixth century. In fact, Buddhism owes its very existence in Japan to the early belief that it had the power to protect the country from various calamities, whether natural or human. Buddhism’s role in this regard has long been encapsulated in the title “nation-protecting Buddhism” (gokoku bukkyo).

Needless to say, Buddhism’s ability to protect the nation was severely tested, if not effectively destroyed, by Japan’s defeat in the Asia-Pacific War. That is to say, this defeat occurred despite the fervent rituals and prayers for Japan’s victory conducted by Japan’s leading Buddhist clerics. Nevertheless, Buddhism has an even deeper connection to disasters, one that could not be eradicated even by defeat in war, that is, its connection to suffering and death.

Just how closely Buddhism is connected to suffering can readily be seen in Buddhism’s basic teachings as encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths:

1. Life means suffering.
2. The origin of suffering is attachment.
3. The cessation of suffering is attainable.
4. The path to the cessation of suffering.

While Buddhism is not the pessimistic religion that some have alleged in that it does offer a way to end suffering, it nevertheless stresses that suffering, leading to death sooner or later, is inherent to the human condition. Thus, disasters, when they occur, are not seen as anything new or surprising but rather as further proof of the inevitability of suffering based on the fundamental Buddhist insight of the impermanence of all things.

Inasmuch as Buddhism enjoys a near monopoly on funeral rites in Japan it was inevitable that photographs of priests praying over the coffins of tsunami victims would quickly appear. What is unusual about the above photo, however, is that the victims are being buried without first having been cremated. This is explained by the need to quickly bury the large number of victims in an area where crematoria were no longer operating. These particular victims will later be disinterred and cremated when conditions allow.
As massive as the loss of life was due to the tsunami, it pales in comparison with the loss of life during the Asia-Pacific War. As the following photograph reveals, Buddhist priests also played a significant role in that war, that is, as Buddhist chaplains whose major role was, as now, to oversee the cremation (when feasible) and burial of the dead.

Unlike US military chaplains, Buddhist chaplains did not wear military uniforms, but their military boots and pith helmets made it clear that they, too, were part of Japan’s military effort. Many commanders found it comforting to have their unit’s Buddhist chaplain accompany them on periodic tours of the front lines based on the belief that the priest’s allegedly miraculous powers would insure their safety.

Nevertheless, behind all Buddhist chaplains’ “practical work” on the battlefield lay a metaphysics that promoted a value that became increasingly important the longer the war lasted - resignation to one’s death. Buddhism was seen as providing the quickest route to acquiring the needed resignation, for it was Buddhism that taught living means to suffer since neither human nature nor the world we live in are perfect. During our lifetime, we inevitably endure physical suffering such as pain, sickness, injury, old age, weakness, and eventually death; and we have to endure such psychological suffering as sadness, fear, frustration, disappointment, and depression. Thus, life in its totality is imperfect and incomplete because our world is subject to impermanence. Since we are never able to keep permanently what we strive for, we must accept that we ourselves as well as all we hold dear will inevitably pass away.

Once this metaphysical foundation has been grasped we can better understand the suicidal, if tactically meaningless, “banzai” charges that characterized the latter stages of the war. This includes, of course, the suicidal attacks of so-called kamikaze pilots. One Sōtō Zen scholar glorified these pilots as follows: “The source of the spirit of the Special Attack Forces [i.e., kamikaze] lies in the denial of the individual self and the rebirth of the soul, which takes upon itself the burden of history. From ancient times Zen has described this conversion of mind as the achievement of complete enlightenment.”

In Japanese culture, of course, it is the fragile and short-lived cherry blossom that best embodies the idea of impermanence. Thus, as shown in the following picture, the cherry blossom quickly became associated with those youth called upon to sacrifice their lives in a desperate attempt to avert defeat.

And, as the following cherry blossom-decorated photo shows, Japan’s rocket-propelled, bomber-launched, suicide plane was also called Ōka (Cherry Blossom).
If these photos seem far removed from recent events, it is worth recalling the photos of workers in the early days of the Fukushima accident headed into the dark and dangerous nuclear reactor buildings. Japanese commentators appropriately referred to such laborers as possessed of the same kamikaze spirit: “At Fukushima, a core of several hundred workers essentially sacrificed themselves in the early stages of the disaster…’I don’t know of any other way to say it, but this is like suicide fighters in a war,’ said University of Tokyo radiology professor Keiichi Nakaga.”

**Cause of Suffering**

In Buddhism the cause of suffering is seen as stemming from attachment, that is, attachment to transient things and the ignorance thereof. Transient things not only include the physical objects that surround us, but also ideas, and in a greater sense, all objects of our perception. Ignorance is the lack of understanding of how our mind is attached to impermanent things. The reasons for suffering are desire, passion, ardor, pursuit of wealth and prestige, striving for fame and popularity, or in short: craving and clinging. Because the objects of our attachment are transient, their loss is inevitable, thus suffering will necessarily follow. Objects of attachment also include the idea of a “self” that is a delusion, because there is no abiding self. What we call “self” is just an imagined entity, and we are merely a part of the ceaseless becoming of the universe.

In the years since the advent of the Heisei period (1989), Japan has experienced numerous crises, ranging from political, financial, and social turmoil to natural disasters, as if inheriting the turbulence of the previous eventful and painful Showa history (1926-89). In the face of calamity, however, the Japanese people have always impressed the world with their extreme resilience and what is often referred to as their “stoicism.” It has been generally suggested that the Japanese people are impressively responsive to disasters, given their all too frequent experience of calamity in an island country located on the Pacific “rim of fire.”

Stoicism, however, is an ancient Greek school of philosophy founded at Athens by Zeno of Citium. The school taught that virtue, the highest good, is based on knowledge, and that the wise live in harmony with divine Reason (also identified with Fate and Providence) that governs nature, and are indifferent to the vicissitudes of fortune and to pleasure and pain.

Buddhism, on the other hand, does not teach indifference to the vicissitudes of life but rather recognition of them as an integral part of the very fabric of an all too impermanent existence.
Thus, while suffering remains real, at least to the degree one remains attached to the world, the bitter sting of impermanence is nevertheless alleviated to some degree by the realization of its inevitability. Thus, rather than stoics, the Japanese may best be characterized as simply “realists.”

This may also help to explain, at least in part, why the Japanese, by and large, do not seem as susceptible as many others to what psychologists have called the “normalcy bias.” The normalcy bias refers to a mental state that people enter when facing a disaster resulting in underestimation of both the possibility of a disaster occurring as well as its possible effects. This often results in situations where people fail to adequately prepare for a disaster, and, on a larger scale, the failure of governments to include the populace in their disaster preparations. The assumption is made that since a disaster never occurred in the past, then it will not occur in the future. It also results in the inability of people to cope with a disaster once it does occur. While there is clearly room to criticize the Japanese government for its past and present lack of disaster preparedness, the Japanese people as a whole do respond with admirable calm and discipline.

If being a “realist” and overcoming the “normalcy bias” may be viewed as positive traits, it is also true that the Japanese have often been identified as having a “stoic attitude” based on their embrace of gaman, or in its verb form gaman suru. Interestingly, this term has deep Buddhist roots in that it is derived from the Sanskrit word māna, (conceit). In its original Buddhist meaning this term had a clearly negative meaning in that it designated one of seven types of human conceit, that is, attachment to self (ga). Yet following the onset of the Edo period in 1600 the fact that “self-attachment” was such an enduring human characteristic led to its negative Buddhist meaning being replaced with a positive meaning in which gaman suru now refers to the ability to endure adversity no matter how severe. In fact, gaman is today often regarded as one of the quintessential Japanese virtues or unique national characteristics. The question must be raised, however, as to what was lost by this medieval change from its original Buddhist meaning, especially when gaman can and has been used to justify the endurance of human-created injustice, including exposure to nuclear radiation?

Yet another popular Japanese term stemming from Buddhism is hōben (Skt. upāya) or “skillful means.” The skillful means referred to here is the Buddha’s ability to adjust his message, that is, the teaching of the Dharma, to meet the spiritual needs and understanding of his listeners. Any such adjustment, however, must be guided by both wisdom and compassion. Nevertheless, over the centuries another meaning of upāya has emerged, a meaning best translated as “expedient means.” Thus, what is “expedient” for the speaker becomes an acceptable expression of the truth. This latter meaning is best captured by the Japanese phrase uso mo hōben (a lie is also expedient means). In a recent article in The Japan Times, the naturalized Japanese Debito Arudou pointed out that the widespread acceptance of this phrase has led to a general attitude in Japan of tolerating, even justifying, not telling the truth, at least the whole truth. Needless to say, nowhere has this tolerance been more evident than in the Japanese government’s continued obfuscation of the seriousness of events linked to Fukushima, most especially the ongoing and widespread radiation contamination. Arudou writes:

Post-Fukushima Japan must realize that public acceptance of lying got us into this radioactive mess in the first place. For radiation has no media cycle. It lingers and poisons the land and food chain. Statistics may be obfuscated or suppressed as usual. But radiation’s half-life is longer than the typical attention span or sustainable degree of public outrage. As the public—possibly worldwide—sickens over time, the truth will leak out.
How ironic that it took a naturalized Japanese of Western origin to point out just how twisted the popular Japanese understanding of a key Buddhist doctrine has become.

**Similarities and Differences with World War II**

On August 28, 1945, shortly after Japan’s surrender, Prime Minister Higashikuni declared: “The military, civilian officials, and the people as a whole must thoroughly self-reflect and repent. I believe that the collective repentance of the hundred million (*ichioku sōzange*) is the first step in the resurrection of our country, the first step in bringing unity to our country.”

By employing the Buddhist term *zange* (repentance), Higashikuni effectively shielded Japan’s political and military leaders, including the emperor, from any criticism or responsibility for Japan’s disastrous defeat. However, as revealed in the following “Verse of Repentance” (*Zangemon*), Buddhist repentance refers to a personal acknowledgement of moral imperfection.

The various evil deeds that I have done in the past, all stem from beginningless greed, hatred and delusion. These deeds were born from body, speech and mind, and I now repent them all.\(^5\)

Higashikuni cleverly invoked Buddhist repentance to socialize, and thereby excuse, the political recklessness if not criminality of Japan’s wartime political and military leaders, thereby making each and every Japanese personally responsible for the disaster visited on the Japanese people as well as Asian victims of Japanese aggression.

Further, Higashikuni’s approach was echoed by related sentiments on the part of Japan’s leading Buddhists. Sōtō Zen scholar-priest Masanaga Reiho, for example, stated on September 15, 1945:

> The cause of Japan’s defeat…was that within our country there were not sufficient capable men who could direct the war by truly giving it their all… That is to say, we lacked individuals who, having transcended self-interest, were able to employ the power of a life based on moral principles…It is religion and education that have the responsibility to develop such individuals.\(^6\)

The question is, did something similar occur during the recent disaster? The answer, as many readers already know, was that it did, as seen in the words of Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintaro. On March 14, 2011 Ishihara held a press conference at which he stated:

> The identity of the Japanese people is greed. This tsunami represents a good opportunity to cleanse this greed (*gayoku*), and one that we must avail ourselves of. Indeed, I think this is divine punishment…though I do feel sorry for the disaster victims.\(^7\)

In making this claim, it should be noted that Ishihara was following a well-established Buddhist precedent in Japan, one that be traced back at least as far as priest Nichiren in the thirteenth century. In 1260, with Japan facing a series of calamities at home and the threat of Mongol invasion from abroad, Nichiren submitted his famous *Risshō-ankoku-ron* (Treatise on Pacifying the Country through the Establishment of True [Buddhism]) to Japan’s warrior rulers in Kamakura. The first dialogue contained the following passage:

> The people of today all turn their backs upon what is right; they give their allegiance to evil. That is the reason why the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation, why sages leave and do not return, and in their stead come devils and demons, disasters and calamities that arise one after another.
This viewpoint was similarly invoked during the Asia-Pacific War as an expression of karmic recompense.

There is not so much as a single bullet flying from the enemy that happens by chance. It is definitely the work of karma, for it is karma that makes it strike home... Your husband died because of his karma... It was the inevitability of karma that caused your husband’s death. In other words, your husband was only meant to live for as long as he did. In those bereaved that have recovered their composure, one sees the realization that their husband’s death was due to the consistent working of karma. No one was to blame [for his death] nor was anyone in the wrong. No one bears responsibility for what happened, for it was simply his karma to die.8

Despite these clear precedents, however, this time Ishihara’s attempt to blame the victims for their victimization created such an uproar that he was forced to apologize. Thus, on the following day, March 15th, the Governor held a second press conference at which he retracted his remarks and offered “a deep apology” for having made them.9

Commenting on Ishihara’s remarks, John Nelson, chairman of theology and religious studies at the University of San Francisco, noted that his remarks about divine retribution stemmed from ancient Japanese Buddhist ideas that have now become unpopular.10

While ancient Japanese did embrace an understanding of karma exemplified by Ishihara’s remarks, it should be noted that such views were not those of Buddhist doctrine. On the contrary, according to Buddhist doctrine, karma refers to only the first of five rules or processes that cause effects. The five rules are: 1) The positive or negative moral consequences of one’s actions; 2) Laws of nature; 3) Seasonal changes and climate; 4) Genetic inheritance; and 5) Processes of consciousness. Thus it is clearly mistaken, though popular, to claim that natural events like earthquakes, tsunami, etc. are the result of human moral failures, that is, their karma. Nevertheless, in Japanese Buddhism this mistaken understanding of karma has long been employed to place blame on the victims of misfortune, including social injustice.

In truth, something similar can be said of at least some representatives of the world’s major religions. In Christianity, for example, Rev Gerhard Wagner, 54, was quoted in his local parish newsletter as saying that the death and destruction of Hurricane Katrina was “divine retribution” for New Orleans’ tolerance of homosexuals and laid-back sexual attitudes. Subsequent to his remarks, the Vatican made this Roman Catholic Austrian cleric a bishop.11

In Israel, Shas spiritual leader and former Chief Sephardic Rabbi Ovadia Yosef described Hurricane Katrina as punishment meted out by God as a result of US President George W. Bush’s support for the Gaza and northern West Bank disengagement. Nor was that all. “There was a tsunami and there are terrible natural disasters, because there isn’t enough Torah study... black people reside there (in New Orleans). Blacks will study the Torah? (God said) let’s bring a tsunami and drown them,” the Rabbi said.12 Clearly the cause of disasters of whatever kind remains a controversial topic among the world’s religions.

War Victims as “Polluted”

Yet another ancient religious belief in Japan is that disaster victims become “polluted” by their experience. While the idea of ritual pollution originally comes from Shinto, it has become firmly entrenched in the Buddhist-Shinto syncretism so typical of today’s Japan. Referencing the aftermath of the Asia-Pacific War, John Dower noted:
Despite a mild Buddhist tradition of care for the weak and infirm… whole new categories of “improper” people felt the sting of stigmatization. These included the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with their taint of—really, their pollution by—radiation; war orphans and street children… War widows…and homeless ex-servicemen or any of the other abandoned people who clogged public places such as Tokyo’s Ueno Station.  

As the following photo only too graphically reveals, pollution due to radiation exposure has once again become the focus of the public’s attention.

The April 3, 2011 edition of Newsweek described the current situation in Japan as follows:

People living near the damaged reactor have already begun to face discrimination. They have been barred from staying in inns outside Fukushima prefecture. Angry motorists in Tokyo and other cities have complained that Fukushima-plate-bearing cars were “contaminated.” Some Minamisoma citizens have sought treatment at medical clinics in cities beyond the buffer zone, only to be turned away because they didn’t have “radiation-free” certificates…children evacuated from Fukushima prefecture—especially from the exclusion and buffer zones—and sent to centers in Tokyo and other cities were now being singled out for rough treatment in elementary schools. Their classmates were shunning them and taunting them as being “irradiated”… As Japan reckons with its latest nuclear tragedy, the suffering endured by the hibakushas still weighs heavy on the land.

Final Comments

As the foregoing comments make clear, the distance between the Asia-Pacific War and the still unfolding events precipitated by the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 is typically much less understood. The same can be said for Buddhism’s relationship between the two. It is not difficult to envision that as victims of Japan’s ongoing radiation contamination contract such illnesses as cancer, and die, that Buddhist priests will once again conduct their funerals and memorial services, understanding their demise as but another manifestation of impermanence. Yet Buddhism also has a strong commitment to compassion based on the realization of the ultimate identity of all things. One is left to ponder what practical impact, beyond conducting funerals, this commitment will have on the lives of the victims of the world’s largest industrial accident. Given Buddhism’s long history in Japan of blaming victims for their misfortune, one cannot be too sanguine about the future.

That said, it is noteworthy that there are a handful of Buddhist priests like Zen-affiliated Abe Koyu, abbot of Joenji temple in Fukushima city. In addition to offering prayers for the thousands left dead or missing from the multiple disasters, he has undertaken the additional task of searching out radioactive “hot spots” in the Fukushima city area and cleaning them up, storing the irradiated earth on the grounds of his own temple. Further, in the summer of 2011 Abe grew and distributed sunflowers and other plants, such as field mustard and amaranthus, in an effort to lighten the impact of the radiation and cheer local residents. Abe explained that he and the other monks are storing the soil on a hill behind the temple because neither the government nor the
nuclear plant operator Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) are helping with the clean-up. “No-one else would take the soil. If there’s nobody to take care of it, the decontamination can’t get going because there’s nowhere to get rid of it,” Abe said. (“Japan Priest Fights Invisible Demon: Radiation,” available here.)

On the other hand, as Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko’s recent speech to foreign journalists revealed, the Japanese government has reverted to its timeworn stance of asserting that, as far as the Fukushima nuclear accident is concerned, all of the major players share responsibility. “Rather than blaming any individual person I believe everyone has to share the pain of responsibility and learn this lesson,” Noda claimed. (f.n. “Noda says no individual to blame for Fukushima nuclear crisis,” available here.) This stance means, of course, that no one need fear criminal prosecution for what is now widely recognized as the world’s greatest industrial accident to date. However, perhaps it should be considered ‘progress’ that Noda didn’t go on to assert the entire Japanese people bore responsibility for what happened.

In any event, given continued evasive comments like Noda’s, it would be well for all, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, to ponder the following words of Helen Caldicott, the Australian authority on the effects of nuclear radiation:

> The early nuclear physicists in the Manhattan Project recognize[d] the toxicity of radioactive elements. I knew many of them quite well. They had hoped that peaceful nuclear energy would absolve their guilt over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but it has only extended it.  

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Notes


3 “The costly fallout of tatemaec and Japan’s culture of deceit,” The Japan Times, November 1, 2011. link.


6 Quoted in Victoria, op cit, p. 160.

8 Quoted in Brian Victoria, Zen War Stories, Routledge, 2003, p. 159.


11 Nick Pisa, “Cleric who said Hurricane Katrina was God’s punishment for how homosexuality is made bishop by Vatican,” Mail Online, February 2, 2009. Available here. Due to the controversy surrounding his views, the Pope effectively revoked Wagner’s appointment a month later.


13 Dower, op cit, p. 61.

“Life-world: Beyond Fukushima and Minamata”
Shoko Yoneyama
October 15, 2012
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Shoko-YONEYAMA/3845

The 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster at Fukushima has encouraged comparisons in many quarters with the tragic experience of Minamata more than 55 years earlier, when mercury-poisoned industrial runoff caused widespread illness and death in the human and animal populations. Rather than viewing these disasters as the unfortunate side effects of modern industrial capitalism (to be addressed, in the capitalist view, with financial compensation) Yoneyama Shoko draws on Minamata victim’s advocate Ogata Masato to imagine a more humane and life-affirming vision of our obligations to one another. In crafting his response to the Chisso Corporation and the Japanese government, Ogata (who eschewed financial compensation) drew on elements of the popular Japanese religious heritage to affirm an ethos of interdependence and the responsibility that follows. This can be seen, for example, in Ogata’s use of the term tsumi, an indigenous Japanese category of ritual impurity that encompasses both physical pollution and moral transgression. Combining notions of “defilement” and of “sin,” tsumi is a principle that (as Brian Victoria notes) has justified some in shunning the victims of chemical or radioactive contamination. Ogata, however, employs the traditional imagery of tsumi to describe, not the victims of pollution but its perpetrators, thereby presenting ecological damage as a profoundly moral matter, one that cannot be reduced to economic impacts or financial compensation.
Life-world: Beyond Fukushima and Minamata  「いのちの世界」: フクシマとミナマタを超えて

Shoko YONEYAMA

Key words: Fukushima, Minamata, World Risk Society, nuclear disaster, modernity, environmental ethics, connectedness, spirituality, soul, life-world, Ulrich Beck, Ogata Masato

1. Introduction

German sociologist Ulrich Beck writes that Japan has become part of the ‘World Risk Society’ as a result of the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima.¹ By World Risk Society he means a society threatened by such things as nuclear accidents, climate change, and the global financial crisis, presenting a catastrophic risk beyond geographical, temporal, national and social boundaries. According to Beck, such risk is an unfortunate by-product of modernity, and poses entirely new challenges to our existing institutions, which attempt to control it using current, known means.² As Gavan McCormack points out, ‘Japan, as one of the most successful capitalist countries in history, represents in concentrated form problems facing contemporary industrial civilization as a whole’.³ The nuclear, social, and institutional predicaments it now faces epitomise the negative consequences of intensive modernisation.

The stalemate over nuclear energy – the restart of Ohi reactors and the massive citizens’ protest against it – suggests that we are indeed at a significant crossroad. But what is the issue? A quick look at the anti-nuclear demonstrations shows that the slogan, ‘Life is more important than money!’, is ubiquitous, suggesting that many citizens see a problem not only with nuclear power generation but also with something more fundamental: the prioritisation of economy over life. The fact that such an obvious proposition has to be raised as a point of protest indicates the depth of the problem. How is this rather extreme dichotomy between life and the economy to be faced at this point of modern history? And what will be Japan’s contribution, if any, in envisaging a new kind of modernity?

This paper explores these questions by drawing upon the notion of ‘life-world’ presented by OGATA Masato,⁴ a Minamata philosopher-fisherman whose ideas developed in response to the Minamata disease disasters in the mid-1950s.⁵ It discusses this concept in order to reflect on the relationship between nature and humankind in an attempt to envision a new kind of modernity that does not generate self-destructive risks as denoted by the notion of ‘World Risk Society’.

2. World Risk Society Japan

The relevance of the concept of ‘World Risk Society’ is obvious with regard to the disaster unleashed at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant on 11 March 2011. There is no question that substantial radiation has been released from the stricken reactors. Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) estimated, based on data collected at the plant, that 900,000 terra-becquerels of radioactive materials (iodine-131 and caesium-137) were released into the atmosphere,⁶ which constitutes 17% of the fallout from Chernobyl;⁷ as well as 150,000 terra-becquerels into the sea, in the first six months after the accident alone.⁸ An international scientific collaborative study, on the other hand, estimated, based on data collected from across the globe, that caesium-137 equivalent to 43% of the Chernobyl emission was released into the atmosphere between 11 March and 20 April 2011, 18% of which was deposited over Japanese land areas, with most of the rest falling over the North Pacific Ocean.⁹ Brumfiel in Nature suggests that the vasty
different estimates may be complementary rather than contradictory because the data were collected at different, mutually exclusive locations.\textsuperscript{10}

Experts fear that a catastrophe on an even larger scale could still occur. Koide Hiroaki, a nuclear scientist at Kyoto University, warns that Japan ‘will be finished’ if approximately 300 tons of spent nuclear fuel (4,000 times the size of the Hiroshima atomic bomb) kept at the spent-fuel pool in the badly damaged No. 4 reactor building, release radiation as a result of a cooling failure caused by, for instance, another earthquake.\textsuperscript{11} If this happens, the entire Fukushima nuclear complex will become inaccessible, leading to radioactive emissions on a cataclysmic scale, perhaps 85 times as great as Chernobyl.\textsuperscript{12} TEPCO reported previously that as of March 2010 there were 1,760 and 1,060 tons of uranium at Fukushima Daiichi and Daini, respectively.\textsuperscript{13} A simple calculation, based on Koide’s estimate above, suggests that this is equivalent to 28,000 Hiroshima bombs. A ‘chain reaction’ involving all six reactors and seven spent fuel pools at the complex was envisioned as the ‘worst case scenario’ by Kondo Shunsuke, Chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, in his report submitted to the government two weeks after March 11. The report, which was suppressed by the government, concludes that if the ‘chain reaction’ happens, the exclusion zone may have to be greater than 170km.\textsuperscript{14} Tokyo is 220km away from the plant. Kondo’s report thus is largely consistent with Koide’s prediction, although they hold opposite positions on the question of nuclear power generation.

TEPCO insists that the No. 4 reactor building can withstand an earthquake equivalent to the quake of March 11,\textsuperscript{15} and the Japanese government has accepted the utility’s plan to start removing the spent fuel from the end of 2013, a task that would then take two years to complete.\textsuperscript{16} But Arnie Gundersen, a former nuclear power industry executive, disagrees with TEPCO’s risk assessment. He says that ‘TEPCO is not moving fast enough and the Japanese Government is not pushing TEPCO to move fast enough either, [and] the top priority of TEPCO and the Japanese Government should be to move the fuel out of that pool as quickly as possible.’\textsuperscript{17} As if to highlight these concerns, the region has had an elevated frequency of earthquakes since March 2011.

Tasaka Hiroshi, a nuclear engineer and Special Advisor to the Cabinet in 2011, warns that a ‘sense of unfounded optimism’ among political, bureaucratic and business leaders ‘presents the

\begin{figure}[h!]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fukushima_daiichi_reactor_no4_may_2012}
\caption{Fukushima Daiichi Reactor No.4, May 2012.}
\end{figure}
biggest risk since the government declared the conclusion of the nuclear disaster at the end of 2011.” Likewise, Gundersen points out that the leaders of earthquake-prone Japan ‘chose, in the face of serious warnings, to consciously take chances that risked disaster’; and that ‘a dismissive attitude to the risks of nuclear accidents’ is at the core of the problem. On October 12, 2012, TEPCO’s president for the first time stated that the utility could have mitigated the impact of the meltdowns if it had diversified power and cooling systems by paying closer attention to international standards. In relation to the risk posed by the spent fuel pool in reactor No. 4 building, systemic inertia continues. Japan constitutes a potentially catastrophic risk to itself, to its neighbours, and to the world.

3. Sociological Theories on Late/Second Modernity and the Question of Ethics

The inability of TEPCO and the Japanese government to take effective action in the face of a nuclear crisis, however, is to be expected to some extent, if, as Beck maintains, world risk is an unfortunate by-product of modernity. After all, corporations such as TEPCO and nation-states such as Japan play a central role in pursuing economic development, which commonly correlates with maximising corporate profit. To the extent that Japan’s modernisation was rapid and successful until recently, the risk it now carries is great. If indeed the nuclear accident is a by-product of modernity, prevention of future accidents will have to involve a transformation of the social system that is key to modernity.

The concept of world risk society represents the conundrum of the era in which we live: a highly industrialised society since around the 1980s, which sociologists variously refer to as ‘late modern’ (Giddens), ‘second modern’ (Beck), or ‘liquid modern’ (Bauman). This era is distinguished from the earlier, ‘first’ or ‘solid’ modern in that in the late/second/liquid modernity individualisation of social institutions advances, and social bonds, which connected individuals to modern institutions such as the (predominantly nuclear) family, (reasonably stable) workplace and, and in the case of the West, (still influential) church, weaken. Instead, living one’s own life, and pursuing individual life projects has become the common denominator of the late/second/liquid modern in the advanced industrial countries. The question is what can provide an ethical foundation in the face of a world risk that can jeopardise our own existence, when the risk itself is the product of the social system in which we live.

In order to explore this question, the report from the Ethics Commission for a Safe Energy Supply, which was convened by German Chancellor Angela Merkel immediately after 3.11, and of which Beck was a key member, presents a significant point of reference. It reads:

The progressive destruction of the environment has prompted the call for ecological responsibility – not only since nuclear accidents and not only in this area. It is a matter of how humans interact with the natural environment and the relationship between society and nature. A special human duty towards nature has resulted from Christian tradition and European culture.

There are two significant points to note about this statement. One is that it draws upon a spiritual tradition – that of Christianity - as the foundation of its ethical position. The other is that it highlights Europe as the cultural basis of its ethics. While this ethical foundation may be suitable in the context of Europe, it leaves a question of what might be an appropriate ethical and cultural foundation in other world regions. Given the fact that Asia plays an increasingly significant role in relation to global warming and nuclear accidents, which are two key issues in the World Risk Society, it seems urgent to address this question at this critical juncture of human history. In the frame of this broad theoretical concern, this paper explores the specific question: what ethical
foundation might Japan draw on to frame its future in response to the multiple crisis posted by the March 11, 2011 disaster?

4. Minamata and Fukushima in Japan’s modern history

Figure 1 shows Japan’s economic growth from 1955-2010 by GDP growth rate (shown by the red line with the corresponding percentage range on the left) and the nominal GDP (shown by the histogram with the scale on the right). The different colours of the bar chart indicate three distinct economic periods: the high economic growth period (1955-1973 indicated in pink), the stable growth period (1974-1990 in blue), and the post-bubble low growth period (1991-2010 in green). The graph begins in 1955, the final year of the postwar reconstruction period according to the then Economic Planning Agency; the beginning of Japan’s rapid economic growth period; the onset of the ‘1955 system’ (one-party rule by the Liberal Democratic Party which lasted until 1993); and the beginning of Japan’s nuclear energy policy with the enactment of the 1955 Atomic Energy Basic Act. The star on the left of the chart indicates the official ‘discovery’ in 1956 of Minamata disease, large-scale methyl-mercury poisoning caused by industrial effluent from Japan’s leading chemical company, Chisso. The star on the right indicates the 2011 nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi. It occurred only days after China officially displaced Japan as the world’s second largest economy. The incidents at Minamata and Fukushima thus coincided almost exactly with the beginning and the end of Japan’s period of rise as an economic power and its positioning as the world’s second economic superpower, what might be called its period of super modernisation.

In 2012, 56 years after the ‘discovery’ of Minamata disease, with a sordid record of corporate denial, court battles by victims and supporters stretching over decades, and compensation for some victims, the Japanese government is determined to bring political closure to the Minamata disease problem by enforcing a strict deadline for applications for government compensation under a special law passed in 2009. Applications closed at the end of July 2012, and over 65,000 people have applied to receive ‘relief measures’. This number does not include about 3,000 victims who had been officially certified as Minamata disease patients before 2010, under the most stringent 1977 criteria, and some 11,000 sufferers who received a payout in 1995, an earlier attempt to bring political closure to the Minamata disease problem. These figures are indicative, in the sense of the tip of an iceberg, of the vast devastation caused by the industrial pollution in Minamata.
In response to the government push to achieve a ‘final and complete’ solution yet again, individuals who have worked closely with the sufferers emphasise that Minamata disease will not be over. Numerous people, including congenital Minamata disease patients across generations, some of whom now face the added challenges of advanced age, still suffer incapacity. Epidemiological studies by independent medical researchers, including one conducted in 2009, have repeatedly found expanding areas, and increasing numbers of people affected by Minamata disease. The strongest sense of problem consciousness, however, comes from the realisation that the lessons of Minamata disease have not been learnt by those in power, either to prevent, or to adequately deal with the 2011 nuclear disaster: most notably, failure on the part of administration to take action to minimise harm and to adequately compensate victims. In the case of Minamata disease, it was not until 1968, twelve years after its official discovery, that the government took action to stop discharge of the effluent. The year 1968 was the year when the Japanese economy became No. 2 in the world. It was not until 1973 that the first victims received compensation after protracted court struggles. The crisis in Fukushima is even more serious in many respects. In Fukushima, the level of devastation is extremely high, and as at August 2012, approximately 111,000 people have been forced to evacuate by the government with no or limited prospects of returning to their homes. The impact of the nuclear crisis is global rather than regional, and in respect of the ecosystem, it is not yet possible to determine its ultimate impact. The underlying power structure of the Japanese 'nuclear village' is more formidable than that of Chisso. Its power is reinforced by close links to the international nuclear regime. The causal link between exposure to the poison and illness is much harder to establish in the case of irradiation: low level irradiation does not result in distinctive symptoms as in Minamata disease; it takes many years to manifest as cancer, the cause of which is difficult to single out; and impact upon the unborn, infants and young children is unknown.

Nonetheless, there are important similarities between Fukushima and Minamata: both involve wide-scale and irrevocable environmental destruction caused by humans; both occurred as a result of placing excessive faith in flawed science; both were driven by relentless pursuit of corporate profit and a warped vision of national development; both were promoted and supported by a collusive relationship among national and local governments, bureaucracy, industry, the mainstream-scientific community, and the media (the nuclear village); both marginalised critical scientists; both sacrificed the wellbeing of local residents, reflected a deep-seated discrimination against rural people, and revealed the structure of dependence of the periphery on the
Moreover, neither methyl-mercury nor radiation can be detected through our five senses, and victims are obliged to be dependent on the government and the offending industry for the release of data crucial to their life, data which are often subject to manipulation.

5. ‘Connectedness’ as the Legacy of Minamata and Fukushima

Seen from a different angle, the commonalities between Minamata and Fukushima can be summarised as a breakdown of connectedness at a multitude of levels: family (e.g. the impact of death or health impairment of a family member, loss of housing, land and other possessions); (loss of) work; food production (farming and fishing); traditional and local ways of life; and sense of connectedness with nature, past and future, ancestors and descendants. Both disasters caused deep schisms and paralysis in affected communities. Minamata disease caused many rifts in the community, depending on one’s position towards Chisso, e.g. whether or not one admitted to having Minamata disease, applied for certification as a Minamata disease patient, or pursued compensation. The nuclear disaster in Fukushima has also caused often invisible rifts in the community and within families, depending on one’s stance on nuclear energy; whether to stay in Fukushima or not (especially between mothers with young children who wanted to leave and in-laws who wanted them to stay); whether to consume locally produced food or not; whether to work for TEPCO or not, etc. Physiologically, Minamata disease destroyed connectedness in the nervous system, whereas radiation severs the connectedness in DNA and cells. If one of the characteristics of modernity is the weakening connectedness (of bonds between people and society), both Minamata and Fukushima epitomise it to its extreme, not only sociologically but also biologically.

Is it any wonder then that connectedness emerged as a legacy of both Minamata and Fukushima? The devastation of the March 11 triple disasters met with overwhelming sympathy, abundant aid, and offers of volunteer work from other parts of Japan and all around the world. Within the affected districts, people strove to revive the spirit of the community, for example, by efforts to salvage traditional festivals and seasonal events. The disaster created a sense of cohesion in Japan. At the end of 2011, the word ‘kizuna’ 絆 (bond/connectedness) was chosen as the kanji character that best symbolised the year of disasters. Indeed, the triple disaster affected the people of Japan in profound ways. A public opinion poll conducted in 2012 by the Cabinet Office found that almost 80 percent of the 6,059 respondents indicated that they came to realise, after the 2011 disaster, the importance of connectedness with society to a greater extent than they did earlier.
In the case of Minamata, the word ‘moyai’ 舫 (mooring boats) has become its legacy, although it took nearly forty years for it to emerge as a key concept. The word was first used officially in 1994 in a speech by the then Minamata Mayor, Masazumi Yoshii. It was Ogata Masato, a Minamata fisherman and Minamata disease sufferer, however, who first proposed the concept as a keyword for the future. He is one of the ‘creative and persistent small leaders’ within the community with whom the Minamata patients have been blessed, and one of the key persons in Minamata who can create new knowledge. He writes:

We have an expression, moyai, which I hold close to my heart… It comes from the verb moyau, which means “to tie two boats together,” or “to moor a boat to a piling.” For instance, when we fished for sardines, two boats of the same size would drag a net between them…. If a storm should blow up while we were fishing, we would tie our boat together with another and head for port. This, too, is called moyau. The other boat didn’t necessarily belong to an acquaintance….

As we headed for port we would talk about our fishing villages, how the fish were running, and so on…. Moyai began as a fishing term, but it has been applied to other aspects of our daily lives…. It implies that a small group of people will go somewhere and also return together. Villagers enjoy going places together.

As Beck points out, different phases of modernity: pre-modern, first-modern and second-modern, have coexisted in the process of the modernisation of Japan. In post-3.11 Japan, Minamata presents a vantage point with which to survey this multifaceted modernity. For Ogata this multiplicity has been his lived history, and the foundation of a philosophy which is based on the notion of the life-world that puts the highest and absolute priority on life. As touched upon earlier, ‘life over economy’ is a phrase often seen in the recent anti-nuclear demonstrations, so that ideas resonating with Ogata’s may well be developed based on experiences of Fukushima. Meanwhile, as Beck points out, ‘we need a new frame of reference for the world risk society [from] non-Western countries’. What is attempted below is to construct such a frame of reference by drawing on ideas that Ogata developed in his fifty year struggle with Minamata disease.

This author had the occasion to interview Ogata in Minamata on 15-17 January 2012 and again on 25 August 2012. What follows draws upon these interviews as well as his two autobiographies – Rowing the Eternal Sea: the Story of a Minamata Fisherman (1996 Japanese and 2001 English) and Chisso wa watashi de atta [Chisso within] (2001). By drawing upon these research materials, it is suggested below that:
1) Ogata’s philosophy of ‘life-world’ (いのちの世界・生命世界), developed from his critique of modernity, presents a notion of the world where humans are envisaged as part of the connectedness of all living beings, souls of the living and the dead, and animate and inanimate elements of nature;

2) the philosophy is based on Japan’s cultural tradition of animism and may provide a spiritual basis for Japan (and possibly other parts of Asia and beyond), constituting an ethical foundation equivalent to that of the ‘Christian tradition and European culture’; and

3) the philosophy has the potential to provide ‘a new frame of reference for the world risk society [from] non-Western countries’ by directly addressing the lacuna in (Western-made) social science: spirituality and nature.

6. A Critique of Modernity by a Minamata Fisherman, OGATA Masato

Ogata Masato was born in 1953, three years before the ‘official discovery’ of Minamata disease, the youngest child of Ogata Fukumatsu, a leader of local fishermen. His father died from acute Minamata disease when Masato was six. Masato’s parents, eight of his siblings and their children have all been officially certified as Minamata disease patients. Masato himself applied for certification, and dedicated himself as a key member of the Minamata Disease Certification Applicants’ Council for over a decade (1974-85).

Masato gradually became sceptical about the true meaning of compensation, however, withdrew his application for certification, which was a prerequisite for compensation, and left the movement. As a result, he was isolated and alienated from Minamata society. More than 25 years later, he explains his thoughts on compensation with extraordinary clarity:

The biggest problem I had was why everything was decided by money. There has been a massive devaluation of compensation. The first compensation [in 1973] ranged from 16 to 18 million yen per patient, but in 1995, it was 2.6 million, and then, 2.1 million (US$26K). The amount went down. This is the case for the lung disease lawsuit (塵肺訴訟) and lawsuits over drug-induced
suffering (薬害訴訟) as well. It was as if life is traded in markets and was devalued in the 40th (1995) and 50th markets [counting from the outbreak of Minamata disease]. With the compensation being slashed like this, the biggest problem is the very fact that the existence of life itself (本来的生命存在) is calculated and converted into a commercial value. The government sees compensation as a ‘cost’. It is the same for TEPCO in relation to the nuclear disaster.49

1) If not money, what?

This deep scepticism about money, especially in its relationship to life, constitutes Ogata's most fundamental critique of modernity. This led to an even more difficult question: ‘If not money, what?’50 The answer he gives is:

The original meaning of ‘nintei’ (認定 certification), I think, is to ‘mitomeru’ (認める certify) a person’s existence. In the final analysis, the question is whether or not the person’s existence is cherished (存在が愛されているか) in an equal dialogical relationship in which you ask a question and get a response (受け答えの関係). What sufferers want essentially is proof that they are cared for. But such matters as certification of patients and environmental pollution are turned into a question of criteria. If the existence of sufferers is cherished, we wouldn’t have been left alone suffering to begin with… My father died within two months of onset of the illness. When I think about what my deceased father would have wanted to say, I think that it would be ‘I am human!’ (おらぁ人間ぞぉ). He wouldn’t have wanted to be certified as a Minamata disease patient!51
Ogata’s scepticism about money, however, does not make him simply an advocate of a pre-modern life style, or an outsider to modern life. Quite the contrary. He definitely sees himself as part of the system of modern society. Moreover, he realises, reflexively, his own position in relation to Chisso, the perpetrator of the disease. This realisation did not come easily to him. It meant shifting his position completely from the safety of being a victim-sufferer-patient-plaintiff who expects and accepts the responsibility of others, to someone who admits to being on the side of the ‘accused’, the system that caused the Minamata disease. It turned his life upside down to the extent that it caused him to have a nervous breakdown. In retrospect he writes:

What Chisso represented is a question we must ask ourselves today. This may sound abrupt but I think that Chisso might have been another me, myself…. The age we live in is a period driven by ‘affluence’, such as money, industries, and convenience. Our everyday life is part of a large and complex system which is extremely difficult to get out of. We are very much dominated by the values of the era that caused Minamata disease. In the past forty years, I myself bought a car and started to drive, and at home we have a television and a fridge, and the boat I use for work is made of plastic. Many things in my home are made of materials from chemical factories like Chisso. Fifty years ago most of the PVC (polyvinyl chloride) used for water pipes was made by Chisso. More recently, they make LCs (liquid crystals). We are very much in a ‘Chisso-ish’ (チッソ的) society. If we narrow our thinking to only Minamata disease, Chisso is responsible. However, in a historical sense, we are already ‘another Chisso’. This society which has pursued ‘modernisation’ and ‘affluence’ has been ourselves, has it not? A big question seems to me how we can break ourselves from our own spell and liberate ourselves (emphasis added).52

Ogata thus re-positioned himself in relation to Chisso by recognising his own position in the broader historical context of modernisation. This re-positioning is highly relevant today in relation to the nuclear crisis and energy consumption. Unless we find ways to live independent of electric- and nuclear power-generating utilities such as TEPCO, we can be regarded, strictly speaking, as ‘another TEPCO’ in Ogata’s words. Here, he asks an important question: how can we break ourselves from our own spell and liberate ourselves? In relation to energy, recent developments in Japan and elsewhere to switch to renewable energy, may represent a step forward towards ‘liberation’. As will be discussed later, Ogata sees the potential of renewable energy to provide an economic system that enables us to live more in tune with the ‘life-world’. Whether it be chemical products (produced by companies such as Chisso) or energy (produced by corporations such as TEPCO), however, there remains a conceptual knot in the relationship between modern human existence and nature that is beyond a technical solution.

Ogata says his realisation that he is ‘another Chisso’ led to an even more fundamental shift: namely, to reposition himself from within human society alone, into a broader system of the ‘life-world’ of which human society is part.53 He says:

‘Then my eyes opened to nature. I was awakened to the life of nature. That was it!’54

He writes:

I was beginning to see that everything is interrelated…. Grass, trees, birds, the sea, fish, human gestures, and words – expressions of nature to which I had grown indifferent – all seemed to
offer subtle hints…. I was drawn to the hills. When I spoke to the trees, they would answer. Of course, they didn’t use human words. It was more like the voice of the wind, explaining to me in a different way what it meant to be alive. I was participating in a communion of living spirits, in an exchange of feelings unencumbered by words.\(^5^5\)

This awakening of his senses became the foundation of Ogata’s philosophy of the ‘life-world’.

2) Being human in the life-world

It was not just humans who suffered and died in the Minamata incident. Vast numbers of other creatures, including fish, cats, birds, and domestic pigs,\(^5^6\) died, and rich ecosystems such as tidal zones were destroyed.\(^5^7\) These ‘other lives’ have rarely been part of the mainstream Minamata discourse.\(^5^8\) Ogata points out that it is the same with regard to the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. The damage humans inflict upon other living things is rarely discussed, and if it is mentioned, it is primarily as ‘trouble’: the trouble caused by a loss of their commercial value, the danger we face as a result of contaminated food, or the nuisance associated with life that needs to be ‘destroyed’. It has been reported that almost 3,000 cows, 30,000 pigs and 600,000 chickens as well as numerous pets were left behind in the nuclear exclusion zone at Fukushima to starve to death.\(^5^9\) A recent international study found that there has been ‘a negative consequence of radiation for birds immediately after the accident on 11 March’.\(^6^0\) After shifting his position from that of a victim of industrial pollution to that of being part of the social system that caused it, Ogata began to think about the responsibility of humans towards other living things. He writes:

[Compensation] does not mean anything to the sea. It means nothing to fish or cats. The truth is that compensation does not mean anything to the dead either. So how can we take responsibility? I think that it is by being aware of the \textit{tsumi} (‘sin’) of having poisoned the sea, by facing the fact itself. I myself am confronted with the question of responsibility.\(^6^1\)

Ogata’s sense of responsibility as a human being came with a sense of loss of connectedness with the life-world.\(^6^2\) He ponders:

When I considered Chisso as offender, I thought that I had nothing to do with it. I thought that it was just a company, with power in the system. But when I began to perceive myself as ‘another Chisso’, I experienced a sense of crisis that I myself was moving away from the connectedness of life.\(^6^3\)
Underlying his notion of life-world is the tradition of animism which is epitomised by the word *gotagai*, a word from the Minamata dialect which means; ‘we’re all in this together’. It is a name given to the sense of connectedness with all life within nature. Ogata continues:

> [Gotagai] doesn’t mean simply that we humans rely upon each other for our existence but that plants and animals are also partners in this life. Gotagai includes the sea, the mountains, everything. Human beings are part of the circle of gotagai; we owe our existence to the vast web of interrelationships that constitute life. 64

What we see here is not an image of humans controlling other living things from above, but something more humble, a vision of people as being on an equal basis with other life forms, constituting part of a complex and mutually supporting web of life. Underlying this notion of *gotagai* is a cultural tradition of animism and pantheism:

Beyond the pale of [institutionalised] Buddhism were local gods like Ebisu [god of the sea and fishing] and the gods of the hills. These were the gods important to the villagers’ daily lives. 65

Placing faith in life and treating it with reverence and gratitude is at the core of this philosophy of the ‘life-world’, 66 and underlying it is the way of life of fishing villages in Minamata:

In the lost world of Minamata fishermen] we caught lots of fish every day, and we lived on them. We were nurtured by the fish and the sea. We would wring a chicken’s neck a few times a year to eat them, and once every few years we might also have caught a mountain rabbit to eat. We lived by killing creatures. There was a sense that we were given life by other lives. In this way of life, I think people knew the depth of the sin of killing. 67

Ogata’s ‘life-world’ is perhaps best portrayed by the image of ‘Biohistory’ which illustrates: ‘the history and diversity of life which came into being over the course of a four billion year period’ (http://www.brh.co.jp/en/). 68 The image was created based on the idea of Nakamura Keiko, Director General of the Biohistory Research Hall, whom Ogata invited to the 50th Anniversary of the Official Acknowledgement of Minamata Disease. In her presentation Nakamura stated that all living beings share the same origin (genome), that human beings are only one of the diverse species which share the same history of development over 3.8 billion years (instead of being at the top of the pyramid), and that human beings are *in nature* (not outside it). Nakamura also stressed the importance of regaining our sense of being living things (生き物としての感覚をとりもどす). 69 Nakamura’s call to regain our sense as living beings resonates with Ogata’s idea of regaining the memory of living things. According to him:

In the age of “modernity”, we standardised, institutionalised and mechanised many things in the name of modernisation. In the process, we reclaimed the sea of Minamata 70 that was full of life saying that it was polluted by mercury. But perhaps it was not just the sea we buried. We have perhaps created a system of concealment to continue institutional and mechanical burying. That can be summarised as the creation of a “false memory system” (偽りの記憶装置). By doing so, we have perhaps moved away from the essence of life, and the memory of the essence of life. I cannot help but feel that various social problems we face today happened because we have lost the “memory of life” (命の記憶). 71

Ogata’s Minamata discourse thus developed into a critique of modernity from the standpoint of the life-world. It addresses the change in our perceptions and senses, what Nakamura calls the loss of ‘the sense of being living things’, or what Ogata calls the loss of our ‘memory of life’, that has been shared for billions of years with other living forms. Ogata’s philosophy is a call to regain our sense of connectedness with this vast world of life.
In order to understand his notion of life-world, however, it is necessary to discuss yet another layer of connectedness, that is, connectedness with the soul. This is the dimension of his Minamata discourse that challenges most deeply the current modes of perception, analysis and evaluation of social phenomena in mainstream Western social science.

3) Connectedness with the ‘Soul’ (*tamashii* 魂)

Further pondering the meaning of the Minamata disease incident, Ogata writes:

The Minamata disease incident has left a question that cannot be dealt with as a political issue. Actually, it is the biggest and most fundamental question. In other words, there is a question that cannot be transformed into a question of policies or institutions. That is the question of the soul.\(^{72}\)

The question of soul is difficult to address in social science language. It is a question that may belong to the realm of what Lyotard calls ‘paralogy’, the basis of a new kind of knowledge which produces not the known but the unknown, widening the imagination and opening it to possibilities of an ‘unknown’ knowledge. Lyotard argues that the possibility of paralogy lies in ‘little narrative(s)’, like the story of Ogata Masato. Beck, on the other hand, points out that the ‘enrichment of the soul’ through the spiritual quest for a ‘God of One’s Own’ has been one of the strong trends in spiritual culture since the 1960s.\(^{73}\) Ogata’s discourse on the soul is thus not necessarily alien in the context of social science. He writes:

I feel that we need to express what soul is more substantively and in a way that is easier to understand. I have been thinking lately how we can convey what soul is, and what we can say about the soul…. Previously I stated that it is another name for life, but in a way, I think it can also be called ‘the stamp of humanity’ (*ningen no akashi* 人間の証). Especially after the war, various things have been modernised and mechanised so they can be integrated into the system society (*システム社会*). This has devoured the soul, which is the basis for the connectedness among people, between humans and other living things, and between humans and the sea, rivers and mountains…. I think that the promise of being human is to sense life (*inochi o kankaku suru* いのちを感覚する) and to manage life (*inochi o tsukasadoru* いのちを司る). Humans exist with this duty. We will never be an existence that can be mechanised and institutionalised (emphasis added).\(^{74}\)

Ogata’s critique of modernity in the deepest sense is that modernisation (including mechanisation) has ‘devoured the soul’, the very basis of connectedness. For him the soul is the essence of life that enables humans to be connected with other living things and with nature. He considers it the duty of humans to use this sense of connectedness to preserve and maintain the life-world. His notion of soul can then be understood as something like the energy that connects people with other living things and with nature, which altogether constitutes the whole of the life-world.

It is with this holistic notion of the relationship between humans, soul, other living things as well as inanimate nature in the life-world that Ogata and sixteen other Minamata disease sufferers established the ’Association of the Original Vow’ (*Hongan no Kai* 本願の会) in 1995. The “Original Vow” for them is a spiritual concept. The statement of the Association begins:
Once Minamata Bay was the treasure chest of our sea. Here schools of fish came to spawn. The young fry matured here and then returned to repeat the cycle. The bay was like a womb. In what is now landfill between Hyakken Port and Myojin Point, the silver scales of sardine and gizzard shad shimmered in the sunlight. Mullet leapt. Shrimp and crab frolicked in the shallow.\(^{75}\)

Landfill was used to cover the area where pollution was most severe. Fish from the area, which were contaminated with high-concentration methyl-mercury, were caught and stuffed in 2,500 oil drums and buried underneath the landfill as ‘polluted fish’. For Ogata, this landfill symbolizes ‘the depth of human sin’.\(^{76}\) On the field of the reclaimed land, members of the Association have enshrined small stone statues of Buddha and other deities, including ‘Totoro,’ as a special Minamata deity for deceased children and other young lives lost. The statement of the Association continues:

On this land reclaimed from the Sea of Sorrow, we vow to enshrine small stone images. Bowing down before [the stone Buddhas], we will clasp our hands in prayer, contemplate the sins of man, and pray for the salvation of those souls lost to organic mercury. It is our deepest wish that this land of disease and death be transformed into a Pure Land of the spirit, where all creatures may be consoled.\(^{77}\)

From this position of recognising our tsumi (‘sin’) and praying to find spiritual consolation, Ogata reflects on the significance of the Minamata disease incident. He writes:

I think that the question Minamata disease poses to people … [is] essentially, the meaning of life. It was the incident which destroyed a world where we could catch lots of fish, octopus, shellfish and prawns from the sea in front of us, collect bracken, tsuwabuki\(^{78}\) and ferns from the mountains behind us, and harvest vegetables from the fields where insects were hovering around us, and birds were soaring above.\(^{79}\)

In the past, we were permitted to live in this world and we had a variety of practices that helped us to feel the connection. Each one of us was connected as a living life with various other lives. We lived it out…. When I was involved with the Minamata movement, I thought, deep in my heart, that I was living on my own. But when that sense crumbled, I realised that I live, and am allowed to live by being connected to various other living things.\(^{80}\)
Ogata’s sense of connectedness is not only towards nature and the souls of the deceased but includes connectedness among people; all of which he calls his ‘spiritual community’: The spiritual community is like an old-fashioned country stew, in which each person has a different face, physique, character, and age. Some would be disabled. But regardless of their characteristics, all would have valuable roles to play. No one would be dispensable. In such a society there would be no discrimination. To acknowledge each other’s differences is to acknowledge our essential equality.\textsuperscript{81}

The strength of Ogata’s notion of spirituality is that it is not ‘other worldly’. Instead, his concept of spirituality is firmly rooted to this world, which includes not only intangible but also observable aspects of nature and people. The spiritual community Ogata describes above epitomises it. It depicts a community where each individual is accepted and cherished for their very existence (存在そのものが愛される) regardless of physique, quality and ability, including disabled Minamata disease sufferers. Ogata writes elsewhere that he remembers his father welcoming intellectually-disabled people to his house, people who otherwise would have nowhere to go. He cherished (kawaigaru がわいがる) them by protecting them from being bullied.\textsuperscript{82} Ogata’s notion of the spiritual community also reminds the author that congenital Minamata sufferers – many in wheelchairs with severe disabilities – have often been called ‘treasure children’ (takarago 宝子) in Minamata.\textsuperscript{83}
Minamata, however, is also a place where discrimination against such sufferers has been strong and many rifts occurred in the community, as discussed earlier. Ogata’s notion of a spiritual community, where other people’s differences are appreciated as their essential qualities, is like his prayer. And with this ‘prayer’, he uses the word ‘moyau’ [to moor] to say, ‘moyatte kaeroo’ [Let’s us moor together to return].

But where does he want to return? He writes:

Was not the crux of the Minamata struggle a call from the spiritual world of Minamata fishermen and victims? It seems to me that the heart of the Minamata question lies in their call to live together in a world where life is revered and connected.

Here lies the essence of Ogata’s philosophy of the life-world: to regain the sense of living together in a spiritual world where life is revered and connected.

The question remains, however, as to how to reconcile this notion of the life-world with the reality of highly materialistic late-modern society? Is such a notion compatible with the everyday life of an advanced industrialised society? Or is it possible only by pursuing a hermit-like ‘hikikomori’ life, after denouncing aspirations, comforts, and sense of progress, which are key to modern living? Asking these questions leads us back to the questions raised at the beginning of this paper:

- How is the dichotomy between ‘life’ (inochi) and economy to be faced at this point of modern history? Is it a matter of either-or, ultimately?

The final section of this paper addresses this question in relation to Ogata’s philosophy. It also addresses three other questions.

- Might there be some Asian principle of environmental ethics that corresponds to Angela Merkel's ‘Christian tradition and European culture’ of the West?

- What is the significance of Japan in the post 3.11 era in regard to envisioning a world beyond the ‘World Risk Society’?

- How is it possible to overcome the shortcomings of modernity, its ‘self-reflexivity’, the tendency to turn the Earth into a ‘World Risk Society’ like octopuses which have a reputation of consuming their own tentacles?

7. The Life-world for a New Modernity


‘How [can we] break ourselves from our own spell and liberate ourselves’ from the spell of the ‘system-society’ driven by the pursuit of affluence? -- Ogata asks. By system-society he means a composite of legal and institutional systems that support modern society. He does not suggest that we should give up living in the system-society in pursuit of living in the life-world. Rather, he sees the relationship between the two as ‘right foot and left foot’: both are indispensable for walking. The question is how to live within this potentially contradictory dual structure.

We need to think how to live with the dual structure. In the global-capitalist-market economy, we are controlled by a view of the world dominated by the economy and we cannot escape from it. It is a world regulated by clock-time, and we feel as if everything is controlled by the
overwhelming power of the economy and politics. But precisely because of this, I think it is necessary to have our own time in ‘cosmic-time’, in order to relax and refresh, and find and regain a sense of our true selves. I think that each person is like a small universe and that it is possible for each of us to find our own way, existentially, to connect to the cosmic-time where life is eternal. It seems to me that living this duality provides a very important hint for us to remain and regulate ourselves as humans. To put it differently, we work in the system-society to earn our living, and we live in the life-world to live our life. It’s like doing two-sword fencing, or having two different, top and bottom, streams of wind, or a double helix structure in one’s life.

For Ogata, to recognise this duality meant to understand that he himself was part of the ‘Chisso-ish’ society and to recognise that he was ‘another Chisso’ as discussed earlier. Ogata emphasises, however, the importance of knowing where each of us ‘stands’, i.e. ‘where you put your centre of gravity’ (重心) and 'where you put your soul'.

Sadly, I myself cannot escape from the money economy or the economic system. I use my mobile phone and my boat is equipped with GPS, for instance. Although I cannot escape from the system, I am still resisting stubbornly. What is it that I am defying? There is only one point ultimately. It is where you put your ‘trust’ (どこに信を置くか shin as in shinrai 信頼). In the end, it is the question of where you place your trust, the system-society or the life-world.

For Ogata, the life-world presents an absolute, ethical frame of reference in which, he as human being, has a sense of responsibility to nature even though he is living in the system-society. In this sense, Ogata’s notion of the life-world may sound somewhat similar to what Turner calls the ‘centre’ or what Birkeland calls the ‘north’ in their work on pilgrimage; an inner space which constitutes a separate ‘place to be’ independent of socially constructed morals and values. Ogata’s life-world is no doubt his ‘place to be’ and it provides him an absolute ethical frame of reference.

The significance of his thoughts, however, goes far beyond his personal sphere, beyond a spiritual quest of his own god/centre/north, which may be interpreted as a postmodern quest for spirituality. Instead, Ogata presents a philosophy, a foundation for environmental ethics that addresses human responsibility vis-à-vis nature at this particular point of history when the globalising world faces the life-threatening reality of ‘self-reflexive’ modernity.

2) Intangible Heritage: Animism

The strength of Ogata’s philosophy lies in its dual historical backgrounds. One is the history of contemporary Japan through which he has lived, from Minamata to Fukushima, a period of radical modernisation which now faces an undeniable turning point. The other is the cultural tradition of Japan inherited and transmitted for centuries: animism. His philosophy is based on what UNESCO calls an ‘Intangible Heritage’. It is similar to the Okinawan value of ‘Nuchi du takara’, the affirmation of the supremacy or sanctity of life, as well as the ancient Shinto whose polytheistic/pantheistic world accommodates an infinite number of kami (gods or deities) as ‘a natural force or manifestation of energy or life-force within given objects or places, and spirits and signs of spiritual energy within the world’. In this tradition, nature is spirituality, and spirituality is nature. Not at all solemn or abstract, Ogata’s spiritual world is crowded with many types of spirits, living and dead, human and others, including plants and inanimate entities in nature such as mountains, rivers and the sea. It is an eternal world full of diversity, all connected by the soul.
Animism is not unique to Japan. Its primordial-indigenous tradition merged with Daoism from China that constitutes a strong cultural heritage of East Asia and beyond. Ogata’s philosophy can be considered as a late-modern version of this cultural heritage and thus has a potential to provide environmental ethics that is widely relevant in Asia. If, as the German Ethics Commission for a Safe Energy Supply points out, environmental ethics should be drawn from a spiritual tradition, an animistic culture might be as appropriate in the East as Christian tradition and European culture is in the West.

In the animistic tradition of pantheism, the relationship between nature and humankind is very different from that in (mainstream) European culture. In Ogata’s view of nature, for instance, there is not the slightest hint that humans are above other living things. The image of humankind is humble. The responsibility of humans, who nonetheless have the power to destroy nature, emanates from within the ‘life-world’, rather than from the position external to it. This notion of a life-world is very different from the discourse on ‘human rights’ and ‘animal rights’, which are often used as keywords in the discourse on environmental ethics.

This cultural heritage, however, has not been part of Japan’s intensive modernisation as seen above. As a consequence, we see a situation where many people in Japan feel as if they are compelled to make an unreasonable choice between ‘life’ and the economy. It is at this historical crossroad that Ogata sees a new possibility emerging, a possibility of redressing the conflicting relationship between the life-world and the system-society. It is through the systematic introduction of renewable energy.

3) Renewable Energy

According to Ogata, the tension between the life-world and the system-society is the problem of the relationship between nature and contemporary human civilisation as a whole. With the triple disaster of earthquake-tsunami-nuclear meltdown in 2011, this tension came to a head, but, he remarks, there has been ‘a historical push’ (時代の後押し) to redress the problem, i.e. people came to realise how important it is to live with a sense of safety. Today, Ogata sees a possibility of reducing the tension further by shifting towards green energy. He says:

I think it is possible to change the existing paradox between economy and life to make them more compatible. If people look back 50 or 100 years from now, it will probably be clear that we have been going through a stage of evolution, a type of new industrial revolution. Previously, 'economy' meant manufacturing and industry, but it has gradually changed. From about 20 years ago, the environmental business became part of the economy. Eco-tourism, for instance, sells the environment to attract tourists. And now we reach a stage where we cannot sustain ourselves without maintaining a balance with nature. We cannot but realise that the tipping-point is near. This is not just the case in relation to the nuclear crisis. It is also the case with global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, water pollution, kosa (airborne sand) from China's spreading deserts, and photochemical smog, etc. With these global issues, how to maintain a balance with nature has become an economic question. Before, economy and nature were conceived separately, but now, nature has become the first thing to consider for the economy.

Renewable energy, Ogata says, increases the compatibility of the life-world and the system-society. He is particularly interested in the alternative energy project advanced by Son Masayoshi, who is one of the key proponents of green energy in Japan. Ogata is particularly positive about solar energy which, unlike wind, has no conceivable harm to humans: in his
words, there are ‘no worries about pollution’ (公害の心配がない). He also sees the positive impact it might have towards local autonomy.

Mr. Son constructively engages himself with renewable energy and many heads of local government endorse his view. I think his project will eventually promote local autonomy and local sovereignty. The nuclear accident has threatened life in a broad area, not only in Fukushima. Because it is an issue directly related to survival, sovereignty should be with local residents, and not with the central government. Decisions about the matter of life should be made by the local people themselves.

Ogata is also interested in the international scope of Son’s project, which covers a vast area of Asia from Mongolia to South East Asia. He continues:

Mr. Son brings the whole of Asia into his perspective, collaborating with other parts of Asia to create mutually beneficial relationships. Because issues such as air pollution and nuclear crises have impact beyond national boundaries, I think their counter measures must also be thought about beyond national boundaries. In that sense, I find his ideas very interesting.

Ogata, however, is apprehensive about the system-society that is supported by alternative energy. He says:

In my neighbourhood, contracts have been signed to build two mega-solar stations. One is on reclaimed land that has been left idle because some factories moved overseas. The other is a pasture used as a cattle farm before. Because agriculture cannot be sustained economically, rice paddies, mountains and fields have been neglected and gone wild. Building solar power stations usually means just putting solar panels on the land that is least valuable. Now, it feels as if nature is being integrated into the commodity economy (商品価値化する) in a different way. Increasingly, nature, mountains and the sea, are been looked at through economic lens, and it feels as if our sense of awe of nature is weakening (畏怖の念が弱体化). Maybe it can’t be helped, but I fear that our reverence towards nature is fading away…. I am a fisherman and I see myself as a kind of ‘thief’ who ‘takes’ from nature. In a sense, fishermen and farmers are all thieves. That’s precisely why, it’s important to treat nature with dignity and respect (仁義を通す).

He implies that the same thinking should apply to renewable energy. If greater commodification of nature indeed leads to a diminished sense of awe, there is perhaps more reason to treat nature more mindfully with dignity and respect. In Ogata’s philosophy, this means to feel connected with the life-world and to have a sense of responsibility towards it from within. This suggests that no matter how compatible the system-society becomes with the life-world, the raison d’être of the life-world is to provide ethical and spiritual dimensions that are not covered by the system-society.

In fact, the duality of the 'life-world' and ‘system society’ does not mean that they simply co-exist. During our interview, Ogata repeatedly talked about the significance of maintaining dialogue (対話的関係): for one person to ask a question and for the other to respond. For Ogata, the ‘Chisso within’ has been a significant ‘other’ with whom he maintains a dialogue, while Chisso Corporation avoided dialogue with sufferers at all costs. For Ogata, it is such a dialogue that makes humans human. The life-world is like a sounding board with which individuals can hold inner dialogues, raise existential questions, and seek ethical references to
live more meaningfully in a highly industrialised, late-modern world. At the same time, the life-world is not just an abstract spiritual world. It is nature that exists in the tangible world, as birds, fish, grass, trees, rocks, water, wind, sunlight, etc. The uneasiness Ogata expresses about the diminishing sense of awe to nature is a cautionary note from the life-world, a composite of spirituality and nature, towards the commercialisation of nature.

4) Spirituality and Nature: the Lacuna of Social Science

Ogata’s philosophy of the life-world is, more than anything else, a critique of modernity. He questions the two most fundamental premises of modernity. One is the dominance of money-centred social values as discussed earlier. The other is the exclusion of matters related to spirituality. There seem to be three interrelated levels in the incongruity between modernity and spirituality. The first is empirical. Namely, there is a sense, to quote Ogata again, that modernisation and mechanisation have ‘devoured the soul’ from everyday life. To put it differently, modernity has a capacity to ‘de-spiritualise’ cultures.98 The second is historical, that is, one of the key features of modernity has been to pursue freedom from the oppressive power of religious institutions, as epitomised by the Nietzschean claim that ‘God is dead’. And, the third is epistemological, which is most relevant in the context of this paper.

Social science, and sociology in particular, is a product of modernity and has operated with secularism as its basic assumption, putting spiritual matters outside its boundary. Spirituality is understood to be something belonging to an ‘other reality’ as against ‘this world’.99 Issues of animism, among other things, have been treated in sociology ‘with the utmost reserve, if not disdain’100 as if it is ‘magic’. The elimination of ‘magic’, according to Max Weber, is ‘one of the most important aspects of the broader process of rationalization,’101 that is to say, the key to modernity.

On the other hand, the critique of modernity has been presented within social science itself as one feature of postmodernism. For Lyotard, in particular, incredulity towards a metanarrative, in this case the fundamental premises of social science, is the very definition of the postmodern.102 He sees in the ‘little narrative’ the potential to produce a new kind of knowledge which opens up our imagination to the unknown, something which has been outside the epistemological boundaries of existing knowledge.103 The ‘little narrative’ denotes the kind of knowledge that has been outside the legitimate sphere of (social) scientific knowledge. The ‘little narrative’ of Ogata presents this possibility of creating a new knowledge as discerned long ago by Tsurumi Kazuko.104 Founded upon the intangible cultural heritage of Japan that is shared with other indigenous cultures, it directly addresses problems of modernity based on his first-hand experience as a key person in the historic Minamata movement, that is, on the very frontline where modernity and the indigenous culture of Japan collided.

Connectedness – moyai (tying boats together) and kizuna (bonds) – emerged as a response to the devastation in Minamata and Fukushima at the beginning and end of radical modernisation in Japan. This is a response from the ancient cultural wisdom to the reckless aspect of super modernity that brought Japan not only affluence but crises. In the post-3.11 world, the indigenous tradition expressed in late-modern Japan may open new epistemological possibilities in social science.

The sense of ‘connectedness that an individual feels to everything that is other than self’ is spirituality.105 And enriching one’s soul by having one’s own god has been a definite trend in the
modern world. Ogata’s philosophy is very much in line with this trend in a world which might be called ‘postmodern’. In his philosophy, however, this connectedness is not based on a one-to-one relationship with one’s own particular god. Rather, it is based on a strong sense of being connected organically to a rhizome-like life-world. In that sense, it presents a philosophy that is counter to the reality of ‘individualization’ and ‘new individualism’ in the globalising late-modern world. Precisely because of this, it is possible, paradoxically, that there will be a greater need to restore a sense of connectedness at a different level in everyday life.

Every philosophy and every social theory is culturally and historically specific. While the impact of the increasing economic power of Asia is felt all over the world, as yet no ethical framework to support its sustainable development has been identified. Ogata’s philosophy may provide a first step for us to start imagining a new way of perceiving everyday life for a different kind of modernity. And to do this may demand an epistemological change in the social sciences. But perhaps there is nothing new in that. Sociology did not exist before Durkheim established the concept, and the existence, of social phenomena ‘sui generis’ that are independent of the actions and intentions of individuals in society. Would it be going too far to say that recognition of the existence ‘sui generis’ of the life-world might be the pre-condition for a new modernity where sustainable development is possible?

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• Ishimure Michiko, Reborn from the Earth Scarred by Modernity: Minamata Disease and the Miracle of the Human Desire to Live

Notes
4 All Japanese names (except the author’s) in this paper are presented in Japanese order: family name first.
5 The term, ‘life-world, has been used in philosophy and sociology to refer to the subjective and conscious dimension of everydaylife (Husserl) including the phenomenological aspects (Merleau-Ponty), which is sometimes posited vis-à-vis the ‘system-world’ (Habermas). Ogata’s discourse can be called phenomenological and he also talks about the dichotomy of the ‘life-world’ and the ‘system society’ (システム社会). With these similarities, it will be interesting to examine Ogata’s philosophy in relation to the western philosophical tradition. This, however, is well beyond the scope of this paper, and will have to be left to a later date.
8 NHK News Web (24.05.2012) 「東電 90 京ベクレル放出を発表」 here (accessed 29.05.2012).
14 Kondo, Shunsuke (25.03.2011) 「福島第一原子力発電所の不測事態シナリオの素描」 here (accessed 31.05.2012). The report was originally suppressed by the Cabinet Office.
16 Asahi shimbun (26.05.2012) 「廃炉作業阻むがれき 福島 4 号機・建屋内部を初公開」 here (accessed 3.06.2012)
21 “Tepco finally admits crisis was avoidable;” Japan Times, October 12, 2012 here. To be sure, the admission was made in a bid to gain permission to restart its closed plants.
28 The blue line indicates the inflation rate, which was included in the original chart produced by the Ministry of Finance but not relevant in this context.
31 Asahi shinbun, 31 August 2012 「水俣病救済策、6万6千人申請、想定2倍、潜在被害多く」 here.
32 環境省総合環境政策局環境保健部特殊疾病対策室 2010 「公害健康被害の補償等に関する法律の被認定者数（水俣病申請処理状況）平成 22 年 3 月末現在」 here.
35 Reconstruction Agency 復興庁 15 August 2012 「復興の現状と取組」 p.37, here.
36 Harada, Masazumi (08.09.2011) 「原田正純医師に聞く 天災ではなく、人災」 東京新聞 Tokyo Shimbun.
39 The kanji was chosen in the annual poll for the kanji character conducted by Japan's Kanji Aptitude Testing Foundation. BBC News Asia, ‘Japanese public choose “kizuna” as kanji of 2011’, 24 December 2011.
40 Respondents were over 20 years of age and were randomly selected from 350 also randomly-selected cities, towns and villages in Japan. Cabinet Office of Japan 内閣府 (2 April 2012) 社会意識に関する世論調査 here, (accessed 28.06.2012).
42 Interview with Ogata Masato, 16 January 2012.


Interview conducted with Masato Ogata, 15 January 2012, Minamata.

Oiwa and Ogata, p.98.

Interview.

Ogata 2001, p.49, my translation. All quotations from this volume have been translated from Japanese to English by the author.

Ogata’s terminology, ‘seimei sekai’ (生命世界) or ‘inochi no sekai’ (いのちの世界), becomes ‘life-world’ when translated into English, which happens to be the same phrase as used by Habermas. Both are the same in that ‘life world’ is conceived as an antithesis of the ‘system world/society’. While the ‘life world’ of Habermas refers to everyday life of humans, however, Ogata’s notion of ‘life world’ covers a much wider spectrum including the biological, ecological and spiritual world of all beings living and dead.

Interview.


Ogata 2001, p.66


Except the work of some Minamata residents: Ogata Masato, Ishimure Michiko and Sugimoto Eiko.

Yomiuri Shimbun, 19 April 2011.


Ogata 2001, p.68.

Ogata 2001, pp. 64-5.

Ogata 2001, p.66.


Ogata and Ogata 2001, p.171.


See the homepage of Biohistory Research Institute for the image of ‘Biohistory’ at here.


This was done as a solution to the pollution caused by the organic mercury.

Ogata 2001, p.63.


Ogata 2001, pp.192-3, emphasis added.


78 *Farfugium japonicum*. Its leaves look like shiny *fuki*, but it is not *fuki* and it has small yellow flowers in autumn. It is evergreen and often seen in Japanese gardens, next to stones.

79 Ogata 2001, p.74
80 Ogata 2001, p.75
81 Ogata and Oiwa 2001, p.172.
82 Ogata 2001, p.10.
83 Ogata and Oiwa 2001, p.162. A strong counter-example to this would be the case of the 14-year-old ‘school killer’ in Kobe in 1998 who murdered a small child and displayed his decapitated head at the gate of his school, in order to demonstrate to society how his ‘existence has been erased’ (存在が消された) by the ‘school society, an incident that has had a prolonged empathic impact among Japanese youth ever since. Yoneyama, Shoko (1999) The Japanese High School: Silence and Resistance, London, Routledge, pp.1-17.

84 Oiwa and Ogata 2001, p.173.
85 Ogata 2001, p.63.
87 Interview with Ogata Masato, 25 August 2012.
88 Ditto.
89 Interview with Ogata Masato, 16 January 2012.
93 This is a far cry from state-shintoism which has been in place since the Meiji period.
95 This image of this spiritual world has been adopted in many ways, including anime films by Miyazaki Hayao, most notably in ‘Spirited Away’ (2001) and ‘Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea’ (2008). A strong feature of Miyazaki films is the presence of numerous spirits and (mostly lovable) monstrous beings that live in the unseen world, especially in nature. There are other famous Japanese manga and anime films such as ‘GeGeGe-no-Kitaro’ by Mizuki Shigeru, and more recently, ‘A Letter to Momo’ (2011) by Okiura Hiroyuki, where beings from the invisible world play central roles. The animistic tradition is perhaps best expressed in ‘Tales of Tono’ (1912), a presentation of folk legends by Yanagita Kunio in literature, as well as by woodblock print artists such as Munakata Shiko and Naka Bokunen in art.
96 All quotations in this section, unless otherwise indicated, are from an Interview with Ogata, 25 August 2012.
100 Flanagan 2007, p.1.
Yoneyama: Life-world: Beyond Fukushima and Minamata


103 Lyotard 1979, pp.60-67.


Rising 3776 meters above the Kanto plain, the volcanic cone of Mt. Fuji is Japan’s tallest mountain. Its size, location, and its striking symmetry have all contributed to its standing, since at least the medieval period, as a paradigmatic mountain in Japanese religion and aesthetics, inspiring religious observances, poetry and the graphic arts. As Byron Earhart demonstrates, however, the significance of a symbol lies in the history of its employment, of the ways its meaning is appropriated and contested over time. Surveying the imagery of Mt. Fuji in propaganda, advertising and popular culture over roughly four decades, he suggests the ways in which this mountain — as a symbolic representation of Japan itself — was employed by both the Japanese government and the Allies as a symbol of the Japanese homeland. During the occupation, images of Fuji were initially censored by the Allies, who were wary of its nationalist implications, while American troops employed the image in their insignia, symbolically capturing the Mountain as the Allies had captured Japan itself. Eventually, of course, images of the mountain returned to the public sphere, serving again as a symbolic stand-in for Japan, but now as a peacetime commercial power.
“Mount Fuji: Shield of War, Badge of Peace”¹
H. Byron Earhart

Invitation to Fuji

Mount Fuji²

The exquisite shape of Fuji, its symmetrical triangle dominating a broad plain, has delighted the Japanese for two millennia, and pleased Western eyes for several centuries. Unlike the manmade symbols of other countries—the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, and the pyramids of Egypt—this universally recognized sign for Japan is a natural landmark.

From its first mention in ancient Japanese poetry, this volcano became a mainstay of not only poetic and literary expression of diverse genres, but also of various graphic forms. Also, not unlike most peaks in the Japanese islands, it was esteemed as a sacred mountain, worthy of worship as a deity itself, or revered as the dwelling place of the divinities of Shinto, Buddhist, and Taoist origin. For most of its history, Fuji has been viewed as a physical, aesthetic, and spiritual phenomenon, but our focus here is on its appropriation as a clarion call for militarism and imperialism in World War II, and then in postwar times its transformation into a harbinger of peace and democracy.

In earlier days Fuji was one among many holy peaks, but in medieval times it eventually came to be seen by Japanese as the “number one” mountain of the known world of the three countries of India, China, and Japan. Two major factors led to an upgrading of Fuji’s importance. As political power shifted from the ancient capitals of Nara and Kyoto to the military rulers of Kamakura and Edo (Tokyo) in eastern Honshu, feudal lords and their retinues (and then merchants and common folk) traveled along the Tokaido (Eastern Sea Road). On this route they were treated to the lovely scenes, especially Fuji, later immortalized in Hiroshige’s woodblock depiction of Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido. In the mid-nineteenth century, as the country juggled the domestic problem of maintaining internal peace while warding off external threats from European and American powers, ideologues sought a symbol to emphasize the notion of “Japan” as a nation rather than as a group of individual feudal territories. Matters of aesthetics were part of the ongoing debate about Japanese identity. Some had favored the more Chinese style of
monochrome painting to depict Fuji in a rather ethereal idealism, but the eighteenth century writer Hiraga Gennai insisted on a more empirical and realistic painting of the mountain. Convinced that the form of Fuji is identical with the concept of Japan as a nation, he argued for painting that could serve the national purpose.

The worldwide recognition of Fuji as an icon for Japan was made possible by the distribution of Hokusai’s and Hiroshige’s woodblock prints to Europe and America. By the time of Commodore Perry’s “opening” of Japan in 1852-1853, this snow-capped triangle was already famous in the West. The 1856 commemorative publication for Perry’s expedition pays tribute to the peak by placing its outline in the center of the embossed covers of the three volumes issued by Congress.

![Hokusai, South Wind, Clear Sky (Red Fuji)](image)

The 1868 Meiji Restoration ended centuries of feudal rule and marked establishment of a new national government, also formalizing the shift of political power to Tokyo. The new government used the prestige of the emperor as the major symbol to forge identification with and allegiance to the national polity. Fuji was recruited for an important supporting role in this political drama in the transition to a unified country. The newly established national educational system included geography as a required subject; the study of Mount Fuji as a unique Japanese heritage was a key component of geography texts. Students read and composed poems about Fuji; viewed and drew pictures of the mountain, sang songs about it, and were encouraged to climb it. This symbol of the country also came to be used in the design of paper currency and coins as well as postage stamps.

**Shield of War**

Mount Fuji—the serene and lofty peak praised by generations of poets and artists, the sublime and sacred mountain that had inspired centuries of religious devotion—was, in effect, a ready-made symbol effective for unifying, motivating, and mobilizing the Japanese citizenry by 1931, when the Japanese army seized Manchuria and established Manchukuo, setting in motion a series of military advances into China and eventually plunging the Asia-Pacific region into a global war.
In 1938, when the government began publishing its own news magazines, Fuji was a stock feature both for the Japanese homefront and the colonies and occupied areas. A prime example of Fuji’s utilization in domestic propaganda is a photo in the October 1944 issue of the widely distributed government publication *Shashin Shūhō* (*Photographic Weekly Report*). Shot from a low angle with a serious-looking youth in the turret of a tank that dominates the picture, a diminutive Fuji is nestled in the lower left of the picture, in the same fashion as some of Hokusai’s everyday scenes.

*Bantam Tank Troop*[^5]

A 1942 issue of the same magazine features the Bantam Tank Troop in a photograph titled “At the Foot of Mount Fuji”; the camera positions Fuji as the crowning touch over this phalanx of boys in outsize uniforms, in front of tanks. The synergy of such pictures goes far beyond what the text explicitly states: although Fuji is invoked as a guardian, at the same time, the images encourage and inspire the boy soldiers to guard and preserve not only this national hallmark, but also the nation as the physical land and political entity nuanced by Fuji. That this deeper message need not be spelled out speaks to the power of Fuji’s iconic status.

A more ambitious appropriation of the sacred peak’s cachet was the plan to make Fuji the emblem of the vast territory of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere that promised Asians relief from the colonial yoke of the European powers, simultaneously liberating these nations and uniting “one billion Asians” under Japanese leadership. One project in this grandiose plan was the Shōnan (Singapore) Express, a train that would run from Tokyo to Singapore, renamed as Shōnan (The Light of the South). A 1942 issue of *Shashin Shūhō* features a cover story of the proposed train route from Tokyo to Shimonoseki, on to Seoul, Mukden, Beijing, Canton, Hanoi, Saigon, Bangkok, and finally Singapore. A photograph of the proposed train at Tokyo station shows the “Fuji Express,” with a Mount Fuji-shaped emblem on the front of the locomotive.[^6] Although the Fuji emblem is difficult to make out in this wartime, low quality newsprint, the map clearly lays out the extensive pan-Asia route on which the Fuji Express was to travel—
traversing Honshu and crossing the ocean, then passing through the major cities of the Asian continent. In effect, Fuji was selected as the logo-in-motion for the great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and symbolic ambassador in Japan’s overseas propaganda campaign. The train, however, never made its transcontinental trek.

A 1944 cover of Shashin Shūhō has a photo of an Army Special Attack Forces (Kamikaze Forces) airplane tail with the outline of Fuji on it. This unit was the Fugaku (Fuji) Squadron. One description of the sendoff of these planes reads, “A man’s life is lighter than a feather, and the mission with which you are charged of destroying the enemy is heavier than Mount Fuji.” From early times Fuji was a favorite thematic subject in all of the decorative arts, including personal items such as combs and netsuke, as well as utilitarian items such as sword guards. One superb example of a seventeenth century “campaign coat” (jinbaori) emblazoned with Fuji survives, probably worn in battle, but behind the scenes. Apparently during World War II, Fuji’s power was employed as an offensive weapon for the first time.

The borders between propaganda, indoctrination, and persuasion are porous, and these techniques share a wide range of expressions. A postage stamp is a means of mailing, but some wartime issues definitely fall into the category of “propaganda.” In fact, an earlier standard English-language catalog of Japanese philately designates a special category of “Propaganda Stamps.” Among twelve such stamps, it notes: “The design of the 4 sen stamp shows peerless Fuji and that monumental tower which was erected in the province of Hyūga (Miyazaki prefecture), the legendary cradle of the ancestors of the Japanese Emperors.” The tower commemorates the legendary first Emperor of Japan, Jimmu Tennō. The 1942 stamp pairs the peak of Fuji and the top of the tower with the imperial chrysanthemum crest in a religio-political trinity of support for imperialistic ambitions and the war effort.

A group of stamps issued during Japan’s World War II occupation of the Philippines, pairs Fuji with a local volcano, Mount Mayon, in the service of Japanese power in the Philippines. A set of three 1943 stamps features two mountains: Mount Mayon, slightly lower to the right emerging out of a tropical setting of palm trees, and Fuji, to the left and a little above, resting on a layer of clouds. The setting is identified as “Philippine Islands,” but the twinning of Fuji with Mayon—Fuji in a slightly superior position—is reminiscent of the Japanese government’s use of Confucian ideology on the Asian continent to urge cooperation of subordinate “little brother” Asian countries with their “big brother” Japan. A 1943 issue of Shashin Shūhō includes an article that calls Mount Mayon “the Philippine Fuji,” a verbal move akin to European discoverers and American explorers planting the cross or a flag to “claim” a territory.

Fuji’s colonial service was not limited to the Philippines: “Eleven kinds of stamps were issued in May, 1943, by the Japanese Naval Administration in the Moluccas and Lesser Sunda.” One set of four includes a stamp featuring Fuji with the symbols of modern Indonesia. The image expresses even more vividly than the caption the dominance of Fuji in the upper half of the stamp, with the “sun-flag” in the middle, and the map of the East Indies at the bottom. Another colonial stamp of earlier date (issued by ‘‘Manchukuo’’ Puppet Government’) is the 1935 set “Visit of Emperor to Japan,” here referring to Henri Pu-yi, the (puppet) emperor of Manchukuo. The stamp shows puffs of clouds over the steep slope of Fuji, described as “auspicious clouds on Fuji,” implying that Japan’s close relationship with Manchukuo boded well for Fuji/Japan. Conversely, Fuji seems to welcome—and authenticate—the puppet emperor of Manchukuo. The patriotic service performed by Fuji’s postal images of the 1930s and 1940s evokes the ideal of
the late Tokugawa ideologues who insisted that pictures of the mountain should be “tools of national utility.” Fuji certainly functioned as an instrument of imperial, colonial, and military goals, both within Japan and in the colonies.

Two Japanese wartime cartoons demonstrate how the image of Fuji was borrowed to promote the war; they contain the gist of the Japanese homefront mission of mocking the enemy and supporting the just cause of the war. One is a pictorial depicting Roosevelt and Churchill as debauched ogres drinking and partying within sight of Mount Fuji, with American military forces advancing over the globe toward the sacred peak, which rises majestically above the horizon and touches the top of the picture. The left side with the two Allied leaders has ominous dark clouds, but Fuji’s triangle is pure white: the morality play of Japan and purity is contrasted with the dark, sinister Allied leaders and their troops. In another cartoon in a 1944 Japanese popular magazine, an American is trying to lasso Mount Fuji, but is thwarted by the righteous bayonet of “the divine country Japan” that spears the American in the posterior.  

**Mount Fuji Across the Pacific**

A remarkable parallel of the Japanese and American propaganda campaigns is that Fuji played a similar role on both sides of the Pacific, serving as a convenient sign for Japan as well as its people and government. An American newspaper cartoon published during the 1942-1943 Japanese occupation of two of the Aleutian Islands presents an interesting foil to the Japanese cartoon of the carousing ogres Roosevelt and Churchill overseeing the attack of Allied forces on Mount Fuji. In the American cartoon the viewpoint is reversed, with an apish Japanese soldier poised on the end of a long diving board that has “The Aleutians” printed on the end. The point of the cartoon is spelled out in its title: “Knock him off that springboard.” A tiny smoking Fuji and a miniature torii (sacred archway) identify the landmass of Japan anchoring that springboard. A significant contrast in the Japanese and American graphics is that on the Japanese side a lofty Fuji is positioned from mid-ground to the top; in the American cartoon, Fuji is a small and roughly drawn prop. But on both sides of the Pacific, no explanation is needed to convey the message that Fuji stands for Japan.

![“Mom and Fuji”](image)
American military propaganda (referred to by practitioners as psychological warfare) was quite active during WWII, with 400,000,000 leaflets of propaganda dropped behind enemy lines in the Southwest Pacific. Under the tutelage of American social scientists, these “psywar” agents deliberately avoided criticism of the emperor to avoid antagonizing Japanese readers, blaming the war instead on the militarists (gunbatsu). Fuji, however, was fair game, and was used both as a carrot and a stick. Leaflets portrayed Fuji as a nostalgia-marker to convince starving and ill-equipped Japanese soldiers on Pacific isles to give up the fight and return to their homeland. One leaflet combines the theme of homesickness with fear, a picture set against the backdrop of cherry blossoms and Fuji, with a Japanese mother and child in the forefront, and dead Japanese soldiers behind this pair. Americans have joked that WWII GIs fought for the homespun values of “mom and apple pie.” This leaflet seems to appeal to the Japanese values of “mom and Fuji.” The same picture (probably a photo montage) was used on other leaflets with several texts calling on Japanese soldiers not to waste their lives in battle or suicide, but to return to the homeland, which was being destroyed by the war. The equating of Fuji and homeland is clear.

Two other American propaganda leaflets utilize a photograph and a woodblock print of Fuji to invoke homesickness. In leaflet 101, the camera captures the triangle of Fuji reflected on a nearby lake, a favorite tourist shot. The back of the leaflet makes clear that “Its purpose was to stir up pangs of homesickness and resentment toward their leaders in Japanese troops who are about to be attacked by American forces.” The full text of this leaflet reads:

Now is the season of beauty in your homeland and the glorious snow-capped peak of Mount Fuji beckons to the traveler and the visitor. Your parents and wives await you and your dear children wonder whether they will ever see you again.
But you are here on a miserable island, awaiting our overwhelming force of men and machines. Your military leaders grow fat at home as they continue to mislead your people. They enjoy the beauties of the season and the thrilling sight of Mount Fuji. Their children eat with them and bask in their love.¹⁷

A leaflet in the style of a traditional print, a rather sentimental landscape, is leaflet 520. The picture features a stereotypical arrangement of rock, beach, waves, ocean, and two curved pines framing a distant Fuji. The text on the back of the leaflet, although not explicitly mentioning Fuji, parlays emotional attachment to the peak to criticize the military leadership and encourage soldiers to return to their homeland.
The sacred mountain was actually “targeted” by another American leaflet. Late in the war, when American planes were regularly bombing Japan, the “psywarriors” printed and dropped single sheets with the triangular peak prominent in the center, like a bull’s-eye. The lower third of the picture is a formation of battleship guns and ships pointing at Fuji; the upper third of the leaflet is the underside of a large four-engine bomber, flanked by a number of twin-engine bombers all heading toward Fuji, with two bombers returning from their sortie. Here the mountain is a visual rubric for Japan, the recipient of unrelenting air and naval bombardment, intended to invoke fear, despair, and surrender.

![Fuji Pilgrim](image)

**Fuji Pilgrim**

One of the most intriguing American leaflets is a portrayal of Fuji in its religious and ethical dimensions to turn the mind of the fighter away from the war toward traditional values. A tasteful dark blue and white broadsheet depicts a Japanese pilgrim standing at the foot of Fuji at the intersection of two paths marked by road-stones reading “Duty” and “Humanity”. The text on the leaflets states, “There are two roads but only one goal,” cajoling the soldier to serve family, emperor, and country by giving up on a war started by the militarists. The pilgrim in traditional outfit is flanked by the two road-stones, aligned with the peak of Fuji, and facing the summit as his “goal.” From each of the stone posts a ribbon of road winds up each side of the image toward the slopes of the mountain. The leaflet shows some acquaintance with the notion of Fuji as a sacred mountain, using the theme of climbing Fuji as an act of pilgrimage linked to personal, social, and national values.

The American psywarriors utilized Fuji as both sign and symbol for subtle invocation of emotions linked to homeland and duty. Japan’s sacred mountain played a double agent role in World War II, recruited for service in both Japanese and American propaganda.

**Badge of Peace**

In the postwar purging and reform administered by the US-led occupation forces, the symbol of Fuji remained intact, yet temporarily hidden from public view. By order of the Occupation censors within SCAP (the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers), Japanese filmmakers were not allowed to show Fuji. This prohibition, like a number of arbitrary decisions of the occupying authorities, was not without its self-contradictions. One film director, Makino Masahiro, who in 1946 was prevented by the censors from including scenes of Mount Fuji in his film *Sophisticated*
Wanderer (*Ikina furaibo*), objected, arguing that the storyline was about cultivating land on the slopes of Fuji, and the film could not be completed without including the mountain. He claimed that Fuji was a symbol not of nationalism, but of the Japanese people. Frustrated by the persistent refusal of the authorities to allow shots of the mountain in the film, Makino asked them if they had really believed Fuji was a symbol of nationalism, why hadn’t they dropped the atomic bomb on Fuji instead of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Makino’s question was rhetorical, but some commentators claim that the U.S. military did entertain the possibility of dropping the atomic bomb on Fuji in order to set off its natural volcanic forces. And a visit to various websites yields such suggestions across the political spectrum: the humanitarian voices write that it would have meant less loss of human life to bomb Fuji; the more vindictive argue that it would have served Japan right to lose its hallmark.

The Occupation’s rejection of Makino’s film presents a double, or even quadruple irony, because this was not the first time a Fuji film was blocked. The left-wing antiwar director Kamei Fumio, who in 1941 proposed a script for *The Geology of Mt. Fuji* (*Fuji no chijitsu*), was turned down by Japanese authorities because its rational, scientific analysis angered the government, which was promoting the mystique of Fuji as a national symbol. Wartime Japanese censorship blocked a film about Fuji because it was merely natural and therefore not imbued with mystical nationalism; postwar American censorship banished the mountain from the screen because even a “natural” scenario of farming on the peak’s slope was presumed to be nationalistic.

If Fuji was excluded from films during the Occupation, it was not blackballed from other media. A photograph of the mountain was used to drive home a front-page 1946 New Year’s editorial of the *Nippon Times*, which announced the end of imperialism and looked forward to “the coming of Democracy and the Four Freedoms promised in the Atlantic Charter. The glistening peak of Mt. Fuji, the blue shadows of the pine mottled with whiteness, reflect a peacefulness that augurs
well for the future...” In less than half a year, Fuji had been transformed from the shield of war to a badge of peace.

Another instance of the postwar “pacification” of Fuji’s image took place in postage stamps. In 1946 the government reissued a stamp featuring Yasukuni Shrine, the Shinto shrine where war dead are memorialized. An important symbol of emperor and war, to this day Yasukuni remains a controversial institution emblematic of the legitimacy and nobility of the emperor, the Japanese empire, and the Pacific War. The Occupation Forces insisted that the Yasukuni stamp be withdrawn. By contrast, “Postwar efforts at postage stamp making in Japan were marked by the implementation of a program for revising designs so as to symbolize a country out for peace. The first step toward the attainment of this avowed object was the issuance on August 1, 1946 of a stamp... [whose] design is taken from the ‘Shower at the Foot of Mt. Fuji,’ one of the masterpieces of Hokusai....” The heritage of the sacred/beautiful peak reemerged to trump its military/imperialistic record of service.

Not all Westerners were favorably inclined toward the sacred mountain as a harbinger of democracy. A postwar newspaper cartoon from the Detroit News portrays Fuji not as the voluntary bearer of, but the involuntary recipient of, democracy. This cartoon is dominated on the left side by an American GI who holds open a book, Democratic Way of Life, forcefully admonishing with his index finger in the face of a much shorter Japanese man holding a scabbarded sword with one hand, an offered flower in the other. The right side of the cartoon is a grab bag of Japanalia, crowned by snow-covered Fuji. Here the moral is that all of Japan, including Fuji, needs the American lesson of democracy.

The ultimate irony in Fuji’s postwar trajectory is the fact that this image, temporarily banned by Occupation censors for its association with Japanese nationalism and militarism, soon became the design of choice for representing a united Japanese and American national and military effort. The American military presence in postwar Japan embraced Fuji, even adopting it as part of their official regalia. A prime example of these “Fujified” American military emblems is spelled out by an official website providing a history of “The United States Army Japan”: “The Distinctive Unit Insignia... for USARJ is a gold color metal and enamel device... consisting of a stylized representation of Mount Fuji in light blue, with a white peak silhouetted against a red
demi-sun on a blue background.... The location of USARJ in Japan is symbolized by the representation of Mount Fuji, a world famous symbol of Japan.”

Other American military groups in Japan have been represented in some form with the shape of Fuji. The Command Submarine Group Seven, the American submarine group stationed at Yokosuka, Japan, has a cap (and various other accessories) with a badge featuring a light blue Fuji in the background, a red Shinto torii (sacred archway) in the middle ground, and in the foreground a submarine flanked by two dolphins. Fuji also appears on a number of postwar American military coins in Japan, representing the army, navy, air force, coast guard, and marines.

These American military symbols harken back to Commodore Perry’s mid-nineteenth century memorial volumes, a major vehicle for introducing Japan to the U.S. and the Western world, which had the outline of Fuji embossed on their cover—suggesting American domination over
Fuji and Japan. In similar fashion, the adoption of Fuji by the U.S. military may also be seen as the “capture” of one of Japan’s preeminent symbols. This brings to mind the Japanese wartime propaganda depicting “the cartoon-thug America” who “tried to lasso Mount Fuji.” One of Japan’s worst wartime fears was realized in peacetime: Fuji became a trophy of the victorious Americans.

The notion of Fuji as military trophy has wartime precedents. Several of the most dramatic American wartime pictures of Fuji show the mountain “captured” by the camera through American submarine periscopes. Winston Churchill in his history of the war selected one such submarine photo of Fuji, pairing it with a photograph of a Japanese ship that has been torpedoed and is sinking.

Crews of various submarines brag about coming close enough to the Japanese homeland to photograph Fuji. The website for the submarine Icefish makes such a claim for their commander: “His daring proximity to the coast of Japan was documented by his famous photograph, published on the cover of Life magazine, of Mount Fuji, taken through the periscope of his submarine.” The braggadocio of these accounts resembles the “counting of coup” by Native Americans, who strove to strike or touch their enemy, and thereby display their own courage while robbing the power of the adversary. Here the derring-do of the sub commanders was to approach and seize the hallmark of Japan through photography.

Such an adventurous challenge could not escape the attention of Hollywood. The periscope “capture” of Fuji was dramatized in the 1943 Warner film Destination Tokyo, which featured Cary Grant. The mostly fictional account has an American submarine land in Tokyo Bay to prepare for Doolittle’s 1942 bombing of Tokyo. In the movie, when the periscope is raised to confirm their position, a huge Fuji appears right in front of them (as the soundtrack rises to a crescendo). This film uses Fuji as a marker for Japan both viewed through the periscope and from the deck of the submarine as a landing party goes ashore, and also in a brief aerial shot when Doolittle’s planes begin their bombing run on Tokyo.

“The Setting Sun”
The most powerful symbolic use of Fuji to depict simultaneously the defeat of Japan and the capture of the mountain was at the surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay, with Fuji as a backdrop. An eight-page brochure issued by “Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Areas” titled “U.S.S. Missouri: Scene of Japanese Surrender,” was originally distributed to Naval personnel shortly after the surrender in 1945. The brochure consists mainly of postcard-size photographs, featuring an aerial shot of the Missouri, and the American and Japanese signatories of the surrender. The back of the pamphlet, titled “The Setting Sun,” shows the U.S. fleet anchored in Tokyo Bay, with the sun setting over the silhouette of Fuji, a fitting end to “the rising sun” (Japan). The picture vividly recalls the imagery of Commodore Perry’s 1856 commemorative volume with the American fleet dominating Tokyo Bay and Fuji, conveying the message that America has again dominated Japan, as symbolized by Fuji.

In 1953, the U.S. Post Office issued a stamp commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the opening of Japan by Perry in 1853. The timing of this stamp is significant also for being released just a year after the end of the 1945-1952 Occupation of Japan. The design of the stamp incorporated the anchorage of American warships in Tokyo Bay and a portrait of Perry, with Fuji in the center and a samurai in the lower right.

These are the same elements found embossed on the official reports of Perry’s Japan mission.

**Exoticism, Eroticism, and Nationalism**

Six decades after the end of World War II, scholars and politicians still argue about the causes of the war and the actions and intentions of the military and governmental leaders on both sides. What has happened to Fuji during this time? The sacred peak has continued to lose some of its sacrosanct aura, climbed by hundreds of thousands of Japanese and Western tourists, and only handfuls of traditional pilgrims. The exoticism of Fuji—seen so frequently in woodblock prints and borrowed so freely and forcefully by van Gogh and other Impressionists, while touted by literary figures such as Lafcadio Hearn, as well as many travelers—thrives, although success has its own perils. From the time of the economic miracle in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s, a veritable flood of stamps featuring Fuji was released by many countries. Fuji’s image has been replicated on almost every conceivable form of consumer goods—from toilet paper to drinking water—and in the United States as a name for Japanese restaurants (many of whose owners and staff are not Japanese).
A lesser-known aspect of Fuji’s heritage has been its erotic undertones—a medieval travel book likened Fuji’s eruptions to “sexual effervescence.” In 1950s America, Wanda Jackson, a contemporary and acquaintance of Elvis Presley, made famous the rockabilly tune “Fujiyama Mama,” which belted out the sexual innuendo of a Fujiyama mama who has been to Nagasaki and Hiroshima and can “do the same” to her lover, because she’s about to blow her top. Her tour of Japan and performance of this song was a smash hit. The author has seen at least one instance of a “Fuji Massage Parlor,” which utilizes “Fuji” as a synonym for “Asian” and draws on GI familiarity with the yellow-skinned sex trade.

The patriotic/nationalistic nuances of Fuji have been much more subdued since 1945. Two notable exceptions are the poet Kusano Shinpei and the painter Yokoyama Taikan. As young men in the early decades of the twentieth century, each spent considerable time outside Japan—Kusano in China, Yokoyama in India—in various “Pan-Asian” ventures before returning to Japan with renewed nationalistic and ultra-nationalistic views. Kusano returned to China in 1940 as an adviser to the puppet government established by the Japanese. He linked Fuji with China’s mythical mountain Kunlun in a 1943 poem—the same year as the release of the Philippine occupation postage stamp equating Fuji and Mount Mayon. In a 1968 poem he declared that Fuji is not a sacred mountain, it is just a mountain—“Just a mountain but the symbolic existence of Japan.”

Yokoyama, who traveled to India in the first decade of the twentieth century, was active in the form of traditional Japanese painting (Nihonga). Shortly before World War II, with his mentor Okakura Kakuzō he welcomed to Japan the Nobel literature laureate Rabindranath Tagore—until Tagore criticized Japanese militarism. Yokoyama was a staunch supporter of Japanese expansionism across Asia, and personally contributed large sums for fighter planes. Like Kusano, after the war Yokoyama remained an unreconstructed nationalist. Kusano’s 1952 sketches for a painting *Pacific Ocean on a Specific Day* (*Aru hi no Taiheiyo*) reveal his intense patriotism. These views of Mount Fuji “looming serenely over wildly turbulent waves” have been interpreted as “a major statement about war and nationhood... an allegory of Japan’s emergence from... World War II.”

Spiritualism, exoticism, eroticism, nationalism, imperialism, orientalism, reverse orientalism, pacifism, neo-nationalism—how could one mountain represent all of these modalities? The wartime and postwar episodes of Fuji’s exploitation, by both Japanese and Allied forces, present a sobering lesson of how culture can be made to serve war and pacification. Perhaps the true test of an icon is its ability to be flexible, malleable, and adaptable to multiple human situations and historical circumstances. Fuji has passed this test with flying colors.

No one can predict the next eruption of Fuji. But like the truncation of Mount St. Helens, or the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 near Sendai, a cataclysmic event could occur, radically altering or even obliterating the perfect geometrical form of the mountain, leaving behind a wealth of aesthetic and spiritual conceptions without an earthly counterpart. Some Japanese and non-Japanese aficionados of Fuji have begun work to have the mountain recognized as a World Heritage Site, in order to preserve this cultural, environmental, and aesthetic legacy for future generations. Whatever the outcome, we share the optimistic view of the poet Kusano that people will still look back at Fuji “as a symbol of particular beauty,” and that “a large number of different works about Fuji [will] be created in the future.”

**Notes**

1. This article is excerpted, with permission, from the author’s forthcoming book, *Mount Fuji: Icon of Japan*, with University of South Carolina Press. The book contains illustrations not in the article, which includes more images related to Fuji’s role in war and peace. Special thanks to my son David C. Earhart for help with materials for the article, to my wife Virginia M. Earhart for assistance with the images, to Mike Sirota for editing the text, and to Mark Selden for editing the article for Japan Focus.

2. This photograph is from the psywarrior.com website, the listing “OWI Pacific Psyop Six Decades Ago,” with thanks to Herbert Friedman.

3. This print is from Wikimedia Commons, accessed April 28, 2011.

4. Hereafter cited as PWR. See PWR 34, 4 October 1944 (cover); see also this photo in David C. Earhart, *Certain Victory: Images of World War II in the Japanese Media*, p. 210, illustration no. 54.

5. This photo is from PWR 246, 11 November 1942, p. 17. Thanks to David C. Earhart for providing this image, courtesy of his Collection of Japanese Primary Sources from the Pacific War.

6. PWR 242, 14 October 1942, pp. 12-13; see this photo in David C. Earhart, *Certain Victory*, p. 291, illustration no. 79.

7. PWR 346, 29 November 1944 (cover); see this photo in David C. Earhart, *Certain Victory*, p. 440, illustration no. 51.


10. PWR 266, 7 April 1943, p. 17; see David C. Earhart, *Certain Victory*, p. 289, illustration no. 74.


14. Psychological warfare leaflets from World War II, dropped from airplanes on Japanese civilians and military personnel, have been collected and described on the psywarrior.com website. Special thanks go to retired United States Army Sergeant Major Herbert Friedman, an expert on U. S. psychological operations, for locating and granting permission to reproduce images of Fuji on American propaganda leaflets. Leaflets are identified by the number on the psywarrior.com website, the listing “OWI Pacific Psyop Six Decades Ago.” Hereafter cited as
“OWI.” Illustration 3 is leaflet 114a on this website. Friedman includes in “OWI” a brief section, “Mount Fuji as a Pictorial Theme of American Psyop,” to which the present author contributed.

15 This image is leaflet 101 from Friedman, “OWI.”

16 Friedman, “OWI.”

17 Friedman, “OWI,” Leaflet 101. Translation from Japanese is quoted from the website.

18 This image is leaflet 520 from Friedman, “OWI.”

19 This image is leaflet 519 from Friedman, “OWI.”

20 This image is leaflet 2064 from Friedman, “OWI.” The translations from Japanese are quoted from the website.

21 This account is adapted from Takakuni Hirano, Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American Occupation, pp.104-145.


23 Yamamoto, p. 76.


25 From “History of the US Army in Japan,” on an earlier website. A more recent website, does not include this historical account, but shows the distinctive insignia as in illustration 9, as well as a Fuji shoulder patch, and a challenge coin with Fuji. For a published source, see Barry Jason Stein and Peter Joseph Capelotti, U.S. Army Heraldic Crests, p. 411. Thanks to David C. Earhart for the gift of this insignia.

26 Thanks to Kenneth C. Earhart for the gift of this cap.

27 Four of these “challenge coins,” each with a different design including Fuji, are in the author’s personal collection, purchased on ebay.

28 See this link. Last accessed April 28, 2011.

29 Gift of the author’s father, Kenneth C. Earhart, who received it when stationed on the USS Missouri at the time of surrender.

30 This stamp is from Wikimedia Commons, accessed April 28, 2011.


Yi Sunsin (1545-1598) was perhaps the most highly successful military commander of Korea’s Chosŏn dynasty, earning particular regard for his naval engagements during the sixteenth-century invasion of Korea by Japanese dictator Toyotomi Hideyoshi. It should perhaps be unsurprising that Admiral Yi, a symbol of Korean defiance of Japanese aggression, would take on fresh significance in the years following World War II, as Korea worked to reimagine itself after a generation of Japanese occupation. The following article by Saeyoung Park describes the ways that Hyŏnch’ungsaa – one of many small Chŏson-era shrines dedicated to Yi Sunsin – was transformed into the first national shrine following President Park Chung Hee’s rise to power in a 1961 coup d’état. Over an eight-year period, the shrine architecture, its commemoration rituals and the surrounding countryside was transformed into an evocation of South Korea as a modern power, even as its connections with the sixteenth-century continued to be emphasized.
“National Heroes and Monuments in South Korea: Patriotism, Modernization and Park Chung Hee’s Remaking of Yi Sunsin’s Shrine”

Saeyoung Park

With “history’s bloodiest century” growing distant, twenty-first-century scholars have become preoccupied with the fraught moral and political dimensions of memory.1 ‘Memory wars’ have become commonplace in discussions over postwar compensation or in anxious debates over national identity in an era of shifting geopolitical realities. In East Asia, one only needs to look at the sore points of Korean-Japanese relations—contested sovereignty over the Dokdo islands, textbook treatments, questions of official visits to the Yasukuni shrine—to realize the centrality of memory in articulating deeply divergent national narratives.2

As servants of collective memory and as guardians of the dead, shrines have served as one focal point for this emerging terrain of historical enquiry. Like museums, statues, and other sites of commemoration, shrines exemplify the exercise of power over the past through the state’s symbolic possession of space. However shrines, and in particular East Asian shrines, often have an early modern genealogy that distinguishes this kind of memorial from other commemorative platforms. In the imperial Chinese and early modern Korean Confucian traditions, for instance, shrines have long served as venues for state-building and postwar commemoration and reconciliation.3 Such developments suggest that the monuments of today did not emerge in a barren commemorative landscape. This paper proposes that by analyzing the transformation of shrines into national monuments in the twentieth century, we can begin to dissect the claims of historicity and authenticity that have made shrines such effective agents within the cultural politics of remembrance. To this end, this article examines the remaking of a Hyŏnch’ungsa, a Chosŏn (1398-1910) shrine honoring a sixteenth-century Korean admiral, Yi Sunsin (1545-1598) in the twentieth century.

Since the twentieth century, there has been a steady stream of films, fictional works, television dramas, statues, postcards, museums, children’s books, self-help works, postage stamps, business leadership texts, and various souvenirs dedicated to bringing people closer to Admiral Yi.4 The flourishing of the ‘Yi Sunsin industry’ is a testament to his enduring popularity and near limitless potential for both statist and commercial exploitation. Yet the sixteenth-century admiral that we know is very much a product of the twentieth century, revealing how the politics of remembrance remains thoroughly embedded in the concerns of the present.

While Hyŏnch’ungsa had been one of many Chosŏn sites of memory celebrating Yi Sunsin, President Park Chung Hee’s (Pak Chŏnghŭi 1917-1979, in power from 1961-1979) supervised renovation and elevated this shrine above all others as a focal point for the remembrance of the Admiral.5 The transformation of this shrine into a national monument provides an opportunity to interrogate the social construction of a national hero by exposing numerous contradictions. First, by remaking an Yi dynasty shrine,6 the twentieth-century commemoration of Yi Sunsin was premised upon a continuation of past ‘traditions’ while making a constitutive break with Chosŏn practices. Second, while the shrine ostensibly represented the valorization of a sixteenth-century hero, the remaking of Hyŏnch’ungsa situated the shrine as an emblem of a new, modern South Korea (hereafter Korea). To wit, not only did the physical transformation of the shrine and its environs—from a rural hamlet to a shrine encased in concrete and disciplined landscaping—present a microcosm of a shining Korean future, but the equating of economic development with
martial struggle repositioned Yi Sunsin as the patron saint of Korean modernization. Third, by situating the shrine as the platform for new national ceremonies, Park re-interpreted shrine commemorative practice as mass spectacle. By specifically privileging the commemoration of Yi Sunsin as a “national ritual” (kukka ĭiryŏ or kukka haengsa), Park publicized his inheritance of the Admiral’s mantle, inviting the public to view his inhabiting of Yi Sunsin’s story through re-enactments of Chosŏn martial skills as well as ritual deference. With the elevation of the Admiral’s Birthday Commemoration to an annual event of national importance, the shrine also became a field within which various participants—the President, various ministries, scholars and the press debated the contours of a postcolonial Korean identity.

Today, Yi Sunsin is among the most venerated heroes from the Korean past and the first Chosŏn exemplar to be remade on such a grand scale in the postcolonial period. However, the expansion of Hyŏnch’ungsa did not occur in a vacuum. While it ultimately represents a significant break with Chosŏn commemorative practices, a long history of honoring exemplars on the peninsula informed the remaking of the shrine. Furthermore, while Yi Sunsin was arguably a central character in the commemorative landscape of postcolonial Korea, other historical figures such as King Sejong the Great, the Chosŏn monarch who had shepherded the creation of the Korean script Han’gul, were also re-imagined as archetypes of intrinsic Korean characteristics that had survived colonial pressures. In his study of the emergence of a Korean “ethnic nationalism” in the 1930s, Gi-Wook Shin has suggested that the veneration of historical heroes such as Yi Sunsin, Ulchimundok, Tan’gun and others was a measure of resistance against the “colonial assimilation policy.” Shin posits the celebration of such hallowed historical figures as a defensive reaction against the encroachment of Japanese imperialism. As my study focuses primarily on the years after the normalization of Japanese-Korean relations, it finds that the cultural production of Yi Sunsin repositioned the Admiral as a leading figure in multiple narratives. The veneration of Yi Sunsin cannot be read strictly as an anti-Japanese movement in the postcolonial period, though his vigorous defense against Hideyoshi’s invading forces in the sixteenth century remains a compelling narrative even today. From 1962 to 1975 (the period of study in this article), thousands of people participated in Yi’s Birthday Commemorations or paid homage at the renovated shrine, engaging as spectators and participants in visual and discursive formations of nationhood.

Through the study of Hyŏnch’ungsa, this article examines the remaking of Yi Sunsin as a sacred national hero in the twentieth century.

**Remaking Hyŏnch’ungsa**

Shortly after Park Chung Hee seized power in a 1961 coup, he ordered minor repairs and additions to Yi Sunsin’s shrine in 1962, and then systematically transformed it to its current state from 1966-1969. Yi Sunsin’s rise as the preeminent Korean hero would mirror Park’s political fortunes. From a very early point in his national career, Park invested considerable effort in promoting Yi’s valor, even donating his own personal funds in the earliest phase of shrine renovation. After a complete makeover, the unveiling of the new shrine was celebrated on the Birthday Commemoration of Yi Sunsin in 1969.

The shrine was located in a rural region of South Ch’ungch’ŏng province. While a sacred red gate built in the Chosŏn period marked its presence to the outside world, the shrine would have been almost indistinguishable from other buildings in a small village in Asan county. Nestled by
straw-thatched residences and farmland, it lacked the raised foundations, walls, signs, and controlled access that later denoted the shrine as a site of extraordinary importance.

As early as March 1962, Park Chung Hee issued an order to more than triple the land dedicated to the shrine (from 1,345 pyŏng to 5,359 pyŏng), and to build a reliquary and an office on the grounds. In 1966, under Park’s orders, the Ministry of Education created an ambitious blueprint to remake Hyŏnch’ungsa. The stated goal of the project was: “in order to commemorate Admiral Yi Sunsin’s achievements forever, a two year expansion of Hyŏnch’ungsa in Asan county, South Ch’ungch’ŏng province will take place.” In line with larger state imperatives to systematically canonize historical venues central to Korean identity, the shrine was declared an official “national historical site.”

When it was finished, the new shrine complex would bear very little resemblance to its Chosŏn incarnation. Newspapers trumpeted the detailed development of the site: “a hundred and sixteen lanterns and mercury lamps have been installed on the central path so that the shrine can be as bright as day at night.” In the first two months of construction in 1966, four hundred meters of road were built to control erosion, and an irrigation canal was covered to beautify the area. The road to the central ritual hall was widened from three to six meters, and the multicolored woodwork (tanch’ŏng) was repainted and workers meticulously refurbished Yi Sunsin’s gravestone.

Was Park Chung Hee inspired by a model monument or museum? State memos are silent on sources of inspiration. However, a close reading of Park’s memos and directives suggests that he had a consistent vision of the affect that the shrine would evoke in visitors. Repeatedly, Park’s memos emphasized that the shrine was to be “impressive” and “awe-inspiring.” A 1966 news article noted that the intent of the redesign was to offer a shrine so imposing that “when Koreans and foreigners come to visit, their heads will bow naturally [in respect].” According to Park’s instructions, the emphasis in the remaking of the Admiral’s shrine was on grandeur (ungchang), making considerations of historical conservation secondary.

From the onset, the purpose of this project was not to simply rebuild and preserve the remnants of the shrine, but to fashion an entirely different monument. Hyŏnch’ungsa in Chosŏn times had been dedicated to Yi Sunsin and two other military officials, Yi Wan and Yi Pongsang, but the new national shrine was to focus exclusively on the Admiral. Adjoining lands were also purchased and nearby residents were “replanted” or relocated to make way for the new shrine complex. In its early stages, the project transformed the landscape around the shrine, urbanizing the complex with concrete walls, broad boulevards and a broad square for mass gatherings. The straw-thatched buildings, the crumbly dirt roads either disappeared or were remade into manicured versions of a commodified past, where paved stone slab roads led to the doors of traditional-looking buildings.

In shepherding the expansion of Hyŏnch’ungsa, Park exercised an extraordinary degree of oversight. After one inspection on August 29, 1968, he fired off a fifteen-point memo to the head of the Ministry of Culture and Information, Hong Chongch’ŏl, where he noted that the grass needed to be trimmed further and asked for new shrubs to demarcate the boundaries of the shrine. His instructions were not limited to the shrine: “Make sure that the crops grown outside of the shrine are charming.” “Ensure that visitors cannot touch the gingko trees in the archery field.” Such wide-ranging, constant and changing feedback from Park to the ministries distinguishes the rebuilding of Hyŏnch’ungsa from other historical sites of interest. Some of
Park’s commands focused on workmanship and aesthetics—“the stones in the central path are irregular. Replace them” or “remove rocks from the garden.” In 1968 alone, Park personally inspected Hyŏnch’ungsas four times, not including a visit made in his place by the Head Presidential Secretary that year. Despite, or perhaps fueled by, domestic insecurities associated with increased North Korean hostilities in 1968, Park’s commitment to the remaking of Yi Sunsin’s shrine remained firm.

One measure in transforming the shrine into a national monument entailed rendering fallow the surrounding farmlands that were being incorporated into the larger shrine complex. In the Chosŏn period, the survival of royally sanctioned shrines often depended on the cultivation of land endowments from the state in order to secure a steady stream of income. In the twentieth-century remaking of Hyŏnch’ungsas, Park expressly ordered the ministries to buy up farmland to add to shrine grounds in order to transform them to green lawns. Gardens were to be ornamental. The primary goal of the new flora on shrine property was to reflect the magnificence of the Admiral, suggesting “grandeur” (changŏm) or “solemnity.” Park repeatedly demanded that landscapers plant larger and older trees that would suggest a longer history for the new Hyŏnch’ungsas.

In Marxist scholarship on labor, some scholars have argued for a correlation between the selective display of non-productivity and a corresponding rise in status. There is an analogous link between ornamentalism and status in the case of Hyŏnch’ungsas. In making a national monument, the deliberate decision to promote non-productive land represents a distancing from pre-modern subsistence agriculture as well as implicitly signifying the state’s wealth in displays of ornamental landscaping.

Transforming a historical Chosŏn shrine to constitute evidence of a Korean modernity posed other challenges. Should buildings on shrine grounds be built in a “modern” or a “Korean” style? The frequent juxtaposition of these words: “modern” and “Korean” suggested that each term occupied a polar extreme in an aesthetic spectrum of development. For shrine planners, the dichotomy of “modern” and “Korean” in state documents inevitably privileged the former while the goal of remaking Hyŏnch’ungsas was ostensibly about preserving the latter. Later in 1968, Park clarified the issue, ordering: “Except for historical buildings, build the new structures in a modern style (hyŏntaesik).” However, continuing confusion over how to embody modernity at the shrine can be seen in the multiple incarnations of the reliquary, which was first built in 1962.
The first reliquary (yumulkwan) was a simple one room building in a traditional style erected to house Yi Sunsin’s personal effects, his writings and other relics. In 1968, this was demolished to make way for a larger concrete building with steel doors that was still in a “Korean style (hansik).” It was also rebuilt on an elevated mound with a white stone staircase for a more lofty appearance. A few months later, this building was demolished and rebuilt in October, 1968 as a “modern steel and concrete stone building.” This version lacked significant gestures to Chosŏn architecture, sporting a flat slab roof and no painted woodwork; in color and in style, this reliquary was a sharp contrast from the other traditional structures and preceding reliquaries. But in 1974, its external appearance was “Koreanized” through cosmetic changes—adding a new Chosŏn style tile roof with sloping eaves and newly painted mock columns to the structure. The new hybrid building perhaps better reflected the duality of the reliquary itself, as a museum dedicated to propagating a select image of the Admiral through the preservation of his writings and personal effects, and as a new institution that had no counterpart in the Chosŏn past. Like the new shrine complex, the reliquary’s legitimacy was founded on its claims about the past, yet it was a firm creation of the present.
Photographs in government publications also emphasized the rapid transformation of the shrine into a modern national site. In the second edition of the *Record of the History of Asan Hyŏnch’ungsa*, recent color pictures heightened the transformation of the shrine by providing a sharp contrast with the black and white unfocused pictures taken in the first phase of construction.
The first picture shows a hamlet with straw roofs. The shrine itself is not easily visible. Taken almost a decade later, the second picture reveals a landscape dominated by the shrine. Private homes are no longer visible in the line of sight.
As Hyŏnch’ungsangsa became a national site of interest, security became a point of concern. In April 1968, Park sent a memo asking the Hyŏnch’ungsangsa staff to consider a series of security measures in order to “preserve the sanctity of the shrine.” A barbed wire fence was installed to restrict free entry. A guard was stationed at the front gate and all visitors were to be recorded and monitored. During events such as the Birthday Commemoration, the shrine staff were to triple the number of guards at the front gate. Such changes limiting the free mobility of visitors brought the shrine fully under state surveillance.

The ‘preservation of sanctity’ also meant that visitors needed instruction in proper conduct. After all, how were visitors to know how to behave in the first national shrine? Park instructed guides to “monitor the behavior of visitors” in the sacred hall as well as in the reliquary. For foreign guests, translated brochures would secure their proper reverence and conduct. Furthermore, Park suggested that the shrine should explicitly encourage consumerism through the construction of a shop and souvenirs such as postcards and stamps. Visitors, described in the memos as “worshippers,” (ch’ampaekaek) would also have to pay entry fees from ten to thirty won.

Entry fees would be used towards landscaping and other ancillary costs. If the fees were properly collected, the shrine stood to make a sizeable annual sum. The Ministry of Culture and Information noted in May 1968: “right now, it is travel season and so there are twenty thousand visitors per day.” Asan county officials seem to have been particularly aware of the value of the shrine as a tourist attraction, tripling the entrance fees from ten won to thirty won for standard admission between March and May 1968.

Nationalist Spectacle: Birthday Commemoration of Yi Sunsin

By the mid-twentieth century, many of the rituals and ceremonies that had mediated socio-political relations in Chosŏn Korea had been discontinued or lost to colonialism. As the Ritual Committee (ŭisik chejŏng wiwŏnhoe) that reformed Yi Sunsin’s Birthday Commemoration noted, no national ceremonies were in practice as royal rituals had been abolished with the demise of the Yi dynasty. At shrines to Confucius and other lower level local ritual sites—such as stand-alone shrines (sau) and shrines at private academies (sŏwŏn) dedicated to local exemplars—ritual obligations were often satisfied erratically in the twentieth century, and varied depending on funding, motivation and other exigencies.

So while the ritual landscape in the 1960s was not completely empty of historical traces, the rupture in ritual practice gave Park Chung Hee an opportunity to revolutionize and centralize the commemoration of Yi Sunsin. In the past, Hyŏnch’ungsangsa had been a lowly sau, a local shrine, and the ritual remembrance of the Admiral reflected its place in the hierarchy of sacred spaces. By transforming the Birthday Commemoration in content and in form, Park could herald the Admiral as a national hero and the object of nationalistic spectacle.

My use of the term spectacle stresses its ability to encourage critical disengagement and manufacture solidarity on the part of spectators and participants alike. Guy Debord’s The Society of the Spectacle first examined the surrender of critical agency in a media saturated consumer society and the role of the spectacle in the ‘politics of consent.’ As Henry A. Giroux has described in his recent work, different periods produce spectacles specific to their historical context. But whether we are referring to Fascist pageantry of the 1930s or Commodore Perry’s...
colorful opening of Japan, spectacles succeed through obfuscation, by concealing the brute immediacy of power underneath an “uninterrupted monologue of self-praise” in order to persuasively and affectively form a consensus.\(^49\) The spectacle, as Debord argues, imposes a normative “social relationship between people that is mediated by images” and informs our understanding of the interplay between power and cultural politics.\(^50\) Within this framework, no affective appeals to national heroes are self-contained, or innocent of political implications. Applying the logic of the spectacle to this project, the veneration of heroes becomes an appeal to unity based on a shared (and constructed) past which holds within itself a promise for a utopian future where all citizens ‘become’ their heroes. Such ritualistic glorification of heroes downplays dissent and masks the compulsion and violence that is central to sovereignty. Even when Kim Dae Jung, (the opposition presidential candidate who was kidnapped and almost executed by Park’s forces) paid his respects at Hyŏnch’ungsa in 1971, he could only voice homilies in support of the Admiral and Park’s reconstruction efforts.\(^51\) When Giroux wrote: “Politics and power are not eliminated, they are simply hidden within broader appeals to solidarity,” he was emphasizing that spectacle distracts the populace from the nakedness of political power in order to favor persuasion over compulsion. However, I would also suggest the manufacture of spectacle produces ahistorical objects of veneration that become increasingly invulnerable to dissent. As Tzvetan Todorov notes in *Hope and Memory*, “sanctification is a mark of restriction, by definition; it places its object in a separate category and makes it untouchable.”\(^52\) Or in other words, historical veneration has a tendency to render the objects of such adoration ahistorical; in the process of becoming an iconic representation of Korean nationalism, Yi Sunsin became increasingly distanced from a complex historical reality.

The twentieth-century equation of Yi Sunsin and martial patriotism not only distanced the Admiral from his historical self, but also inspired militaristic displays of fervor in honor of the hero. In the seventies, on many occasions several hundred male high school students engaged in a long march (about 120 km) from Seoul to Hyŏnch’ungsa prior to the Admiral’s Birthday Commemoration.\(^53\) Dressed in military fatigues, armed and carrying a large flag, this paramilitary detail would arrive at the shrine in time for the ceremonies and were sometimes personally greeted by the president.\(^54\) The prospect of hundreds of young civilian students engaging in such militarized activity was unproblematically embraced by the press, which saluted their patriotism.

Such cases of ‘performing nationalism’ point to the ways in which the shrine became a nexus of rhetoric, acts, gestures and narratives that centered on an emerging, postcolonial *national* Korean identity. As a site of memory, Hyŏnch’ungsa was not only the guardian of the Admiral’s legacy but also served as an authenticator of a legitimate Korean future. Through the examination of Hyŏnch’ungsa, we can see how state-building and policies at the national level produced important and tangible effects in the making of individual citizens.

**Birthday Commemoration: Before and After Reform**

It was, of course, not only student patriots who honored Yi Sunsin. One of the most important expressions of the national commitment to Yi Sunsin’s legacy was the annual Birthday Commemoration, celebrated on each April 28\(^{th}\) following the solar calendar. In 1962, Chairman Park\(^55\) first attended the birthday commemoration (*t’ansin kinyŏm*) of Yi Sunsin and he faithfully attended this annual event throughout his presidency.
Newspaper records suggest that while the Admiral and his shrine had never completely disappeared from public consciousness in the twentieth century, it was Park Chung Hee’s interventions that drew the nation’s gaze to Hyŏnch’ungsa. After Park’s first attendance at the 417th commemoration of the Admiral’s birthday, national papers such as the Tonga ilbo and the Chosŏn ilbo consistently covered these events. These ceremonies grew, becoming orchestrated national celebrations of enormous proportions. In 1969, the Tonga ilbo estimated that about 10,000 people attended Yi Sunsin’s birthday celebrations at Hyŏnch’ungsa for a day-long event; in a previous ceremony in 1962, the ceremony had only taken two hours.56

For Park Chung Hee, Hyŏnch’ungsa was an “arena where the spirit of Chungmu-gong [Yi Sunsin] is fostered and reared,”57 where he should be venerated as a “great ancestor.” As in Chosŏn times, the shrine was a place to foster emulation of exemplars:

I would like to stress strongly that the way to respect and adore Admiral Yi from the bottom of our hearts does not consist in simply constructing a shrine, but in reaffirming and intensifying our determination and efforts to face and overcome the trouble-ridden reality of our fatherland, faithfully following the precious teachings he left behind.58

According to Park, the emulation of the sixteenth-century Admiral called upon citizens to work towards national purposes in the twentieth century.

For Park, the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries were linked as times of parallel crises. As Yi Sunsin had fended off peril in the sixteenth century, Koreans “still face difficult ordeals and more than ever, our people must be united in solidarity, in our efforts and sacrifice so that we can face such important times.”59 Hence, the veneration of Yi provided an opportunity to mobilize citizens for twentieth-century goals. By subsuming modernization, anti-Communism and economic development under the umbrella of nationalism and patriotism, Park could re-interpret Yi’s merits within a framework that was vastly different from Chosŏn commemorative ideals.60 Following the admiral’s example meant a commitment to Park’s vision of social and economic reconstruction, where the Admiral’s “patriotic loyalty was to be the “foundation of modernizing our country, of our citizens’ new way of thinking.””61 As Park noted:

…[We] who have such a great ancestor as Chungmugong [Yi Sunsin] have to work hard to follow his example [lit. toward his direction]. This is indeed a joy as well as a sacred duty and mission imposed upon us…62

Within this argument, the veneration of Yi Sunsin was congruent with a shared sacred mission of postcolonial development, making the Admiral the patron saint of patriotic modernization.

Prior to Park’s participation in the Admiral’s Birthday Commemoration, any ritual recognition of Yi Sunsin at Hyŏnch’ungsa would have been the prerogative of his descendants or local leaders. In the Chosŏn period, the monarch sometimes sent an official to preside at the spring and autumn sacrifices for a particularly important worthy, but these court visits were not fixed annual events.

After Park’s visits anointed the Birthday Commemoration as an event of national importance, the ceremonies assumed a fairly regular form. Commemorations usually began in the late morning, after 10am when all the invited students, local citizens, foreign guests and dignitaries were seated, forming a large group of spectators. Before the ritual reform of the late sixties, Park, Yi Sunsin’s descendants and local Confucian officials would lead the chesa, or sacrifice, where a
libation would be offered in conjunction with several unblemished food offerings. Similar to Confucian rituals of ancestral remembrance, there would be ceremonial bowing in front of the spirit altar under a large portrait of the Admiral as well as the burning of incense. In addition to the chesa, Park Chung Hee gave a speech expounding Yi Sunsin’s singular merits. Demonstrations of archery, tours of the shrine, music concerts, history lectures, and the singing of a paean to Yi Sunsin were part of the event. Cocktail parties and fireworks ended the evening, and the President returned to the capital the following day.

Park Chung Hee first ordered changes in ceremony after participating in Yi Sunsin’s Birthday Commemoration on April 28, 1966. On May 24, 1966, the Committee on Ceremony and Ritual (ŭisik chejŏng wiwŏnhoe or the Ritual Committee) was established to create national ceremonies (kukmin ŭirye) from Chosŏn rituals and ceremonies.

After participating in the 1966 Birthday Commemoration, Park ordered that the rituals should be ‘standardized (kyubŏmhwa).’ Standardization required several major changes. First, the Birthday Commemoration of Yi Sunsin would be declared a national event (kukka haengsa). Second, the order of the events needed to be revised. Third, the spectators should receive guidance about how to behave at a national ceremony (kukmin ŭirye) and last, ritual clothing and accoutrements should be regulated and made uniform.

The elevation of the ceremony to a national event was not as simple as it first seemed. Scholars on the Ritual Committee were aware that such changes posed a break with Chosŏn practices and the history of the shrine itself. The Ritual Committee ultimately justified the unique elevation of Hyŏnch’’ungsa over the Admiral’s other shrines by focusing on Park’s participation in the Birthday Commemoration. “Times have changed and because of the involvement of the head of state, the ceremonies must be elevated,” the Ritual Committee proclaimed in 1966. Ritual protocol for shrines to Confucius, which were of a comparatively higher level, were substituted for pre-existing ritual practices.

The instruction, that ‘spectators should receive guidance about how to behave at a national ceremony’ highlights both the novelty of such national events as well as emphasizing the interactive dynamic that Park expected at such spectacles. In his work on pageantry and power in Meiji Japan, Takashi Fujitani argues that participation of spectators had important consequences. On one hand, national pageantry extended the gaze of the state, serving as occasions where the observers would “internalize their own surveillance.” On the other hand, he also notes that the people who came to observe events such as the promulgation of the Meiji constitution often behaved in ways that dismayed educated observers. Spectators often conducted themselves as they would at local festivals, showing little awareness of how to properly conduct themselves as modern citizens at national ceremonies. Park’s injunction that the spectators were to be indoctrinated with proper behavior suitable for a national ceremony also acknowledges that the Birthday Commemoration was not previously orchestrated in a way that yielded the signification that he desired, and that the training of spectators was a key element in bringing the nation to a singular, homogenous understanding of the Admiral and his legacy.

A second round of changes in ceremony and ritual took place in 1968. Still dissatisfied after the 1968 Birthday Commemoration, Park personally handwrote his complaint about the festivities. The earlier round of changes to the ceremony had been insufficient, and he expressed his dissatisfaction at the hodge-podge nature of the birthday celebrations: “The way it is carried out now, it is neither religious, nor Confucian, nor entirely modern (hyŏntaesa).” The
Ministry of Education was ordered to “analyze how the ritual formalities can become more official and regulated, as more pious and solemn observances.” Given his dissatisfaction with the results of the first round of changes, Park sent clear signals that he wanted the second reformation of the birthday celebrations to be thorough. He indicated that the ceremony needed to be thoroughly re-examined from the “seating” to “how to walk” to “how to bow” and many other minutiae of ceremonial conduct.

The changes in the ensuing round of reforms severed many of the local ties to the shrine and completed its transformation into a national monument. A new Committee on Ceremony and Ritual was formed in late 1968 and offered new recommendations in January 1969. It noted that while in the postwar period, remembrance of Yi Sunsin had been conducted principally in a Confucian manner, it would be elevated to a different ritual, a tarye. In the past, local Confucians had participated in the commemoration of Yi Sunsin, as they had at his shrines during the Chosŏn period. As this was no longer “suitable,” their roles at Hyŏnch’ungsas would now be taken over by the staff members of the Hyŏnch’ungsas Management Office. In essence, the officiants at the ritual remembrance of Yi would now be representatives of the central government, which suited the new dictates as the “Hyŏnch’ungsas Management Office is a national institution (kikan).”

Yi Sunsin’s descendants were also excluded from the ritual remembrance of Yi at the shrine. Since the Birthday Commemoration was a “nationwide national ceremony (kŏkukchŏkin kukka haengsa),” a Hyŏnch’ungsas Management Office protocol official would now take over the duties of supervising the rituals that had previously been relegated to one of the Admiral’s direct descendants.

Elsewhere, I have shown that local officials and local Confucian literati played significant roles in building and maintaining the shrines with the help and collusion of the central government in the Chosŏn period. The court and local stakeholders were often in conflict, especially in cases where the central government sought to shape the remembrance of an exemplar by eliminating irregular or illegitimate shrines. Shrine practice oscillated between the needs of the central government and the desires of the local elite in the Chosŏn period, and in the twentieth century, we see a broad swing toward national prerogatives. The changes in the remembrance of Yi Sunsin in the twentieth century suggests that the constant struggle between local and central authorities swung decisively in favor of the latter in the case of Hyŏnch’ungsas, and this was a critical development in the making of Yi Sunsin as a sacred hero for a “modern” Korean nation.

Inhabiting the Admiral’s Story

Changes in ritual had explicitly privileged Park’s participation in the commemoration of Yi Sunsin, supporting what other scholars have described as his desire to “overlap” with or become Yi Sunsin. While many studies have peripherally acknowledged this phenomenon, few scholars have addressed how Park sought to ‘become’ the Admiral.

Park’s public inhabiting of Yi Sunsin’s story was captured annually in his archery demonstration at a small field bordering the Admiral’s ancestral home, now contained within the expanded shrine grounds. Numerous photographs and footage of Park’s archery demonstrations survive. An early photograph in 1962 (the first year that Park attended the Birthday Commemoration), shows the then Chairman Park in his unbuttoned military uniform, surrounded by officials and the press, grinning broadly after shooting a curved Chosŏn bow. Later
photographs show a much more carefully staged affair, with the famously short president alone on an elevated stage, posing with a drawn bow for photographers and videographers.

Chairman Park with a Chosŏn bow in 1962

Park Chung Hee at Hyŏnch’ungsŏ 1967
How are we to read these images? How was the annual archery demonstration an iconic moment in Park’s becoming Yi Sunsin? And why choose archery? Yi Sunsin was not especially famed as an archer; furthermore, while his writings as well as the hagiographic essays compiled after his death acknowledge his childhood propensity for military arts, ultimately they privilege his literary leanings. Following Korean Confucian understandings of success, his contemporaries portrayed Yi’s victories as triumphs of will and virtue, rather than as the result of clever turns of strategy or military skill. The battlefield was seen as an extension of one’s inner state, and therefore victories and defeats were as dependent on self-cultivation as on armaments.

Park’s mimicry of Yi Sunsin’s martial skills places his remembrance within a politics of thinking about the Chosŏn past. In the Korean Enlightenment period during the turn of the twentieth century, radical intellectuals such as Sin Ch’ae ho, Yi Kwang su, and others were consumed by the search for the root causes of Korean failure in the age of imperialism. Sin, in particular, attributed Korea’s failures and gradual loss of sovereignty to the effeminate literary tendencies of the yangban gentry that, in his view, had stifled the martial impulses that had always been inherent in the Korean people.

Sin’s work clearly influenced Park, as his first book, Our Nation’s Path alludes to the former’s arguments extensively. In a break with Chosŏn understanding, both Sin and Park posit Yi Sunsin as a victim of the weak, scheming literary yangban:

It was he, who, when imprisoned grief-stricken due to wicked slanderings by treacherous retainers and subsequently reprimanded by the king, solemnly showed the sublimity of firm purpose and justice, and went to the front without official rank or title to save his fatherland from the invading enemy. Only a real patriot who deeply loved his fatherland and fellow countrymen, purposely avoiding opportunities given to enjoy a high degree of political power and wealth would have done this. This was also an honor that only such a national hero could obtain through such patriotic deeds.

For Park, Yi was a hero who was maligned by the civilian Chosŏn administration whose commitment to the country fueled his patriotism in the face of criticism. The parallels between Yi Sunsin—a sixteenth-century general poorly understood by his civilian contemporaries—and Park Chung Hee, a general who had overthrown a civilian government in the name of national salvation were not difficult to miss. In several speeches, Park invited the comparison: “If another real patriot like Yi suddenly emerges and guides the nation onto the right course, the people of this country should be bound to enjoy prosperity and happiness.” As Yi Sunsin had saved Chosŏn Korea from total defeat (with the help of Chinese forces who conveniently disappear from Park’s narrative), Park could offer himself as an analogous savior, as an architect of national restoration. By erasing the “national humiliation (kukch’i)” of the Imjin war the Admiral was “a leading historical figure that we can be proud of in the eyes of the world.” In eliding the twin Japanese invasions—the sixteenth-century Imjin war and colonization, Park offered tantalizing promises, perhaps even a redemption of humiliation and a restoration of national pride.

But Park’s success in inhabiting the story of Yi Sunsin depended strongly on the strategic employment of historical authenticity. The logic of Park’s mimesis suggested that by reliving the Admiral’s historical acts, the president could be endowed with Yi Sunsin’s spirit. Hence the field bordering the Admiral’s ancestral home, now included in the expanded shrine complex,
under the shade of centuries old gingko trees that had purportedly witnessed the martial practice of the young Yi Sunsin was an irresistible arena for Park’s performance.

But had Yi Sunsin actually practiced archery in these fields?

Project notes and documents suggest that such a practice field (mutochang) had not existed prior to the expansion of Hyŏnch’ungsa. A small parcel of land stood next to the Yi ancestral home, but its characterization as a ‘field where the Admiral personally sharpened his martial skills’ emerged through the remaking of the shrine complex. Yi Ênsang (no relation), a scholar advisor, seems to have been the first to recommend that a field for martial practice should be built in 1966, in the early days of planning. Further notes from 1968 suggest that consultations with the army would be required to build a proper ‘area for target practice (sakyŏkchang),’ confirming that the practice field was a product of twentieth-century imagination, rather than sixteenth-century realities.

Contrasting history and memory, Barry Schwartz and Howard Schuman have argued that history and memory work at cross-purposes: “historians aim to describe events in all their complexity and ambiguity; commemorative agents, to simplify events into objects of celebration and moral instruction.” Or to borrow Todorov’s phrasing, commemoration ‘has no obligation to the truth, only an obligation to the good.’ In the case of Park’s archery demonstration, a question emerges: does it matter that history and memory disagree? That the memory of Yi’s archery practice, eagerly propagated by the national shrine, is a historical improbability? Ultimately, the success of Hyŏnch’ungsa as a memorial to Yi Sunsin depends on the eliding of what Schuman and Schwartz describe as the perpendicular purposes of history and memory—that is, the power of Yi Sunsin as a national hero and the saint of an authentic Korean martial spirit depends on whether the claims of truthful historical representation have any purchase with the audience, and not on their actual truth. The fact that the Admiral may never have practiced at a practice field near his ancestral home ultimately does not undermine the power of this image—Park drawing a bow—nor does it limit the effectiveness of his mimicry.

Park Chung Hee at Archery Photo Shoot, Hyŏnch’ungsa 1973
A search for ‘the truth’ assumes that there is some static empirical reality that remains to be recovered, and that is not the goal here. To paraphrase Peter Carrier, historical monuments are by nature, reflections of their time. They are “prisms for understanding successive historical and political contexts in which memory cultures evolve” and are fundamentally creatures of the present rather than the past.  

**Hyŏnch’ungsas as a Site of Domestic and International Tourism, 1970-1975**

A discrepancy exists between contemporary Korean and English terms for visiting a shrine. In English, one could perhaps ‘go on a pilgrimage’ to a sacred site or ‘visit’ it as a secular tourist. In other words, a person can signify varying intentions about their shrine visit through different modes of description (a pilgrimage versus a visit). In Korean, a visit to Hyŏnch’ungsas would usually be described in either of two ways: as an act of pilgrimage (*sunrye*) to the locale or as ‘worshipping’ or paying one’s respect (*ch’ampae*) at the shrine; regardless of whether the visitor was a foreign diplomat, President Park, a student or a backpacking tourist, one’s visit is articulated through the use of the term ‘worship.’ Because of the linguistic framework, it is difficult to read a person’s physical presence at a shrine as anything other than a positive act that reifies and participates in the goals of the shrine regardless of the visitor’s intent.

At this point, one could suggest two different premises. The inability to express a journey to a shrine in non-sacred terms, one could argue, suggests that the integrity of shrines as sacred liminal spaces remained intact. An alternative interpretation might point out that if all visits, regardless of their intent, fall under an umbrella of ‘sacred,’ the concept would lose much of its meaning. This section suggests that the renovation of Hyŏnch’ungsas marks a point in the history of Korean shrines where popular tourism changed commemorative practice.

The practice of commemoration at Hyŏnch’ungsas in the late sixties and early seventies was transformed by the twin phenomena of nationalistic spectacles and middle class tourism. An earlier section in this article has discussed the commemoration of Yi Sunsin’s birthday as a national event at this shrine. But as a star attraction on the weekend itineraries of Seoul urbanites, the shrine also allowed for the commingling of nationalism and leisure. This new mode of commemorative practice in the twentieth century contrasted sharply with the social place of shrines in the Chosŏn period.

Chosŏn shrines were spaces that demanded the active participation of the elite and passive admiration of commoners. As far as we know, visits to shrines in the Chosŏn period were the primary reserve of yangban men. Officials, the local elite, and yangban male family members of the enshrined would visit in order to perform services or examine the facilities for disrepair. Traveling yangban men would sometimes write letters or poems about a shrine they had visited. Due to the demographics of surviving source materials, determining the visibility of the shrine in the lives of common people remains a challenge.

The place of shrines in Korean society changed drastically under Park Chung Hee. By 1970, growing industrialization and burgeoning bourgeois wealth had given birth to middle class leisure. As a newspaper noted that year, “Tourism is no longer the reserve of the rich.” Certainly, the majority of participants in the emerging leisure industry were the urban denizens of Seoul, but travel was a “common” option that was easily within reach of many others in ways that it had never been before. The geographical mobility of travelers was also no longer limited to family, hometown or professional demands; seeking unknown destinations, the
number of travelers in 1970 who used a tour company rose 31.4% from the previous year. As the sixth most popular attraction in Korea, Hyŏnch’ungsas was a fashionable choice for these new travelers. Recently built highways also transformed domestic travel from one end of the country to the other from a two-day trip to a single day’s journey. The shrine, which was about 120km (about 75 miles) from Seoul, was ideally located as a weekend destination. Many of these weekend getaways were package trips offering a visit to Hyŏnch’ungsa, fishing, hiking in the countryside for urbanites; on occasion, such tight schedules challenged the strict curfew laws.

In thinking about the Hyŏnch’ungsas shrine as an intersection of tourism and commemorative practice, it seems to me that an approach that focuses solely on issues of political identity and nationalism at the cost of probing quotidian interactions by non-elites, such as tourism, fails to fully grasp the role of national heroes and their monuments. As described in the first half of this article, the expansion and renovation of Hyŏnch’ungsas not only elevated this shrine over all of Yi Sunsin’s other memorial sites, but it also became the symbolic face of a new, modern Korea. And as such, it was a site that was clearly designed to be seen; its place of prominence on diplomatic tours, school field trips, state-sponsored travel and homeland tour itineraries was not an accident. However, as the following discussion of tourism and Hyŏnch’ungsas suggests, many faces of the shrine coexist: the patriotic shrine as a monument to a national hero, the modern shrine that embodies economic progress, and a shrine that attracts tourist money by offering a simple and commodified understanding of history. Whether as a site of national pageantry or as a destination for school fieldtrips, Hyŏnch’ungsas was the locus of multiple, and sometimes conflicting, visions of the Korean past. By examining Hyŏnch’ungsas through a sightseeing lens, this section hopes to shed light on the social relations between commemoration, tourism and national identity in twentieth-century Korea.

Young People and Hyŏnch’ungsas

As developing citizens, children constituted a desirable tourist demographic. Converging commercial and national interests, the National Railroad invited three hundred select students from Seoul primary schools for a free trip to Hyŏnch’ungsas in 1975. This generous offer was designed to “inspire love for railroads in growing children and enlighten them about railroad safety as well as to inspire the desire to perform service for the country.” In this way, the company could inculcate young consumers about the convenience of railroads while furthering their moral education as citizens.

A story from a traveling teacher also illustrates how children traveling to pay respect to Yi Sunsin could be read as model citizens. In 1975, four fifth grade girls were on their way to Hyŏnch’ungsas when a teacher from an unrelated school sat in their train car. The girls, noting the sun streaming through the windows, decided to turn off the lights to conserve energy. They then politely offered to share their snack, some chestnuts, with the teacher. Afterwards, they meticulously packed their trash in little plastic bags.

Admiring the students, the teacher marveled later that he “felt deeply in his heart that our citizens need to model themselves after the spirit of these children’s actions” just as the students sought to emulate the spirit of Yi Sunsin. For these girls, visiting Hyŏnch’ungsas afforded the opportunity to display the manifold ways in which they were modern citizens properly versed in public hygiene and conservation practices.
Most students came to Hyŏnch’ungsa through field trips. If such mundane visits caught the attention of the national press, it was often because of tragedy or controversy.

Of the thousands of students who arrived at Hyŏnch’ungsa each year to make their way through the reliquary, the ritual halls, and the archery fields, a few caught food poisoning, died from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning or were unluckily caught in a crash on their way home.97

A different kind of student came under closer scrutiny. In the early seventies, reports emerged of overseas Korean students traveling to Hyŏnch’ungsa, usually as part of a larger educational or ‘return to the motherland’ trip. While some of these students were from the United States, a large number were Korean kyopo or zainichi Koreans who lived in Japan.98 From 1970-1975, there were multiple state sponsored invitations extended to both the pro-North and pro-South overseas Korean communities in Japan, creating an influx of adult and student kyopo tourists.

Sonia Ryang has written eloquently on the plight of Koreans in Japan.99 After independence, many Koreans repatriated but a sizeable community chose to remain in Japan. In the aftermath of the Korean War, the community split along ideological lines, rather than geographical divides. Hence a large number of self-identified North Koreans in Japan were actually from the South. As Cold War tensions rose, ideological battles between North and South Korea were waged on Japanese soil as well as in the peninsula proper. The North Korean state frowned heavily on any links between the North Korean community in Japan and South Korea, including the maintenance of family ties.100 In light of this, the South Korean government seized an opportunity to cleave a greater divide between the communist government and pro-North Koreans in Japan, pressuring the latter to switch political allegiances for open contact with their kin in the South. It is unclear whether government suasion yielded the desired ideological results, but these homeland trips were read as critical maneuvers in the highly symbolic landscape of the Cold War in the South Korean press.

When 700 Ch’ongnyŏn101 Koreans arrived from Japan on September 15, 1975, newspaper headlines trumpeted that they had timed their first return in thirty years to pay respects to their ancestors over the Harvest Festival (Chusŏk) in their motherland.102

The first stop on their tour was Hyŏnch’ungsa. A newspaper caption under a picture of the visitors burning incense at the shrine noted: North Korean residents from Japan cry as they see the true picture of life in the fatherland while paying their respects at Hyŏnch’ungsa.103

The ‘true picture’ (ch’ammosŭp), journalists suggested, was the rapid modernization of the country. The Ch’ongnyŏn visitors, one article noted, repeatedly marveled at the development that had taken place in the thirty years they had been away.104 Several expressed regret at the lies that they had been told by senior Ch’ongnyŏn members about the ‘true’ state of affairs in South Korea and wished that they had returned earlier.105 Many promised to enlighten others about the modern and “developed” reality of South Korean life upon their return.106

Hyŏnch’ungsa was a microcosm of the new reality that the state wished to project to the pro-North Koreans and the world at large. Park Chung Hee had expressly demanded that the new Hyŏnch’ungsa evoke feelings of awe and grandeur, to represent the new Korea that was emerging under his regime. When some of the pro-North Korean residents visited the shrine in 1975, they found the experience transformative. Moved to tears, they said: “After paying our respects at Hyŏnch’ungsa, we are ashamed to have been tricked by the North [Korean] devils.”107
For the South Korean government, Hyŏnch’ungsa was an important asset in the battle for legitimacy between North and South Korea.

Both sides claimed to be the torchbearers of competing visions of a Korean future; being seen as the guardians of an authentic and worthy Korean past was an integral element in this struggle. The renovation of the shrine—and the new interpretive context of containing Chosŏn history within modern concrete trappings—was emblematic of the state’s transformative power over the nation’s history and its people. The twentieth-century state under Park Chung Hee shared many of the Yi dynasty’s aims in honoring Yi Sunsin and propagating him as an exemplar of loyalty. In both cases, the state promoted a singular model of state-society relations, a vision of a shared commitment to the integrity of the state and its people by promoting a particular narrative of the past through shrines.

If North and South Korea were competing for the affections and loyalties of Koreans at home and abroad, Hyŏnch’ungsa was a central contestant in these ‘beauty pageant’ tours of the South. But visits to Hyŏnch’ungsa also exposed cracks in the central conceit of a homogeneous Korean identity that served as the ontological basis of these homeland tours.

By the early seventies, many visitors, mainly students of Korean origin from Japan and the United States, had little or no acquaintance with life in Korea. Their homeland tours promoted an image of a unified, singular Korean identity captured in the prospect of overseas Koreans returning to the comfort of the ‘bosom of their motherland.’ Hyŏnch’ungsa was often the first stop on itineraries that were designed to impress upon them the glory of their Korean heritage.

The malaise over these kyopo emerges in small but consistent ways in news coverage. Concerning the lines between Korean identity and other, where did the kyopo fit? On one hand, journalists emphasized the idea that bonds of ethnic solidarity were unbreakable. “Over seven hundred thousand of our kyopo have crossed the sea to live in the lands of others,” but having returned for a short visit, no other place felt more “comfortable.” News articles also proudly trumpeted national economic progress, invariably claiming progress seen through dazzled kyopo eyes: “The tall buildings and highways in Seoul and Pusan clearly show the developed reality” of Korea, visiting students noted.

But some differences between the kyopo and native Koreans were hard to ignore. The lack of language skills and shared cultural experiences were painfully obvious. ”He can only say ‘Thank you’ in our language” one article noted glumly about a successful kyopo from Hawai’i. In 1971, the Tonga ilbo published excerpts from the travel diaries of four zainichi students. Some of the students hoped that native Koreans would be patient and support their acquisition of the language skills and knowledge necessary to maintain “a unified race” (tong’il minjok). Even though the state invited the kyopo to return, to pay homage at Hyŏnch’ungsa or engage in other activities that were part of the cultural construction of Korean identity, such measures had limits. The palpable differences between diaspora and mainland Koreans strained the illusion of a culturally and historically homogeneous people.

Furthermore, extensive news coverage of these trips suggests that the approval of kyopo was highly desirable. Repeatedly, journalists asked the kyopo to evaluate the modern motherland: “It’s much more developed and transformed than I thought” zainichi students reportedly said in 1971. Just as the opinions of foreign visitors and American dignitaries were highly sought after,
the kyopo’s insight into Korean conditions were invaluable precisely because of their outsider status.

Foreign dignitaries: American and North Korean officials

That Hyŏnch’ungsa had emerged as a visible face of Korean modernity was evident by the early seventies. The shrine was a ‘must-see’ destination on the itineraries of foreign dignitaries and travelers. When President Gerald Ford spent about a day in Korea during his tour of East Asia in 1974, the shrine was on his schedule.114 Journalists chronicled the visit of lesser officials as well; the Tonga ilbo noted that Deputy Secretary of Defense Bill Clements had arrived at 4:20pm on September 12, 1973 to pay his respects to the Admiral.115 The visit lasted forty minutes. He showed particular interest in the model of the turtle boat, and praised the traditional ondol heating system in the Admiral’s home as superior to those used by his forefathers. Such visits from foreign VIPs reaffirmed the Admiral’s centrality in a historical narrative that imagined equivalences between Yi’s sixteenth-century martial spirit and the drive towards twentieth-century modernity. The shrine, with its broad boulevards, concrete walls, modern hygienic facilities, and trees planted in disciplined rows was a suitable monument to the Admiral’s endeavors arguably because his patriotism, now inherent in all Koreans, had been channeled towards the economic activity that had made it all possible. According to Park Chung Hee’s famous dictum, “work while fighting, fight while working,” martial spirit was congruent to economic progress, making a day’s work at the office as critical to national defense as a patrol at the DMZ.116

The participation of foreigners in the commemoration of Yi Sunsin was noted as an important sign of his universal heroism. Most foreign participation was composed of visits to Hyŏnch’ungsa, but on rare occasions, some people went to greater lengths to show their admiration of the Admiral. A “blue-eyed American,” one ‘Charlie Sollong’117 used his own funds to erect a four to five meter statue of Yi Sunsin in Ŭichŏngpu. At the unveiling, Charlie gave a speech: “I put up this statue to honor the prospect that Koreans will soon reunify North and South in the spirit of the heroic Yi Sunsin.” The crowd “warmly applauded” his words.118

Regarding foreign veneration of the Admiral, few events were as closely scrutinized as the North Korean delegation’s visit to Hyŏnch’ungsa during the first North-South Red Cross Talks in 1972. For those who hoped for unification, a visit to the Admiral’s shrine promised a rare moment of unity; after all, the Admiral was as much a hero in North Korea as he was in the south.119 The South Korean scholar Yi Ŭnsang urged the North Koreans at Hyŏnch’ungsa to put aside their differences and “stop looking for enemies within.” He pleaded with the North Korean delegates: “Admiral Yi did not look for enemies within but found external foes; even though there were those who slandered him from within, he did not participate [in such mischief]. Our situation today is similar to the one at that time, so let us not look to fight amongst ourselves.”120 If there were similar sentiments on the other side that day, they were not recorded.

Intense curiosity about the North Korean visitors, more than two decades after partition, encouraged journalists to go to extremes to learn as possible about their secretive guests. After interviewing official tour guides, hotel maids, and shop attendants, journalists ascertained little about North Korean attitudes towards the South save hostility and suspicion. The maids reported that all paper scraps had been burnt in the rooms; guests had left little behind except some North
Korean cigarettes, liquor, and pictures of Kim Il Sung that had been carefully positioned in each luxury hotel suite. At the hotel gift store, a clerk’s helpful suggestion that a silk tie would make a wonderful souvenir was met with an angry retort that the delegate had no use for ties since he had hundreds back home. At Hyŏnch’ungsa, the South Korean guides took the delegation on an extensive tour of the shrine. At the museum, they showed the North Korean visitors Yi Sunsin’s personal belongings and were met with disbelief and suspicion; the delegates whispered loudly amongst themselves that they were fakes.

Actually, there was some truth to this claim. In 1969, as the renovation of Hyŏnch’ungsa neared completion, attempts to consolidate all of Yi Sunsin’s relics at the shrine met with resistance from Ch’ungyŏlsa, another of Yi Sunsin’s Chosŏn shrines. The twentieth-century state’s impulse to centralize the commemoration of Yi Sunsin in a single locale was contrary to its Chosŏn history and practice, where multiple shrines were erected at locations with a proven history. As a compromise, the government ordered replicas made of the relics for display at Hyŏnch’ungsa, returning the originals to Ch’ungyŏlsa. Shrines in the Chosŏn period had to have an authentic relationship with the exemplar; imitation or reproduction of relics would have theoretically undermined the sacrality of the shrine itself. In the twentieth century, changing ideas of commemoration privileged visibility over ritual; most ‘worshippers’ came to merely gaze at the Admiral’s shrine and associated relics, rather than seeking to commune with his spirit through a series of symbolic acts. The interplay between ‘worshipper’ and exemplar operated within a different logic from the Chosŏn period, perhaps favoring Yi Sunsin as icon over his historical self. Ultimately, the question here is not so much about whether or not these imitations undermine sacrality per se, but rather about the centrality of relics and the visual experience in the twentieth-century consumption of sacred heroes.

Within the limited space of this article, I have refrained from engaging the multiple incarnations of Yi Sunsin in the Chosŏn period. However, this article also suggests that Park’s act of breaking with Chosŏn ritual practices—in creating a modern, national hero—was also a process of creating the image of a static, singular and inferior Chosŏn past. Yi Sunsin’s exceptionalism, captured in a narrative valorizing a visionary leader whose achievements highlighted the ‘near-sightedness’ of the Chosŏn state—perversely reinforced twentieth-century prejudices against the past. Modernization does not simply create a shared national imaginary of a desirable future; often premised upon a break with a purported ‘tradition-bound’ and unfavorable past, modernization is the simultaneous creation of the past and the present. In the 1960s, anxiety over South Korea’s economic inferiority relative to North Korean prowess was a central concern. Hence, the remaking of the past at this time constituted an arena for competitive claims to modernity. The strategic manipulation of Yi Sunsin’s image was central to this process in Cold War Korea.

Schwartz and Schuman have argued that commemoration makes claims of legitimacy by privileging a particular historical narrative over others. In the 1970s under Park Chung Hee, Yi Sunsin’s Hyŏnch’ungsa symbolized a vision of a modern Korea built by a homogeneous energized people, and the thousands of participants who arrived at the shrine legitimized this project through their presence. While ritual served as the backbone of an individual’s interaction with a shrine in the Chosŏn period, the consumption of a visual, commodified history would be
the central experience of commemoration for those who came to ‘worship’ at Hyŏnch’ungsa in the twentieth century.

Thanks to Deokyo Choi, Nicholas Harkness, and Jaeeun Kim for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article. I am particularly grateful for the questions raised by Sheila Miyoshi Jager, Hong Kal, Mark Selden, Don Baker, Tobie Meyer-Fong, and William T. Rowe.

Saeyoung Park’s dissertation, “Sacred Spaces and the Commemoration of War in Chosŏn Korea” (Johns Hopkins University) centers on the politics of remembrance in the early modern period. Her next project explores the political implications of sexuality and the mutability of the body in Chosŏn Korea and Imperial China.

Glossary

ch’ampae 參拜

Ch’ongnyŏn 總聯 (在日本朝鮮人總聯合會)

changŏm 莊嚴

cherye 祭禮

chesa 祭祀

Chosŏn 朝鮮

Chusŏk 秋夕

Hyŏnch’ungsa 顯忠祠

hyŏntaehwa 現代化

kaehwa kyemonggi 開化啓蒙期

kikan 期間

kŏkukchŏkin kukka haengsa 擧國的in 國家行事

kukch’i 國恥

kukka haengsa 國家行事

kukka ŭirye 國家儀禮

kukmin ŭirye 國民儀禮

kukkūi yŏngung 救國의 英雄

kwikam 龜鑑

kyopo 僑胞
kyubŏmhwa 規範化
Mindan 民團 (在日本大韓民國民團)
minjok 民族
minjokŭi t’aeyang 民族의 太陽
mutochang 武道場
ondol 溫突
Onyang 溫陽
Park Chung Hee 朴正熙
sadang 祠堂
sakyŏkchang 射擊場
sŏngung 聖雄
South Ch’ungch’ŏng 忠淸南道
sunrye 巡禮
t’ansin kinyŏm 誕辰紀念
t’ansin kinyŏm chejŏn 誕辰紀念祭典
tarye 茶禮
tong ’il minjok 同— 民族
ŭm 淫
ungchang 雄壯
yangban 兩班
Yi Sunsin 李舜臣
Yi Ŭnsang 李殷相
yŏngung 英雄
yumulkwan 遺物館
Zainichi (Jp.)/chae ’il (Kr.) 在日

Notes
2 For Yasukuni shrine, see: John Breen, ed., *Yasukuni, the War Dead and the Struggle for Japan’s Past* (London: Hurst, 2007). For the Korean War Memorial and the Yasukuni museum, see [this link](#).


6 The Yi dynasty refers to the royal lineage of the Chosŏn dynasty.


9 The government declared the renovation of Hyŏnch’ungsas was complete in 1969 but some smaller construction and landscaping projects continued until 1975, when a revised edition of the *Record of the History of Asan Hyŏnch’ungsas* was published by the Ministry of Culture and Information (*Munhwa kongbobu)*.

10 One pyŏng is 3.3 meters squared.


12 Ibid., 81.
13 Ibid., 79-81.
18 Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.), 87.
19 Ibid., 92.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 107.
22 Ibid., 92.
23 Ibid., 87.
24 Ibid., 88.
25 Ibid., 86-107.
26 Thanks to Sheila Miyoshi Jager for stressing the relevance of the Blue House Raid and the seizure of the USS Pueblo in 1968. This article suggests that Park saw the reinvention of Hyŏnch’’ungsa as a critical support of his legitimacy in the Cold War. As mentioned elsewhere in this article, narratives of competing legitimacy composed an important front in the Cold War. Offering himself as the guardian of a (selectively) glorious Chosŏn past was central to Park’s claims of South Korean superiority and authenticity.
27 Ibid., 87.
28 Ibid., 88.
29 Ibid., 82, 88.
30 Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.), 201.
31 Lise Vogel, Marxism and the Oppression of Women (Rutgers University Press, 1987), 33-102. Some feminist scholars have drawn correlations between the selective display of leisure and a corresponding rise in status in order to explain the popularity of bourgeois domesticity and women’s withdrawal from the workplace. The classic formulation linking leisure and pecuniary abilities is Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 110.
32 Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.), 93.
33 Ibid., 154-157.
34 Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.), 155.
I do not mean to assume a static continuous Chosŏn ritual practice concerning Yi Sunsin; broadly speaking, there were two peaks in the commemoration of Yi Sunsin—the first after his death, and the second during the eighteenth century. The veneration of Yi in the late Chosŏn period was associated with the eliding of the Japanese invasion of Korea and the Manchu wars within a cosmopolitan Confucian rhetoric of Ming loyalism. I explore the construction of these ideologies elsewhere.

50 Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, 12.


52 Tzvetan Todorov, Hope and Memory (Princeton University Press, 2003), 162.

53 Three hundred and twenty eight students march in 1972: “Kŏkyosaeng 328myŏng Hyŏnch’unga cha’m’paehaengkun,” Tonga ilbo, April 26, 1972; Four hundred and eighty five students march to the shrine in 1975: “Ch’umgmugong tansin 430chu kinyŏm Hyŏnch’unhgsasŏ chehyang omsu,” Tonga ilbo, April 28, 1975. There was another march in 1974 that was reported in the press, and possibly more.

54 A Taehan newsreel (Taehan nusŭ) of the 1972 student march can be seen here. Last accessed March 30, 2010.
55 As Park Chung Hee was known between the 1961 coup and 1963 accession to the presidency.


57 Chungmugong, literally meaning ‘Loyal and Martial Lord’ is the posthumous title granted by the Chosŏn court in recognition of Yi Sunsin’s exceptional merit. The Admiral is interchangeably referred to as Chungmugong or Yi Sunsin in modern and historical documents after his death.

58 Chung Hee Park, Major Speeches by Korea’s Park Chung Hee, A New Horizon in Asia 3 (Seoul: Hollym Corp., 1970), 243.


60 Kim, Korea’s Development under Park Chung Hee, 4-33. Park sought to mobilize the country under the twin banners of anti-Communism and economic development.

61 Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.), 32. Italics mine.

62 Park, Major Speeches by Korea’s Park Chung Hee, 244.

63 Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.), 23.

64 Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi, 25.


66 Ibid., 221.

67 A copy of Park’s handwritten order can be seen in Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.), 29-30.

68 Ibid., 29.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., 30.

71 Literally, this means tea ceremony. Tea ceremonies in Korean history were not solely restricted to a stylistic consumption of brewed tea; such rites were used in Buddhist worship, diplomatic practices and court ritual. All the documents I have seen note the elevation of the new ritual commemoration to the level of a ‘tea ceremony,’ but they fail to mention which particular Chosŏn precedent(s) are at work.

72 Munhwa Kongbobu, Asan Hyŏnch’ungsa yŏnhyŏk chi, 31.

73 Saeyoung Park, Sacred Spaces and Postwar Commemoration in Chosŏn Korea, (Johns Hopkins University, Ph.D Diss forthcoming).

74 Park Kyeri, “The Statues of Ch’ungmugong and National Ideology,” The History of Recent Modern Korean Art 12 (January 2004): 162. In his comparative study of national heroes, Yi Sangrok is even more explicit: “That Park Chung Hee privately most admired Yi Sunsin is a

75 Munhwa Kongbobu, *Asan Hyŏnch’ungsya yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.),* unpaginated.


77 By Korean Enlightenment, I mean the *kaehwa kyemonggi,* roughly 1896-1910.


80 Ibid., 243.


82 Chung Hee Park, *Pak Chŏng-Hŭi Taet’ongnyong Ŝŏnjip,* vol. 6 (Seoul: Chimungak, 1969), 153.


84 Munhwa Kongbobu, *Asan Hyŏnch’ungsya yŏnhyŏk chi (2nd ed.),* 70.

85 Barry Schwartz and Howard Schuman, “History, Commemoration, and Belief: Abraham Lincoln in American Memory, 1945-2001,” *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 2 (April 2005): 185. While the authors problematize the conflicting dynamics between history and memory quite nicely, their theoretical construction of the dichotomy of history and memory can be a bit rigid. The distinction between “historians” and “commemorative agents” can be artificial in the sense that historians too may play a commemorative role.

86 Todorov, *Hope and Memory,* 199. I am using Todorov’s words out of context here. He writes: “If we adopt this position, then historians have no obligation to the truth, only an obligation to the good.” In his work on history and memory, this sentence is from his analysis of the critique historians have endured for undermining heroes.


89 Cf. Jonathan Culler’s discussion of the English and French terms for river and stream in *Ferdinand de Saussure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 33-34. To paraphrase Saussure’s claim, signs function not because of any intrinsic value, but through their relative position; by application, the main point I make here is that the discrepancy between the English and Korean terms in this instance focuses our attention on the particular socio-linguistic construction of sacred spaces.

90 Here I am referring to official shrines, and not illicit (*ŭm*) shrines, many of which were of shamanistic nature and were frequented by women.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.


98 The Korean residents in Japan are often referred to using the Japanese word, *zainichi* (在日), which usually indicates persons of Korean descent residing in Japan. Lacking Japanese citizenship, including the second and third generation, they occupy ambiguous positions in Japanese society.


100 Deokyo Choi has been kind enough to lend his perspective through a series of emails in February 2010. Also thanks to Jaeheun Kim for her helpful article “The Making and Unmaking of a “Transborder Nation”: South Korea during and after the Cold War.” *Theory and Society* 38, no. 2 (2009): 133-164.

101 Ch’ongnyŏn is the organization of Koreans in Japan sympathetic to North Korea and Mindan is the name of the opposing group that leans towards South Korea.


103 “Hyŏne’hu ngsa rūl ch’ampaehanŭn choh’ungnyŏn kye chae’il kyopodŭl,” *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, September 17, 1975.


105 Ibid.


Many of the tours that were reported in the press were government sponsored, such as in 1973 when the Ministry of Culture invited kyopo students from Japan and the United States to see the “true face” (ch’ammosūp) of Korea.


"Chokukūi p’um’anūn yōksi pokūnhae,” Tonga ilbo, October 12, 1972.


"Chokukūi p’um’anūn yōksi pokūnhae,” Tonga ilbo, October 12, 1972.


"P’o’odū ch’ehan 24sikan ilchŏng,” Tonga ilbo, November 20, 1974.


Chung Hee Park, Chungdan hanūn chanūn súngni haji mot handa: Pak Chŏng-hŭi taet’ongnyŏng yŏnsŏl chip, 4th ed. (Seoul: Hallim Ch’ulp’ansa, 1968), 41. For Park Chung Hee’s linking of patriotism and development, see his speech “Inkan ŭi kŭntaehwa wa saenghwal ŭi kyŏngchehwa” in the same volume, 13-34.

This English name was transliterated into Korean and I have had to transliterate it back into English. My apologies to Mr. Charles Sollong (sic?) for possibly butchering his name.


"Yi Ŭnsang-ssi Yi Chungmugong ŭi ŏl,” Tonga ilbo, September 14, 1972.

"Puk ŭi saramtŭlyi namkin Soūl sapak oilhwa annaeyangkwa hot’el chikwonul t’onghaetul ponta,” Tonga ilbo, September 18, 1972.

Ibid.

"Kwihyanghanun Ch’ungmugong p’alsap’um,” Tonga ilbo, October 11, 1969.

Schwartz and Schuman, “History, Commemoration, and Belief: Abraham Lincoln in American Memory, 1945-2001,” 184-186; Todorov, Hope and Memory, 164-176. Critiques of memory work and commemoration are often rooted in the dichotomy of memory and history. The controversy over history and memory cannot be engaged in detail here; but it is worth noting that much of the critical debate between history and memory is exacerbated by their seemingly similar claims to the truth but contrasting ontological foundations.
Part II: Imagining Community in a Changing World

When we speak of “religion,” we often associate it first and foremost with matters of belief: to be “religious” is commonly understood in terms of the doctrines we accept, and the extent to which our actions are rooted in those doctrines. Indeed, our behavior (whether ethical or ritual) often makes sense precisely in the context of the religious world(s) we inhabit. As we found in Part I of this reader, religious traditions provide some of our most fundamental orientations to the world, profoundly shaping how we understand and respond to our experiences, even as those experiences influence the way we perceive the meaning of our traditions.

Nevertheless, our understanding of the role of religion traditions in modern history would be severely impoverished if we were to view religion solely as a matter of personal faith or doctrinal adherence. Images of religious belonging are also an important element in the construction of social identity, often serving as a marker of national, ethnic or socioeconomic divisions. If, as Benedict Anderson has famously suggested, the modern nation-state can best be understood as an “imagined community,” many of the authoritative symbols by which communities create and maintain that shared sense of identity have been rooted either in the resources offered by one’s own religious traditions, or in the (often stereotyped) images of others’ religious commitments.

The reciprocal relationship between religious tradition and social identity is inevitably shaped by the larger historical contexts in which they appear. One of these was the imperialism that affected (and afflicted) much of the modern history of the region. Western imperialist powers (most notably the Portuguese, Dutch and English) operated in the Asia Pacific since the sixteenth century, and were joined by a rapidly expanding Japanese empire at the beginning of the twentieth. This had an enormous impact, not only on the political fortunes of the Japanese nation, but on Japanese images of religious belonging. For scholars like Miyazawa Kenji, for example, the opening of Japanese interests to a larger world permitted, not only an enthusiastic exploration of world culture (from Beethoven to Esperanto), but a reframing of his own Buddhist commitments from a global perspective. Moreover, as Cemil Ayden and Michael Penn point out, the geopolitical vision of Japanese imperial ambition – conceived, by the 1930s, as a pan-Asian movement against Western imperialism to be led by Japan – supported the rise of Islamic Studies in Japan. To be sure, the ideologically-driven desire of some to find a partner against Western imperialism in the Islamic world occasionally led to problematic interpretations, but the vantage permitted by that particular historic perspective may continue to offer insights from which we might learn today.

With the end of the Pacific War in 1945, religious identity often came to be formulated in the idiom of the Cold War. Japan, only recently defeated by the Allies (which had included both the Soviet Union and China) was quickly reimagined as an ally in a new global struggle. As Vladimir Tikhonov argues, the exigencies of the Cold War – which, for many in the West, was viewed as a contest with “godless” communism – also helps to explain the striking growth of Christianity in South Korea. Government support for Christian military chaplains (backed by American aid and assisted by internal divisions within the South Korean Buddhist establishment), he suggests, played an important role, not only in the establishment of the South Korean state as a Cold War ally, but in the size of its Christian
minority, which remains by far the largest in the region. In a similar fashion, the article by Kawakami Yasunori describes the experience of the small but cohesive Japanese Muslim community. With a history extending back roughly a century, this community is comprised largely of immigrants who arrived in Japan during the “bubble economy” of the 1990s. Those who remained (often by starting families with Japanese spouses) have built strong ties with their new home, but remain connected to the majority Muslim countries of their birth.

This continually shifting imagination of community creates novel opportunities for asserting shared identity, both within and across national boundaries. Yet it also creates new outliers, minority groups whose relation to the social center is often fraught with uncertainty. At the same time that Japan was setting out on its rise as an imperial power, for instance, it also set about annexing nearby territories (including the islands now known as Okinawa and Hokkaido) and consolidating its cultural influence over the local populations. The Ainu people of Hokkaido, for example, are a native group that has struggled to retain its own language, religion and culture in the face of a century of policies by the Japanese government designed to assimilate them into a national culture. In recent years, these efforts to preserve Ainu culture have been bolstered by technology, including digital recordings of traditional songs and televised Ainu-language programs. Yet the work of Chiri Yukie – a young Ainu woman who traveled to Tokyo in 1922 to work with Japanese linguists to translate the ancient songs of the Ainu into Japanese – bears poignant witness to the changed world in which those songs live on. Her song of the owl god, presented here, not only provides fascinating glimpses into the religious world of the Ainu, but can also be read as an expression of her nostalgia for the past and her hope for a future in a changed world.

In other cases, minority groups may be a central feature in the consolidation of national identity, as Andre Vltchek suggests in his report from Indonesia. Despite public media images to the contrary, Vltchek presents a picture of complex and volatile patterns of alliance and antagonism in the contemporary discourse of national identity, in which minority religious groups (including both Christians and Muslim sects like the Ahmadiyah) and cultural practices (like the customary clothing of the Balinese) face suppression in the name of a rising Salafist Sunni nationalism, supported by international (especially Saudi) money. He shows the way that legal initiatives, presented to further a vision of Islamic piety in the face of Indonesian religious diversity also (even primarily) serves the interests of state power.

Any discussion of religion, identity and tradition in the modern Asia Pacific must take into consideration what Mark Selden calls the “Yasukuni Problem.” First established in 1869 to enshrine the spirits of soldiers who died in the fighting that inaugurated the Meiji Restoration, the Yasukuni Shrine became a cornerstone of State Shinto, a governmental effort to imagine the Japanese nation-state on the foundations of a vision of ancient religious heritage. Today, almost 2.5 million war dead are venerated as deities (kami) at the shrine for their sacrifice to the nation, most in the service of Japan’s imperial ambitions during the long Pacific War. Under the auspices of the postwar Constitution – a document that both disavows war and affirms the separation of religion and state power – Yasukuni has become a private religious establishment, but the shrine continues to serve a fundamentally nationalist project, a powerful synergy of war memory, religious practice and national identity. Visits to the shrine by Japanese political leaders (if not by the
Emperor himself) suggest to many in Japan and abroad that the shrine – and the revisionist image of Japanese responsibility for the Pacific War that it upholds – has the support of the Japanese government, prompting legal challenges by Japanese citizens, as well as international protest.

Yet as Selden suggests, the “Yasukuni Problem” is not uniquely Japanese; the controversy surrounding this institution is grounded, not only in the political history of Japanese empire, but in the larger dynamics of modern nationalisms, and the global political history of the post-war period (most notably the U.S.-led rehabilitation of Japan as a Cold War ally). Moreover, responses to the shrine cut across the boundaries of national and sectarian identities in complex ways. John Breen, for example, outlines a variety of responses to the political role of Yasukuni shrine by the Catholic church, from the Vatican’s gestures of support for the shrine and its observances to the Japanese bishops’ more wary responses to the threat that the status of the shrine might pose to Japan’s constitutional separation of religion and state. Moreover, as Tanaka Nobumasa notes, the 2001 “Asia Lawsuit,” which demanded the end of visits to the shrine by government leaders, was joined not only by the Japanese, but by Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese citizens, some of whom were appalled to learn that their relatives (drafted from among the subject populations of the empire) had been enshrined at Yasukuni without their knowledge or consent. As one figure interviewed for the piece notes, the plaintiffs in this case included individuals whose parents may well have fought one another during the Pacific War, but who have united in their refusal to participate in the sort of community imagined by this vision of the wartime past, and to move forward on the basis of a different image of the past and the future.
Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933) was a multi-talented educator, poet and author of the Taisho era. In his introduction, Roger Pulvers describes him as “a dilettante typical” of his time, combining a profound appreciation for all the world’s culture (he was an devotee of Beethoven, and translated more than one of his own works into Esperanto) with a deep commitment to the Buddhist tradition. His short story “Indra’s Net,” for example, demonstrates a number of the trajectories of this fascinating character. The protagonist — an archaeologist at work unearthing the Buddhist artifacts of the ancient Silk Road — carefully describes the geological features of the Tsela Pass even as he seeks to affirm his community with the Buddhist culture of that place in a cosmic epiphany replete with heavenly beings. As the afterward by Jane Marie Law indicates, the core images of this story are grounded less in the personal idiosyncrasies of its author, however, than the canonical symbolism of the Avatamsaka Sutra (Kegon-kyō), a scripture that teaches the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings and all experiences. It is this image of “Indra’s Net” that helps to locate, not only the story’s protagonist, but one suspects, Miyazawa himself, in a larger world, a vision in which the diversity of societies and the physical environment is grounded in a fundamental unity, one not entirely incompatible with the imperialist trajectories of his day.
Miyazawa Kenji must certainly be the world’s only author who described himself as a single illumination of light. The actual lines—the very first in his “Preface to *Spring and Ashura*”—go this way.

The phenomenon called I

Is a single blue illumination

This ray of light comes from “karma’s alternating current lamp”…

Flickering unceasingly, restlessly

Together with the sights of the land and all else

Or is Kenji describing all of us with this “I”? After all, the “blue” in this poem is the blue of the other world, the place where we are all headed (albeit not necessarily in an upward direction). Blue is the most commonly used color by Kenji in his works; and the sky appears as a transit medium for all living creatures.

Among his poems, perhaps this “Preface” best describes his take on life. This take is all-encompassing. He does not view human life—or any other form of life, for that matter—as separate from the rocks, mountains, rivers, the light, the wind…. This is what he means by “Together with the sights of the land and all else.”

If “Preface” is his clearest pronouncement of this in verse, then “Indra’s Net,” which appears in English here for the first time, is his most inspired and direct shot at his universe in prose. Fiercely lyrical and unmistakably devotional, it describes a vision of Paradise as seen at the Tsel Pass in northern India. At 4215 meters above sea level, he may be halfway to Paradise already.

How did this man, born into a well-to-do entrepreneurial family in the provincial Iwate Prefecture town of Hanamaki at the end of the 19th century, come to envision himself in such a remote spot, ecstatic at the floor of heaven?

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*Osawa Onsen just outside Hanamaki. Kenji often went to the rotenburo (outdoor
Though he never left Japan in his lifetime, that didn’t stop him from pursuing a gamut of interests that transported him to what we call “the outside world.” This is an apt phrase for Kenji, whose outside world extended into the cosmos.

He studied German, English and Esperanto. He was obsessed with classical music, Beethoven in particular. (He owned the largest collection of records in Iwate.) Many of his characters have non-Japanese names; many of his stories take place outside Japan.

Years ago I described Kenji as “a dilettante typical of the Taisho Era,” and I would still stick to this description. Millions of his compatriots at the time were into foreign languages, Western music and fantasies about foreign places they did not have the opportunity or means to get to. Kenji, in this, was no exception. The exception was his fanaticism for these things, his obsessiveness. He was generally a highly obsessive individual; and today, psychiatrists would have a justifiable field day with his symptomatic hyperactive behavior.

But the focus of this hyperactivity in a myriad of spheres is, in his case, unique: faith. Kenji was a devout and dogmatic Buddhist. He was also a dedicated proselytizer. He wanted to see all of us, someday, gathered around that big bonfire in the sky, sending heat and light out to this world, laughing together and singing songs, preferably one of his own compositions, “Once Around the Stars.”

We often encounter in Kenji’s phenomenology rivers and rocks in the sky. As an amateur geologist—there is now a museum in Hanamaki featuring a collection of the minerals mentioned in his works—he knew his rocks well. His nickname at school was “Rocky” (石ころ賢). One of the themes in his poetry and prose is that reality cannot be portrayed merely in the present and that a description that does not consider what the scene or object was like in the past and what it will be like in the future is, at best, fragmentary and, at worst, inaccurate.

When you read the descriptions in “Indra’s Net” please bear this in mind. You are looking not at the surreal. There is no surrealism in Kenji’s world. Everything that is is a part of everything that was or will be. The universe may be chaotic, but it makes perfect sense.

As the Buddha says to the two little brothers in his exquisite story “Barefeet of Light” (ひかりの素足)...
“There’s nothing to be frightened of. Compared to the great virtue that envelopes the world, your sins are what a little drop of dew on the point of a thistle’s thorn is to the light of the sun.”

The life of one of the brothers in “Barefeet of Light” is saved by the Buddha, thanks to his spirit of self-sacrifice. Kenji’s kaleidoscopic visions of the real world were grounded in his sharpened sense of moral justice. In that way, his faith was as down-to-earth as it was visionary.

Indra’s Net

It seemed then that I had collapsed, out of utter exhaustion, on a bed of green grass and wind. In that faint autumn wind I exchanged bows, courteous to a fault, with my tin-colored shadow. Then, I stepped alone onto a dark cowberry carpet and traveled about the Tsela Plateau.

The cowberry boasted red fruit.

The white sky blanketed the entire plateau. It was a cold white, whiter than kaolin china. The rarefied air sang in a high-pitched whirr, no doubt due to the sun making its lonely way beyond the white porcelain clouds. The sun had already sunk below the black barbed ridges in the west, creaking in the dim light of a late afternoon.

I looked around, gasping like a fish.

Wherever I looked, there wasn’t even a shadow of a bird, nor was there so much as a trace of any gentle beast.

“What on earth am I visiting here in the upper reaches of the atmosphere, moving around in this air that cuts through me?” I asked this of myself.

The cowberry was, before I knew it, gone, and the ground was covered in a sheet of dry ash-colored moss. Red moss flowers were blossoming here and there. But all this did was to intensify the cold grief of the plateau.

Before long, the late afternoon was in twilight, the moss flowers appeared reddish black, and the color of the sky above the ridges turned a faint and somber yellow.

It was then that I caught sight of an all-white lake far in the distance.

“That’s not water! It’s natrium salt or something that’s crystallized,” I said to myself. “I mustn’t lose heart by getting all happy and taken in.”

Even so, I hurried over there.
The lake came closer, glittering. Before I knew it I was gazing at pure-white quartz sand and, beyond that, a place brimming darkly with real water.

The sand squeaked. I picked up a pinch of it and examined it in the dim light of the sky. It was made up of dihexagonal pyramid grains.

“This has come from dacite or rhyolite.”

That’s what I figured, whispering to myself, standing on the water’s edge.

“Hey, this is supercooled water!” I whispered in my mind. “This is the granddaddy of water in both a liquid and a solid state!”

My palm absolutely gave off a pale phosphorescence in the water.

Suddenly there was a high-pitch ring all around.

“It’s the wind. It’s the green grasses. There was a rumble and a roar.” These were the words ringing in my head. It was pitch dark, pitch dark with a faint red tinge.

I opened my eyes wider.

Night had fallen and the sky was as transparent as it could be. The water of the galaxy flowed silently over the sky’s plain, which was made up of beautifully fired, polished steel. Little corundum pebbles shined, and every grain of sand on the banks could be counted.

The cold dark-violet plate of the sky was studded with the cleavage planes of diamonds and pointy grains of sapphire, and fragments of silicon the size of smoke tree seeds had been picked up in exquisite tweezers and inlaid into it, and all of this separately and on its own breathed in and out, trembling and quaking.

When I took another look at where my feet were, small yellow and blue flames were flickering and twinkling in the grains of sand in the sky. I suppose that supercooled lake in the Tsela Plateau was a part of the galaxy itself.

Yet, dawn seemed to come quickly on the plateau.

It was very clear that something like glass molecules you could see right through were floating up into the air and, above all, what looked like a fountain in the sky surrounded by nine small blue stars in the east was quickly transformed in the terribly dim light of the sky from steel to amazonite.

I saw an angel fly through space that had a dark-violet, subtle sheen.

“At last it’s slipped in,” I thought, my heart jumping with delight. “It has suddenly made its way from the Tsela Plateau of the realm of humans to that of the heavens.”

The angel soared straight ahead.

“It’s covering 10 kilometers in the blink of an eye!” I whispered to myself. “But look! It isn’t even budging. It’s soaring ahead so far without moving, without changing place, without changing form.”

The angel’s robe was as thin as smoke, and its holy necklace absorbed whispers of light from the dimly-lit plate of the sky.
“Got it,” I thought. “The air here is rarified almost to the point of becoming a vacuum. That’s why there’s no wind to disturb the folds in that delicate robe.”

The angel opened its dark blue eyes wide but didn’t blink them once. It soared absolutely straight ahead with the faintest smile on its lips. Yet, it was neither moving, nor changing place or form.

“This is the place where all hopes are purified. The number of wishes is alleviated. Gravity is neutralized within itself, and a cold scent of quince floats through the air. And so, the cord on the angel’s robe neither ripples, nor does it hang straight down.”

But then the amazonite in the sky was transformed into a weird plate of purple agate, and I could no longer see the figure of the soaring angel.

“This is the Tsela Plateau after all,” I said, explaining it to myself. “You can’t count on just one single episode.”

But what was strange was that the cold quince-like scent was still permeating the sky. And once again I sensed that this mysterious world in the sky was like a dream.

“There’s something really funny here!” I thought to myself, standing there. “This celestial space seems to be right beside my sensations. As I walk on the path here and fragments of mica gradually appear in great number, it seems to me that I am getting closer and closer to granite. It may be just a fluke, but the more often it appears this way, the more true it gets. I’m sure I’ll be able to sense this celestial world on this plateau again.”

I turned my eyes from the sky to the plateau. The sand was now as pure white as can be. The blue of the lake, now more ancient-looking than verdigris, gave my heart a chill.

Suddenly I saw three heavenly children before me. They wore the thinnest robes, woven, it seemed, from frost, and transparent shoes, standing on the water’s edge, peering intently into the eastern sky, as if waiting for the sun to rise. The eastern sky was already alight with whiteness. From the folds in their robes I could tell they were from Gandhara. I recognized them as being from a fresco that I had excavated at the ruins of the great Khotan Temple. I approached them quietly and greeted them in a very low voice, so as not to frighten them.

“Good morning, children of the fresco at the great Khotan Temple.”

The three of them turned toward me. The radiance of their holy necklaces and their imposing and magnificent black eyes….

I spoke again, continuing to approach them.

“Good morning, children of the fresco at the great Khotan Temple.”

“And who may you be?” asked the child on the right, looking straight at me without blinking.

“I am Aoki Akira, who excavated the great Khotan Temple from the sands.”

“And what are you doing here?” said the same child, looking sternly at me straight in the eye.
“I want to worship the sun together with you.”
“The sun? It won’t be long.”
The three of them turned away from me. Their necklaces briefly shined like yellow and bitter-orange and green needles, and their robes fluttered in the colors of the rainbow.
In the fiery platinum sky, from the edge of the olive green field beyond the lake, something that looked like it was melted, something seductive, as old as gold, crimson like that seen in a kiln, a single ray of light appeared.
The heavenly children stood perfectly erect and brought their hands together, looking toward it. It was the sun. It was the sun of this heavenly realm, solemnly rocking its strangely round body that was like a thing melted down, in an instant climbing properly up in the sky. Its light now flowed in needles and bundles, and everywhere you looked you could hear a clicking and clacking.
The heavenly children jumped up and down in rapture, running over the silica sand of the pure-blue lake of True Enlightenment. Then suddenly one of the children bumped into me, and jumping back, screamed out while pointing up to the sky.
“Look, look, look at Indra’s net!”
I looked up at the sky. The zenith was now azure blue, and from it to the four corners of the pale edges of the sky, Indra’s spectral net vibrated radiantly as if burning, its fibers more fine than a spider’s web, its construction more elaborate than that of hypha, all blending together transparently, purely, in a billion intermingled parts.
“Look, heavens, it’s the drums of the wind!” said another child, bumping into me and running off in a flurry.
What can only be seen as the sun’s minus counterparts, shining indigo dark and gold and green and ashen, drums seemed to fall from the sky, and, impervious to human striking, pounded out a sound with all their might; and while those countless heavenly drums called out, they seemed to be making no sound at the same time. I watched it all for so long that my eyes clouded over and all I could do was stagger about.
“Look, look at the blue peacock!” quietly said the same child who was on the right as he walked by me. Sure enough, beyond Indra’s net in the sky, on the far edge of those countless resounding heavenly drums, an enormous and strange blue peacock, fanning out its jeweled tail feathers, sang out in an ethereal voice.
That peacock was most certainly present in the sky. Yet, it was not to be seen at all. It was certainly crying out. Yet its cries were not to be heard at all.

After that, there was no way that I could see the three heavenly children.

Far from it, I vaguely recalled my own figure collapsed deep into the green grass and the wind.
Postscript: Wisdom, Beauty and Compassion in Miyazawa Kenji’s “Indra’s Net”

Miyazawa Kenji’s story “Indra’s Net,” in title and content, calls forth one of the most appealing visual references in Buddhism. Indra, sitting in his palace atop Mt. Meru (Sumeru in Buddhism, a mythical abode of deities, buddhas and bodhisattvas), unfurls a net above himself in the endless, empty, radiant sky. In the eye of each connection of the net hangs a jewel, and each jewel has countless facets. A brilliant sun illuminates the net, and each facet of each jewel reflects in it all the other jewels and all their facets. The image is one of radiance, of endless reproduction of reality, of interpenetration, of visual and imaginative emergence. It is also grandiose and clearly challenges our usual intellect and imagination as we try to grasp each facet containing the entirety of the rest of the field of refractions within it. Everything is as real as light.

Why did the early composers of Mahayana literature use such images, designed, almost perfectly, to blow our minds? What is at stake, beyond incomprehensibility, in an image such as Indra’s net?

A powerful meditative tool, this visual device actually depends on a number of important philosophical ideas that coalesced in Mahayana Buddhism around the turn of the Common Era, as Buddhism became a pan-Asian phenomenon and absorbed ideas centered on a cosmic scale. All of these ideas, which continued to be expanded upon by religious thinkers over the next several centuries, challenge us with a simple Mahayana claim, in which EVERYTHING is at stake: To penetrate the true nature of reality is to activate the ground of compassion. Conversely, to be truly compassionate, one must penetrate the true nature of reality. Wisdom, the ability to penetrate the true nature of reality and compassion, the ultimate goal in Buddhism, are like two wings of one bird. One cannot fly without both wings. What text presented us with Indra’s net and what are some of the core Mahayana ideas that undergird this reflexive claim?

The Avatamsaka Sutra
The image of Indra’s Net appears in a text called the Avatamsaka Sutra (a shortening of the Sanskrit title Buddhâvatamsaka-nâma mahâvaipulya sūtra, Huayan-jing in Chinese and Kegon-kyô in Japanese) a composite text, sections of which circulated and continue to circulate independently.

Because this brief discussion concerns a Japanese writer, translations of Buddhist terms from here on will be limited to the Japanese. The components of the text were composed, most likely in Khotan (or a wider range of Central Asia), over a long period of time, probably around the third or fourth century CE. They were collected and redacted into a single text and appeared as a Chinese collection completed by Buddhabhadra in about 420. Subsequent versions appeared over the next several hundred years, bringing the text to its current form of forty chapters. The Huayan School of Buddhism in China, which centers on this text, had wide influence on other schools of Chinese Buddhism and influenced the emergence of Chan (Zen) as well. The Kegon school of Buddhism, based on this scripture, was one of the six schools of Buddhism in Nara Japan (710-794), and although Kegon never gained widespread popular worship in Japan after this period comparable to Tendai, Shingon or Zen, the school continues to exist in Japan today. This sutra is considered to be one of the most influential sutras in East Asian Buddhism. As a whole, it follows a two-part strategy: visual imagination followed by doctrinal exposition. The themes are the interdependent and interpenetrating nature of all reality and the stages of the cultivation of the bodhisattva path. The common English name for this sutra is The Flower Garland Sutra.

**Unique status of the text in Mahayana Buddhism**

According to Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the text as a visual and doctrinal reality occupies a unique status. When the historical Buddha achieved enlightenment under the bodhi tree, the teaching he expounded was THIS one: the Avatamsaka Sutra. He entered into a state where the realm of enlightened beings surrounded him, and he not only described its fantastic, radiant beauty, but also preached the doctrines of emptiness and interpenetration, namely that all phenomena participate in and contain all other phenomena. Soon, however, he realized that what he was preaching was not accessible to the sentient beings in our buddha field. The very idea of interpenetration is too sublime, on too cosmic a scale for ordinary consciousness to understand.
He then modified his pedagogical method, and preached the sermon we know today as “The First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma,” which contains the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, the Middle Way, the Three-fold Nature of Existence, what is regarded in later Mahayana Buddhism as the “provisional doctrine.” Provisional to what? To what he first expounded as he entered his state of enlightened mind: the Avatamsaka Sutra. Part of the task of all Mahayana literature is to demonstrate that the new formulation of Buddhism, while emerging from early Buddhism, regards this very early Buddhism as an impartial and incomplete teaching, to be fully unfolded (even revealed) in the teachings of Mahayana. And to sell that idea, this text resorts to a visual and aesthetic appeal on a cosmic scale.

The core idea of the Avatamsaka Sutra is that all things, all phenomena, all dharmas contain in them all other things, all other phenomena, all other dharmas. The rich visual imagery of the Avatamsaka Sutra, of which the imagery of Indra’s net is but one celebrated example, make it clear that this interpenetration is both beyond our ability to grasp with our usual intellects and is also extraordinarily beautiful. Far from being nihilistic, interpenetration and this radical interdependence of all things is something we should aspire to know. We WANT to know it: it is so sublime and expansive. It is an awareness the realization of which has the power to transform one entirely. And it is the foundation of the bodhisattva path: the cultivation of enlightened mind and compassion for the benefit of all sentient beings. This idea, as expounded in the Avatamsaka Sutra, is dependent on (and assumes) a number of Mahayana developments.

The cosmic Buddha and the historical Buddha

According to Mahayana Buddhism, the buddha from our realm, Shakyamuni Buddha is the historical manifestation for our buddha field of the cosmic principle of the universe: the Dharmakaya (Dainichi in Japanese). Our Buddha achieved enlightenment, and far from just “snuffing out” of the cycle of birth and death, he exists in the great space of mind, and is in the presence of other enlightened beings from other buddha fields, which are as endless as the number of grains of sand in the river Ganges (to use a common Mahayana expression). This idea not only situates our Buddha in a much wider cosmic context, it also means that all of these buddhas and bodhisattvas from other buddha fields are interpenetrating one another in all of their sublime forms. The possibility for the complete Mahayana doctrine in this formulation is guaranteed: Beings in our buddha field can receive the teachings from other buddhas and bodhisattvas, and even resonate with the cosmic resonance of the cosmic Buddha itself (an idea developed through esoteric ritual, most directly through Shingon and also Tendai).

Far from being unique, our Buddha is one of billions and billions of enlightened beings in the universe. This idea provides Mahayana Buddhism with legitimacy, and also holds out to us that enlightenment is possible.

The Dharmakaya, this cosmic principle in Mahayana Buddhism, in Japanese is referred to as “The Great Sun Buddha” (Dainichi Nyorai). When we experience the nature of reality in all its entirety, it is as blinding and all illuminating as the Sun.

The great the bodhisattva ideal and the bodhisattva path

Mahayana Buddhism also shifted the very goal of Buddhist practice, from a quest for personal liberation out of the cycle of birth and death and the ocean of suffering, to the goal of great compassion embodied in the bodhisattva ideal. One should enter the path of Buddhist salvation for the sole purpose of achieving enlightenment so that one can alleviate the suffering of other
sentient beings. One vows, upon entering the path (as a monk originally and later with provisions for lay people) to continue to choose rebirth after enlightenment, until ALL sentient beings are saved from the ocean of suffering. If one sentient being is left behind, one’s own enlightenment was for selfish ends.

Such a lofty and altruistic idea could sound naïve if that was all there was to it. In Mahayana Buddhist doctrine, a significant discourse developed which grappled with the very difficulty of that process. Beyond the eightfold path of “provisional” Buddhism as preached in the “First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma,” the bodhisattva path explores the nature of the human psyche and the cultivation of moral, devotional and meditative prowess, and also the cultivation, after enlightenment, of supernatural abilities, designed to make the assistance of sentient beings possible. In other words, to put it bluntly, if you are an ordinary, unenlightened person and you try and save sentient beings, chances are you will simply contribute to the problem. But as an enlightened being, your powers will be much greater. And along your path toward enlightenment, you are in training to be an enlightened being.

These multitudes who surround the Buddha as he expounds the Avatamsaka Sutra are these enlightened beings and the world he perceives is how they experience reality all the time. Buddhas and bodhisattvas do not get their minds blown by cosmic ideas like Indra’s Net; formulations such as these are the normal order of reality, the True Dharma. Our own experience of reality, by comparison, is limited and drab and clouds the brilliant and beautiful nature of a reality fully perceived.

The doctrine of emptiness

The doctrine of emptiness lies at the heart of Mahayana Buddhism. Emerging from the core idea of the interdependent and co-dependent origin and nature of all things, the doctrine states that all things (ideas, physical objects, realities) are empty of inherent existence. They exist because they are dependent on other things: they “co-emerge” and “inter-are.”

But far from being a doctrine of nihilism, Mahayana Buddhism wants to advance the idea that this idea is sublime. While things may be empty of inherent existence, they are simply FULL of other, more profound things. In short, all things are connected to all other things. Absolutely nothing exists inherently by itself without being connected in a great NET of interpenetration.

Herein lies the beauty of the image of Indra’s net: all things exist as reflected realities of all other things. And they are brilliant in the sun (the rising of which is awaited in Miyazawa’s story).

How does an idea like this activate the mind of compassion? To know the true nature of reality, this interdependent and interpenetrating universe, is to remove the “I”, and realize a greater “We.” We are all connected. We are all made of the very light that is the endlessly refracted light of Indra’s net.

The “I” in Miyazawa’s story falls (through sleep or dream or reverie) in a grassy field, into a temporary state when he is able to be there on the Tsela Plateau, able to penetrate the radiance of the true nature of reality, able to see the angels that he only saw in stone relief in one dimension as an archaeologist of the Khotan Temple before. But now he is there with them awaiting the rising of the sun: the appearance of Dainichi Nyorai. We can only imagine, if like “I” in Miyazawa’s story, we are able to shake loose our habitual mind (through meditation, through dream, through aesthetic reverie) and see the universe in this way, how it might transform our way of being in the world.
Perhaps this was the question Miyazawa was asking: What happens to “I” after this vision in the grassy field?

Roger Pulvers is an American-born Australian author, playwright, theatre director and translator living in Japan. He has published 40 books in Japanese and English and, in 2008, was the recipient of the Miyazawa Kenji Prize. In 2009 he was awarded Best Script Prize at the Teheran International Film Festival for “Ashita e no Yuigon.” He is the translator of Kenji Miyazawa, Strong in the Rain: Selected Poems.

Jane Marie Law is Associate Professor of Japanese Religions and Ritual Studies at Cornell University. She is the author of Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death and Rebirth of the Awaji Ningyō Jōruri Tradition (Princeton University Press, 1997) and most recently, co-editor with Vanessa Sasson of Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion and Culture (Oxford University Press, 2008). Her current research focuses on cultural memory of atrocity and the possibilities of reconciliation. She lives with her family and horses in the sublime corner of Indra’s Net known as Ithaca, New York.
The disciplines of “area studies” (exploring the language, culture and religious traditions of particular geographic regions) have always been bound up with geopolitics and perceptions of national interest. Not only does academic (and popular) interest in these studies wax and wane according to their role in contemporary politics, but their basic assumptions and orientations are often strongly influenced by those interests. In Michael Penn’s interview with Cemil Aydin, they discuss the rise and decline of Japanese Islamic Studies during the 1930s and 40s. Aydin suggests that the preconceptions of Islamicists during that period were strongly shaped by the geopolitical image of Japan as a leading light in Asian efforts to throw off the yoke of Western imperialism. For these scholars, the monotheistic roots of Islam – shared with both Judaism and Christianity – often seemed to be in tension with the twentieth-century political context of much of the Islamic world, which struggled with the domination of Western powers in ways not unlike Asia. Despite the changes in Japanese Islamic Studies since the end of the Pacific War, this perspective (so very different from many of the preconceptions that drive Islamic Studies in the Western academy) not only helps us understand some of the distinctive features of Japanese images of Islam, but may provide a useful vantage from which to re-evaluate our own images of this tradition.
Imperial Japan’s Islamic Policies and Anti-Westernism
Cemil Aydin Interview by Michael Penn

Cemil Aydin is a specialist on the intellectual and political history of decolonization and anti-Westernism, especially with respect to Japan and the Ottoman Empire.

Michael Penn: I’d like to begin by asking you how it is that you became interested in studying prewar and wartime Japanese scholarship on the Islamic world as well as the broader topic of anti-Westernism in Asia.

Cemil Aydin: In my graduate school education, I was initially interested in doing a global-comparative history of Ottoman and Japanese modernization. Like all Ph.D. students, my choice of a research topic emerged out of intensive readings for the Ph.D. examinations, conversations with professors and historiographical controversies. Well, after taking several classes with Akira Iriye, John Dower, Albert Craig, Herbert Bix and Andrew Gordon, I did have a general sense of the field. It was during this process, while reading Prof. Selcuk Esenbel’s first articles on Abdurresid Ibrahim and Japan’s links with Muslim Pan-Asianists, and an article by Harry Harootunian on the "Japanese Revolt against the West," that I first encountered Okawa Shumei’s writings on the Muslim world. I remember being puzzled by the fact that one of Japan’s leading Pan-Asianists was also the founder of Islamic Studies in that country. This exciting reading process coincided with the controversies on Pan-Asianism and historical memory provoked by a Japanese revisionist movie on Tojo Hideki and the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal called Pride. In the end, I decided to write a thesis on Okawa Shumei’s Pan-Asianism, which allowed me to discuss two controversial issues, namely the roots of anti-Westernism and the complex relationship between Pan-Asianism and imperialism.

Okawa Shumei (left) and Ishiwara Kanji were known for radical nationalist and Pan-Asianist ideas. Okawa was also a pioneer of Islamic Studies scholarship in Japan

I completed my thesis just a year after September 11 while there was much scholarly and non-
scholarly interest in the questions of anti-Westernism. As someone who worked on Japanese critiques of the West, I became very concerned about a particular view, highly influential in American foreign policy, which explained Muslim critiques of the West as an eternal conflict between Islam and Christendom. According to this theory of "What Went Wrong," Muslims were unique in their discontent with the international order and Western powers because they could simply not accept seeing Christians being more powerful and prosperous than themselves. Of course, you can imagine the policy implications of such an analysis. Students of Japan know well that rejection of the Western hegemony or modernity was a powerful theme in Japanese intellectual history, even though Japan had nothing to do with the Islamic tradition. Through comparison of anti-Western ideas of Pan-Asianism in Japan and Pan-Islamism in the Middle East, I tried to show that anti-Westernism is a complex, yet modern, phenomenon that is neither a religious conservative reaction to Western universalism nor a natural response to imperialism.

Michael Penn: Can you give us a general idea of how significant Japan's wartime scholarship on Islam really was? Broadly speaking, why does it deserve our attention today?

Cemil Aydin: To start with, there was an impressive boom of scholarship on the Muslim world in wartime Japan, which is not well-known today. More importantly, this scholarship was surprisingly sympathetic to Muslim societies, at times displaying identification between Japanese and Muslims as fellow Asians and Easterners with shared problems.

Understanding the characteristics and achievements of this scholarship is important in several ways: It gives us a unique perspective on the relationship between empires and knowledge if we compare Japanese scholarship with European scholarship on the Muslim world. Wartime-era Japanese scholars of Islam were not free from imperial projects and interests, and their work was framed by broader imperial needs and discourses. Yet, even when we recognize the complicity of area studies scholarship with imperial interests, there is another question: Did the fact that Japan was a non-white and non-Christian empire make any difference in Japanese Orientalist scholarship on the Muslim world? Looking at books and magazines published by Japanese scholars from 1937 to 1945, I realized that there are significant differences in comparison with Western Orientalism: a Pan-Asian discourse of civilization was shaping a stronger interest in modern Muslim nationalism against Western colonialism, and in some ways, Japanese scholars were more successful in their predictions and analysis of contemporary Muslim modernism. For example, while European scholars saw modernizing reforms in Turkey during the 1920s as a betrayal of Islam, Japanese scholars perceived them as necessary steps for the revival of the Muslim world -- something similar to what the Meiji reforms did for Japan. Moreover, Japanese scholars of Islam had a clear agenda of overcoming Eurocentric biases and prejudices about Islam in their writings. In fact, in the heyday of Japanese imperial culture, they developed an almost internationalist vision of introducing the Japanese public to the unfamiliar world of Islam. Some were very critical of the Japanese public's ignorance of Islam at a time when they were claiming to be the leader or elder brother of Asia.

Michael Penn: How would you assess the wartime Japanese scholarship in comparison with Japanese scholarship on the Islamic world today?

Cemil Aydin: There is, of course, a certain rupture, or a conscious break between the postwar and prewar scholarly interests on the Muslim world. For example, Professor Itagaki Yuzo, one of the leading names of postwar scholarship, is a very different person than Okawa Shumei. Many of the new scholars of Islam either had graduate training in America, or have been to Muslim
countries for their education. This was not true for prewar scholars of Islam. The community of
Islam scholars in Japan, at least in major universities, is a diverse group of people with a strong
tradition of self-reflection about their discipline, especially in relation to Orientalism.

Nevertheless, I can think of one aspect of continuity from prewar scholarship to contemporary
discourses on the Muslim world -- an implicit legacy of a kind of Pan-Asian identity. As a result,
both the left and right in Japan (whatever these political ideologies entail in the Japanese context)
are generally sympathetic to modern Muslim thought. This is a big contrast to Europe and
America where scholars on the right see Muslim nationalism and Islamic movements as an
enemy of the West. There is a staunchly anti-Muslim right wing or Christian fundamentalist
rhetoric in America, and a small minority group of scholars feed them with academic analysis.
No matter what intellectuals think of Japanese ignorance of the Islamic world, I cannot think of
such a hostile rhetoric existing in Japan.

Michael Penn: In your article, you argue that the wartime scholarship surpassed what might be
expected by research institutes whose funding and establishment relied deeply on military and
colonial interests. Can you explain this?

Cemil Aydin: This is perhaps similar to contemporary America. A lot of Islamic studies research
is funded and underwritten by governmental interest in the Islamic world. It is almost impossible
to escape the framework of American imperial involvement as the indirect motivation behind
these funding organizations. For example, the Carnegie Foundation in New York has a major
initiative where every year they pick almost twenty scholars of Islam and support their research
for two years. Does that mean that every scholar working in America today is serving the
American empire in the Middle East? The fact that neo-con supporters of Bush policies blame
the Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) for being extreme leftist, anti-American, pro-
Arab and pro-Muslim indicates that knowledge production and empire processes are not that
simple. This also does not mean that progressive members of Middle East or Islamic studies
scholarship in America are free from the needs and interests of an American hegemony in the
Middle East, even when American scholars of Islam are overall very critical of American foreign
policy in the Middle East.

The situation of Japanese scholars on Islam was similarly complex. There clearly were some left-
inclining or liberal scholars among Japanese scholars working in Islamic studies from 1937 to
1945. After all, Takeuchi Yoshimi, a leading left voice in postwar Japan, was also a young
scholar of Islam during that time. Hence, academically sophisticated members of the Islamic
studies community mostly did what they were already doing in terms of their research and
publication. One can still read them today with interest and learn something from that work.
There were also many articles and pamphlets, mostly motivated by a short term imperial agenda,
that do not seem to have much value today.
Takeuchi Yoshimi's influential intellectual career started at the Institute for Islamic Studies with research on Chinese Muslims

Michael Penn: You note that Okawa Shumei at one point identified Islam as more part of "Western civilization" than "Eastern civilization," but then seemed to backtrack and not follow through on his own insight. Why did Japanese scholars seem to have such difficulty deciding whether Islam was "East" or "West"?

Cemil Aydin: Okawa Shumei's writings provide good examples of the contradictions between serious scholarly thinking on the role of Muslim societies in world history, and dominant Pan-Asianist views. According to the dominant Pan-Asianist perception of the world, the Muslim world was mainly in Asia, although it had parts beyond Asia. One should be aware of the fact that Europe, the West, the Islamic World, Asia were all geopolitical terms, assumed to be in competitive power relations, and their reality was rarely questioned, even by non-Asiaists. We do know that different branches of European Orientalism gave these geographical imaginations an historical and cultural content. More importantly, most of the Realist international relations or world politics literature also took these entities as basic units of analysis and prescription. For example, a book by an American white supremacist and Harvard Ph.D. in international history, Lothrop Stoddard, titled The World of Islam, became well read in its Arabic and Ottoman translations. It is primarily about the Islam-West relationship in world politics at the end of World War I. Stoddard's book was one among hundreds of books in the first quarter of the twentieth century that conceptualized a domain of Islamic World as a reality, despite the stark diversity and disconnectedness in this imagined unity. Okawa Shumei read and used that book in his research as well. Pan-Asianism relied on this geopolitical thinking.
On the other hand, Orientalist literature produced enough knowledge on history, literature and religion to challenge these basic assumptions. Japanese scholars of Islam could actually read the products of European Orientalism to challenge the basic premises of Orientalism. Okawa was instrumental in establishing one of the best library collections on Islam and the Muslim world during the 1930s, especially by buying all the published materials in these fields in European languages. He was himself a good researcher, and in his book published in 1942 he does note that categorizing Islam as an Eastern, non-Hellenistic civilization, as the Other of the West, is a fallacy, because in many ways, Islam is a Western religion, much closer to European civilization than to Far Eastern civilization. He notes this with some delight, because challenging the Eurocentric prejudices of Islam in European writings was one of the main agendas of Japanese scholarship.

Okawa does not address the paradox that, in one place, he talks about Muslims as fellow Asians, with whom Japan must have solidarity against the West, and in another place he emphasizes that Islam is a Western religion, closer to Christianity than to Buddhism. For him and many others of his generation, the geopolitical meanings of the Islamic World, Asia and Europe were a reality not to be challenged by fine historical and scholarly insights into world history and comparative religions.
Michael Penn: I presume that the Japanese military authorities briefly became interested in Islam because they viewed it as a sort of anti-Western warrior religion that they could utilize to challenge British power and for other purposes in China?

Cemil Aydin: They indeed had such beliefs and at some point they devised fantasy-driven policies based on the assumptions that Muslims were very anti-Western and always sympathetic to Japan -- and one should not forget that some of these images of Muslims being violent and anti-Western were coming from Europeans. Professor Selcuk Esenbel has written in detail about the Japanese military's "Islam policy" in her American Historical Review article a couple of years ago. As she also noted, it was not unique to the Japanese Empire that they were planning to use a geopolitical entity, religion or ethnic group against other rival empires. Actually, both the German Empire and later Italian Empire had plans to use so called "Muslim rage against the West" for their own purposes, and thus became interested in Pan-Islamism. The policy impact of these stereotypes about Muslims is still worth investigating. During the revolutionary acts of violence against British rule in India around 1907, for example, Orientalist-ethnologists at the German foreign ministry assumed and argued that this was the Muslim revolt and rage, although actual violent acts were being committed mostly by Hindu nationalists. Somehow, violent Hindu revolutionaries did not fit into German notions of the Orient.

Japanese military authorities were aware of what other empires were doing, and in one Islam policy pamphlet they did note the history of "Islam policy" by the German and Italian Empires. But then, they argued that Japan would be more successful in gaining Muslim support because it had no negative history in the Muslim world, and Muslims had sympathized with Japan since the Russo-Japanese War. In reality, Japanese efforts to gain the support of Chinese Muslims against Chinese nationalism did not produce any results. Indeed, there was significant support among Chinese Muslims for both the nationalists and the Communists in China against Japanese imperialism. More importantly, there was no single Muslim world to warrant such an Islam policy.

There was also a more anti-colonial "liberation" discourse in Japanese policies on Islam, one that emphasized Japan's mission to liberate Asia, including subjugated Muslims. This is again a highly common imperial strategy, Think about how many times Muslims were liberated by the Western Empires such as Britain, France and America: Saving Arab Muslims from the Turkish oppression, liberating Muslim women from the domination of fundamentalist men, or minorities from majority Sunni yoke, and even bringing secularism to save moderate Muslims from
theocratic rule. Somehow, being an anti-imperialist empire was not a peculiarity of Japan. All empires played the game of emancipation.

Michael Penn: It's ironic that today the negative image of Islam in Japan is chiefly associated with its perceived connections with violence and terrorism while in the late 1930s, the anti-Western struggle of some Muslims was regarded by many Japanese as the most attractive feature of the West Asian region. This seems to tell us more about Japan than Islam, wouldn't you say?

Japanese Muslim agents who joined 1934 and 1936 pilgrimages

Cemil Aydin: You are right. Violence and terrorism can have positive meanings when they are seen as a temporary means for a noble goal. Hence, "jihad" against colonialism—Western colonialism—did not seem bad for Japanese observers. At one point, liberal members of the Islamic studies community, such as Okubo Koji, described Japan's Greater East Asia as a Holy War (sometimes translated as "jihad") against unjust European hegemony in Asia.

It is interesting that Japanese scholars often emphasized that seeing Islam as a "religion of jihad" is a product of European Orientalist biases, and that the Japanese should see Islam as a religion
of love given the strength of the Sufi tradition within Islam. In fact, Okawa Shumei corrected himself in this regard. In his earlier writings, Okawa, like Kita Ikki, referred to the principle of "Koran ka, ken ka" (Either the Quran or the Sword) as a common pattern of the spread of Islam. You either accept Islam or you face the military might of the Muslims. In fact, Kita Ikki saw this as a good thing. However, in his later scholarly writings, Okawa emphasized that Islam actually spread peacefully through merchants and scholars, not through military conquest, and the Japanese phrase "Koran Ka, ken ka" was a sheer internalization of Christian polemics against Islam.

In his postwar reflection on his Islamic Studies days, Takeuchi Yoshimi makes a very wise comment on this. He says that Islam, like Christianity, can neither be a religion of the sword nor a religion of love. Yet, Japanese scholars felt the need to emphasize the love aspect against European Orientalist discourses.

Michael Penn: At the end of the Pacific War, the Japanese scholarship on Islam quickly disappeared from public consciousness and most of the scholars moved on to other subjects. Why did Islamic studies in Japan collapse so completely in the 1950s and 1960s?

Cemil Aydin: Once the Japanese Empire ended, most of the infrastructure for Islamic studies scholarship was lost. Who would care about area studies in a time when the Japanese nation was stripped of its empire and facing the challenge of recovery and rebuilding. It was also practically impossible to revive anything during the 1950s. For example, the biggest Islamic Studies library in Tokyo burned down during the aerial bombing. Some other books were taken to the US during the occupation and never returned. There was also a new mood of "Leaving Asia" and "Joining the West" among Japanese intellectuals. In fact, Takeuchi Yoshimi noted the negative results of this loss. While being critical of the imperial complicities of prewar Islam scholarship, Takeuchi underlined the fact that this scholarship had also made positive contributions such as introducing an unfamiliar world civilization to Japan, contributing to an understanding of world history and globalization beyond Eurocentric narratives, and a necessary sympathy for Third World nationalisms.
Some members of the prewar Islamic Studies establishment continued doing research. The most famous of them was Izutsu Toshihiko, who was still young at the end of the war, became a well-known international authority on the Quran and Sufism. The very fact that the Islamic Studies community in Japan has grown rapidly since the 1970s, after Japan became a great economic power, is also highly interesting, and must have something to do with the earlier efforts.

Toshihiko Izutsu started his education in Islamic Studies at the suggestion of Okawa Shumei, and learned Arabic in wartime Japan from two prominent Muslim Pan-Islamists, Abdurresid Ibrahim and Musa Carullah

Michael Penn: I have just finished reading your excellent book on anti-Westernism. It seems that in many ways, the "global moment" of the Russo-Japanese War can be seen as the highpoint of genuine affection between Japan and the Islamic world. Why did that moment pass so quickly? Today, it is almost completely forgotten.

Cemil Aydin: The 1905 Japanese victory became a turning point in the history of decolonization beyond the Japanese Empire's intentions and actions. After all, 1905 was a war between two Empires (Russia and Japan) through the involvement of a third empire, the British. But the turn of the 20th century imperial world order was so closely linked to the legitimacy of race ideologies and notions of White-Christian superiority that Japan's victory shattered these legitimacy discourses. After 1905, all major anti-colonial nationalists, whether in the Muslim world or beyond, could use the Japanese example in their arguments and mobilization efforts. Admiration for Japan was related to intellectual contestation over rising nationalism throughout Asia. The global moment of the Russo-Japanese War lasted about a decade while anti-colonial nationalism was utilizing a Pan-Asian discourse. During this decade, the Japanese Empire did not support any anti-colonial national movement, nor did it have to. In fact, Japanese authorities expelled some of the Vietnamese students and Indian nationalists who came to Japan to learn from them. After World War I, due to the Bolshevik Revolution and Wilsonian ideals, Japan's
role as a metaphor in anti-colonial thought decreased. Thus, during the late 1930s, when Japanese propaganda referred back to 1905 as a moment of their leadership in Asia, they no longer had a broad audience. It may be forgotten now, but before World War II, the Japanese education system taught all Japanese children about the admiration of Turks, Arabs or Indians for their nation. That became a somewhat unhealthy, narcissist reference.

Michael Penn: One final question, a hot potato. Your book suggests that anti-Westernism before 1945 was not really a conservative reaction or a retreat into some kind of primordial identity, but rather a reflection of the crisis of legitimacy affecting the European-based international order as a whole. In 2007, should we view the global spread of anti-Americanism in a similar way? In other words, is the loss of legitimacy of the American-dominated international order the primary factor that gives rise to anti-Americanism today?

Cemil Aydin: I think this parallel exists, though a lot has changed from the late 19th to the late 20th century. The basic argument of anti-Americanism today -- that American imperialism is violating the universal values that the imagined and highly-stereotyped West proclaims -- is similar to the colonial era anti-Westernism that posited that European imperialism contradicted all the Enlightenment ideals the West was preaching to the rest of the world. In other words, in both cases, anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism, there are claims of unequal and unjust power relations in an unstable world. I should also note that the anti-Westernism of the last century has complex intellectual lineages, relying on the critiques of modernity in the West, and an authentic civilization discourse formulated to challenge the European discourse of racial and religious superiority. Today's anti-Americanism has roots in Cold War-era European thought. Yet, the legitimacy crisis of a single global international order is still the main reason behind the current anti-Americanism.

Cemil Aydin was recently profiled by History News Network as a "Top Young Historian."


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“South Korea’s Christian Military Chaplaincy in the Korean War: Religion as Ideology?”
Vladimir Tikhonov
May 6, 2013
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South Korea is notable for its large Christian population; although Catholics and Protestants remain a minority, they represent a far greater fraction of the population than in other East Asian nations. As in Japan, Christian missionaries and converts faced periods of government persecution, and by the twentieth century, Christians likely represented a similarly tiny proportion of the population in Japan and in the Korean peninsula. This changed dramatically after 1945, however, when the South Korean government embraced Christianity as an indication of its antagonism towards the (godless) Communism of the North and its affinity with its American sponsors. As Vladimir Tikhonov argues, however, it would be facile to view the rise of Christianity among the South Korean populace as a simple matter of government proclamation. Instead, he suggests that military chaplains represented the central institution by which the government’s support of Christianity (with all that this meant for their relations with the U.S. during the Cold War) became an important part of the religious life of the South Korean public. Contrasting the government’s support of Christian chaplains with its dismissal of Buddhist clergy hoping to play a similar role, he suggests some of the ways in which the reputation of some institutions (like the Buddhist clergy) were marked by their past under Japanese colonialism, while others (like the South Korean military, whose officer corps had many veterans of the Japanese army) were able to redefine themselves as part of the new geopolitical order.
South Korea’s Christian Military Chaplaincy in the Korean War - religion as ideology?

Vladimir Tikhonov

Summary: The present paper examines the military chaplaincy in the context of a problem which has long intrigued researchers, namely the reasons for the rapid growth of the Christian (Protestant and Catholic) churches in 1950-80s South Korea compared to Japan or Taiwan. The author suggests that, whereas a general answer to the question may be the use of Christianity as a de facto state ideology in the years 1948-1960 and its functioning as an ideology of capitalist modernisation in the 1960s-80s, a particularly important part of government-induced Christianization of South Korea was the institution of military chaplaincy. In 1951-1968, Christians—despite being a numerical minority!—monopolized the chaplaincy in the military, and fully utilised this monopoly, “solacing” vulnerable youth forcibly conscripted for military service and making many “church family members”. The loyalties won in such a way, often lasted for life, thus providing the churches with new recruits and the hard-core anti-Communist state—with docile anti-Communist Christian subjects.

From its very beginnings in the wake of Japan’s defeat and US occupation, South Korea suffered from an acute deficit of political legitimacy. Its lack of nationalistic credentials was mainly due to the fact that the privileged layers of the colonial society, tainted by their collaboration with the Japanese, conspicuously retained their positions. While South Korea’s first Constitution (1948) promised workers a share in company profits (iik kyunjŏm), the reality of mass pauperism and hunger wages was only too obvious (Sŏ 2007: 22-43). One of the ways of compensating for the evident lack of socio-economic progress was to emphasise the “freedom and democracy” in South Korea—as opposed to what South Korean propagandists termed the “totalitarian regime” in the North. But the claims to “democracy” were belied by the authoritarian behaviour of South Korea’s first president, Syngman Rhee (Yi Sŭngman), whose regime was by 1952 routinely characterized as “dictatorial” even by his conservative opponents from the parliamentary Democratic Party (Pak 1998).

Facing a serious deficit of compelling ideology—aside from rabid anti-Communism and primordialist invocations of “Korean blood and glory” (Sŏ 1998)—the newborn pro-American regime turned to religious symbols to substitute for secular ideological tools. This turn was hardly new as such: Protestant Christians, together with indigenous Ch’ŏndogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way) activists, were among the main organizers of the March 1, 1919 pro-independence demonstrations, although none of them anticipated the degree to which the movement would eventually radicalize participants (Lee 2000), and the Protestant YMCA was among the many “cultural-nationalist” groups conducting rural reconstruction work in the 1920s and 1930s (Wells 1990: 98-162). Kim Il Sung’s father, Kim Hyŏngjik, was a Protestant nationalist, and, unsurprisingly, some elements suggestive of formative Christian influences surfaced in the chuch’ê (self-reliance) ideology which substituted for Soviet “Marxism-Leninism” in 1960s-80s North Korea (Ch’oe 1986). Raising the status of religious—mainly Christian—ideology to that of state ideology was, however, somewhat new in late 1940s-early 1950s South Korea, although state Shinto of colonial times (Grayson 1993) did provide a blueprint of sorts. Syngman Rhee’s religious turn was greatly helped by a number of interrelated contextual circumstances:

1. The clashes between Protestant and Catholic establishments and North Korean authorities in 1945-1950 made the overwhelming majority of Korea’s Christians North and South
into hard-core anti-Communists, and guaranteed their loyalty to Seoul regime. The conflict was hardly inevitable, since North Korea was originally planned as a “people’s democracy” where “progressive religionists” were ensured their rightful place as builders of a new society. Mao’s China conducted a broadly similar policy too in the early years of the PRC; in Stalin’s USSR, by contrast, the Orthodox Church was a target for state suppression in 1930-1941, although its position was strengthened as a part of the wartime “national reconciliation” policy in 1941-1945 (Fletcher 1965). North Korea’s initial, rather tolerant, position towards religion seems to have been influenced by the wartime improvement in relations between the Orthodox and the Soviet state. In fact, as a result of the People’s Committees’ elections in November 1946, 2.7% of their members (94 persons) turned out to be “full-time religion practitioners” (sŏngjikcha); approximately the same share of pastors, priests and monks was among the People’s Committee members elected in June 1949 (cited in Kim 2012, 400). However, already in January 1946, Christian political leaders in the northern part of Korea, led by the chairman of the Korean Democratic Party, Cho Mansik, defied the Soviet occupation authorities on the issue of the Allies’ proposed trusteeship over Korea. The Soviet authorities—unwilling to establish a “friendly” state of their own in the North at this stage—were prepared to enforce the decision of the December 1945 Moscow conference of US, British and Soviet foreign ministers and put Korea under an Allied trusteeship for five years, something right-wing Korean nationalists opposed to (although in reality it could theoretically be one way to keep Korea intact. See Lankov 2001). When Cho was placed under house arrest, a sizeable number of his followers fled south. The conflict between the majority of the Christian leadership and the Soviet and North Korean authorities afterwards was ostensibly ignited by such symbolic issues as Peoples’ Committees elections on Sunday, November 3, 1946; in the background, however, lurked the conflict between mostly middle-class and richer Christians, who comprised only about 2-3% of North Korea’s overall population, and the new power-holders themselves mostly hailing from and reliant upon the poorer majority of North Koreans (Han’guk Kidokkyo Yŏksa Hakhoe 2009, 45-50). In the end, around 25% of the Presbyterian and 59% of the Methodist pastors from North Korea migrated to the South, together with an estimated 70-80,000 lay Protestant believers and some 6,000 Catholics (Kang 2006: 410-431). Many of these migrants lost their possessions in North Korea, often due to the egalitarian land reform there in March 1946 (on the reform, see Armstrong 2003: 75-85), and that too strengthened their support of the anti-Communist regime in South Korea.

2. A large part of the new ruling elite in South Korea (?) was comprised of Christians, especially Protestants, in a society where only slightly over 2% of the population (500,198 out of the total population of 20,188,641 in 1950) were Protestants. The three most prominent right-wing émigré nationalists who returned to (South) Korea by late 1945 and were contending for leadership—Syngman Rhee (1875-1965), Kim Ku (1876-1949) and Kim Kyusik (1881-1950)—either were devout Protestants or at least experimented with Protestantism at some point in their lives (Kim Ku’s case), and all of them agreed that the “new Korea” should be grounded in “Christian ideals” (Han’guk Kidokkyo Yŏksa Hakhoe 2009, 41). 21% of the parliament deputies elected in South Korea in the first-ever separate elections on May 10, 1948—elections that were seen as illegitimate and were boycotted by most of the Left—were Protestants, a large part of them being wealthier right-wingers. Among the administrative elite, the proportion of
Protestants was even higher. 38% of the 242 persons who served as ministers or vice-ministers under the Syngman Rhee presidency in 1948-1960, were Protestants, a large part of them being wealthy individuals with either American or Japanese educational background (Kang 1996: 175-178). Small wonder that in such an atmosphere, the majority of Protestant clergymen identified “democratic spirit”, “anti-Communism” and “Christianity” as largely synonymous, and felt committed to “grounding our new country in the Gospels’ message”, with obvious encouragement from the political authorities who saw them as their strongest, most unwavering supporters (Han’guk Kidokkyo Yŏksa Hakhoe 2009: 43-44). The “inseparable alliance” between the new political and administrative elites and Christian, especially Protestant, leadership, was further cemented by the Korean War in 1950-1953, as right-wing Christians came to regard the South Korean authorities as their only protectors from the threat of “victimization by Communists”. Buddhists felt more estranged from what they—with good reasons—tended to perceive as “Christian government”, but the interests of the conservative sangha leaders, mostly abbots of the richer, land-owning temples, were well served by the very moderate South Korean version of the land reform (conducted in 1949-1950) which obliged the peasants to pay for the land they were to receive (Sŏ 2007: 38-43) and additionally protected the landholdings of the temples as long as they were tilled by the monks themselves (Kim 2000: 108-111). Some renowned lay and monastic Buddhist leaders (Chŏn Chinhan, Paek Sŏng’uk etc.) joined Syngman Rhee’s government too as ministers, although such cases were relatively rare.

3. Christianity was one of the main links between South Korea and its American sponsors. As Lee Chae-jin formulated it, South Korea as a separate state was a Cold War creation of the Truman administration which primarily viewed it as “a buffer to protect security and integrity of Japan in the larger context of America’s regional and global policies” (Lee 2006: 23). As a gateway to Japan, South Korea was a global asset of the United States; at the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff came by autumn 1947 to the conclusion that South Korea’s military-strategic value was relatively low. This conclusion was accepted by the Truman administration and was reflected in the famous January 12, 1950 speech by Secretary of State Dean Acheson, excluding both South Korean and Taiwan from the US “defence perimeter” in the Pacific, which otherwise included the Philippines and, very centrally, Japan (Lee 2006: 24-25). US entry into the Korean War, dictated by the general Cold War paradigm (Cumings 1990: 550), did cement US commitment to its military protectorate in the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, but relations with the Syngman Rhee government remained strained on many counts (Park 1975). In such a situation, the image of South Korea as a “Christian country” could serve as an important element in appealing to the American public an important consideration in obtaining badly needed humanitarian help through Protestant and Catholic churches in the US and elsewhere in the western world. No wonder then that a prominent lay Catholic elder, John Chang (Chang Myŏn, 1899-1966), was selected as South Korea’s first ambassador to the US in January, 1949 (Lee 2006: 24). Another good example was the demonstrations organized by South Korea’s National Christian Council in June 1949 calling for the adoption of the Korean Aid Bill by the US Congress. “Let the churches of the world unite their forces to protect the church in Korea” was one of the slogans, together with more direct appeals to American Christian brethren (Haga 2012). The chaplaincy in the military—the topic of this paper—was to become yet another link between South Korea
and it’s not fully reliable, but still indispensable American protector and sponsor. It was fully modelled on the American system—in fact, South Korea was one of the first non-European societies penetrated by American missionaries where such an institution took roots (Kang 2006: 346). US missionaries were also well represented among the pioneering chaplains in the South Korean army. For example, a US Maryknoller with Korea experience since 1931, George M. Carroll (1906-1981), was a chaplain to the United Nations’ forces from the beginning of the Korean War and concurrently a member of the committee for the advancement of the establishment of chaplaincy in the Korean army beginning in September 1950. He was later charged with training of the Korean chaplains and translation of the relevant regulations of the US Army into the Korean language. Another pioneer of Korean chaplaincy was William E. Shaw, a prominent Methodist missionary who worked in Korea since 1921 (Haga 2012; Kang 2006: 347).

The US army employed 1618 chaplains by 1953 (Johnson 2013), and fighting side by side with it was a huge stimulus for the new-born South Korean army to develop a chaplain corps of its own, a key measure in uplifting Korean civilization.

As the above discussion indicates, religion in the Syngman Rhee government’s ideological policy, contained from the very beginning the seeds of a possible conflict between different religions. “Religion” meant first and foremost Christianity in both Catholic and (primarily) Protestant versions, but hardly “native” religions, Buddhism included. It is not that they were deliberately excluded: rather, the very situation in which Christian elites were to dominate the new state and obtain important advantages through their ability to communicate more directly with its chief international backer, led to marginalization of non-Christians. The dominant view of Buddhism as peripheral in relation to Christianity translated also into administrative measures which the Buddhist community perceived as religious discrimination. For example, US military government in Korea made Christmas an official holiday, but did not allow Korean Buddhists to take over the deserted Japanese Buddhist temples despite the fact that forty-three such temples in Seoul were taken under de facto control and management of Korean Buddhists after Japanese withdrawal. In the provinces, however, a number of former Japanese temples became the objects of embittered disputes between Korean Buddhists and other claimants (Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong Kyoyug’wŏn Purhak Yŏn’gu 2008, 25). Nor was the Syngman Rhee administration any more flexible on this issue. However, it conducted the 1949-1950 land reforms in a way arguably less ruinous for the monastic economy than more confiscatory—and thus more egalitarian—reforms in North Korea, allowing the temples to keep the land within atwo km. zone around them. That was one of the factors beyond the willingness of the mainstream sangha to collaborate with the perceived “Christian” government, and to marginalize the few radicals—who protested against the establishment of a separate South Korean state, and wished Korea to remain unified at any cost—within its own ranks (Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong Kyoyug’wŏn Purhak Yŏn’gu 2005: 162-174). In any case, the alternative—the North Korean regime, which was gradually radicalising on account of the general Cold War confrontation and especially Korean War—looked significantly worse, especially for monks who had collaborated with the Japanese colonial authorities, since the purge of collaborators was one of the main ways in which North Korea was establishing its nationalist legitimacy (on the collaboration between sangha and the Japanese colonial authorities, see Im 1993; on the purge of collaborators in North Korea, see Armstrong 1995). The only remaining realistic alternative was to emulate Christian successes - first and foremost, their success in proselytising. This pattern of institutional
behaviour was clearly recognizable in the issue of establishing the Buddhist military chaplaincy, to be treated below.

A part of this “religious turn” in the military pivoted on the chaplaincy - initially purely Christian, established in 1951. The chaplaincy, a time-honoured institution utilized by the European powers and the US as early as the First World War, gained renewed significance in the global Cold War. In the US military, chaplains were not only expected to prevent demoralization and to assure that soldiers were not won over by radical doctrines. They were also to aid in the “moral strengthening” of the occupied areas of Europe and Japan through active proselytising, and to implement “moral training” programs instituted throughout the armed forces in 1951. These programs were designed to forestall criminal behaviour and venereal diseases in the ranks, as well as curbing rapes and attacks against civilians, to win the “hearts and minds” during the Cold War (Gunn 2009, 87-91). US military chaplaincy was the primary model for its South Korean counterpart; and, not unlike the US chaplains, especially Evangelicals, the South Korean chaplains also regarded their mission as a proselytising one, taking advantage of privileged access to youth experiencing danger and hardships. As for Korean Buddhist efforts at religious propagation inside the military, the pre-1945 Buddhist chaplaincy in the Japanese imperial military (Victoria 1997) was an obvious role model. While there were no Korean Buddhist chaplains during the Pacific War, pro-Japanese Korean Buddhist leaders actively encouraged younger monks to volunteer for the service in the Japanese imperial military—telling them, for example, that they were to “wield the sword which false refute the false and disclose the true, and become military missionaries of Korean Buddhism in battle” (Cited in: Im 1993, Vol. 2, 441). Most of these people retained their influence after 1945 and were keen to utilize once again the past experiences of the wartime collaboration with the state.

In the South Korean case, the establishment of the field chaplaincy was an initiative of Christian leaders, lay and ordained, including some leading military figures in the newly established South Korean army and navy. It was, however, quickly embraced by the Syngman Rhee administration, assumedly in hope that it would ideologically cement the army of the new state lacking nationalistic legitimacy and broadly perceived as externally imposed (ojesapchok) (Chin 2000: 108-139). However, once established, the chaplaincy played several roles. In addition to spreading the message of Christian anti-Communism—which belonged to the ideological mainstream of the new state—it also functioned as a tool of Christian proselytising, and was partly responsible for the strong numerical growth of the Christian churches in the 1950s and 1960s. As Christians were enlarging their share of the religious market (on this theoretical approach, see, for example, Hadden 1987), their exclusive right to military chaplaincy was increasingly seen as an expression of unduly state favouritism—that is, unfair competition—by the Buddhist community, eager to emulate Christian proselytising methods. In the end, institutional Buddhism succeeded in establishing the military chaplaincy of its own, an event which signified further strengthening of its cohesive ties with the authoritarian anti-Communist state.

This paper shows how the military chaplaincy was established and functioned in the 1950s, how it fulfilled its ideological roles, and what were the competing influences in the process of its institutionalization. It will hopefully help to improve understanding of the role of such a state-sponsored institution as military chaplaincy in the functioning of religious markets under conditions of religious pluralism and relatively activist state building—but it was not fully able to dominate civil society (on “semi-competitive authoritarianism” in 1950s South Korea, see Han
It will also shed some light on the role religion and religious ideology played in the global Cold War, on the forefront of which both parts of divided Korea found themselves by the late 1940s.

The Committee for the Advancement of the Establishment of the Chaplaincy in the Korean Army (Kunjong chedo ch ’ujin wiwŏnhoe) was formed on September 18, 1950. Together with George M. Carroll, mentioned above as one of the “fathers” of the Korean chaplaincy, its members included the most prominent hard-line anti-Communists in the Korean church world, Rev. Han Kyŏngjik (1902-2000) from Presbyterian Church and Yu Hyŏnggi (1897-1989) from the Methodist Church. Both were refugees from North Korea, and were appalled by what they deemed a lack of fighting spirit in South Korean soldiers—forcibly conscripted by the government, which most still had difficulties to recognise as their own. The anti-Communist churchmen obviously hoped that the chaplaincy would strengthen the \textit{élan} of the South Korean troops, and their hope was shared by Syngman Rhee who quickly endorsed their proposal. In fact, a \textit{de facto} chaplaincy, under the name of “spiritual training” (chŏnhun), was already run by the South Korean navy from 1949 onwards, its chief, Admiral Son Wŏn’il (1909-1980), a son of famed Methodist pastor, Son Chŏngdo (1872-1931), being a firm believer in “Christian spirit” as the only way to effectively lead the South Korean military (Kang 2006: 348). In considering the plan, Syngman Rhee was, however, fearful of opposition within the ranks of the army commanders (Haga 2012). A large part of the middle- and high-ranking officers of the South Korean army were ethnic Koreans with Japanese imperial army experience. Among army officers who received military training before 1948 and eventually reached the full general rank, 226 served in the Japanese army, 44 served in the army of Manchukuo and only 32 fought against the Japanese, predominantly in Korean military units attached to the Guomindang (Han 1993: 130). Some of the former Japanese and Manchukuo officers, notoriously colonel (in 1952 promoted to full general) Paek Sŏnyŏp (b. 1920), infamous for his brutal suppression of the Communist guerrillas in South Korea in 1948-1950, were Christians, but the majority were not. Syngman Rhee feared possible negative reactions in the military ranks to what could appear to be imposition of his own faith onto the soldiers. Thus, when the Bureau of Military Religion (Kunsŭngkwa, later Kunmokkwa) was created in the Personnel Department of the Infantry General Staff on February 7, 1951 (general order no. 31), it was supposed to be staffed by civilians who were to be paid by their own denominations. The first Korean chaplains, trained by Shaw and Carroll, were dispatched to military units in early April 1952; the number reached 139 by June 1952 (Hwang 2008: 193-194).
Rhee’s worries notwithstanding, the new institution quickly proved its usefulness to South Korean army commanders. Chaplains and their field churches were instrumental in increasing the number of active, practicing Christians inside the army—under conditions when being Christian practically implied being a committed anti-Communist, and thus, by extension, an active supporter of the South Korean regime rather than a passive victim of forcible conscription. The absolute majority of chaplains were Protestants, mostly Presbyterians and Methodists. By April 1954, out of 296 military chaplains, 35 were Catholics and the rest were Protestants, 209 of them being either Presbyterians or Methodists. The Protestant chaplains built 186 military churches, and succeeded in raising the percentage of Protestants in the army to 20%, almost five times higher than the share of Christians in the general population at that time (Kang 2006: 349). Especially important for Syngman Rhee’s anti-Communist cause was the ministry to the North Korean and Chinese prisoners of war incarcerated—under rather appalling conditions (Lee, Kang and Huh, 2013) - in a specially built concentration camp on Kôje Island near the southern coast of Korea. There, Harold Voelkel (1898-1984, Korean name: Ok Hoyŏl), an experienced missionary who first came to Korea in 1928, and some twenty of his Korean colleagues in chaplaincy were busy converting the prisoners to Christianity and anti-Communism. The results were considered excellent: 15,012 out of some 140,000 North Korean POWs became believers by April 1952, and several tens of thousands more showed at least some interest in the evangelization activities in the camp, some evidently in hope of receiving better treatment, and some genuinely adopting Christianity as a personal way, both psychological and socio-political, out of the predicaments of national division, war and detention. Voelkel and his Korean colleagues made a sizable contribution to making more than 80,000 North Korean POW decide to reject repatriation to the North (Kang 2006: 349-351; Yi 2010). As a reward, the status of chaplains was quickly raised. On June 16, 1952, all 139 active-duty chaplains were given the status of salaried civilian employees of the South Korean military and in December 1954, were further promoted to active-duty military officers (hyŏn’yŏk changgyo) (Kang 2006: 347). By this time, the South Korean military chaplaincy fully resembled its US prototype. With one significant difference—while the US military had non-Christian (namely Jewish) chaplains already from 1862, South Korea—in which, unlike the US, Christians were numerically a tiny minority—at first did not allow any non-Christian denominations in its chaplaincy services. This fact testifies to the degree of Christian influence inside the South Korean elites of the 1950s, and
also to the paramount importance of Christianity to Syngman Rhee’s state, as well as the degree of Christian loyalty to the militantly anti-Communist South Korean regime.

Buddhists found themselves in incomparably more difficult circumstances than Christians during the Korean War for a number of reasons. First, they did not dispose of any comparable resources, since, unlike Christians, they received no significant financial or other help from abroad. Foreign humanitarian, financial and technical help was of huge importance in a country almost completely destroyed by the war, and almost half of the foreign aid organizations which joined the Korean Association of Voluntary Agencies (KAVA), were Christian. US Presbyterians alone raised USD 1,800,000 for Korea in 1950-1954 (Rhodes and Campbell 1965: 322), and much of this money was channeled through Korean churches, which gave them an enormous advantage in the domestic religious market. By contrast, institutional Buddhism lacked not only any aid from outside, but also international network of contacts aside from its leaders’ participation in the World Fellowship of Buddhists’ meetings beginning from the second meeting in Japan in 1952 (Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong Kyoyug’wŏn Purhak Yŏn’ghuso 2000: 69). Second, as described above, the Buddhists were much more alienated from the new state’s power centres than Christians. Third, the three year war destroyed a large number of richer temples (Pongsŏnsa, Kŏnbongsa, Naksansa, Wŏlchŏngsa etc.) which before the war had contributed significantly to the Korean Buddhists’ Central Executive Committee (Taehan Pulgyo Chung’ang Ch’ongmuwŏn), further undermining its economic position (Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong Kyoyug’wŏn Purhak Yŏn’ghuso 2000: 69). Finally, Syngman Rhee, in his populist attempts to position himself as a devoted anti-Japanese patriotic fighter, initiated on May 20, 1954, a campaign for expulsion of the married (“Japanized”) monks from Korean temples. Since the
married monks were in the majority, the campaign opened the gates for embittered struggles between celibate and married monks over control of the temples, and left little room for other concerns until the early 1960s, when the state started to intervene more systematically to sort out the conflict (Taehan Pulgyo Chogye jong Kyoy’wŏn Purhak Yŏn’guso 2005: 196-228). This explains why institutional Buddhism was in no position to forcefully protest the discrimination to which it was subjected as a result of establishment of a Christian-only chaplaincy in the country in which the majority of the actively religious population was predominantly Buddhist, especially in the countryside. The inability to protest on the level of organized Buddhism did not mean, however, that some individual monks, temples and monastic groups did not attempt to challenge the newly established Christian monopoly on such an important institution in a hard-core conscription society (Moon 2005) as military chaplaincy. Some of these attempts are also noteworthy for the ideology deployed to legitimise the state violence of the Korean War in the name of Buddhist religion and traditions. For example, the official mouthpiece of Korean Buddhism, Pulgyo Sinmun, editorialized in 1964—in an attempt to persuade the military to allow the Buddhist chaplaincy in its ranks—that only Buddhism, “the essence of our national tradition”, with its “brilliant traditions of state protection”, had imbied the “view of life and death acutely needed by the soldiers”. Buddhism—in addition to being a good “spiritual weapon” making soldiers more willing to die for the state—was also advertised as the “religion of harmony best suited to the military chain of command”, since, unlike Christians, Buddhists were not supposed to distance themselves from non-believers (cited in Hwang 2008, 206). In a way, Buddhist leaders were struggling for the attention of the military bureaucracy, begging to be utilized as a “weapon” in the anti-Communist crusade.

The first to attempt compete with the Christians in the field of military chaplaincy were middle-level Buddhist leaders based in Southern Kyŏngsang Province, especially those based in areas around Pusan, which were never occupied by the North Korean army and were the least devastated by the war. Mansan (O Kwansu, 1900-1971), a married monk who worked as a missionary at Southern Kyŏngsang Provincial Buddhist Executive Committee (Kyŏngnam Chongmuwŏn), took the initiative and secured the cooperation of several local monks, some of them, as abbots of temples in and around Pusan, were able to mobilize resources needed for chaplaincy. Some of these monks later came to play an important role on the Korean Buddhist scene—Yi Pŏphong, the Japanese-educated and married abbot of Pusan-based Kŭmsusa, is currently the spiritual head of Avatamsaka-sutra-based Wŏnhyojong (Wŏnhyo Order), and Tŏg’ám (An Hŭngdŏk, 1912-2003), also a Japanese-educated married monk, was to become one of the leaders of the separate order for married monks, the T’aegojong (T’aego Order), which would be established in 1970. The activist monks were able to visit at least some front-line military units due to help rendered by some commanding officers who were either Buddhists or favourably inclined towards Buddhism. One of them, then colonel (later general) Ch’oe Honghŭi (1918-2002), became well-known as a systematiser of t’ae kwŏndo (a Korean martial art) in the late 1950s; another, Sin T’aeyŏng (1891-1959), a lieutenant-general, was to become the South Korean Minister of Defense during the last period of the war (March 29, 1952 to June 30, 1953). Both had Japanese military experience. Sin, who entered the Japanese Imperial Army Academy in 1912, was often mentioned as one of the “elders” of one of the influential groups inside the South Korean military, namely the network of Japanese Imperial Army Academy alumni. Ch’oe, a Hamgyŏng Province native who was proud of his mastery of Confucian classics, seemed to intensely dislike the “Christian general” Paek Sŏnyŏp, who was especially favoured by fellow Christian Syngman Rhee. Yet another important helper was a married monk, Posŏng (Chŏng
Tusŏk, 1906-1998, later the supreme spiritual leader of T’aegojong), who served as a Korean Army Academy teacher during and after the Korean War, and was seemingly alienated by Christian hegemony there. In the end, either pro-Buddhist sympathies or antipathy towards Christianity on the part of some important military figures laid the foundation for an “informal” chaplaincy conducted by some Buddhist clerics during the war. With the assistance of friendly commanders, they were even able to build the first, short-lived military Buddhist temple, Towŏnsa (Kangwŏn Province, Yanggu County), close to the DMZ, in a mountainous area where several military units were based (Ch’oe 1997: 301-302; Han 1993: 167-173; Hwang 2008: 192-198).

What was the message that activist monks sought to extend to the soldiers? The declaration of intentions drawn up by the 15 member-strong Society for Buddhist Missionary Work in the Army (founded March 7, 1951), mentioned such standard themes of South Korean propaganda as “sacred war” (sŏngjŏn) and “unification of the country through the destruction of Communism” (myŏlgong t’ong’il). It also mentioned, however, military chaplaincy as the “first step toward making of a Buddhist world” (segye purhwa), as well as the “spirit of hwarangs” as the “guiding philosophy” of the South Korean army (Hwang 2008: 197). It was indeed so, in a way. The Japanese-educated historian Yi Sŏn’gŭn (1905-1983), one of the chief ideologists of the Korean military (appointed chief of the Spiritual Training Department Chŏnghunkwa of the Ministry of Defense in February 1950), wrote and published in 1950 a book in which he—as an admirer of bushido—suggested that the hwarang organization of aristocratic youth in the sixth-tenth century Silla Kingdom (on this organization, see Lee 1993: 101-107), with its distinctive culture of battlefield self-sacrifice, was the source of a “genuinely Korean spirit”, as well as a “spirit of anti-Communism” (Yi 1950). Since two of the hwarang organization’s early seventh-century members were known to have received their “five commandments” from a well-known Buddhist preceptor, Wŏn’gwang (541-630?), and the fourth of these commandments prescribed never to retreat in battle (for English translation of the commandments see Lee 1993: 100), the self-styled Buddhist chaplains would claim that the brave South Korean soldiers were indeed upholding Buddhist priest Wŏn’gwang’s “five commandments” (Hwang 2008: 197). In a way, the ample appropriation of Korean ancient history—in which Buddhism did play a crucially important role—for the sake of developing South Korea’s distinctive brand of cultural and historical nationalism helped the activist monks to root their claims to nationalistic legitimacy in the military’s own ideological guidebooks. The traditional-style Buddhist chant written and put to music by Mansan, Chonggun hoesimgok (The Melody of Converting one’s Heart while Following the Army), again mentioned Wŏn’gwang’s “five commandments” as the “greatest spiritual weapon” the South Korean army possessed. In reality, however, much of the “ideological work” by the Buddhist monks in the army was about distributing the amulets and pictures of Avalokiteshvara (Kwan’ŭm) and rings with Amitabha’s image, all supposed to assuage the loneliness and fear the soldiers felt, and conducting funeral services for fallen soldiers, 65% of whom reportedly were from Buddhist families (Hwang 2008: 198-199).

The enthusiasm of some Buddhist figures notwithstanding, the May 6, 1952 petition of the Society for Buddhist Missionary Work in the Army, in which it asked the Defence Ministry to grant Buddhist chaplains the same status as their Christian colleagues, was rejected. Given both the political and diplomatic weight of the Christian community and its unwavering support for the Syngman Rhee regime, it was deemed wiser to keep its lucrative monopoly on religion inside the army ranks intact. The Buddhist community was in no position to protest, for reasons
enumerated above, and concentrated on missionary work in units whose commanders were supportive. Ch’oe Honghŭi was reportedly one such commander who used his military authority and connections to help rebuild an important temple, Naksaksan, in Kangwŏn Province. Yet another crucially important field of Buddhist missionary work was the Korean Army, Naval and Air Forces Academies, whose graduates could potentially help institutional Buddhism in a society in which the military was among the most dominant institutions (Hwang 2008: 200-201).

From the very inception of the service academies, Christians dominated them, and Buddhist activists had to fight an uphill battle. By 1966, at the most technologically advanced Air Force Academy, Protestants comprised 34.7% of the student body, and Catholics an additional 20.5%. In the largest and most influential Army Academy, Protestant students accounted for 24.2% and Catholic students for 17.1% of the total respectively (Kang 2006: 355). Christian churches were quickly expanding in the 1950s and 1960s, and by 1970, Protestants alone constituted approximately 10% of the South Korean population (Han’guk Kidokkyo Yŏksa Hakhoe 2009: 116), but even taking this into account, the share of Christians among academy students greatly exceeded that among the general population. The main reason for such a phenomenon was the strong position of Christians among the academies’ teachers, as well as among the South Korean elite in general; Christian faith counted as one of the factors of personal success. Sometimes, Christianity was even forcibly promoted—both by teachers and senior students (sŏnbae) who wielded significant power over younger students. Yu Sangjong (brigadier general)—the Buddhist officer who later made decisive contribution to the establishment of the Buddhist chaplaincy in the late 1960s—remembers that his school seniors made church attendance obligatory to him and his fellow students. Christianity was seen as “American/civilized religion” and a symbol of state loyalty. Buddhist monks could not enter the Army Academy unless they changed the traditional robes for “civilized” Western suits (Pak 2009). Despite all odds, and, significantly, with the help of the two future military dictators of South Korea, Chŏn Tuhwan (Chun Doo-hwan) and No T’aeu (Roh Tae-woo)—both were Yu’s seniors at the same academy at that time, and both were Buddhists—Yu succeeded in organising the first-ever Buddhist students’ society at the Army Academy in 1954. The Naval Academy followed suit in 1959 and the Air Force Academy—in 1960 respectively (Pak 2009). Some former members of this society—Pak Hŭido (b. 1934, the Army Chief of Staff in 1985-1986), Yi Sŏkpok (former commander of Army’s fifth division, currently chairman of the Buddhists Society for Defending the Republic of Korea Taehan Minguk Chik’igi Pulgyodo Ch’ongyanghaph), Sŏn Yunhŭi (former commander of the South Korean military police) and others—later played central roles in developing cohesive ties between the military and Buddhist establishments (Pak 2009).
In conclusion, although the Syngman Rhee regime’s favouritism towards Christians in general and especially close ties with Protestants did not save it from a relatively easy demise in April 1960 as a result of a “student revolution”—grounded in the frustration of the middle classes, and especially younger, educated urbanites at the lack of socio-economic development, the “privatisation of power” by ruling groups and their underlings and subsequent corruption (Sŏ 2007: 266-300) - it did have important consequences. The number of Protestant believers alone grew thrice in 1950-1960 (Han’guk Kidokkyo Yŏksa Hakhoe 2009: 116), and the Christian chaplaincy system in the military contributed significantly to this growth. Under the “Christian president” Syngman Rhee, most commanding officers, their own personal religious affiliation notwithstanding, provided chaplains with privileged access to barrack life, and chaplains made use of the resources made available to them by their congregations to win soldiers’ “hearts and minds” (Kang 1996: 352-353). The soldiers who became Christians in such a way, tended to have long-lasting loyalty to the denomination they first encountered while undergoing the deprivations of military service, and, by extension, to become loyal to the hard-core anti-Communist state that the churches whole-heartedly supported. Consequently, the South Korean state, its initial externally imposed characteristics notwithstanding, was able to gradually win a sort of Gramscian “ideological hegemony” in society. “Christian presidents” did not emerge in South Korea after Syngman Rhee’s overthrow in 1960 and until Kim Young-sam’s (Kim Yongsam) assumption of presidential powers in 1993. However, conservatively interpreted Christianity, especially in the form represented by the “mammoth churches”, with their message that “God blesses the rich” and extreme anti-Communist rhetoric, did become one of the important ideologies of the quickly developing industrial capitalism in South Korea (Kim 2012). A small minority of left-wing Protestants in pre-1950 South Korea relocated to North Korea either immediately before or during the Korean War, as their survival in the anti-Communist “fortress state” in South Korea was close to impossible. Rev. Kim Ch’angjun (1890-1959), a US-educated Methodist pastor who ended up as one of the foremost critics of US war crimes in 1950-53 in Anglophone publications abroad, and was ultimately buried in the Patriotic Martyrs’ Cemetery in Pyongyang, is a case in the point. Interest in labour, human rights and unification reappeared among a minority of Korean Christians only in the 1970s, in the course of the struggle against the semi-fascistic Yusin (revitalization) system (1972-1979) (Yi 2001, 374-380).

Buddhists remained in the majority among South Korea’s religious population in the 1950s, but were in a comparatively weaker position due to their relative alienation from state power, relatively weaker economic position vis-à-vis the Christian churches lavishly supported by the
Korean state and from abroad, weaker nationalist legitimacy (on account of their full-spectrum collaboration with the colonial powers from 1910 to 1945 and the well-known images of the “Japanized” married monks), and preoccupation with internal affairs from the beginning of the purge against the “Japanized” monks initiated on May 20, 1954 by Syngman Rhee himself with devastating effects on institutional Buddhism. Thus, it lacked the negotiating power vis-à-vis the state needed to formally challenge the Christian monopoly on military chaplaincy. Some activist monks attempted, however, to make local, de facto challenges to the Christian monopoly by mobilising a network of sympathetic non-Christian officers, and by deploying Buddhism’s own version of religious legitimization for state violence, deliberately linked to state-promoted nationalistic discourses on “hwango spirit”. In a way, instead of trying to resist the state which openly engaged in practices of religious discrimination in favour of Christians, Buddhists—the monastic establishment being just as anti-Communist as their Christian counterparts—entered a “competition in loyalty” of sorts against the Christians. The successes were limited in the 1950s, but more pronounced in the 1960s and 1970s when new, non-Christian military dictators, interested in winning the allegiance of the predominantly Buddhist rural and lower-class urban populations, entered into an ideological alliance with the conservative monastic establishment, allowing the latter to fully deploy its doctrine of “state-protected Buddhism” (hoguk Pulgyo). The Buddhist chaplaincy in the military was established in 1968, first and foremost because Buddhists were a significant group among South Korean troops sent to fight in the Vietnam War after 1966. It was calculated that Buddhist chaplains would “strengthen” their spirit and help them to build some understanding with the largely Buddhist Vietnamese (Hwang 2008: 212-241). For the anti-Communist monastic establishment, any criticism of the Vietnam War and Korean involvement in it was unthinkable. The establishment of Buddhist chaplaincy in the wake of the dispatch of Korean troops to Vietnam was celebrated as an “achievement” in the Buddhist missionary field, indeed as a “milestone” of sorts for contemporary Korean Buddhism (Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong P’ogyowŏn 1999: 234).

The dominant paradigm of anti-Communism and “state-protective Buddhism” was challenged only by minjung (“People’s”) Buddhist activists in the 1980s, but even then, the legitimacy of the Buddhist chaplaincy in the military was rarely, if ever, questioned (Jorgensen 2010). While it was widely recognized that, as a matter of principle, Buddhists should totally abstain from bad karma-generating violence, even the minjung monks approved of “altruistic violence” (“for the purpose of saving other sentient beings”), and were perhaps too nationalistic to question the very institute of the national army—as opposed to the obviously “anti-national”, USA-dependant military dictatorship (Jorgensen 2010). Thus, not unlike mainstream Catholics and most Protestant denominations, the majority in the South Korean Buddhist community came to perceive the institute of military chaplaincy as a fully legitimate missionary tool, essential for “competition in the acquisition of believers” since religious loyalties gained in the military by the conscripts in their early twenties tend to stay long (Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong P’ogyowŏn 2007: 203-205)—without much thought given to the Cold War origins of this institution in South Korea, its ideological underpinning, or its essentially problematic relationship to Buddhism’s original teachings on ahimsa (non-violence).

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Notes

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2 Peoples’ Committees were the main type of elected authority in early (1945 to 1950) North Korea. They originated from the spontaneously formed local self-governing bodies which mushroomed all over Korea immediately after imperial Japan’s demise in August 1945. In the USA-occupied South Korea, however, these self-governing bodies were never officially acknowledged by the Occupation authorities. See (Armstrong 2003: 67-70).

3 The conservative majority of both Presbyterians and Methodists—which already regarded the new, egalitarian regime as “devilish”—opposed both doing anything other than prayer on Sunday and to the use of churches as polling stations in some districts. Kim Il Sung attempted to persuade conservative church leaders to collaborate in the “historical national enterprise”—with the help of his maternal relative, Rev. Kang Ryang’uk (1903-1983)—with little result (Han’guk Kidokkyo Yŏksa Hakhoe 2009, 48-49)

4 On the phenomenon of the predominant Christianization of the enterprising population of northwestern Korea in the 1900s and during the colonial period, see Kang 1999.

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The history of Islam in Japan dates back roughly a century (the first Japanese to go on pilgrimage to Mecca did so in 1910, and the earliest Japanese mosque dates to 1935). The largest growth in the numbers of Muslims living and worshipping in Japan took place during the so-called “bubble economy” of the 1990s, when foreign workers (many from Islamic countries) entered Japan for employment. Despite subsequent restrictions placed on such workers, a number remained in Japan, marrying Japanese citizens and starting families. In his interviews with Muslim foreign workers and Japanese converts to Islam, Kawakami Yasunori suggests something of the intersection of personal experience and political context shaping this newest chapter in the history of Japanese religion. Even as some Japanese join the Islamic community as converts, and Muslim groups put down roots by building mosques and other long-term institutions, some Muslims retain a sense of connection with their countries of origin, and consider returning for the sake of their children's traditional upbringing.
Local Mosques and the Lives of Muslims in Japan
Kawakami Yasunori

The Muslim community in Japan has a history of about 100 years. For example, an Islamic mosque in Kobe dates from 1935.

Opening of the Tokyo Mosque, 1938

But the number of Muslims was relatively small before the 1980s. The number of Muslims in Japan grew rapidly in the mid-1980 during the bubble economy. At that time young men from Muslim countries including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iran came to Japan and worked in small businesses or factories which experienced labor shortages. But when the controversy over illegal foreign workers began, the Japanese government halted entry on short-term visits without a visa for citizens of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran. Following the collapse of the bubble economy in 1990, a number of Muslims acquired resident status and some obtained legal residence in Japan by marrying Japanese women. There is no accurate record of the religious affiliation of foreign residents in Japan, but we can estimate the approximate number of Muslims from the native countries of foreigners. Keiko Sakurai calculated the number of Muslims in Japan in 2000 to be 63,552 (Nihon no Muslim Shakai (Muslim society in Japan) Chikuma shinsho, 2003). Now many of them have families. They live and work with Japanese and send their children to Japanese schools. With the passage of time, they began to construct their lives as Muslims. Japanese can see the ‘real Muslims lives’ before their eyes in Japan today. Against the world-wide negative media campaign against Muslims and Islam, it is useful for Japanese to take the opportunity to understand the Muslims in their midst. —Morita Toyoko, Kobe University

“Allah Akbar!” (God is great!)

The Yokohama Mosque in Yokohama’s Tsuzuki Ward echoes with the sound of Friday prayers chanted in Arabic. Worshippers in the 200-square-meter mosque number about 70—Muslims...
from Asia, Africa and elsewhere. The premises were purchased last summer and then renovated, opening for services at the end of last year.

Before that, Muslims in Yokohama prayed in private apartments. On Friday, the holiest day of the Muslim week, worshippers would gather at one of their apartments for prayers, while police looked askance at the long lines of cars parked outside. Sometimes during the fasting month of Ramadan, police would get calls from neighbors uneasy about the large and mysterious after-sunset gathering of foreigners.

In January 2006, the local Islamic community decided to purchase a two-story reinforced concrete building and turn it into a mosque. The price: 100 million yen. The contract called for a 10 million yen down payment in March, with the remaining 90 million yen to be paid within four months. An appeal went out for contributions from foreign Muslims all over the country—in Osaka, Nagoya, Toyama, Niigata and Hokkaido.

“There it was, May already, and we’d collected no more than 20 million yen,” recalls Iqbal, a 43-year-old Pakistani used car dealer.

Iqbal came to Japan in 1988, and launched his dealership three years later. Now he owns three used car showrooms in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Business is good, but “When there’s no mosque, something important is missing from your life,” he says.

A mosque is more than a place of worship. It occupies a central role in Islamic life. Adults not only pray there but also attend sermons as well, given by religious teachers. Children study the Koran there. The mosque collects charity and assists the poor. It forms the core of the Islamic community.

A Tokyo Mosque in Yoyogi

There are currently between 30 and 40 single-story mosques in Japan, plus another 100 or more apartment rooms set aside, in the absence of more suitable facilities, for prayers. Many Muslim communities have plans to build mosques in the near future.
Mohammad, 38, runs an Asian grocery store in Tsunashima, Yokohama. The Sri Lankan had 520,000 yen in savings, and was thinking of donating 300,000 yen towards the purchase of the mosque. He changed his mind and donated 500,000 yen, virtually emptying his account.

He says: “When you make a contribution to a mosque, God prepares a house for you in heaven. It’s thanks to God that I’ve been able to make my way in Japan up to now. And God will continue to help me in future.”

Mohammed, the seventh-century founder of Islam, was a merchant of Mecca, and many passages in the Koran reflect a merchant’s manner of thinking—as, for example: “Who is there who will lend a good loan to God? For He will double it for him, and for him is a generous reward.”

The deadline for payment of the 90 million yen was 11 am July 20. On July 10, the community was still 5 million yen short. Iqbal worked the phones, contacting foreign Muslims all over Japan. On the morning of July 20, 2 million yen arrived in cash. That, plus contributions forwarded directly to a special bank account, just made up the required amount.

In Nagoya, local foreign Muslims, most of them used car dealers, got together and purchased for 46 million yen a suburban building that had previously been a clothing store, turning it into the Nagoya Port Mosque, which opened last autumn.

“Wherever in the world Muslims live, it’s only natural that there be a mosque,” says Hanif, a 36-year-old Sri Lankan.

Factory Workers

“Come to prayers, prayers are more important than sleep.”

At 5:30 on Sunday morning, the muezzin summons the faithful of Shin-Anjo, Aichi Prefecture, to worship at the New Anjo Mosque. Among the more than 300 who had been here for Saturday night prayers, about 100—this reporter with them—spent the night at the mosque.

More than half the worshippers are Indonesians working at nearby factories turning out auto parts and other products on a subcontract basis. The workers are participants in a three-year program that since the early 1990s has offered training (for one year) and on-the-job experience (two years) to about 5,000 overseas applicants. Second in numbers only to the Chinese are those from Indonesia, the world’s largest Islamic country.

“Don’t cheat people,” says the preacher. “Earn your profits by just means only. Profits are given to you by God. He wants to test you in your use of them. Help the needy, follow the way of Islam—and God will reward you.”

“It’s hard to say afternoon prayers at work,” says one trainee. “And if there’s overtime, I can’t say prayers after sunset either.”

Muslims pray five times a day—in the morning, just after noon, around 3 pm, after sunset and at night. Morning and nighttime prayers can be recited at their lodgings. The noon prayer can be said during the lunch break. But mid-afternoon and sunset prayers present a difficulty.

“When I first came,” says another trainee, “I said to the boss, ‘Give me time to say my prayers, and in return I’ll work really hard for you.’ All it takes is 10 minutes. And a serious Muslim who says his prayers is serious about his work, too.”
In their home countries, most offices and factories set aside space for prayers. But Japan, even as it welcomes Islamic workers, offers very little in the way of workplace prayer space. Prayer and work do not mix naturally here.

“I’m going to my lodging to get some sleep,” says an Indonesian trainee as he leaves the mosque at 8 am Sunday. “I have to go to work this evening. I’m on the night shift.”

He works from 8 pm to 8 am every night except Saturday. This is his third year in Japan. He’s worked the night shift for the past year. “It’s good for me,” he says. “I asked for the night shift. It means I can pray five times a day.”

**Pilgrimage to Mecca**

Monir Morshed is a 32-year-old Bangladeshi engineer working for a computer company in Tokyo’s Shinjuku Ward. At the end of last year, he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Every year more than two million Muslims from all over the world journey to this holiest of Islamic sites. “The pilgrimage washes your sins clean,” Monir says. “You feel as if you’ve been reborn.”

He came to Japan in 1993 on a Japanese government scholarship. He graduated from the Tokyo Institute of Technology, went on to graduate school to do a master’s course, and then stayed in Japan to work. Last year, he began to think seriously about going to Mecca. He gave his employers notice that he would be taking three weeks’ leave towards the end of the year. In summer, he began to observe Islamic teaching with particular rigor. Dining with colleagues, he refrained not only from drinking but also from so much as touching a sake bottle.

In September, there was an office party. “Before, when we poured each other drinks, my colleagues would pour my juice while I poured their beer. But I couldn’t do that any more, so I made up for it by serving their vegetables for them.”

Devout Muslims must abstain not only from alcohol, but also from food or cakes flavored with alcohol. “Strictly speaking, it’s not right for me even to attend dinners where alcohol is served,” Monir says. “However,” he adds—in an apparent concession to Japanese ways—“socializing is important, too.”

In Islam, there are specially qualified holy men who answer questions put to them by believers. These questions can be about anything, from matters of faith to human relationships, business and contracts, even politics. Answers are grounded in the Koran and in judgments rendered by great scholars in the past.

Shaikh Hafiz Salman, 43, graduated from a religious seminary in Pakistan and now serves as imam at the Otsuka Mosque in Tokyo’s Toshima Ward. “Muslims living in Japan are beset by questions that simply don’t arise among Muslims in the Islamic world,” he says. “It’s my job to address these questions.”

Monir consulted Shaikh Hafiz regarding whether it was acceptable for him to attend office parties. “It would be best not to, but if you must attend, do not touch alcohol,” Shaikh Hafiz replied. Monir’s leave of absence began on Dec. 20. At a year-end party just before, his boss took him aside and said, “Take care of yourself; we’ll see you next year.” Monir had felt uncomfortable about taking time off. “It pleased me that the boss spoke to me like that,” he says.
Children Learn Arabic

At the mosque in Ebina, Kanagawa Prefecture, about 10 children around age 10 are learning the Arabic alphabet. Every day from 4 pm to 8 pm, the mosque holds Koran classes. They started last November, at the urging of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims living in the area who wanted their children to be properly versed in the ancestral religion and the Arabic language. The classes are taught by the parents themselves.

Children learn Arabic at the Yokohama Mosque

Slaiman, a 39-year-old Sri Lankan who lives in neighboring Yamato and deals in used cars, sends his two sons, age 8 and 4, to classes at the mosque. He himself began studying Arabic at age 5 at a mosque school in Sri Lanka. He wants to give his own children a similar religious environment. “The Koran is written in Arabic,” he says. “If the children don’t learn it now they won’t be able to read it properly or understand the meaning of the prayers.”

Islam is not faith in isolation. It teaches faith, morality and human relations as a whole, and children must learn it early if they are to fully master it. “Japanese schools teach only knowledge—not how to be a good human being,” says one Muslim father.

Nasr-abdllah, 49, operates an Asian grocery store in Shinjuku Ward. Originally from India, he has plans to open an Islamic school. “Foreign Muslims living in Japan are deeply troubled about their children’s education,” he explains. “In some cases, the father wants to send the children to school in his home country, but his Japanese wife is opposed. Some couples have divorced over this.” Nasr-abdllah’s Japanese wife took their six children to Malaysia for two years, to give their three daughters, when they reached school age, the benefits of Islamic schooling.

Hossein, a 43-year-old car dealer in Katsushika Ward, has been in Japan 20 years, but he and his Japanese wife plan to take their three children to his native Bangladesh next July so the elder children, a 10-year-old daughter and a 7-year-old son, can acquire the beginnings of an Islamic education. They currently attend a local elementary school. Forbidden by their religion from eating pork or any meat not prepared in accord with Islamic rites, the children bring lunch from home following the same menu but prepared to conform to their faith. School authorities waived the usual dress regulations, allowing the daughter to wear an Islamic scarf.

Hossein says: “Soon, my daughter will have to don a full veil, which exposes only the eyes. It will be hard for her to attend Japanese school. As for my son, I want him to grow up to be an Islamic scholar in Bangladesh.”

There are many Islamic schools in Western nations with large Muslim populations, but in Japan, there is not a single Muslim elementary or junior high school. The Otsuka Mosque in Toshima
Ward plans to register itself as an educational corporation and establish an Islamic school, but for now all it can offer is a daycare center with no official status.

For a man in his mid-30s with no previous experience as a computer engineer, Ibrahim (Ken) Okubo faced a wall of difficulties starting his new profession as a systems engineer.

Okubo would go through 35 interviews over a period of six months before finally landing a job. During this time, the Japanese Islamic convert was supported by the foreign Muslims he would meet at the mosques. They would offer to help him in any way they could. Some introduced him to potential employers. “In Islam, it is God’s will to help people in difficulty. They do not expect anything in return and you don’t have to give something back as is the custom among the Japanese,” Okubo says. “The idea is that the reward will come from God. Many Japanese think that they have no one but themselves to turn to, and personal relationships can become stifling.”

Okubo was around 20 when he took an interest in foreign cultures. He began attending Arabic lessons at the Islamic Center-Japan in Tokyo’s Setagaya Ward. He eventually came across Tablighi Jamaat, a nonpolitical missionary group from Pakistan focusing on Islamic revival. “I was overwhelmed by their intensity when praying to God and their warmth as people,” Okubo says. He converted to Islam and spent four months in Pakistan doing missionary work.
Currently, there are seven mosques in Japan that belong to Tablighi. Okubo is one of the few Japanese participants in the group. Okubo, now a 41-year-old systems engineer living and working in Tokyo, is widely known among the Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and other foreign Muslims living in Japan.

On the first day he reported to work at his new company, he explained to his superior that as a Muslim, he would not go out drinking and that he would have to pray during work hours. His employer gave his consent, and Okubo now prays twice in the afternoon in the employee lounge or on the fire escape landing.

Exchanges between foreign Muslims living in Japan and the Japanese are quite limited. Yet encounters at the workplace and other areas are increasing in number. When it happens, the Japanese often feel that Muslims have a sense of stability as people who accept their fate as God’s will. It has inspired some Japanese to become believers.

Ogawara Hiromasa, a 35-year-old company employee from Saitama, came into contact with Islam after he graduated from high school. Ogawara joined a printing company where he met a Pakistani colleague. Ogawara soon became fascinated by his way of life. “He was strong and always held a positive view,” Ogawara says. Ogawara befriended him, and would sometimes help him with child care and shopping before eventually becoming his pupil. Ogawara converted eight years ago. “Today, it is frightening in Japan where people can easily take offense just by hearing a choice of words that they do not like. Things are more relaxed in the world of Islam,” he says.

Although an accurate number of Muslims in Japan is not available, Muslims from Asian nations such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh make up most of the foreign Muslims, numbering between 70,000 and 100,000. The estimated number of Japanese Muslims ranges from thousands to tens of thousands. The Japan Muslim Association estimates from registrations that there are somewhere between 7,000 and 10,000. Of the Japanese Muslims, the biggest group consists of
women who converted when they married Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who came to Japan in the 1980s to work.

Indian Muslim Nasr-abdllah, 49, who runs an Asian food store in Tokyo’s Shinjuku Ward, married a Japanese woman 16 years ago. “The Japanese do good deeds but worry too much about other people’s opinion. Sometimes my wife is preoccupied with school and garbage collection and ends up delaying her prayers,” says Nasr-abdllah with a wry smile.

The Japanese feel Islam is something far removed from them. Yet a large number of Muslim populations exist in Asian countries. The number of Muslims is steadily increasing in Japan where they work as businessmen, computer engineers and specialized trainees. Our understanding of Islam holds an important clue in the internationalization progressing around us.

_Kawakami Yasunori is a senior staff writer for the Asahi Shimbun. This article appeared in The Asia Shimbun on May 4, 2007. Posted at Japan Focus on May 30, 2007._
A descendant of the Hokkaido Ainu people, Chiri Yukie (1903-1922) became versed in the oral tradition of kamuy yukar (songs of the gods) from a young age. At the encouragement of the linguist Kindaichi Kyōsuke, she transliterated and translated these songs into Japanese. Her Ainu shin’yōshū (Ainu Songs of the Gods) was published posthumously in 1923. The following translation presents the author’s preface, as well as a song attributed to the owl, patron deity of the village (kotan kor kamuy). In the former, Chiri shares both her nostalgia for a lost Ainu past, and her hope that her heritage will be preserved by sharing it with a Japanese-speaking audience. In the latter, we find a depiction of Ainu ritual, one that revolves around the notion of animals as both deities and the prey of hunters – after choosing to fall to an arrow, the owl is invited to stay with the impoverished family of the boy who shot it, receiving inau (offerings) and making the household prosper once more. It is a song that speaks, not only to the profound religious significance of animal spirits in hunter-gatherer traditions like that of the Ainu, but offers a commentary on the shifting nature of social fortunes – something of which Chiri seems to have been poignantly aware. It is hard not to view, in her recounting of an ancient hunting ritual, a thinly veiled commentary on the fate of her people – though reviled by their neighbors, both once had wealth and distinction, a state to which they may yet return through the proper veneration of the deity (kamuy).
The Song the Owl God Himself Sang. “Silver Droplets Fall Fall All Around,” an Ainu Tale
Transliterated in Romaji and Translated from Ainu into Japanese by Chiri Yukie
Translated and introduced by Kyoko

*Kamuichikap kamui yaieyukar,
“Shirokanipe ranran pishkan”*

Chiri Yukie (1903-1922) was born in Horobetsu, Hokkaido, to Chiri Takakichi and Nami. Nami was the daughter of an Hokkaido Ainu grandsire, Kan’nari. Yukie was the older sister of the linguist Chiri Mashiho (1909-1961). When she was five and six years of age, she lived in Horobetsu with her grandmother, the great bard Monasinouk. Yukie grew up listening to recitations in the oral tradition as narrated by Monasinouk and later also by her adoptive mother Kan’nari Matsu, Nami’s sister. Starting in 1909, she and Monasinouk lived with Matsu at the Episcopal Church compound in Chikabumi in the suburbs of Asahikawa. After a total of seven years of normal and higher normal school education, she attended Asahikawa Girls Vocational School for three years, graduating in 1910.

When the linguist Kindaichi Kyōsuke visited Kan’nari Matsu in 1918 during one of his research trips to Hokkaido, he learned that Yukie, too, was versed in oral tradition. At his encouragement, she began transcription. In 1921 she sent Kindaichi a manuscript that she called “Ainu densetsushu” (A Collection of Ainu Legends.) She stayed with the Kindaichis in
Tokyo in 1922 to edit the collection for publication. Hours after completing it, she died of heart disease.

The work was published in 1923 under the title *Ainu shin’yōshū* (Ainu Songs of Gods) by Kyōdo Kenkyūsha, presided over by the ethnologist Yanagita Kunio. The book has been included in the Iwanami Library since 1978. In addition to Chiri Yukie’s preface, her romanized transcription of the original Ainu songs with Japanese annotations, and her modern Japanese translation, followed by Kindaichi’s afterword, the Iwanami edition appends Chiri Mashiho’s scholarly essay on songs of gods. Whereas the first edition stated that the work was “Compiled by Chiri Yukie,” the Iwanami editors corrected this to “Compiled and Translated by Chiri Yukie.”

The Japanese word *shin’yō* is a translation of *kamuy yukar*, a song in which, in principle, a nature god speaks in the first person. This is distinct from *yukar*, a long epic about human heroes, and *wepeker*, prose folk tales. *Kamuy yukar*, narrated in patterned literary Ainu as is *yukar*, always contains a refrain called *sakehe* that differs from song to song, and often ends in a colloquial phrase like *ari...kamuy yayeyukar* (thus the so-and-so god sings about himself, or mimics himself in the form of a song of a god) or *ari...kamuy isoytak* (thus the so-and-so god tells his tale). *Kamuy yukar* was customarily sung by women, while *yukar* was traditionally sung by men, although female bards took over the latter by the mid-twentieth century when few male bards were left.)
Chiri Yukie’s book contains thirteen songs of gods such as the owl, fox, rabbit, little wolf, sea, frog, otter, and swamp mussel deities, and the spirit of the damp ground. “Silver Droplets Fall” is the first of her collection, and one of the two owl god songs. The owl (or more precisely, in Horobetsu, Blakiston’s eagle-owl) is *kotan-kor-kamuy*, the guardian god of the *kotan* (hamlet).

The English translation here is based on Chiri Yukie’s Japanese translation in the Iwanami Library edition of *Ainu Shin’yōshū*. Her Japanese notes on the romanized Ainu text are also included because they provide useful information. Her spelling is retained wherever she uses Ainu expressions, although the spelling system has changed since then. Her line division is also honored as much as possible, while recent Japanese translation practice is to divide lines more closely to reflect metric patterns of the original. Another translation into Japanese of the piece by Chiri Mashiho in *Yukar kanshō* (Appreciation of Yukar, 1956) with his annotations and a commentary by Oda Kunio, is reproduced in Hanasaki Kōhei, *Shimajima wa hanazuna* (The Islands Are a Festoon, Shakai Hyōronsha, 1990). Chiri Mashiho’s version pays closer attention to the metric pattern and literary devices of the original such as parallelisms and repetitions, providing a basis for subsequent translations of *kamuy yukar* and *yukar*. There is a difference in the treatment of the refrain as well. Chiri Yukie interpreted it to say “Silver droplets fall,” while Chiri Mashio took the word “fall” as
Chirie: The Song the Owl God Himself Sang

imperative, meaning “Fall, you silver droplets.” He also argues that the title means “the song the owl
god sang of himself” rather than “the song the owl god sang himself.” These and other differences
aside, most Japanese readers still go to Chiri Yukie’s version, which has historical weight as the first
published transliteration and translation from Ainu oral literature by an Ainu in any language.

Doubts may arise about the logic of transcribing traditional oral performances into a written text,
whether romanized or rendered into Japanese. Yet such
transcriptions preserved Ainu tradition from oblivion. Consider Kayano Shigeru’s great cultural
preservation project, Kayano Shigeru no Ainu shin’wa shūsei (Kayano Shigeru’s collection of Ainu
mythology, 10 volumes, 1998). Based on years of making recordings of recitation by elderly bards,
Kayano provided CD’s as well as the romanized text, kana transcription, Japanese translation, and
annotations. Kayano’s efforts extended to attempts to preserve the Ainu language for future
generations. For example, Sapporo Television started an Ainu language lesson program in 1999 with
Kayano as the original instructor. It continues today with elderly and younger Ainu lecturers from
different areas of Hokkaidō representing Ainu local dialects.

Similar attention to the sound has been paid to Chiri Yukie’s thirteen kamuy yukar as well in recent
Nakamoto Mutsuko (1928- ), who earlier collaborated on the text and recording of Kamuy Yukar
(1995), in 2003 published a CD version of Chiri Yukie’s Ainu shin’yōshū (Sōfūkan).

It contains Nakamoto’s singing in Ainu, Japanese recitation by Kurotani Masumi, and English
reading by Julie Kaizawa. Again, NHK’s widely-viewed weekly series, “Sono toki rekishi ga ugoita”
(History Moved at That Moment) featured Chiri Yukie in October 2008, placing similar importance
on her as on the central characters in the other four installments in the same month: the Sengoku
warrior Azai Nagamasa, the Chinese heroes of the Three Kingdoms, the late-Tokugawa Shogunal
wife Atsuhime, and the novelist Murasaki Shikibu. Here too, the program included Nakamoto’s oral
performance of passages from the Ainu Shin’yōshū.

Direct Ainu-to-English translation by Donald Philippi of the two songs of the owl god from Chiri
Yukie’s collection appears in his Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans (Princeton University Press / The
University of Tokyo Press, 1979). Listening for the original rhythm, he freely divides lines, using
even shorter lines than did Chiri Mashiho. He also sets off the refrain from the rest of the text. His
translation is from Ainu oral tradition as transcribed by Chiri Yukie. The following is the first
English translation from Chiri Yukie’s Japanese rendering of the original, which is both a literary
product in its own right and a text which has been widely read and recognized in Japan as a
landmark of Ainu creativity and Ainu-Japanese cultural relations.

Preface to the Ainu Shin’yōshū (Ainu Songs of Gods)

Chiri Yukie

Long ago, this spacious Hokkaidō was our ancestors’ space of freedom. Like innocent children,
as they led their happy, leisurely lives embraced by beautiful, great nature, truly they were the
beloved of nature; how blissful it must have been.

On land in winter, kicking the deep snow that covers forests and fields, stepping over mountain
after mountain, unafraid of the cold that freezes heaven and earth, they hunt bear; at sea in
summer, on the green waves where a cool breeze swims, accompanied by the songs of white
seagulls, they float small boats like tree leaves on the water to fish all day; in flowering spring,
while basking in the soft sun, they spend long days singing with perpetually warbling birds, collecting butterbur and sagebrush; in autumn of red leaves, through the stormy wind they divide the pampas grass with its budding ears, catch salmon till evening, and as fishing torches go out they dream beneath the full moon while deer call their companions in the valley. What a happy life this must have been. That realm of peace has passed; the dream shattered tens of years since, this land rapidly changing with mountains and fields transformed one by one into villages, villages into towns.

Nature unchanged from ancient times has faded before we realized it. And where are the many who used to live pleasurably in the fields and the mountains? The few of us Ainu who remain watch wide-eyed with surprise as the world advances. And from those eyes is lost the sparkle of the beautiful souls of the people of old, whose every move and motion were controlled by religious sentiment; our eyes are filled with anxiety, burning with complaints, too dulled and darkened to discern the way ahead so that we have to rely on others’ mercy. A wretched sight. The vanishing—that is our name; what a sad name we bear.

Long ago, our blissful ancestors would not for a moment have imagined that their native land would in future become so miserable.

Time flows ceaselessly, the world progresses without limit. If at some point just two or three strong persons appeared from among us, who, in the harsh arena of competition, now expose what wreckage we have become, the day would eventually come when we would keep pace with the advancing world. That is our truly earnest wish, what we pray for day and night.

But—the many words that our beloved ancestors used to communicate in their daily lives as they rose and as they lay, the many beautiful words they used to use and transmitted to us: would they also all disappear in vain together with the weak and vanishing? Oh, that is too pitiful and regrettable.

Having been born an Ainu and grown surrounded by the Ainu language, I have written down, with my clumsy pen, one or two very small pieces from the various tales that our ancestors enjoyed reciting on rainy evenings or snowy nights as they gathered at their leisure.

If many of you who know us read this book, together with our ancestral people I would consider it an infinite joy, a supreme blessing.

March 1, the eleventh year of Taisho
Chiri Yukie

The Yukar the Owl Himself Sang

“Silver droplets fall fall all around me
golden droplets fall fall all around me.” So singing

I went down along the river’s flow, above the human village.

As I looked down below
paupers of old have now become rich, while rich men of old have now become paupers, it seems.

By the shore, human children are at play with little toy bows with little toy arrows.

“Silver droplets fall fall all around me golden droplets fall fall all around me.” So singing as I passed above the children running beneath me they said the following:

“A beautiful bird! a divine bird!

Now, shoot that bird, the one who shoots it, who takes it first is a true valiant, a true hero.”

So saying, children of paupers of old now rich fixing to little golden bows little golden arrows shot at me, but I let the little golden arrows pass beneath me and pass above me.

Amongst them, amongst the children one child carrying a plain little bow and plain little arrows is mingling with the rest. As I look a pauper’s child he seems, from his clothing too it is clear. Yet a careful look at his eyes reveals that he is the offspring of a worthy person, a bird of a different feather he mingles with the rest.

To a plain little bow he fixes a plain little arrow, he too aims at me.

Then the children of paupers of old now rich burst into laughter
and they say
“Oh how ridiculous a pauper child,
that bird, the divine bird
doesn’t even take our golden arrows, one like yours
a pauper child’s plain arrow of rotten wood
surely he’ll take it all right
that bird, the divine bird.”
So saying they kicked and beat
the pauper child. Not a whit minding
the pauper child aimed at me.
Looking at how it was, I was touched with pity.
“Silver droplets fall fall all around me
golden droplets fall fall all around me.” So singing
slowly in the big sky
I was making a large circle. The pauper child
one foot far out and the other foot close by
biting his lower lip, aiming awhile
let it go. The little arrow flew
sparkling toward me, so I extended
my hand and took that little arrow.
Circling around and around
I whirled down through the whistling wind.
Then, those children ran toward me
stirring up a blizzard of sand, they raced.
The moment I fell to the ground
the pauper child ran to me first and took me.
Then the children of paupers of old now rich
came running from behind him.
They said twenty bad things, thirty bad things
pushing and beating the pauper child:
“A hateful child, a pauper’s child
what we tried to do first you did ahead of us!”
When they said this the pauper child covered me
with his body, firmly holding me under his belly.
After trying and trying, finally from between people
he leaped out, and ran and ran.
Children of paupers of old now rich
threw stones and splinters of wood at him but
the pauper child, not a whit minding
stirring up a blizzard of sand, ran and arrived
at the front of a little hut. The little child
put me into the house through the honored window
adding words to tell the story that it was thus and so.
An old couple from within the house
came out each with a hand on their forehead
and I saw that they were extremely poor yet
there were signs of a master, signs of a mistress.
Seeing me they bent themselves at the waist with surprise.
The old man fixed his sash
and made a ceremonial bow.
“Owl god, great god,
to the meager household of us paupers
thank you for presenting yourself.
One who counted myself amongst the rich in bygone days
now I’m reduced to a humble pauper as you see
I stand in awe of lodging you
the god of the land, the great god
but today the day has already dusked
so this evening we will lodge you the great god
and tomorrow, with inau if with nothing else
we will send you the great god on your way.” So saying
he repeated his ceremonial bows over and over again.
The old woman, beneath the eastern window
laid a spread and seated me on it.
And then the moment they lay down
with snores they fell fast asleep.
Seated between ear and ear of my body
I was, but not too long after that around midnight
I rose.
“Silver droplets fall fall all around me
golden droplets fall fall all around me.”
Thus singing quietly
to the left seat, to the right seat within the house I flew
making beautiful sounds.
When I fluttered my wings, around me
beautiful treasures, divine treasures scattered down
making beautiful sounds.
Within a short while, I filled this tiny house
with wonderful treasures, divine treasures.
“Silver droplets fall fall around me
golden droplets fall fall around me.”
So singing I changed this tiny house
in a short while into a golden house, a large house.
In the house I made a fine treasure altar
hastily made fine beautiful garments
decorated the interior of the house.
Far more finely than for the residence of the rich
I decorated the interior of this large house.
That done, as before I sat
between ear and ear of my helmet.⁹
I made the people of the house have a dream:
*Ainunishpa*¹⁰ unluckily became a pauper
and by paupers of old now rich
was ridiculed and bullied. Which I saw
and took pity, so although I am not a plain god
of meager status, I lodged
at a human house, made him a rich person.
This I let them know.
That done, a little while later when it dawned
the people of the house rose all together
rubbing their eyes they looked around the house
and all fell on the floor losing their legs.
The old woman cried loudly
the old man shed large teardrops.
But before long the old man rose
came to me, ceremoniously bowed
twenty times, thirty times in repetition and said,
“A mere dream, a mere sleep I thought I had but what wonder to see your blessings in reality. To our humble, humble,\textsuperscript{11} meager house you have come, and for that alone I am thankful the kotan god, the great god pities our misfortune and behold,\textsuperscript{12} the most precious of blessings you have given us.” Thus through tears he spoke. Then, the old man cut an \textit{inau} tree, beautifully carved a fine \textit{inau} and decorated me. The old woman dressed up with the little child’s help she gathered firewood scooped water, prepared to brew wine, and in a little while arranged six vats at the seat of honor. And then, with the old woman of fire,\textsuperscript{13} the old female god I exchanged stories\textsuperscript{14} of various gods. In two days or so, wine being the gods’ favorite, inside the house the fragrance already wafted. Now, the child, deliberately clad in old clothes to invite\textsuperscript{15} from throughout the village the paupers of old now rich was sent off on an errand. As I saw him from behind, entering each house the child delivered the message he was sent with at which the paupers of old now rich
burst into laughter:

“This is strange, those paupers
what wine they brew
what feast they invite people for
let’s go and see what’s there
and have a big laugh.” So saying
to one another, many of them together came
and from a long distance, at the mere sight of the house
some went back startled and embarrassed
while others lost their legs upon reaching the front of the house.
Then, as the lady of the house went outside
took all by the hand and ushered them inside
all crawled and sidled
none raising his head.
Upon this, the master of the house rose
spoke in a sonorous voice like a cuckoo’s. 16
Thus and so, he said, was the situation:
“Like this, being paupers, without reservation
to keep company with you was beyond us
but the great god took pity
no evil thoughts did we ever entertain
and so in this manner we have been blessed
from now on throughout the village we will be a family
so, let’s be friends
and keep company—to you
I convey this wish.” Thus
he spoke, whereupon the people
time and time again rubbed their palms together
apologizing to the master of the house for their wrongs
from now on they would be friends, they said to one another.
I too received ceremonial bows.
That done, their hearts mellowing
they held a cheerful banquet.
With the god of fire, the god of the house\textsuperscript{17}
and the god of the altar\textsuperscript{18} I spoke
while the humans danced and stepped
watching which I was deeply amused.
Two days passed, three days passed, and the banquet ended.
The humans made good friends
seeing which I felt relieved and

to the God of fire, the god of the house
and the god of the altar I bade farewell.
That done, I returned to my house.
Before I arrived, my house had been
filled with beautiful \textit{inau} and beautiful wine.
So, to nearby gods and distant gods
I sent a messenger to invite them to a cheerful banquet
I was holding. At the party, to those gods
I spoke minutely of how when I visited a human village
its appearances and circumstances were
upon which the gods praised me highly.
When the gods were leaving, beautiful \textit{inau}
were my gifts, two of them, three of them.
When I look toward that Ainu village
now it is peaceful, humans are
all good friends, that *nishipa*
being the village head.

His child, now having become
a man, has a wife, has a child
is filial to his father, to his mother.
Always, always, when he brews wine,
at the start of a banquet, he sends me *inau* and wine.

I too sit behind the humans
at all times
as I guard the human land.
Thus the owl god told his tale.

**Notes**

1. In bygone days, adults made small bows and arrows for young boys. While enjoying shooting for enjoyment at trees and birds, before they knew it, the boys became skilled archers. In the Ainu word *akshinotponku*, *ak* means archery, *shinbot* play, and *ponai* a little arrow.

2. *shiktumorke*: a look. When trying to learn a person’s identity, the best way is said to be to look at the eyes. When one looks about restlessly, one is scolded.

3. *achikara*: it means “dirty.”

4. When birds and beasts are shot down, it is said that they take the arrows because they want the human-made arrows.

5. *kotankorkamui*: god of the land or the village. In the mountains, there are *nupurikorkamui*, the god that has the mountain (bear), *nupuripakorkamui*, the god who has the east side of the mountain (wolf), and so forth, and the owl is placed next to the bear and the wolf. *Kotankorkamui* is not a wild, hasty type like the god of the mountains or the god of the eastern mountains. Usually, he is calm with eyes closed, and is said to open his eyes only when a serious event occurs.

6. Ceremonial whittled twig or pole, usually made of willow, with shavings left on (tr.).

7. Chiri Mashiho explains in a footnote to his translation that when the owl god was seated on the patterned mat beneath the honored window, its spirit was believed to reside between ear and ear (*Shmajima wa hanazuna*, p. 113).

8. There is a fire pit at the center of the house. The side against the eastern window is the seat of honor. Looked at from the seat of honor, the right is *eshiso*, the left, *harkiso*. Only men can take
the seat of honor. A visitor who is humbler than the master of the house refrains from taking the
seat of honor. The master of the house and his wife always take the right seats. Next in
importance are the left seats, while the western seats (near the entrance) are the most humble.

9 *hayokpe*: armor. Whether birds or beasts, when in the mountains, though invisible to humans,
they each have a house that resembles a human house and lead their lives in the same shapes as
humans. When visiting a human village, they are said to appear in armor. Their corpses are their
gear, and their true forms, though invisible, are said to dwell between ear and ear of the corpses.

10 *Nishpa*, now spelled *nispa*, meaning a well-to-do man, a wealthy man of high status, or master,
is the antonym of *wenkur*, a pauper (tr.).

11 *otuipe*: one with a tail cut short. [Annotating the phrase *wenash shiri otuiash shiri.*] A dog tail
so short that it looks cut off is not much respected. An unworthy human is badmouthed as *wenpe*,
bad fellow, and *otuipe*, one with a tail cut short.

12 *chikashnukar*. When a god at some unexpected moment graces a favorite human with a great
fortune, that person says in delight *ikashnukar an*.

13 *apehuchi*, the old woman of fire. The god of fire, the most important of the gods in the house,
is always an old woman. When gods of the mountains, the sea and so forth visit a house as does
this owl god, *apehuchi* takes the lead in conversing with the guests. It is also acceptable to call
her *kamuihuchi* (divine old woman).

14 *neusar*, chatting. While worldly rumor is also called *neusar*, usually it refers to such things as
*kamuiyukar* (songs of gods) and *uwepeker* (old tales).

15 *ashke a uk*. Ashke means fingers or hand. A *uk* means to take. This refers to inviting people
when there is a celebration and so forth.

16 *kakkokhau*: cuckoo voice. Because a cuckoo’s voice is beautiful and clear, one who articulates
so everyone understands is likened to the bird.

17 *chisekorcakui*, the god who owns the house. The god of fire is like the housewife, the god of
the house like the master. The god of the house is a male, and is also called *chisekorekashi*, the
old man who owns the house.

18 *nusakorkamui*, the god who has the altar, an old woman. The god of the altar, too, is always
female. When something bad happens she may appear before humans in the form of a snake. So,
when a snake appears near the altar or near the eastern window, people say, “Perhaps the old
woman of the altar went out on some business,” and they never kill that snake. It is said that if
one kills it, one will pay dearly for it.

*Kyoko Selden is the co-translator of Kayano Shigeru’s* Our Land Was a Forest *(Westview, 1994)*
*and translator of Honda Katsuichi’s* Harukor: Ainu Woman’s Tale *(University of California
Press, 2000).*
Andre Vltchek has written more than one article for The Asia-Pacific Journal demonstrating the rise of militant Islamic nationalism in Indonesia, in refutation of many Western media outlets and statements in U.S. foreign policy that would characterize the country as a bastion of human rights and religious moderation in the Islamic world. In the article reproduced here, he indicates several strands that come together to form the religious climate in the most populous Islamic nation in the world. In at least some instances, the rise of intolerance appears to be a matter of religious orthodoxy in the strict sense of the word: for example, the Ahmadiyah sect, a minority group that posits the existence of prophets after Muhammad, has faced concerted pressure by mainstream Islamic groups (who have declared them heretical) and by the government itself (which has prohibited them from publicly spreading their doctrines on the basis of their “deviant” views). Other instances – like the anti-pornography laws of 2008 – seem to combine calls for Islamic sexual morality with opposition to the traditional dress of minority ethnic groups like the Balinese, while offering sweeping new censorship powers to the government.
Jihad, Orthodox Islam and Religious Intolerance in Indonesia

Andre Vltchek

Dozens of green military tents dot the vast campground and jamboree site at Cibubur, a suburb just half an hour’s drive from the center of Jakarta. Hundreds of girls, some as young as 15, have called this camp home for almost 6 months. This is where they eat, wash, sleep and study, separated from the rain and mud by the thin fabric of the tents.

Attack on the Evangelical School of Theology

On July 25, 2008, armed gangs from East Jakarta attacked students from the Evangelical School of Theology (SETIA) and their campus in Kampung Pulo. Police refused to intervene and at least 20 students were injured, some with machete cuts. In the following days, staff and students were evacuated even as protestors armed with swords, machetes, bamboo stakes and acid continued to stalk young people. From the outset, the Indonesian media played down the accident.

In August 2008, 650 female students were housed in Cibubur—dozens of girls shared each of the huge tents while the water supply and access to toilets in the camp were limited. 600 boys were housed in a so-called transit hotel, inside the city. There was no professional psychological help available, despite the fact that many of the students were recovering from trauma. International coverage was sparse. The US Ambassador visited the camp once, discreetly, making no official statement.
Studying in the camp

Entris, one of the victims of the attack, recalled the events of July 28: “They broke into our place in the middle of the night. For 3 days we tried to hide in the dormitory. We were surrounded and couldn’t do anything. Attackers used stones and firebombs and they even had guns. Some press tried to play it down: claiming that this was not a religious attack, but we all heard what the attackers were screaming: “Go get their people. Fight for your religion.” And the crowd was responding: ‘Jihad! Let’s go—let’s do jihad against SETIA students! Let’s fry them—let’s make satay from them!’ I spoke to the press. We told exactly what happened. We explained everything to TV-One, to RCTI and to other channels and publications. They only wrote and showed what suited them and never anything about the religious nature of the attacks.”

Another girl, Erna, confirmed her friend’s testimony: “They attacked the male dormitory first and later the female dormitory. They shouted from the mosque: “Jihad, Allahu Akbar, attack, kill them, burn them!”

Several eyewitnesses report that police stood by and watched the attack on 1,200 children and young people, some left on the ground bleeding.

Indonesia is the most populous Muslim-majority nation in the world. Around 88% of its more than 230 million inhabitants identify themselves as Muslims, most of them Sunni. The manipulation of religion has played an often destabilizing, even destructive role in this young nation formed of the former Dutch East Indies. During the Sukarno period, efforts were made to uphold secularism against Muslim groups seeking to establish a religious state while moderate Islam was channeled through legal political parties. During the military coup in 1965, which was supported by the United States and other Western powers, between 500,000 and 3 million Communists, activists, intellectuals and members of the Chinese minority died in massacres that extended over several months. Leaders of NU, including former President Abdurrahman Wahid,
years later admitted their organization’s participation in the events, with Muslim youth groups alongside the military doing most of the killing.

Suharto, in the years after 1965, forced a merger of the Muslim parties (PPP) leaving them emasculated alongside his Golkar Party and the military. Now the Muslim majority is once again flexing its political muscle; sending direct signals to increasingly frightened minorities of other officially recognized religions including Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism.

Against Secularism

In June 2008, before the attack against SETIA students, members of the radical Islamist Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) attacked secularists at the National Monument (Monas) in Central Jakarta leaving at least 70 people injured.

National Alliance for the Freedom of Faith and Religion (AKKBB) activists had entered the Monas area to commemorate the 63rd year of Sukarno’s tolerant Pancasila state ideology when they were confronted and beaten by FPI members, spokesperson of the Jakarta Police told the Jakarta Post.

According to eyewitnesses, some 1,200 police officers at the scene when the clash occurred refused to intervene. To the outrage of the human rights groups and minorities, police later claimed that arresting attackers would have been counter-productive, as it would fuel even wider riots.

For years, FPI had been attacking bars, pork-selling outlets and “deviant and blasphemous” groups and sects under the nose of the police, which in most cases did nothing to protect victims. Even after the Monas attack, despite the pressure from human rights organizations, government Attorney General Hendarman Supandji made clear that the FPI would not be outlawed: “First, we issue them reprimands, then we go to the Supreme Court”, he said. President Yudhoyono condemned the attack but refused to take any decisive action to crack down on FPI violence.

FPI demonstrators scuffle with police in Jakarta in 2007 (Tatan Syuflana)

At the press conference one day after the attack, FPI leader Habib Riziq Shihab showed no fear or remorse. Instead of apologizing to AKKBB, he turned his wrath against the members of the Ahmadiyah sect, declaring: “We will never allow the arrest of a single member of our force before the government dissolves Ahmadiyah. We will fight to our last drop of blood.”
Ahmadiyah and Muslim Minorities

He was referring to an old and well-established Muslim sect with more than 500,000 members—Ahmadiyah—that in recent year had been subjected to repeated attacks, its members threatened, harassed and beaten. Thousands of Ahmadiyah followers in all corners of the country are living under threat after several groups, including the Council of Ulamas, declared the sect blasphemous. Their sin seems to be that they believe Mohammad was not the last prophet (according to them the last prophet was Ahmad), contradicting fundamental Muslim dogma. The government, and particularly President Yudhoyono, refused to protect the sect from the attacks led by the radicals, eventually yielding to the ulemas and banning Ahmadiyahs from preaching in public.

“Ahmadiyah arrived in Indonesia in 1925”, explained Zafrullah Pontoh, one of the sect’s leaders. “We were registered in 1953 and between 1925 and 1980 there were no physical attacks on our members. Of course there were many debates between our and mainstream scholars. But then MUI announced their verdict that Ahmadiyah is not a Muslim sect and the attacks began. We were labeled as deviant. Attacks intensified particularly after 2005. Recently our mosque in Sukabumi was burned down. Several of our mosques and schools were demolished and the local government had sealed six of our other mosques. Then 3 cabinet ministers jointly decided that we couldn’t preach openly, because we refuse to accept Mohammad as the last prophet. Indonesian media got involved and as often happens, they misunderstood or misinterpreted the decision of the ministers, claiming that we were banned, while the decision simply said that we cannot preach in public. Months after the decision we are still waiting for the media to cover the story properly. It seems that only foreign journalists, like those from the BBC and CNN, are telling the story as it is. There are increasing numbers of attacks against those who are not part of the Muslim mainstream. It happened to us, it happened many times to Liberal Islam. Shia Muslims here simply do not say openly that they are Shia, otherwise they would encounter the same fate as our people.”

While Ahmadiyah was effectively banned from preaching in public by the government, FPI despite hundreds of attacks against individuals and property was allowed to exist as a legally unsanctioned movement (although Justice and Human Rights Minister Andi Mattalata recently would not answer whether FPI was a legal entity registered with his office). Critics say that the Indonesian state is determined to protect criminals, especially those belonging to the religious majority, and punish the victims.

“There is nothing we can do to stop this”, declared Ditasari a political leader and former head of PRD, the only progressive opposition party in Indonesia. “Indonesia has been hijacked by Islamists and religion is in full control over society. We can’t reverse the process, anymore. We can only slow it down to some degree. You can’t say that you don’t believe in God, anymore. For years atheists were compared to Marxists and Marxists were a legitimate target.”

A 2008 survey conducted by the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace in Bekasi, Depok and Tangerang shows that 56% of the young people in Greater Jakarta support sharia-based laws. And Sharia-based laws are mushrooming all over the country, especially in West Java. They may be unconstitutional, but President Yudhoyono and his government are unwilling to confront them, as several sizeable and well-organized religious groups support them.

“This Presidency is the worst that could have happened to Indonesia”, commented Ditasari. “Not because Yudhoyono is evil, but because he is too weak to confront religious extremism,
corruption and other major problems that Indonesia is facing. He is not willing to take decisive action to defend the constitution. And decisive actions are needed urgently, as Indonesia is right now at a crossroads.”

**The Anti-Pornography Law**

Faithful to his course of non-confrontation with religious majority, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed in December 2008 the anti-pornography bill, ratifying a law that criminalizes any sex-related materials deemed to violate public morality. Signing of the bill provoked an outcry from civil society groups, human rights activists and regional leaders.

According to The Jakarta Post: “…resistance to the law remains widespread, with some provinces—including Bali, Papua, North Sulawesi and East Nusa Tenggara—rejecting it out of hand… The bill has survived protracted protests from rights activists and pluralist organizations, warning that it could lead to national disintegration. An article that allows members of the public to take action to destroy pornographic material has raised fears that several groups will take the law into their own hands, using it as grounds to justify the use of violence and intimidation.”

Critics warn that the bill is not really about pornography, but about the dress code and lifestyle of several non-Muslim minorities all over the archipelago.

Park ranger I Gede Santika working at Taman Hutan Raya - the largest mangrove protected area in Bali—did not try to hide his outrage over the bill: “I think 100% of Balinese people oppose the bill. If the central government forces us to live in accordance with the bill, maybe we will have to ask for special autonomy. Tourists will not visit Bali anymore as for them Bali means heat and sun and they like to swim here, sunbathe and enjoy running around with as little clothes as possible. Why should we follow Arabic countries - we have our own culture. In Bali, women traditionally wear ‘kebayas’, which will be considered too sexy by some people in Jakarta. But this is our island. In Papua they have their own customs and there is no reason to interfere.”

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*Balinese hand-crafted clothing*
New fashion trend in Jakarta

Boys and girls... boys have the right to choose

The Electronic Information and Transactions Law

This was not the first bill of its kind in 2008. On March 25, the House of Representatives passed a bill banning all pornographic websites, threatening to jail users and providers who will now face up to three years in prison or a substantial fine. Indonesia is a country where one has to read between the lines, as the establishment is never clear about what precisely it is trying to achieve. The new legislation, the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, is not only about censoring pornography. Under the law, anyone found guilty of transmitting false news or racial and religious hate messages on the Internet could face up to six years in prison or a fine of 1 billion rupiah (approximately US$109,000).

While everyone was discussing pornography, legislators quietly passed the bill, which allows the state to control the flow of information and to persecute any writer, filmmaker or journalist. “False news?” What is false news? In the Indonesian context, based on the country’s tradition, “false” will be any news that is disliked by the establishment. And one shouldn’t expect a law
that prohibits “racial and religious hate messages” to protect minorities from racial abuse and religious discrimination. The bill seems to be designed to protect the majority.

The Ascendancy of Orthodox Islam

In recent years, Indonesia experienced several brutal acts of religious intolerance, including two deadly bombings in Bali, bombing of Australian Embassy in Jakarta, bombing of Marriott hotel in Jakarta, decapitation of schoolgirls in Sulawesi, violence against religious and ethnic minorities in Papua and elsewhere, as well as blocking of churchgoers trying to attend their religious services.

The ongoing government-sponsored “transmigration” project (with similarities to the one used by the Soviet Union in the Baltic Republics), critics assert, is designed to make a minority out of the majority in several non-Muslim parts of Indonesia, including Papua where approximately 60% of inhabitants are now of Muslim belief.

The Islamic Defender’s Front (FPI) and other radical Islamic groups have won their “struggle” to assure that there are almost no bars left in Yogyakarta or Jakarta, except in hotels and other enclosed compounds. While FPI members were plundering drinking establishments, police stood by and watched, whether sympathetic or simply unwilling to intervene. There are calls to make all food “halal”. Now even most of the five-star hotels in the city don’t serve pork.

While in the Middle East and North Africa mosques broadcast only short and often artistic calls for prayer, Jakarta mosques blast entire prayers through loudspeakers. This “educational” process lasts five hours a day or more, recalling certain passages from Orwell. Meanwhile, hundreds of girls from SETIA are still living in isolation in Cibubur.

“There is practically no assistance from the government”, explains 22 years old Santa Maria Perangin-angin, one of the victims. “I think they think of us as the lowest human beings. We don’t ask for many things, but why don’t they treat us differently? President Yudhoyono came to this park to open the ASEAN Jamboree but he did not visit us here although they must have told him that we are living in this compound. At that time, I felt very sad and cried; I felt desperate that we were not given any attention. The President has done nothing for us. There is no justice. I can see this only as a test for my faith.”

“Our people get the worst treatment”, explains one Papuan student who declined to be identified for safety reasons. “Many of us are not Muslim and we are black. As a result, we have to suffer both verbal and physical abuse.”

In August 2007, more than 70,000 members of a hard-line Muslim group held a rally in Indonesia calling for a caliphate—or Islamic rule—to govern the world. Some were promoting regional caliphate that would include Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Southern Philippines and Southern Thailand. The supporters of the Hizbut Tahrir group filled most of an 80,000-seat sports stadium in the capital Jakarta, waving flags as they heard fiery speeches saying it was “time for the caliphate to reign.” The organization is banned in several Middle Eastern countries, but not in Indonesia.

Throughout Southeast Asia, and even in China, Sunni orthodoxy is everywhere being strengthened by infusions of Saudi money and large doses of Wahhabist doctrine. As Indonesia’s Muslim majority flexes its muscle, it is becoming extremely difficult to continue calling this fourth most populous nation on earth “a tolerant and moderate state”, an expression long used by a complacent international diplomatic and journalistic community in Jakarta.
As economic crises inevitably hit Indonesian shores with full force, there is a danger that 2009 will witness an upsurge of religious orthodoxy that targets the nation’s vulnerable minorities.

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The Yasukuni shrine is a rich focal point for myth-making, by the shrine’s supporters as well as its critics. In the following essay, Mark Selden examines the reciprocal action of war memory and nationalism at Yasukuni, placing the distinctive features of the shrine as a religious focal point for national identity in the context of broader trends in twentieth- and twenty-first-century nationalisms. As he notes, the “alchemy” by which the horrors of war are transformed into memories of a glorious past represents a central feature, not only of the Yasukuni shrine, but of war memorials the world over. Indeed, his consideration of war memorials and ossuaries constructed in Okinawa – under the auspices of Okinawan villages, the Japanese government and the U.S. military occupation – suggests something of the complex dynamics at work in the enshrinement of memory and the shaping of national identity.
Japan, the United States and Yasukuni Nationalism: War, Historical Memory and the Future of the Asia Pacific

Mark Selden

Japan’s Yasukuni problem is inseparable from the fact that nationalism is the dominant ideology of our era. This is abundantly clear in media representations, memorials, museums and popular consciousness during and after wars and other international conflicts.* This is true not only of Japan but also of South Korea, China and the US, among many others. And it is surely nationalism—stimulated and emboldened throughout Asia following the end of the era of US-Soviet confrontation, the rise of China as a regional and world power, and aggressive US actions associated with the “war on terror”—that constitutes the most powerful obstacle to resolution of the issues that divide nations and inflame passions in the Asia Pacific and beyond. Throughout the twentieth century, nationalism has everywhere been the handmaiden of war: war has provided a powerful stimulus to nationalism; nationalism has repeatedly led nations to war; and war memory is central to framing and fueling nationalist historical legacies. This article considers Yasukuni Shrine and Japanese war memory and representation in relationship to contemporary nationalism and its implications for the future of East Asia.

The contentious issues that continue to swirl around war, memory, and representation are central to shaping nationalist thought, the future of Japan, the Asia-Pacific region, and the US-Japan relationship. Why do issues such as the role of Yasukuni Shrine repeatedly surface six decades after Japan’s defeat even as the generation that experienced the war is passing from the scene? This seems all the more counterintuitive at a time when the economies and even the cultures of China, Japan and Korea are deeply intertwined.

The “Yasukuni problem” is at the epicenter of the complex set of issues surrounding Japanese wars in the Asia Pacific, the emperor, religion, and identity. Yasukuni issues are deeply intertwined with China-Japan, Korea-Japan and the US-Japan relationship. Attention to Yasukuni reveals distinctive characteristics of Japanese nationalism while allowing us to explore a number of themes of comparative nationalism.

It is important to state clearly at the outset the reason for undertaking this analysis: it is to search for ways that might contribute to mutual understanding among the nations and peoples of the Asia Pacific, including Japan, China, Korea and the United States.

I will emphasize three points about the “Yasukuni Problem” and contemporary nationalisms that seem absent in much of the discussion in Japan, Asia and internationally. The first is the need to transcend an exclusively Japanese perspective by locating the issues within the framework of the Japan-US relationship that has dominated Japanese politics for more than six decades. The second locates war nationalism in general and “Yasukuni nationalism” in particular within the broader purview of competing nationalisms in the Asia Pacific, including Chinese, Korean and US nationalisms. The third deconstructs “the Japanese,” to recognize deep fissures among the Japanese people with respect to Yasukuni, nationalism, the emperor in whose name Japan fought, and memories of colonialism and war. Each of these requires breaking with a monolithic understanding of the issues. Each has implications for moving beyond the present political impasse and reflecting on approaches that could contribute toward tension reduction in the Asia Pacific.
Yasukuni Jinja both is and is not a “Japanese” problem. As a Shinto shrine with enduring historical links to the emperor—established in 1869 “to commemorate and honor the achievement of those who dedicated their precious life for their country”—and with a deep association with every Japanese war from the Meiji era through the Asia Pacific War, it evokes Japanese tradition linking Shinto, emperor and war. Yet to see it simply as Japanese is to neglect a range of features characteristic of contemporary nationalisms. This view ignores important regional and global forces, particularly the role of the United States, in shaping politics and ideology from the Japanese occupation to today.
Japanese neonationalists insist on the quintessential Japanese character of Yasukuni, thereby attempting to place it beyond discussion by people in neighboring and other countries, as well as seeking to crush debate within Japan. But they are not alone in their stress on Japaneseness. In calling for a politics of pride, their scorn for the Tokyo Trial and other international assessments of Japanese war crimes, and their insistence that the era of apologies to victims of Japanese war atrocities should end, contemporary Japanese nationalists share something with certain Japanese progressives and pacifists. Whether praising former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro’s high profile visits to Yasukuni and defending the legitimacy of the Yushukan museum exhibits, which glorify the exploits of the Japanese military in the Asia Pacific War and praise Japan for liberating Asia from European colonialism, or criticizing them as an illegitimate attempt to reverse historical verdicts and a slap in the face to Japan’s neighbors, both nationalists and progressives routinely present Yasukuni as a uniquely Japanese phenomenon.

**Yasukuni, Commemoration and the US-Japan Relationship**

Yasukuni is, of course, quintessentially Japanese in its mix of Shinto and emperor lore, its architecture and rituals that apotheosize the military war dead as *kami* (deities), and its nationalist perspective on colonialism and war, emperor, and the souls enshrined there.
As Yomiuri Shimbun’s editor Watanabe Tsuneo commented tartly of the exhibits at the Yushukan museum on the shrine grounds, “That facility praises militarism and children who go through that memorial come out saying, ‘Japan actually won the last war.’” More precisely, the exhibits, centered on the devotion of the military to emperor and nation, elevate Japan’s war making to aesthetic and spiritual heights, embracing the imperial mission and lionizing the kamikaze pilots sent to sacrifice themselves for emperor and nation.

Throughout the war years (1931-45), indeed from the Meiji era forward, Yasukuni Shrine was the centerpiece of what Takahashi Tetsuya has termed the “emotional alchemy” of turning the grief of bereaved families into the patriotic exhilaration of enshrinement of the war dead as deities with the stamp of official recognition of personal sacrifice and honor by the emperor.

It is an alchemy sealed in Japanese government payments to deceased soldiers’ families that for six decades has forged a bond between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and a powerful
constituency, while implicitly legitimating the aims of colonialism and war for which so many Japanese soldiers and civilians died.³

Another kind of alchemy goes hand in hand with the alchemy of exaltation. This is the alchemy of amnesia...forgetting atrocities and war crimes, forgetting the treatment of the military comfort women, of forced laborers, of those whose lands were invaded, homes destroyed and families slaughtered in the name of emperor and empire. While the military dead were enshrined as kami at Yasukuni shrine and their families received state pensions, the hundreds of thousands of civilian dead and many more injured were forgotten: neither shrine nor state commemorated their sacrifice or attended to the needs of their families. If nationalism has everything to do with invented tradition, as Benedict Anderson has compellingly argued, it is equally about suppressed or forgotten traditions.

All nations symbolically elevate the sacrifice of the military war dead—their own dead—a compact to secure the compliance of soldiers and civilians to fight and die for goals proclaimed by the state.⁴ If the symbolism of Yasukuni is distinctive in its particulars, it is but one such manifestation of a global phenomenon of state-sponsored war nationalism pivoting on the military war dead. With the enshrinement of Japan’s 2.46 million military dead, the senbotsusha,
that is, all who died in uniform from Meiji through the Pacific War (2.1 million in the Pacific War), Yasukuni reinforced its position as the central symbol linking emperor, war, the military and empire. John Breen’s sensitive analysis of the shrine’s rites of apotheosis and propitiation well documents the nexus of power and ideology that gives the shrine its special place in contemporary Japan.

Okinawa, Japan, the United States and the War Dead

Okinawa provides another vantage point from which to assess the Yasukuni phenomenon, and not only because the Battle of Okinawa, the only major campaign fought on Japanese soil, was the costliest of the Asia-Pacific War in terms of Japanese, Okinawan and American lives. The Battle has also played a crucial role in framing the postwar US-Japan-Okinawa relationship and the historical memory battles that continue to this day.

The different positions of Okinawans and Japanese became patently clear in the course of the Battle, when Japanese forces compelled many Okinawans seeking shelter from the American attack to commit collective mass suicide (shudan jiketsu) rather than surrender. Japanese-Okinawan differences in perspective would also shape subsequent commemoration and memory practices in the form of controversies over monuments, museums, films, manga, and textbook interpretations.

With an estimated 250,000 deaths the Japanese state, including 150,000 Okinawans (more than one-fourth of the civilian population) and 100,000 Japanese forces, as well as 12,000 US troops, the battle turned central and southern areas of the main island into a wasteland. Even while the fighting raged, US forces sequestered large areas of central Okinawa and began constructing airfields, roads and bases. Indeed, as early as 1947, as Takemae Eiji observes, “more than one third of Okinawa’s arable surface lay under roads and runways or behind barbed wire.” When US authorities resettled residents of these areas to the south, the settlers encountered the bones of the war dead lying scattered on the ground.

Immediately following resettlement, community-organized bone collection campaigns (ikotsu shushu) were waged to make the former battlefield livable and to conciliate the spirits of the dead. Bones were washed and then cremated or placed in newly built ossuaries scattered
throughout Southern Okinawa. The remains of 135,000 people were collected between 1946 and 1955. In the most celebrated case, the 4,300 residents of Mawashi Village who were resettled in Miwa Village, painstakingly collected the remains of 35,000 people and deposited them in an ossuary at Konpaku-no-to, which became, and remains today, the major site for local commemoration of the Battle, and above all for the losses of the Okinawan people civilians as well as soldiers.

Konpaku is not, however, Okinawa’s only major commemorative site. In July 1957, the Relief Section of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands established a central ossuary at Shikina, transferring war remains from small ossuaries and shipping identifiable Japanese remains to the mainland. The inaugural memorial service for Shikina was held on January 25, 1958. The US authorities, with deep misgivings, permitted three representatives from Yasukuni Shrine, two Diet members, and a representative from the Prime Minister’s Office to attend. There were also representatives of the Okinawa Bereaved Families Federation, which, like the national organization, lobbied for closer relations between the Okinawan war dead and Yasukuni Shrine, as well as Japanese government subsidies for, and official visits to, Yasukuni.⁹ In short, US efforts to sever the Ryukyus from Japan were thwarted by means of linkages between Okinawan and mainland Japanese commemorative practices that linked the Okinawan dead to Japan, and specifically to Yasukuni Shrine.
If Konpaku was the creation of Okinawan villagers, Shikina was primarily the product of GRI (that is, the US administration of the Ryukyu Islands) under pressure from Tokyo. Yet we cannot simply conclude that Konpaku embodied Okinawan sentiment while Shikina was the expression of Tokyo and/or the US. Both sites honored the military and the civilian dead, Japanese and Okinawan, although as we will note, with quite different emphases.

In the wake of the establishment of the Shikina commemorative site, the Japanese government moved vigorously to consolidate its territorial claims to Okinawa, still a US military colony, through establishing prefectural memorial sites to the military dead. Six prefectural monuments were built between 1954 and 1963, then thirty-nine more between 1963 and 1971, nearly all in the vicinity of Shikina on Mabuni Hill.

With the prefectural monuments close to those honoring Generals Ushijima Mitsuru and Cho Isamu, commanders of the Japanese 32nd Army who committed suicide at Mabuni Hill, the Japanese military and the state placed its imprint on Okinawan soil and bid to create a unified military-centered war memory for both Japanese and Okinawans. That memory highlighted loyalty to the emperor and reification of the war mission as exemplified by the choice of suicide over surrender.

The Japanese government, displaced from Okinawa by US forces, worked to lay claim not only to the souls of mainland Japanese soldiers who died, but also to those of Okinawan soldiers and even civilians. USCAR documents record the fact that in January 1964 “the Japanese cabinet decided to confer court ranks and decorations posthumously to World War II war dead, including approximately 52,700 Ryukyuan (Okinawans).”

Who were the Ryukyuans chosen to receive court ranks and decorations, and did they in fact receive them? Were Okinawan civilians among those enshrined at Yasukuni…hitherto reserved for the military dead? Figal does not provide definitive answers and further research has yet to resolve the issue. It seems likely, however, that Ryukyuan civilians, notably the 580 members of
the Himeyuri (Maiden Lily) student nurse corps and the 2,000 strong Blood and Iron Corps, comprised of junior high and high school students, called up during the Battle of Okinawa and mythologized by the Japanese government for their loyalty, were among those who were slated for honors.\textsuperscript{11}

In short, even while Okinawa remained a US military colony, albeit with recognition that Japan possessed residual sovereignty, Japanese authorities moved to lay claim to the souls of the Okinawan war dead (military and civilian), while memorializing and apotheosizing fallen Japanese soldiers.

Following Okinawa’s reversion to Japanese administration, on May 15, 1972, the Okinawa Battle Site Governmental Park established by GRI was renamed the Okinawa Battle Site National Park and the entire area around Mabuni Hill became the Peace National Park.

It is widely believed that Japan has no national cemetery, or that Yasukuni Shrine functions in effect as a national war cemetery that preserves no remains of deceased soldiers. But in 1979 the Shikina Central Ossuary that housed the remains of the unknown war dead was replaced by the National Okinawa War Dead Cemetery (NOWC) at Mabuni Hill. With the war remains transferred from both Konpaku-no-to, the local ossuary, and from Shikina, NOWC became Japan’s first and only national cemetery. Fugal shows how the cemetery expanded beyond its Okinawan roots to become a national sacred site that commemorates all of Japan’s Asia Pacific War dead:

Prefectures enshrined the spirits of the war dead from all south seas campaigns and in some cases from continental Asia as well, transforming the form and function of memorial space in Okinawa from its local roots around Komesu to a national shrine centered at the site where the Japanese commanders committed ritual suicide on 23 June 1945.

The cemetery is a mecca for Japanese tour groups, including military groups organized by unit and by prefecture, paying homage not only to the war dead from the Battle of Okinawa, but also to the Asia Pacific War, one celebrating the emperor-military bond.

Following the election of Ota Masahide as Governor in 1990, Okinawa moved to create the Cornerstone of Peace (Ishiji) at Mabuni Hill, inscribing in stone the names and nationality of the 239,000 combatant and noncombatant dead of all nations: Japanese, American, Korean, Taiwanese, British, and Okinawan among others. This cosmopolitan and inclusive approach, with its distinctive Okinawan roots and close attention to the civilian victims of the Battle, stands out among the world’s memorials. The Cornerstone contains this inscription looking beyond the nationalist passions of war: “The Cornerstone of Peace” is a place to remember and honor the 200,000 people who lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa and other battles, to appreciate the peace in which we live today and to pray for everlasting world peace.”
Yet for all its universalism, we note the continued stamp of the nation state in two important ways in the memorial spaces at Mabuni. First, the dead are arrayed in separate areas by nationality, and with Okinawans distinguished from mainland Japanese. Second, Mabuni Hill includes not only the Okinawan representations encapsulated in the Cornerstone of Peace and Konpaku-no-to, but the NOWC and the prefectural military memorials with their intimate ties to the Japanese military and Yasukuni Shrine. The mélange of memorials illustrates the conflicting approaches to commemoration between the Japanese state and Okinawan prefectural authorities. We may say that NOWC is a monument to war while the Cornerstone is a monument to peace. The Cornerstone of Peace is notable for its inclusiveness in commemorating the dead of all nations, its honoring of civilians and military victims of the Battle, and its partially successful attempt to transcend nationalist categories in search of universal peace. It is an achievement that has been realized in no mainland Japanese, American, British or German national commemorative site with which I am familiar. 

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Yasukuni, Nationalism and Historical Memory in Postwar Japan

The postwar period brought subtle yet crucial changes in the construction of Japanese war memories. During the occupation, Yasukuni, like so much else, became a Japan-US construction with implications for the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. The Yasukuni problem is most fruitfully viewed in relation to US decisions that include the permanent positioning of US forces in Japan, the preservation of Emperor Hirohito on the throne at the symbolic center of postwar Japanese politics yet subordinate to American power, and the dismantling of state Shinto while allowing the shrine to continue as an independent religious legal entity. Yasukuni’s formal position was redefined by constitutional provisions separating church and state, yet important ritual bonds linking emperor and shrine remained intact. Because the post-war Constitution does not specify a head of state, the emperor and the imperial representative was able to patronize and visit Yasukuni, the chief priest of the shrine held regular audiences with the emperor, and the emperor’s representative played a central role in shrine rituals without raising legal issues.13

Yasukuni Shrine was intimately associated with, and provided legitimation for, Japan’s Pacific War, enshrining those who sacrificed their lives for Japan. In the 1930s and early 1940s, visits by
the emperor and by families of deceased soldiers enshrined as *kami* provided ideological and spiritual foundations for war and empire.

In the postwar, with Japan at peace and occupied by US forces, the shrine has played a role in structuring how the war is remembered and presented to the Japanese people. It did so within a framework crafted by the occupation authorities who exonerated the emperor of all responsibility for initiating or waging war. Indeed, Hirohito was credited by both the occupation authorities and the Japanese government with bringing peace by personally intervening to end the war. Not only would the emperor not be deposed or tried as a war criminal, he would be shielded even from testifying at the Tokyo Trial. The verdict at Tokyo, sentencing Tojo and a small number of prominent military and government officials to death, as well as the convictions of thousands of soldiers and police officials tried in B and C class tribunals, in leaving untouched Japan’s supreme wartime leader, essentially absolved the Japanese people of the responsibility to examine their own behavior in the era of colonialism and war. For these reasons, the US as well as Japan ultimately shares responsibility for resolving issues of war responsibility that it helped to create, including those associated with the emperor and with Yasukuni Shrine.

During the occupation, while shorn of official ties to the state and given a ‘private’ religious status, Yasukuni Shrine remained the central national-religious symbol for those who would defend the memory of war and would deny calls from Chinese, Koreans and other victims, including GI prisoners of war, for apologies and compensation for Japanese war crimes and atrocities.

Whatever its official status, the link between Yasukuni and the emperor, and between Yasukuni and the Japanese government has remained strong. Hirohito made eight postwar visits to Yasukuni, the last in 1975, firmly nurturing the bond between emperor and shrine on the one hand, and the souls of the military dead enshrined there on the other. Hirohito never paid a personal visit to Yasukuni after the October 17, 1978 enshrinement of 14 Class-A war criminals.
defined by the Tokyo Trial and styled “Showa martyrs” by the Shrine authorities. Nor has his successor, Akihito, who has reigned since 1989, paid a public visit to the shrine. Yasukuni Shrine continues to highlight its imperial bond, as in this passage from its website: “twice every year—in the spring and autumn—major rituals are conducted, on which occasion offerings from His Majesty the Emperor are dedicated to them, and also attended by members of the imperial family.”

The symbolism linking emperor-Yasukuni-war-empire remains in place, a compelling example of what Herbert Bix calls Hirohito’s apparition. That is, regardless of whether the emperor personally visited Yasukuni, there could be no public questioning of the role and responsibility of the emperor in war and empire, or of the nexus of power linking emperor and shrine. But if the emperor ceases to pay homage publicly at Yasukuni, what sustains the shrine’s importance in the public arena?

**Viewing Japan as a Monolith**

International critics of Japanese neonationalism frequently present Japan as a monolithic entity, a nation that is thoroughly unrepentant about, even celebratory of its record in the era of colonialism and war. Throughout the postwar era, however, the Japanese polity has been, and remains, deeply divided over how to remember the era of colonialism and war in general, and the Yasukuni problem in particular. This explains the furor among Japanese provoked by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro’s Yasukuni visits and by state approval of textbooks that reiterate neonationalist themes.

For more than half a century public sentiment in favor of the no-war clause in Japan’s Constitution, has helped prevent the ruling party, with US support, from eliminating Article 9 in order to legitimate overseas military activities. Most important, sustained popular support for Article 9 is widely recognized as one important factor that has enabled Japan, which was more or less continuously at war from 1895 to 1945, to enjoy six decades of peace and prosperity. Popular support has not, however, been sufficient to prevent the ruling coalition from steadily eroding the meaning of Article 9 by extending the regional and even global reach of Japanese military power within the US-Japan framework and to set in motion a process of Constitutional revision. Popular support for Article 9 goes hand in hand with substantial popular sentiment critical of Japan’s conduct of the Asia Pacific War and Yasukuni nationalism, a finding repeatedly confirmed in public opinion polls.

Japanese critiques of the Pacific War have not been limited to pacifists and progressives. Kaya Okinori (1889-1977), who led the War Bereaved Families Association (Nihon Izokukai), for fifteen years beginning in 1962, was finance minister in the wartime Tojo cabinet. The Association is a powerful political bulwark and lobby for Yasukuni Shrine, and, indeed for the Liberal Democratic Party, which in turn continues to support family members of deceased soldiers financially six decades after the war. Kaya served ten years of a life sentence imposed by the Tokyo Tribunal before being released and eventually taking up a post as Justice Minister. In his memoirs, Kaya condemned Japan’s war against the US and criticized his own role in the war. His most important point, no less pertinent today than when he wrote, is this: “as a Japanese, it is extremely regrettable that the people themselves could not judge the responsibility of their leaders.”
Despite US and Japanese policies encouraging remilitarization, significant numbers of Japanese, particularly many of the wartime generation, have long sought to make amends to Japan’s victims, most importantly by rejecting the wartime ideology of emperor-centered nationalism, colonialism and kokutai. For example, many Japanese scholars have displayed dedication, resourcefulness and courage in researching and analyzing Japanese war crimes and atrocities. Their research has made it possible to mount effective critiques of atrocities including the Nanjing Massacre and the comfort women, and to question fundamental premises of Yasukuni nationalism. Indeed, many Japanese citizens, deeply influenced by the lessons of the Pacific War and Japan’s crushing defeat, resisted militarizing trends from a pacifist perspective throughout their lives. In contrast for example to the US anti-Iraq War movement, which fizzled once the war began despite widespread continued popular disapproval of the conduct of the war, Japanese pacifism and activism have been sustained in large and small ways over decades, notably in the anti-nuclear movements. The number of privately founded peace museums, perhaps more than in the rest of the world combined, provides one measure of this. The fifty year effort by Chukiren veterans (China Returnees) who were captured and re-educated in China, and have publicly criticized their own atrocities and those committed by other members of the Japanese military ever since, is another.  

Critics of the revival of Japanese neonationalism have good reason to be concerned about trends of recent years, notably Japan’s dispatch of troops and ships to the Persian Gulf in support of US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, it is important to recognize, however, that in contrast to the US, for sixty years Japan has NOT gone to war, Japanese have not killed or been killed on battlefields in Asia and beyond, proponents of Constitutional revision have not succeeded in eliminating Article 9 of the Constitution, and Yasukuni nationalism appears to be far weaker than it was in wartime.  

Nevertheless, in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the Socialist Party as the major opposition party, and the decline of social democracy in the face of a US-spearheaded neoliberalism, a neonationalist revival has accompanied the redefinition of the US-Japan security
relationship. We have suggested that Japan’s failure to adequately come to terms with its wartime aggression and the nature of its atrocities remains an obstacle to the achievement of a viable Pacific community.

The issues are not, of course, limited to Japanese intransigence, as our discussion of US war conduct has made plain. Progress on this front will also require recognition on the part of both Korea and China of the need to curb their own volatile nationalisms in the interest of a common vision for the future of the region.

Hong Kal has examined the construction of Japanese and Korean nationalisms through Yasukuni Shrine and the Korean War Memorial in Seoul. In both instances, the governments seek to cloak their legitimacy in the conduct of these wars, the Asia-Pacific War for Tokyo and the Korean War for Seoul. And in both, the presence and influence of the United States, first in its wartime role and subsequently in its postwar construction of Japanese and Korean polities, is palpable and invisible. While Yasukuni nationalism reverberates throughout the Asia Pacific, the manifestations of South Korean nationalism projected in the War Memorial center on North-South rivalry.

The Political Logic of Yasukuni Nationalism and the US-Japan Alliance

For three decades, the symbolism binding the state and Yasukuni—and the heart of the Yasukuni controversy internationally—has been intimately linked with official Prime Ministerial visits that began with Nakasone Yasuhiro in 1987 and continued with Koizumi Junichiro’s annual visits in the years 2001-2006. Also important, albeit off stage, is the continuing ritual bond solidified by the central presence of the imperial representative in all important shrine ceremonies.

Since 1970, on a number of occasions historical issues centered on the China-Japan War, atrocities, and the Yasukuni shrine have fueled conflict. The China factor has grown in importance and complexity for Japan in recent decades as China emerged as a major power and competitor in Asia and as economic relations among China, Japan, South Korea and the US rapidly expanded. Indicative of the stakes are the fact that in spring 2008 China replaced the United States as Japan’s leading trade partner while Japan was China’s number three partner, with bilateral trade totals of $237 billion.

Prime Minister Koizumi’s annual Yasukuni pilgrimages were among the three central symbolic and practical international actions of his five-year tenure, together with his visits to North Korea and the dispatch of Japanese ground troops [GSDF] to Iraq, as well as naval forces [MSDF] and air forces [ASDF] to the Persian Gulf. The Yasukuni visits affronted not only China and Korea, but also the people of other Asian nations and the United States. They may also have firmed Koizumi’s political base in Japan even while sparking controversy. Paradoxically, it is precisely because Koizumi moved so determinedly to lash Japan to US regional and global strategic designs that Yasukuni loomed so large for him. While Koizumi’s successors have wisely refrained from visiting Yasukuni so as to avoid provoking China and Korea, they have continued to embrace growing Japanese subordination to US power, sought to expand Japan’s military reach within the US-Japan framework, and supported neonationalist calls for textbooks that elide reference to Japan’s war atrocities. This is evident in former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s passage of a new education law and measures setting in motion the process to amend the constitution.
One result of Prime Minister Koizumi’s annual Yasukuni visits, and, to a lesser extent, the battles over Japanese textbook nationalism, was that relations soured and five years passed without a meeting at the highest levels of the Chinese and Japanese leadership between 2001 and 2006. This was also a period in which other Japan-China conflicts, notably the Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands territorial and oil and gas dispute flared. Japan-South Korea relations were similarly poisoned by the combination of Yasukuni nationalism and territorial disputes centered on the Dokdo/Takeshima Islets, offsetting the potentially salutary influence of the shared hosting of the 2002 World Cup and a cultural boom touched off by the unprecedented success in Japan of the Korean TV drama Winter Sonata.

The clashes in the region have gone hand in hand with challenges from a resurgent Japanese nationalism that has frequently played out around Yasukuni and related historical memory issues. Abe regularly visited the shrine on August 15, the date of Japan’s surrender, prior to assuming office. In June 2006, he firmly rejected Beijing’s call for an end to Yasukuni visits as a precondition for talks, saying “We cannot and will not allow Japan’s freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and our feeling in memory of the war dead to be violated in such a manner.” Abe nevertheless refrained from publicly visiting the Shrine during his tenure as Prime Minister, as has his successor Fukuda Yasuo.

The transition from Koizumi to Abe and Fukuda, and the growing recognition in influential sectors of Japanese business and intellectual life of the importance of China and Korea for Japan’s future, have made it possible to put aside, at least temporarily, the passionate encounters over Yasukuni and to reopen diplomatic negotiations at the highest levels. While Japanese neonationalist book and manga authors as well as filmmakers continue to reenact the Pacific War and defend the benevolence of Japanese colonial rule and vilify China and Korea, as Matthew Penney has shown, in recent years the most important Japanese books published on China have underlined Chinese achievements and paved the way toward China-Japan rapprochement. As the preceding analysis suggests, however, neonationalism remains a latent and dangerous force in Japanese and regional politics.

Prime Minister Fukuda’s determination to extend the MSDF role in refueling US and coalition ships in the Persian Gulf is indicative of an expansive Japanese military within the framework of US power. The Japanese military actions in the Gulf, of course, have strategic implications both for guarding Japan’s oil lifeline from the Middle East, as well as for extending the reach of the US-Japan strategic alliance.

Gavan McCormack has observed that Japan’s deepening structural dependence and subordination requires the theatre of nationalism to make it palatable to the Japanese people. The independence that is denied in substance must be affirmed and celebrated in ritual and rhetoric. Indeed, for Japan to become the Great Britain of East Asia, as in its dispatch of GSDF, MSDF and ASDF to the war zone of the Persian Gulf, Yasukuni and other rituals of bravado, and educational efforts such as those conducted by the Yūshūkan, are conducted to satisfy pride. Nationalist bravado may conceal an overweening reality of dependence. Precisely the Koizumi, Abe and Fukuda administrations’ support for US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for the Bush administration’s global “war on terror” buys tacit US acceptance of Yasukuni nationalism and an expansive Japanese military role while inflaming Japan’s relations with her neighbors.
At a time when many nations bridle at the Bush administration’s scorn for international norms of law and justice, as in its invasion of Iraq and the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, and in its unilateral claims to the right to intervene anywhere and everywhere, Japan’s support for US military ambitions globally increases the importance of Yasukuni as a statement to strengthen the LDP’s nationalist credentials at home. Japan places ever more of its cards on an expansive military alliance with the US, as illustrated by its extraordinary agreement to pay $6 billion (and perhaps much more) to fund the cost of transferring 8,000 US Marines from Okinawa to Guam. As Japan commits to an enlarged regional military subordinate to US regional and global power projections throughout the Asia Pacific, all the more it requires more dramatic claims to nationalist credentials domestically.

The evolving character of the US-Japan alliance is well illustrated by the establishment of a forward base or regional headquarters for I Corps, the US Army’s Asia Pacific and Middle East headquarters at Camp Zama in Kanagawa, Japan. In this way, the integration of US and Japanese military planning for the entire Asia Pacific is being facilitated in flagrant violation of Article 9. The US military’s five-day “Valiant Shield” exercise off Guam in June 2006 brought together US and allied Navy, Air Force, Marine and Coast guard forces involving an armada of three aircraft carriers and 25 other ships, including the Yokosuka-based Kitty Hawk group and other Japan-based ships. The 22,000 troops and 280 warplanes, including the III Marine Expeditionary Force and 5th Air Force based in Okinawa, joined in the largest military exercise in the Pacific since the Vietnam War, sending powerful warning signals toward both North Korea and China. Most important, from the perspective of understanding the Yasukuni phenomenon, is that Japan’s military subordination to US power enables it to expand its military reach and ignore or flout the strong feelings of Asian neighbors, even those that are important economic partners.

Since the 1980s, China-Japan and Korea-Japan economic relationships have grown exponentially at the same time that their political relations have remained volatile. Notable are Japanese territorial conflicts with South Korea over Dokdo/Takeshima and with China over the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands and Okinotorishima Island. Tensions with both China and Korea are further inflamed by the intertwined issues of natural gas and fishing rights, as well as by war memory issues of which Yasukuni Shrine and the comfort women have been the most contentious. In June, 2008, following the visit to Japan of China’s President Hu Jintao, a China-Japan agreement was signed to jointly develop natural gas deposits in disputed areas in the vicinity of the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands. In the long run, however, resolution of historical controversies is important to long-term stability and regional coordination.

Nationalism and War in the 21st Century

Many nations including Britain, France and Germany, maintain a sacred site that is the apotheosis of war nationalism. The American Shrine to war nationalism is Arlington National Cemetery, the repository of official celebration of American wars. Boasting no less than 260,000 individual grave markers, the site is administered by the US Army. By contrast, Yasukuni Shrine is not a cemetery. But the names of each of the dead soldiers-turned-deities (kami) are recorded by name in the Reijibo Hoanden (Repository for the Register of Deities).
The *kami* include not only Japanese soldiers, but also 50,000 Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean soldiers of the Japanese imperial armed forces, as well as tens of thousands of Okinawan civilians called to service in the final conflict on Okinawa. These are preserved as the shrine’s cultural capital and its claim to centrality in the nation’s historical and religious imagination. Indeed, whereas American war nationalism requires tracking down and recovery of the remains of the dead from US combat zones, a process that continues in Korea and Vietnam decades after the end of the war, as Utsumi Aiko points out, more than one million Japanese bodies remain unrecovered and the Japanese state has done little to recover them from the battlefields of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Whereas the US has gone to extraordinary lengths and at great cost to bring back the remains of its war dead from far-flung battlefields, Japanese authorities have emphasized the enshrinement of the spirit at Yasukuni and the creation of war memorials at Mabuni Hill in Okinawa.

The two sites of Arlington and Yasukuni, as well as the Okinawa Battlesite National Park, share celebratory war narratives emphasizing each nation’s just and heroic combat in all of its wars, and prioritizing of World War II/the Asia-Pacific War as the signature war in national memory. As Benedict Anderson puts it following a review of a number of sacred war memorial sites, “Each in a different but related way shows why, no matter what crimes a nation’s government commits and its passing citizenry endorses, My Country is ultimately good.” Arlington, Yasukuni, and the Okinawa Battlesite Park are the sacred sites that link war and the state in nations with distinctive religious and commemorative traditions but with shared needs to recognize the sacrifice that the dead have made for the nation. One can search in vain at Arlington and at Yasukuni, for example, for any self-critical reflection on wars commemorated, above all any understanding of the plight of the victims of those wars. One finds no explanation, or even hint, of American or Japanese economic or geostrategic interests in the locales where wars were fought and whose victims the nation enshrines. Still less is there recognition of, or reflection on, atrocities or war crimes committed by Japanese or American forces in pursuit of national goals. We have reviewed Japanese crimes of war above. Notable American war crimes and atrocities include the firebombing of more than sixty Japanese cities, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the use of Agent Orange and napalm to bomb Vietnamese civilians, and the systematic torture of captives in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. All were
actions approved at the highest levels of government and formed integral parts of American war making. In construction a new world order following its victory in World War II, the US pioneered principles of universality of international law in the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals. But it also wielded its hegemonic power to restrict prosecution to the defeated and to deflect criticism of American war making and atrocities. In this way, it insists on US impunity to international law and international norms, including those that it helped establish and enforce. In this way, it insists on US impunity to international law and international norms, including those that it helped establish and enforce.38

War memorials and war rhetoric celebrate the war-making prowess of the state and link the military, the nation and people in a perfect union against a common profoundly evil foe: for the US, the demonization of Al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein and the Axis of Evil are but the latest in a chain of American representational acts whose long pedigree runs from the Indian wars through the Philippines-American war of 1900 to Japan in the Pacific War years 1941-45, on to the present. The problem of nationalism becomes acute when the failure to come to terms with the dark side of aggressive and expansionist wars either paves the way for new military adventures, as in the US since World War II, or when symbolic state acts antagonize the victims of former wars, impede reconciliation, or create conditions that could prove conducive to a new cycle of conflicts, as in contemporary Japan.

We have shown a number of ways in which American and Japanese war nationalisms are intertwined as a result of US occupation policies that preserved Hirohito as emperor and permitted continuity of the Japanese government under a US-led occupation authority, paving the way for the subsequent forging of the US-Japan military alliance. Yet international criticisms of neonationalism have centered almost exclusively on Japan, the more vulnerable of the two nations, despite the fact that the US replaced Japan as the nation involved in a nearly unbroken succession of wars beyond its borders in the wake of World War II. It is surely time to recognize and analyze the character of US neonationalism rooted in structures of permanent warfare, a global network of military bases protecting both territorial and economic interests, and a claim that American wars serve to liberate oppressed people according to the formula of democracy and development.39 In this respect, American claims resonate with long-discredited claims during the Asia-Pacific War that Japan was liberating Asia from European colonialism. Indeed they are simply the latest incarnation of the moral and developmentalist claims of colonialisms across the ages and across the globe. Today, these ideological claims rest on the institutional foundations of a global network of more than 1,000 US overseas military bases, a financial base in a military budget that is comparable to that of the rest of the world’s military budgets combined, and a strategic conception that defines a permanent “war on terror” as the US global mission.40

In noting the close relationship between nationalism and war, I do not wish to equate all nationalisms. In particular, I distinguish anticolonial nationalisms, that is nationalisms of resistance to invasion and colonization, such as those that took shape in China, Vietnam, and Korea in the first half of the twentieth century, from aggressive and expansionist forms of nationalism associated with colonial and post-colonial regimes and including both Japan and the United States. Nevertheless, even the nationalisms of victims that gave rise to national liberation and independence movements risk degenerating into malignant chauvinisms that can pave the way for subsequent rounds of war and block the way to regional accord. Examples include Chinese and Vietnamese nationalisms fueling the China-Vietnam border war of 1979, and contemporary Chinese and Korean nationalisms in the form of historical memory debates over
the ancient Koguryo/Gaogouli kingdom on the China/Korean border that have inflamed tensions between the two nations.

**From Yasukuni Politics to Tension Reduction and Regional Integration in the Asia Pacific**

I conclude by looking beyond Yasukuni politics, the politics of emperor-centered Shinto nationalism and historical memories that generate confrontation politics, to reflect briefly on more hopeful regional alternatives that could promote more equitable forms of economic integration and cultural interplay.

The Asia-Pacific region is presently in the early stages of what could emerge as the third great epoch of region formation of the last half millennium. This follows on the China-centric tributary-trade order which reached its peak in the eighteenth century, an epoch of prolonged peace and prosperity in core areas of the region (but also an era in which the reach of Chinese power extended far into Inner Asia), and a Japan-centric Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere of the 1930s and 1940s, a brief and violent era of permanent war, instability and massive bloodshed. The postwar US-dominated order in Asia, like the nineteenth century European-centered colonial order, was predicated on regional fragmentation/division and the privileging of bilateral security, political and economic relationships within the US zone rather than on regional integration. It was likewise characterized by fierce military conflict, indicative of the failure of the US, like Japan earlier, to turn military supremacy into a stable hegemonic order.41

The US-China opening of 1970 and the resurgence of Asian economies in the final decades of the twentieth century paved the way for the re-knitting of regional bonds, the emergence of East Asia as one of the world’s three dynamic centers, and China’s reemergence as a regional and global power. This has not given rise to a regionalism of the European Union type characterized by political, security, juridical and diplomatic integration as manifest in the European parliament, a common currency, a NATO security regime, and a common judicial structure.42 East Asian regionalism, like its postwar European variant, began to take shape within the framework of American geopolitical dominance. However, in the course of the last quarter century, regional economic integration, pivoting on China, Japan and Korea, and measured by trade, investment, and technology transfers, has proceeded rapidly, while signs abound of US decline. The US retains regional and global strategic primacy and a major economic position. But its soaring balance of payments and budget deficits, the sub-prime bubble, and the collapse of the value of the dollar against Asian and other currencies, and a costly permanent and unwinnable war on terror all point to its relative, decline.

In recent years, regional integration in East Asia has been reinforced by new levels of cultural interaction (albeit not without xenophobic reaction) involving film, TV, anime, music, sports, and manga, with cultural exchanges among China-Japan-South Korea interchanges among the most dynamic and intense. At the same time, wider efforts at regional integration have centered on ASEAN. ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan and Korea) and other variations have emerged, with China playing a vigorous regional role and Japan a far more reticent one. This pattern has been replicated in the Six-Party talks centered on the North Korea bomb and the US-North Korea relationship in which China has played a leading role while Japan remains at best a reluctant partner. Other regional formations have simultaneously appeared, notably including the Shanghai Group linking Russia, China and Central Asian nations, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). China has led in each of these regional endeavors, while a much more prosperous and technologically advanced Japan has been content to reaffirm its
subordinate ties to the US and has been slow to respond to emerging regional formations in which a resurgent China could play a major or even leading role.

Major obstacles continue to confront the realization of the cooperative possibilities inherent in the economic and cultural realms of regional cooperation in East Asia. None seem more important than the potential clash with the political and strategic dimensions of Japanese nationalism and/or the US-Japan order, both of which appear to center on curbing an ascendant China.

A dilemma confronting East Asia in the new millennium is how to mediate nationalisms that inflame historical antagonisms. To the extent that the critique of the chauvinism of others serves to privilege one’s own nationalism, the result can only be a deepening spiral of conflict. It is essential that critiques of nationalism begin, therefore, with close examination of one’s own nation: the roots and consequences of its nationalism, its record as a colonial power, an invader, and an oppressor of other peoples including ethnic minorities. This applies to Japan, the US and China, among others. This can provide a foundation for exploring the possibilities of alternative cooperative perspectives. The postwar predominance of US power has long granted Japan impunity from confronting its own atrocities and its aggressive and interventionist posture. Assessment of the Yasukuni problem, in particular one by an American, must locate the issues within the parameters of the US-Japan relationship. This requires reflection on both Japanese and American war crimes and atrocities that have yet to be recognized and effectively addressed by the Japanese or American governments in the form of apologies and compensation of victims, and ultimately in each nation’s textbooks, museums and historical monuments.

History matters. The starting point for reconciliation in the wake of wars, as the German experience amply demonstrates, lies with overcoming historical amnesia to recognize one’s own war crimes and atrocities and redress victim grievances. In the absence of steps by all parties toward overcoming the poisonous legacy of earlier wars, the Asia-Pacific region could be destined to continue to fight anew many of the still unresolved battles of a war that ended more than six decades ago but continues to reverberate powerfully in historical memory.

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Notes

* Thanks to John Breen and Gerald Figal for advice and information, and especially to Laura Hein for relentless critique of an earlier draft of this article.

1 The quotation is from the [Yasukuni Shrine website](http://www.yasukuni.or.jp/).

2 See the editorials by the Yomiuri and the Asahi about the Yasukuni Shrine on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War, which framed an important debate on the shrine. While the “conservative” Yomiuri and the “liberal” Asahi have frequently taken different positions on such war and peace issues as the dispatch of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces in support of the US war in Iraq, they shared a critical perspective on the question of Prime Minister visits to the shrine. The sources cited below illustrate the depth of the Yasukuni debate within Japanese society. [Yasukuni Shrine, Nationalism and Japan’s International Relations](http://www.japanfocus.org/XML/yasukuni-yomiuri-and-asahi-1995-60th-anniversary-editorial). See the joint editorial by the Yomiuri and Asahi calling for a national memorial to replace Yasukuni Shrine: “[Yomiuri and Asahi Editors Call for a National Memorial to Replace Yasukuni](http://www.asahi.com/articles/BW59901351.html)" by
Wakamiya Yoshibumi and Watanabe Tsuneo. The Yomiuri also published a twenty-two part series on “War Responsibility” that remains available at their website.

It was subsequently published as a book under the title Who Was Responsible? From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor, available in Japanese, English and Chinese editions. For an astute assessment of the Yomiuri project see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Who is Responsible? The Yomiuri Project and the Enduring Legacy of the Asia-Pacific War.”

3 Korean soldiers who were conscripted into the Japanese army were and remain enshrined in Yasukuni, as are indigenous people of Taiwan. However, with the loss of Japanese citizenship in 1952, surviving Korean and Taiwanese veterans were deprived of pensions. On US treatment and classification of Koreans in occupied Japan see Mark Caprio, “Resident aliens: forging the political status of Koreans in occupied Japan,” in Mark E. Caprio and Yoneyuki Sugita, eds., Democracy in Occupied Japan. The U.S. occupation and Japanese politics and society (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 178-199; see also Yoshiko Nozaki, Hiromitsu Inokuchi and Kim Tae-young, Legal Categories, Demographic Change and Japan’s Korean Residents in the Long Twentieth Century.

4 The same is true of groups that challenge state power through armed struggle in the name of democracy, national independence, revolution, eternal salvation, or other goals, often en route to the creation of new nations. The state then possesses and invokes goals and the memory of the martyrred, as its own. The People’s Republic of China is a particularly interesting case. The state has long highlighted Chinese Communist-led resistance to Japan, both that of the army and of local guerrillas, as the central national myth, enshrined in museums and monuments. Yet there is no Chinese national cemetery which honors the war dead. See Kirk Denton’s analysis of the shift in Chinese museum representation of the Anti-Japanese resistance from the narrative of heroic resistance to one highlighting atrocities and victimization in the post-Mao years. Heroic Resistance and Victims of Atrocity: Negotiating the Memory of Japanese Imperialism in Chinese Museums.


10 Figal cites USCAR, “JGLO no. II. Letter from Hisajiro Fujita, Chief Officer JGLO to Colonel William Wensboro, Acting Civil Administrator, USCAR,” 7 February 1964. OPA reference code U81100983B. See also USCAR, “Court Ranks and Decorations Will Be Posthumously Conferred on WWII War Dead,” 18 February 1964 and USCAR “Program for Conferment of Rank and Decorations to Ryukyu War Dead,” 24 February 1965.

11 Takemae, *Inside GHQ*, pp. 31-37; the photograph of two members of the Blood and Iron Corps, p. 34, shows boys in uniforms and boots who look barely twelve years old.

12 John Breen observes (personal correspondence August 3, 2008) that the cenotaph, by its empty nature (emblematic of those whose remains are not there), suggests the possibility that the November 11 ceremony, celebrated since 1946 offers prayers for all the war dead of the two World Wars, and not just the British. The ceremony, however, featuring the Queen and other members of the royal family, together with representatives of the British government and military, suggests to me a strong national orientation.


15 Kinue Tokudome, “*The Bataan Death March and the 66-Year Struggle for Justice.*”

16 Herbert Bix, in a personal note of August 21, 2008, points out that in his 1975 visit, at a moment of fierce debate over state support for Yasukuni, Hirohito was greeted by protest banners. Following the collective enshrinement of war criminals, Hirohito feared being drawn into both domestic and international conflicts involving China and Korea, and perhaps the United States.

17 [http://www.yasukuni.or.jp/english/about/index.html](http://www.yasukuni.or.jp/english/about/index.html)

18 Wakamiya Yoshibumi, “*War-bereaved Families’ Dilemma: thoughts on Japan’s war,*” Asahi Shimbun, July 8, 2005.


20 Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany and the United States* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).


*Foundations of Cooperation: Imagining the Future of Sino-Japanese Relations*, Japan Focus


That transfer is contingent, however, on the expansion of the US Air Station at Henoko, which has been stalled by Okinawan resistance for a decade. See Koji Taira, *Okinawan Environmentalists Put Robert Gates and DOD on Trial. The Dugong and the Fate of the Henoko Air Station*.


See the official *US Pacific Command website for Valiant Shield*.

Eric Watkins, *China, Japan agree on East China Sea E&P projects*, *Oil and Gas Journal*, June 20, 2008; Andre Fesyun, “*China, Japan agree on East China Sea gas deposits.*”

John Breen emphasizes important differences between Yasukuni Shrine and Britain’s Cenotaph, France’s Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and Arlington Cemetery: “Yasukuni alone is a religious institution, a sacred site with its own priesthood who perform rites for the dead, propitiating them as kami… The Western sites are relatively ‘unencumbered’ as sites of tribute, mourning and memory… Yasukuni venerates the dead as kami and in the ritual process of so doing it tends to the glorification of self-sacrifice and the idealization of Japan’s imperial past.” “*The dead and the living,*” pp. 90-91. There are indeed distinctive differences in the ritual practice of Yasukuni, in the spiritual weight of the bonds linking shrine, emperor, the military and the nation. In the discussion that follows, I nevertheless emphasize common features in sites that link war, the sacrifice of dead soldiers, the state, and the national purpose, as well as the role of the priesthood in paying tribute to the fallen heroes of each nation. In 1959 the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery was established to commemorate the unknown war dead. Despite various
proposals, attempts to shift some or all official memorialization of the military dead—including in some instances the military dead of all countries—from Yasukuni to Chidorigafuchi have failed.

33 Andrew M. McGreevy, *Arlington National Cemetery and Yasukuni Jinja: History, Memory, and the Sacred*, Japan Focus. The shrine authorities have brushed aside demands by Korean, Taiwanese and Okinawan families to disenhrine their family members, insisting that Yasukuni alone decides who is to be enshrined. Taiwanese and Koreans were drafted in the final years of the war; Okinawan youth were mobilized for “volunteer corps” as nurses or fighters to support Japanese forces during the battle.


35 Japanese progressive scholars, who have written extensively and insightfully about the Yasukuni problem, rarely write comparatively about Japan’s war nationalism, atrocities, or other aspects of US and Japanese wars. An important exception is Tanaka Toshiyuki, *Sora no sensoshi* (History of Air War) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2008); see also his *Hidden Horrors. Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (Boulder: Westview, 1996).


37 We have noted one important difference in Okinawa’s Cornerstone of Peace from other memorials: its commemoration of victims of all nations. There is another important difference. Exhibits in the Okinawan Prefectural Museum at Mabumi contain extensive information which reveals Japanese treatment of Okinawan civilians such as the military’s imposition of compulsory mass suicide (*shudan jiketsu*). The contrast to both the Yushukan and the Smithsonian Museum’s Enola Gay exhibit on the fiftieth Anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki could not be starker. See Gerald Figal, “Waging Peace on Okinawa,” in Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Islands of Discontent. Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pp. 65-98; Laura Hein and Mark Selden, “Commemoration and Silence: Fifty Years of Remembering the Bomb in America and Japan,” in Hein and Selden, eds., *Living With the bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp.3-36.
The US does prosecute a small fraction of its own war crimes, in each case singling out a soldier or soldiers who committed specific atrocities without examining the pattern of warfare of which it was a part, or pursuing the issue up the chain of command as required by the Nuremberg principles.

Mark Selden, *Japanese and American War Atrocities, Historical Memory and Reconciliation: World War II to Today*.


“The Dead Must Not be Abused: Yasukuni Shrine, the Prime Minister and the Constitution”
Tanaka Nobumasa
February 20, 2004
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Nobumasa-Tanaka/1873

In 1978, Yasukuni enshrined the spirits of 14 Class A war criminals as “martyrs,” after which Emperor Hirohito (and, from his accession to the throne in 1989, Emperor Akihito) ceased making visits to the shrine. Nevertheless, visits by prominent elected representatives (most notoriously, the annual visits by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro on the anniversary of Japan’s surrender) have continued, stirring international protest and internal legal challenges. As the following article suggests, at stake in these challenges is not only the constitutionality of such visits, but also the meaning of enshrinement itself. If, as legal arguments contend (and the Osaka High Court affirmed), shrine visits by Koizumi took place in his official capacity as Prime Minister, this represents a violation of the separation of religion and state power affirmed in the post-war Constitution. At the same time, these official visits imply to many at least tacit governmental support for the policies of the shrine, which not only works to glorify Japan’s imperialist past, but also enshrines a number of names (including those of former Taiwanese and Korean colonial subjects) over the strong objection of surviving relatives.
The Dead Must Not Be Abused: Yasukuni Shrine, the Prime Minister and the Constitution

Tanaka Nobumasa

Translated by Vanessa B. Ward

Approximately 6,000 people in Japan and overseas have filed lawsuits in six district courts, charging that Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro’s repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine in his capacity as Prime Minister violates principles of freedom of religion and the separation of politics and religion enshrined in Japan’s Constitution. Plaintiffs include Korean residents of Japan, whose fathers died in the Asia-Pacific War and who the Japanese state has enshrined as gods at Yasukuni Shrine, in violation of their families’ wishes. On 27 February, the Osaka District Court ruled that the Prime Minister’s visit was made not as a private citizen but in his official capacity. A ruling by the Fukuoka District Court on April 16 declared the visits unconstitutional for violating the separation of religion and state. Both courts rejected payment of damages to the plaintiffs. The Prime Minister responded that he would continue his visits to the shrine in violation of the court judgments and despite (or perhaps because of) protests by the Chinese, Korean and other Asian governments. This article analyses the Yasukuni visits in relation to the Koizumi administration’s decision to send Japanese troops to Iraq. It also inquires into the cultural and political meaning of enshrining Korean and Taiwanese soldiers in Japan’s imperial army as gods at Yasukuni.

The First Judgment in the Lawsuit Against Prime Minister Koizumi’s Visit to Yasukuni

Approximately 6,000 people in Japan and overseas have filed lawsuits in six district courts charging that Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine is in breach of the principles of freedom of religion and the separation of politics and religion. The Osaka District Court hands down its judgment on 27 February, the first in this series of ‘Yasukuni Visit is Unconstitutional Lawsuits.’ In the wake of the dispatch of the Self-Defense Force to Iraq, will the judiciary have the good sense to stem the slide towards the ‘war state,’ or will they simply go with the flow?

Focusing on the lawsuit in Osaka, known as the “Asia lawsuit” because of the identity of the plaintiffs, and the “Shikoku lawsuit” which makes almost the same claim, I consider what is being called into question by these charges of unconstitutionality in the context of the times.

The “Asia Lawsuit”

The “Asia lawsuit” was brought in the Osaka District Court on 1 November 2001 (the Shikoku, Kyushu and Yamaguchi actions commenced on the same day). Naming the Japanese state, Mr Koizumi, Prime Minister Koizumi, and the religious corporation Yasukuni Shrine as defendants, it demanded: first, recognition of the unconstitutionality of Koizumi’s visits to the shrine; second, compensation for damages; and third an injunction against future visits. One feature of these actions, the first since the legality of prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine was called into question following the “official visit” in 1985 of then-Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, is the regional spread of the plaintiffs. Among the 639 plaintiffs in the “Asia lawsuit,” one hundred or so are South Koreans, or South Korean-residents-in-Japan, and Chinese who have joined with Japanese citizens. In addition, in the second action brought on 7 February 2003, more than half of the 236 plaintiffs (124) are Taiwanese. The “Asia lawsuit,” which crosses national borders, is
the first case relating to the separation of politics and religion since the 1965 Tsu “Earth Appeasing Ceremony” lawsuit.

The regional spread of the plaintiffs is the most significant feature of this lawsuit: people from across Asia, including Korean and Taiwanese victims of Japan’s colonial rule and war of invasion, have joined with those from the aggressor nation, Japanese citizens (including bereaved families), to become plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the postwar Japanese government. This reflects the popular wish no longer to be aggressors or victims, and no longer to allow Japan to become a country that wages war.

**The Human Rights of Korean Victims Violated by Prime Ministerial Visit**

Let’s hear the testimony (mainly court testimony from 6 October 2003) of Korean Lee Hija (b. 1942), who, as a plaintiff in the “Asian lawsuit,” has boldly continued to call Japan to account.

With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Ms Lee’s birthplace, Ganghwa Island, became the site of fierce battle, and soldiers, bombs and gunshots blasted their way into the young girl’s life. Seeing soldiers with guns, the girl, not yet ten years old, remembered her father (Lee Sahyun), who had not returned home since being forcibly drafted into the Japanese army as a civilian employee when she was a one-year old.

‘When the Korean War came, I began to think that my father must have died on the battlefield, but even now I don’t want to accept his death.’

In 1992, almost a half a century after the event, Ms Lee, the current president of the Conference to Promote Compensation of Asia Pacific War Victims, learnt that her father died in June of the year after he was drafted. Until 1992, there had been no contact at all from the Japanese government. Five years later, in 1997, Ms Lee learnt that her father had been enshrined at Yasukuni.

‘Everything went dark and my blood boiled. It was a feeling that only those people who had the same experience would understand.’

Not only had Ms Lee’s father been taken from her, he had also, without a word of consent from his family and without Ms Lee even being informed of his death, been enshrined at Yasukuni where all those who died on the battlefield ‘for the Emperor and Japan’ were glorified as ‘the spirits of the war dead.’ He was thus implicated in Japan’s war of invasion. The humiliation was no doubt intense. Ms Lee is pursuing a separate action to have the enshrinement nullified. About 49 000 Taiwanese and Koreans (from both North and South) who were mobilised and died in Japan’s war of aggression are enshrined at Yasukuni.

Prime Minister Koizumi has repeatedly visited Yasukuni Shrine to express ‘respect and appreciation.’ Ms Lee’s feelings of love and respect for her father (her moral rights) are being repeatedly thrown into turmoil. Furthermore, Ms Lee, who does not believe in any specific religion, says that her moral right not to believe has been violated by Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine. How to mourn and remember a deceased relative, including through religious acts, is a decision for the bereaved family (a right of personal choice), and no one else, let alone the state authority of another country, has the right to impose their meaning of ‘respect’ or ‘appreciation.’ The wish of the Korean plaintiffs who have had their relatives taken from them is that ‘the dead be returned.’
At the seventh plea session of the “Asia lawsuit” on 6 October, witnesses for the plaintiffs, including Ryukoku University professor Hirano Takeshi (Constitutional Law) testified that the right of privacy in relation to religion, stemming from article 13 (respect for the individual) and paragraphs 1 and 3 of article 20 (freedom of religion and prohibition of religious activity by the State) of the Constitution, ‘is expanding and becoming enriched.’ According to Hirano’s testimony, Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine violated Ms Lee’s privacy rights in relation to religion. Furthermore, in her testimony, Ms Lee said that, in Korea if you are enshrined at Yasukuni and ‘if you support enshrinement at Yasukuni, you are taken to be a collaborator who supported the war of invasion.’ Therefore, even Ms Lee’s moral rights (national moral rights) were being violated by the visit.

‘War is Bad’: A Shared Will

Even though it is called the “Asia lawsuit,” in the legal action that was brought by the Japanese aggressors (including bereaved families) together with the Taiwanese, Korean and Chinese victims, an effort was nevertheless required to reach out across ‘borders.’ In her testimony Ms Lee used the word ‘exchange.’

‘Conscientious Japanese people are trying to overcome the pain of the past through exchange with citizens’ groups, but Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit is obstructing such exchange. [...] I want him to reflect upon the effect of his visit and pledge not to visit the Shrine again. If he did, this exchange would become more lively.’

Religious scholar and professor at Nishiyama Junior College, Hishiki Masaharu, appraises the “Asia lawsuit” highly. ‘Actually, that aggressors and victims should join forces against the Japanese state raises serious issues. For example, it is possible that the father of one of the Japanese plaintiffs might have killed Ms Lee’s father. However, what transcends this is people’s shared antiwar sentiment.’

The title of the newsletter produced by the “Asia lawsuit” plaintiffs, We will not kill, we will not be killed, we will not allow killing, is an expression of the people’s hope for peace that transcends borders.

Suh Chwijin (b. 1947) says, ‘My starting point is that war is always bad.’ Ms Suh followed closely the unconstitutionality action brought by 6 Japanese bereaved families against Prime Minister Nakasone’s official visit (1986). ‘Until part way through the lawsuit, somewhere inside of me was the thought “Aren’t the Japanese, even you, the aggressors.”’ But when she heard the testimony of one of the bereaved family plaintiffs about ‘Our relatives who died in the war died for no purpose,’ something changed inside of Ms Suh.

‘I thought that nothing would change until Japanese bereaved families said that these deaths were in vain, so when I heard that testimony I was really impressed.’

But as the examination continued, Ms Suh was overwhelmed by the power of the testimony of the Taiwanese and Koreans and became dissatisfied with the tiny voices of the Japanese plaintiffs -- the people who bore the greatest responsibility for stopping the war. This comes from an impatience at Japan’s rush to assist in the current Iraq war and at not being able to stop it. Ms Suh also directs this irritation at herself.
‘I call myself zainichi, but it’s more than half a century since I, a Korean, was born in Kobe. If we continue silently to accept prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni then I also end up becoming an aggressor.’

Ms Lee and Ms Suh share the same hope: that the significance of Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine be recognised not as a statement of peace but as an affirmation of war.

**As Orphans of ‘Siberian Internees’**

Nevertheless, Japanese plaintiffs have earnestly tried to relate the transgression of Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to their own experience and history. One of them is the plaintiff in the “Shikoku lawsuit,” Yoshida Takako (b. 1935).

In 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian government began to release the names of the 60,000 or so Siberian internees who had died. At that time, Takako continued to scour the list of names reported in the newspaper and finally discovered her misspelt father’s name, Ine Osamu,* ‘Ine Hagatake.’ Takako stared at these two words in the newspaper. ‘It’s Father!’ The surname ‘Ine’ was rather rare and Takako was convinced that it must be him. But there was no information about where he died.

Takako remembered that the official report of her father’s death delivered in 1947 had stated ‘Died of illness in the area of Siberia.’ At the time, Takako, a 6th grader in primary school, went with her mother to the repatriation support office in Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture, to collect his remains. But inside ‘the plain wooden box’ that they were given were not his remains, ‘only a piece of board’ on which was written ‘the spirit of Ine Osamu.’ Since then, Takako continued to think that her ‘Father was alive.’ After being made to wait half a century, Takako’s whole body convulsed with anger at the two word report of a dead internee, ‘Ine Hagatake,’ made, as if throwing away a scrap of paper, by the state which thrice drafted her father.

Takako wrote letters of protest every day to the Russian government, to the then-Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She wrote: ‘Do you think that you can settle an individual’s life in such a slapdash manner? The state has a responsibility to find a witness to my father’s death.’

When Takako, born in Osaka, was in the third grade at primary school, she was evacuated to Takamatsu, and in the meantime her family moved to ‘Manchuria.’ The combined effects of losing two older brothers and her grandfather in the war, the destruction by aerial bombardment of the house where she was evacuated, and the remarriage of her mother after the end of the war, shattered her “family within.” Takako continued to search for her father from whom she was separated as a nine-year-old, and every year between 1992 and 1996 went alone to Siberia in search of his grave and to bring him home. At night she worked in a noodle shop near Osaka Hokko, and during the day attended Russian language classes. But she still did not find her father’s grave. Even though she was an orphan, her mother’s remarriage meant that she was ineligible for support under the Law for the Relief of the Families of War Victims and Survivors and could not receive any state support for her trips to Siberia in search of the grave. Although categorised as a member of a bereaved family by state policy, the absurd situation of not being treated as such continued.

When she learned of Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine, Takako felt ‘used.’ ‘The issue of my father is a personal matter so when a complete outsider visits, I feel as if they
are somehow using the issue. Even though I’m a member of a bereaved family I’ve not once been treated as such. For a while, I’ve thought that if someone at Yasukuni Shrine -- what category of people do they enshrine? -- was treating my father as a god, surely that would be overstepping their authority.’ Takako truly does not want her dear father to be used by the state. This is not just an issue for bereaved families. In the past, the state praised the dead while it mobilised the living for war.

On 3 October 2002, Takako stated to the Matsuyama District Court:

> Just as the war that Japan started is still a fresh wound for the war victims of various Asian nations, so for me it is not an old wound still to heal. When a new signal linked to war is sent, the memory of that time when we lined up and saw off the young men returns, and the pain is unbearable. The children, who we only assume to be victims, also bear some responsibility for the war of invasion. Children must never again be made the aggressors or victims of war.

The range of Takako’s experience as a victim of war, along with that of other Asian victims, is an admirable statement of the coming together of the hope that the past will never be repeated.

Just after Takako made her statement to the court, she expressed her thoughts in the following composition:

> Not the orphan of the “heroic spirit” of the deceased  
> I make this statement on behalf  
> Of my father in Siberia  
> Hazarding One’s Calling as a Teacher

Another of the “Asia lawsuit” plaintiffs, Teramoto Tsutomu (b. 1950), interpreted Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine from the standpoint of an education worker. From the time he was a junior high school student, Teramoto heard about the evacuation experience of his mother, a primary school teacher, and at the high school where he was first appointed as a teacher he tackled antidiscrimination and human rights education for thirteen years.

‘Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine came on top of the raising of the Japanese flag, the Hinomaru, and the singing of the national anthem, Kimigayo, during school ceremonies that were then being made compulsory. Also in the 1980s, I learned of the role of the Education Tower at Osaka Castle park, once known as the “sukuni of Education,” in the war of invasion and colonial rule. That’s why I felt that the Prime Minister’s visit to Yasukuni as a means of mobilising the nation for war must be stopped.’

Mr. Teramoto testified in court to a fear that the Prime Minister’s visit was being taken as surety for possible deaths, in the context of the dispatch to Iraq of members of the Self Defence Forces, soldiers who, in a broad sense, were his pupils. In response, the Prime Minister’s defense lawyers argued that this was nothing more than wanting to sound an alarm bell, and that no harm had been done. The existence, or otherwise, of legal damage attributable to the Prime Minister’s visit therefore became an important point of contention in the lawsuit.

Antiwar sentiments, discomfort and the like are not considered to constitute a violation of any legal interest. However, Teramoto sought to argue otherwise by joining the plaintiffs in this action.
‘My entire purpose as a teacher is threatened by Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine -- I came to question if I could really continue as a teacher.’

The premise of the plaintiffs’ claim is that Prime Minister Koizumi visited ‘as Prime Minister.’ But the defense insisted that it was a personal visit by Mr Koizumi, who is Prime Minister. This was another important issue in the trial.

If Prime Minister Koizumi visited Yasukuni Shrine as a private citizen, just as he might go to enjoy the opera, one of his hobbies, then there would be no cause for political, social, or international controversy. But when he went to Yasukuni Shrine he used a public car, registered as the Prime Minister, donated flowers, commented at a press conference immediately after visiting, and the Chief Cabinet Secretary went so far as to announce ‘the Prime Minister’s comment.’ In outward form, and in actuality, this was a ‘prime ministerial visit,’ and society generally understood it as such.

Speaking for the plaintiffs, lawyer Inoue Jiro added, ‘Never once did Prime Minister Koizumi refute criticism from foreign countries by saying that it was a “visit in a private capacity.”’

**Will the Judiciary Arrive at a Determination of Unconstitutionality?**

In the “Asia lawsuit” and the “Shikoku lawsuit,” Yasukuni Shrine was named for the first time as a defendant -- a fact that attracted considerable attention. It was claimed that Yasukuni Shrine should not have received the Prime Minister’s visit. In response, Yasukuni Shrine argued that before, during and after the war it was the ‘central facility for mourning and comforting the spirits of the war dead,’ and that as ‘an appropriate place for prayers of peace’ Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit was in keeping with the common hopes not only of bereaved families but also of many Japanese nationals.

The principal focus of the six current lawsuits against Yasukuni Shrine, including the “Asia lawsuit,” is whether or not the judiciary will enter into a judgement of unconstitutionality. Already in the unconstitutionality lawsuit against Nakasone’s official visit, there was a judgement of ‘unconstitutionality should it continue’ (February 1992, Fukuoka High Court) and ‘the possibility of unconstitutionality’ (July 1992, Osaka High Court).

Lawyer Inoue Jiro points out that the 1997 Supreme Court (Grand Bench) judgement in the Ehime Tamagushiryo (an offering to the gods) lawsuit is key.

‘The Supreme Court judgement determined that public authorities’ relationship with Yasukuni Shrine (Shinto shrine for the war dead) must not exceed a fixed limit, but it is clear that the extent of the relationship suggested by the Prime Minister’s visit, in terms of religiosity as well as in terms of its influence, and the impression and interest it has created, is markedly greater than in the Tamagushiryo case. That is why I think that there must be a judgement of unconstitutionality.’

Moreover, Inoue Jiro stated that the fact that Prime Minister Koizumi has visited four times, including this year, in spite of the Grand Bench’s judgement, ‘disregards the judiciary’ and strengthens the charge of unconstitutionality. At the end of Yoshida Takako’s statement of opinion given in Matsuyama District Court, there was also a question for the judiciary.

‘No matter how much the fine words “peace” and “pledge not to wage war” are used to justify it, it is an undeniable fact that the Prime Minister’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine is an act that violates
the constitutional principle of separation of politics and religion. ... I want to ask whether the Prime Minister’s twisting of the principle of separation of politics and religion laid down in the constitution can really be forgiven.’

Moreover, Lee Heeja of the “Asia lawsuit” rounded off her testimony with the following:

I am not saying “Bring my dead father back to life!” I want to sound a warning and highlight the reasons why Yasukuni Shrine and the visit of Japan’s supreme ruler, the Prime Minister, to Yasukuni Shrine are reprehensible. It really hurts ... I don’t want to make the pain any worse than it already is.

However, on 10 February in the House of Councillors Budget Committee, Prime Minister Koizumi triumphantly declared:

We are being told what to do by other countries, but I have no intention of changing my position.

In the midst of the dispatch of troops to Iraq and heightened interest in Asia, how will the Osaka District Court decide these lawsuits?

* In the newspaper, her father’s name, which would normally be written in kanji characters, had been spelt in the katakana syllabary according to an incorrect reading of the kanji characters.

“Popes, Bishops and War Criminals: Reflections on Catholics and Yasukuni in Post-War Japan”
John Breen
March 1, 2010
http://www.japanfocus.org/-John-Breen/3312

Among the many groups for which the Yasukuni Shrine raises important questions is Japan’s Christian population. In 1988, for example, the Japanese Supreme Court rejected the claim of Nakaya Yasuko, the Christian widow of an officer in Japan’s Self Defense Force, who objected on religious grounds to her husband’s enshrinement as a Shinto deity at a shrine affiliated with Yasukuni. Yet, as John Breen’s survey of Catholic responses to Yasukuni indicates, relations between Christian authorities and the shrine are often complex. At one level, of course, is a basic theological question: to what extent can Catholics participate in rituals associated with non-Christian religious traditions? Interestingly, the Vatican (in a continuation of policies set down when Yasukuni was an institution of State Shinto) affirmed that Catholics may, in fact, participate in such rituals, insofar as those rites serve as expressions of patriotism. At the same time, however, Yasukuni has raised criticism from the Catholic Bishops in Japan, especially regarding the threat posed by government support of the shrine to the constitutional separation of religion and state power. Catholic politicians and intellectuals, meanwhile, run the gamut from outright apologetics for the shrine to advocacy for a more secular memorial. In his concluding comments, Breen carefully outlines the various issues at stake, and suggests that no simple solution is likely to address them all.
Popes, Bishops and War Criminals: reflections on Catholics and Yasukuni in post-war Japan

John Breen

In November 1945, General McArthur invited two Catholic priests to GHQ to sound them out on a proposal he was poised to implement, namely the razing of Yasukuni, the Tokyo shrine dedicated to the Japanese war dead. The priests were Bruno Bitter, SJ, head of Sophia University, and Patrick Byrne, Maryknoll. Both men quickly declared their opposition. It was, they insisted, the right and duty of citizens everywhere to honour their war dead; Yasukuni was, moreover, a national monument to the war dead, which honoured men and women of all faiths equally, and not merely a Shinto shrine; finally, GHQ’s plans to destroy Yasukuni would be so damaging as to imperil the entire Occupation endeavour. McArthur was persuaded by these arguments, and Yasukuni was spared. Yasukuni owes its survival, then, in post-war Japan to the intercession of two Catholic priests. While this author has found no independent evidence to corroborate this intriguing story, Fr Shimura Tatsuya recounts it in his book Kyōkai hiwa, and he for one is persuaded.

The Catholic-Yasukuni relationship in post-war Japan is but a minor plotline in Yasukuni’s dynamic post-war history, although it assumed some real importance for the brief duration of Asō Tarō’s premiership (September 2008 to September 2009). After all, Asō was Japan’s first Catholic premier and a staunch Yasukuni advocate. Here I offer some post-Asō reflections on the Catholic-Yasukuni relationship in the full knowledge that they are more revealing of the Catholic Church than they are of Yasukuni shrine.

Fr. Bruno Bitter

In what follows, I discuss first of all the contrary positions, by turns conciliatory and critical, of the Vatican and of Japanese Bishops on the ‘Yasukuni problem.’ This ‘problem’ hinges, of
course, on state patronage of the shrine, which is contentious on at least two counts: it is a ‘legal’
problem since the Constitution provides for the separation of religion and state; and a ‘symbolic’
one since Yasukuni enshrines Japan’s A-class war criminals. Against this institutional position, I
set the views of some prominent Catholic intellectuals. What is striking is that, on the whole,
these Catholics distance themselves from the critical stance of the Japanese bishops, and share
with the Vatican, and indeed with former PM Asō, a broadly positive ‘take’ on Yasukuni. My
method here is to introduce faithfully a selection of their views, and let the reader judge their
merits. In the final section, the present author, who is also a Catholic, offers his own argument on
Yasukuni and the challenges it poses in the 21st century.

Asō Tarō, Japan’s Catholic prime minister (2008-9)

The Vatican, the Bishops and War criminals

Sometime in 1975, Pope Paul VI granted an audience in the Vatican to a Japanese Buddhist
monk called Nakata Junna 仲田順和. Nakata was the head-priest at the Honsenji 品川寺, a
Shingon temple of the Daigoji 醍醐寺 lineage in Shinagawa, Tokyo. He was also an admirer of
Pope Paul’s cultivation of dialogue with people of all faiths and people of none. His hope was
that the pontiff might say a Mass for the repose of the souls of the 1,618 men condemned as
Class A, B and C war criminals. In the tale as it is related by Nagoshi Futaranosuke 名越二荒之助,
Pope Paul spoke of the Tokyo war crimes tribunal that condemned the Class A criminals as
‘an embarrassment,’ and he promised to say the Mass requested of him. Nakata Junna,
incidentally, inherited his concern for the war criminals from his late father, Junkai 順海, who
had built a memorial hall (the Eireidō 英霊堂) in the grounds of the Honsenji temple. The hall
commemorates not only Japan’s war criminals but the so-called gakutohei 学徒兵 students
who were pulled out of the university and mobilized from 1943, ill-prepared for battle. Beneath
the eaves of the Honsenji memorial hall, hangs a bell inscribed with the names of seven of the
Class A war criminals. Pilgrims ring the bell and pray for the repose of their souls.
Pope Paul VI died in 1978 before he was able to fulfil his promise, but in April 1980, a letter arrived at the Honsenji from the Vatican, explaining that Pope John Paul II intended to keep his predecessor’s word. The Mass for 1,618 war criminals of Classes A, B and C would take place in St. Peter’s on May 22nd of that year, and Nakata Junna was invited to attend. Junna duly did so in the company of the sculptor Hoshino Kōho 星野皓穂, who had spent the previous three years constructing a miniature replica of the Daigoji temple’s 5-story pagoda, into which he placed the memorial tablets he had personally made for all 1,618 war criminals. This he took with him to Rome as a gift for the Pope. A contemporary photograph shows Pope John Paul II blessing the eight-foot high structure.
There is a context to the concern expressed by the two post-war pontiffs for the Japanese war criminals. The context is provided by a document styled *Pluries Instanterque*, issued by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*) in 1951. Or rather, it was re-issued in 1951, for its origins go back to 1936. *Pluries Instanterque* was the Catholic Church’s response to the prewar dilemma in which Catholics found themselves, when required by their university, say, to visit Yasukuni and other shrines, and makes acts of obeisance. The Catholic Church’s position had been that Catholics’ participation in shrine rites of any sort was unacceptable, and this in turn had led to the infamous Sophia University incident of 1932, the essential dynamic which is easily summarized: In May 1932, the University’s military attaché took a party of students to Yasukuni, and ordered them to salute the war dead. Two, or perhaps three, students refused on the grounds that it compromised their beliefs. The Army Ministry responded to their refusal by withdrawing the military attaché from Sophia, thus doing irreparable harm to the university’s reputation. The Archbishop of Tokyo, Jean Chambon, immediately sought the views of other bishops in Japan, and was persuaded that some flexibility was after all possible. In June, he informed the Army Ministry that Sophia students were now at liberty to salute the war dead. To prove the point, at least one hundred Sophia students participated fully in a Yasukuni rite to commemorate the first anniversary of the Manchurian incident in September 1932.
Subsequently, Sophia president Fr. Herman Hoffman himself paid a visit to Yasukuni to offer his respects. It was, anyway, to legitimate the new situation in Japan that the Propaganda Fide issues the document *Pluries Instanterque* four years later in 1936. As George Minamiki observes, *Pluries Instanterque* was a “liberating instruction”. It not only allowed Catholics to attend Shinto shrines; it positively encouraged them to attend. In so doing, it was informed by Education Ministry assurances that shrine practice had “only the significance of love of country”.6

The point to emphasise here is that in 1951 the Vatican reconfirmed its approval for Catholics’ participation in Yasukuni rites with the re-issue of *Pluries Instanterque*.7 Of course, there were in 1951 no Class A, or indeed Class B or C, war criminals enshrined in Yasukuni. The latter were enshrined in 1959 and the former in 1978 amid considerable secrecy.8 By the following year, however, the Class A war criminals’ enshrinement had become common knowledge. Pope John Paul celebrated his Mass in 1980. In light of the Church’s approach to Yasukuni and of the Papal Mass, it is not surprising that the Vatican has never problematised the shrine’s apotheosis of these men. What is striking, however, is that the Japanese Bishops have.

Such was not yet the case, however, in October 1981 when the Japanese Bishops issued a stern warning to PM Suzuki Zenkō 鈴木善幸 on Yasukuni. Their concern was uniquely with Japan’s post-war Constitution. They were galvanised by the latest in a series of LDP attempts to force a bill through the Diet for the nationalization of Yasukuni. The bill was a threat, argued the Bishops, to both the separation of religion and state, and to the freedom of religion, two principles at the ‘foundation of the Japanese Constitution.’9 To nationalize the shrine was to divest it of its post-war status as a religious corporation, and redefine it as a ‘special status, non-religious’ institution. The Bishops saw that the objective of the Suzuki administration was to clear the Constitutional way for Prime Ministers’ patronage of the shrine. After all, if the shrine were no longer ‘religious’ in law, no legal objection could be raised against Prime Ministers worshiping there. The Bishops also voiced their concerns that the proposed shift in Yasukuni’s status would enable the state to enforce citizens’ attendance at Yasukuni rites—just as had happened in pre-war Japan. As it turned out, the Bishops’ fears were groundless as the latest bill, like its predecessors, was rejected by the Diet.

The bishops made no reference to the war criminals here; nor did the Japanese Catholic Conference on Justice and Peace when it petitioned Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro 中曽根康弘 in 1985. The occasion was Nakasone’s historic pilgrimage to Yasukuni on August 15th of that year.10 The Conference demanded that Nakasone give ‘due acknowledgement’ to the principles of state-religion separation and religious freedom. The Conference was hardly reassured to learn that Nakasone’s act of worship there was so abbreviated that it incurred the wrath of the Yasukuni Chief priest.11 In fact, Nakasone’s visit created such a diplomatic furore that he never returned, and it was to be another fifteen years before the Catholic Bishops had cause to speak out again on Yasukuni. Only now did they voice concerns about Yasukuni’s Class A war criminals. In August 2000, the Japanese bishops protested at official visits to Yasukuni by Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō 森喜朗 and Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō 石原慎太郎, and this was the argument they deployed:

Yasukuni today venerates Tōjō Hideki 東條英機 and other A class war criminals. At Yasukuni, all the men who engaged in killing on the Asiatic mainland and then died are venerated now as ‘glorious spirits’ (*eirei* 英霊).... The actions of Prime Minister [Mori] and his
cabinet are in no way different from the old association of militarism with state Shinto on the grounds that Shinto was ‘non-religious,’ an [association] which led Japan to wage aggressive war.

This was the first time the Bishops had cited the war criminals, and they were sufficiently concerned as to demand Prime Minister Mori’s immediate resignation."

Twenty years later, the visit to Yasukuni of Prime Minister Koizumi Jun’ichirō in October 2005 galvanized the Bishops once more. It did so principally because Koizumi’s visit came in the wake of two important court cases, one in the Fukuoka District Court in 2004 and another in the Osaka High Court in 2005. The judges in both cases dismissed the suits, which citizens groups had filed for damages. The judges found no evidence that the plaintiffs’ “legal interests” had been infringed. Both judges chose, however, to issue obiter dicta on the cases in question. Obiter dicta are not rulings but “expressions of opinion on matters of law”, and so “not of binding authority” (OED). It was the opinion of both men that Koizumi’s actions did indeed breach Article 20 of the Constitution. In their letter to Koizumi, the Japanese Bishops fully recognized the human desire to mourn the war dead and pray for the bereaved. They insisted, however, that his patronage of Yasukuni was altogether different. Yasukuni glorified war, and venerated Class A war criminals, and Koizumi’s presence there was a denial of Japan’s responsibility for war in Asia. His actions, they alleged, projected an image of Japan as a menace to its Asian neighbours. It is a matter of record that Koizumi was no more swayed by the Japanese Bishops than he was by the Fukuoka and Osaka judges. He returned boldly to Yasukuni in August 2006.

The most recent statement on Yasukuni by the Japanese Bishops dates from February 2007. The context was a growing concern within the Church, and in society at large, that the ruling LDP was retreating from the constitutional provision for state-religion separation. Evidence of retreat was there in the draft revision of the Constitution, which the LDP published in October 2005. The coincidence of this draft with other strident new Yasukuni proposals, not least by then-Foreign Minister Asō Tarō in 2006, was behind the Bishops’ statement. The Bishops found offensive the proposed revision to Article 20. The revised article, it is true, forbids ‘state involvement in religious education and religious practice,’ but it does so only when such practice ‘extends beyond the realm of social ritual and customary practices.’ In other words, practices that can be so defined are immune, and representatives of the state may engage in them with impunity. The Bishops were aware that this category was designed to accommodate state veneration of the war dead at Yasukuni. This was, of course, precisely the category of activity in which Yasukuni worship was located in the 1930s and 40s. The Bishops’ warning was stern: ‘The danger is ever present of [Japan] once again walking the path it walked before and during the war. [The LDP’s position] not only suggests their indifference to the principle of state-religion separation; [the revised Article 20] also constitutes a direct threat to the basic human right of religious freedom.”

Catholic intellectuals

From the time of Mori Yoshirō’s premiership in 2000, then, the Catholic bishops of Japan began to take issue not only with the constitutional challenge posed by state patronage of Yasukuni, but also now with the ‘symbolic’ challenge of Yasukuni’s war criminal enshrinement. This position put them at odds with the Vatican and Pluries Instanterque. It is against this background that I
now shift my focus to the Yasukuni arguments of a select number of prominent Catholic intellectuals: Sono Ayako 曾野綾子, best selling Japanese novelist; her husband Miura Shumon 三浦朱門, himself a prize-winning novelist; Kevin Doak, an American historian of Japan, and Josef Pittau SJ, former president of Sophia University. Between them these intellectuals have constructed, through their publications in the popular press, the Catholic discourse on Yasukuni. All four are practicing Catholics, and discuss Yasukuni from a self-consciously Catholic perspective. Three of the four are ‘pro-Yasukuni’ so that their views are at odds with the position of the Japanese bishops and, at least Kevin Doak’s, squarely in line with that of the Vatican. The fourth, Josef Pittau, is much more wary. All four are distinguished and authoritative voices, whose arguments merit our consideration.

**Sono Ayako**

Sono Ayako’s identification with Yasukuni dates back to the early 1980s. She was one intellectual among several who contributed to a series of discussions on Yasukuni launched by then-PM Nakasone. The discussions began in 1984, and were styled Kakuryō no Yasukuni jinja sanpai mondai ni kansuru kondankai 閣僚の靖国神社参拝問題に関する懇談会 (or Yasukuni-kon 靖国懇, for short). The group, whose full title translates as ‘Discussion group on problems relating to Cabinet worship at Yasukuni’, was intended to clear the constitutional way for Nakasone’s anniversary pilgrimage to Yasukuni in 1985. To assess Sono Ayako’s contribution, we need to consider her own account, written nearly 20 years later. Sono’s view of the Yasukuni problem in 1984, ‘as a Christian and a Japanese citizen,’ was that official prime ministerial visits posed a potential threat to religious freedom. Curiously, she was thinking here uniquely of prime ministers’ religious freedom. That freedom would be infringed if, say, all PMs were obligated to worship at Yasukuni, and if a PM came to power whose religion prevented him from doing so. In such an extreme case, the PM’s religious freedom would be infringed. Sono, unlike the LDP, stressed the fact of Yasukuni’s religiosity, insisting no non-Japanese would accept the argument that Yasukuni rites were merely ‘traditional, non-religious’ practices. In fact, of course, she is here dismissing the position of the Catholic Church as articulated in *Pluries Instanterque*.

Sono Ayako also believed, in 1984 at least, that prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni were ‘unconstitutional’; this put her at odds with the majority view in Yasukuni kon. The solution, as she saw it, was for the state to create a new, European-style site for the war dead, with no linkage to any religion or religious group. Her criticisms of state patronage were, nonetheless, muted. Whether PMs attended Yasukuni; whether they went in an official car; and whether they paid for flowers out of public funds or their own pockets, were all matters for them to determine. These were ‘minor issues’ and, anyway, Sono for one saw no possibility of a ‘revival of militarism’. Prime Ministers certainly should not feel obligated to respond to ‘impotent’ journalists’ questions as to whether they headed to Yasukuni in a private or official capacity.

Such was Sono Ayako’s position in the 1980s: a new site was ideal since Prime Ministerial patronage of Yasukuni was unconstitutional, but that patronage was understandable. There is no suggestion that Sono shared the concerns which the Japanese Bishops conveyed to Suzuki Zenkō, for example. And there is no reference, critical or otherwise, to the war criminals’ presence in Yasukuni’s pantheon. Sono’s Yasukuni writings since then have not been voluminous, but she has turned her thoughts to Yasukuni in several different fora. In the 1990s, as a president of Nippon Zaidan 日本財団 (Nippon Foundation), she reiterated her 1985
position and, then, in 2005, in an article for the very right wing journal, Shokun 吶君 she abandoned that position. In the article, entitled ‘Yasukuni ni mairimasu’ (靖国に参ります I am heading to Yasukuni), she recalls her 1985 views, but she is now more understanding of Yasukuni and its post-war dilemma. Yasukuni had religiosity forced upon it by the Occupation, and its very survival depended on it restyling itself a religious juridical person. Sono clearly now understands Yasukuni as something other than a ‘religious’ site. In this article, she also relates a pivotal encounter with a war veteran. The unnamed man, ‘who had lost many classmates in the war’, heads to Yasukuni every year. He persuaded her [we are given to understand] that Yasukuni is ‘a place where men feel peace in their innermost being.’ Sono is quickly won over, and reflects with sorrow that so many of today’s youths prefer Disneyland or shopping in Shibuya to Yasukuni. Sono’s war veteran encounter explains why she was now broadcasting to Shokun readers that she and her husband, Miura Shumon, would both be heading to Yasukuni on 15 August, 2005. 18

Absent from Sono’s essay is any suggestion that Yasukuni remains a ‘problem’ at all. Rather, she writes: ‘A nation that forgets to show gratitude to those who sacrificed themselves for the nation cannot survive… People cannot live without patriotism… Patriotism is not a high-level article of faith; it is an indispensable item, like a pot or a stove, without which life is unliveable.’ Yasukuni, it seems, has now become for Sono Ayako just such an indispensable item. There is, in this essay, no further reflection on the constitutional challenges posed by Yasukuni and once again no consideration of the war criminals’ controversial presence. Her views are aligned squarely with Yasukuni apologists, who insist Yasukuni worship is not religious but ‘a Japanese custom or practice.’ In an article she wrote for the Sankei shinbun 産經新聞 also in 2005, she argued, indeed, that ‘The meaning of Yasukuni in the post war has been transformed. It has become a site that transcends religion. It no longer glorifies war; it is a place where war and its tragedy are mourned.’ 19

Miura Shumon

Space here does not permit an in-depth appraisal of Miura Shumon’s Yasukuni views, but he is the author of a book on Yasukuni styled Yasukuni jinja: tadashiku rikai suru tame ni (靖国神社：正しく理解するために Yasukuni shrine: towards a correct understanding), and the key points of his argument bear brief elucidation. 20 Miura structures his defence of Yasukuni—for that is what it amounts to—around two fundamental points: 1) that Shinto stands in opposition to no creed anywhere; it is an extremely primitive religion (taihen genshiteki na shūkyō 大変原始的な宗教), rather, that worships ancestors, expresses awe before nature, abhors impurity, and strives for the purification of the spirit; 21 and 2) that Yasukuni shrine is a Shinto site of mourning which, owing to the intrinsic nature of Shinto, ‘transcends religion.’ Naturally, then, Miura himself experiences no discomfort when receiving a Shinto purification or, indeed, when paying his respects at Yasukuni. 22 ‘I intend to go there on pilgrimage on 15 August, the day of war’s end. My purpose is to reflect with sorrow on the many who sacrificed themselves to build today’s Japan, who died leaving behind all sorts of memories.’ 23

On the war criminals, whose presence at Yasukuni greatly taxes the Japanese Bishops, Miura writes that they died ‘in connection with the Second world war’ and, in that sense, are ‘no different from the war dead.’ 24 He grants that some of them ‘no doubt committed acts of violence on local people, and abused prisoners of war,’ but insists the war tribunal was itself ‘an act of
revenge.’ Anyway, once these men are dead they are, ‘according to the Japanese view of religion’, all Buddhas and kami. Miura Shumon concludes his argument with a striking and challenging statement: ‘I do not recognize Shinto as a religion, and it is precisely this which enables me to recognize both the [Yasukuni] shrine and the kami venerated there.’

Kevin Doak

Kevin Doak, who teaches Japanese history at Georgetown University, is one of the most consistently interesting academic writers of his generation. His research focuses on Japan’s experience of nationalism and modernity. Doak’s thinking on Yasukuni has been published widely in the right-wing Japanese media such as the Sankei newspaper, and the journals Voice and Shokun. Only recently, however, has he made his views known in English in an important essay entitled ‘A religious perspective on the Yasukuni Shrine controversy.’

Doak’s position is that there is no constitutional impediment to Japanese Prime Ministers’ visiting Yasukuni; Prime Ministerial visits neither violate the separation of state-religion nor threaten the religious freedom of any Japanese citizen. In adopting this position, he is informed by the afore-mentioned Pluries Instanterque, and its acceptance of the Japanese government’s definition of Yasukuni in the 1930s as a civic, patriotic site. As we have seen, it sanctioned Catholics’ visits there as ‘purely of civic value.’ Doak stresses the significance of the re-issue of this document in 1951, and sees it as a natural reflection of the Catholic Church’s tolerant theological thinking, and its broadminded approach to Shinto before, during and after the war.

Doak is clear there are things that no Catholic must do at Yasukuni: they must not, for example, pray to a dead soldier as a kami, nor must they leave the impression that they are so doing. Nonetheless, in line with Pluries Instanterque, he argues that Catholics’ displays of respect to the war dead at Yasukuni, acts of patriotism and prayers to Jesus Christ there are fine and, indeed, desirable. Doak insists on Catholics’ moral obligation to pray for the dead, especially ‘notable sinners,’ and his position on the war criminals is distinctive. Like many historians of both liberal and conservative streaks, and indeed the Vatican itself, he regards the Tokyo war crimes tribunal as a travesty; he insists, anyway, that we have no right to stand God-like in judgment over the war criminals. He rejects as preposterous the argument that a Prime Minister’s veneration at Yasukuni amounts to his approval of the actions of Tōjō Hideki and others. For Doak, this is every bit as absurd as proposing that US presidents advocate slavery when they honour the war dead at Arlington, just because Confederates are buried there. He refuses to allow that only the Japanese who waged war on the US and Asia are condemned as war criminals, while the American atomic bombing of Hiroshima 広島 and Nagasaki 長崎 and its firebombing of Tokyo are not recognised as criminal. Doak has no truck, therefore, with proposals of Sono Ayako and others back in the 1980s, for the creation of a new non-religious memorial site, untainted by war criminals’ spirits. It should be equally obvious how far his own Pluries Instanterque-informed position is from that now adopted by fellow Catholics Sono and Miura.

Doak welcomes Prime Ministerial visits to Yasukuni shrine, then, but the specific argument he deploys is striking. He sees Koizumi’s annual pilgrimages to Yasukuni as constituting a sequence of highly desirable ‘sacred acts’ in a dangerously secular world. Yasukuni’s value lies precisely in that it is a sacred site, and as such it offers a vital counter to secularism. This is the essence of Doak’s position:
I wish that [Koizumi] had abandoned his reserve and visited Yasukuni monthly or even weekly... to gain a greater familiarity with the sacred nature of the sacrifices that are commemorated there... Had he done so on the holy day of Sunday, and with much greater frequency, he could have made it clear to the world that his actions were not intended to glorify war or militarism, as is claimed by the Chinese, for example; rather that they were a spiritual response to issues of life and death. In order to pay one’s respects to the war dead, prayers that transcend this world are necessary. And the sacred site of Yasukuni has a vital function in this regard for the Japanese people.  

Josef Pittau

The three Catholic intellectuals discussed above share in common a distinctly positive take on Yasukuni and on the state’s patronage of it, although they arrived by rather divergent paths. They may be exceptional Catholics, and it may well be true, as Fr. William Grimm asserts, that “most Catholics, like most Christians in Japan, tend to the left on the issue of Yasukuni, opposing visits by government officials and special status for the shrine”. There are, however, precious few Catholics, apart from the Japanese bishops, who put pen to paper to articulate an anti-Yasukuni position. One Catholic who bears mention in this context is Josef Pittau SJ. Pittau, erstwhile president of Sophia University (1968-1981) and esteemed historian, is a Jesuit priest and consecrated Archbishop. His views merit some consideration since they were actively sought by and published in the popular right-wing journal Shokun in 2006. Pittau’s views have served to complicate the very well known Catholic position on Yasukuni as articulated by Sono, Miura and Doak.

Archbishop Joseph Pittau S.J.

Pittau, in his discussion with a Catholic Shokun reporter, affirms the right of Japanese Prime ministers to visit Yasukuni, but only if it is clear their actions do not compromise the separation of state and religion. “I believe it is extremely dangerous for Yasukuni to become the symbol of
Japan, to become its state religion. Are such concerns not strengthened by Koizumi visiting Yasukuni not as an individual, but as a prime minister representing the people of Japan? Pittau insists the Catholic Church does not problematise private visits to Yasukuni, and that he himself has visited and offered up prayers for the war dead there. However, he refutes the idea, championed by Sono and Miura, that Yasukuni is a supra-religious site to which the rules of separation of state and religion do not apply. “I cannot agree with the position that holds that Yasukuni is a special, state symbol that transcends religion”. Such an idea, he notes, “apart from anything else plays into the hands of the Chinese, enabling them to attack Japan for having revived state Shinto.” On the war and war crimes, Pittau says: “I believe it is a fact that the Japanese did terrible things in the war, beginning with Nanking.” But “forgiveness is vital”. The Chinese especially must learn to forgive. “[Without forgiveness], there will never be real peace in East Asia.” Pittau does not criticise the enshrinement of the Class A war criminals, but he notes with regret that their presence at Yasukuni generated huge problems of a political character. It enables some to claim these men are innocents; such people, in making this claim, are using Yasukuni for their own political purposes. But so too, he insists, are the Chinese when they attack Japan for reviving militarism on account of its enshrinement of the war criminals. For Pittau, Yasukuni is, indeed, a problem, but the problem lies uniquely in its intimacy with the state.

### Yasukuni and the memory problem

The several views discussed above, along with the position of the Catholic bishops and, of course, the Vatican constitute the Catholic discourse on Yasukuni in the 21st century. But to this author, at least, they all miss several key points about Yasukuni in its present manifestation. All sites to the war dead are sites of memory, but Yasukuni plays with the memory of past wars in a way that less encumbered sites, such as the Cenotaph in London and the Arlington national cemetery near Washington, cannot do. This has much to do with the fact that the Cenotaph and Arlington are not religious sites; but Yasukuni is. It is so in at least these senses: 1) it is defined in law as a religious corporation (shūkyō hōjin); 2) it is served by a dedicated, professional Shinto priesthood who perform recognizably Shinto rites of propitiation; 3) these Shinto rites take place in spaces that are readily identifiable, through their material symbols, as Shinto. The first and most important point about Yasukuni shrine is, indeed, that it exists for the performance of Shinto rites. The rites, which its priests perform for the war dead every morning and evening of every day of the year, are of two types: ‘apotheosis’ and ‘propitiation.’ During and immediately after the war, Yasukuni priests performed Shinto rites of apotheosis to render the war dead as Shinto kami or gods. Today, however, the vast majority of rites are acts of propitiation. They involve, that is, priests presenting offerings to these kami to pacify them and ensure they bestow their blessings on the living. The problem here is that Yasukuni propitiates all the Japanese war dead, without discrimination. Why is this a problem?

Yasukuni and its apologists often refer to the war dead as eirei or ‘glorious/heroic spirits,’ and there is no doubt that the pantheon includes men who exhibited extraordinary courage: men who willingly sacrificed their lives for their fellow men, for imperial Japan and for the emperor. However, the pantheon also includes others like the hundreds of thousands of men who died of starvation in, say, the New Guinea campaign. It includes, too, the commanders who botched the New Guinea campaign and many others besides, condemning young Japanese soldiers to the most humiliating and painful of deaths. The consequence of Yasukuni’s indiscriminate apotheosis and propitiation of these men is that the reality of Japanese military conduct in the
Pacific War is consigned to oblivion. Yasukuni rites dramatize the war uniquely as a noble undertaking of heroes and heroic action, and leave no scope for reflection on war’s brutality and cruelty. There is no encouragement to reflect on the terrible suffering the Japanese inflicted across Asia, or indeed on the suffering that many Japanese, both soldiers and civilians, themselves underwent. The apotheosis and glorification of the war dead, understandable perhaps in wartime, serves after war’s end to bury the trauma of suffering and to absolve the state of its responsibilities.  

There is another vital point to make about Yasukuni, which concerns ethical values. Yasukuni, more than any other Shinto shrine with the exception of Ise, is an imperial site. It is styled a chokusaisha or ‘shrine privileged to receive imperial offerings,’ and every year at the autumn and spring festivals it receives a gift-bearing emissary dispatched from his palace by the emperor. Its rites are frequently patronized by imperial princes. Visually, too, it is unmistakably imperial: its buildings are draped with banners and lit with lanterns, all sporting the imperial sixteen-petaled chrysanthemum; its great wooden gate is embossed with a gold chrysanthemum. But above all, Yasukuni is imperial in that it celebrates the sacrifices of the war dead on the emperor’s behalf. Yasukuni venerates the war dead as paragons of those imperial values of loyalty, self-sacrifice and patriotism, and it holds those values up as the ideal. Yasukuni, its priests and apologists see these values as twenty-first century Japan’s salvation; this is a most important point for understanding Yasukuni in the present.

Take for example Kobori Keiichirō, emeritus professor of Tokyo University, and perhaps the most prolific of many such pro-Yasukuni intellectuals. For him, Yasukuni is about nothing so much as the ethical regeneration of post-war society. Kobori laments that today’s youth have no sense of gratitude for having been born Japanese. If only the could witness the Prime Minister and the emperor worshipping the heroic war dead at Yasukuni, their attitude, he is persuaded, would be transformed. It is Yasukuni’s ethical obsession that explains, in turn, why the shrine is today a magnet for ultra right-wing groups. These groups understand Yasukuni for what it is: the ultimate expression of those war-time imperial values that they laud. No one who visits Yasukuni today can fail to be struck by the anomaly between the shrine’s claims to be a place of peace on the one hand and, on the other, the often intimidating and sometimes violent activities there of right-wing activists. Yasukuni and its apologists have effectively appropriated the war dead for their own narrow political purposes. They have turned a site of mourning into a place of propaganda. In the view of this author, it is here, in the related realms of memory and ethics, that the real Yasukuni problem lies.

Conclusion

In the post-war period, the Vatican has engaged with Yasukuni in two important ways: the re-issue of Pluries Instanterque in 1951 which confirmed that Japanese Catholics were at liberty to participate in Shinto rites; and the papal Mass for the war criminals in 1980, shortly after their enshrinement in Yasukuni. In contrast to the Vatican, the Japanese bishops have spoken out whenever they espied an imminent threat to the principles of state-religion separation and religious freedom. Latterly, they articulated new concerns about Yasukuni’s enshrinement of war criminals. By contrast, Catholic intellectuals, at least the three of the four surveyed here, share an altogether more positive ‘take’ on Yasukuni. Sono, Miura and Doak do not share the concerns of the Catholic bishops; nor do they regard Yasukuni or its patronage by the state as constituting any sort of problem. Miura and Sono have arrived at a position that is indistinguishable from far-
right wing Yasukuni apologists. Doak’s position is informed, rather, by the Church’s *Pluripes Instanterque*, and he has fashioned his own unique perspective on the value of Yasukuni to secular Japanese society. It is only Pittau who offers a contrasting and complicating perspective.

A concluding word is in order on Japan’s Catholic Prime Minister for a year, Asō Tarō. Asō was keenly aware of Yasukuni as a problem, so much so that he refrained from visiting the shrine during his premiership. This was not, it is clear, on account of his Catholic beliefs, which have featured nowhere in his Yasukuni theorising; nor was it obviously for reasons diplomatic. For Asō, the problem is Constitutional and it arises because of Yasukuni’s undeniable religiosity. Asō’s solution involves redefining the shrine as ‘non-religious’. This is the position he articulated in a position paper in 2006, which is still available on his website. Asō’s concern is simply that state representatives must be able to mourn the war dead without breaching the Constitution. The shrine must, in his view, divest itself of its religious symbolism, and forego its legal status as a religious juridical person. It can then be nationalised and so ‘return’ to its ‘non-religious’ origins. This is a re-working of the Yasukuni bill idea that last reared its head in the premiership of Suzuki Zenkō. At least, this seems to be the case, but Asō fails to articulate what he means by ‘religious symbolism’ and, indeed, returning to ‘non-religious origins’. It is striking, anyway, that he describes his ‘ideal’ Yasukuni in terms that are distinctly religious: Yasukuni should be a ‘quiet, solemn place of prayer’; the state would ‘venerate’ the war dead there; the emperor would ‘worship’ there; its rites would be ‘spirit-pacifying,’ even as they were ‘non-religious’ and ‘traditional.’ Even the new (and very ungainly) name he has proposed has a distinctly religious ring to it: ‘The Yasukuni shrine, a national site of mourning (spirit-summoning shrine).’

There is a fatal flaw in Asō’s ‘solution’, however. For he fails to take account of the wishes of the 100 and more Yasukuni priests. The priests would certainly welcome a privileged relationship with the state, but not if it involves a stripping of the shrine’s Shinto religious symbolism. They, after all, devote their lives to propitiating the Yasukuni kami in what are unmistakably Shinto rites. Asō’s failure to consider their fate is just one reason why Japan’s former Catholic Prime Minister, for all his enthusiasm, is unlikely to hold the key to the enduring problem that is Yasukuni.

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Notes

1 This is a revised and updated version of an article that appeared in *Japan Mission Journal*, 63, 2 (2009) under the title ““The danger is ever present”: Catholic critiques of Yasukuni shrine in post-war Japan’. The author wishes to thank Mark Selden for his insightful comments.


3 Nagoshi relates this story in several places, including Nagoshi, ‘Shōwa junnansha’.pp.6-7


5 The photographs of Pope John Paul with Nakata Junna, of the pagoda and of the Mass in St. Peter’s, are taken from Nagoshi ed., *Sekai ni hirakareta Shōwa no sensō kinenkan*, pp. 162-5.
See George Minamiki’s discussion of *Pluries Instanterque* (*The Chinese rites controversy*, pp.154-8.). Minamiki locates his discussion of the dilemma faced by the Catholic Church in the broader context of the Chinese rites controversy.


On the enshrinement of the Class A war criminals, see Breen, “Introduction: a Yasukuni genealogy”.

‘Shinkyō no jiyū to seikyō bunri ni kansuru yōbō.’ This document can be viewed online [here](#).

See the document *Yasukuni jinja kōshiki sanpai hantai yōbō sho* on line [here](#). On Nakasone’s visit in its international context, see Rose, ‘Stalemate’.

On Nakasone’s visit and the rage of Chief Priest Matsudaira, see Breen, ‘Voices of rage’.


On the significance of these *obiter dicta*, see Breen, “Voices of rage”.

The Bishops’ letter can be viewed online [here](#). The bishops also drew Koizumi’s attention here to their statement of August styled ‘*The non-violent path to peace*’ (*Hibōryoku ni yoru heiwa e no michi*).

The draft can be viewed and down-loaded [here](#).

Nihon katorikku shikyō kyōgi kai, shakai shikyō iinkai ed., *Shinkyō no jiyū to seikyō bunri*, pp. 10-16.

Sono, ‘Yasukuni ni mairimasu,’ pp. 36-41 and Sono, ‘Kakuryō no Yasukuni jinja sanpai mondai,’ pp. 22-25.

Sono, ‘Yasukuni ni mairimasu,’ p.41. To understand Sono’s shift in position, it is no doubt useful to note her denialist credentials. Especially notable in this regard is her writing on the Okinawan campaign, her denial that the military ordered citizens to commit mass suicide, and her dispute over historical facts with the Nobel prize winner Ōe Kenzaburō, the author of Okinawa No-to 沖縄ノート (岩波書店 1970). For a dispassionate overview of the issues at stake here, see Rabson, “Case dismissed”.


Miura, *Yasukuni jinja*.

Miura, *Yasukuni jinja*, pp.63-4; p. 66; p. 78-80. Miura reiterates here the Shinto establishment’s view of Shinto, which of course merits our attention. For a critical appraisal of just this understanding of Shinto, see Breen and Teeuwen, *A new history of Shinto*.

Miura, *Yasukuni jinja*, p. 70; 80.

Miura, *Yasukuni jinja*, p. 84.


Miura, *Yasukuni jinja*, p. 86. Note that Miura refers to Shinto on p.66 as a ‘primitive religion’ even though here he denies it is any sort of religion. Note, too, that Miura and Sono find space in their latest book, *Fūfu koron* [A couple’s arguments] to promote their views on Yasukuni. Yasukuni is one subject on which they do not argue.

This position, it has to be said, is stated rather than argued in this essay. Doak, ‘A religious perspective,’ p. 52; p.58.


*Ib.*, pp.55-6.

*Ib.*, pp. 61-2.

*Ib.*, 53-4.

Grimm, “The Catholic Church and Yasukuni shrine”

Pittau, “Katorikku daishikyō”, p. 53.


Pittau, “Katorikku daishikyō”, p. 58.

Pittau, “Katorikku daishikyō”, p. 57.

For a fuller and better documented version of these arguments, see Breen, ‘Yasukuni and the loss of historical memory.’

On Yasukuni and the New Guinea campaign, see Breen, ‘Voices of rage’.

Breen, ‘Yasukuni and the loss of historical memory,’ pp. 144-48. A fuller understanding of how Yasukuni invokes the memory of the past demands a consideration of Yasukuni’s Yūshūkan war museum. For diverse takes on the museum and its exhibits, see Nelson, “Social memory as ritual practice”; Breen, “Yasukuni and the loss of historical memory”, and Nitta, “And why shouldn’t the Prime Minister?”.


‘Yasukuni ni iyasaka are’ (Long live Yasukuni) can be viewed here. Asō prefaces his comments by saying they constitute his private opinion, and have ‘nothing whatsoever’ to do with his role as Foreign minister.

In Japanese, it is Kokuritsu tsuitō shisetsu Yasukuni sha (shōkonsha).

For a very positive appraisal of his ideas, see Tōgō, *Rekishi to gaikō*, pp.58-9.

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Minamiki, George, Chinese rites controversy from its beginning to modern times, Loyola University Press, 1985.


Nagoshi Futaranosuke, ‘Shōwa junnansha ni sasageru chinkon no misa: shūkyō ya shōhai o koeru ro-ma hō’ō昭和殉難者にささげる鎮魂のミサ：宗教や勝敗を超えるローマ法王, Yasukuni, 1.2.07.


Nitta Hirotoshi, “And why shouldn’t the Japanese Prime Minister worship at Yasukuni?: A personal view” in Breen ed. Yasukuni, the war dead and the struggle for Japan’s past.


Rabson, Steve, “Case Dismissed: Osaka Court Upholds Novelist Oe Kenzaburo for Writing that the Japanese Military Ordered “Group Suicides” in the Battle of Okinawa”.

Rabson, Steve, “Case Dismissed: Osaka Court Upholds Novelist Oe Kenzaburo for Writing that the Japanese Military Ordered “Group Suicides” in the Battle of Okinawa”.


Sono Ayako, ‘Yasukuni ni mairimasu’, 靖国に参ります Shokun (September 2005).


Recommended Further Reading

“Diminishing Returns? Prime Minister Koizumi’s Visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in the Context of East Asian Nationalisms.”
Phil Deans
East Asia 24 (2007): 269-294

The Yasukuni Shrine is a site of contested nationalist politics in Japan and in neighboring countries. Within Japan, the status of the Shrine exists in a tension between public and private (as well as religious and secular) meanings. These tensions are given a specific focus in the context of visits to the Shrine by Japanese Prime Ministers. The history of such visits is discussed and analyzed in this article with particular attention given to the causes and consequences of the visits by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro between 2001 and 2006. It is argued that the controversies over the visits in Japan and elsewhere are best understood in the context of ‘revisionist nationalism’ in Japan.

“The Yasukuni Shrine and the Competing Patriotic Pasts of East Asia.”
Shaun Dwyer

In this article, Dwyer examines the patriotic war narrative at the Yushukan, the museum of the Yasukuni Shrine. He argues that the Yushukan narrative and accounts of the war by other countries in the region like Korea and China represents the construction of a “practical past,” one that uses the more authoritative rhetoric of historical narratives in other to legitimize its claims. While Dwyer argues that such forms of national memory are not bound by the academic standards of historical narrative, the publication of dissenting personal accounts by Japanese war survivors like Ota Masahide nevertheless has the capacity to create debate, and question the nationalist narrative of the Yushukan.

Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity (fourth edition)
H. Byron Earhart
Cengage Learning

This book acts as an introduction to the history of Japanese religion. Of interest to general readers, the book takes the reader through the diversity of Japanese religions including Shinto, Buddhism, religious Taoism and Confucianism. It also introduces the reader to several aspects of Japanese religiosity such as folk religion, Christianity in Japan in the late 19th century, as well as the development of religion after World War II.

“Japan’s Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900-1945.”
Selcuk Esenbel

Esenbel discusses a part of Japanese pre-war history that has not been examined in-depth, namely Japanese nationalists’ attempts between 1900 and 1945 to forge allies within the Islamic world. On the one hand, Japanese political and intellectual leaders argued for the importance of building bridges with the Muslim world in order to create a new Asia under Japanese power. On the other hand, some Muslim activists proved willing to collaborate with Japanese imperial power if it meant the expulsion of Western dominion. These developments are especially significant in light of the later U.S. efforts to forge close relations with the Islamic world as a bulwark against communism, a trend that contributed to the rise of radical Islam today. These twentieth-century developments, Esenbel argues, may provide a more useful context for understanding today’s political Islam than the image of a “clash of civilizations.”

“Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People.”
William Fitzhugh and Chisato Dubreuil, eds.
Smithsonian Institution, 1999.

The Ainu is a native population in northern Japan, today mostly residing in Hokkaido, of whom most Westerners in North America and Europe are ignorant. The Ainu peoples face discrimination in various areas of their lives, leading many to conceal their ethnic identity. Published by the Smithsonian Institution at the National Museum of Natural History and the University of Washington Press, this book is an illustrated compendium of various aspects of Ainu life including Ainu history, current affairs, arts and culture.

Kazuo Kasahara, ed.

This book brings together a range of Japanese scholars to elaborate the history of Japanese religion from prehistory to the present. These scholars provide a wealth of detail on the development of a range of religious traditions, including Buddhist sects, Shinto shrines, Shugendo mountain ascetics, Christian missionaries, and the so-called “new religions” that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The work is particularly strong on the doctrinal debates and changing institutional arrangements that shaped the Japanese religious experience.

“A Feminist Reading of Gender and National Memory at the Yasukuni Shrine.”
Jemima Repo
Repo contributes to scholarly debate about the Yasukuni Shrine with a gendered reading of the shrine. She argues that the shrine emphasizes the violence (and violent deaths) of males, thereby glorifying a vision of militarized masculinity while suppressing the portrayal of Japanese women as anything but subservient. The space and architecture of the Yasukuni portrays woman’s role in war as nurturing and domestic. Repo also argues that women of “respectable” sexuality such as the Japanese military nurses and the Okinawan “Star Lilies Corps” (Himeyuri Butai) were held up as tirelessly maternal and subservient to the soldiers, with the latter group portrayed as virginial “sacrificial daughters in war narratives. However, this version of history serves to silence the history of those that do not correspond to the ideal. In this respect, efforts to draw attention to the role of Korean and Chinese “comfort women” during the war represents a rejection of the dominant discourses of Yasukuni. Repo ends by pointing out that there is much potential for academic discussion from the viewpoint of critical feminism as it could add to ongoing discussion at Yasukuni and beyond on the nature of national memory.

“Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil.”
Whitley R.P. Kaufman

Kaufman argues here that the doctrine of karma and rebirth developed in the modern period as a systemic explanation of suffering in the world is not a morally satisfactory solution to the problem of evil. The theory has been praised by thinkers like Max Weber for its consistency and has been examined previously by philosophers as to whether it can account for the contradiction that even though God is good and omnipotent, there is still evil in the world. Although Kaufman acknowledges several advantages to the karma theory, he presents five arguments against its adequacy as a response to the problem of evil.

“Awkward Talisman: War Memory, Reconciliation and Yasukuni.”
Jeff Kingston.

The Yasukuni Shrine is so controversial, says Kingston in this essay, because it is concerned with issues of reconciliation and national memory. Therefore competing narratives have arisen about the shrine, hampering reconciliation. Consequently, groups within and outside of Japan have opposed elite political action at the shrine. However, Kingston argues that no amount of repackaging can hide the shrine’s association with Japan’s past imperial ideology and its consequences, as Japanese politicians attempt to cast the Yasukuni as an acceptable site for honoring the war dead by depoliticizing it or removing its Class-A war criminals. Instead, Kingston argues that Yasukuni is still useful for it stirs up continued debate about war history and prevents it from fading into the past.
“Mobilizing from the Margins: Domestic Citizen Politics and the Yasukuni Shrine.”
Brian Masshardt.

Masshardt in this essay examines former Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi’s six consecutive annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Based on field research, he uncovers the strategies undertaken by various domestic groups who support or oppose his visits to the shrine, such as the Japan Conference and the YDP. This, Masshardt argues, has implications on the construction of Japanese national memory and historical nationalism. He also argues that the ongoing conflict surrounding elite political action at Yasukuni Shrine is not necessarily about “winners” or “losers” but the important implication is that it represents an opportunity for Japan to recognize its responsibility in the war, therefore possibly advancing democracy’s progress in Japanese society.

“Religion and Society in Modern Japan: Selected Readings.”
Mark Mullins and Shimazono Susumu, eds.
Asian Humanities Press.

This serves as an anthology of religion and society in Japan, with its essays -- from both Japanese and Western scholarship -- focusing specifically on Japanese religiosity, religion and the state, traditional religious institutions and new religious movements. Compiled with an undergraduate audience in mind, the anthology shows the diverse forms of religiosity in Japanese culture and the role it plays in Japanese society.

“Islam in Japan: Adversity and Diversity.”
Michael Penn.

In this article, Michael Penn provides an overview to the social condition that Muslims living in today’s Japan face. Penn argues that generally, while Muslims want to reach out to Japan, the Japanese are apprehensive about Islam. Muslims in Japan will continue to face some barriers and discrimination in a country that is not particularly welcome of multi-culturalism, and the problem is further accentuated for ethnic Japanese who are Muslim, as barriers they face in the workplace are further accentuated by pressures from their family to adhere to Japanese norms. This article suggests that, despite public diplomatic attempts at forging stronger ties between Japan and the Islamic world, the reality for the average Japanese is far from adversity-free. While activists of the 20th century claimed that Islam would soon expand among the Japanese population, this article shows that there is still much apprehension in contemporary society towards the religion.

“Beyond Belief: Japanese Approaches to the Meaning of Religion.”
James Mark Shields.
In this short essay, Shields examines some distinctive features of Japanese religiosity, contrasting these with the assumptions that often guide Western scholars’ approaches to religion. Examining the phenomenon of orthopraxy (that practice, rather than doctrine, is primary) in Japanese religion, he explores the particular way in which religion and the state have been linked throughout Japanese history.

**“Islam in Indonesia: Its History, Development and Future Challenges.”**  
Jusuf Wannandi  

This article provides an overview of the role of Islam in Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim country. Wannandi argues that Islam has always been mainstream, moderate and open. While religious parties have been politically important they have never made Indonesia a Muslim state. Therefore, Wannandi suggests that even though some aggressive, extremist Islamic groups have sought to set the political tone of the country since the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, these are in the minority as most groups are moderate, tolerant and democratic. The positive development of Islam, he argues, is only complicated by the weakness of the government and the nation’s political and economic crises. If these problems are solved, Wannandi says, Indonesia could be held as the model of political Islam around the world.