

THE YASUKUNI SHRINE PROBLEM IN THE EAST ASIAN CONTEXT: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN MODERN JAPAN

Abstract

The problem of issues surrounding Yasukuni Shrine is one of the main topics in religion and politics in contemporary Japan. This paper tries to approach the Yasukuni Shrine problem, first by contextualizing this problem in the East Asian settings, then by reviewing the recent court cases surrounding Yasukuni Shrine, and finally by commenting on two documentary films focusing on this problem. Examining the reactions by the Chinese government to the visits paid by Japanese politicians since the mid-1970s shows that these visits, to the place where the class A war criminals are enshrined, has been regarded in the Chinese official view as offensive to the victims of the aggressive wars of Japan. The recent court cases targeting mainly the former Prime Minister Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine are worth special attention because they have involved Koreans and Taiwanese besides Japanese as the plaintiffs. These cases have presented constitutional points of dispute for both Japanese and other Asian people. These situations have set the backdrop of the production and screening of the documentary films, *Annyong*, *Sayonara* (2005), and *Yasukuni* (2007). These two films illustrate not only the current problem of Yasukuni Shrine but also the surrounding setting of this problem in East Asia.

Key words: Shinto, Yasukuni Shrine, Freedom of religion, War Memorial, „Gungun lawsuit“.

Religion and Politics as a Present Problem

In an introduction to the *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, a handbook published recently, its editor Jeffrey Haynes pays special attention to the political influences of religion and religious involvement in politics in various parts of the world since the late 1970s (Haynes 2009, 1-2). He does not seem to pay regard to any Japanese case with regard to this “return of religion,” but Japan presents a particular case in its own right. It should be regarded as one example of a developed country outside of the West that has had to accommodate, somewhat awkwardly, modern Western institutions, including religious matters.

In a chapter entitled “Religion and the State” in the same book, John Madeley is

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very conscious about the modern Western bias in reducing the relation between religion and the state into the relation between church and the state, adding that “this foreshortening of focus with its distinctly ethnocentric underlying assumptions as to what counts as religion and the state systematically underestimates the actual range of variation to be found in the other parts of the world and at other times” (Madeley 2009, 174). And accordingly, after almost eight pages’ description about religion and the state in modern Europe, Madeley devotes about half the space to arguing about the rest of the world in a section entitled “Beyond Europe: Contemporary religion-state relations in the rest of the world.” Actually, his argument in this section, with the tables almost covering two pages in total, presents some findings based on the “Religion and State Project database” developed by Jonathan Fox as its project founder,² but does not elaborate further on the contemporary situations regarding the relation between religion and the state outside of Europe. He briefly comments on Islamists’ efforts to gain or to contest political power (Madeley 2009, 189), but no mention is made of East Asian countries.

The contemporary situations in Japan apparently interest neither Haynes nor Madeley, but nevertheless the modern Japanese case presents a particular example of a modernized state. In the following, I will first summarize recent arguments about this case, and then proceed to reflect on one specific issue in the subject of religion and politics that has been under heated discussion for several years, and on its further development in documentary film productions.

Recent Arguments regarding the Japanese Case

On the subject of religion and politics, or religion and state, in contemporary Japan, I would first refer to the recent arguments before delving into a specific issue. Helen Hardacre, a specialist in modern Japanese religions,³ has written on the subject in numerous publications, so here I will first review a few points in her discussions, especially in regard to the postwar situation.

Hardacre (2006) presents an overview of “State and Religion in Japan” from Japanese prehistory through contemporary Japan. The latter refers to the postwar period since 1945, and her argument about this period starts by mentioning the Shinto Directive issued in 1945 and the Constitution effectuated in 1947, namely, the dismantling of so-called State Shinto, and the other that postulates, among other matters, the freedom of religion, and the separation of religion from the state. She notices especially the postwar privileged status of religious organizations as “religious corporations” that can be contrasted with the prewar heavy regulation of religion by the state. She also notices, however, that the Constitutional separation between religion and state has been challenged repeatedly, especially in the attempts by the Liberal Democratic Party (abbreviated as the LDP) to effectuate state support for the Yasukuni Shrine. She summarizes the situation:

Lawsuits have repeatedly sought to prohibit public expenditure by local administrations on Shinto ground-breaking rites for public buildings, or on the

² See the project website: <http://www.religionandstate.org> (Accessed 6. 11. 2009).

³ On Hardacre’s scholarship in general, and her interest in religion and the state in Japan, see Ambros and Williams’s introductory essay that contains the bibliography of Hardacre’s major publications (Ambros and Williams 2009).

installation of memorials for the war dead. The result has been mixed. Shinto ground-breaking rituals were eventually declared “customary” rather than religious in nature (thus allowing expenditure of public funds), while publicly constructed war memorials have frequently been disallowed. (Hardacre 2006, 285)

Hardacre does not present detailed discussion about another topic, Soka Gakkai and Komeito,⁴ but at the end of a one-paragraph explanation of them she only points out to the most recent situation, mentioning that „[w]hen Komeito entered a coalition with the LDP in the 1990s and thus became part of the government, renewed debate about the proper relation between religion and state arose” (ibid.).⁵ She ends her chapter by paying attention to the situation that the 1995 poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway by Aum Shinrikyō has caused regarding the relation between religion and the state, that is, the new regulation that strengthens the responsibility of the state to oversee and regulate religions.

At another occasion, Hardacre presents again her understanding about almost the same issue, this time under the category of religion and politics in an encyclopedia article (Hardacre 2007). In addition to the above-mentioned topics, she introduces a few other related points in her arguments. One point is a proposal for a revision of the 1947 Constitution. The LDP has composed its own draft of the revised Constitution, and with regard to Article 20 that presently postulates the separation between religion and the state,⁶ the revision proposed by the LDP draws a distinction between permissible activities and forbidden ones for the state and other public bodies based on the accumulated decisions by the Supreme Court, which was described as “mixed results” in the above citation. Hardacre explains:

[...] following Supreme Court decisions issued since 1947, a distinction would be drawn between religious ritual (which would still be prohibited) and “customary observances,” which might include ceremonies originating in Shinto practice but no longer seen by most people as having a religious character. Shinto grounds purification rituals is the primary example of such a ceremony, one that is widely performed at the commencement of construction on all kinds of built structures. The Supreme Court has ruled several times that tax money may be spent for the performance of this ritual, and if the constitution were revised as proposed, cities and towns would be able to conduct such rites for public buildings without fear of legal challenge. Thus Supreme Court rulings provide the parameters for proposals expanding the sphere of ritual permitted to local and national administrations. (Hardacre 2007, 497-498)

In these two essays, Hardacre treats the subject of religion and the state, or religion and politics, in the Japanese context, referring to such topics as the postwar status of religious corporations, the coalition government of the LDP and Komeito, and the constitutional prescription of the separation between religion and the state, and its

4 The original Japanese pronunciation should be spelled as Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō, as Hardacre spells them, but since their English websites do not use the macrons, I write the words without the macrons even in the citations below. This paper does not focus on this topic, but for the most recent arguments, see George Ehrhardt’s review on four books on Soka Gakkai and/or Komeito (Ehrhardt 2008).

5 This coalition formed between the LDP and Komeito began in 1999 and ended in 2009.

6 Article 20 reads as follows. Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite or practice. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.

possible revision. Now we proceed to review another argument to get a different perspective to approach the issue.

Readers familiar with scholarship on Japanese religion will naturally reach for Hardacre's work when they have an interest in religion and politics in the Japanese context, whereas if they are more familiar with political science, or more specifically, comparative politics, they may consult A. Maria Toyoda⁷ and Aiji Tanaka's article, "Religion and Politics in Japan" (Toyoda and Tanaka 2002). But their chapter included in a book entitled *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, the Few, and the Many* (Jelen and Wilcox 2002) will, in my view, leave for the readers a number of further questions rather than answers.

In arguing the role of religion in Japanese political history, Toyoda and Tanaka trace three distinct periods, one before the Meiji Restoration, another between the Meiji Restoration and the end of World War II, and then the postwar period. The authors notice that "[a]lthough once religion played an important role in politics in society, in the postwar period religion has become far less relevant to politics," continuing as follows:

In the nineteenth century and prewar and wartime periods of the twentieth century, religious ideology was central to the political notions of the Japanese state and nation. Religious worship of the emperor, militarism, imperialism, and nationalism were tightly intertwined. After Japan's surrender in World War II, these doctrines were suppressed. Subsequently, religion in contemporary postwar Japanese society is viewed by most observers as politically irrelevant, or at most on the political periphery. (Toyoda and Tanaka 2002, 269)

Just as the authors contrast here the period from the Meiji era through the end of World War II and the postwar period, I will focus these two modern periods. As to the former period, the authors point out „the growing and more formal ties between religious belief and the concepts of nationalism and emperor worship," while as to the latter, they point out „the relative decline of religious belief and patriotic fervor following the surrender" (271).

As to the period after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Toyoda and Tanaka pay attention to the roles of Shinto in the process of Japan's modernization. They differentiate shrine-based Shinto (*jinja* Shinto) from sectarian Shinto (*kyoha* Shinto⁸), calling the former "revised" Shinto that „was to become the basis for Japan's ultranationalist and militarist movements" (276).⁹ These movements ultimately led to the war waged since 1930s where in the authors' explanation „the military used religious symbolism to mobilize the population for sacrifice, and to help prepare its fighting forces for death" (277). They summarized the consequence of the tie between religion and nationalism and militarism as follows:

7 A Maria Toyoda is misrepresented in this book as Maria A. Toyoda. See her own website: <http://amtoyoda.googlepages.com/home> (Accessed 6. 11. 2009).

8 Toyoda and Tanaka use the spelling of "kyouha".

9 Toyoda and Tanaka mention that beside these two strains of Shinto, "local versions of Shinto continued to be practiced" (276), but this statement should be taken to be misleading or mistaken, as the local versions of Shinto themselves are usually called *jinja* Shinto (shrine Shinto). Another point should be mentioned. The authors state that [the Meiji government] made Shinto the official state religion (*ibid.*), but a more nuanced description will be more suitable, because the so-called State Shinto system became relatively stable after the failure of the governmental policy to make Shinto the state religion.

The interweaving between religion, militarism, and nationalism had a tremendous impact that endures today. So closely was Shinto tied to war that the invocation of religion in official ceremonies in Japan continues to raise great domestic and international controversy. (Ibid.)

As to the postwar situation, Toyoda and Tanaka characterize the period as „a significant break in the connection between Shinto and nationalism and militarism” (ibid.).¹⁰ In their view, however, with all constitutional and legal provisions after the war, „nationalistic impulses with religious overtones persisted within the ranks of Japan’s political, intellectual and bureaucratic elite” (278).¹¹ According to them, the Liberal Democratic Party that was established in 1955 and would enjoy „nearly forty years of uninterrupted rule” (279) contained one faction „composed of nationalistic hardliners, many of whom retained a commitment to State Shinto” (ibid.).¹² Before proceeding to explicate the most recent situations since 1980s, the authors mention the only party „with a more explicit religious appeal,” Komeito, adding that „Japanese voters are generally quite negative toward the concept of religious party,” based on a survey conducted by the Leisure Development Center of Japan in 1979 (280).¹³

Toyoda and Tanaka see the revival of nationalism in the succeeding period of 1980s and 1990s, first, in the field of anthropology and archaeology, which they think „gave credibility to and promoted popular ideas regarding the mystical nature or the origin of the Japanese race” (281).¹⁴ The authors then move to another topic of the Yasukuni Shrine controversy. After the LDP attempt to „nationalize the management of the Yasukuni Shrine” finally failed by 1974, „hardliners backed official annual visits of the prime minister to the Shrine every August 15, on the anniversary of the end of World War II in the Pacific” (282).¹⁵

10 Toyoda and Tanaka mistakenly note that the directive to dismantle of state Shinto was issued by the Allied Powers in October 1945 (277). The directive was in fact issued on 15 December 1945.

11 What the author mean concretely by this sentence is not clear. They also use such terms as “religious nationalists,” “religion-based nationalism,” and “[r]eligious conservatism” (279), but here again the concrete references are missing.

12 As to the LDP hard-liners, Toyoda and Tanaka state that “[they] have crafted an economic nationalism message that draws on religion” (281), adding that “harder-line version of nationalism did explicitly refer to many of the same concepts of racial purity and divine origin that was advanced during the Meiji through Showa periods” (ibid.).

13 The authors come back to the subject of Soka Gakkai and Komeito in the latter part of this chapter, describing the period when Komeito joined in the coalition government with the LDP in the 1990s onwards (283-4).

14 They continue: „The Kyoto School, headquartered at the prestigious Minpaku National Ethnological Museum, was the main proponent of these views that helped to revive the unsettling, though this time more implicit, concept of Japanese racial superiority” (281). This statement sounds very shocking because it does not rely on any concrete source. Recent studies have revealed that Japanese ethnology and anthropology had the interwar history in connection with the Japanese military aggression on China and other Asian and Pacific regions, but it is usually understood that liberal intellectuals and journalists had warned against the establishment not of Minpaku established in 1974 but of Nichibunken, International Research Center for Japanese Studies, established under Nakasone Yasuhiro’s (as the Prime Minister from 1982-1987) strong leadership, with Umehara Takeshi as the first Director-General from 1987 through 1995.

15 The visit on August 15 was first made in 1975 by Miki Takeo, Prime Minister since 1974 through 1976, although he announced that he paid this visit in a private capacity. The date of the August 15 had no special meaning for Yasukuni Shrine until this visit by Miki, because those enshrined there were not only fallen soldiers on World War II, but also those fallen in the earlier wars, although the former was the greatest majority among those enshrined. The reason for the visit on this day comes from the visitors’ side, such as veterans, and bereaved family members of fallen soldiers of World War II. With this visit by Miki, special attention came to be paid to this date. In addition, in what capacity any public figure visits this Shrine became a contentious issue.

In a section entitled „Religion Today”, Toyoda and Tanaka present observations in contrast. On the one hand, „the idea of a Japanese nation is still rooted in religious principles and myth,”¹⁶ in their view, on the other hand, „religious relevance to daily lives and political goals of Shinto and Buddhism has largely been lost,” and “[i]n more recent years, the influence of the main religions has declined as a result of mobility and urbanization, which have undermined the traditional *ujigami*, or neighborhood organization, centered on shrines or temples”(282-3).¹⁷ If we now focus on the relation between religion and politics, skipping the mention of the Aum Shinrikyo incident in 1995, and jumping to the concluding chapter subtitled „Toward a Nonwestern Understanding of Religion and Politics,” we find the final sentence of the chapter interesting, that is: „Religion does matter in the politics of contemporary Japan, not in the way we are accustomed to seeing it matter in Western politics, but to the extent that it provides the historical basis for today’s civic culture” (285).

As both Hardacre on the one hand and Toyoda and Tanaka on the other mentioned, at least two subjects in the field of religion and politics deserve consideration in contemporary Japan. One is Yasukuni Shrine, and the other is Soka Gakkai and Komeito. I will focus the present situation surrounding Yasukuni Shrine in the following, leaving another occasion in the near future for the latter subject.

I. The Yasukuni Shrine Problem: From Domestic to East Asian Disputes

Yasukuni Shrine and Its Postwar History

Yasukuni Shrine, established as Tokyo Shokon-sha in 1869, and renamed as Yasukuni Shrine in 1879, kept its status of national facility until 1945, mainly under the supervision of the Ministries of Army and Navy. This shrine was originally established to enshrine the soldiers who lost their lives during the wars that were carried out internally in order to unify the nation, and externally to achieve the Japanese imperialist interests in Asian countries and Pacific regions.¹⁸

In the years following World War II the General Headquarters (GHQ) and the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) worked to reform occupied Japan into a modern democracy. These reforms included disarming and dismantling what remained of Japan’s former militaristic regime. This process continued from 1945 until the formalization of a peace treaty between Japan and the allied nations in 1952.

As part of the reforms initiated by GHQ, in February 1946 some 86,000 of the total of approximately 106,000 Shinto Shrines were merged into Jinja Honcho (the Association of Shinto Shrines) to form a private religious corporation. As a result Shinto emerged as one religion among many in a context of contemporary religious pluralism. Yasukuni Shrine, however, chose to become an individual religious corporation keeping itself

¹⁶ Here again, it is not clear what is meant by the religious or mythical idea of the Japanese nation.

¹⁷ This observation sounds somewhat anachronistic because urbanization in Japan could be found in earlier years than “the more recent years.” The population of the Tokyo Metropolis, for example, grew from 3.5 million of 1945 to 6.3 million in 1950, 10.9 million in 1965, and 12.6 million in 2005, according to the official statistics of the Tokyo Metropolitan government. Another point to mention is that *ujigami* is a term generally related to Shinto and shrines, not to Buddhism and temples.

¹⁸ For an outline of the history of Yasukuni Shrine and its current problem, see Okuyama 2005; 2007; and 2009. For various attitudes toward the Yasukuni Shrine problem, see Breen 2008.

apart from the Association of Shinto Shrines, on the ground that its function under the imperial regime had been completely different from other Shinto shrines. GHQ kept Yasukuni under scrutiny, since they regarded Yasukuni as responsible for Japanese militarism and ultra-nationalism during the war, and suspected the latter might keep the militarism under disguise. In November 1946 GHQ decided to allow that the precinct of national property where religious facilities were located to be transferred to each facility as a private organization, but this decision did not apply to Yasukuni Shrine and other militaristic shrines. It was only after the peace treaty was effectuated in 1952 that the status of Yasukuni Shrine as a private religious corporation was finally established.

I will not delve into the details of the history of Yasukuni Shrine from the 1950s through the late 1970s. The year 1978 was significant because Yasukuni made a decision as to the object of its enshrinement in the year.¹⁹ The decision was for Yasukuni Shrine to enshrine class A war criminals, which has complicated the issue surrounding Yasukuni Shrine tremendously until today. The class A war criminals were not ordinary fallen soldiers but were those criminals responsible for the Japanese aggressive war and were regarded as having committed so-called „crimes against the peace.”²⁰ Of the 28 prosecuted class A war criminals, 25 were convicted (two among these 28 died of illness during the International Military Tribunal for the Far East [aka the Tokyo Trial] and one was discharged due to mental illness). Of these 25 seven were executed, five died of illness in prison after the trial, and the other thirteen were imprisoned but released afterwards. The fourteen dead, including the two who died during the trial, were enshrined at Yasukuni in 1978.

On 15 August 1985, Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro visited Yasukuni, publicly announcing it as an official visit. Criticism from Asian countries was immediate. In response to international reaction, the Liberal Democratic Party tried to persuade Yasukuni to withdraw the enshrinement of the class A war criminals, but Yasukuni refused. Nakasone had to discontinue his visits during the rest of his term as Prime Minister until 1987. The next visit by a Prime Minister came only eleven years later, in 1996, by Hashimoto Ryutaro, again provoking a storm of criticism from abroad, mainly aimed at the enshrinement of the class A war criminals.

Against this historical backdrop, Koizumi Jun'ichiro took office in 2001 with the public pledge that he would visit Yasukuni Shrine on August 15. After taking office, umi visited the Shrine once every year until he left office in 2006.²¹ Koizumi's visits

19 The following description is based on my earlier article. See Okuyama 2005.

20 The concept of “crimes against the peace” was introduced in the International Military Tribunal (1945-46) against the Nazi Germany, also known as Nuremberg Trials.

21 Koizumi issued the statement on his visit to Yasukuni Shrine on 13 August 2001 as follows (the provisional translation of the Cabinet). The day after tomorrow, August 15, is the fifty-sixth anniversary of the end of the war. Looking back to the last war at the very beginning of the twenty-first century, solemn feelings fill my heart. During the war, Japan caused tremendous sufferings to many people of the world including its own people. Following a mistaken national policy during a certain period in the past, Japan imposed, through its colonial rule and aggression, immeasurable ravages and suffering particularly to the people of the neighboring countries in Asia. This has left a still incurable scar to many people in the region. Sincerely facing these deeply regrettable historical facts as they are, here I offer my feelings of profound remorse and sincere mourning to all the victims of the war.

I believe that Japan must never again proceed a path to war. Every year, before the souls of those who lost their lives in the battlefield while believing in the future of Japan in those difficult days, I have recalled that the present peace and prosperity

stimulated disputes both for and against Yasukuni Shrine and on related issues, and led to several court cases including the ones mentioned later.²²

The Chinese Government's Reaction

Before proceeding to these court cases, we need to review reactions of neighboring countries to Japanese politicians' connection with Yasukuni Shrine.

Ichitani Kazuo traces the reactions by the Chinese government to Japanese prime ministers' visit to Yasukuni Shrine in detail.²³ According to Ichitani, after Miki Takeo's visit on 15th August 1975, the succeeding Prime Ministers also paid visit to the Shrine repeatedly, including Fukuda Takeo's visit on the same date of 1978 (the other visits were made on different dates). Yasukuni Shrine enshrined the class A war criminals in October 1978, but only in April 1979 was this fact reported in a major national newspaper (Ichitani 2007, 42).

On 15th August 1980, Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko with other 18 cabinet members visited Yasukuni Shrine in a private capacity. Two days later, *People's Daily* reported the fact with such additional information as the enshrinement of class A war criminals (ibid.). Suzuki repeated the visit on the same date in 1981 and 1982, and accordingly *People's Daily* critically commented on it. Ichitani notices that *People's Daily* targeted on the issue whether or not it was official for the Prime Minister or other cabinet members to visit to Yasukuni Shrine where "militarists" are enshrined.

Prime Minister Nakasone visited repeatedly, and these visits included the ones on 15th August in 1983 and 1984. In 1985 the Chief-Secretary of the Cabinet announced on 14th August that Nakasone would make "an official visit" on the next day. On this occasion, however, Nakasone visited without following respectful religious procedures

of Japan are founded on the ultimate sacrifices they made, and renewed my vow for peace. I had thought that people of Japan and those of the neighboring countries would understand my belief if it was fully explained, and thus, after my assumption of office as Prime Minister, I expressed my wish to visit Yasukuni Shrine on August 15.

However, as the anniversary of the end of the war came closer, vocal debates have started at home and abroad as to whether I should visit Yasukuni Shrine. In the course of these debates, opinions requesting the cancellation of my visit to Yasukuni Shrine were voiced not only within Japan but also from other countries. It would be totally contrary to my wish, under these circumstances, if my visit to Yasukuni Shrine on August 15 could, against my intention, lead people of neighboring countries to cast doubts on the fundamental policy of Japan of denying war and desiring peace. Taking seriously such situations both in and outside of Japan, I have made my own decision not to visit Yasukuni Shrine on that day, and I would like to choose another day for a visit.

As Prime Minister, I deeply regret withdrawing what I have once said. However, even if I have my own views on a visit to Yasukuni Shrine, I am now in a position to devote myself to my duty as Prime Minister, and to deal with various challenges, taking broad national interests into consideration.

If circumstances permit, I would like to have opportunities as soon as possible to have face-to-face meetings with leaders of China and the Republic of Korea, in order to exchange views on the peace and development of the Asia-Pacific region of the future and to talk about my belief mentioned above.

Furthermore, as an issue for the future, I think that we need to discuss what could be done in order for people at home and abroad to pay memorial tribute without discomfort, while respecting the feelings of the Japanese people toward Yasukuni Shrine and Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery.

I do sincerely ask the people of Japan to understand my genuine feelings.

22 For an outline of these cases, see Tanaka 2007; Okuyama 2008.

23 Ichitani also mentions the Korean government's criticism against the Japanese politicians' visit to Yasukuni Shrine, but here I only focus on that of the Chinese government.

that Yasukuni Shrine requires of the visitors, in order to avoid any suspicion of violation of the constitutional separation between religion and the state. Nakasone made a statement after the visit that Japan would not return to prewar militarism, ultranationalism, or State Shinto. This one was the first official visit after the war by the Prime Minister in the capacity of Prime Minister (44).

At the Cabinet announcement on the 14th, the Chinese government immediately expressed their opposition to Nakasone's visit. Their criticism gradually focused on the issue of the enshrinement of the class A war criminals, and later in the month, the following opinion was confirmed officially by the Vice-Prime Yao Yilin, and the General Secretary of the Communist Party Hu Yaobang, that the Japanese Prime Minister or any cabinet member's official visit to Yasukuni Shrine where the class A war criminals are enshrined would afflict victims of former Japanese aggressive wars (45). In the end, Nakasone gave up further official visit, and his visit on 15th August 1985 became his last as Prime Minister.

In the case of Prime Minister Koizumi, he visited regularly every year after he took office, but avoided the date of 15th August from 2001 to 2005. Koizumi also wanted to avoid the class A war criminals' becoming the point of dispute, but the Chinese government kept their criticism against Japanese politicians' visit to the place enshrining those criminals. A seeming unwillingness to compromise on both sides produced almost nothing but stimulation to nationalism in both countries. This may explain to some extent Koizumi's rather stable popularity among the Japanese people. But as long as Yasukuni Shrine is the place to enshrine fallen soldiers and other war dead for the modern Japanese nation, this Shrine cannot be considered to be a neutral institution for commemoration for the war dead and civilian victims in the war. As such Yasukuni Shrine will continue to be regarded as "a military shrine," and the conduct of visiting there as militaristic. Prime Minister Koizumi made the visit on 15 August only once in 2006, just two months before he left office.

A Korean Intellectual's Criticism

Recently there have been more and more opportunities for serious and sincere intellectual exchanges of opinions between Koreans and Japanese, though sometimes those exchanges can be difficult experiences for both, especially on a delicate topic like Yasukuni Shrine. Park Yu-Ha is a Korean scholar specializing in Japanese literature, and her book entitled *For the Compromise* was published originally in Korean in 2005, and translated into Japanese in 2006. She discusses in the book such controversial issues between Korea and Japan as Japanese textbooks, wartime comfort women, and Liancourt Rocks, in addition to the Yasukuni Shrine problem.

She takes up Koizumi's statement issued on 13th August 2001 about his visit to Yasukuni Shrine to scrutinize his motivation. She admits Koizumi's feeling of remorse and apologies to victims of Japan's aggressions and colonial rule. She also admits his vow for peace under the postwar Japanese policy of denying war and desiring peace. But when he says that the present peace and prosperity of Japan are founded on the sacrifices of those who lost their lives in the battlefield while believing in the future of Japan, and that he visits Yasukuni Shrine to express his respect and gratitude toward these people, Park stops to question his reasoning. In her view, Koizumi shows

no doubt concerning the wars themselves, and especially as to why and how those people had to sacrifice their precious lives in the wars (Park 2006, 118-120).

Park traces the postwar history of Yasukuni Shrine, referring to its surrounding actors, for example, the Japan Association of War-bereaved Families, the Association of Shinto Shrines, and the Liberal Democratic Party (120-4). She then examines the opinions of such supporters of Yasukuni Shrine as Kobori Keiichiro, who criticize the Occupation of Japan by the Allied Powers and the Tokyo Trial (124-7). The Yasukuni supporters insist that the fallen soldiers of Japan sacrificed themselves to the nation for the cause of the liberation of Asia from the colonialism by the West, but this insistence immediately appears to Park to be false because Japan was also an imperialistic power that colonized Korea (129-34). According to her, when you notice that Yasukuni Shrine praises the spirit of willingly sacrificing oneself for the nation, Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni and his vow for peace will look somewhat contradictory. His professed respect and gratitude toward fallen soldiers will, in her view, lead to be glorification of the war itself (137-8).

Park as a Korean admits that the same structure can be found in the National Cemetery of Korea as a facility for praising the dead sacrificing themselves for the nation (138-44). But she finds an idiosyncrasy of Yasukuni Shrine in that Yasukuni had the role of sending the people to the battlefields, and additionally that the Yasukuni supporters are willing to affirm the past wars of Japan (145). If these supporters insist that the sacrificial death of the soldiers was totally voluntary without agony or doubt, then they are, in her view, distorting their death (145-50).

In Park's thinking, the visit to Yasukuni Shrine will ultimately lead to the affirmation of militarism, as long as Yasukuni keeps the present view toward the past wars of Japan (152). Even if another national facility for the war dead should be established beside Yasukuni Shrine, expressing respect and gratitude for the war dead would not be a suitable act. She suggests instead that the later generations need to apologize to the former wartime generations for the latter's being forced to devote themselves to murders and atrocities (152-3).

Yasukuni Shrine can be situated in the context described thus far, that is, in the context where intervention of Japanese domestic politics from time to time has caused arguments both for and against Yasukuni Shrine, and where Asian people are watching with vigilance against a possible reemergence of Japanese militarism.

II The Court Cases surrounding Yasukuni and Their Representations

Asians Joining in Cases against Yasukuni Shrine

Even before 2001 there were several court cases surrounding Yasukuni Shrine, but Koizumi Jun'ichiro's inauguration in the year and his repeated visits to Yasukuni led to other cases including the following that involved foreign citizens.

In June 2001, 252 Koreans who were former soldiers and civilian workers in the Japanese army, or their bereaved families, filed suit against the Japanese state for redress. This lawsuit is called "*Gungun saiban*" ("*Gungun lawsuit*") because the Korean plaintiffs are former soldiers (*gunjin*), civilian workers (*gunzoku*), or their bereaved families. In this case, the plaintiffs understood that the enshrinement of Korean

soldiers and workers at Yasukuni Shrine were processed with the active involvement of the Japanese government, and they demanded that it be annulled.²⁴ The Japanese government has denied responsibility for the redress because Koreans who were Japanese subjects under the pre-war through inter-war Japanese regime are no longer Japanese citizens. They also claim that the after-war relationship between Japan and Korea has been regulated and the related problems have been solved by inter-governmental treaties. In May 2006 the Tokyo district court dismissed the case, the plaintiffs appealed, and the Tokyo high court dismissed the case in October 2009.

Korean and Chinese living in Japan, and other Koreans abroad, joined in some cases targeting Yasukuni Shrine and questioning the legality of Koizumi's visits. The case filed on November 2001 at the Osaka district court included around 120 Chinese and Koreans among the total 639 plaintiffs, and this case was referred to as the Yasukuni Asian Case. In June 2006, the Supreme Court dismissed this case.

Another case filed in February 2003 also at the Osaka district court included 124 Taiwanese among the total 236 plaintiffs, and the case was referred to as the Yasukuni Taiwanese Case. Among these 124, 34 were indigenous Taiwanese including a Taiwanese legislator Ko Kim Sò-mûi.²⁵ After the dismissal at the district court, the Osaka high court judged on 30th September 2005 that the prime minister's visit was unconstitutional, though the compensation was dismissed. Although just after this judgment Koizumi visited Yasukuni Shrine on 17th October, he seemingly tried to be less religious in his style of visit.

In August 2006, the Taiwanese and Japanese bereaved families filed a case against Yasukuni Shrine as well as the Japanese state, demanding an annulment of the enshrinement of their dead family members at Yasukuni Shrine, and redress at the Osaka district court. In February 2009, all the demands were dismissed.

In February 2007, eleven Koreans filed another suit against Yasukuni Shrine as well as the Japanese state for annulment of the enshrinement, apology, and redress. This case is pending at the Tokyo district court.

Koizumi's intentional involvement with Yasukuni Shrine and these court cases, filed after he took office, have mobilized supporters for the contestants. Some film artists also have joined in the movement, which I will turn to in the next section.

Yasukuni Problems Represented in Documentary Films

Annyong, Sayonara (2005)

A documentary film, *Annyong, Sayonara*, directed by Kim Tae-il and Katō Kumiko (2005), awarded at Pusan, focuses on the very core of the Yasukuni problem, namely, the unsolved treatment of modern Japanese imperialism and colonialism, and the ongoing legal issue regarding the freedom of religion. Featuring a Korean representative of the plaintiffs of the above-mentioned "Gungun lawsuit," Ms. Lee Hee-ja, and a Japanese supporter, Mr. Furukawa, the film shows mainly three different sectors in parallel: one is composed of interviews with Japanese of diverse opinions, both right and left, on

24 27,863 Taiwanese and 21,181 Koreans are included among around 2,466,000 enshrined souls at Yasukuni Shrine (Tanaka 2007, 42).

25 She used to be an actress, named May Chin, who was cast in a 1993 movie *The Wedding Banquet*.

modern Japanese history, the present position of Japan, and Yasukuni Shrine; another is composed of interviews with Koreans basically critical and resentful not only of Japan's past but also of present irresponsible position of the Japanese government; and the other is composed of Lee's and Furukawa's activities set against the backdrop of documentary images filmed around Yasukuni Shrine.

Lee was born in 1943, and her father was drafted by the Japanese army in 1943. After the war, Lee's family did not receive any information about her father. In 1989, she joined in a group of bereaved families of the Pacific War victims, and became active in searching for clues of her missing father's whereabouts. Through this activity, she learned that he died in southern China, and that he had been enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine since 1959. In 2001 she started to request that Yasukuni Shrine delete his name from the list of those enshrined, joining in the Gungun lawsuit plaintiffs. The film shows Lee's father's tombstone located in a national cemetery in Chunan, Korea. But the surface of the stone is kept flat without any inscription, because Lee thinks his spirit is still captured in Yasukuni Shrine.

The basic standpoint of this film is clear enough to show that the film making itself was a support activity for the court cases against Yasukuni Shrine and the Japanese government. This film shows that Koreans and Taiwanese, the offspring of the former subjugated by the imperial Japan, now are contesting against Japan for redress. But it also shows that there are some Japanese who support these Koreans and Taiwanese, gradually trying to bridge the gap between Koreans, Taiwanese, and possibly Chinese hatred and Japanese ignorance. One could hope that solidarity, if not on the international or diplomatic level, would begin to emerge on the level of ordinary people.

The least we can say is that the production of this film, *Annyong, Sayonara*, as a joint project by both Koreans and Japanese, is a strong signal for future collaborations between the two peoples.

Yasukuni (2007)

Another documentary film, *Yasukuni*, directed by Li Ying (2007), screened at the international film festivals at Sundance and Berlin, awarded at Hong Kong, and invited to Pusan, has caused contentions outside of theaters in Japan lately.²⁶ A Chinese filmmaker, Li Ying, received financial support for its production from an independent administrative institution, the Japan Arts Council, which functions under the jurisdiction of the Agency of Cultural Affairs. Lawmakers of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party wanted to check the legitimacy of this public subsidy and requested that the film be screened to them before the release. The politicians did not intend censorship, according to their own explanations, and after watching their impressions were divided between appreciation and criticism. But after this prerelease screening in March 2008, almost all the scheduled releases were temporarily cancelled, mainly because the theaters wanted to avoid potential friction that the film might cause between them and the rightists. The argument grew and spread to include certain vocal rightists that in fact supported its screening. At last, several theaters started to release this film in May.

²⁶ The following argument is based on my earlier essay. See Okuyama 2009.

This film is basically composed of two parts; one is a series of interviews by Li Ying with Mr. Kariya, who is an old forge of the Japanese sword full of craftsmanship, and the other is scenes filmed on the precinct of Yasukuni Shrine on the memorial day of the end of war, 15th August, on one year or another.

The series of interview features the solemn tradition of forging the sword, which used to have a military purpose and a relation to Yasukuni Shrine. This tradition traces back to the 1930s, when the martial spirit was highly inspired. The interview shows odd conversation between Li and Kariya, often missing each other's meaning unintentionally because of Li's limited ability in Japanese language and Kariya's difficulty in hearing. It also sometimes shows Kariya's perplexity about the wartime cruelty of the object of his devotion, the Japanese sword. Side by side with the interview, Li inserts historical photographs that show Japanese soldiers killing the captives on the war field with the same kind of Japanese sword.

Scenes filmed at Yasukuni Shrine show various groups of people who visit to bow in front of the shrine. Impressive among them are men's groups in a military uniform, some of whom seem veterans, but the others look like young people with a mania for militarism. There appear also protesters against militarism and those who want to expel these protesters out of the sanctuary, showing conspicuous "Chinophobia." Also filmed are Taiwanese, Korean, and Japanese protesters against Yasukuni Shrine who brought the "Gungun lawsuit" mentioned above.

Outside of the theaters, the LDP politicians' intervening inquiry, followed by suspended screening, inflamed dispute on this documentary film. Here are some of the issues presented by those engaged in this discussion.

A lawyer and LDP politician, Inada Tomomi, a member of the House of Representatives, insisted that she wanted to check the legitimacy of the public subsidy. Her judgment about the legitimacy reasons is as follows: The conditions of the subsidization by the Japan Arts Council stipulate that the grantees should be Japanese corporations, and that the objectives of the products should not be commercial, religious, or political. According to Inada, the producers of this film can hardly be regarded as Japanese, one being the agent in Tokyo for a Chinese TV station, and the other two Chinese organizations. And the film itself inevitably contains some political intentions. Thus Inada judges that this subsidization was not legitimate.

Another LDP politician, Arimura Haruko, a member of the House of Councilors, also has an interest in the legitimacy of the public subsidy, but she added another issue in her argument. She wanted to know whether the main figure, Mr. Kariya, has agreed to appear in the film or not. One of her findings is the fact that he does not want to appear in the film on Yasukuni Shrine. He had only heard from Li that the filming was all about craftsman's forging the Japanese sword, and did not expect his images to be mixed with the noisy scenes of the present Yasukuni Shrine. Concerned about the stance of the film, Kariya asked that his name and images be deleted from the film, but in vain.

The first reaction in the press to these interventions by politicians was express concern about endangering the freedom of expression. After the initial suspension, dozens of intellectuals, and workers and unions within and out of the press supported the screening, and then a number of theaters decided to screen the film. As for the freedom of expression, it seems to have been ensured through strong advocacy. On the

other hand, Li and others have questioned the legitimacy of politicians' intervention, but the politicians' insistence that they find it necessary to check the legitimacy of public subsidization cannot be dismissed.

After reading through various arguments with regard to the issues surrounding this documentary film, I find Mori Tatsuya's comment important.²⁷ Mori is another documentary film director, and has his own idea about making documentary films. In his idea, "documentaries are a self-expression by cutting out fragments from one reality, and reconstituting another using the cut-out fragments" (Mori 2008, 59). And as such they should be independent of the consent of those people in the film to their appearing there. If it became necessary for a director to obtain all the prerelease consent by those who appeared in the film, he or she could not make any documentaries. Although he does not elaborate further, I think Mori would make his own documentaries even if someone shown in the film should complain about his or her appearing there. This seems to mean that Mori must have a firm determination to be ready for any lawsuit against him.

II Conclusion

The present situation surrounding Yasukuni Shrine has been influenced by the postwar religious reformation led by GHQ/SCAP, conservative politicians' nationalistic inclination for respecting Japan's modern history that in fact contains imperialism and colonialism, and the decision made by Yasukuni Shrine itself as a private religious corporation, to name a few among others. And the present situation especially after 1978 has caused conflicts between Japan and other Asian countries once in a while not only on a diplomatic level, but also on the level of people's feelings. In reaction to the rise of Asian people's anger, nationalist and patriotic sentiments also surged among Japanese people, as happened under the Koizumi government.

More specifically, the situation surrounding Yasukuni Shrine has presented a number of legal, or more precisely, constitutional, problems. My basic understanding is that the modern legal system in Japan has been framed through assimilating the Western model and that legislation that regulates relations between religion and the state does not completely fit in with the cultural and religious settings of Japan. Despite that, however, as long as the Japanese respect the modern legal system in its own right, they need to keep revising or devising the system, or applying it, so that they can feel less awkward with it.

The latest issue surrounding Yasukuni Shrine was the one related to the documentary film, *Yasukuni*. The film not only vividly captures recent noisy and nasty scenes being unfolded on the sanctuary, but also has caused conflicts of its own. In contrast with another documentary film, *Annyong, Sayonara*, which clearly stands by the plaintiffs of "Gungun lawsuit," Li Ying's standpoint has turned out to be a little ambiguous. The audience cannot deny his rapport with Kariya, but watching Kariya's scene mixed with atrocities of Japanese soldiers may lead the audience to doubt the authenticity of that rapport, and to wonder, "Doesn't Li betray Kariya's trust in him?" Both Arimura's question and Mori's comment, though from the opposite standpoints, reveal suspicions surrounding representation, especially in the process of making documentaries. One

²⁷ For Mori's argument, see Mori 2008; Mori and Saitō 2008.

possible way to mitigation may be observed in *Annyong, Sayonara*, in that it shows a possibility of solidarity among ordinary people in Japan and other Asian countries, and that its production itself was a joint project by Koreans and Japanese.

There remain a number of other problems surrounding Yasukuni Shrine, and we need to continue to think about them. Thinking about Yasukuni Shrine in the context of modern history of East Asia will clarify a particular case of religion and politics in this region. In addition, it will hopefully shed light on a path toward a possible future shared by the peoples from different shores, with different experiences, and of different views.

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ПРОБЛЕМ ХРАМА ЈАСУКУНИ У КОНТЕКСТУ ИСТОЧНЕ АЗИЈЕ: РЕЛИГИЈА И ПОЛИТИКА У САВРЕМЕНОМ ЈАПАНУ

Резиме

Проблем питања која окружују храм Јасукуни једна је од главних тема религије и политике у савременом Јапану. Овај рад покушава да приђе проблему храма Јасукуни постављајући га, најпре, у контекст околности у Источној Азији, затим прегледом недавних судских процеса у вези с храмом Јасукуни, и, коначно, коментаришући два документарна филма усредсређена на овај проблем. Испитивање реакција кинеске владе на посете јапанских политичара од средине 1970-тих, показује да те посете, месту на коме се чува успомена на ратне злочинце првог реда, кинески званичници сматрају увредљивим за жртве јапанских агресивних ратова. Недавни судски процеси, углавном усмерени на понављане посете бившег премијера Коизумија храму Јасукуни, завређују посебну пажњу, јер они, у улози тужиоца, осим Јапанаца укључују и Корејанце и Тајванце. Ови случајеви представљају елементе уставног спорења и за јапански и за друге азијске народе. Ове ситуације дале су оквир за продукцију и приказивање документарних филмова *Анјонг*, *Сајонара* (2005) и *Јасукуни* (2007). Ова два филма илуструју не само тренутни проблем храма Јасукуни, већ и околности у Источној Азији које овај проблем окружују.

Кључне речи: шинто, Јасукуни храм, слобода религије, ратни споменик, парница Гунган.

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