

War Commemoration and the Yasukuni Shrine Issue



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Remembering Soldiers

The USA: Memorial Day

Germany: Veterans' Day vs Volkstrauertag

Russia: 9 May vs 3 September

South Korea: National Liberation Day

China: Victory Day and Nanjing Massacre Memorial Day

The UK: Armistice Day

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What do we make of this?



The peace and prosperity that we now enjoy have been built upon the sacrifices of you who gave up your precious lives while thinking of your beloved children and wives, praying for the happiness of the mothers and fathers you left behind, and wishing that the mountains and riversides of your hometowns would be lush with greenery. We will never forget this, even for a moment.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, 15 August 2013.

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Nationalism

- Brings “us” together by creating a clear division with “them”.
- A recipe for pride and purpose, or, controversy and conflict.
- The Japanese version is at Yasukuni Shrine.
- Let's watch a short video on WMT ...

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Yasukuni Shrine: Overview

- 1869: Founded as Tokyo Shokonsha
- 1879: Renamed Yasukuni Shrine
- Enshrines 2.46 million *eirei* (“glorious dead”) who were military (*gunjin*) or attached to the military (*gunzoku*) up to 1945.
- Civilians are not enshrined, except for those “attached to the military”.

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“To their country”

About Yasukuni Jinja Festivals and Rituals Precinct Map

History

The origins of Yasukuni Jinja lie in a shrine called Shokonsha, which was established at Kudan in Tokyo in the second year of the Meiji era (1869) by the will of the Emperor Meiji. In 1879, it was renamed Yasukuni Jinja.

When the Emperor Meiji visited Shokonsha for the first time on January 27, 1874, he composed a poem: “I assure those of you who fought and died for your country that your names will live forever at this shrine in Musashino.” As expressed by this poem, Yasukuni Jinja was established to commemorate and honor the achievements of those who dedicated their precious lives to their country. The name “Yasukuni,” bestowed by the Emperor Meiji, means to preserve peace for the entire nation.

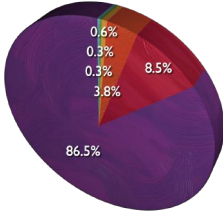


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Who are the *Eirei*?

- Bakumatsu, Boshin War
- Satsuma Rebellion
- Taiwan Expedition onwards
- Russo-Japanese War onwards
- Manchurian Incident, China War
- Great East Asian War



- 7,751 *eirei* died in the Bakumatsu period (up to the end of the Boshin War, 1868-9).
- But, their enshrinement reveals the essence of Yasukuni Shrine.

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Who is Enshrined?



Hijikata Toshizo (Shinsengumi, died at the Battle of Hakodate in 1869)



Saigo Takamori (fought for the restoration 1868-9, died a rebel in 1877)



Yoshida Shoin (Imperialist intellectual, executed during the Ansei Purge in 1859)

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Who is Enshrined?

Tokugawa loyalists ("rebels") are not enshrined.

Hijikata Toshizo (Shinsengumi, died at the Battle of Hakodate in 1869)

Not fighting for but *dying* for the new government.

Saigo Takamori (fought for the restoration 1868-9, died a rebel in 1877)

Retroactive apotheosis for imperial loyalists.

Yoshida Shoin (Imperialist intellectual, executed during the Ansei Purge in 1859)

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In the Service of the Emperor

The common feature of all *eirei* is not "*kuni no tame*" (for the country) or even "death in battle", it is *death* while in the service of or fighting for the *Emperor*.



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In the Service of the Emperor

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"Real" Yasukuni patrons argue the Emperor, not the Prime Minister, should be worshipping at Yasukuni.

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The Controversy Today



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Four Main Issues

- **Constitutional Issue:** Can politicians pay their respects at a religious site?
- **Diplomatic Issue:** Worship angers Asian neighbours (Class A War Criminals).
- **Philosophical Issue:** How does one remember the perpetrators of invasion and war crimes?
- **Cultural Issue:** Attitudes towards commemoration of ancestors.

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Constitutional Issue

- Pre-1945: Yasukuni under state patronage.
- Post-defeat: Proposal to abolish/destroy Yasukuni.
- 1947: The Constitution protects freedom of religion. Separation of religion and state (Article 20).
- 1951: Yasukuni made an autonomous religious organization.

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Constitutional Issue

- 1960s and 1970s: Unsuccessful attempts to return Yasukuni Shrine to state patronage.
- 1945-75: Prime ministers visit routinely at the Spring and Autumn festivals; Emperor Hirohito makes 8 visits.
- 1975: PM Miki Takeo visits on 15 August.

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Constitutional Issue

- “Private” vs “Official” worship.
- Can sitting prime ministers ever act in a “private” capacity?
- What parts of the “worship” indicate if it is private?
- Does avoiding the proper Shinto ritual mean it is not *sanpai*, i.e. not religious?

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Diplomatic Issue

- 1978: 14 class A war criminals are quietly enshrined (reported by the press in 1979).
- Yasukuni worship as the “veneration of war criminals”.
- Yasukuni’s nationalistic views of history are clear in the exhibits of the Yushukan Museum.

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Diplomatic Issue

- 1985: Nakasone Yasuhiro worships in an “official capacity” on 15 August.
- 1992: Miyazawa Kiichi (secret worship)
- 1996: Hashimoto Ryutaro (on his birthday).
- 2001-2006: Koizumi Junichiro.
- 2013: Abe Shinzo.
- But ... no visits by an Emperor since 1975.

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Philosophical Issue

- Focusing on class A war criminals is simplistic.
- Over 1000 B/C class war criminals are also enshrined.
- Many who committed war crimes never faced trial.
- How to commemorate the war dead given Japanese war responsibility.

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Cultural Issue

- Ancestor reverence a part of Japanese culture.
- The war dead deserve to be revered like any others.
- Other countries have sites and events of remembrance. Why not Japan?

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Commemoration



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Alternatives to Yasukuni Shrine

- 2002: Intensive discussions about a non-religious alternative to Yasukuni.
- Opposed by nationalists: “the war dead are at Yasukuni”
- Opposed by progressives: it still commemorates aggressors.
- Nixed by the Koizumi administration.
- A campaign pledge of the DPJ in 2009, but it never materialized.

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Alternatives to Yasukuni Shrine

- The cemetery at Chidorigafuchi.
- The network of Gokoku Shrines.
- The Ceremony to Commemorate the War Dead (15 August).
- Countless local commemorative events both large (Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Okinawa) and small.

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Towards our debate



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Debate

- The motion: “The Japanese Prime Minister should worship at Yasukuni Shrine on 15 August every year.”
- Reading is available via the website.
- Prepare arguments both for and against the motion!

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