Mourning and Violence in the Land of Peace:
Reflections on Yasukuni

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My talk today focuses on the Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo, and seeks to highlight a particular problem that attaches to it. In Japan, in China and in Korea—and in Europe and the USA to some extent—there persists a perception among politicians and intellectuals interested in, and concerned about, Japan that Yasukuni is a problem. In Japanese, it is rare to hear the word "Yasukuni" in isolation; it is invariably paired with the noun *mondai* (problem), as in "Yasukuni *mondai*." Even the shrine's priests and apologists refer to the Yasukuni *mondai*. This perception is almost non-existent in Indonesia for reasons that are, of course, historical. Japan's occupation of Indonesia freed it from its Dutch colonisers and, for all the brutality subsequently recorded under Japanese rule, Japan was the spur to Indonesian independence. There are also, as Dr. Sudung has assured me, reasons eminently practical for Yasukuni not being on the Indonesian radar. Post-war Indonesia and Japan enjoy a fruitful and productive relationship, and there is no reason to let past wrongs undermine it. This situation anyway seems to require that I begin by setting out for you as simply as possible what Yasukuni is and, above all, what it does, before I explore any of the problems that might attach to it.

Figure 1

Yasukuni is a Shinto shrine in the heart of Tokyo, close to the imperial palace. It is one of a small number of shrines especially favoured by the imperial court. To this day, the emperor sends an emissary to Yasukuni twice a year to represent him at the shrine's Great Autumn and Spring Rites.[1] This Yasukuni shrine is a modern invention, created in the wake of the Meiji Revolution of 1868. In symbolic terms, however, it is indistinguishable from other Shinto shrines in the land. Its sacred space is marked by a

[1] Shrines so privileged are known as *chokusaisha*. There are sixteen of them today.

sequence of *torii* gates along the main pilgrims' path; the architecture of its buildings is entirely consistent with that found in other Shinto shrines. Like Shinto shrines everywhere, it is served by a community of shrine priests, who wear what shrine priests always wear; they perform rites that are not of themselves remarkable: the rites involve priests making offerings and offering prayers to the kami or gods enshrined in the Main Sanctuary. What does distinguish Yasukuni, however, is that the kami it enshrines are not the kami of the 8th century *Kojiki* or *Nihon shoki* myths; nor are they the kami of mountains or forests or waterfalls or rivers. Rather, they are the Japanese war-dead. They are regular men, and some women, who died in the imperial cause from the mid 19th century to 1945. Among the war dead are Class A war criminals, men condemned at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, and who were subsequently executed or died in prison. The logic of their enshrinement is that Japan was still at war with America till the Occupation ended in 1952; they are no less war dead than the men who died on the battlefields of Asia. It is important to understand that there are no human remains in Yasukuni at all; it is not a cemetery. Nor is it equivalent to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There is, however, such a site—a secular site—not very far from Yasukuni, known as Chidorigafuchi. At Yasukuni, all the war dead enshrined as kami are named. The shrine keeps records for every one of them.

Yasukuni shrine is, thus, a site of mourning and, like all such sites, it is a site of memory too. It is a place to which the bereaved, the sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, of the war dead come to mourn and remember their loved ones. This much it shares in common with all sites of mourning in the democratic post war world, but there are some striking differences, too. One of them, indeed, is that it is a religious and not a secular site. In law it is a religious juridical person (*shūkyō hōjin*). Another—possibly related—difference is that it is a place of violence. Yasukuni is a place of mourning and a place of violence, and that fact needs to be acknowledged, and problematized. I certainly do not suggest Yasukuni is always a place of violence; it is often the place of peace, which is implicit in its name.[2] Of course, I am not saying either that priests engage in violence personally; or that they actively encourage violence. However, I *am* asking whether they and the shrine, however unwittingly, give moral sanction to violence and, if they do, why that might be. I should warn you, though, that I have no simple conclusions to offer. My greater concern is to present a problem that has been overlooked in the voluminous literature on Yasukuni. Let me allude first to some of the other problems that stir about Yasukuni since they define the shrine's space as one of contestation, and are integral therefore to the matter at hand. Contestation at Yasukuni seems to be linked deeply to the fact that the shrine is a religious not a secular site.

[2] Yasukuni means "land of peace."

1) The Cluster of Problems That is Yasukuni

Problem 1: Objects and Their Effects

The Japanese Constitution provides for the separation of state and religion, and so the state and its representatives have to keep a distance from religious sites like Yasukuni. This means that Yasukuni, as a private religious juridical person, cannot be a *national* state of mourning, even though this is what it aspires to be. Post war prime ministers naturally enough want to—surely they are obliged to—mourn the men and women who died for Japan but, owing to the Constitution, this is problematic at Yasukuni. What are they to do? One solution is for them to mourn the war dead at another, non-religious site. Nearby Chidorigafuchi is an obvious candidate. The incumbent Democratic Party was quick to make clear its intention to avoid Yasukuni, and commemorate the war dead at this site.[3] Another possibility is to create a new non-religious site; this idea has been discussed since the 1980s and was raised again most recently in the administration of Koizumi Jun'ichirō. A third possibility is, somehow or other, to strip away the religiosity of Yasukuni. This is the most radical proposal since the other options leave Yasukuni untouched. To render Yasukuni "non-religious" is—depending on one's definition of what constitutes religion—to destroy the shrine as it has been for most of its relatively short life. The most recent advocate of such a position was Asō Tarō while he served as Japan's Foreign Minister.[4]

Fourteen post-war PMs have nonetheless venerated the war-dead at Yasukuni, and many others have demonstrated their yearning to do so by sending flowers. Koizumi Jun'ichirō was the boldest and most persistent of Yasukuni patrons in the post war period; his actions, like those of his predecessors, were in clear breach of the Constitution. This, at least, is what plaintiffs in a multiplicity of court cases have claimed. But were they in fact unconstitutional? Matters prove to be far from clear. In the 1970s, a Supreme Court judgement muddied the constitutional waters by establishing the so-called "object and effect standard" (*mokuteki kōka kijun*). The upshot of this was that state-religion separation provided by the post war Constitution is *not* after all to be considered absolute. The state and its representatives *may* engage with religious institutions, so long as the object and effect of their actions do not amount to a privileging of Shinto or any other religion. In fact, of course, prime ministers have been practically free to pay their respects at many other religious institutions Buddhist temples, Catholic churches and even other Shinto shrines without creating a murmur of objection. So the "object and effect standard" served to iron out the contradictions in the system. A new question now arose: when a PM patronises Yasukuni, is his *object* to promote Shinto, and is promotion the *effect* of his patronage?[5]

Plaintiffs have found it impossible to get a ruling on this. Japan does not have constitutional courts, so they cannot challenge the PM's actions directly. They have to sue the Prime Minister claiming infringement of rights. In other words, the plaintiff has to claim that Koizumi's worship at Yasukuni, say, caused them "spiritual damage." Such cases are invariably dismissed and, following a landmark ruling in June 2006, they seem unlikely to recur in the future.[6] What judges can do is issue *obiter dicta*, which are

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[3] *INDEX 2009*, p. 1. The document can be downloaded at http://www.dpj.or.jp/news/?num=16667 (last accessed 8.8.11). See below n.9.

[4] On Asō's argument for a non-religious Yasukuni, see Breen, "Popes, Bishops and War Criminals."

[5] On the object and effect ruling and its ramifications, see Breen, "Voices of Rage."

[6] Okumura, "Koizumi Yasukuni soshō to wa nan datta no ka," pp. 68–9.

non-binding opinions on the judgement deemed relevant to a case. In 2004, Justice Kamekawa opined in such an *obiter dictum* that Koizumi had, indeed, set out to "aid, assist and promote Yasukuni shrine, a religious institution that disseminates Shinto." He concluded that the Prime Minister's Yasukuni visit was in breach of Article 20.[7] A similar *obiter dictum* was issued the next year. However, *obiter dicta* are *not* rulings. They are not binding and this, of course, explains why Koizumi returned with impunity to Yasukuni in August 2006.[8] In brief, Yasukuni remains an unsolved problem in the realm of state-religion relations. It is so regarded both by those who support the shrine and by those who oppose it.

Problem 2: Worshipping War Criminals

There are 14 Class A war criminals in the Yasukuni pantheon. They are apotheosized at Yasukuni; they are propitiated in daily rites, and worshipped alongside the pantheon's 2.5 million other kami. It is Yasukuni's religious operations that are once more fundamental here. For whom, though, are the Class A war criminals a problem? They are not so for the priests, nor presumably for the five prime ministers who have visited there, following the secret enshrinement in 1978. Nor do they represent a problem for about 50% of Japanese polled. The most significant opposition has come from leaders of the incumbent Democratic Party, whose 2009 manifesto cites the war criminal presence as the reason why no Democratic Party leader will patronise the shrine.[9] It is clear, moreover, that their presence was problematic for the last emperor, Hirohito. Emperor Hirohito had attended Yasukuni rites twice a year from the late 1930s through to war's end. He had been a much less regular patron in the post war, it is true, but he did attend in autumn 1975 to mark the 30th anniversary of war's end, and he is known to have planned a return for 1985. This never came about. His objection to Yasukuni's enshrinement of the war criminals is the reason why.[10]

However, it is above all successive leaders of the Peoples Republic of China who have problematised this issue. After all, among the war criminals are men responsible for terrible wrongs inflicted on the Chinese people. When, say, Koizumi patronised the shrine, was he not approving the actions of the war criminals—however much he may have protested to the contrary? Not all is as it seems, of course. The Chinese problematisation of the issue has always intensified as domestic political issues have become graver.[11] More interesting still is evidence that the Chinese had no substantial objections to the war criminal presence or to the patronage of the shrine by Japanese leaders, until they were visited by a delegation of the now defunct Japan Socialist party.[12] Nonetheless, the Chinese have been instrumental in assuring that state patronage of Yasukuni is a defining issue of post war East Asian diplomacy.

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7 Koizumi's payment of offerings out of his own pocket absolved him of breaching Article 89.

8 On the use of *obiter dicta*, see Breen, "Voices of Rage."

9 *INDEX 2009*: "It is problematic for the prime minister and his cabinet to visit Yasukuni shrine in an official capacity, given its enshrinement of Class A war criminals. We shall work towards the construction of a new national site of mourning with no specific religious character, in order that anybody and everybody can, without ill-feelings, honour the war dead and swear their commitment to non-war and peace."

10 On the emperor and the war criminal presence, see Breen, "Introduction: A Yasukuni Genealogy," pp. 2–5.

11 *The Guardian*, 15 August 2006.

Problem 3: Amnesia

There is finally the fundamental problem of how Yasukuni remembers the past—and the men and women whose actions gave the past its meaning. This problem too is inherently connected to the fact of Yasukuni's religiosity. The religious rites performed by the Yasukuni priesthood, especially those Autumn and Spring Great rites at which the imperial emissary is the main player, constitute a narrative account of Japan's imperial past. The account is simple and straightforward, appealing and persuasive, and it goes like this:

> Millions of Japanese went to war in the 1930s and 40s on behalf of emperor and imperial Japan; 2,300,000 of them sacrificed their lives in the cause of emperor and empire after heroic struggle. To a man, they died embodying the hallowed imperial virtues of loyalty, patriotism and self-sacrifice. They are thus all heroes, and their deaths are noble and honourable, before they are ever tragic. The war, which created so many heroes, was thus a heroic and noble undertaking.[13]

This uncomplicated narrative is, of course, myth and not history. What matters here is what is banished by the ritual reproduction of the myth. First of all, there are the sacrifices of the common man and woman. Yasukuni is a military shrine, which was created for the purpose of enshrining the military. It enshrines men and women who fit into one of a number of specific categories: *gun, gunzoku* and *jungunzoku* (namely military, quasi-military and quasi-quasi military). It does not mark the sacrifices of the common man or woman.[14] Secondly, the myth's reproduction in ritual form helps erase from memory countless squalid deaths that resulted not from heroic action but from starvation and disease. In New Guinea alone, it is estimated that 100,000 men died of starvation. The New Guinea campaign is widely acknowledged to have been botched from start to finish. And yet the men responsible for the campaign, as well as those who starved to death, are worshipped at Yasukuni as heroes. (This is not, of course, to deny that were men who performed acts of extraordinary bravery in New Guinea.) The narrative, finally, distracts ritual participants from reflection on the brutality and cruelty of all war. At Yasukuni, war is nothing but glorious. It is thus, because those who sacrificed their lives did so on behalf of emperor and country. They embodied the essential virtues of self-sacrifice, loyalty and patriotism. It should be added here that the narrative is told not only in ritual time. For, adjacent to the shrine's Worship Hall there is a war museum called the Yūshūkan. It has a history nearly as old as the shrine itself. In the post war, it finally re-opened in 1985, and was completely refurbished in 2002. The museum in its post war manifestation has animated this same heroic, noble narrative through pictures, relics, textual exposition

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[12] On this point, see Breen, "Voices of Rage."

[13] On Yasukuni as a site of memory, see Breen, "Yasukuni and the Loss of Historical Memory." In revised form, the article is re-published as "Fine Words Indeed: Yasukuni and the Narrative Fetishism of War" in John Nelson and Inge Prohl eds., *The Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions,* Brill (Forthcoming.)

[14] The multiple categories of *gun, gunzoku* and *jungunzoku* (military, quasi-military and quasi-quasi military) are helpfully set out in "Senbotsu sha no gōshi" in Yasukuni Jinja ed., *Yasukuni no inori*, p. 186.

and, most powerfully, movies.[15]

2) Yasukuni and Violence

Yasukuni Accommodations

Yasukuni means "land of peace." It is surely an anomaly that a site that is often genuinely a place of peace—despite its displays of military hardware—and always a place of mourning, should have any association at all with violence. But Yasukuni does have such an association. This point was made most articulately in *Yasukuni* (2008), the documentary film by Chinese director, Li Ying. I am not aware that this film was ever screened here in Jakarta, but it stirred much controversy in Japan. Many cinemas refused to show it for fear they would be targeted by right-wing thugs. But it won international acclaim and prizes, and duly became the most viewed documentary film in Japanese history.[16] In the opinion of this author, it is not an especially well-made film. The running theme features the shrine's 90 year-old sword-smith, Kariya Naoji, and endeavours to associate him and his swords with the Nanking massacre of 1937. Swords were, of course, deployed as weapons of slaughter in Nanking, but this theme is contrived. There is little drama to the scenes featuring Kariya; they are labored and often lack clarity. The film does, however, contain a number of striking scenes. One of these displays for all to see the unfortunate connection between Yasukuni and violence.

The date is 15 August 2006. Prime minister Koizumi has kept his promise to venerate the war dead at Yasukuni on this day, which marks war's end. In the precinct of Yasukuni shrine, the Glorious War Dead Society (Eirei ni kotaeru kai) is staging its annual event. The event, styled "200,000 pilgrims to Yasukuni" (Yasukuni nijūman nin sanpai undō), this year features a talk by the ultra-conservative, charismatic governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintarō. Ishihara has just finished his keynote address, urging Japan to "stand up, and be strong." He steps down from the stage to rapturous applause. Society members start to close the event with a stirring rendition of *Kimi ga yo*, but just as they do, two young men appear before the stage, shouting "War of aggression!" (*shinryaku sensō*) ; they start to unfurl a banner. Both men are swiftly set upon. One man escapes; a second is wrestled to the ground and strangled. Eventually, he too frees himself, only to be hounded out of the shrine by a snarling mob to the chant of: "Omae wa Chūgokujin darō! Chūgoku ni kaere, Chūgoku ni kaere!" (You are Chinese, yeah?! Go back to China! Go back to China!) The students (both of whom are Japanese) retreat to the periphery of the precinct, where the police become interested. What happens next is difficult to see, but one student is punched in the face, blood seeps from his mouth. The police arrest him, and leave his attacker unchallenged. Peace—of sorts—returns to Yasukuni.

On 15 August 2009, a similar sort of event occurred. Once again, the Glorious War Dead society's "200,000 pilgrims to Yasukuni" event acted as trigger. This time the guest speaker was disgraced General Tamogami Toshio. Tamogami was Chief of Staff of the Self Defence forces, renowned for his unspoken

[15] For a thoughtful critique of the presence of a history museum at a site dedicated to mourning the war dead, see Tōgō, *Rekishi to gaikō*, pp. 48–53. 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?"

[16] The film won the Best Documentary Award at the Hong Kong film festival in 2008.

views. In 2008, he published an essay called "Was Japan an Aggressor Nation?" (Nihon wa shinryaku kokka de atta no ka.) His essay, in which he argued that Japan was unequivocally not an aggressor, won him the Fuji Toshio prize. His Yasukuni speech retraced the theme; he duly insisted Japan was innocent of aggression in the last war. As he stepped down from the stage, he was confronted by a Japanese-speaking Canadian peace activist. The Canadian told him calmly that, were he a German giving a talk in Germany, his comments would have got him arrested. The Canadian was then surrounded, manhandled, threatened by an aggressive mob and finally, at the urging of one of the thugs, arrested by the police.[17] He was eventually released, but only after writing a letter of apology to Yasukuni shrine, to General Tamogami and to Sakura Channel—the ultra-conservative TV channel who had been filming the General. These are acts of violence against the person. They happen within the precinct of Yasukuni shrine.

On 14 August 2010, an event of quite a different order—one that is nonetheless related to issues of violence—took place at Yasukuni. It was a visit by a group of ultra-right wing European politicians. Jean-Marie le Pen, founder and former president of the French Front National, and Adam Walker, Staff Manager of the British National Party, were joined there by far-right activists from Austria, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, Romania and Belgium. Le Pen has been convicted of inciting racial hatred and for "minimizing the Holocaust"; Walker was charged with, but later cleared of, racial and religious intolerance, after posting comments on the internet describing immigrants as "savage animals."[18] These men were in Japan at the invitation of the Issuikai, an ultra-right organisation founded in the 1970s to pursue Mishima Yukio's revolutionary agenda for postwar Japan. The organization is anti-American and anti-Democratic, advocates a Heisei Restoration [of power to the emperor], and its president, Kimura Mitsuhiro, must surely be the only Japanese to have organized a rite of commemoration to mark the death of Sadam Hussein. In August last year, Yasukuni priests welcomed these men into the shrine's Main Sanctuary. The press, including BBC reporters, quizzed Le Pen and Walker on what they were doing at a place like Yasukuni. The line of questioning proved unproductive. The question that needed to be asked—and is far more relevant to our present concerns—was rather: Why does Yasukuni shrine, a self-proclaimed place of peace - play host to men whose views are anything but peaceful?

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[17] The incident, which was featured and discussed on the right-wing Sakura TV channel, can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YO4DEOhkWYw (last accessed 4.1.11).

[18] *Daily Mail,* 25 May 2010.

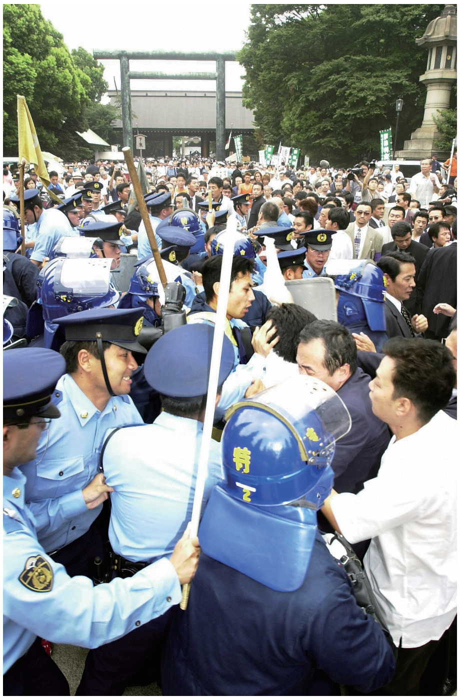

Figure 2

Questions of the same order are prompted by these images. Figure 2 depicts a scene from within the Yasukuni precinct on 15 August 2001. It features the police in the midst of a melee attempting to keep apart pro-Yasukuni and anti-Yasukuni elements.[19] Figure 3 shows a group of Neo-Nazi youths parading in front of the Yasukuni Worship Hall on 15 August 2006. They strut with a Nazi-type flag held high, wearing the black uniforms and the boots of the SS, whom they obviously admire.

In Figure 4 is one of a military style truck belonging to Ōshi gijuku (Cherry blossom warrior ethic

Figure 3

[19] This image is reproduced on the cover of Breen ed., *Yasukuni, the War Dead, and the Struggle for Japan's Past.*

association), one ultra-right wing group whose members invariably clash with the police, and—where possible—with others they identify as unpatriotic, in and around Yasukuni on 15 August. The slogans emblazoned on trucks that circled the shrine on 15 August 2010 included "Protect the *kokutai!*" "Worship the gods and love the nation!" and "Kamikaze attack unit!" These slogans resonate with imperial Japan before its defeat; this is the Japan that these groups idealise. The truck's loudspeakers assault the ear with Imperial Japanese army songs, and shrill declarations of their ultra conservative ideals.

Figure 4

It is clear from these images that violence, and men who advocate violence, are drawn to Yasukuni and, indeed, have found a place there. The priests at Yasukuni shrine could refuse access to neo-Nazis or other ultra right wing groups; they could request the police remove them. They could proclaim their views as abhorrent, and insist loud and clear that what these people stand for—and fight for—is alien to the peace which Yasukuni advocates. The shrine does no such thing. It is difficult, therefore, to counter the impression that Yasukuni—unwittingly at least—gives moral sanction to violence. I asked one influential Yasukuni apologist why the shrine allowed ultra right wing groups privileged access to Yasukuni space, and he responded: "Would you like me to try and get them removed, then?" He was intimating, of course, that it was perfectly possible to remove them, but that neither he nor his fellow apologists had ever thought these men of violence a problem; nor their views abhorrent.

In becoming the "most watched documentary in Japanese history," Li Ying's film overtook a celebrated 1987 film called *Yuki yukite shingun*. In the view of this author, it is an altogether more gripping and important work than *Yasukuni*. It fully deserved to win the Berlin Film Festival award in 1987, and several other awards thereafter. The film is not, in fact, about Yasukuni at all, but on reviewing it recently, I was struck by one scene that is intimately related to Yasukuni. *Yuki yukite shingun* features a war veteran by the name of Okuzaki Kenzō. He is deeply traumatised by his experiences of the hell that was New Guinea. Indeed, the viewer of the documentary sometimes suspects Okuzaki has lost his mind. In the scene in question, he confronts Sgt. Yamada, the former leader of his unit. Okuzaki has tracked

Yamada down nearly 30 years after the war, and now accuses him of murdering his friend all those years ago in New Guinea. The truly shocking thing to emerge is that Okuzaki is convinced Yamada shot him to consume his flesh. Okuzaki anyway knows his murdered friend will never rest in peace until Yamada admits his wrong-doing and apologises.

> Okuzaki: I have brought along the brother of the man you killed. You owe him an apology.
> Yamada: Why should I apologise?
> Okuzaki (pointing to the companion he has brought with him): You and two others killed his brother.
> Yamada: I know nothing about that.
> Okuzaki: The truth is the only way to mourn him.
> Yamada: I mourn in my way. You mourn in your way. I mourn in my way, and that is why I go to Yasukuni…

Hardly has the word "Yasukuni" left Sgt. Yamada's lips, than Okuzaki yields to uncontrollable rage. Crying "You think there is salvation in being a Yasukuni hero, do you? You …you…," he attacks Yamada, knocking him to the ground, throttling him. Nothing, it seems, stirred the wrath of Okuzaki more than Yasukuni. He subsequently announced to the film's director his attention to go to Yasukuni at the Spring Festival, and cut down the imperial emissary there. To be sure, Okuzaki was a highly unstable man, but Yasukuni provokes in many people feelings of intense anger, which sometimes boil over into violence. Why does it attract men, of whatever political disposition, who are predisposed to violence? What is it about Yasukuni that forces us as a result to make associate this site of mourning with violence?

3) Violence and Mourning

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* "to mourn" is

1) to feel sorrow, grief or regret
2) to lament the death of someone
3) to exhibit the conventional signs of grief. [20]

There are many, many visitors to Yasukuni who exhibit or express sorrow, and so quite evidently feel sorrow, and who lament as they stand before the shrine's imposing Worship Hall.[21] Evidently, they mourn, as they remember. But there are many others, such as some we encountered in Section 2 above, who come to Yasukuni with other attitudes, and for other purposes. This is perhaps a consequence of what Yasukuni does, and has always done, beyond the realm of mourning. So, what does it do beyond mourning?

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[20] *Webster's* concurs:
1) To feel or express sorrow for something
2) Grieve for someone who has died
3) Utter in a sorrowful manner

[21] Yasukuni claims to receive 6 million visitors a year.

Part of the answer should be clear enough. Through ritual performance in the Main Sanctuary and the strategy of display in the War Museum, Yasukuni renders all the military war dead indiscriminately heroic. They are heroes because they died glorious deaths, and their deaths were glorious because they embodied the virtues of self-sacrifice, loyalty and patriotism. The sorrow, grief and regret that constitute the heart of mourning are displaced by celebration. Yasukuni celebrates the war dead and their virtues but, in so doing, ends up engaging in a struggle over the meaning of the Japanese past. There is an act of violence perpetrated on the memories of men like Okuzaki in the indiscriminate celebration of all men as heroic paragons of virtue.

This is what seems to have prompted Okuzaki's to assault on Yamada. New Guinea was a hell that both men had experienced. It was intolerable for Okuzaki that Yamada refused to face it. Iida Susumu was another who lived through New Guinea. He was imprisoned in Sugamo as a Class B war criminal, and reflected there on his actions. In recent years, he has written two important and moving books on the war that include reflections on Yasukuni. In the following citation, he directs his anger at the shrine that can transform incompetent military commanders into glorious spirits:

> "We despised the military commanders who planned that New Guinea campaign. Do these men merit honour as the nation's glorious war dead? Words like 'glorious spirits of the war dead' are simply designed to avoid the issue of responsibility.… The [refusal] of these men [to accept responsibility] is insufferable."[22]

Iida wrote that he could hear the war dead as they seethed with rage at Yasukuni's ritual re-writing of their past.

There is another aggressive dynamic here, too. Yasukuni enshrines the war dead as its right; it does not ask the permission of the bereaved. In the military past, when Yasukuni belonged to the state, the military and the bereaved naturally regarded enshrinement as the greatest honor. In the immediate post war, too, it is easy to see that enshrinement served—as it did no doubt for Yamada—to bury the trauma of loss. But enshrinement can also be a violation. Li Ying's film gives a striking example of a group of Taiwanese who so regard it. Accompanied by a Japanese Buddhist priest, they storm the Yasukuni shrine office, demanding—in vain—that their compatriots be set free from the Yasukuni pantheon. Another example concerns Hirota Kōki, the one civilian executed as a Class A war criminal. He was enshrined at Yasukuni in 1978 as a glorious war dead, but his family recently revealed their shock and anger on first learning of this. "If possible, we would like the shrine to cancel his enshrinement. We have no wish for him to be celebrated as a glorious spirit. It gives us no pleasure to know he is so celebrated. We never asked for it or wanted it, and Yasukuni never consulted us either." The shrine issued a statement saying they do not regard approval of the bereaved as a necessary precondition for enshrinement.

Yasukuni celebrates the virtues of self-sacrifice, loyalty and patriotism and it attributes them to all the war dead, as we have seen. However, it is also engaged in their active dissemination. Through their

[22] Iida offers further reflections throughout his books *Jigoku no Nihon hei* and *Tamashizume e no michi*. For the former, see especially pp. 175–82; for the latter, pp. 222–28 and 341–60.

dissemination, it seeks to effect a transformation of Japanese society. Ethical dissemination is central to Yasukuni's understanding of its own role in postwar Japan; the understanding is shared by the LDP, and by shrine apologists. Consider the LDP Outline of a proposal for legislation on Yasukuni (*Yasukuni hōan yōkō*), way back in 1956:

> Yasukuni shrine exists to venerate the dead, to honor their posthumous virtue *and thus* to bring about a revival in the ethics of contemporary Japan.

The conjunction is critical for it implies that the shrine, in its post war manifestation, exists first and foremost to regenerate the moral order of Japanese society; that mourning the war dead is in fact now a subordinate function. Similar statements are to be found in the writings of most of Yasukuni's post war Chief priests and in those of satellite groups like the Yasukuni Worshippers Society (1999).

> [We seek] to comfort and honour the glorious spirits, but also to inherit their hearts, establish state ethics (*kokka dōgi*), and contribute to the fashioning of a healthy national ethic (*kokumin dōtoku*).[23]

This is the view of Kobori Keiichirō, perhaps the most prolific of Yasukuni's apologists:

> If only the Yasukuni problem can be solved [so that the PM and emperor both venerate there] the attitude of the young toward Japan will be quite transformed. I believe they will then come round to the belief that Japan is a nation to be proud of, that we Japanese have something of which we can truly be proud.

This "something" refers to the ethical qualities imputed to the war dead. The sorrow, lament and regret that give meaning to mourning are displaced in these authoritative definitions; instead they yield to a new post war agenda. Yasukuni, its priests and apologists have recruited the war dead to fight a new battle, one that hopes to see postwar society refashioned on the model of the society that obtained prewar. There can be no peace for the war dead at Yasukuni; they have ethical battles still to fight. Could it be that there exist here, in Yasukuni's efforts to re-position itself and the war dead in post war Japan, reasons why the shrine might accommodate violence?

Conclusion

I readily admit that I have hardly explained either the physical violence that erupts sporadically at Yasukuni, or the sense of intimidation that is more often in the air. In my defence, I can only claim that I set out with a more limited aim. That aim was to identify the problem, and locate it in the context of certain fundamental operations that Yasukuni carries out as a religious corporation: its indiscriminate

[23] "Go sōritsu hyaku yonjūnen kinen taisai ni yose" in *Jinja shinpō*, 28-10-09. On the ethical propagation by Yasukuni and its apologists, see Breen, "Voices of Rage."

enshrinement of all the war dead as kami; its attribution to them all of heroic virtues; its proclamation and active dissemination of those heroic virtues. These all amount to the shrine's engagement in a battle over the meaning of the past and of the present. These are the operations that occupy Yasukuni's time and space, and they crowd out the possibilities for mourning and the reflection and sorrow and lament, that give meaning to mourning.

In the final analysis, it perhaps matters less to explain precisely why Yasukuni has this association than that it does have such an association. It strikes me as odd that violence has not been discussed before in the context of Yasukuni and the "Yasukuni problem." After all, this issue is surely one integral to an understanding of Yasukuni in the 21st century.

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