

# The Yasukuni Shrine Controversy from the Perspective of Southeast Asia: A Hidden Dispute

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Historical challenges between Japan and China, and between Japan and South Korea have been caused by a confluence of factors. Broadly speaking, these include the management of historical education in Japan as well as Japanese politicians' historical recognition of their country's imperialism and of the Asia-Pacific War. More specific problems can be identified: the description of the Asia-Pacific War in Japanese history textbooks, the Japanese prime ministers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and the comfort women controversy. Worthy of note, it was not only in China and South Korea that the Japanese military inflicted oppressions and cruelty during the "Greater East Asia War" but also in Southeast Asian countries and Pacific Islands (former Nan'yo Gunto or South Pacific Mandate). It is understandable that the peoples in these regions support anti-Japanese movements observed in China and in South Korea. Surprisingly, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website reports that people from Southeast Asian countries and Pacific Islands view Japan favorably, stating that these countries perceive their wartime sufferings differently from China and South Korea. This paper explores why reactions that emerged in China and South Korea differ from those in Southeast Asian countries.

Small countries avoid direct confrontation with great powers. Like fisherfolk in troubled waters, they play at the conflict among the larger countries, dancing to it so as to avoid falling into the mercy of any one of these competing powers. Nevertheless, latent frustrations sometimes surface. Southeast Asian countries criticize not only Japan, but also China, South Korea, the US, and countries in Western Europe for failing to respect them. Small countries might have hidden disputes against larger ones. In order to address these issues or to mitigate their escalation, it is imperative for powerful countries to pay close attention to covert yet significant disputes with less powerful states.

## Introduction

Historical challenges between Japan and China, and between Japan and South Korea have been caused by a confluence of factors. Broadly speaking, these include the management of historical education in Japan as well as Japanese politicians' historical recognition of their country's imperialism and of the Asia-Pacific War. More specific problems can be identified: the description of the Asia-Pacific War in Japanese history textbooks, the Japanese prime ministers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and the comfort women controversy. Worthy of note, it was not only in China and South Korea that the Japanese military inflicted oppressions and cruelty during the "Greater East Asia War" but also in Southeast Asian countries and Pacific Islands (former Nan'yo Gunto or South Pacific Mandate). It is understandable that the peoples in these regions support anti-Japanese movements observed in China and in

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South Korea. Surprisingly, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website reports that people from Southeast Asian countries and Pacific Islands view Japan favorably, stating that these countries perceive their wartime sufferings differently from China and South Korea.<sup>1</sup> Taking stock of these discrepant positions, this paper raises the following questions: (1) Were wartime experiences in Southeast Asia and Pacific Islands disparate from those in China and South Korea? (2) Was Japanese diplomacy in Southeast Asia and Pacific Islands a success, whereas in China and South Korea, a failure? (3) Does the discrepancy arise only because anti-Japanese sentiments are expressed in China and South Korea but remain unarticulated in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands?

This paper explores why reactions that emerged in China and South Korea differ from those in Southeast Asian countries. In charting their responses, newspaper articles that appeared in the *The Asahi Shimbun* were analyzed. In particular, it focuses on the historical controversies—such as how Japan has been dealing with the textbook issue—existing among Japan, China and South Korea over Japanese prime ministers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine. This is followed by an examination of how English newspapers in Southeast Asian countries reported the controversies. In so doing, I hope to show the reasons why Southeast Asian countries did not mirror anti-Japanese movements in China and South Korea.

***“Festival and Its Heart”: A Documentary Introducing Yasukuni Shrine (in Japanese)***

“The divine door of a huge chrysanthemum crest” (Chrysanthemum is a symbol of the royal family) opens in the “rhythm of a big drum’s beat,” begins the documentary shown in Yasukuni Shrine website. The 17 minute-long documentary introduces each season’s festivals, the most important of which are those of spring and autumn. With the aim to convey “the heart of Yasukuni” to succeeding generations, these festivals have been performed “by the emperor’s special envoy.” In various scenes, the chrysanthemum crest is shown, signifying that the shrine was built for the emperor. The film ends by featuring the “farewell notes that were written by fallen soldiers for their loved ones” and that can be found on the bulletin board in front of the worshippers’ hall entitled “I Can Gladly Die.” Simultaneously, the narration reads: “The fallen soldiers vowed to each other that they will meet here again after becoming the cherry blossoms of Yasukuni. These cherry blossoms in full bloom are the fallen soldiers warmly welcoming us.”<sup>2</sup> From this narration, we can surmise that “the heart of Yasukuni” is to dedicate our precious lives to the emperor. Clearly, the nature of Yasukuni Shrine is different from other Japanese shrines and foreign facilities commemorating those who died in battle. Unlike others, this shrine seems to depict death as a virtue.

After the Japanese defeat in the war, it was common and somewhat customary for the incumbent prime minister to visit Yasukuni Shrine. Prime ministers Yoshida Shigeru (1878–1967; 1946–47 and

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press23\\_000019.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press23_000019.html) (14 September 2016); <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/pr/wakaru/topics/vol127/index.html> (1 January 2017).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.yasukuni.or.jp/english/movie/index.html> (July 7, 2017).

48–54 in office), Kishi Nobusuke (1896–1987; 1957–60 in office), Sato Eisaku (1901–75; 1964–72 in office), and Tanaka Kakuei (1918–93; 1972–74 in office) visited the shrine during the spring and autumn festivals, and so on. The first one to make the visit on the “anniversary of the end of the war” was Miki Takeo (1907–88; 1974–76 in office) in 1975; this was a private affair. Succeeding prime ministers visited the shrine as well: Fukuda Takeo (1905–95; 1976–78 in office) in 1978; Suzuki Zenko (1911–2004; 1980–82 in office) in 1980 to 1982; Nakasone Yasuhiro (1918–; 1982–87 in office) in 1983 and 1984. They had been emphasizing that their visits were private in nature; gradually the line between what was considered private and official has been blurred. The emperor himself visited the shrine eight times after the end of war, with the last visit being on November 21, 1975. Some say that the emperor was “displeased” by the fact that 14 class-A war criminals had been secretly enshrined on October 17, 1978. This fact was made public through news reports that were published on April 19, 1979.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. The Start of History Controversy among Japan, China and South Korea

### *Prime Minister Nakasone’s Visit to Yasukuni Shrine in 1985*

It was Prime Minister Nakasone’s official visit to the shrine on August 15, 1985 that triggered the protests in China and South Korea. Eventually these protests developed into full-scale international issues between Japan and these countries. After 40 years since the Japanese defeat in the war, the prime minister considered the protests as turning points, adopting the slogan “Settlement of Postwar Politics.” As part and parcel of the process, Nakasone aimed at the implementation of official visit to the shrine and organized a private advisory body called “Discussion on the Visit to Yasukuni Shrine by the Cabinet Ministers” under the chief cabinet secretary. The body submitted a report on August 9 after 21 meetings. Discussions primarily tackled Article 20 of the Constitution, more specifically the principle of separation of religion and state: Was the prime minister’s visit to the shrine unconstitutional or not? In resolving the matter, international public opinions were also considered.<sup>4</sup>

After receiving the report, the plan of the prime minister’s official visit to the shrine on August 15 was announced. Immediately after, on August 11, the *People’s Daily*, an organ of the Chinese Communist Party “reported in detail protests within Japan against the official visit.” China had previously criticized the official visit in the summer of 1982 when the textbook issue came up. China protested against the “textbook issue along with the move to change the Constitution and the issue of official visit to the shrine.” The day before the prime minister’s visit, in the afternoon of August 14, the Chinese government, through the spokesman of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed opposition to it for the first time. It said: “It [Prime Minister’s visit] will hurt the feelings of many in Asia, including the Chinese and the Japanese, who suffered under Japanese militarism.” As if in response, Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujinami Takao issued the following statement that evening:

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<sup>3</sup> *The Nikkei*, July 20, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, August 10, 1985.

Numerous Japanese, including the bereaved families, consider Yasukuni Shrine the central memorial facility for the war dead and they strongly wish that government officials visit the shrine... As far as international relations are concerned, we do deeply realize our country had inflicted profound sufferings and damages to many people, particularly in Asian countries. We reflect on our deeds and have resolved not to repeat the same acts.<sup>5</sup>

A year later, on August 14, 1986, Chief Cabinet Secretary Gotoda Masaharu made a statement emphasizing Japan's consideration toward its neighboring countries. This statement was conveyed to China and South Korea through diplomatic channel. It read:

The official visit to Yasukuni Shrine last year gained criticisms from our neighboring countries, which our past deeds had gravely pained and damaged. The criticism might have occurred because the shrine included the so-called class-A war criminals, thus making them one of the objects of worship during visits. What essentially was our effort to reflect on our past actions created misunderstanding and distrust. As we have expressed in various occasions, we work towards self-reflection and are determined to create a future of peace and friendship. Misunderstanding and mistrust such as this would damage our national advocacy of promoting friendly relationships with other nations. It is certainly not the ultimate wish of the war dead.<sup>6</sup>

This remark indicates that China and South Korea questioned the inclusion of the class-A war criminals in the shrine.

China and South Korea, representing Asia, protested and criticized the official visit. How did Southeast Asian countries, whose lands were converted into a war zone, react to such protest? The visit to the shrine was held on August 15, 1985, the day of surrender. Local newspapers in Southeast Asia published articles on the dropping of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the emperor's message at the national memorial service at the Budokan. Only the papers in Singapore, Malaysia, and Burma (Myanmar after 1989) reported the visit of the shrine under the headline "Nakasone." Articles in these papers were sent by foreign news agencies such as Reuters. They deemed that the visit was against the Constitution's provision on the separation of religion and state. They also reported a rise in protests and criticisms in Japan due to the revival of militarism in the country. Individual articles or editorials were nowhere to be seen and no follow-up articles were released. As far as English newspapers were concerned, there was no visible reaction in Southeast Asian countries in response to the prime minister's visit to the shrine.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, August 12, 15, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, August 15, 1986.

### ***Prime Minister Hashimoto's Visit to Yasukuni Shrine in 1996***

Chief Cabinet Secretary Gotoda's statement, announced on August 14, 1986, did not directly mention the official visit, leaving it ambiguous: "We intend to neither oppose nor abolish official visit per se." After this remark, no visit by the prime minister was observed for ten years. The Liberal Democratic Party's campaign pledge for the House of Councilors election in July 1992 was to make the official visit legal. Later it was revealed that in November of that year, a month after the emperor's visit to China in October, Prime Minister Miyazawa Ki'ichi (1919–2007; 1991–93 in office) paid a private visit to the shrine.<sup>7</sup>

During these years, Japan, China, and South Korea went through political upheavals. The Liberal Democratic Party lost heavily, gaining only 223 seats out of 511, at the 1993 general elections. In January 1996, the Liberal Democratic Party made a comeback by forming a coalition government, however it still failed to reclaim dominance in the next general election (October 1996), obtaining only 239 seats out of 500. Earlier, in June 1994, a coalition government of three parties—the Liberal Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party of Japan and the New Party Sakigake—was established and the chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Japan, Murayama Tomi'ichi (1924–; 1994–96 in office) was designated as prime minister. On August 15, 1995, the 50th anniversary of the war's end, the so-called "Murayama Statement" was released.<sup>8</sup> Some viewed it rather optimistically, considering it to be the end of the postwar period in which Japan no longer had to apologize for their past military aggression.

Meanwhile, in China, the government was internationally criticized and isolated for suppressing students who demanded political reform in the so-called the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. In 1991 South Korea, along with North Korea, joined the United Nations and established diplomatic relations with China in the following year. In March 1993, North Korea withdrew from the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which was succeeded by an announcement made in June 1994 to pull out from the International Atomic Energy Agency. The untimely death of Chairman Kim Il-song (1912–94; 1948–94 in office) in July further raised anxiety among the people of South Korea.

Taking these incidents as background, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro (1937–2006; 1996–98 in office) visited the shrine on his 59th birthday on July 29, 1996 without any prior notice to the public and signed "Prime Minister" at a Shinto's ledger. By this time the Liberal Democratic Party had returned as the majority party. Hashimoto emphasized that his visit was purely private, paying tribute to his cousin and friends. China (which itself had just launched a nuclear test) criticized Hashimoto's visit: "It is most regrettable. The spirits of the ringleaders of militarism, such as Tojo Hideki, have been enshrined at Yasukuni." South Korea likewise commented: "The sentiments of the nation and the people who experienced the sufferings by the invasion should be respected." Critical reports were also

<sup>7</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, August 9, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/pm/murayama/9508.html> (July 7, 2017).

issued in the Pyongyang broadcast and the Hong Kong English newspaper.<sup>9</sup>

In the following two days, English newspapers in Singapore, such as *The Straits Times*, printed news articles from Reuters and L'Agence France-Presse (AFP) concerning criticism from China and South Korea. However, there was no photo of Prime Minister Hashimoto paying his respects to the shrine. Other English newspapers in Indonesia, Thailand, Brunei, Malaysia, and Myanmar also issued articles sent in by foreign news agencies. It is noteworthy that the papers in Indonesia, Brunei, and Malaysia published photos of protest demonstrations in South Korea.

## 2. From Interstate to Regional Issues

The latter part of 1990s was an important period for Southeast Asia: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grew significantly and aimed at a stronger organization. With Vietnam's entry in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999, the total number of member countries amounted to ten. Furthermore, Japan, China, and South Korea were included, constituting the ASEAN Plus Three in 1997. At the same time, top-level meetings between the ASEAN and each of the three countries were conducted. The ASEAN responded well to the Asian currency crisis when the value of the Thai Baht suddenly dipped in 1997. In April 2001, Koizumi Jun'ichiro (1942–; 2001–06 in office) was inaugurated as prime minister with 80 percent approval rate. He vowed to “demolish the Liberal Democratic Party” and dismantle the Keiseikai faction which had ruled the party and from which former prime ministers such as Takeshita Noboru (1924–2000; 1987–89 in office), Obuchi Keizo (1937–2000; 1998–2000 in office), and Hashimoto belonged. During the election campaign, Koizumi stated his intention to visit Yasukuni Shrine once he was elected as prime minister.

### ***Prime Minister Koizumi's Visit to Yasukuni Shrine in 2001***

As August 15 was fast approaching, China and South Korea, along with the Japanese opposition parties expressed their displeasure toward Koizumi's planned visit to the shrine. The coalition parties in power, the Komeito and the Conservative Party, acted with caution. Amidst the debate between those who were for and those who were against the visit, Koizumi's approval rating declined to 60 percent. After “careful consideration,” the visit was made on August 13, instead of the original plan of August 15 of 2001. China and South Korea, which had unofficially appealed against the action, called Japanese ambassadors in their respective ministry of foreign affairs and handed them official statements. Since then, these statements became the basis for the criticisms against the issue of the Japanese prime minister's visit to Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>10</sup>

An outline of the Chinese Government Statement is provided here:

- The Chinese government and the people show strong indignation towards the shrine visit.
- Japan accepted the judgement of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. How it deals

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<sup>9</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, July 29–August 2, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, August 14, 2001.

with the issue of a government official visiting the shrine, where class-A war criminals are enshrined, is a touchstone by which the Japanese government's attitude toward its history of aggression should be measured.

- Japan recognized, reflected on, and apologized for its invasion of China. Government officials' visits to the shrine go against this reflection and apology. The visit may lead the peoples of China, Asia, and the world to question Japanese recognition of historical issues.
- We do take notice that the Japanese government gave up on visiting the shrine on August 15, a sensitive date [since the Japanese surrendered on this day]; that it announced the remark regarding the visit; and that Japan recognized the past invasion and reflected upon it. However, the actual visit and the spirit of the remark are contradictory.
- The visit to the shrine damaged the political basis of China and Japan's relationship. Furthermore, it offended the Chinese people as well as other Asian peoples victimized [by Japan]. It will have an impact on the development of the two countries.
- We, the peoples of Asia, will closely observe how Japan will put into practice [its professed dedication to] international cooperation. The burden is laid on the Japanese government and intelligent people should give it considerable attention.

Here is the full statement of the South Korean government on this issue:

- Our government expresses our deep regret concerning Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine, the symbol of modern Japanese militarism. He did so in spite of our much-expressed concern and against strong opposition from the Japanese people.
- Prime Minister Koizumi recognized Japan's colonial rule and invasion. He explained that his visit was to cherish the memories of those who died for Japan and to renew his pledge for peace. However, we cannot help but express our concern. The Japanese prime minister's visit and prayer includes those war criminals who destroyed world peace and brought indescribable damages to neighboring countries.
- We once more would like to emphasize that if Prime Minister Koizumi wishes to genuinely construct friendly relations with the neighboring countries, he should respect the standpoint of these countries and peoples' feelings on the foundation of an accurate recognition of history.

After the prime minister's visit, there was a protest rally of some hundreds in downtown Seoul as well as demonstrations and rallies in the provinces. North Korea also denounced the visit. Chinese coverage regarding the visit was rather low-key. Accordingly, criticism against the Chinese government flooded the internet. Taiwan also expressed dissatisfaction. In Hong Kong, about 30 protesters demonstrated. In Malaysia and Singapore, protest rallies were held mainly by ethnic Chinese. Vietnam simply expressed its concern.

To counter these reactions, the Secretary-General of the Liberal Democratic Party, Yamasaki Taku

made a round of visits to five Southeast Asian countries between August 16 and 24, 2001, carrying a letter from the Prime Minister Koizumi. The countries included Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Yamasaki's visits were speculated to have been in reaction to the prime minister's visit to the shrine; these were also criticized as "apology pilgrimage" or "apology diplomacy." Despite the speculation, the talks with the officials in these countries largely dealt with economic issues and the Yasukuni controversy hardly came up. Therefore, Yamasaki concluded that Southeast Asian countries were not included in "Asian countries" or "neighboring countries" that China and South Korea referred to.

However, the articles that appeared on *The Straits Times* were contrary to Yamasaki's impression. It was obvious that the tone of their stories was different from those covered at the time of Prime Minister Nakasone's visit in 1985 and of Prime Minister Hashimoto's in 1996. *The Strait Times* Tokyo branch, which had daily circulation based on its own information gathering as well as articles sent by its Beijing branch, covered the protest rallies in South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Besides official visits to the shrine, *The Strait Times* Tokyo also tackled other issues such as those concerning Japanese history textbooks, comfort women, North Korea, and internal politics. Its editorials and commentaries were written comprehensively, even suggesting a solution to the problem and citing Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery as an alternative to Yasukuni Shrine. The feature story plainly explained the background of the controversy. Photographs were used to convey important messages because many Southeast Asian countries are multi-lingual societies. While the photo of Prime Minister Koizumi paying his respects led by the Shinto priest appeared only once, the bigger photos of fierce protest appeared several times. The articles reported the results of a public-opinion poll conducted by *The Mainich Shimbun*: 65 percent support the visits of Japanese Cabinet members and Diet members to Yasukuni Shrine; only 28 percent were against. Other articles tried to explain why Koizumi's approval rate was so high at 81 percent. Private stories, such as him being an Elvis Presley fan who enjoys music on weekends, surfaced in the coming days.

The articles in an English newspaper in Singapore demonstrate that: Japan did not deal with its postwar problems adequately; the Southeast Asian countries seemed to support the protests by China and South Korea; and Japanese people did not understand the anger of other Asian countries. These newspaper articles were not only based on their own fact-finding initiatives but also included those dispatched by other news agencies and articles published internationally. Their analysis seemed to have nailed the core issue and even proposed a solution. They suggested that the reason Japan could not understand the anger of the neighboring countries can be blamed on how history is taught in Japan.

What can be gleaned from newspaper articles published across Southeast Asia is that the newspaper companies affiliated with the Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agencies have been printing each other's articles. For instance, *The Jakarta Post* of Indonesia reprinted an article from *The Nation* of Thailand on August 16. It said: It was not only China, South Korea, and ethnic Chinese in Malaysia



who were against Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to the shrine. Both papers explain that people had been silent because Japan was the largest aid donor in the region and that they did not want to jeopardize the relationship. *The Jakarta Post*, however, pointed out that Japanese economic power seemed to have been declining. The *New Straits Times* of Malaysia reported on the same day under its "Comment" column that it was understandable why cordial relations with Japan, which possesses strong economic power, must be maintained. However, it also pointed out that a Singaporean politician, who until recently had been pushing the "Learn from Japan" campaign, now said Japan should learn information techniques from Singapore.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Prime Minister Koizumi's Visit to Yasukuni Shrine Between 2002–2004***

Prime Minister Koizumi visited the shrine on April 21, 2002, January 14, 2003 and January 1, 2004. Many English newspapers in Southeast Asia covered the visits. Although the resentments of the Chinese and South Koreans were published, there was no editorial or commentary that dealt with the issue. It seems that the controversy did not worsen. On the contrary, Chinese and South Korean antipathy had been gradually growing. In South Korea, controversies over Japanese history textbooks and the territorial dispute over Takeshima (Dokdo) Islands became more serious. As the South Korean government was conducting a study on "the forgetting of the past," it protested against the enactment of an ordinance by the Shimane prefectural assembly in 2005 designating February 22 as the "Day of Takeshima Islands," which was to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the inauguration of Takeshima Islands as part of Shimane jurisdiction in 1905. The South Korean government promptly released "the Declaration of National Security Council Standing Committee" on March 17 and established "the new principle toward Japan."

On March 31, the South Korean ambassador to the United Nations announced: "The South Korean government makes it clear that it will oppose Japan's entry to the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member and will 'continue its efforts to block it.'" The South Korean government also considered the Japanese history textbooks, which were approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in April, as "a falsification of history." Thus they requested for a "voluntary revision" on the part of Japan.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding Japan's entry to the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member, the *The Asahi Shimbun* covered reactions in China. It reported that in China, an online signature campaign opposing Japan's entry started at the latter part of March 2015. At the end of March, the Chinese government claimed that the history textbook committee had received funding from corporations. Boycotts of Japanese products then began. When a summit meeting between Japan and France was held in Tokyo on March 27, Prime Minister Koizumi conveyed to French President Jacques René

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<sup>11</sup> "Asian Neighbors Question PM Koizumi's Priorities," *The Jakarta Post*, August 16, 2001; Lee Poh Ping, "Hoping Koizumi's Visit to Shrine Won't Affect Economic Changes," *New Straits Times*, August 16, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, April 1, 2005.

Chirac (1932–; 1995–2007 in office) that Japan had opposed the lifting of an embargo imposed by the EU (European Union) on the export of weapons to China from the point of security in the East Asian region. On the part of President Chirac, he announced that he would support Japan's entry into the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member that had a power of veto. On April 1, Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry Nakagawa Shoichi made it known that the ministry planned to award a Japanese civilian enterprise with a temporary digging right in the gas field in East China Sea. This turn of events further created new causes of conflict.

As if to respond to these events, violent demonstrations such as the breaking of glass windows of Japanese corporations in Chengdu and Shenzhen occurred between April 2 and 3, 2005. On April 9, a large-scale demonstration in Beijing was held, with protesters throwing stones at the Japanese Embassy. On April 10, large demonstrations were held in the cities of Guangzhou and Shenzhen attended by 20,000 and 10,000 persons respectively. They attracted significant media attention and became major news in Japan. Other parts of China also saw demonstrations: some ten thousands in Shanghai; some thousands in Tianjin and Hangzhou on April 16; and the following day, more than ten thousands came together in Shenzhen. Other areas included from the north: Shenyang, Ningpo, Changsha, Xiamen, Dongguan, Zhuhai, and Hong Kong participated by some thousands to hundreds of people. The negative effects on Japanese corporations mounted. In Japan, uneasiness spread among Chinese residents as glass bottles were thrown at Chinese Consulate in Osaka. Even metal pellets/bullets were thrown at the Japan-China Language Institute in Tokyo and China Bank in Yokohama.

Anti-Japanese demonstration in China and in Chinese communities in Japan subsided when the Asian-African Conference was held in Jakarta, Indonesia in commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Bandung Conference. Both heads of China and Japan attended, and Prime Minister Koizumi expressed "regret and apology" in a speech on April 22, 2005. The following day, a meeting was held between Japanese and Chinese leaders. No large-scale demonstrations were observed following the meeting, and nothing alarming took place during the anniversary day of 1919 May Fourth Movement. However, vice press official of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "We recognize the apology but we will observe future actions." He demanded concrete measures be taken regarding future visits to Yasukuni Shrine by a prime minister. He added, "We hope the Japanese political leaders understand the sentiment of the victimized countries in Asia, including China. The Yasukuni Shrine issue is the most difficult problem in the political relationship between the two countries." He vehemently insisted on the cancellation of the visit.

After the settlement of the controversy at the Japan-China summit meeting, *The Straits Times* remained with the issue for a period of time, which was easier to track and understand compared to any Japanese newspapers' coverage. It commented: No matter how many times the Japanese politicians apologize, the Beijing government believes that the Japanese politicians will not stop visiting the shrine because they have no sincere will to recompense for the past atrocities. That said, the Beijing government was successful in handling the situation by suppressing anti-Japanese demonstrations for the

moment and punishing those who turned into mobs.

The reason no demonstrations took place in Singapore as well as in South Korea and Malaysia was explained by Ignatius Low, a journalist for *The Straits Times* on the May 1 issue of the broadsheet. His grandmother experienced the Japanese occupation in Singapore and she repeatedly narrated the misery during the occupation period. He observed that she never sympathized with poor Oshin, the heroine of a Japanese TV drama that aired in Singapore, no matter what hardship she encountered simply because she was a Japanese. The writer, on the other hand, like many Singaporeans during his time, only received a two-year history education in middle school, which was future-oriented, therefore, he never felt the impact of the Japanese occupation. Low concluded his article by remarking: "The past continues to the present and future, therefore it is imperative to study and remember history."<sup>13</sup>

As Chinese anti-Japanese movement gained intensity, *The Jakarta Post* released an article entitled "Japan Thumbs Nose at Int'l Public Opinion" on April 19, 2005 written by Bantarto Bandoro, a magazine editor and lecturer at the University of Indonesia. It starts with: "If one were to ask which countries of East Asia have the most conflicting relations with other countries in the region, the answer is probably Japan." Japan, who has been creating problems with China and South Korea regarding the issues of history textbooks and territorial sovereignty, has been consistently insensitive to the feelings of the victims who experienced atrocities at the height of the Second World War, the history of which has been taught in Japan in a distorted manner. In turn, its international reputation had gradually declined. Japan seems to want to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, but it is hard to believe that a country which cannot get along with its neighboring countries could achieve and manage international responsibility as a leading nation. The article concluded:

So, the countries in Asia in particular will be watching Japan carefully whether its future international security role is commensurate with the way Japan handles its past history. For Japan to exert a leadership role commensurate with its economic power, it needs to win the respect of its neighbors in the region, rather than merely maintaining friendships with them.<sup>14</sup>

*The Jakarta Post* released an editorial on April 20 entitled "Courage to Face History." It wrote as follows: That anti-Japanese demonstrations had been radicalized in China and that counter-demonstrations had been held in Japan make the situation critical. The issue concerns not only the two countries, rather it involves the entire East Asian region. If the root cause is not solved, problems will flare up again. It is not difficult to understand why peoples in China and South Korea have been indignant over Japanese history textbooks. If the Indonesians read the new history textbooks describing them having warmly welcomed the arrival of the Japanese military in 1942, many of them would be utterly shocked. Under the occupation in the 1940s, the peoples of Southeast Asia also experienced cruel

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<sup>13</sup> Ignatius Low, "Our Past Is More Than Just History," *The Straits Times*, May 1, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Bantarto Bandoro, "Japan Thumbs Nose at Int'l Public Opinion," *The Jakarta Post*, April 19, 2005.

treatment, though China and South Korea had it worse. Japan underwent economic growth after the war and the neighboring countries benefitted from such a growth, receiving Official Development Assistance (ODA) and private direct investment. To quote the words of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (1947–; 2001–10 in office), President of the Philippines, the power of Japanese yen was “almighty.” While this may be true in the past, the strength of the Japanese currency declined as China began consolidating power. We can say that Japan has not been squarely facing the historical facts. It seems to be incapable of dealing with it. It seems that Japan has not sincerely apologized to those who experienced cruelty under the Japanese, and unfortunately it has been teaching a distorted version of history to the younger generations. Unlike Japanese textbooks, textbooks published in other Asian countries describe in detail the pain inflicted by the Japanese. These painful experiences are historical facts. We must encourage the Japanese to handle history in a more universal and objective manner to hopefully contribute to peace.

On its April 12, 2005 issue, *The Nation* of Thailand published an article that appeared in *The Jakarta Post*. It argued that the Japanese youth have been generally ignorant about the war and, sadly, have no intention of learning from history.<sup>15</sup> *The Nation* and *The Jakarta Post* joined the Asia News Network established in 1999 by seven media organizations. Since then, they have been borrowing content—articles and photos—and circulating it among themselves. Currently, all 12 media organizations from ten ASEAN nations have joined this network.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Prime Minister Koizumi’s Visit to Yasukuni Shrine between 2005 and 2006***

Notwithstanding the anti-Japanese demonstrations in China half a year ago, Prime Minister Koizumi visited the shrine on October 17, 2005. English news publications in Southeast Asia seemed to reach a deadlock on the issue. An editorial, “Japan’s Irreverence,” was released by *The Jakarta Post* on October 24. It wrote, Japan “should learn from Germany.” It went on to say that Japan’s economic development and its contributions to the region in the past 50 years had been recognized. However, the contributions were based on promoting cooperation among the countries in the region, not to compensate for their past crimes. The Indonesian people are not the type of people who hold a grudge against anything, but recognize the Dutch and Japanese colonization as historical facts.

It also stated that Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to the shrine is a cruel insult against Asian peoples who were the victims of Japanese imperialism and harms the spirit of cooperation in the region. It is also a violation of the Japanese Constitution which upholds the principle of the separation of religion and state. Japanese ultra-nationalism and their failure to recognize and apologize for past crimes contributed to political tensions in the region, creating uneasiness among the public. Japan has not yet gained the neighboring countries’ “trust,” which is the most important factor in human and state rela-

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<sup>15</sup> “Japan’s Stalled Maturity,” *The Nation*, April 12, 2005; “Courage to Face History,” *The Jakarta Post*, April 20, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.asianews.network/about> (December 10, 2016).

tions.<sup>17</sup>

Prime Minister Koizumi assumed the position on April 26, 2001 and retired on September 26, 2006 after serving two terms for a total of five and a half years. In Japan, as well as elsewhere in the world, many newspapers speculated that he might visit the shrine for the last time as prime minister on August 15, 2006. *The Asahi Shimbun* on August 3 published the result of a comparison of public opinion in Japan and in China. In regard to the visit to the shrine by the politicians, 51 percent responded “against it under any circumstance” while 30 percent expressed that “it is all right to visit the shrine if the war criminals are not enshrined.” Regarding the Japanese–Chinese relationship, 69 percent of the Japanese and 41 percent of Chinese answered that the status of the relations is “not good.” Among the Japanese respondents, 35 percent said that the tensed relationship was due to Chinese reactions while 15 percent said it was caused by the Japanese. Among the Chinese respondents 98 percent answered that it was due to Japan’s actions.

On August 15, the prime minister conducted the visit to the shrine as speculated by the media and the general public. He said, “Whenever I visit the shrine, there has always been criticism. I might as well visit today which is the appropriate day.” China and South Korea criticized it as expected, however, their interest was now on the next prime minister as Koizumi’s tenure was to end in less than two months, and because both countries have been tormented by the non-reaction of the Japanese government and have become rather despondent. The South Korean government commented: “Our primary interests had been issues of history textbooks and comfort women and not Yasukuni Shrine. However, the Yasukuni Shrine issue became the biggest obstacle between the two countries because of Prime Minister Koizumi’s repeated visits to the shrine” and President Roh Moo-hyun (1946–2009; 2003–08 in office) adopting the slogan of the re-examination of history. The Yasukuni issue “has become a major obstacle to the relation between our countries.” South Korea pointed out that because of these, the issue became more aggravated and complicated. The reactions of other countries were as follows: Taiwan showed some degree of understanding; the US watched calmly remarking that it was Japan’s domestic affairs; Australia expressed some anxiety; both Singapore and Malaysia protested; and Indonesia’s minister of Foreign Affairs declined to provide any comment.<sup>18</sup>

*The Straits Times* reported on August 18 that Abe Shinzo, the likely successor as the next prime minister, was trying to strengthen Japanese military power. Abe, *The Strait Times* reported, was working towards changing the Peace Constitution in order to exercise the right to arrange a collective defense. Furthermore, on August 20, the Tokyo bureau of *The Straits Times*, under the caption “Sayonara Koizumi-san,” summarized the Koizumi Administration’s performance including his visits to the shrine. It said: In February 2001, two months before he assumed prime ministership, Koizumi paid a visit to Chiran in Kagoshima prefecture, which had been known as a military base for suicide (*kamikaze*) squad. He shed tears when he read a letter written by a mother of a Divine Wind Suicide Squad

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<sup>17</sup> “Japan’s Irreverence,” *The Jakarta Post*, October 24, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, August 16, 2006.

member. He felt he must pay a visit to Yasukuni Shrine for their sake. However, because the souls of 14 class-A war criminals—who not only propelled the war but also delivered hundreds of thousands of youths to their death—were added to the shrine in 1978, many world leaders, including those of Singapore, repeatedly warned the prime minister against the visit. According to the public opinion poll conducted by *The Asahi Shimbun*, 57 percent of the Japanese did not hope for Prime Minister Koizumi to visit the shrine.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Becoming International Issues

When Koizumi, the president of the Liberal Democratic Party, retired after his term ended in September 2006, Abe Shinzo (1954–; 2006–07, 2012– in office) became the prime minister. His grandfather is the former prime minister, Kishi, who was confined in prison for three years and several months as a suspected class-A war criminal but was eventually acquitted. Abe replied during the Diet assembly that he would not visit the shrine and that he would follow the “Murayama Statement.” He chose China for his first official visit abroad. However, his government was not stable. With the Liberal Democratic Party’s crushing defeat against the Democratic Party of Japan at the House of Councilors election in July 2007, it lost dominance in the upper house of the Diet, thus creating the so-called “twisted Diet.” In September of the same year, Prime Minister Abe tendered his resignation and Fukuda Yasuo (1936–; 2007–08 in office) became the prime minister. Fukuda too soon resigned in September 2008 and Aso Taro (1940–; 2008–09 in office) assumed the post.

After the defeat of Liberal Democratic Party during the general election in August 2009, the Democratic Party of Japan assumed leadership. It was the first actual government transition after the war. However, Hatoyama Yukio (1947–; 2009–10 in office) who assumed the prime ministership resigned in June 2010 as US–Japan relations deteriorated over the relocation of the US military base in Futenma, Okinawa. The post was assumed by Kan Naoto (1946–; 2010–11 in office) during whose term the government was unstable and relations between Japan and the US further plummeted. While political relations were turning sour, a Chinese fishing boat and two Japan Coast Guard patrol boats collided in September 2010 in the coastal waters of Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands. The following month, in October, Communist Party of China held the fifth General Congress of the 17th Central Committee. In 2010 the Chinese GDP (Gross Domestic Product) reached the second in the world, overtaking that of Japan.

#### ***Collision of Chinese Fishing Boat and Japanese Patrol Boat in 2010***

On September 7, 2010, two patrol boats “Yonakuni” and “Mizuki” belonging to the Japan Coast Guard in Ishigaki both “touched” the Chinese fishing trawler near Kuba Island (Kobi Sho), Senkaku Islands. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a phone call to the Chinese ambassador in Tokyo, communicating that it was a regrettable incident and that the captain of the boat was arrested

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<sup>19</sup> “Abe Wants Revamp of Pacifist Charter,” *The Straits Times*, August 18, 2006; “Sayonara, Koizumi-san,” *The Straits Times*, August 20, 2006.

based on the civic law. Immediately the Chinese vice minister of Foreign Affairs summoned the Japanese ambassador to China and demanded for the suspension of the “unlawful interference of the Japanese government.” The captain remained in detention. However, on September 24, as if to make a concession to the Chinese government’s firm position, the district public prosecutor’s office in Naha decided to release the captain. Meanwhile, the Japanese government insisted there was no political interference. Despite these concessions however, the Chinese offensive never softened. In order to find a way out of the situation, Prime Ministers Wen Jiabao and Kan Naoto met and had a “friendly” talk for 25 minutes on October 4 at Brussels where the ASEM (Asia–Europe Meeting) summit was being held. Both confirmed “strategic reciprocity relation” and agreed to reopen discussions. On October 16, thousands of dissatisfied protesters participated in anti-Japanese demonstrations in Chengdu, Xian, and Zhengzhou. When the Chinese government sensed they might turn into anti-government criticism, the authorities shut down the internet and ordered a curfew on students. With these suppressions, the situation finally relaxed.

A September 27 article by Tokyo correspondent in *The Straits Times* titled “Weak Tokyo Makes Strong Beijing Bolder” commented that due to the lack of diplomatic skill on the part of the incumbent Democratic Party of Japan, the problem had worsened and that the balance of power in Asia had changed. *The Nation* of Thailand released an opinion piece dated October 4 under the title “China’s Row with Japan Has Implications for ASEAN.” It was an observation from “the region,” not from abroad. It said: In the past five years, the relationship between China and Japan has rapidly improved, which has spurred the construction of an East Asian community. However, the Chinese government’s firm position over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands had negative implications to the region. The ASEAN does not side with China or Japan; however, we are concerned whether China would take the same attitude toward the ASEAN. In the past several decades, especially since 2005, the ASEAN took advantage of the rivalry between China and Japan. However, the ASEAN no longer considers China and Japan as outsiders. This article demonstrated that Chinese-Japanese relations would significantly influence the ASEAN.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Japanese “Nationalization” of Senkaku Islands in 2012***

The decision to nationalize the Senkaku Islands was made public by Ishihara Shintaro at an official visit to Washington DC. As governor of Tokyo, Ishihara announced on April 16, 2012 his plan to purchase the islands. Likewise, on May 31 the Liberal Democratic Party, the opposition party during that time, included the nationalization of the islands in its second campaign pledge for the next House of Representatives election to be held on December 16. The Liberal Democratic Party felt confident to recapture their power. Noda Yoshihiko (1957–; 2011–12 in office) of the Democratic Party of Japan assumed the premiership after Kan stepped down on September 2, 2011. Like Ishihara, Noda

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<sup>20</sup> Kwan Weng Kin, “Weak Tokyo Makes Strong Beijing Bolder,” *The Straits Times*, September 27, 2010; Kavi Chongkittavorn, “China’s Row with Japan Has Implications for ASEAN,” *The Nation*, October 4, 2010.

announced on July 7, 2012 the plan of nationalization, which was conveyed during the Japan–China Foreign Ministers’ conference on July 11. China insisted on its dominion and dispatched marine patrol boats to nearby waters as a protest. On September 11, the nationalization of the islands was decided at the cabinet meeting and the islands were purchased for ¥2,050,000,000.

Protesting this decision, China joined hands with countries that experienced Japanese occupation, highlighting the history of the war of aggression. Furthermore, China submitted the new nautical chart to the United Nations, which included as part of their territorial waters the Senkaku Islands and its neighboring seas. Anti-Japanese demonstrations turned into riots: Stones were thrown at the Japanese Embassy; Japanese-owned department stores and shopping malls were looted; factories were burned; Japanese automobiles were destroyed; and glass windows of Japanese restaurants were broken. The demonstrations further spread and peaked on September 18, the 81st anniversary of the Liutiaohu Incident. Several other demonstrations erupted in around 50 to 100 other cities. In some of these demonstrations, the participants counted tens of thousands.

In the meantime, Japan, China, and South Korea each appealed for a resolution on territorial domain and the issue of comfort women at the United Nations General Assembly. To raise the issue internationally, advertisements were published in American newspapers. The Chinese government invited South Korea to form “a united front,” however, the South Korean government was cautious because China and South Korea still had to resolve disputes especially on maritime affairs regarding the Yellow Sea (West Sea) and fishing laws. Meanwhile, the ASEAN became cautious of the dominion of China over the South China Sea and on September 12, the Philippines formally decided to claim and rename the territorial waters as “the West Philippine Sea” that included the Spratly Islands.

### ***Prime Minister Abe’s Visit to Yasukuni Shrine in 2013***

Xi Jinping (1953–; 2013– in office) assumed the position of general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, becoming the supreme leader of the People’s Republic of China on November 15, 2012. In Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party won overwhelmingly at the House of Representatives general election on December 16; ten days later Abe Shinzo assumed the prime minister’s position. On September 14, when Abe was still a candidate for the presidency of the Liberal Democratic Party, he expressed at a joint press conference “utmost regret for being unable to visit the Yasukuni shrine as prime minister between 2006 and 2007.” His words refueled anxiety over the relations with China and South Korea. As anticipated, the diplomatic relationships with both countries went cold after Abe stepped into power. Instead of visiting the shrine, he limited his action to dedicating a *sakaki* (a species of camellia) to the shrine, during the Shinto observance of the spring and fall festivals. At the anniversary of the end of the war (August 15), he offered a donation out of his own pocket. However, just one year after his inauguration, on December 26, 2013, Abe visited the main shrine clad in mourning coat. He also visited “Chinrei-sha” (Pacification of Spirits Shrine) on the shrine grounds, where all the war dead in the world had been memorialized. Following this, the “State-



ment by Prime Minister Abe: Pledge for Everlasting Peace” was released in several languages: Japanese, English, Chinese, Arabic, French, German, South Korean, Russian, and Spanish.

Violent protests were held in China and in South Korea, similar to those after Prime Minister Koizumi visits in 2001 to 2006. Taiwan and North Korea joined in the clamor. Interestingly, the criticisms that erupted were not limited to the neighboring countries. The US government, through its embassy in Tokyo, proclaimed: “The United States government is disappointed by the action taken by the Japanese leaders which could deteriorate the relationships with the neighboring countries.” Previously in October, John Kerry (Secretary of State) and Charles Timothy “Chuck” Hagel (Secretary of Defense) visited the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery. It was “a silent message” on the part of the US to the Japanese leaders. In April, Deputy Prime Minister Aso visited Yasukuni Shrine immediately after discussions with Vice President Joseph Robinette “Joe” Biden. Earlier on December 3, Vice President Biden had met with Prime Minister Abe and warned him “not to create problems with China.” The British media pointed out the right-leaning tendency of the Abe administration citing the December 6 approval of the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets (SDS) or the State Secrecy Law. US media also criticized the law as it was “reminiscent of the prewar Empire” or “dangerous nationalism.” The criticism was followed by pronouncements of the EU and Russia on December 26. The press officer of the Higher Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) of the EU Diplomatic Security expressed fear that the Japanese politicians’ actions might lead to instability in East Asia. On the other hand, Russia reiterated, “Understanding the past correctly is an important basis in creating a relationship between Japan and its neighboring countries today.” Russia added, “We recognize some attempts that are increasingly pulling Japan away from what has been accepted in the world regarding the results of the Second World War.” This statement was made with the northern territories issue in mind (a dispute over the northernmost islands held by Russia since 1945 but claimed by Japan). Abe envisioned to “grow out of the postwar regime” and declared the Tokyo Trial as a “conviction made by the victors of the Allied Powers.” Russia’s statement seemed to have a relation with Abe’s words.<sup>21</sup>

*The Asahi Shimbun* published an article dated December 28, which reminded the public the implications of the prime minister’s visit since Koizumi’s visit seven years ago. It argues that the difference in power between the US and China has since shifted dramatically. Closing the gap between the two states and ensuring unity among Japan, the US and South Korea became more crucial especially to East Asian security. Meanwhile, continues the article, Russia began feeling anxious about its role. Previously, Russia played a lead role in historic events, having liberated Europe from fascist Nazis and, as a member of the Allied Powers, Asia from Japan. After the Soviet Union was dissolved, three Baltic states turned closer to the EU. As Russia saw the Yasukuni Shrine as a symbol of fascist militarism, it shares something in common with China: a fight against fascism. The article argues that considering

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<sup>21</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, December 27, 2013.

Soviet Union, China, US, and England were all allied powers that created the world order after the World War II, Japan's isolation might be unavoidable. Along with this article, *The Asahi Shimbun* published feature articles under the title "The Reason the US, China, and South Korea are Upset."

As international criticism grew, the Chinese minister of Foreign Affairs talked with his counterparts in Russia, Germany, and Vietnam over the phone on December 30 and planned to do the same with the South Korean minister on December 31. On January 1, 2014, *The Asahi Shimbun* made public the conversation between the Chinese minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, and his Russian counterpart, Sergey V. Lavrov. Wang said, "Prime Minister Abe's action heightened the vigilance of peace-loving states and peoples all over the world." He subsequently appealed, "Let us work together to maintain postwar international order as nations that both won the anti-Fascist world wars and are permanent members of the UN Security Council." Lavrov responded, "Russia absolutely agrees with China." "We would like to encourage Japan to review its incorrect version of history and not to take actions that would intensify regional tensions."

In resolving the issue on the visit of the prime minister, a couple of suggestions have been proposed. The first is to construct a national memorial facility and the second, the separation of class-A war criminals from the memorial. On December 27, 2013, the Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide indicated at a press conference that no plan to construct such a facility was being considered. In responding to the second proposal, he expressed that the decision was "up to the shrine," without mentioning the government's official stand on the matter. On the evening of January 6, 2014, in a meeting organized by actor Tsugawa Masahiko, Abe expressed his displeasure and reluctance toward the construction of a national memorial facility. "Perhaps the bereaved families will not visit such a memorial facility," Abe explained.

Despite criticisms from the international community, no appropriate actions materialized to resolve the matter. Thus, China and South Korea decided to appeal to the international public. They tapped US and British media, criticized Japan at the UN Security Council board meeting on January 29 and, China in particular, ran a negative campaign in at least 50 countries to which respective Japanese ambassadors responded accordingly. However, these efforts seem to affect neither the Japanese government nor its citizens. In Japan, no feeling of urgency was detected. According to the public opinion survey conducted by *The Asahi Shimbun* on January 25 and 26, 41 percent expressed that it was all right for the prime minister to visit the Yasukuni Shrine, while 46 percent was against it. In reaction to foreign criticisms, 51 percent said these "should be considered seriously" and 40 percent answered with "not so much." 50 percent was for the construction of a non-religious memorial facility while 29 percent was against it.

On December 31, 2013, the Tokyo correspondent of *The Straits Times* wrote an "Opinion" column observing that the right-leaning tendency of Japan was becoming apparent. While neither the emperor nor foreign top government officials had and would visit the shrine, the Japanese youth support the prime minister's visit. According to the column, they had been influenced by the movie "The Eternal

Zero (or *Kamikaze* in other territories),” which depicted the suicide squad (*kamikaze*) pilots in a positive way. Hyakuta Naoki, the author of the novel on which the film was based, was appointed by Abe as a member of the NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Japan Broadcasting Corporation) administration committee.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Approval of Japanese Military Legislation in 2015***

On September 19, 2015, the Japanese Military Legislation was approved in the House of Councilors. The first Prime Minister born after the war, Abe envisioned Japan to “grow out of the postwar regime” and called for a revision of the Constitution. Abe set up the “Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security” in order to implement a collective self-defense arrangement during his first administration between 2006 and 2007. As soon as the second Abe administration was assembled in December 2012, the Advisory Panel was reorganized in February 2013. Two laws of importance were passed in December: the first allowed the cabinet to set up the National Security Council, and the second, The State Secrecy Law, raised the penalty for government employees who leaked security-related information. In April 2014, three principles on arms exports were abolished. In July, collective self-defense for allies was recognized at the cabinet meeting by reinterpreting the Constitution. In February 2015, an Official Development Assistance reform was conducted based on “national interest first.” In April, 2015, Japan–US guidelines on defense cooperation were revised for the first time since its establishment 18 years ago. The revised guideline allows Japan to assist the US military whenever.

The US government and media welcomed the Japanese military activities expanding overseas. However, *Le Monde* in France, on its electronic version, published a report called “Fear of the End of Pacifism.” The Philippines, which had expected US assistance over territorial disputes in the South China Sea, welcomed Japan’s move although it expressed resentment toward the Japanese for its history of military invasion in the country. South Korea showed a more subtle reaction, commenting that “Japan should maintain the spirit of the Peace Constitution and should go forward with transparency in order to contribute to peace and security for the region.” Meanwhile, China “has been strongly interested in Japan’s military trend for historical reasons.” “Japan’s actions have gone beyond the limit of the Japanese Peace Constitution.”<sup>23</sup> *The Straits Times* strongly questioned Japanese sense of responsibility in the region in an “Opinion” column dated September 25. It warned that north-eastern Asian countries were being reminded of an old ghost by the Japanese rearmament. The same could be said about the Southeast Asian countries, including Malaya and Singapore, which the Japanese Empire invaded, occupied, and ravaged in the name of liberating Asia from the European/American colonial rules during the World War II. It stated that Japan should show with utmost transparency how it was going to contribute to the stabilization of the region.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kwan Weng Kin, “Abe’s War Shrine Visit Confirms Shift to Right,” *The Straits Times*, December 31, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, September 18, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> “The Straits Times Says Japan’s Need for Defence and Diplomacy,” *The Straits Times*, September 25, 2015.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Since Prime Minister Nakasone's official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in 1985, China and South Korea have been strongly opposed to the visit. Especially in China, large-scale demonstrations were held, sometimes turning into violent mobs. Representing other Asian countries and regions that had been colonized or occupied by the Japanese, China and South Korea routinely and publicly expressed their dismay against Japan. Interestingly, few anti-Japanese demonstrations supporting China and South Korea were observed in the Southeast Asian region. Initially, newspapers in these countries simply reported the facts without providing any sustained coverage on the visit. It was only during Prime Minister Koizumi's visit in 2001 when they began consider the matter as a regional issue. What was distinct in the coverage during this period was that it was comprehensive, fleshed out in detail, and proposed actual solutions. Such regional contextualization and initiatives towards a resolution is not entirely unrelated to the ASEAN Plus Three meetings which had been regularly convening since 1997, and the meetings between ASEAN and each of the three countries.

Southeast Asian media acknowledged that the controversies among East Asian countries (Japan, China, and South Korea) have an impact on regional security in East and Southeast Asia at large. Initially, they viewed the issue as foreign and not directly concerning them. However, as China's economic growth became impossible to ignore, balancing friendly relations between the controversy-embroiled countries became a daunting task for ASEAN member states that had largely depended on Japanese government-sponsored development aid.

English newspapers in Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand began to point out that Japan was failing to address its history of aggression with sincerity. Moreover, it neglects the societies and cultures of the countries to which it provides ODA. Outbursts such as these are quite similar to those found in China and South Korea. On the other hand, fierce anti-Japanese demonstrations and newspaper pieces were not observed in the Philippines, despite the fact that the Philippines was dragged into the Japan-US war, losing seven percent of its total population or 1,100,000 persons, and had to subsequently deal with the issue on comfort women. With an ongoing territorial dispute against China over the South China Sea, Philippine media deemed it unwise to antagonize Japan. Nevertheless, frustrations toward Japan were reflected in articles reprinted from other Southeast Asian countries. From this we can surmise that the Philippines was involved in the disputes, albeit discreetly unlike other countries that openly criticized Japan.

Small countries avoid direct confrontation with great powers. Like fisherfolk in troubled waters, they play at the conflict among the larger countries, dancing to it so as to avoid falling into the mercy of any one of these competing powers. Nevertheless, latent frustrations sometimes surface. Southeast Asian countries criticize not only Japan, but also China, South Korea, the US, and countries in Western Europe for failing to respect them. Such frustrations can be gleaned from recent territorial disputes in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea as well as the anti-Chinese movement unfolding in Vietnam. In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte (1945-; 2016- in office) openly

expressed anti-US sentiments and had been courting China. Small countries might have hidden disputes against larger ones. In order to address these issues or to mitigate their escalation, it is imperative for powerful countries to pay close attention to covert yet significant disputes with less powerful states.

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