

Cultural Memory, Ventriloquism, and Performance: Reflections on Yasukuni Shrine

Masaki Matsubara

Cornell University

This article is a study of cultural memory, focusing on the case of a particular constructed memorial site, Yasukuni Shintō Shrine (hereafter, Yasukuni), one of the more controversial religious and political sites in Japan. By “cultural memory,” I mean a culturally constructed memory in light of needs and agendas of the present. It denotes exclusively constructions of the past as they are held by people in the given social, cultural, and historical context of the present. I argue that cultural memory is the memory through which people in the present use the past to drive an agenda in the present. This cultural memory is manifested by rituals or performances on special occasions such as commemoration days. What demands attention is that cultural memory is not about revealing past events as accurately as possible, neither is it necessarily about preserving cultural continuity. Rather it is about making “meaningful,” “persuasive,” “true” statements about the past in the particular given context of the present. Within this conceptual framework of cultural memory, this article demonstrates how the cultural memory of Yasukuni has actively constructed the past depending on certain social and cultural milieus of the present.

This article sets to explore a particular constructed memorial site, Yasukuni Shintō Shrine, one of the more controversial religious and political sites in Japan. In this article, I examine the ways the heavily crafted cultural memory of Yasukuni has been designed to meet the needs and agendas of the present radical right in Japan. I consider how the culturally constructed memory of the controversy of Yasukuni is shaped and represented by the shrine itself and its apologists as well as by its affiliated media as a tactic to legitimate the right’s claims and to distort wartime memories. I argue that Yasukuni functions as a self-perpetuating controversy machine. I am interested in investigating what the cultural memory of Yasukuni appeals to and how it does so, how it becomes “persuasive” and “true” for different groups of people, and what

An earlier version of this article was presented at a conference on “Cultural Memory and Cultures in Transitions” at Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania, 11–13 May 2006. Research for this article was primarily conducted on site at the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, Japan, on 15 August 2005, and in January 2006.

consequences that way of remembering Yasukuni brings about. Considering these questions, I am concerned not with what the content of Yasukuni's crafted memory of the past actually is, but rather with how that content is presented to people, or more specifically, how and what people interiorize, forget, and selectively remember. The Yasukuni narrative elevates these emotions and memories among others for very specific purposes. I examine how the cultural memory of Yasukuni is constructed in an attempt to rehabilitate and shape its idealized past. The agenda is that Japan is once more an imperial Japan, a glorious empire, united by an imagined Japanese spirit of loyalty, self-sacrifice, and pride.

What I am coming to see about the Yasukuni narrative and controversy is that the shrine leadership, in concert with politicians and academics, seeks a younger, somewhat destabilized or alienated audience to replace its nearly defunct generation of veteran supporters. They do this through the careful orchestration of an array of voices.

First, I briefly discuss the history of Yasukuni; second, I outline a variety of voices used to present Yasukuni to the consuming media and public. I divide these voices into a classification of five: the voices from young Japanese, middle-aged Japanese, ultra-right wing extremists, bereaved women, and Taiwanese victims of Japanese aggression from the war era. I am concerned here with exploring not only the possibility of a multiplicity of *Yasukunis* having complex relations with the shrine positively as well as negatively, but, more importantly, also Yasukuni's attempts to manipulate wartime memories and to reestablish the shrine's idealized past. I am provisionally using the metaphor of ventriloquism because I explore how a very mystified, almost concealed agent or system of agents manipulates voices that exist in many arenas. Yasukuni officials insist, loudly and often, that they say and do nothing and that the controversy is beyond their control. "The lady doth protest too much, methinks."¹ My discussion here is accompanied by the material below that includes examples of most of those voices. Last, I focus on how the voices of Yasukuni's right-wing apologists are manifested through their commemorative performances at the shrine on 15 August, the anniversary of the day of surrender. I show that these people, who elevate the glory of Japan's imperial past as well as the heroic war dead and enjoy privileged participation in their performances on that day, collude in the shrine's self-performance.

Additionally, I underscore here an important fact. Most of the voices I discuss were not alive during the Second World War. This is a reflection of what Marianne Hirsch has called "post memory," that is to say, people who draw remembered identity from events that happened before they were born. I argue that these are the easiest memories to manipulate and the agents of Yasukuni know this.

¹ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, ii, 239.

Brief history of Yasukuni Shrine

Yasukuni, located near the Imperial Palace in the heart of Tokyo, was originally established in 1869, at the request of the Emperor Meiji. Particularly after the end of the 19th century, the shrine came to be understood as the sacred place for enshrining all the spirits of those who lost their lives for the sake of the nation in a series of foreign wars that ended with Japan's defeat in 1945. The spirits enshrined and honored at the shrine were all regarded as the heroic spirits who protected the nation. The shrine was positioned as the "guardian deity of the nation," the deity identified with the ancestor spirit of the Japanese people. Especially in the 1930s and 1940s, the shrine functioned as one source of the spiritual support of Japan's militaristic nationalism. Currently Yasukuni enshrines the spirits of some 2.5 million war dead, including 14 Japanese Class-A war criminals as well as an estimated 50,000 Taiwanese and Korean soldiers who fought "for the sake of the country." The Class-A war criminals were the top leaders of the Japanese imperial army, including the then Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki, who were charged with war crimes at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East from 1946 to 1948. Tōjō was executed on 23 December 1948, but not enshrined until 31 years later, in 1979. Today for many Asian countries, Yasukuni is perceived as a symbol of Japan's aggression during the war years. The former Prime Minister Koizumi's tributes to the shrine have sparked vehement protests by those Asian countries who were the targets of Japanese military aggression in the war, including China, current North and South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Burma.

Typology of voices of Yasukuni memories

1. *Young Japanese voices from newspaper Yasukuni*

Yasukuni Shrine includes in its precincts a large worship hall (*haiden* and *honden*) as well as a very large museum of the Second World War, called *Yūshūkan*. A number of people leave messages in guest-books that are provided near the exit of the *Yūshūkan*. Scholar John Nelson remarks, "Nowhere does the sanctimonious perspective of victimization gain a louder voice than at the *Yūshūkan*."² What catches one's eye on approach is the area in front of the museum where some memorials are erected, including memorials of war horses, war dogs, and mothers surrounded by the children they raised in spite of the loss of their husbands. These are only a few examples that reveal the museum's concern with getting us to see war mothers as our mothers, war dogs as our dogs, and war horses as our horses. Their suffering is ours. One can also find the memorial of Indian Justice Radhabinod Pal who was the Asian judge at the war crimes tribunal in Tokyo. This memorial denotes Yasukuni's

² John Nelson, "Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, 2 (May 2003): 454.

admiration for Pal's views that the Japanese were innocent of all war crimes and that the real aggressors in Asia were British and American imperialists.³ The shrine says, in other words, that our sacrifice was not in vain. Young visitors to the museum as well as to the shrine leave their remarks, which are selectively shown in the shrine's monthly newspaper *Yasukuni*.

Type One in the material below shows five statements made by young Japanese. One of the common points in these five statements is that the speakers have found the occasion of visiting Yasukuni an experience which fosters their nationalist emotions. They are encouraged to learn more fully about the view of Japan's history from what the shrine and museum provide, the circumstances of the time, and the importance of bolstering a sense of the pride in being Japanese and honoring the spirits of the war dead enshrined at the shrine. Their emotional landscape is manipulated to rehabilitate and shape Yasukuni's memory of its idealized past. They are tied to Yasukuni's crafted communal, "historical" memory. In this regard, it is crucial to highlight that the newspaper advertises the positive assessment of Yasukuni's past, precisely through the selection of voices whose speakers are thus used as its spokesmen. But it is also important to underline that Yasukuni labors to implant in its visitors and others an exclusively monolithic war memory of the marvelous war dead and imperial Japan, which then stirs up the significance of honoring the war dead and national pride in current audiences. Yasukuni performs itself toward the reestablishment of its idealized past.

2. *Middle-aged Japanese voices from newspaper Yasukuni*

Type Two in the material below shows five statements made by middle-aged Japanese. One of the common points among the first four statements is that those voices reflect the memories of the dead in specific relation to the writers and, in effect, admire and try to rehabilitate a lost Japanese spirit and action that have been forgotten in the present. For Yasukuni, this rhetoric of admiration and its rehabilitation is a necessary element for shaping the ideals of the shrine.

There is only one criticism of the memories reported in Yasukuni in the series of the newspaper from 1 February 2004 to 1 October 2005. The fifth statement reveals the shrine's concealment of exactly what Japanese imperial forces did during the Second World War. Clearly, Yasukuni's primary task is to produce a selective, revised memory. Yasukuni's selection of voices is exclusively designed to encourage us to proclaim the glory of dying for one's country. It follows two stages: we identify with past sufferers, and we then regard "our" suffering as a noble sacrifice. More specifically, it recalls Japanese soldiers fighting glorious engagements and dying glorious deaths. We are

³ John Breen, "Yasukuni: Ritual and Memory," *Japan Focus* 293 [online], <http://japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=293> (11-02-2005).

encouraged to forget the atrocities of war, as they are never mentioned or outright denied.

Yasukuni's selection of voices for shaping the past can also be found in the case of the shrine's use of actual veteran voices. Here I only briefly mention that the newspaper *Yasukuni* excludes the anti-war claims veterans have made and also the peripheral feeling in society that these veterans have recognized and confessed.⁴

3. *Voices from Japanese ultra right-wing extremists*

I turn my attention to the voices of ultra right-wing extremists, a few of whom I interviewed at the shrine in January, 2006. A sixty-eight-year-old man, Okuda Ichio, whom I interviewed on 1 January, is an excellent case in point of Hirsch's "post memory." He excitedly recounted the stories of a brave soldier who was a member of a spy unit working in China in 1944. I was also told about the passenger-cargo ship, *Tsushima Maru*, which was loaded with about 2,000 people and was sunk by the US submarine *Bowfin* in 1944. Reflecting on these memories of the war as if they were his own, Okuda said to me, "I come to Yasukuni more than 200 days in a year and play my *shamisen* here for those who died in the war; of course, I come to Yasukuni on 15 August every year and pay respect to the war dead who protected the nation." For Okuda, his personal emotion for the war dead functions as the central motivation of his performance at the shrine. He has an excess of emotion which he translates into these performances.

However, as Example 1 of Type Three in the material below shows, Okuda, when asked about the Second World War and Yasukuni, emphasized the loss of Japanese pride, the significance of its rehabilitation, and the shrine as the center of the Japanese spirit. As Examples 2 and 3 below show, Okuda's concerns are also shared with the two right-wing members whom I interviewed at the shrine. One of the common points among the three interviewees can be found in their desire to reestablish what they are calling Japanese spirit, *yamato damashii*, and hence rehabilitate pride in being Japanese by honoring the glorious military dead enshrined at Yasukuni. This desire is precisely what the shrine cultivates. Nelson writes, "an array of political action groups labors to convert curiosity and empathy into activism and patronage."⁵ This manipulation of desire is manifested in commemorative performances. In fact, it is these people who present what can only be called ritual performances at the commemorative ceremonies at the shrine on 15 August. It is these people who engage in paramilitary activities on that day at Yasukuni, the activities that actually make the shrine a place of spectacle, often ridiculed or worried about in the global press. They act as if they were the

⁴ I discuss this point in detail in the longer version of my paper presented at the conference on "Cultural Memory and Cultures in Transitions."

⁵ Nelson, "Social Memory as Ritual Practice," 456.

mainstream of Yasukuni's history and status during wartime Japan. They act out post memory. The shrine, while claiming innocence, manipulates the spectacle.

4. *Seemingly timeless bereaved women's voices*

The fourth type is bereaved women's voices, which show two cases. Before turning to the examples, it is important to point out that Yasukuni has a habit of confusing the chronology of deaths and the timeline of events. A 70-year-old widow in 1997 would have lost her husband in 1945, the last year of the war, at age 18. Did she not remarry? These widows' voices float ahistorically, set along side the present voices as if they are synchronous.

The first case is the so-called "Yasukuni Wife (*yasukuni no tsuma*)," or "a bereaved woman whose husband is enshrined in Yasukuni." Example 1 of Type Four in the material below shows the case of Iwai Masuko, 83 years old, who submitted a statement to the Osaka District Court on April, 2002, against its verdict that the Prime Minister Koizumi's 13 August visit to the shrine in 2001 was unconstitutional. Her statement speaks in vindication of Koizumi's tribute at the shrine in an extremely emotional tone. This is one case that shows the bereaved family members who have deep feelings for Yasukuni.

The second is a case of mothers whose sons lost their lives in the war. For instance, Example 2 in the material shows an excerpt of the conversations by two women, Nakamura and Saito. It should be emphasized that their conversations were printed in a magazine published in 1939, two years after the Second Sino-Japanese War began.

These mothers' grief over losing their sons in the war is overcome by regarding their deaths as honorable deaths for the sake of the country. However, this view of glorifying the war dead is exactly what Yasukuni repeatedly stressed, that is to say, the spiritual bond between the Japanese family and the nation. Nelson points out that "the enshrinement of their loved ones and the accompanying rituals conducted in their honor must have been ennobling on the one hand [...] but agonizing on the other."⁶ However, Nelson does not really explore how the shrine uses these old agonies to advance a revised history. Ito Fumiko, a 70-year-old woman, said, "More than 50 years have passed, but my grief has not changed,"⁷ while she came to pay tribute to her husband in 1997. Today, Yasukuni officials insist these mothers' "persuasive" and "true" voices are the representative of all bereaved women, parallel with Iwai's powerful voice for the support of the shrine. However, it must be pointed out that while Yasukuni removes the ideological nature of those mothers' voices and thus dehistoricizes them to shape its memories in regard to its present agendas, it adopts the

⁶ Ibid., 452.

⁷ "Rain Fails to Dampen Turnout at Yasukuni," *The Japan Times*, 15 August 1997 [online], <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn19970815a1.html> (04-07-2006).

voice of authority to sell its own rhetoric. This rhetoric fixes those mothers' voices as the authoritative memory of anguish of Yasukuni. In further work, I will explore the myriad ways Yasukuni uses the female voice in all documentaries.

5. *Taiwanese voices*

Now I turn to a discussion of voices also part of the Yasukuni controversy, but not produced or directed by the shrine itself. The memories of Yasukuni among Taiwanese are reflected in their lawsuits and protests in Osaka and Tokyo from 2003 to 2005. In particular, a group of 236 plaintiffs, including 124 Taiwanese, filed a lawsuit to the Osaka District Court in 2003. They sued the state, Prime Minister Koizumi, and Yasukuni Shrine over Koizumi's repeated visits to the shrine, claiming that his visits violate Japan's Constitution, which stipulates the separation of state and religion. In addition, these plaintiffs, who also included 111 Japanese and one South Korean resident in Japan whose relatives died in the war, demanded 10,000 yen (about \$100) per plaintiff in compensation for their psychological damage caused by Koizumi's visits to the shrine.⁸ The Court, however, rejected this lawsuit in 2004, ruling that his visits to Yasukuni were private. Although another lawsuit case filed in the Osaka Court in 2005 reversed this verdict and ruled that his visits violate the Constitution's rules regarding religion and state, the Court again rejected the Taiwanese plaintiffs' claims to be compensated over the visits.

One of the noteworthy aspects of this lawsuit is that the suit against Koizumi's Yasukuni visits was the first to involve plaintiffs from Taiwan. Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule from 1895 to 1945. In particular, a group among those Taiwanese plaintiffs, led by an independent legislator, Gaojin Sumei (高金素梅), constitutes relatives of indigenous Taiwanese who were forcibly conscripted into the Japanese military and perished during the war. Gaojin, born in 1965, is not only a current lawmaker, but also a descendant of the Atayal (泰雅) tribe, one of the Taiwanese aborigines. More interestingly, she was an actress in films such as *The Wedding Banquet* in 1991. This Atayal tribe was one of Taiwan's aboriginal tribes that were named by the Japanese colonial government "Takasago people (高砂族)" who were recruited as the Takasago Volunteer Army to fight for the Imperial Japanese Army in Southeast Asia by 1945. Hence, those Taiwanese plaintiffs also demanded the removal of their ancestors' names as well as other Taiwanese soldiers' names from the shrine's enshrinement list. As Type Five in the material below shows, Gaojin strongly

⁸ For more information, see "Yasukuni Visit Draws More Flak," *The Japan Times*, 30 January 2003 [online], <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20030130b3.html> (04-07-2006); "236 Sue over Visits to Yasukuni," *The Japan Times*, 18 February 2003 [online], <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20030218a2.html> (04-07-2006); and "Yasukuni Visits Ruled 'Private,'" *The Japan Times*, 14 May 2004 [online], <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20040514a2.html> (04-07-2006). See also Takahashi Tetsuya's *Yasukuni mondai* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2005), pp. 15–7.

emphasizes that those enshrined indigenous Taiwanese did not fight voluntarily but were forced to fight for the Japanese emperor. However, their demands are pending in the Osaka Court and a decision has not yet been reached.

Under these circumstances, the Taiwanese media, including the *Taipei Times*, particularly emphasizes the lawsuit case that made a reversing ruling that Koizumi's visits to the shrine were unconstitutional. It quoted Gaojin's comments, "We're not satisfied with today's ruling, though it did take one little step forward. We urge the Japanese government to take three or four steps forward," while in contrast, it also introduces Koizumi's comment, "I don't understand why my visits to Yasukuni violate the Constitution [...]. I visit Yasukuni as a private citizen and as prime minister, but not in a public capacity."⁹

The *Taipei Times* also stresses the case that a Taiwanese protest in Tokyo in 2005, organized by Gaojin and 60 other members, was prohibited by the Japanese police. It states, "A group of Taiwanese Aborigines was forced to cancel a protest over the enshrinement of their relatives at the Yasukuni shrine [...] after being blocked by police outside the shrine's gate."¹⁰

However, it is noteworthy that the shrine does use the Taiwan protests to set up its counter-memory. The shrine's audience is not Taiwanese, but Japanese people. A Japanese ultra-rightist newspaper *Kokumin shinbun*, closely allied with Yasukuni, quotes a former soldier, Wu Zhengnan (吳正男), born in 1927 and a descendant of the Atayal tribe, who states: "Gaojin Sumei is absolutely not the representative of 'the Takasago people.' She is a disgrace to Taiwanese."¹¹ It also quotes a man by the name of Ke Zhengxin (柯正信), who criticizes Gaojin and her protest group and states, "What is wrong with the emperor, the Prime Minister, and the people with heart to visit the shrine which worships the spirits of those who died for the country as loyal citizens." He continues, "Not only do they not appreciate this gratitude, but they insulted Yasukuni Shrine, which, itself, says nothing, by demanding compensation. They made fools of themselves by taking inhumane action."¹² However, the newspaper does not show who the speaker, Ke Zhengxin, is. In fact, Ke's age, birth place, and all other information related to his identity are unclear. Although the Japanese version of the internet site, Google, shows a total of 17 hits to this name, all the references refer to the *Kokumin shinbun* article. There is no information about him in other sources like the *Taipei Times*, *China Post*, and *Xinhua News Agency*. It thus is possible to argue that he is a fringe figure used for political purposes in the *Kokumin shinbun* to vindicate and

⁹ "Koizumi Shrine Visits Ruled Unconstitutional," *Taipei Times*, 1 October 2005 [online], <http://www.taipeitimes.com/news/front/archives/2005/10/01/2003273949> (04-11-2006).

¹⁰ "Tokyo Police Shut down Protest over Aboriginal names," *Taipei Times*, 15 June 2005 [online], <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2005/06/15/2003259352> (04-11-2006).

¹¹ "Takasagozoku ikai no kaiken," *Kokumin shinbun*, 25 July 2003.

¹² "Yasukuni soshodan wa takasagozoku no haji," *Kokumin shinbun*, 25 March 2003.

justify the issues concerning worship at Yasukuni. It is certainly interesting to think that the voices over Yasukuni are completely different even among Taiwanese. But, more importantly, this view constitutes evidence that the newspaper creates Taiwanese voices in the tactic of ventriloquism it uses to legitimate and justify an imperial Japan, a glorious empire, united in a spirit of loyalty and self-sacrifice. The newspaper *Kokumin shinbun*, in its use of ventriloquism, colludes in Yasukuni's shaping of this idealized past.

Ritual performances of the 15 August—commemorations at Yasukuni in 2005

Now my discussion turns to the ritual performances at the 15 August—commemorations at Yasukuni in 2005. On 15 August every year, Yasukuni receives special attention nationally and internationally. This is the day when many politicians pay tribute and when the neighboring Asian countries re-recognize how the Japanese government bolsters the glorification of the war dead as well as the country's imperial past. This is also the day when Yasukuni's ultra-rightist apologists most enjoy privileged participation in their commemorative performances at the shrine, addressing basic three agendas: supporting the Prime Minister's worship for the war dead at the shrine as his duty; emphasizing the glory of the war dead and Japan's imperial past; and last, re-establishing pride in being the Japanese people. This agenda gets performed in many ways.

On 15 August 2005, the day of the sixtieth anniversary of Japan's defeat in the Second World War, Professor Jane Marie Law, her thirteen-year-old son, Sam, and I visited Yasukuni. We were told in a news report on that night that more than 200,000 people visited the shrine, even though that day was hit by a heat wave. Under the close watch of armed police, what caught my eye on the approach to the shrine was people who were handing out pamphlets concerning the disputes of the Second World War, the Northern Territories, and the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea, including pamphlets that provided lessons about how the national identity of Japan and Japanese must be firmly established. Protests from opposition groups represented by leftists also occurred on this day, but these groups were not allowed on the shrine's precincts. While the shrine maintains that it does nothing to advance these demonstrations, the leftists are not allowed inside. In 2005, they were not very visible at all.

A juxtaposition of somber and festive moods composed the atmosphere of that day, but I was struck by a number of right-wing members as well as paramilitary members who were demonstrating and performing along the shrine's central walkway toward the Main Hall. This scene was indeed what the priest with whom I spoke described to me as not performance but rather "costume play." Those performers include a range of ages

and genders, but the vast majority if not all of them clearly had no experiences of the war. Those ultra-rightists dressed in military uniforms. Some of them were wearing T-shirts with slogans that read “Japanese! Be proud of yourself as a descendent of the Yamato tribe,” “15 August is the day of mortification,” and also “Japanese, arm! We win next!” Witnessing this, I encountered a scene in which right-wing members intimidated a BBC broadcast team filming those militaristic performances, by surrounding them and making threatening gestures in the middle of the central walkway. We stood nearby and watched.

Many ultra-rightists were also singing war military songs, playing *shamisen*, and making bugling calls. There were also women dressed in the relief party uniforms of the imperial army. What especially caught visitors’ attention was those who put on military uniforms, charging with their swords held high, hoisting wartime Japan’s big rising sun flag, and marching with the leader’s bark of commands, toward the Main Hall. At almost 12 o’clock p.m., I also encountered a group of right-wing members, led by an old man. This group took up a position slightly to the right side of the shrine’s Main Hall, while the old man sat knelt his heels on the ground and paid respects. Meanwhile, his many followers were standing at attention behind him, while some held Japan’s national flags, some held a flag that read, “Gather under the Sun flag and unite around the emperor,” and some had sashes that read, “Yasukuni Shrine for nation protection.” Once the time signal was played at noon, this old man deeply bowed and touched his head directly on the ground to worship for the war dead. All of his followers, other performers as well as the visitors to the shrine stopped walking and offered a silent prayer toward the Main Hall for a minute. It was a moment of absolute silence, except for the clicking of cameras. A real Japanese ritual performance.

In the shade of trees near the Main Hall, we also encountered a scene in which a middle-aged paramilitary man, who was wearing a green military uniform and grasping Japan’s national flag in his hand, denied the common images of the Nanjing massacre in China to a few men and women who stood nearby. He was refuting the brutality of the Japanese imperial army in that atrocity. He stated that although people believe that Japanese soldiers attacked women and eventually killed them or that they cut the pregnant women’s bellies, took out fetuses, and played volleyball with the decapitated heads, these things never happened. Instead, he asked *us* how Japanese people could do such things, while he strongly emphasized that *we* cannot do such things. During a period of silence, an elderly woman who was more than eighty suddenly started to quarrel with that man about his negation of the Japanese army’s cruel acts in Nanjing, by asking if he was a soldier. She continued to ask him if he fought in the war. Most interestingly, when she vehemently stated that she knew the war and she was there, he walked away from her in silence. This situation showed us that the paramilitary man talked about the war from the nationalistic pride and revisionist views that distorted and

justified the history of Japan's imperial past and tried to legitimate the status of Yasukuni. Although he wore a uniform, he had not been there.

The 15 August commemorations reveal those performers' concerns with memory and the shaping of Yasukuni's past. Their displays are all designed to proclaim the glory of soldiers dying for the emperor and *his* country. Participants' performances encourage people to recall the spirit of Japanese soldiers who gloriously fought and honorably died, while bearing witness to the glory of imperial Japan. Their performances also encouraged people to forget the atrocities of the war, by openly stating that they never happened.

In conclusion, I have seen how the cultural memory of Yasukuni is constructed through a variety of ways and, in so doing, focuses on the re-establishment of patriotism and heroism of the war dead in glorious imperial Japan. This in itself is the consequence of an act of selective memory, for it eliminates the possibility of the Japanese imperial army's aggression and atrocities. To put it in another way, the cultural memory of Yasukuni is constructed based on at least four strategies: 1) identification of the present generation with the suffering of the war generation through the manipulation of "post memory;" 2) the translation of this identification into sacrifice for the emperor, and thus a higher, meaningful "cause;" 3) "concealment" of atrocity; and 4) the introduction of a "monolithic mnemonic." This concealment distorts the narrative of the war. The monolithic mnemonic actively transforms that military nationalism into a positive motif that emphasizes the absolute glory of fighting and losing one's life for the sake of the country. As a consequence, this monolithic mnemonic sanitizes traumatic memories with the glorification of imperial Japan and the war dead. This strategy, then, brings about historical revisionism as a necessary tactic to legitimate that glorification. It justifies the memories of Yasukuni in regard to present needs of re-establishing an agenda that Japan is once more an imperial Japan, a glorious empire, united in the Japanese spirit of loyalty, self-sacrifice, and pride. Yasukuni apologists, who enjoy their privileged participation in commemorative ceremonies at the shrine on 15 August and other visitors who support the shrine in this issue, have no choice but to collude in Yasukuni's construction of this monolithic idealized past. I wonder if the shrine counts Professor Law, her son Sam, and me, a Zen priest, among its "followers." How many of the 200,000 were the "curious" like us?

The material on typology of voices of Yasukuni memories

Type One: Young Japanese voices from newspaper Yasukuni

1. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 January 2003); a 14-year-old boy:

I visited the Yūshūkan to see combat planes like those named 'Zerosen' and 'Suisei.' But when I saw the other displays, I thought that people in those days devoted themselves to fighting for the sake of the country. Today, however, there are few people who are proud of our country. Also in general, people write off soldiers as villains. I found a display that

showed Asian countries rejoicing over their emancipation from European invasion and colonization by the Japanese army. Did Japan really do only bad things? [...] I also thought that it's quite arbitrary of the US to drop A-bombs just for the purpose of making postwar dealings more advantageous for itself than for Russia.¹³

2. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 July 2003); a 23-year-old man:

At the Yūshūkan, I keenly felt the great spirit of our ancestors who fought for the sake of the country. Currently, there are many politicians, media, and civilian associations for peace, all of which have given a look of reproach at the shrine. I really wish they would listen to the voices of the heroic war dead, or *eirei*, enshrined here at the shrine [...]. I strongly hope that more people, including me, visit and worship at the shrine and learn about the heroic war dead at the museum.¹⁴

3. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 July 2003); a 23-year-old man:

The current young generation conceives of today's peace, happiness, and prosperity in Japan as very natural, and they act arrogantly. We owe today's peace, happiness, and prosperity to the heroic war dead. I feel that the young generation like us must recognize this fact and act with more respect and appreciation to them in our everyday life. As long as I see the current deplorable state of Japanese youth, politics, and society, I must worry about the deterioration of Japan.¹⁵

4. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 November 2005); a 27-year-old housewife:

Just a hundred year ago, people in Japan protected their own country at the risk of losing their lives. I regret that people in today's Japan do not think their country is important. I also regret that Japan nowadays has become a country that receives in silence other countries' interventions [...]. After visiting the shrine and its museum, I keenly realized that I want to protect and develop Japan by emerging from our own masochistic perspectives and attitudes which have increased since the war, and I also want us to be proud of ourselves and our country like our great ancestors were a hundred years ago.¹⁶

5. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 November 2005); a 22-year-old woman:

I recognized anew not only that we are able to live thanks to the heroic war dead who gave their precious lives for the sake of the country and their families, but also that we today have been able to live peacefully and happily precisely because of the people who struggled in the spirit of the heroic war dead to rebuild this country with their strong minds from the poverty right from the end of the war to the present. However, today, I think that many people have lost their pride as Japanese. I want to live every day keeping in mind always the pride that there was in the past and those who came through in the depths of despair with a hope toward the future.¹⁷

¹³ “Yūshūkan tomo no kai: kaiin ankēto,” *Yasukuni*, 1 January 2003, 7. All the information reported in this material was translated by myself.

¹⁴ “Yūshūkan tomo no kai setsuritsu kara ichinen,” *Yasukuni*, 1 July 2003, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “Yūshūkan: haikansha no koe,” *Yasukuni*, 1 November 2005, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

*Type Two: Middle-aged Japanese voices from the Newspaper Yasukuni*1. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 September 2004); a 39-year-old man:

I came to meet my grandfather today [...]. I am now a parent, and hence can understand what you must have gone through for your family in those days. Please sleep peacefully at the shrine. I will devote myself to developing Japan's peace through education. I will come back again. I wish Japan further happiness and success toward the future.¹⁸

2. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 September 2005); a 40-year-old man states:

In the last sixteen years I have lived in the Kanto area,¹⁹ but it was the first time for me to worship at the shrine today. I regret how current politics and the media have terribly treated Yasukuni Shrine. Today I feel keenly dismayed by the wretchedness and insincerity of Japan today. When did we Japanese forget our pure and noble mind that always loved Japan and always wished for peace more than anyone else in the world? I feel upset when I see the low levels of the recent discussions of Yasukuni. I really feel upset when I think that this current situation of Japan has forgotten the Japanese spirit and pride which many of the youth, with their futures ahead of them, died trying to protect in the war. Please sleep peacefully. I will come back here sometime soon.²⁰

3. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 October 2005); a 68-year-old man:

I became sixty-eight years old now, and today was my first time to worship at the shrine. I could not stop my tears from so much emotion. Although I do not know my father's face, I know he is enshrined here. Dear father, this is the person I grew up to become. Dear father, my mother also died three years ago, and now I am alone. But I now have a happy life. Please do not worry about me. I owe this to you.²¹

4. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 November 2005); a middle-aged man:

My grand-uncle died in Okinawa as a kamikaze pilot on 4 May 1945. It was when he was still twenty years old. This year, sixty years after the end of the war, I came to Yasukuni Shrine to see him. When I went up the escalator and saw the big *torii*²² of the shrine, I could not stop my tears. My grand-uncle's body is still now in the bottom of the Okinawan sea, but I am sure his spirit is here. I will live with pride as a Japanese, succeeding his spirit and mind with which he fought to protect the country and his family with his precious life. I believe that this is the best way to express my gratitude for him, which I can do in today's peaceful times.²³

5. The newspaper *Yasukuni* (1 April 2005); a 65-year-old man:

Japan is small. Nothing changes from the past that this country is poor in natural resources. This country had the Sino-Japanese War only thirty-four years after the opening of the country and had the Russo-Japanese War two years later. After that, Japan brought about the

¹⁸ "Yūshūkan: haikansha no koe," *Yasukuni*, 1 September 2004, 8.

¹⁹ Kanto area refers to the eastern part of the mainland of Japan, especially six prefectures centering on the megalopolis of Tokyo.

²⁰ "Yūshūkan: haikansha no koe," *Yasukuni*, 1 September 2005, 6.

²¹ "Yūshūkan: haikansha no koe," *Yasukuni*, 1 October 2005, 4.

²² A *torii* is a gateway at the entrance to a Shinto shrine.

²³ "Yūshūkan: haikansha no koe," *Yasukuni*, 1 November 2005, 11.

painful Pacific War, and even now the country has had lasting issues. It has had difficult relations with neighboring countries like China and South Korea. Current Japanese must strive to understand the true history of Japan and Yasukuni.²⁴

Type Three: The voices from ultra right-wing extremists

1. a) Okuda Ichio, 68 years old; interviewed on 1 January 2006, at the shrine:

Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration and thus the unconditional surrender. But the GHQ advanced 'Japan's unconditional surrender' abroad as their part of occupation strategies. They completely brainwashed the Japanese people to try to make them lose confidence that Japan was a great nation. The Soviet Union was worse. Against the Potsdam Declaration, they interned Japanese soldiers in Manchuria and others, forced them to do harsh work, and finally killed about 60,000 of them.²⁵

b) Okuda; interviewed on 2 January 2006, at the shrine:

Recently, I was interviewed by the media [news channel] Al Jazeera. They asked me, 'What is Yasukuni Shrine for you?' 'What does it mean to you?' I said, 'You are fools! This is the sacred place for us, the Japanese. This is the mosque for you. This is the most sacred place for our spirit.' When I said this, they kept silent.²⁶

c) Okuda; interviewed on 16 January 2006, at the shrine:

As a living Japanese today, I must fully realize the cost of precious lives that was paid to obtain Japan's current peace. We are indebted to our ancestors for our presence. I cannot thank them enough. How do the glorious spirits see our current situation of Japan, in which the people have lost their pride in being Japanese? I really want to do something to change this situation. I want to revive Japanese pride.²⁷

2. An unidentified 58-year-old man with no war experience; a member of a right-wing association which he declined to name; interviewed on 1 January 2006, at the shrine:

There was no single Japanese who fought in the Pacific War. The United States just gave it that name. Japanese should call this battle 'The Great East Asia War' with absolute confidence and pride because Japan battled for the sake of the emancipation of Asia from Europe, Soviet, America, and others.²⁸

All Japanese were much grieved to hear of the emperor's words at noon on 15 August in 1945. There were many people who killed themselves to take responsibility for the country's defeat and the humiliation to the emperor. As far as we know, more than 700 people killed themselves. This must be an unprecedented case in the world history. It is the crystallization of *yamato damashii*, the Japanese spirit, and pride.²⁹

²⁴ "Yūshūkan: haikansha no koe," *Yasukuni*, 1 April 2005, 8.

²⁵ This is my interview with him on 1 January 2006.

²⁶ This is my interview with him on 2 January 2006.

²⁷ This is my interview with him on 16 January 2006.

²⁸ This is my interview with him on 1 January 2006.

²⁹ This is my interview with him on 1 January 2006.

3. An unidentified 52-year-old man with no war experience; a member of another right-wing group which he declined to name; interviewed on 1 January 2006, at the shrine:

Many sacrificed and lost their lives in the battles to protect this Japanese nation and to protect families. The act of grieving for these people's spirits is, for Japanese who are alive today, truly a matter of course, and a duty. I regret the current situation in which there are many arguments for and against the issue of tribute at Yasukuni because of the intervention of other countries. I make no excuses for this situation concerning our ancestors. I even feel great shame for the youth who will shoulder Japan's future. The Yasukuni is nothing but the authority and guide of the Japanese spirit.³⁰

Type Four: Seemingly timeless bereaved women's voices

1. Iwai Masuko, 83 years old; in her statement submitted to the Osaka District Court on April, 2002, against the ruling that the Prime Minister's visit is unconstitutional:

If one is offended by the Prime Minister's visitation to Yasukuni Shrine, I, as a Yasukuni wife, feel millions and billions times more pain in my heart, given that the status of Yasukuni Shrine is not officially recognized by the government, nor do the circumstances allow the Emperor to officially visit the Shrine to worship. The humiliation to the Yasukuni Shrine is millions of times more painful than the humiliation to me, since my husband went to the war and died in the battle believing that he would be enshrined. I can never let it happen for my beloved husband. Kill me a million times instead of humiliating the Shrine. I can see my body all torn, blood gushing from every part of my body, and my blood united with the pool of blood shed by the soldiers, when I hear one word of humiliation attached to the Shrine.³¹

2. In the account titled *Kanrui zadankai*, or "the meeting of tears of gratitude," published in the magazine *Shufu no tomo* (literally, "friends of wives") in 1939:

Nakamura: I am deeply grateful that someone like me could have a son to serve the Emperor. Saito: [Since my son died in the war], there is nothing to do in my life but visit the Yasukuni Shrine to worship the Emperor. I would be content even if I died today. I would die smiling. Nakamura: I cannot help feeling lonely when I realize that my son will never return, but he died for the country and the Emperor appreciates his sacrifice. I can forget everything and feel absolutely happy.³²

Type Five: Taiwanese voices

Gaojin Sumei (高金素梅); "236 Sue over Visits to Yasukuni," *The Japan Times*, 18 February 2003:

Yasukuni is a monument to the prewar state Shinto which forced people to revere the Japanese emperor against their will. Those Taiwanese enshrined at Yasukuni are claimed by the Japanese government to have died for the emperor. This has caused a lot of grief for the surviving families, because it ignores the truth, which is that the indigenous Taiwanese did not fight voluntarily but were forced to do so.³³

³⁰ This is my interview with him on 1 January 2006.

³¹ Tetsuya Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2005, 13.

³² *Ibid.*, 21-4.

³³ "236 Sue over Visits to Yasukuni," *The Japan Times*, 18 February 2003 [online], <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20030218a2.html> (04-07-2006).

REFERENCES

- Antoni, Klaus. "Yasukuni-Jinja and Folk Religion," in *Religion and Society in Modern Japan*, ed. Mark Mullins, Susumu Shimazono, and Paul L. Swanson, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1993, 121–32.
- Assmann, Jan. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65 (Spring/ Summer, 1995): 125–33.
- Breen, John. "Yasukuni Shrine: Ritual and Memory," *Japan Focus* 293 (2004).
- . "The Dead and the Living in the Land of Peace: A Sociology of the Yasukuni Shrine," *Mortality* 9, 1 (2004): 76–93.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Creemers, Wilhelmus H.M. *Shrine Shintō after World War II*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968.
- Foucault, Michel. "Truth and Power," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, 51–75.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Hardacre, Helen. *Shintō and the State 1868–1988*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- . "State and Religion in Japan," in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, ed. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, 274–88.
- Hayashi, Makoto. "Religion in the Modern Period," in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, ed. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006.
- Hirano, Takeshi. *Seikyō bunri saiban to kokka shintō*, Kyoto: Hōritsu Bunkasha, 1995.
- The Japan Times*, Tokyo, 2000–2005.
- Kobori, Keiichirō. *Yasukuni jinja to nihonjin*, Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo, 2005.
- Kokumin shinbun*, 25 March – 25 July, 2003.
- LaCapra, Dominick. "Perpetrators and Victims: The Goldhagen Debate and Beyond," in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, 114–40.
- McGreevy, Andrew M. "Arlington National Cemetery and Yasukuni Jinja: History, Memory, and the Sacred," *Japan Focus* 359 (2005).
- Murakami, Shigeyoshi. *Kokka Shinto*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970.
- Nakajima, Michio. *Tennō no daigawari to kokumin*, Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1990.
- Nelson, John. *A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.
- . *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000.
- . "Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, 2 (2003): 443–67.
- Okazaki, Hisahiko. *Kokka senryaku kara mita yasukuni mondai*, Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūjo, 2005.
- Sharf, Robert H. "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Sturken, Marita. "Spectacles of Memory and Amnesia," in *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 122–44.
- "Taiwan no Gaojin Sumei yasukuni soshō de rekishijijitsu ni hansurukoto wo notamau," *Kokumin shinbun*, 25 September 2003.
- Taipei Times*, Taipei, 2005.

Takahashi, Tetsuya. *Yasukuni mondai*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2005.

The People's Daily, Beijing, 2005.

Xinhua ribao, Beijing, 2005.

Yasukuni, Tokyo: Yasukuni jinja shamsho, 2003–2006.

Masaki MATSUBARA (mm332@cornell.edu), Doctoral Candidate at the Asian Religions Program,
Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University

✉: Asian Religions Program, Department of Asian Studies, 350 Rockefeller Hall, Cornell University,
Ithaca, NY 14853–2502, USA

