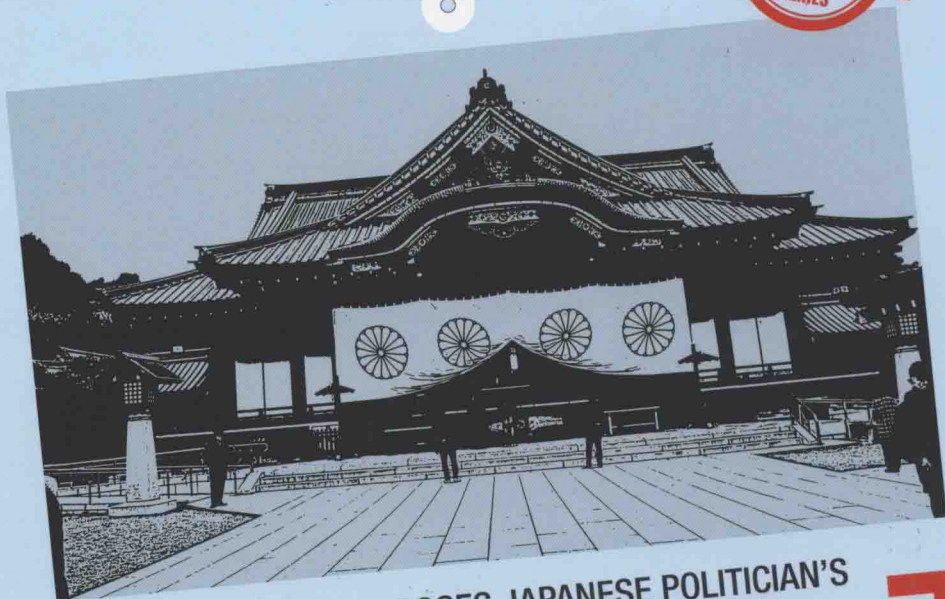


WHY CHINA OPPOSES JAPANESE
POLITICIAN'S
VISIT TO YASUKUNI SHRINE
SERIES



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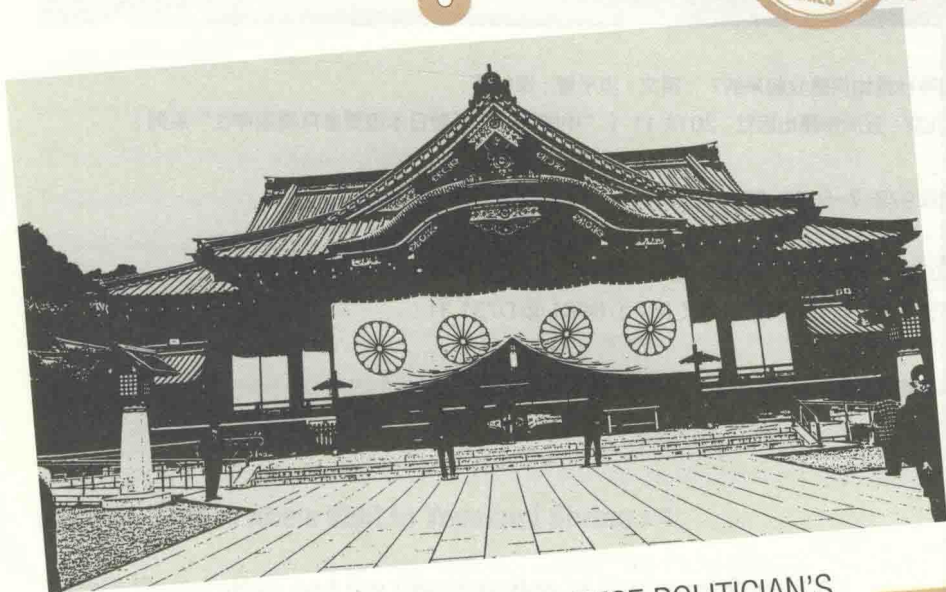
HOW WAS YASUKUNI SHRINE CONSTRUCTED?

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著 者: 步 平

译 者: 译 谷

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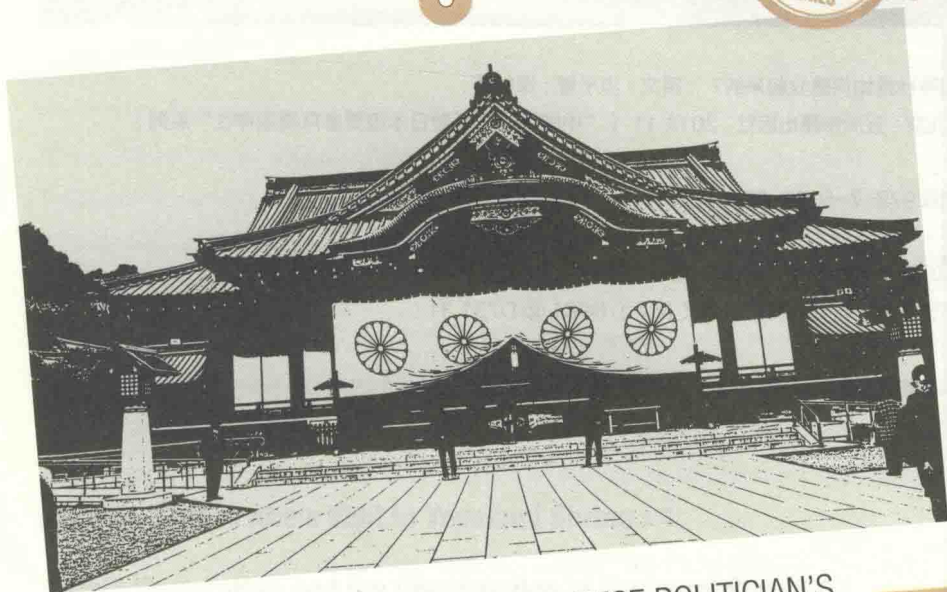
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PREFACE: SHINZO ABE'S VISIT TO YASUKUNI SHRINE

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Yasukuni Shrine on December 26, 2013. This triggered wide dissatisfaction and opposition from the media in Japan and other countries and denied Abe's attempt to obtain wider social support by visiting Yasukuni Shrine. In recent years, Japanese politician's frequent visits to Yasukuni Shrine greatly harm the feelings of citizens in China and other Asian countries that Japan invaded and intensify the relationship between Japan and these countries. Besides, Yasukuni Shrine has become the central issue that involves citizens in Asian countries.

Yasukuni Shrine is shrine that adjoins a palace in the center of Tokyo, Japan. In Japan where Shinto prevails, Yasukuni Shrine is the only shrine that



The Haiden of the Yasukuni Shrine is the place of worshipping by ordinary people.

is named after Yasukuni among over 80,000 shrines. *Yasu* means to stabilize or pacify. Therefore, *Kuni* means to stabilize the country. As Yasukuni Shrine is unique in Japan, there is no counterpart in other languages. In English, *Yasukuni* is transliterated as Yasukuni according to its Japanese pronunciation; *Shrine* is translated into shrine, meaning sacred places, such as “church,” “altar,” or “soul-site.”

As Yasukuni Shrine is unique in Japan, foreigners do not really understand its nature and often conjecture based on their experiences or knowledge. Some consider it as a facility for exhibition like military museum, some identify it with Arlington National Cemetery in US and Red Square in Russia, and some equate it with Monument to the People's Heroes in China. In this sense, Yasukuni Shrine is a sacred place and Japanese politicians can defend themselves though Chinese protest their visits to Yasukuni Shrine.

There is a big paradox, however. If Yasukuni Shrine is a sacred place to mourn for the dead in the war, or shrine in English, why Abe and others' visits cause so great disturbances? Japanese right-wing groups and conservative forces often retort: Each country can mourn for their heroes in shrine, Americans in Arlington National Cemetery, Russians igniting the torch in Red Square, and Chinese presenting wreath in Monument to the People's Heroes. Why Japanese cannot visit their heroes in Yasukuni Shrine? This is how Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe justify their visits, and they even obtain the understanding and support of some Japanese. To them, those who criticize them disrespect the shrine and deny human nature.

In addition, Japanese politicians use Japanese tradition as a pretext for their visits to Yasukuni Shrine. They claim that in Japan, one's misdeeds can be forgiven after he dies, and that their visits aim to respect soldiers who died for Japan rather than confirm Japanese militarism. They also associate their visits with the will of god, directing the Yasukuni Shrine Issue to 3-6 century when Shinto was founded, to 200 BC when God of Farming appeared, or even to 10,000 years ago when soul worship originated. This simply stresses the relationship between Yasukuni Shrine and Japanese traditional culture and refutes the criticism on the visits to



The "Shinmon" of the Yasukuni Shrine is the main gate of the shrine.

it with the excuse of respecting Japanese tradition. Does Yasukuni Shrine really present Japanese tradition?

According to the surveys of public opinions in Japan, one half Japanese citizens agree to visit Yasukuni Shrine. However, on the purpose of Japanese politicians, 56.5% consider they pray for peace, 51.9% think they vow to avoid the historical mistake, 38.8% believe they express their gratitude to the dead, and 11.3% view they glorify the achievements of the dead. In spite that few agree to honor the dead, most accept the reason for Japanese politician's visit to Yasukuni Shrine. Then, why Japanese citizens criticize Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine? How do Japanese citizens view the issues on Yasukuni Shrine? We should take these questions into account.

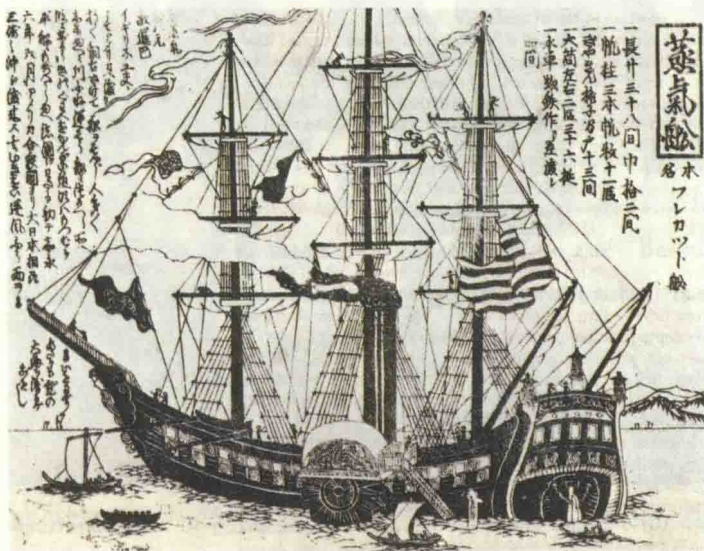
In fact, the nature of Yasukuni Shrine cannot be reduced to "a sacred place to stabilize the country." We must learn its history and influence in Japan. That's the key point.

I. MEIJI RESTORATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF YASUKUNI SHRINE

Yasukuni Shrine is simply one of the over 80,000 shrines in Japan, with the deep background of Shinto. In the pre-1860s Japan, there was no Yasukuni Shrine and Yasukuni God. It was after Meiji Restoration that Yasukuni Shrine was constructed. Why?

1. Meiji Restoration and the Establishment of Mikado's Power

In 1853, 4 warships reached Edo Bay (Tokyo Bay today) directed by Perry, commander of U.S. East India Fleet and coerced Japan into opening the door to the West with force. The shogunate that made the Mikado a figurehead decided to compromise, which ended Japan's closed-door policy. To many Japanese feudal lords and samurais, the political choice was a "shameful" surrender, and they launched the Sonno-joi Movement that revered the Mikado and expelled



1853 Japanese painting
"Perry's Black Ships"

the barbarians. As a result, shogun's rule was overthrown and Mikado's power was strengthened. Meanwhile, Meiji Restoration was started. As a political and social reform, Meiji Restoration marked Japan's march toward capitalism and the formation of Mikado System. The drastic social change and Western capitalism pressure impacted Japan greatly and imprinted itself deeply in Japanese history. Yasukuni Shrine was one important example.

Similar to other countries where capitalism took a long time, in Japan, Sonnō-jōi Movement and Meiji Restoration saw fierce political and military struggles and the death of many Japanese soldiers. According to Japanese custom, their family members or relatives would mourn or hold memorial ceremony for



Japanese painting depicting Mikado Meiji (wearing a Napoleon hat) on a visit to patients wounded in the Satsuma Rebellion in a temporary hospital in Osaka in 1877



Mikado Meiji who established the
Yasukuni Shrine

them. One ceremony was Summoning-Soul (*Zhao Hun*), meaning to call back the souls of the dead from the heaven and settle them. Summoning-Soul originally came from Confucianism and meant the son stood on the roof and called his father's soul to express his filial piety when his father died. In Japan, Summoning-Soul was combined with Shinto and became the "Belief in Protective Soul." Whoever died in wars would be enshrined to comfort their souls.

In December 1862, when Meiji Restoration was not started, Anti-Shogun Japanese held Summoning-Soul Sacrifice for those who were killed by shogunate at Spirit Mountain in the east of Kyoto. To them, they mourned for those who were wronged or killed themselves for the Mikado or contributed to the establishment of Mikado's power, rather than those who died but opposed them.

A non-governmental ceremony as it was, it suggested a fundamental change in the sacrifice offered to the dead. In the past, all the dead could be enshrined regardless of their political stance. Now, the dead must be members of a political school, and the sacrifice embodied strong political color and differed from the "Belief in Protective Soul." (Although the sacrifice developed from it) In other words, only those who died for the Mikado could be enshrined. With strong political color, those who were enshrined were juxtaposed with the Mikado, Japanese government, and Japan, and were firstly viewed as God of Protection of Japan.

In June 1868, with heavy cost, the army that supported the Mikado entered Edo, which Mikado Meiji renamed Tokyo and made the capital. Later, Mikado Meiji ordered: "Summoning-Soul Sacrifice should be held for the soldiers who sacrificed for the court since the spring. Each domain must collect the soldier's name and date and report." This indicated Mikado Meiji attached great importance to the sacrifice to the dead.

Meanwhile, various sacrificial ceremonies for the dead were held. On June 2, Arisugawa-no-miya, General Commander of East Expedition, chaired the Summoning-Soul Sacrifice held in the largest hall of Edo to offer sacrifice to the generals and soldiers who supported Mikado Meiji, or the valorous "Imperial Army" that sacrificed for the Mikado, excluding the "enemy soldiers" of shogunate. Obviously, the sacrificial ceremony embodied strong political color and resembled the national memorial. In September, Meiji government issued the document on holding Summoning-Soul Sacrifice for the dead, which was the first official evidence.

Afterward, Meiji government held posthumous sacrifices for the supporters who died earlier, which was followed by the domain governments. These sacrifices were for these who died in Sonno-joi Movement and supported Mikado Meiji. The sacrificial ceremonies signified that to commemorate or mourn for the dead was a governmental or official act, aiming to honor and encourage whoever died for the Mikado.

It was notable that after Meiji Restoration, the sacrifice to the dead in war was not universal as it was exclusive to these who supported or died for the

Mikado. The sacrifice became an official act. It was not so much for the dead as Japanese citizens, hinting that anyone who died for the Mikado would be honored and seen as God of Protection of Japan. In addition, since the sacrifice for the dead was politicized, the “Belief in Protective Soul” that was founded on Shinto had been fundamentally changed.

2. Summoning-Soul Sacrifice and Tokyo Shokonsha

According to the imperial edict of Mikado Meiji that Summoning-Soul Sacrifice should be held for the soldiers who sacrificed for the court, Japanese government prepared for a large-scale national sacrifice. It was proposed that though Summoning-Soul Sacrifice was held for the dead in the war to enhance the morale, it was done in haste. Since Meiji government was founded, national reverence for the Mikado must be established to declare the end of shogun's rule and consolidate Meiji Mikado's power. In addition, Summoning-Soul Shrine



Origin of the Yasukuni Shrine – the Kyoto Ryozen Gokoku Shrine established in 1868



One scene of worshipping in the Yasukuni Shrine



Imperial envoy worshipping the Yasukuni Shrine

should be constructed near Tokyo to hold Summoning-Soul Sacrifice for these who died for the restoration of Mikado's power and the establishment of Meiji government and to publicize to the public the newly-started army modernization. In this sense, the sacrifice was the biggest one since the founding of Meiji government, and an opportunity for Meiji government to justify its legitimacy and authority to the public. The proposal was approved by Mikado Meiji.

In Shintoism doctrines and rules, Summoning-Soul meant to call back the souls of the dead soldiers from the heaven and enshrined as god. Summoning-Soul Site or shrine was needed to hold the ceremony and place the divine souls. As Edo (Tokyo) suffered wars, there was no suitable place. Mikado Meiji ordered Department of Military Affairs (later Ministry of the Military, Ministry of War of Japan, or Ministry of the Navy of Japan) to choose the site and arrange Summoning-Soul Sacrifice. To prepare the ceremony, Mikado Meiji allotted 10,000 dans as "Sacrifice Fund," which amounted to the construction of Ise Grand Shrine, where Amaterasu was worshiped. By now, the sacrifice for the dead played the most important role like that for Amaterasu. Omura Masujiro, vice director of Department of Military Affairs, was in charge of the affairs.

Night, June 28, 1869, Summoning-Soul ceremony was held at the newly-built shrine. Soul was actually abstract and unreal. In Summoning-Soul ceremony, the souls called back from the heaven were called *Zhu* in Chinese pronunciation and written in a roll called "Soul Sealed Register" that recorded the names and posts of the dead, as well as when and where they died. When "Soul Sealed Register" was settled in the shrine, Summoning-Soul ceremony, or Soul-Calming ceremony, Soul-Summoning ceremony, was completed. The dead turned out to be the unreal god in people's consciousness from the real body.

Prior to the ceremony, Mikado Meiji called in the *Jingi-kan* (official in Department of Shinto Affairs) who chaired the ceremony to express his concern.

After the ceremony was held, the newly-built shrine became the residence of the dead's souls. In the next day, the souls were worshiped and visited. These were the practices in Summoning-Soul and Comforting-Soul: the former first and the latter on the next day.