

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



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Bu Ping



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In the process of promoting “nationalization” of the Yasukuni Shrine, *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* proposed by the LDP made the greatest influence on Japanese society. However, this bill was submitted to the Congress for 6 times and every time got rejected, which indicated there was powerful resistance against it. The Japanese people severely doubted and worried about “nationalization” of the Yasukuni Shrine. Just in this context, the issue of politicians visiting the Yasukuni Shrine was raised.



Tourists having a group photo taken in front of the Yasukuni Shrine



## I. THE YASUKUNI SHRINE BILL EVOLVED INTO THE BILL OF COMFORTING-SOUL AND SHOWING RESPECT

### 1. *The Yasukuni Shrine Bill* – Attempt to Realize “Nationalization”

The LDP submitted *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* to the sixty-first session of the Congress in June 1969. This bill was made up of 39 articles in 8 chapters. Although in long content, its core idea could be summed up as: to dismiss the Yasukuni Shrine as a religious corporation, re-establish it as a special corporation supervised by the Prime Minister and financed by the state budget at 200 million yen annually. That is to say, the bill explicitly proposed to turn the Yasukuni Shrine into a national shrine again.



The Yasukuni Shrine claims it was named “for the peace of the motherland,” but according to the instructions on this caution sign, pacifistic activities are still prohibited in it because only worshipping is allowed here.



The flags used by the Japanese army in the occupation of Nanjing in 1937 are still kept in the Yasukuni Shrine.

However, the bill was based on a very strange and contradictory logic. As mentioned above, the promoting forces for “nationalization” of the Yasukuni Shrine tried best to avoid the religious nature of the Yasukuni Shrine and deny it’s a religious group, because only in this way could the Yasukuni Shrine connect with the state and politics more closely. The bill did propose to change the position of the Yasukuni Shrine as a religious corporation. However, how could it be a shrine if without the religious position? They proposed to change the Yasukuni Shrine into a so-called special corporation, but supervised by the Prime Minister, even with financial support from the state. To put it bluntly, it’s actually a government agency in disguise. The real purpose was to regard the Yasukuni Shrine as a national hero monument or memorial museum. In this way, the Yasukuni Shrine could regain its special position as before and during the war and return to the time when the State Shinto was rampant. What was this other than a historical retrogression?

The Article 1 of the bill made clear the objective and purpose of the Yasukuni Shrine, putting forward that: the Yasukuni Shrine was established for the people to express respect towards the hero souls of the war dead and those who died for the country. People came here to admire their morality, praise their deeds and make “comforting-soul” to comfort the hero souls, to carry forward their great achievements. All the war dead here were still explicitly called “hero souls.” It’s obvious that, same as during the war, it was still in full agreement with the aggressive war launched by Japan. The purpose of using the special religious concept of “comforting-soul” and emphasizing the relationship between the “hero souls” and Japanese state was actually to endow the religious concept with a “public” significance. That is to say, the LDP had accepted to copy the religious activities in the Yasukuni Shrine wholly as a national event. This was a deep contempt for the constitutional principle of “separation of religion and politics.”

In fact, the drafters of this bill also felt diffident about nationalization of the



The division chiefs of the Japanese army killed on battlegrounds in China are also enshrined in the Yasukuni Shrine and introduced as heroes.



Trees with military unit designations used in wartime let people see the current presence of the so-called "Imperial Army" dissolved for the crime of invasion.

Yasukuni Shrine for fear of being criticized it violated the Japanese constitution, so they added a "interpretation regulation" in the Article 2 on purpose claiming that: Although the concept of "Yasukuni Shrine" was used in this bill, it's only to regard the Yasukuni Shrine as the religious agency as before taking into consideration the long history of the word "Yasukuni Shrine" since it was founded. In the following articles, it also emphasized the Yasukuni Shrine in the bill was "not religious," unlike the former one which edified and cultivated the believers by specific teaching. However, this explanation made the bill more suspicious that its real purpose was to turn the Yasukuni Shrine into a national sacrifice site under the pretext of religion. It seemed to be more exposed though they tried to hide it.

According to other articles of the bill, the Yasukuni Shrine actually had no difference from its current position as a religious corporation no matter in sense of the name or the contents. For example, about the activities of the new Yasukuni Shrine, it claimed in the Article 22 that: taking into consideration the tradition of



the Yasukuni Shrine since it's founded, we would perform the following activities: (1) to register the names and other information about the war dead and place the roster respectfully in the Yasukuni Shrine; (2) to hold a variety of comforting-soul activities in the Yasukuni Shrine to admire their morality; (3) to hold a variety of ceremonies in the Yasukuni Shrine to praise their deeds and express gratitude; and so on... No matter in content or in form, these were the core activities of the Yasukuni Shrine as a religious corporation, and actually its main tasks as one of main fronts of the State Shinto before and during the war.

In the Article 3 of *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill*, it also regulated that, confirmation of the war dead and those who died for the country should be nominated by the Yasukuni Shrine and determined by the Prime Minister according to the criteria stipulated by the decree. If the decision of determining the new sacred god was shifted from the shrine to the Prime Minister in accordance with this regulation, the "state-operated" property of the Yasukuni Shrine would be more prominent. So *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* of the LDP was also called the "nationalization" bill of the Yasukuni Shrine. It's conceivable that such a bill would definitely arouse strong reaction in Japanese society.

When the LDP repeatedly submitted *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* to the Congress, people of various Parties, groups and classes in Japanese society also reacted in succession, with more and more strong opposition. The religious organizations reacted first, especially Christianity and Buddhism groups who launched large-scale movements. By 1973, the opposition signatures of new religious groups including RKK (Rissho Koseikai), Myochikai, Geninkyo, and Zenrikai, etc. had reached 11 million. As for the large groups such as Christian groups and Soka Gakkai, the protest was more powerful. The protest of common people was also very active. For a time, "the Yasukuni issue" had become a common concern of the whole Japanese society. Not only the Japanese people, but even Korean groups and many other Asian people in Japan were also concerned about the progress of the Yasukuni Shrine issue.

Because all Parties out of power strongly opposed *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* of the LDP, and Christian groups, Buddhist groups, Soka Gakkai, Kosei Kai

and Peace Organization also severely criticized the bill, it was declared to be abolished before completed scrutiny and submitted to the Congress. In the same way, since 1969, the LDP had submitted *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* to the Congress for discussion in six consecutive years but every time got abolished. This greatly frustrated the LDP who accounted for absolute majority in the Parliament. Since 1974, because the councilors of the Parties out of power had increased to basically the equivalent proportion to the LDP in power, it's no longer possible for the LDP to force them to pass *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* as in the House of Representatives before, so the LDP had to look for other methods.

## **2. *The Bill of Comforting-soul and Showing Respect* – a “Circuitous Strategy” of the LDP**

In the context that the Parties out of power had the equivalent proportion to the Party in power in the election of the Senate, the plan of LDP about forcing the Senate to pass *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* was bankrupt, but they didn't give up the target of “nationalization” of the Yasukuni Shrine, so tried to realize it by a circuitous way.

In 1975, Masayuki Fujio, a LDP councilor, and Asao Mihara, the vice president of the Congress Countermeasure Committee, proposed to be practical to convert the LDP's activities for the former purpose of realizing *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* into the movements for the target of achieving the “official visit,” and firstly proposed a suggestion named *the Bill of Comforting-soul and Showing Respect* within the LDP. The main contents of the proposal included four points: The first was to instigate the Mikado and national authority staff to visit the Yasukuni Shrine officially; The second was to instigate the foreign diplomats to visit the Yasukuni Shrine officially; The third was to instigate the whole SDF and the honor guards to visit the Yasukuni Shrine; The fourth was to confirm the name of the bill as “the Legislative Proposal regarding Showing Respect (Ritual) towards Those Who Died for the Country.” Fujio believed that, the previous six failures in the Congress proved it's very difficult to realize *the Yasukuni Shrine Bill* once for all, so we should adopt the strategy of phased implementation, namely for the



first step to promote above mentioned three kinds of public employees, especially the Mikado and national authority staff to visit the Yasukuni Shrine officially. If this step was realized, it could prove the special relationship between the Yasukuni Shrine and the state and indirectly realize “nationalization” of the Yasukuni Shrine. So the only difference from real “nationalization” of the Yasukuni Shrine was the nominal problem.

Fujio’s proposition was known as the “stage theory,” so the *Bill of Comforting-soul and Showing Respect* was also called a circuitous bill of the *Yasukuni Shrine Bill*. That is to say, in the circumstance that it’s hopeless to pass the Yasukuni Shrine Bill in the Congress straightly, they took a circuitous strategy from the side by achieving the above mentioned *Bill of Comforting-soul and Showing Respect* at first.

It’s necessary to explain that, Fujio put forward the concept of “official visit”



On August 15, 2002, the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan’s defeat, a group of people wearing uniforms of “Imperial Army” of the Japanese Empire swaggered in front of the Yasukuni Shrine.



On August 15, 2005, a group of Japanese local councilors swaggered through the streets holding flags to worship the Yasukuni Shrine.



On October 18, 2013, the second day of the regular autumn worshipping of the Yasukuni Shrine, 159 members of the House of Representatives in the Japanese all-party group "Everybody Comes to Worship the Yasukuni Shrine" worshipped the Yasukuni Shrine.

(“formulary visit” in Japanese language) here. What did “official visit” mean then? Fujio didn’t mention about the specific content of “official visit” here. However, there did exist different kinds of visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. One kind of situation was that family members of the war dead commemorated the related war dead privately. This was purely expression of personal feelings without any specific political purpose, so was called “private visit.” The other was visit performed by the government or public institution staff out of worship and praise towards the spirit of the war dead, from the “public” stand point with obvious political purpose, so it’s “official visit.” In fact, since it’s established, the Yasukuni Shrine explicitly didn’t accept the war dead existing in it as individuals, but only approved the abstract “Yasukuni God” integrated by all the “hero souls.” It emphasized that the purpose of visit was to demonstrate the spirit of “hero souls,” not to mourn for the war dead as individuals. According to this logic, there never existed the so-called “private visit” at all. During the war, visits organized by the army, schools and various other institutions were certainly with “public” nature. However, because the government was prohibited to organize any official activities about visiting the Yasukuni Shrine according to “the Shinto Directive,” and the Yasukuni Shrine had no way to refuse family members of the war dead to visit “privately,” the concept of so-called “private visit” then appeared.

Although politicians had two kinds of identities as the “public” and the “private,” but in that context, it’s obvious that their visits involved specific political purpose, so they must be “official visits.” As for the politicians who emphasized their visits were “private,” they were nothing more than finding excuses.

On August 15, 1975, Takeo Miki, the Prime Minister at that time, forced by the pressure of internal cliques of the LDP, directly went to visit the Yasukuni Shrine after attended the memorial ceremony for the nationwide war dead held in the Budokan Hall. That is to say, as a politician Miki wanted to show Japanese society that he paid attention to the effect of the Yasukuni Shrine. However, the Prime Minister Miki felt diffident about his action, so he declared it’s a visit in private identity without any “public” significance – neither by official car, nor paid by public funds, except that he registered his position as “the Prime Minister”