

# Visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister and Japan-China Relations: What is Confusing the Debate? \*

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Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Yasukuni Shrine on December 26, 2013 to mark the one-year milestone of his return to office. This was the first visit by a prime minister since Junichiro Koizumi's visit in August 2006 on the day commemorating the end of World War II.

Public opinion in Japan was divided over Prime Minister Abe's visit but the media were mostly critical, based on the belief that prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine would prove an obstacle to improving Japan-China relations and should thus be halted. In fact the Chinese government strongly protested against Abe's visit and started a world-wide campaign against it.

This paper considers factors that might make visits to Yasukuni Shrine by Japanese prime ministers in general – and not just those by Abe or Koizumi – problematic for Japan-China relations, and explains the reasons that I am not of the opinion that the visits should be stopped because of potentially adverse effects on ties between Japan and China.

This paper was originally written in Japanese for the international seminar “Memory, Reconciliation and Security in the Asia-Pacific Region” (“2<sup>nd</sup> Memory Seminar”) hosted by the Japan Foundation on Awajishima in December 2006, and it discusses the issues surrounding visits to Yasukuni Shrine in the context of the visits made by Prime Minister Koizumi. Although more than ten years have since passed, I believe after reading it again that this paper could prove useful in structuring the debate over this issue and I have thus decided to publish an English-language version.

Prime Minister Abe made the following statement immediately after his visit to Yasukuni Shrine:

“Today, I paid a visit to Yasukuni Shrine and expressed my sincere condolences, paid my respects and prayed for the souls of all those who had fought for the country and made ultimate sacrifices. I also visited Chinreisha, a remembrance memorial to pray for the souls of all the people regardless of nationalities who lost their lives in the war, but not enshrined in Yasukuni Shrine...Regrettably, it is a reality that the visit to Yasukuni Shrine has become a political and diplomatic issue. Some people criticize the visit to Yasukuni as paying homage to war criminals, but the purpose of my visit today, on the anniversary of my administration's taking office, is to report before the souls of the war dead how my administration has worked for one year and to renew the pledge that Japan must never wage a war again .<sup>i</sup>”

\* This article was originally published in 「阪大法学」 by The Law Association of Osaka University, Vol.64, No.3,4, 2014.

i Statement by Prime Minister Abe - Pledge for everlasting peace -Thursday, December 26, 2013  
[http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201312/1202986\\_7801.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201312/1202986_7801.html)

It has been nearly four years since Prime Minister Abe offered these remarks following his Yasukuni Shrine visit and, though he has not made clear when he will pay another visit to the shrine, he has continued to send ritual *masakaki* tree offerings under the name of the prime minister for the annual spring and autumn festivals. I hope this paper will also be of help in evaluating this position adopted by Prime Minister Abe.

### ***Introduction***

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Yasukuni Shrine, as he pledged during the Liberal Democratic Party presidential election five years earlier, on the anniversary of the end of the Second World War (August 15, 2006). This was the first visit by a prime minister on that day since Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's visit 21 years earlier. Various domestic opinion polls following the visit indicated, for the most part, that approval for the visit to the shrine exceeded disapproval.<sup>ii</sup> China and South Korea were opposed as expected but, perhaps with a view toward the future after the Koizumi administration, the tone of their reactions was restrained, and there were no demonstrations or outstanding protest movements.

While looking at the conditions of Japan-China bilateral relations over the past five years, this paper is an effort to examine why the Yasukuni issue has become complicated as a diplomatic issue, and to seek measures for improving Japan-China relations. While the Yasukuni issue is a complex matter to begin with, entwining “praying for the souls” of the war dead and past memories and introspection, in recent years Japan's diplomatic relations with neighboring countries have heavily overshadowed this issue, making the situation utterly chaotic for problem-solving discussions. In this paper, I want to consider several reasons why the Chinese government has not accepted the repeated explanations by Prime Minister Koizumi, and his successors, regarding his visits to Yasukuni Shrine, bring order to this chaotic debate, and seek clues toward resolving or calming down the issue.

Ever since Prime Minister Koizumi's first visit to Yasukuni Shrine as prime minister (August 13, 2001), he has repeatedly explained his reasons for visiting the shrine in remarks and press conferences following his visits. Following his visit on August 15, 2006, he explained in an interview with the press as follows:

“I say this every time I visit. Japan reflects on past wars and must never cause war again. Moreover, the peace and prosperity of Japan today were not realized only by the people who are alive today. The Japan of today was built on those whose precious lives were sacrificed in war. I visit Yasukuni Shrine with the spirit of heartfelt respect and gratitude to the dead who had to go to war and give up their lives for their mother country and for their families. I have come with the same intentions this year.”<sup>iii</sup>

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ii For example, a survey conducted by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper (August 15–16, 2006) showed 53% approval with 39% disapproval, while in a survey conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper (August 21–22, 2006), 49% of the respondents approved while 37% responded that the prime minister should not have visited the shrine.

iii Web page of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet:  
<http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/koizumispeech/2006/08/15interview.html>.

In other words, Koizumi explains that his visits are to comfort the spirits of those who lost their lives fighting for their country, to reflect on the past, and to renew the vow of renunciation of war. There have been no changes to his explanations that his visits are to “pray for the souls of the dead and advance peace.”

Koizumi’s historical understanding reinforces that explanation. At the Asia-Africa Summit held in April 2005, the prime minister again expressed his understanding (the same understanding that was expressed by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in his statement 10 years earlier) that “in the past, Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations,” reflecting on the past and apologizing. Based on that understanding, Koizumi also clearly stated that his own visits to Yasukuni Shrine are absolutely not to glorify war, and that he does not approve of the historical viewpoint presented in the shrine’s adjacent Yushukan museum. Regarding the so-called Class A war criminals as well, whose joint enshrinement has often been debated in the context of fierce controversy over the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo Trials), Koizumi made it clear that he recognizes them as war criminals, and that his visits to Yasukuni Shrine are not to “pray for their souls.”

If we believe Koizumi’s explanation as it is, then I do not think there is a gap in the understanding of past history that cannot be overcome between the prime minister and Chinese government leaders.

However, the Chinese government did not accept visits by the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine. The Chinese criticized the visits with “strong indignation,” and demanded that Koizumi match his words with his actions, that is, if he regrets the past, to stop visiting Yasukuni Shrine. When the Chinese government’s demands were repeatedly refused, they took the exceptional response of suddenly refusing to hold any summit meetings with Japan, and refraining from speaking with the Japanese prime minister almost entirely, even when placed together at international conferences.

So, what is it that the Chinese government finds to be so objectionable? Why did they not accept the words of the prime minister, whose historical understanding seems to have no particular problem, and bury the hatchet at some appropriate moment? The leaders of China must know well that good relations with Japan are important in putting forth their strategy of “peaceful rise.”

Regarding this point, it is often observed that the Chinese government may no longer easily control the Chinese people’s anti-Japanese nationalism, which the government itself sparked through patriotic education and other means, may need to show anger before the Chinese people, may have concerns that popular criticism of the government as weak would set off a power struggle within the government, or, as the contradictions accompanying rapid economic growth pile up, that officials may have to be extremely sensitive to issues that affect the legitimacy of Communist Party rule (based on the unification of China from victory in the war against Japan), and, what is more, may be unwilling to lower its raised fist from the belief that because the Japanese side has often given in over such issues in the past, by showing strong anger, Japan will give in this time as well. Such observations are believed to have some element of truth.

In this paper, however, leaving such observations aside for the moment, we accept as is the

explanation of the Chinese government, in other words, that “visits by the Japanese prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine, where Class A war criminals are enshrined, harm the feelings of the Chinese people (and thus cannot be accepted),” and ask why that is so. We consider the reasons why visits to the shrine to “pray for the souls of the dead and advance peace” injure the feelings of the Chinese people so much that the Chinese government takes such a strong stance. If the reasons why this hurts their feelings include some misunderstandings, then it might be possible to remove them. Even if their removal is difficult, if the reasons are accurately understood, then some sort of wisdom regarding visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister might emerge. This approach is adopted from those expectations.

### ***Chapter 1 Honoring and Praying for the Souls of the War Dead***

Yasukuni Shrine was established at Kudan-ue near Edo Castle as “Tokyo Shokonsha” in the second year of the Meiji era (1869). It was renamed Yasukuni Shrine 10 years later. It was built as a shrine to deify loyalists (state martyrs) who lost their lives in political disputes up to the Meiji Restoration and the war dead on the government army side of the Boshin War. Since it was established, soldiers who died in internal and external wars conducted by modern Japan (soldiers on the Japanese side and, in the case of civil wars, soldiers who died on the government side) have been enshrined one after another, and the number of persons enshrined (deities) now exceeds 2,460,000. These include over 2,320,000 who perished in the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War. The shrine was formerly a national facility under the jurisdiction of the Army and Navy, but, in the reforms under the GHQ occupation, it was restarted as a religious corporation after the war. Regardless of that change, it is viewed by many Japanese people as a place where the souls of people who lost their lives fighting for the nation rest.<sup>iv</sup>

There is no reason why there should be issues with the leader of any country going to such a place to “pray for the souls” of the dead. In fact, up until 1985, when visits by the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine unexpectedly became a diplomatic issue with China, 12 of the previous 16 prime ministers visited the shrine during their terms of office.<sup>v</sup>

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iv There are many papers regarding Yasukuni Shrine and the debate about the shrine. In writing this paper, I have referred to books published relatively recently and papers published over the past two years in such magazines as *Sekai*, *Ronza*, *Bungei Shunju*, *Shokun*, *Voice*, and *Seiron*. The main books are Shiro Akazawa, *Yasukuni jinja: Semegiau (senbotsusha tsuito) no yukue* [Yasukuni Shrine: Future of the struggle (mourning the war dead)] (Iwanami Shoten, 2005); Jun Eto and Keiichiro Kobori, eds., *Shinpan: Yasukuni ronshu* [New edition: Collection of essays on Yasukuni] (Kindai Shuppansha, 2004); Fuyuko Kamisaka, *Senso o shiranai hito no tame no yasukuni mondai* [The Yasukuni issue for people who do not know war] (Bunshun Shinsho, 2006); Keiichiro Kobori, *Yasukuni jinja to nihon jin* [Yasukuni Shrine and the Japanese] (PHP Shinsho, 1998); Keiichiro Kobori and Shoichi Watanabe, eds., *Shin seiki no yasukuni jinja* [Yasukuni Shrine in the new century] (Kindai Shuppansha, 2005); Tetsuya Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai* [The Yasukuni issue] (Chikuma Shinsho, 2005); Nobumasa Tanaka, *Yasukuni no sengo shi* [The post-war history of Yasukuni] (Iwanami Shinsho, 2002); Hidetatsu Namekawa, ed., *Yasukuni mondai nyumon: Yasukuni no datsu shinwaka e* [Introduction to the Yasukuni issue: Toward freedom from the Yasukuni myth] (Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 2006); Isao Tokoro, ed., *Yokoso yasukuni jinja e* [Welcome to Yasukuni Shrine] (Kindai Shuppansha, 2000); Shuhei Mitsuchi, *Yasukuni mondai no genten* [Origin of the Yasukuni issue] (Nippon Hyoron Sha, 2005).

v Among the 11 prime ministers from that time until Prime Minister Koizumi, the only two prime ministers to visit the shrine were Koizumi and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto. However, it is said that Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa also secretly visited the shrine. (Tadashi Itagaki, *Yasukuni koshiki sanpai no sokatsu* [Summary of official visits to Yasukuni Shrine] (Tendensha, 2000).)

Of course, political significance is inevitably attached to the actions of leaders, and that probably needs to be considered. Consideration has been given to the form of the visits from the principle of separation of religion and state under the Constitution, as is widely known. However, even if such consideration is necessary, there is no reason to criticize the act of “praying for the souls” of the war dead in and of itself.

Prime Minister Koizumi asserts that he visits the shrine in his private capacity as a Japanese national and not as prime minister, and that these visits are a “personal matter of one’s heart.”<sup>vi</sup> Georgetown University Professor Kevin Doak acknowledges Koizumi’s assertion as an effort to remove the political and diplomatic significance from the act of “praying for the souls” of the dead, and warns that demands for Koizumi to cease his visits to the shrine might threaten human spirituality and faith, and jeopardize the cornerstones of democracy.

Doak explains this is because the individual rights and citizens’ freedoms that are the foundations of democratic society are premised on spiritual respect of the dignity of others. In particular, when those receiving the expression of respect are the dead, that has a psychological and spiritual significance that transcends one’s own life and the present world. Moreover, Doak says, when those dead are war dead who died for the fatherland, in mourning, the human heart that can recognize the suffering of death becomes a stronger foundation. This kind of sincerity includes a factor of faith that is not bound by religious sect.<sup>vii</sup>

To make clear that his visits to Yasukuni Shrine are a “matter of the heart,” Prof. Doak proposes that the prime minister should visit the shrine every month, rather than just once a year. Within Japan, there are opinions that if this is a personal “matter of the heart,” then restraint should be exercised for the national interest (Japan-China friendship), but Doak defends Prime Minister Koizumi, saying that belittling a “matter of the heart” is a dangerous stance that threatens democracy.

The problem is that the Chinese government sees Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine not as a “matter of the heart,” but rather as a “political issue.” That is where the two sides are at cross-purposes. The Chinese critic Shi Ping, who resides in Japan, points out the influence of communist ideology in the background of those cross-purposes: as Communist Party members, Chinese government leaders are materialistic atheists, and do not recognize the necessity of the act of “praying for the souls” of the dead. To them, the act of comforting the souls of the dead, which do not exist in the first place, is absolute nonsense. Thus, no matter how many times Prime Minister Koizumi repeats that this is a “matter of the heart,” Shi Ping says it is difficult for the Chinese to simply accept that statement, and they view this as a mere excuse to camouflage political intent.<sup>viii</sup>

Such ideological bias is probably also one important reason why the Chinese government views the “matter of the heart” of visits to Yasukuni Shrine as a “political issue.” However, that is not all.

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vi New Year’s press conference by Prime Minister Koizumi (January 4, 2006). Web page of the Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet: <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/koizumispeech/2006/01/04press.html>.

vii Kevin Doak, “Yasukuni sanpai no kosatsu” [Considerations on visits to Yasukuni Shrine], *Sankei Shimbun*, May 25–27, 2006.

viii Shi Ping, *Nicchu no shukumei* [The destiny of Japan and China] (Fusosha, 2006), 98–105.

There are factors on the Japanese side as well. For example, during the 2001 Liberal Democratic Party presidential campaign, Prime Minister Koizumi pledged that in spite of all difficulties he would visit Yasukuni Shrine on the anniversary of the end of the Pacific War, August 15. As frequently noted, the background to this announcement was the political objective of gaining the support of the Japan War-Bereaved Families Association in an election where Koizumi was initially at a disadvantage. This political objective undeniably clouded the prime minister's explanation that the visits are a "matter of the heart."

Yet, beyond that, there is still a more fundamental factor on the Japanese side concerning the very role of Yasukuni Shrine itself: the fact that Yasukuni Shrine was originally not only a shrine to "pray for the souls" of the war dead, but also a shrine to "honor" them. That is, Yasukuni Shrine is not only to "comfort the souls" of the war dead, but also to "honor their accomplishments." Part of the preamble to the Yasukuni Shrine policy (enacted September 30, 1952) reads as follows:

"This shrine was established on June 29, 1869 by the will of the Meiji Emperor in order to enshrine persons who died for our country since 1853 (when Commodore Perry arrived by ship) and carry out religious services for them in eternity, pray for their souls, and honor their names for all time." (The information in parentheses was added by me.)

The duality of "praying for souls" and "honoring" as used here may be the greatest factor confusing the debate regarding Yasukuni Shrine. The supporters of the visits to Yasukuni Shrine generally stress the significance of "praying for souls," while those who oppose the visits tend to stress the significance of "honoring." The former cannot understand why the natural human act of "comforting the souls" of the dead is criticized. In contrast, the latter view "honoring the accomplishments" of the persons enshrined at this shrine as an issue of political and historical significance. This structure of being at cross-purposes is frequently seen. Ritsumeikan University Professor Shiro Akazawa, who examined the post-war position of Yasukuni Shrine using the duality of "praying for souls" and "honoring" as the main axis, insightfully points out that the Yasukuni issue "was also a battle over the understanding of what sort of facility Yasukuni Shrine is positioned to be."<sup>ix</sup>

The debate over the joint enshrinement of so-called Class A war criminals (a total of 14 persons, seven executed by the Tokyo Trials, five who died during imprisonment, and two who died while being tried) is deeply tied to the controversy over the understanding of what type of facility this shrine is viewed to be. In contrast to the Chinese government's strong criticism over having these 14 persons enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine (from 1978)—which is the Chinese government's greatest point of criticism regarding the visits of the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine—those who defend the joint enshrinement present an explanation of cultural differences. This is the explanation that Japanese culture (unlike Chinese culture) is a culture that "does not blame the dead" and, regardless of what sort of life a person led, once someone dies, there is no problem with mourning that person's soul. In contrast, China has a culture which "does not mind blaming the dead," and that is the root of

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ix Shiro Akazawa, *Yasukuni jinja* [Yasukuni Shrine] (Iwanami Shoten), 12. Professor Akazawa discusses how at one point amid the post-war pacifism, Yasukuni Shrine worked to change into a shrine only for "praying for souls," but could not realize this because of insufficient reflection and reform by the shrine itself, as well as changes in attitudes among the bereaved families.

the criticism of the joint enshrinement of those persons.<sup>x</sup>

I will not consider whether this cultural explanation is right or wrong. Regardless, what is clear is that this explanation presumes that Yasukuni Shrine is “a shrine for praying for souls.” For that reason, this explanation only sounds like it misses the mark to those who assume that Yasukuni Shrine is “a shrine for honoring” (even if they accept that cultural explanation). To those people, the issue is not whether one “blames or does not blame” the dead, but rather whether or not to “honor” the dead. Simply stated, the issue is whether to “praise or not praise” the dead.

Regarding this issue, first we must consider what the objects of “honoring” are at Yasukuni Shrine. As I mentioned before, there are more than 2.46 million people enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine. With that many people enshrined, “honoring their accomplishments” does not mean praising every thought and action of their entire lives. That would be impossible. These “honors” should be seen as “honoring the accomplishment” of the one point of having given their lives for their country. Immediately after the end of the war, the philosopher Uzuhiko Ashizu wrote as follows regarding the meaning of being enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine:

“These persons who gave their lives for the fatherland in war (Japanese wars after the Meiji Restoration) were enshrined not because they praised despotism nor because they were fanatical believers in militarism. They were enshrined because they sacrificed their lives for the fatherland.”<sup>xi</sup> (The information in parentheses was added by me.)

There should be no particular problem with “honoring” the act of “sacrificing lives for the fatherland” in the sense used here. Of course, there is the criticism that such “honor” has the danger of encouraging people to die for the state.<sup>xii</sup> It goes without saying that there is a need to pay attention to such danger. Regardless, “honoring” in this sense is an act seen worldwide, and assuming the existence of the nation-state, I think most people would accept this act to be as natural as the act of “praying for souls.” At the very least, this is not a reason to necessarily change a “matter of the heart” into a “political issue.”

Nevertheless, this is what may be said regarding “honoring” the regular war dead. What about the act of “honoring” Class A war criminals? When told that those cases are quite different, it may be difficult to respond.

The jointly enshrined so-called Class A war criminals are people who died in relation to the Tokyo Trials, which took place under the occupation while a state of war was still ongoing—a court with many problems from the viewpoint of international law. Therefore, it can be argued that those persons, in their own way, “sacrificed their lives for the fatherland.” However, unlike the regular war dead, those persons died after being convicted for their past actions. If such death is “honored,” that could be viewed as a denial of their convictions, or at least an act that denies the legitimacy of their

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x For example, such cultural arguments are included in a February 2002 declaration supporting Prime Minister Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine by Japan’s largest conservative group, the Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference). Nippon Kaigi, “Shusho no yasukuni jinja sanpai ‘hantai’ ron ni hanbaku suru” [Refutation of the arguments against visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister], <http://cgi.kuretakekai.com/yasukunisensei.html>.

xi Uzuhiko Ashizu, “Yasukuni jinja to heiwa no riso” [Yasukuni Shrine and the ideal of peace], in *Yasukuni mondai nyumon* [Introduction to the Yasukuni issue], ed. Hidetatsu Namekawa.

xii In his best seller *Yasukuni mondai* [The Yasukuni issue], Tetsuya Takahashi makes this criticism by saying whether it is for “honoring” or for “praying for souls,” state memorial facilities for the war dead have such meaning.

convictions.

There is a debate as to whether or not such a denial is correct. But if such a denial is made, it is difficult to avoid the inclusion of political significance.

If Yasukuni Shrine is viewed as a shrine for “honoring” in this way, then the joint enshrinement of Class A war criminals is certainly a factor which politicizes the Yasukuni issue. In fact, that politicization has divided public opinion and led to harsh friction with China.

Being concerned about this, some politicians are working to remove the Class A war criminals who have been enshrined from the list of deities and enshrine them at a separate location (the so-called “separate enshrinement” theory). The shrine, however, has clearly stated that removal is not possible under its doctrine. Because the shrine says this is not possible, politics cannot force Yasukuni Shrine, which is now a private-sector religious corporation, to adopt that approach.

Also, some politicians propose creating a new (non-religious) national memorial facility, and using that to mourn the war dead. However, that proposal does not have sufficient support inside Japan. Moreover, a report from a government advisory panel of experts<sup>xiii</sup> concludes that the new facility and Yasukuni Shrine could coexist. So even if a new facility were built, that does not mean the prime minister and other leaders could be prohibited from visiting Yasukuni Shrine, and so this would not directly lead to a resolution of the issue of enshrinement of Class A war criminals.

If the Class A war criminals remain as deities, and “honoring” them continues to politicize the Yasukuni issue, those who explain visits to Yasukuni Shrine as a “matter of the heart” will have to emphasize more and more that the purpose of the visits is to “pray for souls.” Even if the shrine is for the purposes of both “praying for souls” and “honoring,” persons visiting the shrine are not obliged to do both. There may be a need to pay attention to the timing and explanation of the reasons for the visits, and to intentionally place some distance from “honoring” Class A war criminals. It may be also necessary to make efforts to relativize the Class A war criminals—who are no more than 14 persons out of 2.46 million—and avoid, as much as possible, politicizing in other ways—for example, making this a topic for domestic political debate.

When efforts emphasizing that the visits are for the purpose of “praying for souls” are combined with efforts by Yasukuni Shrine itself, they are more effective. The recent debates criticizing visits by the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine include those which place the problem with the shrine’s ancillary museum facility, the Yushukan, which is for the purpose of “honoring the souls of the war dead” and “clarifying the facts of modern history.” The Yushukan presents the details of how the persons enshrined died, and displays photographs, wills, articles left by the deceased, weapons they used, and other artifacts.<sup>xiv</sup> What is problematic is not those exhibition items themselves, but rather the panels and other displays, which explain the wars in which the war dead fought.

Under the basic understanding that the wars executed by modern Japan were “to establish a

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xiii Report of the *Tsuito heiwa kinen no tame no kinenhi to shisetsu no arikata o kangaeru kondankai* (Study group on the approach to memorial monuments and other facilities for mourning and praying for peace), <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/tuitou/kettei/021224houkoku.html#dail>.

xiv Regarding the displays at the Yushukan, see Yasukuni Shrine, *Yushukan zuroku* [Yushukan pictorial record] (2003).



modern state, and for the self-existence and self-defense of the country, and, moreover, viewed from world history, to achieve a free and equal world regardless of skin color” (Yasukuni Shrine Yushukan pamphlet), the displays show a historical understanding that the Greater East Asia War was unavoidable. Critics insist that the prime minister of Japan should not visit Yasukuni Shrine, which has facilities that present a viewpoint not necessarily consistent with that of the Japanese government (such as that seen in the remarks by former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama).

This is a position that cannot be logically upheld. If Japan’s prime ministers should not visit Yasukuni Shrine because there is a difference in historical viewpoint, then they should not visit the memorial monuments and memorial facilities in other countries as well. Prime Minister Koizumi attended the ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War held in May 2005 in Moscow, and paid his respects to the war dead. Yet Prime Minister Koizumi’s historical perspective on the Second World War is probably not the same as the Russian government’s historical perspective. Koizumi visited the Museum of the War of Chinese People’s Resistance Against Japanese Aggression at the Marco Polo Bridge when he visited China in October 2001, but does that indicate he agrees with that museum’s historical perspective? There are always diverse interpretations of history, especially when interpreting multi-faceted wars like the “Asia-Pacific War.” Even if it is all right that the government has one viewpoint and does not accept differing viewpoints, insisting the head of state should not visit such places because they show a different viewpoint would be an attitude which lacks humility toward history.

Despite that, of course, as a practical issue, if Yasukuni Shrine explicitly displays a certain viewpoint on Japan’s past for the purposes of “honoring the souls of the war dead” and “clarifying the facts of modern history,” that will provoke people who hold a different viewpoint. If, as a result, this issue is politicized and Yasukuni Shrine as a place to “pray for souls” gets caught up in the cacophony, then that is unfortunate.

I am not saying that therefore Yasukuni Shrine should not present its viewpoint at all; however, it might be helpful to exercise some ingenuity in how that is presented. For example, it could be made clear that the opinion of the Yushukan is just one of many diverse opinions. The museum can be cautious not to open itself up to criticism from the use of inaccurate and unnecessary accounts.<sup>xv</sup> From the perspective of “clarifying the facts of modern history,” the errors and failures of the state should also be stated more frankly.<sup>xvi</sup> So why not make an effort toward a bit more ingenuity regarding those areas as well? I have heard that Yasukuni Shrine itself is prepared to work at revising accounts that cause misunderstandings. [Supplementary Note: In 2007, the Yushukan made an effort to revise its historical materials, especially those concerning the Second World War, to make them more objective. Inaccurate and unnecessary accounts, such as those shown in Endnote

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xv For example, the description in the display “Roosevelt’s Strategy and U.S. Entry into World War II” reads as if the U.S. made war to escape from the Great Depression. It also states that Roosevelt’s only path to overcome the anti-war sentiment of the American people was to corner Japan and force Japan to initiate war. The former seems to be a failed, forced, Marxist interpretation, and the latter ignores how in the autumn of 1941, before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt had issued an order that any German submarines navigating the Atlantic Ocean were to be attacked on sight (a “shoot-on-sight” order), stepping up pressure on Germany.

xvi For example, the display explaining the Tripartite Pact among Japan, Germany and Italy has a description to the effect that this alliance was formed to achieve a balance of power and prevent the U.S. from participating in the war. While that itself is correct, it would be better to honestly state the errors and failures of that alliance, such as the complete error of that judgment and how greatly Japan was dishonored by its alliance with the racist Nazi Germany.

xiv, were deleted. However, perhaps because of its purpose of “honoring the souls of the war dead,” the Yushukan has avoided the type of criticism in Endnote xv. The Yushukan cannot be viewed as a completely objective historical museum.]

As another effort that is useful in emphasizing “praying for souls” among Yasukuni Shrine’s two purposes of “praying for souls” and “honoring,” the spotlight can be cast on the existence of the Chinreisha within the precincts of Yasukuni Shrine. The Chinreisha is a shrine located on the left side facing Yasukuni Shrine’s Honden (the main shrine), next to the Motomiya, which is Yasukuni Shrine’s original shrine. The Chinreisha was constructed after the war in 1965. It is dedicated to those not enshrined in the Honden—unknown war dead and those killed by wars worldwide. The motives for the construction of this shrine, which broadly “prays for the souls” of the war dead, are not entirely clear. Some say the shrine priest at the time was intentionally making an effort to link “praying for souls” at Yasukuni Shrine and world peace.<sup>xvii</sup> One of the criticisms of Yasukuni Shrine is that it only enshrines some of the war dead who have been selected. To seek understanding of Yasukuni Shrine among more people, together with the Honden, it might be beneficial to have a shrine for “praying for souls” which has no logic for selection (which is linked with “honoring”). [Supplementary Note: When Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013 as the first prime minister in seven years since Prime Minister Koizumi, he revealed that he visited the Chinreisha, which is a shrine established not only for Japanese but also to “pray for the souls” of people who died on all battlefields, including people from foreign countries.]

## ***Chapter 2 War Responsibility and “Dichotomy”***

Regardless of how much “praying for souls” is stressed, that alone will not get the Chinese government to accept visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister. That is made difficult by the position taken by the Chinese government regarding Japan’s responsibility for past wars.

As is well known, the Chinese government takes the standpoint that the past wars between Japan and China were caused by “a few militarists in Japan,” so regular Japanese citizens are not responsible, and, on the contrary, they are also victims like the Chinese people. This is a position the Chinese government adopted when diplomatic relations between Japan and China were restored in 1972 so that the Chinese people, who suffered great sacrifices in the war, could accept reconciliation with Japan.<sup>xviii</sup> Within the international environment of reconciliation between the U.S. and China and confrontation between China and the Soviet Union, for the Chinese government leaders, who decided to reconcile with Japan without taking reparations, this position must have been absolutely necessary for domestic politics.

From this standpoint, visits by the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine, which enshrines Class A war criminals who represent (as the Chinese government sees it) “a few militarists,” even if only for the purpose of “praying for souls,” are viewed as showing an attitude belittling war responsibility, or not looking honestly at war responsibility. If that is how it appears, then the Chinese government cannot remain silent.

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xvii Akazawa, *Yasukuni jinja*, 162–163.

xviii At the banquet welcoming Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on September 25, 1972, Premier Zhou Enlai said, “Following the teachings of Chairman Mao Zedong, the Chinese people have made a strict distinction between a small group of militarists and the broad Japanese people.”

However, the Chinese government has not consistently maintained this point historically. During the six years from 1979, when the fact that Class A war criminals are jointly enshrined became clear, to 1985, when Prime Minister Nakasone visited the shrine on the date commemorating the end of the war, the three prime ministers Masayoshi Ohira, Zenko Suzuki and Yasuhiro Nakasone visited Yasukuni Shrine (a total of 21 times), but the Chinese government did not make the shrine visits into an issue. Prime Minister Ohira, who visited the shrine in the spring of 1979, said at the Diet, “I believe history will judge the Class A war criminals and the Greater East Asia War,” clearly indicating the stance of having no problems with the joint enshrinement. The Chinese government welcomed Ohira when he visited China that November. That past attitude of the Chinese government is not consistent with the Chinese government’s present stance of criticizing the joint enshrinement of the Class A war criminals as a problem of war responsibility.

Leaving that aside, what should be given attention in the Chinese government’s criticism regarding the joint enshrinement of the Class A war criminals is the difference in the way of thinking regarding war responsibility in the two countries Japan and China. The Japanese government does not accept the position of the Chinese government regarding war responsibility, which separates “a few militarists” and regular citizens (the “dichotomy theory”). In fact, this is another main reason why the debate over Yasukuni Shrine as a diplomatic issue has become confused.

As for why the Japanese government does not accept the “dichotomy theory,” first of all, it is not clear to whom exactly “a few militarists” refers. According to testimony by persons involved, during the negotiations to normalize diplomatic relations between Japan and China, the Chinese side pressed the Japanese side to accept the “dichotomy theory,” but the Japanese side refused because it was not clear how wide the range of “a few militarists” extends.<sup>xix</sup> Of course, the Japanese government understands that the Chinese government stands on its recognition of the “dichotomy theory,” but that is as far as it goes. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made clear that Japan’s normalization of diplomatic relations with China was not based on agreement with the “dichotomy theory” (Meeting of the House of Representatives Budget Committee; October 6, 2006). [Supplementary Note: In the Joint Communique of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People’s Republic of China issued at the time of normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China (1972), for the sentence which reads “The Japanese side is keenly conscious of the responsibility for the serious damage that Japan caused in the past to the Chinese people through war, and deeply reproaches itself,” the Chinese side initially proposed “The Japanese government deeply reproaches itself for damages that Japanese militarism caused in the past to the Chinese people through war.” In response, Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ohira said, “During Prime Minister Tanaka’s visit to China, he will express remorse regarding the past as the representative of all Japanese citizens. Consequently, all of Japan feels remorse over war, and we would like to adopt this expression, in this sense.” In the end, the final text adopted “Japan” and not “Japanese militarism” as the subject which caused serious damage to the Chinese people. Regarding this point, see Akira Ishii and others, eds., *Kiroku to kosho: Nicchu kokko seijoka, nicchu heiwa joyaku teiketsu kosho* [Records and investigation: Negotiations for the normalization of Japan-China diplomatic relations and the signing of the Japan-China Peace and Friendship Treaty] (Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 92, 120.]

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xix Testimony of Hajime Morita, who worked as a private secretary to Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ohira. “Nicchu wa rekishi ni do mukiaeba iino ka” [How Should Japan and China face history?], *NHK Special*, NHK, August 14, 2006.

The background to the Japanese government's refusal to accept the "dichotomy theory" may include the fact that the "dichotomy theory" is influenced by the Tokyo Trials. The Tokyo Trials have been criticized as unjust for unfairness in trial procedures, errors in the recognition of facts, and trials based on ex post facto law.<sup>xx</sup> They have a bad reputation inside Japan and, even if their political meaning is recognized, the general view is that they have many problems as trials.

The Tokyo Trials introduced the new concept of a "crime against peace," making the starting and execution of a war of invasion a crime, and Japan's war leaders were tried based on that crime. As pointed out by the international legal expert Professor Yasuaki Onuma, this concept of a "crime against peace" is based on two ideas as premises. The first is the "illegality of war viewpoint" that war is illegal in principle. The next is the "leaders' responsibility viewpoint" that the responsibility for state actions lies with the state's leaders.<sup>xxi</sup> Among these two ideas, the former was already established in the international community prior to the Second World War, as seen in the General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy (1928), but that is not true of the latter. After the First World War, the Allies attempted to place the responsibility for Germany's actions on Emperor William II, and included words to that effect in the Treaty of Versailles. As time passed and calm returned, though, that idea was rejected. The criticism of "crime against peace" at the Tokyo Trials as ex post facto law is largely based on the point that the "leaders' responsibility viewpoint" was not yet established.

Regardless, the "dichotomy theory" is based precisely on this "leaders' responsibility viewpoint." To be sure, the idea is consistent with common sense that "it is natural for leaders to take responsibility." However, with respect to the wars of modern states, can responsibility really be placed on individuals, even though they are leaders? Modern states are moved not by the power of individuals, but by the power of organizations. Leaders cannot freely control all the actions of modern states just as they wish.

There are also concerns that if the "leaders' responsibility viewpoint" is thoroughly implemented, then the process would end by placing responsibility only on the leaders and a few people around them. Is that really sufficient? The "leaders' responsibility viewpoint" does have the significance that leaders cannot easily be exempted from their responsibility. However, this approach may separate other persons from their responsibility for war, and foster an irresponsible attitude toward the past.

The war responsibility of the modern state should probably be borne by the state, not by individuals. The state should take responsibility, and citizens should bear an obligation to support the state, for example, through payment of taxes for reparations. Of course, there is a difference between regular citizens and leaders in the amount of responsibility to the state, so the way they fulfill their obligations will naturally differ. It is probably also necessary to pursue their responsibility to the state. However, that is a discussion of their "domestic" responsibility, and must be considered separately from their "foreign" responsibility.

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xx Regarding the Tokyo Trials, see Richard H. Minear, *Tokyo saiban: Shosha no sabaki*, trans. Nisuke Ando (Fukumura Shuppan, 1972); originally published as *Victor's Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial* (Princeton University Press, 1971).

xxi Yasuaki Onuma, *Tokyo saiban kara sengo sekinin no shiso e* [From the Tokyo Trials to thoughts on post-war responsibility], 4th ed. (Toshindo, 1997), 32.

Incidentally, the argument for the “separate enshrinement” of Class A war criminals includes the opinion that, aside from their “foreign” war responsibility, they should take responsibility, as the country’s leaders, for the results of causing the Japanese people to suffer from a miserable war. As noted by Associate Professor Kei Ushimura of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, however, we should not forget that the Class A war criminals include persons punished for what they felt subjectively was precisely such “domestic” responsibility.<sup>xxii</sup> Furthermore, if “separate enshrinement” is pursued for taking “domestic” responsibility as leaders of the war, the issue arises of how to think about such examples as General Shigeru Honjo, the Commander in Chief of the Kwantung Army during the Manchurian Incident who committed suicide after the war and was later jointly enshrined. In his will, General Honjo wrote that the Manchurian Incident was “entirely my responsibility as the Commander in Chief of the Kwantung Army at that time.”

To date, the government of Japan has not given a simple and clear-cut explanation of Japan’s war responsibility like the Chinese government’s “dichotomy theory.” For that reason, the rejection of the “dichotomy theory” has been seen as an effort to evade war responsibility. Unfortunately, visits by the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine, which jointly enshrines Class A war criminals, have also wound up being received that way. If that is the case, when rejecting China’s “dichotomy theory,” instead of just expressing rejection, Japan should present easily understood explanations of how it has fulfilled its “foreign” war responsibility in the past “as a state” and how it will fulfill this in the future.

Post-war Japan has achieved peace with former enemy nations through treaties and joint communiques that do not refer to “war responsibility.” This is based on reflection over how the Versailles (Peace) Treaty after the First World War placed the responsibility for starting the war on Germany alone, imposed harsh reparations, causing resentment and confusion among the German people, and consequently led to the rise of the Nazis. Materials released in recent years reveal that, in the process of drafting the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida was shown a draft of the treaty (the U.K. draft) with the preamble referring to Japan’s war responsibility, and Yoshida vehemently opposed this, saying it would “repeat the experience of the Versailles Treaty” (that reference was ultimately deleted).<sup>xxiii</sup>

Of course, the fact that peace treaties and joint communiques do not mention war responsibility does not mean that Japan therefore bears no war responsibility. In fact, over the past 60 years, Japan has fulfilled that responsibility in its own way. There may be some argument about whether it may be said this has now all been settled. That is inevitable, since there is no set definition of how a state should fulfil its war responsibility.

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xxii Kei Ushimura, *“Senso sekinin” ron no shinjitsu* [The truth of the “war responsibility” theory] (PHP Shuppan, 2006).

xxiii Regarding this point, see my essay “Heiwa joyaku to ‘tokyo saiban jutaku’ ronso ga kaku gaikoshi teki shiten” [The diplomatic historical perspective missing in the debate on the Peace Treaty and the “acceptance of the Tokyo Trials”], *Seiron*, September 2005. This essay holds that the argument which says Japan recognizes the Tokyo Trials and its war responsibility under Article 11 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which has been brought out in relation to the issue of visits by the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine in recent years, is erroneous not only from the perspective of interpretation of that article but also from the perspective of diplomatic history. That is because such an argument ignores that the Tokyo Trials and the San Francisco Peace Treaty were agreements arranged with entirely different spirits. In short, the former is an agreement of “victors’ justice” and “condemnation of the past,” while the latter is an agreement of “reconciliation between the winners and losers” and “future orientation.”

However, using common sense, once international boundaries have been changed, reparations paid, war criminals punished, apologies given, and peace treaties (or equivalent agreements) signed, legally, at least, it should be acceptable to say that this has been settled. In that sense, Japan has more or less finished fulfilling its war responsibility. Japan will no longer be presented with any legal demands regarding its war responsibility from the countries it fought against (the issue of how to view individual claims from persons in countries that suffered damages may remain, but that is, in a way, separate from the legal relations among states).

Yet the reason why this cannot be said to have been completely settled is that along with legal responsibility, war responsibility also includes the aspect of morality. States do not move and should not move based on morality in the same way as individuals. Nevertheless, since states are groupings of individuals, they cannot exist without morality. That the state is a system not only for power and profit but also for morality has been an established theory of international political science since E. H. Carr.<sup>xxiv</sup> When a country takes moral responsibility as a state together with legal responsibility for the unnecessary damages and suffering it caused other countries and peoples in the past, that should be seen not as a mistake, but rather as an honorable stance taken as a civilized country.

However, how to fulfill this moral responsibility is a difficult question. That is because moral responsibility does not have some specific meaning, and taking some concrete action will not make it disappear. Also, moral responsibility does not mean a country will certainly do something because another country asks that it be done, or will certainly not do something because the other country asks that it not be done. If moral responsibility had that meaning, it could no longer be separated from legal responsibility. Moreover, the ways in which other countries fulfilled moral responsibility for past wars cannot be used as a standard (although it may be possible to use these as a reference). The conditions of war vary greatly, and ideas regarding morality also vary from country to country.

Consequently, the debate regarding how Japan should fulfill its moral responsibility for the Second World War will likely continue substantially beyond the present time. Accepting that as a premise, the government of Japan should make efforts to be able to clearly explain how Japan has fulfilled its moral responsibility to date.

Items that can readily be mentioned include expressions of regret over past errors such as repeated apologies,<sup>xxv</sup> remarks by Prime Minister Murayama,<sup>xxvi</sup> and remarks by Prime Minister Koizumi which followed suit.<sup>xxvii</sup> Domestically, these have been subject to criticisms such as apologies should not be repeated countless times, and those statements of regret simplify a complex past

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xxiv Edward Hallett Carr, *Kiki no niju nen* [The twenty years' crisis], trans. Shigeru Inoue (Iwanami Shoten, 1952); Masataka Kosaka, *Kokusai seiji* [International politics] (Chuko Shinsho, 1966).

xxv In his book, former Consul-General of Japan in Shanghai Nobuyuki Sugimoto says Japan has apologized more than 20 times to date, and lists representative examples. Nobuyuki Sugimoto, *Daichi no hoko: Moto shanghai so ryoji ga mita chugoku* [Cry from the earth: China seen by the former Consul-General of Japan in Shanghai] (PHP Shuppan, 2006), 328–331, 343–348.

xxvi Statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, "Sengo goju shunen no shusen kinenbi ni atatte" [On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war's end] (August 15, 1995); [http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/danwa/07/dmu\\_0815.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/danwa/07/dmu_0815.html).

xxvii Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (August 15, 2005); <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/koizumispeech/2005/08/15danwa.html>.

history. Yet the government of Japan has expressed such apologies and regrets in order to fulfill its moral responsibility as a state. Also, while it is difficult to say that this is all based on consideration of moral responsibility, the background to the huge official development assistance that Japan has given China over the past 20 years includes the aspect of a moral response to a reconciliation that did not include reparations.

Nevertheless, the more fundamental point that the government of Japan should explain regarding moral responsibility is the very stance that Japan has maintained for 60 years since the end of the war, of not using “force as a means of settling international disputes” and preserving the peace. I believe that taking moral responsibility for war begins with the decision not to repeat past mistakes and efforts to accomplish that decision.

Ultimately, Japan’s past mistakes began from attempting to use force to settle international disputes that emerged when Japan acted to protect and expand its own interests on the Chinese mainland. While it cannot be said unilaterally that Japan alone was guilty in each individual use of force, post-war Japan has reflected on such use of force, and firmly observed its constitutional provisions which explicitly state that it will never again use force as a means of settling international disputes (Constitution of Japan, Article 9, Paragraph 1). Japan will probably continue to firmly preserve the spirit of this provision in the future as well. In recent years, there have been movements within Japan toward revising the Constitution, but the main proposed revisions do not oppose this provision.

Taking the above discussion as given, considering the relation between the present Yasukuni issue and war responsibility, in the end, the point of dispute is whether or not Japan can fulfill its moral responsibility for the war while the prime minister continues to visit Yasukuni Shrine. From the position that moral responsibility does not mean accepting specific demands from other countries, the answer is affirmative.

Nevertheless, it is hard to claim that showing indifference to the position of the Chinese government – that visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister hurt the feelings of the Chinese people who underwent great suffering during the war – is a moral stance. Of course, the idea that Japan must quit something believed to be correct because “it hurts the feelings of the Chinese people” would make Japan-China relations distorted based on the feelings of just one side. Even if that would calm the bilateral relations for the time being, it would not be possible to build healthy relations over the long term. However, conversely, completely ignoring the other country’s feelings because something is right is also not the appropriate attitude for building sound relations over the long term.

Therefore, the Japanese government needs to listen carefully to China’s assertions, and devise a way for the prime minister to visit Yasukuni Shrine while giving as much consideration as possible to the feelings of the Chinese. It is also necessary to give a good explanation of that approach to the Chinese. Fundamentally, visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister are a domestic political issue inside Japan, and not a matter which should be meddled with by foreign countries. Accordingly, inside Japan, there is deeply rooted dissatisfaction with China’s position seeking that the prime minister not visit Yasukuni Shrine as outrageous interference in Japan’s domestic affairs. Nevertheless, from the perspective of fulfilling moral responsibility for the war, even if there is discontent, Japan should not take the stance of “refusing to listen.” Regardless of whether or not

the other side is satisfied, efforts should be made to give consideration to their feelings within the range that is possible. Explanations should also be given. I feel that would be a good way of fulfilling Japan's moral responsibility.

### ***Conclusion***

If visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister are a thorn in the side of Japan-China relations, they are a thorn that has been stuck in various complex ways. If we carelessly try to pull it out because it hurts, it cannot be removed and, on the contrary, the attempt will only intensify the pain. If I try to explain the reasons why I have concerns over those voices who call for self-restraint in visits by the prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine for the stable development of Japan-China relations using a metaphor, this is what emerges.

There is no doubt that the visits to Yasukuni Shrine by Prime Minister Koizumi over the past five years have entangled the relations between the governments of both countries. The feeling that this is unfortunate because entangled relations were not desired is understandable. As for how to untangle what has been entangled, though, the simple thinking that the prime minister should stop visiting Yasukuni Shrine since that is what entangled the relations in the first place should not be followed. This is because, if the prime minister ceases visiting the shrine because of China's strong opposition, that will certainly result in strong opposition to China inside Japan, which would then cause great trouble in Japan-China relations. There is a high likelihood that "being forced" to give in to China on the Yasukuni issue would lead to a "hardening" of relations and a rigid diplomatic stance of absolutely refusing to compromise on other issues. Also, even if one prime minister ceases visiting Yasukuni Shrine, the problem will only become even more severe if a future prime minister is pushed by the domestic reaction and resumes visits to the shrine.

Some say that, since that would be problematic, Japan should just stop the visits of its own accord, and not because that is requested by China. What are the reasons why the prime minister would stop the visits under independent judgment, and not because this is requested by China? Are there clear-cut grounds that would convince the Japanese people, and not result in a "hardening" of bilateral relations?

There have been a wide variety of discussions concerning these questions. However, since this issue concerns the "matter of the heart" of how to "pray for the souls" of the war dead, and also involves national and historical viewpoints of reflection on the war, the debate has become complicated, with no conclusion in sight, and stuck at the level of "that can be said, but this can also be said." To be sure, the explanations by Prime Minister Koizumi for his visits to Yasukuni Shrine, which were described in the Introduction of this paper, are not accepted by all Japanese. Conversely, however, there are no reasons to decisively refute those explanations and gain agreement among the great majority of Japanese that indeed the prime minister should not visit Yasukuni Shrine after all.

Probably because there may be no good reason for the prime minister not to visit Yasukuni Shrine, there is the argument that, regardless of the rights and wrongs of the shrine visits, these visits harm relations with important neighboring countries and harm Japan's reputation in foreign countries, so they are a negative for Japanese diplomacy and should therefore be stopped. This is an argument that consideration should be given to Japan's national interests in diplomacy. Yet even if we accept that continuing the shrine visits is a diplomatic loss (some argue that stopping as asked



publicly by a foreign country is an even greater diplomatic loss), can the national interest really be judged by the diplomatic gains and losses alone? The Yasukuni issue is an issue that concerns the fundamental principle of the state of “praying for the souls” of the war dead and reflecting on the war, as well as Japan’s tradition and culture. So, the judgment of what are Japan’s national interests in this issue must be based on those aspects as well.

If no definitive reason can be found for why the prime minister should not visit Yasukuni Shrine (aside from the reason that China wants the visits to stop), efforts to quickly resolve the Yasukuni issue between Japan and China probably will not do well. If we hasten a short-term resolution, that may, on the contrary, worsen Japan-China relations. The approach of seeking a short-term resolution, more often than not, is based on ignoring and not understanding the other party’s position.

Instead, the only idea may be to seek a “quieting” of this issue in the short term and to seek a means of resolution over the long term. First, the parties must come to terms in those areas where this is possible without giving up the fundamental principles of each state, and make efforts to remove the Yasukuni issue from the focus of Japan-China relations. Using the prior metaphor, for the time being, rather than trying to remove the thorn, the parties should allow time so that the thorn can then be removed without causing damage, while devising measures to ease the pain.

To those ends, the Japanese and Chinese people need to gain a good understanding about the complex ways in which the thorn has been stuck. This paper has been an effort to seek and understand the reasons why the Chinese side has not accepted the prime minister’s explanation that this is a “matter of the heart.” To summarize, Yasukuni Shrine is a shrine that has the two purposes of “praying for souls” and “honoring.” Second, the way of thinking about the subject of “war responsibility” differs between Japan and China. Broadly speaking, these two factors have been presented. Of course, these two are not the only factors but, if we focus on these two factors, it may be possible to sort out and gain a better understanding of the complex ways in which the thorn is stuck. Also, if we focus on these two factors, we can understand that if Japanese prime ministers, like Prime Minister Koizumi, continue to visit Yasukuni Shrine for “praying for the souls of the dead and advancing peace,” then efforts should be made to (1) distance this from the “honoring” of so-called Class A war criminals and (2) make it clear that the visits are not to evade Japan’s war responsibility.

Naturally, whether addressing these two factors or other factors, mutual efforts will be required to gain a good understanding of the causes that make ways in which the “thorn” has been stuck complex, and to ease the pain from the thorn by responding to them. Fundamentally, to begin with, Japan must make what efforts it can, while the Chinese side has to recognize those efforts, even if it does not recognize the visits to the shrine themselves. It may take a bit more time before that can be achieved, and that may have to be accepted.

Speaking from the viewpoint of long-term Japan-China relations, the Yasukuni issue is not an issue whereby focusing on and solving this problem can improve bilateral relations, but rather an issue that will move toward resolution at a time when Japan and China have established good relations. As mentioned above, there was a period from 1979 through 1985, after the Class A war criminals were jointly enshrined, when visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister did not become a political issue between Japan and China. During that period, Japan-China relations were favorable, with the existence of the common threat of the Soviet Union under the Cold War paradigm

**Visits to Yasukuni Shrine by the Prime Minister and Japan-China Relations:  
What is Confusing the Debate?**

and the initiation of Japanese aid for China's reform and opening policy. Of course, the conditions at that time were different from those at the present time. There is no longer a common threat, and the need for economic assistance has decreased. Yet there are still strong reasons for both countries to seek good bilateral relations, as there were at that time. That is why there are hopes the Yasukuni problem can be solved as a diplomatic problem.

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This paper was translated by JIIA from Japanese into English with the author's consent in 2017.  
JIIA takes full responsibility for the translation.

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