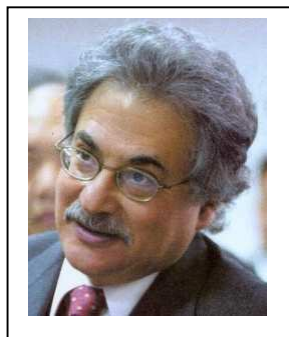


YASUKUNI SHRINE

TYPHOON'S EYE OF JAPAN'S SPIRITUAL/POLITICAL STORM REJECTING WARTIME VICTIM REDRESS

by Barry A. Fisher

Talk presented at the International Academic Symposium-Yasukuni Shrine on November 8, 2007 at Columbia University. Speakers and participants from South Korea, Japan, and the United States.



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As the 20th century ended, Japan's wartime allies, newly unified Germany and Austria, along with Holocaust-profiting Swiss banks, all settled remaining victim claims for some \$7 billion, with acknowledgment and apologies, making full efforts to close the historical book on their stained past.

Europe moved forward but Asia continued as a prisoner of the war and its colonial past. Korea's division of Soviet and American creation remained, and Japan still refused even to consider, much less acknowledge, apologize, and settle, the claims of the victims of its wartime atrocities, instead dragging its last century of horror deeper and deeper into the new one. Japan's postwar resistance is a function of factors, including U.S. continuing Cold War interests that support rather than challenge Japan's revisionist distortion of history, and particularly Japan's religious and psychological differences from ally Germany of which the Yasukuni Shrine's seemingly calm ambience defies its presence as nothing less than the spiritual and political center of Japan's right wing revisionist movement rejecting wartime victim redress--Indeed, it's the typhoon's eye of the growing international storm of protest against Japan's rejectionism.

The century-long horror that Japan refuses to confront covered most of Asia and the Pacific region, began with its 1931 invasion of China, merged with World War II, and ended only in 1945. And the 1931 invasion was staged from the Korean peninsula, which Japan had already controlled for 25 years, beginning in 1905. From the inception of this control, Japan had subjected Koreans to brutal oppression, slave labor, atrocities, and cultural genocide. It prohibited the study of Korean history, culture, language, and religion, and, by 1938, it forced all Koreans to adopt Japanese names. In a country where clan relationships are key, the abolition of Korean names was an ethnic cleansing attempt to erase nationality and historical memory.

The seeds of Korea's Japanese colonial control were planted when U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt engineered the Portsmouth Treaty ending the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 which gave Japan control of Korea with Japan agreeing to not interfere with U.S. control of the Philippines. But even before that, Japanese aggression against its neighbors had begun warring China in 1894 and seizing the island of Taiwan the following year.

During Japan's campaign of aggression in the first half of the 20th century, Japan committed populations to slave labor, biological and chemical warfare, "medical experiments," massacres, massive forced displacements, and sexual slavery under the euphemism "Comfort Women". In massive slave ship operations not seen in the world since the African slave trade of centuries ago, Japanese ships with cargoes of millions of men, women, and children including multinational POWs crisscrossed the vast Pacific region Japan controlled. These slave cargos from Korea, China, the Philippines, Burma, the Dutch West Indies and elsewhere were taken to wherever the Emperor's military needed conscripts, labors or sex slaves.

What wartime Japan did to the living conscripts it continued after death to their spirit souls. Kidnapped and slaves to Japan's military in life, tens of thousands of Taiwanese, Koreans and other in death have been subjected to Shinto ritual by Yasukuni Shrine priests hijacking, imprisoning, and enslaving them as guardian spirits of Japan to serve the Emperor and protect the divine nation along side some 1,000 war criminal souls, including perpetrators of atrocities against Taiwanese, Koreans, and others, and members of the deceased's own families. Shinto holds that the process of imprisoning souls in the central Tokyo Shrine is irreversible through eternity, thus dragging Japan's wartime arrogance into the 21st century and beyond.

Yasukuni Shrine priests deny demands for disenshrinement claiming spiritual impossibility and also refuse the requests of non-Shinto families of the dead to conduct ritual at Yasukuni for their souls. Having looted the cultural treasures of so many countries during wartime, in continuation of colonial imperialism and racism, it loots and expropriates the spirit souls of those culture in death. A notorious example of such an attempt was in June 2005 when a group of indigenous Taiwanese attempted to visit Yasukuni Shrine with the help of Japanese Catholics. Representing 9 tribes from Taiwan whose ancestors are enshrined at Yasukuni, their intention was to request the removal of their relatives from the Shrine and to peacefully pray for the return of their ancestors souls. Instead they were ejected by the right wing and police.



Author is second from right, at the microphone

Located in the heart of Tokyo near the Imperial Palace, the Shrine is Japan's national center for enshrining the spirit deity of all those who served the Emperor in any way in wartime, including foreign forced conscripts and war crimes perpetrator. The Shrine's Book of Souls lists 2,466,532 men and women, including 27,863 Taiwanese and 21,181 Koreans (50,000), many forced conscripted and includes 1,068 post war Japanese military POWs convicted of war crimes, including 14 Class A war criminals. The last war dead are from WWII and no one is included who died after the year of the Japan-US 1951 SF Treaty. Most are enshrined from the Asia Pacific/WWII -2.3 million; the next largest number is 88,500 from the Russo-Japanese War that ended in 1905 with a treaty the U.S. helped engineer that actually sowed the seeds of the wars that followed ending only in 1945.

Before the war the Shrine was the symbol of nationalism, militarism and willing-to-die devotion to the living deity Emperor and the Shrine featured exhibits to modern warfare where visitors could shoot weapons and military recruitment was conducted. Now as memory of the war dims, it has increasingly returned to becoming a mecca and symbol for Japan's ultra rightist and nationalists who want to remilitarize Japan so it can return to its past glory. Many in Japan still view Shinto as Japan's state religion and worship the Emperor as Shinto's living deity. They claim, and taught at the Shrine is that the occupying U.S. illegally forced its end as the state religion in hopes of breaking the Shinto/Nationalism/Militarism/Emperor deity link, and they claim that the Emperor couldn't and didn't in fact renounce his divinity in 1946. As then Japanese PM Mori declared in 2000, Japan is a "divine nation with the emperor at its core" and to many this defines the country's national identity. The Shrine displays many war weapons and includes statues honoring kamakazi and kaiten plane and human torpedo suicide

bombers. The grounds contain a war museum that glorifies Japan, reveres the emperor's deity status as decendent of the Sun Goddess, and presents a revisionist history of the Asian Pacific/World War II. Japan's conquest of East Asia during the 20th century which it portrays as efforts to save the region from the imperial advances of Western powers. Japanese POW's executed for war crimes are presented as "unjustly tried" by "sham" illegal tribunals. In fact, Japanese politicians, up to and including the just-resigned nationalistic prime minister, Shinzo Abe, have long lauded as a hero the only one of 11 Allied judges—the Indian Radhabinod Pal-- who would have found not guilty Japan's top wartime leaders of war crimes. Indeed, a monument to Judge Pal stands at the Yasukuni Shrine. Before the war the Yasukuni Shine Museum, the only one like it in Japan served as a place of state propaganda and youth military recruitment. Closed during the occupation it's size has been expanded over the years and it's again a propaganda tool. Its clear message is that Japan is unapologetic about responsibilities for the war and official visits to the Shrine by public officials is viewed by many as a demonstration of acceptance of this point of view.

Visits to the Shrine by the Japanese PM and cabinet members have been cause of protests by China, North and South Korea Taiwan and elsewhere since the early 1980's when it was learned that 14 war criminals, including the infamous PM Tojo, were secretly enshrined in 1979 and it was not until March 2007 when secret Japanese government documents were revealed that permitted the enshrinement.

Yasukuni is watched by right wing patrols and anyone that may be their for protest or is otherwise not wanted is subject to being physically attacked by teams of black suited skinheads. Japanese riot police standby not far away to assist the skinheads and prevent peaceful protesting visitors from entering the public park grounds of the Shrine. Jean Chung and I were attacked by skinheads and ejected from the Shrine by riot police not long ago. As you enter the grounds and the walkway to the principle areas, traditional shamisen players sing Japan wartime songs honoring the emperor and people with tables display the wartime flag and distribute right wing militaristic, nationalistic literature.

When I first visited the Shrine in 1999 I was struck by a statue with bronze reliefs depicting glorious war victories presented by a Japanese insurance company in the early 1930's. I was reminded that German insurance companies served a major role for the Nazis and many were the targets of class action Holocaust victim court cases. In Japan as in Germany insurance companies had large cash resources funded wars by providing money for industries and the government. Moreover, the companies were enriched by confiscating and never paying claims owed to the victims of Germany and Japan. The war role of Japanese insurance companies should be investigated.

"Rich Country Strong Army" was Japan's national slogan of self-strengthening from the beginning of the Meiji era to 1945. One of Japan's biggest insurance companies during Japan's 20th century wars of aggression was called the Rich Country Strong Army Life Insurance Company—after WWII, the goal of a strong army had to be dropped, but Japan continued to pursue the goal of Rich Country and this insurance company changed its name to Rich Country Life Insurance Company, dropping "strong army." It was this

company whose name is on the statue at the Shrine I first saw in 1999.

Americans can relate to the Yasukuni Shrine controversy from recent experiences in the U.S. An example involved the politically very powerful Mormon Church of which Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney is a leading Republican presidential candidate. It is now known that over many decades, the Mormon Church has spent millions in world-wide collection of the names of non-Mormon deceased. They then subject those persons to a secret ritual in the Mormon Temple to purify and wash away sins, baptizing in death into the Church by proxy for heavenly protection. The American public, including the Jewish community, learned of this practice in 1994 and a loud public controversy erupted with strong protests that millions of souls, including Holocaust victims, Rabbis, and noted Jews, including Albert Einstein, Israel PM Golda Meier and Sigmund Freud had been subjected to this religious ritual and enshrined in the Mormon Temple. The Church quickly agreed to cease this highly objectionable posthumous baptism of Jews.

The Yasukuni Shrine enshrinement is no less objectionable. During the 40 years from 1905 to 1945 of Japan's Asia colonial and war campaigns millions of men, women and children of all religious faiths were subject to kidnap, ethnic cleansing of their culture, language, forced Japanization, including adherence to the nationalistic, emperor worshipping Shintoism of the period. To be freed of Japan control by death only to be kidnapped in death to have their souls subject to ritual keeping them tied to the Japan Shinto shrine for warriors is no less outrageous as the Mormon practice to kidnap souls of those who resisted conversion in life. This is even more so the Korean, Taiwanese and other forced conscripted to be enshrined with over 1,000 war criminal souls, including those of persons who tormented, tortured and killed their families.

American public opinion was unified on the Mormon posthumous baptisms and also was united in outrage 10 years before in 1985 when President Reagan visited Germany and paid homage to German war dead at the Bitburg cemetery and included the graves of 49 members of Hitler's elite atrocity killers, the Waffen SS. Reagan called the visit a mistake based on false information that the cemetery contained both Americans and Germans but no SS.

Americans can also relate to Yasukuni issues—and perhaps even help--- from the standpoint of constitutional law and fundamental human rights. Japan and the U.S. share the same constitutional provisions regarding the first amendment rights of public place assembly, literature distribution, speech, rights to access to public forums., many of which are also imbedded in recognized international human rights. In the United States, the clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution that prohibits the “establishment” of religion has been interpreted to mean that religious symbols cannot be maintained on public land. When the government has tried to circumvent this result by transferring the land to a private organization as with the Yasukuni Shrine, the courts have held that the constitutional violation persists.

In the U.S., not only are there the cases that find a continuing constitutional violation after a publicly owned religious symbol is given over into private hands, but some state courts have interpreted their own constitutions as requiring private property

open to the public, like shopping malls, to allow certain kinds of private speech. There are other cases that have found transfers of public property to be outright shams, not entitled to legal respect.

The Yasukuni Shrine is a large park-like space open to the public in an extremely prominent site in the middle of Tokyo. While it is now nominally private, the transfer to the Shinto group was likely made without any payment to the government and its function is pretty much indistinguishable from what it was before the transfer. The Shrine is apparently open to the wanderings of the public, but the authorities of the Shrine have frequently shut down even nondisruptive speech that they don't like.

The prominence and use of the Shrine seem to belie the official separation of religion and state in postwar Japan and may violate the constitution. Even if the operation of the Shrine itself is considered legal, Japanese authorities may not have the right at their whim to stop people from offering prayers or communicating ideas there.

Before concluding, I want to talk about several factors that support Japan's Yasukuni ultra right wing and victim claims rejectionists all constituting obstacles we must overcome for success. One is the U.S. While supporting redress for Germany's victims, the U.S. refused those of Germany ally Japan; instead, the U.S. supported Japan and its companies in every one of the court cases filed in the U.S.

The U.S. role in all of these cases can't be understated. While the U.S. President's position expressed through the State and Justice Departments was to pressure settlements from the Germans, Austrians, and Swiss, the U.S. government joined Japan's side in every case demanding dismissal. As the author of *Rape of Nanking*, Iris Chang, and I wrote in a commentaries published in the Los Angeles and Washington Times, when Japanese cases, particularly the "Comfort Women" case, were filed in 2000, "these women expected the U.S. government to view their claims with sympathy and to help them negotiate a resolution with Japan." While supporting international laws against sexual human trafficking and women's rights in international fora, the U. S. applied a double standard and turned its back on Asian while supporting European victims further fracturing the U.S. image as a global advocate of human rights.

A factor that may be in play is the Bush administration's efforts at creating an imperial presidency, flexing its executive power muscles to try to expand them as much as possible. Perhaps more subtly than in its actions in the war on terror--but no less unmistakably--its legal positions in the Japanese cases have embraced this approach. In my Jeong slave labor and Hwang "Comfort Women" cases, the Bush Administration went so far as reversing the U.S. government position in the Holocaust cases pending during the Clinton years, asserting that it could render a case non-justifiable, that is, without court jurisdiction, by claiming that a court could not even entertain the case without interfering with foreign policy and U.S. treaty commitments.

I want to mention two other factors impeding settlement with Japan—both the effect of the Cold War and the religious and psychological differences between Germany and Japanese society. At the moment World War II ended, the United States was still

allied with the Soviet Union, and the two powers agreed to what was thought to be a temporary division of the Korean Peninsula. But, by 1949, faced with the founding of the new Communist nations of North Korea and China, the United States made strategic decisions to support and rebuild Japan as its principal Pacific ally against the two just-created Soviet allies. A terrible result was that historical truth of a half century of Japan aggression itself became a casualty victim of the Cold War.

An ancient adage is that “history is written by the victors,” and so it usually is. But Post-war Pacific history provides, however, a very big twist to this adage. After the creation of North Korea in 1948 and the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when it became clear that Communist states would seek dominance in Asia, and America has signaled the importance of its alliance with Japan,—it happened that the Japanese defeat of 1945—indeed its "unconditional surrender"—became transformed through a process of diplomatic magic into making Japan a victor. Just a few years after its abject loss, Japan now stood as the linchpin of the American plan for security in the Pacific. The U.S. objectives were simply not served by having its school history books teach its citizens about Japan's atrocities and history of aggression that might make Americans sympathetic with Japan's victims, now U.S. enemies China and North Korea. As a result of the Cold War generations of Americans are ignorant of much of 20th century Asian history, knowledge that is critical to understand the present and avoid in the future the mistakes of the past.

Germany, unlike Japan, was pressured to teach the Holocaust atrocities to its children, encourage trips to death camp, apologize and pay restitution. But unlike Japan's victims, Germany's victims were American friends and no pressure was on Japan to do the same for Japan's victims which included vast populations of Cold War enemy Communist countries with atrocity sites where homage should be paid such as Nanking were located in those same enemy countries.

Nor did the U.S. pressure Japan to teach the truth. Japanese textbooks often indulged in outright whitewash and falsification, prompting protests from across Japan's former Pacific empire but silence from the U.S. and other Western governments. History has been a lightning rod issue. By 1993 activities of the redress movement, particularly after the filing of “Comfort Women” cases in Japan, resulted in Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro's statement of regret for Japan's “war of aggression” which he called “a mistaken war.” But he was immediately attacked by the right wing and conservatives, especially in the long dominant LDP, and, by 1995, legislators formed a group to publish a volume of essays justifying the so called “Great East Asian War” and attacking as lies the accounts of Japan wartime atrocities, including the Nanking Massacre.

Revisionist groups sprouted outside the government, including the “Free History” advocates led by Tokyo University professor Nobukatsu, supporting the proposition that little historical proof for atrocities exists, and Japan need not apologize. This movement has only grown over the last decade, and the trumped-up "controversy" over the facts of history has led to Japan schoolbooks' retreating from even the small amount of accurate history they had previously included. (And) There has also been increasing support for right-wing sentiment expressed regarding the Yasukuni Shrine, Japanese rearmament, and

rejection of the victim redress movement.

Reasons for Japan's failure to confront its past include the cultural and psychological. A number of scholars have identified differences between Germany's Christian-based "guilt culture" and Japan's "shame culture" as defining lines in the opposite ways the two have thought about their wartime victims.

Japanese society is, according to many scholars, fundamentally group oriented and hierarchical, focused on what others in society think; according to this theory, in European culture, guilt is more concerned with individuals, their conscience and their moral and religious rules. Under the "shame" principle, admitting failures or crimes makes the entire group lose face and brings shame to all. Maintaining face—appearance—is most important, and dependency on the group and the stronger entity, in this case including the U.S., is key to Japanese society. When expectations fall short, feelings of group victimization become strong.

As my colleagues Berton and Lachkar have written, part of the reason why the Japanese have refused to acknowledge their aggression and war crimes is the fact that several events towards the end of the war were used by Japanese leaders to transform them, in their own eyes, into victims rather than aggressors. When the world's first atomic bombs were dropped, many Japanese were taught and became convinced that the bomb was not used on Germany because Germany was a "white" nation, and that dropping the bomb on Japan was racially motivated. Of course, the reality was that the bomb was only first tested on July 16, 1945, more than two months *after* Germany had capitulated on May 8, but facts often find little foothold against deep-seated emotion.

Yet many Japanese think it justified to ignore the Nanking Massacre and other atrocities and, instead, focus on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I do want to end with some observations about progress that has been made and optimistic projections for the future. With increasing momentum, the international victim redress movement has included mass demonstrations, victim court cases in many countries, major academic public conferences, demonstrations, war crimes tribunals conducted by international NGO's, books and films, U.N. and internet petitions, including the 42 million signing against Japan's campaign for a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council until it resolves victim issues, findings and reports by special rapporteurs and resolutions passed by the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights, and legislation, recently the U.S. Congress's House Resolution 121 of July 2007 demanding that Japan acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility for its massive system of wartime sexual slavery. Similar bills are currently pending in the parliaments of Canada (House of Commons Motion 291), and the Philippines (House of Representatives Resolution 124), and others will be introduced in the legislatures of other countries. The passage of these bills will help boost initiatives by legislators in Japan where in recent elections the redress rejectionist LDP Party lost the upper House of Councillors-Japan's Senate and only last Thursday the Japan Supreme Court courageously ruled against the government holding that Korean conscripts injured in the Hagasaki/Hiroshima A Bomb attacks are entitled to Japan paid health benefits. And

unlike his predecessors, the new Prime Minister Fukuda said he would not be going to the Yasukuni Shrine. The “Comfort Women” issue has also led in the last few years to China’s and North Korea’s becoming active participants in the redress movement and to opening new doors of communication and cooperation with South Korea. Over the last several years, these efforts have raised the historical and political consciousness of public officials and citizens worldwide. This external pressure, combined with the crescendo of criticism and demands inside Japan that the nation face its past may force release of the quantum of shame necessary to bring about action that will result in Japan to now move forward in the new century.

Thank You.

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