

SHINTO IDEOLOGY IN MODERN GARB

- February 11, 1983 -

Ideological Background of National Foundation Day

Kigensetsu, predecessor of the postwar Kenkoku Kinen no Hi (National Foundation Day) celebrated on Feb. 11, was established in 1872 - or quite recently, compared with the ancient tradition it is commonly believed to represent. In fact the ideology behind National Foundation Day is not very "ancient" either.

That ideology is Kokugaku, or "National Learning," especially as articulated by HIRATA Atsutane (1776-1843), who wedded Shinto sentiments to National Learning. But, in so doing, he rejected the Shinto of his time in favor of a fictitious and idealized "ancient Shinto" embodying the "true Japanese spirit" uncovered by Kokugaku.

Foto: Shinto priests at Meiji Shrine leave ceremony on Feb. 11.

Kokugaku before Atsutane did have older roots. In the 12th and 13th centuries some of the court nobility (no longer politically important, as samurai ruled the country) engaged in study of the Japanese verse form waka, giving birth to a tradition of "poetics" (kagaku, lit., "verse learning"). In the 15th and 16th centuries, noblemen who were well-versed in the Chinese classics extended their studies far beyond waka to include the Japanese classics (e.g., Kojiki and Man'yō-shū), court practices, and Shinto. This activity came to be known as "Japanese learning" (Wagaku).

Intellectual life in the 17th and 18th centuries was dominated by Confucian studies, which included linguistic and textual criticism - a method adapted by MOTOORI Norinaga (1730-1801) to develop the newer National Learning (Kokugaku) that had special interest in ascertaining the "original ethical way" and the "original aesthetic sense" of the Japanese. Norinaga regarded the "ancient way" of the Japanese as the creation of the gods (Confucianism was merely the creation of ancient sages). He was highly critical of all foreign influences, Chinese or Western.

But it was Atsutane who, in the early 19th century, produced the special and extreme blend of nationalism, Shinto, and National Learning that provided the ideological underpinning of Kigensetsu and many other symbols of Imperial primacy. The same ideological blend provides the basis for the recent National Foundation Day ceremonies which were revived in 1967. The ceremony finally gained the official support of the Prime Minister's Office in 1978 and the backing of the Ministry

of Education in 1981. This year for the first time, the Shinto-style ceremonies held at the National Theater were backed by the Ministry of Home Affairs which provided the impetus for official backing of similar regional services throughout Japan. (See following articles) (DLS)

David L. Swain, 1983. Kyodan Newsletter 172, 20. Februar 1983

Foto: National Theater on Feb. 11

"NATIONALIZATION OF YASUKUNI SHRINE MEANS REVIVAL OF MILITARISM . . . "

With this as one of their slogans, many Christians joined with citizen's groups gathered in record numbers throughout Japan on Feb. 11, 1983, to oppose the government-backed National Foundation Day celebration. Although incomplete, the figures released by the Kyodan Shimpo show that over 11,500 persons attended the 90 rallies included in its survey.

Two of the largest gatherings reported were the Miyagi Prefectural Rally in Sendai and the Chiyoda Rally in Tokyo with over 700 each. The various rallies in Okinawa alone totalled over 2,000 persons. The underlying concern behind these protests against National Foundation Day is the well-grounded fear that Japan's present government is promoting a revival of militarism. The one issue that continues to be symbolic of these attempts is the nationalization of Yasukuni Shrine.

From 1969 to 1974, a bill to nationalize Yasukuni Shrine was presented five times in the National Diet for the purpose of returning the Shinto shrine to national government administration (the shrine, like all other Shinto shrines, was removed from national support and administration by the Occupation GHQ's "Shinto Directive" in December 1945; see Chronology). But each time, the Yasukuni Shrine nationalization bill was defeated. Even so, the government, the ruling Liberal-Democratic Party, and persons related to the shrine have not abandoned hope of nationalizing this shrine, which enshrines Japan's war dead.

What is the nature, and the underlying intent, of these Yasukuni Shrine bills - clearly the most controversial in postwar Diet history? It is no exaggeration to say that for a non-Japanese person to understand the Yasukuni Shrine issue is to reach a basic understanding of modern Japan.

The essence of the Yasukuni issue is best revealed in the popular query: "Why is it wrong for the country to venerate (matsuru) those who died for the country (o-kuni)?"

Those who oppose nationalization of the shrine must be able to respond clearly and convincingly to this question. And yet, such is not easy, for it is a very difficult question even for those opposed to nationalizing Yasukuni Shrine. The difficulty is evident in three key terms of the question."

1. "The country (o-kuni)"

In the term o-kuni, the "o" is an honorific. The Japanese language is well-known for its abundance of honorifics. But in this particular case, the "o" is the superlative of

all honorifics, for it means that the country is "the Emperor's country." For people who use this term, Japan is not "our" country but "his" country.

The notion that the country belongs to the Emperor has been an article of faith among the Japanese people since ancient times; it is a political myth rooted in the "Age of the gods" that predates recorded history. This political myth was exploited to the utmost in the "Fifteen-years War" (1931-45); it was a powerful ideological weapon in Japan's arsenal of that period.

With Japan's defeat in 1945, this political myth was thoroughly discredited. The "Shinto Directive" issued by the Occupation GHQ completely negated the beliefs that "the Emperor is descended from the gods," "Japan is the land of the gods," and "the Japanese are superior to other peoples."

The efforts to restore Yasukuni Shrine to national administration are, at bottom, part of an attempt to resurrect the political myth shattered along with Japan's war effort in 1945.

2. "Dying for the country"

The ideal of the samurai code of honor (bushidō) was "to die a death fully worthy of a samurai." In time, this ideal spread beyond samurai ranks to influence the thinking of the general populace. Indeed, to die for one's master was regarded as the highest morality. Since Meiji times (1868-1912), this ideal was exploited to the fullest extent, and "dying for one's master," of course, came to mean dying for the Emperor. Dying for the Emperor, in turn, was referred to as "a glorious death in battle." Such a death was a necessary condition for becoming one of the "gods" enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine.

This notion of "a glorious death in battle" fostered among the Japanese people an extremely narrow attitude toward war. It robbed them of opportunities to develop more responsible views of war as aggression and as a crime against justice and humanity.

In the state-authorized textbooks used during wartime, there was a story about a heroic bugler. "Even though Corpsman Kiguchi died, he never took his lips from his bugle." This idealization of death in battle was intimately linked to the glorification of war. In much the same way, Yasukuni Shrine was directly connected with the promotion of militarism in Japan.

3. "To enshrine and venerate (matsuru) the war dead"

To enshrine the war dead means, in the Shinto context, to deify them and thus to venerate them as "gods." Enshrinement has both religious and political meanings - a crucial point in understanding the nature and role of Yasukuni Shrine.

In its religious dimension, the purpose of enshrinement is to console and pacify the spirits of the war dead. This religious meaning of the term has something in common with general religious practices.

The political meaning, however, is "to praise heroic spirits," that is, to praise the war dead as heroes. The political purpose of enshrinement is, therefore, not directed toward the war dead; it is, rather, aimed at the hearts of the people still living - to indoctrinate them with militarism.

The pompous festivals of Yasukuni Shrine are aimed precisely at indoctrination, as are the Imperial visits to the shrine. This crucial point is not always obvious to many people. Yasukuni Shrine promoters, however, skillfully manipulate this "blind spot" among the people in order to revive and promote militarism once again in this country.

*Article by UEMATSU Eiji, 1983 (translated by David L. SWAIN)
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YASUKUNI RELATED CHRONOLOGY

1868--6/29 Tokyo Shōkonsha founded at Kudan in Tokyo by order of Emperor Meiji for enshrining those who died in battle for the "Imperial cause"

1879--6/4 Renamed Yasukuni Shrine (YS) and designated a "Governmental Shrine with Special Status" (Bekkaku Kampeisha)

1887--3/17 Became only shrine under jurisdiction of Army and Navy

1939--3/15 All regional shōkonsha renamed "Gokoku Jinja" [shrine to protect the country]

1945--10/14 Occupation GHQ issues directive to "abolish all controls on political, social and religious freedoms"

1945--12/15 Occupation GHQ's "Shinto directive" orders end to all government preservation, support, certification, supervision, and promotion of "State Shinto" and "Shrine Shinto"

1952--8/1 YS becomes 'religious juridical person,' i.e., public but nongovernmental religious organization

1952--11/6 Conference of Families of the War Dead calls for government financial support of YS

1969--6/30 First YS nationalization bill submitted to Diet

1974--6/3 Diet rejects YS nationalization bill fifth time

1975--2/22 Liberal-Democratic Party abandons efforts for passage of YS bill

1976--6/22 Supporters of YS nationalization form "Society to Respond to Heroic Spirits" (Eirei ni Kotaeru Kai)

1978--12/15 Mie Prefectural Assembly becomes first to pass resolution favoring "official visits to YS"

1979--4/18 News reports confirm that 14 "Class A" war criminals already enshrined at YS

Some Government-related Events

1889--2/11 Meiji Constitution promulgated; article 28 guarantees religious freedom "within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to [the people's] duties as subjects" 1939--3/28 Religious Organizations Law enacted (Shinto shrines excluded due to "special status")

1945--8/15 Emperor announces war's end

1947--5/3 New constitution becomes effective; article 20 guarantees religious freedom, separation of religion and state; article 89 prohibits government financial support of religious organizations

1951--4/3 Religious Organizations Law enacted, enforced

1959--3/28 National war dead monument erected at Chidorigafuchi in Tokyo

1963--8/15 Government sponsors memorial ceremony for war dead

1966--6/25 Diet passes bill to make Feb. 11 "National Foundation Day"

1978--2/11 Prime Minister's Office (PMO) supports rightist group's "Ceremony to Celebrate National Foundation Day"

1979--6/6 "Imperial era" (Gengo) bill passed by Diet

1982--6/28 Appeals made to Iwate and Ehime district courts against use of government funds for "offering to gods"

1983--2/11 Ministry of Home Affairs joins PMO and Ministry of Education in support of rightist "Ceremony to Celebrate National Foundation Day"

Some Christian-related Actions

1930--Jan. Japan National Christian Council issues declaration against forced participation in Shinto activities and shrine visits

1941--6/24 Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan founded; recognized by government on 1941.11.24

1960--5/17 Japan Christian Rengōkai (incl. R. Cath., Prot., & Orth.) cautions all Diet members against nationalization of Yasukuni Shrine

1969--8/27 Christian families of war dead demand that Yasukuni Shrine delete Christian names from list of enshrined war dead (YS rejects demand)

1973--1/22 Christian wife (Mrs. NAKAYA Yasuko) appeals to Yamaguchi District Court for cancellation of Self-Defense Forces enshrinement of her deceased

husband; wins appeal in Yamaguchi District Court on 1979. 3. 22, and Hiroshima High Court on 1982. 6. 1.

*Chronology by OHKAWA Ichiro, 1983 (translated by David L. SWAIN)
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For related KNL articles...KNL. Nos. 44, 74, 83, 90, 92, 99, 101, 107, 111, 116, 117, 120, 124, 125, 127, 132, 134, 136, 141, 142, 145, 147, 152, 157, 158, 162, 164, 165, 166, and 168.

NATIONAL CEREMONY at NATIONAL THEATER

The location of the National Foundation Day Ceremony in Tokyo on Feb. 11, 1983, was shifted from last year's site at the Meiji Shrine Hall to the National Theater Grand Hall in order to play down the religious character of the services. Japan's hawkish Prime Minister, NAKASONE Yasuhiro, had expressed his desire to attend if the religious tone was lessened and it gained wide public support.

Foto: Foreign Minister Abe arrives to greet foreign dignitaries

Foto: Right-wing groups gathered at Meiji Shrine Feb 11.

However, when he did not attend, the ultra-nationalistic sponsors of the ceremony still seemed pleased to receive a special congratulatory message from Nakasone, the first to be sent by a Prime Minister. It was explained that Nakasone's heavy diplomatic schedule prevented him from attending.

In spite of the change in location, the ceremony was identical with the one held in earlier years on the Meiji Shrine precincts. After the opening greetings, nearly 2,000 patriotic voices were raised in the unison singing of the "Imperial Hymn," *Kimi ga yo*. Although contrary in spirit to the present Constitution, this prewar anthem has been promoted by conservative hard-liners as Japan's national anthem and was so listed in the program. The Ministry of Education has promoted its use on national holidays since 1958, and in 1977 the Education Ministry's Curriculum Guide listed it as the "national anthem" for the first time. (see KNL #124)

The words of "*kimi ga yo*" were adapted from an ancient 31-syllable *tanka* poem in the *Kokinshu* anthology compiled in 905. Later in the program there was a recitation of a *waka* poem in the ceremonial court style used in the poetic recitations before the Emperor at New Year's. The words of the *waka* chosen for the Foundation Day Ceremony were written by Emperor Meiji in 1909, and praise the "venerated father who built the Shrine at Kashiwara." The present Kashiwara Shrine was constructed in 1889 at the spot in Nara Prefecture where according to legend the mythical Jimmu became the first Emperor of Japan. The literal translation of this *waka* reads: Our country has not been moved since the pillars of the shrine were first put up by our venerable father in Kashiwara.

After the singing of the "Imperial Hymn;" the English program listed "A Slight Bow." This, however, was much more than "a slight bow." In Japanese it is *hairei* (lit. bowing in worship). The participants were led in this act with the explanation that "we are reverently bowing to the Mausoleum of Emperor Jimmu through the medium of our national flag" (which was prominently hung as a backdrop in the

center of the stage). A reverent silence prevailed as the audience (with the exception of this reporter) bowed in deep veneration towards the flag.

In the brief commemorative remarks by the celebrity-composer, MAYUZUMI Toshiro, who serves as chairman of the sponsoring executive committee, he referred to the mythical accounts of ancient Japan found in the Nihon Shoki as the basis for "the truth in our hearts upon which our history stands." He said that "even though these traditions were used by the militarists during the Great Asian War, this did not negate their true meaning."

While calling for Japanese to contribute to world peace and prosperity, he cautioned them saying, "we have no guarantee that the present peace will continue." He declared, "we must work to defend the nation on such issues as education and textbooks, the Constitution, national defense and Yasukuni Shrine." In conclusion, he remarked that "due to the many dangers today we must love our country more than ever and work harder for the development and prosperity of our nation."

The loudest applause of the ceremony came when greetings were given on behalf of the 66 foreign delegations in attendance. The presence of foreign dignitaries has been used to publicize the "official" nature of the ceremonies. It was also used as pressure for the attendance of Japan's Foreign Minister at a reception for the diplomatic corps after the ceremony, this year attended by Foreign Minister Abe (see photo).

The National Theater is located directly across the inner moat that surrounds the Imperial Palace. The ceremony ended with three loud shouts of "Banzai," almost within earshot of the Emperor himself.

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