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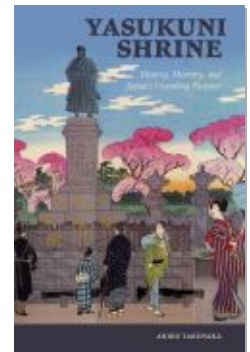
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FOUR

INSTITUTIONALIZING GRIEF

Yasukuni Shrine and Total War

The night that the white palanquin entered Yasukuni Shrine, I was just so thankful . . . so thankful.

*A MOTHER'S COMMENT DURING A GROUP DISCUSSION AFTER A YASUKUNI
ENSHRINEMENT RITUAL*

I truly had a hard time with that broadcast. You see, the ceremony is conducted in pitch dark. And there'd be tormented screams like "Murderer!" "Give me back my child!" coming from the bereaved families that lined both sides of the main approach. The military police were at a loss as these people had just lost a close family member. But I had to make sure that the microphone would not pick up these voices. That was really tough.

*NHK RADIO ANNOUNCER RECOUNTING HIS EXPERIENCE DURING A LIVE
BROADCAST OF THE YASUKUNI ENSHRINEMENT RITUAL*

At 10:20 p.m. on September 18, 1931, dynamite planted by Japan's Kwantung Army exploded at a segment of the Southern Manchurian Railway near Mukden. This episode—referred to at the time in Japan as the "Manchurian Incident (Manshū Jihen)"—launched the Asia-Pacific War: the extended military conflict that Japan fought for the next fifteen years. From 1937 on, it was a total war that required new kinds of support from the home front. It demanded not only the production and supply of weapons and other resources for the military but also—and perhaps more importantly—emotional readiness: readiness of men to engage in warfare and of women to support the men at any cost to themselves. The willingness to sacrifice everything, including one's own life, was inextricable from emotional readiness.

This chapter examines the construction of emotional readiness on the home front: readiness to send a loved one off to war with the understanding that he most likely will not come back; readiness to accept loss with pride and gratitude. I refer to this process as the institutionalization of grief. We

saw, in chapters 2 and 3, the institutionalization of joy. Organized groups transformed public rituals, celebrations, and even funerals into spectacles. People who previously were mere spectators became participants through collective activities: singing military songs, shouting *banzai* choruses, and parading in victory celebrations. The institutionalization of grief involved similar practices. Institutions such as elementary schools, neighborhood associations, local veterans' groups, and women's organizations created public displays out of each occasion associated with grief—from receiving the death notice and ashes of the fallen, to taking part in funerals, memorial practices, and, finally, enshrinement of the deceased's spirit at Yasukuni Shrine. Involvement in these organized communal activities instructed the participants in socially acceptable or appropriate emotional responses to personal moments of grief. A new way of marking death was conceived through this institutionalization of grief: a value system that favored pride and gratitude over sadness and sorrow; a value system that sought to define an exalted meaning for war death. Through narratives of public and private grief the mass media reproduced, propagated, and instructed readers in acceptable emotional responses to such loss. This chapter's first epigraph is one such example: A mother who had just attended the enshrinement ritual of her only son expresses gratitude rather than sadness.¹ The Myth of the War Experience, which initially emerged from modern Japan's earlier wars, appears to have been fully established and accepted by this time.²

At the same time, however, not everyone subscribed to these forms of emotional responses. Some went through the prescribed motions to avoid conflict or social censure. Others expressed their sadness and anger in private. Still others were arrested for public expressions of dissent. But media reports and other printed narratives during the war rarely related demonstrations of discontent, sorrow, and anguish. The radio announcer in the second epigraph recounts one such experience: In the midst of the enshrinement ritual, where all in attendance were supposedly grateful that their loved ones were becoming the god of Yasukuni, some family members vociferously accused the Japanese state and the shrine of murder.³ But just as the microphone eluded their screams of grief, so both self-censorship and censored media representations created an image that all of Japan was united in its "Yasukuni the belief": the idea that war death in a family was an occasion for pride and joy. This censored or repressed image later shaped the collective memory of wartime Japan as it relates to Yasukuni Shrine—the collective memory that provides the strong foundation of "Yasukuni the issue." I suggest the importance of acknowledging the presence

of counternarratives and, further, of paying attention to the complex process by means of which the censored images were created. One of my aims here is to complicate the relationship between Yasukuni Shrine and what is popularly understood as the Japanese experience of the Asia-Pacific War: one that reinforces the narrative of victimhood.

This chapter is organized around the fate of an ordinary army private, Kurokawa Umekichi, a twenty-year-old from Kanagawa Prefecture who enlisted in December 1933 and died six months later due to injuries sustained during service. I trace Umekichi's journey through objects left behind. These 420 objects and documents associated with his military service, his death, the return of his ashes, local memorial services, and Yasukuni enshrinement have been stored in a custom-made cedar box and preserved first by his father and later by his younger brother.⁴ At the time of Umekichi's death, less than three years into the fifteen-year war, all death-related practices, including cremation and memorial at the battlefield, as well as the reception and memorialization of his ashes back home, received extraordinary care and attention. At the same time, even in the early years of the war, the institutionalization of grief was firmly established in the postdeath practices, including public rituals and their representations in the mass media. To give a fuller picture of the cultural practices associated with military death during the Asia-Pacific War period, I juxtapose Umekichi's journey with similar episodes from later years of the war compiled from various media sources and material produced by Yasukuni Shrine. In particular, I consult an official itinerary for a family visit to a Yasukuni enshrinement in April 1940: a detailed document that informed bereaved families of the schedule of events that would take place in association with the *shōkon* ritual for their loved one. Due to the lack of time and resources, the death rituals of many who died in the later years of the war were more truncated than those of Umekichi. But as I demonstrate later, death-related practices on the home front continued to be a vital part of the institutionalization of grief.

A striking feature of the war's later years, especially after the start of the all-out war against China in July 1937, is the use of mass media and public spectacle to create an impression that, regardless of the tremendous number of lives lost, every Japanese military death received personalized acknowledgment. Thus, the impression was that the state and the military accounted for and tended to each and every one of the hundreds of thousands of Japanese who lost their lives each year. I examine the use of the news media and photographs to record, disseminate, and publicize the thoroughness of the treatment accorded to the bodies (the return of the ashes

from the front) and the spirits (Yasukuni enshrinement) of the war dead. Family attendance at the *shōkon* rituals, which memorialized the spirit of the dead at Yasukuni Shrine, received particular media attention. In reality, only a fraction of the bereaved family members were able to attend these *shōkon* rituals during the Asia-Pacific War years. But technology and media allowed all of these families throughout the Japanese empire to experience the rituals vicariously. The mass media also created an impression that participation in the ritual was imminent for all who had experienced a war death in their family. Similarly, making a spectacle of returning the ashes of the dead from the battlefield was meant to demonstrate the care and consideration the state and the military accorded each military death. These presentations, along with photographic reproductions in the mass media, also reinforced the message that war death was the highest honor a Japanese male could achieve; that death at war was acknowledged and appreciated by the state and should be accepted by the family with pride, not sorrow.

THE "HONORABLE DEATH" OF ARMY PRIVATE
KUROKAWA UMEKICHI

Kurokawa Umekichi enlisted in the Imperial Japanese Army in late 1933, the early stages of the war. Japan's view of the military conflict in northern China at the time was overwhelmingly positive, as its military had achieved a series of victories, and the death toll had not climbed to the unfathomable magnitude that it did in the later years. The mass media constantly conveyed, through newspaper articles, photographs, and newsreels, success stories of Japanese troops helping the development of Japan's puppet-state, Manchukuo.⁵ Celebration of war expanded into and invigorated popular culture. Umekichi's experience was typical for a man who enlisted during the early years of the war. He received a grand, celebratory send-off with banners decorating the front door of his family's home, an official speech by the head of the neighborhood association, and a parade beyond the local train station and as far as the gate to his regiment. And after his death, too, the military treated his body and remains with great care.

Immediately after enlistment, Umekichi was stationed in Dunhua, China. After six months of training, he was assigned to guard the Kyōhaku Academy, a local school for young Japanese immigrants to Manchukuo. On June 7, 1934, six days after the completion of his training, Umekichi, along with fourteen other men from his unit, took off on a multiday supply

transport mission. Two days into the trip, local bandits ambushed the group, and Umekichi and four other soldiers were killed. The surviving unit members cremated the bodies on site the same day. The five men's ashes were flown back to Dunhua on June 18 and, after a brief tribute, temporarily entrusted to the Dunhua branch of Higashi Honganji Temple. On June 28 a portion of their ashes was buried at Goryō-gaoka, a cemetery inside the Kyōhaku Academy. Another portion was interred in a local war memorial. A wake was held on July 10, exactly one month after their death. The following day, Umekichi's unit held a dignified memorial at the temple for the five men. The remaining ashes were divided into two portions: One was buried at the temple, and the other was sent to the home of each deceased soldier in a box of unvarnished wood wrapped in white cloth. By this point, Umekichi's and his comrades' ashes had already received multiple memorial services. The box with Umekichi's ashes left the Dunhua temple on July 12, 1934, and traveled to the port city of Dalian via Hsinking (capital of Manchukuo) and Mukden (present-day Shenyang). A sergeant from Umekichi's unit was charged with supervising transportation. The trajectory of this trip is well recorded. The sergeant carefully noted the details of the journey, including not only the route but, more notably, the kinds of people who welcomed the remains at various points during the trip.⁶

The homeward journey of dead soldiers' ashes was institutionalized into a spectacle during the Asia-Pacific War. Unvarnished wood boxes wrapped in white cloth were a familiar sight throughout Japan. These boxes were, in fact, meant to be visible to the public; they were typically transported from the front by returning troops, who paraded back to their local posts just as they had done when they left for the front. But the parade was often significantly smaller since many men who had marched off were now replaced by wooden boxes wrapped in white cloth and hung around the necks of the surviving soldiers.⁷ The boxes were called *kotsubako*, or ash box, and were traditionally used to carry the urn holding the deceased's ashes.

The journey of Umekichi's *kotsubako* created spectacles along its route even before leaving Manchuria. According to the transportation log, fifty-three names were recorded in association with his wake and send-off in Hsinking, the capital of Manchukuo on July 13. On July 14, Umekichi's *kotsubako* arrived in Mukden, where another sizable memorial service was held. Personal names were not recorded for this event, but the log notes that dozens of people were present. On July 15 the ashes traveled by train to Dalian. Representatives of local women's groups and other associations welcomed the arrival of the ashes and paid tribute at stations along the way. Umekichi

and his comrades received another memorial service at Dalian, with “hundreds of schoolchildren and citizens” in attendance.⁸ According to the log, many made offerings of flowers, sweets, and lanterns at the services. The log documents the extent to which the military mobilized Japanese residents in Manchuria to participate in the war effort.

On July 16 the box embarked by boat at Dalian and were shipped from there to Kobe, Japan. En route to his hometown, Umekichi's *kotsubako* received similar tributes. Among the objects preserved by his family are numerous business cards that traveled home with him. The cards were left by people who greeted his ashes at various stops in Japan. The majority of the cards belonged to members of various veteran's associations, as well as the Patriotic Women's Group (Aikoku Fujinkai) and the Women's Group for National Defense (Kokubō Fujinkai), two leading women's organizations that mobilized housewives for homefront support activities.⁹ The cards are grouped by city and prefecture, and we find that Umekichi's ashes stopped briefly in at least ten locations between Kobe and his hometown. Large numbers of people gathered at each stop to pay tribute to Umekichi's *kotsubako* and to present offerings of flowers and sweets. The objects left behind thus attest to a series of elaborate commemorations at multiple locations that had no prior association with the deceased. But most of the attendees did not participate in these events voluntarily. As we know, Umekichi was an army private from a small town in Kanagawa. But his ashes received a hero's welcome at all of these places because the crowds in attendance were organized by the women's groups, veterans associations, and elementary schools. Most of those gathered had been forced to attend as members of these organized groups. The military also sent detailed schedules and instructions in advance, with the expectation that crowds would be mobilized.¹⁰ The result was a well-orchestrated and an intensely experienced display of appreciation for Umekichi's sacrifice and achievement.

Umekichi was the first war dead from his small hometown. The town's annual summer festival was canceled in deference to the events marking the return of Umekichi's *kotsubako* and his funeral. The mayor accompanied Umekichi's parents to receive the *kotsubako* at Kamakura Station on July 20. Two days later, his hometown hosted an elaborate Buddhist-style funeral at the Kanazawa elementary school. Newspapers reported that the procession that transported Umekichi's ashes from the local temple to the school stretched for more than one kilometer. Neighbors recalled that the funeral lasted at least three days. Surviving documents suggest the Kurokawa residence received guests for more than a week. Local newspapers

report several thousand people in attendance at the funeral. Notable figures sent funeral offerings, including the emperor and empress, the army minister, the chief of staff, and other military leaders.

YASUKUNI SHRINE DURING THE ASIA-PACIFIC WAR

The town's funeral was not Umekichi's final memorial service. Several memorial events for a single military casualty were not uncommon during the early years of the war. Furthermore, memorial sites for the dead were not restricted to one location or a single religious tradition. In fact, in modern Japan the military dead typically received multiple memorial rituals.¹¹ Many towns and villages conducted their own public memorial service, usually in the Buddhist style. Some held Shinto-style services at the prefectural *gokoku jinja* (literally, "nation-protecting shrines"; as prefectural versions of Yasukuni Shrine, these were incorporated into a nationwide hierarchical network of shrines and memorials with Yasukuni at the top).¹² The family of the deceased often conducted a private funeral in accordance with their own religious beliefs, as they also did for other family members. Most families also followed the Buddhist tradition of memorializing the deceased individuals at their family altar (*butsudan*). Beginning in the late 1930s, many cities, towns, and villages constructed a *chūreitō*, a communal memorial built according to a single design guideline, on which the names of the dead were engraved and into which personal effects such as nail clippings and locks of hair were deposited.¹³

The most notable memorial service for imperial Japan's military dead was the *shōkon* ritual at Yasukuni Shrine. Umekichi was a part of the forty-ninth collective enshrinement ritual, conducted in April 1935, to commemorate 813 war deaths that occurred in Manchuria.¹⁴ A *shōkon* ritual was scheduled for April 26, followed by a special festival (*rinji taisai*) and a regular festival (*rei taisai*) on the thirtieth.¹⁵ In early April, Umekichi's family received a large brown envelope from the Army Ministry's Committee for Yasukuni Shrine Special Festival. Among other documents in the envelope was a smaller white envelope containing a formal notice of Umekichi's Yasukuni enshrinement: a rectangular card with gold edging and a gold cherry blossom stamped on the top center. At the time of Umekichi's enshrinement, up to three family members were eligible to participate in the *shōkon* ritual and associated events.¹⁶ Following instructions provided by the military, Umekichi's father, Tomizō, mother, Aki, and younger brother Kikuzō traveled to Tokyo using the discounted train tickets and a subsidy

of fifteen yen provided by the Patriotic Comfort Association (Aikoku Jippei Kai). The family stayed at the Military Hall (Gunjin Kaikan) in Tokyo, where they remained until the thirtieth. They participated in various events organized by the military and visited several sites in Tokyo. This elaborate trip accompanying a family member's war death provided more than an opportunity to participate in the memorial ritual. As I illustrate later, the trip encompassed a much larger agenda not only for the family that attended the ritual but also for all Japanese families who had already sent a member to war or were about to do so.

As soon as the details of the enshrinement ceremony were determined, the families of the war dead were sent an invitation to it. They also received a detailed itinerary of their visit. Umekichi's family received a sheet of paper with a five-day schedule with events inside the shrine grounds as well as visits to the Ken'anfu Hall,¹⁷ Shinjuku Imperial Garden, and Meiji Shrine. Families' visits grew in size and number of events in the following years as the number of death toll rose. In April 1940, for example, the itinerary was a seven-page booklet (see figure 4). The 1940 event involved a much larger number of families than that for Umekichi's memorial, and its itinerary is a well-choreographed schedule of 12,802 bereaved families divided into 128 groups of approximately one hundred families each.¹⁸ (Since two people per deceased soldier were invited in 1940, we can assume that approximately twenty-five thousand people were scheduled to attend this event.) According to this itinerary, registration for the families started on April 20 and continued until noon of April 23 at the Yasukuni Shrine grounds and the Imperial Guard Grounds, both atop Kudan Hill. Families registered with the shrine upon their arrival in Tokyo and continued to follow the schedule provided.

I will return to Umekichi's journey, as well as that of the family that received the April 1940 itinerary, to describe what a typical *shōkon* ritual would have been like. But first I refer to other sources that suggest what bereaved families experienced during their visit to the grounds of Yasukuni Shrine. The discussion of Yasukuni Shrine in chapter 2 ended with the Russo-Japanese War. Many additions and changes had been made to the shrine by the time of Umekichi's enshrinement. The Great Kantō earthquake of September 1, 1923, destroyed the shrine office and Cappelletti's museum. Furthermore, the shrine's declining prestige in the decades following the Russo-Japanese War led to institutional changes. In fact, documents suggest that Yasukuni Shrine diminished in popularity after all of the war dead from the Russo-Japanese War were enshrined. In an effort to continue

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FIGURE 4. Schedule for the war-bereaved families' visit to Yasukuni Shrine, April 1940 (author's collection).

attracting visitors to the semiannual festivals, the Yasukuni management drafted a proposal around 1922 to designate regular shrine festival days as annual holidays.¹⁹ According to the proposal, “despite the vast number of spirits enshrined with potential for increasing indefinitely in the future,” visitors to the shrine were limited to members of the military. The general public showed little interest in the shrine during those years. The proposal further lamented the lack of visits by the prime minister.²⁰

War brought nonmilitary visitors back to the shrine. Efforts to transform festival days into national holidays failed, but the increasing number of war deaths in Manchuria redirected popular attention to Yasukuni Shrine. New structures on the shrine grounds also appealed to the visitors. In October 1931 the heavily damaged Yūshūkan building was replaced by a new building designed by the prominent architect Itō Chūta.²¹ He also drew up plans for two other additions: a stone *torii* at the south entrance of the

outer garden (1933) and the shrine gate for the inner garden (1934), a commanding presence with two heavy wooden doors, each embellished with enormous golden chrysanthemum seals. A memorial hall for the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Imperial Mandate for the Military was added in 1933. A new shrine office was completed in 1934. The increasing number of Japanese casualties in Manchuria also brought about a change to the shrine grounds. According to the *Asahi* newspaper, a small shrine was added to the Yasukuni grounds in November 1931 to accommodate the increasing length of time between death and enshrinement. Spirits of the war dead were to be placed here temporarily until their official enshrinement during the semiannual festivals.²²

As in previous wars, the new Yūshūkan Museum dynamically reported and celebrated Japanese military achievements. The newly built museum building did not resemble Cappelletti's fortresslike brick structure. Consonant with the rapidly intensifying nationalist milieu, it featured a modern rendition of a Japanese castle, echoing the theme of a military museum. The museum's first floor prominently featured the years of the Meiji Restoration and celebrated the imperial nation, which was indebted to the sacrifices of those enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine. Periods of Japanese history prior to the Meiji era were relegated to the second floor. Of the ten rooms on the first floor, the first five (rooms 11 to 15) were dedicated to previous wars of the modern period, from the Meiji Restoration to World War I. Displays in the remaining five rooms were dedicated to the ongoing "incident" and were updated continuously. Room 16, dedicated to the Manchurian Incident, displayed articles left behind by the fallen Japanese troops, commemorative items from events at home in support of the war, and weapons and uniforms taken from China as spoils of war. Room 17 contained weapons from Taiwan and the southern islands. Room 18 was dedicated to contemporary naval weaponry, room 19 to weapons used on land, and room 20 to aerial weapons. The main feature of the museum was the two-story central atrium, where large-scale military hardware, including tanks and airplanes, were exhibited and around which the smaller exhibit rooms were located.²³ When the museum reopened in 1931, most of the items on display showcased Japan's military technology and achievements—a trend consistent with the museum's earlier objective of using objects to educate visitors about recent military achievements. But with the intensification of the Asia-Pacific War, a new trend at the museum took hold, namely, an emphasis on personal items and mementos of the war dead, which is evident at the museum today.²⁴

Additional war-themed displays outside Yūshūkan were available in 1935, when the Kurokawa family was visiting Tokyo. Beginning in 1932, Yūshūkan held two-week-long special exhibits in an annex building on a regular basis. These exhibits were free of charge and showcased items related to the “China Incident,” including spoils of war, items left behind by the fallen soldiers, and commemorative gifts for exemplary members of the home front. Items on display were updated regularly in order to “provide an accurate description of the Incident and to show the activities of our soldiers.”²⁵ Special exhibitions were also held in the annex on Army Day (March 10), Navy Day (May 27), and the anniversary of the Japanese military (November 28). For example, nearly thirty thousand people visited the annex on the morning of April 25, 1932, the day of the forty-seventh *shōkon* ceremony, which enshrined the victims of the Manchurian Incident.²⁶

At the time of the Kurokawa family’s visit, another exhibit space, dedicated to Japan’s ongoing battles, was—in the tradition of the panorama building from the Russo-Japanese War years—designed to captivate the audience with technological sophistication: the National Defense Hall (Kokubōkan), which opened in 1934.²⁷ The objective of this new addition was to enable visitors to gain an understanding of the “true meaning of national defense (*kokubō no hongī*)” through various representations of the latest military technology.²⁸ Evidence indicates, however, that the Kokubōkan was a simulated military environment that allowed visitors to vicariously observe and participate in warfare.

Kokubōkan no longer exists. The building was renamed Yasukuni Hall (Yasukuni Kaikan) during the Allied occupation and currently houses a visitor’s lounge on the first floor and a library on the second. Literature associated with Yasukuni Shrine mentions the facility only in passing.²⁹ Yet its wartime exhibits are documented along with numerous (grainy) photographs in a booklet published by the Yūshūkan Museum in 1934.³⁰ According to the booklet, exhibits were dedicated to the ongoing war and, with the exception of one room dedicated to the home front, each room featured new military technology such as chemical weapons, laser telephones (*kōsen denwa*), and machine guns. Most of the exhibits were experiential in nature. The cockpit of an actual heavy bomber was displayed in the exhibit titled “Bombing from an Airplane (*Kijō yori suru bakugeki*).” The visitor entered the exhibit and was allowed to sit at the controls in the cockpit for a simulated flight at an altitude of one thousand meters and speed of 180 kilometers per hour. The illusion was accomplished by means of a device positioned several feet below the floor. A large piece of cloth painted with a

landscape moved in a loop to give the “pilot” a sense of altitude and speed. A push of a button in the cockpit produced a flash of light on the landscape, simulating the detonation of a bomb. The cockpit was also equipped with a machine gun, which the visitor could swivel to simulate its operation. In the Gas Experience Room (*Gasu taikenshitsu*), the visitor donned a gas mask and walked into a room filled with tear gas. In the Indoor Shooting and Contemporary Warfare Diorama Room the visitor could “shoot freely at targets such as human figures, tanks, and planes in flight and acquire shooting skills as a kind of hobby.”³¹ Some of the activities, including the gas room and the operation of remote-control model tanks, required the supervision of museum personnel.³² Whenever it was available, the latest technology was incorporated to enhance the visitor’s experience. For the fall festival of 1939, for example, several exhibits incorporated sound effects using the Filmon endless sound belt, a technological innovation that allowed the continuous playing of prerecorded sound by utilizing a looped audiotape approximately thirteen meters long.³³ While the panorama buildings promoted wars of imperialism by allowing viewers to vicariously observe realistic representations of battlefields, these installations presented an overwhelmingly positive view of the ongoing warfare through the lure of technology. Such exhibits most likely targeted young boys to intensify their interest in the military.³⁴

It was not only inside these buildings that visitors could admire the accomplishments of the ongoing war. For every special festival during the Asia-Pacific War, additional war-related exhibits were mounted on the shrine grounds. The spatial configuration of the shrine, however, was different from that for festivals of the previous wars. At this point, the intended approach was linear—as it is today. The space was fully configured as a shrine, unlike its park-like atmosphere in earlier years, suggesting that the religious and commemorative aspects of the space had been strengthened. A trip down the main approach to the worship hall and back could be considered a pilgrimage. But during these festivals the trip was nothing like a typical pilgrimage to a religious institution. Large battlefield dioramas with three-dimensional, life-sized figures of Japanese troops lined the main approach of the outer shrine (see figure 5). The exhibits were newly created for each festival. They often represented the latest feats of the Japanese military, functioning as a source of news about the war and propagating militarism. For example, a diorama approximately ninety meters long was created for the festival of April 1942, portraying a scene of Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941, using material donated by the Imperial Navy.³⁵

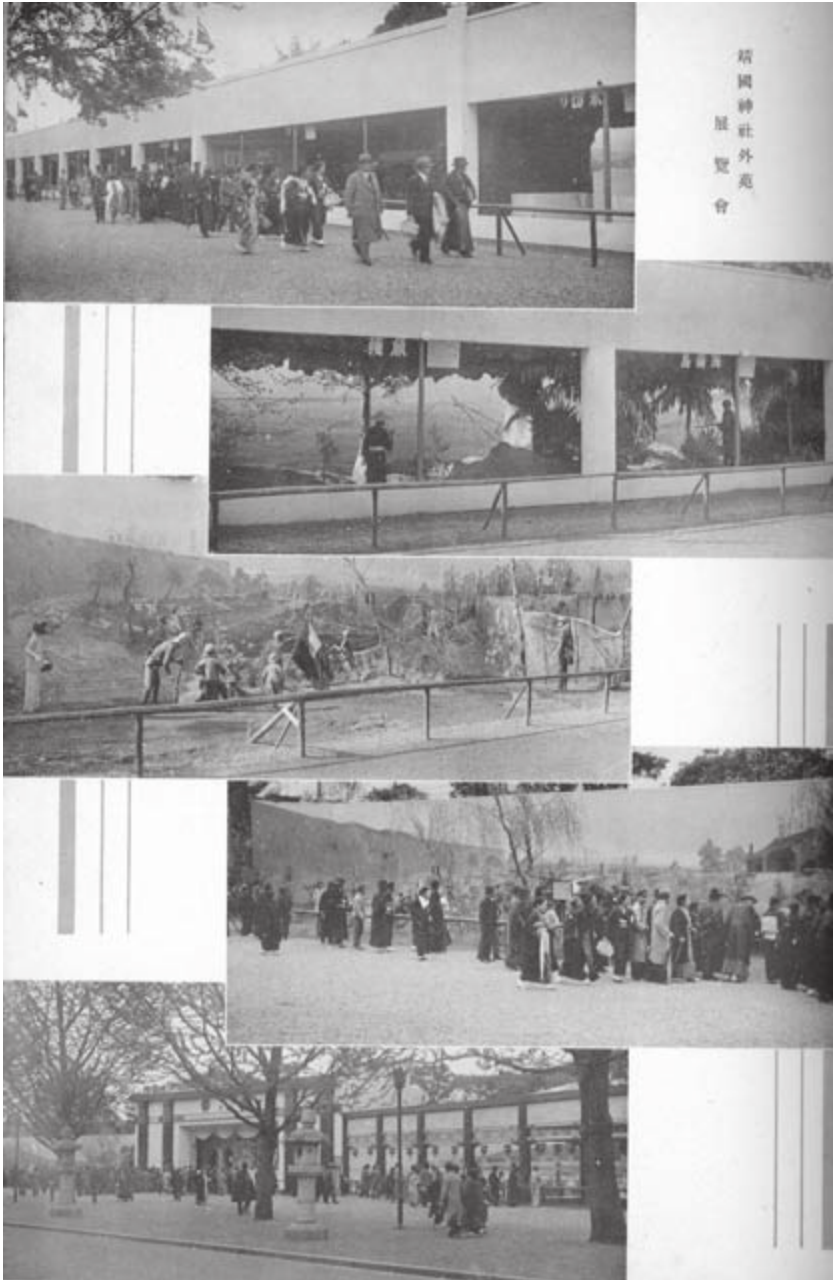


FIGURE 5. Families viewing exhibits in the outer garden of Yasukuni Shrine (*Yasukuni Jinja rinji taisai shashinchō*, April 1940).

With the monumental scale and technological splendor of the exhibits, the shrine grounds increasingly took on an atmosphere of an elaborate festival celebrating Japan's militarism. Thus, for local visitors the Yasukuni festivals were an updated and militarized rendering of the Meiji festivals with circuses and horse races, at least until attacks on the Japanese homeland became a real possibility.³⁶ For the bereaved families, however, the war-themed exhibits may have had an additional function. Life-sized representations promoted a sense of the enormity of both the Japanese cause and the military success; at the same time, the displays helped families of the war dead to appreciate the national significance of their loss.

THE *SHŌKON* RITUAL

The main event for bereaved families was the *shōkon* ritual. For the Kurokawa family, it took place on their second night in Tokyo. Approximately twenty-four hundred bereaved family members gathered from around the country. For the ritual, which commenced at eight, they were instructed to be sitting at designated places on the shrine grounds by seven in the evening. In attendance were members and representatives of the military units associated with the war dead being enshrined, as well as representatives from all military divisions throughout Japan and officer training schools in Tokyo. Head priest Kamo Momoki officiated at the ceremony in the presence of ten priests. The ritual concluded when a wooden box, into which the spirits were believed to have gathered, was purified and transported on a palanquin into the main shrine.³⁷

Starting in 1869, *shōkon* rituals were conducted as needed just before the regular spring and fall festivals. The ritual itself traditionally took place at two o'clock in the morning but was moved up to the evening beginning with the annual festival of May 1911. Even during the extended peacetime in the 1920s, several enshrinements were conducted for war dead from World War I and the Siberian Intervention (1918–1922). After the start of the armed conflict in China, *shōkon* practice recommenced in earnest at the forty-sixth ceremony, which preceded the spring festival in 1932. The rituals took place annually until 1937 and twice a year thereafter. When the all-out war began in China that year, the death toll quickly increased. In the fall of 1938 the number of those enshrined was more than ten thousand, and this number increased throughout the rest of the war. As the number of war dead to be enshrined grew, the number of invitations extended to family members was reduced to two per family.

I now turn to the April 23, 1940, *shōkon* ritual to give a more detailed picture based on the itinerary, the official photo album, and newspaper articles. Families were expected to spend the entire day of the ritual on the shrine grounds. According to the itinerary, the morning and early afternoon were dedicated to viewing the “incident-related exhibition” in the outer garden. Families were instructed to gather at designated locations in and around the shrine as early as three in the afternoon. From there, officials directed them to their assigned seating area. Photographs of the event show that their seating area was not limited to the shrine grounds but extended along residential streets immediately outside the shrine. The families were dressed in formal attire and were seated huddled together in rows on thin mats laid directly on the ground (see figure 6). Military personnel sat in front of the seated families. All in attendance were to be seated by 6:30 p.m., and they were expected to remain in their places until 10 p.m. In lieu of dinner, they were given a piece of bread to eat while waiting.

Family members began seating themselves around four in the afternoon, awaiting the start of the ritual.³⁸ According to the *Yomiuri* newspaper’s report the following morning, approximately twenty-five thousand people attended, which suggests that the families of almost all of those enshrined were present.³⁹ Bonfires were lit on the *shōkon* grounds around 7 p.m. Thirty minutes later, government and military personnel entered and took their places on folding chairs under tents. Following the performance of the song “Umi yukaba” by the Imperial Navy band, the head priest stood in front of



FIGURE 6. Families during the *shōkon* ritual (Yasukuni Jinja rinji taisai shashinchō, April 1940).



FIGURE 7. *Shōkon* ritual (*Yasukuni Jinja rinji taisai shashinchō*, April 1940).

the small shrine at the innermost area of the *shōkon* grounds and conducted rituals to call in the spirits of the military dead so that they could be appeased and cleansed (see figure 7). During this ritual, 12,799 spirits were called into the shrine to be commemorated as god. It was understood that all of the spirits to be enshrined that evening were gathered in a small chest of unvarnished wood (*karabitsu*) that was placed in the small shrine.⁴⁰ Accompanied by *koto* music and the navy band, the head priest made offerings and paid tribute in the direction of the Imperial Palace. Representatives from the government and the military also presented offerings. The head priest then stepped out of the *shōkon* grounds and carried the offerings to the main shrine. When he returned, all of the music stopped as he placed the chest containing the spirits in a cedar palanquin wrapped in white silk.⁴¹ The music then resumed, and a procession of priests carried the palanquin to the main shrine. Instead of going directly into the main shrine, the procession traveled out of the shrine grounds through the north gate, meandered through the adjacent streets, alongside which families sat, and finally reentered the main entrance at the east end, where they proceed along the main approach to the shrine building. Family members bade farewell to their fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands as the palanquin procession passed by. An *Asahi* newspaper article describes sobs whirling like the wind above

the family members, the sound of hands clapping, and white handkerchiefs waving farewell in the dark.⁴² Coins thrown by the families—monetary offerings for the Yasukuni god—showered the palanquin.⁴³ After the spirits were placed in the main shrine, all of the lights in the shrine grounds were lit for the first time. The ritual ended with a performance by the military band at exactly ten o'clock.

BEREAVED FAMILIES IN TOKYO

As mentioned earlier, the Kurokawa family and other families invited to the *shōkon* ritual received a package that included tickets to various facilities in Tokyo. Among the Yasukuni-related documents preserved by Kikuzō is an envelope that had contained such tickets. The inventory lists the following: free passes for Tokyo city trams; certificates for visits to the Ken'anfu Hall and Shinjuku Imperial Garden; entrance tickets for the Imperial Museum, Yūshūkan Museum, National Defense Hall, and the Ueno Zoo; tickets to the entertainment in the Yasukuni outer gardens; and entrance tickets to various entertainment facilities in Tokyo. Remaining in the envelope are tickets to some of the facilities listed, as well as the Hanayashiki amusement park in Asakusa.⁴⁴

Various activities were also planned for the family who traveled to Tokyo in April 1940 (the original owner of the itinerary in my possession). In the morning after the *shōkon* ritual, all of the families attended speeches by the army and navy ministers. Thereafter, schedules were arranged according to the group the family was assigned to: well-choreographed planning had as many as five different events for the families occurring simultaneously (see figure 8). The itinerary has handwritten check marks above certain activities—presumably made by the original owner of the itinerary. I follow this person's activities to present a typical family's Tokyo experience.

In the late morning of April 24, after the speeches, the family reported to the Meiji Jingū swimming pool, where they were driven to the Shinjuku Imperial Garden. They presumably used their certificate to enter the beautifully landscaped gardens. On April 25 was the emperor's visit. The family reported to a designated location by 7:30 a.m. and sat in their assigned area as they had for the *shōkon* ritual. The emperor made his brief visit at 10 a.m. The front page of the evening edition of *Asahi* newspaper that day featured a photograph of the emperor in his military uniform, decorated with medals, saber in his left hand, and hat in his right. The grand chamberlain, the Minister of the Imperial Household, and the emperor's chief aide-de-camp,

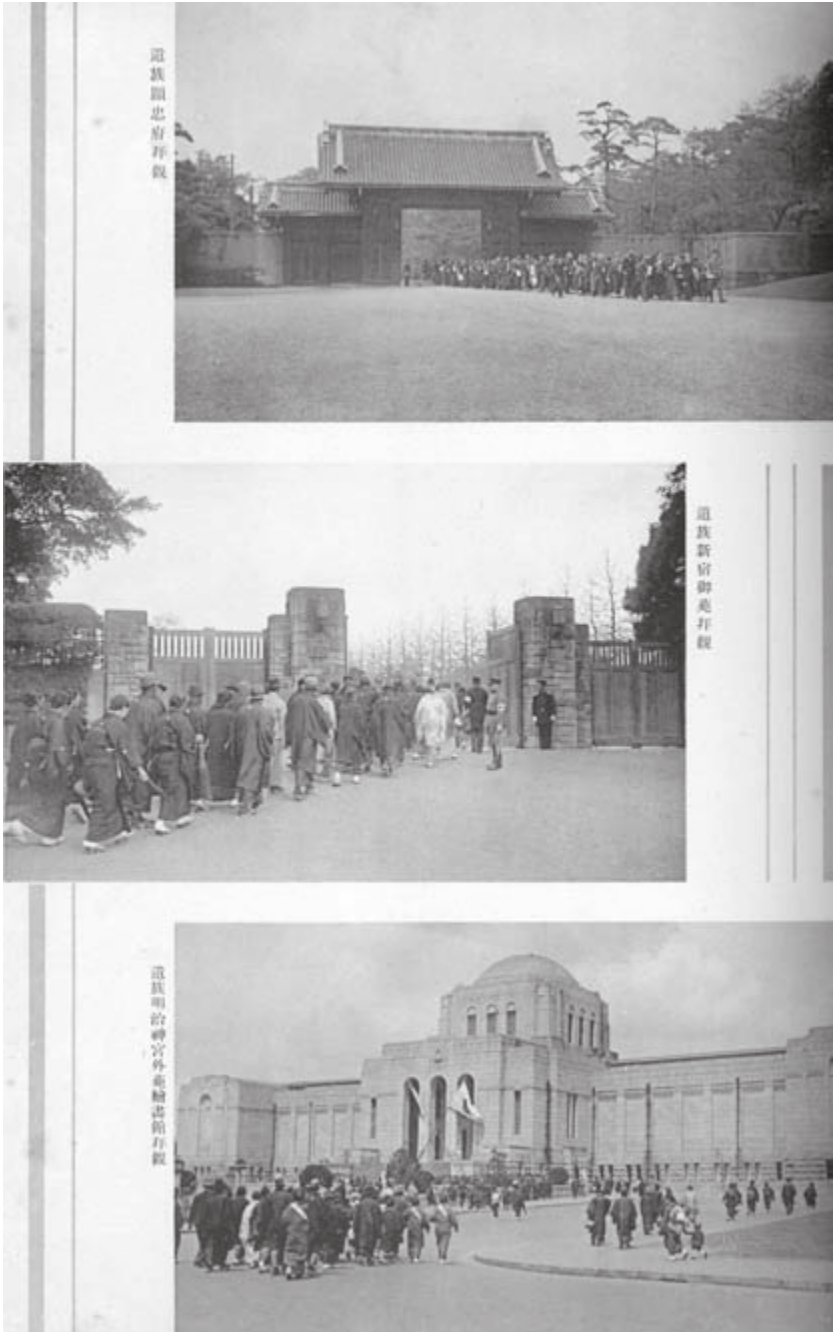


FIGURE 8. Families touring Tokyo sites (Yasukuni Jinja rinji taisai shashinchō, April 1940).

among others, escorted him. Accompanied by the *kimigayo* performance by the military band, the emperor proceeded into the main shrine at 10:10, paid tribute to the *eirei* at 10:15, when a siren wailed to mark the precise moment of his tribute, and departed the shrine at 10:17.⁴⁵ No events were scheduled for the family following the emperor's visit that day.

On the morning of April 26, one of the family members visited the Ken'anfu.⁴⁶ On April 27, the family attended shows at the Japan Youth Hall. On the morning of April 28, the family entered the main shrine to pay their final tribute to the spirit of the deceased, who, by that point, had been transformed into god ("highly anticipated meeting [*ureshii taimen*]," according to the *Asahi* newspaper). The main shrine visit was packaged with the taking of commemorative photographs with their assigned groups (see figure 9). All 128 group photographs are included in a photo album that was sent later to the families.

The albums were produced for many of the special festivals, although their thickness varied from year to year.⁴⁷ The 1935 album, produced for the festival during which Umekichi was enshrined, is relatively slim, with forty-six leaves with photographs printed on one side. A list of the military dead enshrined follows the photographs. The April 1940 album is about 1.5 inches thick and has 113 leaves of photographs along with pages that list the names of those enshrined. The albums typically follow the families' journey, starting with their arrival at Tokyo Station.⁴⁸ They show families at registration desks, entering the Yūshūkan Museum, and viewing the displays in the outer garden. The *shōkon* ritual is covered in detail: a close-up of the shrine where the ritual was performed; photographs of military officials seated in folding chairs under tents; many more of the *izoku* crowded on mats. The photograph of the head priest performing the ritual was usually taken from behind. Most of the albums also include the palanquin processing in the darkness through the crowd of families. Albums for events at which the emperor appeared include photographs of him and the empress immediately following scenes from the *shōkon* ritual, forging a connection between the most sacred ritual and the imperial visit. The emperor, however, never visited during the ritual itself. The remaining pages cover the families' activities: men and women entering the main shrine, groups of families visiting other sites on their Tokyo itinerary. The album also includes snapshots of the entertainment at places on their itinerary, such as the Kabukiza theater and the Military Hall.

Details about the origin and production of these albums are unclear. Ethnologist Tanakamaru Katsuhiko, for example, discusses an April 1942



FIGURE 9. Group photograph of the families of war dead (*Yasukuni Jinja rinji taisai shashinchō*, April 1940).

photo album in a chapter of his posthumous book, which explores modern military death. He notes that “there is no preface or commentary, and it is not possible to know the objective or the particulars of its production.”⁴⁹ It is clear, however, that the albums were distributed to the bereaved families.⁵⁰ The idea of distributing one album per deceased individual is astounding, particularly in the later years, when more than twenty thousand dead were being enshrined at each event. But the implications of the albums spread far beyond the immediate family. Families, on receiving the albums when back home, most likely circulated them in the community and in neighborhood or women’s associations, as was the practice with mass-market magazines and other publications at the time, along with stories of their trip.

These photo albums and their communal viewing became especially meaningful in the final years of the war, for not everyone who had lost a family member was awarded a trip to Tokyo. To be more precise, the vast majority were not. Enshrinement at Yasukuni Shrine was a multistep process that included the compilation of detailed paperwork as well as the formal blessings of the emperor. Consequently, the enshrinement rate of the Asia-Pacific War deaths at the end of the war was a little more than 10 percent. That is, of the 2,319,994 deaths from that war currently enshrined at Yasukuni, the rituals were completed for only 251,135 as of August 1945.⁵¹ Between death and enshrinement was a long delay, which increased as the number of war dead rose. Umekichi’s spirit was enshrined in the first ritual that followed his death. But the enshrinement of the so-called Greater East Asia War (1941–1945) dead began in earnest only in April 1944.⁵² Families typically had to wait several years before they were invited to Tokyo to participate in the enshrinement of their loved one. The photo album, then, provided families-in-waiting a vicarious experience of the *shōkon* ritual and associated events until they could attend themselves.

The viewing experience would have been an opportunity to demonstrate patriotism and to witness and express the appropriate emotional response to a war death. It provided an opportunity for the albums’ owners to show the photographs and tell their stories with pride; those gathered around would listen and respond with respect for the man who had just fulfilled the most honorable duty to the nation. It was also an opportunity to create a community of members who not only censored their own comments but also kept a close watch on the words and behaviors of others. This form of mutual surveillance further encourages self-censorship. Thus the group performs, willingly or in response to the gaze of others, an institutionalized response to grief demonstrated through pride, gratitude, and respect rather

than sorrow. This kind of communal practice, whether in the context of informal gatherings of neighbors or meetings of established organizations such as women's associations, played a key role in propagating fanatic forms of nationalism and militarism.

THE FATE OF THE DEAD BODIES

Umekichi died at a time when each military death was given individual attention. The number of war dead was still small enough for sufficient time and resources to be available for the performance of Umekichi's cremation and memorial rituals close to the battlefield. This came to an end as battles intensified in the Pacific theater and hundreds and thousands of Japanese troops died in short periods of time. Entire units were decimated; planeloads of troops crashed; ships sank along with their entire crews. At this rate, the war casualties could no longer be attended to individually. Moreover, the dead bodies were far from Japan.

Through its treatment of the bodies and cremated ashes, the Japanese military used the distance between the site of death and the home of the deceased to promote patriotism, institutionalize grief, and aestheticize war death and sacrifice. As we saw with Umekichi's journey, during the early years of the war the return of the ashes from the battlefield served as an occasion for a new kind of spectacle that culminated in public funerals. In the later years of the Asia-Pacific War, as it became increasingly impossible to transport the material remains (ashes) of the war dead, the Yasukuni rituals, with their focus on spirits, were further highlighted. When the death rate drastically increased, making timely enshrinement at Yasukuni Shrine impossible in the final years of the war, the mass media created an image of imminent enshrinement.

All along the Japanese military was aware of the problem of managing dead bodies on faraway battlefields. The military devised regulations and continually revised them as it attempted to streamline its treatment of the fallen. But as I explain later, this process of streamlining also proved effective for tightening the military's control over its living and dead troops—and by extension over their family members. The careful treatment of Umekichi and other war dead was in part driven by the military's need to demonstrate its authority over the people.

According to historian Harada Keiichi, who conducted an extensive study of military life and death in modern Japan, from the outset the regulations frequently changed.⁵³ Initially, before major international armed conflicts,

the military focused on exercising control over the method of and the location for burying its dead. In 1869 the newly established Military Ministry (Hyōbu-shō) ordered that, when a soldier died from illness, the body would be buried in a temple near the location of death and a sum of ten *ryō* provided to the family.⁵⁴ At the time, soldiers were given a Shinto-style ritual, and their bodies buried without cremation. Two years later discussions began on the selection of sites dedicated to military burial, and several military cemeteries were established in the following years. In December 1873, shortly after the start of conscription, the Army Ministry, which, together with the Navy Ministry, replaced the Military Ministry in 1872, announced that, unless a family member requested otherwise within two days of death, all noncommissioned officers (*kashikan*) and privates (*heisotsu*) who died while on active duty, both at war and in peacetime, would be buried in their local army cemetery.⁵⁵ In 1886 the army added a provision allowing the family to request a reburial within six months of death.

The likelihood of families retrieving dead bodies or ashes diminished considerably during wartime. Burial regulations became more specific during the Sino-Japanese War, when both the army and the navy established regulations for wartime burial.⁵⁶ For example, the army stipulated that the corpse was to be buried in an “army burial ground, shared cemetery, or other selected site. Depending on the circumstances, cremation and collective burial are permitted.”⁵⁷ “Other selected site” most likely referred to battlefields. In August 1897 the army announced that both army and navy personnel were to be buried in military cemeteries. According to this new ordinance, families were required to wait ten or more years after the soldier’s death before requesting a reburial. In other words, if a conscripted soldier were to die on active duty, his family was denied its customary death-related rituals for at least a decade.⁵⁸ Death-related rituals, previously held locally and privately by the family, were thus taken over by the military, which maintained full custody of the men even after death. This model of military control remained in force throughout the Asia-Pacific War years, with modifications that enabled the families to believe that the military was giving the utmost care to their lost loved ones.

With the start of international warfare, the military began to regulate management of the dead in order to ensure that ashes and important mementos be returned from overseas battlefields. During the Russo-Japanese War, the army established its Regulations for Battlefield Cleaning and Burial of the Dead (Army Notice 100, May 30, 1904).⁵⁹ According to this notice, a “battlefield cleaning troop” (*senjō sōji-tai*) was to be organized in each unit

immediately following a battle. Their job was to search for the dead and the wounded, as well as their belongings.⁶⁰ Cremation methods differed according to the rank of the deceased. When individual cremation of all of the dead was not feasible due to battlefield circumstances, noncommissioned officers and privates could be collectively cremated after locks of hair were cut off each body to be sent back home. Even in these cases, all higher-ranking personnel were to be cremated individually. The military also conducted *shōkon* ceremonies on site. For example, in his study of five hundred letters sent home during the Russo-Japanese War, Ōe Shinobu notes that an auxiliary soldier, Matsuzaki Yonosuke, who, upon arrival in Lüshun after the ceasefire, wrote home about an elaborate ceremony for the fallen that involved fifteen Buddhist priests from the head temple.⁶¹ Battlefield *shōkon* ceremonies at the time consisted of a formal Shinto ritual followed by an informal Buddhist one. In fact, General Nogi himself conducted the formal Shinto-style portion of this ceremony, which took place on January 14, 1905, two weeks after Russia's surrender. These rituals on the front were opportunities for the surviving men to witness the treatment they would receive if they were to die: Their spirits would be memorialized at Yasukuni Shrine, whereas their bodies would be cremated by the hands of their unit members.

According to the original plan, battlefield burial was considered a temporary measure, and all of the remains of the fallen were to be transported back home, where they would be buried in their local military cemeteries. Notices requesting reburial as well as permission for reburial remain, but no record exists on the actual reburial procedure. Due to the unprecedented number of combat deaths during the war against Russia, official reburial of the dead does not seem to have been realistic.⁶² The majority of the ashes remained buried close to the battlefields. This practice from Japan's earlier wars would change completely during the Asia-Pacific War, when the ashes of the fallen were transported back home, allowing the family to bury the dead in their family grave. This new system of homecoming did not just benefit the family. It also empowered the military with symbolic control of its men even after their death and robbed the family members of the opportunity to perform the full death rituals, which included the viewing of the dead body before cremation for a final farewell. More important, the spectacle created by the homecoming of the ashes would emphasize the significance of dying for Japan at war. While Yasukuni Shrine is singled out today for taking over the death rituals of the fallen and consequently robbing the family members of opportunities for proper memorial services, these

practices of the Japanese military demonstrate that Yasukuni rituals constituted only one part of the postdeath procedures. Rituals and spectacles associated with the return of the ashes, along with their representation in the popular media, played a key role in the institutionalization of grief, which functioned to promote positive attitudes about dying for one's country. Yasukuni Shrine played a central role in death rituals in the last years of the Asia-Pacific War in part, because the excessive number of war casualties and the resulting difficulties in the management of corpses highlighted the convenience made possible by the spiritual transaction at the shrine.

Umekichi's ashes returned in a box of unvarnished wood wrapped in white cloth. Numerous other families received similar boxes in the years during and immediately following the Asia-Pacific War. It was understood that these boxes contained the actual ashes of their loved ones, who were cremated on the battlefield where they died. In many cases, they did, as was the case with Umekichi. But as the war intensified, so did the difficulty of battlefield cremation. Ashes came to be replaced by locks of hair, teeth, and other portable, nonperishable body parts, sometimes stored in safety by its owner before his death or otherwise retrieved from the corpse by his comrades.⁶³ For deaths that occurred while troops were far from their base, the surviving members had to hold on to the ashes and other mementos until they arrived at a site from which these items could be sent to Japan. But it was not uncommon for the men who carried their comrades' mementos to be killed as well. In the more disastrous battles of later years, starting with the Battle of Guadalcanal (August 1942–February 1943), retrieval of even the smallest body parts was no longer possible, as mutilated corpses quickly piled up on the battlefields. In fact, for the near-naked corpses in the tattered remains of their uniforms, the only identification possible was as Japanese troops.⁶⁴ In many instances, bodies were lost to the Pacific Ocean along with the ship or plane that had been carrying them. Nevertheless, the war dead typically returned to their family as a wooden box.

What, then, did these boxes typically contain? Ono Eiko, winner of a 2004 speech contest for Chiran (Kagoshima town known as a former *tokkō* base), remembers that a small stone was inside the box instead of her father's ashes.⁶⁵ In many cases, the box that family members of the deceased received contained a piece of paper, a rock from the battlefield, or a handful of sand in place of ashes. Recipients typically placed the box on their family altar and later in the family grave. Even during the war, it was well known that some, if not almost all, of the boxes did not contain the ashes or a piece of bone of the deceased. Although some families were infuriated by this, most

chose to treat the box as if it contained the actual remains of their loved ones. In the case of a Shizuoka family whose son had drowned while being transported to a southern island, a piece of paper was found inside the box that was returned in lieu of the son. The family added to the box the lock of hair and nail clippings that he had left with them prior to his departure and conducted a traditional Buddhist funeral as if the box contained the son's actual ashes.⁶⁶

The presence of a handful of sand or a rock from the battlefield was sometimes a result of sincere intentions. Bereaved family members of troops in the 29th Infantry Regiment who lost their lives on Guadalcanal Island received a note written by Commander Ōshima Mamoru along with the handful of sand in the boxes. The note explained the significance of the sand. I summarize it here to give a picture of the battlefield situation on the southern islands. First of all, the surviving troops found it difficult to cremate the dead bodies since smoke resulting from cremation would alert enemy planes of their location. Moreover, whatever small amounts of ashes they were able to obtain were lost when the soldiers who were carrying them were themselves killed. The surviving troops agreed that the spirits of the war dead descended to the beach on the island, gathered some sand, and conducted a *shōkon* ceremony. As was the case in the Russo-Japanese War instance that I noted earlier, the commanding officer conducted a Shintō ritual, followed by the Buddhist chaplain's recitation of the sutra. They then divided the sand by the number of fallen, placed a small amount in individual boxes, and sent the boxes to the family members.⁶⁷

Additional correspondence about the dead depended on the circumstances and the rank of the deceased and might help the family accept the death of the father, the son, the brother, or the husband. The military was unlikely to supply extra information and material unless the deceased was a high-ranking officer prior to his death. For most casualties, the delivery of a telegram or a postcard followed by a box wrapped in white cloth completed the military's obligation.⁶⁸ Many did not learn of the death or receive the box until after Japan's surrender. Unable to acknowledge the death of their loved one, family members often sought further details about the death. Some fortunate families were able to hear about their sons' and husbands' final moments, mostly from their fellow soldiers, who often sought out the families of their fallen comrades to deliver the mementos. But most never received any concrete information about the death. Even today, close to seven decades after the war, many family members of Japanese war dead still travel to former battlefield sites in Southeast Asia looking for remains.⁶⁹

Many consider the encounter with whatever parts of the dead body may still remain the best opportunity available to them today.

Through Yasukuni enshrinement, the military tended to the spirits of the war dead. These spirits, thought to have separated from the body at death, were called into the shrine during the semiannual rituals that took place prior to enshrinement. The spirits remained at the shrine instead of returning home. But the spirits were not the military's only focus. The narrative of Umekichi's heroic homecoming illustrates the weight of the military's concern to enable proper treatment of the dead. But the practice of posthumous homecoming symbolized the state's rather than the family's ownership of the body. The structure of the nation-state, in which people became loyal subjects of the emperor, was maintained even after one's death. Just as the body mattered to the family, or perhaps *because* the body mattered to the family, it, too, mattered to the military, which regulated the disposition of dead bodies. By controlling the fate of both the body and the spirit of the war dead, the military demonstrated its authority over its men. It also exerted authority over the family of the war dead by controlling the ways in which the bodies were or were not returned to them in a manner reminiscent of the imperial troops' denial of Aizu burial (see chapter 1). For a society in which the living maintain a close relationship with the dead, the treatment of the latter strongly affected the relations among the former. Even the heroic return of Umekichi's remains can be considered, along with the enshrinement of his spirit at Yasukuni, as a display of the state's control of its military personnel.⁷⁰

REPORTS OF LOSS IN THE MASS MEDIA

Umekichi's death was reported in local newspapers as early as June 13, 1934. *Yokosuka bōeki shinpō*, for example, headlined the news of his death as "My Son's Death, Which I Have Offered to the Emperor: The Emotional Tears of Father, Tomizō" and reported that the father was "joyful at heart for the son, whose death [he is] proud of," while smiling through tears.⁷¹ *Tōkyō nichichi* newspaper reported that Tomizō said, "It is at least a consolation that my son has died for the nation."⁷² The local press continued to follow the story of Umekichi's war death. On July 22 and 23 newspapers reported on the town's elaborate funeral for Umekichi. On April 2, 1935, newspapers announced Umekichi's Yasukuni enshrinement. The elements in the local press's narrative are familiar: A young man loses his life at war, the family is proud of his contribution to the national cause, and his

death is acknowledged, appreciated, and commemorated both locally and nationally.

During the Asia-Pacific War, newspapers, along with other forms of mass media, contributed to the construction of the image of a home front that fully supported the war effort. As Louise Young details, the latest technology, along with the collaboration between the media and the military, enabled almost immediate reportage of battlefield news back home. War was profitable for the press, and thus the press heavily invested in covering it.⁷³ Readers enthusiastically followed Japan's military successes, actual ones in the early years and fabricated ones near the end of the war. However, many readers considered the fate of the men sent away from their own community to be even more important. Regional newspapers closely followed the fates of local men as they were sent off to the battlefield, particularly in the early years of the Asia-Pacific War. The "heroic" war dead and their subsequent memorial activities were always covered in detail. The purpose of media reports on local deaths was not simply to disseminate information. By following the journey of the local war dead, media reports also instructed the readers in the importance of publicly commemorating war death.

Newspaper articles also informed readers of and provided guidance on the protocol associated with commemorating war deaths. I present here an example from Niigata chronicled by historian Yano Keiichi.⁷⁴ In November 1931 *Niigata* newspaper began following the homecoming of the first local war dead: four men from Niigata City who had died in Manchuria. As the date of the public memorial approached, articles began directing the residents to fly the *hinomaru* flag with a black ribbon. The same paper also announced a detailed schedule of events, starting with the arrival of the ashes at Niigata Station, followed by military parades to the homes of the deceased and then to the municipal memorial. The publication of this information implied that the readers were expected to participate in these events. Newspapers also reported on the memorial service the following day with ample details and photographs of a crowd numbering more than twelve thousand. These papers followed up the next spring with reports on the Yasukuni enshrinement of the local dead. Thus, media coverage helped mobilize the public to participate in the memorial process both in person and vicariously.

Newspapers and mass-market magazines also focused their coverage on the bereaved families. The widows, parents, and younger siblings typically responded to interviews describing the deceased in terms appropriate for an *irei*, such as caring, loyal, and brave, while depicting their own emotions as grateful and proud. Such coverage was also instructive. The reports

indirectly coached readers not only on the behaviors proper for a bereaved family but also on the appropriate emotions they should experience. The media were thus a powerful tool in institutionalizing grief and propagating expectations regarding the behaviors and emotions suitable for grieving war death. Narratives of families conforming to the new conventions for war death bereavement prepared other families to respond in a like manner as the need arose. In the quoted comments, bereaved family members usually exhibited pride and gratitude along with sadness, as did Umekichi's father (quoted earlier). Such comments were often, but not always, a sincere expression of the grieving family's emotions.

There were also instances when the media, in the absence of publishable quotes, fabricated typical and fitting quotes.⁷⁵ In *Imōtotachi no kagaribi* (A Beacon by the Younger Sisters), a compilation of the memoirs of women who lost their older brothers during the Asia-Pacific War, one woman recalls the period immediately after her older brother's death. Her local newspaper reported the death with a photograph of the four siblings taken prior to the brother's departure. A statement attributed to her accompanied the photograph: "This is an honor. I will work as hard as my brother in homeland defense." According to the woman, however, she had not spoken to anyone for quite some time after her brother's death, and she did not even know how the newspaper obtained the photograph.⁷⁶ By reading reports of other families' reactions to their loss, people knew what was expected of them. Thus, families typically spoke in that manner. As Jonathan Abel points out, the goal of censorship in wartime Japan was to cultivate an internal censor in all imperial subjects so that censorship would no longer be required.⁷⁷ Activities in these systems of mutual surveillance nurtured self-censorship. By continuing to comment in an acceptable and expected manner, bereaved families displayed and propagated the proper response to grief. Once published, these comments remained on record and in collective memory.

In addition to reporting on the festivals, newspapers provided programming information on live radio coverage of the *shōkon* ritual, which began on April 25, 1932. The NHK broadcasting service transmitted *shōkon* ceremonies live not only in Japan and its colonies but also in Japanese-occupied Manchuria and Shanghai.⁷⁸ During festivals at which the emperor made his appearance, listeners had another opportunity to participate in a collective ritual throughout the Japanese empire. At the exact time the emperor was scheduled to pay tribute at Yasukuni (10:15 a.m.), the whole country came to a halt to observe a minute of silence.⁷⁹ Through this broadcast, all imperial

subjects had an opportunity to vicariously, yet collectively, experience the intimate ritual that was taking place in Tokyo. This shared experience—one that historian Hara Takeshi calls “rule by time (*jikan shihai*)”—created a virtual community centered around Yasukuni Shrine and the emperor and encompassing the entire Japanese empire.⁸⁰

CREATING *BIDAN* FOR EVERYONE

Ritual activities and festival events at Yasukuni Shrine varied little over the years. A case in point is the live radio coverage of the *shōkon* rituals by an NHK announcer. Although live radio gave the impression that the announcer was describing what he was watching, in reality, the announcer was just reading a script.⁸¹ That is, he timed the reading to synchronize with what was taking place on the shrine grounds. With the music and other sounds in the background, the generic prose could seem authentic to off-site listeners. Despite changes and updates to the installations in the Yasukuni-owned museums and the outer garden, these texts were always about the ongoing war. Outer-garden panoramas were about events on the battlefield; museum exhibits were about weapons and personal possessions of the deceased; and the rituals memorialized the war dead. Each event was a variation on a theme. Differences were so slight that a lengthy script could be written ahead of time even for the most important component of the event.

Producers of mass media were acutely aware of this problem. To maintain readers' interest in the semiannual events throughout the war years, newspapers featured personal stories collected from the bereaved festival attendees. On the first day of the April 1942 festival, for example, *Asahi* newspaper introduced three visitors to Yasukuni as representatives of “faithful devotion to the *eirei* (*eirei ni sasagu sekisei*)”: a father who fell ill during his trip from Fukuoka and died upon arrival in Tokyo (his wife vowed to pay tribute for both of them); a wealthy war widow who donated fifty yen for every festival in accordance with her deceased husband's wishes; a younger brother of a deceased soldier who collected money from his classmates to donate to the shrine.⁸² The personal stories offered much-needed variation to repetitious articles about enshrinement and at the same time continued to instruct readers on proper patriotic behavior on the home front.

A favorite of the *Asahi* newspaper was the annual “orphans' visit”⁸³ to Yasukuni Shrine, which started in August 1939 and was sponsored by the Soldiers' Relief Association (Gunjin Engo Kai).⁸⁴ That year, the *Asahi* followed the children from August 3, when the first child arrived in Tokyo, until

August 6, when they were finally able to “meet” their fathers in the inner shrine. Similar reportage continued every year with a focus on several children with backgrounds of interest. *Asahi* also featured children at other times. On January 31, 1932, for example, the paper introduced fifteen boys and girls aged eight to fifteen, who visited the shrine every morning at six o’clock. The article featured the children’s photograph and commended the youngsters for praying every day for good weather for the soldiers fighting in Manchuria, as well as for a Japanese victory.

The orphans’ visits to Yasukuni, like those of *shōkon* participants, were officially recorded in photo albums. According to the 1939 album, 1,301 sixth-graders representing every prefecture as well as Korea and Sakhalin gathered in Tokyo for three days in August. The highlight of the visit was on Sunday, August 6, when they received gifts from the empress at the Military Hall and visited Yasukuni Shrine, Yūshūkan, the National Defense Hall, the Navy Hall, Meiji Shrine and its treasure hall, the outer garden of Meiji Shrine, and the picture gallery (Kaiga-kan). Due to the large number of participants, worship at the Yasukuni Shrine took place in two groups. Each group lined up in the gravel courtyard between the inner shrine and the worship hall and received purification from a priest. One boy and one girl, representing the group, ascended into the inner shrine and made the *tamagushi* (sprig of a sacred tree) offering while the rest of the group prayed with their heads down. Forty-eight buses were mobilized for the tour of Tokyo sites to follow. In the gathering at the Military Hall that night, military officials made speeches, assuring the children that their fathers had become the god of Yasukuni, regardless of their social status or military rank at the time of their death.⁸⁵

Newspaper stories about mothers and wives of the deceased were also popular. For example, in September 1939 *Asahi* newspaper featured a meeting on Yasukuni grounds of a soldier and the mother of his deceased comrade. After his comrade’s death, the soldier regularly wrote to the mother from the front.⁸⁶ A mother interviewed at the fall 1941 event was quoted as feeling grateful and honored to be invited to the ceremony for the second time—a year before, for her eldest son, and this time for her third son.⁸⁷ Widows were also introduced in articles. These human-interest stories featuring dedicated family members were called “*bidan*” (beautiful stories, or praiseworthy anecdotes) and were a media favorite throughout the war.⁸⁸

As the death toll began increasing in the mid-1930s, Yasukuni Shrine became a staple for articles in mass-market magazines. For example, *Shufu no tomo* (Housewife’s Companion), the most popular women’s magazine

at the time, regularly featured articles on Yasukuni Shrine. Rare cases of female enshrinement at Yasukuni were always covered in detail. In May 1938, for example, the magazine published an article on three nurses who were enshrined in Yasukuni, detailing the heroic death of each.⁸⁹ A popular format in *Shufu no tomo* was group discussions (*taidan*) among women in the magazine's target demographic. For example, the May 1939 issue showcased a discussion among five young mothers whose husbands had died before the birth of their children. On the first two pages was a photograph of the five women with young children in their arms, against a background illustration easily identifiable as Yasukuni Shrine by the large *torii* and Ōmura's statue. A young widow responds to a sympathetic comment about the loss of her husband: "It cannot be helped as it is for the nation, for Japan. I am happy that my husband died for the emperor." Another recalls her husband telling her not to worry since his spirit will live on at Yasukuni after his body dies.⁹⁰ In the next issue (June 1939) was a discussion among elderly widows that took place immediately following the *shōkon* ritual; their only—and unmarried—child had died at war. The elderly mothers, who were now alone and without family, expressed awe and gratitude in response to their experience. Here is an excerpt that conveys the tone:

MORIKAWA YUKI: The night that the white palanquin entered Yasukuni Shrine, I was just so thankful . . . so thankful.

MURAI YOKI: It is all the fine doings of the emperor. It is too good to be true.

NAKAMURA SHIGE: Yes, we all cried.

TAKAI HINA: Tears of happiness. We cried tears of happiness.

NAKAMURA: I am just so grateful that folks like us were given children that could serve the emperor.

The mothers proceeded to talk about the beauty of the imperial garden, which they had just visited (by virtue of their sons' death), likening it to paradise.⁹¹

This mothers' dialogue is well known. It has been cited in various critiques of Yasukuni Shrine ever since literary critic Hashikawa Bunzō reproduced the passage in his 1974 article "The Establishment and Transformation of Yasukuni Philosophy (*Yasukuni shisō no seiritsu to hen'yō*)."⁹² For Hashikawa, the discussion was "the most exemplary representation of Yasukuni belief." Takahashi Tetsuya disagrees with Hashikawa's reading. He reintroduced the dialogue in his 2005 bestseller, *Yasukuni mondai* (The Yasukuni Issue), quoting earlier parts of the dialogue, in which the mothers

express sadness and loneliness, to demonstrate an emotional shift.⁹³ For example, Morikawa Yuki, quoted in the preceding extract as being thankful, says earlier in the discussion that “I understand that my child is already gone. But when I see a healthy soldier, I cannot help thinking perhaps he is alive somewhere just like that man. Since I am by myself, I end up complaining, in the evenings especially. I know it’s shameful, but as a parent, I think of how wonderful my son was. But whenever I have such a thought, I quickly remind myself what an honorable deed he has done. I can then smile with all my heart.”⁹⁴

For Takahashi, the problem of Yasukuni Shrine is that it functions as what he calls an “alchemy of emotions (*kanjō no renkin jutsu*),” which replaces grief and sadness with a feeling of honor and gratitude by assigning a new significance to death.⁹⁵ Takahashi explains that this is precisely what had happened as Morikawa demonstrated an emotional transition from sadness to gratitude. For her, the topic of Yasukuni Shrine represented the honorable deed her son had performed. The unbearable sadness was thus replaced by joy, supported by phrases such as “honorable death for the sake of the country” and “having a son who could be of use to the emperor.”

COUNTERNARRATIVES

For me, the juxtaposition of Morikawa’s comments represents not a replacement of grief with honor but a wide range of honest emotions that a grieving person might experience. It is the oscillation between sincere sadness and the kind of appropriate response that one had been conditioned to have through activities and media representations such as those I have outlined. I would further argue that this is the range of emotions commonly expected of someone coping with a major loss: wavering between allowing oneself to be consumed by immense grief and attempting to identify and grasp some positive outcome or benefit. A similar range of emotions can be observed in the printed responses of Umekichi’s father. The local newspaper *Yokosuka bōei shinpō* reported Umekichi’s father as saying, “Since I had already offered my son to the emperor [when I sent him off to the front], I am truly pleased to have him die.”⁹⁶ This seems to be the typical response expected of a patriotic Japanese subject during wartime. But according to another newspaper, *Tōkyō nichichi shinbun*, Umekichi’s father, having experienced the death of two young sons before Umekichi, became hysterical with sadness and yet stated that he was “at least consoled by the fact that he died for the country.”⁹⁷ Umekichi’s brother Kikuzō, eleven years old at

the time, remembers differently. According to Kikuzō, his father, upon receiving the notice of Umekichi's death, tore apart scrolls dedicated to the gods while screaming in distress that there are "no gods or buddhas in this world."⁹⁸

The printed comments by the elderly mothers and Umekichi's father were in part a result of the self-censorship that took place when bereaved family members talked to the media. Producers of mass media also practiced self-censorship. Years after the Asia-Pacific War, a veteran announcer of the Japanese national network NHK recalled his toughest wartime assignment as a live radio broadcaster during *shōkon* ceremonies at Yasukuni. I reproduce here the quote that I introduced in the epigraph: "I truly had a hard time with that broadcast. You see, the ceremony is conducted in pitch dark. And there'd be tormented screams like 'Murderer!' 'Give me back my child!' coming from the bereaved families that lined both sides of the main approach. The military police were at a loss as these people had just lost a close family member. But I had to make sure that the microphone would not pick up those voices. That was really tough."⁹⁹

For the radio audience, the erasure of dissenting voices from the official broadcast rendered them absent. In the official narrative, family members in attendance at the *shōkon* ritual were proud and grateful. But ethnographer Orikuchi Shinobu remembers hearing sobs as well as clapping and joyous voices when he attended the April 1943 ritual.¹⁰⁰ The emotions of the bereaved families were not uniform; the motives behind the emotions exhibited were varied. Some attendees were perhaps truly happy and proud, whereas others like the elderly mother oscillated between pride and loneliness. Those who felt only sad or angry probably did not attend the ceremony. The radio representation of the *shōkon* ritual—highly manipulated by the state network personnel—constructed a scenario that reinforced the image that all Japanese supported the current militarist state.

This image—a literal representation of the wartime slogan "one million hearts beating as one"—still shapes the Japanese collective memory not only as wartime state propaganda but also as the wartime norm. But many accounts also reject the pro-war propaganda. Wartime police records contain numerous reports of ordinary Japanese arrested for making antiwar statements or comments that did not revere the emperor. In January 1942, merely a month after the glorious reports of the Pearl Harbor attack, a fifty-one-year-old male was arrested for repeatedly uttering as follows in public: "I received notice that my son died in Singapore. It might be for the country as they say, but as a parent, I cannot help crying."¹⁰¹ That same month, a

man was arrested in a Hokkaidō bar for making statements such as “Even if I am conscripted, I will not die for the emperor.”¹⁰² In March 1942, when newspapers were reporting consecutive victories by the Japanese military on a daily basis, a man was arrested for arguing that “Japan started a large-scale war with the United States, but there is no way that such a small country can win.”¹⁰³ But such voices of dissent were almost always silenced and never publicized by the mass media.

Dissent was not always vocalized. Also in 1942, graffiti on a wall of a Tokyo subway station read: “Peace should not be bloody.”¹⁰⁴ Many antiwar graffiti were found on public bathroom walls: “Stop the war, we have no rice,” “Stop the war, give us back our freedom.”¹⁰⁵ Many other reported graffiti were critical of the emperor and the imperial family and questioned the validity of the emperor system. But these graffiti, too, were quickly erased, preserved only as police documents. The public narrative that can be gathered from mass media and other approved publications did not even hint at the presence of such sentiments.

Since these voices were typically silenced during the war, apart from police records, they can be heard only through venues such as oral history interviews. Cultural anthropologist Kitamura Riko points out the difficulties of interviewing people about wartime experiences, as the outcome often depends on the questions asked or how they are framed. For example, a Mr. Sugamaru, born in 1911, did not go to war because he did not pass the health examination. Asked how he felt, he initially responded that he was distressed because he was not able to fulfill his obligation; he believed that joining the military was something to be grateful for. When Kitamura repeated the same question after two hours of interviewing, Sugamaru responded, “Well, you know, we’d talked about joining the military as something to be proud of, but in reality, no one wanted to go.”¹⁰⁶ Here the respondent had worked through his past and untangled his emotions in order to distinguish the memories of his personal emotions from what he had been conditioned to believe. Many of the village practices that Kitamura documented were subversive. Villagers recalled climbing a mountain to pray, outwardly for Japan’s victory but in reality so that their sons would not be drafted. Others constructed hidden meanings for everyday practices such as shouts of *banzai*. In some villages, when these shouts were used to send soldiers off to war, they were tacitly understood to signify “come back safely” rather than “long live the emperor.”¹⁰⁷ Other anthropologists have collected memories of attempts to fail the health exam and of prayers and talismans that were meant to prevent injuries and death on the battlefield.

As was the case with the disparity between Umekichi's father's response to local media and his cry of distress inside his home, most Japanese succeeded in suppressing their emotions in public. They typically responded to social expectations, which included participating in military-related events, particularly those associated with honoring the dead. Participation in such events offered opportunities to practice and perform an acceptable form of patriotism. These practices and performances became further normalized through their repetition at events associated with the homecoming of the ashes and memorializing of the dead, as well as celebrations and commemorations of reported military successes. Disseminating representations of such events through the mass media further reinforced the image that all imperial subjects were fighting as one. For some, participation in these events gradually indoctrinated them in the official narrative of the state: a narrative that declared the Asia-Pacific War a holy war, that celebrated Emperor Hirohito as the living manifestation of god, and that encouraged young men to die at war. For those who were born during the war, this was the only narrative they knew. Many did not have more complete information for contextualizing their experience. With the passage of time, however, these complex relationships with Japan's Myth of the War Experience were gradually simplified into a narrative of victimhood. The presence of Yasukuni Shrine as the principal party accountable certainly facilitated this process.

During the final years of the war, Yasukuni Shrine continued to hold *shōkon* rituals and regular festivals regardless of the deteriorating living conditions in Tokyo. During the spring festival of 1942—less than a week after the first air raid that damaged parts of Tokyo—police cautioned visitors and nearby residents not to mistake the light and sound of ceremonial fireworks for air raids.¹⁰⁸ Fireworks, battle-scene dioramas, and flower arrangements showcased inside the inner shrine were prohibited during the fall festival of 1944.¹⁰⁹ Sumo matches, however, took place even in April 1945 in the midst of air raids. Despite the sober atmosphere resulting from the prohibition on vendors and show tents, sizable crowds attended each festival.

In the very last years of the war the military demonstrated concern for the attendees' safety during the *shōkon* ceremonies. By the spring of 1944, only one family member per deceased soldier was permitted to participate. The elderly, women, and children were advised not to attend. Because of the apprehension about air raids, family members were lodged outside Tokyo. In the fall of 1944 family attendance at the *shōkon* ceremony was strongly

discouraged. Instead, regional ceremonies took place at *gokoku* shrines throughout Japan, during which family members listened to the radio broadcast of the Yasukuni ritual and worshipped Yasukuni Shrine from afar.¹¹⁰

Early in the morning of March 10, 1945, 325 Allied B-29 bombers were mobilized to drop nearly eighteen hundred tons of incendiary bombs on Tokyo. More than a third of the city was decimated; in excess of one hundred thousand people were killed. Two more raids occurred in mid-April, when an incendiary bomb struck the shrine grounds near the main shrine. Although the military prohibited family members from attending, Yasukuni Shrine's spring *shōkon* ritual took place as scheduled.¹¹¹ The sixty-sixth *shōkon* ceremony, which was held in the evening of April 24, was interrupted many times by air raids. Only army and navy officials participated. During the ceremony, the officials were relocated to air raid shelters several times, while the two chief priests, Ikeda Ryōhachi and Fujita Katsushige, remained at the *shōkon* grounds.¹¹² Nonetheless, the spirits of 37,053 fallen were merged into the Yasukuni god at the end of the evening. A special festival took place the following day. The emperor and the empress visited separately, on April 28 and May 5, respectively.¹¹³ This was the last *shōkon* ritual of Imperial Japan.