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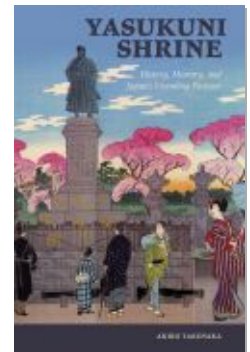
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ONE

MOBILIZING DEATH

Developing the Myth of Yasukuni

Today on the way to the villa I passed through the temple grounds of Ueno. The two-story gate and most of the buildings were burned in the battle last summer; so now the grandeur of the past is but a dream. I want to purify this ground and dedicate it as a memorial to the war dead.

KIDO TAKAYOSHI, THE DIARY OF KIDO TAKAYOSHI

On January 15, 1869, statesman Kido Takayoshi noted in his diary that the Kan'eiji site in Ueno, which he happened to walk through earlier that day, should be purified and transformed into a memorial for the war dead.¹ He was, in fact, proposing that Ueno, once bustling with patrons of the Kan'eiji temple but now left devastated after the Battle of Ueno the previous year, should house a memorial for the imperial loyalist men who fell during the restoration. In short, Kido was recommending that an institution akin to what would become Yasukuni Shrine be built at Ueno. Kido's proposal did not materialize, however. Ōmura Masujirō, who soon would become the vice minister of the newly created Army Ministry, opposed Kido's choice, arguing that the spirits of the dead bakufu soldiers—enemy casualties of that battle—haunted the site. Furthermore, the land was unavailable, as the Meiji government announced shortly thereafter that it had designated the Ueno site for a new university hospital. Instead, Ōmura selected a stretch of land atop Kudan Hill that had been controlled by the bakufu infantry—the site that Yasukuni Shrine currently occupies. He recommended it as the most auspicious location for the Imperial Palace: The site was situated to the northwest (*inui*) of the palace, the direction in need of protection.²

Ōmura had grand plans. He predicted that the Kudan site, with its proximity to the Imperial Palace and a commanding view of Tokyo, would become a strategic spot in case of armed domestic conflict. Thus, it was—at least symbolically—to function as more than a memorial for the fallen. At

the time, the road that traveled up the hill comprised nine sloped steps (hence the name Kudan, or nine steps), and from the summit one could see as far as Tokyo Bay. As the original pathway up Kudan was narrow and steep, Ōmura planned to widen it and decrease the incline for easier travel by the military. Although they did not yet exist in Japan, he imagined horse-drawn carriages traveling along the street.³ In addition to the memorial itself, Ōmura also proposed an expansive plan for the site (shown on a map dated June 1869) that would include a communal cemetery for those memorialized.⁴

These visions of Ōmura Masujirō became the foundation for the Yasukuni Shrine that we know today. But the shrine grounds do not include a cemetery, and Yasukuni Shrine has dealt only with the spirits—not the physical bodies—of the fallen. The decision to eliminate the cemetery was partly logistical. Ōmura's original plan included an expansion of the site into a large area of surrounding buildings, a proposal that did not materialize due to vehement opposition by local shopkeepers.⁵ Nonetheless, the construction project for the memorial itself commenced in mid-June 1869. Temporary structures, which included the inner shrine, a worship hall, and two offering halls, were hurriedly completed in ten days, all in time for a memorial scheduled at the end of the same month.⁶ In the evening of June 28, the first *shōkon* ritual (literally translated as a ritual to invite the spirits of the dead) took place, which memorialized the spirits of 3,588 imperialist men who had fallen during the Boshin War. For five days following the ritual, from June 29 to July 3, the shrine hosted festivities that featured sumo matches and fireworks. An imperial messenger paid tribute on June 29. Units of the Imperial Army took turns firing celebratory gun salutes. Visitors were treated to sacred sake.⁷ Until the permanent inner shrine was completed three years later, three festivals per year took place at the site.⁸

At the time, these structures were known as the Tokyo Shōkonsha, or the “Tokyo shrine to invite in spirits of the dead,” and together they comprised the immediate predecessor to Yasukuni Shrine.⁹ As I detail in the next chapter, it was not a well-known site at first. Even the five-day festival to commemorate the first enshrinement of the imperial fallen seems to have captured little attention. Although the Kudan area quickly became a popular location, the shrine was generally absent from cultural representations of Tokyo in general and of the Kudan area in particular. The turning point was the 1872 spring festival, conducted immediately after the permanent structure was completed, during which numerous people visited the shrine grounds. An article reporting the festival in the *Yūbin hōchi* newspaper suggests one reason for the lack of attention in previous years:

On May 15th, the annual Shōkonsha festival took place at the new building at Kudan Hill completed on May 10th. For the past couple of years, *few people visited this shrine and many had no respect for the facility, as enshrined here were only those from the Western domains. . . .* With the completion of the new building however, numerous people, both officials and the masses, have flocked to the shrine raising clouds of dust. The scene is unlike any seen here before.¹⁰

It was the new, permanent shrine that attracted Tokyoites, not the memorial function of the site. By this time, other novelties were perched atop Kudan Hill, including a pair of monumental stone lanterns completed in 1871. Together with the spectacular view of the bay, the shrine grounds inspired artists and attracted nearby residents. Festivals and other events on the shrine grounds quickly became popular.

There was a simple reason that people living within easy traveling distance of the shrine initially had little knowledge of the men who were memorialized: Most Tokyoites had no association with them and were uninterested in their cause. The antibakufu faction, which took political power away from the Tokugawas, was led by men from Chōshū and Satsuma, the “Western domains,” as noted in the article. Other major participants were the domains of Aki, Inshū, and Tosa, also located in the Western half of Japan. While leaders quickly took over Tokyo to organize the new government, residents were not invested in the fate of the imperialist dead. Not only did the men come from the faraway “Western domains,” but ordinary Tokyoites at the time also had little to do with armed conflict. Armed participation in a military cause was for the most part limited to the samurai class during the Tokugawa era. For most others, battles were spectacles in which deaths occurred to unknown and unrelated people. During the Battle of Ueno, for example, nearby residents gathered to watch the confrontation, while opportunistic shopkeepers wove their way through the crowd selling rice balls and pickled vegetables.¹¹ The significance of the shrine as a memorial to deaths that occurred at Ueno and other related battles was not apparent to most Tokyoites in the early Meiji era.

Of course, Tokyo Shōkonsha (and Yasukuni Shrine soon thereafter) did not remain an obscure institution for long, as can be observed by the prominent place it occupied in the last years of the Asia-Pacific War. The process that transformed it into a central institution of war memory, however, is not straightforward. Wars and the resulting loss of life in Japan’s imperialist quest certainly played a key role in this transformation: Death was presented

in a positive light in order to sustain a level of enthusiasm to support these wars.

Imperial Japan was certainly not alone in this effort. In analyzing the modern European experience of warfare (roughly contemporaneous with my work here), George Mosse discusses what he refers to as “the Myth of the War Experience,” with a particular focus on how the concept was mobilized in post–World War I Germany.¹² In representations of war memory in prose, poetry, picture books, and film, Mosse identifies a strong urge to portray a higher meaning of the war experience that was shaped by encounters with mass death and argues that this Myth of the War Experience developed more significantly in defeated nations.¹³ Redefining the meaning of the lives that were lost was central to this myth: War death was presented as sacrifice and resurrection rather than loss of life. Young soldiers were remembered as having fought courageously and dying for the homeland singing joyously (in striking parallel to the anecdotal accounts of Japanese troops shouting “Long live the emperor!” in the face of death). Mosse contends that these narratives were influential not so much for the soldiers in the trenches but, significantly, more for those waiting at home.¹⁴

Many parallels to Mosse’s claim can be found in Japan during the first half of the twentieth century. I am interested here in exploring the development of such myths and their transformation into a sort of national belief (*Yasukuni the belief*). Yasukuni Shrine certainly played an important role in this process. However, these initial chapters examine the multiplicity of tools mobilized in the process of transforming this myth into a belief, of which Yasukuni Shrine was one. Over time, and certainly by the 1940s, Yasukuni Shrine came to occupy center stage in the Japanese myth of war experience. But the shrine’s role in this myth was not always so apparent in the early years. In this chapter I focus on the earliest phase in the creation of this belief. What was the origin of the idea that dying in war for the emperor’s sake is the greatest honor one could ever achieve? And who realized that this idea could be used to mobilize men for a common cause even in the face of death? “Yasukuni the belief,” of course, is an invented tradition, just like national holidays, anthems, flags, and other conventions of nationhood.¹⁵ But typically inventions that become traditions are based loosely on preexisting conventions. I am interested in exploring the origins of the myth and the ways in which they were reinvented.

THE ORIGINS OF YASUKUNI PRACTICE

In order to address these questions, I start in the years leading up to the Restoration, when the practice of commemorating war death was normalized. The early history of Yasukuni Shrine provided in key works by scholars such as Ōe Shinobu is straightforward and is summarized here.¹⁶ The practice of memorializing the fallen imperial loyalists began several years before the Boshin War as rituals conducted by members of the Chōshū domain. What started as a local ritual developed into a national one when restoration-related dead from multiple domains were collectively enshrined in Kyoto on December 24, 1862. With the relocation of the imperial capital in 1868, the new government ordered a transfer of the spirits to the newly built shrine in central Tokyo (Tokyo Shōkonsha). Constructing the shrine in the middle of the new capital symbolized the central role this institution occupied in the newly constructed nation. And with the frequent wars Japan subsequently engaged in, as well as through its association with the emperor, Yasukuni Shrine attained its notorious status during the Asia-Pacific War years and beyond.

There are no inaccuracies in this narrative. Yet it does not explain the process through which the Japanese came to embrace the idea of dying for the emperor or the idea of transforming the war dead into a protector god for Japan—a process that closely aligns with the development of the Myth of the War Experience in modern Japan. In this and the next two chapters I explore the beginnings of this myth and how it was shaped during Japan's earlier wars of imperialism. Newly invented cultural practices can enjoy wider acceptance when they draw on existing customs. Memorializing military death at Yasukuni Shrine was no exception. Although the *shōkon* ritual conducted at Yasukuni Shrine was introduced during the last years of the Tokugawa era, planners of this ritual drew on precedents and customs.

According to modern ethnographic accounts, *shōkon* rituals in general draw from traditional death-related practices in Japan, which developed out of the belief in the close relationship between the living and the dead.¹⁷ It was believed, for example, that the spirits of the dead lingered in the world of the living after death. It was commonly thought that spirits were confused about or unaccepting of their death. Rituals were designed to call back the wandering spirits to the world of the living or to attempt to communicate with the spirits, typically to placate them.¹⁸ This kind of spirit, *aramitama* (spirit of the new dead) in Buddhist terminology, was considered to possess a great deal of energy, which made it capable of harming the

living. Especially feared were spirits of those who were believed to have had special powers (whether psychic or political) while alive, those who felt contempt for humanity, those whose death rituals were not performed properly, and those who died an untimely death (including the military dead). Rituals were conducted in order to tame these spirits, based on the belief that, when properly appeased, the power of vengeful spirits is transformed and brings positive influence to the living. The imperial court historically followed this tradition to commemorate and posthumously promote men that had died a tragic death as a way to placate their spirits. Examples of such “promotion” include Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) and Kusunoki Masashige (c. 1294–1336), both of whom had shrines dedicated to them. As I will explain, Kusunoki, in particular, played a key role in the foundation of the Yasukuni myth.

In medieval times the fear of vengeful spirits (*goryō shinkō*) grew into a battlefield memorial practice. Warriors adopted this practice in order to memorialize battlefield deaths during the tumultuous period from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. According to this practice, all deaths were memorialized, whether enemy or ally.¹⁹ Once the outcome of the battle was determined, the victors conducted a ritual called *dai segaki e* (the great rite to appease hungry ghosts) for all of the war dead from both sides. Following the ritual, the victors typically erected a memorial on the site for both enemy and ally (*teki mikata kuyō-hi*). This medieval practice is distinct from Yasukuni ritual in that both enemy and ally were memorialized together.²⁰ In fact, during these battlefield rituals, the dead from the defeated side were memorialized with particular attentiveness.²¹ Previous accounts of the origins of Yasukuni practice conclude that the creators of Yasukuni Shrine appropriated and politicized this traditional ritual by selectively memorializing and commemorating war death for the emperor.²²

A close examination of the ways that death rituals were conducted in the years leading up to and during the restoration suggests, however, that there was not yet an established arrangement to discriminate enemy dead. Some domains performed memorial rituals for their men. In some of the restoration-related battles, all dead were memorialized regardless of which side they had fought for. In other cases, concerted efforts were made to prevent the enemy from tending to their dead. But when Tokyo Shōkonsha was originally created, the idea of selective memorialization was not yet institutionalized. Instead, a move to politicize the war dead for a larger cause emerged during the last years of the Tokugawa era. Later on I outline the development of death rituals in some of the antibakufu domains and then

introduce instances where death—encompassing both the physical bodies and the spirits of the dead—was mobilized for the construction of a collective identity. The idea of mobilizing death for a political cause is not unique to modern Japan, and thus my analysis is informed by scholars who have studied the politics of memorial, burial, exhumation, and reburial elsewhere.²³

SON'NŌ JŌI AND THE LEGEND OF KUSUNOKI MASASHIGE

Two domains in particular hold the key to the modern practice of *shōkon*, which developed into the ideas behind Yasukuni Shrine: Chōshū, a key player of the Meiji Restoration and situated at the Western end of mainland Japan, and Mito, the birthplace of the Mito School of nativist thought, located much closer to Edo. During the final years of the Tokugawa era, men of samurai status in Chōshū began to collectively and publicly memorialize the deaths of samurai. Around the same time, some six hundred miles away, Mito ideologues were promoting the idea of *son'nō jōi* (revere the emperor; expel the barbarian) as a way to strengthen the national consciousness of Japan as a whole by uniting under the emperor. Both were responding to the emerging sense of crisis precipitated by the decline of bakufu influence, social unrest more generally, and the appearance of foreign ships in Japanese waters.

In the beginning the Chōshū practice was exclusively domain based. In October 1851 Chōshū leader Mōri Takachika ordered research on and the collection of the names of all samurai who died for a cause that benefited the domain—or should have benefited it. Two years later, in 1853, Chōshū men created a register of such domainal deaths, deposited it at the local Tōshunji temple, and performed a Buddhist-style memorial service on June 14. This practice was to be an annual ritual conducted on the same date. While the religious style differs, this ritual—a memorial service regularly performed for an exclusive group of people—bears striking resemblance to the Yasukuni practice. But little information exists on the reasons for this annual rite since *Kōhon mori no shigeri*, the official chronicle of Chōshū history, contains only brief entries on events.²⁴ For example, the 1851 entry simply notes that the names, as well as date and location of death, were recorded for “all war dead and loyal dead from long past (*ōko yori*).” The 1853 entry mentions a memorial ritual that was to take place on June 14 every year.²⁵

The circumstances contributing to the reasons for these rituals, however, are open to interpretation. For instance, these rites became an annual event

when foreign ships appeared in the waters surrounding Japan: Commodore Matthew Perry, a catalyst for Japan's dramatic shift in foreign policy, arrived at Uraga on June 5, 1853. Domestic politics also contributed to the situation. Because of a two-and-a-half-century-old history, Chōshū leaders held the bakufu in deep contempt throughout the Tokugawa regime.²⁶ Legend has it that, as an annual new year's tradition, a retainer would ask the daimyo, "should it be this year [that we attack the Tokugawas]?" to which the daimyo would always respond, "not yet." Retainers are said to have slept with their feet facing Edo to demonstrate their resentment.²⁷ By this time, with the political power of the bakufu waning, Chōshū leaders began to anticipate armed conflict, whether domestic or international, in the near future, with an eye to opportunities to overthrow the bakufu. A practice of collective memorial was thus useful. At a time when more deaths could be foreseen, ritualized treatment of the dead could help promote a collective identity.

Although there are similarities between the annual Chōshū memorials and Yasukuni practice, the Chōshū rituals were conducted in the Buddhist style. How did the shift to the Shinto style of Yasukuni enshrinement take place? Further, how was the concept of fighting for the emperor incorporated into the rituals? Here I turn to Mito, a domain that produced the thinkers who played a central role in shaping the political ideas behind the restoration, including *son'nō jōi*. The *Shinron* (The New Theses, 1825), by Mito scholar Aizawa Seishisai, is a key text that promotes the concept of *son'nō jōi* and highlights the emperor's importance. Written as a response to the bakufu order of the same year to expel foreigners from Japanese waters, *Shinron* attempted to strengthen a collective, national consciousness of Japan through unity under the emperor. *Shinron*, however, did not criticize bakufu authority. Its goal was to secure Japanese independence by establishing a strong political structure that maintained the bakufu politically, while creating a renewed identity around the traditional authority of the emperor. In short, the recommendation was to emphasize national consciousness of Japan as a whole (with both the bakufu and the court intact) over allegiance to individual domains.²⁸ Of course, this stance changed once the bakufu signed treaties to open Japanese ports: *Son'nō jōi* quickly came to include the idea of overthrowing the bakufu.

To promote a new brand of *son'nō jōi* that included restoring exclusive power to the emperor, Mito scholars used a fourteenth-century figure, Kusunoki Masashige (c.1294–1336), whom they could associate with a previous "restoration" of imperial power over a bakufu that occurred during the

final years of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). At that time, when bakufu power was faltering in the hands of the Hōjō family, Emperor Go-Daigo took military measures to terminate the bakufu and establish his own rule: the short-lived Kenmu Restoration (1333–1336). Kusunoki fought for the emperor and played a key role in the court's success. But he was not as successful when, in 1335, Ashikaga Takauji led his army and wrested political power from the court and later started the next bakufu. In May 1336, after losing the decisive battle against Takauji, Kusunoki killed himself in Minatogawa, present-day Kobe.²⁹ The Kusunoki tragedy was popularized through the epic *Taiheiki*, which is considered to have been written in the fourteenth century and was used as the subject of *kōdan* (professional storytelling) during the Muromachi and Tokugawa periods.³⁰ But his grave was untended until 1692, when Mito daimyo Mitsukuni restored the burial site and constructed a new gravestone.³¹ The Kusunoki figure proved useful for the Mito scholars' attempts to foster a sense of nationalism focused on the emperor. His initial success was reinterpreted in the late Tokugawa years as a historical example of the emperor asserting his authority with the help of a brave warrior to reclaim rule from a military leader. His tragic death—voluntary and by his own hand—came to symbolize ultimate loyalty to the emperor. Kusunoki quickly came to be revered as a hero in a historical “overthrowing of the bakufu” and as the emperor's loyal follower who sacrificed his life for the imperial cause.

Kusunoki also appears in *Shinron*, in which Aizawa Seishisai advocated the deification of people who accomplished extraordinary deeds for Japan. The connection with Shinto is also introduced here. In *Shinron*, Aizawa mentions Shinto shrines that are dedicated to people whose deeds were significant (e.g., Kitano and Kasuga) and argues that reviving the tradition of deifying loyal warriors would encourage commoners to pay reverence to the gods. He even suggests a series of holidays, many of which are for Shinto rites, but also includes several dates on which people who accomplished great feats would be celebrated. One such figure was Kusunoki. In his 1834 text, *Sōen wagen*—a commentary on court-related events and rituals—Aizawa proposed gathering comrades on the anniversary of Kusunoki Masashige's death for training and morale building.³² Here we see a communal identity beginning to develop via the death rituals.

Aizawa's follower Maki Izumi went one step further in his 1859 text, *Keii gusetsu*, in which he argues for the deification of loyal warriors in history and their posthumous promotion. In addition, he suggests dedicating shrines to these figures as a way of inspiring contemporary warriors.³³ On May 25,

1862, Maki conducted a ritual for Kusunoki, during which he also memorialized eight spirits of antibakufu Satsuma warriors who died during the Teradaya incident.³⁴ Around this time, Kusunoki rituals began taking place in other domains as well. In 1865, residents of the Yamaguchi domain, for example, began regularly conducting a Kusunoki ritual and soon incorporated the dead from their own domain into the ceremony.³⁵ Through these combined memorials, the Kusunoki legend shifted its emphasis from a narrative of successful imperial restoration to one of a brave hero who sacrificed his life for an imperial cause. His death was thus mobilized for a larger political objective: to rally around the emperor in order to unseat the Tokugawa regime from power. This new interpretation of the Kusunoki legend became popularized in late Tokugawa Japan and, consequently, in the modern years as well.

CHŌSHŪ MEMORIAL PRACTICES

The idea of Kusunoki worship traveled to the Chōshū domain early on. In the mid-1850s, Yoshida Shōin, scholar and son of a Chōshū samurai, preached passionately on the heroic self-sacrifice of Kusunoki to pupils in his private school while he was under house arrest.³⁶ A strong dissenter of the bakufu's passive foreign policies, Shōin encouraged his students to follow Kusunoki's lead and defy the bakufu in order to restore power to the court. Through his fervent instruction he cultivated many enthusiastic followers, including Takasugi Shinsaku and Kusaka Gensui, who would play central roles in the movement to overthrow the bakufu. In addition to these men's contempt for the bakufu, as a domain Chōshū also had reasons for supporting the imperial court: It was believed that the Mōri family (the daimyo of Chōshū) had blood ties with the imperial court.³⁷

In the early 1860s, Chōshū leaders began developing a more encompassing memorial practice. By this time clashes between the antibakufu and pro-bakufu factions led to bloodshed such as the Ansei purges (1858–1859) and the Sakurada Gate incident (1860).³⁸ Shōin was executed in October 1859 as a part of the Ansei purges. Also by this time, Kyoto was emerging as the key site for antibakufu supporters who were not limited by domain boundaries; many converged in the imperial capital to plan an overthrow of the Tokugawa regime. Because heroic sacrifices would inspire their men, Chōshū leaders conspired to hold a collective memorial rite in Kyoto to commemorate their dead. But the bakufu forbade a proper memorial for these dead. From the bakufu's viewpoint, the imperial loyalist dead were criminals who

had been executed or killed as anti-imperial rebels. The first matters for attention, therefore, entailed obtaining a court mandate to remove their criminal status. The involvement of the emperor was also useful for the leaders of the antibakufu movement since it would emphasize the idea that the antibakufu faction was now fighting for a common cause: the restoration of imperial political power. In their view, a memorial sanctioned by the emperor offered the perfect opportunity to instill in the antibakufu supporters a sense of *son'nō*—reverence for the emperor—as well as a collective identity.

In 1862 Chōshū leaders successfully solicited Emperor Kōmei's approval to posthumously exonerate men who died for antibakufu causes. On August 2 of that year, Kōmei sent the bakufu an imperial message about his plan to memorialize "deaths in state affairs (*kokujū*)."³⁹ The message ordered the bakufu to provide the emperor with the names of the dead associated with the Ansei purges and all imperial loyalist deaths thereafter.⁴⁰ The bakufu had little choice but to comply with the emperor's order. Fourteenth shōgun Iemochi gave permission to free all imperial loyalist prisoners, exonerated all those who had died, and granted permission to construct graves for them. Among those exonerated was Yoshida Shōin. Chōshū men requested this ritual largely to revive the name of Shōin, their revered teacher. But the event had even greater historical significance: It was the first memorial ritual initiated in the name of the emperor, it involved multiple domains, and those memorialized were officially acknowledged as deaths resulting from state affairs. Thus it can be considered the key event in the move to restore political power in the name of the emperor through the use of death rituals.

Kōmei himself officiated a *shōkon* ritual at the Reimeisha shrine at Mt. Ryōzen in Higashiyama, Kyoto, on December 24, 1862.⁴¹ For the first time, men from multiple domains were memorialized together in the name of the emperor and recognized for their joint efforts to overthrow the bakufu.⁴² This transformed the practice of memorialization into a tool for constructing a collective identity. The ritual also assigned a new meaning to the deaths: Not only were the men relieved of their criminal status, but they were also now heroes and martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for the imperial cause. This transformation closely parallels the myth construction in modern Europe but is firmly grounded in a Japanese narrative. In the following year, 1863, for the first time in Kyoto a physical structure was built exclusively for the *shōkon* ritual. Men from the Tsuwano domain constructed a small shrine inside the Yasaka Shrine grounds, situated at the foot of Ryōzen,

where, on July 25, they collectively memorialized forty-six men. Immediately after the ritual, the shrine was relocated to the residence of Tsuwano leader Fukuba Bisei to conceal the event from pro-bakufu men. In 1931 the structure was transferred once again to Yasukuni Shrine, where it still exists on the grounds as the Motomiya, or original shrine.⁴³

Chōshū rituals also took on a Shinto quality once the move toward restoration began. On May 25, 1864, members conducted a memorial at the Shiraishi residence, where the *kibeitai* (volunteer army comprised primarily of commoners; the *kibeitai* played a significant role in the restoration) would soon be established.⁴⁴ Loyalists from the Chōshū domain were in attendance along with Maki Izumi, the Kusunoki admirer and *son'nō jōi* advocate from Mito. For the first time for the Chōshū men, the rituals were conducted in the Shinto style. Prayers were offered not only for the dead but also for Kusunoki's success with *son'nō jōi*. For the first time the Chōshū idea of regularly memorializing dead comrades merged with the Mito idea of commemorating commendable deaths as gods in the Shinto tradition—and offering prayers for military success.

Back in their home domain, Chōshū also led the creation of physical structures for the rituals. In August 1865 Chōshū constructed a shrine at a site in Sakurayama (Shimonoseki), where memorial rituals continued to be held on a regular basis.⁴⁵ A permanent structure for the rituals provided a space dedicated to the memorialization of the soldiers' comrades: It would be useful not only for regular events but also as a visible marker, a constant reminder for the men of the importance of their political cause. During the previous month a law had been passed that required each county to build its own *shōkonsha*, or shrine for conducting memorial rituals.⁴⁶ By the end of 1865, fifteen such memorial sites were active in the Chōshū domain.⁴⁷ Unlike Yasukuni Shrine, gravelike stones with the names of the deceased now neatly stand behind the shrine. There are no bodies here, however, as they were cremated and the ashes buried at temples or battlefields. The stones are markers to which the spirits of the dead were to return. This idea of stone markers may seem distinct from the practice at Yasukuni Shrine. However, I suggest that the original plans included it quite likely as the “cemetery” proposed by Ōmura. Had the shopkeepers not protested the expansion of the shrine grounds, Yasukuni Shrine may have taken on an identity different from what it has today.

The Chōshū shrines were also educational. At the time of the restoration, many lower-ranked members of domains that were fighting on behalf of the emperor knew little about him. Moreover, the unification of the

nation under the emperor's name was still a new idea. Some lacked access to even a part of the education that a child of a samurai received. In fact, in August 1863, in the midst of attacks by foreign battleships at Shimonoseki, Chōshū member Takasugi Shinsaku created the *kiheitai*, which enabled commoners to fight. Many soldiers thus maintained loyalty to their immediate leaders but were unaware of the larger cause of overthrowing the bakufu in the name of the emperor. To those fighting for the emperor and risking their lives, just as their deceased comrades had done, the memorial practice and physical presence of the *shōkonsha* buildings reinforced the message of an imperial cause. An iteration of Aizawa's 1834 proposal to annually commemorate Kusunoki's death is evident here: Men concluded their *shōkon* ceremonies by pledging to follow in the footsteps of their slain comrades and always followed the ceremony with military training.⁴⁸ In this sense, a *shōkonsha* was not merely a memorial site but also a place to which men pledged to return as spirits. For the commoners it held an educational purpose as well: They were conscripted to construct the local *shōkonsha*. Their involvement in building the shrine was a way to heighten their awareness of the idea that they were all fighting together for a cause.

The regular rituals also normalized two conditions that had recently been introduced along with the *shōkon* rituals: first, the idea that the domain, rather than the family member of the deceased, had authority over the memorialization process, and second, the attenuated distinction between shrines dedicated to gods and those dedicated to human spirits, given that the deceased were previously not considered gods.⁴⁹ The domain's authority over memorialization of the dead transferred the right to perform death rituals from the private entity of the family to a public one of the domain. This shift established the precedent for the Japanese state's control over the memorialization of war death in the later years.

Architects of the new government, which comprised primarily Chōshū men, developed this domain-based practice into a national one. In May 1868 the newly instituted government built a *shōkonsha* on Ryōzen to collectively commemorate imperial loyalists who had lost their lives in political struggles since 1853, as well as the soldiers of the Imperial Army killed at Toba-Fushimi, the first Battle of the Boshin War.⁵⁰ The Kyoto facility housed the graves of representative loyalist dead as well as several domain-specific shrines and was considered a central facility at the time. However, the practice of collective memorial was not limited to this site. For example, on June 2, 1868, less than two months after the bakufu relinquished Edo Castle, to collectively commemorate all deaths in the Imperial Army, the

governor general of the Eastern Expedition Group (Tōseigun) held a large-scaled *shōkon* ceremony at Edo Castle rather than the newly constructed Higashiyama Shōkonsha. The ceremony was conducted in the very hall where negotiations to hand over the castle were held by the last shogun, Yoshinobu, thus highlighting the redemptive symbolism of the event: that the transfer of power occurred as a result of the lives lost. The official chronicle of Yasukuni Shrine points to this ritual as the beginning of the Tokyo Shōkonsha. Yet, it was not an official state ritual because it was a military memorial rite that happened to be conducted during the Eastern Expedition.⁵¹ Nevertheless, this event, which took place in the same hall where Yoshinobu officially relinquished his right to political power, is significant for its symbolism and the specificity of its site. The multiplicity of sites at which memorials were conducted suggests, however, that the idea of collectively memorializing all imperial war dead at one site was not yet fully developed.

Memorial rituals continued in Kyoto as well. The spirits of 374 loyalist dead were memorialized at a Kyoto military training ground on July 10 and 11, 1868. Men also conducted memorial rites on the grounds where actual battles had taken place. But the situation changed on July 17, 1868, when Tokyo was designated the new capital. With the official relocation of Emperor Meiji from Kyoto to Tokyo in March 1869, the new government decided to construct a *shōkonsha* in Tokyo to replace the one in Higashiyama.⁵²

WHO CAN BE ENSHRINED?

Chronologically, we have arrived at the moment when Ōmura Masujirō selected the site at Kudan. But before I discuss the development of the shrine, I want to address one more issue surrounding a characteristic of the *shōkon* practice at Yasukuni Shrine: the problem of selective memorialization. One major criticism of Yasukuni Shrine in recent decades is that it commemorates only particular kinds of deaths: mostly Japanese military deaths that resulted from wars of imperialism and, as outlined earlier, loyalist deaths that occurred during the restoration. This kind of selective memorialization has had further ramifications in the post-Asia-Pacific War period. Many bereaved family members have submitted requests to Yasukuni Shrine to have their loved ones enshrined, whereas others have demanded the removal of names from the shrine's register.⁵³ As I detail in chapter 5, the process of post-1945 memorialization includes the compilation of the names and other

information about the deceased, which were often provided by the Japanese state. Although the head priest always makes the final decision in atypical cases, for example, the Class-A war criminals, a set of guidelines also helps determine the names for enshrinement. These guidelines have changed numerous times, even after 1945, sometimes resulting in enshrinement of those who had died decades earlier.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, enshrinement always followed the most current guidelines. When did this process of selective memorialization begin, and who determined the criteria by which the dead came to be enshrined?

The popular theory, namely, that antibakufu men started selective memorialization for political purposes during the restoration-related battles, may not be entirely accurate. Late Tokugawa memorial practices did become increasingly political, but there were no predetermined qualifications the deceased had to meet in order to be memorialized in a particular ritual. In fact, at times all of the deaths on both the imperial and the bakufu side were memorialized, as with the memorial that was ordered by the court and performed in October 1864 at Chion-in, a Pure Land temple in Kyoto.⁵⁵ Moreover, during the Boshin War, imperial loyalists often allowed the enemy dead to be memorialized. For example, imperial troops immediately consented to the burial and memorial of the pro-bakufu fighters who died in the Battle of Echigo-Koide in April 1868. Imperial loyalist leaders, who gave the consent, attended and participated in the memorial service.⁵⁶

In principle, the concept of military enshrinement seems simple. In the case of Japan's wars of imperialism against foreign nations, the process was somewhat straightforward: Regardless of whether a military death on the field, a military death resulting from illness, or the death of a civilian who had proven affiliation with the military, it was not difficult to assess eligibility as long as a set of criteria was specified.⁵⁷ But matters were not as simple for restoration-related deaths. The process of restoration involved a variety of causes of death, for example, from a more or less straightforward death on the battlefield during the Boshin War to executions during the Ansei purges. In addition, the last years of the Tokugawa era saw shifting alliances between domains, which often made it difficult to determine which lives were lost while supporting the imperial cause. For example, the relationship between Chōshū and Satsuma, as well as Chōshū's perceived loyalty to the imperial court, both shifted dramatically in the last years of the Tokugawa period. Another case in point is the shifting alliance among the three domains of Aizu, Satsuma, and Chōshū. In August 1863, leaders of Aizu and Satsuma collaborated to drive the Chōshū powers out of Kyoto. In the

Kinmon incident of July 1864, Chōshū men attempted to recover their positions in Kyoto and became involved in an armed skirmish with Aizu men outside the imperial palace. As a result, Chōshū, which had always allied itself with the imperial court, was labeled an enemy of the court. In 1866, however, Chōshū established an alliance with Satsuma, thus transforming Aizu into a common enemy and restoring its relationship with the court.⁵⁸

In such situations it can be difficult to determine who is eligible for an official, court-sanctioned memorial. Based on subsequent reinterpretation of late Tokugawa events, some men came to be eligible for enshrinement decades after death. It was not until the 1930s that Yasukuni Shrine formulated an official set of enshrinement criteria for those who had fallen in events associated with the restoration.⁵⁹ In other words, the origin of Yasukuni practice does not suggest a well-defined intention of posthumous discrimination. Rather, the focus was on the creation of a common, collective identity through memorial practice—a quality that I argue existed up to the end of the Asia-Pacific War.

POLITICAL USE OF DEATH: DEAD BODIES AND MEMORIAL PRACTICES

The idea to establish eligibility for memorialization and to use the practice of memorializing for political purposes thus developed gradually. At the outset, efforts were not focused exclusively on the spirits of the dead—the practice of Yasukuni Shrine—but on death rites in general, including proper burial of the bodies. And in later years, during Japan's wars of imperialism, the military took full control of not only the spirits of the war dead (through Yasukuni Shrine) but also their bodies as a way to exert power over those still alive. Although Yasukuni enshrinement often took center stage in the mass media, there were other, sometimes more elaborate procedures that dealt with the bodies. Local memorial services were also important. I detail these processes in later chapters. Here I want to highlight the presence of other kinds of practices surrounding war death.

Being under the jurisdiction of the military, it is not surprising that Yasukuni Shrine became a venue through which the military organized its dead. Particularly in the final years of the Asia-Pacific War, when retrieval of bodies from the battlefield was nearly impossible, this idea of mobilizing the spirits of the war dead became a useful replacement for rituals

associated with bodies and ashes. At the same time, I suggest that memorial rituals at Yasukuni Shrine were only one component of a variety of practices that utilized death to promote militaristic nationalism and that such ideas gradually emerged during the restoration.

As we have seen in the discussion of the 1862 process of rehabilitating the posthumous status of men who were considered antibakufu, criminals and traitors (*kokuzoku*) were not eligible for typical death-related rites in Tokugawa Japan. As a case in point, I refer to Yoshida Shōin, who was executed in 1859 as a part of the Ansei purges, and follow Shōin's body to explore the use of dead bodies for political ends. On October 27, 1859, Shōin was beheaded in an Edo prison and thrown into a hole in the ground along with other executed criminals. On January 1, 1863, upon receiving permission from the bakufu, Takasugi Shinsaku led his men to unearth and transport Shōin's remains from the mass burial ground to open land in Tokyo that Chōshū owned.⁶⁰ Takasugi transformed the event into a spectacle. According to some accounts, the procession barged onto a Ueno bridge that was reserved exclusively for use by the shogun, viciously attacked the guards, and proceeded to cross the bridge. Kusaka Gensui, another of Shōin's followers, ordered the funeral rites to be conducted in the Shinto style. Takasugi read a poem that likened the landscape of the new gravesite to Shōin's hometown, where he had directed his school.⁶¹ In 1882, followers constructed a Shinto shrine by the gravestone, thus elevating Shōin to the status of a god.

In the Shōin example, we see the dead—both the spirit and the physical remains—being utilized to make a political statement. Shōin's spirit was memorialized in an official ritual carried out by the emperor in Kyoto, thus signifying that the death was for an imperial cause. The spectacle that involved exhuming the remains and official reburial demonstrated that Shōin was not a criminal and further highlighted the mistake that the bakufu made in convicting him. The Kyoto ritual and the Tokyo spectacle together signified the determination of the Chōshū men to pursue the process of *jōi* in the name of the emperor—an action that Shōin himself had advocated. The procession that forced its way over the bridge reserved for the shogun—if it did indeed happen—symbolized the power of the imperial loyalists over the shogun. The rituals associated with Shōin's death were not conducted exclusively for the dead, for example, placating the potentially angry spirit of Shōin, but were transformed into practices that created new meanings for the living, both enemy and ally.

FORBIDDING PROPER BURIAL: AIZU DEATHS

Another significant instance during the restoration, when practices associated with death, burial, and memorial were highly politicized, was the Battle of Aizu, which took place around the castle town of Aizu-Wakamatsu and lasted from April 20–September 22, 1868.⁶² I examine this battle in some detail because many death-related practices observed here—from the act of taking one’s own life to the treatment of dead enemy bodies—are relevant for thinking about the perceived value of life as well as the use of death in ways that are associated with Yasukuni Shrine and, perhaps more important, why the shrine and the beliefs associated with it had such resonance in wartime Japan. A number of mass suicides took place during the battle, most famously the tragic deaths of the *Shōnen Byakko-tai* (the Boys White Tiger Corps). During and after the battle, the imperial troops—led by *Chōshū*—forbade the burial of Aizu dead. The subsequent Aizu struggle for proper burial of their people resulted in the fierce animosity between residents of two regions that persists today.⁶³ If *Shōin*’s example presents a case study in posthumous restoration of honor through rituals involving the body and the spirit, incidents that occurred during the Battle of Aizu demonstrate the power to control people by denying proper burial and memorialization of their dead. Taken together, the two incidents provide a strong rationale for politicizing memorial practices, which took place alongside the development of criteria for enshrinement at Yasukuni Shrine.

The Battle of Aizu is one segment of the Boshin War. But by this point Edo Castle had already been seized by the imperial powers. Fighting persisted because pro-bakufu factions did not surrender upon the change of guard at the castle. The Battle of Ueno (May 15, 1868) took place a month after the castle fell, after which bakufu troops fled north to Aizu in order to merge with the pro-bakufu men in the northern domains. The people of Aizu had no chance of winning this battle. Aizu fighters initially outnumbered imperial troops approximately 7,000 to 3,000, but the emperor’s men were equipped with better weapons. As a result of the constant exchange of fire with European fleets in the previous decade, *Chōshū* had been importing and utilizing armaments far superior to those owned by other domains, such as the Spencer repeating rifle and the Armstrong cannon.⁶⁴ Moreover, half of the Aizu troops were not trained soldiers but an ad hoc collection of farmers and merchants. Over the short period of time between August 23, when the imperial troops invaded the castle town of Aizu-Wakamatsu, and the fall of Tsuruga Castle on September 22, hundreds of

corpses piled up in the castle town. I focus here on the treatment of these dead bodies.

The Aizu deaths were not limited to armed men or those killed by the enemy. When imperial troops entered Aizu-Wakamatsu, many Aizu residents rushed inside the castle walls, their last stronghold. However, numerous women and children chose to remain outside and take their own lives in order to avoid burdening the fighting men by getting in their way or consuming the limited supplies. The most spectacular of such mass suicides took place on August 23, 1868, inside the residence of Aizu elder Saigō Tanomo. Here, twenty-one family members, dressed in white, exchanged their last cups of sake, read their last poems, and stabbed themselves and each other.⁶⁵ Approximately 230 family members of Aizu fighters died in a similar manner on the same day.⁶⁶ Twice as many died in battle that day. Several hundred drowned while trying to escape by crossing the Aka River.⁶⁷ Many others took their own lives inside the castle. Some took a different path to their death: On August 25, at the Battle of Yanagi Bridge, some twenty women picked up their halberds (*naginata*) and charged the imperial troops.⁶⁸ In later decades, during Japan's wars of imperialism, many women reportedly killed their children and themselves so as not to emotionally burden their men as they went off to war. During the final years of the Asia-Pacific War, women began practicing with halberds and bamboo sticks to prepare for an Allied invasion. It is worth pointing out here that Aizu women did not need Yasukuni Shrine or the emperor to perform these actions, the impetus for which was instilled by Confucian teachings as well as their willingness to protect their hometown.

The imperial troops, which had swelled considerably by the end of July, broke through the castle walls on August 23. Aizu corpses piled up everywhere so quickly that many were thrown into old wells. According to an Aizu resident who was fifteen at the time of the battle, the imperial troops confiscated Aizu property, killed the elderly and children, raped some women, and captured many others who were kept at military bases and forced to have sex with the troops.⁶⁹ Parallels between imperial loyalist practices and Japanese atrocities in Nanjing decades later are notable. Some consider this brutality by Chōshū men retaliation for the Aizu residents' acts of betrayal earlier in the decade (i.e., the Kinmon incident and the coup of the previous year). The final attack on the castle was launched on September 15. Equipped with more than one hundred cannons, the imperial troops fired some twenty-seven hundred shots into the castle over the next twenty-four hours. Nevertheless, the Aizu continued to fight until September 22,

when they finally surrendered by raising three white flags—sewn by women inside the castle from pieces of white cloth they had gathered—from the castle. Although the death toll on the imperial side was approximately three hundred, the Aizu suffered at least ten times that many losses.

Immediately following the Aizu surrender, the imperial troops began memorializing their own dead. Their site of choice was the Yūzū Temple in the castle town.⁷⁰ The first memorial stone—for twenty troops from the Ōgaki domain—was erected in October. By April 1869 a cemetery for imperial troops had been completed on the temple site. The construction of memorials for the imperial troops continued for another year. The last of the memorials—a Chōshū memorial for their fifteen troops—was completed in April 1870. Imperial loyalist deaths in Aizu were officially recognized by both the Aizu and the court in the subsequent years. In September 1870 prefectural governor Shijō Ryūhei conducted a *shōkon* ritual. During his northeastern tour in 1876, Meiji sent an imperial messenger to conduct a state-sponsored memorial service.⁷¹

The speedy construction of memorials and cemeteries for the imperial troops is not surprising given the history of memorial rituals conducted by Chōshū and their allied domains. Their treatment of the enemy (Aizu) dead, which may have been motivated by contempt, is a useful example of the political mobilization of dead bodies. The bodies of the Aizu dead were abandoned—left to rot throughout the battle. A diary entry by an Aizu resident in early September 1868 describes heaps of corpses, many headless, some with their stomachs slit open. Maggots oozed from the cuts. Wild animals feeding on the corpses further mutilated them.⁷² But even after the castle's surrender, Aizu survivors were forbidden from burying their dead. Thus the imperial loyalists created a spectacle of the dead Aizu bodies. By denying the Aizu the right to bury and memorialize their dead, the imperial troops demonstrated their control over their defeated enemy.⁷³ The importance of taking care of their dead is demonstrated in the repeated attempts by the Aizu to obtain permission for burial and memorialization. In the remainder of this section I explore this idea of selective memorialization, of maintaining power over a group of people through the control of their dead.

Even after Aizu officially surrendered with a letter of apology for rebelling against the “emperor’s military,” the imperial troops forbade all rituals for appeasing the lost Aizu souls. The prohibition extended to the corpses: The bakufu dead were not permitted a burial. For many months, their bodies were left uncovered to rot on farms, in fields and mountains. Local residents made many attempts to bury their dead secretly, but the

imperial troops stubbornly exhumed the remains and threw them back into the fields.⁷⁴ An account by an Aizu resident who made great efforts to bury and memorialize his former comrades exemplifies the situation: “The Western (imperial) troops forbade us to even touch any of the Eastern (Aizu and bakufu) dead. We were to be punished severely if we tampered with the bodies. Thus, no one ventured to bury the Eastern dead. The bodies became food for wild animals like foxes and raccoons, and wild birds like eagles and crows. The remaining parts further decayed, resulting in a sight so cruel that one could not even bear to see it.”⁷⁵

The situation was no better for the young members of the Byakko-tai, the famous auxiliary group of young men aged sixteen and seventeen, who committed mass suicide at the Iimori Mountain pass.⁷⁶ Like the others, their bodies were left scattered at the site of their death. Aizu residents had great respect for these highly trained young men and wished for their proper burial. In December 1868 Yoshida Saki, wife of Takizawa village chief Yoshida Isoji, had the bodies secretly buried at Myōkokuji, their family temple. But the imperial troops quickly discovered their action. Isoji was imprisoned (instead of Saki). The Byakko-tai bodies were unearthed and thrown into the fields once again.⁷⁷ The imperial loyalists permitted the reburial of the young men’s bodies only after repeated pleas from surviving Aizu members. However, the reburial, which was conducted at the Iimori Mountain pass, was not official: It was conducted in the middle of the night with cooperation from villagers who were paid to transport the bodies. The Aizu were not given an opportunity to pay tribute to the young lives that were lost for what they considered a noble cause.

It is possible that the idea of selective memorialization developed through this process. For imperial loyalists, forbidding what the Aizu strongly desired (burial and memorialization of their dead) allowed them to exert control over the Aizu survivors. As the armed conflict between the imperial troops and the pro-bakufu faction was continuing at the time, imperial loyalists needed to maintain their demonstration of power over the Aizu survivors to prevent further uprisings. The more the Aizu survivors desired proper burial for the fallen, the more acutely they felt controlled by the imperial troops through their denial of proper burial.⁷⁸

Aizu survivors continued to negotiate for the burial of bodies that were rotting in the fields. The imperial troops ultimately consented, but with restrictions that were even more stringent than those for the Byakko-tai burial. Since the dead, as members of the defeated side, were considered criminals, they were not to be buried on temple grounds. Moreover, their

burial was to be conducted not by their family and friends but by the underclass (*hinin*), who suffered from social discrimination. Residents were forbidden to participate in the burial. The imperial loyalists proposed a riverbank site where executed prisoners had once been buried. Further negotiations enabled the Aizu to bury their dead on two local temple grounds, but the method of burial was to remain the same. In this manner, the Aizu survivors experienced a double deprivation: the loss of those who had fallen in battle and the denial of an opportunity to properly bury them.

Burial of the Aizu dead started on February 24, 1869, five months after the fall of the castle:

Since the collection and burial of bodies took place in the midst of confusion following the fall of the castle, there was no proper equipment to transport the bodies. They wrapped the bodies in rough straw mats or placed them in bags made of woven straw and used door panels and even bathtubs for transportation. On the grounds of Amida Temple, they dug a round hole eight *ken* in diameter and several *ken* in depth [one *ken* is 1.8 meters, thus the hole was about fifteen meters in diameter and a few meters deep] and laid the bodies with their heads to the north on straw mats. They layered the bodies and the mats. The bodies piled up to several *shaku* [one *shaku* is approximately thirty centimeters] above the ground. They then transported the remaining bodies to Chōmeiji Temple for burial. They covered the pile of bodies on Amida Temple grounds with soil to construct a huge mound. They erected a marker on which was written “Spirits of Martyrs [*Jun’nan no rei*]” and constructed a small worship hall.⁷⁹

All in all, 1,281 bodies were buried at Amida Temple, and more than one hundred were transported to Chōmeiji Temple.⁸⁰ The imperial loyalists, after making their inspection, disapproved the burial method at Amida and ordered the Aizu both to remove the marker that praised the dead as martyrs and to demolish the worship hall. Nearly ten years later, in August 1876, the Meiji government finally gave permission for the memorialization of *bakufu* dead throughout Japan.

The manner in which local residents were barred from participating in the burial process is emblematic of the imperial troops’ demonstration of their authority over Aizu. The initial ban on burial forced the Aizu to viscerally acknowledge the cruelty of the imperial troops’ treatment even after death: a constant reminder of the Aizu subjugation by the imperial troops. Furthermore, by permitting the bodies to be buried only by members of the

underclass and thus erasing traces of dead bodies from fields and streets, the imperial troops silenced the Aizu from making further demands in relation to their dead. At the same time, however, the resulting absence of bodies robbed the Aizu of the opportunity to properly memorialize their dead.

Just as the collective memorialization of the imperial troops contributed to their construction of a singular identity, so the prohibition of burial obstructed the Aizu people's attempt to reestablish their collective identity after their defeat and consequently prevented future uprisings. Most Aizu burial requests were not initiated by family members of the dead but by locals who sought to exonerate their clan's status through proper burial of the dead. Through such burial, survivors sought to restore dignity to their collective identity as Aizu. By forbidding proper burial, the imperial troops were trying to prevent the Aizu from restoring their collective identity. During the Asia-Pacific War, the Japanese state took the role of memorial for the dead away from the immediate families of the casualties. Although it is not clear that the takeover was conducted for purposes similar to those of the imperial troops during the Battle of Aizu, the official treatment of war dead during Japan's later wars of imperialism (namely, memorial rituals for the bodies and enshrinement of spirits at Yasukuni) no doubt facilitated the sense of obligation and powerlessness that people felt toward the Japanese state.

THE SATSUMA REBELLION AND THE BIRTH OF YASUKUNI SHRINE

As we have seen, Yasukuni Shrine did not start out as a *jinja* (Shinto shrine) but as a *shōkonsha*, a term that can be literally translated as “a shrine to invite spirits.” It initially had no official ties with Shintoism. The status of the memorial changed on June 4, 1879, when Grand Minister Sanjō Santomi issued a directive that announced the renaming of Tokyo Shōkonsha as Yasukuni Shrine. The document also designated Yasukuni Shrine as a Special Government Shrine (*bekkaku kanpeisha*).⁸¹ This designation of the memorial as a Shinto shrine completes the first period in the history of Yasukuni Shrine. With the designation, the rituals and physical structures associated with the use of the war dead for political purposes were institutionalized. At the same time, the spirits of those enshrined became a permanent fixture in the shrine itself.

At the beginning of Meiji, numerous memorials for the imperial loyalist dead had already been constructed, situated mostly within the imperial loyalist domains.⁸² In February 1874 the government ordered all such

institutions to be renamed as *shōkonsha*, thus officially recognizing a network of restoration-related memorials throughout Japan. (This network was further institutionalized in 1939 with the designation of the shrines as *gokoku jinja*, or shrines to protect the nation.) In March 1874 the government announced financial support for the operation and maintenance of such memorials.⁸³ Tokyo Shōkonsha was the largest such memorial by far, yet at the time its status was no higher than that of the other shrines. In fact, only the dead from the Boshin War were enshrined in Tokyo at the time. The spirits of those who had fallen previously in restoration-related incidents were still memorialized in Kyoto.

On November 30, 1874, Hayashi Tomoyuki of the Ministry of the Interior proposed that the Kyoto spirits be transferred to Tokyo. However, the Grand Council of State did not give its consent. But on January 15, 1875, the council ordered the Ministry of the Interior to begin a comprehensive search for the names of and other relevant information about the men who had died in restoration-related incidents.⁸⁴ These men would not become enshrined in Tokyo until 1879, when the names of two men from the Yonezawa domain were added to the register.⁸⁵ But Hayashi's proposal is significant in that it marked the beginning of attempts to transform Tokyo Shōkonsha into a national institution. The desire for higher status was in part practical. Tokyo Shōkonsha had a serious lack of personnel at the time. As many as sixty-two men from patriotic groups were hired in November 1869 to take over administrative tasks, maintenance of the site, and performance of the ritual events; by 1872 the number was reduced to seven.⁸⁶ Naming the memorial was also a cause for concern. A *shōkonsha* was understood to be a site to which gods are temporarily invited from the heavens during rituals. It was not an appropriate designation for an institution where the spirits of the war dead permanently reside. This issue later became crucial for designating Tokyo Shōkonsha as Yasukuni Shrine.

The year 1874 saw two other important events at Tokyo Shōkonsha: Emperor Meiji's first visit and the memorial of those fallen in the Saga Rebellion of February 1874. Emperor Meiji visited the shrine for the first time during a festival on January 27, 1874. The young emperor paid tribute at the worship hall and observed a formal visit by his troops—the newly formed Imperial Army of commoner conscripts.⁸⁷ The following month, 192 of the new conscripts died in Saga while suppressing an uprising by a group of disgruntled former samurai. These men—the first casualties from the emperor's army—were enshrined at Tokyo Shōkonsha on August 27, 1874, as the first new additions since the creation of the shrine. The enshrinement ritual was

performed at the newly prepared *shōkon saitei*, a site dedicated to inviting the spirits.⁸⁸

The Saga Rebellion was the first of a series of armed skirmishes between former samurai and the new military. The shift of political power from the military control of the Tokugawa bakufu to a central government entailed many changes nationwide, including the reorganization of the entire country from domains to prefectures. Another significant change was the elimination of the status system, which hit the samurai class the hardest: They were forced to give up their right to wear swords, and their stipends were cut drastically. In January 1873 the new government inaugurated conscription, introducing and enforcing an entirely new concept of the Japanese military. These rapid reforms sparked uprisings by former samurai, the largest of which was the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. Saigō Takamori led the revolt. He had resigned from the Meiji government and founded a private military academy in his hometown in Kagoshima, formerly Satsuma domain. On January 30, 1873, Saigō's army, supplemented by local dissenters, attacked government troops in the Kumamoto castle, only to be defeated by a large number of supplementary troops sent from Tokyo. By the time Saigō was killed on September 24, 1877, his army had suffered approximately twenty thousand fatalities. More than six thousand government soldiers were killed in the conflict.⁸⁹ Most of the government casualties were enshrined in Tokyo Shōkonsha on November 12, 1877.⁹⁰ Although Saigō had played a key role in the restoration, the dead on Saigō's side (including Saigō himself) were not enshrined because, having rebelled against the state, they were criminals. The Satsuma Rebellion was the last of the domestic disputes associated with the change of political power from the shogunate to the new Meiji government.

These rebellions, the last domestic battles of modern Japan, produced new military deaths: spirits that needed official enshrinement. Most of the imperial dead were enshrined in a ritual preceding a semiannual festival soon thereafter. But these additional deaths highlighted the need for a new function for Tokyo Shōkonsha—the continuous enshrinement of additional spirits. A structured and institutionalized ritual for memorial was desired, as well as official status for the *shōkonsha*. Army and navy personnel were administering ceremonies and events modeled on those of a typical Shinto shrine, with large semiannual festivals supplemented by midsized and small ones, as well as imperial events, including *yōhai*⁹¹ ceremonies and the Tenchōsetsu⁹² festival. But Tokyo Shōkonsha was not a Shinto shrine.

On October 24, 1878, the army sent a written request to the Grand Council of State asking permission to retain a regular priest to perform the rites at Tokyo Shōkonsha.⁹³ The Grand Council denied this request because Tokyo Shōkonsha was not an officially recognized Shinto shrine and did not qualify to retain a priest.⁹⁴ The army then made an inquiry to the ministries of the navy and the interior requesting the designation of Tokyo Shōkonsha as a Shinto shrine. The army representative argued that the presence of a regular priest was required inasmuch as it was a site where “spirits that died during noble battles for the nation reside permanently.”⁹⁵ After several rounds of correspondence among officials of the army, navy, Ministry of the Interior, and the Grand Council of State, on June 4, 1879, all of the parties agreed to designate the shrine as a Special Government Shrine. They also decided that three ministries would share the responsibilities associated with the Tokyo Shōkonsha.⁹⁶ On the same day, Tokyo Shōkonsha was renamed Yasukuni Shrine.⁹⁷ On June 25 an imperial messenger arrived at the shrine in order to perform a ceremony to report the name change to the gods.⁹⁸ The army and the navy assumed sole control of the shrine in 1887.

Many scholars have analyzed the political aspects of designating Tokyo Shōkonsha as Yasukuni Shrine. For example, Murakami Shigeyoshi sees this transition as an attempt by the army to establish a hierarchy of *shōkonsha*, with the Tokyo Shōkonsha at the apex. Patriotism at the local level could be redirected to the state and the emperor by putting regional *shōkonsha* under state control. This would raise an awareness of an emperor-centered nationhood among regional residents, who still felt loyalty to their clans. According to Murakami, Tokyo Shōkonsha needed the official shrine status for this ideological purpose, and the army capitalized on the Satsuma Rebellion as an opportunity to put this system in place.⁹⁹ Shinto scholars disagree with Murakami. Sakamoto Koremaru, for example, points out that by July 1871 the domain system had been abolished in favor of prefectures.¹⁰⁰ Since regional *shōkonsha*, constructed with a domain’s budget and previously supported by it, were neglected and had begun to physically deteriorate, the Meiji government took over the management and operation of regional *shōkonsha* in 1873 and 1874. The Shinto scholars also argue that the designation of Tokyo Shōkonsha as a shrine was not related to a hierarchical relationship between Yasukuni Shrine and regional *shōkonsha* since the regional institutions were not designated as shrines until 1936.¹⁰¹

Murakami’s argument becomes less convincing when contextualized in the relationship between the Meiji government and Shinto in early Meiji. Beginning in 1868, the government had dropped its patronage of Buddhism

and begun its official support of Shinto. But since Shinto was a cult of *kami* worship in the Tokugawa era, the relationship between Shinto and religion remained nebulous at this point. (This relationship would become one source of the postwar problems surrounding Yasukuni Shrine.) Nevertheless, the government made concerted efforts to institutionalize Shinto by assigning rankings to the shrines and organizing people into parishioners (*ujiko*) of shrines.¹⁰² As Helen Hardacre illuminates in her study of State Shinto, the focal point (if any) for the government at this point in the campaign to popularize Shinto was Ise Shrine, already with strong ties to the imperial family.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, it is likely that both the military and the government saw the benefit in officially designating Shinto status to Tokyo Shōkonsha in order to raise the prestige of both Shinto and Shōkonsha.

The army's initial motive for shrine designation was to retain a regular priest. But this was not the most significant change that the memorial underwent when it was designated a shrine. According to Miyaji Naokazu, pioneering scholar of modern Shinto, the principal criteria of a Shinto shrine (*jinja*) is the permanent presence of the god's spirit within the structure.¹⁰⁴ Until the introduction of Buddhism in Japan, Shinto shrines were temporary structures, sometimes merely a small, square space demarcated by four sticks with a pillar in the center, on which the god was to descend during rituals. Sometimes natural objects such as a rock or a tree were considered to be the object into which gods descended. In each case, the gods were sent away after the ritual. When permanent shrines were introduced under the influence of Buddhist temples, it was understood that gods resided in the structures permanently.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, the *shōkon* ceremony at Yasukuni does not include a ritual to send off the spirits after they are appeased. As the army requested, the spirits of the war dead were to reside permanently at Yasukuni. The names of the memorialized were deposited in the Reijibo Hōanden (hall for the enshrinement of registers), located behind the main shrine. The new status as a Special Government Shrine also indicated that those enshrined were loyal subjects, equivalent to the gods of Special Government Shrines throughout Japan, which included notables such as Kusunoki Masashige, Tokugawa Ieyasu, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Oda Nobunaga.¹⁰⁶

It is not clear how the initial creators of Tokyo Shōkonsha conceptualized the building's relationship with the spirits of the fallen. By definition, *shōkonsha* is a shrine into which the spirits of the dead are invited. However, by the time the army requested Shinto shrine status, its interpretation of Tokyo Shōkonsha was that of a conventional Shinto shrine, where

spirits resided permanently. The text of the army's request for a regular priest at Tokyo Shōkonsha argues that the site "is unlike a so-called *shōkonjō* [area designated for *shōkon* rituals], to which the spirits of the heavens are invited to receive an offering on occasion." The document continues that, if this were such a temporary residence for the gods, then "one custodian without a priest would suffice," but since it is "an important and eternal shrine where spirits who fought and died courageously for our nation since the Boshin [War] are enshrined, with four major festivals per year and four minor festivals per month," the employment of a regular priest was critical.¹⁰⁷

As we have seen, the idea behind official memorialization of the war dead continued to develop during the first few years of its inception. The memorialization process assumed more or less its complete shape with the designation of Yasukuni Shrine as a Special Government Shrine, but enshrinement criteria continued to change. Perhaps more important, although the shrine quickly gained popularity as a site of entertainment after the permanent shrine was constructed, the general public, for the most part, remained unaware of the political motivation behind the monument. The character of Yasukuni Shrine would continue to change in succeeding decades, particularly with the onset of Japan's international wars of imperialism. Myths associated with war death were transformed into "Yasukuni the belief" during these conflicts.