

Recommended Further Reading

“Diminishing Returns? Prime Minister Koizumi’s Visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in the Context of East Asian Nationalisms.”

Phil Deans

East Asia 24 (2007): 269-294

The Yasukuni Shrine is a site of contested nationalist politics in Japan and in neighboring countries. Within Japan, the status of the Shrine exists in a tension between public and private (as well as religious and secular) meanings. These tensions are given a specific focus in the context of visits to the Shrine by Japanese Prime Ministers. The history of such visits is discussed and analyzed in this article with particular attention given to the causes and consequences of the visits by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro between 2001 and 2006. It is argued that the controversies over the visits in Japan and elsewhere are best understood in the context of ‘revisionist nationalism’ in Japan.

“The Yasukuni Shrine and the Competing Patriotic Pasts of East Asia.”

Shaun Dwyer

History & Memory 22/2 (2010): 147-177.

In this article, Dwyer examines the patriotic war narrative at the Yushukan, the museum of the Yasukuni Shrine. He argues that the Yushukan narrative and accounts of the war by other countries in the region like Korea and China represents the construction of a “practical past,” one that uses the more authoritative rhetoric of historical narratives in order to legitimize its claims.

While Dwyer argues that such forms of national memory are not bound by the academic standards of historical narrative, the publication of dissenting personal accounts by Japanese war survivors like Ota Masahide nevertheless has the capacity to create debate, and question the nationalist narrative of the Yushukan.

Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity (fourth edition)

H. Byron Earhart

Cengage Learning

This book acts as an introduction to the history of Japanese religion. Of interest to general readers, the book takes the reader through the diversity of Japanese religions including Shinto, Buddhism, religious Taoism and Confucianism. It also introduces the reader to several aspects of Japanese religiosity such as folk religion, Christianity in Japan in the late 19th century, as well as the development of religion after World War II.

“Japan’s Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900-1945.”

Selcuk Eesel

The American Historical Review 109/4 (October 2007): 1140-1170.

Eesel discusses a part of Japanese pre-war history that has not been examined in-depth, namely Japanese nationalists' attempts between 1900 and 1945 to forge allies within the Islamic world. On the one hand, Japanese political and intellectual leaders argued for the importance of building bridges with the Muslim world in order to create a new Asia under Japanese power. On the other hand, some Muslim activists proved willing to collaborate with Japanese imperial power if it meant the expulsion of Western dominion. These developments are especially significant in light of the later U.S. efforts to forge close relations with the Islamic world as a bulwark against communism, a trend that contributed to the rise of radical Islam today. These twentieth-century developments, Eesel argues, may provide a more useful context for understanding today's political Islam than the image of a "clash of civilizations."

"Ainu: Spirit of a Northern People."

William Fitzhugh and Chisato Dubreuil, eds.
Smithsonian Institution, 1999.

The Ainu is a native population in northern Japan, today mostly residing in Hokkaido, of whom most Westerners in North America and Europe are ignorant. The Ainu peoples face discrimination in various areas of their lives, leading many to conceal their ethnic identity. Published by the Smithsonian Institution at the National Museum of Natural History and the University of Washington Press, this book is an illustrated compendium of various aspects of Ainu life including Ainu history, current affairs, arts and culture.

A History of Japanese Religion.

Kazuo Kasahara, ed.
Kosei Publishing, 2002.

This book brings together a range of Japanese scholars to elaborate the history of Japanese religion from prehistory to the present. These scholars provide a wealth of detail on the development of a range of religious traditions, including Buddhist sects, Shinto shrines, Shugendo mountain ascetics, Christian missionaries, and the so-called "new religions" that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The work is particularly strong on the doctrinal debates and changing institutional arrangements that shaped the Japanese religious experience.

"A Feminist Reading of Gender and National Memory at the Yasukuni Shrine."

Jemima Repo
Japan Forum 20/2 (2008): 219-243.

Repo contributes to scholarly debate about the Yasukuni Shrine with a gendered reading of the shrine. She argues that the shrine emphasizes the violence (and violent deaths) of males, thereby glorifying a vision of militarized masculinity while suppressing the portrayal of Japanese woman as anything but subservient. The space and architecture of the Yaskuni portrays woman's role in war as nurturing and domestic. Repo also argues that women of "respectable" sexuality such as the Japanese military nurses and the Okinawan "Star Lilies Corps" (*Himeyuri Butai*) were held up as tirelessly maternal and subservient to the soldiers, with the latter group portrayed as virginal "sacrificial daughters in war narratives. However, this version of history serves to silence the history of those that do not correspond to the ideal. In this respect, efforts to draw attention to the role of Korean and Chinese "comfort women" during the war represents a rejection of the dominant discourses of Yasukuni. Repo ends by pointing out that there is much potential for academic discussion from the viewpoint of critical feminism as it could add to ongoing discussion at Yasukuni and beyond on the nature of national memory.

"Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil."

Whitley R.P. Kaufman

Philosophy East & West 55/1 (January 2005): 15-32.

Kaufman argues here that the doctrine of karma and rebirth developed in the modern period as a systemic explanation of suffering in the world is not a morally satisfactory solution to the problem of evil. The theory has been praised by thinkers like Max Weber for its consistency and has been examined previously by philosophers as to whether it can account for the contradiction that even though God is good and omnipotent, there is still evil in the world. Although Kaufman acknowledges several advantages to the karma theory, he presents five arguments against its adequacy as a response to the problem of evil.

"Awkward Talisman: War Memory, Reconciliation and Yasukuni."

Jeff Kingston.

East Asia 24 (2007): 295-318.

The Yasukuni Shrine is so controversial, says Kingston in this essay, because it is concerned with issues of reconciliation and national memory. Therefore competing narratives have arisen about the shrine, hampering reconciliation. Consequently, groups within and outside of Japan have opposed elite political action at the shrine. However, Kingston argues that no amount of repackaging can hide the shrine's association with Japan's past imperial ideology and its consequences, as Japanese politicians attempt to cast the Yasukuni as an acceptable site for honoring the war dead by depoliticizing it or removing its Class-A war criminals. Instead, Kingston argues that Yasukuni is still useful for it stirs up continued debate about war history and prevents it from fading into the past.

"Mobilizing from the Margins: Domestic Citizen Politics and the Yasukuni Shrine."

Brian Masshardt.

East Asia 24 (2007): 319-335.

Masshardt in this essay examines former Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's six consecutive annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Based on field research, he uncovers the strategies undertaken by various domestic groups who support or oppose his visits to the shrine, such as the Japan Conference and the YDP. This, Masshardt argues, has implications on the construction of Japanese national memory and historical nationalism. He also argues that the ongoing conflict surrounding elite political action at Yasukuni Shrine is not necessarily about "winners" or "losers" but the important implication is that it represents an opportunity for Japan to recognize its responsibility in the war, therefore possibly advancing democracy's progress in Japanese society.

"Religion and Society in Modern Japan: Selected Readings."

Mark Mullins and Shimazono Susumu, eds.

Asian Humanities Press.

This serves as an anthology of religion and society in Japan, with its essays -- from both Japanese and Western scholarship -- focusing specifically on Japanese religiosity, religion and the state, traditional religious institutions and new religious movements. Compiled with an undergraduate audience in mind, the anthology shows the diverse forms of religiosity in Japanese culture and the role it plays in Japanese society.

"Islam in Japan: Adversity and Diversity."

Michael Penn.

Harvard Asia Quarterly 10/1 (2006): 31-36.

In this article, Michael Penn provides an overview to the social condition that Muslims living in today's Japan face. Penn argues that generally, while Muslims want to reach out to Japan, the Japanese are apprehensive about Islam. Muslims in Japan will continue to face some barriers and discrimination in a country that is not particularly welcome of multiculturalism, and the problem is further accentuated for ethnic Japanese who are Muslim, as barriers they face in the workplace are further accentuated by pressures from their family to adhere to Japanese norms. This article suggests that, despite public diplomatic attempts at forging stronger ties between Japan and the Islamic world, the reality for the average Japanese is far from adversity-free. While activists of the 20th century claimed that Islam would soon expand among the Japanese population, this article shows that there is still much apprehension in contemporary society towards the religion.

"Beyond Belief: Japanese Approaches to the Meaning of Religion."

James Mark Shields.

Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 39/2 (2010): 133-149.

In this short essay, Shields examines some distinctive features of Japanese religiosity, contrasting these with the assumptions that often guide Western scholars' approaches to religion. Examining the phenomenon of orthopraxy (that practice, rather than doctrine, is primary) in Japanese religion, he explores the particular way in which religion and the state have been linked throughout Japanese history.

"Islam in Indonesia: Its History, Development and Future Challenges."

Jusuf Wannandi

Asia-Pacific Review 9/2 (2002): 104-112.

This article provides an overview of the role of Islam in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country. Wannandi argues that Islam has always been mainstream, moderate and open. While religious parties have been politically important they have never made Indonesia a Muslim state. Therefore, Wannandi suggests that even though some aggressive, extremist Islamic groups have sought to set the political tone of the country since the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, these are in the minority as most groups are moderate, tolerant and democratic. The positive development of Islam, he argues, is only complicated by the weakness of the government and the nation's political and economic crises. If these problems are solved, Wannandi says, Indonesia could be held as the model of political Islam around the world.