

Proposal to Humiliation Panel for 2nd International Conference for Multicultural Discourses

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Yasukuni Shrine: Preventing Humiliation for East Asia, Preserving Dignity for Japan's War Dead.

Yasukuni shrine is one of the few relics left of the Meiji period's "state Shinto" movement in Japan. Though Yasukuni shrine no longer receives financial support from the Japanese government, in accordance with the "Shinto directive" imposed on Japan by the United States occupation forces, a shrine visit by the Japanese prime minister stirs up heated controversy both within Japan and abroad. 1,068 persons accused of war crimes including 12 class A war criminals are enshrined at Yasukuni, every year on August 5th, the anniversary of the day the Japanese government officially surrendered to the Allied forces, thousands come to Yasukuni, including Japanese military veterans dressed in sixty year old Japanese military uniforms, right wing groups in large black busses with nationalist slogans pasted on the side, and people who lived through the war who come to pray in respect for the family members who died. This past August former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi was among the participants at the shrine, which outraged many of Japan's neighbors, principally Japan and Korea. Shinzo Abe, the current nationalist leading Japanese Prime Minister supported Mr. Koizumi's visit to the shrine.

Currently, Mr. Abe is making relations with Japan and Korea, as well as the United States a top priority on his political agenda. A trip to visit the leaders of both China and South Korea was the first move he made after being named the new Japanese PM. Mr. Abe's decision of whether or not to visit Yasukuni shrine will have a major impact on Japan's relations with its Asian neighbors and the international

perception of Japan abroad.

This paper argues that the issue of the Japanese prime minister's visit to Yasukuni shrine is far more than a superficial act, done to appease Japan's right wing political factions, but is a major symbolic event. I explore how the symbol of Yasukuni shrine serves to heighten feelings of humiliation among Japan's Asian neighbors, particularly The People's Republic of China and the two Koreas, while at the same time preserving the dignity of those who feel close to the wartime Japan, most of whom have lost loved ones in military service to Japan.

I explore relative literature from the field of humiliations studies, as well as psychoanalysis, and deconstructionist analyses to consider the symbolic role Yasukuni shrine plays in Japanese public and civic life, Japan's East Asian relations, as well as Japan's image around the world. I will also outline the history of Shinto(ism) and describe Yasukuni's place in Shinto history. Other topics related to Japan's relations with East Asia like revisionist text books, and disputes over historical claims pertaining to Japan's alleged and/or actual war crimes especially highlighting the Yushuman nationalist war museum at Yasukuni shrine will be considered from the perspective within Japanese society as well as from the Korean and Chinese perspectives. I will also discuss the future of Yasukuni and the need for alternative monuments and traditions to honor those who died in military service to Japan.