

## 10 ‘Land of kami, land of the dead’

### Paligenesis and the aesthetics of religious revisionism in Kobayashi Yoshinori’s ‘Neo-Gōmanist Manifesto: On Yasukuni’

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Figure 10.1 *Shin gōmanizumu sengen special: Yasukuniron* [Neo-Gōmanism Manifesto Special: On Yasukuni], p. 12.<sup>1</sup>

Manga is an art that should warn of or actively attack all things in the world that are unjust, irrational, unnatural, or incongruous with the will of the nation.

Katō Etsurō, *Shin rinen manga no gihō*  
[Techniques for a New Manga], 1942

Yasukuni Shrine is the final stronghold in defence of the history, spirit, and culture of Japan.

Kobayashi Yoshinori, *Yasukuniron*, 2005, 68

In 1992, just as Japan’s economic bubble was in process of bursting, a series of manga began to appear in the weekly Japanese tabloid *SPA!* under the title *Gōmanism sengen* (Haughtiness or Insolence Manifesto). Authored by Kobayashi Yoshinori (b. 1953), this series blurs the line between manga and graphic novel<sup>2</sup> to engage in forthright social and political commentary with an unabashedly (ultra-)nationalistic slant. Over the next decade and a half, Kobayashi and his works became a publishing

phenomenon. As of 2010, there were over 30 volumes of Gōmanism (and Neo-Gōmanism) manga, including several ‘special editions’ – such as the best-selling *Shin gōmanizumu sengen special: Sensōron* (Neo-Gōmanism Manifesto Special: On War, 1998) – that have caused controversy and even international criticism for their revisionist portrayal of modern Japanese history.<sup>3</sup> At its most general, Neo-Gōmanism is a graphic ‘style’ marked by withering sarcasm and blustering anger at what is perceived as Japanese capitulation to the West and China on matters of foreign policy and the treatment of recent East Asian history. Its very success, however, warrants closer treatment.

In 2005, Kobayashi published a graphic work entitled *Shin gōmanizumu sengen special: Yasukuniron* (Neo-Gōmanism Manifesto Special: On Yasukuni), which tackles the much-debated ‘problem’ of Yasukuni Shrine, the militaristic religious complex that has become a lightning-rod for debates regarding Japanese historical memory – especially with regard to the military expansionism in East Asia that led to the Asia-Pacific War (1931–45). Frequently overlooked in discussions of Yasukuni, however, are a number of complex issues related to its religious doctrines – in particular, the interpretation of Shinto presented at Yasukuni and the dominant ideology of Japan’s military era: ‘State Shinto’ (*kokka Shintō*). This essay examines the portrayal of the Yasukuni Issue within *Yasukuniron*, in order to: (a) flesh out the characteristics of Kobayashi’s Neo-Gōmanism in relation to the ‘theology’ of State Shinto; (b) examine the power and limits of manga as a representational form for teaching about the complex nexus of religion, politics and history in modern Japan; and (c) make the case that Yasukuni Shrine itself has long functioned as a form of ‘revisionist manga’ – and is thus the perfect subject for Kobayashi’s Neo-Gōmanist treatment.

### **Yasukuni and the legacy of State Shinto: a brief overview<sup>4</sup>**

The shrine that would become Yasukuni was founded in 1869, a year following the Meiji Restoration, as a place for ‘pacifying’ the spirits of all those killed in wars fought for the ‘nation’.<sup>5</sup> Originally known as Tokyo Shōkonsha (literally, Tokyo shrine for the invocation of the dead), the name was changed to Yasukuni Jinja in 1879 at the behest of the Meiji Emperor. As Kobayashi notes, Yasukuni was chosen to imply ‘pacify the nation’, and in a (State) Shinto context this was understood to mean that the primary if not sole purpose of this shrine was to pacify the spirits of the war dead, which would help bring tranquility (and protection) to the national body (*kokutai*).<sup>6</sup> Administered directly by the ministries of the Army and Navy, by the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), Yasukuni had entered into popular consciousness as a symbol of Japanese imperial conquest and a focus for the state-sponsored cult of the war dead. Today, Yasukuni enshrines the ‘souls’ of 2.5 million people, including roughly 57,000 women, 21,000 Koreans, 28,000 Taiwanese, at least three Britons and, most controversially by far, 14 individuals indicted as ‘Class A’ war criminals.<sup>7</sup> All of these men and women ‘offered their lives to the nation in the upheavals that brought forth the modern state’ between 1853 and the present. As such, according

to Kobayashi (and Yasukuni), those enshrined at Yasukuni are anything but 'mere victims' (*tan naru giseisha*). They are rather 'martyrs' (*junnansha*) 'heroic spirits' (*eirei*), and '(protective) gods of the nation' (*gokokushin*). As we shall see, the intertwined tropes of martyrdom and victimhood play an important role in the attempt to 'restore' Yasukuni – and by extension, true Japanese 'spirit' and 'identity'.

In contrast to the coverage of the various political issues raised by Yasukuni, the more specific religious or 'theological' elements are often overlooked in popular coverage as well as within scholarly analysis. Yasukuni is, after all, a 'shrine', and one that has played a central role in the formulation and expression of a particular religious ideology that is often known today as 'State Shinto' (*kokka Shintō*).<sup>8</sup> While there remains much debate over the precise meaning of State Shinto, there is general consensus that modern Shinto nationalism has roots in the so-called National Learning or Nativist School (*kokugaku*) of the mid- to late Edo period (1600–1867). While Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) is the most significant early figure in Shinto revivalism, it was his self-proclaimed successor, Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), who transfigured nativist doctrine into a more 'heroic' and populist form, focused on loyalty, patriotism and attunement to the spirits of the dead.<sup>9</sup> Known as Hirata or Restoration Shinto (*fukkō Shintō*), Atsutane's interpretation of Shinto nativism would come to serve as one of the primary doctrinal foundations for the State Shinto of Meiji, Taishō and early Shōwa.<sup>10</sup> It is also important to note the influence of Confucian and Neo-confucian traditions, which had gained influence in the Edo period as a source of ethical and sociopolitical reflection on the nation. Whereas 'traditional' Shinto provided to State Shinto a connection to the Japanese ancestral land, indigenous spirits and the symbolic power of the emperor, Confucianism, especially as interpreted via the Mito School, added a strong sense of moral righteousness, including the core virtues of loyalty (*chū*) and filial piety (*kō*) – transplanted in State Shinto from the head of the family to the head of the family-state (*kokka*), i.e., the emperor.<sup>11</sup>

The basic 'theology' of State Shinto, at least in its later, wartime incarnation, might be summarised as follows: (a) all Japanese belong to a single national body (*kokutai*), whose 'head' is the emperor – not any specific person so much as the 'unbroken' imperial line; (b) the Imperial House, by virtue of its lineal connection to the heavenly *kami*, as confirmed in the sacred classics, is sacrosanct and inviolable; (c) all Japanese, by virtue of being members of the national body, owe their complete allegiance and filial piety to the emperor, a living *kami*; (d) by extension, all Japanese must obey the directives of the (imperial) state, even to the point of giving their lives for the *kokutai*.<sup>12</sup> This is also the theological foundation of Yasukuni Shrine – albeit with a greater emphasis on the glories of self-sacrifice and martyrdom. As I will show in this essay, while Kobayashi's manga revisioning<sup>13</sup> of Yasukuni also relies on this basic set of theological or ideological premises, *Yasukuniron* indicates a subtle but significant shift in focus away from the ancient period, the Imperial House and the state and towards a populist, modernist and possibly fascist rendering of 'State Shinto'. In some ways, this might be read as a 'return' to Atsutane's vision of National Learning as largely a 'cult of the dead'.

## The Gōmanist ‘truth’ about the Yasukuni problem

The title of the preface to *Yasukuniron* – ‘The Ignorance behind the Yasukuni Problem’ (‘Muchi ni yoru Yasukuni mondai’)<sup>14</sup> – is pure Gōmanism. Here and throughout the manga Kobayashi asserts that the entire ‘problem’ of Yasukuni is based on a widespread (at times, it would seem, universal) ignorance of the various issues involved, an ignorance willfully perpetuated by national politicians and the mass media. However, the Truth is out there (or rather, in here, i.e., the pages of *Yasukuniron*), and possession of that Truth will set us all free from our blindness. In short, do not expect to find here any postmodern prevarications about the nature of truth and reality. It can and will be uncovered, using ‘objective’ methods of historical investigation (coupled, of course, with stark and sometimes disturbing visuals).<sup>15</sup> However, Kobayashi and his manga avatar (who I will refer to as K) are not only waging a battle against ignorance, for such ignorance is aided and abetted by cowardice and moral failure.<sup>16</sup> We see this visualised on page 22, where K practically jumps out of the frame to declaim that, unless the nation ‘has the balls’ to restore Yasukuni Shrine to its rightful place, there will be no hope of a ‘Japanese restoration’ (or perhaps, a ‘revival of the Japanese people’).<sup>17</sup> This is the underlying theme of the work, and makes for a narrative whose storyline is epic in structure, with the lone hero – the manga-fied everyman K – engaged in a quest against enemies of various sorts.<sup>18</sup> The reader is invited to identify with the author via his avatar, and become a part of the battle for the restoration of Truth. This is visualised most clearly on page 12, where, after the formulaic query/call to arms: ‘Goman kamashite yoka desu ka?’ (‘Will you permit me to be a little insolent?’) the reader is explicitly invited to join the quest for the truth (*shinjitsu*) about Yasukuni, in order to help rescue the nation from its ‘shameful’ state brought about by the misinformation of the unholy triumvirate of ‘politicians, scholars and the mass media’.

The ‘argument’ of *Yasukuniron* works in piecemeal fashion, a form which is not only well-suited to manga format but also reflects a particular style of academic discourse in Japan, where the structure sometimes tends to be considerably less encumbered than in the West. As an opening gambit, *Yasukuniron* begins with a stark example of popular misunderstanding regarding Yasukuni – in this case, ignorance the Shinto doctrine and practice of *bunshi* 分祀 (lit. ‘separation of worship’, but best translated as ‘the ritual separation and transfer of an enshrined *kami* to another shrine’).<sup>19</sup> After noting, quite correctly, that politicians in the National Diet frequently call for the ‘separation’ of the enshrined Class A war criminals at Yasukuni, K argues that the ritual process of *bunshi* in Shinto is akin to the transfer of a flame from one candle to another; in each case, nothing is lost of the original. On the contrary, the original flame/*kami* is by this means effectively *multiplied* (quite the opposite of our common-sense understanding of ‘separation’). Before coming to the conclusion of this mini set-piece, K adds a personal anecdote. He too, we (literally) ‘see’, is briefly puzzled by the fact that a small shrine in his Tokyo neighborhood could be dedicated to Ōkununushi (a popular *kami* who plays a significant role in the early chronicles *Kojiki* and *Nihon*

*shoki*), when this *kami*'s 'home' is the grand Izumo Taisha in distant Shimane prefecture. The answer is, of course, that he/we/politicians do not get the true meaning of *bunshi*, in which is it quite reasonable to have a single *kami* enshrined in hundreds or even, with major *kami* like Inari, Tenjin and Hachiman, tens of thousands of shrines. And yet: 'This is the Shinto idea'. Then the climax, with a mocking K pointing his finger: 'If you were to "separate" the Class A war criminals, General Tōjō and the rest would remain in Yasukuni as well as appear in the new location . . . *If this is what you want, then by all means, go ahead and "separate"!*'<sup>20</sup>

This brief tableau bears analysis, since it is representative of the style that characterises Kobayashi's Gōmanist manga. While K's presentation of the Shinto doctrine and ritual of *bunshi* is quite correct, it is here employed in a classic case of rhetorical bait and switch. When politicians, commentators or scholars call for a 'separation' of Class A war criminals from Yasukuni, they are *not* referring to the 'orthodox' doctrine of *bunshi*, but rather to the more elusive – and, it has been argued, palpably 'modern' – idea of the souls of Yasukuni being enshrined as a collective unit – a mass *tama* without distinction.<sup>21</sup> This, at least according to the shrine itself, is the primary reason that the souls cannot be 'separated'. As Yasukuni head priest Matsudaira Nagayoshi (1915–2005), explained in 1987:

That [i.e., separation] is absolutely impossible. In this shrine there is something called a 'seat' (*za*), which acts as a cushion (*zabuton*) for the *kami*. In shrines other than Yasukuni, such a 'seat' does not exist. The 2.5 million soul-pillars rest on the same cushion. It is impossible to separate them from this (*hikihansu koto wa dekimasen*).<sup>22</sup>

After a panel in which K notes that, in any event, only 'atheists' and 'materialists' would conceive of telling certain enshrined *kami* that they alone are a 'bother' (*jama*) and need to be placed elsewhere, this first salvo is quickly followed by an equally derisive rejection of the alternative proposal: to build a national 'non-religious' memorial for the war dead (*kokuritsu tsuitō shisetsu*). K's point here is reliant entirely on emotion, based on a staple trope of Yasukuni war remembrance: the final promise of imperial soldiers to their comrades and loved ones that they would 'meet again at Yasukuni'. He asks, with a sneer, whether politicians are prepared to say to these men (or their departed souls), just 60 years after the war's end, that they will instead have to settle for a posthumous rendezvous at the 'National Memorial Facility'. This argument is continued throughout chapter four, in which K – surely aware of the irony given the historical connection between Yasukuni and State Shinto – accuses the Koizumi administration (and opposition) of attempting to create a 'new religion' for the state, one that attempts to bypass the rituals of Shinto, Buddhism and Christianity, but ends up being merely a religion without substance.<sup>23</sup>

All throughout, the reader is peppered with images of various sorts: some realistic (K's face, the neighborhood shrine), others 'comic' (caricatures of various

politicians), and still others abstract (tadpole-like souls swimming through the air, in search of their proper home) or palpably symbolic (a Shinto *torii* [gate] bathed in a bright glow). The author adds a panel above the images, in which he adds another layer of comment. Here, in the Gōmanist equivalent of a scholarly footnote, we read that while Shinto forms the basis of an unconscious ethos for all Japanese, it has only weak prescriptions for regulating external behavior. This is why commentators are led to the mistaken conclusion that Shinto is ‘flexible’ (*yūzū ga kikumono*) and therefore open to change at the whim of politics.<sup>24</sup> While it is certainly true that premodern Shinto lacks the formality of doctrine found in most religious traditions, and is therefore, one might argue, more susceptible to political manipulation, the assumption that Shinto forms the unconscious core of the Japanese ethos is one that deserves more attention. I will return to this later in the essay.

Chapter one – ‘The Truth about Yasukuni Group Enshrinement that is Unknown to National Diet Members’ (‘Kokkai giin ga shiranai Yasukuni gōshi no shinjitsu’) – picks up the theme of the ignorance of politicians in relation to the Yasukuni doctrine of ‘group enshrinement’ (*gōshi*). The opening pages, however, are devoted to reflection on the nature of war (as a nearly-universal modern phenomenon, *usually* begun by Western powers), buttressed by a by-now familiar litany regarding the illegitimacy (and ‘victor’s justice’) of both the Tokyo War Crimes Trial and San Francisco Peace Treaty. Noting that most of the contemporary debate on Yasukuni surrounds the issue of the 1978 enshrinement of the fourteen ‘Class A’ war criminals, K boldly asserts that, in fact, this debate is based on a false premise: i.e., that these men actually *were/are* ‘Class A war criminals’. In fact, K asserts, citing the dissenting opinion of Indian Judge Pal, they – along with other 1850 or so ‘war criminals’ – are rather collective victims, even ‘martyrs’ (*junnan shisha*) of a ‘ceremony of savage retribution’ (*yaban na hōfuku no gishiki*) waged by the victorious Allies.<sup>25</sup>

Here the argument begins to turn away from the opinions of weak-kneed politicians and leftist media towards that of the Japanese people, who, K claims, stand squarely on the right side of truth. On the one hand, Kobayashi Gōmanism leans heavily on the appeal of the author (and his avatars) as a lone crusader fighting for truth and justice, but in order to succeed he must also hearken to ethnic populism: ‘we’ ordinary Japanese *know* the truth, even if our ‘leaders’ do not. As is familiar in contemporary conservative populism wherever it is found, a sharp divide is thus established between the elites (i.e., intellectuals, media, government) and the people (however vaguely defined).<sup>26</sup> While there is thus a recognition of a national ‘personality split’, it is one that may be healed over time, if we are willing to take the necessary steps.<sup>27</sup> In *Yasukuniron*, this tension is resolved in the following fashion: postwar Japanese (including the bulk of politicians and media) were quite content with the postwar meaning of Yasukuni, but they have since either (a) lost interest because caught up in a ‘materialist’ culture, or (b) been negatively influenced by a few leftist politicians and the mass media, who since 1985 have effectively *created* the Yasukuni ‘problem’.<sup>28</sup> In short, this is the story of a collective, and fairly recent, *fall* into ignorance – albeit one that is not primarily the fault of the people.<sup>29</sup> The organic metaphor here is (disturbingly) familiar: the nation is



sick, and requires a strong dose of medicine – i.e., Gōmanism – to be brought back to health.

Throughout this chapter, as elsewhere in *Yasukuniron*, the 'argument' is broken up by episodes of unabashed sentiment, or what we might call 'human interest' stories: first a one-page aside regarding an emotional song written by several 'war criminals' in a Philippine jail cell, which not only became a hit in postwar Japan but had such an effect on the Philippine president that he was moved to release all Japanese prisoners of war; then a brief vignette regarding the author's reception of a certificate (*saishin no ki*) from Yasukuni noting the posthumous 'deification' of his own grandfather, who perished in Siberia during the war, and his decision in 1999 to contribute a manga-decorated lantern to Yasukuni for display during the annual Mitama Matsuri (several of which are reproduced in the manga).<sup>30</sup>

Finally, just prior to the chapter's close with a rousing call-to-arms, K begins another counter-argument against those who claim that Yasukuni is in fact a modern and derivative version of (State) Shinto, a nationalist ideology that is not representative of anything in Japanese religion, tradition or custom. This point is further elaborated in chapter two, where it makes up a large part of K's analysis of the Japanese public's 'fall' away from the truth about Yasukuni. As my analysis here is based primarily on the religious claims of Yasukuni and *Yasukuniron*, this is a 'rebuttal' that requires further attention. After establishing the black and white scenario of 'us' vs. 'them' throughout chapter one, K gives us a very brief history of Shinto, in which he admits that what we call 'Shinto' has 'naturally transformed over the course of history'. In short, though 'Shinto may have a "foundation", it is *not* thereby "fundamentalist"' ('Shinto ni "genri" wa aru toshite, "genrishugi" wa nai'). On face, this seems a striking admission, since it runs against a common understanding of Shinto as the unchanging substructure (or, as K put it in the preface) 'unconscious ethos' of the Japanese people. However, with recent trends in Shinto scholarship – notably after the work of Kuroda Toshio, and more recently in the writings of John Breen and Mark Teeuwen – which question the very existence of anything we can reasonably call 'Shinto' prior to the eighteenth century, Kobayashi could hardly rely on such an uncritical ahistorical essentialism (K admits in particular the significant impact of Buddhism on Shinto, though the example provided is of architectural rather than doctrinal influence). K's reply, here and in chapter two, is more subtle: (a) Yasukuni Shrine may be a 'modern' creation, but this is simply because it is dedicated to the construction of Japan as a modern nation; since this is a set of conditions that never existed in the past, there was literally no need for such a shrine before the Meiji Restoration; (b) following on this, he asks, by what criterion do we call something a 'tradition' or 'custom'? – is Meiji Shrine, K asks, also a product of the modern period, not a traditional shrine?; (c) on the other hand, Yasukuni *is* rooted in an ancient tradition, i.e., the longstanding Japanese practice of 'ancestor worship' (*sosen sūhai*).<sup>31</sup> Thus, K argues, while Yasukuni as an institution may have 'modern' elements, it is squarely rooted in an ancient Japanese tradition of reverence for the spirits of the dead – whatever one might choose to call that tradition.<sup>32</sup> Here we see a subtle

but important shift away from 'Shinto' to the practice of ancestor veneration as the root of Japanese spirit, culture and 'identity'.

### **Envisioning (with) the dead**

Embedded within Kobayashi's treatment is a portrayal of Yasukuni, and by extension, the enshrined heroes who sacrificed their lives to build a modern Japan, and whose souls continue to protect Japan, as 'victims' of widespread (internal) ignorance and (external) violence. The violence of which the imperial army – and particularly the individuals judged as war criminals – is so often accused is here turned around against the accusers. This is dramatically visualised throughout *Yasukuniron*, in which every single image of the heroic dead is presented in a form that scholars of fascism would identify as *kitsch* – i.e., unambiguously sentimentalised, to the point of caricature (Figure 10.2), while the faces and figures of the 'others' – especially Chinese and Koreans – are generally rendered as cruel and vindictive monsters (Figure 10.3).<sup>33</sup> This applies to a lesser extent to the depiction of Westerners as well as 'internal others' – politicians, the mass media and leftist activists and intellectuals – though the latter are more often depicted as being pathetic/slavish (politicians) or fanatics (leftists, media) (Figures 10.4 and 10.5).

In all cases, the emphasis is clearly on the violence, both literal and figurative, that has been and continues to be done *to* Yasukuni-qua-the heroic dead-qua-'the Japanese' *by* others. The menace of internal violence is perfectly encapsulated in a small frame (see Figures 10.6 and 10.7, below), which depicts two leering figures with a newspaper representing the media, activists and politicians extending out of the Japanese islands to drop flaming *torii* on the heads of what are presumably ordinary Japanese people, who scramble about in a panic (Figure 10.6), while the spectre of external violence is dramatically depicted in several images on page 46, which show the 'ethnic character' of Japan literally melting away (*subete massatsu shite*), while foreigners (holding their respective national flags) look on with disdain, egged on by Japanese leftists who call for increasing 'globalisation' (Figure 10.7).

### **Revisioning (state) Shinto as peace**

In order to support the claim that Yasukuni is a legitimate and traditional representation of Japanese spirituality and identity and not (simply) a political or nationalist symbol as it is so often represented, K presents the doctrine and practice of Yasukuni as being founded on Japanese ancestor veneration, which is itself a specific instance of a more general desire to bring peace and harmony both to one's loved ones and to the community at large. Here the argument runs in several directions. First, it includes an attempt to render the Japanese practice of 'comforting the dead' a natural and universal aspect of 'national character' – i.e., an (inviolable) part of culture and tradition – and thus 'completely distinct from a practice that is rooted in nation or ethnicity'.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, there *are* important differences between



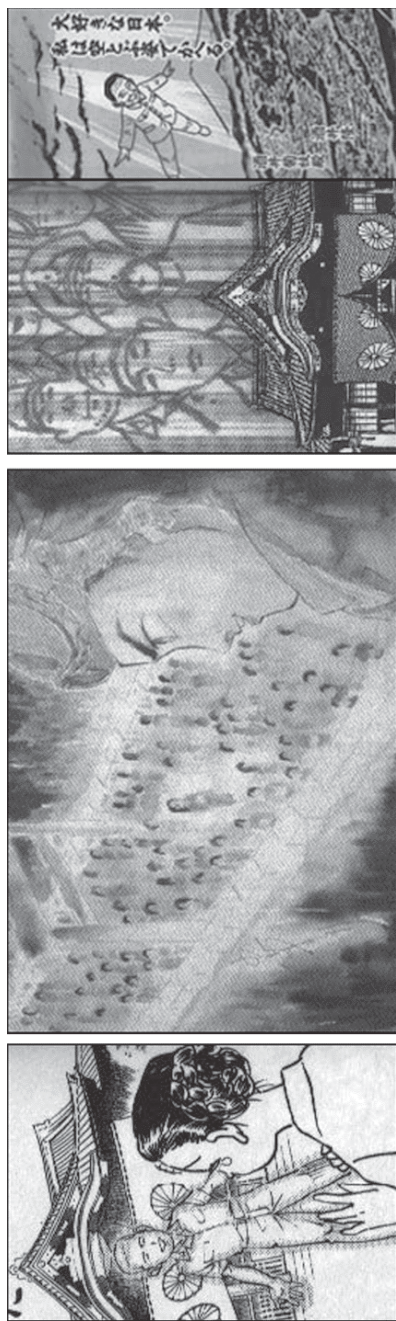


Figure 10.2 Depictions of war dead as 'heroic spirits', (from left to right, pp. 41, 19, 45, 137).



Figure 10.3 External others as 'monsters' (from left to right pp. 14, 121, 138).



Figure 10.4 Slavish politicians, p. 9.



Figure 10.5 Fanatical media, p. 34.

the various religious understandings of the afterlife. As opposed to Christianity, K asserts, where spirits are called home to be with the one God, in Japanese polytheism *kami* can be found literally anywhere and everywhere, and those who die are automatically considered to be *kami* or buddhas. Moreover, as opposed to the Christian separation of this world and the next, for ‘we Japanese’, the dead remain among us, even, as the accompanying graphic indicates, within the hustle and bustle of urbanised modern life. So far, this argument suggests that non-Japanese should understand and respect these differences in the Japanese understanding of the afterlife. There is also here an implication that the Japanese have a closer, more immediate relation to the dead, who live among them, than do Christians – and this



Figure 10.6 Violence of the internal other, p. 12.



Figure 10.7 Violence of the external other, p. 46.

difference plays a role in understanding the importance of Yasukuni to the Japanese national character and identity. But the discussion of religious differences does not end there; on pages 42 and 43 K presents a sharp contrast between the peaceful and tolerant Japanese afterlife (where everyone is automatically raised to the status of a *kami* or buddha), and the Chinese belief, 'in which the flesh of the dead is torn off their bones by their bitter enemies, and the bones are ground to a powder, which is then consumed'.<sup>35</sup> In short, while Yasukuni Shinto is based on a universal need to comfort the dead, the unique elements of the traditional Japanese concept of the afterlife provide a tenor of tolerance and peace that is in stark contrast to that found in countries such as China (Figures 10.8 and 10.9) – which, hypocritically but perhaps unsurprisingly, practices the very same form of





*Figure 10.8* Chinese afterlife, p. 42.



*Figure 10.9* Japanese afterlife, p. 42.

posthumous violence on the Japanese war dead as they imagine happens in the Chinese afterlife.

Without getting into the fact that both Chinese and Japanese understandings of the afterlife are extremely varied (largely as a result of both countries having



Figure 10.10 'The people' honouring Yasukuni, p. 39.



Figure 10.11 'Protecting' Yasukuni, p. 22.

complex and highly syncretic religious histories), we might note that K's analysis leaves out the deeply rooted Sino-Japanese conception of the the dead as 'restless' and potentially 'wrathful' spirits (*onryō* or *goryō*) caught in a state of limbo – a popular belief which has roots that date to the ninth century, and very much continues to this day (as witnessed by the success of recent Japanese horror films like 'The Ring' ('Ringu') and 'The Grudge' ('Juon')). More to the point, it would appear that this belief was the primary instigation for the establishment of Yasukuni Shrine itself as a place to 'pacify' the spirits of the war dead. In other words, the shine may have originally been intended not to protect the souls of the

heroic dead, but rather to protect the living from their unsettled wrath!<sup>36</sup> While this is clearly not an idea promoted by either Yasukuni or the Yūshūkan today, it does relate, however unintentionally, to Kobayashi's implication that his heroic spirits have every right to be wrathful. Throughout the manga, K frames the act of pilgrimage to Yasukuni in terms of both *honoring* and *pacifying* the spirits – albeit less for their violent deaths in battle as for what they have suffered *since* the war.

### Individuation and nationalisation of the 'heroic spirits'

As has been noted, one of the central tensions in Yasukuni Shinto is that between the deceased spirits as individuals – with distinctive personalities, ambitions and family relationships, and as subjects – i.e., embodiments of the national spirit of heroism, loyalty and sacrifice in the face of near-certain death. Within State Shinto logic, this was normally glossed with the notion that the Imperial State is an extension of the family, and thus all individualised feelings and duties must be sublimated (or sacrificed) to the higher calling of national loyalty. In practice, what we see is an accommodation to individuation of the heroic dead, at least within certain limits. On a practical level, of course, it would be impossible to deny the emotional connection between the war dead enshrined at Yasukuni and their loved ones left behind – not least because of the fact that this is (unsurprisingly) a central theme of so many of their letters and diaries.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the emotional bond is what brings many to the shrine itself; family members go to Yasukuni to 'meet' and 'pray for/to' their deceased kin. The 'doctrinal' facts that these individuals have been posthumously elevated into *mikoto* or *kamigami*, and thus separated from all worldly ties, or rendered into a single mass *tama/kami* that protects the nation, holds little resonance for Yasukuni visitors, who approach the dead as they would at any Buddhist temple or family altar. And this extends even to those without enshrined family members. Indeed, the final chamber of the Yūshūkan museum, which displays the personal letters of hundreds of these young men, is by far the most moving part of the museum. Whatever one's politics, it is hard not to be stirred by the words of these men – particularly when they speak of their parents and children. What is missing, of course, is any sense that these men may have been divided in their loyalties, or hesitant to sacrifice themselves for the Emperor and 'family-state'. While they are thus individuated in terms of the specifics of their letters, these same letters take on a standard form that serves to erase any trace of resistance. It goes without saying that a more comprehensive analysis of the writings of the Japanese military during the war – including the *tokkōtai* – provides a much more diverse field of perspectives.<sup>38</sup>

In the pages of *Yasukuniron*, Kobayashi follows the Yūshūkan museum in this 'accommodation' of the individual-qua-subject. In fact, the attempt to render in graphic form the heroic lives – and more importantly, deaths – of these men is fundamental to Kobayashi's 'thesis', which, as noted, relies heavily on the evoking an emotional attachment to 'our ancestors' (*ware ware no sosen*). In this sense, chapter three: 'Japanese Spirits: The Heroic Suicides of the Postwar' ('Nihonjin no tama: Shusen jiketsu resshi'), forms the heart of the manga. After chastising



the postwar Japanese for so quickly adopting US-imposed principles and values – and, at the instigation of the fanatical left-wing – coming to spit upon those who fought and lost the war, K goes on a quest to uncover the personal stories of some extraordinary heroes. While the Yūshūkan and others have paid attention to the lives and deaths of many of these ‘ordinary’ men and women, K ups the ante by retrieving the heroic legends of a few of the roughly 600 individuals who gave up their lives *after* the war’s end on 15 August, 1945. In these brief stories, which combine a few dramatic and gory images with an abundance of text, we see a similar pattern emerge as with the Yūshūkan letters. Though the stories are unique in some respects, they merge together to create a common, nationalised subject. Notable throughout these heroic tales is the fact that, while the the apparent moral is the unswerving loyalty of these men as imperial subjects – embodied in their refusal to accept American domination<sup>39</sup> – their reproduced letters reveal their love for their family members, whom they will ‘meet again’ at Yasukuni. This is continued in the following section, in which five additional letters from fallen soldiers are reproduced on lined paper.<sup>40</sup> In short, the immediate emotional appeal of family ties serves as a ‘hook’ to draw us back to Yasukuni, which becomes nothing more or less than the ‘holographic entry point’ through which ‘we Japanese’ can return ‘home’ to our identity as national subjects.<sup>41</sup>

### **The paligenetic imperative: manga as tool for revival of the Japanese ‘spirit’**

Though Kobayashi’s manga are presented as expressions of his own personal (and ‘insolent’) opinions, their very popularity betrays a receptive audience of like-minded readers, and renders them worthy of study as a sociocultural phenomenon. Moreover, Kobayashi’s personal links to the revisionist Liberal Historiography Study Group (‘Jiyūshugi shikan kenkyūkai’), the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (‘Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukuru kai’), as well as the Japan Conference (‘Nihon kaigi’)<sup>42</sup> suggest a larger goal of educational, social and religious – if not outright political – transformation.<sup>43</sup> The reader is explicitly invited to join the fight for a revival of the true Japanese spirit or culture – rooted in the virtues of respect, filial piety, national pride, self-sacrifice and, last but not least, a sense of ‘heroic history’. To do so, they must first *identify* with Yasukuni, which both symbolises this spirit and literally ‘embodies’ the victimhood of the nation’s heroes to the continuing violence of ‘others’.<sup>44</sup> Thus, what is aimed for here is more than simply a ‘closed community of mourning’, since the process of individuated and collective mourning is conceived as a form of self and communal realisation.<sup>45</sup> Though it thrives on a bombastic method of ‘insolence’, Kobayashi’s Neo-Gōmanism is, at bottom *technique of subjectivity*; i.e., an ideology that looks to reconstruct a (national) identity via individual conversion. Crucially, this conversion takes place through *identification* – which is at least as much a visual and emotive process as a cognitive one. And it is a conversion that can only effectively take place at Yasukuni Shrine. In all of these senses, Neo-Gōmanism here, as elsewhere, is committed to the paligenetic imperative, which Roger Griffin has



Figure 10.12 K 'inviting' us to 'see' the spirits, p. 146.

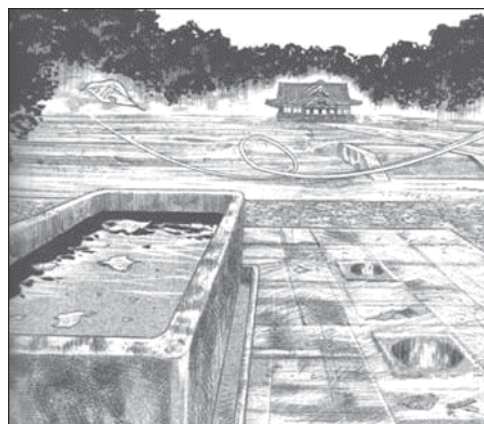


Figure 10.13 Yasukuni, if left 'unprotected', p. 196.

argued is central to fascism; i.e., the myth of the a 'purifying, cathartic, national rebirth'.<sup>46</sup> The trope of (national-cum-individual) sickness, humiliation and victimhood followed by an apotheosis of rebirth is visually encapsulated in the final page of chapter seven (previously published in *Sensoron II*), in which K stands, Christ-like, in front of the mass of ordinary Japanese, urging us to recognise that the very world in which we live has been constructed on the pillars of those who sacrificed their lives in the war (Figure 10.12). Here, the visual turns things around, so that the invited reader is placed in a position behind the spirits (who appear in their usual ghostly, benevolent form), facing K and those who have already realised the truth.<sup>47</sup>

In its unspecified promise of both communal healing and individual redemption, here, as elsewhere, the imagery resonates with Griffin's analysis of the fascist mythos, which attempts to 'unleash strong affective energies' through a vision of reality by positing an organic nation in a state of decay that, because it possesses a life cycle, can be revitalised through the manipulation of a group psyche. What is distinctive here, however, is that rather than 'appealing to individuals to sacrifice themselves for a destiny that will bring them greatness', the reader is invited to simply *identify* with those who have done the 'work' of sacrifice – those who remain unsettled due to our lack of recognition.

### 'Land of kami, land of the dead'

This brings us back to the issue of death, deification, and pacification in relation to the intertwined theologies of State Shinto, Yasukuni Shrine and *Yasukuniron*. The concluding chapter to the manga – 'Land of Kami is also the Land of the Dead' ('Kami no kuni wa shisha no kuni demo aru') – provides us with an effective re-entry point. It begins with several questions, posed as a challenge to the reader: Have we Japanese become a-religious (*mushūkyō*)? Have we Japanese embraced materialism (*muibutsuron*)? This is followed by a personal story in which Kobayashi relates his conversion from youthful atheism. While anxiously waiting for a loved one undergoing surgery, K realises that he has nothing to which he can pray to, and that his previous unbelief is little more than egoism. And yet, he relates, at this time he had completely forgotten how to 'give thanks' or 'take a vow'.<sup>48</sup> After a few short vignettes depicting key events in the author's life, each of which concludes with the familiar image of a deceased spirit hovering above, K begins to 'pay attention to the glance' of the spirits of the deceased – who are very much 'living with us'. In order to more fully hear what the spirits are trying to convey to him, he decides to pay homage to the dead at Yasukuni Shrine, where he becomes enveloped with a feeling of 'public spirit' (*kōteki na kimochi*).

If it was not already evident, by the final chapter of *Yasukuniron* the basic 'theology' of Yasukuni – at least, in Kobayashi's interpretation – becomes clear. The shrine is a place in which we the living can go to meet with the dead. By paying homage at the shrine (in 'traditional' manner), and by simply 'paying attention' to these spirits via an exchange of glances, we confirm our own history and establish both our individual and national identity. In short, we are engaging in a populist version of 'spirit pacification' (*tamashizume* or *chinkon*), a ritual that dates back to the original 'State Shinto' instituted under Emperor Tenmu in the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries CE. As Naumann has argued, state cult ceremonies of this time seem to have been centered on petitions, thanksgiving and warding off evil. Pacification of Spirit ceremonies were among the most important rites for imperial-cum-state protection. Performed near the winter solstice, the primary goal of *chinkonsai* was the restoration of the vital power (*tama*) of the emperor in analogy to the sun (and the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu).<sup>49</sup> In a later context, the 'pacification of spirits' took on a quite different sense, with the introduction (from the continent) of the belief that once a person dies, their 'soul' or

‘spirit’ (*tama*) lingers in an unsettled state until it is correctly ‘addressed’ by the proper funeral rituals and appropriate period of mourning.

As noted above, from the mid-Heian period, a belief in *onryō* or ‘vengeful ghosts’ became widespread among both elites and commoners. According to this idea, unsettled spirits – those wronged in life, or whose death came under less than ideal circumstances – would cause all sorts of trouble to those left behind, especially but not exclusively their enemies. The classic instance of this is the posthumous deification of the courtier Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) as Tenman-tenjin in the tenth century.<sup>50</sup> In any event, due to an early Shinto sense of death itself as a form ‘impurity’ and ‘pollution’, in Japan Buddhism has largely been the tradition responsible for dealing with matters of death, and specific rituals (*kuyō*) were developed in order to appease and ‘pacify’ these spirits.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, though these ideas about death and the afterlife seems to elide well – even sharing key terms – with certain aspects of State Shinto, the ‘Buddhistic’ focus on individual spirits who are or may be unsettled runs against several other elements of State Shinto and Yasukuni doctrine and ritual practice – in particular the understanding that the process of divinisation is one in which the ‘souls’ of the dead heroes are enshrined en masse, as a collective and inseparable unit. As we have seen, in *Yasukuniron*, as in the Yūshūkan museum, the emphasis is squarely placed on the ‘human’ side of the story, with the dead heroes visualised clearly by the bereaved (and the reader) as idealised, peaceful and individuated spirits, chagrined only by the lack of respect that is given them in contemporary Japan.

Finally, a key aspect of Yasukuni theology – again, as interpreted through the lens of *Yasukuniron* – is the importance of pilgrimage. Although Kobayashi makes note of the Mitama Festival – held in mid-July at Yasukuni for the ‘consolation’ (*nagusameru*) of the souls of the dead – he places greater emphasis on the necessity of regular visitations to the shrine as the most effective way of consoling the heroic spirits, via a process of memorialisation and identification. But pilgrimage can also be understood as a means of self-purification on the part of the pilgrim. As Brian Bocking notes, in Japan this concept dates back to the medieval Watarai priestly lineage, who promoted pilgrimage to the Outer (*Gekū*) Shrine at Ise as a form of ‘self-purification, progress towards enlightenment and the uncovering of the inborn spiritual values of purity, honesty and compassion’.<sup>52</sup> In the Edo period, popular pilgrimage to Ise experienced another boom, which helped in the establishment of a transregional religious (if not specifically ‘Shinto’) consciousness.<sup>53</sup> In *Yasukuniron*, it is through an exchange of ‘glances’ that the consolation-qua-identification-qua-purification takes place, and this requires that the spirits be individuated as much as possible, even while conforming to a particular ‘type’. Though the rhetoric of their day called on these young men and women to ‘extinguish themselves through service to the state’ (*messhi hōkō*), at Yasukuni and in *Yasukuniron* they are invoked as individuated spirits still very much among us. It is only our *neglect* of Yasukuni that puts them (and by extension, us) in danger of being extinguished. According to Kobayashi, Japan is indeed a ‘land of kami’,<sup>54</sup> but, even more importantly, it is a ‘land of the (living) dead’.<sup>55</sup>

In this last respect, however unconsciously, the Neo-Gōmanist theology aligns remarkably with the National Learning doctrine of Hirata Atsutane. Atsutane is infamous for his fascination (some would say obsession) with the spirit world; a place that he believed was humanity's 'true home'. As he writes in his *Yūgenben*:

When one grows old and dies, one's body will return to dust, but one's spirit (*tamashii*) will not disappear. Returning to the Hidden Realm (*kakuriyo*), it will be subject to the reign of Ōkuninushi no Ōkami, accept his commands, and from Heaven it will protect not only its descendents but all those related to it. These are the 'hidden matters' (*kakurigoto*) of man.<sup>56</sup>

For Atsutane, the other world of the spirits may be 'hidden' from our everyday gaze, but it remains accessible, as it is all around us. It is in fact 'a very real world, in constant and very close contact, always engaging with the world we inhabit'. In order to return to the Age of the Gods, all we need to do, then, is truly open our eyes. Finally, although the imperial ancestress and sun goddess Amaterasu was the central figure in *kokugaku* as well as the state-sponsored imperial cult of the twentieth century, here her position of supremacy is co-opted by Ōkuninushi, the 'Great Lord of the Land' who acts as both king and judge of the Hidden Realm. Although *Yasukuniron* does not present Ōkuninushi in this way, the basic structure of Atsutane's spiritual world, as well his sense that life in this world is fleeting and is ultimately given to us in order that we perfect our ability to perform 'true acts of virtue' – of which the highest is sacrifice for the nation – is a perfect fit.

With regard to going against the ultranationalist grain, it is interesting to note that for all of the emphasis on sacrifice and heroism found in the pages of *Yasukuniron*, the figure who, in State Shinto ideology, is the presumed focus for such loyalty – the literal and figurative 'head' of the national body – is virtually absent. Indeed, just as he has not been seen at Yasukuni Shrine itself for 30 years, the emperor is hardly even mentioned in Kobayashi's tribute to Yasukuni.<sup>57</sup> With respect to the theology of Yasukuni/*Yasukuniron*, we may conclude from this that: (a) the emperor, just as he did during the period of ultranationalism (and before), functions more as an 'empty' symbol than a real presence;<sup>58</sup> or (b) the lack of the Emperor suggests a turn towards a more 'populist' appeal to the war dead as 'our heroic ancestors' – and the 'pillars' (*hashira*) upon which the modern state has been constructed. In other words, though this could hardly be admitted, perhaps this absence masks an understanding that we have reached the stage where the national body no longer needs a head in order to function.

### Yasukuni Shrine as 'revisionist manga'

In this final section, by way of conclusion, I would like to consider whether Yasukuni Shrine might be understood as a form of 'revisionist manga'. First, as noted above, Kobayashi clearly wants to emphasise the double identity of

Yasukuni: as both traditional *and* modern. In his reading of Meiji history, Yasukuni is the original symbol of 'Japan' as a modern nation-state, and (thus) the key to a full-fledged 'restoration' of the Japanese character, which has been lost since the war (but crucially, remains deeply rooted within the hearts of the common people); at the same time, Yasukuni represents a fundamental aspect – if not the very essence – of Japanese culture and tradition: respect and reverence for the ancestors (whether one chooses to call this 'Shinto' or not).<sup>59</sup> This double identity is physically enacted on the *sandō* or pathway leading to Yasukuni Shrine itself. Walking towards the shrine, the first *torii* one passes through is a massive, iron-covered structure, resonant of modernity and technology (and, some might argue, fascist monumentalism). This is followed by a second *torii*, somewhat smaller (though still imposing), plated in a softer bronze. Finally, as one comes closer to the wooden gates leading to the central *haiden* (worship hall) and *honden* (main sanctuary), one passes through a third *torii*, constructed in simple, unpainted wood. In short, the Yasukuni visitor gradually moves from the massive portal of modernity to the humble, traditional gate (though in fact all three *torii* have been constructed in *shinmei* style, which reproduces the *torii* of Ise Shrine, often considered the most 'authentic' or 'pure' form of Shinto architecture). This progression through the various *torii*, one that is, not incidentally, faithfully reproduced (in color) on the cover and initial two pages of *Yasukuniron*, provides a simple but effective metaphor for Yasukuni itself.

The grounds of Yasukuni contain a number of buildings, none of which would be out of place in a 'traditional' Shinto shrine – except for the fact that several of these structures, including the *haiden*, *sakuramon* (wooden doors, emblazoned with large gilded *kikumon* or chrysanthemum Imperial crests), *kagami* (mirror) that resides in the sanctuary, and, as noted, the first two 'modern' *torii*, are unusually large and imposing.<sup>60</sup> However, unlike most Shinto shrines, the primary focus of reverence at Yasukuni is literally 'not there' – though the shrine does have *shintai* (the mirror as well as a sword), the 2.5 million 'souls' have no physical location or embodiment. Moreover, they are not, at least according to the official Yasukuni doctrine, any longer individual spirits with connections to family and loved ones – they have 'merged with' the national (or, as critics would have it, *imperial*) will. From this it could be argued that, for all the rituals that take place there, the 'shrine' is already a 'memorial' – albeit one in which 'memory' is forcefully reinscribed by the Yūshūkan museum, which acts as an 'intertext' or explanadum to Yasukuni, filling the massive structures and empty spaces with a streamlined narrative of 'historical facts' – and concluding with an overtly emotional appeal to identifications with the victims-qua-heroes of the war 'to establish the modern nation'. In short, Yasukuni Shrine functions as the concrete embodiment of a *revisioning* of prewar (but largely modern) Japanese religious rituals and socio-political ideas, whose aim is at least as much 'national reconstruction' as 'spirit pacification'.<sup>61</sup> It is a three-dimensional 'text' whose stark imagery and by-turns aggressive and sentimental 'intertext' (i.e., Yūshūkan) appeals directly to our raw emotions, while relying upon an effective erasure of the diversity that complicates history and religious tradition.



Although State Shinto was officially 'disestablished' after the war, and has, along with ultra-nationalism and militarism, come to be repudiated by the vast majority of the Japanese people, the institutionalised form of Shinto as embodied in the postwar Association of Shinto Shrines (*Jinja honchō*) contains more than a few hints of its more obviously politicised forerunner.<sup>62</sup> This is most clear in the promotion (and widely accepted notion) of Shinto as a cultural (if not 'ethnic') form that is somehow inherent to being 'Japanese' (a belief that often goes hand-in-hand with a reluctance to label Shinto a 'religion'). Indeed, Shinto-consciousness – or, since the word 'Shinto' itself is not commonly employed, *kami*, *jinja*, or *matsuri*-consciousness – plays a significant role in contemporary Japanese national identity, though only when reframed in terms that make it appear 'cultural' rather than 'religious' or 'political'.<sup>63</sup> Explicitly anti-political and anti-religious, this 'folkism' or 'ethno-nationalism' (*minzokushugi*) as a general pattern of thought remains strong in contemporary Japan, and can be readily tapped into by those whose aims are in fact political.<sup>64</sup>

## Notes

- 1 All images are from Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Shin gōmanizumu sengen special: Yasukuniron* [Neo-Gōmanism Manifesto Special: On Yasukuni], published by Gentōsha in 2005 (hereafter: *Yasukuniron*).
- 2 While a detailed discussion of the difference between the two terms is beyond the scope of this chapter, either of the two commonly used terms could be used simply in order to highlight the fact that the representation and argument are rooted in techniques of sequential art.
- 3 For detailed discussions see for example, Clifford, 'Cleansing History'; Iwasaki and Richter, 'Historical Revisionism'.
- 4 The Yasukuni controversy has received significant treatment in Japanese scholarship (e.g., Murakami, *Yasukuni no shisō*; Ōe, *Yasukuni jinja*; Tanaka, *Yasukuni no sengoshi*; Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai*). English sources tend to focus on the political and foreign policy issues, though a few, such as Powles, *Yasukuni Jinja Hōan*; Antoni, 'Yasukuni-Jinja'; Nelson, 'Social Memory'; and Breen, 'The Dead and the Living', pay attention to Yasukuni ritual and doctrine. See Matsumoto *et al.*, 'War Responsibility', for a brief, balanced introduction to the issues.
- 5 Originally the 'nation' here did not mean some abstract 'Japan', but rather the very concrete (and still vulnerable) fledgling Meiji state. Thus, while those who fought and died on the side of the Restoration find a posthumous home in Yasukuni, this is not the case for those who fought *against* the Meiji state, either in the battles leading up to the Restoration or in the sporadic uprisings following its promulgation.
- 6 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 7.
- 7 These facts (save the mention of the Britons) are all noted in the 'overnote' to page 7 of *Yasukuniron*.
- 8 Because of what they see as its belated provenance, many contemporary scholars pointedly refuse to employ the term 'State Shinto' (see, e.g., Nitta, 'Shinto as "Non-religion"', 268). While acknowledging that the term might lead to the assumption of a government-directed Shinto that was all powerful and conceptually unified from the Meiji Restoration through the end of the Asia-Pacific War (which was certainly not the case), I contend that it is a useful moniker for the self-consciously 'non-religious' (or 'supra-religious') discourse of state-centered 'Shinto' that emerged in the aftermath of the (failed) Great Promulgation Campaign (*taikyō senpu undō*) of 1870–84, and, after

a few decades of uneven development, reached a peak during the Asia-Pacific War. Though institutionally disestablished with SCAP's 1945 Shinto Directive, the legacy of State Shinto ideology can be felt today – and not only at Yasukuni Shrine (see Boocking, 'Changing Images', 183; Hardacre, *Shinto and the State*, 4).

- 9 National Learning sought to 'recover' an idealised, pure mentality and world view ascribed to the ancient Japanese, to return to the thought and consciousness of the ancients before the country became . . . 'polluted' by contact with foreign culture and religion. Buddhism was attacked as the agency most to blame for Japan's loss of its original way of life.

(Hardacre, *Shinto and State*, 16)

Interestingly, by substituting the word 'wartime' for ancient, and replacing 'the leftist mass media' for 'Buddhism', this becomes an acute précis of Kobayashi's Gōmanism.

- 10 Inflected, of course, via the writings and institutional work of figures such as Ōkuni Takamasa (1792–1871), an immensely influential figure who, while rejecting 'Hirata Shinto' as one among many Shinto schools unsuited to the new age, was deeply indebted to the ideas of Atsutane himself.
- 11 Expressed in this way, one might cite the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku chokugo*) as the 'founding' document of State Shinto ideology, despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that it explicitly avoids terms specific to Shinto, or any other 'religious' tradition, and is purposely vague in content. As support for this, we might note the way in which the Rescript quickly took on the form of a 'sacred text' (see Yamamoto and Imano, *Kindai kyōiku*, 75–89). If, indeed, the Rescript forms the bones of ultranationalist Shinto, then it is the 'National Morality' (*kokumin dōtoku*) writings of philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1944), especially *Rinri to shūkyō no kankei* [Relation between Ethics and Religion] (1902) and *Kokumin dōtoku gairon* [Introduction to National Morality] (1912), that provide the flesh, to be further filled out in early Shōwa by the *Kokutai no hongi* [Cardinal Principles of the National Polity] (1937) – which makes explicit reference to Yasukuni – and *Shinmin no michi* [Way of the Imperial Subject] (1941), two documents promulgated by Doctrinal Bureau (*Kyōgakuka*) of the Education Ministry. To be sure, State Shinto – at least in an ideological sense – was at least as indebted to 'National Morality' as it was to 'National Learning'.
- 12 See Kawakami Hajime's succinct formulation of what he called *kokkakyō* (state cult), as cited in Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai* 30–31. Also see Hardacre 1989, 90–92, on the state's 'concerted and sustained effort to promote a cult of the war dead and historical loyalists', via the creation and support of 'Special Shrines' such as Yasukuni, which, by mid-Meiji, 'received respect exceeded only by that accorded to the Ise Grand Shrines'.
- 13 I'm using the term 'revisioning' deliberately to refer to two things: (a) the technique of 'revisionist' history – which *Yasukuniron* certainly engages in; and (b) the more literal sense of 'making over' or 'recreating Yasukuni in a visual way' via the graphic techniques of manga.
- 14 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 5.
- 15 As Sharon Kinsella (*Adult Manga*, 112–113) notes, 'neo-conservative' *seinen* manga as a whole tend to rely on a realistic and objective narrative that effectively masks their ideological content. While this applies to Kobayashi, who relies heavily on realistic (as well as photographic) images, it is important to note that Neo-Gōmanism also employs caricature (Figures 10.4 and 10.5) and symbolism (Figure 10.6), as well as a form of kitschy sentimentalism that verges on 'fantasy' (Figure 10.2). Also, whereas Kinsella critiques neo-conservative manga for (deceptively) striving to eliminate the authorial function, this would be hard to apply to Kobayashi, who fairly revels in making himself (as K) the hero of his own works.
- 16 In fact, Kobayashi the author has two distinct manga avatars: K, who acts as the protagonist of the stories, and another figure, who I will call G (for the Gōmanist) who personifies and gives voices to the more strident, haughty or insolent side of the

- argument. G, who resembles K in features, is always pictured in a seated position, outside – usually above – the frame itself (or spliced between frames), wearing what appears to be a nineteenth-century European military uniform, complete with epaulettes and stars surrounding his head. Though G is intended to personify the haughtier aspect of K, he also acts as the supplier of additional 'facts' to buttress K's harangue.
- 17 'Nihonkoku wa dōdō to Yasukuni jinja o mamoru kiryō o torimodosanuba naranai! Sore nakushite Nipponjin no fukkatsu wa nai!' (Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 12).
- 18 Throughout *Yasukuniron*, and the Gōmanist oeuvre more generally, Kobayashi paints a portrait of 'himself' as an astute, angry, but otherwise ordinary middle-aged everyman.
- 19 To Kobayashi's credit, he does not, like many commentators, avoid the trickier 'religious' aspects of the Yasukuni problem; indeed, these become a centerpiece for his argument about the 'criminal ignorance' (*hanzaiteki muchi*) of politicians, scholars and the mass media. Of course, much of what he says is either incorrect or grossly oversimplified.
- 20 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 6, emphasis in original.
- 21 See Matsumoto *et al.*, 'War Responsibility', 26.
- 22 Quoted in Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai*, 74.
- 23 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 89.
- 24 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 6.
- 25 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 13–14.
- 26 This divide finds concise visual expression in a small frame on page 20, in which we see representatives of this unholy trinity literally crushing the people, with K himself looking on in rage. The accompanying caption reads: 'The feelings of the nation's people are being trampled underfoot by those postwar leftists in the mass media and government who use Yasukuni as a political tool'. Disgust at politicians 'playing politics' in times of national crisis or with 'sacred' sites or symbols is also a staple of contemporary populist rhetoric in the United States.
- 27 As shown by Takahashi Tetsuya (*Yasukuni mondai*, 194–197), this way of thinking about the Japanese – as a single 'we' that has lost its prior unity – continues to play a role in shaping debates about history and culture. Takahashi takes critic Katō Norihiro to task for extending this 'nationalist' assumption, even while presenting himself as a 'moderate'. Unsurprisingly, Kobayashi has attacked Katō from the other direction, accusing him of a 'masochistic' approach to history (an accusation which is also applied to Takahashi's own *Yasukuni mondai*, mentioned several times within the pages of *Yasukuniron*).
- 28 Prior to his 'official' visit to Yasukuni on 15 August 1985, Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro explained that he would not follow the 'traditional' Shinto practice of two bows, two claps, and one bow but would simply make a single bow before the *honden*. According to K, in thus bowing to left-wing media pressure, Nakasone inaugurated the sad legacy of the Prime Minister's 'private' vs. 'public' visits to Yasukuni (*Yasukuniron* 32–35).
- 29 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 15–22.
- 30 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 16–19.
- 31 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 21.
- 32 Besides, he goes on, if Yasukuni were merely a manifestation of the prewar state cult, how has it continued its 'splendid existence' to this day? Though somewhat fallacious in logic, this query does pose an important question: why, despite the controversies, *is* Yasukuni still frequented by so many 'ordinary' Japanese – compared, say, to the Chidorigafuchi cemetery, built in 1959 as a secular alternative? Though this is a question whose answer would require empirical fieldwork, I suggest that Yasukuni's relative popularity is due to the fact that it is a major shrine in a populous area, whose *raison d'être* attracts the immediate family members of the war dead (though their numbers are falling off steadily), as well as anyone with a sense that the war dead should be 'mourned' in some fashion. Katō Norihiro (*Haisengo ron*) has argued that the Yasukuni ideology persists precisely *because* of the leftist opposition. While

- Takahashi ('Japanese Neo-nationalism') has criticised this point as anachronistic, it cannot be completely discounted. In general, though, I think we would be mistaken to place too much emphasis on the ideological motivations of the ordinary Yasukuni visitor, which – like the motivations of the war dead – no doubt range widely, or may even be irrelevant. Kobayashi is probably not far off in his assertion that most people go to Yasukuni because they have become accustomed to it as 'an established place to meet the spirits' (*teichaku shiteshimatta tama tononaka no ba na no da*) (*Yasukuniron*, 98) – though one conclusion that might be drawn from this assertion is that the nationalist rhetoric of the shrine and museum really doesn't mean all that much to most people.
- 33 Of course, the depiction of foreigners (especially Westerners and Chinese) as 'devils' (*oni*) and 'monsters' (*yōkai*) has a stalwart history, dating back to visual portrayals of the arrival of Commodore Perry and his men in 1853, and appearing as a staple in 'militarist' manga beginning with Utagawa Yoshiiku's *Kokkei Yamatoshiki* (Comical Record of Japanese History), published during the first Sino-Japanese war (1894–95); see Addiss, *Japanese Ghosts*, 18.
  - 34 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 38–39. Though K here neglects the important distinction between comforting the dead as family or ancestor spirits, and comforting the 'war dead' – including those to whom you bear no relation. The latter concept only emerged in the Meiji period, in the context Japan's first 'modern wars' against China (1894–95) and Russia (1904–05), and thus was unquestionably a product of emergent nationalism. See Takanaka, 'Architecture', 236.
  - 35 The idea of misunderstandings of Yasukuni based on cultural differences regarding the afterlife, particularly with respect to Chinese vs. Japanese views of death, is fairly common. Prime Minister Koizumi and Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka both raised the same point in response to foreign criticism of Koizumi's 2004 visit to Yasukuni (cited in Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai*, 152–153).
  - 36 See Antoni, 'Yasukuni-Jinja', 133; Takahashi, *Yasukuni mondai*, 58–59.
  - 37 This tension is perfectly encapsulated by the recent phenomenon of the presentation, by family members of unwed deceased soldiers, of 'bride dolls' (*hanayome ningyō*) to Yasukuni. Initially hesitant, the shrine has come to accept and even promote this practice, despite the fact that it clearly runs against several key components of Yasukuni theology. See Schatteschneider, 'Work of Sacrifice'.
  - 38 See, e.g., Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze*.
  - 39 In this regard, it is worth noting that Kobayashi employs the term *jiketsu* – which can mean both suicide and self-determination – rather than the more common (and explicit) term for suicide: *jisatsu*.
  - 40 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 77–86.
  - 41 I am employing terms here used by Thomas Kasulis in his *Shinto: The Way Home* (2004) to point out that even the most 'innocent', apolitical postwar understandings of 'existential' Shinto may contain traces of prewar 'culturalist' rhetoric. Kasulis himself notes that, in State Shinto terms, the emperor served as a kind of 'holographic entry point'; for Kobayashi, this role is played by Yasukuni Shrine as an embodiment of the 'heroic spirits'.
  - 42 The Japan Conference was formed in 1997 with the merger of the Conference to Defend Japan, which includes veterans of the Imperial Army and Navy, and the Society to Defend Japan, a group aligned towards more specifically religious matters. The associated think tank for the Japan Conference is the Japan Policy Institute; see their website: [www.nihonkaigi.org.jp](http://www.nihonkaigi.org.jp).
  - 43 It is unclear whether Kobayashi's mantra of 'restoring' Yasukuni implies a return to direct state sponsorship, i.e., State Shinto in the fuller sense. If so, he may not be as fringe as is often assumed. According to Hardacre:

So eager is the [postwar] state to reappropriate Shintō symbolism in articulating a myth of cultural identity that it has supported several judicial decisions that seem to

move toward a reestablishment of the former alliance of Shintō and the state, even when a curtailment of individual religious liberties is involved.

(*Shinto and the State*, 26–27)

Hardacre wrote these words in the late 1980s; how much this still applies after the 'regime change' of 2009 remains an open question.

- 44 Much has been written about the appropriation of 'victimhood' in the context of postwar Japan, particularly in relation to the 'collusion' between postwar Japanese conservatives and SCAP Occupation authorities, each of whom had a vested interest in downplaying Japan's military aggression and colonial expansionism in Asia prior to Pearl Harbor (see, e.g., Sakai, 'Two Negations', 163). I believe Kobayashi effectively taps into this rhetoric in *Yasukuniron*, by emphasising the postwar 'violence' done to the Yasukuni war dead by foreigners as well as the 'internal other'.
- 45 I have borrowed this term from Takahashi Tetsuya ('Japanese Neo-nationalism', 205).
- 46 Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, xi.
- 47 Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 146.
- 48 'Shikamo, sono ato, sono toki no inori to tomo ni sasageta nakai sae washi wa wasurete shimattairu no dakara . . .' (Kobayashi, *Yasukuniron*, 158).
- 49 See Naumann, 'State Cult', 54–55.
- 50 The deification of Michizane was in fact a highly syncretistic affair, involving input from representatives of state ritual ('Shinto'), folk religion, and institutional Buddhism. It should be emphasised that the deification of Michizane was primarily intended to *pacify* his angry ghost, and not to *worship* his person as such. The construction of shrines to worship the spirits of particular individuals – alive or dead – is a relatively recent phenomenon, one that emerged in the Edo Period, and then experienced a boom in the early Meiji Period (1868–1912) (see Katō Genchi, *Honpō seishi*; Boot, 'Death of a Shogun', 144).
- 51 The notion of death as 'pollution' (*kegare*) – as one finds, for example, in the *Kojiki* – seems worlds away from Yasukuni theology, which is premised on death (for the emperor/state) as the highest act of nobility; indeed, as a virtual act of transcendence. And yet, even after the Restoration, Hirata School loyalists within the newly reconstituted *Jingikan* were appalled by the Ōkuni faction's support for 'Shinto funerals' (see Hardacre, *Shinto and State*, 36).
- 52 Bocking, 'Changing Images', 177–178. Though Watarai Shinto is often considered a 'purely' Shinto school, in fact, like all forms of 'Shinto' prior to the emergence of the Yoshida School in the sixteenth century, was deeply enmeshed with Buddhism (see, e.g., Kuroda, 'Shinto in History', 2). In fact, the idea of pilgrimage to Ise as a form of self-purification is rooted in the Tendai Buddhist teaching of *hongaku* or 'original enlightenment'.
- 53 See Hardacre, *Shinto and State*, 15–16.
- 54 As K notes (*Yasukuniron*, 176), then Prime Minister Mori Yoshirō was roundly castigated for his assertion at a gathering of Shinto leaders on 15 May 2000 that Japan is 'a land of kami' (*kami no kuni*) – based, in K's view, on a fundamental misunderstanding of the Japanese term *kami*, as well as a cultural differences in the concept of 'public' with respect to religion: 'A religious outlook is the very foundation of [Japanese] society's public spirit' (*shūkyōkan wa sono shakai no 'kōkyōshin' no kiso ni naru kara da*). Of course, there is some truth to the first assertion, as the common English translation of *kami* as 'God' (or 'gods') is misleading, as was the widespread translation of Mori's words in Western press as 'Japan is a divine nation'. And yet, K fails to mention the other – and perhaps more controversial – part of Mori's statement: 'Japan is a land of kami, with the emperor as the center' (*Nihon wa tennō o chūshin to suru kami no kuni*).
- 55 K, always fond of finding instances of non-Japanese support for his positions, cites late-nineteenth-century Greek–Irish Japanist Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) as the source for this particular phrase (*Yasukuniron*, 175).

- 56 Hirata, *Zenshū*, 267; quoted in Kamata, 'Disfiguring', 305, translation by Breen and Teeuwen.
- 57 The exception is several panels on page 177, in which K 'rebutts' the misunderstanding about the emperor as a living 'god', and points out (fancifully; see Barrett, 'Shinto and Taoism') that the term *tennō* was deliberately chosen to make the Japanese emperor equivalent to the Chinese emperor, thus asserting Japan's 'independence' from the Middle Kingdom. Of note here is K's reference to the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* as 'fables' (*monogatari*) that the Japanese people have the 'magnanimity' (*doryō*) to hold onto, despite their 'marvelous' (*kisekitekiteki*) character. This is another reflection of the modernist character of Kobayashi's work.
- 58 Of course, 'empty', as any East Asian Buddhist would know, need not imply powerless or ineffective (see Takashi, *Splendid Monarchy*, 24).
- 59 While there is no question that ritual attention to spirits of the dead in Japan predates the Meiji period, it is a stretch to suggest, as K does on page 170, that it is the basis of ancient 'Shinto'. Rather, ancestor veneration only became widespread throughout Japanese society 'during the seventeenth century under Buddhist influence' (Breen, 'Dead and Living', 85). The idea, however, that ancestor veneration is the root of not only Japanese 'religion' but the very bedrock of Japanese 'culture' – understood as 'constitution' or 'way of life' – is not uncommon; see Etō and Kobori, *Yasukuni ronshū*.
- 60 See Breen, 'Dead and Living', for a full description of the layout of Yasukuni Shrine.
- 61 See Breen, 'Dead and Living'.
- 62 See Murakami, *Kokka Shintō*, 216–222; also see the *Jinja Honchō* website: <http://www.jinjahoncho.or.jp/>, accessed 12 July 2012. Thanks to John Breen for bringing to my attention the different portrayals of 'Shinto' on the English and Japanese versions of the website.
- 63 See Nishikawa, 'Two Interpretations', 248. Also see Takahashi's critique of Etō's use of 'culture' (*bunka*) to mask Yasukuni's political agenda (*Yasukuni mondai*, 173–178).
- 64 See Kevin Doak's argument with respect to a postwar continuation of 'fascism unseen' ('Fascism Seen', 33–34).

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