

Envisioning Tokyo's Acropolis: Nagano Uheiji's 1907 Blueprint for Kudan Hill and the Political Economy of Yasukuni Shrine

Joshua Baxter

Abstract:

Nagano Uheiji, a Meiji period architect, declared in 1907 that Yasukuni Shrine and Kudan Hill should be made into "Tokyo's Acropolis". While his plans never came to fruition, it tells us a lot about how Yasukuni Shrine was both perceived and experienced during the Meiji period. In particular, it points to the role of the shrine as a center of entertainment, which contributed to its becoming a city landmark. But how are we to conceptualize the presence of entertainment alongside the performance of rituals coordinated by the state? The key to understanding how the carnivalesque atmosphere of these festivals fits into the history of the war shrine is to look at its political economy in order to see how the masses 'offered' their patronage.

Keywords: Yasukuni Shrine; Nagano Uheiji; political economy; *kaichō*

In the October 1907 issue of *Architectural Journal (Kenchiku Zasshi)*, Nagano Uheiji² (1867-1937) presented a blueprint for remaking the Yasukuni Shrine complex.³ Although at this time Nagano was already a prolific architect having designed the Bank of Japan branches in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Kyoto and Hiroshima, his designs for Yasukuni were apparently neither requested, promoted nor, in the end, approved by the state. Nonetheless, his vision of the shrine grounds conveyed an image of a victorious postwar Japan in a moment of

ecstasy that is visible in his sketches. With a towering triumphal gate, three neo-classical buildings, and a European style formal garden, his plans sought to transform Yasukuni into a monument of global scale. In fact, in his own words, Nagano decided that it was time to make Yasukuni Shrine and Kudan Hill "Tokyo's Acropolis".⁴ Envisioning a full remodeling of the shrine grounds that would have had implications for the configuration of Tokyo's downtown, Nagano went as far as to include his own take on the Agora. He fashioned this open courtyard that would be used as a marketplace and public square after the Roman forum and placed it at the foot of Kudan Hill just as the Agora was situated in relation to the Acropolis. However, as I will argue, this visual reproduction of the Acropolis was more than just an architectural homage to the ancient empires of the past. Nagano's design incorporated elements that spoke to how the people of Tokyo both experienced and perceived Yasukuni Shrine during the Meiji period. In particular, the inclusion of the forum and its relation to entertainment on the shrine grounds opens up a part of Yasukuni's history that has thus far received little attention: its political economy.

Although Nagano's blueprint for Yasukuni Shrine was never realized—perhaps even more so because it was not—it opens up a space in which we can think about the shrine historically without the limitations of the contemporary discourse that have produced the so-called "Problem of Yasukuni". In other words, it offers an image of how people might

have perceived Yasukuni Shrine during the Meiji period. When you ask people about Yasukuni today, rarely does it spark conversations about horse races, sumo wrestling, circuses or freak shows. And yet if one was to ask this very same question in Tokyo 125 years ago it would have been rare to hear anything other than comments about the entertainment options on top of Kudan Hill. During the Meiji period Yasukuni Shrine was locally known as a place for amusement rather than for strict association with Japan's military endeavors and the commemoration of the war dead. It hosted foreign circuses from Europe (from France in 1871 and Italy in 1887), operated the first horse racing track in Tokyo, and was a popular place for Edo forms of entertainment like peep and freak shows (*misemonokoya*). While some scholars of Japan have written about this aspect of the shrine's history, it is generally used in contrast to the contemporary moment in order to capture a temporal image of the shrine when things were not so complicated.⁵ However, this begs the question of why entertainment was such a prominent feature at the shrine when the state obviously envisioned it as a tool for nation building? Or, in other words, how are we to conceptualize the presence of entertainment alongside the performance of rituals coordinated by the state? In order to answer these questions this paper will examine the phenomenon of entertainment at Yasukuni Shrine through a study of its political economy. By focussing on the economic aspect I hope to show that Nagano Uheiji's 1907 plans to turn Kudan Hill into "Tokyo's Acropolis" demonstrates not only the degree to which entertainment was associated with the space of the shrine but also how integral it was to its economic survival.

More often than not scholarship on Yasukuni quickly jumps through the Meiji period setting up a narrative that is dominated by a history of the Pacific War and the postwar problems surrounding the shrine. These histories

generally aim to link the emperor with Shinto and war thus creating the stage for the postwar discussion of war responsibility, the relationship between church and state, as well as the issue of collective memory. Because these narratives drive scholarship on Yasukuni the Meiji period seems to stand out as an anomaly since it does not always neatly fit into our contemporary understanding of the shrine. One example of this is the prominence of entertainment on the shrine grounds during the shrine's early history. As a space designed for the commemoration of war the very presence of entertainment seems to present a contradiction, thus very few historians focus on entertainment at the shrine with any detail. For those that do address it, entertainment is generally understood as a spectacle or simply as a means to attract crowds to the shrine.⁶ The only text that uses entertainment as its focal point in narrating a history of the shrine is *Yasukuni* by Tsubouchi Yuzo. His work offers a refreshing narrative that discusses entertainment via a spatial history of the shrine grounds which opens up the space of Yasukuni beyond the discourse of state and religion. However, even though he includes entertainment alongside the production of state ideology, his anecdotal approach to Yasukuni's history lacks a clear analysis of why entertainment was a prominent fixture at this state institution. Up to this point most scholarship generally treats this past as a distant historical moment that has little importance today as it is no longer officially a part of events at Yasukuni.⁷ While my own work draws on these earlier investigations on entertainment and the space of Yasukuni, this article will situate entertainment within the political economy of the shrine to show that the annual festivals were not just vital for the performance of state and religious rituals but were instrumental in keeping the shrine fiscally viable.

The Annual Grand Festivals (*reitaisai*)⁸

Before jumping into a discussion on the political economy of the shrine and Nagano's blueprint for Yasukuni, I want to paint a picture of what the annual festivals were like in the early Meiji period. The Annual Spring Festival of 1872 began on May 15th and lasted for three days.⁹ The first day was filled with formal events such as the ceremony for the invocation of the dead (*shōkonsai*) attended by government officials and military leaders. While some of these rituals may have been visible to the general public it seems unlikely that they would have attracted many spectators in the early years as very few people would have been personally connected to the war dead at this time. Even for those who were related to the war dead, the earliest instance of bereaved families being invited to the capital to attend the special enshrinement ceremonies was 1877 following the Seinan War. Thus this day was reserved for the pomp and ceremony of the political and military elite, which would have drawn larger crowds on occasions such as when the emperor attended in January of 1874 but otherwise received less attention.

On the second day, however, the festivities featured horse races sponsored and organized by the Army Ministry. The track was first used the previous year and became an annual event until its closure in 1898. Not only did the races prove to be popular, growing in size and frequency, but they also made heroes out of the riders who were keen on winning the prizes. In 1871 the races featured prizes of five watches, five pieces of woolen cloth, and five blankets and each year the prize purse expanded.¹⁰ By 1875 the prizes included twenty-five thick blankets (*mōfu*) worth 100 yen, however, this was deemed to be too expensive for the Army Ministry and was lowered to 50 yen and later in 1879 to 25 yen per day.¹¹ The horse races attracted many spectators not only for the novelty of horse racing but also for the excitement of the race. The journalist Yamamoto Shōgetsu gave a brief description of the races in the 1890s:

Since horse racing was a rare event, even the trees were overflowing

with spectators watching. The horses were generally from the military

who hosted the event and the riders were soldiers in their uniforms. It

was as if it was a continuation of their military training, recklessly striking

the horses with unrivaled malice. Sometimes serious injuries occurred

because of the sharp curve which threw riders off of their horses which

made it all the more exciting for the spectators.¹²



Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, Tokyo Shōkonsha Nai Gaijin Keiba, 1871.

In the first 10 years of operation at least three times the *Yomiuri Shinbun* reported that riders had fallen off their horses and had been taken to the hospital. On one occasion a rider was run over by another horse and received what seemed to be fatal injuries. The number of

races varied but generally increased throughout the Meiji period as a result of their popularity. In the November festival of 1881 thirty races were held whereas by December 1895 there were seventy-three races at the special ceremonies marking the end of the Sino-Japanese War. In November of 1891 it was reported that so many people attempted to enter the west gate of the track that it caused a commotion (*tsumuji*) so big that it was worth mentioning in the newspaper the next day.

The third day of the 1872 festival featured sumo matches followed by fireworks. Generally the professional wrestlers who competed were associated with the Tokyo Sumo Association¹³ with a few exceptions such as the ceremony following the Seinan War in November of 1877 where 180 wrestlers from the Osaka Sumo Association participated.¹⁴ In July of 1880 amateur wrestlers were also allowed to compete for the first time. Once again the Army Ministry supplied the prize money, whose purse in May of 1892 was over 200 yen. The wrestling matches were so popular that in 1898 the Tokyo Sumo Association decided that it would hold a 7-day tournament at Yasukuni Shrine the following year in July.¹⁵ The sumo matches held during the festivals were often attended by members of the Imperial Household as well as top Meiji politicians and bureaucrats. Once again the *Yomiuri Shinbun* gives us an idea of how popular the sumo matches were when they reported that so many spectators (including soldiers in uniform) attended that the stands collapsed in June of 1879. The fireworks that usually concluded the festival were also a major attraction and newspapers often published the time as well as the number of fireworks to be set off hoping to attract a larger audience.

The large number of people who attended the festivals made Yasukuni Shrine an ideal place for the operation of peep tents and freak shows (*misemonokoya*) and other types of vendors. As part of the expanded policing of entertainment, on June 15, 1876 it was announced in the

Yokohama Mainichi that all *misemono* from Ginza, Asakusa's Okuyama and Kuramae were no longer allowed to operate there (except for special events such as festivals) and had to move immediately to either Kanda's Hanaokamachi or to the Shōkonsha in Fujimicho (Yasukuni Shrine).¹⁶ It is impossible to know to what extent this was enforced but it certainly contributed to the increase of *misemono* operating on the shrine grounds. For example, the *Yomiuri Shinbun* listed a number of *misemono* that operated during the July 1877 festival and in 1892 there were so many stalls set up that they covered the road from the shrine grounds all the way to the bottom of Kudan Hill.¹⁷ During the Annual Grand Fall Festival in 1900 the paper counted at least 36 *misemono* operating on the shrine grounds.

The author Tayama Katai (1872-1930) wrote a brief section on his own experience at Yasukuni Shrine in *Tokyo no Sanjyū Nen*. He begins by stating that even though Ueno Park made an impression on him it still did not compare to Yasukuni and the memories he had of that place. His first visit at the age of six was visiting the shrine with his mother to see the fountain and golden carp. As he got older his visits became more frequent partly because his father was killed in the Seinan War (1877) and was enshrined there. Other memories from his childhood include asking his mother for money in order to see the various *misemono* and vendors during the annual festivals. He writes:

After I got a little older I used to like going out by myself at night to walk

around the various illuminated stalls set up on the roadside, though these

were not proper shows as such. There were fortune-tellers, and people with

acetylene lamps, and people who mended broken china by fusing the pieces

under heat. They always had people gathered around their stalls, and I used

to think that the very way in which they spoke was a type of art in itself. There'd

also be someone singing sentimental love songs, and someone--a student,

perhaps--performing sword dances.¹⁸

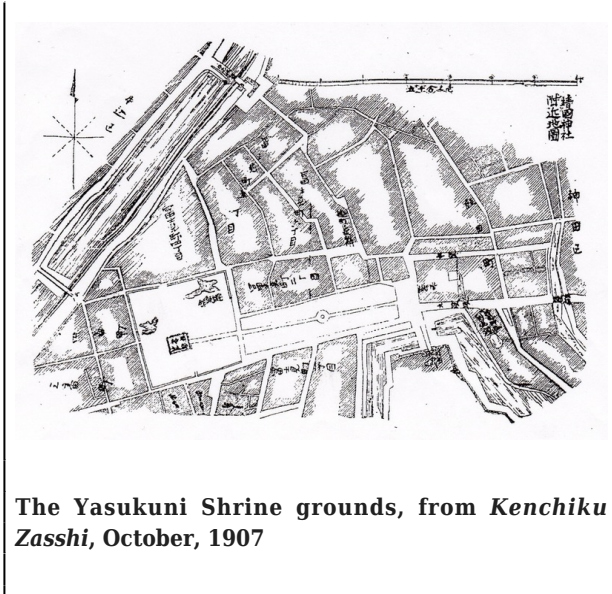
Even though Tayama would have been part of a very small demographic of citizens who had relatives enshrined at Yasukuni in its first two decades, it is interesting how he speaks very little of his father's own enshrinement and instead focusses on the allure of the *misemono*. Of course, Tayama was not the only one who was captivated by the various types of entertainment offered at the shrine. Meiji bureaucrats like Kido Takayoshi, scholars such as Hattori Seiichi (pen-name Hattori Bushō), as well as other personal accounts of the shrine grounds all gave detailed descriptions of the excitement and carnivalesque atmosphere that the festivals provided. The attraction of the Annual Grand Festivals quickly turned Yasukuni Shrine into a tourist destination illustrated by its presence in guidebooks during the 1870s and 1880s. With such fanfare and reputation it is easy to see how Nagano could envision Yasukuni as 'Tokyo's Acropolis' in 1907.

Nagano's Yasukuni

Victory over the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War was a pinnacle moment for the Meiji government and its modern army. The

victory celebrations at home were marked with grand parades and the construction of triumphal arches across Japan. It was in this celebratory atmosphere that Nagano Uheiiji made plans to redesign the Yasukuni Shrine complex. His blueprint for Kudan Hill was meant to be a national memorial for those who died in the Russo-Japanese War, which is easily recognizable with his towering triumphal gate and large neo-classical buildings that would have been visible from all around the city. If the victory was Japan's crowning achievement then Yasukuni was to be the jewel of that crown by being transformed from a simple shrine into a monumental hill-top complex. First I will briefly give an overview of his blueprint for the shrine before focussing on his inclusion of a permanent entertainment space at the foot of Kudan Hill.

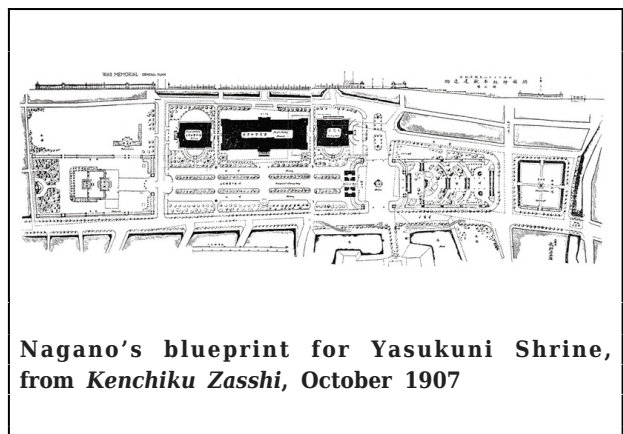
Nagano suggested a full remaking of the shrine grounds that would have more than doubled the existing allotment of land by adding another 27,000 *tsubo* (22 acres).¹⁹ Expanding to the north as far as Chūzaka street to align with the road behind the war museum (Yūshūkan) as well as to the east as far as the Nihonbashi River, the resulting space would have been a rectangular shape that began at the foot of Kudan Hill and made its way west up to the main hall of the shrine. The main shrine as well as the area around the war museum would have been left as they were while the rest of the grounds would be completely transformed.



The Yasukuni Shrine grounds, from *Kenchiku Zasshi*, October, 1907

The walkway leading to the inner sanctuary and the newly constructed hall of worship began from the bronze *torii* that Emperor Meiji donated to the shrine in 1887. From the bronze *torii* the walkway opened up into a giant promenade that Nagano referred to as the middle garden. With three avenues allowing for horse carriages as well as pedestrian traffic the middle garden was meant to facilitate the arrival of large crowds. To the north of the middle garden was access to the Naval and Military Museum which was connected to the Naval and Military Library on the west side and a Military Club on the east side by covered walkways. In contrast to the shrine's *shinmeizukuri* (style of shrine architecture based on Ise Jingu) the buildings would be constructed with stone and red bricks in a blend of European elements (Renaissance, Baroque and neo-classical) and, from what can be gathered from the rough sketches that Nagano made, the Naval and Military Museum was the basis for his 1910 winning design of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei. The Museum was four stories at its tallest point and was roughly 165 meters (91 *ken*) by 67m (37 *ken*) in size. The Library and Military Club were both three stories tall and had dimensions of roughly 62m (34 *ken*) by 49m (27 *ken*). At the eastern side of the middle garden stood a large memorial gate

that towered over the grounds at 75.75m (250 *shaku*) in height with an archway of almost 11 meters (6 *ken*). In typical Nagano style the gate would be composed of both western and eastern influences that contained the "sacredness of the pyramids mixed with classical architecture."²⁰ Following the Russo-Japanese War, triumphal arches began appearing all across the country imitating the war celebrations of Europe. At almost 76 meters the memorial gate would have been the tallest structure in Japan eclipsing the famous *Ryōunkaku* in Asakusa by 7 meters and denotes an intentional departure from the use of a *torii* to mark the entrance to a sacred space. The memorial gate opened to a large intersection that would join Kudanzaka Street with Chūzaka Street and would allow for access to the hill from Iidacho. On the other side of the gate were the formal gardens that would be layered, stepping down the decline of the hill towards the lower city (*shitamachi*). At the base of the formal gardens would be the last section of Nagano's refashioned Yasukuni complex: the entertainment grounds (*kōgyōba*).



Nagano's blueprint for Yasukuni Shrine, from *Kenchiku Zasshi*, October 1907

While Nagano's arch and neo-classical structures on top of Kudan Hill deserve analysis simply due to their grandeur at this historical moment I want instead to focus on what may at first appear as an oddity in his plans. The entertainment space was designed to resemble the Roman Forum in its function as both a market and public square for performances. A two-story stone and red brick

row house would be built around the square with a courtyard in the middle. This structure would serve to permanently house various shops and food stalls and was designed with the intent of recreating Asakusa's shopping street (*nakamise*).²¹ The interior space would be large enough to allow for various *misemono* shows to set up during the annual festivals and perhaps even be permanently housed. Finally, in the center of the courtyard a 67 meter tall stone pillar dedicated to the war dead would be erected.

The inclusion of this space shows the extent to which entertainment was associated with the space of Yasukuni and was obviously something that Nagano envisioned as being a part of the shrine's future as well. It's even more significant that he included this space given the recent redevelopment of the shrine grounds. At the turn of the century the space of Yasukuni was considerably transformed by the addition of a Hall of Worship (*haiden*) in front of the inner sanctuary as well as the removal of the horseracing track in 1901. Although there was no official reason given for the removal of the track, perhaps it was the increase of crowds following the victory over the Chinese in 1895 or the cost of operating the races, which had made the event financially prohibitive for the Army Ministry. With the removal of the racetrack this large open space was now labelled as the Outer Garden (*gaien*). Perhaps it was this open free space that inspired part of Nagano's design or maybe he was even more closely informed and connected to the shrine than historical documents suggest. In June of 1906 the Yasukuni Shrine Office prohibited the operation of stalls that had set up shop where the race track used to be since the crowds that gathered there were obstructing the path for those who wanted to pay their respects at the shrine.²² We do not know whether Nagano was aware of this issue regarding the Outer Garden, but his plans certainly resolved the problems of overcrowding and the proliferation of shops on the shrine grounds.

The grandiose nature of Nagano's plans would have further entrenched Yasukuni's position as one of Tokyo's most popular locations to visit during the Meiji period. With an estimated cost of 17.6 million yen it would have cost about 9% of the 1908 Army and Navy Ministry's budget²³ and would have been eight times the cost of Nagano's Presidential Office Building in Taipei that was built in 1910. Given the vast expense and scope of this project, Nagano's vision for Yasukuni Shrine illuminates the financial resources of the shrine and its growing popularity as a national landmark. By the end of the Meiji period Yasukuni Shrine was the twenty-third largest landholder in the city of Tokyo and generated annual revenues of around 2 million yen. This indicates that the shrine had more than just religious and political significance for the state. In fact, if we turn to the political economy of the shrine we can see that Nagano's inclusion of an entertainment space shows that he was also aware of its economic importance to the Shrine.

The Economy of Yasukuni Shrine

The economy of the shrine is one aspect that has been generally neglected in scholarship on Yasukuni but is important in order to understand how state and religion are intricately tied to this space.²⁴ At the center of this history is the relation of both the state and religion to consumption. Whereas the state historically emerges as the adjudicator of surplus (whether it is a surplus in the fields or the collection of taxes), religion also is formed around exchanges that result in the consumption of material goods through ritual. In his essay "The Economics of Ritual Power," the historian of Japanese religion, Allan G. Grapard, laments that when it comes to the study of ritual practices its relation to economics is sadly often forgotten. In examining rituals in the Heian period, he observed that rituals in Japan always included material possessions and that these objects

were a key component in fusing the ‘visible’ material world and the forces of the ‘invisible’ realm. Helping to bridge this gap was the state since it has always concerned itself with the regulation of exchanges. Grapard states:

No ritualist I can think of among the Baruya of Papua New Guinea, the

Brahmins of Kerala, the Taoist masters of Taiwan, the Shinto officiants

of Japan, the monks of Bali, or the Catholic priests of France performs

for free, or for matters that are not explicitly related to human exchanges

or to any exchange *tout court...* because ritual is fundamentally inseparable

from what Georges Bataille calls ‘the accursed share’. In all the manifestations

of ritual I have briefly examined above, ritual’s relation to the state was

connected to consumption...²⁵

The rituals at Yasukuni Shrine also fit into this description by Grapard as it was directly managed and funded by the state. The priests received state salaries and the shrine received an annual stipend for its operations. On top of this the shrine also received various forms of other donations both votive and monetary that helped facilitate the performance of rituals. Through a broader examination of these donations we can observe how entertainment factors into the relation between state rituals

and consumption.

It is well known that Yasukuni was a benefactor of state funds until the end of the war when the 1947 Constitution separated church and state in Japan. However, as the head archivist at the shrine, Noda Anpei, quickly pointed out to me, this annual government stipend was not only significantly less than what Ise Jingu received at the time but it also did not cover all expenses. Thus from the outset Yasukuni Shrine was dependent on generating revenues either through soliciting donations, collecting land rent or by the operation of profit-producing ventures. Originally in August 1869 it was announced that the shrine would receive 10,000 koku of rice, but just four months later this amount was cut by half due to financial pressures on the Finance Ministry. Thus from December 1869 the shrine received 5000 koku of rice as an annual stipend and this continued for seven years. From 1876 the stipend was monetized and the amount was set at 7,550 yen, which remained unchanged for the rest of the Meiji period. However, this official support from the government was also supplemented by donations made directly from the imperial house. The chart below outlines the frequency and type of offerings that were made by the extended imperial family during the Meiji period.

Special Votive Offerings from the Imperial Family in the Meiji Period

Benefactor	Frequency	Offerings	Monetary Value (¥)
Emperor	13 times between 1874-1910	Cloth (<i>heihaku</i>) and money	24,300
Crown Prince (Taisho Emperor)	29 times between 1899-1910	Sticky rice cakes (<i>kagamimochi</i>), refined sake (<i>seishu</i>) and money	390
Imperial Families	94 times between 1869-1907	Sticky rice cakes (<i>kashiwamochi</i> and <i>kagamimochi</i>) sacred sake (<i>shinshu</i>), fish, Japanese dough buns (<i>manjū</i>), and money	155,400

Collected from *Yasukuni Jinja Shi*, 131-143.

The total monetary value of the gifts was over ¥180,000 which amounted to 66% of what the shrine received from the government through annual stipends. On top of these gifts the

emperor also donated ¥15,000 for the construction of a *torii* in 1887. The government further extended financial support for the shrine by sponsoring the Special Grand Festivals (*rinji taisai*) between 1895 and 1910. On nine different occasions ¥326,500 was donated to the shrine to cover expenses ranging from preparing the grounds or paying wages for those who directed the activities. Sometimes even foreign branches of the Japanese government contributed to the shrine such as the Taiwanese Government-General's (*sōtokufu*) donation of ¥10,000 to the shrine during the Annual Grand Spring Festival in 1911. Through imperial and government benefactors alone Yasukuni Shrine received over ¥531,000 between 1869 and 1911. In relation to the annual stipends this was more than two times what the shrine officially received from the government. Although these special donations made to the shrine amount to a significant sum at the time (especially considering that the Yasukuni priests on a state salary would have collectively received a maximum of ¥2,340 per year),²⁶ it did not compare to the amount of money collected through monetary offerings from the general public.

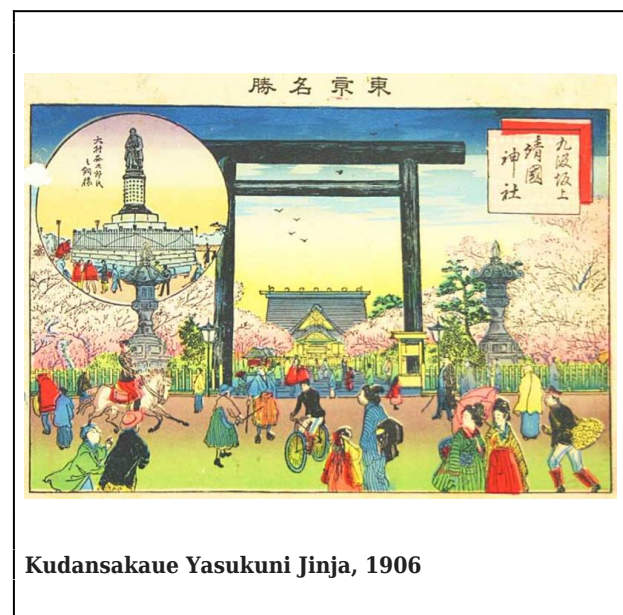
In relation to the almost ¥280,000 received in annual stipends as well as the ¥531,000 of donations from the imperial house and government during the entire Meiji period, the amount of monetary offerings received from 1891-1910 alone amounted to ¥18,133,665 (Table 2). This money would have contributed not only to covering its operating expenses but also for investing in capital projects such as expanding the shrine's landholdings and building new structures. If we look at the breakdown of the offerings by month it is clear that there is an increase of offerings both immediately prior to and during the annual festivals in May and November.²⁷ In fact, the months where there were no festivals generally saw around one-tenth of the offerings and in 1906 the difference between the lowest and

highest month was one-sixtieth. By looking at the monetary offerings we can see how important the annual festivals were for raising funds that kept the shrine fiscally healthy. Since most forms of entertainment only operated during the festivals (although there are some records of *misemonokoya* operating throughout the year) it points to the structural role that entertainment held in relation to the political economy of the shrine. Thus entertainment did more than simply introduce people to Yasukuni Shrine as other scholars have concluded.

Monetary Offerings at Yasukuni Shrine from 1891-1910 (yen)

	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March
1891	18,643	32,844	7,109	7,493	7,176	7,429	13,832	14,840	3,804	6,428	6,404	7,934
1892	26,934	28,375	4,392	4,805	7,757	5,168	7,205	21,122	4,928	8,642	8,079	15,370
1893	35,481	87,717	7,461	6,321	6,003	9,497	8,521	26,345	5,588	8,515	7,215	23,298
1894	28,360	35,221	7,300	5,770	6,029	57,773	30,786	46,994	16,856	20,688	33,948	42,360
1895	78,359	70,010	23,972	16,281	18,623	16,183	24,669	26,328	153,465	32,554	23,134	43,063
1896	89,101	100,320	25,460	19,854	21,424	23,744	25,346	76,981	15,444	20,372	20,685	35,681
1897	84,630	71,900	19,025	18,392	18,369	19,146	25,165	26,246	15,798	19,484	26,434	23,728
1898	91,162	73,582	14,181	11,973	12,078	14,852	24,340	84,728	15,826	22,031	22,371	35,273
1899	76,433	65,161	12,000	13,008	10,334	7,353	7,880	35,403	5,375	12,786	11,919	18,132
1900	42,298	60,405	8,647	8,225	6,576	9,559	13,494	55,036	8,161	14,927	9,769	20,867
1901	40,001	56,689	8,568	9,749	7,813	10,823	31,729	316,767	23,033	41,353	31,276	64,631
1902	136,566	146,622	28,311	27,006	28,827	31,305	96,055	137,725	17,361	34,471	27,992	42,577
1903	110,762	159,792	24,751	25,608	20,879	22,338	29,941	120,860	25,516	29,372	48,650	59,410
1904	99,210	316,866	51,744	52,257	41,705	65,872	75,985	222,146	43,821	94,257	70,771	96,738
1905	213,688	916,493	59,074	83,978	75,579	74,638	126,431	228,686	50,940	82,492	50,881	106,246
1906	432,397	1,483,787	65,117	58,625	61,220	66,030	79,645	236,690	39,130	66,075	25,225	92,602
1907	337,352	230,674	88,343	102,053	38,152	52,275	52,777	184,192	32,554	61,440	50,199	84,490
1908	177,352	208,108	46,675	53,820	45,008	72,307	75,620	266,582	24,400	49,424	50,543	109,391
1909	204,810	414,400	50,455	42,803	49,626	72,030	66,491	301,083	31,510	52,732	39,370	93,654
1910	286,270	482,050	30,650	44,370	39,040	47,830	51,310	418,640	31,880	50,870	57,930	14,887

Compiled from the *Yasukuni Jinja Shi*, 114.



Kudansakaue Yasukuni Jinja, 1906

Another revenue generator for the shrine that was also a product of the popularity of the grand festivals was the money collected from the entry fees to the war museum (Yūshūkan). Although the historical records only give annual statistics thus making it impossible to break down exactly when people visited the Yūshūkan, we can assume that it also reflects a similar breakdown as the monetary offerings since the festivals attracted the largest crowds. At a cost of 3 sen per adult and 1 sen for children aged 6-10, the Yūshūkan would have been another form of entertainment for the masses albeit one that was directly managed by the state.²⁸ From 1882 to 1910 the shrine collected ¥119,113 from over 4.21 million visitors to the Yūshūkan which from 1890 was directed into the shrine's coffers after it came under the supervision of the Yasukuni Shrine Office. When this total is added to the amount collected through all donations and the stipend we can see that by the end of the Meiji period the official state support of the shrine only amounted to 1.5% of total revenues. Thus the relation of the state to ritual in terms of the political economy of Yasukuni Shrine is reliant on the consumption of not only votive offerings but also on the consumption of entertainment by the masses.

Given the role that entertainment played as a revenue producer for the shrine during the Meiji period it seems that the Annual Grand Festivals at Yasukuni had a similar function to the Edo period *kaichō*. The *kaichō*, literally the "lifting of the curtain", was a religious festival that offered the rare opportunity to view religious icons and relics up close. Much like the festivals at Yasukuni they were meant to attract new patrons to the temple on special days that were generally designed to raise funds for temple maintenance and to supplement operation costs. Throughout the Edo period a total of 1,566 *kaichō* took place and were meticulously recorded by the bakufu since such festivities had to receive approval.²⁹ Almost half of these were hosted by an urban

temple and were unique in that they were much more carnivalesque with various forms of entertainment and shops that supplemented the showing of an icon or relic. Naturally these larger festivals attracted more crowds and added revenues to the temple after collecting land rent from their temporary business associates as well as receiving a share of their profits. In their book *Practically Religious*, Reader and Tanabe argue that the emergence of the *kaichō* was dependent on two external factors. First, the rise of the merchant class meant that there were more people who could afford pilgrimages, which were not only expensive but also regulated by the bakufu through travel restrictions. Second is what they call the secularization of Buddhism and which led to the insistence of economic returns "on any investment of effort and resources."³⁰ Both of their arguments point to the rise of a commodity economy during the Edo period and the effect it had on society including religious practices. This shift in the economy was reflected in the organization and operation of temples in Japan. Generally large temples relied on wealthy benefactors to fulfill their material needs while smaller local temples relied on the community to operate. This system of financial support was formalized in 1640 with the "household temple system" (*danka seido*), which required all households to be registered with and financially support a local temple. With more money in circulation with the growth of the merchant class (*chōnin*), temples could receive funds from more than just their usual donors. This resulted in a significant increase in the number of Buddhist temples between the years 1727 to 1852, from 323,462 to 465,049 temples.³¹ With an increase in competition the temples turned to new methods of raising funds such as the *kaichō*, which solicited funds for religious purposes (*kange gomen*) under the watchful gaze of the state.³²

Although there are some variances in the content of these events, the Annual Grand

Festivals at Yasukuni Shrine reproduced the structure of the Edo *kaichō* which is evident through a study of its political economy. I think this association with the *kaichō* is worth making since it not only offers a historical correlation regarding the use of entertainment at shrines during large festivities but also points to the necessity of exploring the economy of ritual just as Grapard urged. As was demonstrated with the collection of monetary offerings and the financial impact that they had on the shrine's revenues, the economy of ritual and its relation to consumption adds another dimension to the shrine's association with the state. However, given that so much of the shrine's revenues derived from non-state sources we can also conclude that a proper examination of Yasukuni Shrine's political economy is a necessary step for understanding its historical emergence as well as its ideological function.

Conclusion

If we return to Nagano's vision of transforming Yasukuni into 'Tokyo's Acropolis' we can see how elements of his blueprint invite us to think about the political economy of the shrine. The inclusion of the Roman-style forum not only formalized the role Yasukuni played as an entertainment space in the capital but also connected the shrine to Japan's feudal past through the *kaichō*. By examining the Annual Grand Festivals at Yasukuni Shrine we can see how elements of the *kaichō* are present and how the state became involved in these festivities not only as a facilitator but also through the distribution of prize purses and the collection of monetary offerings. So how should we conceptualize the presence of entertainment alongside the performance of rituals coordinated by the state? To begin, we cannot simply treat entertainment as a spectacle on its own somehow cut off from the official state rituals as other scholars have suggested. Instead we need to further unfold how the state's role in the construction of

Yasukuni Shrine went beyond its ideological formation as a tool of nation-building. As Grapard suggests, examining the correlation between the state and ritual through consumption is just one example of how to think through the political economy of Yasukuni Shrine.

This paper hopes to establish that Yasukuni Shrine had more than just religious and political functions. It had its own economy, an economy that, while historically linked to Edo period forms of display culture, was also connected to Meiji Japan's economic development. Given that the shrine's historical emergence and the history of capitalism in Japan share the same temporal moment, this correlation should not be surprising. Yet current discourse on Yasukuni seems to ignore these aspects of the shrine's history in favor of pushing forward the narratives of the nation and the state. While I do not suggest replacing these narratives, I think that political economy can be used to supplement these discourses on Yasukuni in order to produce a stronger critique of the shrine's function in Japan's postwar society. To produce a critique that does not include Yasukuni's political economy not only overlooks a part of its history but also makes the task of disentangling the shrine from its past impossible.

Joshua Baxter is a PhD Candidate in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Toronto. His dissertation will look at Yasukuni Shrine during the Meiji period and is tentatively titled "Capital-Nation-State: A Genealogy of Yasukuni Shrine." Along with an interest in unfolding the relation between religion and economy, his research focusses on urban space, labour history and the historiography of modern Japan.

Recommended citation: *Joshua Baxter, "Envisioning Tokyo's Acropolis: Nagano Uheiji's 1907 Blueprint for Kudan Hill and the Political Economy of Yasukuni Shrine", The*

Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 13, Issue 38, No. 3, September 28, 2015.

Related articles

- Akiko Takenaka, [Mobilizing Death in Imperial Japan: War and the Origins of the Myth of Yasukuni](#)
- John Breen, [Popes, Bishops and War Criminals: reflections on Catholics and Yasukuni in post-war Japan](#)
- John Junkerman, [Li Ying's "Yasukuni": The Controversy Continues](#)
- Akiko Takenaka, [Enshrinement Politics: War Dead and War Criminals at Yasukuni Shrine](#)
- Takahashi Tetsuya, [Yasukuni Shrine at the Heart of Japan's National Debate: History, Memory, Denial](#)
- Takahashi Tetsuya, [The National Politics of the Yasukuni Shrine](#)
- Mark Selden, [Nationalism, Historical Memory and Contemporary Conflicts in the Asia Pacific: the Yasukuni Phenomenon, Japan, and the United States](#)
- Matthew Penney, [Nationalism and Anti-Americanism in Japan - Manga Wars, Aso, Tamogami, and Progressive Alternatives](#)
- John Breen, [Yasukuni Shrine: Ritual and Memory](#)
- Yomiuri Shimbun and Asahi Shimbun, [Yasukuni Shrine, Nationalism and Japan's International Relations](#)
- Andrew M. McGreevy, [Arlington National Cemetery and Yasukuni Jinja: History, Memory, and the Sacred](#)

Notes

¹ The research for this article was completed

with the assistance of a generous Doctoral Scholarship from the Japan Foundation in 2013-2014 under the guidance of Professor Matsumoto Takenori at the University of Tokyo.

² Nagano Uheiji was a Meiji period architect who designed over thirty national banks for Japan. He was born in what is now Niigata prefecture in the city of Jōetsu. In 1893 he graduated from the Engineering Department at the Imperial University (currently the University of Tokyo). He is also well-known for his design of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei which was completed in 1919.

³ Nagano Uheiji, "Meiji Sanjūnanahachinen Sengo Kinen Kenchikubutsu Setsumei," *Kenchiku Zasshi* No. 250, October 1907: 560.

⁴ In 1933 the German architect, Bruno Taut (1880-1938), would later claim Ise Jingu to be Japan's 'Acropolis' saying that "(the Parthenon) is the greatest and most aesthetically sublime building in stone as the Ise shrine is in wood." Bruno Taut, *Houses and People of Japan* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1937), 139. While Nagano is thinking more about space and the meaning of the Acropolis, Taut's comparison is based on structure and, more specifically, the material elements that were used.

⁵ For example, John Nelson argues that this was a stage of Yasukuni's development before the state had fully implemented its ideological function. "Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 62, no. 2 (May, 2003), 449.

⁶ Kobori Keiichirō (*Yasukuni Jinja to Nihonjin*, 1996) is one Japanese scholar who holds this position, which is reiterated by John Breen (*Yasukuni, the War Dead and the Struggle for Japan's Past*, 2008 and *The Cultural Politics of Nationalism and Nation-Building*, 2014). Also, see the work of John Nelson ("Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine,"

2003) who links the historical presence of entertainment at Yasukuni with other shrines and, most recently, Akiko Takenaka's *Yasukuni Shrine: History, Memory, and Japan's Unending Postwar* (2015) which dedicates a full chapter to entertainment at the shrine as spectacle.

⁷ Although one can still observe fragments of this past during the Mitama Festival in July which features *misemono* acts and food stalls.

⁸ Although religious scholars such as John Breen have translated *reitaisai* as 'Great Rites' I'm using the term festival to denote a more popular understanding of the term as it would have been perceived by commoners who attended these events. In Japan festivals already contain a religious connotation, so it does not ignore the religious nature of the event but at the same time enhances the other activities associated with the Annual Great Festivals.

⁹ *Yasukuni Jinja Hyakunen Shi Vol. 1* (Tokyo: Yasukuni Jinja, 1983), 47.

¹⁰ Teikoku Keiba Kyōkai, *Nihon Baseishi: Teikoku Keiba Kyōkaihen Vol. 4* (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1982), 602.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 602.

¹² Yamamoto Shōgetsu, *Meiji Sesō Hyakuwa* (Tokyo: Daiichi Shobo, 1936), 36-37. This occurred after the construction of the Ōmura statue in 1893 so his account was written sometime between 1893 and 1898.

¹³ The Tokyo Sumo Association and the Osaka Sumo Association merged in 1927 to form what is now today the Japan Sumo Association.

¹⁴ *Yasukuni Jinja Shi* (Tokyo: Yasukuni Jinja, 1911), 115. The total cost of this specific tournament was around 2800 yen.

¹⁵ The proceeds from this tournament would be

put towards the construction of the new Worship Hall (*haiden*) that was completed in 1901.

¹⁶ *Meiji no Engei Vol. 1*, edited by Kurata Yoshihiro (Tokyo: Kokuritsu Gekijyō Chōsa Yōseibu Geinō Chōsashitsu, 1980), 156.

¹⁷ At the 1877 festival there were stalls selling paper cranes, there were dancing "ascending dragons" (*nobori ryū*), carts filled with flowers (*hanamiguruma*), standing dolls, and a handmade noodles stand (*sangokuichi*). The festival in November of the same year also featured many stalls that were selling famous local foods.

¹⁸ Tayama Katai, *Literary Life in Tokyo, 1885-1915: Tayama Katai's memoirs 'Thirty years in Tokyo'* (New York: Brill, 1987), 91.

¹⁹ 1 *tsubo*=3.3 square meters

²⁰ Nagano, *Kenchiku Zasshi*, 561.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 561.

²² *Yasukuni Jinja Hyakunen Shi Vol. 4* (Tokyo: Yasukuni Jinja, 1987), 169.

²³ Data taken from *Shiryō Meiji Hyakunen* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Kaisha, 1966), 651.

²⁴ I think that this is what Tsubouchi's *Yasukuni* is missing particularly as he laments the turning of the purification garden (*yuniwa*) into a parking lot in 1985. Consideration of the shrine's political economy would give some historical background to Yasukuni's Chief Priest Matsudaira Nagayoshi's comment on having to be "self-reliant" (pages 336-337) after being cut off from state funds, as the opening of the parking lot also coincides with the reopening of the Yūshūkan. For reasons unknown (despite the fact that it foregrounds his lamenting of Yasukuni's declining prominence in Japanese society), Tsubouchi holds to this sacred space as if it was

historically unchanged even though this space was originally used for the sumo ring and later the Noh theater. During the Meiji period the purification ceremony was generally held at the Kagura Hall (for the performance of ancient Shinto music and dance) which was to the south side of the Main Hall. Later it was held next to the Worship Hall.

²⁵ Allan G. Grapard, “The Economics of Ritual Power”, *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, edited by John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (New York: Routledge, 2000), 89-90.

²⁶ *Yasukuni Jinja Shi*, 176.

²⁷ The only time where the numbers vary is for December 1895 since a special ceremony was held to commemorate the victory in the Sino-Japanese War. Records for monetary offerings were not kept prior to 1890 as this was when the Yasukuni Shrine Office was constructed.

²⁸ According to Tsurumi’s study of workers at the Osaka Cotton-Spinning Mill, this would have been an expensive trip equalling a day’s wages for a couple with two children over the age of 10 in 1883. E. Patricia Tsurumi, *Factory Girls: Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 43.

²⁹ A record of all permits given to temples and shrines from 1733-1868 can be found in the *Kyūbaku hikitsugisho* under the *kaichō sashiyurushichō* at the National Diet Library in Tokyo. Of these *kaichō* 824 of them were *igaichō*, meaning they took place inside the temple sanctuary. These were meant to showcase religious icons such as statues that were not regularly accessible to common worshippers. The remaining 741 *kaichō* were *degaichō*, denoting that they took place outside of the temple grounds.

³⁰ Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, *Practically Religious: worldly benefits and the common religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 85.

³¹ While there are debates regarding the exact number of temples during this period these two figures seem to be the most accurate. Statistics are from McCullin’s notes in *Buddhism and the State in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 398.

³² Some shrines would also request money directly from the bakufu while others would only apply for the permit. Roughly 28% of temples were successful in being granted a permit or receiving a subsidy from the bakufu. Hiruma Hisashi, *Edo no Kaichō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1980), 26.