Statism in Shōwa Japan

Shōwa Statism (国家主義 Kokka Shugi) was a political syncretism of Japanese extreme right-wing political ideologies, developed over a period of time from the Meiji Restoration. It is sometimes also referred to as Shōwa nationalism or Japanese fascism.

This statist movement dominated Japanese politics during the first part of the Shōwa period (reign of Hirohito). It was a mixture of ideas such as Japanese ultranationalism, militarism, and state capitalism, that were proposed by a number of contemporary political philosophers and thinkers in Japan.

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Origins

With a more aggressive foreign policy, and victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese War and over Imperial Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, Japan joined the imperialist powers. The need for a strong military to secure Japan's new overseas empire was strengthened by a sense that only through a strong military would Japan earn the respect of Western nations, and thus revision of the "unequal treaties" imposed in the 1800s.

The Japanese military viewed itself as "politically clean" in terms of corruption, and criticized political parties under a liberal democracy as self-serving and a threat to national security by their failure to provide adequate military spending or to address pressing social and economic issues. The complicity of the politicians with the zaibatsu corporate monopolies also came under criticism. The military tended to favor dirigisme and other forms of direct state control over industry, rather than free market capitalism, as well as greater state-sponsored social welfare to reduce the attraction of socialism and communism in Japan.

The special relation of militarists and the central civil government with the Imperial Family supported the important position of the Emperor as Head of State with political powers, and the relationship with the nationalist right-wing movements. However, Japanese political thought had relatively little contact with European political thinking until the 20th century.
Under this ascendancy of the military, the country developed a very hierarchical, aristocratic economic system with significant state involvement. During the Meiji Restoration, there had been a surge in the creation of monopolies. This was in part due to state intervention, as the monopolies served to allow Japan to become a world economic power. The state itself owned some of the monopolies, and others were owned by the zaibatsu. The monopolies managed the central core of the economy, with other aspects being controlled by the government ministry appropriate to the activity, including the National Central Bank and the Imperial family. This economic arrangement was in many ways similar to the later corporatist models of European fascists.

During the same period, certain thinkers with ideals similar to those from shogunate times developed the early basis of Japanese expansionism and Pan-Asianist theories. Such thought later was developed by writers such as Saneshige Komaki into the Hakkō ichiu, Yen Block, and Amau doctrines.[1]

**Developments in the Shōwa era**

**International Policy**

The 1919 Treaty of Versailles did not recognize the Empire of Japan's territorial claims, and international naval treaties between Western powers and the Empire of Japan, (Washington Naval Treaty and London Naval Treaty), imposed limitations on naval shipbuilding which limited the size of the Imperial Japanese Navy at a 10:10:6 ratio. These measures were considered by many in Japan as refusal of by the Occidental powers to consider Japan an equal partner. The latter brought about the May 15 Incident.

On the basis national security, these events released a surge of Japanese nationalism and resulted in the end of collaboration diplomacy which supported peaceful economic expansion. The implementation of a military dictatorship and territorial expansionism were considered the best ways to protect the Yamato-damashii.

**Civil discourse on statism**

In the early 1930s, the Ministry of Home Affairs began arresting left-wing political dissidents, generally in order to exact a confession and renouncement of anti-state leanings. Over 30,000 such arrests were made between 1930 and 1933. In response, a group of writers founded a Japanese branch of the International Popular Front Against Fascism, and published articles in major literary journals warning of the dangers of statism. Their periodical, The People's Library (人 民 文 庫), achieved a circulation of over five thousand and was widely read in literary circles, but was eventually censored, and later dismantled in January 1938.

**Works of Ikki Kita**

Ikki Kita was an early 20th-century political theorist, who advocated a hybrid of state socialism with “Asian nationalism”, which thus blended the ultranationalist movement with Japanese militarism. His political philosophy was outlined in his thesis National Policy and Pure Socialism (国体論及び純正社会主義 Kokutai ron oyobi junsei shakai shugi) of 1908 and An Outline Plan for the Reorganization of Japan (日本改造法案大綱 Nihon Kaizō Hōan Taikō) of 1928. Kita proposed a military coup d'état to replace the existing political structure of Japan with a military dictatorship. The new military leadership would rescind the Meiji Constitution, ban political parties, replace the Diet of Japan with an assembly free of corruption, and would nationalize major industries. Kita also envisioned strict limits to private ownership of property, and land reform to improve the lot of tenant farmers. Thus strengthened internally Japan could then embark on a crusade to free all of Asia from Western imperialism.

Although his works were banned by the government almost immediately after publication, circulation was widespread, and his thesis proved popular not only with the younger officer class excited at the prospects of military rule and Japanese expansionism, but with the populist movement for its appeal to the agrarian classes and to the left wing of the socialist movement.

**Works of Shūmei Ōkawa**
Shūmei Ōkawa was a right-wing political philosopher, active in numerous Japanese nationalist societies in the 1920s. In 1926, he published Japan and the Way of the Japanese (日本及び日本人の道 Nihon oyobi Nihonjin no michi), among other works, which helped popularize the concept of the inevitability of a clash of civilizations between Japan and the west. Politically, his theories built on the works of Ikki Kita, but further emphasized that Japan needed to return to its traditional kokutai traditions in order to survive the increasing social tensions created by industrialization and foreign cultural influences.

Works of Sadao Araki

Sadao Araki was a noted political philosopher in the Imperial Japanese Army during the 1920s, who had a wide following within the junior officer corps. Although implicated in the February 26 Incident, he went on to serve in numerous influential government posts, and was a cabinet minister under Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe.

The Japanese Army, already trained along Prussian lines since the early Meiji period, often mentioned the affinity between yamato-damashii and the "Prussian Military Spirit" in pushing for a military alliance with Italy and Germany along with the need to combat Soviet communism. Araki's writing are imbued with nostalgia towards the military administrative system of former shogunate, in a similar manner to which the Fascist Party of Italy looked back to the ancient ideals of the Roman Empire or the NSDAP in Germany recalled an idealized version of First Reich and the Teutonic Order.

Araki modified the interpretation of the bushido warrior code to seishin kyōiku ("spiritual training"), which he introduced to the military as Army Minister, and to the general public as Education Minister, and in general brought the concepts of the Showa Restoration movement into mainstream Japanese politics.

Some of the distinctive features of this policy were also used outside Japan. The puppet states of Manchukuo, Mengjiang, and the Wang Jingwei Government were later organized party in accordance with Araki's ideas. In the case of Wang Jingwei's state, he himself had some German influences—prior to the Japanese invasion of China, he met with German leaders and picked up some fascist ideas during his time in the Kuomintang. These, he combined with Japanese militarist thinking. Japanese agents also supported local and nationalist elements in Southeast Asia and White Russian residents in Manchukuo before war broke out.

Works of Seigō Nakano

Seigō Nakano sought to bring about a rebirth of Japan through a blend of the samurai ethic, Neo-Confucianism, and populist nationalism modeled on European fascism. He saw Saigō Takamori as epitomizing the 'true spirit' of the Meiji ishin, and the task of modern Japan to recapture it.

Shōwa Restoration Movement

Ikki Kita and Shūmei Ōkawa joined forces in 1919 to organize the short-lived Yūzonsha (猶存社), a political study group intended to become an umbrella organization for the various right-socialist movements. Although the group soon collapsed due to irreconcilable ideological differences between Kita and Ōkawa, it served its purpose in that it managed to join the right-wing anti-socialist, Pan-Asian militarist societies with centrist and left-wing supporters of state socialism.
In the 1920s and 1930s, these supporters of Japanese statism used the slogan Showa Restoration (昭和維新 Shōwa isshin), which implied that a new resolution was needed to replace the existing political order dominated by corrupt politicians and capitalists, with one which (in their eyes), would fulfill the original goals of the Meiji Restoration of direct Imperial rule via military proxies.

However, the Shōwa Restoration had different meanings for different groups. For the radicals of the Sakurakai, it meant violent overthrow of the government to create a national syndicalist state with more equitable distribution of wealth and the removal of corrupt politicians and zaibatsu leaders. For the young officers it meant a return to some form of "military-shogunate in which the emperor would re-assume direct political power with dictatorial attributes, as well as divine symbolism, without the intervention of the Diet or liberal democracy but who would effectively be a figurehead with day-to-day decisions left to the military leadership.

Another point of view was supported by Prince Chichibu, a brother of Emperor Shōwa, who repeatedly counseled him to implement a direct imperial rule, even if that meant suspending the constitution. In principle, some theorists proposed Shōwa Restoration, the plan of giving direct dictatorial powers to the Emperor (due to his divine attributes) for leading the future overseas actions in mainland Asia. This was the purpose behind the February 26 Incident and other similar uprisings in Japan. Later, however, these previously mentioned thinkers decided to organize their own political clique based on previous radical, militaristic movements in the 1930s; this was the origin of the Kodoha party and their political desire to take direct control of all the political power in the country from the moderate and democratic political voices.

Following the formation of this "political clique", there was a new current of thought among militarists, industrialists and landowners that emphasized a desire to return to the ancient shogunate system, but in the form of a modern military dictatorship with new structures. It was organized with the Japanese Navy and Japanese Army acting as clans under command of a supreme military native dictator (the shōgun) controlling the country. In this government, the Emperor was covertly reduced in his functions and used as a figurehead for political or religious use under the control of the militarists.

The failure of various attempted coups, including the League of Blood Incident, the Imperial Colors Incident and the February 26 Incident, discredited supporters of the Shōwa Restoration movement, but the concepts of Japanese statism migrated to mainstream Japanese politics, where it joined with some elements of European fascism.

Comparisons with European fascism

Early Shōwa statism is sometimes given the retrospective label "fascism", but this was not a self-appellation and it is clear that the comparison is inaccurate. When authoritarian tools of the state such as the Kempeitai were put into use in the early Shōwa period, they were employed to protect the rule of law under the Meiji Constitution from perceived enemies on both the left and the right.

Some ideologists, such as Kingoro Hashimoto, proposed a single party dictatorship, based on egalitarian populism, patterned after the European fascist movements. An Investigation of Global Policy with the Yamato Race as Nucleus shows the influence clearly.

These geopolitical ideals developed into the Amau Doctrine (天羽声明, an Asian Monroe Doctrine), stating that Japan assumed total responsibility for peace in Asia, and can be seen later when Prime Minister Kōki Hirota proclaimed justified Japanese expansion into northern China as the creation of "a special zone, anti-communist, pro-Japanese and pro-Manchukuo" that was a "fundamental part" of Japanese national existence.

Although the reformist right wing, kakushin uyoku, was interested in the concept, the idealist right wing, or kannen uyoku, rejected fascism as they rejected all things of western origin.

Because of the mistrust of unions in such unity, the Japanese went to replace them with "councils" in every factory, containing both management and worker representatives to contain conflict. Like the Nazi councils they were copying, this was part of a program to create a classless national unity.

Kokuhonsha
The Kokuhonsha was founded in 1924 by conservative Minister of Justice and President of the House of Peers Hiranuma Kiichirō. It called on Japanese patriots to reject the various foreign political "-isms" (such as socialism, communism, Marxism, anarchism, etc.) in favor of a rather vaguely defined "Japanese national spirit" (kokutai). The name "kokuhon" was selected as an antithesis to the word "minpon", from minpon shugi, the commonly-used translation for the word democracy, and the society was openly supportive of totalitarian ideology.

**Divine Right and Way of the Warrior**

One particular concept exploited was a decree ascribed to the mythical first emperor of Japan, Emperor Jimmu, in 660 BC: the policy of hakkō ichiu (八紘一宇, all eight corners of the world under one roof). This also related to the concept of kokutai or national polity, meaning the uniqueness of the Japanese people in having a leader with spiritual origins. The pamphlet Kokutai no Hongi taught that students should put the nation before the self, and that they were part of the state and not separate from it. Shinmin no Michi enjoined all Japanese to follow the central precepts of loyalty and filial piety, which would throw aside selfishness and allow them to complete their "holy task."

The bases of the modern form of kokutai and hakkō ichiu were to develop after 1868 and would take the following form:

1. Japan is the center of the world, with its ruler the Tennō (Emperor), a divine being, who derives his divinity from ancestral descent from the great Amaterasu-Omikami, the Goddess of the Sun herself.
2. The Kami (Japan's gods and goddesses) have Japan under their special protection. Thus, the people and soil Dai Nippon and all its institutions are superior to all others.
3. All of these attributes are fundamental to the Kodoshugisha (Imperial Way) and give Japan a divine mission to bring all nations under one roof, so that all humanity can share the advantage of being ruled by the Tennō.

The concept of the divine Emperors was another belief that was to fit the later goals. It was an integral part of the Japanese religious structure that the Tennō was divine, descended directly from the line of Ama-Terasu (or Amaterasu, the Sun Kami or Goddess).

The final idea that was modified in modern times was the concept of Bushido. Bushido was the warrior code and laws of feudal Japan, that while having cultural surface differences, was at its heart not that different from the code of chivalry or any other similar system in other cultures. In later years, the code of Bushido found a resurgence in belief following the Meiji Restoration. At first, this allowed Japan to field what was considered one of the most professional and humane militaries in the world, one respected by friend and foe alike. Eventually, however, this belief would become a combination of propaganda and fanaticism that would lead to the Second Sino-Japanese War of the 1930s and World War II.

It was the third concept, especially that would chart Japan's course towards several wars that would culminate with World War II.

**New Order Movement**

During 1940, Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe proclaimed the Shintaisei (New National Structure), making Japan into a "National Defense State". Under the National Mobilization Law, the government was given absolute power over the nation's assets. All political parties were ordered to dissolve into the Imperial Rule Assistance Association forming a one-party state based on totalitarian values. Such measures as the National Service Draft Ordinance and the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement were intended to mobilize Japanese society for a total war against the West.

Associated with government efforts to create a statist society included creation of the Tonarigumi (residents' committees), and emphasis on the Kokutai no Hongi ("Japan's Fundamentals of National Policy"), presenting a view of Japan's history, and its mission to unite the East and West under the Hakkō ichiu theory in schools as...
official texts. The official academic text was another book, *Shinmin no Michi* (The Subject's Way), the "moral national Bible", presented an effective catechism on nation, religion, cultural, social, and ideological topics.

### The Axis

Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933, bringing it closer to the Third Reich, which also left that year, and Fascist Italy, which was dissatisfied with the League. During the 1930s Japan drifted further away from Western Europe and America. American and French films were increasingly censored, and in 1937 Japan froze all American assets throughout its empire.

In 1940, the three countries formed the Axis powers, and became closer linked. Japan imported Nazi propaganda films such as *Ohm Krüger* (1941), advertising them as narratives showing the suffering caused by Western imperialism.

### End of military statism

Japanese statism was discredited and destroyed by the utter failure of Japan's military in World War II. After the surrender of Japan, Japan was put under allied occupation. Some of its former military leaders were tried for war crimes before the Tokyo tribunal, the government educational system was revised, and the tenets of liberal democracy written into the post-war Constitution of Japan as one of its key themes.

The collapse of statist ideologies in 1945–46 was paralleled by a formalisation of relations between the Shinto religion and the Japanese state, including disestablishment termination of Shinto's status as a state religion. In August 1945, the term State Shinto (*Kokka Shintō*) was invented to refer to some aspects of statism. On 1 January 1946, Emperor Shōwa issued an imperial rescript, sometimes referred as the*Ningen-sengen* ("Humanity Declaration") in which he quoted the Five Charter Oath (*Gokajō no Goseimon*) of his grandfather, Emperor Meiji and renounced officially "the false conception that the Emperor is a divinity". However, the wording of the Declaration – in the court language of the Imperial family, an archaic Japanese dialect known as Kyūteigo – and content of this statement have been the subject of much debate. For instance, the renunciation did not include the word usually used to impute the Emperor's divinity: *arahitogami* ("living god"). It instead used the unusual word *akitsumikami*, which was officially translated as "divinity", but more literally meant "manifestation/incarnation of a kami ("god/spirit")". Hence, commentators such as John W. Dower and Herbert P. Bix have argued, Hirohito did not specifically deny being a "living god" (*arahitogami*).

### See also

- Japanese militarism
- Imperial Way Faction
- List of Japanese political figures in early Shōwa period
- Japanese nationalism
- Nazism
- Italian Fascism
- List of Japanese institutions (1930–45)
- Propaganda in Japan during World War II

### References

- Hook, Glenn D (2007).*Militarization and Demilitarization in Contemporary Japan*Taylor & Francis. ASIN B000IOVTI
Notes

1. Akihiko Takagi, [1](http://www.nuim.ie/staff/dpringle/igu/takagi.pdf) mentions "Nippon Chiseigaku Sengen" (A manifesto of Japanese Geopolitics) written in 1940 by Saneshige Komaki, a professor of Kyoto Imperial University and one of the representatives of the Kyoto school, [as] an example of the merging of geopolitics into Japanese traditional ultranationalism.


3. Herbert Bix, Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan 2001, p. 284

4. Doak, Kevin (2009). "Fascism Seen and Unseen" In Tansman, Alan. The culture of Japanese fascism Durham: Duke University Press. p. 44 ISBN 0822344521. "Careful attention to the history of the Special Higher Police, and particularly to their use by Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki against his enemies even further to his political right, reveals that extreme rightists, fascists, and practically anyone deemed to pose a threat to the Meiji constitutional order were at risk."


8. Bix, Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan, page 164

9. Reynolds, Japan in the Fascist Era, page 76


External links

- About Japanese Nationalist groups, Kempeitai, Kwantung Army Group 371 and other related topics
- Info about Japanese secret societies
- Article on Alan Tansman’s forthcoming book, The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism


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Japanese militarism refers to the ideology in the Empire of Japan that militarism should dominate the political and social life of the nation, and that the strength of the military is equal to the strength of a nation.

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### History

**Rise of militarism**

The military had a strong influence on Japanese society from the Meiji Restoration. Almost all leaders in Japanese society during the Meiji period (whether in the military, politics or business) were ex-samurai or descendants of samurai, and shared a set of values and outlooks. The early Meiji government viewed Japan as threatened by western imperialism, and one of the prime motivations for the Fukoku Kyohei policy was to strengthen Japan's economic and industrial foundations, so that a strong military could be built to defend Japan against outside powers.

The rise of universal military conscription, introduced by Yamagata Aritomo in 1873, along with the proclamation of the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors in 1882 enabled the military to indoctrinate thousands of men from various social backgrounds with military-patriotic values and the concept of unquestioning loyalty to the Emperor as the basis of the Japanese state (kokutai). Yamagata like many Japanese was strongly influenced by the recent striking success of Prussia in transforming itself from an agricultural state to a leading modern industrial and military power. He accepted Prussian political ideas, which favored military expansion abroad and authoritarian government at home. The Prussian model also devalued the notion of civilian control over the independent military, which meant that in Japan, as in Germany, the military could develop into a state within a state, thus exercising greater influence on politics in general.[1]

Following the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War, the Army Staff College and the Japanese General Staff paid close attention to Major Jakob Meckel's views on the superiority of the German military model over the French system as the reason for German victory. In response to a Japanese request, Prussian Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke sent Meckel to Japan to become an
In Japan, Meckel worked closely with future Prime Ministers General Katsura Tarō and General Yamagata Aritomo, and with army strategist General Kawakami Soroku. Meckel made numerous recommendations which were implemented, including reorganization of the command structure of the army into divisions and regiments, thus increasing mobility, strengthening the army logistics and transportation structure with the major army bases connected by railways, establishing artillery and engineering regiments as independent commands, and revising the universal conscription system to abolish virtually all exceptions. A bust of Meckel was sited in front of the Japanese Army Staff College from 1909 through 1945.

Although his period in Japan (1885–1888) was relatively short, Meckel had a tremendous impact on the development of the Japanese military. He is credited with having introduced Clausewitz's military theories and the Prussian concept of war games (kriegspiel) in a process of refining tactics. By training some sixty of the highest-ranking Japanese officers of the time in tactics, strategy and organization, he was able to replace the previous influences of the French advisors with his own philosophies. Meckel especially reinforced Hermann Roesler's ideal of subservience to the Emperor by teaching his pupils that Prussian military success was a consequence of the officer class's unswerving loyalty to their sovereign Emperor, as expressly codified in Articles XI-XIII of the Meiji Constitution.

The rise of political parties in the late Meiji period was coupled with the rise of secret and semi-secret patriotic societies, such as the Genyōsha (1881) and Kokuryūkai (1901), which coupled political activities with paramilitary activities and military intelligence, and supported expansionism overseas as a solution to Japan's domestic issues.

Japan felt looked down on by Western countries during the late 19th century. The phrase fukoku kyōhei (rich nation, strong army) was created during this time and shows how Japanese officials saw imperialism as the way to gain respect and power. With a more aggressive foreign policy, and victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese War and over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, Japan joined the imperialist powers. The need for a strong military to secure Japan's new overseas empire was strengthened by a sense that only through a strong military would Japan earn the respect of western nations, and thus revision of the unequal treaties.

**Economic factors**

During the 19th century, Great Power status was considered dependent on resource-rich colonial empires, both as a source of raw materials for military and industrial production, and international prestige.

Due to the lack of resources in Japanese home islands, raw materials such as iron, oil, and coal largely had to be imported. The success of Japan in securing Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910) had brought Japan primarily agricultural colonies. In terms of resources, the Japanese military looked towards Manchuria's iron and coal, Indochina's rubber, and China's vast resources. However, the army was at variance with the zaibatsu financial and industrial corporations on how to manage economic expansion, a conflict also affecting domestic politics.

**Independence of the military**

Also forming part of the basis for the growth of militarism was the freedom from civilian control enjoyed by the Japanese armed forces. In 1878, the Imperial Japanese Army established the Imperial Japanese Army General Staff office, modeled after the Prussian General Staff. This office was independent of, and equal (and later superior) to the Ministry of War of Japan in terms of authority. The Imperial Japanese Navy soon followed with the Imperial Japanese Navy General Staff. These General Staff offices were responsible for the planning and execution of military operations, and reported directly to the emperor. As the Chiefs of the General Staff were not cabinet ministers, they did not report to the Prime Minister of Japan, and were thus completely independent of any civilian oversight or control.

The Army and the Navy also had decisive say on the formation (and survival) of any civilian government. Since the law required that the posts of Army Minister and Navy Minister be filled by active duty officers nominated by their respective services, and since the law also required that a prime minister resign if he could not fill all of his cabinet posts, both the Army and the Navy had final say on
the formation of a cabinet, and could bring down the cabinet at any time by withdrawing their minister and refusing to nominate a successor. In reality, while this tactic was used only one time (ironically to prevent a General, Kazushige Ugaki, from becoming Prime Minister in 1937), the threat always loomed large when the military made any demands on the civilian leadership.

**Growth of ultranationalism**

During the Taishō period, Japan saw a short period of democratic rule (the so-called "Taisho democracy"), and several diplomatic attempts were made to encourage peace, such as the Washington Naval Treaty and participation in the League of Nations. However, with the beginning of the Shōwa era, the apparent collapse of the world economic order with the Great Depression starting in 1929, coupled with the imposition of trade barriers by western nations and an increasing radicalism in Japanese politics including issues of domestic terrorist violence (including an assassination attempt on the emperor in 1932 and a number of attempted coups d’état by ultra-nationalist secret societies) led to a resurgence of so-called "jingoistic" patriotism, a weakening of democratic forces and a belief that the military could solve all threats both domestic and foreign. Patriotic education also strengthened the sense of a *hakko ichiu*, or a divine mission to unify Asia under Japanese rule.

Those who continued to resist the "military solution" including nationalists with unquestionable patriotism, such as generals Jotaro Watanabe and Tetsuzan Nagata and ex-Foreign Minister Kijūrō Shidehara were driven from office or an active role in the government.

A turning point came with the ratification of the London Naval Treaty of 1930. Prime Minister Osachi Hamaguchi and his Minseito party agreed to a treaty which would severely limit Japanese naval power. This treaty was strongly opposed by the military, who claimed that it would endanger national defense, and was portrayed by the opposition Rikken Seiyukai party as having been forced upon Japan by a hostile United States, which further inflamed growing anti-foreign sentiment.

The Japanese system of party government finally met its demise with the May 15 Incident in 1932, when a group of junior naval officers and army cadets assassinated Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi. Although the assassins were put on trial and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, they were seen popularly as having acted out of patriotism and the atmosphere was set where the military was able to act with little restraint.

**Growth of military adventurism**

Japan had been involved in the Asian continent continuously from the First Sino-Japanese War, Boxer Rebellion, Russo-Japanese War, World War I and the Siberian Intervention. During the term of Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi from 1927 to 1929, Japan sent troops three times to China to obstruct Chiang Kai-shek's unification campaign. In June 1928, adventurist officers of the Kwantung Army embarked on unauthorized initiatives to protect Japanese interests in Manchuria, including the assassination of a former ally, warlord Zhang Zuolin, in hopes of sparking a general conflict.

The Manchurian Incident of September 1931 did not fail, and it set the stage for the Japanese military takeover of all of Manchuria. Kwantung Army conspirators blew up a few meters of South Manchurian Railway Company track near Mukden, blamed it on Chinese saboteurs, and used the event as an excuse to invade and seize the vast territory.

In Tokyo one month later, in the Imperial Colors Incident military figures failed in an attempt to establish a military dictatorship but again the news was suppressed and the military perpetrators were not punished.

In January 1932, Japanese forces attacked Shanghai in the First Shanghai Incident, waging a three-month undeclared war there before a truce was reached. The civilian government in Tokyo was powerless to prevent these military adventures, and instead of being condemned, the Kwantung Army's actions enjoyed considerable popular support.

Inukai's successors, military men chosen by Saionji Kimmochi, the last surviving genrō, recognized Manchukuo and generally approved the army's actions in securing Manchuria as an industrial base, an area for Japanese emigration, and a potential staging ground for war with the Soviet Union. Various army factions contended for power amid increasing suppression of dissent and more assassinations. In the February 26 Incident of 1936, the Army's elite First Infantry Division staged an attempted coup d'état in yet
another effort to overthrow civilian rule. The revolt was put down by other military units, and its leaders were executed after secret trials. Despite public dismay over these events and the discredit they brought to numerous military figures, Japan's civilian leadership capitulated to the army's demands in the hope of ending domestic violence. Increases were seen in defense budgets, naval construction (Japan announced it would no longer accede to disarmament treaties), and patriotic indoctrination as Japan moved toward a wartime footing[3].

In November 1936, the Anti-Comintern Pact, an agreement to exchange information and collaborate in preventing communist activities, was signed by Japan and Germany (Italy joined a year later). War was launched against China with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 7, 1937 in which a clash near Beijing between Chinese and Japanese troops quickly escalated into the full-scale warfare of the Second Sino-Japanese War, followed by the Soviet-Japanese Border Wars and the Pacific War.

Despite the military's long tradition of independence from civilian control, its efforts at staging a coup d'état to overthrow the civilian government, and its forcing Japan into war through insubordination and military adventurism, the military was ultimately unable to force a military dictatorship on Japan.

Under Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, the Japanese government was streamlined to meet war-time conditions and under the National Mobilization Law was given absolute power over the nation's assets. In 1940, all political parties were ordered to dissolve into the Imperial Rule Assistance Association, forming a one-party state based on totalitarian values. Even so, there was much entrenched opposition from the government bureaucrats, and in the 1942 general election for the Japanese Diet, the military was still unable to do away with the last vestiges of party politics. This was partly due to the fact that the military itself was not a monolithic structure, but was rent internally with its own political factions. Even Japan's wartime Prime Minister, Hideki Tōjō, had difficulty controlling portions of his own military

Japan's overseas possessions, greatly extended as a result of early successes in the Pacific War were organized into a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which was to have integrated Asia politically and economically—under Japanese leadership—against Western domination.

Opposition to militarism

Despite the apparently monolithic national consensus on the official aggressive policies pursued by the Imperial government in the first part of the Shōwa era, some substantial opposition did exist. This was one of various forms of Japanese dissidence during the Shōwa period

The most organized open opposition to militarism was from the Japanese Communist Party. In the early 1930s Communist activists attempted to influence army conscripts, but the party was suppressed during the mid-1930s within Japan.

Personal opposition included individuals from the fields of party politics, business and culture. Some notable examples include:

- Hara Takashi, a commoner and liberal thinker of the Rikken Seiyūkai had become prime minister in 1918 with the rallying cry of “Militarism is dead.” Three years later, however, Hara was assassinated.
- Kijirō Shidehara followed a non-interventionist policy toward China, attempting to stabilize its relations with Great Britain and the United States. The term “Shidehara diplomacy” came to describe Japan's liberal foreign policy during the 1920s, and was assailed by military interests who believed it was weakening the country.
- Baron Takuma Dan, director of Mitsui Bank, was an important opponent of Japan overseas interventions and was known for his pro-American views. He was murdered on March 5, 1932 in the blood of the Incident.
- Minobe Tatsukichi, a respected professor at Tokyo Imperial University declared the emperor to be a part of the constitutional structure of Japan rather than a sacred power beyond the state itself in 1935. His constitutional interpretation was overwhelmingly accepted by bureaucrats until the 1930s. In the increasingly militant 1930s, these ideas led to attacks against Minobe in the House of Peers and his resignation from that body.
- Saitō Takao, a graduate of Yale University was a member of the Rikken Minseito party. On February 2, 1940, he made a speech in the Diet in which he sharply questioned the prosecution and justification of Japan's “holy war” in China. He was expelled from the Diet on March 7, 1940 and his speech also led to the creation of the League of Diet Members Believing the Objectives of the Holy War by Fumimaro Konoe.
- Admiral Sōkichi Takagi, an opponent of Japan's decision to declare war on the United States, was asked by Navy Minister Shigetarō Shimadato compile a report analyzing Japanese defeats during the Pacific campaign of 1942. His analysis convinced Takagi of Japan's inevitable defeat. Believing that the only solution for Japan was the...
elimination of the Tōjō-led government and artruce with the United States, Ōkagi began planning for the assassination of Prime Minister Hideki Tōjō before his removal from office in July 1944.

- Kanō Jigorō, creator of Judo and founder of the modern Japanese educational system, member of Japan's Olympic Committee, and de facto foreign minister for Japan was a staunch opponent of militarism. Concerned that his Judo school, the Kodokan, would be used as a military training center, he obtained a promise from the Emperor that it would not be. Alternate sources list different causes of death, and some consider his passing to be suspicious.

**Japan attacking Pearl Harbor**

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor happened on December 7, 1941. Multiple events led to the attack, such as the Japanese peoples' opposition to Westernism and the breaking off of negotiations between Japan and the United States. Japan had plans to take over other Asian countries, which resulted in the US to strip any war materials and resources to be sold to the Japanese and froze all assets and bank accounts in the US. The US fleet moved from being stationed in California to be moved in Pearl Harbor to somewhat control Japan's aggression and imposed on an embargo of essential materials, because Japan was trying to take over and control more territories.

**Post-war**

Despite efforts to totally militarize Japanese society during the war, including such measures as the National Service Draft Ordinance and the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement, Japanese militarism was discredited by the failure of Japan's military in World War II and by the American occupation. After the surrender of Japan, many of its former military leaders were tried for war crimes before the Tokyo tribunal, its government, educational system revised and had pacifism written into the post-war Constitution of Japan as one of its key tenets.

**Timeline**

- **1931:** Hamaguchi dies and Wakatsuki Reijirō becomes prime minister (April 14). Inukai Tsuyoshi becomes prime minister (December 13) and increases funding for the military in China.
- **1932:** After an attack on Japanese monks in Shanghai (January 18), Japanese forces shell the city (January 29). Manchukuo is established with Henry Pu Yi as emperor (February 29). Inukai is assassinated during a coup attempt and Saitō Makoto becomes prime minister (May 15).
- **1933:** Japan leaves the League of Nations (March 27).
- **1934:** Keisuke Okada becomes prime minister (July 8). Japan withdraws from the Washington Naval Treaty (December 29).
- **1936:** Coup attempt, February 26 Incident crushed by Hirohito. Kōki Hirota becomes prime minister (March 9). Japan signs its first pact with Germany (November 25) and occupies Tsingtao (December 3).
- **1937:** Senjūrō Hayashi becomes prime minister (February 2). Prince Konoe Fumimaro becomes prime minister (June 4). The Sino-Japanese War starts with the Battle of Lugou Bridge (July 7). Japan captures Peking (July 31).
- **1938:** Battle of Taierzhuang (March 24). Canton falls to Japanese forces (October 21).
- **1939:** Hiranuma Kiichirō becomes prime minister (January 5). Japanese forces suffer a military defeat at Battles of Khalkhin Gol against Soviet forces (September 15). Abe Nobuyuki becomes prime minister (August 30).
- **1941:** Japan and Soviet Union signs a non aggression pact (April 13). General Hideki Tōjō becomes prime minister (October 18). Japanese naval forces attack Pearl Harbor, Hawaii (December 7) (see Attack on Pearl Harbor), prompting the United States to declare war on Japan (December 8). Japan conquers Hong Kong (December 25).
- **1943:** U.S. victory in Battle of Guadalcanal (February 9). Japan defeated at Battle of Tarawa (November 23).
- **1944:** Tojo resigns and Kuniaki Koiso becomes prime minister (July 22).
(June 21). U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima (August 6), and on Nagasaki in the same day that USSR entered the War against Japan (August 9). Japan surrenders (September 2): Allied occupation begins.

See also

- Statism in Shōwa Japan
- List of Japanese political and military incidents
- List of Japanese political figures in early Shōwa period
- List of Japanese nationalist movements and parties
- Japanese nationalism
- Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere
- Imperialism in Asia

Notes

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State Shinto

State Shintō (国家神道 or 国家神道 Kokka Shintō) describes the Empire of Japan's ideological use of the native folk traditions of Shinto. The state strongly encouraged Shinto practices to emphasize the Emperor as a divine being, which was exercised through control of shrine finances and training regimes for priests.

The State Shinto ideology emerged at the start of the Meiji era, after government officials defined freedom of religion within the Meiji Constitution. Imperial scholars believed Shinto reflected the historical fact of the Emperor's divine origins rather than a religious belief, and argued that it should enjoy a privileged relationship with the Japanese state. The government argued that Shinto was a non-religious moral tradition and patriotic practice. Though early Meiji-era attempts to unite Shinto and the state failed, this non-religious concept of ideological Shinto was incorporated into state bureaucracy. Shrines were defined as patriotic, not religious, institutions, which served state purposes such as honoring the war dead.

The state also integrated local shrines into political functions, occasionally spurring local opposition and resentment. With fewer shrines financed by the state, nearly 80,000 closed or merged with neighbors. Many shrines and shrine organizations began to independently embrace these state directives, regardless of funding. By 1940, Shinto priests risked persecution for performing traditionally "religious" Shinto ceremonies. Imperial Japan did not draw a distinction between ideological Shinto and traditional Shinto.

US military leaders introduced the term "State Shinto" to differentiate the state's ideology from traditional Shinto practices in the 1945 Shinto Directive. That decree established Shinto as a religion, and banned further ideological uses of Shinto by the state.

Controversy continues to surround the use of Shinto symbols in state functions.

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Origins of the term

Shinto is a blend of indigenous Japanese folk practices, beliefs, court manners, and spirit-worship which dates back to at least 600 AD. These beliefs were unified as "Shinto" during the Meiji era (1868-1912), though the Chronicles of Japan (Nihon Shoki) first referenced the term in the eighth century. Shinto has no set of doctrines or founder, but draws from a set of creation myths described in books such as the Kojiki.

The 1945 "Shinto Directive" of the United States General Headquarters introduced the "State Shinto" distinction when it began governing Japan after the second world war. The Shinto Directive, (officially the "Abolition of Governmental Sponsorship, Support, Perpetuation, Control and Dissemination of State Shinto") defined State Shinto as "that branch of Shinto (Kokka Shinto or Jinja Shinto) which, by official acts of the Japanese government, has been differentiated from the religion of Sect Shinto (Shuha Shinto or Kyoha Shinto) and has been classified a non-religious national cult.

The "State Shinto" term was thus used to categorize, and abolish, Imperial Japanese practices that relied on Shinto to support nationalistic ideology. By refusing to ban Shinto practices outright, Japan's post-war constitution was thus able to preserve full Freedom of Religion.

Definitions

The definition of State Shinto requires distinction from the term "Shinto," which was one aspect of a set of nationalist symbols integrated into the State Shinto ideology. Though some scholars, such as Woodard and Holtom, and the Shinto Directive itself, use the terms "Shrine Shinto" and "State Shinto" interchangeably, most contemporary scholars use the term "Shrine Shinto" to refer to the majority of Shinto shrines which were outside of State Shinto influence, leaving "State Shinto" to refer to shrines and practices deliberately intended to reflect state ideology.

Interpretations

Most generally, State Shinto refers to any use of Shinto practices incorporated into the national ideology during the Meiji period starting in 1868. It is often described as any state-supported, Shinto-inspired ideology or practice intended to inspire national integration, unity, and loyalty. State Shinto is also understood to refer to the state rituals and ideology of Emperor-worship, which was not a traditional emphasis of Shinto — of the 124 Japanese emperors, only 20 have dedicated shrines.

"State Shinto" was not an official designation for any practice or belief in Imperial Japan during this period. Instead, it was developed at the end of the war to describe the mixture of state support for non-religious shrine activities and immersive ideological support for the Kokutai policy in education, including the training of all shrine priests. This permitted a form of traditional religious Shinto to reflect a State Shinto position without the direct control of the state. The extent to which Emperor worship was supported by the population is unclear, though scholars such as Ashizu Uzuhiko, Sakamoto Koremaru, and Nitta Hitoshi argue that the government's funding and control of Shrines was never adequate enough to justify a claim to the existence of a State Shinto.

The extent of popular support for the actions categorized as "State Shinto" is the subject of debate. Some contemporary Shinto authorities reject the concept of State Shinto, and seek to restore elements of the practice, such as naming time periods after the Emperor. This view often sees "State Shinto" purely as an invention of the United States' "Shinto Directive."
Shinto as political ideology

"Religious" practice, in its Western sense, was unknown in Japan prior to the Meiji restoration. Religion was understood to encompass a series of beliefs about faith and the afterlife, but also closely associated with Western power. The Meiji restoration had re-established the Emperor, a "religious" figure, as the head of the Japanese state.

Religious freedom was initially a response to demands of Western governments. Japan had allowed Christian missionaries under pressure from Western governments, but viewed Christianity as a foreign threat. The state was challenged to establish a suprareligious interpretation of Shinto that incorporated, and promoted, the Emperor's divine lineage. By establishing Shinto as a unique form of "suprareligious" cultural practice, it would be exempted from Meiji laws protecting freedom of religion.

The "State Shinto" ideology presented Shinto as something beyond religion, "a unity of government and teaching ... not a religion." Rather than a religious practice, Shinto was understood as a form of education, which "consists of the traditions of the imperial house, beginning in the age of gods and continuing through history.

Scholars, such as Sakamoto Koremaru, argue that the "State Shinto" system existed only between 1900 and 1945, corresponding to the state's creation of the Bureau of Shrines. That bureau distinguished Shinto from religions managed by the Bureau of Shrines and Temples, which became the Bureau of Religions. Separated through this state bureaucracy, Shinto was distinguished from Buddhist temples and Christian churches, which were formulated as religious. This marked the start of the state's official designation of Shinto shrines as "suprareligious" or "non-religious".

State Shinto was thus not recognized as a "state religion" during the Meiji era. Instead, State Shinto is considered an appropriation of traditional Shinto through state financial support for ideologically aligned shrines.

Implementation of Shinto ideology

The Empire of Japan endeavored, through education initiatives and specific financial support for new shrines, to frame Shinto practice as a patriotic moral tradition.

From the early Meiji era, the divine origin of the Emperor was the official position of the state, and taught in classrooms not as myth, but as historical fact. Shinto priests were hired to teach in public schools, and cultivated this teaching, alongside reverence for the Emperor and compulsory class trips to shrines. State Shinto practitioners also emphasized the ritual aspect as a traditional civic practice that did not explicitly call on faith to participate.

By balancing a "suprareligious" understanding of Shinto as the source of divinity for both Japan and the Emperor, the state was able to compel participation in rituals from Japanese subjects while claiming to respect their freedom of religion. The state was thus able to enshrine its place in civic society in ways religions could not. This included teaching its ideological strand of Shinto in public schools, including ceremonial recitations to the Emperor and rites involving the Emperor's portrait.

In 1926, the government organized the Shūkyō Seido Chōsakai (宗 教 制 度 調 査 会, Religious System Investigative Committee) and then the Jinja Seido Chōsakai (神 社 制 度 調 査 会, Shrine System Investigative Committee), which further established the suprareligious "Shintogaku" ideology.
To protect this non-religious distinction, practices which did not align with state functions were increasingly prohibited. This included preaching at shrines and conducting funerals. The use of the symbolic *torii* gate was restricted to government-supported shrines.

As religious rituals without state functions were restricted, practitioners were driven underground and frequently arrested. Alternative Shinto movements, such as Omotokyo, were hampered by the imprisonment of its priests in 1921. The status of so-called "State Shinto" shrines changed in 1931; from that point, shrines were pressured to focus on the divinity of the Emperor Hirohito or shrine priests could face persecution.

Some intellectuals at the time, such as Yanagita Kunio, were critics of Imperial Japan's argument at the time that Shinto was not religious. In 1936, the Catholic Church's *Propaganda Fide* agreed with the state definition, and announced that visits to shrines had "only a purely civil value".

State control of shrines

Though the government's ideological interest in Shinto is well-known, there is debate over how much control the government had over local shrines, and for how long. Shrine finances were not purely state-supported. Shinto priests, even when state-supported, had tended to avoid preaching on ideological matters until the establishment of the Wartime Shrine board in 1940.

In 1906, the government issued a policy to limit its financial support to one shrine per village. This state supported shrines that followed its specific guidelines for funding, and encouraged unfunded shrines to become partners with the larger shrines. As a result of this initiative to consolidate Shinto beliefs into state-approved practices, Japan's 200,000 shrines had been reduced to 120,000 by 1914, consolidating control to shrines favorable to the state interpretation of Shinto.

In 1910, graduates of state-run Shinto schools, such as Kokugakuin University and Kougakkan University, were implicitly allowed to become public school teachers. A greater number of better-trained priests with educations at state-supported schools, combined with a rising patriotic fervor, is believed by some to have seeded an environment in which grassroots Emperor worship was possible, even without financial support for local shrines.

In 1913, official rules for Shrine priests — *Kankokaikeisha ika jinja shinshoku hōmu kisoku* — specifically called upon "a duty to observe festivals conforming to the rituals of the state." Some shrines did adopt State Shinto practice independent of financial support from the government. Several Shrine Associations advocated for support of "State Shinto" directives independently, including the Shrine Administration Organization, the Shrine Priest Collaboration Organization, and the Shrine Priest Training Organization.

In 1940, the state created the wartime shrine board, which expanded control over state shrines and expanded the state's role. Up to that point, individual priests had been limited in their political roles, delegated to certain rituals and shrine upkeep, and rarely encouraged Emperor worship, or other aspects of state ideology, independently. No shrine priest, or member of the Wartime Shrine board, had previously sought public office, which some scholars, such as Sakamoto, suggest is evidence of the state's use of Shinto to its own ends, rather than the Shinto priest's attempt to achieve political power.

### Ideological origins

Scholar Katsurajima Nobuhiro suggests the "supra-religious" frame on State Shinto practices drew upon the state's previous failures to consolidate religious Shinto for state purposes.
Kokugaku ("National Learning") was an early attempt to develop ideological interpretations of Shinto, many of which would later form the basis of "State Shinto" ideology.[6:66] Kokugaku was an Edo-period educational philosophy which sought a "pure" form of Japanese Shinto, stripped of foreign influences — particularly Buddhism.[6:28]

In the Meiji era, scholar Hirata Atsutane advocated for a return to "National Learning" as a way to eliminate the influence of Buddhism and distill a nativist form of Shinto.[6:16] From 1870 to 1884, Atsutane, along with priests and scholars, lead a "Great Promulgation Campaign" advocating a fusion of nationalism and Shinto through worship of the Emperor. There had been no previous tradition of absolute obedience to the Emperor in Shinto.[5:119] This initiative failed to attract public support,[5:119][6:42] and intellectuals dismissed the idea.[6:51] Author Fukuzawa Yukichi dismissed the campaign at the time as an "insignificant movement."[6:119]

Despite its failure, Atsutane's nativist interpretation of Shinto would encourage a later scholar, Okuni Takamasa. Takamasa advocated control and standardization of Shinto practice through a governmental "Department of Divinity."[6:18] These activists urged leaders to consolidate diverse, localized Shinto practices into a standardized national practice, which they argued would unify Japan in support of the Emperor.[6:17]

The state responded by establishing the Department of Divinity ("jingikan") in 1869.[6:17][7:112] This government bureaucracy encouraged the segregation of Kami spirits from Buddhist ones, and emphasized the divine lineage of the Emperor from the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu.[7:112] This action sought to reverse what had been a blending of Buddhist and Shinto practices in Japan.[4:59] That department was unsuccessful, and demoted to a Ministry.[7:113] In 1872, policy for Shrines and other religions was taken over by the Ministry of Education.[7:113] The Ministry intended to standardize rituals across shrines, and saw some small success, but fell short of its original intent[7:113]

**National Teaching**

In calling for the return of the Department of Divinity in 1874, a group of Shinto priests issued a collective statement calling Shinto a "National Teaching." That statement advocated for understanding Shinto as distinct from religions. Shinto, they argued, was a preservation of the traditions of the Imperial house and therefore represented the purest form of Japanese state rites.[6:66] These scholars wrote,

> National Teaching is teaching the codes of national government to the people without error. Japan is called the divine land because it is ruled by the heavenly deities descendants, who consolidate the work of the deities. The Way of such consolidation and rule by divine descendants is called Shinto.

— Signed by various Shinto leaders, 1874, Source material[5:122]

Signatories of the statement included Shinto leaders, practitioners and scholars such as Tanaka Yoritsune, chief priest of Ise shrine; Motoori Toyokai, head of Kanda shrine; and Hirayama Seisai, head of a major tutelary shrine in Tokyo.[6:68–69] Nonetheless, this concept of Shinto as a "National Learning" failed to take hold in most popular conceptions of Shinto.[6:73]

**Great Promulgation Campaign**
The Bureau of Shinto Affairs attempted to standardize the training of priests in 1875. This created a division between state actors and local priests, who disagreed over the content of that standardized training. This debate concerned which kami, or spirits, to include in rituals— particularly whether state kami should be included. This debate marked the rise of the Ise sect, which was open to a stronger state presence in Shinto, and the Izumo sect, which was not. The Izumo sect advocated for recognition of the god Ōkuninushi as an equal to Amaterasu, which had theological consequences for emperor-worship. This debate, the "enshrinement debate," posed a serious ideological threat to the Meiji era government.

A result of the enshrinement debate was that the Ministry of the Interior concentrated on distinctions of "religion" and "doctrine", stating that "Shinto rituals (shinsai) are performed by the state whereas religious doctrines (kyōhō) are to be followed by individuals and families." Through this logic, Shinto rituals were a civic responsibility which all Japanese subjects were expected to participate in, whereas "religious" Shinto was a matter of personal faith and subject to freedom of religion. This debate marked an early failure in crafting of a unified national Shinto practice, and led to a sharp decline in both state grants to Shinto shrines and to the appointment of Shinto priests to government positions. The Ministry of Home Affairs took responsibility for shrines in 1877, and began to separate Shinto religious practices from indoctrination. In 1887, the Ministry stopped financial support for most shrines, aside from select Imperial shrines tied to state functions.

**Yasukuni Shrine**

In 1879, Yasukuni Shrine was built to enshrine the war dead. The emperor visited and performed rites for the war dead at Yasukuni, the highest possible honor in Shinto. Around this time, the state began to assign shrines with meanings rooted in patriotic nationalism; including a network of shrines dedicated to soldiers killed in battle. These assignments had no connection to the history of these local shrines, which led to resentment.

In contemporary times, the shrine has become a controversial symbol for Japanese nationalists. While many citizens of various political persuasions visit the site to honor relatives killed in battle, whose kami (spirit) are said to be enshrined there, so too are the kami of several class-A war criminals These criminals were enshrined in a secret ceremony in 1978, which has raised the ire of Japanese pacifists and the international community. No Emperor has visited the shrine since, and visits by prime ministers and government officials to the shrine have been the subject of lawsuits and media controversy.

**In occupied territories**

As the Japanese extended their territorial holdings, shrines were constructed with the purpose of hosting Japanese kami in occupied lands. This practice began with Naminoue Shrine in Okinawa in 1890. Major shrines built across Asia included Karafuto Shrine in Sakhalin in 1910 and Chosen Shrine, Korea, in 1919; these shrines were designated just under Ise Shrine in national importance. Other shrines included Shonan Shrine in Singapore, San'a Shrine in Hainan Island (China), Okinawa Shrine in Shuri, Okinawa, Akatsuki Shrine in Saigon, and Hokoku Shrine in Java.

The Japanese built almost 400 shrines in occupied Korea, and worship was mandatory for Koreans. A statement from the head of the Home Office in Korea wrote about the shrines in a
directive: "...they have an existence totally distinct from religion, and worship at the shrines is an act of patriotism and loyalty, the basic moral virtues of our nation,\[6\]:125\[14\]

**Post-war**

On 1 January 1946, Emperor Shōwa issued a statement, sometimes referred to as the Humanity Declaration in which he quoted the Five Charter Oath of Emperor Meiji, announced that he was not an Akitsumikami (a divinity in human form) and that Japan was not built on myths.\[2\]:39 The U.S. General Headquarters quickly defined and banned practices it identified as "State Shinto", but because the U.S. saw freedom of religion as a crucial aspect of post-war Japan it did not place a full ban on Japanese religious ceremonies involving the Emperor.\[9\]:702 General Douglas MacArthur and the State Department sought to maintain the authority of the Emperor to avoid "lasting resentment" among the Japanese people during the occupation and reconstruction of Japan.\[3\]:429\[9\]:702

The Shinto Directive stated it was established to "free the Japanese people from direct or indirect compulsion to believe or profess to believe in a religion or cult officially designated by the state" and "prevent a recurrence of the perversion of Shinto theory and beliefs into militaristic and ultranationalistic propaganda."\[2\]:39

Today, while the Imperial House continues to perform Shinto rituals as "private ceremonies", participation and belief are no longer compelled from Japanese citizens, nor funded by the state.\[9\]:703

Other aspects of the government's "suprareligious" enforcement of Shinto practices, such as school trips to Shinto shrines, were forbidden.\[3\]:432 Many innovations of Meiji-era Shinto are present in contemporary Shinto, such as a belief among priests that Shinto is a non-religious cultural practice that encourages national unity.\[6\]:161

**Controversies**

Controversy has emerged during the funerals and weddings of members of the Japanese Imperial Family as they present a merging of Shinto and state functions. The Japanese treasury does not pay for these events, which preserves the distinction between state and shrine functions.\[9\]:703

The Association of Shinto Shrines is politically active in encouraging support for the Emperor,\[9\]:706 including campaigns such as distributing amulets from Ise Shrine.\[27\] Ise Shrine was one of the most important shrines in State Shinto, symbolizing Amaterasu's presence and connection to the Emperor.\[10\] In contrast, the Meiji-era Yasukuni Shrine is frequently the target of State Shinto controversies, mostly owing to its enshrinement of Japanese war criminals.\[10\]

Conservative politicians and nationalist interest groups continue to advocate for returning the Emperor to a central political and religious position, which they believe will restore a national sense of unity.\[9\]:428\[21\]

**See also**

- Kokutai
- Emperor of Japan
- Shinto sects and schools
- Yasukuni Shrine controversy
- Statism in Shōwa Japan
- Nippon Kaigi

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