

Political Agenda Behind the Japanese Emperor and Empress' "Irei" Visit to the Philippines

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Emperor Akihito and empress Michiko of Japan visited the Philippines from January 26 to 30, 2016. It was the first visit to the country by a Japanese emperor since the end of the Asia-Pacific War. The pair's first visit was in 1962 when they were crown prince and princess.

The primary purpose of the visit was to "mark the 60th anniversary of the normalization of bilateral diplomatic relations" in light of the "friendship and goodwill between the two nations."¹ With Akihito and Michiko's "strong wishes," at least as it was reported so widely in the Japanese media,² two days out of the five-day itinerary were dedicated to "irei 慰霊," that is, to mourn those who perished under Imperial Japan's occupation of the country from December 1941 to August 1945.

The Japanese term "irei" literally means to "comfort the spirit" of the dead, and is used generally to mean notions such as to "mourn," "pay tribute (respect) to," and/or to "remember" those who die in abnormal situations like wars, natural disasters, accidents, and crimes. Another word commonly used for such purposes is "tsuito 追悼," - literally "to remember the dead with sadness." The latter term is regarded as more neutral and secular, and is used for those who die of natural causes as well. The two are often used interchangeably, but some problematize the term "irei" as having a religious meaning, one tied to Shintoism, and the two should be distinguished carefully.

Folklorist Shintani Takanori points out that notions of remembering the dead in Japanese culture, with its tradition of "enshrining the

dead as gods," cannot be easily translated into Anglophone culture. The word "irei" has a connotation beyond "comforting the spirit" of the dead, which embeds in the word the possibility of the "comforted spirit being elevated to a higher spirituality" to the level of "deities/gods," which can even become "objects of spiritual worship."³

Shintani's argument immediately suggests that we consider its Shintoist, particularly Imperial Japan's state-sanctioned Shintoist significance when the word "irei" is used to describe the Japanese emperor and empress' trips to remember the war dead. This is particularly the case given the ongoing international controversy over Yasukuni Shrine, which enshrines those who died for the emperor in battles during the period of the Empire of Japan, notably during the Asia-Pacific War. Following Shintani, in this article we italicize the term *irei* to call attention to the difficulty of translating the complex notion into an English term.⁴

Akihito and Michiko had paid such *irei* visits previously to Iwojima (1994), Nagasaki, Hiroshima, Okinawa and Tokyo (aerial bombing) to mark the 50th of the war end in 1995, Saipan (2005), and Palau (2015). The Japanese media across the board applauded their visit to the Philippines, as one that demonstrated the pair's sincere gesture of remorse over the scars of war. It is, however, necessary to carefully examine political calculations behind this visit.

1. A precursor to Japan-U.S.-Philippines military unification

First, this visit took place in the midst of increasing military cooperation and alliance among the United States, Japan and the Philippines, based on a strategy of opposing China's advancement in the South China Sea.

In November 2015, President Obama visited the Philippines for the APEC summit and on board the Philippine's Navy ship BRP Gregorio del Pilar, a former U.S. Coast Guard vessel, he stressed the two countries' "shared commitment to the security of the waters of this region and to the freedom of navigation," and reiterated the U.S. plan to increase military aid to its allies in the region.⁵ Shortly after Obama's visit, the U.S. announced an increase in its annual military aid to the Philippines to 79 million dollars.⁶



Obama made his remarks on board BRP Gregorio Del Pilar at Manila Harbor, November 17, 2015

The Supreme Court of the Philippines, as if in response, ruled on January 12, 2016 that the Enhanced Defense Co-operation Agreement (EDCA) was constitutional. The 10-year defense agreement signed in 2014, which would allow expansion of U.S. military activities in the Philippines, "rotating ships and planes for humanitarian and maritime security operations."⁷ EDCA had met the legal challenge which claimed that the pact infringed the nation's sovereignty.⁸

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, in a January 12 meeting in Washington with their Filipino counterparts, welcomed the Philippine Supreme Court' decision. Carter said that the Philippines "is a critical ally of the United States as we continue and gather and strengthen our rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region... our commitment is ironclad."⁹ According to a news report of January 13, the Philippines will offer eight military bases for the United States to build facilities to store equipment and supplies.¹⁰ These moves are understood in the context of rising tensions in the South China Sea, including territorial disputes between China and the Philippines over islands in the South China Sea. The Philippines brought the case to the UN-appointed permanent court of arbitration (PCA) in the Hague in 2013, and the final judgement is expected in mid-2016, with the likelihood of being in favour of the Philippines.¹¹

Japan and the Philippines have been holding reciprocal visits. In June 2015, Prime Minister Benigno Aquino III visited Japan as a state guest, and in the June 4 "Joint Declaration - A Strengthened Strategic Partnership for Advancing the Shared Principles and Goals of Peace, Security, and Growth in the Region and Beyond," the two governments agreed to "expand their security cooperation" through means such as "participation of Self-Defense Forces in disaster relief activities in the Philippines," and "the expansion of bilateral and multilateral trainings and exercises for capacity building."

In the following month, Prime Minister Abe visited the Philippines as part of a three-state tour that included Singapore and Malaysia, and in the bilateral summit, announced Japan's provision of 10 patrol vessels through a yen loan "in order to enhance the capacity of the Philippine Coast Guard." These moves all address the "South China Sea issue" which Abe indicated "is a matter that concerns the

regional and international communities."¹²

In April 2016, the Japanese Defense Minister Nakatani Gen is expected to visit the Philippines to discuss with his Philippines counterpart, Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin, Japan's provision of military equipment to the Philippines such as TC-90 training aircraft and expanding joint military exercises between Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Philippine Navy.¹³

Akihito and Michiko's visit to the Philippines should be understood in the context of such increasing military alliance involving U.S., Philippines and Japan. The Abe administration has used symbolic *irei* trip to pave the way for Japan to play a more active military role overseas under the "use of the right to collective self-defense" enabled by the set of laws rammed through last year that changed the interpretation of the Article 9, the pacifist clause of Japan's post-war constitution.

Emperor Akihito on the other hand, during the Imperial Palace banquet to welcome President Aquino on June 3, 2015, emphasized the need for the Japanese to remember the "loss of many Filipino lives" as a result of the "fierce battles between Japan and the United States" that took place in the Philippines, with "a profound sense of remorse." He offered his "deepest condolences to all those who lost their lives then."¹⁴ Significantly, however, Akihito has refrained from any word of direct apology on such occasions, just as in his trips to Saipan and Palau.

The Philippine Star, one of the most-read broadsheet in the Philippines, rightly observed:

Akihito has repeatedly expressed regret for the damage caused by the war but has never offered a straightforward apology. The furthest he has gone is to express "deep" remorse in an address last

year marking the 70th anniversary of the end of the war.¹⁵

The fact that he, and Japanese society as a whole including the government, generally leave the matter of war responsibility ambiguous, and the fact that Japan is once again becoming "a country that can fight wars" under the U.S.-Japan military alliance and the set of "war bills," are not unrelated.

The Philippine Star seems to understand this trip in terms of such political goals:

While he has been jeered on previous foreign visits, Akihito was welcomed with full state honors in the Philippines, which now depends on Japan as a leading trading partner, provider of development aid, and a major ally as Manila confronts an assertive Beijing in contested territories in the South China Sea.¹⁶

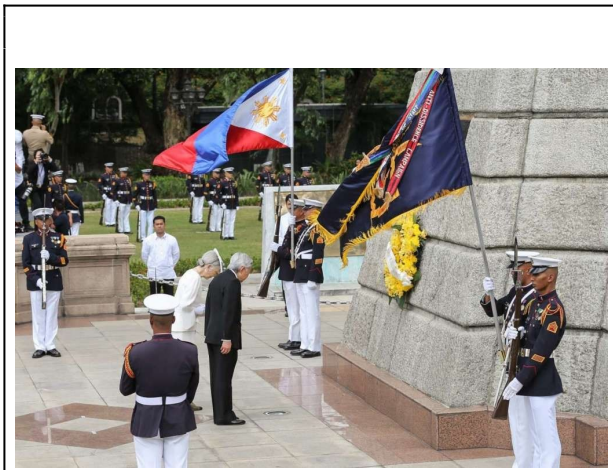
2. "Independence of the Philippines" and "Battle of Manila"

Emperor Akihito during this trip gave two formal speeches, at Haneda Airport upon embarking and at the state banquet hosted by President Aquino in the Philippines. In these speeches, he mentioned "Independence of the Philippines" and the "Battle of Manila" of February 1945. The Japanese media generally praised these references, but Akihito failed to clarify critical elements of these historical events.

Imperial Japan that hampered Philippine's independence

In his remarks during the state banquet in Manila, Akihito mentioned José Rizal (1861-1896) twice, and applauded him as a

"national hero" who "pressed for independence" from "Spanish control."¹⁷ The couple even visited and placed flowers at the José Rizal Monument on the morning of January 27.¹⁸ Rizal, a doctor, author, artist, was an anti-colonial leader who inspired the Philippine Revolution (1896-98) that freed the country from the three centuries of Spanish rule, only to be taken over by the U.S., after the Philippine-American war (1899-1902) that pitted Filipino revolutionaries against the U.S. Army.



Akihito and Michiko bow at the José Rizal Monument, January 27

If Akihito emphasized the "independence of the Philippines," why did he only refer to "independence from Spain," which was more than a century ago, and not independence from the United States or from Japan? It is worth recalling that the Philippines was at the brink of independence in 1941 on the eve of the Japanese invasion. While his father Hirohito's army in effect thwarted Philippines' independence and delayed it till after the Japanese war, his praise of José Rizal appears more like an intended concealment of the history of Japan's own invasion and colonization of the country, which was ironically the very chapter of history Akihito wanted to address in this visit.

There was a special sentiment towards Japan on the part of the Philippines, which was invaded just before its independence from the U.S. In the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, the Filipino judge Delfin Jaranilla argued all Class-A war criminals be sentenced to death. Carlos Romulo, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines at the time of San Francisco Peace Treaty told Japan "to demonstrate your spiritual repentance and proof of renascence before we extend our hand of forgiveness and friendship."¹⁹

Horrors of the Battle of Manila and Emperor Hirohito's responsibility

Akihito's speeches touched on the Battle of Manila (February 3 to March 3, 1945), in which "a great many innocent Filipino civilians became casualties of the fierce battles fought in the city of Manila," and said that the loss of many Filipino lives in the battles on Philippine soil is "something we Japanese must never forget." True, approximately 1.1 million people in the Philippines were killed in the battles on their islands, including those who were slaughtered by the Japanese Army. It is also unquestionable that the biggest responsibility of the war lay with Emperor Hirohito, who issued the imperial edict that started the war.

Hirohito's responsibility is particularly noteworthy where the Battle of Manila is concerned, because on February 14, 1945, his close aide Konoe Fumimaro urged him to surrender, saying "defeat is inevitable," in the document known as "Konoe Memorandum." Hirohito rejected Konoe's advice, saying it would be "difficult unless after one more successful battle." If Hirohito had heeded Konoe's advice, the casualties of the Battle of Manila would have been significantly less. Likewise, all the deaths of the six months between then and Hirohito's surrender of August 15, including those of the aerial bombings of Tokyo (March 10) and other cities, the Battle of Okinawa, atomic-bombing of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and civilian and military (including POWs) casualties in all areas affected by the Japanese war across Asia-Pacific would have been avoided.

If Akihito were to voice his concern over the "great many innocent Filipino civilians" who became "casualties of the fierce battles fought in the city of Manila," should he have not first apologized for his father's war responsibility? It is this history that "we Japanese must never forget," not a concealed or glorified version of history.

3. Disguise of Japan's responsibility as perpetrator of war and nationalism

Now, who did Akihito and Michiko meet and who did they not meet? Where did they go and where did they not go?



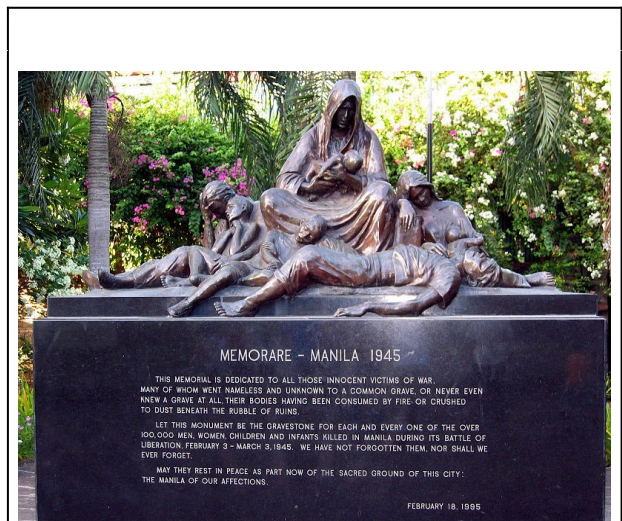
The Imperial couple dedicated flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Heroes' Cemetery in Manila, January 27

Japanese war-bereaved and former "comfort women"

The first war memory site that the couple visited was the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Heroes' Cemetery in Taguig in metro Manila on January 27. Japan's national newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* reported that this visit took place at the insistence of the couple

that the trip include a visit to Philippine war victims as well as Japanese war victims.²⁰ It appears that in the absence of their suggestion, Hirohito's heir as emperor of Japan would have only visited the war memorial for fallen Japanese soldiers in his state visit to the Philippines.

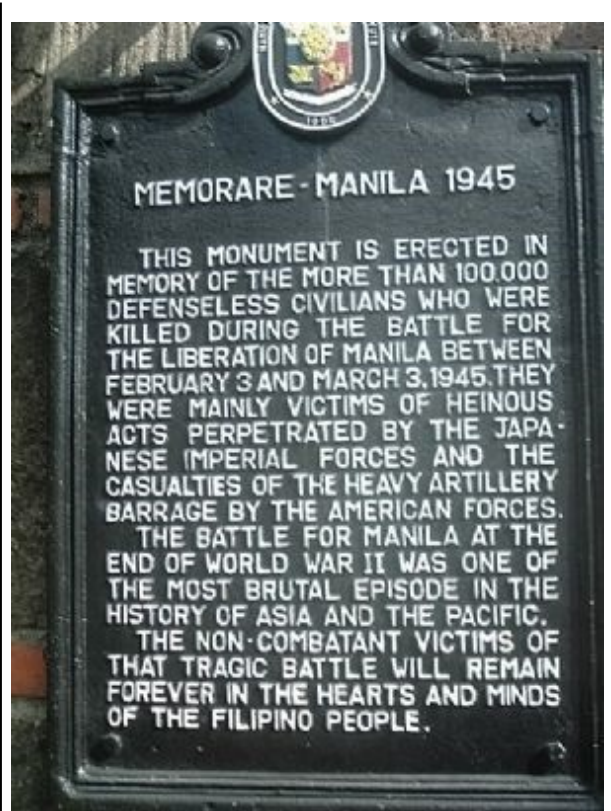
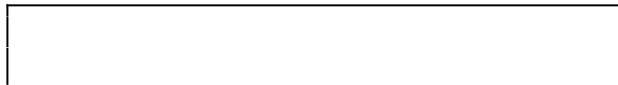
Akihito and Michiko, however, could have visited another site too if they had truly wished to mourn the civilian victims of the Battle of Manila. They did not visit the monument dedicated to the victims of the Battle, "Memorare-Manila 1945," although it is located near the *José Rizal* monument that the couple did visit on January 27. Memorare-Manila 1945 was built by the civilian survivors and their descendants in February 1995, the 50th anniversary of the Battle. It is a painfully vivid representation of the civilian suffering in the Battle, with the "figure of a hooded woman slumped on the ground in great despair for the lifeless child she cradles in her arms. Six suffering figures surround her, a glimpse of the great despair brought about by the gruesome massacres that were perpetrated all over the city inflicted by Imperial Japanese soldiers on civilians during the liberation of the city."²¹



Memorare-Manila 1945, Intramuros, Manila

The Inscription on the marker says: ²²

This monument is erected in memory of the more than 100,000 defenseless civilians who were killed during the Battle for the Liberation of Manila between February 3 and March 3, 1945. They were mainly victims of heinous acts perpetrated by the Japanese Imperial Forces and the casualties of the heavy artillery barrage by the American Forces. The Battle for Manila at the end of World War II was one of the most brutal episode in the history of Asia and the Pacific. The non-combatant victims of that tragic battle will remain forever in the hearts and minds of the Filipino people.



Marker of the Memorare-Manila 1945

Is it possible that the pair would have wanted to visit this memorial too if they had the chance, just as they made an unplanned stop at the memorials for the Korean victims and that for the Okinawan victims in their war memory trip to Saipan in 2005? In his formal speeches, Akihito made references such as "During World War II, countless Filipino, American, and Japanese lives were lost in the Philippines. A great many innocent Filipino civilians became casualties of the fierce battles fought in the city of Manila" (At Haneda Airport on January 26), and "During this war, fierce battles between Japan and the United States took place on Philippine soil, resulting in the loss of many Filipino lives and leaving many Filipinos injured" (at the state banquet on January 27), avoiding carefully *who* actually killed those Filipino civilians. Perhaps the direct reference to "Japanese Imperial Forces," Akihito's father's army, as the perpetrator of the "heinous acts"

at Memorare-Manila 1945 was too inconvenient for the Japanese government which was intent on keeping the former emperor's war responsibility as vague as possible.

The discrepancy between Akihito's word that extended his remorse for the innocent victims of the war and the fact that he and his wife only visited war memorials for the fallen soldiers is another indication that any focus on the civilian casualties of war would be inconvenient to the true purpose of this trip for the two governments: to solidify and advance the bilateral military alliance. To reinforce that point, even though the Japanese media labelled this trip as "*irei no tabi*," a trip for *irei*, and the imperial couple appeared to have embraced that purpose throughout the trip, the Imperial Household Agency's official definition of the trip²³ does not mention it, whereas that for the previous trips to Saipan²⁴ and Palau²⁵ clearly stated that purpose.

The highlight of Akihito and Michiko's trip, at least as shown in its extensive coverage in the Japanese media, was their visit on January 29 to the Japanese Memorial Garden at Cavinti township of Laguna province, built by the Japanese government in 1973 for *irei* of the approximately 518,000 soldiers who died in the Philippines, one of the biggest Japanese military casualties in all the Asia-Pacific battlefields.²⁶ The pair presented flowers and bowed, as 170 relatives of the Japanese war dead looked on, some quietly weeping. Though the practice of treating the emperor as a god was halted at the end of WWII as the emperor became only "human" and was redefined as a "symbol" of the nation in the post-war constitution, the fact that many Japanese still revere the emperor was clear in the emotional welcome of Akihito and Michiko by the families of the war dead and those of Japanese descent living in the Philippines. The *Inquirer* published a report on this event titled, "Demigod image of Japanese emperor remains among followers."²⁷ There did not seem to be any resentment in

these people's minds in seeing the son of Hirohito, under whose command their loved ones died. They were among the half million Japanese men, the majority of whom died of starvation and disease.²⁸



Akihito and Michiko present chrysanthemum flowers at the memorial for fallen Japanese soldiers, 比島戦没者の碑 on January 29

After the ceremony, Akihito and Michiko spoke to the families of the war dead, offering words of consolation like, "You must have gone through a lot of hardship."²⁹ Families expressed their reactions in such phrases as, "My mind is full of emotions," according to Japanese newspaper reports.³⁰ This is how the melodrama was created between a "merciful Emperor and Empress" and the families of the war dead and surviving soldiers. Japanese public broadcaster NHK aired the whole event live, as a special program, making it the main event of their visit to the Philippines. The visit was supposed to be about "friendship and goodwill," but the emperor's central message was presented as *irei* of the fallen Japanese soldiers.

There was another group of people who were eagerly awaiting the arrival of Akihito and Michiko, whether they noticed them or not. They were a group of Filipinas who were "comfort women" victims of the Japanese

military sex slavery system, and their supporters, about three hundred in all. On January 27, while the pair was visiting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the military cemetery, the *lolas* (grandmothers) belonging to the group Lila Pilipina and their supporters stood at Chino Roces Bridge in Manila for an hour under blistering sun, "urging President Aquino to tell Emperor Akihito to issue a public apology and give reparation to all 'comfort women.'"³¹



Women's group Gabriela's protest in Manila, January 27

Lila Pilipina was joined by a women's group and political party Gabriela, whose representative Luzviminda Ilagan expressed frustration over President Aquino's neglect of this issue during the emperor's state visit, creating "an image in media and academe about his pacifism and 'deep remorse.'" Ilagan said:

"Deep remorse as a personal sentiment by the Emperor will never be accepted by the war victims as official apology. Worse, it could all be a publicity stunt to mask moves by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe abetted by US President Barack Obama to remove Japan's anti-war constitutional provision and boost military

missions abroad. Filipinos should be wary and oppose being dragged into another bloody war and another generation of comfort women."³²

On January 29, eight women who are members of another survivors' group Malaya Lolos gathered in front of the Japanese Embassy in Manila and lit candles, while Akihito and Michiko were visiting the memorial for fallen Japanese soldiers.³³

Did Akihito and Michiko know about this rally for the former "comfort women"? If they spent so much time in meeting with, and giving "kind words" to the families of the Japanese military members and Japanese Filipinos, should they have not also met with and listened to the voices of those "comfort women" survivors, who were victimized by Japan, and still waiting for the government's unequivocal apology, state compensation, and inclusion, instead of exclusion, of the history in Japanese school textbooks?

The Inquirer's editorial addressing the visit echoes this sentiment:



Eight "comfort women" survivors light candles during a protest at the Japanese Embassy in Manila, January 29

For the generation of Filipinos who witnessed and lived through the atrocities of World War II, the Japanese Emperor's visit to the Philippines this week is bound to summon painful memories that make forgiveness extremely difficult. The voices of the surviving Filipino "comfort women" who were captured and turned into sex slaves for Japanese soldiers may have been the most persistent. But they are not alone in asking: Is there an obligation to forgive and to forget?

Almost none of these emotions were reported in the mainstream Japanese media, which are known for their adulatory coverage of all matters related to the imperial family.

Ignored "Bataan Death March"

Bataan Peninsula is just about the same distance from Manila as Caliraya is, where the emperor and empress lay flowers at the monument to remember the Japanese war dead. This is where the "Bataan Death March," which is central to the Filipino collective war memory, took place.

On April 9, 1945, the Japanese Army conquered Bataan, and forced about 76,000 prisoners of war (66,000 Americans, 10,000 Filipinos) to march from the southern tip of Bataan Peninsula to Camp O'Donnell, 11 km west of Capas, about 100 km, for days (partly also traveling by rail, in "cramped and unsanitary boxcars"), during which captives were "beaten, shot, bayoneted, and in many cases, beheaded." Only 54,000 reached the camp and many who made it eventually died at the camp of starvation and disease.³⁴

The Bataan Death March, in violation of international law concerning treatment of POWs, is notorious as one of the events

symbolic of Japanese military's atrocities. For the people of the Philippines, this history is not something that is in the past and forgotten. Indeed, a marathon, called the "Bataan Death March 102/160 Ultra Marathon Race," dedicated to this history, is held every year.³⁵ This year, the 102 km ultra marathon started on January 30, the day Akihito and Michiko left the country. Was this just a coincidence?

There are many monuments along the route of the Bataan Death March to commemorate the suffering and perseverance of the POWs. If the Japanese emperor and empress's intent was to "*irei* also for the Filipino war victims," not just Japanese war dead, should they have not also gone to Bataan and presented flowers for the victims of the deadly march well-known in the Philippines and internationally?

And what about the American POWs? In fact, after a brief mention of the loss of American lives in his speech at Haneda Airport upon embarkation, Akihito did not acknowledge the American casualties or the abuse of POWs at all for the entire stay in the Philippines. Another form of selectivity in his *irei* was total exclusion of the thousands of Filipino resistance guerilla fighters who fought the Japanese Army throughout the occupation period. Akihito's emphasis in his referral to the Filipino casualties were the "innocent civilians."

There is a commonality between the sexual slavery survivors, whom Akihito and Michiko did not meet, and the memorials of "Bataan" and the "Battle of Manila" that the pair did not visit. It lies in the fact that they are symbolic of the war atrocities committed by the Empire of Japan. Would it be too much to suggest that the intent behind the emperor and empress' trip was to evade Japan's war responsibilities rather than face them?

How did the Japanese media report this trip? The newspapers quoted words of yearning from the war bereaved, former Japanese soldiers, and Japanese Filipinos. The media reports also

stressed the "words of consideration" from the couple toward those from Japan and of Japanese descent. The politically moderate *Asahi Shimbun* editorial of January 29 noted, "The royal couple went all the way to the sites where fierce battles took place to show their wish for peace. We would like to share their feelings and thoughts." Left-leaning *Tokyo Shimbun*'s editorial of January 26 said, "We would like to share the emperor and empress's wish for peace conveyed by their numerous precious words." Right-leaning *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the biggest national paper in the world, summarized the royal couple's visit in its January 31 editorial that the way the emperor and empress sincerely face the history of the past war "must have made a strong impression on the minds of the people of the Philippines."

across the political spectrum is a new kind of nationalism that attempts to mobilize Japanese nationals (*kokumin*) under the imperial couple – a nationalism that hides Japan's responsibility for its aggressive war and aims to unite Japanese nationals under such a distorted "history."

4. Emperor and empress's "irei trip" is a forerunner for Abe-led constitutional revision

Prime Minister Abe made clear that he would make constitutional revision a main issue in the upcoming Upper House election (July 2016) and seek to amend the Constitution following the election. In short, the imperial couple's trip to the Philippines for *irei* of the war dead was a forerunner of constitutional revision.

a) Expansion of the emperor's "public acts" stipulated in the constitution

The "imperial diplomacy" by the emperor and the empress is not included in the "acts in matters of state" allowed for the emperor in the current constitution.³⁶ The government has attempted to justify "imperial diplomacy" arguing that these are the emperor's "public acts". In the absence of any constitutional stipulation for such acts, an attempt was clearly being made to expand the emperor's authority.

The Liberal Democratic Party thus attempts to add a clause to the current Article 7 of the constitution that stipulates "acts in matters of state." In their "Draft of Revision, the Constitution of Japan" (issued on April 27, 2012), they have added a clause (in their draft, the 5th clause of Article 6), "...the Emperor shall perform public acts such as ceremonies held by the state, local public entities and other public entities"³⁷ LDP's Q & A page for its constitutional revision draft explains this clause, "Some acts of the Emperor have a public nature. However, the current constitution has no provision for such public



Bataan Death March 95km marker, Bacolor, Pampanga

A common feature of these commentaries

acts by the Emperor. This was why it was deemed necessary to have clear constitutional stipulation for such public acts."

b) Danger of making state religious activities constitutional

This article has shown that acts of *irei* for the war dead have strong religious connotations. This means that *irei* trips by the emperor and the empress may infringe Clause 3, Article 20 of the current constitution, "The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity." This is why the LDP draft for constitutional revision adds to the same clause, "...however, this does not necessarily apply to activities that do not exceed the scope of social rituals and customary acts." If the constitution is revised as the LDP wishes, *irei* trips by the emperor and the empress may be regarded as one of the "social rituals," paving the way for making public religious acts by "the State and its organs," including the emperor and the other imperial family members, constitutional.

c) Setting the stage for making the emperor "Head of State"

In this visit, the Japanese emperor and empress were "state guests," and the emperor even reviewed the Philippines' guard of honour with President Aquino, in the state-sponsored welcome ceremony on January 27.³⁸ Emperor Akihito was precisely treated as "Head of State" throughout the trip. This is also exactly how the LDP envisions the new role of the emperor, by defining him as "Head of State" in its constitutional revision draft, a fundamental change from the "symbol of the State and of the unity of the People" in the current post-war constitution. The current definition was a departure from the constitution of the Empire of Japan (the Meiji Constitution) that defined the Emperor as "the head of the Empire," "sacred and inviolable."³⁹ De facto treatment of the emperor as "head of state" such as one seen in the Philippines visit paves the way to

officially redefining the emperor one step closer to the pre-1945 definition.



Akihito reviews an honour guard at the welcome ceremony at Malacanang Palace, January 27

This is how the emperor and the empress' *irei* trip plays a political role in Abe's and the LDP's planned constitutional revision. It is all the more important that political use of the emperor in coordination with the move for constitutional revision be critically examined, particularly given the Japanese media's virtual gag order on any matter related to the imperial family. Some liberal-minded Japanese pundits praise the "peace-loving" emperor to counteract Abe's warmongering and undemocratic policymaking, but this is also a dangerous utilization of the person who is a mere "symbol", someone who is constitutionally barred from being given any authority over the people of Japan, in whom sovereignty resides.

Satoko Oka Norimatsu translated, and expanded Kihara Satoru's four-part article on the Japanese imperial couple's visit to the Philippines in collaboration with Kihara. The article was posted in Kihara's blog Ari no hitokoto ("A Word from an Ant") on January 23, February 1, February 2, and February 4.

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Notes

¹ "Firipin gohomon," The Imperial Household Agency, December 4, 2015.

² For example, in *Mainichi Shimbun's* "Emperor's wishes to mourn war dead behind swift reciprocal visit to Philippines," January 27, 2016.

³ Shintani Takanori, "Minzoku gaku kara miru irei to tsuito," *Meiji Shotoku kinen gakkai kiyō*, vol. 44, November 2007, pp. 178-180.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Remarks by President Obama After Touring the BRP Gregorio del Pilar," *The White House*, November 17, 2015.

⁶ "U.S. raises military aid to PH amid sea tension with China," *CNN Philippines*, November 26, 2015.

⁷ "Philippines offers eight bases to U.S. under new military deal," *Reuters*, January 13, 2016.

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