

On December 26<sup>th</sup> of 2013, Japanese Prime Minister Abe visited the Yasukuni War Shrine in Tokyo. Many found this visit controversial, but Prime Minister Abe considered it a nationalistic action supporting his goal to change the pacifist constitution that Japan adopted after the conclusion of World War II.

Living in a country considered to be a military superpower, the implications of the Yasukuni Shrine visit are difficult to fathom. The United States has always been known for its military, yet Japan's has been inactive for nearly seven decades. How would the alteration of the constitution affect Japan, the United States, and other countries around the world? The Yasukuni Shrine visit and the goals of the Japanese Prime Minister could act as a springboard to discussion about US-Japanese relations and cultural differences between the two countries.

Understanding the opinions of the Japanese people towards the military is crucial to perceiving the significance of the Yasukuni Shrine visit. If I was living with a host family in Japan when this event occurred, I would ask for their opinions of Article Nine in the Japanese Constitution, which bans the Japanese military from maintaining armed forces with war potential. I am unsure which side the family would take on the issue. Would the family believe that Japan resigning its military forces heavily contributed to the modernization and success of its economy? By focusing more on the economy than defense, Japan's economic growth from the 1960s onwards has transformed it into an international superpower boasting the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest GDP.

This would bring me to question if the family supports the idea of bringing the military back or not. Would they think that reinstating the military would undermine the currently pacifistic nature of Japan? Or would they think that the military could actually improve Japan's role in the world as a keeper of peace? Prime Minister Abe believes that a military is important to peace keeping and assisting the United States, but it may also allude to Japan's militaristic past. I believe that my host family would

support the idea of assisting allies through the military, but would not support the use of the military to wage a war against another country.

If the Japanese military becomes reinstated, there is no doubt that the relationship between the United States and Japan would change. Japan would be able to join the United States in military activities and assist the United States in time of emergency. Since Japan does not bear this responsibility now, I would ask my host family if they believe that the use of the military in this manner is appropriate.

The plan to change the Japanese Constitution is an issue that is profoundly intertwined with post-war era Japan, its culture, foreign relations, and economy. Gaining the opportunity to speak to a Japanese family and community would clarify my understanding of this issue through the eyes of the Japanese people.