

Aspiration for the Memorial Service for All Who Perished in War

The Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha Buddhist sect, after the conclusion of World War II, has been conducting annual memorial services at the Hongwanji and Otani Mausoleum in Kyoto for those who perished in war. In addition to these services, we have been observing the Memorial Service for All Who Perished in War at the Chidorigafuchi National Memorial Park, Chiyoda-ward, Tokyo, since 1981.

The phrase “All Who Perished in War” contains our sentiment toward all victims in the world who lost their precious lives due to repeated warfare by human beings.

We conduct the annual service at Chidorigafuchi on September 18, the date of the Lake Liutiao Incident, also known as the Mukden Incident, an early event that led to the Manchurian Incident, which was the preface to the Asia-Pacific War that lasted for 15 years.

The Chidorigafuchi National Memorial Park was established in 1959, and it is where the ashes of approximately three hundred fifty thousand people are interred, mostly from the Asia-Pacific War, including both military and civilian, that could not be returned to their families.

Considering these circumstances, going beyond nationality, principle and policy, this Park with its atmosphere of solemnity and dignity, should be regarded as the appropriate place where we pay our homage to all who perished in war.

On April 15, 1995, the Fiftieth Anniversary of the End of the Second World War and Memorial for All Who Perished in the War was conducted at the Hongwanji, and the Monshu (the head priest and religious leader) of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha delivered his official message. In it, the Monshu stated, “...in front of the Buddha and our forebears, we cannot help but feel deep shame and repentance for the fact that we actively cooperated in promoting the war under the name of the Buddha Dharma, disregarding the teaching of our Founder...” which clarified the responsibility of our religious organization concerning the war and expressed our solid resolution to live as Jodo Shinshu Buddhists who pursue world peace.

On May 24, 2004, the Hongwanji Board of Governors issued decrees to express their official view as to how the Hongwanji should address and cope with problems from the war that remain. The decrees reconfirm the Monshu’s message as follows: “During the war, under the tremendously strict legal control that was emphasized in accord with development of the political totalitarianism and militarism, our religious organization cooperated with the military regime and gave our support to the war that was begun as a national policy.” Further, they declare, “Out of regret for our own history, in order to attend to the aspiration of our founder Shinran Shonin who wishes ‘May peace and tranquility prevail throughout the world, and may the Buddhist teaching spread!’, we resolve to further our anti-war and peace movements in order to build a peaceful world without war through interchange and communication with the people of the world.”

This being our position, the significance of our conducting the Memorial for All Those Who Perished in War at the Chidorigafuchi National Memorial Park is none other than our expression of regret for our mistake in supporting Japan’s war of aggression and our renewed resolution for peace in order to build world that is free of war.

It is our hope that this Memorial Service will serve as the opportunity to remember all those who perished due to war, and for everyone in their own way to promote activities for eliminating war and building world peace.