

# Ryoichi Sasakawa

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**Ryoichi Sasakawa** (笹川 良一 *Sasakawa Ryōichi*, May 4, 1899 – July 18, 1995) was a Japanese businessman, politician, and philanthropist. He was born in Minoh, Osaka. In the 1930s and during the Second World War he was active both in finance and in politics, actively supporting the Japanese war effort including raising his own paramilitary units. He was elected to the Japanese parliament during the war. After Japan's defeat he was imprisoned for a time as a suspected war criminal, and then found financial success in various business ventures including motorboat racing and ship building. He supported anticommunist activities including the World Anti-Communist League. In 1951 he helped found the Nippon Foundation and became its first president. The foundation has done charitable work around the world, for which it and Sasakawa have received many official honors.

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## Prewar activity

In the 1930s, during the Sino-Japanese War, Sasakawa rose to prominence by using wealth gained in rice speculation<sup>[1]</sup> to build a voluntary flying squad within Japan for the purpose of providing trained pilots in the case of a national emergency.<sup>[2]</sup> He also built an air defense field, donating it to the army. Once Japan began to coordinate its air power in 1941, Sasakawa dissolved his voluntary flying group and gave all of its facilities and aircraft to the nation.<sup>[3]</sup> In addition, he used the various mining interests that he had accumulated to support the army by in a more concrete fashion.<sup>[4]</sup> It has been noted that "... his family records show ... that his mining ventures were not as profitable in wartime as they could have been" because he seems to have been more interested in supporting the war effort than in making a profit.<sup>[5]</sup>

In addition, the 1930s saw Sasakawa take the helm of the Kokusui Taishu-to, or Patriotic Peoples' Party (PPP).<sup>[6]</sup> This small organization was one of the many right-wing groups that sprang up in Japan in the lead-up to World War II.<sup>[7]</sup> It was in this connection that he first met Yoshio Kodama, who was at that time a member.<sup>[8]</sup> In 1935, Sasakawa and twelve other leading members of the PPP were arrested and held for

**Ryoichi Sasakawa**  
笹川 良



<b>Born</b>	May 4, 1899 Shinagawa, Tokyo, Japan
<b>Died</b>	July 18, 1995 (aged 96)
<b>Cause of death</b>	Stroke
<b>Occupation</b>	Businessman, sports administrator

three years on suspicion of having ordered the blackmail of several leading companies, such as Takashimaya, the Hankyu Railway, and Tokyo Life Insurance.<sup>[9]</sup> Though he was eventually acquitted, the jail time and the subsequent appeals process took a total of 6 years, leading up the opening year of World War II.<sup>[10]</sup> In the end, the prosecution itself revealed that the charges against him had been based more on perception of the PPP as "dangerous," than on actual evidence of blackmail.<sup>[11]</sup>

Sasakawa's trials ended in August 1941.<sup>[12]</sup> In December that year, World War II broke out in the Pacific, and in April 1942, Sasakawa won a seat in the Japanese parliament, taking one of only 85 out of 466 seats that were captured by non-government-backed candidates.<sup>[13]</sup> The reason that such candidates were so few was that it was wartime, and those in power were doing all they could to control policy while maintaining a mask of parliamentary democracy.<sup>[14]</sup> Sasakawa joined the parliament nearly a half year after the war began, as a member of the "opposition."

In parliament, he stood against the government's suppression of the freedom of speech and its pressure for the conformity of all parliamentarians.<sup>[15]</sup> However, his efforts in this vein were largely unsuccessful, and he spent much of the war outside of parliament, touring Manchuria and China, visiting prisons around the country, and cheering those on the home front.<sup>[16]</sup> He advocated war extension. During the war he flew a squadron bomber to Rome and met Mussolini.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Sugamo prison

At the end of the war, Sasakawa entered the occupation-run Sugamo prison. While until a short time before his arrest, there was little possibility of his detainment, much less as a Class A war crimes suspect,<sup>[18]</sup> from October to November, 1945, he launched a campaign of twenty or so speeches in Osaka, decrying victor's justice and demanding to be taken as a prisoner so that he could help defend Japan in the Tokyo war crimes trials.<sup>[19]</sup> He was "...motivated by a desire to speak out in defense of the emperor and in the interests of Japan at the Tokyo Trials."<sup>[13]</sup>

The US summary for his arrest, dated December 4, 1945 read as follows:

Sasakawa should be arrested for the following reasons: first, for leading campaigns instigating aggression, nationalism and hostility against the United States. And second, for his continued vigorous activities in an organization that strongly impedes the development of democracy in Japan.<sup>[20]</sup>

While in the prison, Sasakawa was able to establish connections with many of the men who had led Japan during the war, and who would go on to reassume these roles after their release. He also came into further contact with Yoshio Kodama, though the exact nature of their prison relationship does not seem to have been as positive as it had been when they were both members of the PPP. (In prison, Kodama pursued a policy of collaborating with his captors, naming names and making questionable statements that put other prisoners at a disadvantage. As part of this policy, he asked that his testimony about Sasakawa be kept secret, and it would appear that Sasakawa never found out about it.<sup>[21]</sup>)

## Postwar activity

On December 23, 1948, Hideki Tōjō and six other class A war criminals were hanged. The next day, all class A suspects who had not been indicted were released (aside from the 7 who were executed, 18 were given very long or life sentences.) Sasakawa and Kodama were among the many who were released. There is much speculation surrounding Sasakawa's release, while some suggest that there was simply not enough

evidence to indict him of Class A war crimes,<sup>[22]</sup> others believe it was due to a lack of resources available to carry out trials of all suspected war criminals.<sup>[23]</sup> The two men subsequently chose different paths in life, but maintained their friendship until the death of Kodama in 1984.<sup>[24]</sup>

Sasakawa became deeply involved in the post-war reconstruction, though he never again entered politics, but chose to use his considerable influence to bolster business and political parties. The most effective of his post-war activities was the creation of a gambling industry that is still in existence today. Along with his friends Syngman Rhee, the Korean dictator, and Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese nationalist leader, he founded the World Anti-Communist League. Among other coups, the league claims to have played a part in the 1966 overthrow of Indonesia's President Sukarno. He stated once: "I am the world's richest fascist."<sup>[25][26][27]</sup>

Sasakawa is also known for his support of Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon in Moon's anti-communist activities.<sup>[28][29]</sup>

Ryoichi Sasakawa helped form the World Union of Karate-do Organizations in 1970, also serving as its president.<sup>[30]</sup>

Sasakawa died July 18, 1995. He had three sons: Masatada, Takashi and Yohei.<sup>[31]</sup>

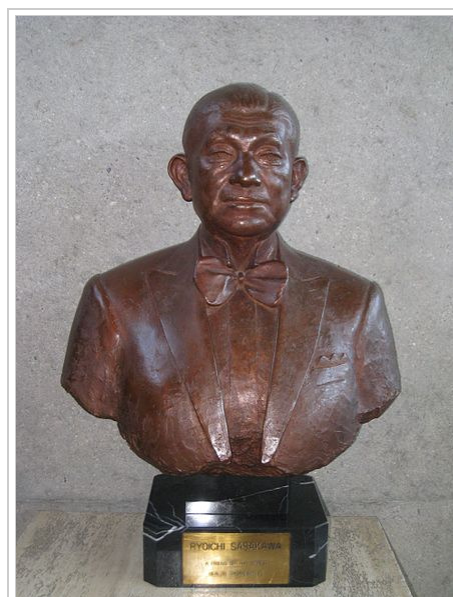
## Nippon Foundation

In 1951 – after extensive bribery of parliamenticians on his behalf<sup>[27]</sup> – the Japanese Diet passed the Motorboat Racing Law – an invention of Sasakawa's. Under this law, motorboat races are held at 24 locations around the nation for the purpose of both bolstering the local economies and providing the revenue needed to support 1) the reconstruction of Japan's maritime industry, and 2) welfare projects around the country. In later years, international projects were also added. The law established that the distribution of the monies to support projects was to be performed by the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation, a body that eventually came to be known as the Nippon Foundation.<sup>[32]</sup> Sasakawa became the foundation's chairman. In fact, public and governmental focus on the issue drove Sasakawa to take pains to make the system as clear as possible.<sup>[33]</sup>

Since motorboat racing is one of only four sports for which gambling is officially allowed in Japan,<sup>[34]</sup> it became a very large resource for rebuilding the nation's shipbuilding industry, and was largely responsible for Japan's meteoric rise to become one of the world's maritime leaders by the 1960s.<sup>[35]</sup> The system is regulated by the department of transport, and it can be noted that many of the foundations Sasakawa later created through grants by The Nippon Foundation were led by previous employees of the department of transport. It should be mentioned, however, that the system of farming out former government employees to businesses and foundations has long been common, legal practice in Japan, though one that Sasakawa himself viewed with suspicion.<sup>[36]</sup>

Under Sasakawa's leadership, The Nippon Foundation made charitable contributions both in Japan and around the world, working with the United Nations on maritime law<sup>[37]</sup> and with the World Health Organization, donating over \$70m to fight leprosy.<sup>[38]</sup>

The group also founded or funded a number of other organizations, such as the United States-Japan



Bust of Sasakawa at the WHO in Geneva.

Foundation;<sup>[39]</sup> The Sasakawa Peace Foundation;<sup>[40]</sup> the Sasakawa Africa Association, an expansion of Norman Borlaug's Green Revolution to Africa;<sup>[41][42][43]</sup> and the University of Houston's Sasakawa International Center for Space Architecture (SICSA).<sup>[44]</sup>

## Honours

- 1976 : Order of Diplomatic Service Merit, 1st class (South Korea)
- 1977 : Order of Brilliant Star, Grand Cordon (Republic of China)
- 1978 : Order of the Sacred Treasure, 1st class, Grand Cordon (Japan)
- 1980 : Order of the Golden Heart (Philippines)
- 1987 : Order of the Rising Sun, 1st Class, Grand Cordon (Japan)
- 1989 : Order of the White Elephant, Knight Grand Cross (Thailand)
- 1993 : Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, Commandeur (France)

## See also

- Gandhi Memorial International Foundation
- Russian armoured cruiser Admiral Nakhimov

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8. Ibid, p.23
9. Ibid, p.42
10. Ibid, p.43
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13. Ibid, p.50

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## External links

- U.S. Senate "Tribute to the Honorable Ryoichi Sasakawa" (<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?r102:S08SE2-64:>)
- Kishi and Corruption: An Anatomy of the 1955 System, Japan Policy Research Institute (JPRI), University of San Francisco (<http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp83.html>)

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Categories: 1899 births | 1995 deaths | Cold War leaders | Japanese activists | Japanese anti-communists | Japanese businesspeople | Japanese fascists | Japanese philanthropists | People from Minoh, Osaka | Members of the House of Representatives (Empire of Japan) | Grand Cordons of the Order of the Rising Sun | Recipients of the Order of the Sacred Treasure, 1st class | Commandeurs of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres | Order of the Golden Heart | Members of the Order of Diplomatic Service Merit

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