



Macquarie University ResearchOnline

This is a version of an article from the following conference:

Lawson, Stephanie and Tannaka, Seiko (2009). Confronting the past, normalizing the present : the problem of Japan's war memories. *International Studies Association* (50th : 15 - 18 February, 2009 : New York).

Access to the published version:

http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p311355_index.html

Confronting the Past, Normalizing the Present: The Problem of Japan's War Memories

Stephanie Lawson (Macquarie University)
Seiko Tannaka (University of East Anglia)

Abstract

Confronting an ugly past is often regarded as essential not only to achieving some justice for the victims but also for allowing those held historically responsible to move on. This is sometimes a prerequisite for the 'normalization' of relations between states whose shared histories may contain events in which one party believes they have been grievously wronged by the other. The paradigm case in which an almost permanent impasse exists in coming to terms with a difficult war past is Japan vis-à-vis its immediate neighbours in East Asia. Japan's new Prime Minister, Taro Aso, although a conservative, is unlikely to follow the path of his Prime Minister Koizumi in visiting the now infamous Yasukuni Shrine – visits which so inflamed passions on the other side of the Sea of Japan. But the cycle of apologetics and denials will almost certainly continue as deep contestations over war memories continue within Japan while at the same time political leaders seek a more prominent role for their country as a 'normal' actor in international affairs. This paper assesses the problem of Japan's 'normalization' efforts with particular reference to issues of nationalism, state identity and normative theory.

Introduction

The willingness of states to confront an ugly past is often regarded as essential not only to achieving some justice for the victims but also for allowing those held historically responsible to move on, thus bringing a measure of 'closure' for both sides.¹ In the parlance of international politics, this also allows for the 'normalization' of relations between states whose shared histories may contain events – usually wars – in which one party is seen to have been grievously wronged by the other. As a corollary, it should also allow a country to assume a 'normal' status as an actor in international politics and to become a fully-fledged member of that rather vaguely defined but ostensibly respectable entity, the 'international community'.²

The paradigm case in which an almost permanent impasse exists in coming to terms with a difficult war past, and 'normalizing' its international relations, is that of Japan vis-à-vis its immediate neighbours in East Asia, especially China and South Korea. Successive Japanese governments have issued apologies and expressions of sincere regret

¹ Laher Nyatagodien Ridwan and Arthur G. Neal, 'Collective Trauma, Apologies and the Politics of Memory', *Journal of Human Rights*, 3 (4), 2004, p.465.

² This is slightly different from the notion of 'international society' which Japan effectively entered in the late nineteenth century following the Meiji restoration as it attained a so-called 'standard of civilization' commensurate with European norms. See Shogo Suzuki, 'Japan's Socialization into Janus-Faced European International Society', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11 (1) 2005, pp.137-164. The 'international community' concept developed after WWII, denoting an entity composed largely of liberal states who regard themselves as holding the moral high ground over non-liberal states. See Russell Buchan, 'A Clash of Normativities: International Society and International Community', *International Community Law Review*, 10 (1), 2008, pp. 3-27.

over the last few decades, countered by periodic episodes within Japan revolving largely around history textbooks and the remembrance of war dead. The international media has weighed in with critical reporting focusing largely on nationalist discourses and the government's apparent failure to deal with its war past, issues which became especially prominent during former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's tenure in office from 2001 to 2006.

Japan's immediate past prime Minister, Yasuo Fukuda, was a moderate on the politics of Japan's war memories and did not follow Koizumi in visiting the now infamous Yasukuni Shrine – visits which so inflamed passions on the other side of the Sea of Japan. Indeed, he succeeded in re-building reasonably amicable relations with his East Asian neighbours after the premierships of Koizumi and his immediate but short-lived successor, Shinzo Abe. Both had pandered to neo-nationalist groups within Japan determined to recast Japan's WWII history in a more positive light with a view to ending the 'masochistic' expression of war memories and, ultimately, to inspiring patriotic pride among younger generations of Japanese. In contrast, Fukuda's foreign policy, elaborated in a major policy speech in January 2008,³ deliberately courted Japan's neighbours, smoothing the way for more productive relations.

The current Prime Minister, Taro Aso, has a record of support for nationalist causes as well as gaffes concerning Japan's war past, although he is expected to put regional relations ahead of the domestic nationalist gallery. Whether or not he maintains a low-key approach, however, it is unlikely that the matter of Japan's war memories will simply fade away. The politics of apologetics has long been driven by the continuation of deep contestations over war memories *within* Japan, periodically fanned by politicians and other actors who continue to deploy war/peace symbolism for their own purposes, while at the same time political leaders seek a more prominent role for their country as a 'normal' actor in international affairs.⁴

We suggest that the quest to become a 'normal' country lies at the heart of contestations over Japan's war memories, generating a set of tensions and contradictions both domestically and internationally which have only deepened with the passing of time. For Japan to become 'normal' is, for some, to become a more assertive military power, at least within the context of the US-Japan alliance, and this trend has been especially evident in the post-9/11 period.⁵ But to project a stronger military profile in international politics is to invite concern, especially among those countries in the immediate region which bore the brunt of Japan's aggression in WWII. One of the ironies is that 'normal' countries have no problem in putting on nationalistic displays drenched in military symbolism. From fourth of July celebrations in the US to ANZAC Day in Australia, commemorative occasions involving flags, anthems and military themes accompanied by self-glorifying speeches about the nation's past, present and future are commonplace.

³ 'Policy Speech by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda to the 169th Session of the Diet', 18 January 2008, at http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/hukudaspeech/2008/01/18housin_e.html.

⁴ For an indication of the extent to which Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) treats 'historical issues' as a significant foreign policy matter, see <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/postwar/index.html>. It is noteworthy that almost nothing has been added to the site since Fukuda became PM, indicating that 'historical issues' are presently taking a back seat.

⁵ See Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Re-emergence as a 'Normal' Military Power?* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004. For an earlier analysis see Glenn D. Hook, *Militarization and Demilitarization in Contemporary Japan*, London, Routledge, 1996.

Thus nationalism and patriotism are considered as not only ‘normal’ but something to be nurtured and celebrated as a sign of a country with a healthy, confident identity.⁶ This is precisely what neo-nationalists in Japan wish for their country.

Interest in Japan’s war memories has generated a huge literature – especially from politics and international relations, history, education and cultural studies. This article, however, does not seek to provide another commentary on the inadequacy or otherwise of government responses, and how Japan’s own failures have created the diplomatic problems it faces in the region. While we agree that many government responses have been problematic, one of our concerns is to highlight how the behaviour of other key actors in the drama has contributed to the impasse. At the same time, we reinforce analyses focusing on the fractured nature of war memories within Japan by emphasizing the tensions produced by contending discourses of war and peace.⁷ We suggest, first, that disputes within Japan have fed into the broader framework of debates over Japan’s identity as an international actor, especially in international security. Second, we argue that contradictions within Japan are further exacerbated by the conflicting messages which emerge from a ‘nationalism-as-normal’ model of state identity in contemporary international relations.

In approaching these issues, we deploy a conceptual framework drawing in part on notions of collective memory, developed in the field of cultural history, which lend themselves readily to the analysis of war narratives. Collective memory studies also resonate broadly with constructivist approaches to international relations which emphasize the importance of ideational factors underpinning state behaviour and which make much of ‘state identity’. However, we do not draw on these uncritically. In contrast with versions of cultural history which hold that ‘historical truth’ exists simply as an act of interpretation in the present, invariably compromised by the play of specific contemporary interests, we hold that certain historical truths have a tangible reality, not least in the form of the lived experiences, for example, of surviving ‘comfort women’. To suggest otherwise is methodologically suspect as well as normatively insupportable.⁸

In analyzing Japan’s war memories, we are also concerned to avoid the over-homogenization effect of notions such as ‘collective memory’ and ‘state identity’ which may encourage the illusion that ‘Japan’ or the ‘Japanese people’ can be characterized as possessing any such singular attributes. On the contrary, the politics of Japan’s war memories and its identity as an international actor are fraught precisely because both its ‘memories’ and the moral status of its war actions are deeply contested within the country. This has not always been the case, and in earlier periods Japan’s pacifist identity, underpinned by Article Nine of the 1947 Constitution, was scarcely debated among Japanese. Times have changed, and in the post 9/11 world Japan has come under

⁶ There is a considerable body of literature on the subject of patriotism and/or nationalism and the extent to which they represent different concepts – see, for example, Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995. For present purposes we make no clear cut distinction between them since ‘patriotism’ is the key concept used by neo-nationalists in Japan. We also note the point that nationalism comes in many forms, within Japan as well as elsewhere, many of which do not involve militaristic themes. See Brian J. McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan: Managing and Mystifying Identity*, Lanham MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.

⁷ This is a major theme in Philip A. Seaton, *Japan’s Contested War Memories: The ‘Memory Rifts’ in Historical Consciousness of World War II*, London, Routledge, 2007.

⁸ For a full discussion of these problems see XXXX.

increasing pressure to play a more active, and therefore more ‘normal’ role in international security, commensurate with its economic status and membership of such elite clubs as the G8. It is in this broad context that the contemporary politics of Japan’s war memories and the quest for ‘normality’ are enmeshed.

Confronting the Past in the Present

The politics of recognition and apology for historical injustices is intimately related to issues of collective memory – the way in which representations of the past are transformed into shared ‘cultural knowledge’ by successive generations through books, films, museums, commemorations and so forth.⁹ There is a close fit with studies in identity, given that memory is probably *the* central medium through which identities are constituted and that studies of the phenomenon are likely to illuminate the conditions under which people turn to their pasts.¹⁰ Or, we might add, turn away from them. It is also suggested that many contemporary manifestations of the ‘memory craze’ are linked to insecurities over identity, and how the past is interpreted through acts of remembering and forgetting is at least partly determined by how the members of a community want to define themselves.¹¹ Similarly, historicizing memory reveals patterns over time indicating that ‘crises of memory are concomitant with crises of identity’.¹² In contemporary Japan, ‘memory politics’ is indeed linked to insecurities over identity. This emanates from how different sectors seek to define and represent Japan in both the past and present, as well as from how certain representations of Japan’s history have been perceived abroad.

History textbooks have a vital role to play in the construction of national identity since they are primary sites of collective memory, reaching out to a captive, impressionable mass audience.¹³ When ‘authorized’ by state agencies, they also constitute *official* historical knowledge and provide a template for ‘proper behaviour’ by citizens as well as the parameters of national imagination.¹⁴ Simultaneously, history textbook narratives define a state’s relations with others, providing instruction for subsequent generations in how one ought to view relations with others in the past, which in turn shapes perceptions of how one’s state ought to behave in the present.¹⁵ Of course, narratives of the past in any text do not constitute a body of neutral knowledge.¹⁶ The selection of topics and their interpretation is invariably attuned to different needs, interests, identities and agendas in the present, as well as visions for the future. Furthermore, memories of past events may change over time as their meanings are

⁹ Alan Confino, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method’, *American Historical Review*, 102 (5), 1997, p. 1386.

¹⁰ Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, ‘Social Memory Studies: From “Collective Memory” to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1998 pp. 133-134.

¹¹ Allan Megill, ‘History, Memory, Identity’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 11 (3), 1998, pp. 41-43.

¹² Wolf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies’, *History and Theory*, 41 (2), 2002, p. 184.

¹³ John K. Nelson, ‘Tempest in a Textbook: A Report on the New Middle School History Textbook in Japan’, *Critical Asian Studies*, 34 (1), 2002, p. 129.

¹⁴ Laura Hein and Mark Selden, ‘The Lessons of War, Global Power, and Social Change’ in Laura Hein and Mark Selden (eds), *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*, Armonk NY, M.E. Sharpe, 2000, p. 1.

¹⁵ Hein and Selden, ‘The Lessons of War’, p. 4.

¹⁶ Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith, *The Politics of the Textbook*, London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 1-2.

adjusted to present contexts and contested by rival readings. The interpretation of the historical past of any given community therefore turns at least partly on questions of identity in a given (present) context.

Constructivism as a broad social theory intersects with collective memory studies at the point at which the ‘reality’ of the world is conceptualized as socially constituted (and reconstituted) in practice and linked to particular identities. Constructivist ideas have given rise to a very diverse field of scholarship encompassing postmodern or poststructuralist approaches through to versions which attempt to occupy some kind of middle ground between the apparent relativism of poststructuralist approaches and strictly positivistic enterprises. Wherever they lie along this spectrum, constructivist approaches generally subscribe to the basic notion that the reality of the human world does not exist ‘out there’ as a given but is constituted and reconstituted in the realm of ideas according to prevailing social norms, interests and identities which in turn give meaning to objects and events. Such an approach clearly problematizes notions of historical truth and, indeed, that is one of the principal points which most versions of constructivism strive to demonstrate, as do collective memory studies.

With respect to identities, constructivism in IR generally sees these as aspects of socially constructed reality that are politically contested and historically contingent. Although there are many actors in the international sphere, those possessing identities, as well as ‘collective memories’, are generally states’. Identities, along with the interests associated with them, are formed in relation to other agents and their own norms, identities, interests etc.¹⁷ State identities thus conceived always run the danger of homogenization and reification, as do collective memories. At least some constructivists, however, are careful to note that the state is not simply a unitary actor but is constituted and reconstituted by different sets of political relations, namely: relations within the state; between state and society (or polity); and between the polity and certain features of the international environment.¹⁸ These observations are especially pertinent in analyzing the way in which Japan’s war memories have been shaped by a variety of factors and competing interpretations of history, both within Japan and abroad.

Since state actors – especially governments – obviously wield very significant power and legitimacy, the construction of meaning by authoritative state actors tends to dominate, especially in the international sphere. This is important in the case of Japan because although many Japanese are by no means in denial of the uglier aspects of Japan’s war history, it is the behaviour of successive governments rather than popular attitudes within Japan that has come under critical scrutiny in the international sphere. But as Seaton’s study shows, it is a mistake to simply grasp hold of a ‘state-centred orthodoxy’, which under most LDP governments has tended to embrace nationalist perspectives, and read that off as emblematic of ‘Japanese attitudes’ as a whole – an orthodoxy which sits comfortably with equally stereotypical, but highly misleading, views about Japanese ‘cultural’ attitudes to authority.¹⁹ Even so, comments by government office-holders constitute part of an *official discourse* to which other countries

¹⁷ See Nicholas Onuf, ‘Constructivism: A User’s Manual’ in Vendulka Kublakova, Nicholas Onuf and Paul Kowert (eds), *International Relations in a Constructed World*, Armonk NY, M.E. Sharpe, 1998, pp.58-78. Note, however, that Onuf’s constructivism is not restricted to states as agents whereas many IR constructivists focus almost exclusively on states and the structures they inhabit.

¹⁸ Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms*, p.4.

¹⁹ Seaton, *Japan’s Contested War Memories*, pp.2-3.

and the international media inevitably respond, regardless of whether such statements represent popular opinion. We turn to the matter of how textbooks also help to constitute official discourses shortly. First, however, we are concerned to complicate the story of Japan's periodic 'amnesia' over aspects of its war past by highlighting the role of other actors.

Remembering and Forgetting Japan's War

At the end of the Pacific War – known to Japanese then as the Greater East Asian War [*daitōa sensō*] – Japan was confronted with the task of not only building a new future, but dealing with a past that had wrought enormous devastation both at home and abroad. That past includes what is widely regarded as an aggressive war of its own making accompanied by the appalling treatment of prisoners of war, which included forced labour, starvation, torture and the notorious biochemical experiments performed by Unit 731 in Manchuria, as well as numerous atrocities against civilians. The most common subjects of official apologies have been the 'Rape of Nanking' in which 300,000 men, women and children are estimated (by Chinese authorities) to have perished, with more than 20,000 women raped, and the forced sexual slavery of so-called 'comfort women' particularly, although not exclusively, in Korea.²⁰ The evidence from a variety of sources – eye-witness accounts, diaries, official documentation, photographic records, and so on²¹ – indicates that there was a great deal to apologize for.

Primary responsibility for war criminality was narrowed down to a small group of high-ranking military personnel, politicians and public servants brought to trial in Tokyo by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Others were tried and sentenced in 'victim countries' but the Tokyo Trials from 1946-48 were by far the most important, resulting in twenty-five convictions. Seven, including General Hideki Tojo, Prime Minister for much of the war, were executed as leading war criminal, while most others received 'life sentences'. By the end of the 1950s, however, all surviving prisoners had been paroled. Emperor Hirohito, in whose name and on whose official authorization many wartime activities were carried out, was exonerated at the behest of Occupation commander, General Douglas MacArthur. US interests, especially in the context of the emergent Cold War, required him as a key figurehead to help stabilize and rebuild the country. Tojo and thirteen other Class A war criminals were secretly enshrined at Yasakuni in 1978, the Shinto Shrine made notorious in recent years by Prime Ministerial visits.

It has been argued that the light sentences received by the convicted Class A war criminals (at least those not executed), and the failure to attribute any responsibility to Hirohito, contributed substantially to Japan's inability to accept responsibility for the atrocities committed in Asia. As a corollary, many Japanese continued to believe that the war in Asia was fought in a righteous cause, namely the liberation of Asian people from

²⁰ See, especially, Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997; Yoshiaki Yoshimi, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* [trans. Suzanne O'Brien], New York: University of Columbia Press, 2000.

²¹ For discussion of the evidence see, Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Interagency Working Group, *Researching Japanese War Crimes Records: Introductory Essays*, Washington DC, National Archives and Records Administration, 2006 (available online at <http://www.archives.gov/iwg/japanese-war-crimes/introductory-essays.pdf>).

European imperialism, and that stories of atrocities were fabricated or, at most, exaggerated.²² Among the current deniers is Tojo's granddaughter, Yuko Tojo, a recent (unsuccessful) candidate for the Diet's House of Councillors. While insisting that Japan needs to regain the pride of the pre-World War Two era, she reiterated the claim that the war in Asia was not an act of Japanese aggression, but was fought 'to liberate the "non-white" colonies from the "whites"'. The Yasukuni Shrine, she suggested, ought to be visited officially not only by Japanese Prime Ministers but by the Emperor too, while criticism from abroad constitutes a violation of sovereignty. And if her grandfather made a mistake, she said, it was not in starting the war but in losing it.²³

The latter remark chimes with the notion that history is written by the victors who clearly have the power to make 'truth' speak on their behalf. The corollary is that those on the losing side may bear an unfair burden of responsibility. Such ideas have been expressed by a prominent flag-bearer of contemporary Japanese nationalism, Nobukatsu Fujioka, Professor of Education at Tokyo University and Vice-Chair of the Japan Society for History Textbook Reform [*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*]. Many Japanese, he says, 'submitted to the victors' view of history' and rather than think too much about it, concentrated instead on the 'path to prosperity' in post-war Japan. It is only now that Japanese are beginning to look at history with their own eyes, a prerequisite to abandoning the 'masochistic view of history'.²⁴

Attitudes within Japan to war history have varied throughout the post-war period, many emanating from personal experience of particular events as well as broader perceptions of how Japan conducted itself in both instigating and prosecuting the war. Hook argues that the experiences of the war, especially the A-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and support for the Constitution, continue as a source of legitimation for an anti-militaristic identity and that this seriously constrains the use of the SDF as a 'normal' military force.²⁵ Another analysis of progressive thought within Japan, allied to notions of pacifism and democracy, shows the strength of anti-war/anti-nationalist movements. Indeed, Japan's official identity in the postwar period, has been one of strict pacifism as enshrined in Article Nine.²⁶ Much has also been made of 'victim consciousness' among Japanese – that is, of the notion that the Japanese people were victims either of their own leaders in taking the country into such a war, or of the atomic bombs that brought it to such a horrific end, or both. Victim consciousness has been another factor in building a 'culture of peace' within Japan, although the victim trope has also served nationalist agendas.

There have always been critical Japanese voices urging full recognition of the worst aspects of Japan's war past. Further, while Japanese leaders attempted to destroy

²² Peter Li (ed.), *Japanese War Crimes: The Search for Justice*, Edison NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003, p.228. See also Herbert P. Bix, 'War Responsibility and Historical Memory: Hirohito's Apparition', *Japan Focus*, 9 May 2008 at <http://japanfocus.org/products/details/2741>.

²³ Stesuo Kamiya, 'Candidate Tojo Seeks Resolution Against A-Bombings', *Japan Times*, 4 July 2007.

²⁴ Nobukatsu Fujioka, 'Education Issues, Comfort Women, and the Creation of a New History Textbook', Speech Delivered at Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, 25 February 1999: <http://www.jiyuu-shikan.org/e/education.html>.

²⁵ Hook, *Militarization and Demilitarization*, p. xiv. See also Reinhard Drifte, *Japan's Security Relations with China Since 1989: From Balancing to Bandwagoning?*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p.8, where he identifies Japan as possessing a 'civilian power mentality' as opposed to a 'military power mentality'.

²⁶ Rikki Kersten, 'The Social Imperative of Pacifism in Postwar Japan: Shimizu Ikutarō and the Uchinada Movement', *Critical Asian Studies*, 38 (3), 2006, pp.303-304.

and conceal evidence of war atrocities at the end of the war, much important evidence of atrocities has been unearthed by Japanese researchers concerned to expose more of the truth about Japan's wartime behaviour, and various Japanese analyses have offered highly critical assessments.²⁷ These have often been neglected or underemphasized, especially in international media reports.²⁸ Rather, the nationalist right has been the main focus of attention, clearly encouraged by Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine during his tenure as Prime Minister.

Official recognition of war wrongs in Japan, however, was rather belated and has been patchy at best, and it was not until the 1970s that there was any official acknowledgement of Japan's wartime behaviour. That Japan did so at this time is attributable to emerging regional pressures within a broader context of increasing global interdependence necessitating closer relations between states.²⁹ Thus for a Japan aspiring to a more prominent role in regional and international affairs, it was becoming increasingly clear to at least some leaders that the apparent lack of 'public memory' of wartime behaviour was impacting negatively on the country's identity abroad and hindering broader foreign policy goals.³⁰

It would be a mistake, however, to read Japan's failure to face up to its war history only very belatedly, and in rather weak terms, as due solely to obdurate politicians, intellectuals and other groups within Japan, let alone as some kind of innate cultural incapacity embedded in the national psyche to admit wrongdoing.³¹ While there had been some pressure from within Japan to confront the past more openly, there had actually been very little from without. A review of the behaviour of key players in the region, as well as of the US, is therefore important in providing a more nuanced analysis of Japan's 'failure' to confront its war past and to achieve a 'normal' status in international relations.

The International Politics of Post-War Historiography

In the aftermath of both its own civil war, as well as the war with Japan, the People's Republic of China (PRC), as it was by the late 1940s, was relatively isolated – not recognized by the US and other important international actors. Official recognition of the PRC by Japan, among others, was an important foreign policy objective, finally achieved in 1972. But until that time, the perceived need to appease Japanese sensibilities and encourage their former foe to develop a foreign policy less oriented to the US meant 'that it was simply not tactful to recall the horrors of the war in detail.'³² Further, although

²⁷ See, for example, Wakayama Yoshibumi, *The Postwar Conservative View of Asia: How the Political Right Has Delayed Japan's Coming to Terms With its History of Aggression in Asia*, Tokyo, LTCB International Library Foundation, 1999; Honda Katsuichi, *The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame*, Armonk NY, M.E. Sharpe, 1999. Relevant publications in Japanese are: *Chūgoku no Nihongun* [The Japanese Troops in China], Tokyo, 1972 and *Chūgoku no tabi* [A Journey to China], Tokyo, 1972.

²⁸ See Seaton's critique of this literature outlined on pp.1-6.

²⁹ Jason A. Edwards, 'Community-Focused Apologia in International Affairs: Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's Apology', *Howard Journal of Communication*, 16 (4), 2005, p.318.

³⁰ Yasuaki cited *ibid.*, p. 324.

³¹ For a critique of national culturalist assumptions in support of this view see Sebastian Conrad, 'Entangled Memories: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945-2001', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38 (1), 2003, pp. 85-99.

³² Rana Mitter, 'Old Ghosts: New Memories: China's Changing War History in the Era of Post-Mao

books, memorials and other vehicles of public memory in China carried stories of Japanese behaviour in the period 1937-1945, it was often difficult to distinguish them from other enemies, especially the Nationalist forces under Chiang Kai-shek with which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was much more concerned.³³

Official narratives sponsored by the CPP government at this time also accorded with a prominent line being taken within Japan, namely, that the war had been instigated by a small number of militarists of which ordinary Japanese were also victims.³⁴ Since it was much more important for the CCP to target the Nationalists (as well as the US) as the true enemy, the investigation of Japanese war crimes was actually suppressed. Of the one thousand or so war criminals detained in China, only forty-five received prison sentences while the remainder were pardoned and repatriated. Further, the CCP preferred to forgo war reparations rather than make it a diplomatic issue with Japan.³⁵ This was a very different China from the one that was to emerge in later years.

South Korea did press for reparations at an early stage and in the 1965 'normalization pact' received grants, loans and financial credits. But Japanese governments declined to call these or any aid packages to other Asian countries 'reparations', thus avoiding explicit acknowledgment of responsibility for wartime behaviour. The issue of 'comfort women' was not addressed at the time, and in fact little was known about it in broader circles.³⁶ The shame experienced by the women, the 'dishonour' it brought to their families, as well as the reluctance of their own government to recognize them as victims, at least in an 'honourable' sense, contributed to a broader culture of denial within South Korea itself which only began to break down decades later.³⁷

Most importantly, US influences worked strongly against a historiography of a 'Greater East Asian War' by insisting on the 'Pacific War' as its official designation and thereby diverting attention from East and Southeast Asia. Studies of US Occupation policies also show a consistent pattern of US collusion in marginalizing Japan's wartime activities in China and Korea with atrocities such as the Nanjing massacre, biochemical experiments and sexual slavery disappearing 'into a historical vacuum.'³⁸ Other sources deny that there was a deliberate, systematic cover-up by the US, suggesting instead that it naturally focused on those responsible for the Pearl Harbor attack and mistreatment of US prisoners of war. There was some attention to the rape of Filipina women and the forced prostitution of Caucasian women. But while there was knowledge of field brothel systems elsewhere, the women working in these were assumed to be mostly professional prostitutes rather than unwilling victims, and so investigations were minimal.³⁹

Politics', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38 (1), 2003, p.118.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Yanan He, 'Remembering and Forgetting the War: Elite Mythmaking, Mass Reaction and Sino-Japanese Relations, 1950-2006', *History and Memory*, 19 (2), 2007, p.47.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

³⁶ See, generally, Mark E. Manyin, *Japan-North Korea Relations: Selected Issues*, CRS Report for Congress (RL32161), 26 November 2003.

³⁷ See Chungsee Sarah Soh, 'The Korean "Comfort Women": Movement for Redress', *Asian Survey*, 36 (12), 1996, pp.1226-1240.

³⁸ Conrad, 'Entangled Memories', p.92.

³⁹ Edward Drea, 'Introduction', Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Interagency Working Group, *Researching Japanese War Crimes Records*, p.15.

We look more closely at history textbooks in the next section, but here we note Nelson's analysis which shows that reformist politicians joined with Occupation authorities 'in blaming Japan's schools and curricula for having created a nation of passive citizens who blindly followed the policies of their government and military.' This led initially to textbooks which challenged earlier systems of authority and compliance. But Cold War exigencies soon prompted changes. Occupation authorities began to encourage themes of both democracy and patriotism in textbooks as a direct result of perceived threats by the Soviet Union, China, and Korean War which 'actively abetted Japan's remilitarization.'⁴⁰ To this day, the US – a country with an extensive record of unacknowledged war-related atrocities of its own⁴¹ – plays down critiques of Japan's war history in East Asia. For while much nationalist mileage is still made of Pearl Harbour memories – with the US as victim – US interests are perceived to lie in Japan's adopting a more active posture in international security which in turn requires de-emphasizing its East Asian war past.⁴²

As indicated previously, Japan *as* victim is another important aspect of post-war narratives, with the imagery of the destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima serving to underscore the innocence of Japanese civilians as victims and the lived experience of A-bomb survivors reinforcing the victim narrative. Victim tropes also became well-entrenched in popular consciousness through, among other things, the iconography of post-war popular culture (movies, television dramas, books) as well as through the Japanese peace movement.⁴³ But again, US policy was important. One commentator argues that victim consciousness was initially promoted by US psychological warfare agents and Occupation authorities to encourage alienation from militarism. It was later appropriated by both left and right wing politicians; the former for the purpose of opposing the Cold War security alliance with the US, and the latter in recognition of electoral pacifist sentiment 'with the added benefit that in doing so they could position themselves apart from the militarist period and perhaps evade discussion of Japanese war responsibility.'⁴⁴ Shimazu's study also shows how post-war popular culture attempted to mark off a polluted past from a present occupied largely by victims.⁴⁵

In summary, Japan's selective remembering and forgetting has clearly been shaped by the behaviour of China, in particular, in the immediate aftermath of the war. Amnesia concerning the treatment of Korean women who were forced to serve in

⁴⁰ Nelson, 'Tempest in a Textbook', p. 30.

⁴¹ See Mark Seldon, 'Japanese and American War Atrocities, Historical Memory and Reconciliation: World War II to Today', *Japan Focus*, <http://japanfocus.org> posted 15 April 2008.

⁴² US complicity in the forgetting of Japan's war crimes is barely balanced by occasional moves such as a resolution sponsored by Representative Michael M. Honda (CA-15) on 31 January 2007 calling on the Japanese government 'to formally and unambiguously apologize for and acknowledge the tragedy that comfort women endured at the hands of its Imperial Army during World War II.' See http://www.house.gov/list/press/ca15_honda/COMFORTWOMEN.html accessed 10 July 2008. For a detailed analysis of US Cold War politics balancing different considerations in Europe and Asia, see Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1992.

⁴³ James Joseph Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2001, p.6.

⁴⁴ Orr, *Victim as Hero*, pp.6-7.

⁴⁵ Naoko Shimazu, 'Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38 (1), 2003, pp.101-116.

comfort stations may have as much to do with Korean attitudes in the post-war period as Japanese ones. And it is difficult to imagine how several Class A war criminals could have gone on to carve out successful political careers in the post-war order if not for the leniency with which the US treated them as well as a largely silent China. This by no means dilutes Japan's responsibilities in terms of its war past, but rather serves to illustrate that the issue of responsibility for how the war has been remembered in Japan must be shared by other key actors. It is against this background, along with a changing regional environment, that debates surrounding representations of national history in school textbooks must be set.

Regional Relations and the History Textbook Controversy

Struggles within Japan between conservatives and progressives over representations in history textbooks began in the early 1960s, but it was not until 1982 that they precipitated a major diplomatic dispute between Japan and its East Asian neighbours. This occurred against a background of increasing conservative pressure on the Japanese Ministry of Education (MOE) to force the revision of existing textbooks which conservatives believed purveyed left-wing views and reflected poorly on Japan. It was during an MOE textbook certification procedure over the period 1981-1982 that media attention focussed on changes from earlier texts. The most controversial related to redescribing Japan's 'aggression' [*shinryaku*] in North China as merely an 'advance' [*shinshutsu*] into North China and the transformation of 'Korean independence movements' into 'Korean riots.'⁴⁶ Leading Japanese domestic newspapers criticized the Ministry for its reactionary endorsing of 'pre-war authority,'⁴⁷ indicating that the MOE's approach did not necessarily resonate with broader public opinion. In the region, anti-Japanese demonstrations erupted in both China and South Korea while their governments lodged official protests. In the early stage of the controversy, however, the Japanese government attempted to treat it as a purely domestic educational concern.⁴⁸

It is noteworthy that conflicting intra-governmental approaches developed between the MOE and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Conservative MOE personnel as well as LDP hardliners objected strongly to acceding to Chinese and South Korean demands. A consistent theme of LDP education policy, along with an objection to 'left-leaning' textbook narratives, was the importance of a 'patriotic education', a view which had gained ground in 1980 after the LDP won a stable majority in both houses of the Diet. But this view had a longer history, and must again be seen as part of the immediate postwar legacy of denial encouraged by the US which, from the mid-1950s, saw 'patriotic education' as important in the 'struggle against communism'. Liberal/left ideas in general were thought to weaken 'defence consciousness' and were, in any event, anathema to conservative US views. In 1955, the Democratic Party (which was to unite with the Liberal Party to become the Liberal Democratic Party), had issued a pamphlet, '*The Problem of Deplorable History Textbooks*' [*Ureubeki Rekishi Kyokasho no Mondai*], in which existing textbooks written by Japan Teachers' Union members were

⁴⁶ *Asahi Shinbun*, 26 June 1982. The wording had actually been changed much earlier but had escaped media attention until now. See Nozaki, 'Japanese Politics', p. 606.

⁴⁷ On the role of the Japanese press in the textbook controversy in 1982, see Caroline Rose, *Interpreting History in Sino-Japanese Relations: A Case Study in Political Decision Making*, London: Nissan Institute/Routledge, 1988, pp.80-94.

⁴⁸ *Asahi Shinbun*, 27 July and 4 August 1982.

condemned for promoting Marxist-Leninist thought, glorifying communism and criticizing Japan. Thus from the 1950s through the 1960s, LDP legislation tightened textbook authorization procedures in the MOE.⁴⁹

With the strengthening of LDP power by the early 1980s, not only were rightist discourses on ‘patriotic education’ encouraged, but issues concerning defence expenditure and the peace constitution emerged as well. Again, this was reinforced by US pressures to increase Japanese military development in line with its considerable economic power. Foreign Minister Sakurauchi Yoshio, however, believed that criticisms from Japan’s East Asian neighbours over the textbook issue needed to be taken seriously,⁵⁰ and the government of Prime Minister Suzuki Zenkō opted to prioritize Japan’s regional diplomacy with a view to strengthening its position as a regional leader. Maintaining cordial relations with China and South Korea was a centrepiece of this strategy. In June 1982, Suzuki attended a summit of advanced industrialized nations in Versailles, announcing in his speech there the ‘basic tasks of Japan’s foreign policy’ in terms of the proactive stance that his country needed to take in an increasingly interdependent world, including Japan’s role in its own region.⁵¹

Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang had visited Japan three months before the textbook dispute occurred and a return visit by Suzuki in September was arranged for the tenth anniversary of Sino-Japanese diplomatic normalization.⁵² The textbook issue could not have erupted at a more embarrassing moment. In August 1982, Chief Cabinet Secretary Miyazawa Kiichi announced that textbook narratives would be revised in the interests of Japan’s good relationship with China and South Korea. The procedures then instigated for revision in accord with the sensitivities of Japan’s neighbours became a new standard in textbook screening called the ‘neighbouring countries’ clause.⁵³ In fact, the post-1982 textbooks continued to provide a more comprehensive treatment of Japan’s wartime behaviour, thus setting in train a more self-reflective approach.⁵⁴

We should note that since a demilitarized Japan’s post-war economic growth had occurred under the US security umbrella, Japan’s foreign policy had been seen as largely passive. However, changes in the region’s military balance followed the Soviet military build-up and the relative decline of American global power in the 1970s. As a rising economic power, Japan was expected to pursue a more proactive foreign and security policy, with the Reagan administration urging Japan to share the burden of regional security arrangements.⁵⁵ Japan’s diplomatic relations in the region had also improved

⁴⁹ See Ōuchi Hirokazu, “‘Rekishi Kyokasyo Ronro/ Toso [Arguments of History Textbooks]’ in Takahashi Tetsuya (ed) *‘Rekishi Ninshiki Ronso [Arguments of History Perceptions]*, Tokyo: Sakuhinsya, 2002, p.51.

⁵⁰ *Asahi Shinbun*, 10th August, 1982.

⁵¹ *Gaiko Seisho 27 [Diplomatic Bluebook 1982 Edition]*, pp.393-397.

⁵² *Asahi Shinbun*, 8 August, 1982.

⁵³ Leonard James Schoppa, (1991) *Education Reform in Japan: A Case of Immobilist Politics* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.62.

⁵⁴ Post-1982 history textbooks actually provided more extensive treatment of Japan’s wartime activities. In the mid-1980s, for example, the Nanjing Massacre began to be treated more fully with information provided on the total numbers killed. Also narrated in more detail after 1982 were the use of forced labour, assimilationist policies during Korean colonization, and suffering caused by Japanese forces in Southeast Asia generally.

⁵⁵ Bruce Cumings, ‘Japan in the World System’ in Andrew Gordon (ed), *Postwar Japan as History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, p.56.

following Suzuki's tour of ASEAN countries in 1981.⁵⁶ This new approach to the Asian region generally was regarded as evidence for Japan's growing independence and activism in foreign policy from the late 1970s to the early 1980s.⁵⁷ Thus the Suzuki government's response to the history textbook controversy confirmed the prioritization of regional relations ahead of domestic pressures from the MOE and LDP conservatives. At the same time, however, China faced its own domestic pressures which in turn shaped its regional responses. The reaction to the 1982 textbook issue was a departure from earlier policy, and must be understood against a background of post-Cultural Revolution difficulties and divisions. Beijing's response was therefore calculated to prioritize internal cohesion and boost regime legitimacy.⁵⁸ Thus China's internal politics was as much a factor in the play of international relations as Japan's.

Recognition of Japan's wartime behaviour in post-1982 textbooks became an important aspect of regional diplomacy, as did the politics of apologies. From the early 1980s through to the 1990s the government expressed remorse for wartime behaviour, offering apologies on around ten occasions. The first over 'comfort women', however, did not occur until 1992 when the first Korean woman testified publicly and joined a group of plaintiffs to file suit against the Japanese government.⁵⁹ Subsequently, former 'comfort women' from Korea, China, Taiwan and the Philippines came forward, and international publicity eventually prompted action from the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.⁶⁰ Professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki also brought to light documents in the Defence Agency's library showing that the Japanese army had indeed supervised forced prostitution.⁶¹ *Asahi Shinbun* carried a government spokesperson's statement to the effect that deep involvement by the Japanese army could no longer be denied.⁶²

While the government maintained that there was no basis for litigation from Korea due to the 1965 agreement, Prime Minister Miyazawa expressed his regret and apologized explicitly to former 'comfort women' in January 1992.⁶³ In August 1993, the then Chief Cabinet Secretary, Kono Yohei, officially acknowledged that Japanese wartime authorities had been 'directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of comfort women', offering apologies to those who had 'suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds.'⁶⁴ Junior high school textbooks in the mid-1990s treated the issue for the first time, stating clearly that many women, especially Korean women, were

⁵⁶ See *Diplomatic Bluebook*, 1981 at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1981/1981-contents.htm>.

⁵⁷ Susumu, Awanohara, 'Shadow of the Warrior', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 January 1981, pp.23-24.

⁵⁸ He, 'Remembering and Forgetting', p. 51.

⁵⁹ See George Hicks, *Japan's War Memories: Amnesia or Concealment?*, Hants: Ashgate, 1998, pp.77-80; Jordan Sand, 'Historians and Public Memory in Japan: The "Comfort Women" Controversy', *History and Memory*, 11, (2) 1999.

⁶⁰ Hicks, *Japan's War Memories*, p.79

⁶¹ Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Jyugun Ianhu [Military Comfort Women]*, Tokyo: Iwanami Sinsho, 1995.

⁶² *Asahi Shinbun*, 13 January 1992.

⁶³ Prime Minister Miyazawa's policy speech on the occasion of the visit to South Korea on 17 January, 1992, *Gaikou Seisho [Diplomatic Blue Book]*no. 36, p.167

⁶⁴ See statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei on the result of the study on 'comfort women', 4 August, 1993 at www.mofa.go.jp/policy/wome/fund/state9308.html.

forced to act as ‘military comfort women’ in war zones.⁶⁵ Other examples of Japan’s wartime conduct towards Chinese, Koreans and Taiwanese, especially with respect to forced labour and conscription, were also explicitly acknowledged.⁶⁶

Developments beyond the region, however, were now impacting on perceptions of Japan’s international role which were to encourage a resurgence of neo-nationalist views. Foremost among these was the first Gulf War when Japan was criticized for its ‘free-rider’ security approach, hitting raw nerves within the LDP government. Although Japan eventually contributed a substantial package in aid of the allied effort, the episode prompted much introspection concerning Japan’s identity as an international actor. Indeed it is seen as something of a watershed for Japan, attracting comparisons (perhaps somewhat exaggerated) with the ‘Black ships crisis’ in the 1850s, which saw the end of Japan’s self-imposed isolation.⁶⁷ Whether exaggerated or not, it is certainly the case that neo-nationalist revisionism and LDP debates over ‘patriotic education’ were now linked with frustrations over perceptions of Japan’s passivity in international security affairs, and thus its distinct lack of ‘normality’ in terms of status. However, this was not to bring immediate changes in official policy. Indeed, the end of LDP dominance in the Diet in 1993 provided an opportunity for a new government to address regional concerns about Japan’s war memories.

While previous Japanese leaders had avoided using the term ‘aggression’, Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro, leader of the Japan New Party [*Nihon Shintō*], stated that he personally accepted that Japan was the aggressor in an unjust war.⁶⁸ A speech by the first socialist Prime Minister, Murayama Tomiichi, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of war in August 1995, was the most forthright acknowledgement of Japan’s wartime record to date:

[I]n the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology. ...

Building from our deep remorse ... Japan must eliminate self-righteous nationalism, promote international coordination as a responsible member of the international community and, thereby, advance the principles of peace and democracy. At the same time, as the only country to have experienced the devastation of atomic bombing, Japan, with a view to the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, must actively strive to further global disarmament in areas such as the strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. It is my conviction that in this way alone can Japan atone for its past and lay to rest the spirits of those who perished.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Atarashii Shakai: Rekishi* [*New Social Studies: History*], Tokyo, Tokyo Shoseki, 1996, p.288; *Chūgaku Shakai: Rekishiteki Bunya* [*Social Studies of Junior High School: History*], Osaka, Osaka Shoseki, 1997, p.250.

⁶⁶ *Chūgaku Shakai: Rekishiteki Bunya* [*Social Studies of Junior High School: History*], Osaka, Osaka Shoseki, 1997, p.64.

⁶⁷ A.K. Courtney Purrington, ‘Tokyo’s Policy Responses during the Gulf Crisis’, *Asian Survey*, 31 (4), 1991, pp.307-323.

⁶⁸ *Asahi Shinbun*, 11 August 1993.

⁶⁹ www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/pm/murayama/9508.html.

Murayama's statement, however, did not signal the beginning of a new era in regional relations. His government (and party) was short-lived and it was not long before the LDP was back in power. At around the same time, Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated when China ignored Japanese protests concerning nuclear testing. Other events, including China's military exercises off Taiwan and Japanese nationalists landing on the disputed Senkaku (Daiiaoyutai) Islands, combined with Chinese concerns over revised US-Japan defence guidelines, added to the tensions. Japan's suspension of a small part of its aid package to China in response to the nuclear test drew sniping comments from China to the effect that Japan would do well to recall the wartime suffering it had inflicted on the Chinese people.⁷⁰ President Jiang Zemin's visit to Japan in November 1998 produced a further deterioration. Prime Minister of the day, Obuchi Keizo, declined to take a more strongly pro-PRC stance on Taiwan or to produce a written apology for Japan's war of aggression, and also failed to produce another substantial economic aid package for China. For his part, President Jiang referred constantly to the 'history problem' during his visit thus inflaming popular attitudes as well.⁷¹

At the same time, Japan was caught in a dilemma produced by the dynamics of the triangular US-China-Japan relationship. The Sino-US rapprochement of the late 1990s following the Taiwan Strait crisis and the Clinton administration's policy of building a 'constructive strategic partnership' with China provoked concerns in Japan that this might degrade the significance of the US-Japan alliance for the United States. This concern was reflected in LDP Secretary-General Kato Koichi's speech in Washington in May 1998 which emphasized the importance of balance.⁷² At this stage Japan appeared worried about possible US prioritization of its relations with China, exacerbated by President Clinton's June 1998 visit to China in a trip that by-passed Japan. This also followed US comments about Japan's apparent inability to stimulate the domestic economy in a period of recession. Thus as US-Chinese relations appeared to enter a new era of cooperation and amity, Japanese commentators and media expressed concern over China's possible displacement of Japan as the US's partner of choice in Asia, a possibility also suggested by US media commentaries.⁷³

In summary, disputes within Japan over representations of the war in East Asia go back almost six decades and involve a range of figures in government, the civil service, the education industry, media, peace advocates, and various other parties representing a range of views from ultra-conservative nationalists and militarists through to moderate, progressive and left/radical figures. The diversity of views within Japan, and the substantial number who accept the evidence of their country's aggression and the atrocities committed by Japanese troops, belie the common assumption that 'Japanese' as a whole cannot face up to their war past.⁷⁴ In addition, and as Yoshiko Nozaki notes, the roots of the controversies lie in Japan's 'stalled process of postwar democratization' in which conservative elites from business, the bureaucracy and government who might

⁷⁰ Christopher B. Johnston, 'Japan's China Policy: Implications for US-Japan Relations', *Asian Survey*, 38 (11), 1998, p.1067.

⁷¹ *Asahi Shinbun*, 27 November 1998.

⁷² Quoted in 'Nation's Top China Hand Dealing Out Foreign Policy Losses,' *Mainichi Daily News*, June 4 1998.

⁷³ See, for example, Stephan S. Roach, 'China's Dynamism, Japan's Inertia,' *New York Times*, June 26 1998.

⁷⁴ Seaton, *Japan's Contested War Memories*, pp.2-3.

otherwise have been purged during the occupation were permitted to coalesce in the early Cold War environment to form the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) which has since had a near monopoly of political power.⁷⁵ With the LDP's return to office by 1996, official stances on war history and apologetics reverted to a more conservative nationalistic mode. Not only had sniping from China and complaints from the US about Japan's passive role in international affairs rankled, many conservatives also believed that negative images of Japan's past was hardly the basis on which to build national pride and a more prominent and 'normal' role in international affairs. This had a direct impact on debates about history textbooks, with the notion of 'patriotic education' and the rejection of 'masochistic history' surfacing once more.

A Neo-Nationalist Ascendancy?

In the mid-1990s neo-nationalists were involved in the publication of *The Review of the Greater East Asian War [Daitoa Senso no Sokatsu]* which promoted a positive view of Japan's role and glossed over the worst aspects of the army's conduct in Asia.⁷⁶ Not surprisingly, LDP conservatives supported efforts to end 'self-tormenting' elements of war history narratives generally.⁷⁷ Conservative discourses were further strengthened by the formation of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform [*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*] in 1997 which mounted a populist campaign for the elimination of narratives about 'comfort women' from textbooks and also for a revision, downwards, of the estimated number killed in the Nanjing Massacre.⁷⁸ Professor Fujioka Nobukatsu complained that history textbooks had become 'a tool of international politics, a card sometimes played in the domestic politics of other countries, or for foreign governments to secure money from Japan,' and that former Prime Minister Miyazawa had 'set the example of apologizing whenever someone made a fuss.' Now, he said, it 'reached all the way to the case of the "comfort women."' ⁷⁹ New narratives subsequently appeared in a *New History Textbook* produced in 2001 by Reform Group members. A prospectus explained:

Japan's postwar history education has led the Japanese people to forget Japan's culture and traditions and to lose their national pride. In particular ... the Japanese have been portrayed as criminals who must continue to apologise through the generations for Japan's wartime conduct to Asian people. Since the end of the Cold War, this 'masochistic' tendency has strengthened

⁷⁵ Yoshiko Nozaki, 'Japanese Politics and the History Textbook Controversy, 1982-2001', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37, 2002, p.603.

⁷⁶ This book was published as a result of studies and workshops to which well known nationalist and conservative intellectuals were invited. See Rekishi Kento Inkai (ed), *Daitoa Senso no Sokatsu* [The Recapitulation of the Greater East Asian War], Tokyo, Tentensha, 1995.

⁷⁷ Soon after the Reform Group was established in January 1997, young LDP politicians founded a study group for Diet members for the purpose of reforming Japanese history education in February in 1997 which worked with the Reform Group.

⁷⁸ For the 'comfort women' issue see Fujioka Nobukatsu, 'Monbudaijin he no Koukai Shokan [A Public Letter to Minister of Education]', *Voice*, October 1996, and for the revision of the Nanjing Massacre figures see Fujioka Nobukatsu, *Kingendaishi Kyoiku no Kakaku: Zendama/ Akudama Shikan wo Koete [Reform of the Modern and Present History Education: Beyond the View of Goodies and Baddies]*, Tokyo, Meiji Toshō, 1996.

⁷⁹ 'Let's Stop Apologizing', interview with Fujioka Nobukatsu *Asia Week*, 14 March 1997 at www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/97/0314/nat4.html.

and the propaganda of former enemies has been narrated as historical fact in the textbooks now in use.⁸⁰

The LDP had also started discussions concerning revision of the Fundamental Law of Education, enacted in 1947, which had been the backbone of Japan's education system throughout the post-war period. It became one of the most strenuously debated issues under the Koizumi administration. In the early stages a government advisory panel supported a program that nurtured 'strong, spiritually rich and more patriotic' Japanese.⁸¹ Another debating point was the definition of 'patriotism' [*aikokushin*]. While the LDP initially attempted to define patriotism as 'a mind that loves the country' and to have both the word and definition enshrined in law, the LDP's coalition partner, New Komeito, pushed for the definition more along the lines of 'a mind that cherishes the country,' arguing that 'love' resonated too strongly with the ultra-nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s.⁸² The coalition eventually agreed to a revised bill which was passed in December 2006 under Abe's government. Abe was reported to be following in Koizumi's footsteps by 'pushing Japan to rebuild national pride and to claim a larger role in the world after six decades of constitutionally enforced pacifism and reticence.'⁸³ Patriotism was now defined, in rather long-winded terms, as 'an attitude that respects tradition and culture, loves the nation and homeland that have fostered them, while respecting other countries and contributing to international peace and development.'⁸⁴ Generally, however, the LDP's approach was very much in tune with the Reform Group. Both sought to construct a more assertive Japanese identity with pride in the past while in foreign policy terms both were concerned to support the Self-Defence Force's (SDF) expansion in the international sphere with the aim of becoming a 'normal' international security player.

In the meantime, the *New History Textbook* offered a modified war narrative by referring to the Nanjing 'incident' instead of 'massacre,' and depicting the war generally as a matter of 'self-defence' combined with a desire to liberate Asia from Western control. It further questioned the legitimacy of the Tokyo War Crime Trials. The following extracts exemplify how Japan's role in the 'Greater East Asian War' was now depicted:

The Japanese government called this war 'the Greater East Asian War' (the term 'the Pacific War' became common because the United States forbade the use of the term 'Greater East Asian War'). The government proclaimed that the purpose of this war was self-defense, the liberation of Asia from Western imperialism and the establishment of "Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere."

[However] because the Japanese army forced local populations to learn Japanese and worship at Shinto shrines, the army met with resistance. When the war situation turned against Japan and food supplies ran short, the army often forced them to do back-breaking work. Moreover, anti-Japanese insurgents who aligned themselves with the Allied Powers engaged in guerrilla warfare in the Philippines and Malaya, which Japanese troops dealt with severely. Many people, civilians included, were killed during these confrontations. After the war was over, Japan paid reparations to those nations. Then Japan was accused of promoting the Greater East

⁸⁰ Reform Group Prospectus at www.tsukurukai.com/02_about_us/01_opinion.html.

⁸¹ *Japan Times Online*, 18 October 2002.

⁸² *Japan Times Online*, 14 April, 2006.

⁸³ *International Herald Tribune*, 15 December 2006.

⁸⁴ *Japan Times Online*, 29 April, 16 December 2006.

Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere philosophy to justify the war and occupation of Asia. ... Later, after Japan was defeated ... all these former colonies achieved independence through their own efforts over the next dozen years. Some Japanese soldiers remained in Asia and participated in the various struggles for independence. The initial goal of Japan's southward advance was to obtain resources, but it also served to spur on nascent independence movements in Asia.⁸⁵

While this narrative acknowledges some negative aspects of Japanese behaviour, it presents positive interpretations of Japan's contribution to independence struggles in the region, interpretations which had never appeared in previous junior high textbooks. Another striking development was the almost complete erasure of the comfort women issue by 2002.⁸⁶ It was scarcely surprising that the approval of such textbooks in 2001 and again in 2005 as suitable for adoption had serious repercussions in China and South Korea. Tensions were further exacerbated by Prime Minister Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine which were, not unexpectedly, interpreted as glorifying Japanese militarism. At the same time Japan was enmeshed in territorial disputes with South Korea over a set of islands⁸⁷ while disputing resource rights in the North China Sea with China, all of which contributed to a new low in regional relations.

The Koizumi government maintained a defensive posture on the textbook issue so that it would appear neither 'weak' in kowtowing to its regional neighbours, nor ashamed of Japan's history. This defensiveness was well illustrated in the government's argument that because the textbooks were produced privately, and individual school districts ultimately decided which textbooks would be used, official policy was not involved. The government also chose to emphasize freedom of speech and publication. At the same time Koizumi and other LDP figures maintained that Japan's neighbours should not permit disagreements over perceptions of history to damage current diplomatic and economic ties, and that the matters should be dealt with calmly.⁸⁸

The more anti-Japanese demonstrations intensified in the region, the more defensive and defiant official Japanese attitudes became. While China blamed anti-Japanese demonstrations there on the Koizumi government's glorification of Japan's wartime actions, Japan's Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka demanded an apology from the Chinese government and claimed compensation for damages to their embassy sustained during violent anti-Japanese demonstrations. Foreign Ministry spokesman, Takashima Hatsuhsa, held the Chinese government responsible for the violence while agriculture Minister Nakagawa Shoichi blamed it for the general deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations.⁸⁹ Just as tensions were reaching a peak, Koizumi delivered a speech at the Asia-Africa summit in April 2005 expressing 'deep remorse' and 'heartfelt' apology over Japan's colonial rule and aggression in Asia.⁹⁰ While this defused some tensions, critics noted that the speech simply quoted the 1995 Murayama statement of apology. More generally, Koizumi's behaviour during his premiership, which included the much

⁸⁵ *The New History Textbook (Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho)*, Tokyo, Fusosya, 2001, pp.277; 281.

⁸⁶ For a detailed analysis see Nozaki, 'Japanese Politics', pp.603-622.

⁸⁷ In spring 2005 the MOE required four textbook publishers to refer to a disputed set of islands – Takeshima in Japanese and Dokdo in Korean – as Japanese territory 'unlawfully occupied by South Korea' which infuriated South Korea.

⁸⁸ *Asahi Shinbun*, 5, 6, 11 April 2005

⁸⁹ *Asahi Shinbun*, 14, 15, 17 April 2005.

⁹⁰ For details of speech, see <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/meet0504/speech.html>

publicized visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, seemed to indicate an end to apologetics or ‘war guilt as diplomacy’. This accorded with the administration’s more assertive posture in world affairs, manifest in its deployment of the SDF in Iraq and its campaigns for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.⁹¹ Clearly, these issues are inextricably linked with neo-nationalist perceptions of the importance of Japan’s role abroad as well as according with the LDP’s desire to amend Article 9 (the peace clause) of the constitution. Yet the more Japan attempted to project a more assertive identity both at home and abroad as a ‘normal’ country, the more it alienated its regional neighbours.

The international and regional environment after 2001 produced some important changes. In addition to the Bush administration’s higher priority for relations with Japan, the ‘war on terror’ provided new opportunities for a more proactive foreign and security policy. Koizumi’s Japan was a ready ally in the US cause. Following ‘9/11’ the Diet passed emergency legislation approving the deployment of Japanese warships to the Indian Ocean in support of US forces in Afghanistan and, in December 2003, the government authorized dispatch of SDF personnel to Iraq for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. This was the first deployment of the SDF that was *not* part of a UN-mandated mission. For Koizumi, it was a perfectly legitimate action for a ‘normal’ member of the international community and a close ally of the US.⁹² It was certainly a significant moment for LDP conservatives and nationalists with their long-cherished ambition to expand the role and importance of the SDF, possibly leading to a revision of the peace constitution.

These objectives were pursued by Abe who assumed office in September 1996 prepared to push a nationalist agenda further both with respect to nurturing patriotism among Japan’s younger generations through school programs as well as by repealing Article Nine of the constitution. Interestingly, he was credited for achieving a measure of rapprochement with China early in his term. But he then invited strong censure for misjudged remarks to the effect that there was no evidence of involvement by the Japanese military in forced prostitution during the war, remarks which he was later obliged to ‘clarify’ and issue yet another apology for.⁹³ It was also under Abe that the Defense Agency was transformed into a full Ministry.⁹⁴ After just on a year in office, Abe resigned following other scandals and gaffes by ministers in the LDP government, although these were largely unconnected with war memories issues.

For a time, under both Koizumi and Abe, neo-nationalist ideas appeared to be strongly in the ascendance. From the history textbook issue to the conduct of foreign relations and the role of the military forces, both leaders pushed strongly for Japan’s ‘normalization’ as a country with pride in its past as well as an active role with a military dimension in international affairs. Prime Minister Fukuda, however, repudiated overtly nationalist postures and never seemed likely to pursue the matter of Article Nine. Nor did he invite further recriminations by visiting Yasukuni in either an official or personal capacity. Indeed, in contrast with his immediate predecessors, Fukuda’s vision of Japan’s role in international society as outlined in his major policy statement put much greater emphasis on Japan as a ‘peace-fostering’ nation engaging in diplomatic efforts to secure

⁹¹ Reform of the UN Security Council is unlikely in the foreseeable future. China, not surprisingly, has generally opposed Japan’s campaign.

⁹² Koizumi’s statement at press conference 9 December 2003 cited at <http://www.mofa.go.jp>

⁹³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4392480.stm>.

⁹⁴ *International Herald Tribune*, 1 April 2007.

‘peace and development in the world’ – a role much more in keeping with the ‘human security’ paradigm promoted by former Prime Ministers Obuchi and Mori.⁹⁵ With the election of Aso as LDP leader, however, the future trajectory of debates over Japan’s war memories are uncertain. But given the ambitions of influential sectors of the LDP in international affairs and the persistence of high-profile nationalist groups in pushing their agenda in education, it is likely resurface again and again and, each time it does, will serve to illustrate why Japan’s prospects of becoming a ‘normal’ actor are so fraught.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Constructivist assumptions hold that foreign policy is shaped by self-expectations concerning what sort of identity a state should project in the international sphere and how it should conduct itself on the broader regional and world stage vis-à-vis other actors. Allied to this is the supposition that domestic norms, values and other ideational factors play a key role in formulating identities and, in turn, shaping foreign policy choices. In the case of Japan, as indeed with many other states, war memories are particularly powerful forces in the construction of national self-imagery and in the legitimation of policy. This analysis is reinforced by recent trends in cultural history which place great emphasis on the link between collective memory and identity. But while collective memories associated with war may be relatively uncontested in ‘normal’ countries – such as those which were on the winning side in WWII – and may therefore function to provide a greater sense of solidity, they have scarcely given rise to a cohesive identity for Japan.

Much of the problem is seen to lie with neo-nationalist elements. These have wielded significant influence over LDP governments with debate centring on history textbooks and the battle for young minds within Japan, tending to reinforce notions of an obdurate ‘Japanese nation’, bound by a set of cultural norms requiring conformity with official views and incapable of facing up to the past. It is clear, however, that neo-nationalist views represent only one strand of a much more complex story. As we have seen, Japan possesses neither a single set of cultural norms characterizing the ‘Japanese nation’, nor a cohesive ‘collective memory’ about its war past. Rather, there are deeply contending interpretations of war history within Japan producing a complex of divergent interpretations concerning past and present and giving rise to strongly opposed discourses of war and peace, thereby making any broad ideological consensus virtually impossible.⁹⁷

The strong tendency in the literature to view Japan as ‘anomalous, if not aberrant or abnormal’ as an actor in international relations⁹⁸ of course invites questions about what, exactly, constitutes a ‘normal’ or indeed an ‘abnormal’ country. In the case of Japan, its ‘abnormality’ is often described in terms of its ‘highly circumscribed military responsibilities outside its own territory and exploring non-military approaches to

⁹⁵ For numerous speeches and documents on Japan’s human security policies see http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/human_secu/index.html.

⁹⁶ Some major Japanese cinemas decided not to show a new film, *Yasukuni*, by a Chinese director who describes his film as ‘an examination of selective memory and the central role the shrine plays in sustaining ambiguity about war guilt.’ The decision was made in light of intimidation by militant neo-nationalist groups. See <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/world/fg-shrine2> accessed 15 July 2008.

⁹⁷ This is the main thrust of analysis in Seaton, *Japan’s Contested War Memories*, 2007.

⁹⁸ Glenn D. Hook, Julie Gilson, Christopher W. Hughes and Hugo Dobson, *Japan’s International Relations: Politics, Economics and Security*, London, Routledge, 2005, p.23.

security.⁹⁹ One aspect of ‘normality’ raised at the beginning, however, concerns the fact that there are deeply conflicting messages conveyed by a ‘nationalism-as-normal’ model of state behaviour and state identity in international relations which in turn accords with conventional realist theory. Arguably, Japan’s problem in becoming ‘normal’ is as much a result of the prevalence of this model as anything else. For a country with such a problematic war past, nationalism can scarcely be regarded as an ‘innocuous sentiment’ which helps to bind members of a national community together in a trusting relationship, as one recent commentary naively suggests.¹⁰⁰

A further question is whether Japan’s ‘non-normal’ status – indeed it’s exceptionalism – really matters, and if so, to whom. If ‘normality’ is what states make of it, as a constructivist approach suggests, is there any reason why Japan should deviate from what has been ‘normal’ for itself in terms of its pacifist credentials? Could this not be used as a basis for a different kind of national pride as well as underscoring a peace-promotion approach to foreign policy and diplomacy, and even to project this as a model for others to emulate? Indeed, a robust form of peace diplomacy has been seen as one promising avenue which can be pursued pragmatically and pro-actively by Japan as it plays to various domestic concerns and international demands.¹⁰¹ All this seemed just possible under the ‘peace and development’ approach outlined by Fukuda in his brief tenure as Prime Minister, but less so under the present administration.¹⁰²

But none of this, in any case, conforms to ‘normality’ as accepted more broadly in international politics, suggesting that in the final analysis, it is not something that every state is simply free to define for itself. It may seem obvious that ‘normality’, by commonsense definition, relates to accepted norms of behaviour among a plurality of actors rather than what any one state may wish to construct for itself. In the context of the present discussion, however, normality in international politics is more plausibly regarded as a product of what the most powerful and influential states wish to regard as such. Thus Japan’s official pacifism is distinctly anomalous for a country with major economic status under pressure from a militaristic US to meet its own criteria for ‘normality’, criteria which many neo-nationalists within Japan are only too ready to comply with. Whether such pressures can be resisted in the longer term is another matter.¹⁰³

Finally, we note the irony that Japan’s official pacifist position has come under the greatest pressure from a militarist version of normality purveyed by the very country that imposed the ‘abnormal’ peace constitution in the first place. A further irony of course lies in the very concept of ‘normality’ implicit in the US’s formulation. In this context it is instructive to recall Okakura Tenshin’s observation, made just over a

⁹⁹ Hughes, *Japan’s Re-emergence*, p.9.

¹⁰⁰ Gustavo de las Casas, ‘Is Nationalism Good for You?’, *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2008, p.52.

¹⁰¹ See Julie Gilson, Building Peace or Following the Leader? Japan’s Peace Consolidation Diplomacy’, *Pacific Affairs*, 80(1), 2007:27-47.

¹⁰² This will be further complicated by China’s ever-increasing economic and military power. See Mike M. Mochizuki, ‘Japan’s Shifting Strategy Towards the Rise of China’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 30(4&5), 2007:739 – 776.

¹⁰³ At the time of writing it is too soon to tell whether the fiasco in Iraq combined with the most spectacular economic crisis in eighty years will together produce major changes in the international status of the US, inevitably impacting on a wide range of issues concerning political and economic ‘normality’ in international affairs.

hundred years ago, that ‘when Japan was engaging in the peaceful arts’ it was regarded (by Western powers) as uncivilized. But when it massacred thousands on the battlefields of Manchuria, it was embraced as a ‘civilized’ – and therefore ‘normal’ – country.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Okakura Tenshin, *Cha no hon* [The Book of Tea], 1906, quoted in Suzuki, ‘Japan’s Socialization’, p.137.