

Graduate Research Essay

‘MEMORY WARS’: THE MANIPULATION OF HISTORY IN THE CONTEXT OF SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS

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History does not exist in a vacuum, but it is ‘owned’ and moulded by governments with political agendas and citizens who want to define their place within both their own society and the wider world. The centrality of history in the articulation of national identity means that Sino-Japanese relations cannot be understood without reference to the ‘memory wars’ in the context of the ‘clash of [...] nationalisms’, as Daqing Yang suggested.¹ The history of war in particular serves as a basis for the evolution of national identities. Professor Fujiwara Kiichi rightly pointed out that ‘[b]ecause society and the state are bound by the same fate - the nation’s fate - war is remembered as the kind of experience that leaves a deep imprint of national solidarity.’² Chinese and Japanese national solidarity is in turn influenced by the belief that the two countries possess a ‘national essence’ (*guoci* and *kokutai* respectively). Political elites usually act as custodians of this national essence and thus it is important for them to control the past with its connotative and emotional meanings. However, while ‘people do learn to identify with their state [...] they also *project* their own aspirations onto it; and when those aspirations are not met, dismay is likely.’³ Thus, the formation of national identity is a multi-faceted and continuous process with various political implications. Here the legacy of the Asia-Pacific War will be analysed both in terms of what role it plays in China and Japan’s domestic sphere as well as how the two states communicate with each other on the basis of the war experience. To contextualise this discussion the paper will focus on the function of war memorials as tools of political ‘education’. To be more precise, the Beijing

¹ Daqing Yang, ‘Mirror for the future or the history card? Understanding the ‘history problem’, in Marie Söderberg (ed.), *Chinese-Japanese Relations in the Twenty-first Century: Complementarity and Conflict*, London/New York: Routledge, 2002, p.22.

² Fujiwara Kiichi, ‘History and Nationalism’, in *Japan Echo*, 28:4 (August 2001), p.38.

³ Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, ‘In Search of a Theory of National Identity’, in L. Dittmer and S.Kim (eds.), *China’s Quest for National Identity*, Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1993, p.22.

War of Resistance Museum (Beijing), the Memorial for the Compatriot Victims in the Nanjing Massacre by the Japanese Invading Troops (Nanjing), and the Yasukuni Shrine/Yushukan Museum (Tokyo) will be considered as case studies.

In September 1931 Japanese forces occupied northern China (Manchuria) and created the Japanese puppet regime 'Manchukuo' headed by the former Chinese emperor Puyi. In July 1937 the so-called Kwantung Army used a minor incident between Chinese and Japanese forces (the Marco Polo Bridge Incident) to start their second wave of expansion into north-eastern China, which included the capture of Shanghai in November and of the Chinese capital Nanjing in December 1937. Those actions were accompanied by excessive violence on the part of the Japanese. Numbers do vary, but conservative estimates suggest that at least 42,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed in Nanjing while 30,000 women were raped.⁴ Furthermore, special military forces, such as Unit 731, used Chinese civilians for medical and biological tests, killing thousands in the process.⁵ As the Japanese advanced into South East Asia following their attack on Pearl Harbour (December 1941), they enslaved young women to serve as 'comfort women' for Japanese troops and they also conscripted thousands of men into forced labour. Thirty-nine thousand of those labourers were Chinese.⁶

The collective suffering of the Chinese people during the war has left a lasting imprint. At the same time, one also has to acknowledge that the war deeply affected Japanese society, too. Imperial Army soldiers generally believed that they were serving their divine Emperor and that their country was acting in self-defence against foreign aggressors, and many may honestly have believed that Japan's creation of a 'Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere' was aimed at 'liberating' Asia from the white imperialists.⁷ Thus, a significant number of Japanese were convinced that they were sacrificing themselves for a noble cause. Instead of being rewarded for this sacrifice, however, Japan had to accept upon surrendering in 1945 that it was experiencing national humiliation for the first time since the forced opening to the West in 1858. Moreover, the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (August 1945) appeared to have caused human suffering on a comparable scale to what had happened to the Chinese in Nanjing. This is not to say that in the immediate post-war period Japanese society continued as before. On the contrary, there existed considerable sympathy for socialists

⁴ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd edn., New York/London: W.W. Norton, 1999, p.423.

⁵ For instance, investigations in relation to the well-publicised law-suit against the Japanese government filed by Chinese villagers under the leadership of activist Wang Xuan have shown that 1,070 local villagers in Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, alone died of the plague in 1942. 'Exposing Japan's Germ Warfare', *qhnews*, 11 September 2002, <http://qhnews.com/912/2002-9-11/14@115529.htm>.

⁶ 'Japan Releases WWII forced labor reports', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 18 July 2003, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/885970/China-20-27.html>

⁷ Onuma Yasuaki, 'The Tokyo War Crimes Trial, War Responsibility, and Postwar Responsibility', in Fei Fei Li *et al.* (eds.), *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*, New York/London: M.E. Sharpe, 2002, p.209.

who had opposed Japanese militarism during the war. Also, the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal established by the Allies in 1945 made it clear that Japanese soldiers had done terrible things during the war. It was recognised that the political and military leaders who had planned those acts should be punished while the destructiveness of war itself was accepted as an exhortation to renounce militarism.⁸ To make up for its past mistakes, the Japanese nation adopted collectively the formula ‘one hundred million repenting together’ (*ichioku sozange*). This meant that everybody but in effect nobody had to take responsibility, as Onuma Yasuaki has argued.⁹ This interpretation is rather simplistic. To be sure, many Japanese did indeed blame themselves individually for having supported the war effort.¹⁰ John Dower summarised Japan’s ambivalent post-war attitude towards its war guilt quite well when he wrote that ‘[v]irtually no one in Japan still dreamed [the] old dreams of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere – but, by much the same token, few cared to be reminded any more about what the imperial “army of locusts” had actually done in that short-lived sphere of conquest’.¹¹ One might also add that the debate about collective and individual war responsibility was sidelined in the late 1940s, when it became apparent that the Americans wanted to transform Japan from a vanquished nation into an ally of the United States against the emerging bloc of Communist states.

Many unresolved tensions remained between the PRC and Japan but could not be resolved due to the Cold-War situation. Following the United States’ lead, Tokyo recognised the Guomindang in Taipei as the legitimate government of China from 1951 until 1972. Only the Sino-US rapprochement in 1971 subsequently enabled Communist China and Japan to establish official contacts. The two countries’ joint communiqué finally put an end to the state of war between them (although in practice unofficial economic contacts had already been established under the *seikei bunri* ‘separate politics from economics’ policy). The government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) agreed not to ask for reparations while the Japanese government acknowledged that it was ‘keenly aware of Japan’s responsibility for causing enormous damage in the past to the Chinese people through war and deeply reproaches itself.’¹² At this time the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was also implementing Deng Xiaoping’s ‘Four Modernisations’ while the threat of Soviet expansionism also loomed in the background.¹³ For this reason the potential economic and political benefits of alignment with Japan were

⁸ Between 1945 and 1950 close to 6,000 individuals accused of atrocities were brought before military tribunals convened throughout Asia by the Allies (not including the Soviet Union). Over 900 were executed. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1999, pp.447-48.

⁹ Onuma, p.215.

¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of this topic see Dower, pp.490-508.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.513.

¹² Passage cited in Yang, p.12.

¹³ The Four Modernisations referred to the intended economic and military strengthening of China through reforms in industry, agriculture, science/technology, and national defence. Spence, pp.590, 618-30.

appreciated.¹⁴ After a honeymoon period of steadily improving political and economic relations, culminating in the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1978, it soon became apparent, however, that the 'history issue' could not be disregarded in Sino-Japanese relations. The preceding decades had shown that just too much was politically at stake for the two countries.

During the 1950s, the CCP leadership had started to recognise the propaganda value of the Asia-Pacific War. The Chinese media were allowed to use the Nanjing Incident (or Massacre as it is called in Chinese) as an opportunity to accuse the 'imperialist' American government of having acted in collusion with the Japanese aggressors, in the hope that such media attacks would prevent the United States from re-militarising Japan.¹⁵ Japanese politicians meanwhile had also come to recognise the advantages of manipulating history. Convicted war criminals were increasingly re-integrated into Japanese society and politics (Kishi Nobusuke, who became prime minister in 1957, was a notable example) while Japan was going through a phase of rapid economic development in the 1950s and 60s. The wish of these influential individuals to forget their past coincided nicely with the wish of Japanese society in general to fashion a positive post-war national image.¹⁶ As a result, 'conservative' historians who tried to downplay Japan's war crimes became very popular with the Ministry of Education. However, the late 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of well-researched contributions by 'progressive' Japanese historians and journalists who, in the heated atmosphere of the Vietnam War, were keen to emphasise the horrors of war by using the suffering inflicted by the Japanese army as a showcase.¹⁷ Both these 'conservatives' and 'progressives' defended their arguments with passion and thereby they prepared the setting for the great textbook debate of 1982.

As noted above, diplomatic relations between China and Japan had only been established ten years before and the repercussions of the textbook debate developed into the first diplomatic crisis between the two states. The controversy is interesting because of what it reveals about the 'history issue' in relation to Chinese and Japanese domestic/foreign policy and nationalism. By the early 1980s Japan's 'economic miracle' was in full swing and was being admired by Western observers like the Harvard sociologist Ezra Vogel whose book *Japan as Number One* (1979) became a best-seller in Japan.¹⁸ It appeared that finally this country was lifting the humiliation it had experienced

¹⁴ Daqing Yang, 'The Malleable and the Contested: The Nanjing Massacre in Postwar China and Japan', in F. Fujitani *et al.* (eds.), *Perilous Memories: The Asia Pacific War(s)*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, pp.61-62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.54.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.57; cf. Kasahara Tokushi, 'Remembering the Nanking Massacre' in Fei Fei Li *et al.* (eds.), p.89.

¹⁷ Daqing Yang, 'The Malleable and the Contested', pp.56-62; Lee En-Han, 'The Nanking Massacre Reassessed: A Study of the Sino-Japanese Controversy over the Factual number of Massacred Victims', in Fei Fei Li *et al.* (eds.), pp.58-61.

¹⁸ Kenneth B. Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 2nd edn., Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1996, p.270.

at the hand of foreigners and beating the West at its own game.¹⁹ Consequently leading politicians of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) advocated that schoolchildren should be instilled with a ‘love of country’ (*aikokushugi*).²⁰ They called for a more patriotic tone in textbooks, which in turn sparked off the so-called ‘patriotic education debate’ (*aikokushin kyoiku ronso*). The plans of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to soften representations of the past and influence public opinion were bitterly opposed by the leftist Japan Teachers’ Union. Therefore when newspapers reported that MoE had allegedly demanded a textbook revision that would frame Japan’s actions during the war in a more positive manner, the ensuing debate stirred up strong reactions in Japan as well as subsequently China and Korea.²¹

The Chinese government had its own reasons for reacting strongly to what technically amounted to a Japanese domestic affair. In 1982, China was going through a period of political and economic transition. Deng Xiaoping was still in the process of consolidating his power after ousting Hua Guofeng from the Chairmanship of the CCP Central Committee and his other posts in 1980. As a former protégé of Mao Zedong the latter still had supporters. Furthermore, a considerable number of intellectuals and many members of the ‘Old Guard’ resented the course Deng’s reforms were taking. To counter the influence of his opponents the new Chinese leader had to find ways to legitimise his authority. Within this context, the textbook debate in Japan was a godsend. By firmly criticising the Japanese government he could prove that he was a patriotic leader following in the footsteps of the great Helmsman Mao who had fought the Japanese during the Asia-Pacific War.²² Deng and his supporters accentuated this fact by launching their attacks on 15 August, the anniversary of Japan’s surrender, and 3 September, the thirty-seventh anniversary of China’s victory in the anti-Japanese war.²³ Furthermore, Deng was also afraid that the restructuring of the economy would alienate the Chinese youth from the CCP. Consequently, the reported distortion of history in Japanese textbooks provided him with an excellent opportunity to educate young people about the historical ‘facts’ with particular emphasis on the achievements of CCP and People Liberation Army (PLA). In this way, Deng

¹⁹ In 1983 opinion polls showed that fifty-three percent of Japanese thought that they were superior to Westerners, compared to just twenty percent thirty years before. Pyle, pp.270-71.

²⁰ Caroline Rose, *Reinterpreting History in Sino-Japanese Relations*, London/New York: Routledge, 1998, pp.59-70.

²¹ The initial newspaper stories were not entirely accurate. MoE’s textbook changes had already been made in the previous year. In any case, revisions portraying pre-1945 Japanese activities in a more positive light were carried out: *shinryaku* (invade and plunder) was altered to *shinko* (enter and assault) and *shinshutsu* (advance into). Daqing Yang, ‘The Malleable and the Contested’, p.62.

²² Rose, p.151.

²³ Hidenori Ijiri, ‘Sino-Japanese Controversy Since the 1972 Diplomatic Normalization’, in Christopher Howe (ed.), *China and Japan: History, Trends, and Prospects*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p.67.

calculated, he could promote a sense of 'spiritual civilisation' in youngsters in order to would maintain the CCP's control over society.²⁴

The multiple significance of historical writing became evident in another facet of the 1982 textbook debate. Both the Japanese and Chinese governments wanted to encourage patriotism by fostering histories that would give them more liberty in their foreign policy options. One can see in the Japanese government's quest to develop a new national pride (*minzoku no hokori*) before and after the textbook debate one aspect of this drive to increase Japan's prestige.²⁵ Prime Minister Nakasone was to become the most prominent defender of this agenda in the mid-1980s when he increased military spending and became the first Japanese head of government to visit the Yasukuni Shrine (the significance of which will be explained later).²⁶ Naturally those developments caused consternation in China and other parts of Asia.

The textbook debate also had an important role to play in Chinese foreign affairs. By taking the opportunity to criticise Japanese militarism during the Second World War, Deng was indirectly attacking the United States. In this way, some writers have suggested, he wanted to signal that he was moving away from co-operation with the West against the Soviet Union towards a position of political equidistance.²⁷ Moreover, his criticisms were probably also an expression of his displeasure at the trade talks between an LDP trade mission and the Taiwanese government that were taking place at the time of the controversy.²⁸

Having provided this introduction of developments up to the early 1980s, it is now time to analyse three case studies which demonstrate how the nexus of politics, nationalism and war have been manipulated in war memorials from the mid-1980s onwards. The Nanjing Massacre or Incident was almost disregarded by Communist historiography until the 1980s because it was difficult to publicise an event in which the CCP played no part. However, the textbook debate provided a more convenient opportunity to resurrect this event since it involved Japanese war crimes. The shift in emphasis was reflected in the construction of the Memorial for the Compatriot Victims in the Nanjing Massacre by the Japanese Invading Troops that was begun in 1983. The actual museum was built in the shape of a coffin in recognition of the fact that it is situated on the site of a mass grave, which has been carefully preserved and can be viewed by the visitors. As is to be expected, the memorial tries to convey the severity of the suffering of the Chinese people. This message is also reinforced by personal letters, photographs, a 'crying wall' with the names of victims, and various symbolic

²⁴ Rose, p.77.

²⁵ Ibid., p.70.

²⁶ Pyle, pp.271-74.

²⁷ Rose, pp.57-58. Ijiri notes that 'the "revival of Japanese militarism" is a code-word for the Chinese leadership which needs to make Japan a "scapegoat" when making a dramatic change of stance in its foreign policy [...] ' Ijiri, p.68.

²⁸ Rose, p.143.

sculptures. It is interesting to note that the Chinese government defiantly maintains that 300,000 Chinese died in Nanjing. This figure has been contested by various non-Chinese historians who put the death toll much lower, but it is the connotative quality of this number which counts.²⁹ Concomitantly, CCP propagandists have attempted to emphasise that the Chinese defenders and inhabitants of Nanjing did not cowardly surrender to their tormentors but awaited their end in a patriotic and heroic way. Indeed, the whole memorial seems to confirm Ian Buruma's comment that 'symbols of collective suffering become a kind of badge of common identity.'³⁰ The government knows this very well and for this reason the atrocities committed by Japanese troops have been illuminated in much detail in movies, novels, and other media with the overt or tacit support of the CCP.³¹ The Nanjing Massacre Memorial itself has been designated a 'Site for Patriotic Education' to be attended by school children.³² Alone during the first decade after its opening four million people visited, including school classes from Japan.³³ However, visits from Japan were cancelled in 2002 when the Japanese nationalist Society for Textbook Reform introduced a petition with LDP support asking the Kagoshima Prefectural Assembly to stop school trips to Nanjing. The petition criticised that the memorial was a 'bastion of anti-Japanese education designed to brainwash visitors'.³⁴ This reaction reflected concern that in 2000 the museum curators had organised a special exhibition commemorating the return to Nanjing of former Japanese Imperial Army soldier-turned-war critic Azuma Shiro and that in September 2001 the museum had served as the site of anti-Japanese protests criticising the distortion of history in Japanese textbooks.³⁵

In many ways, the Beijing War of Resistance Museum carries out similar cultural functions as its Nanjing counterpart, but with a significant point of contrast in that its thematic focus is much broader and its political messages arguably more diverse. Built in 1987 and extended in 1997, the compound is 30,000 square metres in size and consists of four main sections which contain a chronological display of Japan's 1931-45 invasion of China, statistical and

²⁹ For a discussion of the 'significance of numbers', see Lee En-han.

³⁰ Ian Buruma, 'The Nanking Massacre as a Historical Symbol', in Fei Fei Li *et al.* (eds.), p.9.

³¹ Chinese films portraying the Nanjing Massacre include *Evidence of the Massacre in Blood* (1988) and the China-Taiwan joint-venture feature film *The Rape of Nanjing* (1995). Written works include *The Fall of Nanjing* by the well-known novelist Zhou Erfu. Daqing Yang, 'The Malleable and the Contested', pp.72-74.

³² *Ibid.*, pp.69-72.

³³ It should be noted that Japanese make up the majority (170,000) of the 200,000-odd visitors. Daqing Yang, 'The Malleable and the Contested', p.67.

³⁴ 'Kagoshima slams "anti-Japanese" school excursions', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 3 July 2002, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/888013/China-120-126.html>.

³⁵ Rana Mitter, 'Old Ghosts, New Memories: China's Changing War History in the Era of Post-Mao Politics', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38:1 (2003), p.122; 'Beijing Gathering Marking Japanese Invasion Day', *People's Daily*, 18 September 2001, http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200109/18/print20010918_80525.html.

descriptive displays, exhibits illustrating the CCP's guerrilla war against the Japanese, and a monument commemorating the 'martyrs' of the war of resistance.³⁶ Some notable features demand particular attention. Throughout the museum three-dimensional illustrative dioramas are used, partly to demonstrate the 'level of development of our construction projects and museum', but also to utilise the tools of political education to maximum effect.³⁷ The scenes depicted mainly emphasise rare victories over the Japanese by Chinese forces (like the Battle of Taierzhuang in 1938 and the Langyashan Incident in 1941) with the intention of showing the war as a 'sacred' (*shensheng*) event.³⁸ The Chinese casualties of war did not simply die but sacrificed themselves in a heroic way for their country. These displays have strong connotations. That combine the spiritual with the nationalist. The alleged thirty-five million Chinese war dead (as represented by tablets with some of the known names) 'will eternally rest peacefully in the great ancestral land'.³⁹

By way of these displays, propagandists try to promote several messages. They want to show that China was a victim of Japanese aggression which inflicted 'national humiliation' (*guochi*) on her while, on the other hand, CCP resistance fighters removed part of this humiliation, thereby paving the way for China's development towards being a great nation under Communist leadership after the war. More broadly speaking, the CCP's representation of the past serves the party's 'image-building campaigns', as Anne-Marie Brady called them, which have become necessary to counterbalance the negative publicity the Tiananmen Incident of June 1989 had caused.⁴⁰ Of course, the construction of the museum began in 1987, but it hardly appears coincidental that major extensions were carried out in 1997 and that recent exhibitions 'emphasise the Communist Party of China's unbending spirit and firm resolution to unite all the Chinese people to fight against the Japanese invaders and protect their motherland'.⁴¹ Furthermore, China's past humiliations can be used conveniently to justify economic and national defence reforms and to encourage ordinary Chinese to support this process.

Ian Buruma has said about the Nanjing museum that 'it demands piety from the Japanese and patriotism from the Chinese.'⁴² It is important to underscore that the two Chinese memorials under discussion here do not

³⁶ Mitter, 'Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987-1997', in *The China Quarterly*, 161 (March 2000), p.281.

³⁷ Museum guide quoted in *ibid.*, p.288.

³⁸ Mitter, 'Behind the Scenes at the Museum', p.289.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Anne-Marie Brady, 'Regimenting the public mind: The modernization of propaganda in the PRC', *International Journal*, Autumn 2002, p.569.

⁴¹ This phrase was used by *People's Daily* to describe an exhibition launched in the museum commemorating the 65th anniversary of the July 7th (Marco Polo Bridge) Incident. 'Beijing Marks 65th Anniversary of July 7th Incident', *People's Daily*, 8 July 2002, http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200207/08/eng20020708_99282.shtml.

⁴² Buruma, p.9.

simply want to humiliate Japanese visitors; on the contrary, the curators and the CCP make a clear distinction between Japanese ‘militarists’ and the ‘people’. The displays also pay increasing attention to the collaboration of Chinese with the occupation forces.⁴³ Importantly, museums in China are intended as a starting point for political dialogue. The last panel in the museum shows an extract from the Sino-Japanese communiqué of 1972 on the importance of reconciliation between two countries.⁴⁴ The same political line is reinforced in the Chinese media. While condemning Japanese militarists of the past and present-day ‘right-wingers’ who ‘follow the old path of aggression and expansion’, most *People’s Daily* articles are anxious to stress that the 2000-year history of Sino-Japanese contacts has been friendly for the most time and that the Chinese people desire an ‘everlasting friendship’ between the two nations.⁴⁵ It is of some interest to emphasise in this context that history is used as a means of political engagement in Sino-Taiwanese relations, too. Chinese sites commemorating the Asia-Pacific War increasingly acknowledge the Guomindang’s contribution to the anti-Japanese war effort in order to facilitate achieving the CCP’s goal of unifying the two countries.⁴⁶

The Yasukuni Shrine and the associated Yushukan Museum have a similar role to perform as the Chinese war memorials, but within a slightly different context. The Yasukuni Shrine complex presents Japanese history in a explicitly nationalistic light, but it needs to be stressed as well that this view of the past has by no means remained unchallenged. In comparison to China, the Japanese political system permits a greater pluralism of publicly expressed views and thus there exist a number of museums which promote a different message from Yasukuni’s. For instance, the Okunoshima Poison Gas Museum opened on Okunoshima Island in 1988 used documents and photographs to document Japan’s use of poison gas during the war. In a similar vein, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum added a new wing in 1996 to house artefacts providing evidence for Japan’s aggression in China. Various other examples could be cited.⁴⁷ What is important to note is the fact that the public system is not obliged to promote a particular policy line favoured by or favourable to the government.⁴⁸

⁴³ For instance, flags, banknotes, and identity cards from the collaborationist government of Wang Jingwei are shown. Mitter, ‘Behind the Scenes at the Museum’, p.283.

⁴⁴ Mitter, ‘Behind the Scenes at the Museum’, p.285.

⁴⁵ Ding Jiaqi, ‘Keeping History Firmly in Mind, Fighting Against Aggression’, *People’s Daily*, 18 September 2001, http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200109/18/print20010918_80501.html; ‘Beijing Gathering Marking Invasion Day’, *People’s Daily*, 18 September 2001, http://fpeng.peopledaily.com.cn/200109/18/print20010918_80525.html.

⁴⁶ Mitter, ‘Old Ghosts, New Memories’, p.123; Daqing Yang, ‘The Malleable and the Contested’, p.74.

⁴⁷ Takashi Yoshida, ‘Refighting the Nanking Massacre: The Continuing Struggle over Memory’, in Fei Fei Li *et al.* (eds.), pp.163-4.

⁴⁸ As mentioned before, the Japanese Teachers’ Union was one of the most vocal critics of textbook reform.

However, the Yasukuni Shrine is nevertheless special because of its cultural/religious significance and the impact this has on Japanese domestic and foreign policy. The construction of the Shrine (whose translated name ironically means 'peaceful country') was begun in 1867 following a period of civil conflict. At the time it was intended as a 'hall for inviting the spirits' (*shokon-jo*) to commemorate the casualties of war. It was believed that the souls of the dead needed to be purified lest they should become 'unquiet spirits' (*onryo*) haunting the living. Concomitantly the process of commemorating the war dead to honour those 'heroes' who had 'sacrificed' their lives in war fitted in perfectly with the emergence of Shinto as a state religion under the Meiji Emperor (1868-1912). By elevating the emperor to the status of a living deity (*kami*) and lending death in battle a religious aura, State Shinto provided the basis for promoting unquestioning obedience to the imperial family and legitimising the militarisation of Japanese society.⁴⁹ The Allied occupation forces after World War II were careful to disallow State Shinto, as was made very clear when an article was inserted into the post-war constitution (Article 20) separating state and religion. It would be wrong to see in Yasukuni a bastion of simmering Japanese militarism, yet traces of the Yasukuni's former significance have remained.⁵⁰ The shrine houses the souls of 2.46 million war dead for almost a century since 1867, many of whom died during the World War Two.⁵¹ Their relatives and descendants of this particular group of fallen soldiers have understandably found it difficult to cope with the fact that so many soldiers died for seemingly no apparent cause when Japan was defeated in 1945. Moreover, many of the former 'heroes' of the Asia-Pacific War were convicted as war criminals. Given the emotional confusion accompanying the post-war reorientation of ethical values it is hardly surprising that even nowadays institutions like the Yasukuni Shrine and the Yushukan Museum try to insert some deeper meaning into Japan's reasons for fighting the Asia-Pacific War. For instance, Ueda Kenji, President of Kokugakin University, wrote in one essay hosted by the Yasukuni website that the Military Tribunal for the Far East said that the Allies had 'ulterior motives' when they accused Japan of having fought a war of aggression. He emphasises that in contrast to Western imperialism 'Japan's dream of building a Great Asia was [...] sought after by the countries of Asia'. The same line of thought is being propagated by the displays in the Yasukuni-affiliated Yushukan Museum, notably through artefacts formerly belonging to 'martyrs', vehicles used by them on suicide missions, and panoramas showing Japanese

⁴⁹ John Nelson, 'Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 62:2 (May 2003), pp.445-49; Pyle, p.129.

⁵⁰ The official Yasukuni website explicitly emphasises that '[w]ar is truly sorrowful.' 'Questions & Answers', Yasukuni website, <http://yasukuni.or.jp/english/qanda.html> (accessed 4 October 2003).

⁵¹ Nelson, p.446.

heroism in action (it is ironic, of course, that apparently Japanese and Chinese propagandists seem to use the same tools to manipulate history).⁵²

Politicians in Japan face a difficult situation. Domestically they win favour with conservative voters if they show that they honour the war dead by annually visiting Yasukuni in August on the anniversaries of Japan's surrender. Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro started this practice in 1985 and many subsequent prime ministers, including Koizumi Junichiro, have followed his practice.⁵³ The LDP has been the strongest party in the Japanese Diet since 1955 and many of its leading politicians hold rather conservative views on nationalism, as the recurrent verbal slip-ups of ministers demonstrate (despite the fact that they are usually forced to resign afterwards).⁵⁴ Many of Japan's most influential statesmen have close ties with the Bereaved Families' Association (Izoku-kai) and the Central Association of Shinto Shrines (Shinseiren); these two organisations promote official visits by public figures to the Shrine as well as encouraging closer ties between politics and religion. Former Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo chaired the Association of Diet Members Willing to Visit Yasukuni Shrine and he appointed to his cabinet three individuals who played leading roles in the Izoku-kai and Shinseiren.⁵⁵ When in 1995 the Socialist prime minister Murayama Tomiichi used the LDP's temporary sojourn in Opposition to present the PRC with an official statement expressing 'deep remorse' for the 'tremendous damage and suffering' Japan had caused during the war, a quarter of all Diet members and five million Japanese signed a petition opposing the resolution.⁵⁶ During the deliberations in the Diet the 'anti-apology' faction succeeded in editing out from the resolution phrases like 'acts of aggression' and 'colonial rule' on the grounds that the war was fought in the emperor's name and therefore the nation could not be blamed.⁵⁷

To return once more to the issue of the Yasukuni Shrine visits, it needs to be acknowledged that Japanese leading politicians are pulled in two directions. On one hand, the influence of nationalists can hardly be disregarded, yet one can also hear voices that criticise the current Prime Minister's trips to the Shrine. In October 2001 Koizumi was sued by a group of 639 plaintiffs for violating Article 20 of the Constitution.⁵⁸ Previously the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party, the Communist Party, and the Social

⁵² Ueda Kenji, 'The Noble Souls of Yasukuni', <http://www.yasukuni.or.jp/english/main.html> (accessed 5 October 2003).

⁵³ Koizumi has visited the shrine four times so far in August 2001, March 2002, January 2003, and August 2003.

⁵⁴ Many examples could be cited since the 1980s, but it suffices to mention one salient incident: in 1994 the then-justice minister called the Nanjing Massacre a fabrication. David Shambaugh, 'China and Japan towards the Twenty-First Century: Rivals for Pre-eminence or Complex Interdependence?', in Christopher Howe (ed.), p.91.

⁵⁵ Nelson, pp.461-62.

⁵⁶ Daqing Yang, 'Mirror for the future or the history card?', p.18.

⁵⁷ Nelson, p.457.

⁵⁸ 'PM rebuffs mass lawsuit over shrine trip', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 1 November 2001, <http://mdn.mainichi.co.jp/news/archive/200111/01/20011101p2a00m0fp004002c.html>.

Democratic Party had openly protested against his plans for the same reasons.⁵⁹ Scylla and Charybdis also await the Prime Minister in foreign policy. Among the souls of the 2.46 million war dead housed in the Yasukuni Shrine are also those of 14 convicted class-A war criminals and for this reason his visits to the site have elicited negative reactions in China and other Asian countries. It was even reported that protesters in South Korea sliced off part of their little fingers in response to Koizumi's 2001 visit.⁶⁰ When dealing with his Chinese counterpart Koizumi has always been keen to emphasise that Japan is a peaceful nation and that the government stands by the Murayama apology of 1995. The LDP's coalition partners and even leading lights in the LDP itself have urged Koizumi to cancel his visits.⁶¹ Yet, Koizumi cannot make too many concessions since Japanese nationalists would conclude that he is weak since he bows to Chinese diplomatic pressure. Unfortunately so far no proper solution has been found which could ameliorate the situation.⁶² As it is, the 'Yasukuni issue' keeps cropping up every year when the Prime Minister's compromises, such as his decision to attend ceremonies at Yasukuni on dates other than 15 August or his effort to deliberately avoid standard protocol at the Shrine, have failed to convince either side.⁶³

History, it seems, will always be an ambivalent factor in Sino-Japanese relations. Beijing emphasises Japan's war-time atrocities partly for domestic consumption, as explained above, but also to extract economic and political concessions. Since the PRC and Japan agreed to waive official reparations in 1972, the 'history issue' can nevertheless be used to make Japan feel obliged to provide indirect relief. Official Development Assistance to China by Japan currently stands at 200 billion yen annually, which is by far the highest contribution the PRC receives from any country.⁶⁴ At the same time Japan profits from this arrangement since most ODA consists of loans which have to be paid back and are primarily to be used for infrastructure development projects aiding China's economic opening up to the West.⁶⁵ Japan benefits

⁵⁹ 'Pressure piles up over PM's Yasukuni trip', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 8 August 2001, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/888160/China-240-250.html>.

⁶⁰ 'Koizumi drops wartime anniversary visit to Yasukuni', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 13 August 2001, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/888160/China-240-257.html>.

⁶¹ 'Tanaka turns on Koizumi over Yasukuni visit', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 26 July 2001, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/888162/China-260-261.html>; 'Pressure piles up over PM's Yasukuni trip', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 8 August 2001, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/888160/China-240-250.html>.

⁶² Apparently detaching the 14 class-A war criminals from the Shrine has not been accepted as viable, and neither has the idea of artificially separating the way the dead are commemorated from official religion found much support. Tamaori Tetsuo, 'The Warped Wisdom of Religious Thought in Modern Japan', *Japan Echo*, 30:3 (June 2003), pp.44-47.

⁶³ Nelson, p.458.

⁶⁴ 'Gov't may slash ODA over military', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 18 July 2001, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/888205/China-260-268.html>. Throughout the 1990s, Japan usually provided two- or three times as much ODA as the second 'generous' donor country, Germany. Marie Söderberg, 'The Role of ODA in the relationship', in Marie Söderberg (ed.), p.120.

⁶⁵ Söderberg, p.116.

most from this process since China is already her second largest trading partner while Japan is China's biggest source of imports.⁶⁶ Japan's foreign direct investment was US\$ 2.76 billion in the first six months of 2003 and China-Japan trade reached US\$ 60.9 billion in the same time period. On the whole the Sino-Japanese economic partnership has great potential and could become a gradual counterweight to the legacy of the war. Yet, even in this field one has to be aware of certain caveats. Japan's increasing penetration of the Chinese market fosters suspicions that Japan tries to revive her wartime goal of creating a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere while some Japanese are equally afraid of China's economic growth.⁶⁷ ODA in particular has come under fire in Japan because it has been argued that the PRC needs no financial assistance anymore since but that instead the PRC uses the credits to modernise the People's Liberation Army.⁶⁸

Tokyo's security alliance with the United States, which the CCP leadership perceives as being directed against itself, and corollary issues like Chinese apprehension over the perceived resurgence Japanese militarism and the unsettled status of Taiwan and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands cause additional friction. Much could be written on the significance of those four factors alone, but suffice it to say in the context of this essay that they exacerbate the historically-founded 'clash of nationalisms'. Politicians both in China and Japan have to tread very carefully. They face the dilemma that they should not appear to be too accommodating, as CCP Secretary General Hu Yaobang found out to his detriment. He had cultivated personal ties with Prime Minister Nakasone and when the latter visited China in 1986, he openly boasted of his friendship with Hu while criticising CCP conservatives for blocking reform in China. Subsequently the CCP Secretary General's critics claimed that he had become a tool of the Japanese in the same fashion as the wartime puppet leader Wang Jingwei had been.⁶⁹ Japanese politics present a mirror image of this. Hardline nationalist politicians like Ishihara Shintaro (the author of the best-seller *Japan That Can Say No*) are integrated into a political patronage networks (*habatsu*) that give them a voice in government (Ishihara's son is currently the Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport in Koizumi's cabinet).⁷⁰ Consequently Japanese cabinets are constrained in their policy choices and they cannot afford to appear 'soft' when communicating with their Chinese counterparts.

⁶⁶ 'China and Japan', *Japan Echo*, 28:2 (April 2001), p.8; 'China-Japan Trade to Exceed US\$ 130bn in 2005, Experts', *People's Daily*, 18 August 2003, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200308/18/eng20030818_122485.shtml.

⁶⁷ Christopher Howe, 'Introduction', in Christopher Howe (ed.), p.10.

⁶⁸ Söderberg, 118-27; 'Gov't may slash ODA over military', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 18 July 2001, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/888205/China-260-268.html>.

⁶⁹ Hidenori Ijiri, 'Sino-Japanese Controversy since the 1972 Diplomatic Normalization', p.76.

⁷⁰ 'Cabinet Profile: Ishihara Nobuteru', *Japan Times*, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?gc20030923a9.htm> (accessed 12 October 2003). For an excellent analysis of the dynamic of 'factions' (*habatsu*) see Park Cheol Hee, 'Factional Dynamics in Japan's LDP Since Political Reform', in *Asian Survey*, 41:3 (May/June 2001), pp.428-61.

Yet, the gradual building-up of a partnership can be mutually advantageous. Sino-Japanese government-to-government contacts have become better rather than worse with the passing of the wartime generation. Premier Zhu Rongji's conciliatory appearance during his visit in autumn 2000 certainly has shown that there is scope for bonding. Room for manoeuvre, however, is currently still limited since Zhu was heavily criticised in China for saying that he did not think contemporary Japanese 'should have to bear responsibility for a war perpetrated by [the forces of] militarism'.⁷¹ Furthermore, closer economic ties and the realisation that conflict would have mutually destabilising effects have encouraged leading statesmen in both countries to emphasise their peaceful intentions when dealing with each other.⁷² Hu Jintao and his backers have realised that criticising Japan only plays into the hands of CCP conservatives who want to slow down the PRC's opening to the West.⁷³ Moreover, it has also become apparent that China and Japan share strategic interests, namely the containment of North Korea, which could be taken as the basis for further talks on security matters.⁷⁴

Government-level contacts between the PRC and Japan have been discussed in some detail, but it needs to be recognised that popular nationalism is of similar significance. Ordinary people in China and other Asian countries still feel much anger towards Japan for several reasons. While using the word 'apology' (*owabi*) for the war during South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's visit in 1998, Prime Minister Obuchi omitted to do the same when Jiang Zemin visited shortly afterwards.⁷⁵ From the perspective of ordinary Chinese people politicians in Japan seem unrepentant. The recurring history textbook controversies (most recently in 2001), the Yasukuni Shrine visits, and comments by Japanese public figures denying Japan's crimes seem to confirm this view.⁷⁶ Hence there is a very real belief that militarism and the will to expand is prevalent in Japan. To make matters worse, law suits filed by victims of Japanese war crimes against the Japanese government have generally fared badly. For instance, the well-publicised attempts of activist Wang Xuan and 180 other plaintiffs to be compensated for the suffering their families had endured as a result of Unit 731's bacteriological tests were dismissed by the Tokyo District Court in August 2002. This decision was

⁷¹ Kato Chihiro, 'The new matrix of Japan-China ties', *Japan Quarterly*, 48:4 (October-December 2001), pp.63-65.

⁷² 'Chinese FM calls for Promotion of Sino-Japan Relations', *People's Daily*, 12 August 2003, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200308/12/eng20030812_122150.shtml; 'Tanaka turns on Koizumi over Yasukuni visit', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 26 July 2001, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/888234/China-260-261.html>; Christopher W. Hughes, 'Sino-Japanese relations and ballistic missile defence', in Söderberg (ed.), p.81.

⁷³ Tim Luard, 'Anti-Japanese protests worry China', *BBC News Online*, 21 September 2003, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/worl.../3118850.st>.

⁷⁴ 'Time to rethink Japan-China', *Japan Times*, 12 August 2003, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?ed20030812a1.htm>.

⁷⁵ Jin Xide, 'The background and trend of the partnership', in Söderberg (ed.), p.110.

⁷⁶ Kato, pp.64-67.

undertaken not because there was no cause for complaint, but due to the legal fact that reparations had been settled on a government-to-government level and because Japan's war crimes had been committed before the enactment of the State Redress Law.⁷⁷ The same or similar arguments have been used in relation to numerous other lawsuits filed by former 'comfort women', Nanjing Massacre survivors, and forced labourers. As one writer succinctly put it, those arguments have 'some legal, but no humanitarian basis.'⁷⁸ As a result there is a strong feeling among Chinese that the Japanese government ought to take greater responsibility, as was evidenced by the recent online petition signed by over one million people calling on Tokyo to compensate the poison gas victims who had been harmed by the discovery of Japanese wartime chemical weapons left in China.⁷⁹

On the other hand, if Japan had to compensate all victims, this would place a huge burden on the Japanese economy. Many Japanese are annoyed that the 'history issue' is brought up time and again despite Japan's official apology in 1995. Especially President Jiang's insistence on mentioning this problem over and over again during his visit in 1998 created much resentment.⁸⁰ Also, it is being felt that other countries distort history (in China's case by inflating the number of war casualties)⁸¹ to extort money from prosperous Japan. Some ask: why should Japan apologise properly when most other colonial powers have failed to do so?⁸² To be fair, it is also true that many Japanese citizens do feel that they have to take responsibility for what happened during the war by compensating the victims of Japanese aggression. For instance, the Asian Women's Fund which had been set up by the government in 1995 to 'convey to the [comfort women] the sincere apologies and remorse felt by the Japanese people' collected 482,200,000 yen between 1995 and 1998 by way of private donations as an 'atonement' fund.⁸³

⁷⁷ Patrick J. Killen, 'Japan court admits to WWII germ warfare', *United Press International*, 27 August 2002.

⁷⁸ Nicholas D. Kristof, 'The Problem of Memory', *Foreign Affairs*, 77:6 (November/December 1998), p.45.

⁷⁹ 'China nets million Japan protests', *BBC News Online*, 21 September 2003, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/worl.../3116422.st>.

⁸⁰ Kokubun Ryosei, 'Japan-China Relations After the Cold War', *Japan Echo*, 28:2 (April 2001), p.10. Unfortunately, the Japanese media played a very negative role in this matter. The media failed to report that as a sign of good-will Jiang went out of his way to visit Sendai where the Chinese writer Lu Xun had studied medicine. Daqing Yang, 'Mirror for the Future or the history card?', p.25.

⁸¹ Figures for the overall number of Chinese war dead have been increased from 10 million to 35 million over the years. Kristof, p.42.

⁸² Daqing Yang, 'The Malleable and the Contested', p.23.

⁸³ United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, 'An Analysis of the Legal Liability of the Government of Japan for "Comfort Women Stations" Established During the Second World War' (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/13), reprinted in *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 6:1 (April 1999), p.76; Yoshida, 'Refighting the Nanking Massacre', pp.164-65. The Fund supports women's non-governmental organisations,

As the Chinese expression goes: in playing the nationalism card the governments have 'mounted a tiger and can't easily dismount' (*qihu nanxia*).⁸⁴ In other words, nationalism can be a useful tool employed by governments to realise certain domestic and foreign policy goals, as discussed above, but at the same time they do not want popular nationalist sentiments to get out of control.⁸⁵ CCP leaders fear that popular opinion could turn against them if the government does not live up to expectations. The excesses of the Cultural Revolution are still well remembered. Also, unchecked conservative nationalism in Japan could seriously undermine the distinction between state and religion. One also has to be aware of the danger that box-office successes like the history-transfiguring movie *Pride* (1998) can contribute to a romanticisation of the war in popular culture, thereby deepening the historical cleavage between Japan and the rest of Asia.⁸⁶

Conclusion

As this paper has attempted to show, history plays a crucial role in Sino-Japanese relations and for this reason it has frequently been manipulated for the sake of nationalism. However, different forces are at work determining what role history plays. The governments of China and Japan have traditionally attempted to use history as a tool of 'political education' as transmitted through textbooks and museums. At the same time the political leaders of the two nations are trying to foster economic co-operation and to gradually build up a political partnership, too. Current problems related to history such as i) the changing nature of Japan's military, ii) the prime minister's Yasukuni visits, and iii) the Japanese state's reluctance to take full responsibility morally and financially for what happened during the war are being overcome by gradual concessions from both sides. The Japanese government's decision (July 2003) to send military forces abroad for the first time since 1945 and the poison gas incident (August 2003) may have temporarily made dialogue more difficult, but observers have pointed out that overall the new Chinese president Hu Jintao is keen to improve relations with Japan.⁸⁷ In return Tokyo finally admitted in July of this year that

provides money financing counselling services for women, supports research and academic study, and holds conferences to address issues affecting women today.

⁸⁴ Expression quoted in Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen, 'The Domestic Context of Chinese Foreign Policy: Does "Public Opinion" Matter?' in David M. Lampton (ed.), *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, p.186.

⁸⁵ Luard, 'Anti-Japanese protests worry China'.

⁸⁶ The movie portrays Tojo Hideki as a war hero more or less forced into war. Kristof, pp.40-41.

⁸⁷ 'Time to rethink Japan-China', *Japan Times*, 12 August 2003, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?ed20030812a1.htm>. The poison gas incident occurred when Chinese workers found barrels containing Japanese World-War II-era poison gas. Forty-three of them suffered injuries and one died.

Japan had used forced labour during the war and in September a Japanese court delivered a 'historic verdict' awarding compensation to victims and relatives of people who had come in contact with abandoned Japanese poison gas.⁸⁸

While government-to-government contacts between China and Japan slowly but gradually improve, the same cannot be said about mutual perceptions at the popular level.⁸⁹ Prejudices play a very negative role and as long as they are not addressed with honesty, co-operation between the two countries will remain strained (especially if tensions are compounded by economic competition). History will only truly be overcome if it is viewed and assessed dispassionately by all countries involved in the Asia-Pacific War. This implies that Japan must fully accept morally and legally the fact that she did wage an aggressive war while finding some acceptable way to compensate the victims. Conversely, the Chinese people must understand that their own history is not free from guilt. Demonising Japan is a rather questionable exercise, given that the PRC's own human rights standards are open to condemnation.

⁸⁸ 'Japan releases WWII forced labor reports', *Mainichi Shimbun*, 18 July 2003, <http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/mdn/search-news/885970/China-20-27.html>; 'Japanese Court Awards Poison Gas Victims', 30 September 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,1280,-3206959,00.html>.

⁸⁹ A survey of popular Chinese attitudes conducted in 1999 showed that Japan ranked as the most unpopular nation. This negative assessment referred to Japan's wartime behaviour, the belief that Japan still has hegemonist ambitions (*baquan yexin*), and that Japanese people continue to discriminate against Chinese people. Conversely, Japan's image of China has suffered too. The most positive results were recorded in 1980, when 76.6 percent of respondents indicated that they had friendly feelings towards the PRC. After the Tiananmen Incident, however, the ratio plunged to 51.6 percent, and by 2000 it was down to 48.8 percent. Chinese survey cited in Fewsmith and Rosen, p.162. The Japanese opinion poll can be found in Ma Licheng, 'New Thinking on Sino-Japanese Relations', *Japan Echo*, 30:3 (June 2003), p.39.