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## JAPAN'S POSTWAR AMBIGUITY

## The war, denials and the future

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Two articles by Hisahiko Okazaki in the Japan Times Weekly International Edition in recent months are built around the issue of the "comfort women." In one of the articles, Okazaki states that a "decent" (*matomona*) person "is one who does not lie," and that being such a person "is the minimum requirement of a member of civil society." However, the remainder of the articles are a maze of illogic leading to Okazaki's recommendation that references to the women should not occur in history textbooks. This is combined with other recommendations, including the "wisdom" and "courage" of, in effect, lying, by which, Okazaki suggests, "Japan will be able at last to resolve its postwar ambiguities."

Two basic issues are involved 50 years after the war in Asia and in continual historical research, denial, further disclosures, admissions and apologies: historical truth, and the telling of it, and the moral integrity of a nation, most particularly a nation that plays a prominent position on the world stage. The two issues are inseparably intertwined. And if there is a black mark against a nation's record, and a severe one, the theme recently raised by the educational academics and some in the media insistent on denial: How to educate the future generations of a nation's citizenry to be proud of their country?

The essence of the "comfort women" issue and the Japanese government's establishment of a private foundation to transfer indirect and direct forms of compensation — after 50 years of silence and inaction — is the denial of responsibility. But the denial is much broader than in relation to this one issue. The "comfort women" were just one relatively small aspect of the way in which Japan carried out its war in China, Myanmar, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia and elsewhere in Asia. The only way to understand and to come to terms with Japan's "postwar ambiguities" is to look at all of it. And the best way to do that is to use the testimony of Japanese citizens who were in the countries that Japan invaded and occupied during the war years.

In the late 1970s, the Soka Gakkai youth division amassed some 56 volumes of oral testimony in the series titled "Senso O Shiranai Sedai E" ("To the Generations Who Do Not Know War"). Those who describe their experiences are not Okazaki's "radical elements," but infantrymen and other front-line soldiers, officers, medical personnel, settlers in Manchuria and China, their wives, teenage agricultural volunteers, Japanese civilians on Okinawa, and so forth. Two volumes of extracts were published in English by The Japan Times in

1982, and it is to one of these, "Peace Is Our Duty," that I will refer to most, together with a more recent compilation of Japanese oral histories, "Japan at War: An Oral History," edited by Haruko Taga Cook and Theodore F. Cook and published in 1992.

The Soka Gakkai volume describes the following:

- The total destruction of Chinese villages, burning all houses, killing all inhabitants (pages 41-42, 63, 128): These were very likely part of the "punitive expeditions" and "rural pacification" that were part of Gen. Okamura's "three all" policy program in North China in 1941 and 1942: *sankō-seisaku*, "kill all, burn all, destroy all."

- The killing of all prisoners: by beheading, bayoneting, burning alive, machine gunning and so on (pages 48-50, 53, 66, 115-116, 122).

- The use of live Chinese captives, including children, for bayonet practice by newly arriving Japanese infantry recruits in China (pages 53, 98, 113, 116, 122, 127, 133): Since every infantry recruit presented in the book describes the exercise as routine, it would appear to have been, if not universal, a very widely practiced part of their training. Myanmarese villagers suffered the same fate as well. The Life magazine "Special Issue: Japan" of Sept. 11, 1964, carries a photograph of such a bayoneting being carried out on Chinese prisoners by a half-dozen Japanese infantrymen, being observed by 50 or more of their colleagues standing around them in a circle.

- The beheading of Chinese captives by officer candidates as qualification to lead troops in combat: In the 1992 volume by the Cooks, Tominaga Shōzō describes his own experience in which 22 new officer candidates, including himself, carried out the beheadings in front of their regimental, battalion and company commanders, seated in a row before them. It was their "trial of courage," without which they would not be qualified as platoon leaders. Later, as a company commander, he explains that in the training of new conscripts, among the "planned exercises for these men, as the last stage of their training, we made them bayonet a living human," corroborating the oral histories quoted above.

- The rape, mass rape, of Chinese women (pages 95, 105, 129, 131): This took place to an extraordinary degree in all the areas occupied by Japanese troops during the war, far in excess of the wartime experiences elsewhere.

- Japanese field surgeons performing dissections on a live Chinese prisoner (page 137): This practice was more widely followed by the Japanese Army's field organizations that carried out biological warfare operations in China: Unit 731 under Gen. Shiro Ishii, Unit 100 under Yūgiro Wakamatsu, Unit Ei 1644 under Tomosada Masuda, and a fourth organization under the command of Lt.

General Masaji Kitano.

- Japanese combat personnel killed Japanese civilians on Okinawa who attempted to flee the combat area to safety in June 1945 (pages 84-85): This included women and children, and was done by shooting and the use of grenades. The same had taken place in July 1944 on Saipan Island.

This compilation is far from exhaustive, especially if one were to draw upon other scholarly and historical sources. There are of course detailed historical monographs, both Japanese and Western, on many of these aspects, but there is no room to refer to those here. Estimates of the number of Chinese killed by Japanese forces range between 10 million and 17 million. Since the trench warfare of World War I, numbers like that have simply not been accumulated even with a half-dozen years of bitter combat, except under conditions of gratuitous slaughter. Massacres and large numbers killed occurred in Singapore and the Philippines as well, and the death of between 300,000 and 500,000 Indonesian forced laborers, or *Kyōseirōdōsha*.

What does all this tell us? First, that every Japanese foot soldier in China knew about nearly all of these activities, with the exception of the operations of the special biological warfare units and the events in isolated locations late in the war such as on the islands of Saipan and Okinawa. The same holds for many who were in Myanmar, the Philippines and Indonesia. And, of course, every junior officer and every senior officer knew. And if they are presently alive, front-line troops and officers alike, they still know it, though if they are questioned, many frequently say that they never talk about it, which is understandable given the nature of the experiences. However, in the eight years between 1986 and 1994, no fewer than four Japanese Cabinet ministers were forced to resign because they made statements that denied one kind or another of Japan's wartime activities. Others escaped resignation by forced "withdrawals" and retractions of their remarks, and the same had occurred before 1986 as well. As late as October 1994, present Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto stated in the Diet that "it was a matter of delicate definition whether Japan had committed aggression against Asian neighbors during the war." The above testimony also tells us that there is every reason to assume that the former senior Liberal-Democratic ministers who were forced to resign or to retract statements knew very well that their claims of innocence and ignorance of any Japanese wartime wrongdoing were dishonest.

The basis of recovery is acknowledgment, the precise opposite of denial. New generations learn to be proud of their country when they are given a nation that emerges from a darker past and that behaves in ways to be proud of. There is no other way, and it certainly

cannot be done by denial, by the continual propagation of evasions, ignorance and irresponsibility, of a fictional, make-believe history. You cannot teach a nation that way. On top of the original criminal behavior, it becomes a rot at the heart and soul of the nation, and only brings further disgrace to Japan. Instead of expunging and eradicating the wrong, it continually propagates it. It is here that the difference between the post-World War II process through which Germany has passed differs so profoundly from that of Japan: In Japan, by and large, the same process has not happened; the 50 years since the war's end were not used for a thorough nationwide coming-to-terms with that portion of the past that consists of Japan's own wartime acts.

In the course of history, many nations and the people in them have carried out outrages against humanity: Spain, England, the United States, Germany have been responsible for conquest, the destruction of native populations, slavery, the Holocaust — and have had, and must bear their burdens. In time, they have acknowledged their actions. In Japan, it seems as if denial by publicists and propagandists gets more pronounced rather than less so and is currently seeing a revival; the two articles by Okazaki and one of the books he champions are symptomatic of it. The same denial is fostered by a significant portion of the LDP members of the Diet. The director of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum could find nothing more than a photograph of "a woman being jostled" to represent the Nanking Massacre, an image that was innocuous and virtually irrelevant, while numerous photographs and film footage taken by Japanese wartime photographers exist. The ritualized apologies produced during overseas trips to Asian neighbors — decades late — are undercut by the months of Diet debate over a single word, as occurred in 1995, and by the repeated disavowals by government ministers. In Germany, by contrast, national legislation penalizes the authorship of "Holocaust Denial." The current generations are not responsible for the deeds of the past, but they are responsible for how those are addressed today. What was done was done. It can't be undone, denied or obliterated. It can only be acknowledged and remedied. A nation cannot have a policy of "*mizaru, iwazaru, kikazaru*" in regard to war and history.

Significant segments of the Japanese political and intellectual elite do not seem to understand the damage that continued denial does to the moral integrity of the nation, as well as to Japan's standing in the international community. By persisting in it, they undermine and destroy both.

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