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Writing 5, The Supreme Court

7 December 2016

Forgotten History and Erased Memories:

Confronting Japanese World War II Atrocities

Americans have an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards Japan.¹ Politically, our nation's leaders consider Japan one of our closest allies and our main bulwark of democracy in Asia. Americans see Japan as a force for good—a beacon of democracy; a true friend of America; a home to modern, educated, developed-world citizens like themselves—in a part of the world where America has few friends. Some even forget that there was once a time when America was at war with Japan. All Americans have learned about World War II, when the US and Japan were enemies on the Pacific front. But American schools teach overwhelmingly Euro-centric history, with World War II curriculum focusing nearly exclusively on the European front. Japanese involvement tends to be boiled down to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the internment of Japanese-Americans, and the dropping of the atomic bombs and their devastating consequences. Because of the emphasis on Japan's "victimhood" in this narrative, history here tends to be highly sympathetic to Japan. But the simplistic American vision of Japan glosses over the shameful wrongs of Japan's past, disrespects all those who suffered Japanese atrocities, and hurts Japan by encouraging a nation that would otherwise deserve its reputation as a benevolent, democratic beacon of hope to fail to be transparent and honest like a true democracy should. While America leveraged its power in respect to Germany and reparations for Holocaust victims, it has never

¹ Stokes, Bruce. "How Strong Is the U.S.-Japan Relationship?" *Foreign Policy*. The FP Group, 14 Apr. 2015. Web. 24 Oct. 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/14/united-states-japan-relationship-poll-washington-tokyo/>.

once used this same power to hold Japan accountable for all the war crimes it committed in WWII. In the aftermath—in part due to US interference—Japanese history has been buried and the memory of Japan's war atrocities has faded like the scent of cherry blossoms on the breeze.

Japanese troops committed indescribably cruel war atrocities during World War II. The most famous example is the Rape of Nanking, when

during the two months after their entry into the Nationalist capital on Dec. 13, 1937, Japanese troops perpetrated a massacre that has virtually no parallel in recent history. Expert witnesses at the International Military Tribunal of the Far East, held in Tokyo in 1946 to try Japanese war criminals, estimated that some 260,000 noncombatants were slaughtered in cold blood. Many experts now believe the number to be over 350,000, an extraordinary figure for a city with a population of only 650,000, several hundred thousand of whom had already fled. The carnage was the result of a secret order sent to Japanese forces in China under the seal of Prince Asaka, uncle of Emperor Hirohito: "Kill all captives." Soon competitions arose among soldiers to see who could kill most efficiently.

After being coaxed into surrendering with promises of fair treatment, prisoners were shot, blown up with hand grenades, bayoneted or decapitated. During the same period, tens of thousands of Chinese women were raped, often in schools and nunneries. Thousands more were put into sexual slavery. In fact, Japan's first wartime "facility for sexual comfort" opened in Nanking in 1938, with Chinese women forced into prostitution referred to in Japanese as "public toilets."²

The devastation and human toll were so appalling that a Nazi official, John Rabe, was horrified and sent a report to Berlin headquarters condemning the invading Japanese troops' violence. In an act ripe with irony, Rabe used the Nazi flag to construct makeshift shelters for hundreds of civilian Chinese refugees.³ But despite efforts like Rabe's, the Japanese massacre was an unstoppable wave of cruelty, leaving bloody devastation and agony in its wake.

Indeed, the Rape of Nanking was not an isolated incident. Although exceptionally horrific due to its scope and extent, it is only one example of inhumane war crimes committed by

² Schell, Orville. "Bearing Witness." *The New York Times*. New York Times Co., 14 Dec. 1997. Web. 23 Oct. 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/books/97/12/14/reviews/971214.14schell.html>.

³ Dowell, Pat. "Shelter Under The Swastika: The John Rabe Story." *NPR*. NPR, 24 June 2010. Web. 14 Oct. 2016. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127482829>.

Japanese troops during World War II. The invading troops treated opposition soldiers and civilians with utter disregard for life and humanity, committing acts that included everything from sadistic torture of American prisoners of war, to cannibalism, to using Indian soldiers for live target practice.⁴ Japanese military scientists used foreign civilians as test subjects for “experiments,” like hanging them upside down until they choked, burying them alive, injecting air into their veins, placing them in high-pressure or poison gas chambers, freezing them until they died of frostbite, and drilling or sawing their skulls.⁵ Even infants and children were experimented on.⁶ It is undeniable that Japanese war atrocities were appalling and barbaric. But while both Germany and Japan engaged in such inhumane behavior during World War II, the big difference between the two lies in how the Allied nations, especially the US, responded to them. Ultimately, what makes Japan stand out is its failure to come clean about its shameful past and America’s contribution to its negligence.

Germany’s postwar narrative is completely different from Japan’s. After its defeat, the Allies occupied Germany and took complete control of the devastated nation. Along with rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure and supporting the impoverished civilian population with provisions, the Allies’ main priority was denazification through demilitarization, dissolving the National Socialist Party, and punishing war criminals.⁷ “The Allies were determined to hold

⁴ K, Jayalakshmi. "War Crimes in WWII: Japanese Practised Cannibalism on Indian Soldiers." *International Business Times*. International Business Times RSS, 11 Aug. 2014. Web. 23 Oct. 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/war-crimes-wwii-japanese-practised-cannibalism-indian-soldiers-1460601>.

⁵ Ryall, Julian. "Human Bones Could Reveal Truth of Japan's 'Unit 731' Experiments." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 15 Feb. 2010. Web. 11 Nov. 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/7236099/Human-bones-could-reveal-truth-of-Japans-Unit-731-experiments.html>.

⁶ Kristof, Nicholas D. "Unmasking Horror -- A Special Report.; Japan Confronting Gruesome War Atrocity." *New York Times*. New York Times Co., 17 Mar. 1995. Web. 14 Oct. 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/03/17/world/unmasking-horror-a-special-report-japan-confronting-gruesome-war-atrocity.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁷ Babb, J. G. D., and Spencer C. Tucker. "Occupation of Germany after the War: World War II." *World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society*, ABC-CLIO, 2016. 10 Nov. 2016. worldatwar.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/960817.

German leaders, both civilian and military, accountable for the war and the mass killings that had taken place in German-occupied Europe.”⁸ The Allies brought German war criminals to justice through the Nuremberg Trials under the International War Crimes Tribunal.⁹ The proceedings at Nuremberg laid bare before the world “the horrors of the Third Reich: the Holocaust, the death camps, the use of slave labor, and Reich’s heinous war crimes.”¹⁰ Most of the guilty defendants received death sentences by hanging, and the rest who were convicted received harsh prison sentences. Along with Nuremberg, the Allied powers held numerous other war crime trials, prosecuting war criminals lower in the ranks. For example, on May 28, 1946, U.S. military authorities hanged Dr. Klaus Karl Schilling, who had been convicted at the Allies’ Dachau war crimes trial of using 1,200 concentration camp prisoners as unwilling subjects for malaria experimentation, killing about 400 total.¹¹ During the period of the Allies’ war crime trials, “the United States was the most rigorous in prosecuting [German] war criminals.”¹²

The US’s response to Japanese war criminals, though, was very different. Japan was responsible for numerous atrocities like Germany’s, such as experimentation on human POWs during WWII; in fact, Japan’s ghastly human experimentation was on a scale far greater than the Germans’.¹³ But unlike their aggressive prosecution of German war criminals, the US occupation authorities never brought the vast majority of Japanese war criminals to justice. A particularly egregious example of the US’s leniency occurred when the US granted immunity to Japanese

⁸ Mueller, Gene. "Nuremberg Trials: World War II." *World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society*, ABC-CLIO, 2016, worldatwar.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/772618. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.

⁹ Babb, J. G. D., and Spencer C. Tucker.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Taylor, Alan. "World War II: After the War." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 30 Oct. 2011. Web. 10 Nov. 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2011/10/world-war-ii-after-the-war/100180/>.

¹² Babb, J. G. D., and Spencer C. Tucker.

¹³ Blumenthal, Ralph. "The World: Revising WWII Atrocities, Comparing the Unspeakable to the Unthinkable." *New York Times*. New York Times Co., 7 Mar. 1999. Web. 11 Nov. 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/07/weekinreview/world-revisiting-world-war-ii-atrocities-comparing-unspeakable-unthinkable.html>.

war criminals responsible for human experimentation with biological warfare, in exchange for the data from that experimentation. This top secret research project, known as Unit 731, was among Japan's most horrific atrocities.

One of the great secrets of Japan during and after World War II was a vast project to develop weapons of biological warfare, including plague, anthrax, cholera and a dozen other pathogens. Japan's biological weapons program was born in the 1930's, in part because Japanese officials were impressed that germ warfare had been banned by the Geneva Convention of 1925. If it was so awful that it had to be banned under international law, the officers reasoned, it must make a great weapon.

The Japanese Army, which then occupied a large chunk of China, evicted the residents of eight villages near Harbin, in Manchuria, to make way for the headquarters of Unit 731. One advantage of China, from the Japanese point of view, was the availability of research subjects on whom germs could be tested. The subjects were called *marutas*, or logs. Unit 731 of the Japanese Imperial Army conducted research by experimenting on humans and by "field testing" plague bombs by dropping them on Chinese cities to see whether they could start plague outbreaks. They could.¹⁴

After deliberately infecting captured Chinese, Korean, and Russian civilians, and as part of the research project, Japanese scientists cut open these prisoners to see what the disease did to humans' insides. "No anesthetic was used out of concern that it might have an effect on the results."¹⁵ Decades later, a medical assistant in a WWII Japanese Army unit in China reflected on "what it is like to cut open a 30-year-old man who is tied naked to a bed and dissect him alive, without anesthetic"¹⁶:

"The fellow knew that it was over for him, and so he didn't struggle when they led him into the room and tied him down," recalled the 72-year-old farmer, then. "But when I picked up the scalpel, that's when he began screaming.

"I cut him open from the chest to the stomach, and he screamed terribly, and his face was all twisted in agony. He made this unimaginable sound, he was screaming so horribly. But then finally he stopped. This was all in a day's work for the surgeons, but it really left an impression on me because it was my first time."¹⁷

¹⁴ Kristof, Nicholas D.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The horror of the war atrocities committed in Unit 731 cannot be understated, but because of Japan's destruction of the evidence, it is difficult to estimate its extent. Scholars and former unit members say that, at the very minimum, at least 300,000 were sickened and 3,000 civilian prisoners were killed in these medical experiments, though other sources report that the death figure is in the tens of thousands.^{18,19} Furthermore, no one knows how many people died in the field tests dropping plague bombs on Chinese cities.²⁰

The blood-curdling war crimes committed in Unit 731 were indisputably deserving of aggressive punishment by the US, but instead, America traded prosecution and the upholding of justice for the germ warfare data Japanese scientists had collected through committing these war crimes.

The research was kept secret after the end of the war in part because the United States Army granted immunity from war crimes prosecution to the doctors in exchange for their data. Japanese and American documents show that the United States helped cover up the human experimentation. Instead of putting the ringleaders on trial, it gave them stipends.²¹

Although the Soviet Union's government was able to prosecute a few Unit 731 members in 1949,²² Washington considered the information from Unit 731 experiments "invaluable in its own biological warfare program"²³ and so refused to bring Unit 731's Director, Shiro Ishii, and his colleagues before the military tribunal. In the end, almost all the members of Unit 731 walked away from their war crimes without facing any consequences at all. And Unit 731 scientists were not the only war criminals that the US let off the hook. General MacArthur, who governed Japan

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Fisher, Max. "Japanese Leader Revives Dark Memories of Imperial-era Biological Experiments in China." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, 18 May 2013. Web. 03 Dec. 2016.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/05/18/japanese-leader-revives-dark-memories-of-imperial-era-biological-experiments-in-china/>.

²⁰ Kristof, Nicholas D.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ken, Kotani. "Unit 731: World War II." *World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society*, ABC-CLIO, 2016, worldatwar.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/759207. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.

during the US's occupation, pardoned all members of the imperial family implicated in war crimes, including Emperor Hirohito, "the mastermind of Japanese involvement in the war,"²⁴ and Prince Asaka, who led the Japanese invasion of Nanking and ordered the Rape of Nanking.²⁵ Consequently, a great many WWII Japanese war criminals walked free with impunity and went on to live long, full lives and have successful careers in politics, academia, business, and medicine²⁶—in large part thanks to the US.

The contrast between the US's treatment of Japan and Germany is perhaps best exemplified if one compares the US response to Unit 731 with its response to German concentration camps. After the Allied forces occupied Nazi concentration camps, they preserved the evidence of the atrocities committed there and used them in the war crime trials that followed.²⁷ In the post-war years, the camps received extensive global media attention and became ubiquitous to the world's understanding of Nazism, and in the decades since, the camps have been preserved as memorials and museums. For example, "the Auschwitz complex has been preserved and serves today as a grim reminder of the Nazi attempt at destroying the Jewish people."²⁸ Immortalizing these sites of war atrocities was and is the most fitting response, as doing so preserves history, protects evidence, and ensures that the memory of the unspeakable wrongs committed by Nazi Germany can never be forgotten. Unit 731, like the concentration camps, held similar damning evidence, with mutilated skulls and bodies, as well as other evidence of inhumane experimentation. But instead of preserving this evidence, the US helped Japan cover up its actions, allowing Japan to blow up Unit 731's facilities "to destroy evidence

²⁴ "Hirohito -- Mastermind of Japanese Involvement in WWII." *Hope of Israel Ministries*. Hope of Israel Ministries, n.d. Web. 02 Dec. 2016. <http://www.hope-of-israel.org/hirohito.htm>.

²⁵ Rothe, Dawn L., James Meernik, and Pordis Ingadottir. *The Realities of the International Criminal Justice System*. Leiden: Brill, 2013, p. 37. Print.

²⁶ Ryall, Julian.

²⁷ Mueller, Gene.

²⁸ Krome, Fred. "Auschwitz: World War II." *World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society*, ABC-CLIO, 2016. Web. 10 Nov. 2016. worldatwar.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/756531

of its weapons and experiments.”²⁹ Additionally, the US censored the outgoing mail of former unit members, so that Unit 731’s existence would remain unknown to the Japanese public and to the world.³⁰

So, why did America deal with war crimes so differently in Germany and Japan? The difference was largely about communism. At the time the US occupied Japan, its biggest fear was the spread of communism, which appeared poised to take over Asia. When China fell to the Communists, who emerged victorious in China’s post-WWII civil war, it only worsened the US’s paranoia about a communist Asia.

With the Cold War intensifying, the government of President Harry S. Truman felt that Japan needed to be moulded into an American ally and a bulwark against the spread of communism. Truman believed that these aims would be difficult to achieve if the Japanese people were alienated by continuing prosecutions of their war criminals. For this reason, the United States called a halt to further war crimes prosecutions.... The decision to halt the prosecutions was entirely based on political expediency. It had nothing to do with issues of legality, morality, or humanity.³¹

In other words, Cold War politics caused the US to forgo the Germany-style aggressive prosecution of war criminals in favor of lenient treatment to garner Japanese goodwill. In addition, the US made a deliberate effort to re-craft the image of Japan from an evil criminal enemy into a benevolent friend and ally. Japan’s wartime enemy status was quickly erased as the Cold War caused the West to create

a confining and oversimplified view of Japan. That view took shape following the communist invasion of South Korea in 1950, when a group of U.S. academics created a sanitized picture of the nation. They portrayed Japan as a land of harmony (*wa*) and the wholesome values of hard work and long-term vision, and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Occupation Censored Unit 731 Ex-members' Mail: Secret Paper." *The Japan Times*, Japan Times RSS, 10 Feb. 2010. Web. 14 Oct. 2016. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2010/02/10/news/occupation-censored-unit-731-ex-members-mail-secret-paper/>.

³¹ Bowen, James. "How the United States Protected Japanese War Criminals." *The Pacific War*. The Pacific War Historical Society, 23 Nov. 2009. Web. 10 Nov. 2016. http://www.pacificwar.org.au/JapWarCrimes/USWarCrime_Coverup.html.

in doing so, they turned the United States' recent enemies into allies who would lend their efforts to the anticommunist crusade.³²

Japan's image was transformed from a former enemy into a benevolent and loyal friend of the US, one that shared its values of democracy and capitalism, a view that has persisted until today.³³ In short, the US saw in Japan a powerful Cold War ally that could help advance the US's Cold War ambitions.

America's concerns about communism also shaped its postwar diplomacy and economic assistance towards Japan. The US used public treaties and agreements to cement a friendship with its Asian protégé, the sole successful thriving capitalistic economy in a sea of communist red. In 1960, a mere fifteen years after WWII ended, Japan and the US signed the "Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security,"³⁴ the first official recognition of Japan's and America's newly forged friendship. It would be the first in a long line of diplomatic agreements,³⁵ and by aggressively promoting close diplomatic ties between the two nations, the US created a strategic alliance it could use not only as a Pacific buffer against communism, but also as a Cold War base for its anti-communist efforts in Asia. These Cold War concerns also lead the US to bolster Japan as an ideal capitalist democracy. During its postwar occupation, the US immediately set to work, helping Japan to enact major reforms that would develop its capitalistic economy. As a direct result of the US's aid, in the decades after WWII, Japan's economy took off in a "postwar economic miracle"³⁶ and the nation enjoyed an era of prosperity and booming growth. While the rest of Asia was battered by the chaos and destruction of Cold War warfare and the human

³² Crawford, Robert J. "Reinterpreting the Japanese Economic Miracle." *Harvard Business Review*. Harvard Business Review, 31 July 2014. Web. 24 Oct. 2016. <https://hbr.org/1998/01/reinterpreting-the-japanese-economic-miracle>.

³³ "U.S. Relations with Japan." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, 11 Mar. 2016. Web. 24 Oct. 2016. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4142.htm>>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Crawford, Robert J.

suffering caused by Communist dictatorships, Japan cemented its position as the exception and became by far and away the most developed, wealthy, thriving Asian nation. In short, to advance its anti-communist agenda, the US had willingly helped Japan to brush its war crimes under the rug, aiding Japan in its deliberate erasure of history.³⁷

As discussed, part of Japan's effort to erase its wartime wrongs involved destroying evidence. After the 1945 surrender, "the Japanese government and military moved swiftly to destroy evidence that might assist in the prosecution of any Japanese for war responsibility or war crimes,"³⁸ and POW and internment camps destroyed all their incriminating camp records.³⁹ After the evidence had been destroyed, it only took time for the atrocities to evaporate from Japan's consciousness. The fact that several of the nations impacted by Japanese atrocities became communist only contributed to Japan's cover-up of history. In the decades after WWII, nations struggling with communism like China, Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia were too weak and preoccupied to demand that Japan apologize for its wartime actions. Additionally, because many of the victims of Japanese war atrocities were from Communist nations, Japan and the US had a premise to ignore their accounts of the horrors they experienced. For example, during the post-war period, accounts of Japanese atrocities, especially related to Unit 731, "were largely ignored or dismissed in the West as Communist propaganda."⁴⁰ By the time communism was no longer shaping essentially all of US foreign policy, nearly half a century had passed—and there is no more effective eraser than time.

In the modern era, Japan has demonstrated the extent of the loss of its collective World War II memory. The Ministry of Japan's website has a very limited acknowledgement of World

³⁷ "Milestones: Occupation and Reconstruction of Japan, 1945–52." *U.S. Department of State: Office of the Historian*. U.S. Department of State, 1 Nov 2013. Web. 24 Oct. 2016. <<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/japan-reconstruction>>.

³⁸ Bowen, James.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Blumenthal, Ralph.

War II wrongdoing. Notably, the government claims that "we must not let the future generations, who have nothing to do with that war, be predestined to apologize."⁴¹ They downplay the Rape of Nanking, omitting the thousands of rapes and glossing over the number of deaths, saying "there are numerous theories as to the actual number of victims, and the Government of Japan believes it is difficult to determine which the correct number is"⁴² even though all reliable sources have estimated the killings alone to number at least 250,000 to over 350,000 deaths.^{43,44} Some governmental officials, such as Former Justice Minister Shigeto Nagano, have even "denied that the massacre had occurred, claiming that it was a Chinese fabrication."⁴⁵ Japanese politicians have denied the history of other WWII war crimes as well, like forced sex slavery and torture of captured civilians.⁴⁶ As to Unit 731, Japan's government has never acknowledged the atrocities and claims it has no records of it.⁴⁷

The extreme right wing in Japan refuses to accept that the unit was anything more than a sanitation team that operated behind the front-line troops while virtually nothing on its activities is mentioned in school history books...

"Most people do not believe it even happened; the rest just want to cover it up and forget about what Japan did during the war," said Tsuyoshi Amemiya, a retired military historian. "Young people don't know and they don't want to know."⁴⁸

Indeed, while other nations like China and South Korea still feel the pain of Japanese wartime wrongs, and their students learn about the atrocities in great detail in their modern-history-focused history classes, Japanese children grow up ignorant of their own nation's

⁴¹ "History Issues Q&A." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 8 Aug. 2016. Web. 14 Oct. 2016. http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q_a/faq16.html#q8.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "BBC News | World | Scarred by History: The Rape of Nanking." *BBC News*. BBC, 13 Dec. 1997. Web. 13 Oct. 2016. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/39166.stm.

⁴⁴ Schell, Orville.

⁴⁵ "BBC News | World | Scarred by History: The Rape of Nanking."

⁴⁶ Tabuchi, Hiroko. "Japan's Abe: No Proof of WWII Sex Slaves." *The Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 02 Mar. 2007. Web. 13 Oct. 2016.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/01/AR2007030100578.html>.

⁴⁷ "Deafening Silence." *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, 26 Feb. 2011. Web. 14 Oct. 2016.

<http://www.economist.com/node/18237081>.

⁴⁸ Ryall, Julian.

shameful past, because their education system contributes to Japan's rewriting of its WWII history. In Japanese schools, history is taught in a way that leaves very little time in the curriculum for the 20th century, and Japanese textbooks gloss over WWII atrocities.⁴⁹ Within Japan, there is also a right-wing movement to further erase any trace of its WWII wrongdoings. For example, a textbook created by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was approved by the Japanese government in 2001 and became a big commercial success. It whitewashed Japan's war record, referring to the Nanking massacre as an 'incident,'⁵⁰ and barely mentioning Unit 731 and comfort women. The outcome is that today, most Japanese grow up not knowing what neighboring nations harbor grudges over. Japan has successfully carried out a cultural forgetting. But these efforts to erase history, presumably done to preserve national reputation and dignity, wind up harming Japan and its relationships with other countries.

Japan's governmental position is blatantly unapologetic, especially when it comes to China. Japan either outright denies the atrocities it committed against this nation, or attempts to undercut their severity, and its government fiercely resists any suggestion that it owes guilt or reparations. Japan argues that its WWII wrongs have already been settled. But in reality, Japan has done very little to make up for or even acknowledge its mistakes. For example, Japan has never paid reparations to China even though China was the greatest victim of its war crimes, as the site of the earliest Japanese invasion in 1937, the source of germ warfare testing grounds and most Unit 731 experimentation subjects, and the victim of the Rape of Nanking and multiple other massacres.^{51,52} Japan has also rejected Chinese requests for DNA samples of Unit 731

⁴⁹ Oi, Mariko. "What Japanese History Lessons Leave out." *BBC News*. BBC, 14 Mar. 2013. Web. 14 Oct. 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21226068>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Schell, Orville.

⁵² Kristof, Nicholas D.

victims to establish the identities of the remains.⁵³ And because of the West's opposition to China as a Communist regime and threat to democracy, nations like the US have never encouraged Japan to do the right thing and fully acknowledge the crimes its troops committed on Chinese soil.

Japanese politicians strain relations with other Asian nations as well, by making insensitive statements and espousing inaccurate claims about Japan's WWII history. Japan's current leader, conservative and nationalist Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is a prime example. In 2007, Abe outright denied the World War II rapes and forced prostitution of Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and other Asian women, sparking international outrage.⁵⁴ The existence of "comfort women" during World War II, when Japanese soldiers used captured civilians as sex slaves, is well-documented. Yet Prime Minister Abe blatantly "denied women were forced into military brothels across Asia, boasting renewed efforts by right-wing politicians to push for an official revision of [a previous] apology."⁵⁵ Another example of Japanese leaders aggravating fellow Asian nations is through their annual visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. Statesmen including Abe have visited and prayed at the Yasukuni Shrine to honor the Japanese war dead enshrined there, which include over a thousand WWII war criminals, most notably fourteen 'Class A' war criminals responsible for some of the most heinous 'crimes against peace.'^{56,57}

“Government leaders and members of the general public in China, and to an only slightly lesser

⁵³ "Deafening Silence."

⁵⁴ Tabuchi, Hiroko. "Japan's Abe: No Proof of WWII Sex Slaves." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 02 Mar. 2007. Web. 13 Oct. 2016. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/01/AR2007030100578.html>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Oi, Mariko.

⁵⁷ Woolf, Christopher. "Why Is the Yasukuni Shrine So Controversial?" *Public Radio International*. Public Radio International, 26 Dec. 2013. Web. 06 Dec. 2016. <http://www.pri.org/stories/2013-12-26/why-yasukuni-shrine-so-controversial>.

degree South Korea, view Yasukuni as a symbol of Imperial Japan's aggressive cruelty,"⁵⁸ and have repeatedly asked for the 'Class A' war criminals' enshrinement to be removed, requests that Japan ignores. Instead, Japanese leaders continue to revere and pray to the war criminals memorialized at Yasukuni along with its heroic war dead, which is close to "a German chancellor visiting Auschwitz or Buchenwald in the midst of some disagreement with Israel. Or a white American politician visiting some lynching site knowing that the NAACP is watching."⁵⁹ Yet another case of the seemingly endless Japanese political provocation of its neighbors involves celebrating the number "731," which, in much of Asia, is as infamous a symbol for WWII war atrocities as the Nazi swastika in the West.⁶⁰ Not only does Japan's government deny Unit 731's atrocities, but in 2013, Prime Minister Abe posed for smiling, thumbs-up photos while sitting in a Japanese military training jet emblazoned with the number "731."⁶¹ Some Japanese officials claimed it was an 'honest mistake,' but Abe's provocation only "deepened the perception that many Japanese leaders are at best unrepentant about wartime abuses and at worst proud of their country's imperial past."⁶² The media in other Asian nations covered the 'numerical provocation' extensively, with South Korea's largest newspapers [even running] the offending photo on their front pages."⁶³ China, South Korea, and Singapore were especially infuriated, with governmental officials loudly condemning the behavior, some even arguing that "Mr. Abe's photo-op [in the jet labeled '731'] was equivalent to German Chancellor Angela

⁵⁸ Fallows, James. "Our New Champion in Self-Defeating Soft Power: Japan." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 25 Dec. 2013. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/our-new-champion-in-self-defeating-soft-power-japan/282654/>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Gale, Alastair. "South Korean Media Blast Abe's 'Numerical Provocations.'" *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, 15 May 2013. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. <http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2013/05/15/south-korean-media-blast-abes-numerical-provocations/>.

⁶¹ Fisher, Max.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Merkel riding an aircraft with a Nazi swastika.”⁶⁴ Whether such actions are ignorant faux pas or intentionally belligerent nationalistic chest-thumping, they only serve to worsen Japan’s reputation in neighboring countries and inflame fears that Japan has not learned from its past.

Japan’s continuing denial of its shameful history was and is likely done out of fear of looking weak, harming national dignity, or damaging its reputation. But acknowledging wrongdoing does not have to be harmful. Take Germany for example, which has handled its WWII history with honesty and accountability. One important way Germany has addressed its World War II history is by insuring that future generations of Germans will always know what happened. As discussed, concentration camps like Auschwitz have become immortalized as museums and memorial sites, and the Holocaust is a standard topic in Germany’s education system and textbooks. “Teaching the subject of the Holocaust and the Nazi era is mandatory in German schools. In addition to the classroom curriculum, almost all students have either visited a concentration camp or a Holocaust memorial or museum.”⁶⁵ Germany has made every effort to educate its youth so that the memory of the crimes of the Holocaust is not lost with time, but stays interwoven in the fabric of Germany’s identity, a reminder of how far democratic Germany has come and a warning of what can happen if it goes astray. Germany’s government also takes the Holocaust seriously. Germany has laws banning Nazi symbols like swastikas⁶⁶ and expressly outlawing denying the Holocaust. It has prosecuted and convicted citizens to prison sentences under its Holocaust denial laws.⁶⁷ The Allies’ post-WWII treatment of Germany shaped the way it has addressed its history. When dealing with Germany, the US never glossed over Nazi atrocities and leveraged its own power and moral authority in efforts to force Germany to

⁶⁴ Gale, Alastair.

⁶⁵ Rensmann, Lars. "Holocaust Education in Germany: An Interview." *PBS*. PBS, 19 May 2005. Web. 11 Nov. 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/germans/education.html>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Zeller, Tom, Jr. "Holocaust Denial." *New York Times Blog*. New York Times Co., 15 Feb. 2007. Web. 11 Nov. 2016. http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/02/15/holocaust-denial-crime-or-free-speech/?_r=0.

confront its history and make reparations,⁶⁸ thus helping to shape Germany's response to its WWII history. Taking responsibility for and learning from its wartime wrongs remains central to Germany's identity, education, government, and culture. And Germany has reaped numerous benefits from taking this path. Internationally in the 21st century, Germany is oft-cited as the most popular and well-liked country in the world⁶⁹ and has excellent diplomatic ties with the US and the rest of Europe, all nations that were once enemies of, occupied by, or victims of Nazi Germany. Today, Germany is a leader and one of the most powerful nations in Europe. Germany's honesty and remorse towards its shameful history does not make Germany look weak; it demonstrates maturity and quiet strength. If Japan learned from Germany's example and took a similar path, it could gain many of the same benefits, such as a clearer conscience, more international respect, and improved relations with the rest of its continent.

Japan is harmed, to this day, by its unjust erasure of its WWII history, which only demonstrates indifference and disregard for the many Asia-Pacific nations that were victims of Japanese atrocities. Going forward, Japan has a moral and democratic duty to acknowledge and apologize fully for its past mistakes. The positive impact of taking these steps cannot be overstated. It would prove the government to be transparent and accountable, and it would smooth out relations with other Asian nations. The international impact of Japan taking responsibility for its WWII war crimes would especially be beneficial to improving Japanese relations with China. "Imperial Japan's bloody invasion of China remains a major source of tension between Asia's two biggest economies,"⁷⁰ and China's government and citizens still

⁶⁸ Babb, J. G. D., and Spencer C. Tucker.

⁶⁹ Dewey, Caitlin. "Poll: Germany Is the World's 'Most Popular' Country." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, 23 May 2013. Web. 15 Nov. 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/05/23/poll-germany-is-the-worlds-most-popular-country/?utm_term=.758c72c8d8f0.

⁷⁰ Connor, Neil. "70 Years On, Unit 731's Wartime Atrocities Fester in China's Memory." *The Japan Times*. Japan Times RSS, 12 Feb. 2015. Web. 14 Nov. 2016. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/12/national/history/70-years-unit-731s-wartime-atrocities-fester-chinas-memory/>.

harbor serious resentment towards Japan for the barbaric atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers on Chinese soil. In comments understood as a reference to Japan, during 2015's Holocaust Memorial Day, a Chinese governmental spokeswoman said pointedly that Germany's remorse towards its WWII wrongs was "for everyone to draw lessons from, commending the 'attitudes demonstrated by the German leaders.'"⁷¹ Wartime atrocities like those committed by Japan can never be made up for or undone. But there is a difference between the mistakes that Japan made during World War II and the continuing and more enduring mistake of not acknowledging its shameful history. While the first can never be corrected, the second can be fixed. And the first step in moving forward and making amends as a nation lies in taking responsibility for its wrongdoing. National dignity is important, but confronting past wrongs does not compromise it. Instead, it proves Japan to be a nation that has come to terms with its shameful past and has the courage to say so.

⁷¹ Ibid.