

## COMMENTARY

# Japan's Revisionist History

–The ultimate consequence of whitewashing the past could be the demise of Japan's admirable Peace Constitution, allowing Japan to retool its formidable industrial base into a weapons industry threatening its neighbors and possibly triggering an unprecedented arms race and another world war.

By Philip J. Cunningham

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The United States, ever quick to criticize China for human rights abuses, has of late been remarkably silent about Japan's ethical lapses, current and historical.

Japanese politicians and publishers have made a cottage industry of denying the 1937 Nanking? Massacre in which the Japanese killed hundreds of thousands of civilians in the old Chinese capital. This is an offense to Chinese sensibilities comparable with Holocaust denial in Europe. In recent months, major publishers and broadcasters have been bullied to conform and self-censor in accord with the rising tide of resurgent militarism. That tacit government approval is given to such xenophobic, right-wing thinking can be seen in the latest Ministry of Education-approved school texts that erase or evade critical lessons drawn from Japan's bad behavior in its war of aggression.

In the "New History Textbook," the Nanking Massacre is dismissed as a controversial "incident." And the war of invasion is no longer termed an invasion. New textbooks drop references to "comfort women," sex slaves of mostly Chinese and Korean origin who were forced to service Japanese fighting men in the field. To borrow a phrase fi-om the late writer Iris Chang, the abused women are being raped a second time, this time by defenders of the Japanese army who attempt to erase them from memory.

China and the U.S. were allies in World War n, each contributing in its own way to the defeat of Japanese militarism. But the Cold War saw the U.S. tum away from China and embrace Japan, with the result that China's vast suffering, estimated at 20 million dead, was never properly memorialized or recognized by its erstwhile ally. To add insult to injury, the U.S. found it expedient to work with Emperor Hirohito and other war criminals of that era in order to facilitate occupation and bolster its anti-communism crusade. Now that the Cold War is over, it is high time the U.S. lend support to China's valid historical complaints.

But Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who has linked his political fate with the unrepentant rightists at home and President Bush's policy abroad, keeps the unholy alliance functioning, offering vocal support for U.S. aggression in Iraq while hailing Japan's fallen military heroes of a bygone era. As if to secure U.S. complacency on controversial textbook changes, U.S. actions in Iraq have been sanitized by Japanese textbook committees that, for instance, whited out "unilateral" from a recent text.

The cozy Tokyo-Washington relationship makes it difficult for the U.S. to take a judicious stand on anti-China antics such as history textbook revision. Last October, while Koizumi was lending vocal support to Bush in the

presidential race and the war in Iraq, Shueisha, one of Japan's leading publishers, suspended publication of an acclaimed historical manga (comic book), "My Country is Burning," for its unflinching portrayal of the Nanking Massacre.

In Beijing last week, Japanese Ambassador Koreshige Anami defended the publishing of right-wing textbooks as a testament to Japan's "freedom of speech and publication." Why then was veteran manga artist Motomiya Hiroshi forced to retract and apologize for "My Country is Burning"? Why then did the NHK TV network, after getting a high-level warning, preemptively cut short a program on comfort women that laid blame on the emperor? If a Chinese Internet cafe gets closed down, it's front-page news. Why isn't the U.S. equally concerned about setbacks to free speech in Japan?

The U.S. should not look the other way in the face of resurgent Japanese militarism, even though a Japan freed of the constraints of its own reprehensible past behavior might serve to keep China on edge or might add muscle to the U.S. policing of the world. The ultimate consequence of whitewashing the past could be the demise of Japan's admirable Peace Constitution, allowing Japan to retool its formidable industrial base into a weapons industry threatening its neighbors and possibly triggering an unprecedented arms race and another world war.

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