

**Rethinking Peace-Building in East Asia:
The Case of Japan's Struggle over History in
Postwar Era⁺**

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Abstract

What is the relationship between the museum and the state? More precisely, in what way does the publicly sponsored museum reflect efforts by the state to expand its power at large? And how do its efforts contribute to the transformation of a nation's identity? These questions have recently begun to be raised not only in the Western context, but also among Asian countries. In Japan, as in most countries, the museum is not just a neutral public space where visitors come to view paintings, sculptures, or valuable cultural and historical heritages. As with other aspects of Japanese cultural life, the museum has become highly politicized in recent years. Both in their conceptual foundations and contents, Japanese museums established in the postwar era reflect very specific political ends. This paper focuses on one peace museum, which is an important tool for peace-building, Peace Osaka, established in Japan's second largest city, to examine how Japan's national identity has transformed politically and socially in the postwar era. By comparing

different memories of war created in different periods in this public museum, we understand how a nation attempts to reconstruct its national identity through the process of selecting historical facts to exhibit in the museum. Furthermore, through the examination of historical controversy in East Asia, we will understand how a nation deals with its conflicting national narratives in the global era.

Keywords: *history education, peace-building, reconciliation, peace museums*

1. Introduction

What is the relationship between the museum and the state? More precisely, in what way does the publicly sponsored museum reflect efforts by the state to expand its power at large? And how do its efforts contribute to the transformation of a nation's identity? These questions have recently begun to be raised not only in the Western context, but also among Asian countries. In Japan, as in most countries, the museum is not just a neutral public space where visitors come to view paintings, sculptures, or valuable cultural and historical heritages. As with other aspects of Japanese cultural life, the museum has become highly politicized in recent years. Both in their conceptual foundations and contents, Japanese museums established in the postwar era reflect very specific political ends.

This is especially true of peace museums established throughout the country after Japan's surrender. Japan's attempt to use the museum as a symbolic tool to enhance its power and authority points to a new image of Japanese identity – pacifism (平和主義 / *heiwa shugi*), that has been the dominant conceptual prism through which Western countries have been viewed. The growth of peace museum, a symbol of Japanese

pacifism, not only reflects a form of social control, but also implies a historical transformation of the social and cultural environment, and political strategy in postwar Japanese society.

In the past several decades, particularly after the textbook crisis erupted in the 1980s, there has been a proliferation of museums in Japan to commemorate Japanese suffering during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945). Those in Hiroshima (広島) and Nagasaki (長崎) have occupied significant places in Japan's national memory and formed the core of the national identity in the postwar era. The high profile of peace museums in these two cities have dominated both Japanese and English literature about Japan's war memory, with the scholarship emphasizing Japan's recognition of its space as a victim of atomic bombings.¹ However, other less well-known public museums in Japan have produced different perspectives on how Japan views its wartime history and how Japan suffered to confront the difficult process of coming to terms with its war memories in the postwar era.

This paper focuses on one peace museum, Peace Osaka (ピースおおさか or Osaka International Peace Center / 大阪国際平和センター), established in Japan's second largest city, to examine how Japan's national identity has transformed in the postwar era. By comparing different memories of war created in different periods in this public museum, we can see how a nation attempts to reconstruct its national identity through the process of deciding which historical facts to exhibit in the museum. Furthermore, through the paradigmatic lens of peace museum, we understand how Japan has transformed politically and socially by creating public spaces to remember the war in these ever-changing times.

2. Pre-1980s War Memory in Japan

For many years following Japan's surrender, the Japanese people were forced to reckon with the psychological and political consequences of their defeat. The enormous economic loss and human casualties caused by the war fundamentally changed the people's understanding of war and peace. Japanese leaders have repeatedly conveyed to their once subjugated neighbors their sincere remorse and intention to never use military force to settle international conflicts. After defeat in 1945, Japan scripted a new "pacifist" national narrative with the pacifist constitution it promulgated in 1947 as a core symbol of its renunciation of wartime militarism and commitment to promoting world peace. This postwar "pacifist" movement also demonstrates Japan's firm conviction to never again have to relive the horrific experience of war. With this "pacifism", Japan gained acceptance in the international community over its period of high economic growth in the 1960s-1970s.

An alternative side of Japanese "pacifism", or "one-country pacifism" (一國平和主義 / *ikkoku heiwa shugi*) as historian Yui Daizaburō (油井大 三郎) frames it, left Japanese ignorant of their country's wartime responsibility.² A 1967 government survey showed that merely 17 percent of Japanese respondents recognized that Japan did "bad things" during the war. By 1972, this figure had risen to 26 percent. But at the same time more than 46 percent of respondents held the opinion that "Japan had no choice but to fight".³ Another government survey conducted in 1975 showed that over 70 percent of Japanese remembered the war for its "shortage of food and materials" and "atomic bombs". Only 9 percent of Japanese respondents viewed the war as a "war of aggression" and admitted the fact that Japan's aggression caused distress among Asian countries.⁴ As indicated in these public surveys, Japanese wartime memory centered on "hardship and suffering", as

symbolized by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs. Victim consciousness (被害者意識 / *higaisha ishiki*) has become deeply engrained in postwar Japanese society.

International criticism of Japanese textbooks in 1982 broke Japan's international isolation. Japan's major newspapers, such as *Asahi Shimbun* (朝日新聞), repeatedly reported on the foreign criticism directed toward the nationalist textbooks. Additionally, official visits by prime ministers to Yasukuni Shrine (靖國神社), starting with the official visit of Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro (中曾根康弘) in 1985, stirred vehement criticism both at home and overseas. Textbooks and Shrine visitations inflamed the history dispute and disrupted relations between Japan and its neighbors, particularly China and South Korea.

Soon after Japan searched for alternative ways to reconcile with its neighbors. Criticism encouraged Japanese leaders to soften their stance. Aware of the controversy he caused, Nakasone stated publicly that the provocation would not be repeated in the future, because "Japan should respect the feelings of Asian countries" to rid international isolation which would subsequently threaten Japan's national interests and international reputation.⁵ Shortly after his visit to Yasukuni, Nakasone became the first prime minister to admit before the Diet (Japan's bicameral legislature, 国会 / *Kokkai*) that Japanese wartime behaviors in Asia was "wrong" and "it was indeed an invasion", although he insisted that the war with the United States "was completely different".⁶

The stance taken by Japanese leaders changed as a result of media criticism and foreign pressure, particularly after the 1989 death of Emperor Hirohito (裕仁 / 昭和天皇). From this time Japanese began discussing war issues far more frankly than before. This included wide media coverage of Asian grievances, including the Nanking (Nanjing) Massacre (南京大屠殺), Chinese and Korean slave labor, "comfort

women,” and the grisly human experiments of Unit 731. Such self-criticism appeared in the 1991 Peace Announcements of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which explicitly acknowledged Japan’s responsibility for the past wrongs. Also at this time Tokyo courts confronted a number of lawsuits that demanded apology and compensation on behalf of those subjected to the above injustices. Under these circumstances, public institutions emerged in Japan that commemorated the war from the perspective of its victims, but also from that of Japanese self-criticism.

3. Japan’s New Identity in the Early 1990s

Peace museums in Japan serve as a center for public education on peace, aiming to educate citizens on the horrific war and how to contribute to world peace. Japanese peace museums surfaced between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s to commemorate the victims of U.S. aerial and atomic bombings. These included the Osaka International Peace Center, known as Peace Osaka (1991), Kawasaki Peace Museum (川崎市平和館, 1992), and Saitama Peace Museum (埼玉県平和資料館, 1993). Peace museums, however, faced problems in deciding the best way to display war history: they often neglect Japan’s wartime conduct.

Peace Osaka, located in Osaka Castle Park (大阪城公園), was co-founded by Osaka prefecture and municipal governments on September 17, 1991, the United Nation’s International Day of Peace, as “a symbol of a peaceful city”. It initially strove to inform people on wartime destruction and the importance of peace-building. The museum’s approach to realizing this goal, at least initially, can best be described as comprehensive. The three-story museum, with an exhibition space of 9,537 square feet, was divided into three exhibition halls: Exhibition Hall A, “U.S. Air Raids on Osaka and Civilian Life in Wartime”; Exhibition Hall B, the “Fifteen-Year War”; and Exhibition Hall C,

“Voice for Peace”. At the entrance of Exhibition Hall A, we find the following introduction:

The Japanese people were responsible for having caused great hardships to the people of the fifteen-year war ... Through a dispassionate and unpretentious reflection of this fifteen-year war, each of us must constantly strive to exert our efforts toward the attainment of lasting global peace.⁷

From the museum entrance exhibits acknowledged both Japan’s war responsibility and Japanese wartime suffering. Exhibition Hall B clarified this purpose and perspective by clearly demonstrating how Japan struggled over war memories and sought to find a new identity in a wider world in the early 1990s. The exhibition’s five sections detailed Japan’s invasion of China, Korea, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific region. It then turned to the end of the war, as symbolized by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The entire exhibit paid particular attention to Japan’s wartime behaviors in China and other Asian countries by displaying pictures with detailed descriptions that illustrated Japan’s wartime crimes and atrocities, including the Nanking Massacre, Unit 731’s human experiments, slave labor, and the bombing of Chinese cities. By demonstrating Japan’s wartime crimes, Peace Osaka condemned Japan’s militarism and appealed to postwar Japanese society to reflect on this history and reconcile with their neighbors.

Peace Osaka’s efforts to publicize Japan’s dark past, rather than strip Japanese of confidence and national dignity, demonstrated the country’s sincere intention to overcome its militaristic past to forge a new place in the international community, to contribute to “a lasting peaceful world”. Its intention to “educate the younger generations to understand the disaster of the war and the significance of peace in order to enable this

museum to be an international center to transmit peace message and contribute to world peace” was evident in its construction plan.⁸ The narrative accompanying the Nanking Massacre display instructed that Chinese “bodies were disposed of by burning, or by throwing them into the Yangtze River.”⁹ The exhibition illustrated the calamities and grievous losses of Chinese and other Asian peoples by exhibiting historical documents and pictures rather than by concealing the dark history of Japanese militarism. Publicizing, criticizing, and acknowledging responsibility for this history demonstrated Japan’s sincere commitment to making a clean break from its wartime legacy.

Rather than assert a national myth and present an irredentist narrative as the core component of nationhood, Peace Osaka focused on a more globalized narrative and Japan’s identity in the international community. The exhibition created a unique consensus among Japanese peace museums in its condemnation of Japan’s militaristic past and excluded reference to alleged past glories, or a feeling of the nation victimized. It was also the first public institution to demonstrate the entire process of Japan’s aggressive war throughout Asia. As the museum’s mission acknowledged, Peace Osaka was a place to “commemorate those who died not only in Japan, but also in Asian countries victimized by Japan’s aggression and colonialism.”¹⁰

Without question Peace Osaka has served as a pioneer public institution in Japan in its intention to educate younger generations on how to view the past from the victim’s perspective, as well as to teach how to respect peoples of the world, as illustrated in the exhibits depicting Chinese and Korean sufferings. In addition, Peace Osaka provided clear evidence of Japan’s efforts to embrace moral responsibility for its aggression and past wrong doings. More importantly, the self-criticism found in Peace Osaka indicates that Japan attempted to choose a strategy leading toward moral recovery of its

national dignity in the globalized world.

Certainly such a comprehensive public museum could not be constructed overnight. Efforts to create the museum began in the early 1980s when several interest groups, including labor union representatives, World War II veterans, liberal journalists and scholars, and women's rights activists initiated a campaign to advance the project. Their movement won support from then governor Kishi Sakae (岸昌), who founded the Osaka Conference on Examining World Peace (世界平和を考える大阪会議 / *Sekai heiwa o kangaeru Ōsaka*) in 1985. During the election year of 1987, the governor along with the mayor of Osaka, Oshima Yasushi (大島靖), issued as a campaign promise the establishment of a peace museum that would support peace research, which they did after being returned to office.¹¹ Their efforts led to the construction of Osaka International Peace Center in 1989.

Osaka has the largest Korean community, and the second largest non-Japanese population in Japan. Approximately 70 percent of foreigners carry Korean ethnicity and another 20 percent have Chinese and Taiwanese origins, thus peoples victimized by Japanese aggression. This demographic structure inspired the museum preparatory committee to examine the effects of Japanese colonial rule and aggression from the perspective of these ethnic groups, but also from that of victims of Japanese brutal Asian rule. The Peace Osaka preparatory committee had experience dealing with issues regarding dealing with different historical perceptions. In 1985 the prefectural government had established a similar museum, Liberty Osaka (大阪人権博物館 / *Ōsaka jinken hakubutsukan*), that centered on the promotion of human rights of ethnic groups and minorities. This unique structure of ethnic population ratio and support from the local politicians and liberal forces allowed Peace Osaka to make an unprecedented portrayal of Japanese colonial rule and aggression in Asia. The fiftieth anniversary of the war's end, however,

initiated a controversy over the proper way for Japan to establish its “national dignity” that radically “normalized” Peace Osaka’s message.

4. Museum Wars of the Late 1990s

As Peace Osaka demonstrated, after governmental procrastination and an intense effort as well as international criticism, Japan began to make attempts to grapple with the issue of wartime responsibility. In 1993, the Japan New Party broke the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)’s long hegemony over Japanese politics. Its leader, Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro (細川護熙), acknowledged Japan’s war as “an aggressive war”.¹² His statement, however, received fierce opposition. In 1994, LDP members of the Diet insisted that Japan’s war was for “justice” and firmly opposed any attempt to apologize for the country’s behavior. These legislators were represented by the Congressmen’s Council of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the End of the War (*Shusen Gojushunen Giin Renmei*) and the Committee for History Investigation (*Rekishi Kento Inukai*) which advanced the publication of *Daitōa sensō no sōkatsu* [an affirmative summation of the Greater East Asia War] released on the auspicious date of August 15, 1995.¹³

Outside the Diet opposing forces gathered from a number of nationalist groups, including Japan’s War Bereaved Families Association (日本遺族会 / *Nippon izokukai*) and the National Council for Defending Japan (*Nippon o mamoru kokumin kaigi*) that praised the glory of the Greater East Asia War. In addition, a group of nationalist academics represented by Fujioka Nobukatsu (藤岡信勝)’s Reform of Modern History (*Kindaishi no jugyo kaikaku*) and Nishio Kanji (西尾幹二)’s Association for Writing New History Textbooks (*Atarashi rekishi kyokasho o tsukurukai*) initiated a campaign to reform history education.

History, as an encounter with truth telling, has strong political meaning when facts are carefully selected, emphasized, or forgotten. Museums, like school textbooks, are important vehicles through which contemporary societies transmit ideas of citizenship and the idealized past and the promised future of the society. They provide authoritative narratives of the nation, delimit proper behavior of citizens, and sketch the parameters of the national imagination. Given their “authentic” character, museums are particularly important storages of memory, public spaces for storytelling, and symbolic architectures of nationhood. Narratives of nationhood, like textbooks themselves, are always unfinished projects, requiring revision and reinterpretation to remain relevant in ever-changing times. Certainly, museums, as one of the most important public facilities for social education about the past, must tell the truth. However, decisions over which historical facts should be selected or forgotten are dependent on different historical understandings and perceptions as well as different political strategies.

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, in 1995, both the central and local governments across Japan drafted museum projects to commemorate war victims. In the late 1970s, Izokukai, one of the largest and strongest interest groups in postwar Japanese society, exerted relentless pressure on the government to carve a national space for those who sacrificed their lives for the nation. In 1992, the Ministry of Welfare revealed plans to construct a national museum, the Memorial Peace Museum for War Victims (*Senbotsusha tsuido heiwa kinenkan*), that chronicled the events of World War II. However, disputes erupted over which historical facts to select and which to reject. Under strong Izokukai pressure, in January 1995 the Ministry of Welfare rewrote its original plans and proposed a war memorial accompanied by a bland exhibition of Japanese wartime experiences. A government spokesman lamented at this time: “It is

difficult to interpret history in a popular way.”¹⁴ The new project, unveiled on March 27, 1999, materialized as Japan’s first national museum to commemorate wartime experiences, the Shōwakan (昭和館) located just across the street from Yasukuni. By demonstrating wartime suffering of Japanese, particularly women and children, Shōwakan presents wartime victimization as experienced equally by Japanese and peoples from other countries.

This form of collective amnesia is not confined to the national museum, but also found in the Tokyo Metropolitan government plans for the Tokyo Peace Memorial (*Tokyo to heiwa kinenkan*). Like Peace Osaka, it attempted to commemorate the victims of the 1945 U.S. aerial bombings of Tokyo. To present an objective narrative of the entire war process, the preparatory committee first envisioned a comprehensive exhibition that detailed Japan’s wartime behavior. Opposing nationalist organizations represented by Fujioka Nobukatsu’s Committee on Examining Tokyo Peace (*Tokyo no heiwa o kangaeru kai*), backed by the conservative media organized a vicious protest campaign. Fujioka criticized the preparatory committee over its “ignorance” of the war, indicating that “the biggest World War II war crime was the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Tokyo”.¹⁵ Fujioka proclaimed that “people who have no history of pride do not constitute a nation”, and insisted that the best way to strengthen “Japan’s dignity” was to create a “national myth” to show “Japanese pride” and efforts to contribute to world peace.¹⁶ Finally, in August 1999, Tokyo metropolitan government succumbed to relentless nationalist pressure and cancelled the project due to “financial difficulty”. Cancellation apparently signaled that museums seeking to confront not only the nature of war but also the more complicated questions of responsibility must locate away from Japan’s political capital.

Since 1995, conservative forces targeted Peace Osaka. From October 1995, LDP Diet leaders began investigating existing public museums. Their declaration that “the government should not encourage public institutions to disseminate a specific ideology” represented a direct fronted assault on Peace Osaka.¹⁷ This statement gave nationalists and the conservative media the green light to attack the Osaka museum. A commentary in the conservative newspaper, *Sankei Shimbun*, denounced the museum for using “false and horrible pictures” to “self-abuse” (自虐 / *jigyaku*) the Japanese people.¹⁸ Members of Fujioka Nobukatsu’s Association for the Advancement of a Liberal View of History (*Jiyushugi shikan kenkyukai*) joined the affront. Of all the pictures in the exhibits, the Nanking Massacre exhibits were the most intractable. “It is absolutely ‘self-flagellation’,” Fujioka criticized, “The exhibit of the Nanjing [Massacre] was a complete fabrication” and all claims of Japanese atrocities were “wartime propaganda ... just a rumor.”¹⁹ Thus removal of all the “self-abusive” exhibits was the best way to “promote a sense of national pride” among the younger generations.²⁰

Museums are repositories of the past and living embodiment of the nation’s collective memory and identity. Public museums in most societies present an “authentic” and unsuspecting story that presents narratives that shape citizen understanding of a nation’s history. People fight for museum exhibits because public education is so obviously about the past, present, and future, reaches so deeply into society, and is directed by state politics. The recent proliferation of memorial services and museums in Japan suggests that, while memory has become more democratic, it has also become more burdensome.

To promote Japan’s “national pride”, nationalist groups began to pressure the government to order Peace Osaka to withdraw its “self-abusive” exhibits including the pictures of the Japanese army’s invasion

of Shanghai (上海) and the bombing of Chungking (重慶, Chongqing), Nationalist China's wartime capital. On March 1, 1997, these nationalist groups, supported by an ultra-nationalist organization, "The Association of Japan's Public Opinion" (*Nippon yoron no kai*), formed "The Citizens' Committee on Amending War Exhibits" (*Senso shiryō no henkou tenji o tadasu kai*), petitioned the government to terminate all financial support for Peace Osaka and demanded that the museum immediately remove its Nanking Massacre exhibits and "reexamine all its wartime exhibits".²¹ These attacks forced Peace Osaka in July 1997 to withdraw several pictures that lacked identifiable sources. However, it left intact most of the self-critical exhibits. Subsequently, the nationalist forces shifted their strategy in tune with changes in the domestic and international environment.

5. Japan in Transition – A New Face, but Old Story

The turn of the century represented a significant transformation in the structure of Japanese politics. Touted as a "political reformer", Koizumi Jun'ichirō (小泉純一郎) came to power in 2001, promising to remake Japan into a state that possessed strong political influence and power commensurable with its position as the world's second largest economy. Moreover, he declared his support for constitutional revision that would allow Japan to maintain regular armed forces. In effect he favored abolishing the restraints of Article 9 of the pacifist constitution. Upon taking office on April 26, 2001, Prime Minister Koizumi, who at that time enjoyed the highest approval ratings of any prime minister in Japanese history, promised to visit Yasukuni Shrine, justifying his decision by the claim that "all war dead should be honored equally".²² His annual Yasukuni visits provoked strong rebukes from China and South Korea. As many Chinese scholars argue, Yasukuni in Chinese

collective memory is “an insult and humiliating place in the traumatic memory of the Chinese nation” as it reflects the entire history of Japan’s aggressive wars against China.²³

As the Yasukuni dispute intensified, memories of Japanese aggression regenerated anti-Japanese animosity throughout China. Repeated Chinese demands over the next several years for an apology eventually led to Japanese complaints of “apology fatigue”. This vicious circle contributed to a further escalation of ultra-nationalism in China and Japan. Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated dramatically over Koizumi’s Yasukuni visits.²⁴

Tension in East Asia stoked rising nationalism in Japan. Japanese politics has been in a state of drift unable to overcome two decades of economic stagnation and its inability to meet the challenges that transformed dramatically in the post-Cold war world. In 2008, a young nationalist lawyer, Hashimoto Tōru (橋下徹), assumed the Osaka prefectural governorship by promising to completely reform local politics. His party, the Osaka Restoration Association (大阪維新の会 / *Ōsaka ishin no kai*), successfully gained a majority in both the prefectural and municipal assemblies. This party later merged with the ultra-nationalist former governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintarō (石原慎太郎), to form the Japan Restoration Party (日本維新の会 / *Nippon ishin no kai*), currently the second largest political force behind the LDP in Japan. As co-leaders of this party Ishihara and Hashimoto denied the truth behind wartime atrocities such as the Nanking Massacre and the “comfort women”.²⁵ They set as their political agenda to restore Japan’s pride and trust in the global world. Hashimoto’s ambition to reform local politics gained success after the Osaka general election in 2011 elected him mayor of Osaka, thanks to strong support from his close ally, Matsui Ichirō (松井一郎), who succeeded Hashimoto as Osaka prefectural governor. The overwhelming triumph of Nippon Ishin

no Kai dramatically changed Japan's political landscape.

Political change put public institutions such as Peace Osaka, a public museum supported by the city and prefecture, at risk. Although the museum attracted 70,000 to 80,000 visitors annually, conservative politicians and nationalist groups repeatedly condemned it over its liberal stance on the war. In 2008, as governor Hashimoto Toru visited Peace Osaka and criticized it for being "negative", saying that "the exhibits could not give children dreams" and threatened that the prefectural government would terminate its funding.²⁶

The critical turning point came in 2011 when Hashimoto's Restoration Party assumed the majority in Osaka's prefectural and municipal assemblies. At this time Hashimoto vowed to settle the Peace Osaka issue. He first froze all funding over Peace Osaka's refusal to accept his directive, and then threatened to close the museum altogether. Subsequently, the Osaka prefectural government announced plans to renovate Peace Osaka into "a new public education center for children to learn about modern history".²⁷ In September 2014, Peace Osaka bowed to conservative pressure and closed its doors for refurbishment.

The renovated Peace Osaka opened its doors on April 30, 2015 after purging "negative" displays of Japan's past aggression and colonialism. In their place, the museum unveiled an expanded section on the U.S. air raids over Osaka that occurred between December 1944 and August 1945. The museum thus became the first comprehensive public institution to display these air raids. Peace Osaka's new mission reads as follows:

As we reach the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, and with more than three-quarters of Japan's population being born after the war, the role of Osaka International Center (Peace Osaka) in passing down the memories of the hardships of war so that they will not be

forgotten, and conveying the importance of peace is becoming more and more important ... In addition, we have made it our goal to create exhibitions that will help the children who are responsible for the next generation to understand the hardship and the background of the war through grasping the reality of air raids in Osaka and the relationship between Osaka and the war, as well as to think about peace as an issue they can relate to themselves.²⁸

The new mission of renovated Peace Osaka was to use the air raids “to help the children who are responsible for the next generation to understand the hardship and the background of the war”. The entire exhibition carries the overall title of a time “when the world was embroiled in war”. The new message, rather than acknowledging Japan’s war responsibility, centered full attention on the sufferings and hardships endured by Japanese during the war and the condemnation of U.S. war crimes, symbolized by its “indiscriminate-bombing of Japanese citizens” to emphasize Japanese victimhood.

From the outside, Peace Osaka maintained its original structure. Inside, however, the museum themes were completely reorganized. The new exhibits are still divided into four zones: Zone A, “In 1945, Osaka Was Engulfed in Fire”; Zone B, “When the World Was Embroiled in War”; Zone C, “Life in Osaka during the War”; and Zone D, “Osaka Reduced to Ashes, with Many Casualties”. As these titles suggest, the refurbished museum emphasized “civilian damage from indiscriminate bombing” initiated by the U.S. military as a serious war crime. Particularly it uses the two words “indiscriminate attacks” on Japanese citizens to redirect focus away from the raids that Japan conducted on Asian cities. Moreover, it uses the words “cruel death” to describe the pitiful fate of Japanese soldiers and civilians, without informing on casualties caused by Japanese aggression. In shifting focus toward U.S.

war crimes against humanity, Peace Osaka released Japan from its wartime responsibilities.

Another major strategy shift in the renovated museum was its lack of explicit acknowledgment of Japanese wartime crimes and aggression. Instead, it shows exhibits that demonstrate Japan's war as "just". Rather than, as previously, reveal Japanese wartime crimes, the narratives of Japanese wartime atrocities were incorporated into a documentary that introduced the background and development of the Sino-Japanese War by the term "Nanjing Incident" (南京事變 / *Nankin jihen*), a time when "many residents were victimized by the Japanese army". More importantly, the narrative emphasizes Chinese nationalists' crimes against Japanese civilians, as exemplified by the 1937 Tungchow (Tongzhou) Incident (通州事件 / *Tsūshū jiken*), which triggered Japanese animosity and worsened the Sino-Japanese relations. By condemning these Chinese "terrorist" slaughters, the renovated exhibits instruct that Chinese provoked Japan into launching the war. Japan thus should not be held responsible for the war.

The biggest physical and ideological alterations are seen in Zone B, "When the World Was Embroiled in War". Formerly titled the "Fifteen-Year War", this Zone detailed Japan's wartime atrocities as symbolized by the Nanking Massacre, slave labor, Japan's colonial rule in Korea, and Japanese aggression in Southeast Asia. The renovated exhibit displayed a chronological chart dating Japan's decision to attack the United States from the Meiji-era (明治時代 / *Meiji-jidai*) wars with China and Russia before advancing to the Pacific War. The former "Fifteen-Year War" exhibit had also used these wars, but as background information to introduce the air raids. The renovated exhibit, to the contrary, focused entirely on the Japan-U.S. War (日米戦争 / *Nichi-Beisensō*), a result of Japan being forced to defend itself against the U.S. embargo on oil and gasoline exports to Japan from 1941. Japan should

not have to accept responsibility for a war that American pressure forced it into fighting.

Zone C, “The Lives of Children during the War”, occupies the same space that the former “The Daily Life of the People” exhibit occupied. The focus on children represents a change from that on ordinary people in the original exhibit. The room resembles a classroom which reflects Peace Osaka’s important mission, namely “exploiting the reality of the Osaka air raids to help children understand the hardships of the war”. The renovated museum focusing on the “feelings” of children targets directly the nationalist criticisms of conservatives such as renowned manga (漫画) artist Kobayashi Yoshinori (小林善範), who claimed that the pre-renovation “negative” and “self-abusive” exhibits were “brainwashing” children.²⁹ The newly renovated museum is thus friendly to younger generations, as it eliminates all violence and crimes save for the U.S. “indiscriminate air raids”. This conversion of Peace Osaka from adult-oriented exhibits to child-friendly exhibits is an important strategy shift in the museum. Using a child’s perspective on war (子供目線 / *kodomo no mesen*), the renovated museum eliminates any question of Japan’s wartime responsibility.

In sum, the newly refurbished Peace Osaka emphasizes Japanese sufferings and downplays Japan’s war responsibility. All exhibits highlight Japanese victimhood by showing U.S. air raids on Osaka. As the museum conclusion illustrates, all Japanese people were indeed victimized by the war. This sense of shared victimhood in universal terms serves as the foundation for a shared experience and identity of a unified Japan, nationhood built on memories of wartime hardship and suffering. In creating this imagined community, Japan ingeniously eludes its moral responsibility. Thus the museum’s political stance shows the public’s penchant to forget and the government’s fostering of a collective amnesia.

6. Japan Bewildering in the 21st Century

Globalization presents opportunity for revised political, economic and security alignments at both the regional and global levels. Narratives of a nation in museums and public institutions must change over time to accommodate both global shifts of power and domestic social transformation. To serve this mission, narrations reinterpret past actions, rendering former justifications obsolete while configuring a new national identity. Simultaneously, political strategy for history education shifts in accordance with changes in the domestic and international atmosphere. The dramatic change of the Peace Osaka exhibits instructs us on how Japan has transformed socially and politically in the globalized world.

It should be noted that the historical transformation of Peace Osaka is just one example of how Japan has redrawn war memory and how Japan has reshaped national identity in the postwar era. Japan experienced a long period of economic stagnation from the 1990s. Japanese politicians have struggled to rid the nation of the long-term recession to restore Japanese confidence and national pride in the international community. Japanese conservatives led by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (安倍晋三), returning to power in 2012, publicly questioned the legitimacy of the Tokyo Tribunal and denied Japan's wartime crimes. Nationalism or "retro-nationalism" in Japan, as Japanese scholar Nakano Kōichi (中野晃一) points out, emerged with an upsurge of patriotic sentiments and nationalistic ideal.³⁰ Overwhelmingly supported by right-wing politicians, Prime Minister Abe has proposed a bill to allow the Japanese self-defense forces the right to participate in collective self-defense which if passed would in effect render null the constitution's peace statement, Article 9.

Japan has been bitterly battling its postwar memories since defeat. From the turn of the century, numerous peace museums have struggled

to develop their narratives in the face of rising nationalism, with some being forced to reorganize their self-critical exhibits. This tendency does not suggest that Japanese pacifism is at an end. Instead, it demonstrates that a new Japanese identity, a retro-nationalist narrative has emerged with strength. This narrative successfully indoctrinates Japanese people through a shared memory of victimhood that has gained wide support among Japanese. The war is past. War responsibility is over. As Prime Minister Abe reiterated in 2015 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, “We must not let our children, grandchildren, and even further generations to come, who have nothing to do with that war, predestined to apologize.”³¹

In sum, the dramatic transformation of Peace Osaka from a progressive to a conservative museum is a significant victory for the recent battles over war memory and history education in Japan. The museum debates in Japan instruct the rest of us: the issues with which Japanese grapple – history, nationalism, identity, regional and global cooperation – are not unique: all nations struggle to confront them in the contemporary world. It reminds us that history is a significant task for all countries to confront, one of the most important fronts where these battles are fought. It is without question that how to teach younger generations to understand history is of critical importance in today’s world.

Notes

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