E ver since the occupation ended in 1952, an ostensibly muffled and progres-
sive education ministry (Monbusho) has regularly carried out a comparable
"whitening over" exercise (a mixture of both "clean" and "white" metaphorical
whitewash) on the textbooks of the day. For instance, having conceded in 1957 the existence of the sanyû (comfort woman) system of forced prostitution
run by the imperial army in China and the Pacific theatre of war from 1937-45,
the latest history textbooks approved in April this year have been obliged to erase
the whole topic once again. This imme-
diately created yet another crisis for
Japan in relations with Korea and China,
whose women were sexualised for use of the system. And for the first time, too,
some of these textbooks also endorse the
official Japanese claim to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, cloaking relentless pressure
from the reigning bureaucrats at the ministry and the ascendant politicians of
jiminn, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). So one has to suspect that the
whitening out of the comfort women may be followed by similar treatment of the
forced labour system which saw thousands of abducted Koreans and Chi-
inese slavery in the mines and factories of wartime Japan. Even the more
famous wartime atrocities, such as the Nanjing massacre of 1937 and the ghast-
ly human experiments and chemical and bacterial attacks orchestrated by
Unit 731 in Manchuria, may be slated for this treatment.

Already the deficiencies of Japan's edu-
cational system seem to have had a
determinable and deadly impact on the
attitudes of Japanese youth. 'In a 1983 NHK [the national broadcaster] poll of
3,629 people, 10 per cent of those aged 16 to 19, and 11 per cent of those in their
20s, replied that 'they can't tell' whether
Japan waged a war of aggression [in
China and the Pacific]. Those ratios rose
to 20 per cent and 37 per cent, respec-
tively, in a 2003 poll.'

Japan's widely regarded as among the principal victims in World War Two - not so much, unfortunately, as victims of their own government, but as victims of discriminatory American poli-
cies in the lead-up to war, and of block-
ade, indiscriminate firebombing and nuclear holocaust towards war's end. Their
critics have been reluctant to accept that
far the US has passed up the chance to
set Japan a good example. Apparently
superpowers never say sorry, even to
close allies, for inflicting needless
death, suffering and destruction.

The suffering and damage inflicted by
Japan's armies have never been ade-
quately acknowledged in official quar-
ters. But with the revelation of such crimes as a good regional neighbour and 'nor-
mal' country in the 21st century, it seems
to have become imperatively to rectify a
flawed historical narrative. Because the politics of apology have been so exorcising - always hostage to the electoral and other priorities of the
core nationalist support base of jimininn - the apologies themselves have been
largely vitiating by euphemism, half-
heartedness, insincerity and conspicu-
ous lack of follow-up.

At the heart of this failure is the preced-
ing American failure to set Japan, as it
did Germany, as a pariah state in 1945. This was all above the result of General
MacArthur's decision to pre-
serve the emperor system and ruthless-
less war criminals. It is a decision worthy of Hitler himself from being held responsible as
commander in chief for Japan's aggres-
sions and atrocities. Supposing that a
claim, Japan's rearmament and its deepening strategic ties with the Unit-
ed States. It has brought the Suno-Japan-
ese bilateral relationship to a postwar nadir.

There are now two competing visions of 'normality' in Japan. One is the
Japan still committed to peace, a serious
 apology process and good neighbourly relations in Asia. The other is a Japan
which would do away with the restric-
tions of the US-imposed 'Peace Consti-
tution' of 1947, in particular its war-
renouncing Article 9, and free Japanese
diplomacy to adopt a complete reperto-
ry of realpolitik instruments and policy approaches. These would range from
unhallowed armed international peace-
keeping operations to the annexation of
wartime Japanese/maritime/territorial/reserve disputes with China and South Korea, and possi-
ble also a nuclear spear to complement or even replace Western deterrence by its dealing with a nuclear North Korea.
This is potential for friction with
Japan's so far indispensable hyperpow-
nerly. We deeply regret to have caused him [the emperor], so much anxiety''
Prime Minister Higashikuni, 4 September 1945

A sincere policy of apology would make for an easier transition to a more stra-
degically and strategically self-reliant, less
Washington-dependent Japan. A permanent UN Security Council seat could ensure, together with an opportu-
nity to negotiate a lasting settlement of the
Senkaku/Diaoyu islands/resources dispute with China free of aggravating nationalistic emotions. As things stand, there is little possibility of
clearing the increasingly toxic atmos-
pheric between Beijing and Tokyo. Yet
there is some kind of strategy - however
essential to face the inevitable recon-
struction of the bilateral relationship as
Japan strives to be 'normal' and China
to gain acceptance as a global great
power. The huge continuing flow of
trade and investment between the two is
clearly now a vulnerable hostage to a
 dysfunctional relationship. In addition, Tokyo can look forward to more populist
but officially condensed attacks on Japan-
ese property and even persons in China
when textbook revision and Yasukuni
memorial visits come time again.

It takes two

But of course it takes two to set up, and the Chinese government role in recent
eruptions of nationalist resentment directed at Japan is not encouraging.
China muddied the whole issue of com-
ensation for Japan's war crimes and
occupation during the 1970s by setting
aside in favour of receiving a large
pension for Japan's war crimes and
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Notes
1. Dower, John. 1999. Embracing Defeat:
Japan in the Wake of World War II. New
York: WW Norton, p 247
2. Rui Yoshiida, ‘Doudu in Tokyo Tribu-
ral’s lynching’, Japan Times, 4 August 2005
3. Depending on decisions about duration, geographical scope, definition of ‘victims’, etc for the masses, a new consensus among responsible professional historians is emerging which sets the victim tally at around 100,000. See David Akam, ‘New
Research on the Nanjing Incident’, Japan-
Focus, No 109, 2004
4. Peter King is an affiliated fellow at IAS and
a research associate in Government and
International Relations at Sydney Universi-
ty, where he was founding president, later
director, of the Centre for Peace and Conflict
Studies. From 1993-96 he was Professor of
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