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War Museums and Victimization: The Case of Japan and the Republic of Korea

Abstract

One important aspect of the history wars that have erupted in Northeast Asia over the past few decades is the way in which participating states use the museum to narrate their wartime histories. The way these museums represent victimization differs in dimensions of space and time but share the characteristic of emphasizing what had been inflicted upon their people and cities, while deflecting the victimizing that they cause. Yet, in this regard, Northeast Asian museums appear “normal” when compared to other war museums around the world. This paper considers the exhibition of victimization as seen in Japan and the Republic of Korea’s main military museums, primarily the Yūshūkan in Tokyo and the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul. While recognizing that the two peoples’ historical scale and degree as victimizer differs greatly, the paper argues that the two institutions share similar approaches in the way they display their wartime histories. It considers whether there is a more productive means of presenting wartime history that maintains national pride while examining victimization within a more comprehensive narrative that includes what has been endured by nationals but also that which the state inflicts upon others. Placing war responsibility as collective to include states responsible for the breach of peace, rather than simply on the party that fired the first shot, shifts the role of the museum to that of an institution capable of engaging its patrons in peace-building debate rather than the nation-building exercise of glorifying battlefield heroics and commemorating national victimization.

Keywords: Museum, wartime victimization, Japan, Republic of Korea

Introduction

The histories of the Japanese archipelago and the Korean peninsula from the 19th century until the end of the Pacific War could not have evolved in greater contrast. Both recognized the potential threat posed by Western-driven imperialism, and both endured intrusions by peoples from imperial powers early in this period. Yet, it was the more aggressive Japanese that challenged Korean sovereignty following their successful transition from Edo to Meiji in 1868, a process that culminated in Japan's 1910 annexation of the strategically critical territory in the Korean peninsula. The more insular Chosŏn Kingdom countered outside threat through diplomatic means that attempted to play off the expansion powers against each other. The Japanese exploited this "incompetent government" (*akusei*) by claiming that its weakness required their military on two occasions to fight wars to preserve Korean sovereignty, first against Qing China (1894-1895) and a decade later against Tsarist Russia (1904-1905). Five short years later, this served as justification for Japan's annexation of the peninsula into its rapidly expanding empire. Annexation was necessary, it reasoned, to prevent Japan's, as well as the region's, victimization by the imperial powers. Koreans, on the other hand, argue that this invasion took place just as Korea was knocking at the door of modernization. In other words, Japan's decision to annex constituted an eleventh hour attempt to prevent Korea from succeeding, rather than over its inability to do so.

The two states now present memories of victimization (both actual and crafted) as the core to the bilateral historical disputes that disrupt Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) relations. Both states turn to common historical memory conduits found elsewhere, namely, school textbooks, museums and archives, and more recently popular culture, to instil within their respective nationals a spirit of community fortified by shared victimization. Focusing on the war museum, this paper examines how the two states present their victimization narratives, primarily in Japan's Yūshūkan and the ROK's War Memorial of Korea (Chŏnjaeng kinyŏmgwan).¹

Both states use the war museum to explain war aggression in different ways. Japan sees its expansion history in Asia Pacific as its answer to a century-long period of outside threat and potential victimization that compelled it to take steps that forced its military engagement from the

¹ The two museums differ in the Yūshūkan's private status against the War Museum of Korea's public status. Both, however, serve as the primary military museum of Japan and the ROK given their location in Tokyo and Seoul, respectively.

1930s. Korea, on the other hand, uses the War Memorial to trace Korean response to victimization by their neighbours up through liberation from Japanese rule in 1945, and as an aggressive bulwark against communist expansion throughout the Cold War period. Both states share the similarity of emphasizing the personal victimization they experienced while downplaying or ignoring what they caused in the process of war. This paper considers how these two war museums incorporate their respective states' acts of aggression in the national narratives. How do their approaches compare with war museums elsewhere? Does it remain useful to instruct patrons on a nationalist version of the nation's darker histories?

The Role of the Military Museum: Justifying the Trials of the Battlefield

Japanese first encountered the modern museum when they began to journey across the seas to the United States and Europe in late Edo (1603-1868), after Commodore Matthew Perry "opened" the country to the world in the mid 19th century. Machida Hisanari, who travelled to England from 1865 as a member of the Satsuma Domain Overseas Study tour, gained inspiration from this experience to eventually help create the Japanese Imperial Museum situated in Ueno Park.² Participants in the Iwakura Mission that departed Yokohama in 1871 to visit the citadels of modernity in the United States and Europe took interest in the museums they visited, particularly those in England. The Japanese found much of interest at the British Museum, for its capacity to demonstrate progress. Tour historian Kume Kunitake reflected on the value of museums as follows:

Progress does not mean discarding what is old and contriving something which is entirely new. In the forming of a nation ... customs and practices arise whose value is tested by constant use, so that when new knowledge arises it naturally does so from [existing] sources, and it is from these sources that it derives its value. Nothing is better than a museum for showing clearly the stages by which these processes happen.³

² Seki Hideo, *Hakubutsukan no tanjō: Machida Hisanari to Tokyo Teikoku Hakubutsukan (The birth of the museum: Machida Hisanari and the Tokyo Imperial Museum)* (Tokyo: Iwanami shinsho, 2005).

³ Kume Kunitake, *Tokumei zenken taishi Bei-ō kairan jikki (A True Account of the Special Embassy's Tour of America and Europe)*, ed. Tanaka Akira, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 114. English translation from Kume Kunitake, *The Iwakura Embassy, 1871-73, a True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary Plenipotentiary's Journey of Observations Through the United States and Europe*, Vol. 2, translated by Martin Collcutt (Chiba: The Japan Documents, 2002), 109-10.

It was the idea of preservation—both of things and ideas—that encouraged the Japanese to create the Tokyo National Museum in 1872 and the Yūshūkan war museum a decade later. The ROK, on the other hand, converted the colonial era Chosŏn Government General Museum founded in 1909 into its first national museum in December 1945. The War Memorial of Korea opened its doors in 1994.

The planning stages of the war museum system in the British parliament centred on purpose in a way that reflects the messages found in their contemporary counterparts: With what message should visitors return following their visit? Should the museum simply inform or move the visitor in a particular way? Or, should it influence by causing the visitor to reflect over, or even debate, causes and effects of their nation's story? Criticism by legislators during debate regarding the Imperial War Museum construction plans introduced at the close of World War I suggests confusion in purpose. Some feared that the museum had potential to “perpetuate the war spirit”, and others questioned whether it could potentially ‘familiarize youth “with all the barbarism of warfare”’.⁴ The committee charged with designing the museum, however, saw its responsibilities differently, as reviving the wartime memories of veterans and civilians to instil pride over a job well done:

Such a museum, if wisely collected and arranged, will be unique, will make a direct appeal to the millions of individuals who have taken part in the war or in war-work of any kind...when they visit the museum in years to come, they should be able by its aid to revive the memory of their work for the war, and, pointing to some exhibit, to say ‘This thing I did’.⁵

This is clearly the impression gained from the Manchester Imperial War Museum, which emphasizes the total effort to defeat the Axis aggressors made by British citizens both on and off the battlefields. Honouring military duties in this way also prepares the next generation for their responsibility should their turn to risk their lives on the battlefield arise. Thus, the war museum is often targeted as the venue for school excursions where museum guides dressed in military fatigue introduce students to the different faces of

⁴ Quoted in Gaynor Kavanagh, ‘Museum as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no. 1 (January 1988): 92.

⁵ Quoted in Kavanagh, ‘Museum as Memorial’, 84.

war.⁶

The war museum's duty to instil pride was most clearly evident in debates surrounding the special exhibition proposed by the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. For this occasion, the museum choreographed a plan to display both the *Enola Gay's* fuselage along with evidence of the destruction caused by the bomb, including pictures of victims and other artefacts. The stated intention behind the exhibit was to go beyond simply offering a 'historical investigation of what happened, why, and what it meant, but to revisit the American decision to use the bomb in 1945, to ask whether the bomb was needed or justified, and to suggest "an uncertain, potentially dangerous future for all of civilization".⁷ This vision challenged the accepted US national narrative that using the bomb was a correct decision; it saved (American) lives by ending a bloody war while, as instructed in one US history textbook, taking 'fewer [Japanese] lives than the regular air raids on Tokyo had'.⁸ Veteran groups and legislators countered with outrage, even questioning the curators' patriotism. The scaled back version of the exhibition contained only the plane's fuselage.

Though coined in the context of Holocaust memorials, the American scholar Sybil Milton's astute observation that such memorials comply with 'a universal willingness to commemorate suffering experienced rather than suffering caused'⁹ appears applicable to most war museums. Their aim appears as a near-universal trend to instil communal pride through emphasis on the victimization that people share as a nation or the end (victory)-justifies-the-means (of victimization)- explanation for the wartime violation. The exhibition "Berlin 1933-1945: Between Propaganda and Terror" situated at a section where the Berlin Wall still remains, is one healthy exception to this rule. The exhibition exploits the reign of terror that fell upon the city during the era of Nazi rule to 'help make these traces legible, and to help us understand what happened at that time and what

⁶ This was the impression I gained upon visiting the museum on 13 September 2016, a date also chosen by number of elementary schools for their excursion as well.

⁷ Quoted from Richard H. Kohn, 'History at Risk: The Case of the *Enola Gay*', in *The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, eds. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 146.

⁸ Winthrop D. Jordan, Miriam Greenblatt, and John S. Bowes, *The Americans: A History* (Evanston, Ill: McDougal, Littell, & Co., 1994), 756. In 1995, an ABC Special Report titled 'Hiroshima: Why We Dropped the Bomb' was aired in an attempt to address the questions that political pressure prevented the museum from asking.

⁹ Sybil Milton quoted in Susan A. Crane, 'Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum', *History and Theory* 36, no. 4 (December 1997): 59.

consequences it has for our times'.¹⁰

Japanese War Memories: Emphasizing a Victimizer's Victimization

The mantra often heard in Japan up into the early 1980s was that as a “country of peace” it had a responsibility to educate the public on its Asia-Pacific war responsibilities to ensure that mistakes of the past were not repeated. At this time, it was possible to find in textbooks and in some museums a rather comprehensive war history that considered both Japanese victimization as well as that caused by the Japanese military. The narrative at this time characterized Japan’s wartime actions as “invasion” (*shinryaku*) of its Asian neighbours. Ma Xiaohua, a Chinese scholar teaching in Japan, asserts that the Osaka International Peace Center (or simply Peace Osaka), located on the grounds of Osaka castle, was one museum that as late as 2013 offered this rather comprehensive view of the Asia-Pacific wars.¹¹

The voice of Japan’s conservative faction gradually chipped away at this rather liberal perspective of Japan’s wartime history. One important turning point came in October 1978 when Yasukuni Shrine finally succeeded in enshrining the fourteen Japanese who were convicted of Class A war crimes by the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. This new attitude was manifested in a number of ways, such as Nakasone Yasuhiro making the first *official* visit as a prime minister (his predecessors had made unofficial visits) to the shrine since the enshrinement of the “Martyrs of Showa” (*Shōwa no junkyōsha*) to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Japan’s defeat in 1945. Heavy criticism from Japan’s Asian neighbours prevented Nakasone from making a second visit. But his visit broke the ice; every Liberal Democratic Party prime minister since has been pressured by Japan’s conservative elements to declare their position on official Yasukuni visitation.¹²

¹⁰ As explained in the exhibition catalogue, page 7. The International Slavery Museum situated in Liverpool, the port from which many of the slave ships to Africa departed, similarly acknowledges the city’s participation in this international crime.

¹¹ Ma Xiaohua, ‘Aija-Taiheiyō chiiki ni okeru chiteki kyōdotai no kōsaku: Kioku no keishō wo meguru Chūgoku to Nihon no sensō hakubutsukan no hikaku kenkyū o chūshin ni’ (‘The Construction of an Asia-Pacific Region Intellectual Community: A Comparative History of the War Museum as a Conduit for Sustaining Memory’), *Osaka Kyōiku Daigaku Kiyō* 61, no 2 (February 2013): 43-56.

¹² After Nakasone, no prime minister had visited Yasukuni until Hashimoto Ryutarō’s 1996 visit. Koizumi Junichirō (five times) and Abe Shinzō have subsequently made official visits. ‘Prime Ministers’ Yasukuni Visits’, *Japan Times* (on-line edition, 16 August 2006), <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2006/08/16/national/politics-diplomacy/prime-ministers-yasukuni-visits/#.V-NEFZN958c>.

This period saw further developments in Japan to bring the country in line with what some perceived to be “normal” (*futsū*) by contemporary global power standards. While arguments here primarily centred on security issues, particularly regarding the “abnormality” of the US imposed postwar constitution that limits Japan’s military capabilities.¹³ The push to resurrect Japanese “normalcy” also suggests changes in the way that Japan scripts its national narrative. This encouraged museums, both new and established, to ‘commemorate suffering [Japanese] experienced rather than suffering [that Japan] caused’ over the first half of the 20th century. School textbooks were first targeted, with conservative groups pressuring the Ministry of Education to edit from them many of the less attractive aspects of the Asia-Pacific wars.¹⁴ Peace Osaka, for example, closed its doors for two years to redesign the museum as one dedicated to using war memory to promote peace, but from the perspective of limited acts of victimization: the aerial bombings that the Allied forces inflicted on Osaka from June 1945.¹⁵

New museums complemented this revised sentiment. The National Showa Memorial Museum (*Shōwakan*), established in 1999, directs attention to the ‘hardships of [Japanese] civilian life...during and after World War II’.¹⁶ The National Memorial Museum for Peace (Heiwa kinen tenji shiryōkan), which opened in November 2000, is devoted to informing Japanese (*kokumin*) on the ‘hardships of Japanese returnees’ (*hikiagesha no kurō*) from the empire after the war.¹⁷ Both museums follow the pattern of “normalcy” in using the war museum to evoke both patriotic sympathy and consolidate a collective national pride among its citizens. The museum’s demonstration of Japanese victimization is more incomplete than it is incorrect in that it neglects to inform on the rather painful story of the military aggression that invited Japan’s eventual victimization. Peace Osaka,

¹³ See, for example, Andrew L. Oros, *Normalizing Japan: Politics and Identity and the Evolution of Security Practice* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). One American scholar, Richard J. Samuels, traces the erosion of Article 9 from the Persian Gulf War of 1991, a reaction by the Japanese government to its “fumbled response” to this war. See his *Securing Japan: Tokyo’s Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 89-92

¹⁴ Daniel C. Sneider reviews these efforts in his ‘The War over Words: History Textbooks and International Relations in Northeast Asia’, in *History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia: Divided Memories*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel C. Sneider, 246-68 (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁵ Ma, ‘Ajia-Taiheiyō chiiki ni okeru chiteki kyōdotai no kōsaku’.

¹⁶ Showa-Kan brochure, English version.

¹⁷ National Memorial Museum for Peace home page <http://www.heiwakinen.jp/about/index.html> (accessed 3 October 2016).

for example, advertises the concept of “peace” as Japanese simply remembering the horrors of the aerial bombings with the aspiration of never again having to experience such a tragedy. It fails to offer hints at what responsibility Japan must accept to ensure this dream’s realization.

Japan’s most important war museum, the Yūshūkan, situated on the grounds of Yasukuni Shrine, differs from the above museums in that it explains why Japan had to do what it did rather than simply instruct on the effects that the wars had on Japan and its people. In other words, it seeks to justify Japan’s wars (from the 1868 Bōshin wars of the Meiji Restoration through the Asia-Pacific wars) from the vantage point of battlefield victimization, while leaving issues such as repatriation and homeland distress to other museums. This “revised” military history has faced criticism from both outsiders and various Japanese circles for its biased perspective. This limitation, however, appears consistent with other war museums that also highlight the hardships and sacrifices endured by their respective militaries and neglect the victimization that they created.

Upon entering the Yūshūkan, visitors are given a choice between the 90 and 120-minute course, with the longer option instructing on Japan’s traditional samurai culture and military traditions. The shorter course delivers people directly to Japan’s modern history, beginning with the precarious situation that the Asian continent faced at the time of the transition in the mid 19th century from the Edo (1603-1868) to Meiji (1868-1912). The first display shows a map tracing encroachments into Asia by seven Western powers: Russia, England, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United States. Arrows follow the advancements of these militaries from their imperial homelands to the Asian territories they conquered, with tags highlighting key events, such as the Opium wars (1840-1842), the Anglo-Burma War (1825-1885) and the anti-British Sepoy Rebellion in India (1857-1859), to emphasize the aggressive intentions of these intrusions.

Though Japan escaped relatively untouched by the imperial powers, it felt compelled to adopt preventive means to prevent their intrusions from compromising Japan’s national sovereignty. A neighbouring display reveals that Edo-era Japan had already directly encountered minor intrusions from abroad, starting with the 1792 Adam Laxman expedition from Russia. An accompanying graph informs that this first effort by Laxman was but one of a number of similar invasions by Russian explorers around the turn of this century. The display lists these and other attempts by outsiders to “open” Japan before these efforts finally enjoyed success with the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853 and treaty negotiations that he forced upon them the following year. The theme of Japan having to defend itself

against invasion and other threats from afar continues as the museum leads its patrons through the long march that led to Japan's inevitable decision to attack Pearl Harbor and British imperial strongholds in southeast Asia.

The tacitly expressed conclusion to this history is obvious; these intrusions left Japan with little choice but to expand and then lash out at Western aggressors' attempts to contain the country. Still, the museum instructs that despite the dire situation Japanese governments continued to strive for peaceful solution by engaging their adversaries in reasonable negotiation. From particularly the 1930s, however, these powers, consistently blocked Japan's peace efforts. Its activities in Manchuria, a territory that the museum describes as having traditionally served as the homeland of five distinct ethnic groups, resulted in the formation of a state independent from Chinese influence. The *Yūshūkan* explains that the Lytton Report that drove Japan from the League of Nations acknowledged the difficulty of returning history to conditions prior to the first Manchurian Incident of September 1931, while warning Japan that this move did not appear necessary for its self defence. The report also advised that Japan should do the impossible, that is, return Manchuria (now Manchukuo) to the Chinese. After war broke out, the United States, Great Britain, France and Russia compromised Japan's position in Asian by supporting China in the conflict. Japanese attempts to negotiate amicable relations with the United States up to the December 1941 Pearl Harbor attack fell on deaf ears with the famous Secretary of State Cordell "Hull Note"¹⁸ issued on 26 November 1941 serving as a virtual "ultimatum for war".

How does the museum explain Japan's expansion onto the Asian continent? It first justifies Korea's absorption as essential for protecting Northeast Asia security.¹⁹ Japanese also claim that last Korean Emperor Sunjong also acknowledged this aim in an imperial rescript issued to commemorate Korea's forced induction into the empire.²⁰ The *Yūshūkan* dates Japan's attempts to protect the peace and Korean independence, from as early as the 1885 Treaty of Tientsin that Japan and China negotiated. The provisions of this agreement permitted Japan the right to dispatch troops to the peninsula should China do so. It thus gained, we learn, a status of

¹⁸ The "Hull Note" demanded Japan's total withdrawal from French Indochina.

¹⁹ See, for example, Prime Minister Katsura Tarō's declaration at the time of annexation that appeared in the Japanese (*Keijō shinpō*), Korean (*Maeil sinbo*) and English (*Seoul Press*) newspapers on 30 August 1910.

²⁰ An "Imperial Rescript", carried by the above three newspapers appeared alongside the prime minister's statement, carried the Korean monarch's laments over his country's inability to exist as a sovereign state.

equality with China. It instructs that the two wars fought by Japan to secure Korea's independence succeeded in first "sweeping" (*issō shita*) Chinese influence from the country, and supported Japan's bid to end the "Korea problem" by defeating Russia. Over the five years that followed, the Japanese government "negotiated" the country's annexation with the Korean government, which it approved on 22 August 1910.

The Yūshūkan's version of this history anticipates its visitors accepting an alternative war history that portrays Japanese sovereignty and its people as victims of a world system that not only threatened Japan but also attempted to strangle the country after the Japanese attempted to play by the rules established by imperial powers. There is some truth to this perspective. However, Japan's argument would be strengthened 1) if it incorporated discussion as to why Western aggression necessitated the Japanese military inflicting atrocities against fellow Asian peoples in its expansionist and wartime activities, and 2) if it promoted serious debate over whether Japan's response to foreign threat indeed brought peace to Japan and the region. Did the wars of 1895, 1905 and the 1930s truly constitute the only viable answer to the international situation that Japan confronted? Finally, there is the issue of responsibility. Emphasizing Japanese victimization deflects responsibility from Japan towards peoples it colonized and the adversaries it confronted. We will return to the question of responsibility below, after considering Japan's approach against that of one of its more vocal critics, the ROK.

A Korean Peninsula: The Land of Three Thousand Invasions

Korea's geographic location, historically situated at the crossroads of waxing and waning empires, subjected the peninsula to countless invasions across the centuries. Visitors to the War Memorial of Korea, opened in 1994, are reminded of an invasion of a different nature upon entering the museum's spacious grounds: a clock frozen in time at 50-6-25, 4:00 a.m. that reminds visitors of the 25 June 1950 invasion initiated by the other Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to begin the Korean War. A second display—the "Statue of Brothers"—shows the taller southern soldier embracing, or uplifting, his visibly inferior northern brother to reveal the ROK's aspiration of one day ending the long, uninvited division of the peninsula.²¹

²¹ See Sheila Jager's *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), Chapter 7. Jager includes as the purpose of the monument an attempt to 'establish a

The War Memorial has also been revising its displays, albeit section-by-section rather than undertaking a full-scale renovation. The section on the modern war history reopened with new permanent displays of the Korean and Vietnam wars. It also appended new sections on its recent scuttles with the DPRK along the peninsula's contested Northern Limit Line in the West Sea, including the suspicious sinking of the Cheonan in March 2010.

The museum covers the theme of invasion in a number of ways, one of which is to exhibit the means employed by Koreans through the centuries to prevent or repel enemy intrusion. One room carries a model of the fortification built around the city of Suwon, just outside of Seoul, designed to stall enemy advancement into Seoul, the capital. Another room houses a rather large model of the famous Turtle ship developed by Admiral Yi Sun-sin to drive off the Japanese invaders of the 16th century. An explanation, linking the anti-Japanese battles in the 16th century to those of the early 20th century hints at the need for ROK-DPRK unification; the continuity of national defence required to counter foreign victimization succeeds only when Koreans unite to accomplish the task at hand.²² Connected to the defence theme is the action of an individual, the northerner An Chunggün, who in October 1909 committed the patriotic act of assassinating the Japanese statesman Itō Hirobumi.²³

Similar to the Yūshūkan, the War Memorial also records attempts by Western expansionists to infiltrate Korean territory, beginning with the first such mission led by the British admiral, William R Broughton in 1797. The Korean War is afforded the Memorial's greatest attention as the most important war since at least the 16th century Hideyoshi invasions (Imjin Wars). The Memorial's most generous exhibit honours the sacrifices made by participants of the 21 UN nations whose men fought alongside the ROK force against those of the DPRK and China. It also offers four-dimensional presentations of the battles that attempt through sound, laser lights and temperature control to simulate for visitors the war's battle conditions.

Due to location, and a rather traditionally weak military culture, Korea had fewer chances to victimize its neighbours. The War Memorial does, however, consider incidents that, depending on one's perspective, show

link between family and nation, ancestor lineage and State pedigree, "blood inheritance" and State legitimacy'. (Jager, *Narratives*, p. 120).

²² Jager, *Narratives*, pp. 126-27.

²³ An is memorialized in the An Chunggün Memorial, arguably the most impressive memorial dedicated to any one Korean, situated near the site of the former Chosen [Shinto] Shrine in Namsan Park.

Koreans as both victims and victimizers. The first example is from the ancient Three Kingdoms Period that lasted up to 668 when the Kingdom of Silla unified the peninsula. Although Silla allied with T'ang China to accomplish this unification, the War Memorial recalls this event through a rather moving picture of the Chinese army battling the largest of the kingdoms, Koguryō (present day DPRK and Northeast China). Lost in the display is this Silla-T'ang alliance that defeated in 668 the Koguryō Kingdom and in 660 the Paekche Kingdom in the southwest to unify the peninsula, and that in victory unified Korea had to forfeit to China a large portion of the defeated kingdom's land, that north of the Yalu and Tumen rivers.²⁴ The picture thus directs viewers to understand this event as an early act of foreign invasion against the peninsula; to include Silla's contribution would corrupt this narrative.

A second, more recent and more controversial example is found in a four dimensional battle performances arranged by the War Memorial. Leading visitors to the far northern extremes of the Korean peninsula, this presentation highlights the harsh conditions that the ROK military experienced during these battles. Here, visitors are given a sample of the Korean soldier's victimization by a presentation incorporating the sounds and (lazar) sights of battle and by decreasing the room temperature in an attempt to simulate winter conditions in northern Korea. This phase of the war took place after US General Douglas MacArthur successfully landed at Inch'ŏn and turned the tide of the war in ROKs favour. At this time, a debate ensued as to whether UN forces should end the war after driving enemy forces back across the thirty-eighth parallel, or cross this artificial barrier to drive the communists from the peninsula. The decision to carry the war to the far reaches of the DPRK-China border was made with assurances that the Chinese would not enter the war, which of course proved to be wrong. The presentation does not engage visitors in critical questions regarding this UN-ROK decision: Did it, too, constitute invasion? Did extending the war justify hardships that soldiers and civilians endured over the remaining two years of the war, and since in the form of tense North-South confrontations, decades of totalitarian rule, and eternally separated families? Rather, viewers are instructed on the sacrifice that the ROK military, along with its UN allies, made in enduring the uncomfortable conditions of the north to protect the ROK from the DPRK and (later) the Chinese communist invaders.

²⁴ Upon returning to the War Memorial in September 2015, the premodern display was closed for revision.

An even clearer example of the ROK as victimizer involves its military actions in the Vietnam War. Between 1965-1973, the Pak Chunghee regime dispatched 300,000 troops to these battlefields. In return, the United States offered the ROK a package of military and economic incentives similar to that which Japan received during the Korean War. American scholar Bruce Cumings writes that the Vietnam War added to the ROK economy an estimated US\$1 billion in payments from the US for troop contributions.²⁵ The United States also relied on the Korean *chaebŏl* to provide war-related materials as it did on the Japanese *zaibatsu* during the Korean War. The War Monument acknowledges this wartime windfall, noting that private industrial expansion required 'to provide needed services and materials for the war effort... contributed greatly to Korea's growing economic development'.

The newly refurbished exhibition provides text explanations on other on-the-ground contributions that ROK troops made to the Vietnam War effort to defeat the communist invaders: they repelled sudden Viet Cong invasions while conducting similar incursions of their own, improved the security and social services of local villages, led search-and-destroy missions, and pacified areas under their jurisdiction. This war narrative is enhanced by four attractive dioramas that advertise the benevolent deeds of this operation: ROK soldiers building schools and medical facilities and teaching the Vietnamese Taekwondo and farming techniques. It neglects, however, to inform on the darker side of ROKs participation: the estimated (by Vietnamese count) 9,000 civilian deaths caused directly by Korean troop massacres during their nine-year tenure in Vietnam.²⁶

The museum's expansion of this display would hardly satisfy the Vietnam government that implored the Korean government to present a more comprehensive picture of Korea's behaviour in this war.²⁷ The benevolent thread of the display, however, does comply with the thread of

²⁵ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 321.

²⁶ Sah Dook-seok, 'In Korea, Vietnam Revisited Quietly', *Korea Times* (3 July 2015). One of the few books on this history is Ahn Junghyo's *White Badge: A Novel of Korea* (New York: Soho Press, 1989). Ahn is a Korean veteran of the Vietnam War. An academic account of the debates on employing Korean troops in the war is provided by Nicholas E. Sarantakes, 'In the Service of the Pharaoh? The United States and the Deployment of Korean Troops in Vietnam, 1965-1968', *Pacific Historical Review* 68, no. 3 (August 1999): 425-449.

²⁷ Steve Borowiec, 'Allegations of S. Korean atrocities arising 40 years after Vietnam War', *Los Angeles Times* (16 May 2015, online edition). <http://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-korea-vietnam-20150516-story.html> (accessed 25 September 2016).

similar histories of wartime victimization, including how similar Japanese institutions recall Japan's imperial and wartime histories. Like Peace Osaka, renovation has allowed the War Memorial to drive home the conservative agenda more clearly and, in the current government's mind, more precisely. Similar to its counterparts, by limiting the displays to a single narrative the War Memorial reveals its purpose as strengthening its visitors views on the national narrative, rather than challenging them to consider possible alternative scenarios.

Conclusion: Is Normalcy Acceptable?

My purpose for focusing on the narratives presented by Japan's Yūshūkan and the ROKs War Memorial of Korea is less to criticize than to consider them against the general concept and practice of historical memory, against which the two institutions approach "normalcy". It is important to remember that the museums themselves, and the revisions they have made recently, have not taken place in a vacuum but within the context of serious history wars between Japan, the ROK and China. The conservative agendas of these states feed off the others' increasingly nationalizing narratives. Japan and the ROK have taken these battles overseas to pressure foreign research and publications into reporting these histories in compliance with their respective historical narratives.²⁸ Recently, the Pak Kūnhye-led ROK government initiated legislation to return high schools to a unified history textbook system by 2017 to replace the present system initiated in 2003 by the liberal Roh Moo hyun [No Munhyōn] administration, which gave schools eight texts from which to choose.²⁹

The museums leave plenty to criticize. But do countries elsewhere do a better job at presenting their wartime histories in a broader, more comprehensive context that invites debate? While exceptions exist, few do. The "normal" war museum adopts the positive, non-controversial narrative that celebrates, rather than critiques, informs rather than challenges, wartime narratives. As the curators at the Smithsonian Air and Space

²⁸ For an interview of one author harassed by Japanese academics and officials over the "comfort women" and "Nanjing massacre" inclusion in his textbook see Ardou Debito, 'Japanese Government Pressures American Publisher to Delete Treatment of Wartime Sexual Slavery: An Interview with Herbert Ziegler', *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, no. 10 (16 March 2005).

²⁹ Se-Woong Koo, 'South Korea's Textbook Whitewash', *New York Times* (online edition, 12 November 2015) <
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/13/opinion/south-koreas-textbook-whitewash.html?_r=0> (accessed 25 September 2016).

Museum learned, to detour from this main stream road invites harsh criticism from the (apparently) stronger conservative voice that hurls accusations of treason at those seeking to challenge or broaden patriotic national narratives.

Do alternatives exist in the way that states narrate their war histories? Although conservative Germans might protest over its failure to present their view of the years of Nazi rule, the “Between Propaganda and Terror” exhibition offers another way for people to reflect on its wartime victimization of Germans and others, similar to how Peace Osaka’s early years presented Japanese wartime operations in Asia. Both presentations strove to develop this wartime history from a multiple perspective approach. In addition to that of the belligerent governments, this approach also examines how the violence of war touched upon a plurality of peoples, both the victimizer and the victimized. Also included in this comprehensive presentation would be the social and economic effects, both during the war and after the guns of battle had silenced and the involved parties strive to repair the damage that hostilities brought to the warring parties, as well as those dragged into the conflict.

The Japanese Yūshūkan and, to a lesser extent, the War Memorial of Korea both expand wartime history by explaining the circumstances that pushed the two states onto the battlefields. Examining these and other such narratives suggests that responsibility for war’s origins are more pluralistic than simply that of the party firing the first shot. However, this approach only works if the museum’s host nation reflects on whether its actions prior to war’s outbreak acted towards fulfilling its most important responsibility: protecting the peace of the nation, the region and the world. Reflecting on international violence in this regard suggests that war’s responsibility is better represented in historical memory as collective, a failure that all involved states (as well as international organizations) contributed towards. Teaching war as a collective action to replace the finger pointing that pushes total blame onto the other, and discourages simplistic distinctions of absolute good versus absolute bad, increases the chances of war history assuming an emphasis on peace building among allies, but also between potential aggressors.

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