

War accountability problems still unresolved By Shinpei Ishii

There's a popular children's song in Japan, called "The Canary that Forgot its Song." **The Japanese**, however, who love singing along to nostalgic karaoke melodies, would **never forget a song, but they do forget their history.**

Singing old patriotic war songs within Japan may be excusable, but sometimes these songs are callously sung in pubs by expatriates living in Korea, China, and South-east Asia. What must local people be thinking when they hear a Japanese nonchalantly singing war songs in a place where Japanese troops massacred, brutalized, raped, and plundered during the war?

Even if the singer is a well-meaning businessperson, it is disgraceful that he does not know his country's history. And if he is ignorant because he has not been taught history, the disgrace is the nation's.

Allow me to touch on a personal matter. In 1945, my 14-year-old brother, Ishii Kohei, was a student at the First Xinjing Middle School in Manchuria, then occupied by Japan. He was sent to a National Service Farm in Dongning, near the then Soviet border, together with 120 of his classmates, and was caught up in the Soviet invasion of August 9. He was one of 3 million Japanese to have died in the war, but I don't know exactly how he died. Well, I said "personal matter," but my brother's death is part of my family's history, and, as such, also a part of Japan's history. In the Japanese language, the expression for dying in vain is "to die a dog's death." If my brother's death is not taught in schools and passed on, his death does not differ from a dog's.

Twenty million people died as a result of a war initiated by Japan. If the reasons, conditions, and meanings of all those deaths are not given even scant mention in Japanese classrooms, history will march on and leave behind countless corpses lying in the dust, as if they were dogs. Slogans such as "Good Neighbors with Asia" or "Japan is Asia's Leader" now have an empty ring. Why is it that such a piercingly painful experience of war has not been properly taught in our schools?

Firstly, those who experienced the war wanted to forget that abominable episode, which they unarguably helped shoulder. And the best method of forgetting the past was to become immersed in the "economic recovery."

The start of the Cold War coincided with Japan's surrender. The allies held tribunals and Japan's top military leaders, plus a batch of "unlucky war criminals of Grades A and B," were executed - to, in effect, bear the guilt and punishment for the entire war. The matter of who was responsible for the war was not pursued any further. The occupation

troops were concerned with turning Japan into a bulwark against the Soviet Union. The Japanese people were forgiven. As a result of this sense of relief, the matter was simply put aside. We neglected to remember, to pursue, and to reveal with our own hands the truth behind the agenda which I have listed at random here:

1. The responsibility of the Emperor, who declared and pursued war;
2. The responsibility of the Japanese bureaucrats, media, intellectuals, technocrats, regional governments, and corporations;
3. The responsibility of those behind the establishment, control, and collapse of the puppet state of Manchukuo;
4. The organized violation by Japanese troops of human rights in Asia, e.g. of "comfort women," "Heiho," those Asian people who were taken by the Japanese military as soldiers, and people forcibly resettled.
5. The murders, torture, brutalization, and looting carried out by the so-called military police;
6. How the scheming and profiteering by the secret services, run by Kodama and Sasakawa, contributed to the funds used by the postwar Conservative political groups;
7. The economic crimes by the Japanese army, which caused inflation across Asia by relying on "local procurement" for resources, foodstuffs, materials, and labor, and by recklessly printing military currency;
8. Who was responsible for the military education which led to the belittlement of local people and the ill-treatment of prisoners;
9. The live dissections, experiments on humans, and toxic gas usage by secret organizations in the 516th and 731st corps;
10. The burning and disposal of important documents on the running of the war by officers and administrative officials concerned;
11. The restoration of the honor of the victims of the "Maintenance of Public Order Act," and the responsibility of the Home Ministry and the special police;
12. The responsibility behind the delay in the surrender, under the slogan "Kokutai gôji," to uphold the national polity.
13. The abandonment of its own citizens, e.g. those left behind in Manchuria, Sakhalin, and China, those that committed mass suicide in Okinawa, the many troops that starved to death abroad, those detained in Siberia;
14. The limitation of pensions to Japanese nationals, and the failure to pay postwar compensation for those who were conscripted and lost their lives in service of the

Japanese military.

Leaving such problems unresolved will have a deep and lasting effect on Japan. It would mean that the Japanese are a people that have not learned from their experience. If they cannot firmly look their past failures in the eye, and neglect to pursue those responsible, the Japanese people will inevitably end up repeating their past mistakes.

With such problems left unattended to, how peculiar must the impression that we make on Asian nations be, if, at the same time, parliamentarians and cabinet ministers in the Liberal Democratic Party unabashedly repeat that "the annexation of Korea was legal" or "Japan also did good things" or "the comfort women were part of commercial operations." The Japanese people's ability to see things clearly is being called to question.

With such problems left unattended to, it is inconceivable that Japan will be genuinely respected by the peoples of Asia, no matter how many niceties top government officials spout or how much ODA (=Overseas Development Aid) is handed out.

With such problems left unattended to, the subject of "comfort women for Imperial troops" was recently added to the social studies textbooks in junior high schools. But is it possible to authoritatively teach pupils if, at the same time, the grownups are not doing what they are supposed to be doing?

Unless these fourteen items are dealt with, the government and citizens cannot teach students about the war in earnest. This, then, is part of the story why today you will find a Japanese expatriate singing war songs in a pub in Beijing or Singapore.

Ishii Shinpei was born in 1942, in Dairen, Manchuria. After graduating from Doshisha University, he joined TV man Union Inc. In 1989 he became independent. In 1992, he won the Galaxy Award with his program for NTV, "Songs Have No Borders." His translations include Ian Buruma's "Wages of Guilt - Memories of War in Germany and Japan", "The Missionary and the Libertine" (TBS Britannica).

His website: <http://www8.plala.or.jp/shinpeishi/English/eng.index.html> 7/14/96

Ishii Shinpei, with whom I corresponded, passed away in June 2009.



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http://www.eu-ro-ni.ch/publications/Ishii_War_responsibility.pdf
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