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## Japan's Olympic Challenge

Bitterness from the Second World War lingers throughout the Asia Pacific region; Japan lost the war, yet rebuilt and became a strong ally with the United States, its one-time opponent. Many in China and South Korea suggest that Japan has not expressed adequate apology to Asian neighbors for wartime aggression. Japan is skilled at adaptation, notes international political economist Jean-Pierre Lehmann, and could take practical steps to mend relations with Asian neighbors with visits and acknowledgment of past wrongdoings. Bold steps are necessary to achieve peace, contends Lehmann, and planning for the 2020 Olympics offers an opportunity. He outlines the changing fortunes of Japan's neighbors, along with the many cultural and political exchanges. Solidarity and mutual respect among Japan, China, South Korea and other Asian nations would allow the continent to emerge as a strong and prosperous leader for the 21st century. – YaleGlobal

In the lead-up to hosting the 2020 Olympics, Japan must foster Asian identity and solidarity

Jean-Pierre Lehmann

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LAUSANNE: The day after the International Olympic Committee announced that Tokyo would host the 2020 Olympic Games, a headline in the *South China Morning Post* read, "China: Tokyo Olympics will only be success if Japan recognises war aggression."

Tokyo's successful hosting of the 1964 Olympics, less than 20 years after its defeat in World War II, was seen as a brilliant illustration of its reintegration into the international community – which at the time was synonymous with the West. A year later Japan joined the GATT, or General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the OECD, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, an exclusive club of rich economies. Geopolitically secure in its military alliance with the United States – and protected by the American "nuclear umbrella" – Tokyo could focus on economic growth, which proved astonishing and was soon dubbed a "miracle." In 1967, Japan surpassed Germany in size of aggregate GDP.

In the meantime, the rest of Asia was still poor and chaotic. China was two years away from launching the devastating Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Vietnam was at war and would remain so for more than another decade, South Korea was still at least 10 years away from achieving any noticeable economic ascent; indeed, in the late 1960s, the state of Asia could be encapsulated in the title and subtitle of a 1968 three-volume opus by Economics Laureate Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry Into the Poverty of Nations*. Once again, Japan was distancing itself from Asia and ensconcing itself in the Western camp. Henceforth, whether in Cold War parlance or in reference to the global economy, "the West" included Japan.

The narrative of the 19th and most of the 20th centuries is the rise of the West and the precipitate decline of the East. In 1820 Asia accounted for 60 percent of global GDP,

with 33 percent from China. By 1913, Asia's share of global GDP had declined to 20 percent. By mid-century, the time of the 1949 Liberation, China's share of global GDP had fallen to less

**Japan bucked the Asian decline trend of the early 20th century and emerged as a major power.**

Opening the past: Former comfort women in South Korea demand an apology from Japan (top); Japan's westernization began with the adoption of Meiji constitution in 1889

than 5 percent.

Japan bucked the Asian decline trend. In the space of one generation, the nation emerged from a feudal, isolated, peasant society to become a major industrial and imperial power. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 it sat with Great Britain,

France, Italy and the United States. Rising phoenix-like from defeat in World War II, by the late 1960s it accounted for half of Asia's total GDP.

Japan showed a knack for adaptation. In the mid-19th century, fearing that it might suffer an ignominious fate at the hands of Western imperialists comparable to China's devastating humiliation in the Opium Wars, Japan underwent a radical political and cultural revolution. With the "restoration" of imperial rule, as the Emperor Meiji ascended the throne in April 1868, a "Charter Oath of Five Articles" was promulgated, the intention of which was to set the spirit and vision of the "new" Japan. The fifth article reads: "Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundation of imperial rule." The 1880s were dubbed the decade of "(western) civilisation and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*), culminating in 1885 with one of modern Japanese history's most seminal publications, written by the prominent Japanese thought-leader of the time, Fukuzawa Yukichi – his image can be found on the Yen 10,000 bank note – entitled *Datsu-A/Nyū-O*, or "exiting Asia/entering Europe."

In fact, Japan's roots and identity lie deeply in East Asian civilization, having borrowed a great deal of learning, culture, philosophy by way of Confucianism, religion by way of Buddhism, a system of writing and art from China and Korea. During the Asuka period, 6th and 7th centuries CE, major reforms were based on Chinese statecraft, while the imperial capitals, Nara and later Kyoto, were modeled on the Tang dynasty's Xi'an.

Japan's modernization following the Meiji reforms cannot be described as sheer westernization. While the structure of many institutions – including the army, navy, parliament, civil code, education system – were imported from the West, the spirit remained Japanese. Nevertheless, for the Chinese and Koreans, Japan's behavior and policies through the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries were those of a "Western" industrialized imperialist power – in fact, even worse.

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**Japan's roots and identity are in East Asian civilization, having borrowed much from China and Korea.**

Korea was brutally colonized economically, politically, militarily and culturally. The sexual enslavement of an estimated 100,000 Korean women during World War II stands out as a heinous crime against humanity. Likewise in China, Japan was responsible for the Nanjing massacre, and the army's Unit 731 carried out lethal biological and chemical experimentation on prisoners, as well as vivisection, with an overall estimated toll of up to 20 million civilian Chinese casualties.

In the first half of the 20th century, Japan allied with two Western powers: Imperial Britain, 1902 to 1922, and Nazi Germany, 1938 to 1944. Since 1952, it formed an alliance with the United States. Japan had no alliance, or, for that matter, a close relationship with an Asian nation.

To make amends for Japan's World War Two aggression, the late Japanese emperor Hirohito made state visits to the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the United States, but not to a single Asian nation, let alone to those that suffered the most, China and Korea. Hirohito's son Akihito is due to visit India in November. This is fine, but relations between Japan and India throughout history have been distant, and there are no burning and potentially conflicting issues as those between Japan and its immediate Asian neighbors, China and Korea. In awarding the 2020 Olympics to Tokyo, the International Olympics Committee seemingly assumed that in the course of the years ahead, war won't break out in Northeast Asia. In keeping with the Olympic ideals, maybe the hope was that the games could ensure peace. Perhaps – but for that, action is required from Japan. For the moment, Japan may not be at war with its neighbors, but it's certainly not at peace. The wounds of war and humiliation have not healed and continue to fester, in turn exacerbated by territorial disputes and irresponsible hawkish language from Japanese leaders.

To achieve peace, as Europe learned, bold steps are necessary. The Franco-German post-war rapprochement is a model, illustrated, among other images, by former French President François Mitterrand and former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl holding hands on 22 September 1984 in Douaumont cemetery in Verdun, where the remains of 150,000 French soldiers rest from one of the bloodiest battles of the first world war. On 4 September, at Oradour-sur-Glane, the site of the worst Nazi massacre of civilians conducted on French soil, French President François Hollande and German President Joachim Gauck held hands, along with one of the three survivors, Jean-Marcel Darthout.

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**Japan may not be at war with neighbors, but it's certainly not at peace. Old wounds have not healed.**

On his way to making his state visit to New Delhi, Emperor Akihito should stop first in Seoul, where he could meditate and hold hands with South Korean President Park Geun-hye in front of the monument to the memory of the Korean sex slaves, with one or more of the survivors. From Seoul, he could fly to Nanjing and undertake a similar exercise with Chinese President Xi Jinping in front of the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall.

These simple acts could turn the pages of an atrocious history of conflict between Japan and its neighbors, and in so doing, Japan could "re-enter" Asia as a force for peace. The 2020 Olympic Games may then mark a magnificent historical turning

point, engendering great hope for the Asian Century.

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