

External and Internal Reconciliation: War Memories and Views of History Regarding Japan in Postwar Taiwan

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Abstract

Taiwanese society today is often characterized as a Japan-friendly society. Yet things are not quite so simple. The formation of differing war memories and views of history is caused partly by the blending of selective elements of remembering and forgetting. Postwar reconciliation between Taiwan and Japan can be seen at two levels—external reconciliation with Japan and internal reconciliation within Taiwanese society. Taiwan's postwar external reconciliation with Japan seems to have proceeded relatively well. Taiwan has recognized the contributions made by Japan during the colonial period. Of course, there exist a number of historical issues between Japan and Taiwan. At the same time, Taiwan has shown little inclination to use these issues with Japan for political purposes. In contrast, internal reconciliation, that is, the work for promoting reconciliation within Taiwanese society, appears complex and unfinished even today. Two Taiwan-related controversies erupted in 2015 in connection with the 70th anniversary of the end of the war. One of them was a dispute concerning the views of wartime history held by Taiwan and Mainland China. Another revealed the existence of different views of history within Taiwanese society. Taiwan is left with the major challenge of how to share memories of different wartime experiences to achieve reconciliation. The issue of postwar reconciliation affects the formation of war memories and views of history in postwar society in numerous ways. As such, when debating reconciliation, we ought to avoid simplifying relationships to those between the perpetrator and the victim.

More than seventy years after the end of the Second World War, reconciliation between Japan and neighboring countries over the conflict and colonial rule remains a major challenge. It goes without saying that progress in the reconciliation process is important for strengthening mutual relations and achieving true peace.

The debate on reconciliation has frequently tended to simplify relationships to those between the perpetrator and the victim. War and colonial rule can in no way be justified. Yet the issue of postwar reconciliation is not merely an issue of wartime and colonial experiences or postwar settlement, and affects the formation of war memories and views of history in postwar society in numerous ways. As such, I want to argue that reconciliation research needs to be conducted with more diverse perspectives and greater attention to specifics.

Taiwanese society today is often characterized as a Japan-friendly society. Yet things are not quite so simple. The ways in which memories of the war resurfaced and the differing narratives that were recounted in Taiwan in 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the end of the War of Resistance Against Japan, demonstrated the complexity of the reconciliation process in Taiwan.

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In this essay, I look at some of the controversies surrounding the reconciliation process between postwar Taiwanese society and Japan—Taiwan’s past colonizer and ruler—as well as the differences in war memories and views of history between *waishengren* (外省人) and *benshengren* (本省人) that came to light in 2015. I will attempt to clarify the two-sided nature of external and internal reconciliation that can be found in Taiwanese society. The formation of differing war memories and views of history is caused partly by the blending of selective elements of remembering and forgetting that I will identify.

I. External Reconciliation: Postwar Reconciliation between Taiwan and Japan

Reconciliation Attempts by the Taiwanese Government

Postwar reconciliation between Taiwan and Japan can be seen at two levels. One of them is at the governmental level. The other is at the level of society.

With regard to the Taiwanese government’s attempts at reconciliation, we can note the magnanimous attitude to postwar settlement displayed by President Chiang Kai-shek, which has also been often acknowledged in postwar Japan society. The Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty was concluded between Taiwan (Republic of China) and Japan in 1952, and people in Japan long felt gratitude to Taiwan for gestures such as relinquishing the right to compensation.

Taiwanese society has recognized the contributions made by Japan during the colonial period. Especially in comparison to China and South Korea, Taiwan stands out in the way in which it remembers Japan’s contributions. For example, Taiwan has recognized the contributions of Yoichi Hatta¹ to pre-war Taiwanese agricultural irrigation projects, especially the Chianan Canal. In 2011, the Taiwanese government opened a museum dedicated to Yoichi Hatta, with President Ma Ying-jeou attending and speaking at the opening ceremony. The ceremony was one manifestation of how Taiwanese accept and honor the contributions and positive aspects of Japanese colonial rule.

As is widely known, so-called historical issues have long existed between Japan and its neighbors in postwar East Asia. Of course, there exist a number of historical issues between Japan and Taiwan, starting with the issue of comfort women. At the same time, Taiwan has shown little inclination to use these issues with Japan for political purposes. Every time there is a major incident related to historical issues between Japan and neighboring countries, Taiwan naturally asserts its viewpoints, but generally avoids using historical issues to influence relations with Japan. Taiwan has been especially careful not to incite nationalism.

The Reconciliation Process at the Level of Taiwanese Society

Taiwan is known as one of the most Japan-friendly societies in the world, but this friendship with Japan gradually developed during the 1990s. One reason is that the older generation of people in Taiwan who spoke Japanese started expressing their feelings for Japan in the 1990s. With the advent of democratization in Taiwan, they became able to express their sentiment for Japan. In most households, although many elderly people who experienced Japanese colonial rule could speak Japanese, they refrained from doing so at home during the long postwar authoritarian era.² It was common for grandchildren to not know that their grandparents spoke Japanese.

Another reason was the so-called “Japanophilia” phenomenon³ among young people in the

¹ Yoichi Hatta (1886-1942) was a Japanese hydraulic engineer. After graduating from Tokyo Imperial University in 1910, he was employed by the Office of the Governor-General of Taiwan and was put in charge of waterworks as well as power generation and irrigation projects.

² Taiwan’s authoritarian era refers to the administrations of Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo, from the end of World War II to the lifting of martial law and the start of democratization in 1987.

³ “Japanophilia” (哈日, *hari*) refers to those who are avid followers of Japanese culture.

1990s, which is when Japanese pop culture really started attracting Taiwanese youth.⁴ Since then, Japanese comics and animated films, movies and pop music, as well as public baths, *matcha*, and other forms of Japanese traditional culture, have gained a strong following among the Taiwanese. In short, there were circumstances that caused two generations to get a better impression of Japan.

Yet there is one thing that we must not forget. The generation in-between, which was exposed to the Kuomintang government's "anti-Japanese" education, does not necessarily have the same feelings for Japan as do the generations that preceded and followed it. We can now see that this generation is catching up with the rest of Taiwanese society in its degree of openness to Japan. For example, even among second-generation *waishengren* in their 50s and early 60s at my research institute, it is not uncommon for people in these age groups to say they understand Japan and to express their sense of closeness to the country. It can be claimed that a Japan-friendly structure that spans several generations now exists in Taiwanese society.⁵

Building Friendship between Taiwan and Japan

Looking at developments in recent years, we can discern the closeness of the two societies by looking at the number of travelers and school trips between Japan and Taiwan. The number of people traveling from Taiwan to Japan in 2017 was 4.56 million.⁶ As Taiwan's population is 23 million, this is quite a large number. The number of Japanese travelers to Taiwan rose to 1.9 million⁷ that year and continues to climb.

According to 2015 data, the number one foreign destination for Taiwanese high-school field trips was Japan. The top overseas destinations for Japanese students until 2015 were the United States and then Singapore, but Taiwan overtook the United States as the most popular destination in 2016. This is clearly an expression of the mutual trust that exists between Japan and Taiwan.

The affinity between Japan and Taiwan was also seen after the earthquake in 2011 that struck northeastern Japan. As has also been reported in Japan, Taiwan strongly sympathized with Japan after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and provided donations of more than 20 billion yen, which is more than the sum of donations received from other countries. Japanese people are still expressing their gratitude for the assistance. Japan likewise provided relief after later earthquakes in Taiwan, allowing feelings of mutual affinity to spread to citizens, as suggested by the idea of a "Japanese-Taiwanese earthquake community."

II. Internal Reconciliation: Lessons from the 2015 Controversies

The Historical Context: 70th Anniversary of Victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan

As discussed above, Taiwan's postwar external reconciliation with Japan seems to have proceeded relatively well. In contrast, internal reconciliation, that is, the work for promoting reconciliation within Taiwanese society, appears complex and unfinished even today. Here I would like to discuss a series of controversies that came about in connection with the 70th anniversary of

⁴ It could be said that the Japanese pop culture boom in Taiwan started before the 1990s, but postwar restrictions on the dissemination of Japanese culture prevented the broadcasting of Japanese songs and TV dramas. These restrictions were lifted in 1993.

⁵ One demonstration of this inter-generational Japan-friendly structure in Taiwanese society is the craze caused by the Japan-friendly movie *Cape No. 7* that premiered in August 2008. It was common to see three generations of people going together to the cinema to watch the movie.

⁶ According to data from Taiwan's Tourism Bureau.

⁷ According to data from Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO).

victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan.

In 2015, the Kuomintang was in power under the administration of Ma Ying-jeou. That year, the government was involved in a number of anniversary events. Media organizations from Japan and all over the world were eager to cover the military parade in Beijing that was held to commemorate China's victory in World War II, while the activities of the Ma administration did not receive so much attention. One such activity was the publication of a pamphlet summarizing the Republic of China's position on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of the war. I was invited by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss what would go into the document and to put it together.⁸ Attention was paid to what kind of statement Prime Minister Shinzo Abe would give in Japan on the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, but similar activities were unfolding in Taiwan. Besides the pamphlet, a small-scale military parade was held in Taiwan.

One of the aims of these events by the Ma administration was perhaps to keep alive the Republic of China's view of history. Amid growing fears that the "naturally independent generation"⁹ was losing their sense of pre-1949 Chinese history, the Ma administration had the aim of continuing a vision of the Republic of China's history that extended more than 100 years into the past, going all the way back to the Xinhai Revolution. Another aim was to emphasize that without the victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan, the postwar Taiwan of today would not exist, thus stressing the intimate relationship between the Republic of China and Taiwan.

Controversy I: Taiwan and Mainland China

Two Taiwan-related controversies erupted in 2015 in connection with the 70th anniversary of the end of the war.

One of them was a dispute between Taiwan and Mainland China. The focal point was the Ma administration's fierce opposition to the Communist Party of China presenting itself as the "key pillar" (中流砥柱) in the War of Resistance Against Japan. The Ma administration refuted this claim by saying that it was the Nationalist government that had contributed the most to the victory and had suffered the most casualties. At the heart of this issue were the tensions and contradictions between the view of history held by the Republic of China and that of the People's Republic of China. We can say that reconciliation has yet to be achieved on this issue between Mainland China and Taiwan. We can also note that former Vice President and former Kuomintang Chairman Lien Chan made a symbolic gesture by attending the Beijing military parade on September 3, 2015. The Ma administration was opposed to Lien's attendance and mobilized public opinion to step up criticism of Lien.¹⁰

Controversy II: Another View of History inside Taiwan

There was another controversy in 2015 that revealed the existence of different views of history within Taiwanese society. It started with an interview given by former President Lee Teng-hui that was carried in the Japanese magazine *Voice*. What gained attention was his remark that "When I was young, I regarded Japan as my fatherland and I fought for Japan."

In response to this, the Ma administration once again expressed its displeasure and started criticizing Lee Teng-hui. At the heart of the issue were the contradictions between the Republic of China's view of history and the view of history held by people in Taiwan. As the controversy

⁸ The pamphlet emphasized how under the leadership of Chairman Chiang Kai-shek, the Kuomintang government, as well as soldiers and the people, fought bravely in the War of Resistance Against Japan, made tremendous sacrifices, and emerged victorious.

⁹ The "naturally independent generation" (天然独世代、*tianran du shidai*) refers to young people in Taiwan with a strong awareness of Taiwan as an independent state.

¹⁰ Ma Ying-jeou also instructed people to leave messages on the Kuomintang website and Facebook page criticizing the actions of Lien Chan.

grew, there was opposition from those advocating the Taiwanese view of history as well. For example, the mother of Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je said that she agreed with Lee Teng-hui based on her own experiences. In this way, historical controversies were communicated and discussed by the Taiwanese media.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, I first want to say that we can see considerable progress when it comes to external reconciliation in Taiwanese society, meaning reconciliation with Japan. The building of inter-generational friendship with Japan has gone relatively smoothly. This also demonstrates one aspect of the flexibility of Taiwanese society's views of history and identity. Yet this does not necessarily mean that the internal reconciliation of Taiwanese society is going well. It would seem that reconciliation has yet to happen between two views of history.

Another point is worth making about the issue of selective remembering and selective forgetting. This does not come up so often in debates within Taiwanese society, but the Kuomintang does not necessarily have positive feelings for Japan because it fought Japan for eight years and made countless sacrifices. In contrast, fighting Japan for eight years is an experience that is not present in the Taiwanese view of history. At the time, Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule, meaning that Taiwan was on the frontline as part of the Imperial Japanese Army and was bombed by American aircraft flying over from China. In this sense, we can tell that a large gap has existed between the Kuomintang's view of history and the indigenous Taiwanese view of history. Perhaps this can be explained using the concepts of selective remembering and selective forgetting? We are left with the major challenge of how to share our memories of different wartime experiences to achieve reconciliation.

Finally, I want to say that when debating reconciliation, we ought to avoid simplifying relationships to those between the perpetrator and the victim. The issue of postwar reconciliation is not merely an issue of wartime and colonial experiences or postwar settlement, and affects the formation of war memories and views of history in postwar society in numerous ways. As such, I want to argue that more diverse perspectives and specificity are needed when conducting research into reconciliation.