

The way history is told in Taiwan: Reassessing a survey in Taipei

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Abstract: When does the post-war era start in Japanese society? The author of this paper, a researcher who studies the former Japanese colony Taiwan, examines the historical descriptions found in Taiwanese textbooks as a start point for reflecting on the political nature of his own accounts of this country. Anthropological study has redirected its eyes on diachronic perspectives in response to its self-criticism for having synchronic descriptions in ethnography. But it is obviously necessary for anthropologists to recognize a variety of perspectives and to know that a government perspective is just one of many. Analyzing the history of an ethnic minority without than understanding, one would certainly be susceptible to the history of the government version. The criticism against anthropologists would become even fiercer if they continue to uncritically edit and tell the memories of people in accordance with histories based on the viewpoints of states and similar entities.

Keywords: Ethnography, Colonialism, Taiwan, perception of history, intercultural education.

Introduction

When does the post-war era start in Japanese society? There are various opinions in terms of when this era ended² but there is little difference in opinion regarding when it started. For example, few would argue that it started before August 6 or 9—days marking the atomic bombing of Japan—or before August 15, 1945. Japan decided to accept the Potsdam Declaration on August 14, 1945, and announced its acceptance the next day. Consequently, August 15, 1945, is generally recognized as the end of World War II period and the beginning of the post-war era in Japanese society. So in Japanese history, the date divides the pre-war and post-war eras and marks the break³ between these two eras.

However, does this breakpoint of August 15, 1945, have a similarly significant meaning in Taiwan, a former colony of the Empire of Japan? One can find the following account in *To Get To Know About Taiwan* (認識台湾)—the history textbook used in Taiwanese middle schools between 1997 and 2002.

Summary:

In the 34th year of Minguo(民国), or 1945, Taiwan broke away from the Japanese colonial administration and became a province of the Republic of China. [...]

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² The time when the post-war era actually ended is debated from various points of view, including political regime change, economic recovery and living standard perspectives.

³ For example, there are people who view pre-war era as the darkest period of militarism and people's actions during that time as exceptional in an attempt to cut it off from democratic post-war era.

In August in the 34th year of Minguo, Japan surrendered unconditionally. The Government of Republic of China immediately established the Taiwan Provincial Government and appointed Chen Yi as its Governor General to take responsibility for the reunification. People in Taiwan passionately welcomed their new Governor and his military officers who came to rule the island. On October 25, 1945 a ceremony was held in Taipei to complete the official handover of Taiwan to the Republic of China. This day was proclaimed the “Retrosession Day of Taiwan.” (National Institute for Compilation and Translation 1993: 85-86)

Based on the above account, we can see that October 25, 1945 marks a milestone in the modern Republic of China. They consider the day when the Republic of China restored Taiwan more meaningful than August 15, the day on which Japan announced its surrender.

The difference in perception of the past between the governments of Japan and the Republic of China results from their different stances in telling history. This difference is based on their countries’ differing official viewpoints, though it does not necessarily bind the viewpoints of individual researchers. It is not a rational conclusion to assume that the viewpoints of the nation are necessarily the same as its individual members, e.g. for an author to describe the history from the viewpoint of the Japanese government just because he or she is a Japanese researcher.

The question of “what is history,” including the issues of credibility of historical documents and of objectivity, and of how it should be recorded, has also been widely discussed in Japan (For example in journals such as *KAN: History, Environment, Civilization* Jan. 2000), and *Shiso* no.980 (2005), as well as in books like Komatsu 1997, etc.). Among these, the academic magazine *Shiso* no.980 stands out in its special issue marking the 60th anniversary of the end of the war in Japan, featuring the post-war era in the Philippines and Okinawa, as well as that from the perspective of Koreans living in Japan, and in casting doubt on the unreflective Japan-centric manner in which history is told, saying, “The 'post-war' has been described with whose, and kind of, standpoint as its center? Has it not been made clear that is that of 'Japanese'?”(Narita & Yoshimi, 2005:6-7). How has the post-war era of Taiwan been described in Japan? Have not many academic books unconsciously described the period from a Japan-centric point of view?

Education specialist Sato perceived noticeable differences in presentations delivered during a symposium on colonial rule held in South Korea, another former Japanese colony. He participated and pointed out the political nature of the historical narratives told about colonialism and the issue of colonialism inside the modern academism, raising the issue of the nonchalance of Japanese researchers towards the political nature of their criticism of Japanese colonial rule. (Komori & Sato 2001: 13-14) Katsura, a scholar of modern Japanese literature, also pointed out the failings of those who discuss colonialism, saying, “We, who submit theses based on the modern intellectual system have strenuously been building an intellectual empire. [...] As I made presentations at academic conferences and workshops, wrote essays and gave lectures, what did I exclude, hide and suppress? However much I talk in support of anti-colonialism, without such consciousness and awareness, I would just exist as a perpetrator, helping to keep enforcing the process of creating colonization rather than helping to overcome the effect of the power of colonization.” (Katsura 2003: 138)

With this in mind, the author of this paper, a researcher who studies the former Japanese colony Taiwan, examines the historical descriptions found in Taiwanese

textbooks as a start point for reflecting on the political nature of his own accounts of this country.

The author has conducted field research in Yushan(玉山) district, Taipei, from September 1994 to May 1996⁴ and then on an on-and-off basis to the present. There are many so-called Benshengren(本省人) people living in Yushan, as described later, of all the districts in Taipei, which retains the rich heritage of their culture. The majority of its residents support the Democratic Progressive Party that advocates Taiwan's independence from mainland China. In 2001 the author completed the dissertation "Urbanization of Taiwan from the Social Anthropological Point of View with a Focus on the Hui Organizations" (hereafter called "Urbanization of Taiwan"). In September, 2002, the author again conducted field research, however on this occasion targeting people not only in the Yushan district but those throughout Taipei whom the author had met during his earlier field research aimed at examining the issue of Japanization in Taiwan during the post-war era. The latter experience prompted the author to reconsider his perception of history with regard to the Yushan district as presented in his "Urbanization of Taiwan." Therefore, in this essay, by using the this following year's (2002's) field research data the author will attempt to critically reexamine the description made from the ethnographic stand point in his dissertation, in order to highlight his own underlying perception of history in Taiwan based on the importance of August 15, 1945, and to illustrate what problems such descriptions cause in the study of Taiwanese society.⁵

The majority of people interviewed by the author were *Benshengren* who had lived in Taiwan since the time of the colonization. There are also indigenous inhabitants and *Waishengren*(外省人) who had moved to the country after the war with the KMT, an examination of whose historical perception this essay does not extend to. Japan's defeat in the war also influenced the life of Japanese people living in Taiwan at that time. It has gradually become apparent through the author's surveys that historical perceptions differ among *Benshengren*, *Waishengren*, indigenous inhabitants and Japanese, but the detailed discussion of this issue will be left to future work.

1. Author's historical perception seen in the dissertation

In the "Urbanization of Taiwan," the author illustrated how the local residents in Yushan coped with the urbanization of the area, which made them a demographic minority within the rapidly increasing population, through the analysis of informal organizations, including surname associations, temples and mutual-aid organizations.⁶ These organizations were operating as places to identify and win over persons of

⁴ The author would like to here express his heartfelt gratitude both to the people in Yushan who have kindly cooperated with his research since September, 1994, and to the Shibusawa Foundation for Ethnological Studies for their generous financial support for field research conducted from September 1994 to May 1996.

⁵ In this paper, the author discusses the historical accounts in books and magazines published in Japan but does not reflect critically on them. In Japan, especially in the cultural studies community, however, there has been much criticism—which is appropriate—done from colonial and imperial perspectives on existing accounts. In this paper, the author examines how he as an anthropologist has described what he heard from informants in Taiwan with the awareness that Sato and Katsura share in this section. The author tries to discuss this as he makes a critical self-examination of the problems that occur while actually writing ethnography, but not as a method for criticizing the writings of others.

⁶ These organizations are generally given names with "hui" at the end, which means "organization" in English. Therefore, the author described these organizations collectively as "hui organizations" in his "Urbanization of Taiwan."

influence among settlers who share the local residents' sense of values, rather than organizations of mutual assistance.

In the "Urbanization of Taiwan," the author divided the history of Yushan after the migration by Han-Chinese civilians into three periods: the first from the start of migration to 1895, the second from 1895 to 1945, and finally, after 1945.

Behind the notion to divide this history into three periods was the perception of the author, who put much emphasis on the year 1945. In the education about the modern history in Asia given at Japanese schools, the issue of the country's colonial rule of neighboring countries is an important topic and this has been repeatedly referred to when we take relations with Asia into consideration. The author had also absorbed this tendency in a variety of (educational) situations. For example, the world history textbook the author used in his high school years has a section that reads as follows.

"...the intensified confrontation between Japan and the Qing China resulted in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) beginning with the outbreak of Donghak Peasant War in 1894. The war ended in the victory of Japan and the Shimonoseki Treaty was concluded the next year. As a result, Qing China accepted the independence of Korea, the transfer of the Liaodong Peninsula, Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands to Japan and the payment of an indemnity, as well as admission to privileged trading conditions, permission to establish businesses at treaty ports and so on." (Murakawa et al.1993: 266)

Speaking specifically from a Taiwanese viewpoint, Taiwan became a Japanese territory through the Shimonoseki Treaty in 1895, which was concluded as a result of Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894.⁷

On the other hand, the textbook also reads as follows with regard to the events around 1945 that involve Japan and Taiwan.

"...on August 14, Japan decided to accept the Potsdam Declaration, to surrender in a meeting held in the presence of the Emperor, and announced this decision to the public the next day. That was when the six year World War II came to an end." (Murakawa et al. 1993: 321)

With regard to August 15, 1945, other textbooks also read similarly⁸: that is, World War II ended on August 15, 1945, according to the world history textbooks used in Japan around 1990. On the other hand, such straightforward expressions as "Japan lost the war" and "Japan returned Taiwan to the government of then China" could not be found in these textbooks. However, the following description was found in reference to the establishment of the People's Republic of China: "With the end of 15 years of war of resistance against Japan, China restored Manchuria and Taiwan

⁷ Similar accounts are also found on page 269 of *World History B* (Ogata et al., 1994); on page 252 of *High School World History Latest Edition* (Takahashi et al., 1988); and on page 246 of *High School Revised Edition World History* (Hirata et al., 1986). However, *High School Revised Edition World History* says "with Japan's superiority" instead of "in the victory of Japan."

⁸ A textbook by publisher Teikoku Shoin refers to September 2, saying, "...accepted the Potsdam Declaration on August 15 and signed the instrument of surrender on September 2. That is how the World War II came to an end in the victory of the allied forces." (Takahashi et al., 1988). The author also found the phrase "in the victory of the allied forces" in other textbooks.

after the war...” (Ogata et al. 1994: 334)⁹ In sum, the return of Taiwan, in contrast to the cession of Taiwan, has not been clearly stated in textbooks.

Primer academic books about Taiwan, which the author obtained during his years studying as a university undergraduate and beyond, state that Taiwan used to be a Japanese colony. As for the history around 1945, two books known as primer books about Taiwan read as follows. A chapter titled “Bright and dark sides of retrocession day: the tragedy of the 2-28 Incident” in *Taiwan—its people, history and spirit* (Tai 1988:83-85) starts with the following sentence. “It was sweltering hot on August 15, 1945. Due to an announcement on the previous day people came to know that there would be an important broadcast by the Emperor at noon and were glued to the radio.” Also, chapter three of Wakabayashi's text *Taiwan—Change and Indecision over Identity* (2001) entitled “The ‘Republic of China’ has come: the 2-28 Incident and Civil War in China” starts with the statement, “On August 15, 1945, the Pacific War came to an end.¹⁰” Both books treat August 15, 1945, as the starting point of the post-war era.

Reflecting on this, it appears quite apparent that the historical perception of the author, however partial it may be, which marks the years 1894, 1895 and 1945 as well as the date August 15, 1945, as extremely important and obvious milestones in history, had been formed under the influence of accounts such as these about Japan and Taiwan.

However, this perception alone did not create the period divisions found in the “Urbanization of Taiwan.” The content of the field interview survey in the area also had some effect. The author attempted to write the dissertation from the viewpoint of local residents who experienced the urbanization in Taipei. For the author, local residents means “*Yinghua-ren*,” a term he often heard during the survey¹¹. *Yinghua* is the old name of Yushan, used from the era of Qing Dynasty to the middle of Japan’s colonial rule. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Yushan was one of the most prosperous towns in Taiwan and *Yinghua-ren* is a word that carries strong associations with such old glory. The author also heard the following about this term during his field survey.

The landlord of the author’s residence in Taiwan, who has *Kejia* (客家) roots, (His father migrated to Taipei from northern Taiwan during the Japanese colonial rule. He then married a woman whose ancestors migrated to Yushan during the Qing Dynasty. The landlord was seventy at the time of the survey.), said in fluent Japanese, “Genuine Yushan people, who are called local residents, are those who have lived in Yushan since before the Japanese colonial rule.” A friend of the author in his mid-thirties at the time of the survey and who has an ancestor who migrated to Yushan at

⁹ A similar description can be found on page 324 of the textbook by Takahashi et al.1982.

¹⁰ On the contrary to this account is the description in *To Know About Taiwan*, the textbook introduced at the beginning of this paper. Among those published in Japan, *Taiwan to be Known More About* 2nd ed. (Wakabayashi 1998) includes the following account by Cho Shiyo. At the end of the chapter titled “Taiwan in the period of Japanese colonial rule,” Cho declares, “With the ceremony marking Japan’s formal surrender in Taipei on October 25, 1945, Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan came to an end” without referring to the date August 15. He also starts the next chapter, titled “Taiwan after the World War II” with the sentence, “The Taiwan Provincial Governor General Chen Yi and other members of the Kuomintang Government’s reunification Committee inherited the Government from Japan’s colonial authority.” Hence, it can be seen that it is just one view to consider August 15 as the turning point in history.

¹¹ Han-Chinese in Taiwan are those migrated from the mainland China. Migration to Yushan from the mainland China also continued on an irregular basis from the end of the Qing Dynasty until the time when the Kuomintang Government retreated to Taiwan. In addition, many other people migrated from the south central part of Taiwan to Yushan, then the center of northern Taiwan. Over the long history of migration, there exist no specific points in time as a given facts that separate local residents and migrants, and that the author needed to surmise these himself.

the end of the Qing Dynasty also told him the same thing. One of the members of the board of directors of a temple that the author had often visited (whose ancestor migrated to Yushan at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and who was in his seventies at the time of the survey.) told the author that, “Those people who migrated to this town during the Japanese colonial rule are not real Yushan people.” Needless to say, those who migrated to the town after the war were neither “*Yinghua-ren*” nor “real Yushan people.” The director of a famous temple in Taipei said, “Only those of us who are descendants of those who supported the prosperity of the Qing Dynasty are “*Yinghua-ren*.” He was *Sanyi-ren* and belonged to one of the three surname groups. *Sanyi-ren* are those from the three prefectures of Huian, Jinjiang and Nanan in Quanzhou of Fujian Province on mainland China, who account for the majority of people who migrated to Yushan during the initial migration period, and their children. In Yusan these people are called, and refer to themselves as, *Sanyi-ren*. The people of the three surname groups means people with the surnames of “Liu,” “Kong” and “Luo,” who played a central role in contributing to the prosperity of Yushan. In Yushan they are called and call themselves the “people of three surnames.”

A woman in her seventies at the time of the survey with the surname “Yan”, whose ancestors migrated to Yushan at the end of the Qing Dynasty said, “Only those *Sanyi-ren* with one of the three surnames are real *Yinghua-ren*.” The author often heard people saying, “Those new residents who came from south central part of the island after the war are not *Yinghua-ren*.”

In Yushan, as seen above, descendants of those who migrated to Taiwan between the time when initial migration began about 300 years ago and the time before the Japanese colonial rule started were considered to be *Yinghua-ren*. Even amongst these, only *Sanyi-ren* were thought of as real *Yinghua-ren*. Furthermore, among *Sanyi-ren*, it was considered that only people of the “three surnames” were genuine *Yinghua-ren*. Perceptions of *Yinghua-ren* tended to rest within this type of nested structure.

The author, in his “Urbanization of Taiwan,” looked on those who migrated to Yushan up until the end of Japanese colonial rule and their descendents as local residents, and saw the rest, those who migrated after the war and who account for the majority of the residents in Yushan at the time of the survey, as new residents¹². As noted above, as the author adopted the time frame of Japan’s pre-colonial rule and post-colonial rule in the “Urbanization of Taiwan,” so the year 1945 became a significant starting point in discussing the history of Yushan.

In sum, the author’s historical perception had been formed by both the history widely and generally circulated in Japan, and by the interviews he made during his surveys in Taiwan. The results of the surveys that took place in Yushan and other parts of Taipei, which are shown below, however, show that the historical perceptions of the people in Taiwan have adapted and reinterpreted along with the transforming political climate, changing over time. The author’s perception in the “Urbanization of Taiwan” represented the historical perspective that evolved among Japanese people and was not one that can be shared with the Taiwanese people.

2. Question about August 15, 1945, as the turning point

The purpose of the author’s field research conducted in 2002 was to study how the Japanese language, a legacy from the Japanese colonial rule, has affected the

¹² That the author could not grasp the experiences of people who migrated to Yushan during the time of Japanese colonial rule was the one of the biggest problems in the “Urbanization of Taiwan,” which made the end of the colonial rule the turning point in the history.

“we feeling” in modern Taiwanese society, especially that of the older generation, through the interview survey of Han-Chinese people who received Japanese education during the colonial period and their children’s generation.

What the author realized from the survey was, as a matter of course, that the relationship between Japan and Taiwan, in people’s actual lives did not break in 1945, nor on August 15 of that year. Certainly, it can be presumed that Japan’s defeat in the war had had some significant meaning to the people of Taiwan at that time. For example, advertisements for jazz concerts and restaurants, which did not appear just before the end of the war, began to appear in *The Taiwan Xinbao*(台灣新報), a Japanese newspaper published in Taiwan, after August 15—on September 18 and 28—in 1945. From these, we can sense the joy of people who were liberated from such slogans as “luxury is the enemy”; a slogan often circulated in the media during the war. Advertisements such as “We make flags of Republic of China” (September 15, *The Taiwan Xinbao*) and “Chinese language lessons” (September 1, *The Taiwan Xinbao*)¹³ were also found. These give some indication of a sense of relief, even joy, among Taiwanese people who were liberated from Japanese colonial rule and had their country returned to their hands.

The Kuomintang Government tried to de-Japanize Taiwan. It intended to make Japanized Taiwan into a province of the Republic of China. Japanese magazines and newspapers were closed down one after the other and Japanese place-names and surnames were forbidden. In their stead, major place-names from mainland China were introduced anew. It also changed the mandarin, or *Minnanyu* (閩南語 Taiwan’s mother tongue) , from Japanese to Chinese and started to educate people in the language. Use of Japanese language in schools was banned. (Books that have dealt with this process of de-Japanization from the viewpoint of examining “Japan” in Taiwan include Cheng 2002.)

However, not all the living conditions of the Taiwanese were severed from “Japan” on August 15, 1945. It was only on September 15, 1945, one month after the Japan’s defeat, that the Kuomintang Government announced that Japanese banknotes should be collected. The actual use of those Japanese banknotes issued in Taiwan was only prohibited across the board two months afterwards on November 7. Also, *The Taiwan Xinbao* was not requisitioned until October 27, 1945. However, the Japanese version of the newspaper continued to be published until January 4, 1946. Also it was not until October 27, 1945, that the education department dispatched its officials to promote speaking Chinese. Almost a year later, on September 14, 1946, the use of Japanese was prohibited at junior high schools. (*Zhonguo Shibao*, 1995, pp. 14-25)

However, the author’s acquaintance was still teaching in Japanese at junior high schools even around that time. He, a Han-Chinese in Taiwan who was studying at the University of Kyoto at the time of Japan’s defeat, said that he conducted lessons using Japanese at junior high schools after returning to Taiwan. He was asked to give lectures at least in *Minnanyu* if he cannot do so in the country’s language by a new *Waishengren* principal who came to the school sometime after. Unable to do it, he returned to Taipei and started a new life as a student at the National Taiwan University. He remembered that this happened around 1947. According to another person who graduated from the National Taiwan University, around the same time the entrance exam and some lectures at the university were still conducted in Japanese, while the graduation examination was conducted in Chinese. Because of this, he said he found it difficult studying for the final examination.

¹³ There was also an advertisement for “Chinese lessons” on September 19.

The use of place names in Japanese was prohibited across the board on November 1, 1945, (*The China Times*, 1995, pp. 15) but the author found some place names in Japanese in parts of advertisements in *Ziliwanbao*(自立晚報), or *The Independent Evening Post*, in 1948 and 1949. (January 24, 1948, January 1, 1949 and April 3, 1949) The crackdown on the use of Japanese records started on August 7, 1946 and Japanese names were prohibited on October 19, 1946. (*The China Times*, 1995, pp. 20-25) According to the results of the author's interview survey, people who acquired Japanese language through their education during Japan's colonial rule were commonly using Japanese in their ordinary lives even at this period. It goes without saying that the use of Japanese was neither completely suppressed nor expelled from public spaces or in daily life from the date, August 15, 1945. Together with these facts, in the process of describing the life of Taiwanese people in relation to Japan, there is no need to lay special stress on the year 1945, still less on the day August 15.

In addition, the following three points had significant meaning for the author in reconsidering the year 1945 as a breakpoint. First, the meaning of the year 1945 appears to differ for people depending on their academic background. For example, what a man who graduated from the Taipei High School and studied at a medical school felt very strongly upon Japan's defeat was that he "would lose friends." He also felt, "What should someone like me who does not speak *Minnanyu* do?" and "How will I go about making living from tomorrow?" Many of those people with higher academic backgrounds considered Japan's surrender as something that greatly changed their then ordinary world. This shows that the day August 15, 1945, did indeed have a significant meaning for these people.

On the other hand and according to the author's understanding of the interviews, people who only completed, or dropped out of, compulsory education said they felt somewhat relieved by the end of the war and, unlike their counterparts from higher academic backgrounds, they expected less change to their ordinary lives. A woman who dropped out of compulsory education said, "My life did not change much." A man who finished only compulsory education said, "Neither Japan nor the Kuomintang had much to do with me, who has always been poor. It meant only a change of ruler. The substitution of a new currency, at an exchange rate of 40,000 yuan of the old currency for one dollar of the new, had a greater effect on me than Japan's defeat."

On February 28, 1947, a resistance movement by *Benshengren* against Kuomintang and *Waishengren* began. However, these resistance members were forcefully suppressed by Chen Yi. According to the announcement in 1992 by the Executive Yuan officially admitting the occurrence of the incident, between 18,000 and 28,000 people were thought to have been killed in the crackdown. This resulted in a fatal rift between *Benshengren* and *Waishengren*. Because discussion of the 2-28 Incident had been severely suppressed by the government until this admission, people in the country, including bereaved family members of the victims, could neither talk about it nor express their sorrow. (They were subjected to execution or other penalties if they were found to have spoken.)

What was said by interviewees to be a turning point in their lives was this 2-28 Incident in 1947 rather than Japan's defeat in 1945. This was common among those interviewed, regardless of their academic background. This is the second point.¹⁴ For example, one man who works as a medical practitioner and who studied at a medical

¹⁴ It does not matter what event is important for whom. Instead, the important thing is that past events that are important for individuals change during their lives, and these divisions do not completely cut off, or create schisms in, their lives. In writing ethnography, however, the writer is often expected to describe some dates as an important dates but that has often resulted in missing something.

school after graduating from Taipei High School said, “I could no longer speak Japanese openly after the 2-28 Incident.” A man, who has run his own business since the end of the war after finishing the compulsory education, said, “My life was changed completely by the 2-28 Incident. Since I had spoken badly about the Kuomintang government, I was unable to stay in my hometown and had to go to Taipei.” There were also many others who said it had become difficult for them to speak Japanese in public spaces after the incident.

Thirdly, I sometimes encountered remarks that indicated conflicting timeframes for understanding the past coexist in some individuals. In the survey conducted in the middle of the 1990s, those who referred to “the end of the war” as the breakpoint to distinguish “we” or local residents, from “others,” referred to the 2-28 Incident as an important breakpoint when looking back at their personal history. In sum, two perspectives existed in one person about his or her past.¹⁵

Even from the historical view of its people, current Taiwan is complicated. Their historical view has always been influenced by Taiwan, the Republic of China and Chinese civilization. Unsurprisingly, they always waver in their manner of how to build their identities and to evaluate the past history. It is difficult even for the old generation of *Benshengren*, to give up their Chinese heritage even when they would readily get rid of the Republic of China. Therefore, several historical views—sometimes conflicting—coexist in their minds. Often this sense of conflict is expressed by silence. And when based on the history of the Republic of China, such conflict often becomes invisible.

In Taiwan, Lee Teng-hui became the President in the direct Presidential election of 1996 and then, four years later, Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party was chosen as the next President. In such changing circumstances, the 2-28 Park was established. The incident was openly discussed a great deal and interviews of people’s life histories were more commonly conducted. These changes transformed people’s perception towards the past and at the same time these were unmistakably perception changing actions.

It was a matter of course that the author, who could not completely share the experience of these changes, felt that there was a gap in historical perception between himself and these people. This experience made the author have doubts about considering the year 1945 and the day August 15 as breakpoints in the history of Taiwan.

3. Questions about August 15, 1945, as a breakpoint

In telling the history of the survey area in the “Urbanization of Taiwan,” the author wrote with great emphasis on the day August 15, 1945, as an important breakpoint in history. The author intended this based on his historical perception formed in Japan together with the results of his interview survey. However, the result of the survey conducted in September 2002 showed that the meaning of the year 1945 and the date August 15 is diverse for the local residents. The author, at the risk of oversimplifying, could say that he saw disparity in the meaning of the day August 15, 1945, between those with a higher (tertiary) academic background and those without.

¹⁵ Some conservative historians who give preference to official written documents, consider these personal recollections worthless as historical source materials. Yet while the historical perceptions of people interviewed may seem contradictory, this should not be surprising if one takes into consideration that these can change according to the interviewer’s intentions and interviewees circumstances. In anthropology, that there are multiple differing historical viewpoints coexisting, and the meaning of their changes over time, are both considered important.

Also, with the unfolding of political change in Taiwan, the 2-28 Incident has come to be talked of as an important event and, for some people, Japan's defeat (or the liberation of Taiwan) and the 2-28 Incident have co-existed as important events without being inconsistent with each other.

This divergence goes to show that the year 1945 and date August 15, 1945, in narrating the past of the place surveyed are not the absolute breakpoints in history. It also reveals that the author had unconsciously treated the year and the date as something special. His action of writing the history of their past with this premise resulted in the overlooking a variety of problems.

First of all, he did not look at the diversity among people who received education under the Japanese rule by placing too much emphasis on the simple distinction between those who received education under the Japanese rule and those who did not. He underestimated the differences between people due to their sex, ethnicity, educational background and age, and homogenized their differing experiences under colonial rule without giving due consideration to these backgrounds.

Second, the author overlooked the political problem of treating the year 1945 and the date August 15 as something special by defining the year and the day as unquestionably important breakpoints. In dividing a continuum into time periods, there must be attempts by him to justify these divisions. Why did he intend to give meaning to the year 1945 in Taiwanese society? Why did local people accept it as natural breakpoint? To view the year 1945 and the day August 15 as self-evident important breakpoints made it impossible for the author to analyze and discuss these questions.

On this issue, the discussion by Huang Zhi-hui on the generation of people who received Japanese education ("Japanese generation¹⁶") serves as a useful reference. Huang, assuming that Taipei in the post-war era has come to have two faces, one as the capital of a victorious country and the other as a colonized city of a defeated country, discussed the issues of the "end of war" and "retrocession." Huang says, "The most symbolic time point, which is August 15, as loss of war or the anniversary of the end of war, is considered as just one more ordinary day as if nothing happened. However, the day when the Republic of China came to rule the island has become a national holiday called 'Retrocession Day' with large-scale commemoration events and celebrations taking place at national and local levels. In the face of such memorial devices which overarch time and space, it could hardly be possible for people who experienced those turbulent times to erase them from their memories." (Huang 2003:123)

It is not to say that August 15 is important because Huang has put emphasis on August 15. Her discussion throws doubt on the matter-of-fact way of treating October 25 as an important breakpoint in history by reminding people of the memories of the Japanese generation who have been ignored in such a narrative. By pointing this out, our attention is drawn to the fact that, there are no absolute breakpoints in history, with important temporal divisions of the past are born through by various devices, in other words, historical memory or perceptions of history are created (invented), and disputes take place over these perceptions. In fact, in considering the issue of the "end of war" and "retrocession" from the viewpoint of the origin of Taiwan's political circumstances, we can assume that emphasis on the "retrocession" with the end of Japanese colonial rule in connection with the involvement of the Kuomintang Government had the effect of covering up the failure of the Kuomintang

¹⁶ These are also people the author mostly dealt with in his survey. That they had willingly talked to the author, he believes, must have something to do with the fact that he is Japanese.

Government's rule as represented by the 2-28 Incident in the eyes of old-generation of *Benshengren*.

In fact, in post-war Taiwan, to know or learn things about Taiwan had been subject of crackdown. *To Know About Taiwan*¹⁷ quoted at the beginning of this essay was the first textbook written in Taiwan to study about Taiwan. In the country, people had their opinions suppressed and were pressured to become Chinese in accordance with the principles of the Republic of China. Memories of those of old generation, in particular, had hardly been told. It was a common problem found not only in Yushan but also in throughout Taipei—noticeable among the old generation of people the author interviewed. Many of them lost their family members and acquaintances in the 2-28 Incident and some of them came to Taipei to flee from the chaos. Those people had kept their silence, unable to speak of their dissatisfaction or sorrow, until recently when Taiwan was democratized.

Historical accounts treating the year 1945 as something special also contains the problem of, not why Taiwan, but why the person writing the account attempts to prioritize this as a breakpoint. As mentioned above, there is no logical reason for a Japanese researcher to write essays from his or her own country's point of view. Moreover, why someone who describes the past has introduced a certain breakpoint is an even more important question, relevant to local historical politics in consideration of the view of the Republic of China and the changing perceptions of the Taiwanese people. When a researcher is unable to objectively adopt the viewpoint of the nation-state, and that he cannot recognize the meaning of his discussion of Taiwan from that external viewpoint, it merely proves that he is ignorant in the politics of the region. So this is why he treats 1945 as something special without any sense of doubt. To make the year 1945 rather than 1947, and to make the day August 15 rather than October 25, the starting point in a stage of history is an act that inscribes the viewpoints of the both the Imperial Japan's empire and contemporary Japan onto Taiwan. To perceive the breakpoint as objective and neutral not only ignores the historical perceptions of the Taiwanese people which are rich in variety but also overlooks the Japanese scholar's own involvement in the process of colonization of Taiwan with an eye of colonial ruler. As a result, he or she fails by falling into the trap that Sato and Katsura have pointed out.

Then, should we regret that the emphasis of the year 1945 is a symbol of the bloated self-consciousness of the Japanese and go along with the status quo of the Taiwanese society? No, clearly this would not be adequate either. We cannot describe (perceive) the past as a continuous unbroken time flow and need to create breakpoints. To make the 2-28 Incident a breakpoint is also an act of choosing to create a break point on the historical timeline. If one decided that February 28 was a obvious breakpoint, he or she would end up repeating the same blunder that the author committed in the "Urbanization of Taiwan." It would only reduce the various experiences of the Taiwanese people to a binary opposition between *Waishengren* and *Benshengren* and fail to see the problems regarding the political nature of historical accounts that treat the 2-28 Incident as something special.

Therefore, what is required in writing about the perception of the past is to include reasons why the writer wants to treat the certain breakpoint as something special, the reasons why the writer needs to divide the history between prewar era and postwar era, and why does he or she need to put emphasis on the 2-28 Incident. It is

¹⁷ The history textbook was harshly criticized by politicians and historians—mainly of *Waishengren*—for its positive view of Japan's colonial rule (e.g. dissemination of school education, development of hygienic concept and construction of infrastructure). It is no longer being used.

also imperative that researchers of ethnographic studies to explain the basis for treating certain events as special.

Conclusion

What the author did in the “Urbanization of Taiwan” was to merely edit the materials he obtained in the surveyed area and create a description of stories that fell in line with politically determined historical breakpoints and periods. It is indispensable to prove political events in empirical approach in doing research on a certain society. Therefore, in describing the past as the history of two countries, and also in giving a political description that has the view of nation-states at its center, it is inevitable that the year 1945 or the days August 15 or October 25 be included as important breakpoints.

However, an anthropologist, who is supposed to describe the society from the viewpoint of people living there, would end up neglecting different histories opened in forms other than what are termed “official histories” if he/she was too distracted by the post-war era of Japan or the “retrocession” of Taiwan. The discussion of Huang mentioned above is also important in this regard. It does not focus on state-to-state confrontation but on that between state and old generation *Benshengren*. Having listened to people, Huang points out that histories exist which cannot be reduced to that of the state, and underlines the need to look at various people who are not homogenized as just one unified entity, the people.

Descriptions of the past based on the memories of people change, as can be seen above, this happened with changes in Taiwanese society and the introduction of government policies. Therefore, if there could be by any chance an objective description, such description would hardly be considered to be objective. On the other hand, there would also be criticism aimed towards any telling of history based on the people’s memories as “history.”

Would not the description, however, by anthropologist of history that is based on people’s memories become all the more meaningful rather than “meaningless”? Any accounts of the past are all in the end the telling of a perception from the viewpoint of a certain individual. This is also true of dominant tellings by states and other entities. However, the difference is that the telling would be represented as legitimate history through textbooks and various other media. In such a circumstance, the act of describing the past from a viewpoint different to that of governments' would cast doubt on their "legitimate" histories as being objective, neutral or academic, and may prove that such a telling is also one that is merely fiction in service of national politics. While the telling of history and its relationship with nation-states has become problematic,¹⁸ it is important and meaningful for anthropologists to talk about history.¹⁹

However, such historical descriptions are not easy. People’s way of life does not change suddenly but only gradually. Still, writers are hardly able to get rid of their mind-set of seeing the past with certain cutoff dates, such as August 15 and October 25, or the year 1945. In addition, they are too used to this kind of thinking which over simplifies the actual lived lives of various people while paying too much attention to important dates.

¹⁸ For example, discussions relevant to the Japanese context can be found in books by Komori and Takahashi (1998) and Narita (2001) and among others.

¹⁹ Such attempts to compare political temporal axis may lead to the departure from telling identities from the simple three-layers of “self, ethnicity and state.” (Matsuda 2002, p. 485)

There are differences between historical views the government establishes and those historical views people come to have from their own experiences and perceptions. But as the author here, Kamizuru, has indicated in this essay with his own descriptions as examples, both those who write and those who are written about live in the framework of nation-states, and it would be difficult for them to write, free from its influence. That would be why many of the descriptions made in the past are based on the history of the nation-state.

Anthropological study has redirected its eyes on diachronic perspectives in response to its self criticism for having synchronic descriptions in ethnography (Sugishima 1999: 319), but they have been singled out and criticized for their naïvety regarding history not only by historians, but also by their anthropologist colleagues. There may be criticism against a lack of appropriate research technique in studying past events but also against the act of writing itself - being dependent on “official histories” without comparing historical breakpoints or periodization. There always exists the problem of the violence of representation in writing history based on people’s memories. The criticism against anthropologists would become even fiercer if they continue to uncritically edit and tell the memories of people in accordance with histories based on the viewpoints of states and similar entities.

Lastly, I would like to briefly introduce the problems of perception from the perspective of intercultural education. One of the most highly regarded experts on intercultural education in Japan, Ebuchi has written that this is “education evolving in a realm where different cultures intermingle” (1994). The individuals examined by the author of this paper had lived through multiple regimes—those of Imperial Japan, the Kuomintang and the Democratic Progressive Party. As such, the author has no doubt that their lives have been formed at the crossroads of intermingling differing culture, just as in an intercultural education. Their mixed perceptions of history, similar to those Ebuchi has pointed out, have also been re-written amidst their relations with the regime of the day, thereby producing differing representations. In examining people with this kind of experience, it is prudent that in educating about that experience, historical perceptions told from a single culture must not be taken as absolute.

However, these individual experiences are readily extracted and emphasized by some. A good example of this is the experience of comfort women, an issue which is currently in dispute between Japan and South Korea. Some cite interviews and historical materials to state that comfort women were there of their own volition; while others assert that they were forced. In contrast to this understanding, while Park Yu-ha indicates that violence was done to these women, she also earnestly points out that there were also times when they were not just simply enduring violence. This book has been criticized by those who emphasize the violent aspects of being a comfort woman as concealing the violent side, and its claims of the peaceful times the women spent have also strengthened the position of those who assert that comfort women volunteered themselves.

Yet, both positions misunderstand Park Yu-ha's ideas. What she takes issue with is the dichotomizing of the experiences of these women into a framework of violence versus volition, and how this ignores the overall picture of the single individual living through multiple cultures. We live in an era where no experience can be understood from a single cultural frame of reference. Thus, if the stories of those who have lived through an era of intermingling cultures are not related in the education of historical perceptions, then the overall picture of the individual will be lost to a history that best serves merely one narrow perspective within one culture, or nation-state.

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