

News from Northeast Asia *continued*



Social changes and history wars in East Asia: 70 years after Korean Liberation

Jung Keunsik

THE YEAR 1945, when World War II came to an end, is remembered as an important historical moment of structural transformation, not only in Europe, but also in East Asia. What is noteworthy is that each country in East Asia has commemorated the end of the war on different dates and with different methods. In Japan, they mark '8.15' as the day the war ended, having many politicians visiting the Yasukuni Shrine to remember the war. In the People's Republic of China, September 3rd is observed as Victory Day (officially, in the 'War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War'), while Taiwan commemorates October 25th as its National Liberation Day. In both Koreas, '8.15' is celebrated as Liberation Day; in South Korea, it is known literally as 'the day the light returned', while in North Korea, it is referred to as 'the day of the Korean people's liberation'.

In South Korea, '8.15' encompasses both national liberation from Japan in 1945 and the foundation of the Republic of Korea in 1948. According to the official commemoration, this year marks 70 years since liberation, although right-wing historians insist that this year marks only the 67th year, revealing the chasm between historical perceptions among the Korean public. There exists a gap between a nation-centered perspective and a state-centered perspective in historical understanding.

Not only in terms of history, but also in terms of memory politics, South Korea is caught up in the complex dynamics of international commemorations of the war. In April earlier this year, both Xi Jinping and Abe Shinzo attended the Asian African Conference Commemoration in Indonesia, which marked the 60th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, while only the Deputy Prime Minister joined from South Korea.

On May 9th, when Russia celebrates Victory Day, President Park Geun-hye, though invited to attend, sent members of the National Assembly as envoys after careful deliberation. Such a decision was speculated to have been made due to the possibility of meeting North Korea's young president, as he had also been invited. Ultimately, the young leader of North Korea passed on visiting Russia at the last moment.

The PRC invited many prominent leaders from around the world for 'Victory Day of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression', and the president of the ROK, in particular, was strongly encouraged to attend. After careful consideration of US-ROK relations, the ROK government first announced her plan to visit the US in October, and then announced her acceptance to attend the PRC's Victory Day event. By the end of August, it had been publicized that neither the Japanese Prime Minister nor the

North Korean leader would be attending China's Victory Day. Consequently, President Park's participation during Victory Day celebrations came to be regarded as highly significant for the PRC.

As the emergent rivalry between the US and the PRC becomes inevitable, the interrelations positioned by the neighboring countries such as Japan, the ROK, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Russia show drastic changes compared to those in 1945 or during the Cold War period. East Asia during the Cold War was more or less divided into two blocks: strong ties between the US, Japan, and the ROK; loose ties between the USSR, the PRC, and the DPRK. While undergoing post-Cold War transformation twice in the 70's and the 90's, structures of history, military politics, and economy have all become entangled in a complex structure as each area developed independently from each other, and the call for the need for an East Asian community has been on the rise. However, with recent heated debates and conflicts over the issues of regional territories and Japanese comfort women, relations between Japan and the PRC, as well as between the ROK and Japan, have deteriorated so far as to be called the 'history war'. The building of East Asian community cooperation in the near future is becoming increasingly unrealistic.

Japan and the ROK, two main allies of the US in the Northeast Asian region, are exhibiting somewhat different paths for international relations. While the traditional allies of the PRC and the DPRK reveal some distance, more tightened are the relations between ROK and PRC. Whether such changes will bring about dramatic transformation of the regional structure in Northeast Asia remains to be seen.

In the ROK, numerous commemorations and memorial events encouraging North and South Korean national exchanges have been held on '8.15' in recent years. However, given heightened military tensions between the two Koreas this year, Koreans experienced much anxiety on National Liberation Day. Fortunately, as a result of the two Koreas' strenuous negotiations and subsequent agreement, military conflict was ultimately averted; in South Korean society, we now have growing voices calling for fundamental changes to this unstable situation, fraught as it is with military tension. The starting point will be to transform the Korean 'armistice state' into a 'peace state', as proposed during the 2015 International Conference for Peace in East Asia on August 13th.

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Above:
At the main gate
of the Yasukuni
Shrine, a father and
a son make a bow.
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Reflections on China's memorial parade, on the 70th anniversary of Victory Day in the 'Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression'

Fu ShaoQiang

TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS of the '9.3 Grand Parade', China held eight consecutive press conferences in August this year, in order to demonstrate that the PRC was in full preparation for the 70th anniversary of victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, as well as to emphasize the significance of this commemoration worldwide.

This event marked China's first major war victory since the Opium War, regaining the long lost international status and beginning a return to the center of the world. Chinese officials noted that China, the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom were all allies during World War II, and worked together to defeat the fascist aggression of German and Japanese forces around the world. Further adding that such allegiances are remembered not only by the people of the allied nations but shared by the peoples of the world. As a G-2 nation dominating the world economy, China has endeavored to evoke such a special memory to present throughout the world China's responsibility and aptitude for peaceful development.

Chinese diplomacy has indeed been a success, with 49 countries participating, including 30 heads of state from Belarus, the Republic of Korea, Russia and others, and 19 high-level government officials and envoys from Australia, Brazil, France, Britain, Canada, Germany, the US and the EU attending the event. In addition, high-profile guests included 10 heads of international and regional organizations, such as the Secretary-General of the UN, both the Director-Generals of WHO and UNESCO, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, former Japanese Prime Minister Murayama, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

In their efforts to influence international public opinion, many international mainstream media outlets have recently observed that the Chinese people had made great sacrifices to ensure victory in the world war against the fascists, and contributed significantly to history, which had been rather ignored or underestimated in the past. *The Economist* commented that the parade would remind the world of how hard Chinese soldiers had fought to resist an imperialist Asian country. And that China's dedication and sacrifice for this history deserves wider recognition. *The Wall Street Journal* also noted that China was an earlier member in the war against fascism, since hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops invaded China and brought about disaster there in 1937, two years before World War II.

In the meantime, Russia's *Nezavisimaya Gazeta (Independent Newspaper)* also published an article stating that China had made significant sacrifices for victory during World War II. Exhibiting a strenuous will to fight against Japanese imperialism, the Chinese people did not give up and fought back under great hardship. Such historical facts have been largely overlooked and underestimated up till now. While many in the international media have interpreted the parade as a symbol of the 'Rise of China', China intends to hold the position dedicated to 'China's Peaceful Rise'. The parade on September 3rd was the first large-scale military parade held on a day other than National Foundation Day since the founding of New China, as well as the first military parade attended by foreign heads of state and friends, implying a great political significance.

The unprecedented parade announced to the world that China intends to play an important role in the post-war world order. At the same time, an even more significant message was delivered to corrupt, anti-reform officials and groups, chiefly, President Xi Jinping's strong power backed by the Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army. As a result, many social problems such as economic slowdown and anti-corruption reform can be more effectively handled so as to provide a more solid ground for reform, along with the 'China Dream'.

China wants to play a role in world peace. China even sent an invitation to Abe Shinzo, though he did not attend. But, former president of the KMT (the Chinese Nationalist Party) Lien Chan, did attend the parade, which was very much welcomed. Great power comes with great responsibility. This Chinese parade was an effort to construct a blueprint for peace and security for both Asia and the wider world, moving forever beyond the fascism of the past.

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