



## Two types of revisionism: historical perceptions 70 years after World War II in Japan

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IN REFLECTING ON historical perceptions in Japan as it passes the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, it is not possible to exclude the issue of an historical revisionism that attempts to justify colonization and imperial invasion prior to 1945. Regarding Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's official statement on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the war's end, August 14th, it is important to note how his remarks have been evaluated and understood. Prime Minister Abe maintains the position that "judgement of history should be left to historians" and that we should "try to avoid viewing the Asia-Pacific War as a war of aggression", while he at the same time continues to deliberately refuse to recognize Japan's responsibility over 'comfort women' for the Imperial Japanese Army. Such a course of historical revisionism still holds a strong social influence in Japan, and it is the radical right-wing groups that Prime Minister Abe is politically based upon.

Abe's speech was limited to 'the Manchurian Incident' in 1931, in which "Japan lost sight of the overall trends in the world" and "took the wrong course and advanced along the road to war". "I bow my head deeply before the souls of all those who perished both at home and abroad. I express my feelings of profound grief and my eternal, sincere condolences," said Abe. Without clearly taking responsibility for the war of aggression and colonial rule, he even claimed that "the Japan-Russia War brought encouragement to many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa". He also carefully avoided remarks that could initiate controversies over the historical perceptions and conflicts between the war-time allies such as the US and the PRC, although he made sure not to miss the opportunity to pay homage to far-right historical revisionists. Consequently, criticism from the Korean media was quite apt, whilst the DPRK was not even mentioned.

Meanwhile, another problem that cannot be set aside when reflecting on historical perceptions in contemporary Japan, is 'historical revisionism of post-war history'. In his statement on August 14th, Abe Shinzo also declared, "with deep repentance for the war, we have created a free democratic country and

consistently upheld the pledge never to wage war again." In addition, he continued, "Japan has repeatedly expressed the feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for its actions during the war." That is to say that during 70 years post war, Japan has been a 'peace nation', repeatedly expressing repentance towards Asian nations.

However, such historical perception is contrary to the facts. Post-war Japan was tied to the Japan-US Security Treaty, playing the role of a 'base state' for US wars in Asia. The land of Japan served as a military base for the US during its involvement in the Korean as well as Vietnam Wars. Moreover, it is widely known that the Japan Coast Guard participated in a naval action during the Korean War. The 'peace nation' Abe claims Japan to be is in clear contradiction to the fact that it was under the nuclear umbrella of the US. Indeed, contemporary historical research shows that in post-war Japan, awareness of Japan as a past perpetrator of military aggression has been lacking. To a certain extent, the Japanese people are more beholden to their position as 'victims' of war.

Compared to historical revisionism of the pre-1945 period, criticism in Japan against revisionism of post-1945 history is far less pronounced. This is partly because the Japanese population that is against the Abe administration shares a similarly complacent historical perception of post-war history, without a full awareness of Japan's post-war structure. In other words, despite opposing the discourse of Abe, liberal critics are somewhat complicit in the revisionism. Moreover, without genuine reflection in Japanese society on a post-war history that does not take full responsibility for Japanese military aggression, a rather self-centered historical perception persists. Consequently, examining the 'historical revisionism of post-war history' will provide an important key to more properly understanding contemporary Japanese history.

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## Seventy years after the war in Taiwan

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AT THE END of World War II in 1945, Taiwan was returned to its motherland, China, after years of Japanese colonial era. Five years later, however, separation came to the PRC and the ROC due to civil war and the KMT's retreat to Taiwan, resulting in cross-strait confrontations between Mainland China and Taiwan. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War.

Within the past twenty years, the Taiwanese people's national identity has more or less evolved from 'one country on two sides of the Strait' to 'Taiwan is a single nation state', while more recently, pro-Japanese colonialism sentiments have begun to appear in Taiwanese society. During the summer of this year, for example, heated discussions arose over Taiwanese history textbooks when local high school students 'occupied' the Ministry of Education and publicly insisted on the erasure of "compulsory mobilization of comfort women" from history textbooks (the current Taiwanese government is led by the KMT, which indoctrinates the history of anti-Japanese movements). Moreover, many academics argue that the Taiwanese people regard themselves as members of a 'defeated country', given that Taiwan suffered from massive airstrikes during World War II. In Taiwanese academia, the emphasizing of Taiwanese identity is pronounced; consequently, the year 1945 is no longer regarded as an important historical turning point. Thus in history textbooks, many concepts related to Japanese colonialism and subsequent transformations have been abandoned. Previously in academia, 'Taiwan Guangfu' (Taiwan Liberation) was frequently employed in describing the transformation of 1945; following the Japanese style, however, 'the end of the war' is now more often employed than 'liberation'.

On August 15th this year, the conference 'War and Taiwan Society' was organized by Academia Sinica's Institute of Taiwan History. It was the largest academic event in Taiwan, marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, and covered such themes as Manchuria, the Kinmen archipelago, folk beliefs, memories of war and other complex issues, all in an effort to reinterpret history with an emphasis on the Taiwanese identity.

There were, however, efforts by the Taiwanese government and pro-unification groups to commemorate 'the victory of the war', even if the scale was somewhat limited. In July, the ROC government held a parade in commemoration of liberation, although its size was reduced and anti-Japanese colors were de-emphasized out of consideration for diplomatic relations with Japan, which in turn provoked public criticism. And on August 15th, civic and pro-unification groups protested against Japanese imperialism in front of the Japan Interchange Association in Taipei: Comfort women, the Diaoyu Islands, Yasukuni Shrine, the Japan-US Security Treaty, and Abe Shinzo's remarks during the war anniversary on August 14th, were all singled out. As for Taiwanese Liberation Day this coming October 25th, which also marks Taiwan's return to China, it remains uncertain how officials and academics will memorialize the date.

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Above: 56 guns representing 56 Chinese ethnic groups fired 70 gun salutes (courtesy of People's Daily Online, kr.people.com.cn).

Right: A Japanese civilian wearing a military uniform commemorates '8.15'. ©Kwon Chul