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# Re-thinking of War Memory and Commemoration

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## 1. The invention of “the 15<sup>th</sup> of August”

The 15<sup>th</sup> of August continues to be a very special day in Japan. However, this date was fixed in the popular memory primarily as a result of domestic politics. On August 14, 1945, the Japanese government signed the Potsdam Treaty. On the afternoon of the following day, it used its administrative machinery to summon the people of Japan, including those in the colonies, to gather around the radio. The “voice” of the Showa Emperor and the role he played would henceforth be associated with the end-of-the-war image. The newspapers printed pictures of teary-eyed people on bended knee in the open space in front of the Imperial Palace. However, these pictures were taken on August 14. The tearful prayers of those pictured were actually supplications for a Japanese victory<sup>1</sup>. The arbitrary date of “the 15<sup>th</sup> of August” was provided as a day of remembrance for lamenting the war dead. It became a media event following the San Francisco Peace Treaty in the summer of 1952, and the National Memorial Service for War Dead has been held on this day since 1963. Conducting war memorial events on August 15 also ensured that these events would coincide with the various media reports, television programs, and school undertakings that occur around the 15<sup>th</sup>, not to mention the traditional Buddhist custom of Bon. On the other hand, other important days were selectively forgotten, including “the 14<sup>th</sup> of August,” VJ-day (September 2, 1945), an international end-of-the-war day, and the Victory Day of Anti-Japanese Aggression War (September 3, 1945) celebrated by the former Soviet Union and Republic of China<sup>2</sup>.

So according to the collective memory of the war in post-war Japan, what was the starting point for the war? Against whom was the war fought? Where was the war fought? In order to understand the past as history, it is necessary that terms be coined by responsible bodies. In relation to this point, successive Japanese politicians and bureaucrats have avoided explicit language, using instead terms like “that war” and “this war.” However, for the people living in the Asia Pacific region and the former colonies of Japan, “the 15<sup>th</sup> of August” is a day to commemorate liberation and victory. In particular, around 1990 there was an emergence of pan-national commemorations, taking into account the people’s voices and collaborative projects. People began to empathize with the victims of the human rights violations that were not provided for under post-war international law, a key example being the comfort women issue. Given that “the 15<sup>th</sup> of August” can also be considered a memorial day that reflects relationships in East Asia, there is a need to establish a stable, common, and pan-national understanding of the date.

## 2. War memories to tell “Don't forget victims of the war.”

On the other hand, it is important to ascertain the kind of memories that are associated with “the 15<sup>th</sup> of August.” In other words, what kind of war-related memories are aroused by this date and shared among the Japanese public? After the First World War, commemorations designed to arouse national sentiments typically focused on the honoring of the soldiers who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country. In Japan, which did not experience the losses of the First World War to the same extent as other countries, the establishment of commemorations in the home front became an urgent matter after the start of the Sino-Japanese War. Accordingly, a new system of commemorations was established throughout the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War. The waging of a total war required the consent of society and the mobilization of citizens. The war dead were enshrined as deities at the Yasukuni

Shrine; a source of pride for their families and hometowns. There were official funerals for conscripts from village communities, who were mourned by the whole community. There was also a government-sponsored movement to build collective tombs for the war dead. War monuments were erected outside the exclusively military graveyard in each town and village. These monuments were known as *chureito* and also served as *columbaria*.

However, the situation was very different after the end of the Second World War. The memories of war aroused by media, citizens' movements, and public education around "the 15<sup>th</sup> of August" have focused on the civilian deaths and the damage wrought by the war. The reason being that scores of civilians were incinerated in their homes by the nuclear bombings, and many more fell victim to the devastating air raids in the closing stages of the war. Under this conception of the war, fingers are not pointed at responsible parties, and rights and wrongs of the war are not questioned. The discourse of peace in post-war Japan was shared across the whole society in the form of an anti-war movement, a key aim of which was the total abolition of nuclear weapons<sup>3</sup>.

Nuclear weapons were a major threat in the post-war world. Information on the "new-type bomb" was treated as a military secret. There was also a censoring of information on the nuclear bombing during the American occupation. The international community displayed interest in the effects of nuclear bombs, and the bombing was not recognized as a crime against humanity under international law. It was thanks to the efforts of grassroots movements in post-war Japan that people started learning about the Hiroshima experience from survivors and commemorating the experience.

In 1954, at the height of the Cold War, a Japanese tuna fishing boat was exposed to the blast from a hydrogen bomb test carried out by the US Forces in the Marshall Islands. This incident prompted a signature-collecting campaign by a housewives' group, which soon swelled into a nationwide popular movement aiming for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Hiroshima became a

key word around the world, and from the 1970's – a decade rocked by anti-Vietnam War protests – it became an important theme in peace education, a theme that encapsulated Japan's national memory of the war. The 1970s also saw the emergence of “national” publications aiming to convey the message of Hiroshima to future generations. The *Barefoot Gen* (Hadashi no Gen; 1973) was a manga about a boy called Gen who got exposed to the Hiroshima bombing. There are various scenes showing the death of entire families, streets littered with corpses, and the disposal of the dead. The manga vividly depicts atomic bomb survivors staring into the abyss of death, people's prejudice toward survivors, and the poverty and social discrimination subsequently faced by those who bore the after-effects of the bombing. Around this time there was a string of atomic bomb-related literature published in high-school Japanese textbooks. An example of such is Masuji Ibuse's *Black Rain* (Kuroi Ame). Eventually, there was the emergence of an air raids commemoration movement, which opposed the Vietnam War. In a single night during the Tokyo air raids (March 10, 1945), around a hundred thousand people perished. While Japan was achieving rapid economic growth, there was a movement to historicize the people's experience of war. This movement was in opposition to the historical perspective that lionized the Imperial Navy and it also stood in opposition to the former army staff's opinion on war <sup>4</sup>. The movement recorded testimonies of the air raids, which took place repeatedly up until August 14 (after the nuclear bombing) and targeted more than 430 areas throughout Japan, including Nagoya (March 12), Osaka (March 15), and Kobe (March 17). It developed into a nationwide grassroots anti-war movement <sup>5</sup>.

From around the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, there were also full-fledged efforts to pass on memories to future generations. Survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings took on the role of communicating in the public arena their personal experiences, the grief of losing one's family in an instant, and their worries about the continuing after-effects. Elementary

and junior high school excursions were deemed to be apt opportunities for peace education, and there were increasing numbers of visits to Hiroshima. From the late 1980s, the air raids commemoration movement started promoting investigations of air raids on regional cities based on U.S. official documents, and the war memories of local areas were incorporated into regional studies at elementary and junior high schools.

### 3. Memories of the war across the borders

However, the national memory of war, premised as it was on the experience of mainland Japanese, disregarded the reality that pre-1945 Japan was a multiethnic nation. Of particular note is the fact that “the 15<sup>th</sup> of August,” as a date that demarcates pre-1945 period from the post-war period, fails to convey the experience of the Japanese settlers in the South Sea Islands, who – soldier and civilian alike – fled from the ravages in the Pacific. It does not speak of the evacuations of the Japanese who settled in Manchuria as part of the national policy and the Japanese residents in Korea and Taiwan. Likewise, it does not convey the images of what occurred in Sakhalin, which lay on the border with the Soviet Union. This conception of the war on the one hand pushes the wartime experiences of those living outside Japan proper to the peripheries of history, and on the other hand, it fails to convey Japan’s war as a war of invasion.

Memories of war tend to become tactical histories told from the perspective of military commanders, and tales of valor. In the case of a total war, however, there is no clear distinction between the front line and the home front, which invites high levels of civilian casualties. When and by whom are memories of war captured, and how are they remembered? It is important to understand that the way in which war is remembered has changed. After the Cold War ended in the late 1980s, a major movement began across East Asia.

For example, a series of museums were built to provide public cultural

spaces for remembering and reflecting on the war against Japan in China. Following criticism against Japan in 1982 over the manner in which Japanese textbooks portray the war, the *Memorial for Compatriots killed in the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Forces of Aggression* was opened in Nanjing in 1985, the *Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance against Japanese Aggression* was opened on the outskirts of Beijing in 1987 (the place where the Sino-Japanese War began), and the *September 18th History Museum* was opened in Shenyang in 1991 to commemorate the Mukden Incident that occurred there. However, a certain length of time is necessary before war memories based on people's testimonies and experiences can be utilized for exhibition. Even in the case of the Nanjing Massacre, which was a matter of concern in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (1946-48), it was not until the 1980s that official attempts to document the testimonies of residents began in earnest. The abovementioned museums underwent renovations in recent years – the Beijing museum in 2005 and the Nanjing museum in 2007 – each adding extensive testimonies of local victims. In the case of the former, the new exhibits focus on the various participants in the anti-Japanese National United Front who fought with the Kuomintang. In the case of the latter, there was the installation of a new memorial hall featuring exhibits of the atrocities committed, including a wall inscribed with the names of victims. At the same time, for present-day China, the relatively well-known atrocities of the Japanese army, such as the Three Alls Policy and the Nanjing Massacre, are merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the horrors of war being taught to the next generation. Toward the end of the Asia-Pacific War, the government of the Republic of China encouraged the documentation of war crimes committed by the Japanese army, having been inspired to do so by the movement to try Nazi war criminals. These records were subsequently referred to in local history-gathering projects that developed from the 1980s onward. For example, there was a case involving an operation conducted by the Japanese army in Yunnan,

a province occupied by the Japanese. The operation involved making the area a no-go zone in order to test the effectiveness of germ warfare <sup>6</sup>. This operation was a classified military secret. Therefore, a grassroots movement and pan-national research were also required in order to determine how the community could recover the information and form a societal record and memory of the war damage for future generations. An investigation into the Japanese bombing of Chongqing was conducted in earnest from the 1990s onward as a result of a grassroots movements in Japan and China <sup>7</sup>. From the late 2000s onwards, there was a slew of class-action lawsuits concerning atrocities like the bombing of Chongqing (2006, plaintiff: Chinese citizens group), and the air raids on the Japanese mainland (2007, plaintiff: Tokyo citizens group; 2008, plaintiff: Osaka citizens group). These actions were joint struggles, and the plaintiffs demanded that the Japanese government provide reparations and conduct inquiries. It is also worth mentioning the investigation into a Japanese atrocity in Taiwan. Having joined in the chemical arms race after the First World War, the Japanese forces in Taiwan dropped mustard gas bombs in an attempt to quell the rebellion of the Wushe (an aboriginal people in Taiwan). Investigations into this incident have proceeded since the 2000s following a change in historical awareness in Taiwan.

The memory of the fighting that took place on Japanese soil is channeled through investigations into the Battle of Okinawa. Okinawa Prefecture has its own war memorial day – “the twenty-third of June.” From the late 1980s and through the 90s, there were many history books published by local governments in Okinawa that included sections on war not found in history books published by local governments on the mainland. The collected accounts of Okinawan residents’ experience of the fighting provide a stark contrast to the traditional memory of the war in Japan. In March 1945, the U.S. forces in the Pacific landed in Okinawa, and intense fighting ensued. The death toll among residents exceeded that of U.S. and Japanese soldiers. There were also frequent occasions



when Japanese soldiers treated residents as the enemy, and scores of residents were gunned down as a result. The residents continued to be exposed to danger even after the hostilities ended. Having been herded into refugee camps, the Okinawan residents were surrounded by foreign forces, who continued their occupation even after the fighting had ended, and they would have to wait a considerable amount of time before they could return to their home towns. The Okinawan prefectural administration erected the Cornerstone of Peace in 1995 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Okinawa. This monument was inscribed with the names of all those who lost their lives in the battle, including American soldiers, Japanese soldiers, and Koreans who were forcibly brought to the island. The monument consists of black granite screens bearing a startling number of names of the lost, many of which are traditional Okinawan girls' names like Kama and Ushi, and people who share the same family name. It is thus unlike any other space for mourning and reflecting on war <sup>8</sup>.

#### 4. The potential of peace museums - how to resist the political pressure from historical revisionism

On the other hand, during the 1990s, as awareness of the wartime perpetrations spread, there was a change in the exhibits of museums around the country. Among the efforts to uncover the war experiences among local residents that took place to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the war, there was an increasing focus on exhibiting the experience of retreat, the experience of soldiers on the battlefield, and the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese forces, which form an important part of the memory of war among Japan's neighbors in Asia. The comfort women issue also became established as an issue of gender and human rights. It has not proven easy to establish an official and permanent exhibition hall of contemporary history, but the Osaka International Peace Center (Peace Osaka) was established as an official prefectural establishment in 1991. The exhibits focus on testimonies of the Osaka air raids, but there is also

a permanent exhibit detailing the experiences of the Sino-Japanese War as per the center's founding principle which states: We must never forget the terrible atrocities wrought upon the people of China and other places in Asia and the Pacific where the war was fought, and also on the Koreans and Taiwanese who lived under Japanese colonial rule <sup>9</sup>.

The attempt during the 1990s to convey memories of the battlefield increased the potential for a new and pan-national way of remembering war. At the same time, school textbook accounts and museum displays became subject to political influence. With regard to school textbooks, during the screening process, there was pressure from the Ministry of Education to revise accounts about the Battle of Okinawa and the forced transportation of Koreans and Chinese. From mid-90s, the structure of the conflict started changing. For example, there was a move by historical revisionists, involving various media, to delete references to comfort women in textbooks. The accounts about the comfort women were ultimately removed from all officially-screened junior high school textbooks in 2008 <sup>10</sup>. High school textbooks also became a target in 2014. In 2013, there was a movement that aimed to remove *Barefoot Gen* from schools on account of its critique of nuclear weapons, and there is a plan to remove the exhibits on wartime atrocities from the Osaka International Peace Center as part of its renewal in April 2015. In conclusion, post-war Japan has had a unique way of recounting the wartime memories it has accumulated. Having encountered the wartime memories of its neighbors in East Asia, this Japanese-way of remembering seemed to be on the brink of a turning point, such that memories will no longer be confined within its own borders. However, today, the focus of war memories has become concealed once again within the country's borders, and so it is impossible to predict where things are headed. Instead, an increasingly inward-looking perception of history is accelerating <sup>11</sup>.

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- 1 Takumi Sato, *8-gatsu 15-nichi no shinwa: shūsen kinenbi no media-gaku*, Chikuma Shinsho, 2005.
  - 2 Toshihiro Tsuganezawa [ed.] *Sengo Nihon no media ibento*, Sekaishisoshia, 2002.
  - 3 Kiichi Fujiwara, *Sensō wo kiokusuru*, Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, 2001
  - 4 Yutaka Yoshida *Nihonjin no sensōkan*, 1995
  - 5 Yoshiaki Fukuma, *Shōdo no kioku*, Shinyosha, 2011
  - 6 Toshiya Iko, *Sensō ha dō kioku sareru no ka?* Kashiwa Shobo, 2014
  - 7 Research Society for Issues concerning War and Air Raids, *jūkeibakugeki to ha nani datta no ka?* Kobunken,2001.
  - 8 Osamu Yakabi, *Okinawa sen beigun senryōshi wo manabinaosu*, Seori-shobo, 2009
  - 9 Hitoshi Koyama, *Kūshū to dōin*, Human Rights Research Institute, 2005
  - 10 Kim Puja, Toshio Nakano [ed. ] *Rekishi to sekinin*, Seikyusha, 2008
  - 11 Atushi Yokoyama,PeaceOSAKA ,The process of the museum's renewal and the problems with the resulting exhibition, *Rekishi Kagaku*,Vol.225,2016.6



# *Re-thinking of War Memory and Commemoration*

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## 要旨

戦後日本の戦争の記憶をめぐる特徴の一つは、制度運用と社会意識とのずれである。政府が主催する戦争のコメモレーションは、玉音放送の日である「8.15」や将兵の死を意味する「戦没者」への慰霊や国家補償制度であるのに対し、戦後日本の戦争の記憶とその認識は、広島・長崎への核兵器使用や全国の都市部を多いつくした無差別爆撃であり、焼夷弾空襲によって住居ごと焼き尽くされる民間人被害であった。本稿ではそれらの戦争認識が戦後史において、例えば1970年代での空襲記録運動の登場に象徴されるような市民社会による再発見、再認識される過程をたどるとともに、戦後の一国史イメージ中心であった限界や他方、国境を超え、対話を可能しつつあった2000年代の平和ミュージアムが歴史修正主義の攻撃に対峙する動きなどをたどることで、戦後日本の戦争の記憶とその特徴を描出した。

*Keywords:* The memories of war, the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, collective memory,  
air raids commemoration movement, peace museum

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