

Historicization of the bitter memories and reconciliation: nationalism as a question for human-beings (commemorating the retirement of professor Kazutsugu Okada, professor Kinichi Shimura, professor Reiko Fukawa and professor Shunbu Jubishi)

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“Historicization of the bitter memories and reconciliation: nationalism as a question for human-beings”

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Introduction

History and Reconciliation, a collection of essays compiled and edited by Fumitaka Kurosawa and Ian Nish, has now been published from The University of Tokyo Press.¹⁾ Kurosawa suggests in his Introduction chapter that the publication has been intended as a joint attempt to approach the issues of the “reconciliation” by making conscious efforts of looking at the history through historians’ academic eyes. Twenty contributors including historians, war survivors, reconciliation activists and diplomats have made sincere attempts to cope with the important question: that is, “how to historicize the history which must not be forgotten…… in order to achieve the ‘heart-to-heart reconciliation.’”²⁾

(1) How to resolve the question of “heart-to-heart reconciliation”

I have had the honour of making a small editorial contribution to the Section II “From Memory to History”.³⁾ The two editors, Kurosawa and Nish, both give their calm, fair and well-balanced observations to history. They are both quite strict about proof by empirical evidence. I was thus

able to learn from them what the academic abstinence in the area of historical narrative is about. It was an invaluable experience for me, as a scholar, to participate in this joint research project by such a wide variety of people of different nationalities, different generations and different backgrounds.

My own chapter, “Historicization of memories and reconciliation”, is what ones might call an introductory paper in Section II, “From memories to history” of the essays-collection.⁴⁾ I have discussed a theme that it nowadays seems to have become a “historians’ mission”⁵⁾ to make contributions to reconciliation. The essay is intended to be a follow-up to what is discussed in the two essays in Section I, “Between history and Reconciliation”: “Sliding the Shoji” by Nish the British editor⁶⁾ and “Tracks of Post-war Study of Modern History of Japan” by Kurosawa the Japanese editor.⁷⁾

Although historical issues are still controversial it is in fact not a self-evident truth that historians are able to discuss the special subject of “reconciliation.” I have given my thoughts on why historians are able to discuss “reconciliation” and what contribution nobody other than historians can make. I also have considered historicization of memories, intellectual exchanges, and changing memories and various issues related to recording personal memories of agony: acculturation of memories.

Following my essay, seven chapters present memoirs and thoughts contributed by a wide range of people: a former PoW, a former civilian internee taken by the Japanese Army and a child of another former internee, a British veteran who fought with Japanese counterparts, reconciliation activists of the war/post-war generations, and a former

diplomat of the MOFA.

You will be able to know from memoirs by Jack Chalker⁸⁾ and Stephen Metcalf,⁹⁾ for example, how reconciliation was made possible with Japan. Jack Chalker had to survive the forced labour at the PoW camps along the Thai-Burma Railway but continued to keep and leave drawings about the life in the camp despite his own life’s being in danger. Stephen Metcalf, in the meantime, was under the tutelage of Missionary Eric Liddell in a CI camp of the Japanese in China. You will recall that Eric Liddell was one of the leading actors of the film, *Chariots of Fire*, and a gold-medal winner of the Paris Olympics in 1924. He happened to be in the same CI camp with Metcalf.

Also, Martin Wilson is a son of a British detainee who was captured by the Japanese army and survived the horrendous Double Tenth Incident.¹⁰⁾ Martin’s memoir reveals concretely, as the two memoirs by Jack Chalker and Stephen Metcalf do, how the difficult task of reconciliation with their former torturers was actually achieved.

While I am not able to introduce, due to the space restriction, all the memoirs and discussions in the Section II of *History and Reconciliation* I do believe it fair to say that every chapter in the Section makes significant contribution to turning bitter memories into records and historical materials and is, quoting Kurosawa, “useful and beneficial in terms of considering academically the issues of criticism to and appreciation of historical materials.”¹¹⁾ Also, while it is true, as Kurosawa points out, that “reconciliation between Japan and the UK, an advanced western country and a former imperial colonialist, is different from those of Japan/China and Japan/Korea, and, therefore the UK/Japan experience cannot simply be

applied to the other cases”, you can find commonalities as well in the mental process forward to personal reconciliation as they are all “concerned about inner aspects of the human beings.”¹²⁾

The same seems to stand true even for mind tracks of those who find it difficult to accept reconciliation and those whose mind sways between the feelings of forgiveness and hatred. Facing personal experience and agonizing memories as a person or as people of a certain nationality it would be difficult to be free from the bondage of nationalism: this is true whether the nationality is Japanese or British and Korean or Chinese. If you can take it as something to involve inner issues common to human beings, that is, if you take it as an issue of agony and anguish you feel precisely because you are a human, that might be able to eliminate to a certain extent nationalism which creates a dichotomy historically in the relationship between perpetrators and victims or allies and foes.

Speaking in accordance with Section II of *History and Reconciliation*, the agony and anguish of those captured and detained by the Japanese military, Jack Chalker, Stephen Metcalf and Martin Wilson’s father, were fundamentally caused by denial of or indifference to their humanity by the perpetrators.

Details of their experience are presented and discussed in the publication from viewpoints and personal experiences of the respective contributors. This writer believes that when you seek solutions for the problems related to reconciliation and nationalism an easier and more constructive solution for the “heart-to-heart reconciliation” would be to regard it as an issue originating from that human agony and anguish.

(2) Nationalism as a human issue

Tanzan Ishibashi, a Japanese politician/economist/journalist (1884-1973), once suggested an idea of thinking about nationalism as a human issue and said;

“The issue here is how to give nationalism a positive direction. It is after all the issue of we human beings ourselves. While you are talking about things like the establishment and organisation you are fundamentally talking about human issues. I believe is most important for human beings to deal with human beings themselves.”

(Tanzan Ishibashi, *Tanzan Dialogue*, Iwanami Publishers, 1994, p. 198.)¹³⁾

Ishibashi seems to make sense to me. The ability to give positive direction to nationalism is actually a human ability of seeking to achieve reconciliation. Might it not be crucially important, for finding solutions to historical issues still lingering in today’s Japan, to regard confrontation-fuelling nationalism based upon a calamitous past as a human issue and to continue to cope with it as human being so that it will move in a positive direction?

If so, setting problem/issue as the one of human-to-human “heart-to-heart reconciliation” can be of some help for promoting relatively easy person-to-person and person-to-group reconciliations between Japan and Korea and also Japan and China and for opening up a new circuit of collective memories to achieve the more difficult collective reconciliation (ie: reconciliation between the nation-states and the

nationals).

At the core of reconciliation is the issue related to the inner feeling and human emotion of “forgiving former enemies”. The democratically advanced British society already seemed to have ideas and traditions to respect individual initiative and at the same time to regard narrow-minded nationalism and aggressive attitudes as barriers to reconciliation. These ideas and values for reconciliation were the basis of people-to-people exchange activities of reconciliation since the 1980s.

It was also of great benefit and fortune to the UK-Japan reconciliation activities that there have been such great academic researchers of Japan as Ian Nish the very coeditor of the essays-collection *History and Reconciliation* and the late Louis Allen among those of the generation who had experienced the war with Japan. There was already at the early stage a circuit of intellectual exchange about war memories between the two countries rather than being caught up with prejudices and complaints to each other and grumbling and making excuse about unreasonable cultural gaps.

It should also be noted that the government leaders of Japan and the UK made their efforts in order not to make historical issues excessively and unnecessarily political and that there have been since the 1970s those who gave a fair amount of appreciation to the strength of UK-Japanese economic and business ties.

There is one thing you will realise through patient unraveling of relations and correlations between the Anglo/Japanese reconciliation project as national policy -- a national “reconciliation policy” aiming to change memories such as the Peace Friendship Exchange Programme --

and reconciliation and forgiveness at a personal level. That is that the situation in a medium term and long term could improve no matter how difficult the “current situation” might be as long as you have citizens, scholars, civil servants, politicians and journalists with strong will for achieving reconciliation and with no complacency or self-righteousness. The situation could also improve as long as you have tension in a good way between government and civil society. And even if the two countries suffered in future from new kinds of difficulties these people and institutions would be able to prevent the situation from deteriorating further.

(3) Japan’s future reconciliation with the Asian neighbours and nationalism in East Asia

As Nish suggests in the book it is important to continue to make efforts for reconciliation rather than to worry about the success or failure of a certain case of reconciliation at a certain time. I have seen those efforts made continuously and multilaterally between Japan and Britain.

I believe, in the meantime, the number one priority in the efforts about East Asian confrontation of history is that you should become aware of the power, internal or external, caused by the gap in historical understandings and diminish the political power of destruction which the power of historical gaps claims hold of. For that, the important task is to look at the history issue as an issue originating from human agony and anguish and be aware of human commonality of each other. After all, nothing translates better than humanity.

In the wartime sexual violence against women, for example, it is not

just femininity but also, more fundamentally, humanity that was abused. The abused was not only the victim whose human dignity was hurt. The perpetrator who abused humanity also had his humanity hurt. It is humanity not just of the victim but also of the perpetrator that needs to be restored. Unless the reconciliation process was built upon the idea of this sort it would not be very easy to find progress in the translation of memories or translational narratives of history. It will also be difficult to draw concrete pictures of working-together and living-together with great effect and with the possibility of achieving reconciliation.

I would suggest, at the same time, that if modern historians want to make any contribution to “reconciliation” by way of recording and writing about traumatic memories they should realise something about the relationship between the researchers (ie: historians) and the researched (ie: those with memories of agony): historians must be aware in the very first place that the relationship is about “I” and “you” at best. It will never be the relationship of “We”.

Taking a wide, bird’s-eye view at what has been done to tackle the issues concerning Japanese reconciliation and nationalism in East Asia, I see a peculiar feature of excessive dependency upon the victims of the war and the colonial rules. I also see in some of the historical arguments and narratives in East Asia heavy reliance on the victims’ accusations, excessive sympathy toward victims and aggressiveness and dependency springing out of pseudo-sense of victimization.

I fear, however, that argument which is dependent upon the victim’s agony might postpone independent judgment on the importance of the issues and the obligation to set the agenda and at worst lead to exploiting

victims as a safety wall for promoting one’s views. While one should seek to establish the I-and-you relationship with victims the delusion of the We-relationship might lead to exploiting the victim and his/her evidence as “It” rather than facing them as you and your evidence, and that would in effect diminish the value, as historical materials, of the recorded memories of agony and lead to the arguer’s own complacency and self-glorification in Japan.

Promoting the “reconciliation” argument excessively dependent upon victims will easily be politicised and fuel up nationalism particularly in East Asia. It is because there still is a lingering Cold War structure in the region. In other words, it still is not even clear who has won the Cold War. E. Barkan and P. Towle have pointed out that accepting the outcome of war, victory or defeat, is one of the important factors to make progress in promoting reconciliation. It seems true that in (West) Germany, a country often compared with Japan, as a success model of reconciliation and the related policy, it was crystal clear who won (and lost) the World War II and even the Cold War. In East Asia, on the other hand, Korea who had been forced to accept colonial rules was not regarded as one of the winners of the World War II and some of the Korean nationals even had to stand on the side of the accused in the process of “building peace through trials” of the post-war trial courts. It also has often been pointed out that the Japanese have no strong and clear sense of defeat to China, and there still seems to be the remnant of the Cold War in the world of Japanese scholars and journalists.

Unlike Europe acceptance of victory and defeat in the two wars has been somewhat blurred in East Asia. Danger of confrontation of history,

whether in Japan, China or Korea, in an area where the acceptance of victory and defeat is vague about the war that ended 66 years ago and also about the Cold War can be summed up by saying that it would be quite difficult to restrain the escalation of “nationalism of the island,” if those victims would be further exploited for specific political argument and thus some more destructive power would be given the historical stereotype and, in particular when there would take place any unexpected clash in conjunction with territorial issues.

Conclusion

It is essential to think at this stage seriously about who and/or what might be able to ease the tension on both sides just in case the situation were to come to a very critical state, which of course should never happen in future.

Human beings have an inherent inclination in favour of reconciliation and harmony, but it sadly seems also true that we tend to seek something aggressive and uplifting. Some people feel even more excited and exhilarated with confrontation becoming fiercer rather than moving toward solution. Quite often you go with things easier to comprehend rather than making strenuous efforts to try to comprehend the complexity of historical incidents. That might help both in strengthening historical stereotype and simply in producing another stereotype.

However, despite efforts and activities for promoting economic, business and cultural exchanges, the relations of Japan/China and Japan/Korea seem to have territorial issues becoming more and more obvious and evident and historical “disputes” becoming potentially

unresolved “conflicts”. I should repeat here that there is always a danger for the nationalism of an island to be quickly escalated.

With the background of all these, I find it worrying that each country seems to have young people who participate in political demonstrations with bad feeling originated from what happened in the past. Evident in movements such as the “Jasmin Revolution,” increasingly popular social network such as Twitter seems to have the potentiality of organisational power within itself. It should also be noted that there is a trend in Japan, China and Korea to exploit external matters with the aim of distracting attention from domestic problems whether it is in the real world or in the virtual space.

Many different attempts and efforts have been made in East Asia since 1980s when the politicisation of history came into the new phase. Historical confrontation in East Asia now seems to be somewhere between “disputes” and “conflicts.” Which of those attempts and efforts have helped in easing the confrontation and how? Or what makes it possible for the confrontation to be eased? Or what has been escalated by what and how? The time seems to have come for us to look back and give introspective thoughts from many different viewpoints in order to open up a new prospect.

In any event, this writer believes that the process of solving Japan’s history issues in East Asia with “reconciliation of heart” in mind will inevitably include such elements as rediscovery of humanity as a common factor, the practice of thinking about nationalism as a human issue, and encouraging a civil society with healthy tension with politics.

Notes:

This paper is based on Nobuko Kosuge, “Historicization of memories and Reconciliation: the UK-Japanese experiences,” History and Reconciliation edited by Fumitaka Kurosawa and Ian Nish, The University of Tokyo Press; “Nationalism as a human issue,” *UP*, The University of Tokyo Press, November 2011. This paper was given on 25 November 2011 for the Conference at Leeds University, UK.

The author expresses her special thanks to Mr. Jiro Harumi for his help at translation. She should add that Mr. Harumi has acted as the Japanese coordinator for The UK-Japan Green Alliance that was promoted by the British Embassy to Tokyo in which he, as the important staff of the Embassy, greatly helped Mr. Philip Malins, the International Friendship and Reconciliation Foundation, who was hoping to have a twin memorial in Japan, of the Reconciliation Grove at the National Memorial Arboretum, Staffordshire, for Philip’s tree-planting in Yamanashi Prefecture.

The author also would like to express her heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Phillida Purvis, Links Japan, who has ever kept making her sincere and genuine efforts for promoting UK-Japan post-war reconciliation in the most constructive and intellectual ways, whatever have happened. It should be emphasised here how sincerely the hard works Mrs. Purvis has made for strengthening the ties between the UK and Japan as well as Japan’s support in developing countries. Her kind and excellent suggestions on the English translation of the Japanese original paper were most helpful and invaluable, which should be specifically noted and thanked by the author here.

Finally, the author should also add here that after the Leeds

Conference on History and Reconciliation, for more than a year, this paper could be quoted without the author’s permission or Mrs. Phillida Purvis,’ in order to avoid any *argumentum ad hominem*. It should be noted that prior to the Conference, very a few misleading mass-email letters about Mrs. Purvis, Professors Nish and Kei Nemoto (Sophia University) as well as the author were sent out towards dozens of individuals *internationally* from a Japanese ‘scholar’ working for a Japanese local, national university and providing her own website, <http://powow.asia/> Mr. Philip Malins, one of the contributors for *History and Reconciliation*, and a speaker at the Conference, has left the author his paper to rebut Tomoyo Nakao, the Japanese scholar, and her continuous false arguments. For the moment, about Malin’s story, see the obituary, *Times*, 17 April 2012; 小菅信子「和解に生きた英退役軍人」『毎日新聞』2012年5月6日。).

- (1) 黒沢文貴、イアン・ニッシュ編『歴史と和解』東京大学出版会、2011年。
- (2) 黒沢「序」前掲書、5頁。
- (3) 前掲書、63～190頁。
- (4) 小菅信子「記憶の歴史化と和解」前掲書、63～92頁。
- (5) ニッシュ、前掲書、30頁。
- (6) ニッシュ著、小菅信子訳「障子を閉める」前掲書、19～32頁。
- (7) 黒沢「戦後の日本近代史研究の軌跡」前掲書、33～60頁。
- (8) ジャック・チョーカー著、根本尚美訳「憎悪から和解へ」前掲書、93～114頁。
- (9) スティーブン・メトカフ著、小菅信子訳『『炎のランナー』エリック・リデルのランニング・シューズ』前掲書、131～140頁。
- (10) マーティン・ウィルソン著、小菅信子訳「和解と赦し」前掲書、131～140頁。
- (11) 黒沢「序」前掲書、10頁。
- (12) 同上。
- (13) 石橋湛山『湛山談話』岩波書店、1994年、198頁。