



JAPANESE POST-WAR PERCEPTION OF THEIR WAR RESPONSIBILITY

By Bu Ping



China Intercontinental Press





Never Forget History

Commemorating the 70th Anniversary
of Victory in the World Anti-Fascist War

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Preface

I. Japan-China Joint History Research

Over a very long time since the normalization of China-Japan diplomatic relations, people often use the phrase "connected by a narrow strip of water" to describe the relations between China and Japan in the East Asia, and place high hopes on the development of such relations after the World War II. Yet since the mid-1990s, the phrase "permanent neighbors to each other" has been more commonly used than "connected by a narrow strip of water" when it comes to Sino-Japanese relations. From this shift in the description of the ties between the two countries, one may sense that there is something helpless, intertwined and complicated in it. Especially after entering the 21st century, some Japanese politicians have connived at history textbook tampering for denying the aggressive nature of the war and covering up the invasion facts, and have frequently paid homage to the Yasukuni Shrine. Their acts have greatly hurt the people in the victim countries, and also undermined the relation between China and Japan. Some researchers have attempted to analyze the reasons for the change in Sino-Japanese relations from perspective of international relation and international politics. In spite of different conclusions resulting from their analysis, they almost all agreed that: the war between China and Japan in modern times as well as the perception of the war are the key factor influencing the development of Sino-Japanese relations.

The historical problems between China and Japan have been provoked exactly by those irresponsible Japanese politicians. But once the problems worsened and could seriously damage the relation of both countries, those people would simply pass the buck, saying: "We believe the historians would make it right on historical issues." Then, since the beginning of December

2006, in line with the consensus agreed by leaders of both countries, the two sides designated and appointed ten scholars each to form a joint research committee, to study historical issues. I was appointed as the head of the Chinese side. With three years of efforts, our co-research report was published to the international community in January 2010.

I received letters and calls from China and abroad after the news of co-research was made public by Chinese and Japanese governments. Some wrote to me with great excitement, hoping that the co-research would contribute to the stability and development of Sino-Japanese relations, some with indignation, expecting Chinese members to denounce the Japanese scholars, and some provided me with new research results and materials. Also, there was lots of criticism, blaming: "Japan should deny the fact that they invaded China. There is no need to discuss and research with them." Some alleged: "Shifting historical issues onto the academic level is walking into their trap of covering up historical facts." An elderly friend of mine even bluntly said to me: "I didn't expect such a researcher of Anti-Japanese War and Japanese war crimes like you could now sit together with Japanese to discuss them. You are the 'surrenderor.'" I did a broad classification, finding that one third of the letters were against the co-research. They were written by people from China Mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or by overseas Chinese from America, Canada and Japan.

As a Chinese scholar, I truly understand what they expressed in those letters. To my knowledge, there are some Japanese right wingers and conservative politicians, scholars and activists disrupting the positive development of Sino-Japanese relations by denying their war crimes. The letters came from a wide range of areas, suggesting that there existed a national common perception of the cruelty of the war and the inhumanity of the invaders. From those letters, we can conclude that the aggressive war had profound impact on Chinese people to the extent that it is still kept alive in the minds of many Chinese people.

At the first meeting of the China-Japan History Co-research Committee, I delivered a speech, part of which is quoted as follows:

"After the war, China and Japan have devoted great efforts to solving historical issues. The political documents such as the Sino-Japanese Joint Statement are the accomplishments of those efforts and the results of the rational thought of historical issues. But Japan has been always reluctant to admit its war crimes and invasion facts, which have been even supported and connived with by some politicians. After the normalization of diplomatic relation, that kind of acts run

contrary to Chinese and Japanese people's common interest and hurt the feeling of the victim country. It is the root cause of the delayed resolution of historical issues and the existence of the unhealthy environment."

In my speech, I firstly spoke highly of the efforts of both countries to address historical issues. Of course efforts of the politicians and the citizens are included. But I also pointed out the issue that some Japanese politicians denying the responsibility to the aggressive war.

However, the Sankei Shimbun editorialized the next day:

"Head of the Chinese side Bu Ping criticized Japan for the statements and actions of denying the invasion, and made speech of emphasizing historical issues of the World War II. But it is not in line with the purpose of China hoping to do the co-research. Leaders of both countries wished to do the co-research for the purpose of preventing historical issues from being the obstacle in the development course of Sino-Japanese relations. So is it the case that China authorities have selected the wrong researchers?"

The Sankei Shimbun claimed that the perception of history should be included in the so-called academic research, to blame the Chinese side on politicizing historical issues, thus saving those Japanese politicians denying the war responsibilities. As a matter of fact, to convert historical issues to political issues is exactly what those Japanese politicians did.

II. Historical Issues at Three Different Levels

Seen from above, the China-Japan historical issue is actually a very complicated problem, which can be seen at the political, civilian and academic levels.

The war ended in 1945, and the diplomatic relation between China and Japan has been normalized since the Joint Statement in 1972. Since then, Sino-Japanese relations have been specified in a number of political documents, such as the *Sino-Japanese Joint Statement*, the *China-Japan Peace and Friendship Treaty* and the *China-Japan Joint Declaration*. The basic principle of "advancing the strategic relationship of mutual benefit in all aspects" was established. But those irresponsible Japanese politicians and right wingers have never stopped provoking troubles, greatly damaging the relations between both countries and seriously hurting Chinese people. It is harmful to the mutual understanding of people in both countries and has a very had influence in development of relations between China and Japan.

If we leave the matter to themselves, doing nothing about the perception of history, Sino-Japanese relations will by no means be put on a healthy path. So the Chinese side would of course fight against the statements of Japanese conservative politicians and their spokesman. That's the China-Japan historical issue at the political level.

In addition to politicizing historical issues by irresponsible Japanese politicians and right wingers, the historical concern at the civilian level could be resulted from mismatch between cultural backgrounds, social environments and language expression systems of both countries. Thus Chinese and Japanese people have different perceptions of history. The method to solve this problem is to learn about and understand each other, namely to communicate the issue. That's why I also had the following opinions at the first meeting of the whole committee members:

"The difference in war experience, post-war social environment and international environment has led to the different perception of history in China and Japan. The difference in historical developing process of different countries is an objective existence and the cultural barrier including language and characters and inadequate communication could worsen the difference to be the misunderstanding in historical perception. Historical understanding is a complex problem, which could happen within a country due to the geographic, interest, emotional and other reasons. So of course it could be even more complex when it comes to China and Japan, one victim and the other the victimizer, in terms of the perception of history."

So it is more important to solve the problem of difference in the perception of history. How was the perception of history of Sino-Japanese relations, especially the war history, of people in both countries developed? What is the divergence and of what nature? Is it possible to communicate the perceptions of the two countries today? What role do historians play in the communication? That's the China-Japan historical issue at the academic level between historians of both countries needing to be solved at first.

While the Japanese wrong perception of war responsibility is pointed out at the political level, therefore, sentiments of the two peoples should not be neglected. And the talk between and co-research of scholars of the two countries to solve the historical understanding problem could be the precondition of solving historical issues at the civilian and political levels.

III. Context or different backgrounds which have shaped people's perception of history

"Mutual understanding" is easy to talk about but hard to realize. Because of the political isolation after the war, the geographical barrier as well as the different war experience, the public of China and Japan almost knew nothing about war experience and historical understanding of each other, let alone mutual understanding. For many Chinese once experienced the war, it's very hard to understand that why would Japanese have a different perception of the history, wondering that isn't the misery the aggressive war brought to China obvious?

During my research of Sino-Japanese historical issues over the past 20 years, I have had a frequent communication with Japanese pacifist communities, and participated in the peace campaigns and peace education programs. That experience accumulated much perceptual understanding of the occurrence of post-war peace thought and campaign in Japan, and of the process of historical understanding of Japanese people, including the intellectuals. Based on that, I read and summarized the historical works of post-war Japanese spirit, and had the first-hand experience of the tortuosity and complexity of Japanese people's historical understanding process.

Japanese people's perception of post-war responsibilities cannot be summarized as "denying the aggressive war" or "continuing to preach the militarism", but it really is of somewhat difference from that of Chinese and Korean people. The perception of the war and the war responsibility investigation and thought in Japanese society did undergo different stages.

The first stage was from the defeat of Japan to the mid-1950s, when the first round of discussion of war responsibility occurred. But the so-called "war responsibility" in Japan at that time was actually referred to the thought of responsibility to the defeat, namely, the responsibility of the servant of the Mikado to the Mikado. It had nothing to do with the responsibility to bring Japanese people into the disaster, let alone the responsibility to the aggressive war having taken countless Chinese's and Asians' life. The true responsible people, including the Mikado, high ranking officers and officials, and the leaders in financial circles who were once active in supporting the war, held their tongue, and even equivocated about their responsibility. So they put forward the "Japanese reiterative repentance".

The second stage was from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, when discussion on the war responsibility was made in the literary circles, ideological circles, and among intellectuals. Discussion of that period was obviously deepened compared with that of the early post-war period, and exceeded the general evaluation of what happened before. They were not satisfied with the abstract apology for inaction in the war. Instead they deeply thought about the practical significance of war responsibility to the development of Japanese society. The debate on war responsibility theory among intellectuals is from the internal and theoretical perspective. It includes the deeply examination of humanity and the concept of "The Community of Remorse" is put forward

The third stage was from the mid-1960s, which is characterized by deeply thinking about the war responsibility of the Mikado and the civilians, especially the "victimizing" responsibility of Japan as the victimizer. As appeal to restore the diplomatic relations between China and Japan, the campaign of discovering the invasion facts of Japanese army to China was launched. Religious people, led by Christians and Buddhists, started thinking about the problem of religious groups supporting the war.

The fourth stage started from the mid-1980s. In the context of Japan being frequently criticized by other countries for war responsibilities led to by the history textbook and Yasukuni Shrine events, Japanese intellectuals started research in related issues, such as the Nanjing Massacre and the Tokyo Trials. Obviously, those empirical studies added more ethical consciousness to the above-mentioned thinking about Japan's war responsibility. The range of war responsibility perception was expanding, and the objects increased.

The fifth stage started from the moment when the Cold War was over. The victim countries which were suppressed in the Cold War system demanded urgently to investigate the war responsibility of Japan, which greatly influenced the investigation on war responsibility within Japan. Requirement to investigate Japan's war responsibility in the victim countries was known in Japan, drove Japanese public to reflect the war responsibility and post-war responsibility, and also stimulated the strong counterback of the historical revisionism in the way of Study Group for a Liberal View of History and Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform. And even worse, there emerged an "ice age" in Sino-Japanese relations.

Because of the social diversity, different Japanese people have different perceptions of the war responsibility no matter during the war or after it.

In terms of time, it should be viewed in the dynamic perspective. Japanese people's perception of the war underwent several major stages, before the war, during the war, after the war, during the Cold War and after the Cold War. Admittedly, their perception of war changed dramatically with the social turmoil and changes. Even now, there are still people insisting in the Conception of Imperial History trying to expand their influence. But they are just the minority now, unable to make a big splash. The mainstream trend is dominated by the peace ideology and campaign, which has a great influence in the change in perception of war of Japanese. Despite lots of defects in their peace campaign and the gap between their historical understanding and that of Chinese public, they are already totally different from the militarism thought and the perception for maintaining the status of militarism thought during the war.

In terms of space, different social classes and different social groups at the same class have different historical understandings. During the war, differences were found in opinion on war timing, range to be spread, war size and other factors between the upper class and the government, between the Control Faction and the Imperial Way Faction among high ranking officers in the army, and between the original or conservative officers and the young and vigorous officers. After the war, differences existed in perception of war responsibility between military and administrative personnel deprived of public employment and the ordinary people, between the intellectuals and the public, between people in Japanese home islands and Okinawa, and between people having undergone the war and those not. Their post-war treatments, represented by the Tokyo Trials, and perceptions of war responsibility of people in different fields including the Mikado were also different.

The diversity in perception of the war of Japanese is in line with the diversified development of Japanese society after the war. Therefore, study on their historical understanding should be from different perspectives and dimensions. Because of the large gap between experiences during the war and after the war, the difference in international environment and the language, it's hard for people from the two countries to exchange opinions of the historical understanding or form the common perception immediately after the war. Even though there were some people discussing about it, it was mismatching. Mistake would certainly occur if trying to think about the post-war perception in each other's own way.

IV. Promoting the Mutual Understanding, Responsibility of the Scholars

In short, to make achievement in the effort, we must joint hands with peaceful development pursuing Japanese to fight against the irresponsible Japanese politicians, the right wingers and the conservative force who distorted the history. Only by promoting friendly relations between people of the two countries based on the dialogue and mutual understanding could the Sino-Japanese historical issue be truly solved and the academic achievement in the common research accepted.

The “dialogue” and “mutual understanding” is a process of bidirectional interactive movement. As the bridge connecting people in the two countries, scholars should introduce the correct and objective knowledge to people in both countries and should lift the “context” barrier. So, if Chinese readers could understand the basic conditions of historical understanding of Japanese after the war and understand their process of historical understanding from a rational angle, isn't it good for mutual exchange and mutual understanding between people from the two countries and the realizing the normalization and Sino-Japanese relations and peaceful and friendly development at a deeper level?

I majored in modern history of China, not history of Japan, especially not the post-war history of ideology of Japan. So I have to keep learning the basic information of Japan and its historical understanding after the war. My experience is nothing but that gained, from a perceptual angle, when I contacted and communicated with Japanese in different fields. I always believed that, to convert those perceptual and scattered experience to the theory is the task of the scholars researching the post-war history of Japan, not mine. But I suddenly wake up when talking with Professor Mark Selden from Cornell University. It was at an international meeting of history education and exchange meeting organized by international NGO organizations in Toronto, Canada. When talking about how to solve the historical understanding divergence at the public level among different countries, I shared my experience. Unexpectedly, Mark Selden was very interested in the topic of learning about the historical understanding of Japan from the perceptual angle. He believed that, to write out my experience would greatly supplement the theoretical research, and its influence could even exceed the significance of theoretical research. Later I found that, there

are more people with the same opinions as Professor Mark Selden. Then I got the confidence to write this book.

This book includes seven chapters. Each chapter covers the first part, the empirical and theoretical analysis and illustration of the process of historical understanding in Japanese society after the war, on the basis of historical data, and the second part, the war experience and perception of the war of some Japanese I met, from the angle of verifying the theory of the first part. I hope the readers could think by connecting the two parts and come to an objective conclusion of the perception of the war of Japanese.

The world has dramatically changed over the 70 post-war years, people now have a new perception of China, East Asia and even all mankind, because at such level, people are easier to find the intercommunity and difference between each other, to communicate and agree with each other. The new historical perspective provided by this new concept of civilianization will let the historiography play a more active role in promoting the development of China and East Asia, the formation of the common market of East Asia and the integration of East Asia.

