Asian Identity: Regional Integration and Collective Memory of the Pacific War in Contemporary Japanese Society

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Despite the most recent difficulties in international relations between Japan and China, the concept of strengthening Asian integration based on "Asian identity" and "Asian values" is a reoccurring theme when discussing the future of the Far East. Japan initially seemed to be a natural leader in the region, partially due to unprecedented economic success and partially due to strong ties with leading global powers such as the United States. It was Japan who along with Australia initialized the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, and has since been a crucial member. However, the rise of China and slow decline of Japanese power have strained relations in the region. Japan is no longer considered a natural leader, and its cooperation with China has become increasingly difficult in recent times. Although it seems that the dream of "Asian integration" is still alive, it has recently started to fade. It is impossible to imagine further regional cooperation without the participation of both China and Japan. There are of course numerous factors which influence international relations between the two countries and Japan's position in the region. In this paper I would like to focus on one often neglected factor which I believe is of particular interest. I would like to analyze how collective memory of the Pacific War in contemporary Japanese society, combined with its deeply rooted conviction of being a natural leader in Asia, creates tension in the region. This is strongly affecting any possibility of not only further economic and cultural regional integration, but also of any cooperation which might lead to establishment of a common "Asian identity", based on a shared set of "Asian values".

When discussing regional integration based on common values and economic cooperation it is impossible to abstain from mentioning the European Union. Despite the fact that numerous scholars believe that European style institutionalization is necessary in order to achieve legitimate integration (Breslin, Higgot, Rosamond, 2002, pp. 13), I believe that drawing any direct comparisons would mean adopting a Eurocentric viewpoint, which should be avoided. There is no reason to assume that any further Asian integration would follow European style institutionalization. As Peter Katzenstein notes: "Theories based on Western, and especially West European experiences, have been of little use in making sense of Asian regionalism" (1997, pp.3-5). Despite this, the European Union is still the best example of successful economic and political integration, and is often brought up as an example even by Asian scholars. Naturally, it is not my intention to dwell upon the history of European integration. However, I believe that it is particularly important to mention one fact. It could be said that the European Union (or more precisely the European Coal and Steel Community as it was initially called, later renamed the European Economic Community before adopting its current name) was a child of its times. In many ways, it was the horrors of World War II which initialized integration. One of the crucial aims of the European Coal and Steel Community was to avoid the risk of any future conflicts at the core of Europe, particularly between France and Germany. Jean Monnet and Robert Shuman suggested initiating integration with two basic industries of coal and steel. They believed that if the mines and steel factories of both France and Germany were under international control, it would become impossible for those two countries to go to war with each other. Apart from France and Germany, the European Coal and Steel Community also initially included Belgium, Luxemburg, Italy and the Netherlands (Thody, 1997, pp. 1-4; Salmon, Nicoll, 1997, pp. 41-47). It is worth noting that right from its humble beginnings the European Union was not limiting itself only to economic integration, but also had a very clear political agenda. Furthermore, common culture and shared history played an important role in

facilitating institution-building processes which in turn have promoted cooperation and peace in the region (Friedberg, 1993-1994, pp. 13).

When discussing any possible further integration in the East, it is important to mention already existing frameworks, which have already, at least partially, contributed to regional cooperation, but which also signify problems making such cooperation difficult. Japan's economic success was unprecedented in the modern history of the Far East. Japan was the first industrialized economy in Asia and its direct investments in the region had been expanding since the late 1960s. Therefore it was natural that Japan became a leader in promoting trade liberalisation and it had taken a very active role in promoting new Asian economic cooperation (Sang Ho, Wong, 2011, pp. 157). As a result, Japan along with Australia initiated APEC, which at first included 12 other states. Due to political turmoil APEC initially excluded China, but since joining in 1991 became a crucial partner for all countries involved (Klintworth, 1995, pp. 488-490). That being said, even at that time Japan seemed to be divided between Asian identity and "western aspirations". At first it seemed that Japan would become a mediator between Eastern and Western members of APEC. This however, turned out to be problematic. Despite being one of the founding members of APEC, and a strong advocate of steady economic cooperation in the region, Japan's position has been challenged by what could be referred to as "legitimacy deficit", which is not only firmly connected with cultural differences in the region, but also with its troubled historical past. Moreover, Japan's strong ties with western powers, particularly with the United States have been sometimes understood as proof of lack of its dedication to Asian affairs (Klintworth, 1995, pp. 494-499).

Nevertheless, Japan's possible role as a leader in the region became visible again during ASEM meetings. ASEM was created as a forum to encourage trade relations with Europe, and it offered a further means through which information between Asian and European Union countries could be exchanged and discussed on a regular basis. Japan was initially reluctant to participate, partially due to prominence of ASEAN countries, which were responsible for creating this initiative (Gilson, 1999, pp. 737; Gaens, 2008, pp. 1). However, more significant for the Japanese government was the fact that the United States was quite obviously excluded from this new forum. Only after the Japanese government was persuaded by US to participate did it begin to play a more active role. ASEM has been described by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an opportunity for Japan to get to know its neighbours better. Due to its international position and economic success Japan became a natural leader in ASEM structures. During the Asian crisis, perception of Japan in the region changed due to its role in ASEM. Asian countries started to perceive Japan again as a natural leader who should take a greater political and economic lead, and were supportive of an increased role for Tokyo in the region. According to Julie Gilson, ASEM cooperation helped Asian states to realize that they have numerous common interests, and that strengthening cooperation in the region might lead to creating a common identity as well (Gilson, 1999, pp. 741-750). It is also worth mentioning other forums such as APT (ASEAN Plus Three), which is the most significant economic framework including only Asian countries. In addition to 10 ASEAN members it also includes Japan, China and South Korea. The first leaders' meetings were held in 1996 and 1997, and were connected with ASEAM talks. APT grew in importance during the Asian Financial Crisis, and initiated discussion regarding The Asian Currency Unit as

a means of stabilizing the region's financial markets (Stubbs, 2002, pp. 448-449). However, it is worth noting that while China has been pushing to strengthen cooperation within APT, Japan on the other hand has been more in favour of the so called East Asia Summit, which also includes the United States, Russia, India and Australia among others (Dent, 2008, pp. 20).

Politics in the Far East has changed significantly since the late-1990s. The rise of China and stagnation of the Japanese economy significantly affected international relations in the region. Even if we assume that further regional integration based on common identity, understood as so called "Asian values" is possible, it is hard to imagine it without the inclusion of both China and Japan. There are of course numerous problems connected with that kind of integration. Most importantly; which countries should be included in that kind of framework? What should be understood as "Asian values"; and what purpose would that kind of integration have? However, I would like to focus on seemingly minor issues that influence Japan's position in the region, as well as its cooperation with China. That would be the collective memory of the Pacific War in contemporary Japanese society and the deeply rooted conviction of being a natural leader in the region. As I will hopefully prove, both of these issues are very strongly connected and shouldn't be treated as being separate. However, it is of course necessary to introduce the concept of collective memory itself. Maurice Halbwachs, who is widely regarded as being responsible for suggesting this idea, noticed that when individuals recollect events from the past, they do so within social boundaries. The process of individual recollection is strongly conditioned by interactions with other member of society. Those other members somehow stimulate each other to remember certain event from the past and forget others simultaneously. Halbwachs stated that we are constantly dealing with social boundaries of memory, which affect the way we remember the past in a very significant way (2008, pp. 3-8).

Building on Halbwachs ideas Jan Assmann introduced the concept of "cultural memory", which tries to incorporate into one theory three elements: memory, culture, and the group. According to Assmann cultural memory preserves knowledge from which the group draws its awareness of unity. Moreover, the objective manifestations of cultural memory can take the form of group self-identification, both in a positive sense (describing what the unique characteristics of a group are) or in a negative sense (what a group is not). He also noticed that cultural memory has a capacity to reconstruct, which means that it always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation (1995, pp. 126-127). Michel Foucault summed it up by stating that, historical memories are socially acquired and collective, and are constantly refashioned to suit present purposes. Individual memories gradually fold together into a collective memory of the group. Embedded in the social fabric, they become idealized memories and their ability to survive in the face of alternative memories, or counter memories, depends on the power of the group that holds them. Seen in this light, history and memory are in a fundamental state of tension (1980, pp. 144).

Furthermore, collective memory is strongly connected with national identity and national myths. The concept of national myth that I would like to introduce here should be understood as described by Anthony D. Smith, as half-truth narratives and beliefs about the origins, identity and purposes of a nation, which form an integral part of the ideological and spiritual foundations for nation and nationalism (1999, pp. 9). National myths, along with collective memory, as well as other factors such as

common territory and culture, constitute what is referred to by Smith as national identity (1999, pp. 14). Taking this into consideration, collective memory, as a socially constructed phenomenon and as an important element of national identity, can be understood as a factor influencing normative and ideal structures which determine the interests of the actors according to constructivist theory of international relations. Constructivist theory stresses that such elements as cultural norms, ideas, and collective identities are changeable (Jackson, Sørensen, 2006, pp. 270-272). It is worth mentioning that according to Alexander Wendt constructivist theory is more interested in human consciousness and its role in international politics (1992, pp. 403-404).

When discussing collective memory of the Pacific War in Japan it is quite common to refer to Yasukuni shrine controversies, comfort women issues, discussions regarding history textbooks, or more recently, Senkaku/Diaoyu disputes. However, it seems that these controversies are mere manifestations of much wider phenomena, which I believe can be traced back to initial years after the end of the war. Conservative elites of that period, which due to the rise of the communist threat gained support from American occupying forces, were not interested in dealing with the past. Instead, they managed to create three main national myths that embodied a minimalistic approach to Japanese war guilt. First was the "myth of the military clique" which held only a small group of military leaders responsible for the war and claimed that the rest of the nation (including the Emperor, the majority of the conservative ruling class, and ordinary Japanese people as well) were nothing more than innocent victims of the war. Second, was the myth that Japan was the only country responsible for opening hostilities in the East. Third was the idea of "sacrifice as heroic", which gave Japanese soldiers special honor due to the fact that they sacrificed their lives for the nation. Since the end of the war until the end of American occupation, Japanese conservative elites were in control of the most important institutional tools, and were able to popularize these self-glorifying and self-whitewashing myths. Their actions were successful largely because their intention of historical mythmaking was in accordance with the American strategy of supporting a stable conservative government in Tokyo. The occupation authorities promoted the so-called Pacific War View of History (*Taiheiyō Sensōkan*) that emphasized the overwhelming superiority of American military power as the main cause of Japanese defeat and held only the Japanese military clique responsible for the war (Orr, 2001, pp. 24-35; Yinan, 2006, pp. 71-72). The first publication of photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki right after the nuclear bombings, which took place in 1952, only strengthened the myth of the Japanese nation as victim, as well as the view of Pacific War as a mainly Japanese-American conflict (Buruma, 1994, pp. 106-109; Saito, 2006, pp. 364-367; Willson, 2001, pp. 130). This view of war history was not challenged until the 1970s, when numerous Japanese scholars, intellectuals as well as journalists drew attention to victims of Japanese Imperialism in Asia, as well as to numerous war crimes committed during this period (Wakabayashi, 2000, pp. 318-320).

Of course the construction of collective memory of the Pacific War in Japan has not been simple. There were controversies, such as the visits of Prime ministers Nakasone and Koizumi to Yasukuni shrine (Hardacre, 1991; Safier, 2001; Breen, 2008), but there were also numerous apologies, the most important of which made by Prime Minister Murayama (Togo, 2013; Yamazaki, 2006). In fact, I believe that one of the most significant characteristics of Japanese discussion regarding its wartime past is

inconsistency. It seems that there is no consensus among political elites regarding interpretation of these historical events. Another characteristic worth mentioning is the still deeply embedded conviction that the Pacific War was essentially a conflict between Japan and the United States, and Japanese aggression in the Far East is often described as colonization, and not as occupation. This interpretation is also strongly connected to understanding of Japan's role in the East. The so called revisionists prefer to promote the point of view which argues that past military actions were necessitated by the threat posed to national existence by other great world powers; that Japan in certain ways destroyed the "myth of white supremacy" and prepared the way for the liberation of East Asia from Western colonial rule; and that Japanese imperialism was in many ways an improvement upon Western modes due to its emphasis on modern economic and social development (Hughes, 2008: pp.45).

Still, the biggest question remains, how this understating of the historical past is affecting Japanese cooperation in the region, and how it influences any possible regional integration. Firstly, there is still ongoing debate regarding Japan's belonging to the Far East. As mentioned before, when discussing possible regional economic cooperation, Japan is strongly advocating inclusion of countries, which are not usually associated with the East, such as Australia, Russia or United States. This sentiment can be partially explained by the will to balance the power of China, if such a framework were to become reality. However, I would argue that there is also another explanation. Japanese identity seems to be strongly divided between the East and the West, and is strongly connected with the concept of hierarchy of civilizations, which can be traced back to the Meiji Period and to such intellectuals as Fukuzawa Yukichi. At that time, he described Japan as more "civilized" than other Far East countries, but not as civilized as Western powers. Moreover, according to Fukuzawa and other similar intellectuals, Japan should become more like those western empires (Schad-Seifer, 2003, pp. 50-52). Successful modernization, which took place in the 19th and early 20th century, along with striking victory over China and then Russia, only strengthened and popularized the myth of cultural superiority over other countries in the region. One of the misconceptions regarding Japanese imperial policy, which was also an important part of Japanese propaganda of that period, was that Japan's intervention in the East was not only aimed at stopping western colonialism, but also to help other countries to become more developed and more "civilized" (Stronach, 1995; Paine, 2003; Rowe, 1939; Padover, 1943; Kushner, 2007). Even though this belief has been seriously challenged at least since the 1970s, due to the economic success of Japan, which became especially prominent in the 1980s, belief in Japan's superiority over other Asian countries had been strengthened. Due to several misconceptions regarding migrant workers, Japanese people still tend to perceive foreigners from other Asian countries as belonging to the so called "lower class", while most Japanese themselves belong to the "middle class". Moreover, John Lie notes that the idea of Japanese superiority over other Asian nations is still present, and is visible in attitudes toward migrant workers (2001, pp. 32-34). As Lie sums it up "although outright expression of chauvinism occurs from time to time, what is more striking is the ways in which cultural confidence is often expressed indirectly and unintentionally" (2001, pp. 45).

Japan's unique position in the region could be seen as an advantage, as it was during the first years of APEC or during ASEM meetings. However, this is contrasted by the still strong conviction of cultural superiority over other nations in the Far East, even if

it is expressed indirectly, just as Lie suggested. Even though this belief predates the Pacific War, I would argue that it is strongly connected with collective memory of this conflict, and how Japan perceives its intervention in the East. Therefore, it should not be surprising that even today there is a strong conviction among Japanese elites, that even though Japan is a natural leader in the region, it also has more in common with the so called West. Hence Japan's aspirations as a leader have been challenged by "legitimacy deficit", which is connected with Japan's imperial legacy in the region, as well as its strong ties with the West, especially with the United States. Furthermore, since the mid-1990s Japan's position in the region has been constantly challenged by the rise of China.

It is difficult to imagine any successful regional cooperation without the inclusion of both China and Japan. Unfortunately, relations between two countries are strongly affected by collective memory of the Pacific War. However, it wasn't until the 1980s, due to changes in strategic agendas as well as domestic power struggles in both countries that collective memory in both Japan and China had significantly changed. Conservative historiography, which promoted a more right–wing view of history and which emerged as a backlash against the progressive narratives, gained prominence at that time as well. Since the 1980s, the right-wingers have passionately attacked the government for making concessions to foreign countries, by for example including accounts of Japanese war atrocities in history textbooks. They believed that such a "masochistic" view of the nation's history would hurt national pride. Many neo-nationalist politicians during the last three decades have made unintentional mistakes which glorified Japan's involvement in Asia during the war, declaring that in reality Japan's engagement in the region was good and just, and that it was aimed at liberating Asian colonies from the West. The same groups have been very critical of the Tokyo War Crimes Trials as well (Yinan, 2006, pp. 76-77). Naturally, the most famous examples of right-wing views of Pacific War history are Yasukuni and the history textbooks controversies. At the same time, memory in China was also undergoing reconstruction. The new official focus on Japanese brutality and Chinese misery during the war simulated victim consciousness among the Chinese. Many even feel bitter about their government's previous concealment of Japanese war crimes and were offended by official propaganda, which promoted friendship between China and Japan. Even though the distinction between Japanese militarists and ordinary Japanese people is still present in official Chinese historiography, common understanding of the war has significantly blurred this difference (Yinan, 2006, pp. 81-83).

Initially Japanese public opinion reacted reluctantly to the rise of the Chinese economy. Japan's decade-long economic stagnation endangered its position as the leader among developing Asian economies, and led to a decline in confidence in Japan maintaining its position as the second economy in the world. Initially Japan was reluctant to acknowledge the astonishing developments in China. Many believed that it would take a long time for China to achieve a level of development equal to that of Japan. However, by 2001 it became obvious that China had become one of the world's great economic powers. As a reaction, numerous books that presented China as a threat were published in Japan. Furthermore, the increasing possibility of China creating an East Asian community with itself as a crucial member was also perceived as a threat to Japan's position in the region and its security (Noriko, 2006, pp. 61). Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni shrine, combined with another history textbook controversy caused massive outrage in China, resulting in numerous

anti-Japanese protests. It should come as no surprise, that the reception of China in Japan and Japan in China changed significantly during that period. This change can be seen in a survey conducted in 2004. Over 58% of respondents in Japan felt "not friendly" toward China, while 53.6% of Chinese respondents felt the same about Japan. It is worth noticing that in a similar survey conducted in the 1980s most Japanese respondents felt "friendly" towards China (Ryōsei, 2006, pp. 21-22).

Even though there were clear signs of improvement in China-Japan relations during Shinzō Abe's first term as the Prime Minister, it seems that he decided to take a harder stance regarding Japanese relations with China and to return to a more nationalistic narrative regarding the Japanese wartime past. It is worth mentioning that relations between both countries became so strained that commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of official international relations between China and Japan had been canceled. The Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute also affected cooperation between them during the APEC summit, where both countries held no formal talks despite the fact that such a meeting had been scheduled (People's Daily, 2012; Pinghui, 2012; BBC News, 2012). Abe's insistence on revising Japan's constitution will without a doubt have an impact on Japan's relation with other Far East countries, particularly with China and South Korea.

The burden of history is still affecting relations in the region. To achieve reconciliation between China and Japan, the two parties crucial to any successful regional integration, both superpowers would have to recognize each other's genuine concerns and tackle the issues that have affected or may affect their bilateral relations. Their cooperation is also essential to regional stability. If they manage to overcome mutual distrust regarding each other's intentions, it might be possible for the two of them to establish some sort of co-leadership in East Asia. In particular, they should confront history-related problems rather than avoiding them or treating them as matters of internal politics, which often seem to be the case in Japan. Christopher Dent presented various possible configurations of regional leadership. As one of the possible patterns, he mentioned the possibility of *general co-leadership*. That would mean that China and Japan form an alliance similar to that of France and Germany in the European Union, which would focus on further advancing East Asian regionalism and representing East Asia in multilateral forums (2008, pp. 23-24). However, this would be only possible if China and Japan developed stronger and more harmonious relations. It seems that without resolving issues connected to collective memory of the Pacific War, such cooperation will not be possible. Moreover, without broad discussion regarding this topic within Japan, it will not be possible for the Japanese people to fully acknowledge its historically determined position in the Far East, as well as to understand what role Japan might play in the future. Another question still remains - is their any possibility of developing regional integration based on so called "Asian identity"? Even though Japan tended to attribute its economic success in the 1980s to certain Asian values, which were not present in the other regions of the world, it is still difficult to define what those values might be. Despite certain efforts to construct a sense of shared identity, nations in Asia lack not only recent memory of cooperation, but also a certain tradition of thinking of themselves as members of a larger cultural entity. Furthermore, the ongoing debate regarding Japan's belonging to the East or the West, not only undermines its position in the region, but makes further discussion regarding potential common values more difficult.

During his speech at Tokyo University, Professor Tsai Tung-Chieh from the Graduate Institute of International Politics of National Chung-Hsing University in Taiwan stressed the importance of developing a new Asian identity, which would focus on what he described as "Asian values". This goal could be achieved by further strengthening cultural, political and military cooperation, instead of focusing only on the economic dimension (2012). However, how to overcome political issues in the region, which recently became even more prominent, is a question that still remains unanswered. However, it is safe to say that such a process would be impossible without developing mutual trust and strengthening the will for cooperation between China and Japan. Nonetheless, developing such trust without solving historical issues first seems to be impossible. This is of course a task for all nations in the region, but I believe that due to its historical burden, Japan has a special role to play in this process.

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