

Taiwan's Place in Northeast Asia's Memory Contests: Can Strategic Diplomacy Help?

By Amy King

Since the end of the Second World War, relations between China and Japan and between the two Koreas and Japan have been fraught with disagreements over history and identity politics, so much so that the present and future often seem captive to differing perceptions of the past. Less well known is the complex debate in Taiwan over its 'history problems' with Japan and Mainland China. Amy King argues that strategic diplomacy provides a powerful lens through which to analyze how Taiwanese elites have constructed historical memory to communicate, contest and negotiate their interests and goals.

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About the author

Amy King is a Lecturer at the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre of The Australian National University.

When we think of the “history problem” in Northeast Asia, it is typically the memory contests between China, Japan and both North and South Korea that spring to mind. An extensive literature has examined the contests among these countries over issues such as the Nanjing massacre, the Yasukuni Shrine and the Japanese military's use of “comfort women” during the Second World War. Yet, this dominant understanding of Northeast Asia's history problem has paid little attention to the role of Taiwan.

In this article I seek to address this gap by examining Taiwan's place in Northeast Asia's memory contests. I do so by adopting the analytical lens of “strategic diplomacy,” defined by Jochen Prantl and Evelyn Goh as “the process by which state and non-state actors socially construct and frame their view of the world; set their agendas; and communicate, contest and negotiate core interests and goals.” Strategic diplomacy offers a useful lens through which to consider how memories of Japanese colonialism, the Second World War, and the post-war settlement have been constructed by political elites in Taiwan. As in Korea and China, Taiwanese memories of Japanese colonialism are contested, have shifted over time, and have been constructed differently by different groups of domestic political elites since 1949. In Taiwan's case, that memory contest is a product of the domestic political struggle over how to define Taiwanese national identity, and of Taiwan's changing security environment. Though Taiwanese memories of Japanese colonialism have often been far more nostalgic — and thus less problematic for the Taiwan-Japan relationship — than those in Korea and China, all these countries' memory contests have been constructed in response to domestic political factors and the regional security environment. Understanding how these factors have combined to produce this history problem is a crucial first step if we are to contemplate how strategic diplomacy might help in managing Northeast Asia's memory contests.

STRATEGIC MEMORY DIPLOMACY UNDER LEE TENG-HUI AND CHEN SHUI-BIAN

Throughout the Cold War, Taiwan allowed few domestic disputes over the memory of Japanese colonialism. Taiwanese official history emphasized the theme of China's victorious struggle against Japanese imperialism and aggression, with the Kuomintang (KMT) portrayed as central to that struggle, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) depicted as a much more marginal and “two-faced” participant.¹ In this official narrative — dictated by a KMT party-state that controlled Taiwanese media, school textbooks, museums and memorials — Taiwanese local history was only mentioned obliquely, if at all. Instead, Taiwan was viewed merely as a site of “patriotic” Chinese resistance against Japanese colonialism.²

This dominant party-state narrative came under threat in the late 1980s, however, as President Chiang Ching-kuo brought an end to martial law and opened the way for political democratization in Taiwan. Memories of Japanese colonialism and wartime aggression quickly became a source of dispute between local Taiwanese (*benshengren*) — that is, those who had been living on Taiwan prior to the KMT's arrival in the late stages of China's civil war, though not necessarily native Taiwanese

— and the KMT “outsiders” (*waishengren*) who had arrived in the late 1940s and 1950s. Whereas the KMT had previously played down Taiwan’s local history in an effort to portray the unity of the Chinese people in collectively resisting the Japanese, *benshengren* now used the history of Japanese colonialism as a way to accentuate Taiwan’s distinctiveness from China. Taiwan’s first two democratically-elected presidents, the KMT’s Lee Teng-hui and the DPP’s Chen Shui-bian, played an important role in shaping these domestic identity debates. Though hailing from the KMT, Lee was also a member of the Hakka ethnic minority on Taiwan, and thus a strong proponent of the *benshengren* movement. Lee’s DPP successor Chen then went much further in politicizing the growing *waishengren-benshengren* divide, and deepening the “nativization” agenda.

Thus, beginning in the 1990s, school history textbooks and educational courses, such as the newly developed course *Renshi Taiwan (Know Taiwan)*, began to focus less on the shared history of Taiwan and China, and more on distinct aspects of Taiwanese history. They did so by putting Japan’s contribution to the modernization and development of Taiwan in the foreground, rather than focusing on Taiwanese resistance to Japanese colonialism. Newer school textbooks discussed the educational, social and economic developments achieved in Taiwan under Japanese rule (1895-1945), and contrasted Taiwan’s much higher levels of development during this period with the lower levels of development achieved on the Mainland.³ Focusing on Japan’s contributions to Taiwan not only allowed anti-KMT elites to portray Taiwan as distinct from the Mainland, but also allowed them to undermine the KMT’s narrative of having been singularly responsible for modernizing Taiwan. Moreover, these new historical narratives could focus on events that had taken place on Taiwan after Japan’s surrender in 1945. In doing so, they contrasted the period of relatively benign Japanese rule before 1945 with the period of harsh occupation under KMT rule after 1945. School textbooks and history curricula emphasized KMT atrocities such as the “228” incident (Feb. 28, 1947), when Chiang Kai-shek’s troops massacred hundreds of local Taiwanese, and ignored atrocities committed by Japanese occupying forces, such as the Musha/Wushe incident in October-December 1930, when Japanese troops gassed Taiwanese rebels.⁴ In addition, the historical narratives told by *benshengren* in the late 1980s and early 1990s used the history of Japanese colonialism as a way to showcase the pluralism of Taiwanese history and culture, thereby creating another point of distinction between Taiwan and the Mainland. Instead of focusing on 5,000 years of unbroken Chinese civilization and Han chauvinism, as was the case on the Mainland, this newer history embraced Taiwan’s contact with Japanese and Dutch colonial forces, celebrated Taiwan’s history as a trading nation that had developed extensive commercial and cultural ties with the West and Japan and appropriated Taiwan’s aboriginal heritage to demonstrate that Taiwan was a pluralistic society.⁵

This domestic contest over the memory of Japanese colonialism was also shaped deeply by Taiwan’s changing security environment in the 1990s. In 1995-1996, in the lead-up to Taiwan’s first democratic elections, Beijing employed successive rounds of military exercises and live missile tests in the Taiwan Strait to protest the Lee government’s efforts to secure greater international status for Taiwan. Though the third Taiwan Strait crisis was ultimately resolved peacefully, the crisis reinforced perceptions in Taiwan that China was willing to use dangerous levels of military force for coercive purposes.⁶ Against the backdrop of this growing security threat from Mainland China, the Taiwanese history problem took on two new dimensions. First, the unveiling of the 228 Monument in Taipei in 1995 coincided with the heightened security threat posed by Mainland China. Commemorating the victims of the 228 incident thus became a way not only for *benshengren* to emphasize the repression that had existed under KMT martial law, but also a way for pro-independence politicians to remind their citizens of the ongoing threat of repression that would inevitably result from reunification with Mainland China.⁷

Second, more positive images of Japanese colonialism were introduced into Taiwan in the 1990s because of a desire by President Lee to cultivate closer political and security ties with Japan. Lee saw an opportunity to co-opt Japan as part of his bid to

create greater international space for Taiwan and to build a countervailing force against growing Chinese power. The 1990s saw rising Japanese concerns about the security threat posed by China. The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis had sparked Japanese worries about Chinese behavior, and raised the specter that China might seek to blockade critically important sea lanes in the Taiwan Strait, or take over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Though it was by no means the only influential factor, the Taiwan Strait crisis played an important role in reinforcing Japan's perceived need for a more effective US-Japan alliance. In April 1996, one month after the Taiwan Strait crisis, Japan and the US began revising their bilateral defense guidelines to allow Japan to play a more active role in regional military operations. The new guidelines, announced in 1997, permitted Japan to provide rear-area support in "situations surrounding Japan," which was widely interpreted as covering the Taiwan Strait.⁸

The 1990s also saw burgeoning identity debates in Japan and, in particular, the emergence of powerful new Japanese voices calling for a less subservient and remorseful version of the history of Japanese imperialism in Asia. These dual trends in Japan coincided neatly with the domestic memory contestation taking place in Taiwan, creating room for strategic memory diplomacy. Japanese such as the bestselling manga author Kobayashi Yoshinori and the right-wing Governor of Tokyo Ishihara Shintaro found common ground with President Lee, as they sought to cultivate memories of Japan's colonial achievements in Taiwan, to credit Japan for Taiwan's successful democratization and to criticize the Japanese government for being too subservient to China in international affairs. Lee's own identity was important in shaping his efforts to cultivate closer relations between Taiwan and Japan. Lee had grown up living under Japanese colonial rule on Taiwan, had served in the Imperial Japanese Army in the Second World War, and had studied at Kyoto Imperial University, all of which left him with a strong shared identity with Japan. In 2001, in a book he co-authored with Kobayashi, Lee spoke with great fondness about Japan's colonial history in Taiwan, called on Japanese to remember their history in a more positive light and criticized those in Japan who focused only on the negative aspects of Japan's history.⁹ Though Lee's sentiment may have derived from his strongly-held personal views, the memories he cultivated through these writings and other activities with Japanese also served strategic diplomatic purposes. Lee used his relationships with politicians, officials and popular writers in Japan to lobby for closer official contact between Japan and Taiwan, to allow visits by Taiwanese officials to Japan and to encourage Japan to play a more active security role in the region.¹⁰

STRATEGIC MEMORY DIPLOMACY UNDER MA YING-JEOU

In 2008, the KMT was re-elected under the leadership of President Ma Ying-jeou. Like the memory contests that took place under Lee and Chen, the Ma administration constructed memories of Japanese colonialism, the Second World War and the post-war settlement in response to Taiwan's domestic political identity debates and changing security environment. In Ma's case, however, historical memory was used as part of a wider project to "re-sinicize" Taiwanese history. Moreover, Ma's strategic memory diplomacy was aimed at achieving simultaneously four apparently contradictory policy aims: stabilizing cross-Strait relations, defending Taiwanese sovereignty claims, enhancing Taiwan's international status *and* strengthening Taiwan's relationship with Japan.

During his term in office (2008-2016), Ma explicitly rejected the approach to Taiwanese identity and cross-Strait relations that had been cultivated by the previous administrations. Building on a strategy first adopted by KMT Chairman Lien Chan in the mid-2000s, Ma overturned Lee and Chen's "de-sinicization" of Taiwanese history and identity. This was partly an electoral strategy designed to undermine the DPP's "nativization" agenda, but was also seen as a way to stabilize cross-Strait ties and re-engage Mainland China after a period of considerable instability. The Ma government re-introduced classical Chinese into the education curriculum; celebrated key aspects of Chinese cultural heritage, such as Confucius

and the Yellow Emperor; and returned the names of national institutions such as the Taiwan Post and the National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall back to their pre-DPP titles, the China Post and the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall.

Ma's re-sinicization of Taiwanese history also directly impacted on how his government remembered Japanese colonialism, the Second World War and the post-war settlement. During the 2008 presidential election campaign, for example, the KMT hosted an exhibition on Chiang Ching-kuo. The exhibition included a commemoration of the life of Taiwanese political leader Jiang Wei-shui (1890-1931), for his resistance against the Japanese occupation of Taiwan.¹¹ In addition, the Ma government was very active in funding and initiating historical exhibitions, conferences and educational materials that showcased the history of key battles in the Second World War and international political treaties negotiated during and in the wake of the war. These included a 2013 conference organized by Ma's presidential office to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the 1943 Cairo Conference and Declaration, and a suite of materials produced in 2015 by Academia Historica, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

In constructing these historical memories, the Ma government highlighted two key narratives that reflected its goals for cross-Strait relations. First, the commemoration of the Second World War shared striking similarities with the way in which the war was simultaneously being commemorated on the Mainland. Beijing and Taipei both focused on the same historical reference points — such as the 1943 Cairo Conference and the 1945 Potsdam Declaration — as a way to emphasize China's contribution to the Allied victory, and China's post-war role as a great power on the world stage (alongside the US, Great Britain and the Soviet Union). Second, the Ma government's commemorative materials also acknowledged the contribution made by the CCP's Eighth Route Army during Second World War battles such as the Battle of Pingxingguan.¹² Acknowledging this shared history and the military contribution made by the CCP allowed the Ma government to highlight the common national story that existed on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and to avoid delegitimizing the CCP's own version of that history. Thus, Ma was constructing historical memory as a way to claim China's wartime history and identity for Taiwan but to do so in a way that would enhance rather than undermine closer cross-Strait relations.

Memories of Japanese colonialism, the Second World War, and the post-war settlement were also constructed by the Ma government in response to Taiwan's regional security environment. Ma's term in office coincided with China's more activist foreign and security policy in East Asia, particularly in maritime and territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas. These disputes directly impact upon Taiwan, which shares with Mainland China many of the same maritime and territorial claims. Indeed, in June 2008, Ma faced one of his first international crises as president when the Japanese Coast Guard arrested the captain of a Taiwanese fishing trawler that was sailing in waters near the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu /Diaoyutai Islands. As Christopher Hughes notes, the dispute placed Ma in the challenging position of negotiating between the Japanese government, domestic Taiwanese activists and critics of Mainland China who condemned Ma for ignoring Chinese sovereignty claims and for assuming that Taiwan could negotiate with Japan as a sovereign government.¹³ Faced with this increasingly precarious position between China and Japan, the Ma government launched two signature policy initiatives between August 2012 and April 2013 — the East China Sea Peace Initiative and the Taiwan-Japan Fisheries Agreement. These two initiatives became a key locus of strategic memory diplomacy with the Ma government using historical memory in developing, communicating and negotiating these initiatives to achieve two core goals.

First, the Ma government used the history of Japanese colonialism and China's defeat of Japan in the Second World War as a way to assert Taiwan's sovereignty

claims to the Diaoyutai Islands without undermining the stability of cross-Strait relations. The assertion of sovereignty was an important goal for the Ma government, given the increasingly demonstrative claims made by both Mainland China and Japan, following Japan's nationalization of three of the islands in 2012. The documentation on the East China Sea Peace Initiative described Japan's "secret annexation" of the islands following Japan's defeat of China in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), and set out Taiwan's sovereignty claims to the islands within the context of key post-Second World War arrangements. The initiative also stipulated that post-war treaties such as the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty (which Taiwan was not invited to sign) and the 1952 Republic of China-Japan Peace Treaty did not undermine Taiwan's sovereignty claims to the islands.¹⁴ However, the history that is presented in Ma's East China Sea Peace Initiative is also carefully constructed so as not to challenge Mainland China's sovereignty claim or undermine the stability of cross-Strait relations. The East China Sea Peace Initiative uses the same historical artefacts as those used by China — such as the "Pictorial Treatise of Taiwan Proper," published in 1872 — to justify Taiwan's sovereignty over the Diaoyutai Islands. Doing so allows the governments on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to acknowledge "Qing China's long and continuous effective administration over the islands as part of Taiwan."¹⁵ The only difference between the two sides' official history is that Ma's initiative omits the term "province," which is used by China when referring to Taiwan.¹⁶ Because both sides consider the Diaoyu/Diaoyutai Islands as being part of Yilan County in Taiwan, it is possible for the Ma government to make a sovereignty claim to the islands without unsettling the "One China" consensus.

Second, the Ma government used historical memory as a way to find creative ways to work with Japan in managing day-to-day fisheries and resource disputes in the East China Sea, and to claim greater international status for Taiwan as a "facilitator of the peace." Documentation on the two initiatives highlights the status of the Republic of China (Taiwan) as one of the four Allied Powers in the Second World War, and its role as one of the founding members of the United Nations, and therefore argues that Ma's East China Sea Peace Initiative is an extension of Taiwan's long-standing role as an international peacemaker.¹⁷ This allowed the Ma government to claim that Taiwan has a special responsibility to temporarily shelve the sovereignty dispute with Japan and find practical ways to "reduce tension and foster peace" in the East China Sea.¹⁸ The Fisheries Agreement provided a platform through which Taiwan and Japan could negotiate a very practical outcome: that is, a maritime area of 74,000 square kilometers in which Taiwanese fishermen now have the right to fish "without interference by Japanese government vessels."¹⁹ But just as important, the Fisheries Agreement and East China Sea Peace Initiative also allowed the Ma government to claim international status as a "responsible stakeholder." It is no coincidence that the Ma government chose Oct. 10, 2012 — the Republic of China's National Day — to take out full-page English-language advertisements in the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* promoting its East China Sea Peace Initiative. During a month in which China and Japan were engaged in diplomatic sledging over disputes in the East China Sea, the Ma government was reminding international audiences of Taiwan's long-standing contributions to international peace.

In many respects, Ma's tenure in office was highly successful. He succeeded in improving cross-Strait relations, and deepening economic, people-to-people and institutional contact between the two sides. Moreover, taking advantage of growing regional tensions between Mainland China and Japan, Ma was able to secure Japan's participation in a maritime initiative of direct benefit to Taiwanese fishing interests, while maintaining Taiwan's sovereignty claims over the Diaoyutai Islands. In each of these areas, the Ma government constructed history as a way to communicate and negotiate its strategic goals with Mainland China and Japan, as well as to wider international audiences.

And yet, Ma's experience also contains a cautionary tale for strategic diplomacy more generally: the importance of the primary domestic audience. Throughout his term in

office, Ma consistently failed to secure domestic support for his cross-Strait agenda. His efforts to re-sinicize Taiwanese identity were viewed with suspicion by a domestic population that increasingly identified itself as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, and which was apprehensive about Taiwan's economic dependence on the mainland. In 2016, the electorate responded: the KMT was badly defeated in the general elections, losing not only the presidency to the DPP's Tsai Ing-wen, but also its majority in the legislature.

CONCLUSION

Since the end of the Cold War, the construction of historical memory in Taiwan has been a response to still-fraught domestic debates over Taiwan's identity, and to Taiwan's changing regional security environment. For the Lee and Chen administrations, highlighting the positive experience and legacy of Japanese colonialism was a way to underscore the differences between *waishengren* and *benshengren* on Taiwan, cultivate a distinct Taiwanese identity and deepen Taiwan's ties with Japan in the face of a more threatening China. For Ma, historical memory served as a way to engage with Mainland China, reinsert the KMT's place in Chinese history and claim greater international space for Taiwan as a "facilitator of the peace." Strategic diplomacy thus provides a powerful lens through which to analyze how Taiwanese elites have constructed historical memory to communicate, contest and negotiate their interests and goals. Looking ahead, strategic diplomacy will continue to serve as an important analytical lens: both the domestic-level drivers and the regional-security drivers of historical memory in Taiwan remain profoundly unsettled by debates within Taiwan about the country's future identity, and by anxiety about the security implications of a rising, and potentially more threatening, Mainland China. All this suggests that, in Taiwan, the history problem may be with us for some time to come.

Amy King is a Lecturer at the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre of The Australian National University.

Notes

1 Barak Kushner, "Nationality and Nostalgia: The Manipulation of Memory in Japan, Taiwan, and China since 1990," *The International History Review* 29, No.4 (2007): 813.

2 Edward Vickers, "Frontiers of Memory: Conflict, Imperialism, and Official Histories in the Formation of Post-Cold War Taiwan Identity," in *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, ed. Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp.214-216.

3 Kushner, 803.

4 Ibid., 803, 813.

5 Vickers, 218, 227-229.

6 Robert S Ross, "The 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force," *International Security* 25, No. 2 (2000): 116-117.

7 Vickers, 226.

8 In 1997, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Seiroku Kajiyama confirmed that the revised defense guidelines would cover situations in the Taiwan Strait, and in 1998, during a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi refused to exclude Taiwan from the scope of the US-Japan defense guidelines. See Qingxin Ken Wang, "Taiwan in Japan's Relations with China and the United States after the Cold War," *Pacific Affairs* 73, No. 3 (2000): 367-368.

9 Kushner, 804-805.

10 Wang, 358-363.

11 Christopher R. Hughes, "Revisiting Identity Politics under Ma Ying-Jeou," in *Political Changes in Taiwan under Ma Ying-Jeou: Partisan Conflict, Policy Choices, External Constraints and Security Challenges*, ed. Jean-Pierre Cabestan and Jacques deLisle (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2014), pp.122-124.

12 See, for example, *Cong Zhanzheng dao Heping: kangzhan shengli ji Taiwan guangfu qishi zhounian jinian te zhan* [From War to Peace: Exhibition Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of Victory in the War of Resistance Against Japan and the Retrocession of Taiwan], Guoshiguan: Taipei, 2015, p.62.

13 Hughes, pp.127-128.

14 "Zhonghua Minguo (Taiwan) tichu: Donghai heping changyi" [The Republic of China (Taiwan) proposes: East China Sea Peace Initiative], pamphlet published by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 3rd Edition, December 2012.

15 Ibid, 4.

16 Ibid, 4; Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, "Zhongguo dui Diaoyudao shixing le changqi guanxia"

[China's long-term jurisdiction over the Diaoyu Islands], September 2015,
www.fmprc.gov.cn/diaoyudao/chn/lsyj/t1301700.htm

17 "Zhonghua Minguo (Taiwan) tichu: Donghai heping changyi," p.3.

18 Ibid, pp.2-3.

19 "The Taiwan-Japan Fisheries Agreement — Embodying the ideals and spirit of the East China Sea Peace Initiative," pamphlet published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 1st Edition, August 2013, p.5.d

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