

KO BUN'YU'S¹ *DEFINING HISTORY*

**A macroscopic analysis of the differences among the histories
of East Asian nations: Japan, China, Taiwan, and Korea**

¹ Profile of Ko Bunyu http://www.sdh-fact.com/CL02_1/72_S3.pdf

FOREWORD

A multitude of factors color our historical perceptions. Some of them are nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, and our best interests. Furthermore, the historical perceptions of individuals and groups may change, influenced by world trends or the passage of time.

In Japan there has been dissent over perceptions of postwar history. The same is true of Taiwan, whose government approves history textbooks. The revision of history textbooks has given rise to unrest. For instance, in the 1990s a group of mainland Chinese launched an attack at a public event intended to explain the reasons for revising Taiwan's history textbooks. When Lee Teng-hui was president of Taiwan (1988-2000), the principal of a middle school that employed mainland Chinese refused to adopt a new civics textbook.

Japan's high school students pour all their energy into preparations for college entrance examinations. But in 2014-15 the attention of Taiwanese university students was drawn to the publication of pro-PRC history textbooks. Their reaction was to form the Sunflower Movement, whose advocates occupied the Legislative Yuan; high school students soon followed their example.

Postwar North and South Korea share the same history, culture, ethnicity, and language. Nevertheless, each nation has conflicting interpretations and perceptions of Korean history, from the Kingdom of Goryeo (918-1392) to the Kingdom of Joseon (1392-1897). The most extreme manifestation of the conflict is both nations' refusal to recognize the other's existence, despite the fact that both are members of the United Nations. The Japanese government, too, has been browbeaten into refusing to recognize North Korea, instead accepting the South's unrealistic claim that the North Korea is part of South Korea! And of course there is disagreement among political parties in South Korea over historical fact, historical interpretation, and historical perception. North Korea sympathizers and conservatives are polar opposites.

One of the more famous disputes pits Korea against the PRC over Goguryeo (37 BC-668 AD), namely, which country's history it belongs in.

Opposition over the historical perception of China (both the PRC and Taiwan) has been raging from several thousands of years. Now that we have entered into the modern era, there is opposition not only between the CPC (Communist Party of China) and the Chinese Nationalist Party of Taiwan, but also within the CPC about how the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) is to be characterized. CPC factions finally agreed upon “decade of turbulence.” Historical evaluations of Mao Zedong are currently evenly divided between positive and negative.

Shitong (Historical Perspectives) compiled by Liu Siji between 708 and 710, recognizes both the Northern and Southern dynasties as legitimate. However, in *Zizhi tongjian* (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), published in 1084, historian Sima Guang affords legitimacy only to the Southern Dynasty. The fifth Qing emperor, Yongzheng, who reigned between 1723 and 1735, wrote *Dayi juemilu* (A Record of Rightness To Dispel Confusion). Yongzheng describes the Manchu conquest of China as morally legitimate.

Did China disappear from the world map during the Yuan and Qing dynasties? Chinese intellectuals are at odds over the answer to this question. Even in the 20th century, both Sun Yat-sen, considered the father of the revolution, and Zhang Binlin, who devised *Zhonghua Minguo*, the Chinese name of the Republic of China, commented that China had twice been a lost kingdom.

Incidentally, the East Indians and the Chinese hold historical perceptions that are diametrically opposite. Indians view history as a phenomenon marking the passage of time. They believe that humans should focus on the most essential, basic matters (such as religion, because it examines the meaning of life and death). The Chinese may go on and on about the correct historical perception, but Indians take no interest; they really don't care. Indians and Pakistanis are of the same ethnicity, but they have embraced different religions. Each nation goes its own way. Indians do not view Sri Lanka as part of India, or inseparable from India; nor do they seek consolidation with Sri Lanka.

Then do the Chinese truly have a passion for history? Not in the least. They prefer the famous novel *Sanguozhi yanyi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) to the more historically accurate *Sanguozhi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms). Even historians, with the exception of those specializing in the Six Dynasties (220-589), do not read

Sanguozhi. On the other hand, Mao Zedong read and reread *Sanguohi yanyi*. He was looking for ideas that would help him win political battles.

Postwar history education in Japan was heavily influenced by the Comintern historical perception (whose goal was social revolution) from Russia, and the Tokyo-Trials historical perception from the US. In the 1980s the Chinese historical perception came to the fore. I believe that the Comintern and Tokyo-Trials historical perceptions are things of the past. However, the demands from Korea and China for Japan to embrace an “accurate” historical perception are very much alive.

Since I was a recipient of the traditional Taiwanese history-education curriculum from the fifth grade through high school, I was not brainwashed by the Comintern or Tokyo-Trials historical perceptions. I did grow up under the influence of the Chinese historical perception. But most Taiwanese view the postwar ROC system as an imported overseas Chinese kingdom. Citizens of Taiwan and the PRC do not share an identity. Moreover, they disagree about almost everything; to use Mao’s words, “conflict and contradiction / antagonistic contradiction].” Therefore, the Taiwanese historical perception is anti-PRC. .

How should we define the Chinese historical perception? In simple terms, it originated from distinctions made between Chinese and foreigners in *Chunqiu dayi* (Exegesis of the Spring and Autumn Annals), and “revere the emperor, but expel foreigners,” as stated in the *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals). It is also the emperor-centric position adopted by *Shiji*. It is legitimacy, as cited in *Zizhi tongjian*, and the Sino-barbarian dichotomy strongly advocated by the three great Neo-Confucian scholars Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, and Wang Fuzhi. And it is *tianzhu* (punishment from heaven), the term used to justify the massacre of barbarians, i.e., non-Chinese tribes.

Among Taiwanese who were brainwashed by the Chinese mindset and Chinese historical perceptions are many people whose minds the Chinese still control. But there are more than a few who oppose the Chinese: people with clear eyes, whose outlook includes the world’s past, present, and future. I am one of them.

Pressed by the PRC and Korea, the Japanese government put on a series of performances after World War II, shows of remorse and apologies. They were politics, not history.

How do we perceive history? In arriving at a value judgement by deciding whether a perception is or is not accurate, we must consider how close it is to historical fact. But there is no need to be intimidated by the likes of remorseful political acts.

Positive freedom — the freedom to adopt one’s own historical perception, and negative freedom — freedom from being coerced to adopt a particular historical perception, are mainstream values in a liberalistic society. A liberalistic nation or regime is founded on the recognition of that freedom, which does not exist in a totalitarian state.

Therefore, what the PRC means by the “correct historical perception” is the historical perception of a totalitarian state, which does not allow for diversity or pluralism regarding opinions or perceptions. Simply to admit or recognize that not only goes against Japan’s national polity and system of government, but also violates Japan’s Constitution (Article 20: Freedom of religion; Article 21: Freedom of expression).

The only conclusion we can reach in an evaluation of modern Japanese history, after the analysis and examination of history that most closely approaches historical fact, is that Japan’s most serious crime was losing the war. At least that is the perception that I and other Taiwanese of my generation, for the most part, share.

To the best of my knowledge, after the Manchurian Incident (1931), only Matsuoka Yosuke, in a speech delivered at the League of Nations, portrayed Japan as a victim. If we expand the scale of history objectively, and broaden the span of historical time, we discover that in the modern era Japan’s contribution to the global community has been immense, so immense that it is impossible to exaggerate when describing it.

In this book I shall reexamine modern Japanese history in the context of historical fact. My goal is to equip readers with historical insight and eliminate the curse of the totalitarian historical perception.

I have written a great many history books, but consider this one to be the culmination of all my works. I dedicate it to my readers.

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