

Panel: Presidential Informal Politics: Becoming Influential Despite the Constitution

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The Informal Influence of Shinzo Abe on the Japanese Politics of Memory Towards the Republic of Korea.

Introduction

The second period of administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe from 2012 is the longest in the modern history of Japanese politics. He may be considered as the strong leader. Abe had ended the period of instability of the Japanese political leadership. He consolidated the power in the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, where in-party political struggle is harder than inter-party one and managed to implement his long-term strategies. One of them is the new strategy of the Japanese politics of memory. Shinzo Abe insists on the revision of the Japan participation in the Second World War. These steps are connected with the attempts to cancel the 9th Article of Constitution, which prohibits Japan from taking part in hostilities. Moreover, it influences relations with the Republic of Korea.

Japan and the Republic of Korea have many historical problems, which are related to the World War 2. The Korean side criticizes the revisionist position of the current Japanese Prime Minister. Main issues, which originate in the period of the occupation of Korea by Japan (1910-1945), are “comfort women”, who were forced into prostitution for Japanese soldiers, and territorial issue over Liancourt rocks. Furthermore, the current Korean president Moon Jae-in actively insists on the resolution of the issue of the forced labour. This problem of the historical past was the cause of the strong tension and “trade war” between countries in 2019 after the decision of the Korean court. It obliged the Japanese company “Nippon Steel &

Sumitomo Metal” to pay compensation to Korean victims exploited during the Second World War. [Goryachev, Goryacheva, 2019]

The Japan-Korea tension over the historical past continues in 2020. For example, in July of 2020 the South Korean botanical garden installed a statue of a Korean woman suffered on the Japanese “comfort station”. In front of this woman the figure of bowing on his knees Shinzo Abe was placed. This statue caused series of protests from the Japanese side. [Japan times, 28.07.2020] They claim that South Korea violates the 2015 agreement on the issue of “comfort women”. Both sides declared in this document, that this issue is finally settled. [*Ianfu mondai nikkanshou*, 28.12.2015] However, this agreement has failed and countries do not comply with it. This declaration was criticized in political circles of both countries and it was not acceptable for the most of Korean people. [Dyachkov, 2019] Korea does not accept this agreement and criticizes it, because they are dissatisfied with the Japanese strategy of forgetting, which is actively promoted by Prime Minister Abe officially and informally. Shinzo Abe attempts to find compromise and mutual decision with Korea, which leave all historical controversies in the past.

Research question, methods and methodology

How effective Shinzo Abe personal influence on the Japanese politics of memory towards the Republic of Korea? To answer this question, next goals should be accomplished

- To identify the strategy of forgetting in the Japanese politics of memory
- To find informal ways of Prime Minister influence on the politics of memory

The identification of the strategy of forgetting will be helpful to measure the influence of Shinzo Abe and effectiveness of his politics of memory in resolving different issues with the Republic of Korea. It is the most vivid phenomenon in the Japanese politics of memory towards Korea. Moreover, it can show how the personal strategy of forgetting of the Prime Minister differs from the official strategy or is it differs at all.

It is possible to study the phenomenon of forgetting in the Japanese politics of memory with the typology of forgetting by the English sociologist Paul Connerton. He identified seven types of forgetting: “repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; forgetting as humiliated silence”. [Connerton, 2008]

Repressive erasure - is most clearly manifested in the history of totalitarian regimes as, for example, the USSR. The physical destruction of "places of memory" associated with a previous regime or people who were convicted posthumously is the most brutal manifestation of this type of forgetting. However, repressive erasure may not always take forms of violence and vandalism.

Prescriptive forgetting, like repressive erasure, can be a strategy of states. However, the difference of this type of forgetting from the first one is that all parties are interested in forgetting some episodes of the past for the common good. In this regard, this forgetting strategy can be publicly recognized.

Forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity is used to avoid cognitive dissonance. Some dark pages of the past may contradict the new identity of both the individual and the states. This type of forgetting precedes a new memory by the eradication of shameful, criminal or contradictory pages of the past.

Structural amnesia happens due to a lack of information. Paul Connerton associates this type of forgetting with the genealogy research of John Barnes. In a person's pedigree, socially significant generations are more likely remembered. The memory of female lines disappears much easier, since they often do not transmit names to their descendants. Moreover, the disappearance of the memory transmitted in the oral form due to the death of their carriers can be attributed to structural amnesia.

Forgetting as annulment arises from an overabundance of information. This forgetting may refer to an obsolete knowledge that is no longer needed in society. Moreover, the cancellation of the past is associated with the emergence of archives

and the Internet. If something can be immortalized in archives, including electronic ones, it is already can be forgotten.

Forgetting as planned obsolescence refers to the culture of consumption in the modern society. Although this type of forgetting carries a potential danger to both individual and group identity, it cannot be attributed to the politics of memory in international relations. Agents of the planned obsolescence are the participants in the system of economic relations.

Forgetting as “humiliated silence” can refer to both civil society and the state. An example of the manifestation of this type of forgetting can be the memory of the bombing of German cities by the allied forces. During this assault, more than 600 thousand civilians were killed. The large number of victims of the war, including the civilian population, cannot be forgotten. However, it is not common to talk about this post-war trauma or raise this issue on the international level. Due to the fact, that the main feature of the politics of memory in Germany is repentance for crimes committed during the Second World War, German have to be silent about their victims.

The Japanese style of politics assumes many ways of informal influence. [Matsuoka, 2020] It can be different factions inside a political party, interest groups, funds. Shinzo Abe is able to be the Prime Minister for such a long time because of his strong informal power. Through these channels he can promote his view of the Japanese politics of memory. This way can be effective to form the strategy according to Abe’s personal view. The existence of such informal influence can be proved with the unofficial statements of Shinzo Abe, which differ from official. The personal opinion of the Japanese Prime Minister and his tactics, realized through informal channels can be noticed and criticized by Korea. I hypothesize that this informal influence is a factor, which prevents Japan-Korea compromise on historical issues.

Shinzo Abe speeches in this research will be analysed with the narrative analyses. Moreover, his official speeches and undocumented statements will be compared. This analysis will be focused on the identification of the forgetting type

of the Japanese politics of memory towards the Republic of Korea and determining the personal influence of Shinzo Abe.

The personal influence of Shinzo Abe on the politics of memory

Does Shinzo Abe have any personal opinion about the Japanese historical past and personal strategy of the politics of memory? The current Prime Minister is criticized for his contradictory attitude about the participation of Japan in the Second World War. Two different positions about his political philosophy and ideology can be found in study of Japanese politics. The first group of researchers labels Shinzo Abe as the rightist, nationalist and revisionist. They argued that his grandfather Nobusuke Kishi influenced Abe's political ideology. After the World War 2 Nobusuke Kishi was convicted as Class A war criminal. He worked in occupied Manchuria and mobilized hundreds of thousands Chinese and Korean people to work on the production of Japanese military equipment. In addition, he was the supporter of the war against the United States. However, he was rehabilitated and even became the Prime Minister. During his administration he supported the alliance with the USA, he wanted to cancel the 9th Article of Constitution and considered the Japanese participation in the World War 2 and necessity and holy duty. [Panov, 2016] Jennifer Dixon also characterizes Shinzo Abe as a far right conservative and revisionist and calls his nationalist faction in LDP the motivating force behind mythmaking and relativizing of the historical past. [2018] Shinzo Abe is the special advisor of a parliamentary group of *Nippon Kaigi* (Japan Conference). This ultra-conservative organisation has a significant influence on the Japanese government.

The second group of researchers agrees that ideology of the current Japanese Prime Minister is very close to nationalism. However, they think that Shinzo Abe is very pragmatic and uses right rhetoric to gain support from the nationalist part of population. [Streltsov, 2013] The bright example of demonstration his strong position for conservative people was the visit of Yasukuni shrine in the beginning of his second administration. This is the important Japanese place of memory, there fallen Japanese warriors are remembered. Chinese and Koreans criticize the practice of visiting this Shinto shrine, because soldiers of the Second World War, including

class A war criminals, are honoured there too. [Panov, 2016] Visiting this place by the Japanese officials could be the reason of serious international tension. Previous Prime Ministers avoided Yasukuni and Japanese people associated it with weakness of political leaders. In December of 2013, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe a year after coming to power visited this shrine. [Japan Times, 26.12.2013] Previously, he was criticized by Japanese people for avoiding to visit it in August in the day of the end of the World War 2. He has chosen the image of the patriot who do not care about the political conjuncture. It was the move to win more trust among Japanese people instead of good relations with China and Republic of Korea. Moreover, there are rightist factions in LDP and Abe needs their support to preserve his leading position in the party. Their nationalist view may influence Shinzo Abe foreign policy strategy. For example, his weak position in territorial issues will be unacceptable for right LDP factions and the in-party struggle will flare up again.

Abe is quite pragmatic because he understood that he cannot establish good relations with China. At the same time, these relationships cannot worsen to the point that prevents economic cooperation. However, it is very risky strategy in relations with the Republic of Korea, because it discords the strategic triangle Washington — Tokyo — Seoul. The main Japanese partner and guarantee of security the United States are dissatisfied with Japan—Korea tensions. They distance themselves from these conflicts or put pressure on Japan especially in issues of the historical past. Such complexity of Japan—Korea relations makes it the very illustrative case for studying the strategy of Shinzo Abe politics of memory.

I suppose that these two views should be combined to get the most detailed political portrait of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Both groups of researchers agree that Abe is the strong and ambitious leader. He wants to go down in the history by returning Japan in the history as an important power in international relations. Very active strategy of the Abe's cabinet in all territorial issues, politics of memory and national security policy is a vivid evidence of it. For example, the Prime Minister has repeatedly stated that he will achieve a peace treaty with Russia and return of four Kuril islands. It is a part of his strategy of make Japan the

significant country in international relations. It is impossible without the politics of memory. He wants to erase shameful episodes from the history of Japan and relieve the burden of apologies. He uses his formal power and informal ways to do it. However, this strategy is very difficult to implement in relations with the Republic of Korea.

The official position of Shinzo Abe regarding the historical past in relations with the Republic of Korea

After the establishment of the cabinet of ministers, Abe declared that he will make the special statement dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the end of the war. [Naikakusori daijin danwa, 14.08.2015] The Prime Minister himself created the expert commission. They had been preparing this statement for a year. This is a very important document in research of the Japanese politics of memory and it has a direct link with the Shinzo Abe personal political philosophy view. Moreover, this statement was directed not just to Japanese people but to the whole world. Asian countries, especially Korea, closely followed the content of this speech. Narrative analyses of this statement will be helpful to determine the forgetting tactic of the Japanese politics of memory towards the Republic of Korea.

The narrative of this speech begins with a theme of the modernization of Japan in the XIX century. Japan is positioned in a global context as an Asian country opposite to Western colonialists. The next topic covers the period from the First World War to the outbreak of the Great Depression. Here Japan had already become a member of the international community. Together with other countries they attempted to abandon war as an instrument of national policy. Then, Abe claims that the Great Depression and the formation of economic blocs caused serious damage to Japan, and the feeling of economic and diplomatic isolation had to “resort to force”. This is how the Prime Minister designates the country's transition to a militaristic track. S. Abe underlines the influence of external factors and the global environment. In his speech it functions as justifications to reduce Japan's guilt and responsibility for the war. Despite the fact that the main theme of the speech is the end of the Second World War, Shinzo Abe did not pay the attention to the war itself

in the historical narrative. He mentioned the Manchurian incident, Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, the path of war of Japan, and immediately the story of the war was interrupted at its end.

The culmination of the statement was the "apology" of the Prime Minister. Abe stated that "Japan has repeatedly expressed feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for its actions during the war." The Prime Minister did not apologize for his own, especially since he further stated that future generations should not bear the burden of constant repentance. Thus, S. Abe expressed his attitude to the apology rhetoric. In his opinion, in the future it should be stopped.

The part of the speech that indirectly connected with Korea is about the colonial rule. The Japanese leader, said that Japan has abandoned the colonial type of ruling. However, neither Korea, nor other countries that were colonially dependent on Japan were mentioned.

In the final part of his speech, S. Abe said that the memory of the Second World War will forever remain in the souls of the Japanese. However, there was no question of Japan's responsibility for the war or mention of any war crimes and their victims. Once again, the Prime Minister referred to the economic bloc system of the 1930s, removing the burden of Japan's militarization to external factors.

Thus, in his speech dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the end of World War 2, Abe Shinzo did not make a direct apology. In his WWII narrative, he did not mention any war crimes, including "comfort women" and Korean forced labour. Korea has never been mentioned at all as a victim of Japanese aggression or as a Japanese colony. The strategy of forgetting of S. Abe is justified by the fact that Japan has repeatedly apologized for what they have done and has suffered greatly because of the war too. Moreover, Japan managed to build a democratic peaceful state, successfully integrated into the system of international relations. In contrast to the silence about the victims of Japan, the Prime Minister devoted a large part of his speech to the victims from the Japanese side, including soldiers. There is clearly a prescriptive type of forgetting. S. Abe's speech is addressed, first of all, to the world

community, including Korea. He tries to inform them that Japan does not intend to apologize for the war “forever”.

The second document that is proving that S. Abe uses prescriptive forgetting as the main strategy of his politics of memory in Japan-Korea relations is the mutual agreement on the “comfort women” in 2015. [*Ianfu mondai nikkanshougi*, 28.12.2015] Abe intended to use this treaty to close the issue of comfort women forever in relations with Korea. This agreement, together with Japanese money compensation, would be a sanction for “forgetting”. The Japanese-Korean statement on “the comfort women” contains Abe Shinzo's apology as a separate paragraph. As the Prime Minister, he expresses “his apologies and regrets” to Korean women who have suffered at the “comfort stations” for the first time.

On the one hand, it may seem that S. Abe contradicts his previous words from the speech dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, where he did not apologize personally and said that future generations of Japan do not have to bear the burden of repentance. On the other hand, in the Japanese-Korean statement on “the comfort women”, both sides confirmed the finality and irreversibility of the solution of this historical problem. The apology of Prime Minister S. Abe is considered here as the last. The Japanese side emphasized in the document and separately later that together with the apology and the payment from the Japanese budget of one billion yen the problem of “the comfort women” can be considered as finally solved. Thus, Abe Shinzo, expecting a complete resolution of the problem at the level of the governments of two countries, sent his personal direct apologies to the South Korean side, which were supposed to become the final step to successfully implement the prescriptive forgetting strategy. However, this agreement has failed. Both Abe and South Korean President Park Geun-hye faced strong criticism and pressure, both in political circles and from the people.

Japan-Korea agreements on “the comfort women” were not implemented and this failure has influenced the transformation of the strategy of Japan's historical policy. Narrative analyses of two official speeches of Shinzo Abe demonstrated that he tries to implement the prescriptive forgetting as the strategy of the politics of

memory in relations with the Republic of Korea. Abe wanted to find the compromise with the Korean side to get “the sanction to forget” past war crimes of Japan. He formally apologized for the first time to Koreans for exploiting “the comfort women” during the WW2 and sides even found agreement in the mutual statement. However, this strategy failed and the historical conflicts connected with “comfort women”, forced labour and Liancourt islands flared up again. Korea and Japan seem to be too far from the new compromise. One of the reason for that is Abe informal influence on the politics of memory, which is strongly criticized and caused to doubt sincerity of Japanese apologies among Koreans.

Informal channels of Abe influence on the Japanese politics of memory

Shinzo Abe may ensure his politics of memory with the help of the mass media. Big media companies are under the constant pressure from the government, which strengthen after the Abe coming to power. There are set of rules and recommendations from the Abe’s government for mass media. It concerns interviews of people, who may criticize the politics of memory of Shinzo Abe. For example, the American media got the letter from the Japanese diplomat. He did not recommend to interview professor Koichi Nakano, who is known for his criticism of the Japanese policy regarding “the comfort women”. [Asahi shinbun, 28.04.2015] Moreover, journalists, who criticize the policy of the current Prime Minister may find themselves in the “black list”. Furthermore, there are interest groups of journalists, who work with the government and positively cover events. In the result of such pressure, the Japanese media have been forced to introduce self-censorship. Korean historical conflicts are presented only in the favourable for the government light. Attempts to revise the history of the Second World War are almost not criticized by the mass media. [Panov, 2016]

The second channel of the informal influence of Shinzo Abe is unofficial statements and speeches, where narrative about the historical past differs from the official. The vivid example is the statement about apologies of ex-Prime Minister of Japan Naoto Kan. Abe said that his apologies to Korean people for traumas of the

colonial rule is the stupidity. [The Japan Times, 24.05.2015] In his official position his rhetoric is softer and he emphasize on the importance of previous apologies.

The third channel of the informal influence on the politics of memory is private education. From the first administration, Shinzo Abe aimed to make education more patriotic. In 2017, the Prime Minister was in the center of a scandal connected with the educational fund *Moritomo gakuen*. [Streltsov, 2017] Schools of this fund used 1890 Imperial Education Edict from the militaristic period of Japan. This fund conducted ultranationalist ideology and called Chinese and Korean people as bearers of dangerous ideas. Akie Abe the wife of the Prime Minister was the honorary director of one of schools. Previously, she claimed that her husband said that the educational program of *Moritomo gakuen* is good. [Asahi shinbun, 2015] Shinzo Abe distanced himself from this fund during the scandal. He said that his wife is a private person. However, she actively uses her status of the first lady and may be considered as the public figure. Moreover, Japanese political style is of the clan nature. Family bonds are very important for politicians in Japan. Abe himself is a descent of the famous political clan. It is very typical to use family members without official position to promote risky policy of official politicians. Private schools of fund, which are supported by nationalist political groups use different schoolbooks with revisionist view on the history of Japan participation in the Second World War.

Conclusion

Shinzo Abe uses the strategy of the prescribed forgetting in his politics of memory in relations with Korea. He tried to find compromise and reach mutual agreement. This is his position directly aimed to the Korean side. In dialogue with Korea he was ready to apologies despite his revisionist position, pressure of nationalist factions in LDP and conservative Japanese people. However, this policy has failed and Japan is in the new stage of confrontation with Korea over the historical past. In 2019 the issue of the forced labour was the reason for the “trade war”. In 2020 “the comfort women” issue surfaced again with the erecting in Korea the statue, which depicts Shinzo Abe kneeling before the Korean girl. Now the

Japanese government tries to defend itself with the 1965 and 2015 agreements, which supposed to end all historical controversies between countries. However, there is the other part of Abe politics of memory, which is directed inside the country. It is harder and revises the period of occupation of Korea more active. Prime Minister Abe uses informal channels to ensure his prescriptive forgetting. These are mass media, personal statements and education.

This informal way can be effective only inside the country because it is strongly criticized abroad and ruins any normalization steps in Japan-Korea relations. The results of the 7th Japan—South Korea joint public opinion poll [2019] showed that about 50% of Korean respondents have a bad impression about Japan. The number of Korean people dissatisfied with Japan decreased by more than 20% over the last four years. However, it is still the big part of population, that will influence Korean decision-makers. Especially, Korean public opinion will influence in historical issues, because 76.1% of Koreans think that Japan has not properly reflected on its history of invading Korea. Thus, it is difficult for S. Abe to find compromise with Korea, because this issue is popular among Koreans and politicians take uncompromising stance to gain support of people. At the other hand, the Korean political institutions is unstable and lack of mechanisms of transmitting. Change of leaders prevent from establishment of long-term strategy for solution of historical problems. These specific features of Korean politics allow to suggest that informal politics of Shinzo Abe is under the observation of Korean government. They ready to use any scandal or fact connected with Japanese revisionism to gain the support of Korean people.

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