HISTORY AND MEMORY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NATIONS OF NORTH EAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Historical memory has a lot of influence on the relationship between states and people of North East Asia (NEA). North East Asia is a complicated region where interests of leading world countries are concentrated. Economic and cultural rise of NEA is accompanied by the rise of national identity and nationalism in region’s states. Those also based on the historical memory. Peoples in the region experience different historical memory. Collective memory is understood as a representation of the past shared by a group or community, there are communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory is generally oral and is often short-lived, perhaps lasting for one generation. In contrast, cultural memory refers to the texts, ceremonies, images, architectures, and monuments designed to memorialize important events.

In the paper the author has being trying to show historical memory in NEA in all those spheres, in mass activity, in textbooks, ceremonies, monuments, etc. Especially the paper pays attention to the anti-Japan movement in China and its influence to the regional situation. So, “overcoming the past” and promotion of uniting potential in spiritual life are the main components of the relationship between states and people of the region.

Keywords: North East Asia history, historical memory, anti-Japan movement in China, textbooks, monuments, museums.

Historical memory has a lot of influence on the relationship between states and people of North East Asia (NEA).

Contemporary period of mankind’s history is characterized by the combination of two main processes – globalization and regionalization. Moreover regionalization has been an important part of globalization manifestation and realization. Though economy underpins those two processes, they are not limited to it. Political, social, civilizing, cultural and spiritual processes play significant roles in regional construction and development.

North East Asia is a complicated region where interests of leading world countries are concentrated. In contemporary world North East Asia is the richest and most dynamically developing region. But it also has been a place where different cultures, different civilizations, different history memories have been meeting and interacting.

Economic and cultural rise of NEA is accompanied by the rise of national identity and nationalism in region’s states. Those also based on the historical memory. Gilbert Rozman asserts, that national identities look back to evaluate country’s history, selectively applauding some periods while making excuses for unsatisfactory outcomes in others. [1]
Peoples in the region experience different historical memory. It is based on different images of the past, besides all these “images of the past” can have both positive and negative features. Conflicts rose in NEA many times in the last two centuries, borders shifted and deep social changes took place. All those issues formed historical memory of nations creating both uniting and dividing lines in the spiritual field of the region.

In recent years the situation in NEA has become more complicated. The past and new conflicts were arisen. Such topics as the debates about the Japan’s aggression against Asia continental countries in modern times, the reflection of this aggression in historical textbooks, the denial of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese, the discussion about ‘comfort women’ again become in the top of public opinion. New events such as territorial disputes between Japan and China (Senkakus or Daioyu islands), Japan and Korea (Takeshima or Dokdo a group of small islets), the visit of the Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Yasukumi Shrine on 26 December 2013, China’s declaration of the Air Defense Identification Zone, etc. have been escalated the tension in the region.

Most of them have connection with the historical memory, especially the Chinese historical memory and Japanese historical memory. As scholars point out during periods of crisis and instability, appeals are often made in collective memory. [2]

Collective memory is understood as a representation of the past shared by a group or community. [3, 181] First, historians come up with the concept of communicative memory. These forms of remembrance are generally oral and are often short-lived, perhaps lasting for one generation. It often privileges the interests of the contemporary. In contrast, cultural memory refers to the texts, ceremonies, images, architectures, and monuments designed to memorialize important events. Schools also play an important role in shaping collective memory because they are often the first places that children learn about important historical events. [3, 182]

In North East Asia all this factors have a significant importance.

First, say about communicative memory. The good example of this phenomenon is anti-Japan demonstration protests in China. The facts show, the younger generation in Northeast Asia seems even more imbued with the ideology of nationalism than those who went through the war. Over the last three decades we can marked several picks of anti-Japan popular protest in China, for example in 1985, 1996, 2005, 2012. In this connection, some questions are rose regarding those protests. What were the contexts of protests? Were there any differences among protests? Did those protests were spontaneous and self-organized or were organized and controlled by governance, or something like mixed? How those protests influenced China’s foreign policy?

The studies [4] show that from one to another protests the process has been intensified. More people and more resources have been involved in actions. For example, in the last protests an Internet communication played a significant role. The contexts of protests were also different. In 1985 some events inspired the activity of Chinese youth. Those were on 15 August in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II in the Pacific the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro Yasukuni Shrine, which honors the souls of Japan’s war dead, the calling of Peking University students to commemorate 18 September, the anniversary of Japan’s 1931 invasion of Northeast China, the plans of students to organize nationwide demonstrations on 9 December, the anniversary of the 1935 student protests against the Nationalist government’s ‘appeasement’ policy toward Japan. The protests were caused by some anniversary dates.
In 1996 new pick of anti-Japan protests in China was caused by Diaoyu Islands dispute. The 1996 dispute emerged in July, when a group of Japanese nationalist activists travelled to the islands to renovate a lighthouse and then demanded that the lighthouse be recognized by the Japanese government. The centers of anti-Japan protests were Hong Kong and Taiwan. Chinese leaders, preparing to resume sovereignty over Hong Kong the following year, maneuvering to avoid having the Hong Kong protests spill over onto the mainland. Those events intensified anti-Japanese feelings in Chinese society.

The 2004-2005 anti-Japan protests also were caused by Diaoyu Islands dispute. In that time the mainland Chinese took part in the movement actively. The ‘baodiao movement’ (‘protect Baodiao Islands movement’) has been spread to mainland China. Yet just as in 1985 and 1996, the Chinese government took steps to cool public anger and stabilize bilateral relations. They began by restraining negative media coverage of Japan, blocking anti-Japan content on the Internet, and prohibiting all Japan-related protests. As a result, public protests – online and on the street – rapidly decline.

The 2012 anti-Japan movement also began by Diaoyu Islands dispute. The activity of protesters was very high. Thousands of people took to the streets as Japanese cars were attacked and Japanese restaurant windows were smashed. On September, the popular Phoenix website’s online poll received over one million responses urging ‘military action’ toward Japan. The protests concentrated across some dates, 7 July, the anniversary of Japan’s 1937 invasion of China, 15 August, the anniversary of the end of WWII in the Pacific, 18 September, anniversary of Japan’s 1931 invasion Manchuria.

The 2012 protests emerges one new element. The 2012 consumer boycott coupled with Beijing’s more assertive economic statecraft, represents a potent extension of the public role in Chinese foreign policy. A consumer boycott emerged in spring 2005 amidst the widespread street demonstrations and online petition campaign protesting Japan’s efforts to gain a permanent set on the UN Security Council.

Interaction between state and society during the 2012 wave of anti-Japan protests largely followed the well-established pattern, best understood as a wave of popular mobilization. [4, 214-215] During this protest we can see that public opinion has more influence on China’s foreign policy. The rise of influence proves that the historical memory has more influence on China’s foreign policy, and on Chinese-Japanese relation.

Next, say about cultural memory, and, first, refer to the textbooks. As mention above, schools play an important role in shaping collective memory. So, we can assert that in all NEA countries the secondary and high school historical textbooks have been having important value. Daniel Sneider states, “Viewed through the prism of using textbooks to form a distinctly “patriotic” rendition of history with a clear goal of identify formation, the textbooks widely used in China are clearly written to this end. In contrast, Japanese textbooks tend to be almost a conscious effort to avoid such ‘patriotic’ education, although that does not necessarily make them more historically complete in their account of the past.” [5, 37]Wartime and not wartime issues such as colonization of Korea by Japan, Japan invasion of continental areas in 1930-40th, 1937 Nanjing Massacre, the existence of so-called ‘comfort women’, etc. are the subject of official demarches and warnings about the revival of Japanese “militarism”.

After the beginning of reforms at the 1980th in Chinese textbooks new narrative had been appeared. During Mao Zedong period the Chinese textbooks concentrated on the
struggle of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its military forces against the Japan's invasion and the national traitor Kuomintang (KMT). But the official historiography has changed since the end of the Cold War, and the most obvious remarkable manifestation of the new official attitude toward the war experience in public culture was the much more positive tone taken towards the role of the KMT government of Chiang Kai-shek. KMT and Chang Kai-shek became national forces, and also take part in war resistance against Japan. But CPC as before played the leading role in the war. The change of attitude towards KMT has been explained by the change of China’s policy towards Taiwan. The necessity for national unity and ‘Taiwan’s return home’ policy change the attitude towards KMT and Chan Kai-shek in the People Republic of China. The same reassessments were also made about some Chinese historical figures. For example, in the past the 19th century reactionaries and conservatives Li Hongzhang and Zeng Guofan has been became the great patriots and national heroes.

In contemporary China there is a trend to deep the history of Japanese aggressive war. In his work Han Dongyu from Northeast Normal University [6] tries to substantiate that Japan’s invasion of Korea 1592-1598, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 and the Japanese War of Aggression against China of the 1930s-1940s were conducted under one ideological tone, Japan’s main purpose was exclusive domination of East Asia.

It is very interesting how in China reflects the end of the war. The war concludes in Europe in May 1945. The Soviet Union declares war on Japan and destroys the elite Japanese Kwantung Army in the northeast. Communist forces launch a nationwide counterattack. And on August 15th, the Japanese surrender (no mention of the atomic bombing appears in this action). In the opposite case, in the historical narratives in some East Asia countries you can get acquainted with US Japan’s atomic bombing, and no mention that Soviet army defeated Japanese Kwantung Army.

And one more trend has been appeared in 2000s, computer games based on historical material. In August 2007, the long-awaited Resistance War Online (Kangzhan Online), a Chinese-developed online game based on the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945) was officially launched in China. [7, 499] Over the last few decades, especially since the beginning of the millennium, computer games have become a ‘global socio-cultural phenomenon’. [8] China’s authorities have begun to use the new medium of online games to propagate patriotic and nationalist values. Chinese patriotic digital games directly resulted from and added force to rising popular nationalism in the 1990th [7, 500]. Some Chinese commentators argue that the emergence of Chinese patriotic games was a reaction to Japan’s own militaristic war games. [7, 501]

Chinese officials have contended:

“History games are unique among online games. If we do not occupy (this market) it will be occupied by foreign manufactures. Then other countries will dominate the right of speech, and China will be left in a position of being portrayed and being narrated rather than delivering its own understanding and sentiment about its own history.” [7, 507]

The Resistance War-themed games embody what the Chinese state wants the people to remember about Resistance War because their storylines are strictly based on the officially sanctioned narrative. [7, 511]

Ceremonies, monuments, and museums have been played the important role in historical memory. For the last time China has been took several opportunities to propagate national values and state’s historical achievements. In February 2014 China’s top legislature Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress ratified two new
national days, one mark victory of the war against Japanese aggression and the other to commemorate victims in the Nanjing Massacre. This was made to keep history firmly in mind, recall the Chinese people’s arduous resistance against Japanese aggression, and commemorate heroic martyrs in the war as well as the people who contributed to the victory, the decision said. [9] The country will now hold national memorial activities on September 3 and December 13 every year.

China’s officials were very active on July 7, 2014, the 77th anniversary of the start of Chinese people’s war of resistance against Japanese invasion. Chinese leader Xi Jinping delivered a special speech at a ceremony at the Museum of the War of the Chinese People’s Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Xi Jinping underscored the intractability of history as the nation commemorate the start of war. He said,

“History is history and facts are facts. Nobody can change history and facts... Anyone who intends to deny, distort or beautify history will not find agreement among Chinese people and people of all other countries... It’s a pity that a small minority of people still ignore iron-clad history and the fact that tens of millions of innocent people sacrificed their lives in the war.” [10]

The Chinese have been widely commemorated the anti-Japan war. A lot of exhibitions, memorial ceremonies have been held. One fact specially attracted my attention. In 2011 the authorities of Fangzheng county (Heilongjiang province) dismantled new monument to Japanese. The monument was built in Chinese-Japanese friendship garden to commemorate more than five thousands Japanese people who were perished in China after the end of World War II. They were Japanese migrants who were settled in Northeast China. Some of them couldn’t return home after the war and was died of starvation. The officials said that this monument have to demonstrate the humanism of Chinese people and the vices of Japanese militarism. But ordinary people stand against this monument. Some young people from “Baodiao movement” tried to destroy the monument themselves. After that the authorities took a decision to dismantle the monument. [11]

All those facts reflect the rise of Chinese-Japanese tensions at the last decade. The new tension has been rose in 2013-2014. The situation in NEA has been became less stable, more conflicted. NEA has a lot of problems, such as situation on Korea peninsula, military activity in region, territorial disputes among state, etc. And now historical memory has been produced new tensions. How to overcome this problem.

So, “overcoming the past” and promotion of uniting potential in spiritual life are the main components of the relationship between states and people of the region. In this process the NEA can base not only on its own experience, but on the experience of other regions. For example, after World War II Europe has gained rich experience in “overcoming the past”.

First steps in this direction have already been made, but they are yet to prove their effectiveness. For example, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean historians issued several collaborative works, where they had been trying to find common approach to the controversial events in the history of those countries in XIX – XX centuries.

Unfortunately, it is necessary to state that Russian scholars are yet to participate in this collaborative work (We mean, issuing the collaborative works), although region’s history problems have been periodically discussed with Russian specialists at different regional conferences.

In order to achieve a more profound success the dialog needs to be held not only among universities and scientific centers, but also among museums of the North East Asia.
In this respect the common historical and geographical researches are of considerable interest. These researches are orientated to study not only communication systems that used to tie together different places for a long time and defensive installations that marked the borders between nations, but also the traditions of region’s cartography and the history of its image.

We consider that the common study of North East Asian history is the starting-point for development of policy of memory, which can promote the strengthening of security and co-development of all participants of regional construction.

REFERENCES