

## **Lost in Memorialization?**

### **--Unmaking of 'History Issues' in Postwar Philippines-Japan Relations--**

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### Introduction

As a historian I usually do not like to refer what happened only in a few weeks before the conference. It is not about the state of emergency but the attendance of H.E. Japanese Ambassador Ryuichiro Yamazaki at the Memorare Manila 1945 gathering, which Ambassador referred to at his opening remarks yesterday. Rarely do I praise the government or any government officials, because I think historians who are doing critical studies on the past should always detach themselves from any government authorities of the past and present. However, this time, I cannot but share appreciation for the recent efforts in the field of public diplomacy of the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines and the leadership of Ambassador Ryuichiro Yamazaki, with respect to the very topic of this presentation, i.e., issues of war memories, including the attendance and important speeches Ambassador made on such occasions as the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of General Yamashita's surrender in Kiangang, Ifugao (September 2, 2005), the 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary of U.S. landing on Leyte (October 20, 2005), and the 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Manila I mentioned just now (February 21, 2006). It was not only attendance of the Ambassador that was important and commendable, but the carefully chosen wording of speeches on these occasions that I think truly important, which has given consideration to the current public sentiments surrounding the memories of war in the

Philippines as far as one can within the range of Japanese government's official views.

In this paper I would like to place the Embassy's and Ambassador's efforts in a historical context by discussing (1) the pattern which might be called as "virtuous circle of Japanese apology and Filipino forgiveness" that has transformed the postwar Philippines-Japan relations from one of hatred to reconciled; (2) historical significance of the war dead memorialization as an important factor in the making of the "virtuous circle"; (3) "lost in memorialization" or fading war memories (on Japanese side) as a flip side of reconciliation, which potentially could have the dangerous consequence in the Philippines-Japan relations; (4) the signs of discontent expressed by the Philippine media on the lack of publicity for the Japanese wartime atrocities and wrongdoings in the Philippines in recent years; response to the dangerous signs and the success of "preventive diplomacy" by Embassy of Japan from 2005 to 2006 and (5) what more should be done; the possibility of sharing and preserving war memories between the peoples without provoking an antagonism. In sum, I would like to point out we have to go beyond what can be achieved by the public diplomacy in order to realize more desirable and much higher level of reconciliation between the Philippines and Japan.

### 1. "Virtuous Circle" of Apology and Forgiveness

Recent efforts of Japanese Embassy and Ambassador I mentioned just now were truly remarkable but not an innovation in the history of Philippines-Japan relations. They rather were an affirmation of its established pattern since at least the 1980s, in which Japanese apology and Filipino forgiveness characterized the mood and created the "virtuous circle" between the two countries. This made a stark contrast with the Northeastern Asian "history issue" disputes, which have been characterized by "vicious circle" of harsh exchange of words and provocations.

For example, when Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone visited the Philippines in May 1983, he was so moved by the welcoming crowds (apparently mobilized by the then dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos) that he personally redrafted a banquet speech, in which he went as far as to say, "our country deeply regrets and repents having caused your country and people such trouble in the past war. The more you treat us with warm friendliness and generosity, the deeper should we repent and castigate ourselves." This was the first time in any occasions that Mr. Nakasone had ever expressed "repentance for the past" in such clear terms.<sup>1</sup> Also noteworthy was President Corazon Aquino's state visit to Japan in November 1986, when Emperor Hirohito allegedly "kept

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<sup>1</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, 5 May 1983, morning edition, p.1.

apologizing for what the Japanese caused the Philippines” while Ms. Aquino told the Emperor “to forget about this.”<sup>2</sup> The handlings of “comfort women” issues in the Philippines-Japan relations might also be included as the one fitted to this pattern.

These cases show that a pattern has been established between the two governments, in which the Japanese side would make an apology and the Philippine side would accept it in good faith. This has not been the case with China or Korea since the 1980s. This contrast becomes more remarkable when we consider the fact that the Philippine government once was an almost lonely challenger in the western democracy to the Japan’s return to the international community during the early postwar years, expressing skepticism about the truthfulness of Japanese determination to eliminate its militarism,<sup>3</sup> while Filipinos as a people were regarded as harboring the worst “feelings against Japan (tainichi kanjo)” for many years after the war because of their intolerable experiences during the war.

The transformation of the bilateral relations from one of hatred to (at least) tolerance was brought about by combination of a number of factors, including international politics of Cold War, reparation and ODA, trade and investment, and so forth. In my previous article titled “Politics of Mourning,”<sup>4</sup> however, I stressed the significance of accumulation of positive images generated from increased contact between the two peoples in memorializing the war dead as a socio-cultural basis of the transformation. Let me summarize my argument in the article.

## 2. Significance of War Dead Memorialization

Because of the vast number of Japanese who died in the Philippines during the Asia-Pacific War, which reached 518,000,<sup>5</sup> memorialization practices, including collecting the war dead remains (bone gathering), pilgrimage tours by bereaved families and veterans as well as erecting statues and markers, were more widely held in the Philippines than any other countries outside Japan. Japanese government missions for gathering remains have been sent to the Philippines since 1958, while pilgrimage tours

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<sup>2</sup> *Washington Post*, November 11, 1986, p. A23.

<sup>3</sup> The most notable example was Carlos P. Romulo’s speech at the Japanese Peace Treaty Conference in San Francisco. See “Excerpts of Speeches Delivered by Delegates at the Japanese Peace Treaty Conference,” *New York Times*, 8 September 1951.

<sup>4</sup> In Setsuho Ikehata & Lydina N. Yu-Jose, eds., *Philippines-Japan Relations*. Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003, pp.337-376.

<sup>5</sup> The figure is a second only to the 711,000 who were killed in China (including 245,400 in Manchuria). Koseisho Shakai Engo Kyoku [MHW Bureau of Social Welfare and War Victim’s Relief Bureau], ed., *Engo 50 nenshi* [Fifty Years of War Victim Relief], pp.578-579.

organized by the Japanese War Bereaved Association (Nippoin Izokukai), prefecture governments, and various tour agencies have been sent to the Philippines since the mid 1960s. The peak was the year 1977, declared by Marcos as the “Year of Peace,” to attract the war bereaved and veterans from all the countries concerned: Japan, the United States, Australia, etc., to visit the Philippines in hope of promoting tourism. The number of pilgrimage tours declined after the 1980s because of political chaos in the Philippines as well as of progressive aging of Japanese bereaved families and veterans. There, however, have still been many Japanese in their 80s or even 90s who continue to visit the Philippines to memorialize their war dead to this date.

What I emphasized in my article is not the number but the pattern of behaviors and experiences as narrated by the Japanese government missions and pilgrim visitors, which we can gather from their government reports, numerous private publications, local newspapers, as well as the journal of JWBA and other organizations which sent tours to the Philippines since the mid 1960s. To sum up, (1) knowing or being taught that the country they would visit to memorialize their war dead had been devastated by Japan, they tend to have more sensibility to Filipino sense of victimization than the average Japanese; quite often they felt they had to apologize for Japanese misdeeds in the war; their apologies, however, were usually made only in general terms and rarely did they admit their own, their lost loved-one’s, or their lost comrade’s wrongdoings; in many cases they tend to think the memorialization should be held jointly or in a spirit of “joint memorialization” commemorating the war dead of both nations (in some cases all the nations concerned including Americans, Australians, etc.); (2) Filipinos who received Japanese missions and pilgrim tourists, assuming that they (Japanese) knew their (Filipino) sufferings, tend to display their hospitality by *not* speaking grudges and avoiding “collision of memories” while showing tolerance and generosity to the mourning visitors; (3) the average reaction of Japanese pilgrim visitors towards the Filipino generosity, which not only allowed but even welcomed the former enemy people to come and memorialize their war dead, was one of deep gratitude; many visitors thus became “repeaters” and many of them came to assume the Philippines to be a more appropriate place to preserve their memories of loved-ones or comrades than Japan, even to be “the second home.” (4) there seems to have existed a kind of reciprocity (in anthropological term) between the kindness shown by Filipinos and the donation by the Japanese to the local communities (or ODA in the national level); such cases as “trade” in human bones or arrogant attitudes of some of the veteran tourists and bone gathering missions show the relation between the host society and the pilgrim visitors did not always deserve reciprocity; on the other hand, positive efforts to

maintain reciprocity in many cases developed into important grassroots sources of locally based non governmental civic exchange between the two peoples.

I also pointed out that the largest bereaved family association, JWBA, shared much of the above-mentioned experiences in their very satisfactory relations with the Philippines, which was precisely summarized in Tadashi Itagaki's address in the 1977 memorial ceremony held in Carilaya Memorial Park.

“sincerity and truthfulness of the war bereaved families has opened a way to heart-to-heart exchange between the two peoples going beyond love and hate, which has lead to the establishment of amicable relationships due to the efforts of people in the both countries. This is ample proof of the fact that heroic spirits (eirei) will live forever as the foundations of peace.”<sup>6</sup>

This satisfaction spoken by one of the top JWBA official had a very important political implication because many of the self-acclaimed nationalist politicians in the Japanese parliament have more or less relied on the support of the organization in their election bids. It is my assumption that JWBA's friendship with the Philippines is not completely unrelated to the total absence of negative reaction or “gaffe” among Japanese rightwing nationalist politicians against the Japanese government's repeated apologies towards the Philippines, while the same politicians show strong resentments against Japanese “diplomacy of apologies” towards China and Korea. The absence of “gaffe” is significant because it has made the Philippines-Japan diplomacy, as well as mutual public sentiment in the two countries, much less strained than the situation in China and Korea.

### 3. Reconciliation and Fading war memories

In terms of Japanese diplomatic history, it may be praised as a remarkable success that the very unfavorable initial situation of a half-million Japanese war dead, on one hand, and over one million Filipino war dead, on the other, was surprisingly “exploited” by the both governments and peoples, thus successfully having brought about today's friendship using a most effective means to touch the human heart, i.e., mourning, and achieve forward-looking bilateral relationships which Japanese government has so wanted to have with all the Asian neighbors.

There is, however, a flip side of the conciliation through memorialization. First

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<sup>6</sup> *JWBA Journal*, No.313, February 1977.

of all it should be reminded that memorializing the war dead is different from recalling or preserving war memories. Just imagine you attend the funeral or any other memorial gatherings like one of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack anniversaries in lower Manhattan. When mourners gather, they assume everyone knows what happened to the victims, who quite often died in unspeakable misery and horror especially in time of wars. People therefore tend to deem it not only unnecessary but even undesirable to recall the graphic circumstances of the tragedy surrounding the death. In this sense, amnesia could be desirable not only for Japanese but Filipino mourners, who really could not recover from their loss of loved-ones and traumatic experiences of the war. Just think about it. How long did it take for Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, an important Filipina intellectual, or Vicky Quirino, the President Elpidio Quirino's daughter, to speak about their near-total loss of family and all the traumatic experiences they had in the Battle for Manila? And the war was equally traumatic for Japanese as well, something we ask our fathers and mothers and get no reply for such a long time.

In this way, Japanese war dead memorialization in the Philippines, accompanied by host-Filipinos' desire to avoid bringing up past traumatic memories, could work not so much to preserve the war memories but rather to quicken the erasure of them. This is exactly what has happened in the postwar Philippines-Japan relations. History has rarely seen such a large number of people go overseas to the former battleground specifically in order to memorialize the war dead, in such continuity for more than four decades, BUT Japanese public memories of war in the Philippines are miserably wearing thin with time to near-total amnesia at present especially among the younger population. I believe all the Japanese university professors here will agree with me about total ignorance about the war in the Philippines among the undergraduate students we teach, even if they are relatively familiar with Japanese colonialism in Korea or the wartime atrocities in China all because of noisy "history issue" disputes.

In the short term, suppressing ugly memories and encouraging both parties to forget them might well have promoted relaxation of tensions and creation of mutual amity. In the long run, however, erasure of war memories may result in unsettling the bases of mutual understandings about the past.

This rather dangerous aspect of amnesia first became evident (in my opinion) between 1994 and 1995, when a series of the 50th anniversary events celebrating the liberation of the Philippines roused memories of the war and Japanese atrocities among the Filipino population, while Japanese media completely failed to cover the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle for Manila or any other Japanese war crimes in the Philippines.

on the occasions. I thought then, however, it could be more or less excusable because it was the time Great Kobe Earthquake and Aum Shinrikyo Cult Subway Terror Attack in Tokyo shook the whole nation of Japan.

After 10 years passed, however, I have to admit that Japanese amnesia about the Battle of the Philippines has reached to the complete erasure of war memories. Recent developments, to which Embassy of Japan responded very successfully, show how it could have potentially dangerous consequences to the Philippines-Japan relations if Japanese amnesia is left uncared for.

#### 4. Preventive Diplomacy 2005-2006

Though the Philippine government has long detached themselves from any of “history issue” disputes whether it be Prime Ministers’ Yasukuni shrine visits or criticism on Japanese amnesia about its wartime atrocities and wrongdoings,<sup>7</sup> the signs of discontent in the public opinion, which could possibly develop into seeds of conflict, appeared in the Philippines news media on the occasions of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, particularly the one of the Battle for Manila in February 2005, exactly one year ago.

There seems to have been at least three interrelated factors behind the discontent: (1) the Philippine government’s inattention or negligence on commemorating the Battle for Manila; (2) lack of publicity in the international communities for the wartime Japanese atrocities in the Philippines and (3) recent Japanese lack of attention and lack of sensibility to the Filipino sentiment about their traumatic war memories.

For example, Maria Isabel Ongpin in her February 2005 column lamented that the memorial gathering organized by the Memorare Manila 1945 had not been attended by the Philippine government officials nor congressmen but only by the diplomatic corps from the United States and EU. Ongpin then stressed the importance of remembrance and thoughtful reflections of the past as a part of “universal awakening that has risen all over the world affected by World War II.”<sup>8</sup> Concerns about lack of publicity for Philippines wartime ordeal both in international communities and in younger generations of the Filipinos were widely shared by the major newspapers, which carried series of feature articles remembering the Japanese atrocities and U.S. fire, be it friendly or unfriendly, which destroyed Manila as well as other parts of the

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<sup>7</sup> The Philippine Ambassador to Japan Domingo Siazon in an interview article stated that “perceptions of history” had never become an issue between the two countries at the government level.” *Asahi Shimbun*, 5 September 2001, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Isabel Ongpin, “Ambient Voices,” *Today*, 19 February 2005.

Philippines during the last months of the war.

Though it should be noted these columns and feature articles rarely aimed at rousing antagonism but showed remarkable objectivity and tolerance, they nevertheless should be taken as signs of gathering clouds which could develop into a storm if not properly addressed. In February 2005, Manila Bulletin published a letter to the editor from the person who was orphaned by the Battle for Manila protesting against the holding Philippines-Japan Friendship Month in February.<sup>9</sup>

Along with other major newspaper columnists, Bambi L. Harper in her November 2005 opinion article threw harsh words for the Japanese government. She claimed that the Japanese government made no official apologies regarding the past invasion to the Filipinos and the Southeast Asian peoples,<sup>10</sup> which was in fact not true but anyway represented displeasure shared by the Filipino intellectuals about lack of Japanese attention to the Philippines when they refer to the past aggression, while the Yasukuni shrine controversy continuously spotlighted China and Korea as two and only critics to Japanese amnesia.

Feeling a gathering storm on the horizon, I was about to publish an article in last December including the following passage, “if I am a Japanese diplomat, I would have sent warning messages to MOFA in Tokyo.” It was in late October that I could manage to withdraw the sentence from my final proof of the article, having found the text of Ambassador Yamazaki’s message on the occasion of the 61<sup>st</sup> Leyte landing anniversary through Philippine Daily Inquirer coverage:

“As I stand on this shore, I am moved by a deep sense of remorse and reflections over the tragic fate of all those who have fought to defend this country against the atrocities of Japanese military aggression.”<sup>11</sup>

I am not pretty sure but I wonder if such words as “atrocities of Japanese military aggression” have ever been uttered by any of the Japanese diplomats in the Philippines.

Then I also found the columnist Bambi L. Harper might have been approached and informed (most possibly by the Embassy of Japan) about the Japanese government’s official position regarding the past aggression. In a later column depicting much blighter side of the Philippines-Japan postwar relations, she referred to both the Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s and Ambassador Ryuichiro Yamazaki’s remarks on different occasions of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary events of the ending of the war, which

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<sup>9</sup> “Not in February! - IF memory serves, it was in February 1986, during the first...” *Manila Bulletin*, 22 February 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Bambi L. Harper, “Resentments,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 November 2005.

<sup>11</sup> “JAPANESE ENVOY EXPRESSES REMORSE OVER WW II,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21 October 2005, Section 7.



equally acknowledged “the misery brought about by Japan’s colonial rule and aggression on the people of Southeast Asia.”<sup>12</sup>

Then February came and with the very first time attendance of Japanese Ambassador, the memorial gathering of Memorare Manila 1945 commemorating the 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Battle seemed to be much more significant one than the last one. Ambassador Yamazaki took the occasion to make the following statement:

With this historical fact in mind, I would like to express my heartfelt apologies and deep sense of remorse over the tragic fate of Manila. Let me also reiterate the Japanese Government’s determination not to allow the lessons of that horrible World War II to erode, and to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world without ever waging a war. Last year I participated in virtually all the ceremonies commemorating the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. In practically all cases, I was invited to lay a wreath and state my remarks, quite similar to today’s ceremony. All of this has led me to be impressed by the noble spirit of reconciliation and the sense of fairness on the part of the Filipino people, firstly, in appreciating Japan as we are now, a nation sharing the values of democracy, freedom and respect for basic human rights, and, secondly, for taking a future-oriented attitude with a view to deepening the friendly relations between our two nations.<sup>13</sup>

As one of the participants of the gathering, Bambi L. Harper offered the following observation of the event.

THE SILENCE WAS PALPABLE AT PLAZUELA DE Sta. Isabel last Saturday in Intramuros when Japanese Ambassador Ryuichiro Yamazaki... expressed his apologies and deep sense of remorse over the tragic fate of Manila...

There was hardly a dry eye in the audience when Ambassador Juan Rocha, who lost his mother in that holocaust, remarked that it had been difficult to forgive when there was no contrition. Yamazaki’s sincere regrets may go a long way in healing those festering wounds.<sup>14</sup>

Without going into further detail of Ambassador Yamazaki’s wording of his speeches and other factors shown in Japanese diplomatic responses to the signs of rising discontent in the Filipino public opinion on the issue, I would only like to point out that the recent efforts of Embassy of Japan in the Philippines can be said to be a good

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<sup>12</sup> Bambi L. Harper, “That Time of Year,” *Ibid.* 25 January 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Ryuichiro Yamazaki on the occasion of the 61st Anniversary of the Battle for the Liberation of Manila Plazuela de Santa Isabel, Intramuros, Manila, 18 February 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Bambi L. Harper, “Closure,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21 February 2006.

example of preventive diplomacy, which in this case has been successful in keeping the Philippines-Japan relations from following the path of vicious circle of “history issue,” which has disturbingly put Northeast Asian international relations in harm’s way for almost five years.

#### 5. Conclusion: What more should be done?

However successful the preventive diplomacy was, it was after all no more than symptomatic treatments, which could not cure the root cause of the problem, i.e., Japanese amnesia. Here it should be noted that neither recent commendable efforts of Ambassador Yamazaki nor Japanese official apologies repeatedly spoken to the Filipino people including Prime Minister Nakasone’s and Emperor Hirohito’s alleged one has ever been given any considerable publicity in Japan. This lack of publicity has deprived Japanese public of any chances to learn what happened in the Philippines during the War. I regret MOFA is not in charge of educating the Japanese public.

If this absence of memories had resulted from years of Filipino forgiveness, it is to be regretted. It may be sometimes more desirable for the search for international mutual understanding not to avoid but to continue to recall memories of an ugly past. One may also ask what will happen when the era of war dead memorialization is over with a change in generations and the two peoples have to confront each other without sharing common grounds or any accumulation of dialogue about their collective past. And the day is coming.

What is necessary, then, to go beyond preventive diplomacy, which is commendable but not enough?

Let me suggest (1) Joint historical studies, which are always on the list of solving “history issue” disputes between Japan and China/Korea, can be and should be “revived” between the Philippines and Japan (I use the term “revive” because we have had the one before); and this time “we/we-inclusive/tayo” should tackle with such untouched issues as the Battle for Manila and other atrocities, which I believe “we” can, taking advantage of accumulation of past collaborations as well as absence of public antagonism on the issue between two peoples; (2) Public support and encouragement for memorial and reconciliation projects by such civic groups as Memorare Manila 1945 and Japanese NPO projects promoting dialogue between Japanese veterans and Filipino people; in this respect Japan-UK reconciliation projects may be regarded as one of the good precedents; it is also necessary to include at least United States in these projects because there are so many Filipino WWII veterans now in the United States

and it was after all the war between Japan and the United States which “we” fought in the Philippines; (3) Focus should be put on educating Japanese public; we (Japanese) should be able to show Ambassador Yamazaki’s “heartfelt apologies and deep sense of remorse” is shared among the Japanese public, that I regret is far from the truth at present. My conclusion therefore is that it may be not so much silence respecting for the dead as a talkative recounting of the past that will be desirable when we think about the future.

Let me conclude my presentation with remembering the victims of the massacre by Japanese soldiers which took place on this very campus of De La Salle during the Battle for Manila, especially on 12 February 1945, killing most of those who took shelter HERE at the time, women and children, brothers and priests. I hope the victims, including the then President of the College Egbert Xavier, would agree with me about necessity of speaking time and again about their unspeakable and horrible deaths.