

On the need for better presentation of Japan's 20-th century history abroad.

One should distinguish two different things: creating a positive image of one's country abroad and dealing with complicated political and historical issues.

In the first area Japan is, in fact, extremely successful and probably the Japanese government has very little to do with that. I would say that no other country except the United States, has been so successful in spreading various elements of its culture abroad as Japan. Japanese food, Japanese films, Japanese comics, Japanese design, and various aspects of traditional Japanese culture are immensely popular all over the world and in this respect China or Korea do not even come close. I can see this all the time in Poland and particularly with young people: every time I mention that I have lived for many years (roughly 25) in Japan, everybody is immensely impressed. Almost every Polish child watches Japanese manga and dreams of going to Japan. In general this produces a very favorable view of Japan, which, however, the Japanese government has not been able to convert into support for Japanese policy objectives.

The problem is with dealing with political and closely related historical issues. In fact, Japan is not unique in this respect: all the countries that were on the losing side in the second world war: Germany, Japan, Italy and some others have it also to some extent. The problem only becomes serious if another country wants to exploit it and unfortunately in the case of Japan there are two such countries: China and South Korea (I do not mention North Korea because its regime is too grotesque to be in any way effective in this respect, at least in the West).

China is, of course, the most adept at exploiting history in this way. Today's communist China is a rival and even a potential enemy of the United States and the West, but during the Second World War the situation was the other way round (China, of course, was not communist then, but the communists have skillfully managed to persuade many in the West that they now speak on behalf of all Chinese, even though they have inflicted far greater sufferings on them than the Japanese ever did). So by bringing up the Second World War China presents itself as a victim of aggression, and reminds Americans of the times when the Japanese used to be their enemies and try to suggest that Japan maybe "moving back" to those days and thus try to undermine the Japanese-American alliance. Because the communists are actually completely cynical, they can be very flexible and cool down or heat up their anti-Japanese propaganda according to their own convenience. In fact, for many years, when they needed good relations with Japan, they did not bring up these issues at all. The Japanese government on the other hand, cannot be so flexible.

Japan's problem with history is even worse than Germany's. The reason is that the Nazis, who actually were a revolutionary force which seized power with only a cover of legality

and imposed on Germany a brutal totalitarian dictatorship with a very definite ideology based on anti-semitism, racism, other ideas which can be easily identified and described. So by rejecting completely all elements of Nazi ideology, viewing the Nazis as criminals who took over power by force and committed horrendous crimes, Germany can disassociate itself from them. Even so, Germany even now has problems with history, and they affect current political situations. For example, Greece is not demanding compensation and Germany is still very reluctant to play any active role in dealing with the growing Russian threat in Europe. In the 1980s there was in Germany what was called "Historikerstreit", a dispute among German historians about the origins and the nature of Nazism: with left wing historians claiming that Nazism was unique and rooted in German history and right wing historians arguing that Nazism was closely related to Soviet communism and born out of a reaction to it.

Japan's situation was completely different because Japan had nothing similar to Nazism. There were attempts to establish a fascist party in late 1930s (for example Nagano Seigo's *Tōhōka*) but none of them came anywhere near to being successful. There was no dictator in Japan, no concentration camps for political opponents (in Germany they started immediately when the Nazis came to power), no murder's of political opponents. There was also nothing like Hitler's Enabling Act of 1933, which made him a dictator. In Japan, political parties dissolved voluntarily in 1940 but all the members of the Diet kept their places. In 1942 a general election was held, in which a large number of "unrecommended" candidates took part and many got elected. Not only was there no clear analogue of the Nazis but also no clear "ideology". This means that it is much harder than in Germany to put the blame on one particular group or dissociate from its ideology.

After the war, when Japan was still viewed in the West as a member of the Axis, an attempt was made to find some analogue of the nazis and fascists in Japan so that the blame could be put on them. At that time the "idea" that wartime Japan was taken over by "militarists" was invented and it was taken up by Japanese left wing historians and intellectuals. But if carefully examine it, you find that it is very difficult to decide who these "militarists" were. It's well known that many of the leading military who were involved in some of the main actions of the war were actually opposed to it. It is well known that admiral Yamamoto, who planned the attack on Pearl Harbour was opposed to the war and so was admiral Onishi, who became known as "the father of the kamikaze". So was general Kuribayashi, who became famous for the defense of Iwo Jima. General Ishihara Kanji, who was the author of the so called Manchurian incident, was fiercely opposed to the war in China and later the attack on Pearl Harbour, that when Hideki Tojo was appointed prime minister, Ishihara called him "enemy of the people" and demanded that he be executed.

In reality, the causes of the Japanese involvement in China and of the Pacific War are complicated and not understood well by the majority of the Japanese or Westerners. The same applies to the conduct of the war. The result is that all of it is very easy to oversimplify and exploit.

The biggest problem for the Japanese Government is that it is very difficult for it to clearly decide what aspects of the past to disassociate from and which not. During the Cold War, it was not much of a problem, because Japan simply relied on its protection on the United States. The Japanese official line was that Japan was the world's most peaceful county, with the most peaceful constitution and the world's only victim of atom bombings. Japanese diplomats abroad preferred to talk about technology or tea ceremony rather than history. Japan tried to be friendly to everyone, even North Korea, and criticize nobody. And, for much of that time, it seemed to work for nobody had any particular interest to attack Japan. But all of this has changed. China is now very different from the way it used to be and so is the United States. Japan now finds that it has to start thinking about its own protection and can no longer rely entirely on others. And now all these unsettled historical issues have become troublesome.

It is not just China and Korea that is causing damage to the Japanese case, but so do many Japanese. On the one hand, the Japanese Left continues to stick to "fascist" vision of wartime Japan and in effect assists China in making it harder for the Japanese government to take the necessary steps to ensure Japan's security in the new circumstances. The Left helps the Chinese by suggesting that the current Japanese government is nostalgic for the past and that it harbors secret ambitions to return to the policy of expansion. I think there are many reasons why Japanese leftists and liberals do this: some of them are real pacifists and believe against all the evidence that the best answer to a military threat is a surrender. Others still believe that China acts in this way because Japan has not apologized enough, however ridiculous this is. Some others are simply Chinese agents.

But the Japanese Right's view of history is also damaging Japan and making it difficult for the Japanese government to clearly deal with the past. I will give you one example of this: if you visit the Yasukuni Shrine's **Yūshūkan** museum, you can get a beautifully illustrated colour guide. At the end is an article by professor Kobori, a well known retired professor of Tokyo University. I don't have it right now with me, but in the article professor Kobori states explicitly that from the moment of Perry's arrival in Japan through all the following years, the Western Powers tried to destroy Japan and finally left it no choice but to go to war. This is written in very good English and it is difficult to think of anything that could be more damaging to the Japanese case in the West.

It is also completely untrue. After all, if America really wanted to destroy Japan, it could have done so after the Second World War, rather than help it recover. Professor Kobori never addresses this matter.

In fact, the history of Japan's relations with the West since the Meiji period is complicated and it difficult to imagine why professor Kobori does not seem to know

it. It would be enough to read one of many articles by professor Hata: for example "Continental Expansion, 1905-1941" in the Cambridge History of Japan. In the beginning of the 20th century Japan and Great Britain were the closest of allies. Both countries considered this alliance central to their policy, in Japan it was called the "bone marrow of imperial diplomacy". The alliance played crucial role in Japan's victory over Russia in 1905. In those days Japan firmly supported British colonial policies, in fact it pledged to help defend British rule in India. On the other hand, it was Britain who suggested to the Japanese the idea of establishment of protectorate in Korea and later, it was the British who gave the Japanese detailed instructions how to carry out a "legal" annexation of Korea. This used to be well known to Koreans. During the rule of general Park Chung-hee, who wanted to keep good relations with Japan, it was always Britain that was blamed for Japan's colonisation of Korea. However, now when it became convenient to blame Japan, Britain's role was forgotten. At that time Japan also enjoyed very good relationship with the U.S. in 1904 both the British and US press enthusiastically supported Japanese attack of Port Arthur, which started the war with Russia, even though it was done without a declaration of war (the Russians did not believe that the Japanese would dare to do this and were sure that if they did, the "monkeys", as tsar Nicholas called them, would easily be defeated). In 1908 Japan and US signed the Root-Takahira agreement. As a result, the United States did not oppose Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 in spite of appeals of the Korean Emperor. In return, Japan supported American protectorate in the Philippines.

Throughout the period Japan admired and imitated the "Anglo-Saxon" powers and the British and American views of Japan were very positive. In particular, there was a great deal of praise in the British and American press for the Japanese treatment and development of its colonies.

The Watershed was the Washington conference of 1921 was the watershed in relations. At that time Britain refused to extend the Anglo-Japanese alliance, which was replaced by an US-Britain-Japan naval arms limitation treaty. This was seen by many Japanese as a betrayal and many began to suspect that the British and the Americans want to force Japan back into backwardness. But the relations between Japan and both Britain and the US remained good throughout the 1920s. Japan's foreign policy was very restrained under the foreign minister Shidehara and in particular Japan refused to intervene in China in 1927 during the so called "Nanking incident", even though both US and Britain intervened and asked Japan to join them. Everything began to change in the 1930's, largely a result of the great economic depression that hit Japan in 1929. There was a prevailing belief in those days that a country like Japan, lacking in natural resources, had to either expand or would face economic collapse. This belief, that was common not only among Japanese but among most Western experts, was the motive behind Japanese expansion into Manchuria. It has to be stressed, however, that this expansion was not the result of a Japanese government policy but the result of insubordinate actions (the so called Mukden incident) by army members lead by a young and unusually able officer

Ishiwara Kanji.

This led to the creation by Japan of what they claimed was an independent country, the empire of Manchukuo, which actually was a Japanese puppet state. In doing so Japan followed exactly all the "international laws" that the British themselves had taught them and used many times in India and other places. The Japanese were sure that they had a perfect "legal case" in Manchuria, at least as good as Britain and the US had in many of their previous actions. But to their great anger and surprise, their claims were rejected by the League of Nations, dominated by their former ally Great Britain. This led directly to Japan leaving the League of Nations.

From that point on the relations between Japan and the US and the UK deteriorated rapidly. They became particularly bad when after the so called "Marco Polo bridge incident" in 1937 Japan became involved in an unending war in China. Again what happened was completely unplanned and unintended - the Japanese did not intend to conquer China but only force Chiang Kai-Shek to negotiate. Japan made no preparations for this war as it was intended to last only a very short time.

It is interesting that general Ishiwara, who organised the "Mukden incident" in Manchuria, was extremely opposed to the Japanese military involvement in China, correctly expecting that it would become like Napoleon's campaign in Spain - a never ending guerrilla war impossible to win or to settle peacefully.

The result of all this was that Japan began to be viewed in the US and Great Britain as an aggressive expansionist power bent on control of all Asia. In Japan, on the other hand, traditional pro-Western politicians such as the former foreign minister Shidehara, lost influence and were replaced by younger men, often military, who had a very different view of the West based on a belief similar to that expressed by professor Kōbōri - that the West was always an enemy of Japan which wanted to reverse all the advances that Japan made since the beginning of the Meiji period. From being a very pro-Western (and colonial) power Japan began to turn into anti-Western one and began to adopt an anti-colonial and pan-Asian ideology, which was completely absent during the earlier period.

Since the Japanese leaders believed that the United States and Britain have hostile and aggressive intentions against Japan, it started to look for powerful allies outside Asia and found them in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. From Japan's point of view, the Berlin Pact of 1940 was essentially defensive, but to Britain and the US it now made Japan look as part of a Nazi-led conspiracy to conquer the world. At this point war became inevitable and this fateful decision affects Japan's image to this day.

All of this and what followed is described extremely well in a brilliant book by Helen Mears, "Mirror for Americans", published in 1948, as well as in many other more academic books. Unfortunately the book of Helen Mears is out of print and no longer well known to Americans.

The biggest problem for the Japanese government and Japan's supporters abroad is to decide on which part of this historical legacy to accept and which to condemn.

Some people in the West and in Japan believe that the simplest solution would be to say: modern Japan like Germany rejects everything that happened, say, between 1935 and 1945. But the problem is that unlike in Germany where 1933 is a real turning point in history, it is not possible to find such a point in Japanese history. If for example, the Japan adopted the view that everything bad started in 1931 (creation of Manchukuo) then Japan would be seen as accepting its colonial past, including the colonization of Korea and Taiwan. If Japan went further back, then it would have to condemn essentially the entire Meiji period, with all its achievements, which are among the greatest in the history of any country.

You can see this problem with great clarity if in one of the most remarkable works written by a Japanese during the Pacific war: the wartime diary of the journalist and diplomatic historian Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, entitled "A Diary of Darkness". Kiyosawa was educated in America and politically he was more similar to an American liberal conservative than any other Japanese intellectual of that time. For example, he was very critical of the war, the government of Hideki Tojo and of most Japanese intellectuals who supported the war, but he was also an anti-communist who saw that the war, in spite of all the anti-communist rhetorics, was turning Japan into something increasingly resembling a communist country. Although Kiyosawa was against the war and against nationalism, he was also a true Japanese patriot; he had a great respect for the Emperor, and he suffered greatly from the fact that he was not allowed to help his country in spite of his great knowledge and experience of American society and diplomacy. Because Kiyosawa was considered a liberal and "pro-American", newspapers and journals were forbidden to publish his articles, which made it hard for him to earn a living (he died from pneumonia caused by malnutrition just before the end of the war).

To me Kiyosawa is the best illustration of what it means to be a patriot without being a nationalist. Kiyosawa hated the war, yet he was hoping that Japan would achieve some big victory near the end, so that it could negotiate peace on better terms. He was a great admirer of admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, because the admiral, like Kiyosawa, hated the war but in spite of that did his best to serve his country. Kiyosawa also had great hopes in the maverick general Ishiwara Kanji, because although Ishiwara wanted to introduce a totalitarian form of government in Japan he was also a supporter of absolute freedom of speech and the press.

In my opinion today's Japan needs above all not just one but many journalists and writers like Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, who can combine realism, true liberalism and patriotism without any utopianism (such as pacifism, communism or pan-Asianism etc.) and who can understand the complexities of Japanese history and look at it from a variety of perspectives and, of course, who has the eloquence to convince both Japanese and foreigners. Unfortunately at this point I do not know of any such person who has a lot of influence. I am afraid that the problem lies with the Japanese education system, that does not produce people like this today (if I were to choose one person who has the qualities to perform such a role, my choice would be the historian George Akita, but unfortunately professional historians never have the kind of influence that popular journalists have).

I think it is very important for the Japanese government to make serious that would lead to the emergence of such people. How to do that is a complicated matter, but it certainly needs substantial amounts of money. I would suggest the creation of think tanks, based in the United States, whose aim would be to support the common values of modern Japan and the United States: such as human rights, democracy, free markets and free trade. These think tanks should be open to journalist and scholars who support these values and are particularly concerned with the Pacific Region. One of the aims would be to deal with difficult issues of history, not by moralizing preaching but by realistic and impartial analysis.

This should have been done a long time ago but it is better late than never.