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Decolonizing the Taiwanese Identity

How did Japanese colonialism in the education sector of Taiwanese society influence the creation of a unique Taiwanese identity that separates itself from being seen as Chinese?

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I. Thesis Introduction

After the second Sino-Japanese war in 1895, Taiwan was passed as a territory of the Qing Empire, into the hands of the Japanese empire. Japan at the time started to expand itself as an empire by colonizing different areas of Asia (II, Sheng). The Japanese empire had expanded its colonization to Korea and Taiwan (2, Aviles). For the onslaught of the 50 years Japan was in power, in Taiwan (1895-1945), their ruling and cultural assimilation of the Taiwanese people has molded the socio-cultural political sense of the Taiwanese identity. Within Taiwan, for parents that became Japanese, their children became Chinese under the KMT Chinese Nationalists colonization in 1945 (II, Sheng).

Before Japan ruled Taiwan, the island was a mix of different ethnic groups. Each of these groups had their own cultural heritage (1, Chiung). There were the indigenous groups, and the Chinese ethnic groups including Hakka and Hokkien. Under the Japanese colonization, these groups underwent a form of cultural assimilation through the primary education system. Even after the primary years of formal schooling under Japanese government, many of these students would then leave Taiwan and go to Japan to study abroad (217, Tsurumi).

This research will explore the education system implemented by Japanese colonialism in the upbringing of these Taiwanese students and seek to explore what sort of learnings that created the Taiwanese identity. This examination of a form of cultural assimilation would prove to be an integral part of the native Taiwanese identity (people living in Taiwan before Republic of China colonialism in 1945).

II. Japanese Legacy in Taiwanese Consciousness

As noted by Andrew Morris author of *Japanese Taiwan, 2015* (5), the Japanese legacy rooted in the historical consciousness of the Taiwanese people is a vital source to understanding the post colonial Taiwan. “ ‘Under the Japanese , we learned to trust the word of the authorities. The Nationalists betrayed that trust; they will never have it again,’ ” (13, Morris). This quote expressed in an interview by a Taiwanese person, outlines a mode of leeriness in expressing how the Taiwanese society feels towards the Nationalist party and how there is a solid foundation of trust upon the past Japanese colonialism of their country.

This lack of trust towards the Nationalist government and the sentimental remembrance of the Japanese colonial history before Chinese colonial rule (12, Morris) is a distinguishing factor that makes the Taiwanese people not very “Chinese” at all. The distinguishing factor of revering the still rooted influences of Japanese colonialism is what influenced the decolonizing motives of Taiwanese people to see themselves as uniquely Taiwanese and not Chinese.

III. Japanese Educational Reform in Taiwan

Japanese colonial education in Taiwan, instituted in the Meiji period in Japan, focused on making the Taiwanese loyal to Japan. These reforms are studied in *Japanese Colonial Education in Taiwan, 1895-1945*, by Patricia Tsurumi, 1977. This creation of loyalty to the Japanese empire happened through a series of events. First off, the Japanese language was instituted as a mandatory fixture into the school system (36, Tsurumi) . Sanitation policies were brought about so that health conditions on the island would improve and so that Taiwanese students could be eligible for medical school (38, Tsurumi).

Taiwan was being tested as a case for assimilation by the Japanese government which was why they wanted to make the Taiwanese people loyal to the Japanese government (36, Tsurumi). The Japanese government wanted to compete with Westernized countries in methods of educating the masses and since they were trying to assimilate Taiwanese people into Japanese society, they wanted to make the Taiwanese people just as competitive with Western counterparts (10-11, Tsurumi). There also carried a common belief in Japanese society to see Taiwan be governed by the “laws and procedures that ruled Japan,” (41, Tsurumi). “The only difference between primary schooling in the colony (Taiwan) and the home country was that such schooling was not compulsory for Japanese children in Taiwan” (33, Tsurumi), this observation in Tsurumi’s work lays out the basic ground work that educational quality and policies in Taiwan was nearly on par with educational quality in the homeland of Japan.

With the educational quality in Taiwan being on par with education in the homeland, many Taiwanese were prepared to go abroad to Japan for higher education (217, Tsurumi), with the experience of going abroad the Taiwanese were granted more freedoms and privileges in Japan than in Taiwan (219, Tsurumi). Lastly the Taiwanese were held between two cultures, Japanese culture and Chinese culture, but each culture had a different view on education. In Chinese folk culture (219, Tsurumi), women were not encouraged to pursue education but in Japanese culture, the education system depicted both men and women in similar job roles, also both men and women were shown doing domestic tasks, and traditionally male dominated sports such as swimming and basketball in the Western perspective (219), were very inclusive of women by Taiwanese educational standards. It is even mentioned that high-

er education was able to give both women and men access into politics that did take a turn towards anti-colonialism in the 1930s (223, Tsurumi).

These many factors about the quality of Japanese education shows a common thread of how the Japanese government sought to open up opportunities for Taiwanese people to have footholds of political agency and intellectual knowledge that enabled many of them to be teachers and physicians (228, Tsurumi). With Taiwanese people becoming educators and medical professionals, these two areas of knowledge would enable Taiwanese to understand the power play of societal politics that would dominate their nation.

IV. KMT Education Reform In Comparison to Japanese Education Reform

This form of enabling education delineates from the Kuomintang Chinese Nationalists who colonized Taiwan in 1945. They sought to restrict the Taiwanese people in the area of education and thus their colonized Japanese-Taiwanese identity in order to tighten their authoritarian control over the island. “Taiwan is my ancestral land; Japan is my motherland,” this quote (Morris, 140) best expresses the view on how this double identity was repressed under the KMT regime, where this identity underwent a metamorphosis of “transformation, comparison, and resistance” that sprouted into a unique Taiwanese self identity (140, Morris).

Japan ceded Taiwan to the Allies after Japan’s loss in World War 2. During this time there was the Chinese civil war taking place in mainland China between the Communists led under Mao-Zhe Dong and Nationalists under Chiang Kai-Shek (Office of the Historian). The Chinese nationalists in China who were in a losing civil war fled to Taiwan and colonized Taiwan as the “Republic of China,” (Office of the Historian). Under the KMT regime it is

noted, “ In primary and secondary schools, which were responsible for the formation of national citizens, students were denied any systematically related Taiwanese history textbooks. Therefore, they did not know that Taiwan has its own literature and arts. Taiwanese were even taught to despise their own beliefs and cultural traditions,” (IV, Sheng). When the KMT came into power in Taiwan, they completely changed the educational knowledge that was being taught in the classrooms to be completely China-centric (V. , Sheng) from the 1945-1980s. Whereas under Japanese schooling, there was more of a balanced between Taiwanese, Chinese and Japanese histories, languages and cultures being taught in the schools (33, Tsurumi).

It should be noted that the Japanese education system did integrate and teach Taiwanese history and culture during the Japanese colonization period (33, Tsurumi). Though in contrast under the KMT regime, there was a type of suppression from the transition of a Japanese schooling system to a Chinese schooling system that created resistance in Taiwanese society that would spur a liberalization of Taiwanese education and thus influence the thinking of Taiwanese students. Even during the 228 Massacre of 1947, it was the many Japanese educated Taiwanese folks that were among thousands of political dissents that were persecuted under the KMT regime, (76, Lin).

V. Realization of a Taiwanese Identity

The KMT dictatorship did slowly integrate some Taiwanese history, languages and culture into the education system, these systematic changes did not take place until the 1990s which was when the dictatorship was stepping down from power and Taiwan was transitioning into a democracy.

One of the most prominent Taiwanese leaders that had Japanese schooling was President Lee Teng Hui who instituted many reforms that profiled Taiwanese culture within the textbooks of Taiwan during his rein from 1988-2000. It should be noted that most of the Taiwanese that were educated under Japanese government attended elementary schools but did not have the privilege to pursue education beyond the primary years, as observed by *Social Class and Education: Global Perspectives* by Shumin Lin, 2012 (76, Lin).

After decades of authoritarian rule, Taiwan's entrance into democracy in the 1990s resulted in one very momentous movement called the 410 Demonstration for Education Reform, (VII, Sheng) where it called for the authoritarian government to release some of its stronghold in influencing how textbooks were created. It called for the schools and teachers to have freedoms in forming educational curriculum instead of having the government control the curriculum. This movement "decentralized" the government and gave the powers over to local authorities who were in charge of teaching Taiwanese students (VII. Sheng). Essentially it was a reclaiming of the Taiwanese identity as a movement that would be uprooted by the people and not by a authoritarian government.

In the most recent dispute during the summer of 2015, the Taiwanese government has sought to make changes into the textbook curriculum that would emphasize the historical linkages of Taiwan and China and give the Chinese KMT nationalists history a more positive light (Tsoi, Foreign Policy). The announcement of these changes, provoked over 150 high schools to protest Taiwan's Ministry of Education to revoke these changes, (Tsoi, Foreign Policy). These protests, high lights the reforming of a Taiwanese identity to separate itself from being Chinese.

VI. Conclusion

There is a dissonance shown in the Taiwanese educational history, where the Taiwanese people had to undergo cultural shifts from powers of colonization. It can be seen that this dissonance created a self awakening for Taiwanese students in the classrooms who had to grow up in families that had undergone generations influenced differently by the various cultural and colonial powers on this island nation.

It is up to the Taiwanese people to create their own voice in identity politics and to halt the erasure of their unique histories in order to maintain and continue to establish it's self proclamation of sovereignty within the Taiwanese society. The tensions among the Taiwanese youth whom were educated under the Japanese government or those educated under KMT regime continue to impact today's education as the Taiwanese society transitions into the Democratic Progressive Party's ruling who favors Taiwanese Nationalism. In fact, the concept of transitional justice is at play in educational reforms that have played out in Taiwan. Transitional justice is what millions of Taiwanese people are still awaiting from the hundreds of thousands of people who were persecuted under the KMT regime, these people wanted to create a separate Taiwanese identity that was not Japanese and was not Chinese. (Note: Transitional justice outlined by Christian Schafferer, *The Rise and Fall of Transitional Justice in Taiwan*, 2014). In the decades of KMT authoritarian rule, this rule sought to colonize Taiwanese minds to shape them into Chinese nationalists instead of Taiwanese nationalists. Though the intent of the KMT regime had the opposite impact on Taiwanese society due to the friction caused by the Japanese colonization and the KMT Chinese colonization of

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Taiwan, this impact created communities that questioned, what is our identity under the powers of changing colonial forces?

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