

Collective War Memory Regarding Japanese Surrender: Comparison Between Okinawa and Mainland Japan

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Abstract

This paper explores factors in the framing of collective memory based on a comparative media policy analysis on mainland Japan and Okinawa during the period immediately after World War II. The paper highlights reasons for disparities in the collective memories of Japanese people from these two regions based on their original experiences of the war and Japan's surrender, U.S. occupation policy on the two regions, and their postwar commemoration traditions. The discussion draws on evidence from official U.S. wartime and postwar documentation. The paper makes a significant contribution to the literature in the field as it highlights the importance of the framing process, which is often largely ignored in collective memory research, as memory is deeply intertwined with society itself.

1. Dominant Memory, Deviant Memory

The year 2015 marked the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. While the mainland Japanese people commemorated their war dead on August 15, which is the day on which Emperor Hirohito made the radio announcement accepting the Potsdam Declaration in 1945, Okinawans commemorated the same war on June 23 at the Okinawa Peace Memorial, a postwar monument at the southernmost part of Okinawa

Island. This was mostly to commemorate those who died in the Battle of Okinawa, the last ground battle of World War II, on the day the organized battle ceased when the Japanese commander committed suicide.

Japanese mainlanders' August 15 commemoration reflects the dominant memory in Japan, while the Okinawans' June 23 commemoration is a local, deviant case. In the year of the 70th anniversary of Japanese surrender, the Japanese mass media covered commemoration ceremonies such as Hiroshima on August 6, Nagasaki on August 9, and the Japanese government's annual Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead on August 15. Meanwhile, the Okinawan press briefly reported these events, but focused on the local Okinawa Memorial Ceremony on June 23, covering a range of Okinawans' personal memories and experiences. What caused the difference? This study explores how the different memories were brought about by comparing the experiences of the Okinawans and Japanese mainlanders.

The death toll of the Battle of Okinawa remains unknown, but it is said that one of every three Okinawan residents died during the battle. After establishing a base on Kerama Islands, U.S. forces landed on Okinawa Island on April 1, 1945, and Okinawans who had hidden in forests or caves were forced to flee on foot. Some surrendered and were detained in civilian camps, while others committed suicide as they had been taught. The U.S. occupation policy on Okinawa stipulated that the U.S. Military Government would establish interrogation camps to detain civilians, because some Okinawans would remain loyal to Japan and might disturb the final U.S. attack on the Japanese mainland. Okinawa Island was regarded as a military base for the expected final battle on mainland Japan, and the construction of U.S. military bases started immediately after their landing.

Following a series of U.S. air attacks, including the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration on August 14 and

World War II ended without the U.S. landing on the Japanese mainland or Kyusyu Island. Emperor Hirohito formally announced Japanese surrender on August 15 on NHK radio, at which time most Japanese people recognized that the war had ended. However, with a few exceptions, the Okinawans did not listen to Emperor Hirohito's announcement. Most did not have radio receivers on the war-devastated islands.

The U.S. and Allied nations occupied Japan from 1945 to 1952, and Okinawa remained under U.S. administration until 1972. Thus, the postwar experiences of Okinawans differed greatly from those of Japanese mainlanders. Fukuma (2011) described it as "a memory of the burnt-down land." As such, the Okinawan collective memory of World War II differs completely from that of Japanese mainlanders.

2. A Review of Memory Studies

Halbwachs originally defined the concept of "collective memory" in 1925 as a certain cognitive image located between personal memory and national memory or history. He observed that a given collective memory does not continue beyond a single generation (Halbwachs, 1989: 98). Furthermore, he argued that collective memory employs a completely different mechanism than does personal memory. Although this French sociologist did not mention the function of the mass media in giving collective memory life extending beyond a single generation, his book *La Mémoire Collective* marked a starting point for current memory studies.

What is collective memory and what frames it? These questions have attracted attention from a range of scholars in the academic fields of art, architecture, community development, psychology, sociology, history, political science, and mass communication. In scholarly discussion, some have renamed collective memory lasting beyond Halbwachs's original definition "public memory," while others refer to it as "social memory." Among earlier memory studies, the American media scholar

Zelizer (2011: 359) investigated the role of journalism in creating memory, proposing that “the particular forms of journalistic relay bring memory work directly into the foreground of journalism” and that the form of journalism “takes on numerous guises in association with the past.” Dayan and Katz (2011: 363) further suggested that “media events edit and re-edit collective memory,” often “quoting from earlier events.” Thus, media communication scholars regard collective memory as lasting beyond a single generation, because the mass media recreate the meaning of events reported and later quoted.

“War memorials” and “memorial days” are a favorite topic among memory scholars. Interestingly, as Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 15) point out, memorial days are usually set aside by nations to “remember the suffering” of their own people. As such, media coverage of memorial events functions to stimulate nationalism. For example, in the U.S., Memorial Day is a national holiday to commemorate dead U.S. soldiers on the last weekend of May. As far as U.S. media coverage of World War II is concerned, before September 11, 2001, December 7 had been an important day dedicated to remembering the 1945 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The slogan “Remember Pearl Harbor” was repeated in American newspapers and on television to rationalize the nation’s defense budget as necessary even in times of peace to prepare for forthcoming war. Following the events of 9/11, September 11 became a new remembrance day on which Americans collectively recall their own suffering as the U.S. waged war against terrorism.

Meanwhile, most Japanese people commemorate those who died in World War II on August 15, the day of Japanese surrender. As August 6 marks the day to remember Hiroshima and August 9 Nagasaki, Japanese mainlanders commemorate World War II in August. For this, media coverage of related memorial events is referred to as “August journalism.” With some exceptions, August journalism has preferred to

highlight Japanese suffering such as that of survivors of the atomic bomb and ordinary citizens, rather than Japanese military aggression and experiences as a victimizer. Dower (2013: 1–2) argued that there are two types of pasts: usable and forgotten. Commemorating the Japanese surrender can be understood as the usable past. Meanwhile, August journalism naturally paid little attention to commemorating the Pearl Harbor bombing on December 8 or the Manchurian incident on September 18. Based on Dower's theory, the latter events can be understood as forgotten pasts representing Japan's national image as a victimizer.

However, the Japanese media historian Sato (2014: 343) argued that Japan's memorial days were derived from "a myth" created by the media coverage of Emperor Hirohito's radio broadcast on August 15, 1945. Based on his examination of Japanese media coverage of the radio announcement, Sato concluded that it was a pre-advertised media event. He suggested "September journalism" to commemorate the end of World War II during the weeks of September, because the formal ceasefire agreement between Japan and the Allied Powers was signed on September 2, 1945 on the U.S. warship Missouri in Tokyo Bay. The formal peace treaty ending the Pacific Theatre of World War II was signed on September 9, 1951 at San Francisco, six years after the occupation by the U.S. and other allied powers. As Sato suggests, it is difficult to determine why most Japanese people commemorate those who died in the war on August 15.

3. Reasons for Differences in Memory

Previous research on collective memory suggested that the media treatment of a certain event at a particular time might set a framework for the collective memory of society. This paper similarly contends that mass media policy in Okinawa contributed to the framework of the collective memory following World War II. War memory

entails not simply commemorating the past, but is built into the political situation of the time and may be affected by the government's media policy. The Okinawan experience suggests what frames its collective memory compared to that of the Japanese mainlanders. In this sense, war memory is not merely a natural product of society, but is purposefully manufactured by the mass media policy adopted by the political elites of the time.

3.1 Original Experiences

First, the original experiences of the Okinawans and Japanese mainlanders differed on the day of Japanese surrender. On August 15, 1945, mainlanders heard Hirohito's radio announcement, but the Okinawans did not.

Quoting Stendhal, Halbwachs noted that a personal memory begins to interact with collective memory after a person reads newspapers and starts to recognize his/her personal experience within the larger social context reported in the mass media. Carey (1992: 65) pointed out that the mass media creates social meaning for an event when it is reported by the news media. Applying Carey's meaning building theory to the case of World War II, the war was reported by the mass media in various participating nations. Each nation reported the war from a different perspective. For example, while the Japanese media reported the Pearl Harbor bombing on December 8 as a brilliant success, the U.S. media described the same event as a "day of infamy." The different media representations at the time of the event set its original image. In this sense, the first news coverage of an event frames collective memory for later years, and media coverage of the same event on anniversary years reproduces the original news frame.

When Emperor Hirohito formally announced Japanese surrender on Japan's national radio on August 15, 1945, this message targeted a Japanese audience. Information regarding the forthcoming announcement was disseminated through

non-mediated local networks such as workplaces and schools, and the Japanese people were waiting for it. Many then heard Hirohito's voice for the first time. Some may not have understood every word of his announcement, but understood that Japan had been defeated as others began to cry. The following day, Japanese newspapers headquartered in Tokyo presented the entire text of the radio announcement and reported the audience's reaction through photographs.

However, in the southernmost islands of the Japanese archipelago, most Okinawans did not hear the radio announcement, as all Okinawan communication media had been destroyed. Most Okinawan survivors were forced to remain in civilian camps, and did not possess radio receivers, as U.S. occupation forces prohibited civilian radio communication. A small number of Okinawans hiding in the mountains coincidentally heard the announcement, but these were exceptions. Before U.S. forces landed on Okinawa Island on April 1, U.S. Navy air attacks destroyed military and civilian radio communication facilities on the island. The Naha Branch of the NHK, the Japanese national broadcaster, started operation in 1942, although the transmitter and staff ceased broadcasting during the earlier stages of the Battle of Okinawa. Several Okinawan newsmen continued to publish their newspapers until mid-May in an underground cave near the old *Ryukyuan Shuri* Castle, which was used as the Japanese military headquarters; however, no civilian communications existed in Okinawa by the end of May 1945. Therefore, the Okinawan media were not able to "witness" the end of the war. Although June 23 is regarded as the end of the Battle of Okinawa, Ota (2004: 275) pointed out that the war did not end on that date; indeed, it is difficult to determine exactly when the war ended in Okinawa.

During the Battle of Okinawa, the U.S. strategy was to detain local civilians in enclosed areas, namely civilian camps, according to Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) directives for the occupation. The Joint Chiefs believed that Okinawans loyal to Japan

might disturb U.S. military activities, and therefore forced them into civilian camps and prohibited all civilian communications to prevent subversive activities (Yoshimoto, 2015: 96). In addition, the U.S. Military Government published a Japanese language weekly, *Ryukyu Shuho*, a fact-based newspaper regarded as part of U.S. psychological warfare (Tsuchiya, 2011: 201–204). For these reasons, the Okinawan experience differed completely from that of Japanese mainlanders, in that the Okinawan media were not able to record the historical moment marking the end of the war.

Instead, the handwritten mimeograph *Uruma Shimpō* was published in a civilian camp. The U.S.-sponsored Japanese newspaper briefly reported the Emperor's radio announcement in the August 15 issue. However, the U.S.-censored mimeograph did not present the entire text of Hirohito's message, relying on news sources like the U.S. wire services AP and UPI and Moscow Broadcasting. The *Uruma Shimpō* reported Japan's defeat as "Finally Long Awaited Peace Comes! A Sense of Relief Prevails." The tone of the headlines resembled that in American newspapers of the same day. Detained in civilian camps, the Okinawans came to know about the Japanese surrender, but did not listen directly to Hirohito's announcement. Although the Battle of Okinawa did not actually end on June 23, U.S. occupation forces declared victory on July 1, before formal Japanese surrender. It was convenient for the postwar U.S. administration in Okinawa to set the date for the beginning of their occupation as early as possible to rationalize the U.S. requisition of Okinawan land. Unable to record their own history with their own media, it was difficult for the Okinawans to determine on what date the war actually ended.

3.2 U.S. Occupation Policy on Okinawa and Japan

Second, the postwar occupation policies of the U.S. concerning the treatment of the Japanese Emperor varied. In mainland Japan, the Emperor was defined as a symbol

of Japan, with this concept stipulated in Article One of the postwar Japanese Constitution. Meanwhile, the U.S. military government in Okinawa intentionally avoided using the term “Emperor,” regarding it as a symbol of “belonging” to Japan.

U.S. policy was articulated in the political directives of the Joint Chiefs, with JCS 1231 determining the postwar occupation principles for the U.S. administration of Okinawa and other Japanese outlying islands. Issued on January 12, 1945, JCS 1231 was a directive to Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Force for Operation Iceberg, and planned for the Battle of Okinawa. The U.S. Joint Chiefs regarded the Japanese Emperor as a symbolic icon, ordering Nimitz and his command not to talk about the Emperor and his future status in Section 21 of the Political Directive of JCS 1231 as follows: “You will refrain from any public expression of opinion concerning the future status of the Emperor or the institution of Emperor, and instruct the forces under your command to the same effect.”

Note that the U.S. did not have the right to independently determine the future status of the Japanese Emperor. Indeed, the U.S. Joint Chiefs were not allowed to define this without final consensus between Britain and other Allied nations. However, U.S. policy consciously treated the Emperor as a politically and psychologically important factor in the postwar occupation. JCS 1231 continued to be effective at least until the early 1960s, or perhaps until 1972 (Yoshimoto, 2015: 312), and the public affairs policy of the U.S. administration carefully avoided the use of the symbolic icon throughout their administration in Okinawa. Meanwhile, the U.S. occupation policy regarding the future status of the Emperor was not decided until the end of 1945, although the Potsdam Declaration did not immediately abolish the Japanese Emperor’s status. For example, in January 1946, an intelligence report by the U.S. State Department proposed that the U.S. should effectively take advantage of the symbolic status of the Japanese Emperor for postwar reconstruction, and especially observe his

New Year's Day rescript and its "psychological effects" on the Japanese audience (Yoshimoto, 2017: 97). General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander in Chief of the Allied Powers, periodically met with Emperor Hirohito, regarding him as a psychologically and politically important factor for postwar U.S.-Japan relations.

3.3 Postwar Commemoration Tradition

Finally, postwar commemoration history differed between Okinawa and mainland Japan. The U.S. and Allied occupation of Japan ended on April 28, 1952, when the Japan Peace Treaty came into effect and Japan recovered her status as an independent nation. However, Okinawa remained under U.S. occupation until May 1972. After the treaty came into effect, U.S. pre-publication censorship over Japanese mass media ended, but the U.S. continued to censor the Okinawan press until the later reversion of Okinawa to Japan. The U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR) administered the Okinawan people, and the Civil Information and Education (CIE) Department of USCAR continued to intervene in the Okinawan press.

On August 15, 1955, the Japanese government conducted the 10th anniversary memorial ceremony to commemorate the end of World War II. The Japanese media covered the event. From then, the Japanese dominant memory started to form based on the August 15 tradition. Okinawans under U.S. administration also wished to commemorate the war dead. However, incoming information to Okinawa was carefully restricted, as the U.S. intended to keep the southern islands isolated. The U.S.-sponsored *Uruma Shimpo* was transferred into a private enterprise, and it began collecting subscription fees from readers in 1947. However, publication remained subject to the permission of the U.S. Military Government.

During the U.S. administration period, the style of media censorship gradually transformed. From 1945 to 1949, U.S. military laws set under the JCS directives

described above aimed to abolish Japanese laws and prohibited civilian radio communications, printing, publication, and photography. In 1949, the wartime criminal codes were abolished, but other military laws were enacted, requiring all publications to be approved by the Okinawan Central Government, a puppet of the U.S. Military Government. In 1950, the Military Government was reorganized into the USCAR, and direct U.S. control over the Okinawans transformed into indirect control through the local Ryukyu Government. However, the Okinawan press remained directly supervised by the CIE. As a whole, the Okinawan press was subject to U.S. censorship. Subsequently, the content did not represent the voices of the Okinawan people.

However, the Okinawans wished to commemorate the war dead. Numerous articles describing a group of young women working as nurses among the injured during the Battle of Okinawa appeared sporadically in *Uruma Shimpo* in the late 1940s. Possibly, these were the only articles of this nature permitted by the U.S. Military Government at the time. The U.S. censorship policy permitted the description of Japanese atrocities, but suppressed any criticism against U.S. forces.

In 1948, August 15 was assigned as August Full Moon Day, a day to look up to the moon (Yoshimoto, 2017: 97). In later years, the symbolic meaning of the August moon featured in an American novel, and the comedy film “The Teahouse of August Moon,” based on the novel, was filmed in Okinawa. Using celebrities such as Marlon Brando and Machiko Kyo, the 1956 Hollywood film used the August moon as a propagandistic symbol of U.S.-Ryukyu cultural exchange and friendship with an American slant (Nakayama, 2011). However, the Okinawans did not overtly commemorate the war dead in any formal ceremonies on August 15. The Okinawan press briefly reported the Japanese commemoration on August 15 during the U.S. administration. The day on which the organized battle of the Japanese Imperial Force ended, June 23, was assigned by Ryukyu Government Ordinance No. 85 as Okinawa

Peace Memorial Day, an official holiday, in 1961. Even after Okinawa's reversion to Japan in 1972, the June 23 commemoration tradition continued. The date was re-defined as a prefectural holiday by Okinawa Prefectural Ordinance No. 42 in October 1974. On August 15, 2015, the 70th anniversary of the Emperor's radio announcement accepting Japan's unconditional surrender, mainland Japanese press coverage featured a series of commemorating events on or around August 15, while Okinawan press coverage commemorating the war was more prominent on or around June 23, Okinawan Peace Memorial Day.

4. Conclusion: The Politics of Memory

To summarize the above discussion, the collective war memory of Okinawans differed from that of Japanese mainlanders. This is because of differences in 1) the original experience on the day of Japan's surrender, 2) the U.S. postwar policy concerning the treatment of the Emperor, and 3) postwar history concerning war memorial days. As a result, June 23, rather than August 15, emerged as a war memorial day for the Okinawans. The difference in their original experience can be understood as the main reason framing the different memory, whereas U.S. post-occupation policy on Japan can be understood as another important contributing factor framing collective memory of the war. Media policy, specifically censorship and public affairs policy, may have functioned as a framer of collective memory in Japanese society, including among the people of Okinawa.

Annual media coverage of remembrance days reproduces collective war memory. World War II ended several decades ago; however, the collective memories of certain elements of the war have been reproduced repeatedly by media coverage of memorial events. As mentioned earlier in this paper, there are two pasts: usable and forgotten. According to Olick (2007: 19), memory entails not simply a commemoration of the

past, but is also formed and reformed in terms of present purposes: “Memory is made wholly neither in the past nor in the present, but in the continual struggle between them.” This reflects a “presentist” approach to collective memory. Although this American sociologist does not specialize in media studies, based on his memory theory, it is possible to argue that mass media coverage of remembrance days can be a powerful presentist memory framer for the usable past, as can the media or/and public affairs policies of the presiding government. Certain events may become part of the usable past, and when continuously covered by the media, become part of the collective memory of society, while those events not repeated in media coverage become part of the forgotten past (Morris-Suzuki, 2014: 22).

The collective memory of Japanese surrender is a dominant memory for Japanese mainlanders. It has served as a convenient, usable past for postwar Japanese politics to commemorate the war while camouflaging Japan’s role in World War II as a victimizer towards China, Korea, and other Asian Pacific regions. For Okinawans, commemorating the Battle of Okinawa embodies an appeal to the Tokyo government in the face of the continued concentration of U.S. bases in Okinawa Prefecture, even after reversion. The collective memories of both Japanese mainlanders and Okinawans are deeply affected by the respective political situations.

The preference for being regarded as a victim, rather than a victimizer, is not unique to Japanese society. As Dower (2013: 132) notes, in every nation, collective memory prefers to reflect a victim rather than a victimizer. Frequently unable to criticize their own government, the mass media are responsible for the formation of the victim mentality. Such media generally target an audience within a nation’s borders, within which it is easy for journalists to criticize other nations, adjusting to mass sentiment. However, the collective memory of each nation is currently becoming more accessible internationally. As Halbwachs pointed out, while collective memory and

historical recognition differ, the former is often misunderstood as the latter, which causes a battle in terms of international memory and may lead to international conflict. In this context, academic understanding of what frames collective memory is becoming increasingly important. This study contributes to work on collective memory-making processes, presenting a comparative case study on the dominant memory of mainland Japanese and the deviant memory of Okinawans regarding the Japanese surrender.

*This paper is based on the author's presentation on July 30, 2016 at the Japan Session sponsored by the Japan Society for Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication (JSSJMC) at the annual conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) held at the University of Leicester, U.K.

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