

Research Report

Name: Lukasz Janusz ZABLONSKI

Organization (at the time of the grant):

Graduate School of International Media, Communication, and Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University

Title of Research: Historical Reconciliation in Japan: Engagement of Japanese Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Peace and Reconciliation in East Asia

Purpose of Research:

The purpose of this research is to examine the process of historical reconciliation in East Asia (involving Japan, China and Korea). In particular, it seeks to explore the role of Japanese grassroots groups and organizations (civil society organizations, CSOs), which promote good relations with China and Korea based upon acknowledgment of Japanese war responsibility (rekishi ninshiki) and self-reflection (hansei) about the war-past, within this process. By comparing efforts of grassroots initiatives in Japan and Germany, it also aims to provide an insight into the different means to reckon with a difficult past in an international context. In sum, the research attempts to approach the problems related to historical reconciliation in East Asia from the perspective of civil society and international comparison with Germany.

'History issue' (rekishi mondai) has been influencing politics in East Asia during the long post-war to the present day, and it is important to study all the actors, who have actively participated in the process of dealing with the legacies of the Asia-Pacific War in Japan. The actions (or no-actions) of the Japanese political elite in this respect have called considerable attention among academics and hit the headlines in the media worldwide. However, the actions of numerous Japanese grassroots activists have been observed and analyzed only outwardly and superficially. Given this scenario, the research presents and examines how the Japanese have attempted to come to terms with the war-past on the popular level. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to both understanding of the complex dynamics of historical reconciliation in East Asia as well as the nature and characteristics of Japanese grassroots groups and organizations. Of particular interest are advantages/limitations of grassroots actors with relation to the dominant position of the government in the process of historical reconciliation.

As regards the ways in which states have rectified wartime injustices after the defeat, Japan is typically compared with Germany. In both countries, a range of distinct grassroots initiatives have addressed the legacies of World War Two, often ahead (or in place) of the governments and against the mainstream thinking. The research compares how activists in both countries have been facing war responsibility more than sixty years after the surrender, and what implications have their actions had for resolving the 'history issue' in the two contexts. By looking at activities of grassroots groups and organizations, which have embraced the history and memory of foreign laborers forced to toil in Japan and Germany during the war, the research seeks to highlight similarities and differences between the two countries, and signalize recent contacts between German and Japanese grassroots groups.

Content/Methodology of Research:

The content on this research consists of two main blocks: theoretical approach to historical reconciliation on the grassroots level (grassroots reconciliation) in East Asia and case studies. The former comprises examination of the 'history issue' in Japan with a special emphasis on the legacies of forced labor, problems related to the process of historical reconciliation from both the perspective of peace studies and International Relations, the role of grassroots groups and organizations in this process, and international comparison with Germany. The latter comprises case studies, in particular analysis of activities of the Hokkaido Forum and Hokkaido Forum for Recognition of Forced Labor and Its Victims (Kyosei Renko Kyosei Rodo wo Kangaeru Hokkaido Foramu) (Japan) and the Society for Contacts with Countries of the Former Soviet Union Kontakte-Kontakty (Kontakte-Kontakty Verein fur Kontakte zu Landern der ehemaligen Sowjetunion) (Germany). In addition, the second part contains numerous secondary case studies, which support discussion on different aspects of grassroots reconciliation in East Asia.

As regards the methodology, the research makes use of qualitative analysis of materials, which have been collected throughout recent years. These materials comprise primarily printed materials published by the grassroots groups, media reporting about their activities, and interviews with their members. Primary sources also include materials obtained through participative observation of the memory work of the groups. In sum, the methodology consists of a mixture of qualitative research and participative observation.

What follows is an extract from the content of the research (highlighting the support of the Konosuke Matsushita Memorial Foundation research grant). In the aftermath of the Asia-Pacific War, the 'history issue'

has been one of the major obstacles in relations between states in East Asia. Most notably, Japanese political leaders have been condemned for being apologetic to the past of the Imperial Japan and thus doing nothing (or too little) about the legacies of the war, and Japanese society has been criticized for being reportedly locked between war past amnesia and dominant narratives of its own victimhood (especially related to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

This research reveals that whereas the majority of the Japanese post-war governments indeed has been reluctant to deal with the legal and moral legacies of the war, there have been numerous grassroots initiatives, which have confronted those legacies on the popular level. During the long post-war, dozens of activists have tirelessly documented and extended knowledge about Japanese war atrocities in Asia-Pacific, at the same time manifesting empathy with the victim countries and encouraging self-reflection about war responsibility in Japanese society. They also have advocated resolution of the 'history issue' by urging the government to do more about Japan's war past, for instance compensate the victims (in individual compensation programs). Such a memory work from the bottom has continuously resonated into historical and political debates both nationally and internationally, fostering historical reconciliation in the region through unofficial channels.

In recent years, grassroots initiatives, which rely on experiences of previous generations of activists, have emerged in Japan. Thanks to the Matsushita grant, an extensive fieldwork on the Fushun's Miracles Inheritance Association (Bujun no Kiseki wo Uketsugu-kai) has been conducted in Japan and China. (The fieldwork consisted of series of meetings and interviews with Uketsugu-kai members in Tokyo, Saitama (November 2009), as well as of a participative observation during the commemoration of 60 years of the War Criminals Management Center in Fushun, China (June 2010).) Uketsugu-kai continues activism of the 'Chinese Returnees Liaison Association' (known as Chukiren), an association of former Japanese soldiers, who as war criminals in Chinese captivity underwent a process of transformation and confessed to atrocities they committed during the war (this transformation has become known as 'the miracle of Fushun'). After the return to Japan, they actively advocated peace (anti-war) and restoration of good relations with China. Today, Uketsugu-kai continues collecting and publishing of testimonies of the former Chukiren members, hoping that the horrors of war would be never repeated, if the sufferings of both victims and perpetrators would widely known.

Also, thanks to the grant, a presentation during the International Studies Association (ISA) 2010 Annual Convention in New Orleans, US, with regard to the advantages and limitations of Japanese and German grassroots groups in historical reconciliation has been made. The paper contextualized activism of the Hokkaido Forum and the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (from Germany) into the broader context of Japan and Germany's attempts to come to terms with the past respectively. Given that grassroots reconciliation is a compromise between ideology and pragmatism, it also illustrated the differences between approaches towards difficult past in German and Japan. Participation in the excavation program organized by the Hokkaido Forum and the local community on the site of the former military airfield in Asajino, northern Hokkaido, where it is believed remains of former Korean forced laborers along with local Japanese are buried on a hidden cemetery, has been partially covered with the grant as well (Mai 2010). Follow-up of the activities of the Hokkaido Forum, including workshops and excavations is to be continued in the coming months.

Conclusion/Observation:

War history and memory remain important issues in East Asian politics. Concerned peace activists in Japan involve in reckoning with the war responsibility, and in so doing they wish to rectify the wrongdoings from the past. Often it is not possible, as the life cannot be returned to the dead nor compensated to the bereaved families. However, such memory work involving human beliefs, feelings, emotions, and spirituality also belongs to the process of establishing relations between states in the aftermath of a war, and it is important to analyze it as one of the many factors that takes part in this complex and protracted process. As the witnesses of the war are dying out and the activism it is carried out mainly by the generation of post-war baby bums, the biggest challenge grassroots reconciliation in East Asia face is to mobilize activists among younger generations to take over the torch and work for peace and understanding in the region.

This research is a work in progress, however in its final stage. Thanks to the Matsushita research grant, substantial fieldwork has been conducted between October 2009 and September 2010. Attending memorable historical events (apart from the commemoration in Fushun, China and fieldwork in Tokyo, Saitama and Hokkaido mentioned above, the grant also facilitated participation in the Nanking Film Festival held in Tokyo in December 2009) and meeting with range of activists in Japan and elsewhere has provided the researcher with a unique opportunity of observing memory work of different groups from 'inside'. Photographic and video documentation of those events has been made possible thanks to the grant as well. Also, numerous books, booklets, and materials such as museums' brochures and DVDs in Japanese and other languages have been purchased during the grant period, in order to both establish/consolidate theoretical framework of the research and expand the scope of the analysis of the activities of the grassroots groups and organizations.

The progress of the research has been presented and discussed in numerous occasions so far. Except for the abovementioned ISA 2010 Annual Convention, the memory work of the Fushun's Miracles Inheritance

Association (Uketsugu-kai) has been presented during a conference held at the University of Leeds, UK (July) (the costs for the conference has been covered by the organizer, therefore the expenses for overseas travel have been rearranged). The article regarding Uketsugu-kai has been submitted for publication in the UK and another publication is in writing process.