

## Teach Taiwan history to Taiwanese

Written by Lee Hsiao-feng 李蕭峰

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Pro-Chinese media have lately made a big deal over whether to use the term “Japanese rule” or “Japanese occupation” when talking about the Japanese colonial era in Taiwan.

Both terms have a lot going for them. Even from a pro-Taiwanese perspective, there is nothing wrong with saying “Japanese occupation.” What pro-unification politicians and media outlets are trying to do is to treat Taiwanese history as a part of Chinese history so that it focuses on Greater China and rejects any Taiwan-centric explanations of Taiwan’s history.

I have often asked my freshman students which country was responsible for bombing Taiwan during the later stages of World War II. Surprisingly, 30 percent of students answer: “Japan.” When reminded that Taiwan was a Japanese colony at the time and asked why Japan would bomb its own territory, one answer that is given is “Didn’t we fight an eight-year war of resistance against Japan?” That answer shows what the problem is: the problem lies in the word “we.” Who are “we?” The “we” that was taught to students in the past was focused on Greater China. That is what created this absurd understanding of history.

Taiwanese history differs from Chinese history. The two have developed along different trajectories and it is neither a vertical nor an inclusive relationship, but a parallel one. To make an analogy, the histories of China’s Hebei or Sichuan provinces can be seen as Chinese local histories, but Taiwanese history is different. It cannot be observed by completely incorporating it into Chinese history. Rather, to look at Taiwanese history, it must be perceived as a part of world history.

During China’s 3,000 to 4,000 years of history, Taiwan has only been a part of it for a very short period of time: when administered by the Qing Dynasty between 1684 and 1895 — which could be called the “Qing occupation” — and by the then Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government between October 1945 and late 1949. Even during that time, Taiwanese developments differed substantially from those in China proper.

Looking at overall Taiwanese history, Taiwan has for most of the time been not a part of China. Taiwan’s modern development began as world history entered the maritime era, and is not a part of Chinese history.

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In the past, Taiwanese history was treated as a sub-branch of Chinese history because Taiwan was seen as a part of Chinese society. Ethnicity is not necessarily the only factor in considering history. Most of the Anglo-Saxons, which make up the bulk of the US population, came from Great Britain, but that doesn't make US history part of British history. Likewise, 75 percent of all Singaporeans are of Chinese descent, as most of their ancestors came from Fujian Province, but that does not make Singaporean history part of Chinese history. The same goes for Taiwan.

History education in the past looked at Taiwan as being located on the fringes of China, so Taiwanese became unfamiliar with Taiwan. Students' national identities became confused and this must be blamed on the history education.

The teaching of the history of Taiwan as an independent subject is often the target of two kinds of distortion and vilification by pro-unification media. One is that these teachers oppose the study of Chinese history, but many of the academics that are members of the Taiwan Historical Association study Chinese history.

The second vilifies those holding the historic view that Taiwan is an independent subject for praising Japan, and even calls those who hold this view "imperial Japanese subjects." This is a malicious distortion. For example, writing about the anti-Japanese patriot Lin Chiu-wu (林秋武) is a gateway to the field of Taiwanese history.

Every historian that views Taiwan as an independent subject will touch upon the anti-Japanese movement in Taiwan, with a particular emphasis on the anti-Japanese social movement among the Taiwanese elite. This should be sufficient to refute any such vilification.

Unless Taiwanese are prepared to become a province of the People's Republic of China, there must be a history education that focuses on Taiwanese identity.

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