

**When *Wansei* Comes “Home:”
Myth, Production and the Politics of Colonial Nostalgia in Postcolonial Taiwan¹**

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My childhood ended together with the war. And at the same time, I lost my “birthplace.” We were expelled from our “birthplace” and were repatriated to “homeland Japan”... Today, after twenty-seven years, I am still being denied by my “birthplace” on the reason that I am Japanese.

However, no one can possibly deny my memories of the “birthplace.”

Goto Akio “Letter to my father”³

Introduction

Goto Akio (1932-1999), a Japanese novelist, was born in what is today North Korea. He was repatriated to Japan after WWII but lost his father and grandmother in the process. Such childhood experience traumatized him and deeply affected his later writings (See Park 2014). Goto and many others who were born in what later became North Korea never had a chance to revisit their birthplaces. This was, however, not the case for those who were born in colonial Taiwan, otherwise known as *wansei* (jp./wansheng ch. 灣生 hereafter *wansei*). Owing to Tanaka Mika (Chen Xuan-ru), the author of the best-selling book as well as the popular documentary film, *Wansheng huijia* 灣生回家, *wansei* have gained much visibility in Taiwan in the recent years.⁴ For instance, the Association of Taiwan-Japan Friendship in Tainan invited fifteen *wansei* to Tainan in September, 2016. Their air tickets and accommodations were all paid. The Association also invited elder Taiwanese men and women who received Japanese education to interact with them. Besides visiting sites of memories like their birthplace and schools, they visited the local household registration office to receive a copy of their personal household

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³ 戦争が終わったとき、わたしの少年時代は終わりました。そしてわたしは、同時に生まれ故郷を失ったわけです。つまり私たちは「生まれ故郷」を追放されて、「祖国日本」へ引揚げてきたわけです。

(.....) 確かにわたしは日本人であるという理由によって二十七年後の今なお「生まれ故郷」から拒まれているかもしれません。しかし、「生まれ故郷」についてのわたしの記憶だけは誰も拒むことは出来ないはずで。後藤明生「父への手紙」, quoted in Park (2014:89).

⁴ In December 2016, “Tanaka” fell from grace as it was revealed by a Japanese journalist that she faked her family background. It turned out to be that she is a “pure” Taiwanese born and raised in Kaohsiung, and not a descendant of a *wansei*. See Yoshimura 2013.

records retained from the colonial period (Liberty Times 9/9/2016: AA1). Such events are unthinkable for Japanese born in Korea—North and South alike. While the Koreans remember the Japanese occupation with distaste, Taiwanese are nostalgic.

This paper examines the making of postcolonial memories of *wansei*. *Wansei* are ethnic Japanese born and raised in Taiwan between 1895 and 1946.⁵ They were repatriated back to Japan in 1946 after Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War (1937-1945). Stories of *wansei*, like those other repatriates, commonly known in Japan as *hikiagesha* 引揚者, were long forgotten after the war because they were not openly discussed in public in Japan and Taiwan alike, but for different reasons. In the case of Japan, Lori Watt (2009) points out that as the postwar nation reinvented itself as “mono-ethnic” and “peace-loving,” stories of repatriates from the former colonies and occupied territories were not welcomed and thus they gradually disappeared from the public discourse; they were excluded from postwar national discourse as the narratives of *hikiage* invoke the memories wars and colonial dominance. On the other hand, in Taiwan, memories of the Japanese colonial past were also untold publically under the postwar Chinese/KMT rule. The KMT which fought against Japan in WWII dominated the public discourse during the martial law period (1949-1987), under which the Japanese past in Taiwan was retold in negative tones, if not neglected all together. Thus, both societies gave no room for memories of the Japanese colonial/imperial past to be produced, reproduced and circulated. It was not until quite recently that all the sudden stories and memories of the Japanese past—in particular *wansei*—were recollected, thanks to the aforementioned work by Tanaka Mika.

Comment [YA1]: Differentiate Lori and Park

Comment [YA2]: Be more specific

What I wish to do in this paper is to revisit the notion of “homeland” through the colonial and postcolonial experiences of *wansei*. I question the blood-based notion of homeland vis-a-vis the experience-based one. Could we argue that Taiwan, not Japan, was the “homeland,” real or imagined, for *wansei* who were born and raised in Taiwan? Could it be possible that many of them experienced being a diasporic in the land of their ancestors in the postwar period? A careful reading of the literature suggests that *wansei* and colonial settlers in Taiwan (as well as in other former Japanese colonies) did have a deep sense of attachment to the land in which they were born and raised, or resided for a long period of time. Yet with the defeat in the WWII and the collapse of the Japanese Empire, it became “wrong” to express (at times even retain) such feeling of nostalgia to the land that had become foreign. In other words, the feeling and the production of homeland was not unrelated to the politics of nationalism. This paper, thus, is an attempt to think beyond the national framework by focusing on the narratives of the *wansei*. Or to put it differently, to rethink on “home”—real and imaginary—through the lens of dislocated people. This paper examines in particular the memories of *wansei/hikiagesha* who were still children at the time of repatriation. A close examination of their gazes is an attempt to challenge and possibly deconstruct the Manichean dualism in which Japanese are seen as “oppressors” and Taiwanese as “victims.” Is it possible to argue that young children under the age 15 who were raised in Taiwan did not quite share the consciousness of being Japanese imperialists? Could it

⁵ The war ended in August 1945. Yet, reparations of the Japanese nationals on the island did not begin until March 1946. Most reparation finished by the end of that year.

be possible that some of them identify themselves as “Taiwanese” instead of “Japanese”? Or perhaps, neither or both.

In order to answer the questions raised above, I have looked into published and unpublished autobiographies and documents such as school yearbooks and alumni newsletters. For this paper, in particular, I relied on two unpublished materials, *Gojyūnen no kizuna: Tainan nihonjin chugaku no kiroku* (Fifty Years of Bondage: Records of Tainan Japanese Middle School) and *Higashi ōtake no yama takaku: Taiwan Takao chūgaku 22 kisei no kiroku* (Mountains Rise High on East Otake/Dawu), and information and insights I received through my interviews to the survivors who attended these schools.

Comment [YA3]: Need to explain why only these schools, both in the South

Background: Empire Comes Home

The collapse of the Japanese empire caused nearly eight million people to move in and out of Japan. This was the greatest exodus Japanese experienced in its modern history. The repatriation was accomplished in a relatively brief period, thanks to the Americans. Most of them were repatriated by the end of 1946. This included five million Japanese, as well as one million Koreans, 40,000 Chinese, and 18,000 Taiwanese (Watt 2009: 2-3).

From Taiwan, 170,000 military personnel returned to Japan by the end of 1945, and the repatriation of Japanese civilians started in March 1946. Within two months all soldiers and 280,000 civilians returned home (Kato 2009:127-128). However, aside from these early repatriates there were some 27,000 Japanese nationals who were “forced” to stay in Taiwan to help the smooth transfer of power and knowledge to the new ruling Chinese Nationalist/KMT government, known as *liuyong riqiao* 留用日僑. They were mostly technicians and engineers, but also included government officials and scholars, as well as their families. They did not leave the island until the spring of 1947, after the notorious “228 Incident.”

According to Wakatsuki (1991) who specializes the history of post-WWII Japanese repatriation, repatriation from Taiwan was “overall smooth without much trouble.” There were reports of occasional thefts and violence against Japanese after the war. In particular, there were numerous retaliations against Japanese policemen, resulting in some deaths. One policeman who committed suicide together with his family due to the fear of retaliation. According to a report from Kaohsiung, Taiwanese often committed looting against the Japanese and it was witnessed that Japanese were tied up and marched around the city with signs listing their criminal acts hanging on their neck. Suzuki Reiko, who was in Taipei after the war, revealed that her father even hired a Taiwanese street gang (*liumang*) to protect the elementary school students from unwanted violence and harassment (Suzuki 2014: 44-46). However, these seem to be rather exceptional events, and in many other places “it was even safe for women to walk on the street at night (Wakatsuki 1991: 89).” In sum, the general situation was far better in Taiwan than other areas. While people in Manchuria literally fled for their lives and experienced murder, rape, and starvation, there was always enough to eat in Taiwan and the violence against the Japanese nationals was limited and rather temporal.⁶ Such difference became evident to all repatriates

Comment [YA4]: Citation needed

Comment [YA5]: Citation needed

⁶ Many Japanese give credit to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek for his generous policy to not humiliate “innocent” Japanese citizens and grant them safe passage home, known as *yide baoyuan* 以德報怨 (repay evil with good).

upon their arrival to Japan. Many repatriates from Taiwan were shocked to hear how repatriates from other areas, especially Manchuria, had been treated. This reality seems to have enabled them put their hardship into perspective, which resulted in their gratitude toward the Taiwanese as well as the Chinese authorities. According to one story, when the repatriates from Taiwan were given food at the port upon their arrival, they complained to the staff who were distributing the food that they could not eat such awful food. To this, the staff replied in disgust, “Those from Manchuria yesterday were eating the same food with tears of gratitude flowing down their cheeks!”⁷

Comment [YA6]: There is a clip from the US navy

The Taiwanese Shift toward Nostalgia for the Japanese

The feelings of Taiwanese toward the Japanese shifted after the arrival of Chinese soldiers from Mainland China. The Taiwanese people then started to realize that the Japanese rulers were being replaced with rulers far more brutal and incompetent; they began to worry about their future. Taiwanese neighbors who had been throwing trash into Japanese houses shortly after “restoration (*guangfu*)” were now telling them not to leave the island. A Japanese middle school student living in Anping recalls:

“Hatred disappeared from their eyes since that day [arrival of Chinese soldiers]. They (Taiwanese) used to use the kids to throw rocks into Japanese houses and put sands and stones into the bucket when we went to beg for water from their well. But after they have seen the miserable Chinese soldiers, they began to praise the Japanese, saying ‘after all Japanese were splendid’ (Gojyu nen 1998: 45).”

One of the students at the Kaohsiung Middle School recalls that when the Japanese were queued up at the pier of Kaohsiung Harbor for the voyage to Japan, suddenly several Taiwanese students (about 10 years old) came searching for a Japanese bully and upon finding him they started beating him in front of the crowd. Nobody stopped the violence, even the boy’s parents. They pretended as if they did not see what was happening. This student remembers the grip of her mother’s hand which was holding his hand became tighter (Higashi Otake no yama takaku 1999: 75). There were still cases of some Taiwanese personally seeing off their close Japanese friends; but the general mood in early 1946 was not that of a warm farewell. It draws a contrast with the departure which is described by Tateishi Tetsuomi 立石鉄臣(1905-1980), an artist born in Taiwan. He left the island on one of the last ships in December 1948.

Comment [YA7]: In footnote, explain who he is

“The pier was full of Taiwanese people who came to see off the Japanese. As the ship started to move, they began singing *hotaru no hikari* (a popular farewell song in Japanese). At the time, people were not allowed to use Japanese in public. It seems as if they did not care... some people were waving a Japanese flag. It must have been a display of nostalgia for the Japanese as well as resistance toward their same race from Mainland China.”



“I Love Taiwan!” 「灣生・風土・立石鐵臣」一書（雄獅美術出版，2004）

The biggest turning point in Taiwanese attitudes toward the Japanese was the “228 Incident.” Sugiyama Toshio, a middle student in Tainan, recalls that the brutal rule by the KMT was far worse than that of the Japanese colonizers. In retrospect, he thinks, this rendered the “Taiwanese to cope with Japanese rule rationally, not emotionally.” [The change of attitude was seen in Taiwanese reaction toward Japanese repatriation. Whereas the early repatriates in March 1946 were literally chased away, there was some kind of bondage between the local Taiwanese and the Japanese who were leaving the island after the 228 Incident. Sugiyama recalls: “it comes as a relief to someone like myself who was born and raised on this island that we were able to wave hands at each other with a feeling of hope to meet again in the future.” He continues:

Comment [YA8]: Also find quotes by Taiwanese

Comment [YA9]: Repeating; move to front

“Had I left Taiwan with fear of retaliation and bitterness, my feelings toward Taiwan may have been different today. My relationship with the Taiwanese had changed into a calm and warm feeling like the sunlight that beams out of the cloud after the storm. Even as a young child, I felt this was something wonderful (Gojyu nen: 13).”

Another Japanese student writes:

“I also remember the day we left Tainan for Keelung. There must have been professors of the Engineering School on the same train. A group of Taiwanese students, in spite of the obstruction from the Chinese soldiers, chased after the departing train, shouting: “Long Live Japan! Please promise us that you will come back! (Gojyu nen: 46)”

Discrimination at Home

For repatriates from Taiwan, unlike from Manchuria and Korea, life after their return “home” was more difficult than the life before return. Many repatriates suffered discrimination at home, and it took them many years to be “(re)integrated” as “Japanese” and to make “Japan” their home. The war had exhausted the land and there were shortages of food and resources everywhere. In such conditions, repatriates were not welcomed as they were seen as an additional burden for the relatives in Japan. Tanba Goneko, who was repatriated to Japan at age 14, recalls how she and her sister were mistreated in the Japanese schools: “They call us name. They said ‘how come you *hikiagesha* can come to school?’ ‘How dare you *hikiagesha* wear such nice clothes and shoes...引揚者のくせに (Gojyunen no kizuna: 43)?” Aoki Kazuhisa, a former student of Kaohsiung Middle School, recalls how he was beaten up by a Japanese student after the first day of class. He was told, “What the hell is a *hikiagesha* like you doing in our school?” Aoki was attending a prestigious public school then and he believes that the popular stereotype on repatriates being poor and of low class instigated the violence. Aoki has no memory of “free (leisure) time” growing up. He had to help my father (who served and later retired as policeman in Taiwan) with his field after school and selling the crops after harvest. “One time, I went to sell them at a housing for low-income families in the evening. There, I met my school teacher in the Taiwan days. Of course, I couldn’t possibly take any money from him!” As a matter of fact, many *hikiagesha*, returned to Japan with a handful of luggage and a mere 1,000 yen (equivalent to half the monthly salary of average men at the time) could not afford to send their children to school. Like Aoki, those who made it to school had to work after school to pay the tuition. They barely had time for themselves. This came in great contrast to their previously affluent and privileged lives in the colony.

Comment [YA10]: Or housings for repatriates?

Narrative of Taiwan as a “Second Home” or “Spiritual Home”

The literature by *wansei* is full of expression of their affection for Taiwan. Too many, their feelings toward Taiwan, their birthplace, surpasses that of Japan, the land of their ancestors. For instance, in my interview with Aoki, he expressed his feeling toward Taiwan by distinguishing the two places as follow: “Japan is my *sokoku* (祖国 land of the ancestors) while Taiwan is my *bokoku* (母国 homeland/motherland).” A careful reading of the literature suggests that this somewhat represents the general feeling of those Japanese nationals born and raised in Taiwan. Other reference to Taiwan includes:

Comment [YA11]: Too much to say

“I think of Taiwan as my second home. I love Taiwan from my heart (H: 46)”⁸

“To me who was born and raised in Taiwan, there is no other place (other than Taiwan) which I can call home... (H: 113)”⁹

⁸台湾を心から愛し、台湾を第二の故郷と思っている。

⁹(寿山で終戦になり引揚げとなりましたが、)台湾で生まれ、育った私にはどうしても台湾が故里です。

“Taiwan has become a foreign country (*ikoku*), but for me, Taiwan is a home of my soul, and I feel that all my students in Taiwan are ‘people of my homeland’ (*urusato no hito*) (Taiwan Association 1982: 181).”

Unlike most adults who felt a sense of great relief when they saw from the ship the shores of Japan appear in front of their eyes, many *wansei*/children wept as Taiwan disappeared into the horizon (Tanaka 2015). For instance, one student writes:

“Although it can be called a motherland, repatriation to Japan, a land where I have never been, was full of anxiety... (H: 44)’¹⁰

The Gaze of the Children

Here I wish to explore the possibility of multiple layered imperial gazes. Park Yuha explores the possibility that children were perhaps “too young” and “too innocent” to have developed a consciousness as “colonialists/imperialists (Park 2014: 98).” By doing so, she is challenging the Manichean binary between the “colonizers” and the “colonized.” This is a very interesting proposition. Yet, two points need to be taken into consideration. First, the recollection of their childhood had been written decades later as grown up adults with the knowledge of Japanese imperialism and war and the awareness of their formerly privileged status as a “Japanese” in the colony. In this case, how innocent can their narratives be? In other words, they may have been innocent in the past, but can only pretend to be so in their narratives. Second, it is hard to tell whether children were free from an imperial gaze just because they were “too young.” Imperialism was a norm back then and especially during the *kominka*/imperialization period (1937-1945) and even elementary school students seem to have been breathing such air. Despite numerous stories of having friendship with Taiwanese friends, everybody knew that Japanese were the privileged class and treated differently from the local Taiwanese. Racial discrimination was ubiquitous and even small children could see it as clear as daylight.¹¹ For instance, Dozaki Hiroshi, a former student at Tainan Industrial High School recalls this childhood memory:

At the time, I was about three years old. My family was a coal dealer, and Lutau was directing the job as an overseer. He was a Taiwanese man, a little over forty, and very studious. He often took me on his bicycle on his free time. One day as we are passing through the roundabout in front of the Provincial Office Building, a policeman suddenly came out of the tree and stood in our way, saying: “Hey, you should know that two seaters are not allowed!” We are taken to the nearby police station. Then, the police officer start hitting Lutau repeatedly. But, Lutau just bowed his head and bore the violence. The police officer thought I was his son. I was so scared and kept crying. Fortunately, a neighbor who saw us reported my father and we were bailed out after my father paid 50 sen.

This is the first memory of my childhood and the scenes are strongly impressed in my brain. Growing up, I thought of what had happened and each

¹⁰母国とはいえ、未だ一度も訪れたことのない日本への引き揚げは不安に満ち溢れたもの

¹¹ For example, on several occasions, I have heard *wansei* telling me how surprised they were to see Japanese doing labor upon their return to Japan.

time I pondered on it. Japanese policemen were kind to Japanese, but they were utterly brutal to Taiwanese. If the lawbreakers are Taiwanese, they would beat them even in front of their own children. How senseless they were. I could not help but to think about the racial discrimination, the colonialism, etc.¹²

Discrimination and violence driven by racism were the banality of evil in the colony. It is not difficult to find stories of these unpleasant events in the memoirs and recollections of students who lived in colonial Taiwan. Beating of Taiwanese students in school was an everyday happening. At the same time, it is true that the beating was part of the Japanese school culture and was not always motivated by racial difference.¹³ Moreover, in some situation, racial difference was not as visible. Aoki who attended the Kaohsiung Middle School recalls since there were not too many Taiwanese students in a Japanese school (*shōgakkō*) and since many of them were using a Japanese name, he and other Japanese students could not distinguished Taiwanese students from Japanese ones (Aoki interview 10/8/2016). While this may be true, the literature is fraught of stories of Taiwanese students being mocked and at times beaten by Japanese students. Some Taiwanese students recall how they hated lunch time because Japanese students pick on them for the kind of food they are eating such as pig tails and ears (NHK 2009). One Taiwanese student recalls how he developed a phobia for the Japanese people as a result of being slapped out of no reason when he was a student. Raymond Liu experienced something similar: he was slapped by his music teacher when he, out of pure curiosity, pressed the piano keyboard (Liu 1998). The incident caused Liu to never explore his music talent. Many cases show that Taiwanese people were traumatized by these racial discrimination. Colonialism/imperialism is such a violence which leaves a scar in the mind of the formerly colonized even into the postcolonial. Yet, occasionally, the conscience of the colonized is bothered by his/her actions and reactions by the recipients of such violence and injustices. One student who was age 15 at the time of Japanese surrender wrote:

“At that time, a Han Chinese student T (anonymous) in the same group (in the military barracks in Hōzan/Fengshan) told us “Japan lost the war.” His voice was full of joy. It was so shocking to us. And such shock quickly changed into anger. “How can that be! You bastard! Watch your mouth!” That is what we all told him more or less. But T was surprisingly calm. He looked at us, almost sympathetically, and again said “Japan has lost!” We exploded in anger, and a rain of iron fists came pouring down on him. Yet, unlike before, he was strong this time around. I saw on his face the pride which can only be expressed by a person who dares to speak the truth. He was even smiling... There were other Chinese students in our group. But, no one else took such a courageous attitude like T. They just watched us beat T with fear of being treated the same.

¹² Dozaki Hiroshi, “Apology to my Taiwanese friends on the 50th Year,” *Hōbokukai kaihō*, No. 44, 1994, p.8.

¹³ Japanese senior students were beating up junior students. It happened in the schools in the colony, as well as those in Japan proper. Such a culture of violence was even inherited in the postwar period and is well alive even today, although no longer so endured by the society.

Comment [YA12]: Citation needed

Their attitude gradually changed as we were demobilized and returned to school. At the time, it was already clear to everyone that Japan had indeed lost the war. They took revenge by beating us up. I was one of the victims. But, T, although he was often badly beaten by us, did not participate in the revenge. And as if he has already forgotten what had happened to him previously or as if he was trying his best to recover the time loss caused by the war, he started to study hard. His attitude to completely ignore us made those of us who were already feeling like losers feel even more miserable... (*Higashi Okate* 154-155)”

Retaliation against Japanese students after the war was also very common. Aoki recalls that Taiwanese students were waiting for Japanese students at the entrance of the station in Kaohsiung and they took them to the side and beat them up. He too almost fell victim yet was shown mercy at last minute when a Taiwanese student rushed over to the site and defended him, saying that “he is a good Japanese who saved me in the past.” They were classmates in elementary school and Aoki once delivered quinine (a medication) to this boy who at the time was suffering from malaria (interview with Aoki). However, not everyone was fortunate like Aoki. K. Suenaga from Tainan experienced being pulled into a local temple by some Taiwanese students, who told him “How dare you not bow to our gods! You Japanese forced us to show respect to your gods before. Now it is our turn (G: 8).”

Moreover, children were patriotic, sometimes even more than the adults, as middle school boys were mobilized into military service. Many students in the upper grades volunteered for the navy or army. Some even became kamikaze pilots and perished at war. Lower grades from the Kaohsiung Middle School were mobilized to build a runway in the middle of sugar cane fields in Xiaogang (what is today Kaohsiung’s international airport). Aoki and other third graders at Kaohsiung Middle School received a “red letter (*akagami*)” and were conscripted into the army unit in Kaohsiung to dig tunnels in the mountain to prepare against US landing and to receive training on how to sneak under tanks with explosives.¹⁴ Some of them were killed by US bombings.

My point is that middle school students, although different from adults, are already too old to have been innocent of their privileged status as Japanese. Female students and elementary school students who were exempted from military service and thus spent their time in the remote countryside to evade air raids may have had different experiences from the boys.

Making of Colonial Nostalgia

One of the main arguments I wish to make in this paper is that *wansei*’s nostalgia toward Taiwan is a product of their postcolonial/imperial experience. It was through the mercy they received from the Taiwanese neighbors, friends, and colleagues after the defeat in war, not because the Japanese treated them fair and equal (in many cases they have not), but despite their arrogance, sense of superiority, and ill-treatment of the local Taiwanese. Second, nostalgia was a result of their experience after returning home: Repatriates from Taiwan realized that their experiences

¹⁴ It turned out later that these students at age 15 were the youngest army private in the history of the Japanese Imperial Army.

were much fortunate than repatriates from other areas, namely Korea and Manchuria: the latter was just happy to be home alive. Stories of sufferings they experienced made them realize how blessed they were to be living in Taiwan. Third, discrimination they received at home made them become nostalgic for Taiwan. Many of the *wansei* had never visited Japan proper before, and the experience of “homecoming” after the end of a long and bitter war was nothing romantic. Many cities in Japan were literally flatten to the ground by the US bombings, and there were severe shortage of food and clothes; streets were full of beggars, orphans, and thieves. In addition, for those who were living in cities like Taipei and Kaohsiung, it felt like their hometowns in Japan were so underdeveloped and remote. Not so long after they arrived at the harbor, their imagination of a beautiful homeland was shattered. One *wansei* recalls how surprised she was to see Japanese blue-collar workers: “You see, in Taiwan, all blue-collar workers are (native) Taiwanese!” Many of them experienced being given a cold shoulder even by their relatives in Japan, who themselves were too poor and too preoccupied to care for people other than themselves.

Another factor that has contributed to *wansei*'s nostalgia for Taiwan is the acceptance and openness of their Taiwanese counterparts. Taiwanese people who received Japanese education have opened their arms to embrace their former classmates, which in turn allowed *wanesei* to frequently visit Taiwan and reestablish and develop relationships. The Taiwanese acceptance and generosity are not unrelated to their postcolonial (or re-colonial) experience after the war, which I will elaborate below. Just as the Japanese nostalgia is a postcolonial/imperial construct, “pro-Japanese” feeling by the Taiwanese is also a postcolonial one, although for those who are older they are based on the real experience of “once being Japanese.”

An Encounter with Wansei who did not leave Taiwan

Above observations and ideas are outcomes of my readings of *wansei* literature such as memoirs and letters, as well as interviews I have been conducting. Yet, nothing was perhaps more enlightening than my encounter with Sumiko Fukaya. She and her siblings were all born in Taiwan. She was 12 when the war ended. Sumiko had a Taiwanese father and a Japanese mother. They met and married in Taiwan. Sumiko's father became “Japanese” by registering himself under his wife's household. When the war ended, however, her father refused to move to Japan, and quickly “recovered” his Taiwanese household registration so that he and the family will spare deportation. Sumiko's father worked as a technician in the sugar industry in Tainan County. When most *liuyong riqiao* were forced to leave Taiwan after the 228 Incident in 1947, his father insisted to stay. This torn the family apart: the mother and the kids who wished to return to Japan like other Japanese friends cried and begged his father but to no avail. According to Sumiko, her older brother became a delinquent due to disappointment and frustration at not being able to return to Japan. He shouted: “Japanese must return to Japan!” The father who feared he might end up becoming a street gangster, years later put him on a ship and smuggled him out of Taiwan. However, the ship which was supposed to sail to Japan went to Shanghai instead and there he was arrested. Sumiko's brother was detained in a concentration camp where he was forced to labor for several years before repatriation to Japan. The family moved to Kaohsiung where she was admitted to Kaohsiung Junior High School as an auditor. She told me

however she did not understand Mandarin and thus could hardly catch up. She managed to graduate from the Girls' High School (which is the best school in Kaohsiung) but she said she doesn't remember anything she studied (interview with Fukaya 10/21/2016). The crucial decision the father made at the end of the war devastated the family: her parents later divorced; the brother left the family for Japan and the two were not reunited until much later.¹⁵ Sumiko told me that her mother once told her that she is proud to have "protected" her children's Japanese nationality.

Sumiko's story is revealing, for, first, while many *wansei* now consider Taiwan to be their homeland, second home, etc., most of them desired to go back to Japan with their families. It is true that being a child and defeated in the War, many of them, even if they had wished to stay on the island, had no choice but to follow the decision of their fathers whose decisions were not free from the policies made by the Chinese authorities. Yet, remaining in Taiwan, especially after the turmoil of the 228 Incident, was not an option most Japanese families would consider (Even many Taiwanese were looking for a way to leave the island).¹⁶ Second, Sumiko, unlike other *wansei*, does not share a strong nostalgia for Taiwan. She is bitter about the fact that she had to stay in Taiwan after the war. She felt as if she was left alone. In the beginning, out of shame, she did not attend any of the alumni gatherings whether they are held in Taiwan or in Japan. Absence of nostalgia can be explained by the continuity of location: pleasant memories from the colonial past and the hardships she experienced in the postwar period both happened in the same location. In addition, unlike other *wansei*, she did not experience repatriation and discrimination against *hikiagesha* in postwar Japan. Paradoxical as it may sound, reparation and postwar discrimination in Japan that *wansei* went through functioned as *rites of passage* that had transformed Taiwan into their "homeland," with memories more sweet than bitter.

Memories and Nation building

The end of a war is the beginning of another war: a war on memory. This war is waged between the forces and agents of remembering and forgetting. The politics of memories continues to this day in many postcolonial nations. For example, unlike *wansei*, memories of nearly one million Japanese living in pre-WWII Korea are forgotten and their stories are barely known in Korea. This is because the memories of the Japanese settlers in Korea would most likely challenge the postwar national discourse in Korea in which Koreans are imagined as "mono-ethnic nation" and the disrupt the dichotomy between Japanese/aliens/oppressors and Koreans/natives/oppressed. Politics of memories of the Japanese past works differently in the two postcolonial nations: whereas in Korea the memories of the Japanese settlers had to be erased in order to construct national identity, in Taiwan the memories of the Japanese past, including *wansei*, are

¹⁵ Sumiko told me that when the family invited his brother, who later became a professor in German Literature, to visit them in Taiwan, jokingly told them that he would be arrested at the airport for the crimes (smuggling out of Taiwan) he committed many years ago.

¹⁶ However, there were numbers of Japanese who were unwilling to leave the island and thus went into hiding, especially in the mountain areas. The size of these kind of people are not known. Yet, it is unlikely to have exceed one hundred.

rediscovered and reinvented to construct a Taiwanese nation, imagined separate from China.

Politics of memory is thus a politics of nation building.

Comment [YA13]: Rework; this sentence is hanging

Conclusion: Beyond national identity

For people like *wansei*, it is cruel to frame them as “Japanese” since their birth and growth in colonial Taiwan somewhat turned them liminal. They are neither “Japanese” nor “Taiwanese” in a straightforward way. They were “Japanese born in Taiwan,” not quite the same as “native Taiwanese” but certainly not the same as Japanese in Japan proper. They experienced “becoming Japanese” after they returned to Japan as a result of Japan’s defeat in WWII and the collapse of the Empire. I once met a *wansei* who told me that she was often told by other Japanese colleagues that she doesn’t quite “behave like Japanese.” She told me that when she later befriended a Japanese American woman from Hawaii, they felt so close to each other and became good friends.

In 2016, Japan commemorated the 70th anniversary of repatriation of Japanese nationals from outer territories. To borrow from Lori Watt, it was a year “when the Empire came home.” However, for many *wansei*, as examined in this paper, the end of the war was a bitter departure from their “homeland”/birthplace to an unfamiliar “fatherland/motherland.” In addition, repatriates were not welcomed in Japan which had been devastated by the war. They experienced discrimination in school, at work, and even in their own “hometown.” Ironically, Japan was reimagined as a homogeneous nation after the end of WWII (Oguma 1995) and the subsequent collapse of the Empire, and in this process, former colonial subjects and repatriates from the colonies (*hikiagesha*) were excluded as “not pure” and were thus subject to prejudice.¹⁷ Park Yuha argues that the narratives of the repatriates were deleted from the postwar public discourse since such narratives inevitably evoke Japanese sins as oppressors (Park 2017). Or perhaps, the Othering was needed so that Japanese could once again become Japanese, as if the *hikiagesha* were the atonement, the sacrifice offered at the altar of a cult called nation or nation-building. The study of repatriates, I argue, is important today in a world where motion and migration—voluntary or forced—had become a norm rather than an irregularity. As far as Japan is concerned, the forgotten narratives of *wansei* and other *hikiagesha* could disrupt the public discourse on the Japanese nation as being “homogeneous” and “mono-cultural.” Moreover, it gives birth to the possibility of reimagining Japan as a multi-ethnic nation, which as a result may alleviate xenophobia, hate speech, and racial crimes against ethnic minorities, such as *zainichi* Koreans and ethnic Chinese, in the country, as well as providing a ground for the nation to embrace more immigrants and refugees.¹⁸

References

¹⁷ It is forgotten today that 30 percent of the population of the Japanese empire were non-Japanese, including Koreans and Taiwanese/Chinese.

¹⁸ Japan has the lowest percentage of immigrants (1.6) among the G8 nations in 2015. Among the other nations, Canada has the highest percentage (21.8) and the Russia the lowest (8.1) (Kirk 2016).

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