

## **Historical Memory and Its Influence on Relations between Tokyo and Taipei under President Ma Ying-jeou (2008–2016)<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract.** Taiwan, a former colony of Japan (1895–1945), for a number of different factors still remains the only region in the world that does not place emphasis on the negative sides of a rather long period of Japanese colonial rule. Problems of the historical past do not directly affect the development of traditionally close relations between Japan and Taiwan, but they play an important role in forming the “Taiwanese identity” and are closely related to the current issues of the foreign and domestic policies of the Republic of China. The ongoing feud between Mainland China and Taiwan, coupled with the current international political situation, also has an effect on the assessment by the Taiwanese of their colonial past and the policies of the Japanese Empire in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the perception of contemporary Japan in Taiwan.

The article discusses the approaches of Taiwanese authorities to problems of the historical past under President Ma Ying-jeou (2008–2016) – a period when the Kuomintang built up equally good relations with Japan and China on the basis of the new conception of “Taiwanese identity”. Making efforts to reconcile the pro-unification and pro-independence parties, the president

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tried to form in Taiwanese society a balanced approach to the understanding of the Japanese and Chinese periods of Taiwan's history, as well as the role of Japan in the development of the modern Republic of China. Calling himself "the best friend of Japan", Ma Ying-jeou continued to strengthen ties between Tokyo and Taipei, and at the same time took a hard-line stance on the territorial dispute with Japan – the issue of sovereignty over the Diaoyudao (釣魚島)/Senkaku islands (or Diaoyutai islands 釣魚臺 as they are called in Taiwan), which appeared again on the agenda of Japan-Taiwan relations. However, the issues of the historical past during the Ma Ying-jeou era did not hamper the development of cooperation between Tokyo and Taipei, and, in 2008-2016, the image of Japan in Taiwan remained constantly positive.

**Keywords:** Taiwan, Japan, Republic of China, Diaoyudao, Senkaku, problems of the historical past, foreign affairs.

## Introduction

Issues of the historical past associated with the expansion of the Japanese Empire in Asia in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are still relevant in the relations of Japan with its neighbours – its former colonies and the countries that underwent military occupation during World War II. First of all, this refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of Korea – the contradictions with these countries over the interpretation of Japan's military past have been on for the last few decades. At the same time, Taiwan, which was Japan's colony for 50 years (1895–1945), still remains the only region in the world that does not place emphasis on the negative sides of a rather long period of Japanese colonial rule due to a number of various factors. Moreover, the perception of the Japanese in Taiwan's society was positive throughout the post-war period and still is today, which markedly contrasts with the predominantly negative image

of Japan in contemporary Korea, also a former colony of the Japanese Empire, not to mention the clearly negative perception of the Japanese in the PRC.

The main discussions over the interpretations of Japanese presence in Taiwan and the results of World War II are, as a rule, limited to a narrow range of issues – they include the demand that Japan should admit its guilt before the Taiwanese women who were sent to military brothels during the war years to “comfort” Japanese soldiers (the so-called “comfort women”, *weianfu* 慰安婦), the demand for monetary compensation for those women, and also the contestation of the sovereignty over the islands of Diaoyudao (釣魚島)/Senkaku (or Diaoyutai 釣魚臺 as they are called in Taiwan). It is important to point out that all these issues are related not to the entire period of Japanese rule but to the war time (the *weianfu* issue) or to the interpretation of the results of the war (the territorial dispute). Discussions in society and the media about aspects of the colonial policy as such on the island mainly took place in the 1990s and the early 2000s during the discussions about compensation for “comfort women”, which, according to many researchers, were highly politicized and often moved to the level of interparty confrontation, mostly between the Kuomintang and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

The shaping of collective memory about the Japanese presence in Taiwan was prompted by both domestic and foreign policy factors. Undoubtedly, the international situation in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the division of the world into two opposing camps and the persisting threat of the island’s annexation to Communist China primarily affected the building of Japan-Taiwan relations after 1945 and also the formation of collective memory about the Japanese period in society. At the same time, the antagonism between the mainland and the island part of China, which, during the first few decades after the war, was just a part of the diplomatic agenda of Taiwan’s relations with the outside world, gradually moved to the domestic political discourse with the beginning of the island’s democratization in the 1990s and provided the grounds for the revaluation of its own colonial past.

Contrasting Taiwan to mainland China in the context of defending liberal and democratic values (under President Lee Teng-hui 李登輝 in 1988–2000) and even striving to acquire political independence (under the administration of Chen Shui-bian 陳水扁 in 2000–2008) also presumed the opposition of Taiwan’s society to the Chinese. The basis for this was the so-called “Taiwan-centric” approach to understanding the island’s history, which focused on the uniqueness of Taiwan’s history, culture, language, and ethnic make-up (all the elements that make “Taiwanese identity”), often through great underestimation or denial of the influence of mainland Chinese culture and history [He Yinan 2014, pp. 475–476]. In this respect, the elements of Japanese tradition brought to the island in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the new system of values provided an additional argument to confirm Taiwan’s uniqueness and special identity of the local people.

This trend was somewhat subdued during the rule of Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), a member of the Kuomintang party, who made an attempt to build friendly relations with both Japan and the PRC on the basis of the new conception of “Taiwanese identity” (the main element of which was now Chinese traditional culture). It is important to note that, making efforts to reconcile the pro-unification and pro-independence parties, the president tried to form in Taiwanese society a balanced approach to the understanding of the Japanese and Chinese periods of Taiwanese history, as well as the problems of the historical past and the role of Japan in the development of the modern Republic of China.

### **Problem of Diaoyudao/Senkaku in Relations between Japan and Taiwan under President Ma Ying-jeou**

Ma Ying-jeou’s victory in the 2008 election meant a return of power to the Kuomintang after the DPP’s eight-year rule. From that moment, Taiwan’s foreign policy was characterized by significant restraint in its relations with mainland China and the desire to avoid

conflict situations in order to build mutually beneficial cooperation. Whereas in the previous years, in their policies, the authorities preferred either the Chinese direction (focusing on close ties with the PRC under the Kuomintang rule in the 1950s–1980s), or the Japanese direction (consolidating cooperation with Tokyo under presidents Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian), Ma Ying-jeou held on the golden mean, striving to develop equally good relations with both countries. Against the background of the previous 20 years, when the policy of the Republic of China was clearly anti-Chinese (and pro-Japanese), as a results of which the Taipei–Beijing relations aggravated significantly, the political course of Ma Ying-jeou was a “cease-fire” in the confrontation of the ROC and the PRC. During the presidency of Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian, the authorities adhered to the course to win independence for Taiwan, strive for democracy, and oppose the PRC. In turn, Ma Ying-jeou embarked on the policy of compliance with the 1992 Consensus (the agreement providing for recognition by both parties of the unity and uniqueness of China: “China and Taiwan are not separate states”), which presumed a return of Japan-Taiwan relations to a fully unofficial format.

In the eyes of Japanese politicians, Ma Ying-jeou’s coming to power signified a change from “friendly relations with Japan” to “friendly relations with the PRC”. The new President of the ROC, who had previously been the Mayor of Taipei, was believed by Tokyo to belong, on the whole, to politicians who were rather hostile than friendly to Japan. Even before his election, Ma Ying-jeou criticized Chen Shui-bian’s excessively soft stand on the disputed islands of Diaoyudao/Senkaku and called to resume negotiations on the ownership of these territories. In addition, he bitterly criticized Japan’s war crimes in China and, with regard to the past events, stated that one “need to forgive, but not to forget” the woes which the Chinese people experienced [Jia Chaowei 2011, p. 102–103; Gordeeva 2012, p. 45].

Almost immediately after Ma Ying-jeou took office, there happened several events which demonstrated some a distancing of Taipei from Tokyo:

- During his inauguration speech in May 2008, the ROC President, speaking of the priority areas of Taiwan's foreign policy, mentioned only the USA, saying nothing about Japan. This was seen as Taipei's lack of attention to bilateral relations.<sup>2</sup>
- Resignation of Hsu Shih-kai (許世楷), head of Taiwan's office in Japan; moreover, from late May to July this position was unoccupied, which was also viewed by the Japanese side as a sign of disrespectful attitude from Taiwan [Jia Chaowei 2011, pp. 101–103].
- An incident of a Taiwan fishing ship colliding with a Japanese patrol boat off the islands of Diaoyudao/Senkaku.

During the rule of Ma Ying-jeou, the ROC, for the first time in many years, reaffirmed its claims to the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands, a group of eight islands in the East China Sea, the sovereignty over which, in addition to Taiwan, is contested by Japan and the PRC. The ROC's claims to these territories are based on the same arguments that are cited by the PRC in its favour: in the Qing era, the islands were part of the Chinese province of Taiwan. Later, following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, they passed to the Japanese Empire as part of that province and remained attached to Taiwan, which Japan abandoned as a result of World War II. Due to the fact that, under the terms of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, the status of Taiwan remained uncertain, the ROC considers the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands to be its territory, while the PRC claims it to be its own, along with Taiwan and other adjacent smaller islands.

The ROC first announced that it had the right to exploit offshore oil reserves in the area of these islands in 1969, soon after hydrocarbon deposits were discovered there. In 1970, the Taiwanese authorities announced that the islands belonged to the ROC. In 1971, during the preparation of the agreement on the transfer of the Ryukyu islands (along with the Senkaku islands) to the jurisdiction of Japan by the US

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<sup>2</sup> Ma Ying-jeou zong tong jiu zhi yan shuo quan wen [Ma Ying-jeou inaugural speech, full text]. Reuters. May 20, 2008. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idCNnCT018060720080520>

administration, the ROC authorities opposed the agreement, considering the inclusion of Diaoyudao into the Japanese prefecture of Okinawa illegal [Kireeva 2013, p. 4–5]. From that moment, Taiwan, just like the PRC, began to contest the sovereignty over the Diaoyudao islands.

In the early 1970s, after the prolongation of the US-Japan Security Treaty in 1970 and the return of Okinawa to Japan under the 1971 Treaty, there emerged the “Defend the Diaoyu Islands Movement” (*baodiao* 保釣/保釣愛國運動), a patriotic movement to protect Chinese sovereignty over these territories, with activists in mainland China, Macao, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as well as the Chinese expat community abroad. Members of the *baodiao* movement regularly held protests, approaching the disputed territories on boats and fishing vessels, often making attempts to land on the shore.<sup>3</sup>

One of such incidents was the sinking of a ship of the *baodiao* movement on June 10, 2008, when a ROC fishing vessel *Lian he hao* (聯合號) collided with a Japanese patrol boat off the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands. The incident sank the Taiwanese vessel; its 16 crew members were saved by Japanese coast guards and brought to the island of Ishigaki for interrogation; the captain was detained. The Taiwanese authorities responded in a rather tough manner – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published an official statement of four points to the effect that the Diaoyudao islands were part of the ROC territory; the ROC invariably defended its sovereignty over these territories; the Taiwanese authorities declared resolute protests over the detainment of the vessel, the damage inflicted on it, and the captain’s arrest; the ROC demanded that Japan release the captain, make apologies, and recompense for the damage; Taiwan intended to consolidate the combat capability of its customs patrol.<sup>4</sup> The next day after the publication of the statement, the Japanese

<sup>3</sup> Later, members of the movement began to join anti-Japanese protests in China and abroad, which were not directly associated with the territorial dispute.

<sup>4</sup> Zheng dui ri ben hai shang bao an ting xun luo jian zhuan chen wo guo hai diao chuan lian he hao shi jian wai jiao bu zhang ou hong lian zhao jian ri ben

side released the captain of the fishing boat and apologized for the incident. At the same time, on June 14, Tokyo also published a statement laying the blame for the incident on the crew of the Taiwanese vessel and, in turn, demanded compensation. The ROC responded by recalling its official representative from Tokyo [He Yinan 2014, p. 495].

This was the first instance in 20 years that the ROC officially declared its principled position on the issue of the islands' ownership. The incident with the sinking of the Taiwanese boat caused an eruption of protests led by *baodiao* activists. On June 15, 2008, participants of the movement simultaneously put to sea on boats from ports of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the PRC (from the city of Xiamen) and, as an act of protest, sailed off the Diaoyudao islands (a Taiwanese boat went round the islands). An important feature of the act was that the Taiwanese side, which formally participated in it, tried to distance itself as much as possible from the other activists: its boat sailed accompanied by a frigate on the same day but at a different time; only Taiwanese citizens could be on board the ship; in addition, the ROC government stated that Taiwan defended its sovereignty over the islands and the rights of Taiwanese fishermen who had for centuries fished in the area of these islands. There were no incidents during the act, but later Tokyo condemned Taipei for the invasion of Japan's territorial waters [He Yinan 2014, pp. 494–495].

Taipei's rather tough reaction to the incident with the fishing boat was not so much an indication that the ROC was drastically reviewing its attitude towards Japan, but rather a desire to show that the Kuomintang was much more decisive than the DPP in upholding Taiwan's interests

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jiao liu xie hui dai biao chi tian wei biao da yan zheng kang yi [Minister of Foreign Affairs Ou Honglian voiced vigorous protest to deputy of Interchange Association Ikeda Tadashi for incident of Taiwanese fishing boat "lian he hao" shipwreck after collision with Japanese coastal patrol interdiction craft]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China. June 12, 2008. [https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content\\_M\\_2.aspx?n=8742DCE7A2A28761&sms=491DoE5BF5F4BC36&s=312E81BE37A69132](https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content_M_2.aspx?n=8742DCE7A2A28761&sms=491DoE5BF5F4BC36&s=312E81BE37A69132)

on the international scene. What made the ROC's position regarding the ownership of the disputed islands particularly clear was Taiwan's reluctance to show a united front with the PRC and to counterpose the ROC against Japan, being at the same time in "one camp" with the mainland. Beijing's traditional pressure on the Taiwan government to join anti-Japanese acts at the moments when Japan-China relations were aggravated due to the issues of the historical past led invariably to the ROC distancing itself from the mainland and declaring its "own dispute with the PRC" [Gordeeva 2015, pp. 109–110].

At the same time, the heightening of tensions in Japan-Taiwan relations was not supported by the general public in the ROC: the president was criticized for overly strict measures towards Tokyo and deliberate deterioration of bilateral relations. However, Ma Ying-jeou did not intend to abandon close trade and economic ties with Japan. The president stated that he was the "best friend" of that country and made significant efforts to strengthen bilateral ties. Describing Japan-Taiwan relations as "special partnership", the ROC president contributed to maintaining contacts between Tokyo and Taipei in various fields, despite their non-official status. After the tensions caused by the incident in June 2008 faded away, in 2009, the ROC authorities put forward a number of initiatives to strengthen Japan-Taiwan interaction – Minister of Foreign Affairs Francisco Ou (Ou Hung-lian, 歐鴻鍊) put together a program for developing bilateral relations in five main areas: economic and trade cooperation, cultural exchanges, youth policy and student exchanges, development of the tourism sector, and a dialogue between Japanese and Taiwanese scientific research centers.

As a result, in 2010–2012, the sides signed a number of documents concerning trade, economic and industrial cooperation, interaction in the patent sphere, an agreement on "open skies", investment protection, and a set of agreements in the humanitarian area [Jia Chaowei 2011, pp. 106–107]. Tokyo and Taipei helped each other after natural disasters – in 2009, after a powerful typhoon in Taiwan, Japan sent essential goods to Taipei and rendered material assistance; in 2011, Taiwan actively helped Japan to overcome the consequences of the

tsunami and the accident at the nuclear power station (the ROC sent 560 tons of relief consignments and transferred over 18 billion yen) [Gordeeva 2015, pp. 89–90].

Strategically, Ma Ying-jeou considered further strengthening of the Japan-US alliance based on the Security Treaty to be the best guarantee of security in the region, though he did not speed up Taiwan's active involvement in the Treaty. Contacts between the Taiwanese and the Japanese authorities continued at a fairly high level – in 2010–2012, the ROC was visited by Japan's former Prime Ministers Aso Tarō, Abe Shinzō and Mori Yoshirō, and, during the APEC summit in 2012, Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko met the ROC's former Vice President Lien Chan (連戰). By the number of concluded agreements and meetings, 2011 was called the year when bilateral relations reached their acme by Taiwan's Foreign Ministry [He Yinan 2014, p. 495].

The growing animosity between Tokyo and Beijing in 2010–2012 over the ownership of the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands practically did not affect the nature of the same territorial dispute between Tokyo and Taipei, as the position of Taiwan was invariable: the ROC insisted on its sovereignty over the islands, since it was its obligation “to protect the rights of Taiwanese fishermen who have for centuries fished in the area of the Diaoyudao islands”. In addition, Taiwan intended to resolve the issue of the islands “in accordance with its own national interests”.<sup>5</sup> In 2010–2012, Taiwanese participants in the *baodiao* movement carried out several acts of protest on boats and fishing vessels, approaching the islands, sometimes trying to land on them and announcing through

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<sup>5</sup> Ri ben jiao liu xie hui li shi zhang jin jing zheng bai hui wai jiao bu bu zhang yang jin tian shuo ming ri ben zheng fu “guo you hua” diao yu tai lie yu zheng ce [The head of the Interchange Association Imai Tadashi commented the Japanese policy of “nationalization” of Dyoitai islands while meeting with Minister for Foreign Affairs of Taiwan Yang Jintian]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan). September 25, 2012. [https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content\\_M\\_2.aspx?n=8742DCE7A2A28761&sms=491D0E5BF5F4BC36&s=7ACE3D5DDE29D6DA](https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content_M_2.aspx?n=8742DCE7A2A28761&sms=491D0E5BF5F4BC36&s=7ACE3D5DDE29D6DA)

loud-speakers that the Diaoyudao islands belonged to the Republic of China. In turn, Japan Coast Guard boats made the Taiwanese ships turn back and did not allow the activists to land on the shore. In those cases, Tokyo usually made oral statements on the unacceptability of violation of Japan's sovereignty over the islands by Taiwan. In August 2012, Ma Ying-jeou tried to relax the tensions by proposing the *East China Sea Peace Initiative*, which provided for resolving the territorial dispute through peaceful means, refraining from taking any antagonistic actions, and establishing a code of conduct in the East China Sea. However, for some political reasons, the initiative did not go any further.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that protest acts, as a rule, took place after the exacerbation of relations between Tokyo and Beijing. For instance, after the incident when the Chinese fishing boat collided with the Japanese Coast Guard ships on September 7, 2010, Taiwanese boats also approached the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands on September 13. After Japan nationalized the disputed territories on September 11, 2012, Taiwanese activists of the *baodiao* movement conducted their protest act on September 25: 50 ships with the *baodiao* slogans (fishing boats with superscriptions "Diaoyudao islands are Taiwanese"), accompanied by 10 patrol boats, entered the 12-mile water area around the islands.<sup>7</sup> The act was quite peaceful – the Taiwanese ships did not meet with any opposition from the Japanese Coast Guard boats, though at times they

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<sup>6</sup> Ma zong tong ti chu "dong hai he ping chang yi" hu yu xiang guan ge fang he ping chu li diao yu tai lie yu zheng yi [President Ma proposes the East China Sea Peace Initiative, calls on all parties concerned to resolve Diaoyutai dispute peacefully]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan). August 5, 2012. [https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content\\_M\\_2.aspx?n=8742DCE7A2A28761&sms=491D0E5BF5F4BC36&s=12E507923C25C262](https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content_M_2.aspx?n=8742DCE7A2A28761&sms=491D0E5BF5F4BC36&s=12E507923C25C262)

<sup>7</sup> Tai wan bao diao chuan jin ru diao yu dao hai yu, xiang ri han hua: zhe shi tai wan ling tu [Taiwanese *baodiao* boat entered water area of Diaoyudao islands, claimed to Japanese: this is territory of Taiwan]. Teng xun xin wen. September 25, 2012. <https://news.qq.com/a/20120925/000802.htm>

were quite close to each other.<sup>8</sup> On the day of the protest act, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement explaining again the ROC position on the issue of the islands' ownership.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the nationalization of the islands, the ROC government, as before, did not show "a united front" with Beijing against Tokyo. Taiwan explained its position by the fact that the ROC and the PRC had their own unsettled conflict over the sovereignty issue. However, this did not prevent Beijing from saying in the media that mainland China and Taiwan jointly opposed Tokyo's attempts to challenge sovereignty over the islands.<sup>10</sup> Another instance of *baodiao* ships approaching the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands occurred on January 24, 2013, when a Taiwanese fishing boat *Quan jia fu hao* (全家福號) came up to the islands to a distance of 28 miles, after which Japanese Coast Guard boats used water cannons to make it turn and go back.<sup>11</sup> The same boat was known due to the fact that when earlier, in July 2012, it approached the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands to a distance of 1.6 miles, the crew did not let the Japanese patrol officers board the boat for inspection.<sup>12</sup>

To settle the issue of the right of Taiwanese ships to fish in the area of the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands, Japan repeatedly proposed that the ROC

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<sup>8</sup> Ri fang cheng duo sou tai wan bao diao chuan jin ru diao yu dao 12 hai li hai yu [Japan says several Taiwanese *baodiao* boats entered 12-mile water area of Diaoyudao islands]. Huan qiu. September 25, 2012. <https://taiwan.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJxc3W>

<sup>9</sup> The head of the Interchange Association... 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Tai wan bao diao chuan jin ru diao yu dao hai yu [Taiwanese *baodiao* boats entered water area of Diaoyudao islands]. Xin lang xin wen. July 5, 2012. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-07-05/081024715562.shtml>

<sup>11</sup> Tai wan bao diao chuan jin ru diao yu dao lian jie hai yu [Taiwanese *baodiao* boats entered water area of Diaoyudao islands]. Xin lang xin wen. January 24, 2013. <http://news.sina.com.cn/w/2013-01-24/112726113070.shtml>

<sup>12</sup> Tai wan bao diao chuan jin ru diao yu dao hai yu [Taiwanese *baodiao* boats entered water area of Diaoyudao islands]. Xin lang xin wen. July 5, 2012. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-07-05/081024715562.shtml>

should be given special conditions for fisheries in the area. As a rule, the Taiwanese authorities turned down these proposals under the pretext that the ROC insisted on its sovereignty over the islands and, consequently, had every right to fish off the islands. However, on April 10, 2013, the Japan-Taiwan Fisheries Agreement was signed. Under the Agreement, Taiwan was free to fish in the area adjacent to the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands (on a sea space of about 4.5 thousand km<sup>2</sup>); but the ROC ships were forbidden from entering the 12-mile territorial zone. To settle the issues of joint development of marine territories adjacent to the islands, a Japan-Taiwan fishing commission was set up. The ROC insisted that the agreement indicated that it did not affect the issue of sovereignty over the islands [Gordeeva 2015, p. 110]. Taiwan's position regarding the ownership of the islands was as follows: "defend sovereignty, postpone the territorial dispute for the future, strive for peace, promote joint development of the countries", "work together on the development of the region's marine resources" [Nippon.com 2013].

The Japan-Taiwan Fisheries Agreement, which substantially released the tensions between Tokyo and Taipei over the disputed territories, caused strict condemnation on the part of the PRC. The annoying factor for Beijing was not only that Taiwan refused for a while to challenge Japan with regard to the ownership of the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands, but the very fact of Japan-Taiwan negotiations. Although the negotiations were held under the auspices of unofficial offices and were positioned as unofficial, yet the ones taking part in them were representatives of official departments (including the Foreign Ministry) of Japan [Gordeeva 2015, p. 110].

### **“Chinese Factor” in Relations between Tokyo and Taipei and its Influence on Historical Memory in Taiwan**

Building relations of mutually beneficial cooperation with Tokyo, Ma Ying-jeou pursued a policy of consolidating economic ties with mainland China; in this case, the sides did not have to choose between

the two equally important partners, being able to develop with each other very close economic cooperation, while bidding by certain restrictions in the political sphere. Maintaining contacts with Japanese conservative politicians, the Taiwanese president, however, distanced himself from Japanese supporters of the ROC independence. Starting from 2008, Taiwan acted according to Ma Ying-jeou's principle of "maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait": "no unification, no independence, no use of force" (不統, 不獨, 不武).<sup>13</sup> In 2008–2016, the ROC and the PRC signed a number of agreements, the most important of which were the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA, 2010) and the Cross-Strait Trade in Services Agreement (2013). These agreements opened the doors of the Taiwanese economy for Chinese investment, middle and big business and significantly promoted tourist exchanges.

In the context of reorientation of Taiwan's foreign policy from the Japan-US direction towards more balanced relationships with the PRC while maintaining close ties with its strategic allies, Ma Ying-jeou also took a more "centrist" stand with regard to Taiwanese identity, a problem that, in the previous decades, had been inseparably connected with the ROC's domestic and foreign policies. The president focused on the Chinese component of the national identity of the islanders, which showed in broader study of Chinese history and culture by younger Taiwanese people. By reminding the people of their Chinese ancestry, the authorities tried to eliminate the basis for the idea of Taiwan's independence, which was based on the historical and cultural uniqueness of the island. During the rule of Ma Ying-jeou, it was popular to consider oneself both Chinese and Taiwanese (over 50 percent of the population); at least, the proportion of those who considered themselves only Taiwanese substantially decreased compared to the percentage before 2008 [He Yanan 2014, pp. 491–492].

While, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the ROC's officials attended festive events in the Japanese mission on the occasion of the Japanese emperor's birthday, which showed a high value of relations with Japan

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<sup>13</sup> Ma Ying-jeou... 2008.

for Taipei and the desire to demonstrate multiculturalism in Taiwanese tradition, Ma Ying-jeou, who attended the ceremonies of remembrance of the Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi* 皇帝), the legendary forefather of the Chinese, showed commitment to traditional Chinese values.<sup>14</sup>

The ROC's authorities re-raised the question of the Taiwanese people's resistance to the colonial administration and the connection of this resistance with the anti-Japanese struggle of all the Chinese in 1937–1945. In 2011, Taipei opened a memorial commemorating the victory in the anti-Japan war and Taiwan's "glorious revival" (抗日戰爭勝利暨臺灣光復紀念碑) and acknowledging the contribution of the island to the struggle against the Japanese invaders.<sup>15</sup> In 2015, Ma Ying-jeou proposed an initiative to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II and the anniversary of Taiwan's victory over Japan; however this proposal evoked an ambiguous reaction in society – in particular, the ROC's former President Lee Teng-hui, who opposed the idea, arguing that, unlike mainland China, Taiwan had not been at war with the Japanese Empire [Hoppens 2018, p. 55].

On the whole, the Japanese rule was assessed rather neutrally in history textbooks, though the term "occupation" was returned to the text; the oppression and discrimination of the islanders was mentioned again, and much attention was devoted to the successes of the colonial administration, the modernization and enlightenment of Taiwan [He Yinan

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<sup>14</sup> Chong jing min zu: ma ying jiu zhu chi zhong shu yao ji huang di ling dian li [Worshipping the ancestor of Chinese nation: Ma Ying-jeou attended grand ceremony for ancestor worship of Yellow Emperor Huang-di]. Huan qiu. April 1, 2016. <https://taiwan.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJUU4V>

<sup>15</sup> The memorial was scheduled to be installed back in 1995 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II; but since some sections of society resisted, it was installed only in 1999; and, by the decision of the Legislative Yuan, no inscription was made on the monument under the pretext that the history of the anti-Japan resistance was too controversial to be clearly interpreted. In 2011, a commemorative inscription was made and the memorial was re-opened.

2014, p. 491]. To confirm that the Taiwanese remember and appreciate the efforts of the colonial masters to improve the island, in 2011, another monument was unveiled in Tainan – one to the well-known Japanese engineer Hatta Yoichi (八田與一), who led the works to organize water supply, to build water reservoirs, irrigation systems, drainage and sewage systems in Taipei.<sup>16</sup>

The invariably good attitude of the Taiwanese to the Japanese, which the islanders showed throughout the entire postwar period irrespective of the current political situation, was confirmed by sociological surveys under Ma Ying-jeou as well. Moreover, the reciprocal favourable feelings of the Japanese towards the Taiwanese increased substantially during the aggravation of relations between Beijing and Tokyo in 2010–2012. The number of those who had amicable feelings for the ROC people was even bigger than during the period of particularly close Japan-Taiwan ties under President Chen Shui-bian (about 70 percent of the Japanese felt sympathy for the ROC people). 52 percent of the Taiwanese found Japan the most attractive country (“their favourite country”) and said that they wanted to go there as tourists: 44 percent and over 60 percent expressed a feeling of closeness to Japan [Gordeeva 2015, pp. 91–92]. At the same time, many believed that, in the future, Taiwan should develop closer relations with the PRC and not with Japan, as it was previously [He Yinan 2014, p. 492]. These facts speak to the effect that the Taiwanese wanted to maintain good relations with mainland China not because they felt antipathy to Japan or felt “more Chinese than Taiwanese”, but rather

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<sup>16</sup> In April 2017, the statue was decapitated by advocates of Taiwan’s unification with the PRC, but in one month the monument was restored and unveiled ceremonially in the presence of Hatta Yoichi’s descendants. This incident caused an ambiguous reaction in society; after the incident with the monument of Hatta Yoichi, some statues of Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek were decapitated and thrown paint over. See: Tai nan “ba tian yu yi tong xiang” zao kan tou [Tainan “Bronze statue of Hatta Yoichi” was decapitated]. Huaxia.com. April 19, 2017. <http://www.huaxia.com/jjtw/jjtd/jrtw/04/5283355.html>

because they did not want the situation in the Taiwan Strait to aggravate. Let us point out again that, in this case, some improvement in the attitude of the ROC people towards mainland China did not affect in any way the traditionally high indicators of Japan's image in Taiwan.

As the ties with mainland China were strengthening, Ma Ying-jeou, who had a reputation of a pro-China politician even earlier, was increasingly perceived by society as a proxy for the PRC interests in Taiwan. This trend became more distinct after he was elected president for the second term in January 2012 and especially after the growth of Chinese influence on Taiwan with Xi Jinping coming to power in March 2013. The population of the island was wary of the increased economic dependence on the mainland and the rapidly growing number of Chinese tourists who literally flooded the ROC. The agreements signed with the PRC (on economic cooperation and trade in services) opened the way for it gaining wide access to the island's economy, which was not sufficiently balanced by the preferences that Taiwanese businesses had in mainland China. The content of the Cross-Strait Trade in Services Agreement (2013) was developed, in fact, behind closed doors, depriving the general public of the possibility to discuss the Agreement, and later the procedure for its consideration in the Legislative Yuan was also violated. Taiwanese society responded with protest – after the Agreement was ratified in March 2014, the discontent turned into a student demonstration (“Sunflower Movement”), the participants of which seized the parliament building. The Umbrella Movement, a political movement in Hong Kong against Beijing's intention to control elections to local government bodies which followed these events, and the unwillingness of the central Chinese authorities to make any concessions were an additional argument against the rapprochement between the ROC and the mainland.

A significant drop in the approval ratings of Ma Ying-jeou by the end of his second presidential term led, as expected, to renewed popularity of the idea of Taiwanese identity on the anti-Chinese basis, the Taiwanese people's greater fellow feelings for Japan, and society's inclination to support the DPP in the coming election. Although in 2008–2016 the issues of the historical past did not impede Japan-Taiwan cooperation,

with the population being disappointed with the President's pro-China policies, his more balanced approach towards the interpretation of the issues of the past ceased to suit the public. Criticism of Ma Ying-jeou was not confined to domestic policy aspects and the "Chinese factor"; his principled position on the territorial dispute with Japan also caused discontent. This concerned not only the incidents when Taiwanese boats intruded in the area of the Diaoyudao/Senkaku islands, but also the dispute between Taiwan and Japan, which emerged early in 2016, over the designation of the Okinotori coral atoll, located in the territorial waters of Japan. Taipei declared that this atoll was not an island, as Tokyo believed, but a rock, which removes the possibility to measure the exclusive economic zone from its border (this is also the position of the PRC) [Hoppens 2018, p. 55]. As for the issue of "comfort women", during the rule of Ma Ying-jeou it was not on the agenda of Japan-Taiwan relations. Although the president expressed his support for these women, the question of compensation to the former *weianfu* did not go anywhere, and this subject was not played up either by the government or by public organizations [Suzuki 2011, p. 244].

## Conclusion

Usually, in Taiwan, the assessment of the colonial rule and Japan's actions during World War II was one of the aspects of the discussion on the ways of the development of the ROC, its status, and prospects for strengthening ties with its nearest neighbours, primarily the PRC, the USA, and Japan. On the domestic agenda, the issues of the historical past appeared, as a rule, in the context of other issues relating to national identity, reinterpretation of the island's history and the search for models of future development of society and the state in Taiwan. Since the authorities often used the issues of the past to increase their own approval rating inside the country, these issues, being clearly politicized, became significantly less attractive for the general public, which perceived them as an element of the interparty confrontation. As a rule, supporters

of closer relations with the PRC (particularly, the Kuomintang) focused on the negative aspects of the colonial rule more often, whereas advocates of independent Taiwan (for example, the DPP) usually pointed to the modernization of the island under the control of the Japanese, contrasting it with the “white terror” of the Chinese administration in the first post-war decades. In this respect, Ma Ying-jeou’s “golden mean” policy was an attempt to reconcile the two dissenting camps, convincing the inhabitants of the island that they could be simultaneously Taiwanese and Chinese; the two sides of the single national identity ceased to be mutually exclusive and were not set against each other any more, unlike the 1990s and the early 2000s.

It is important to note that, in the 2010s, an important factor to the shaping of the ROC’s foreign and domestic policies was the increasing role of mainland China, which began to more actively claim leadership both in the region and in the world. The PRC’s principled position on the disputed territorial issues, Beijing’s closer attention to the Taiwan question, and significant aggravation of Japan-China relations in 2010–2013, in fact, prompted the ROC to consolidate ties with the US-Japan alliance and to categorically reject the imposed economic integration with the mainland; as a result, this led to stronger pro-Japanese sentiment in society and Taiwan’s desire to be “closer” to Japan than China.

In this context, in order to keep the balance between the PRC and Japan, the Taiwanese government sought to maintain sufficiently good relations with each country, to defend the ROC’s interests in the territorial dispute while rejecting express support from Japan or China in periods of exacerbation of their relations [He Yinan 2014, pp. 497–498].<sup>17</sup> However, as practice showed, it turned out to be quite difficult for the ROC to follow this course in full measure. According to some researchers, it was increasingly difficult for Taiwan to maneuver between such heavyweight

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<sup>17</sup> According to some researchers, Ma Ying-jeou’s policy of balance results from the fact that, in the system of PRC-Japan-ROC, relations Taiwan is the weakest apex of this asymmetrical triangle, which is found not in the centre but in the periphery of main international processes [Chen Mumin 2013].

players as the PRC and Japan as their bilateral relations deteriorated in the early 2010s, since Taiwan was “squeezed” by contradictions between Beijing and Tokyo, with each side expecting Taiwan to support it, and not the other side, in times of crisis.

The same dependence can be observed in the Taiwanese people’s definition of their national identity: in times of conflicts between Beijing and Tokyo, as a rule, under the pressure of the Chinese authorities, the people of the ROC began to harbor kinder feelings for Japan, to recall the positive aspects of the colonial period, and to think about their belonging to a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community, which, as it was developing on the basis of democratic values, was moving further and further away from the mainland. Thus, the historical memory of the Japanese presence in Taiwan, the assessment of the colonial past and the role of Japan in forming the contemporary ROC, which invariably influence the shaping of the phenomenon of “Taiwanese identity”, prove to be inseparably connected with the most important problems of Taiwan’s domestic and foreign policies.

The DPP’s confident victory in the 2016 election (and then in 2020), which meant a return to power of advocates of stronger ties of the ROC with the USA and Japan, confirmed the intention of Taiwanese society to distance itself from Communist China and move further along the path of democratic development with the support from its main strategic allies. After the new President representing the DPP, Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), took office, Japan-Taiwan relations, as expected, gained great momentum, while the issues of the historical past were even more muted against the background of consolidated ties with Tokyo, which are so important for Taipei.

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