

Remaining importance of Japan's wartime occupation of Guam
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Abstract

This paper will be on the legacy of wartime Japanese occupation that contributes to post-war US militarisation on Guam. I will present my interpretation of the historical legacy of the liberation and Chamorro loyalty in Guam: that the indigenous Chamorro people are indebted to the United States for ending the hardship endured under the brutal Japanese occupation. I will introduce some Chamorro elders' testimonies of their wartime experiences. These stories and presentation of wartime memories of the Japanese occupation have helped create the myth of Chamorro loyalty to the US and the residents' cooperation to the US military on Guam. Official recognition of collective suffering of the Chamorro people as US citizens or Japanese colonial subjects has been limited. At the same time, there is a lack of communication and discussion on the wartime past on the part of Japanese visitors, government officials, expats and local residents in Guam. The silence prolongs the liberation myth, and the stability of Guam as a major US military outpost, also hosting the outflow of US forces in Japan. It will discuss communication and discussion that nevertheless exists, initiated by the citizens' attempt for reconciliation and alternative war commemorations.

Introduction

Guam has appeared much more prominent in the media since 2005-6 when the governments of the US and Japan agreed on a series of redeployment of US Forces in Japan, including shifting troops from Okinawa.

In talks on international politics, re-deployment of US military forces involving Okinawa and Guam are discussed mainly from the perspective of inter-state relations, such as the rise of China, border disputes (Spratley, Senkaku), Guam's geopolitical location in the West Pacific.

Citizen activists have critiqued this US military fortification in Guam and Okinawa a.k.a. re-deployment in terms of environmentalist also cultural heritage protection.

This paper argues for the importance of seeing the current political circumstances from a **historical** perspective.

How have US military bases in Guam, so highly concentrated in the Island, been accepted in postwar Guam?

What is the relevance of history, especially wartime history?

To ask these questions enables us to fully engage with the fact that today's military occupation in Guam is a continuing legacy of the Asia-Pacific War evolving from the imperial rivalry between the US and Japan.

The War is in the past, but the past is not dead.

This paper argues that two historical narratives – 1) of wartime Guam's history as 'liberation'; and 2) collective amnesia of wartime experience and historical disengagement of the Japanese – as contributing social background to the postwar US military occupation, and the current Japan-sponsored US military buildup in Guam.

Firstly I will discuss the importance of the legacy of Guam's liberation from the wartime Japanese occupation.

Secondly I will also discuss some important movement of Japanese people toward historical engagement with occupation in Guam.

1. Legacy of Liberation: how war is represented in Guam

The Chamorro people indeed suffered deeply from the Japanese invasion and the military occupation and the trauma from it.

Horrific period of Chamorro history: show Liberation Day pictures & Camacho's letter

The Japanese air attack, immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, interrupted the annual morning mass that commemorated Holy Mary in Hagana on 8 December. This attack is still remembered as the start of hardship under Japanese occupation from Dec 1944-July 1944.

The Japanese subjected the islanders (the population at that time was approximately 20,000) to forced labor, internment and executed.

More than 1100 known to have been executed
14,700 suffered from beatings, be-heading, rape, humiliation, suffering

Japan at the time called itself the empire of Japan. In Guam and Mariana Islands, as in other southeastern occupied territories, assimilation policy to 'Japanise' the indigenous people. Japanese language was taught in school. Guam was designated 'Zettai Kokubo Ken' (the absolutely maintained national defence area').

After being ruled by the US Navy since 1898 US Spanish War, the Chamorros saw themselves as American. According to Higuchi's research, the Japanese military members saw the Chamorros to be too individualistic and Americanised to be assimilated to be like Japanese people (Higuchi 2001: 25-34)

Chamorro people waited for the US return eagerly till July 1944.

Integration with the military and the obligation to pay back has been expressed in enthusiastic patriotism in Guam society. The Pacific Daily News reads as if it was a propaganda newspaper, representing values that support the system of war and

training for war. Together with other Mariana Islands, Guam has a highest military recruit rate per capita.

In all areas of the island's life, military interests and practices remain the main framework for governance of the territory. US forces control about one third of the island's land surface.¹

However, outside of Guam, the collective sufferings and loss, and the patriotic loyalty are not recognised, in the USA. The War reparation bill, after a long struggle by Guam delegate to the Congress is still undergoing.

According to the 1951 San Francisco Treaty, Japan is exempted from paying for the losses of sufferings caused by wartime Japanese occupation. The US is responsible for war reparation of Guam, however, the 1945 Meritorious Act was very poorly instigated and only very few received any money. Guam's delegates to the Congress have tried to pass the bill. They recognised the US treatment of Guam has been unsatisfying considering the claims from the Japanese Americans who were interned during the war and the residents of Aleutian Islands who were forcibly relocated before the Japanese invasion.

In 2010 reparation is submitted as the Guam World War II Loyalty Recognition Act (the name of the bill says everything, HR44 §126), as an amendment to The National Defense Authorization Act. Interestingly, it was Senators Carl Levin and John McCain (integrating Futenma to Kadena) who most strongly opposed to creating a precedent to compensating injustice.

Guam's Delegate to Congress Madeline Bordallo is eager to pass this bill: recognition of Chamorro people's patriotic loyalty is 'important for a successful buildup'. While recognition of wartime suffering is crucial for the less than 1000 survivors, the compensation will have an effect of further entrenching US militarism in Guam, not to mention the buildup of Guam to accept Marines transferred from Okinawa.

However, with reparation process in the congress stagnating, the Chamorro people are looking at the US military in a different way from simply benevolent Uncle Sam. In the process of reflecting the past, the people are acknowledging again the Americans evacuated the Island when they detected the Japanese landing was eminent. In other words, the Chamorros were deserted for 32 months to be subjected to the horrific Japanese occupation. The war reparation issue reveals the people in Guam as only ambiguously 'American'.

This situation is similar to Okinawans who were cut off from Japan to be subjected to the ad hoc postwar US military rule.

2. Toward historical identification

In recent years, historians are focusing on the Japanese military in the Asia and the Pacific War as the 'occupier'. How did Japanese people and the indigenous people saw their role as 'the occupier'?

¹ Immediately after the Asia-Pacific War, the Department of Defense appropriated up to 82 per cent of the land, which has been partially returned since then (Natividad and Leon-Guerrero 2010).

Guam's ambiguous political status is explained only in the historical context of imperfect de-colonisation after the Japanese military left. Guam is an incorporated territory. In Southeast and South Asia many former European and American colonies were decolonized. Not in Guam and Pacific Islands.

Guam's 'American' status is ambiguous: decolonisation has been forfeited in the process of war settlement. Japan got away with the responsibility to pay for the Chamorro people's suffering.

The whole issue of

Almost 80% of visitors on Guam were Japanese (0.93 million a year). The Japanese resort industry reaps benefits. Local Philippine and migrant population are employed as cheap labour, not many locals benefit from the industry.

In 2010, an annual memorial mass was held at a central cathedral that was bombed by the Japanese in 1941 after Pearl Harbor. Some war survivors' were attendant; their names were called and they were applauded at the mass.

In front of the cathedral, there were a group of Japanese tourists guided by a tourist company, sampling coconut juice in the Spanish Plaza. I felt very uncomfortable but asked some of them if they knew the meaning of 8 December for the local people. None of them knew or were told by the tourist company about the significance of the mass, or of the day.

Yamaguchi points out the disengagement of Japanese people with Japanese occupation of Guam is a potential 'risk' for the tourist industry, in the advent of the recent growth in local historical reflection on the wartime past (山口 2007).

Kyoko Nakayama (2011) explains the domination of the Japanese capital as 'Japanese neo-colonialism' in Guam. She advocates the utility of Japanese postcolonialism for understanding tourism and development in Guam.

In Guam's case, we can omit the 'post-' prefix when we talk about Guam as a US colony. However, it may be useful to consider Japan's presence in Guam in terms of postcolonialism.

What about Guam's militarization and occupation, when we engage with Japanese postcoloniality in Guam?

Why does Japan pay for the Marines transfer? This is obvious from the fact that Japan is sponsoring the majority of the cost required for shifting the US Forces in Japan to Guam.

Conclusion

A young US soldier's understanding: Guam's lack of autonomy under US military 'better off than what would have been under Japanese'. This statement is suggestive of Guam's position, located in between Japanese and US spheres of influence. In Catherine Lutz's words, Empire is in the details. In Guam, almost every

detail in society is related to the history of Japanese occupation and the ensuing US empire. Decolonisation has been left imperfect, and in the process, militarisation of the US empire entrenched itself. How to understand the wartime past is very much alive and political in today's Guam, continues to be the area of contestation, as in Okinawa,.

Colonisation and neo-colonisation in Guam in the postwar period has co-existed with historical disengagement in the form of the liberation narrative and lack of recognition of wartime suffering of the Chamorros from the Japanese and the stateside Americans. Having said that, however, I also worry about some superficial awareness campaign and empty apology by the Japanese visitors promoted by the 'risk' language. Imagining a different Guam, neither colonised by Japan or the US, require a historical engagement and identification with the past that is critical of continuing colonialism and the US empire in Guam.

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