

Episode 10: Historical Memory

Hello, I'm Barry Clarke from this is Radio Australia and welcome to 'Smart Societies'. This program is 'Historical Memory'.

YOSHIO SUGIMOTO: It seems to me that cleverness or smartness should not simply imply scientific, technological and mathematical knowledge, nor should it mean only managerial and financial skills. But also cleverness and smartness should encompass critical thinking about one's society, and also extensive knowledge about its historical past.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ARCHIVES: Well the Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama has made the strongest apology yet for Japan's military behaviour during World War II. It was a personal apology, and Mr Murayama said Japan was wrong to enter the war and that its armies had caused tremendous damage and suffering to many countries, in particular those of Asia. In a first for a Japanese leader Mr Murayama said government policy at the time of the war had been wrong. From Tokyo John Shovelan reports that despite Mr Murayama's best efforts the statement may still not appease everyone.

BARRY CLARKE: That was August 1995; the 50th anniversary of the end of the war but it wasn't the end of the debate in Japan over the content of its history textbooks. Put simply, one side argues for excluding or 'watering down' the country's military exploits leading up to and during World War II. The other side pushes for a more objective representation of history.

Yoshio Sugimoto is Professor of Sociology at Melbourne's La Trobe University.

YOSHIO SUGIMOTO: The Japanese educational system is highly centralised by the Ministry of Education and Science, which authorises all the textbooks that can be used in public schools. And in these textbooks there has always been a tendency to whitewash Japan's wrong past, including the Japanese military's activities and atrocities in continental Asia and other areas.

CLARKE: Professor Yoichi Kibata is a historian from the University of Tokyo.

YOICHI KIBATA: There was a lawsuit about it and textbook censorship from the 1960s onwards, but it was in the 1980s that this censorship problem became more problematic as a result of it becoming a diplomatic issue between Japan and the other Asian countries. And after that the problem of history censorship became a public issue in a way. The content of the history textbooks began to change because of the loosening of censorship to some extent.

CLARKE: Does it need more loosening in your viewpoint? Where does it sit now in 2003?

YOICHI KIBATA: I think more loosening is necessary because there are still points about which the rather strict censorship is exercised, and of course there are self-censorships from the sort of publisher's point of view. And there are factors, which should be solved and improved in writing history textbooks. And in my view the sort of correction of historical facts, dates and names and so on, there must be some sort of screening about this kind of correctness of concrete data. But the content and the argument of history textbooks should be left free.

CLARKE: No doubt there were other Japanese who had a more perhaps realistic view of what happened. So how did their view sit with the more populist view?

YOICHI KIBATA: Of course it's more comfortable to think that the Japanese were a victim and the Japanese were not an aggressor. So although a sort of realistic view of the war existed from the

very beginning, there were many historians who painted a very critical picture of Japan based on what actually happened in Asia. But these works tended to be read less than more popular descriptions of the war.

CLARKE: So what role do historians play in this debate?

YOICHI KIBATA: Of course historians can play a very big role in this respect, both in writing and in teaching and lecturing and so on. But the writing of history textbooks is the most important thing because the textbooks are used in various levels of education, and the young people acquire their knowledge mainly through the textbooks. And so what is written in the textbooks, especially in the history textbooks, is very important in shaping historical consciousness, and historians can play a very big role.

CLARKE: On 6 August, 1945, an atomic bomb was dropped by allied forces on Hiroshima, which marked the beginning of the end of the Second World War. It was the first of two bombs - the other targeted Nagasaki. The bombs caused massive devastation and huge loss of life.

CLARKE: We're standing here in the Peace Park in Hiroshima and I just wonder what are your emotions and what are your feelings about this particular place?

WOMAN VISITOR: Well as an Israeli and as a daughter of a survivor from Holocaust, I'm quite excited to be here and I'm full of emotions, not contradicting emotions but actually I identify very deeply with the people who suffered here from this blast.

MAN VISITOR: I'm in Japan for the past week or so, most of them have been pretty touristy spots, but Hiroshima kind of resides a place in history where a huge atrocity was committed. It's a little bit overwhelming and it's kind of astonishing sitting here looking at this one atomic dome centre that stays up throughout the course of however so many years. It's also really peaceful here, the river going up the side, the waterfalls going, so it kind of gives you time to sit down and take a time out and think about stuff.

WOMAN VISITOR: I'm very moved by it all, I've only just arrived so I've got a lot to see yet. I've done a bit of reading previously before arriving, and I'm here with my son trying to educate him a little bit about it. It's very moving, overwhelming actually.

MAN VISITOR: You have to understand that if you ask the Japanese people, almost I should say 70, 80, 90 per cent would say they are against the war, whatever the war is, it could be self defence, or could be sanctioned by the United Nations, it doesn't matter. War is something that reminds all Japanese about Hiroshima. In the Peace Park that's a very nice green park, but there were a lot of houses, it was a downtown area, and there now is just nothing left.

MAN VISITOR: It is a very important monument for the Second World War and for me deeply impressed to see where it happened and what was the influence on the area, which is very well shown and in the museum. And I think it's a good idea to keep that place as long as possible, as long as we have atomic weapons.

CLARKE: I'm standing here with a Japanese school teacher and a number of children that he has with him, and we're just outside the Hiroshima Peace Museum.

SCHOOL TEACHER: People all over the world think about peace. We want everyone to come from all over the world.

CLARKE: So you want many people from the world to come here to see this place?

SCHOOL TEACHER: Yes, and no more war.

WOMAN VISITOR: There are many, many school trips come to Hiroshima. When they come here they think about peace a little bit, it's good for them. Maybe this is first time for them to see such a terrible thing. I think we have to think more deeply about peace.

CLARKE: What effect do you think did the atomic bomb have in shaping the general discourse about the war and Japan's role in it?

YOICHI KIBATA: This varies from generation to generation I think. For example people of my generation, if you were born during the war or shortly after the war, have a clear memory about the atomic bomb, irrespective of the actual experience of the bomb itself or not. I mean we are taught or told about the atomic bomb when we are small children. But as for the young people their memory of the atomic bomb is very poor. I mean if you go to Nagasaki or Hiroshima in spring or in autumn you can see lots of young people, school children who are there on school trips. But sometimes they first know about the atomic bomb when they visit those places. Of course there are young people who are interested in history and what happened during the war, but those young people are rather the exception, they're not the rule.

CLARKE: No doubt the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki contributed to the perceptions many Japanese hold, that they were victims rather than aggressors. But what other factors might contribute to this? **YOICHI KIBATA:**

YOICHI KIBATA: The war was fought outside Japan; the Japanese soldiers who committed the aggressive actions did that outside Japan. And for the people living in Japan the war memories were dominated by the shortage of goods and bombardment by the American airforce and general hardships during the war and so on. So these memories dominated the Japanese people's memories of war after the war, and people who came back from abroad, from the front didn't talk much about what they did. And so those memories of Japan as an aggressor were sort of concealed for a long time after the war.

CLARKE: And what has been the effect of that general perception on Japanese society? How has it manifested itself?

YOICHI KIBATA: In my view the most important thing was it affected Japanese attitude towards Asia. Japan was an aggressive country in many parts of Asia, but because of that neglect or ignorance about what the Japanese military did in those Asian countries, the Japanese people did not feel a sort of sense of guilt towards Asian countries.

And there are various aspects, I mean the Japanese society and Japanese government chose to become a sort of peaceful society, and that resulted from the image of Japan as a country which suffered from the war. But in relation to Japan's relations with the Asian countries this kind of a lack of a sense of being the aggressor affected very much Japan's attitude towards Asian countries after the war.

CLARKE: As Japan rebuilt its economy after the war and began to trade with other Asian countries, countries they'd occupied and been at war with, there was a recognition that Japan needed to come to terms with its military history.

YOICHI KIBATA: Well it was from I think the 1970s, that was some 30 years after the end of the war that Japanese policy began to be more oriented towards Asian countries. But that was not because Japanese people had discovered that Japan was an aggressor or something like that during the war, but because of the economic development of some of the Asian countries which were going

to catch up with Japan economically and so on. So the practical importance of Asian countries became so great that Japan could not ignore the Asian neighbours as before.

But from the 1980s I think the historical memories about Japan having been an aggressor began to play some sort of role in Japan's relations with Asian countries, and this was manifested in the problem of history textbook and the protest from Asian countries about Japanese history textbook censorship and various people coming to the fore saying they were victims of Japanese aggression and so on. And these kind of factors inevitably affected Japan's relations with Asian countries, and many people in Japan began to think that Japan should pay more attention to this kind of historical memories, and aspects of history in dealing with Asian countries.

CLARKE: Akira Shimizu is professor of marketing at Meiji University in Tokyo. His research indicates that even the consumer preferences of older Japanese are affected by historical memory.

AKIRA SHIMIZU: If you come to your friend's house in Australia you can find many made in China or made in Korea things, that's interesting, but if you come to Japanese friend's house you cannot find many made in China or made in Korea. Yes many Japanese have some kind of made in China or made in Korea, but when your friends come to our house we hide these things.

CLARKE: Why is it, so that they don't want to show that perhaps they have products that are made in countries outside of Japan?

AKIRA SHIMIZU: It's an historical reason, Japanese like Europe or America or such a kind of things because in the Meiji era in 1868 they introduced many things from Europe and America, so they think that Europe and America are very developing countries, and such a kind of legends we have for long, long time. So we think that European and American is good. But historically thinking we have not good things for Korea and China at World War Two, so it is very difficult or confused feelings about Korea or China.

CLARKE: So changing attitudes like that then given that China is such a large manufacturing powerhouse these days and Korea for that matter too, what attitudes do you think need to change in Japan?

AKIRA SHIMIZU: One important thing is lucky we have now changing generations. Old type of generation think China old or Korea old, but such a young generation don't think about anything or any bad feelings about China or Korea because our ancestors did very bad thing for China or Korea, but we didn't do such a kind of thing. So our minds need changing and also many Japanese young people are coming for sightseeing to China or I think Korea and have good feelings about that. So I hope that young generation's minds are changing.

CLARKE: This is Smart Societies on Radio Australia and this program, 'Historical Memory'.

JAYA SUPRANA: My name is Jaya Suprana. I was born in Bali, and I'm a proud Indonesian but also a sad Indonesian.

CLARKE: Jaya Suprana is a household name in Indonesia; he's a television personality, a humourist, a classically trained concert pianist and a successful businessman. So why is he a sad Indonesian?

JAYA SUPRANA: Because you know my country is now torn apart by the so-called terrorism and disintegration and many, many bad things. My own people killed their own people, so our beautiful country is torn apart.

CLARKE: Pak Jaya decided to make a stand on communal violence and terrorism. 2003 marked the 100th birthday of one of the country's founding fathers, Mohammed Hatta. So Jaya Suprana invited Mohammed Hatta's daughters and then President Megawati Sukarnoputri, among others, to join him at the piano for a song that strikes a chord with all Indonesians.

JAYA SUPRANA: This is from a great composer, the late Ismail Marzuki called 'Indonesia Pusaka', and this song was venerated by many leaders from our country, such as Mohammed Hatta, the vice president, the founding father, even Bung Karno also loved it. So actually the inspiration came from the family from Pak Hatta they said to us that one of the most favourite songs of Pak Hatta is 'Indonesia Pusaka'. And I thought that if Pak Hatta was still alive he must be very, very sad to see our country disintegrating.

SUE SLAMEN: Now when you came up with this very novel idea and very ambitious idea of inviting everyone from the president to even the head of the Indonesian army, who I think's a very good singer, is he not?

JAYA SUPRANA: Yeah, yeah, Mr Bambang Susilo Yudhoyono is very good.

SUE SLAMEN: To come to, well they didn't come together, you recorded them separately, do you think the fact that you chose or the Hatta daughters chose this song that does strike a chord with Indonesians that they couldn't really refuse?

JAYA SUPRANA: All our people love this song, because this song forces us to love Indonesia, we cannot hate Indonesia with this song. But after they finished the song they begin to fight again, and I proved that I can, at least in a television editing room, I can get them together.

CLARKE: Jaya Suprana's video of the song's recording has been shown countless times on Indonesian television. And when he visited Australia it was screened at the University of Melbourne where Dr Arief Budiman heads the Indonesian program.

DR ARIEF BUDIMAN: The song is quite popular, it's like 'Waltzing Matilda' in Australia, everybody knows about that. This song started when we were in primary school, so I think when people listen to the song they remember about Indonesia, even they remember their childhood I think when they were together. And again this film in Australia it was shown during when there was a lot of political conflict in Indonesia, and I think the message of Jaya Suprana is to tell the people, look we are all, this is only one country, the only country that we have. So I think the film becomes quite emotional because of the contrast between reality and what we maybe forget.

TRANSLATION OF SONG: 'Indonesia my beloved country, eternally glorious world heritage. That is the place I was born, cradled, nurtured with the love by my mother. That is my shelter when I grow old, where at last I will close my eyes.'

SUE SLAMEN: When you showed the film it included some of the bad news stories that have come out of Indonesia - the communal violence, the burning of churches and the attacks on Muslims and Christians and the Bali bombings, you're Balinese, something that resonates with Australians, is that what finally drove you to try and do something as an individual?

JAYA SUPRANA: Yeah, yeah because that was terrorism, it was chaotic in Indonesia, that is a fact, but please you know we love Indonesia and we will build our country again.

SUE SLAMEN: Don't judge us all by the acts of a few?

JAYA SUPRANA: Yes, yeah, this is only some crazy people who did that. I think what is most important is to understand the history as a fact, not as a misconception, that is the only way to interpret history in the right way.

SUE SLAMEN: The very idea of Indonesia, the nation of Indonesia is of course quite young like so many post-colonial societies in Asia. In your view how important is historical memory?

JAYA SUPRANA: I think it's very, very important. Historical memory is the most important tool to face the future. If we do not have historical memory we cannot face the future, because we do not know our own identity. The contemporary people they do not remember the past, I don't think so, because now we have our freedom. But we must now use our freedom correctly.

CLARKE: Indonesia is a country of many ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences and while the nation was founded on the ideal of 'unity in diversity', it's a message that's all too often forgotten.

Arief Budiman:

DR ARIEF BUDIMAN: They remember that intellectually but not emotionally, so they keep struggling, they keep talking about their self interests or group interests, so the film is very important just to make them aware again emotionally that we must not destroy our country. But I think it's very difficult to stop and look at it now, people are still fighting and politics is like that.

But the film has its significance, I mean it's very important and I think when the Indonesian people come there are two feelings, to enjoyment I would say first of all the song is beautiful and it reminds them with the past history of their childhood and other things. Secondly they like that all these figures that sing the song, the same song so when you look at the film because the song is the same, you look at the style of the singer and that is really enjoyable because looking from the people, the president, top person in Jakarta going down to garbage collector and the bechak driver. So it's very enjoyable the film, I think the idea is really great, I mean only that kind of idea only could come from Jaya Suprana.

CLARKE: It was often said that the Indonesian army occupied a special place in the nation's history because of the pivotal role it played in the independence struggle. But as Dr Budiman reminds us history has often been interpreted to suit political agendas.

DR ARIEF BUDIMAN: The army was put in a very strategic position in Indonesia, but the problem is that under Sukarno for instance many of the people who fought for the revolutions did not necessarily join the formal army, they were still civilians. And so they called themselves as the freedom fighter, but the army was put in a special position. And then when Suharto came to power he dramatised the role of the military as if the military was the most important component of that. And so we have this concept of dual function of the military under Suharto, that means the military has the right to go into civilian politics because they were fighting to liberate this country from the Dutch.

SUE SLAMEN: So how important is it in this post-Suharto period where civil society is trying to rebuild itself after those long years of authoritarianism that the historic role of the army and civilians in the freedom struggle is taught in schools? Are you satisfied that kids are now getting a rounded view of history?

DR ARIEF BUDIMAN: Yes I think it's much more balanced now compared to under Suharto. Now there is a resistance against it. The army's important but not like what Suharto had said.

SUE SLAMEN: So during the post-Suharto era you haven't seen the same kind of textbook debate that we've seen in other societies like Japan notably, the need to rewrite history so people get a rounded view of their own history?

DR ARIEF BUDIMAN: Oh yeah, there is some rewriting about the, especially in the teaching of the revolution and the military. I think the teaching was balanced before Suharto came to power, so I think maybe we just not really re-writing the new one but just republish the old one with updating things. But for sure there was bias during Suharto about the role of the military, which is not taught any more in high school.

CLARKE: In the next and final program, 'Generational Change', a panel of Asia specialists look at the challenges for young leaders.

This series is produced by Sue Slamen and Barry Clarke from Radio Australia.

