

# The Abe government versus the Emperor on history issues

Yukihisa Fujita  
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Just after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered his statement on Aug. 14 to mark the 70th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II, the Foreign Ministry deleted a "History Issues Q&A" section on its website, which was based on Prime Ministers Tomiichi Murayama and Junichiro Koizumi's statements on the 50th and 60th anniversary of the war's end, respectively, and then reinstated the section but with altered content on the evening of Sept. 18, just before the Abe administration steamrolled its controversial security legislation, which included the collective self-defense doctrine, through the Upper House.

A look at the new version of the Q&A makes it clear that the statement delivered by Abe, which played down his revisionist position on war-related historical issues, was intended to facilitate the passage of the security bills. By omitting references to Japan's colonial rule and aggression in the past, the statement hides Abe's true color — his reluctance to admit the fact that Japan committed any transgressions.

With regard to the question of "How does the government of Japan recognize the history concerning the previous war?" the version that was deleted from the website clearly referred to certain passages in the Murayama statement, such as "In the past, Japan, through colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly in Asia," and "I ... express ... my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology...."

In the new version, the answer to this same question, which I understand is now in the process of being translated into English, refers in Japanese to the Murayama and Koizumi statements, but characteristically its reference to the statement issued by Abe does not include his name. It only says, "On Aug. 14, 2015, the Cabinet adopted the statement by the prime minister 70 years after the war." It then provides links to the three statements.

The deleted version carried a straightforward message of deep remorse and



heartfelt apology about Japan's colonial rule and aggression, which were included in the Murayama and Koizumi statements.

But the new content instead employs a roundabout way to explain Abe's position. Replying to the question of "Isn't it that Japan did not make formal apologies toward Asian countries that suffered damage from war?" it now says that it was made clear in the prime minister's statement of Aug. 14, 2015, that the feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apologies that have been consistently maintained by successive governments as expressed by the Murayama and Koizumi statements will be faithfully inherited.

But the problem is that in neither the statement delivered by Abe nor the Foreign Ministry's website, one cannot find commitments or remarks made in the first person by Abe. This is in stark contrast to the statements by Murayama and Koizumi, who expressed their "deep remorse" and "heartfelt apology" in the first person.

With regard to Abe's statement, Shin-ichi Kitaoka, who served as acting chairman of Abe's private advisory panel on the content of the statement to be issued for the 70th anniversary of the war's end, said, "I wish that he had said, using the first person 'I,' that Japan carried out aggression and that this must not be repeated."

Of the four key phrases Murayama and Koizumi used in their statements, "aggression" and "colonial rule" found their way into two of Abe's sentences: "Incident, aggression, war — we shall never again resort to any form of the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes" and "We shall abandon colonial rule forever and respect the right of self-determination of all peoples throughout the world," according to the English translation carried by the website of the prime minister's office. But the original Japanese sentences contain no subjects. Thus it is unclear whether "we" in the English translation refers to Japan or whether the sentences are general statements of truisms.

Abe's statement says, "The Russo-Japanese War gave encouragement to many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa." This sentence derives from a proposal made by the advisory panel of experts. However, another sentence proposed by the panel — "The independence of (Western) colonies in Asia was promoted as a result. But it is not correct to assert that Japan fought for the liberation of Asia as its national policy" — was not incorporated in Abe's statement. Therefore, it must be pointed out that Abe selected self-serving parts of the panel's advice.

I find other inconsistencies elsewhere as well. The Abe statement mentions reconciliation with Western prisoners of war. But apparently due to deep resentment over the fact that ex-POWs from the United States took Japanese corporations to court in pursuit of apologies and compensation for their wartime forced labor, the Japanese government, while inviting former POWs from Britain, the Netherlands and Australia to Japan, excluded former U.S. POWs for many years. It wasn't until 2009, 64 years after the end of the war, that the government started inviting former POWs from the U.S. — thanks to efforts by a federation of nonpartisan members of the Diet, which included myself, and support from citizens' groups.

The address by Emperor Akihito on the occasion of the Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead on Aug. 15, the 70th anniversary of the war's end, stands in marked contrast to Abe's statement. For the first time in his memorial day address, the Emperor used the phrase "bearing in mind the feelings of profound remorse about the last war."

This was a deeply meaningful message following similar sentiments he expressed during his visit to China in 1992 and at a banquet at the Imperial Palace when South Korean President Kim Young-sam visited Japan in 1994.

Also, the Emperor used the phrase: "the ceaseless efforts made by the people of Japan toward recovery from the devastation of the war and toward development, backed by their earnest desire for the continuation of peace." I believe that he has underlined the feelings of the Japanese people, who hope that their country will continue to uphold its resolve never to engage in war again.

The Emperor's address in effect reemphasized the words and actions of Emperor Hirohito and himself to console the souls of those who died in war by visiting Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Okinawa, Saipan and Palau's Peleliu Island during the 50th, 60th and 70th anniversary years of the war's end.

From the context, the subject of all the sentences in the Emperor's Japanese message cannot be other than "I" and the English translation by the Imperial Household Agency uses "I." It is clear that they represent the feelings of the Emperor himself.

Commenting on Abe's statement, the French newspaper *Le Monde* said "It placed weight not on true remorse but on superficial pacifism." The *New York Times*, referring to the Emperor's address, said "It will strengthen the view that it represents a quiet opposition to Prime Minister Abe's policy." Kent E. Calder, a former U.S. diplomat and current director of the Reischauer Center

for East Asian Studies at SAIS/Johns Hopkins University in Washington, raised the question: "If the diplomatic calculations of the prime minister's office are proving astute in the short run, what are the longer-term implications of Abe's historical grammar: a stance full of verbs and objects, but absent sentence subjects and any clear assumption of responsibility?"

The Emperor's address, which is full of sincerity in consoling the spirits of those who died in war and mourning the loss of lives, "deeply touched my heart," said a bereaved family member who attended the memorial ceremony.

If Abe wants his statement to win trust from within and outside the country, he should make the subjects of his sentences and Japan's responsibility for the colonial rule and aggression clear. He should demonstrate through both word and action that his administration's position on war-related issues is consistent with the position taken by preceding governments.

In his statement, Abe said: "We must not let our children, grandchildren, and even further generations to come ... be predestined to apologize." Yet as long as it is made unclear who is issuing the apology and who exactly were responsible for the aggression and colonial rule, it should be taken that the prime minister has no intention of apologizing. As long as there are discrepancies between words that sound fine on the surface and concrete actions, it will be the people of the coming generations who will be forced to pay the consequences.

Only by trying to solve the remaining war-related issues and trying to reach a "complete and final resolution" as written in various treaties such as the Japan-South Korea agreement on the right of claims, can we liberate the children of coming generations from the fate of having to apologize again and again.

The government should initiate measures to provide support to former POWs and "comfort women," overseas atomic bomb victims — who are mostly Koreans — and orphans left abroad after the war and their foster parents, and also to Japanese soldiers who were interned in Siberia after World War II as well as former Class-B and -C war criminals.

We should seek not only legal solutions but also moral and political solutions, and solutions that help soothe victims' sentiment. It is high time that the government and people worked hand in hand to bring about reconciliations with the peoples of other nations.

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*Yukihisa Fujita, a former senior vice finance minister, is a Democratic Party of Japan member of the Upper House.*

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