

Prof. TANIGAKI on Hong Kong Identity

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I have often debated the issue of Hong Kong with Prof. Tanigaki since the time when she was a postgraduate student, and listening to her presentation today I was left with the impression that her research on this topic is developing tremendously, and also that we differ somewhat in our points of view. The main point of departure in our respective thinking lies in the question of how to think about the issue of identity of Hong Kong people, especially on how to perceive the relationship between the ethnic consciousness of Hong Kong people and democratization. For example, Tanigaki interprets the current Hong Kong democratic factions' developing a strong anti-Japanese movement around the issue of the territorial claims to the Spratly Islands and emphasizing the territorial claims as an allegiance to China and weakening Hong Kong identity. That is to say, she thinks that the emergence of Chinese nationalism is part of a weakening of Hong Kong identity and that this is contrary to moves for democratization. I do not think this is the case at all.

I studied at Hong Kong University for one year, from 1970 to 1971. Just around that time, two different trends started -the emergence of ethnicity with anti-Japanese sentiments as seen in movements for the defense of the Spratly Islands by young students (the Chinese call it the movement to defend fishing rights), and the start of calls for democracy beginning with the movement to make Chinese the language for official documents. That is to say, the two movements, anti-Japanese Chinese nationalism and democratization, started at the same time. The question is what are the differences between Chinese nationalism and democratization?

First of all, Tanigaki interprets Hong Kong nationalism, which calls for the return of the territorial rights of the Spratly Islands to

China, as implying that there is a feeling of identification with the People's Republic of China government. However, in reality, emphasizing the return of the territorial rights does not necessarily imply that there is a feeling of wanting to return to the Chinese government on the part of Hong Kong people. What I mean is that, the basic essence of Hong Kong Chinese nationalism is deeply rooted in a feeling of identification with the Chinese mainland as a homeland. The majority of Hong Kong people, as Tanigaki points out, consist of refugees who came from the Chinese mainland. Between 1950 and 1970 we saw on the one hand, the emergence of second generation Hong Kong people, that is to say those born and raised in Hong Kong. However, on the other hand, we continued to have a steady flow of refugees from the mainland. As a consequence of this there was created among the Hong Kong people a special identity: that of being refugees. After the signing of the treaty and the agreement for the return of Hong Kong to China the population which came from the mainland changed in its status from that of refugees to legal immigrants. Furthermore, in the 1980s third generation Hong Kong people emerged and this too of course brought changes to the identity of the Hong Kong people. However, on looking at democratization movements and the political campaigns which find their roots in this special form of nationalism, we can say that the former trend is still more pronounced.

Many of the first generation of Hong Kong people who were refugees, escaped to Hong Kong by abandoning their homeland and fleeing from the civil wars and political turmoil which ensued. But they did not go so far as to abandon their feelings for their homeland. As a result, there were many people who did not hold a feeling of identification with the political parties which caused the civil wars and political turmoil which ensued, i.e. there were strong feelings to distance themselves from the Chinese Communist Party or the Chinese Nationalist Party, but they still held strong feelings of wanting to return to the Chinese mainland and remain part of the Chinese sphere of influence. That is to say, Hong Kong people's nationalism is not about identity towards Chinese politics itself (political power); rather it is a patriotic identity (patriotism towards

their homeland) towards the natural and cultural aspects of the country, and it is precisely this peculiarly stateless identity that is the identity of the Hong Kong people.

Because of this, not only did the Hong Kong movements to defend the Spratly Islands from the start of the 1970s until now, have nothing to do with a feeling of identification with China as a political power but what is more, on the contrary, there were many areas in which there are strong feelings of criticism towards the Chinese government and the Taiwanese Nationalist Party. What I mean is that, both the Chinese government and Taiwanese government not only made the issue of the Spratly Islands an issue of patriotic nationalism, but they also developed it into a more complex issue, by using it as a means of bargaining in diplomatic relations with Japan and the US. For example, the Nationalist Party, when they were forced to leave the UN from 1971 to 1972, although taking a strong stance on the face of it, in effect adopted a compromise position in their negotiations from the fear that excessive deterioration of relations with Japan concerning the Islands would invite further international isolation. Similarly, around the same time, the Chinese government did not have the will to take up this issue as a fundamental principle of patriotic nationalism, and simply used it as a bargaining tool, because they too were wrestling with the diplomatic issues of rebuilding relations with the US and normalizing relations with Japan. Within this climate, there were virtually no campaigns aimed at criticizing Japan over territorial rights to the Spratly Islands by the general public in China or Taiwan, save for some lone brave voices in the media. In stark contrast to this, in Hong Kong there were daily large-scale protests by students and the general public, and these included criticism of both the Chinese government and Taiwanese government from the standpoint of Chinese nationalism. Of course, there were no Communist Party backed Hong Kong left-wing organizations in these movements. These characteristics are manifest in exactly the same form in the political campaigns surrounding the Spratly Islands we see today.

The political dynamics which are seen here, have many things

in common with the period in 1915 when the Okuma (大隈重信) government enforced 21 demands on Yuan Shi-kai (袁世凱) which included the exclusive semi-colonial rule of Shandon Province, and in 1917 when Japanese government forced the Nishihara loans to further increase subordination to Japan. This led to fierce student-led and public campaigns against Japan and in turn led to criticism of the Chinese government also. That is to say, in the Chinese world, this patriotic nationalism does not necessarily imply campaigns which support the government; rather, there is an overwhelming number of instances where it includes criticism of the government. Furthermore, it doesn't matter if it is the Chinese government or the Taiwanese government; if these campaigns are driven by patriotic nationalism, there is a dynamic at work which makes it difficult to easily suppress these campaigns in order to preserve the political status quo, even if they include criticism of the government. What is more, in the case of Hong Kong people who do not hold a feeling of identification towards any kind of political party or political body, we can say that this patriotic nationalism includes criticism of the Chinese government or Taiwanese government as a matter of necessity.

As Tanigaki points out, the campaigns of patriotic nationalism which are represented by the movements for the protection of the Spratly Islands in Hong Kong, started with the outbreak of disorder caused by left wing riots a few years earlier in 1967. Until these left wing riots broke out ordinary Hong Kong citizens showed no signs of developing any political campaigns. The reasons for this are simply that on the one hand the Chinese government did not send any direct political signals to start political movements calling for the return of Hong Kong by mobilizing left wing Hong Kong people which was a government patronized organization, and on the other hand the British government in Hong Kong did not start any moves aimed at increasing colonial government. The Chinese government, in a climate in which they were forced into international isolation under the cold war structure after the end of the Second World War, was well aware that Hong Kong served an important role as the only portal to the international world. Furthermore, both the Chinese and

British governments wanted to preserve stability in Hong Kong and recognized the benefits of preserving a relationship of non-aggression.

However this situation of stability began to disintegrate with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese utilitarian policy towards Hong Kong up until then was strongly affected by the influences of political campaigns of fundamentalist revolutionary ideology. As a result, the Hong Kong left wing had no alternative but to start riots in order to show the Chinese government the loyalty of the Hong Kong left wing. However, the Hong Kong left wing then was a so-called "left wing force" that was formed under the direction of Chinese Communist Party organizations that included the Hong Kong branch office of the Chinese News Agency (新華社) and the Bank of China (中國銀行). Hong Kong, then and now, imports vast quantities of daily commodities such as food, clothing, natural medicines (ingredients) and stationary from the Chinese mainland. Many companies that had departments for distributing these commodities were linked to the "left wing," including freight, wholesalers, as well as large and small-scale retailers (of the Chinese national products). Whilst they make up a political force which cannot be ignored altogether, nevertheless they are nothing more than a small number of factions. For the majority of the Hong Kong public, these left wing riots came like a bolt out of the blue, as up until then they had never doubted that the stability of Hong Kong; this being the result of the stability between the Chinese and British governments and the merits of Hong Kong for both countries. For this reason the students and intelligentsia which formed the conscious section of the Hong Kong society became acutely aware of the need to start political campaigns for self-preservation. This campaign of course had to be politically neutral between the Chinese, Taiwanese and British governments. The reasons for this are that allegiance to one of the political powers would invite the wrath of the others and would invoke destabilization of Hong Kong. What had developed was precisely this patriotic form of Chinese nationalism towards the homeland. It was able to demand political recognition by all the political powers and furthermore, it could be

used as a sharp weapon for turning their criticism to each of the political parties.

The identity of the majority of Hong Kong people who do not hold any feelings of allegiance towards any political bodies is strongly reflected in the democratic movements of the Hong Kong people. In 1971 English was the formal language of the British colony. As English was designated as the official language for legal documentation and other official documents used for lawsuits, many ordinary Hong Kong citizens, in the case of disputes and especially in disputes with English native speakers, had no option but to give up any hopes of bringing them to court. This is just one example of the undemocratic situation that arises as part and parcel of colonial rule. The “movement to make Chinese the official language” is the first democratization movement that has been started in order to reform this kind of situation. Naturally this entails political criticism of British colonial rule but at the same time it also includes a sense of Chinese nationalism for the restoration of “Chinese”. This is also the reason why this movement has started at virtually the same time as the anti-Japanese movement calling for the defense of the Spratly Islands.

Aiming criticism at political bodies which have a stake in Hong Kong society is of course something fundamentally different from movements to form an independent government in Hong Kong. This is a means by which the Hong Kong people can stand up for themselves and resist the threats from the British, Chinese and Taiwanese governments towards the stability of Hong Kong as a free living space for the Hong Kong people. As we can see from the above, what was at work was a movement theory in which both patriotic territorial Chinese nationalism and demands for democracy were inextricably entwined. The mentality of political self-determination that arose here is what created the identity of Hong Kong people. Of course, this is fundamentally the same mentality that is at work in the democracy movements in Hong Kong in 1999 since the return to China.