

## EDITORIAL: 78 years after war, the world needs to ‘grab back freedom’

### **РЕДАКЦІЯ: 78 років після війни світ має «повернути свободу»**

*В редакційній статті, автори розповідають про поразку Японії в Другій світовій війні і проводять паралелі між нею та теперішньою війною між росією та Україною. Автори нагадують, що у онлайн-промові до парламенту Японії в березні минулого року президент України Володимир Зеленський заявив, що між двома країнами немає різниці в «наших почуттях свободи... наших бажаннях жити... наших прагненнях до миру». Однак Україна не має можливості здатися, щоб отримати свободу, вибір, який свого часу зробила Японія. Багатьом громадянам України заборонено залишати країну, адже Україні нічого не залишається, як поки що обмежити свободи і права громадян, щоб нація не втратила свободу. Автори наголошують, що глибоке горе України заслуговує глибокого співчуття та розуміння. Картина Японії, коли вона зазнала поразки у війні, після того, як після Другої японо-китайської війни загинуло більше 3,1 млрд японців і більшість великих міст було перетворено на попіл, має багато подібності до сьогодишньої України. Проте як агресор Японія того часу мала більше спільного з нинішньою росією. Автори нагадують, що після визнання територій на сході України, контрольованих проросійськими силами, незалежними від України, росія почала повномасштабне вторгнення в країну, а Японська імперська армія використовувала Маньчжоу-Го, маріонеткову державу, створену Японією в Маньчжурії (північно-східний Китай), як плацдарм для вторгнення в Китай. Автори підсумовують статтю, наголошуючи, що це історичний факт, про який всі повинні пам'ятати, коли виникає питання: «Чому Японія підтримує Україну?».*

<https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14981572>

Aug. 15 in 1945, 78 years ago, is remembered as the day of Japan's defeat in World War II.

On Sept. 2 that year, Japanese government representatives signed the Japanese Instrument of Surrender aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay in a diplomatic action that formally ended the war.

The Japanese delegation was led by Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu (1887-1957). Shigemitsu was the very official who, in 1943 when the war situation was becoming unfavorable to Japan, struggled to justify the “cause” of the war, albeit belatedly.

Japan was in a position to “give freedom to the peoples of Asia and protect their freedom,” Shigemitsu wrote in his notes at the time.

It was clearly a response to the “Atlantic Charter,” a statement issued in August 1941 by the leaders of Britain and the United States.

The document, which set out American and British goals for the world after the end of the war, upheld freedom of all countries and the liberation of all people. At least for Shigemitsu, one aspect of the war was a “fight over freedom.”

But what actually happened was completely different from Shigemitsu's narrative.

In Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula, which Japan had ruled since before the war, and in mainland China and Southeast Asia, which had newly become battlefields and occupied territories, Japan deprived local people of freedom, exploited them and inflicted indescribable suffering on them.

Defeated and occupied, Japan regained freedom of society in a historical irony.

Genzaburo Yoshino (1899-1981), the author of the 1937 novel “How Do You Live?”, recalls his feelings at the time in a book titled “Shokugyo Toshiteno Henshusha” (Editor as a profession).

“The reform was largely thanks to the blows from outside that overthrew the old forces (which ruled Japan before and during the war), rather than being achieved by the Japanese on their own, so I found it difficult to rejoice without reserve.”

The irony of history doesn’t stop there. It can be said that the freedom and peace Japan enjoyed as it made a fresh start after the war were actually supported by the sacrifices of the surrounding regions.

Taiwan, which confronts China across a strait, and South Korea, which borders North Korea, were forced to act as a “bulwark” against communism during the Cold War, and their own freedom was not taken seriously. The U.S.-backed dictatorships in both Taiwan and South Korea cracked down on dissident workers and students.

In Okinawa, which was under U.S. military rule, the land of local residents was taken away to build U.S. military bases. Even after Okinawa’s reversion to Japan, the rights of people in the southernmost prefecture have been trampled upon to this day.

To what extent has Japanese society been aware of this structure?

### **UKRAINE’S ANGUISH**

In an online speech to Japan’s Diet last March, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said there was no difference between the two countries in “our feelings of freedom ... our desires to live ... our aspirations for peace.”

However, Ukraine does not have the option of surrendering to gain freedom, the choice Japan once took.

Many Ukrainian citizens are prohibited from leaving the country because they have been targets of mobilization over the past year and a half. Ukraine has no choice but to restrict citizens’ freedoms and rights for the time being so that the nation will not lose its freedom. Ukraine’s profound anguish deserves deep sympathy and understanding.

The picture of Japan when it was defeated in the war, after more than 3.1 million Japanese died since the Second Sino-Japanese War and most major cities were reduced to ashes, has many similarities to today’s Ukraine.

However, as an aggressor, Japan at that time had more in common with present-day Russia.

After recognizing areas in eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian forces as independent of Ukraine, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of the country. The Imperial Japanese Army used Manchukuo, a puppet state created by Japan in Manchuria (northeastern China), as a foothold for invading China.

This is a historical fact we should keep in mind when we ask ourselves, “Why does Japan support Ukraine?”

### **DANGER OF DYSFUNCTIONAL THINKING**

What is happening in Ukraine has generated military tensions and reverberations in East Asia. Japan is wondering whether it is on the front line of confronting China, which has now become a superpower.

The Japanese government has decided on a huge increase in defense spending without sufficient scrutiny of the proposal. Security considerations have become an inevitable topic for discussions about trade and investment. The government continues to put pressure on the Science Council of Japan, which is cautious about military research in order to protect “academic freedom.”

“The security environment is becoming more dangerous.” This cliché seems to be making our thinking dysfunctional.

There is no doubt about the importance of ensuring that Japan has the ability to defend itself. That makes it all the more important to ensure in-depth debate on the issue. The ability to

imagine the horrors of war and the sincerity to learn from mistakes of the past are also indispensable.

### **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AT STAKE**

Japan was ranked 16th in the Democracy Index 2022, compiled by Economist Intelligence Unit, a research arm of the Economist magazine, while Taiwan came in 10th place.

One factor behind the difference was levels of political participation. Voter turnout in the last Taiwanese presidential election in 2020 was about 75 percent. The figure indicates Taiwanese people's strong commitment to defending the freedom that was won after a long period of dictatorship.

In contrast, voter turnouts in Japan's national elections have been languishing below 60 percent. This may be a sign that Japanese voters are half sleeping on their rights.

The international NGO Reporters Without Borders has rated Japan lower than Taiwan and South Korea in terms of freedom of the press. The organization has pointed out that political pressure and gender inequality in Japan are hindering the role of journalists in holding the government accountable.

Let us recall, as a warning to ourselves, the fact that the prewar media's pandering to the military and acceptance of speech control contributed to Japan's reckless rush into the war.

Japanese citizens should take the freedom gained through the nation's devastating defeat in the war as something they themselves own and make use of it every day. "By doing so, the 'freedom given' (to us) will become the 'freedom we have grabbed back,'" Yoshino wrote.

The relevance of this argument has not faded at all.