Japan, the Absent Power:
—Why Japan Does Not Appear on the Stage of International History—*

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Abstract

This article argues that one of the reasons Japan does not appear in the writings on international history is the lack of aggressive and wide declassification of its government records, the failure of its leaders to leave memoirs, diaries, and personal papers, and the lack of a system of prime ministerial libraries, like the Presidential Libraries in the United States. After reviewing the role of the National Archives and Records Administration and the Presidential Libraries in the United States, the article proposes that Japan establish a similar Prime Minister Library system.

Keywords: government records, declassification, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, U.S. Presidential Libraries, international history, Japanese political and diplomatic history, soft power

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Introduction

As seen in the visit of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to the United States in the spring of 2007, Japan remains unable to escape the so-called "History Problem." This is an issue not only of East Asia and Southeast Asia, but one that involves the United States, Australia, Europe, and other countries as well and continues to be of strong interest. While the facts and interpretations of World War II can be debated, no one can deny that the actions of Imperial Japanese forces were inhumane and have forever shamed the name of Japan and its image.

How about the postwar? As a peaceful democracy, Japan has protected the rights of free speech, human rights, and the rule of law, and has performed much good work over the past six decades. Nevertheless, people abroad know little of these accomplishments and the people who led Japan in these endeavors. Japan, in other words, does not really appear in the writings of international history.

One of the reasons for this may have to do with the fact that Japan's public diplomacy is not properly developed, but in fact, the problem is deeper than this. Japan does not actively declassify documents or pursue transparency. Its policy-makers rarely open their private papers or publish their diaries and memoirs. For the memoirs that are published, most of them are unavailable in English. As a result, Japan will remain an absent power in the chronicles of international history now and in the future.

In recent years, Japan is pursuing hard power more and more, and in the process has seemed to forget the importance of soft power.[1] The purpose of this paper is to propose a way in which Japan can reverse the trend of being an absent power in international history.

A Discovery in the United States

As a specialist on U.S.-Japan relations, for the past decade or so, I have regularly visited the National Archives, presidential libraries, and other archival collections in the United States, and have often lamented the fact that similar well-endowed libraries, easy to use, do not exist in Japan.

While Japan's role in international affairs is increasingly being recognized here and abroad, it does not systematically leave or make available a record of its accomplishments.

1) For more on the concept of soft power in international relations, see Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

Paradoxically, it is almost as if Japan, due to its lack of transparency, is disavowing its presence in international history. Any lack of understanding or knowledge of Japan abroad is less the fault of those living abroad, but instead a problem of Japan's own making.

This point was driven home to the writer when he visited the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library last August as part of a joint research project on U.S.-Japan relations, as I was responsible for the chapter on the 1970s. As readers will remember, President Ford passed away shortly after that in December last year. The Ford Presidential Library opened in 1981, and is located on the campus of the University of Michigan. The second floor of the library houses the reading room for the documents on Ford's presidency (August 1974-January 1977). One day while there, I looked at the more than one hundred books on one shelf about his administration, including the recollections of staff and officials, and the memoirs, all written in English, of foreign leaders who served around the time of Ford.

I was unable to locate the memoirs of any Japanese official or prime minister among them. The Ford administration was overlapped on the Japanese side by those of Tanaka Kakuei, Miki Takeo, and Fukuda Takeo. Of the three, only Miki left a collection of essays entitled *Gikai Seiji to Tomo ni* (My Journey with Parliamentary Politics). While there are biographies of those three prime ministers, with the exception of one thin book in English about Tanaka, the rest are all in Japanese.

In other words, in two ways, Japan remains absent in the records of international history. Not only do its political leaders not write memoirs or leave diaries in the first place, but because the ones that are written are not done so in the international language of English, Japan remains inaccessible to non-Japanese historians of international history.

Japan's Face-less Politics and Diplomacy

In the literature abroad, even if the country name of Japan does appear, Japanese individuals do not really show up in the text with the exception of "Tojo" and "Hirohito." Go ahead and try it yourself by looking in any index.

This is not only true of books abroad, but in research here in Japan. References to political leaders are few. Instead, organizations, systems, and the situation at the time are often the focus of the writings. Compared to U.S. presidents, the authority of Japanese prime ministers is weaker. Even if the prime minister exercises leadership, some scholars will argue, it is not decisive.

This sort of argument was particularly common in the days when the bureaucracy was

strongest, but even then, the writer does not think it was entirely accurate and he certainly does not think it reflects reality today.

In any case, whether it is in Japanese research or in that conducted abroad, Japan is a face-less country when it comes to writings on its political and diplomatic history. As a result, many writings fail to go beyond the "Japan, Inc." approach to describing Japan.

Of course there are books that attempt to describe the people of postwar Japan and their policies, but they are few. And, as mentioned earlier, since most of those books are not translated into English, if one does not read Japanese, then the books are not known abroad.

The postwar prime ministers whose memoirs and biographies are translated into English include Yoshida Shigeru's *The Yoshida Memoirs* (Kaiso Junen), *Ohira Masayoshi's Postwar Politicians* (Hito to Shiso), and Nakasone Yasuhiro's *The Making of the New Japan* (Seiji to Jinsei). In addition, Hosokawa Morihiro's *The Time to Act is Now* and Hashimoto Ryutaro's *Vision of Japan* were translated into Japanese, but these collections of thoughts and ideas were more about what they wanted to do from now, rather than memoirs in the true sense of the word that scholars could examine to understand Japanese statesmanship.

The same thing can be send of politicians, ambassadors, and government officials. In recent years, there have been those who have left their party or government agency and written "kiss and tell" stories, but in the end it remains a one-time phenomenon and the larger story is left untold

Due to this situation, not only does Japan's face not appear in Japanese politics and diplomacy, but is not left in the annals of international history. In this case, Japan loses, the world loses, and history loses.

In order not to lose any more, it is necessary for government officials to write and publish memoirs and their diaries, and to translate them into English. But there is one more thing the writer would like to recommend. In order to give a face to Japanese political and diplomatic studies, this writer would like to see a prime ministerial library system along the lines the U.S. presidential libraries system established in Japan.

What are U.S. Presidential Libraries?

Readers who have traveled to the U.S. to conduct research and gather documents will understand what I write, but the declassification system of the U.S. is quite advanced and archives around the country are well endowed from many perspectives. In particular, this is

particularly true of the U.S. National Archives and the Presidential Libraries under it. Not only do they possess a specialist staff, many documents, and outstanding facilities, but the Presidential Libraries also provide research funds in which to do ones work. It is almost no comparison when one looks at the poor environment when research is conducted in Japan.

By the way, the motto of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, established in 1934, is "democracy starts here." In other words, democracy begins at the archives, where one can view declassified documents. If there is no transparency and accountability, democracy does not function. One of America's strengths is that it actively declassifies official documents. Indeed, one of America's soft power strengths can be found in this very fact.

In addition to the National Archives II, found in the suburbs outside of Washington, D.C., the Presidential Libraries serve an important function.

Traditionally, the papers of the presidents were considered personal papers. When the administration ended, the papers of that administration became scattered. If luck prevailed, some of the papers found their way to the manuscript collection of the Library of Congress or were gathered, relatively intact, by a collector who knew their worth. However, in most cases, the papers were unfortunately lost. In other cases, if the families of former presidents retained the papers, access to them by researchers was restricted, and it was a long time before an objective look at the administration was possible.

In 1939, on the advice of scholars and historians, President Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to preserve documents from his administration for future generations, and set aside a part of his estate at Hyde Park (16 hectares) for the construction of a library and museum. Donations from friends and ordinary citizens covered the construction costs.

While it is not more than a guess, one reason that Roosevelt probably recognized the importance of preserving the documents from his administration was due to the fact that the size of the government grew during his administration, and as a result he saw the need for their preservation.

That necessity only grew during and after the war. That was because America went from a country that was self-isolated and did not really involve itself in international affairs to one that became the leader of the Allies and then of the Free World.

President Harry S. Truman, who succeeded Roosevelt in 1945 when the latter died, also decided to begin construction on a library and museum in 1950. Ordinary citizens and friends of Truman conributed to the building of the library and museum in his hometown of Independence, Missouri, and Truman, who lived for almost 20 years after his administra-

tion ended, used an office in the library.

In 1955, Congress passed the Presidential Libraries Act which was a law that made possible a government-private sector partnership in which donations would be used to build the libraries and museums and government funds to run the libraries. Afterwards, each president has built libraries and museums, and NARA is in charge of the papers of 12 administrations, from Herbert Hoover to William J. Clinton.

Readers might assume that all of the presidents come from the East Coast of the United States, but in fact, with the exception of Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, the other ten presidents of the past 12 administrations are from the Midwest and West Coast. As a result, when visiting these libraries and museums, it is a great opportunity to go to a place one might not normally get to.

As mentioned above, the Ford Presidential Library is located in the state of Michigan, a place someone like me from the East Coast does not normally go to. In addition, in the case of the Ford Library, his museum is actually located not in Ann Arbor but in the city of Grand Rapids, which is the central part of his former electoral district when he was in the House of Representatives. While it is two hours away from the library by car, it is worth the trip. Ford was a simple man, but he served fairly and honestly in a very difficult time following the resignation of Richard M. Nixon, and did a great job.

When I wrote that NARA manages the records of 12 administrations, I purposely did not use the word "library" due to the problem of the Nixon Administration papers. As readers know, Nixon was found to have interfered in the investigation of the political scandal known as "Watergate," and was forced to resign in August 1974. In order to preserve the integrity of the administration's papers, Congress blocked the transfer of his administration's papers to the Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, California. In addition, Congress passed the Presidential Records Act in 1978, which clarified that the papers of an administration are the property of the government and not of the individual. Until then, it was quite vague, but the Presidential Records Act made it law.

Currently, the papers of the Nixon Administration are in the National Archives II building in College Park and are available to researchers. Nixon's papers prior to when he was president, and following his presidency until his passing away in 1994, are stored in his library and museum in southern California.

Like the documents in the National Archives, the papers in respective Presidential Libraries are declassified at certain intervals and by using the 1966 Freedom of Information Act, researchers can request documents to be declassified. After a review, the document

will either become available in full or in part.

Professional staff are found in each of the libraries. They are extremely knowledgeable not only about the administration, but also about the life and times of that president and the people that made up the administration. With the many documents available, the professional and courteous staff, and the ability to experience the hometown of that president, the presidential libraries provide a wonderful environment in which to do research. Moreover, users have the opportunity to meet and learn about other researchers on the president or administration or his policies, and as this network expands, you are able to provide help to one another on the research.

In addition to the research facilities, the Presidential Libraries serve another function, namely the presence of museums in the same complex (with the exception of the Ford Museum, explained above). In the museums can be found displays of the period of America in which the president served (and grew up in), videos, photos, as well as a scene by scene reenactment of the childhood, education, and career of the president in a very realistic manner. This is not only of great interest to the researcher, but helps promote civics for visitors, whether adults or elementary, middle school, and high school students alike. Furthermore, foundations exist at each of the libraries in order to fund the activities of the libraries and museums, and these foundations also provide travel and other grants to facilitate research. These grants are not limited to Americans, but are available for researchers around the world to use the collections.

In addition, the libraries and museums sponsor on almost a weekly basis public forums and exhibitions. For example, one of the more well known events in recent memory was the farewell speech of United Nations Secretary General Kofi A. Annan at the Truman Presidential Library, the video and text of which is available on the Internet. Annan called on America to exercise the type of positive leadership exhibited in the 1940s.

Many of the libraries also sponsor "centers" for public policy. The most famous is the Carter Center at the James E. Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, Georgia. The Carter Center is actively promoting peace-building, monitoring elections, fighting poverty and disease, and doing a number of other things. Similarly, Nixon, who was famous for his diplomatic skills, helped to create the Nixon Center before his passing, which is involved in educating the American public of international affairs and America's national interests.

One more important function of the libraries is to provide an office to the former presidents. Despite retiring, the prestige of the president is very high and he often is tasked by his own government, foreign governments, and the United Nations to use that prestige on

behalf of mankind. As a result, an office for this person is necessary. Similarly, in the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, for example, Johnson's wife has an office there, and until his passing, Johnson's National Security Advisor, Dr. Walt W. Rostow, maintained one and was regularly there. When a researcher had a question about a document, he or she could actually ask the former official in person. This was an incredible opportunity that this writer used as much as I could when I did research there in the summer of 2000.

Establishing and Supporting Prime Ministerial Libraries

In light of the above, the reader can see how pitifully far behind Japan's research environment is. What's more, it is quite ironic that when writing about Japan's postwar history, researchers actually have to use American materials, as the United States is much further ahead in declassification of its documents.

It goes without saying that the Japanese government needs to declassify more of its records; at the same time, this writer would like to suggest the establishment of a system for Prime Ministerial Libraries in Japan.

Of course, there are several foundations and memorial halls already, but it is necessary to strengthen them by creating a national system.

With the exception of Uno Sosuke, who passed away in 1998, Takeshita Noboru and Obuchi Keizo, who both died in 2000, and Hashimoto Ryutaro, who died last year (2006) in July, eight of the remaining prime ministers from Nakasone Yasuhiro to Koizumi Junichiro are alive, and it would make sense to begin with their administrations.*

The Prime Ministerial Libraries could be built in the hometown or at their alma maters. It would lead to the renaissance of local communities were the libraries to be built in the hometowns, and to strengthening the resources of universities, struggling financially as they are, in the latter case. Like American presidents, many Japanese prime ministers are from the countryside. Few people get the chance to visit Okayama, Gunma, Oita, Kumamoto, and other areas, but were a prime minister's library and museum located there, visitors would certainly increase.

Although it is on the decline now, Japan in recent years has been promoting the "Yokoso! Japan" campaign, to invite more foreigners to visit Japan, but the reality is that

* Miyazawa Kiichi passed away on June 28, 2007, after this article had been submitted.

these visitors rarely make it outside of the main sightseeing areas. If there is a prime ministerial library and museum, not only would the researcher go and visit there, but his or her family and friends would likely come as well (For example, this writer received a travel grant to go to the Ford Presidential Library, and while there befriended a couple from Italy, who were researchers and had also received a similar travel grant. The two young researchers and I traveled around together, dining, shopping, and sightseeing, during the week we were working at the Library.)

Both local governments and the central government are in dire financial straits, but if the construction of the library and museum and management of the records were made a joint venture between the private and public sectors, then it might be possible to do it in a way that both sides would find financially acceptable.

This might sound like an economic stimulus package, but it is not meant as so. However, if it does in fact lead to the economic stimulus of local communities, all the better.

One more effect is the enhancement of research. If materials are properly cared for and easy to use, it will lead to giving a face to the research for Japan's politics and diplomacy and make that research more detailed and reliable. Likewise, with these materials, it becomes possible to review the policy process and conduct policy studies, historical research, and studies on leadership. Moreover, it becomes possible to examine what Japan's postwar contributions were, and if the research goes well enough, to uncover unknown or highlight undervalued contributions.

If the Prime Ministerial Libraries, like their counterparts in the U.S., provide research grants to foreign researchers, then the results of the research will be published abroad. With these results, Japan will begin to take on a presence in international history.

As this research continues and the libraries and museums become more and more developed, a healthy form of "patriotism" will grow among the elementary, middle, and high school students.

A true "Beautiful Country" is in the end its people, the people of Japan and its leaders. Isn't it therefore necessary for there to be a place to commemorate the accomplishments of the people and their leaders alike in the form of prime ministerial libraries?

Toward Real Soft Power

Over the past few years, there has been an increased interest in Japan's public diplomacy, but it is focused on food, *anime*, and the like. Soft power that truly moves and moti-

vates international politics is one with a rich history, culture, and institutions. While Japan is not conspicuous, it does have a great record in democracy, administration, education, diplomacy, economic, and other fields, and there have been many outstanding individuals who promoted this.

Why Japan does not introduce this record more abroad is a great mystery. If Japan truly wishes to promote its soft power, it is necessary to introduce more the path that it has taken in the postwar and the individual prime ministers who made this possible. Aggressively declassifying its records, and establishing a system of prime ministerial libraries and museums are the first steps in this process.