Historiography, especially narration of a seminal event like the Second World War, plays a significant role in the formation of modern nation-states. It has been argued that “public commemoration of war” is one the few “honest ritual occasions during which nationhood, even if complex and disputed,” can be brought into being and revalidated.1 But in order to conduct “public commemoration of war” as a national event or “ritual,” a particular set of perspectives on the war needs to be shared broadly across the society, so that the audience and participants—the citizens—can have a common conceptual foundation, providing the basis on which a public commemoration can be carried out.

This conceptual foundation not only helps citizens to shape the perception of their own culture and to define who they are, it also defines others, and in particular, it defines enemies. Creation or “production” of such perspectives within a society is arguably never neutral or objective. The agents involved in this activity always have their own agendas, targeted at and at the same time shaping particular audiences. This activity also brings certain kinds of benefits—political, economic, or other—to those engaged in it. Looking at the intersection of history and memory, this chapter sets out to explore and compare efforts at creating shared perceptions of the Second World War (hereafter “the War”) in Taiwan.

By examining textbooks produced in different historical periods, this chapter will analyze how perspectives on the War were constructed and disseminated via the agency of different government authorities for the consumption of the Taiwanese public. When the War began in the 1930s, Taiwan had been under Japanese colonial rule for more than three decades. The island was particularly heavily involved in Japan’s war effort from 1941 to 1945. At the end of the War, however, Japanese rule was terminated and Taiwan was handed over to the Chinese Nationalist government. As two opposing regimes in the War had ruled Taiwan one after another, perceptions of the War as constructed and

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1 Hans J. van de Ven. 1996. “War in the Making of Modern China,” Modern Asian Studies (Special Issue: War in Modern China) 30, no. 4: 751.
disseminated in Taiwan by these two regimes showed a sharp contrast in their content. Such a contrast will help us to identify the agenda each regime was pursuing through their nationalistic and patriotic rhetoric.

To compare this activity under the two regimes each side of 1945, this chapter will firstly examine various textbooks published and adopted by the Taiwan Sōtokufu 臺灣總督府 (Taiwan Government-General), the highest Japanese colonial authority in Taiwan, and analyze what information was made known and presented to schoolchildren about the War while the War was still going on. Secondly, it will examine textbooks published and adopted by the Chinese authorities in the immediate postwar period, in order to compare them with narratives about the War produced and disseminated before 1945. In particular, this essay will examine how these two political regimes localized narratives about the War, and also explore the implications of these localizations in Taiwan for the consumption of the Taiwanese people.

Presentation of the War in Japanese Colonial Texts Before 1945

The Taiwan Government-General began to implement mandatory elementary education in 1943. More than 65% of school-age Taiwanese children were enrolled in schools at that time. The enrolment rate rose to 71% in 1944, and by the end of the War it was reported at above 80%. As school enrollment expanded and the proportion of the educated population rose at the height of the War, elementary school textbooks became a crucial vehicle in constructing and disseminating knowledge of the War. And in addition to textbooks used in regular schools, the Taiwan Government-General also published non-school texts—designed for the consumption of a wider Taiwanese audience who were not enrolled in school or beyond school age—such as Taiwan seinen tokuhon 臺灣青年讀本 (Reader for Taiwanese Youth).

These school and non-school texts produced and circulated by the colonial authorities (hereafter referred to as “colonial texts”) both played a significant role in shaping the Taiwanese knowledge of the War up to the end of the colonial rule in 1945. To provide a more comprehensive overview, this chapter will

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2 Xu Peixian 許佩賢. 2005 Zhimindi Taiwan de jindai xuexiao 殖民地台灣的近代學校 (Modern Schools in Colonial Taiwan). Taipei: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, p. 179.
4 Taiwan Sōtokufu. 1943. Taiwan seinen tokuhon 臺灣青年讀本 (Reader for Taiwanese Youth). Taipei: Taiwan Education Association.