

The Grave Legacy of Japan's Colonialism: Hate Speech, Comfort Women, and Ahn Jung-Guen*

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Introduction

Japan's increasingly antagonistic diplomatic relationship with Korea and China has been deteriorating in recent years and is now the worst it has been in postwar history (WEDGE Infinity, 2015). The political climate surrounding Japan and its neighbors is greatly affecting the descendants of colonial citizens, especially those from Korea, China, the Philippines, and Taiwan. Categorized as foreign residents under Japan's nationality law, colonial descendants who have been living in Japan for multiple generations have nearly no civic rights, such as suffrage or eligibility to be political candidates, unless they become naturalized Japanese citizens. However, placing them "foreign residents" is not appropriate because many of them were born in Japan. The fact that the Japanese government and society have neglected to integrate the descendants of colonial subjects is one of the many unsettled issues regarding Japanese colonialism. Japan's wartime legacy continues to be embedded in its national policy and its treatment of descendants of colonial subjects.

Japan has been criticized for not properly acknowledging its brutal colonial rule during its period of imperialism. John Dower (2012) warns that Japan's long tradition of sanitizing history will most likely continue to trigger serious conflicts with neighboring countries in the future. "Japan's sense of victimization" has been the major sentiment that most Japanese people have about the Asia-Pacific War in general. Japan's self perception highlighted "the sense of victimization" and downplayed its war responsibility to Asia (Tanaka, 2006). The lack of explanations of the war memory has been sharply criticized as "Japan's non-stop historic amnesia" (Barry, 2005) and the "forced silence of history to the Japanese people and Asian people" (Makino, 2017). On May 5, 2015, more than 450 scholars, most of whom were Western, urged Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to boldly confront Japan's wartime past. Yet he did not, which shows that the conservative leader still wants to dilute Japan's past injustices (Sieg, 2015).

In this paper, three unresolved issues concerning Japan's colonial past that continue to affect the present are discussed: (1) Japan's racism and xenophobia toward Koreans, Chinese and Filipinos; (2) the controversial debates surrounding the issue of comfort women (sex slaves); and (3) the historical and political significance of Ahn Jung-Geun, a famous patriotic Korean who assassinated Japan's first Prime Minister and Resident General in Korea, Itō Hirofumi, in 1909. This paper attempts to expose multiple perspectives on the varied and often conflicting "historical facts" surrounding these issues and explore

what war means to the different groups of people affected by Japan's colonial past.

Racial discrimination against Koreans and Chinese

When proposing that Tokyo host the 2020 Summer Olympics, Japanese officials emphasized Japan's safety and security. However, minority residents do not feel Japan safe due to the high rate of hate crimes and xenophobia toward ethnic minority communities. Although it did not involve ethnic minorities, the killing of 19 physically disabled people by a Japanese man in Sagami-hara is a symbolic case that has triggered immense fear among marginalized groups in Japan.

At dawn on July 27, 2016, Satoshi Uematsu, a 26-year-old former employee of a home for patients with disabilities in Sagami-hara, crept into the rooms of his former patients and stabbed each of them in their sleep. Eighteen died immediately and 27 were fatally injured. This was one of the worst hate crimes against people with disabilities and the worst massacre in Japan since World War II. What is most disturbing is Uematsu's intent: he had previously told his doctor that he agreed with the ideology of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, and he had boasted about his plan to kill 470 people with disabilities (McKirdy & Griffiths, 2016).

Mass murders are relatively rare in Japan, but the country has experienced sporadic death threats and sporadic attacks (McCurry, 2016). On an Internet broadcast, the leader of an extremely right-wing, chauvinist group, Makoto Sakurai, made comments about "hunting Koreans," implying that he supported genocide of the Korean people (CNN iReport, 2013). His remark is causing widespread fear among Korean people living in Japan.

There is a long history of racial discrimination against Korean and Chinese residents in Japan. The massacre of 6,000 Koreans during the aftermath of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake is one of the most horrible incidents. As a result, the descendants of former colonized citizens of Korea and China—comprising the largest minority groups in Japan—worry about their safety and wonder whether a similar massacre might occur if another natural disaster strikes (Yamada, 2011; Kato, 2014). Miyoko Kudo (2009) denied the mass killing, or rather, justified the murders in her book, *Kanto Daishinsai-Chosenjin gyakusatuno shinjitsu* [*The Kanto Earthquake — The Facts of the Massacre of Koreans*], by claiming that Koreans had committed violent crimes and rapes. Yasuo Kato (2014), also published a book titled *Kanto daishinsai, Chosenjin gyakusatsu wa nakatta* [*The Kanto Earthquake—The Fabricated Story of the Massacre of Koreans*]. The content of this book is almost the same as Kudo's. This anti-Korean perspective has begun to be spread among the Japanese majority today, especially after North Korea's launch of ballistic missiles.

Racism towards other non-Japanese people

The Japanese government initially took no action to combat hate speech in the country. But after receiving sharp criticism from the international community, the government reluctantly began to take action. The Ministry of Justice conducted a survey of 1,152 demonstrations in 29 urban and rural prefectures from April 2012 to September 2015. About 40% of the demonstrations were concentrated in Tokyo, Osaka-fu, Aichi-ken, and Hokkaido (Ministry of Justice, 2016).

The signs in these protests showed messages such as the following: "Kill them all!", "Strangle the

Koreans! Kill them!", "Kill the Koreans!", "Execution squad." "Hang the Koreans! Poison them! Let them jump off a building!", "Shit-eating gooks.", "Good or bad Koreans, it doesn't matter; kill them all", and "Kill the illegal aliens!" A placard also featured a picture of South Korean President Park Geun-hye next to the words, "Wanted Criminal; please help in arresting her" (Committee on the Protection of Human Rights of the Central Head Office of the Korean Residents Union in Japan, 2014).

Since Japan has no laws banning or regulating discrimination, prejudice, or racism, its social climate has recently become oppressive and dangerous for minority groups (Maeda, 2013; Morooka, 2013; Yasuda, 2015). Koreans are the main targets of hate speech, but the xenophobic attitude of right-wingers has targeted other foreigners, including illegal Filipino workers and their families.

In 2010, a Filipino family who had been living illegally in Japan was split up when the parents were ordered to return to the Philippines while their 13-year-old daughter Noriko Calderon stayed in Japan. The extremist, racist right-wing hate group *Zaitokukai* harassed the family, verbally assaulting them and other residents in their neighborhood (Japan Probe, 2008). However, Noriko is almost indistinguishable from the other Japanese girls in her junior high school; she was born in Japan, has spent her whole life there, and can only speak Japanese.

While these incidents have been attributed to various factors, the two most important are Japan's complete lack of anti-discrimination laws and the public's poor understanding of Japan's past history, minority communities' cultures, and human rights issues. More seriously, the Japanese government does not understand or enforce standard international human rights, and so far, it has been unwilling to pass laws regulating hate speech and hate crimes (International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism — Japan Committee, 2013).

Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his political goals

Unlike in Europe, history revisionists in Tokyo are quite common and include respected figures in Japanese society, such as politicians and journalists (Halpin, 2015). Prime Minister Abe Shinzo is a member of *Nippon Kaigi*, or the Japan Conference, an extremist right-wing group that is reshaping Japanese politics. About 80 percent of the Cabinet and half of the country's parliamentarians are also members of this group, making it perhaps Japan's most influential political organization (Carney, 2015). In total, there are 38,000 members who mobilize support, formulate the nation's policies, and aim to restore the mighty status of the Japanese Empire (Carney, 2015).

In 2013, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his deputy and finance minister, Taro Aso of the Liberal Democratic Party, took control of Japan. Abe has called for reconsideration of the 1993 and 1995 official apologies for wartime sexual slavery, and in 2001, he even pressured *Nippon Hoso Kyokai* [NHK; the Japan Broadcasting Corporation] to censor its previous reports of the issue. He has consistently denied the Nanjing Massacre and has stated that children's textbooks should instill "love" of "a beautiful country" by omitting the dark parts of Japan's past. Finally, he has declared that his political mission is "recovering Japan's independence" (*dokuritsu no kaifuku*) in the postwar order (Arudou, 2013).

Abe's election as Prime Minister in 2007 indicated a change in political power that has affected Japan's social climate. He gave up the position after 366 days due to illness, but he was re-elected on December 16, 2012. Since his re-election, Japan's diplomatic relationships with its nearest neighbors, especially Korea and China, have deteriorated. Abe's controversial actions and words have repeatedly

sparked fury, not only in Asian countries but also in the international community. On December 26, 2012, he visited the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors leaders convicted of war crimes by a tribunal of the Allies as well as Japanese citizens who died in the war, to pay his respects. Abe also made a public commitment to re-examine the Kono Statement on comfort women to restore Japan's disgraced image. His continuous unapologetic statements have infuriated Korea and China.

Wartime rape and military prostitution

Comfort women (Japanese: *Jyugun Ianfu*/従軍慰安婦) were women and girls who were forced into sex slavery by the Japanese Empire during World War II. The term “comfort” (慰安) is used euphemistically; the role of enslaved women was to “comfort” Japanese soldiers by providing sexual services. “Comfort stations” (従軍慰安所) were set up in Japan's occupied territories to prevent the increased local hostility generated by the rape of local women by Japanese soldiers and avoid the leakage of information through privately managed brothels. Prepubescent virgin girls were systematically targeted and forced into sex slavery by the military to decrease the spread of venereal diseases to Japanese soldiers (Yoshimi, 1995). The female victims were mostly from Korea, China, the Philippines, and Indonesia, and they were deceived, forcibly brought to Japan, or violently kidnapped in order to work in military-run brothels as sex slaves. The exact number is a matter of disagreement between Japan and Korea, with estimates ranging between 20,000 and 400,000. Despite the limited data available, many historians agree that Japan's comfort women system was one of the largest (if not the largest) wartime sexual slavery and prostitution institutions in history (Hicks, 1997; Yoshimi, 2009). A Dutch victim of the system, Jan Ruff-O'Herne, testified to the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs in 2007:

In the so-called “Comfort Station,” I was systematically beaten and raped day and night. Even the Japanese doctor raped me each time he visited the brothel to examine us for venereal disease. And to humiliate us even more, the doors and windows were left open, so the Japanese could watch us being examined (Comfort Women, 2007, p.25).

Terazawa (2014) pointed out that, unlike other cases of wartime rape and military prostitution, Japan's government and military were not only complicit in these acts of aggression but also organized the system; in most other cases, violence against women was largely perpetrated by individuals and privately managed brothels. As Ruff-O'Herne's testimony indicated, the fact that a Japanese doctor, who was sent expressly to ensure that women did not contract venereal disease, raped her each time he visited evinced the Japanese government's institutionalization and sanction of sex slavery within the military. Due to Japan's strong “shame culture” (Benedict, 1967), its history of comfort women and issues concerning sex are considered taboo and are often not acknowledged publicly. However, the fact that Japan has not confronted the issue of comfort women has ironically disgraced its image internationally.

Eternally buried in shame

Akihiro Miwa, a famous Japanese entertainer, talked to three former Japanese comfort women about their experiences (Miwa, 2013). Their stories illustrate the human trafficking system conducted by the Japanese military, the victims of which included Japanese women, since the Japanese government forced licensed brothels to close during the war. Until the US army made prostitution illegal in 1946, prostitution and human trafficking were rampant in Japan. The women who worked at brothels were from poor families, and some of them had been sold into prostitution by their parents. Thus, poverty, the male chauvinist society, and gender bias against females were the key factors behind the system.

Those who had lost their jobs at private brothels were asked by the local Japanese military agency to go to the frontlines and serve the Japanese soldiers. These women were sometimes forced to join the battle and fight alongside the Japanese soldiers. If they were killed in battle, their clothes were stripped off and changed to Chinese garments because the military felt that the participation of Japanese women in battle was shameful.

Miwa's story about Japanese comfort women shows the unimaginable circumstances faced by comfort women. For example, when the military withdrew from war zones, comfort women were left behind. These women had nowhere to go because the people in their hometowns, their family members, and even their parents were ashamed of them. They were told to leave their families or villages for good. During the occupation by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, brothels were opened again, but only American soldiers were permitted to use them. Survivors of comfort stations had to work as prostitutes again, but were of the lowest status due to their histories.

Miwa was so moved and infuriated by the women's stories that he composed a song entitled "Women and their homeland [*Sokoku to onnnatachi*/祖国と女たち]; song for comfort women" (Miwa, n. d.). The lyrics state that Japanese soldiers are honored and respected after death. However, these women, who sacrificed their lives for their country, would not be honored, but shamed. Although the issue of comfort women is supported by sound historical evidence, it is complicated, and the hidden truths surrounding this dark period in Japan's history have led to conflicting interpretations among victims, scholars, human rights activists, the public, and the government.

War memories across national borders—Ahn Jung-Geun

In the last section of this paper, the author would like to examine a historical figure, Ahn Jung-Geun (安重根, Korean pronunciation: andzungun, September 2, 1879–March 26, 1910, Christian name: Thomas), a Korean independence activist and pan-Asianist. Considered a national hero in Korea and a war criminal in Japan, the story of Ahn Jung-Geun symbolizes the impact of conflict on the two nations.

On October 26, 1909, he assassinated Itō Hirofumi, a four-time Prime Minister of Japan and former Resident General of Korea, following the signing of the Eulsa Treaty, which brought Korea to the verge of annexation by Japan. Ahn was posthumously awarded the Order of Merit for National Foundation in 1962 by the South Korean government, the most prestigious civil decoration in the Republic of Korea, for his efforts toward Korean independence. However, in Japan, Ahn is regarded as an assassin and terrorist who killed Itō Hirofumi, with little else is known about him. This exemplifies the contrasting war memories between Japan and Korea.

When China opened a memorial museum for Ahn Jung-Geun, the Minister of State Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga was upset. At a news conference, Suga called Ahn a terrorist and assassin (The Huffington Post, 2014). Suga's statement infuriated Korea and China and showed that Suga himself apparently did not know what kind of person Ahn Jung-Geun was.

Ryukoku University, where the author teaches, has four pieces of Ahn's written messages. For a long time, few people knew they were there; the university did not advertise possession of these messages due to the ambivalent views about Ahn Jung-Geun in Japan. One might wonder, then, why Ryukoku University possesses Ahn's calligraphic works. The university was founded as a Gakuryō educational facility for Jōdo Shinshū at Nishi Hongwanji in 1639. It is one of the oldest universities not only in Asia but also in the world. Jōdo Shinshū, also known as New Buddhism, was founded by Shinran Shonin (1173–1263), is the most widely practiced branch of Buddhism in Japan, with 20% of its population identifying themselves as members. Even before the Japanese colonization of Korea started in 1910, Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist monks were actively engaged in missionary work in Korea, such as serving as chaplains for prisoners.

The Jōdo School was introduced to Korea in 1897, and its first temple was built the following year. This occurred before Japan's annexation of Korea. During the Meiji Period, Japanese Buddhism was threatened by the emerging power of Shintoism, which became an official national ideology. Japanese Buddhism began to expand its religious activities overseas, and one of the sects of Jōdo Shinshū, Shinshu Otaniha, tried to recover its hegemony in the new territorial land, Korea (Kim, 2011). As a result, Japanese Buddhist missionaries were deeply involved in colonial politics (Yamamoto, 2010).

Ahn's friendship with the chaplain Tsuda Kaijyun

Ahn was a devout Catholic as well as a patriot. Japanese guards at Lǔshùn (旅順) Prison in Liao, Manchuria, such as Tohichi Chiba (千葉十七), immediately realized that Ahn was not an impulsive criminal, but a dignified soldier. Thus, the prison guards began to treat him with respect. One of them, a Japanese Buddhist priest, was appointed as Ahn's chaplain. Before Ahn was executed, he gave the priest three pieces of his calligraphic work as a symbol of their friendship. Tsuda Kaijun was the priest who brought these works to Japan, but it is not clear if he received the calligraphy from Ahn directly.

Despite the fact that in 1909, he cut off the last joint of the ring finger on his left hand as a pledge to kill Itō Hirofumi, all of Ahn's calligraphic works were beautifully drawn with his left hand. Tsuda secretly kept the calligraphic works at his temple, and after he died, his family deposited them at Ryukoku University so that Ahn's inspiring work could be utilized as an educational resource. Feeling obliged to do so, the author and her research colleagues established Ahn Jung-Geun's East Asia Peace Research Center at Ryukoku University in 2013. The purpose of the Center is to provide quality education to students at Ryukoku University, allowing them to gain an understanding of who Ahn Jung-Geun was and the social and political climates at the beginning of Japan's colonization of Korea.

Why did Ahn Jung-Geun kill Itō Hirofumi?

In court, Ahn Jung-Geun stated 15 reasons for killing Itō Hirofumi (Nakano, 1996), and one of the reasons was that Ito was responsible for the assassination of Emperor Komei (孝明天皇). Emperor

Komei (孝明天皇), who supported the Tokugawa government, died at the age of 36. Just after the Emperor's death, his demise was attributed to a natural death by smallpox as well as to poisoning, which Ahn believed Itō was responsible. Emperor Komei was the father of Meiji (the 121st Emperor), and Komei's presence was one of the greatest obstacles to Choshu-Clan's (長州藩) emerging political power. Emperor Komei's mysterious death enabled a shift in political power towards Itō Hirofumi, who advanced from the least powerful to the most powerful samurai in Japan. When his image was depicted on Japan's new 1,000-yen bill in 1963, neighboring countries—particularly Korea and China—criticized the move and the bill disappeared quickly (Tanaka, 1995).

Ahn Jung-Geun's pan-Asianism

Ahn was born on September 2, 1879 in Haeju, Hwanghae-do. Highly educated, he devoted himself to the education of the Korean people. In 1907, he exiled himself to Vladivostok, Russia to join the armed resistance against Japanese colonial rulers. When he shot Itō at Harbin Station, he screamed "Korean independence!" in Russian so the Russian soldiers could understand. Ahn strongly believed that Eastern Asian countries—China, Korea, and Japan—should collaborate to resist European colonialism. His ultimate desire was to restore peace in East Asia. However, since he killed Itō, the Japanese have not acknowledged Ahn's beliefs and values.

Ahn was a devout Christian who believed in peace and love beyond national borders and ethnic identities. After his arrest, he was sent to Lüshun (Japanese: 旅順) Prison in Dalian, China, where he began to write a paper entitled "On Peace in East Asia" (東洋平和論; 동양평화론). In this paper, he suggested that Korea, China, and Japan share a currency issued by a common bank. He also recommended a combined military to combat Western invasion and encouraged young people to study the languages of their neighboring countries. His ideas about East Asian unity were ahead of his time, paralleling those of the European Commission and the European Union (EU) today.

Ahn's calligraphic writings at Ryukoku University focus on three messages:

- People should be happy about their lives, and intellectuals should contribute to society with their knowledge and wisdom (『不仁者不可以久處約』).
- You should promptly try to find out things you do not know. You should not feel embarrassed to ask someone who is younger or less educated than yourself (『敏而好學不恥下問』).
- You should always stay humble and engage in self-reflection (『戒慎乎其所不睹』).

Conclusion

The relationship between Japan and Korea improved a great deal during the 1990s due to collaboration between Keizō Obuchi, the 84th Prime Minister of Japan, and Kim Dae-Jung, the eighth President of South Korea, to achieve reconciliation and peace. Obuchi's statement was issued in a meeting with Kim Dae-Jung. Past visits by South Korean leaders were also occasions for apologies from the Japanese government, but Obuchi's statement based on the 1995 Murayama discourse was more significant since it was a joint declaration issued by Obuchi and Kim Dae-Jung (Kristof, 1998). Additionally, during a dinner event with Dae-Jung on October 8, 1996, Emperor Akihito said, "There was a period when our nation brought to bear great sufferings upon the people of the Korean Peninsula. The

deep sorrow that I feel over this will never be forgotten" (Lisiero, 2015, p. 122).

Prime Minister Abe Shinzo changed the tone of Japan's "apology." On August 14, 2015, "We must not let our children, grandchildren and even further generations to come be predestined to apologize" (Prime Minister and his Cabinet, 2015). Note the strong contrast between Abe's statement and the speech the former President of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker, delivered during a ceremony commemorating the 40th anniversary of the end of the war and national-socialist tyranny at Bundestag, Bonn in 1985:

The vast majority of today's population were either children then or had not been born. They cannot profess a guilt of their own for crimes that they did not commit. No discerning person can expect them to wear a penitential robe simply because they are Germans. But their forefathers have left them a grave legacy. All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it. The young and old generations must and can help each other to understand why it is vital to keep alive the memories. It is not a case of coming to terms with the past. That is not possible. It cannot be subsequently modified or made undone. However, anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present. Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection. (Bundespraesident, 2015)

The same year that President von Weizsäcker delivered his speech, Prime Minister Nakasone visited the Yasukuni Shrine, an ongoing source of diplomatic friction between China and South Korea. The political stance set by Nakasone continues to be prevalent under the conservative Abe administration; the government not only continues to deny Japan's wartime atrocities and more nationalist groups are glorifying Japan's imperial past. President von Weizsäcker's statement, "Anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present. Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection," rings especially true for Japan, present and future.

Notes

* This is a modified version of the paper that the author presented at the 5th Bi-Annual International Conference of the Japanese Studies Association of Southeast Asia (JSA-ASEAN) (Dec. 15 & 16, 2016) as a plenary speaker on Dec. 15, 2016 in Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines.

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