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## Transnational History of Victimhood Nationalism – On the Transpacific Space<sup>1</sup>

### The Transnationality of Victimhood Nationalism

Contrary to the belief that nationalism is national, nationalism is one of the most peculiar transnational phenomena. Nationalist imagination can be fed often in the transnational space because national uniqueness or peculiarity can be brought into relief only by comparison with 'Others'. 'Victimhood nationalism' is no exception since victims without perpetrators are unthinkable, or vice versa. The collective dichotomy of victimizers and victims articulates the transnationality of the nationalism too. *Modus operandi* of the victimhood nationalism on the trans-pacific space is a good indication of the transnationality of the nationalism. But the political consumption of the victimhood seems to be national rather than transnational. Once put into the dichotomy of victimizers and victims in national terms, the victimhood becomes hereditary and thus consolidates the national collective beyond generations. In this essay I'd like to explore how the victimhood as a historical culture, be level of consciousness or sub-consciousness, has justified the nationalism on the transpacific space of collective memories.

The epistemological binary of collective guilt and collective innocence facilitates the victimhood as a historical culture. In the categorical thinking of the collective guilt, "people supposedly are guilty of, or feel guilty about, things done in their name but not by them."<sup>2</sup> Along with the collective guilt, the collective innocence contributes to building a strong solidarity among the self-claimed victims. The muscular ties inside victimhood community seem the most salient point in the postwar *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. I would like to suggest the term 'victimhood nationalism' as a working hypothesis to explain the competing national memories over the historical position of victims in coming to terms with the pasts.<sup>3</sup> The 'victim-

<sup>1</sup> The original version of this essay was published in *History Compass* vol. 7 (November, 2009). The present essay is slightly modified with a focus on the trans-pacific space.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 278.

<sup>3</sup> See Lim, Jie-Hyun, 'Hüisaengja Ŭisik Minjökjuüi (Victimhood Nationalism)', *Bipyung (Criticism)*, 15 (Summer, 2007), 154–176; "Victimhood Nationalism: Compelling or Competing?" *The Korea Herald*, April 9, 2007.

hood nationalism' is complete when victimhood becomes hereditary in the historical imagination. Without a reflection on the interplay of the collective guilt and victimhood nationalism, the postwar *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* cannot be properly grasped. A transnational history of 'coming to terms with past' would show that victimhood nationalism has been a rock to any historical reconciliation effort. The trans-pacific space has been the battlefield of competing collective memories for the position of victims.

What is most stunning phenomenon in the victimhood nationalism is the magical metamorphosis of the individual victimizer into the collective victim. This magic has been often unnoticed in 'a distasteful competition over who suffered most'.<sup>4</sup> It is through this magic that individual perpetrators could be exonerated from one's own criminal doings. One can find a vivid example from the Ludański brothers' successive self-exonerations in Poland. As the only living convicted for the genocide in Jedwabne, they defined themselves as 'a victim of fascism, of capitalism, of the *Sanacja* regime' in the era of People's Poland. After the 'Fall', capitalism and the *Sanacja* regime were replaced by socialism and People's Poland in the Ludański brothers' memories of victimhood: "like the whole nation we suffered under the Germans, the Soviets, and the People's Republic of Poland."<sup>5</sup> Individual victimizers became collective victims by hiding themselves behind the memory wall of the national victimhood. What one witnesses in this metamorphosis is the obsession with the collective innocence and victimhood.

Victimhood nationalism has the sacralization of memories as its epistemological ally since sacralized memories effectively block the skeptical and critical eyes of the outsiders to 'our own unique past'. Perhaps a certain degree of sacralization of memories is inevitable for individuals, which makes the past into a unique event incomparable with the others' experiences. On the contrary, the collective memory comes into being by communication, education, commemoration, rituals and ceremonies among the masses. A memory evoked tends to become fixed in a stereotype and installs itself in the place of raw memories.<sup>6</sup> By nature, such a collective memory cannot be sacralized. Rather it is an arena of political contestation. In reality, however, the sacralization of memories has been rampant especially in discourses of victimhood nationalism. Sacralized memories effectively block the skeptical and critical eyes of the outsiders to 'our own unique past'. In this unique past, nationalists could find the mental enclave where they can enjoy a morally comfortable position, regardless of whether these heirs of historical victimhood become today's perpetrators. The colloquial thesis of 'you, foreigners can never ever understand our own tragic national past' defends victimhood nationalism against historical

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<sup>4</sup> Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic 'introduction', Polonsky and Michlic (eds.), *The Neighbors Responded: The controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Bikont, 'We of Jedwabne', in *Neighbors Responded*, 268, 294.

<sup>6</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 24.

scrutiny.<sup>7</sup> Once exposed to the light of comparative analysis, however, sacralized memories are open to communication with others. And the seemingly solid victimhood nationalism, I hope, melts away into air.

Along with the task of desacralizing national memories, the transnationality of victimhood nationalism demands a multilayered *histoire croisée* approach to comprehend the entangled past of the victimized and victimizers in the colonial and dictatorship era. For instance victimhood nationalisms among the victimized in Poland, Israel and Korea should be examined with a focus on the interplay of perpetrators and victims, collective guilt and innocence. Very often it is not difficult to find the outcry of the victimhood nationalism among victimizers in Germany and Japan, which in turn strengthens the victimhood nationalism among victims. Indeed victimhood nationalism has been nourished on the ‘antagonistic complicity of nationalisms’ in East Asia.<sup>8</sup> One should recognize the asymmetry between victims in the victimized/colonized nation and victims in the victimizing/colonizing nations, but the vicious circle of victimhood nationalisms should not be excused by that asymmetry on the collective abstract.

Arguably, a multi-layered *histoire croisée* analysis would reveal messy complexities of the historical reality such as the antagonistic complicity of nationalisms between the victimizers and victims, plurality of individual and collective relations among the victimizers and victims, victimizers’ perception of the collective self as victims, individual victims victimized by the victimhood in abstract, and the floating division of victimizers and victims. Postcolonial perspectives throw a critical gaze at the victimhood nationalism. Victimhood nationalism is no longer a weapon of criticism by the victimized but a criticism of weapon by the newly emerging national power elites. In this essay I will concentrate mainly on a transnational history of the victimhood nationalism in the trans-pacific space of collective memories.

### <From Heroes to victims: Hereditary Victimhood in Korea>

In January of 2007, Yoko Kawashima Watkins’ autobiographical novella *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* brought the Korean mass media and intellectual podium to a vociferous turmoil.<sup>9</sup> Major newspapers in Korea covered this novella for more than a month. This *Bildungsroman* tells how the narrator, an 11-year-old Japanese girl, and her family were faced with threats on their lives, hunger and fear of sexual

<sup>7</sup> I have encountered this colloquial thesis most frequently from ordinary Poles in street. It is intriguing that many a ‘Western’ historian of Korean history shares the similar experience in Korea in which they were dissuaded not to study Korean history.

<sup>8</sup> Lim, Jie-Hyun, “The Antagonistic Complicity of Nationalisms-On Nationalist Phenomenology in East Asian History Textbooks,” Steffi Richter ed., *Contested Views of a Common Past: Revisions of History in Contemporary East Asia* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2008), pp. 205-222; *Jōgdaejōk Gongbūmjadeul (Antagonistic Accomplices)* (Seoul: Sonamu, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* (New York: Beech Tree, 1994). 요코 카와시마 왓킨스, <요코 이야기> (서울: 문학동네, 2005).

assault on their way home to Japan from Nanam, a North Korean town, upon Japan's defeat in World War II. Based on her own experience and memory, this story describes vividly the ordeal Japanese expellees had to go through. No less than three million Japanese expellees from the Manchuria and North Korean region are said to have encountered a similar fate on their way back home, an East Asian version of the East European 'wypędzenie-Vertreibung'. The postwar Japan produced stories of these expellees' ordeals, which can be classified into the narrative of *Hikiage* (引揚: salvage?). Yoko Kawashima Watkins' memoir belongs to the narrative of *Hikiage*. *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* was not the first Japanese *Hikiage* literature translated into Korean. Another *Hikiage* story by Hujiwara Dei (1949) was translated into Korean during the Korean Civil War in 1951, which remains interestingly enough one of fifty bestsellers in Korea since 1945. Perhaps it may have appealed much to Koreans who were suffering from the civil war at the time.<sup>10</sup>

Translated into Korean in 2005, Yoko Kawashima Watkins' novella enjoyed a positive, though lukewarm, response from the Korean Mass Media. Media reviews of this book were neither enthusiastic nor critical. On May 13, 2005 *Yonhap News* reviewed it as 'an autobiographical novella to describe the story of Japanese expellees upon Japan's defeat'. *Chosun-Ilbo* published a book review on 6 of May that reads: "Leaving aside the nationality (of the author), it can be evaluated as a *Bildungsroman* to describe in serenity how the war can bring a whole family to an ordeal." Inferred from those book reviews, "*So Far from the Bamboo Grove*" seemed not to make a deep impression to journalists of the literary section. It was not a success in marketing either. Fewer than three thousand copies had been sold in a year and a half. Seemingly, Yoko Watkins' book was doomed to be forgotten among Korean readers.

But suddenly this novella was caught in the cross-fire of four major Korean newspapers and one news agency on January 18, 2007, which was followed by a series of attack. The social pressure was so enormous that the Korean publisher *Munhakdongne*, having tried to defend the book in vain, had to make a quick decision to withdraw all copies from the book stores. It seems not a coincidence that the Korean consulate in the Boston area sent a protest letter to the Massachusetts state department of education on January 16, 2007. The difference in local time between Boston and Seoul implies that there was no time lag between the Korean consulate's protest in Boston and mass media coverage of *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* in Seoul. According to a report of the *Boston Globe*, the main protesting point was that Yoko Kawashima Watkins' novella describes Koreans as evil perpetrators while the Japanese remain innocent victims.<sup>11</sup> The Korean consulate expressed its deep concern that young Americans would be tempted to the distorted and faked past of East Asia if they read *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* in schools.

An archaeological excavation of this weird uproar reveals the PAAHE (Parents for an Accurate Asian History Education) behind the scene which initiated the tsunami of the long distance nationalism. This group consists of Korean-Americans in

<sup>10</sup> Yoon, Sang In, 'Sunandamüi Yuhok', *Bipyung*, 15 (Summer, 2007), 197-98.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/west/2007/02/korean\\_official.html](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/west/2007/02/korean_official.html).

the New York City and Great Boston area, many of whom are well-educated medical doctors and lawyers.<sup>12</sup> It was these Korean Americans of the PAAHE who took the initiative in the trans-Pacific criticism of the *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*. They were furious at that Yoko Kawashima Watkins, widely read at schools, who portrays Koreans as evil perpetrators and Japanese as innocent victims to American school girls and boys who are largely ignorant of East Asian history.

Their wording of criticism sounds very positivistic. The PAAHE is seeking for 'accurate Asian history' whose clear-cut accuracy does not allow the complexity and ambiguity. Very often 'distortion of truth', 'fabrication of facts', 'historical lies' are heard.<sup>13</sup> It is by the initiative of the PAAHE that the Korean press turned its negligent eyes to the *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* in January of 2007. As it crosses the Pacific to Korea, the accusation snowballed. The Yoko Kawashima Watkins was suspected and branded as a daughter of the Japanese war criminal, 'presumably' an officer of Unit 731 infamous for its bio-warfare experiments. Despite the PAAHE's obsession with accurate history, their suspicion of the Japanese war criminal's daughter has yet to be proven. But this suspicion of itself was enough to give an impression that Yoko as the daughter of a Japanese war criminal could not be an innocent victim. That criticism seems very vulnerable to the historical reality that shows clearly the suffering of the Japanese expellees from Manchuria and Korean peninsula.

What made the PAAHE members most impatient is the reversed order of victims and victimizers. In the schematic dichotomy of collective guilt and innocence, the Japanese as an absolute category becomes a uniform mass of victimizers. The bitter experience of the Japanese expellees as individuals stands no longer as a fact under the abstract category of the Japanese as perpetrators. The schematic dichotomy of collective guilt and innocence in terms of the nation, deeply rooted among Korean Americans, seems to reinforce the ethnocentric self-identity among them. It is in the same vein that the Chinese diaspora in the USA have seized on the Nanjing Massacre to perceive an ethnic identity. Many American Jews cling to the sanctity of the Holocaust as basic to their identity too.<sup>14</sup> In a sense the victimhood memory has been a mainstay of the long distance nationalism among the diaspora communities in the USA. What is at issue here is the Korean Americans' parental concern of their kids. It is supposed that their kids are subject to the bullying of American school-mates just because they are ethnic descendents of Koreans as terrible victimizers depicted in the *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*.

Perhaps American intellectuals' ignorance of the historical suffering of the East Asian people, in stark contrast with their keen concern about the Jewish suffering, made the American readership of *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* complicated so

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<sup>12</sup> [http://issue.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2007/02/15/2007021500361.html](http://issue.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2007/02/15/2007021500361.html)

<sup>13</sup> The protest emails from members of the PAAHE to my column of victimhood nationalism in *The Korea Herald* show the 'intellectual absolutism' of 'our truth' and 'Yoko Watkins's lie', which is justified by the positivistic conception of history.

<sup>14</sup> Joshua A. Fogel ed., *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

far.<sup>15</sup> The PAAHE's criticism might have targeted the Eurocentrism which dominates American perception of the historical suffering. Unfortunately, however, the PAAHE's perspective failed to problematize that Eurocentrism and could not escape from the schematic dichotomy of the Japanese victimizers and Korean victims. That way of reasoning inherent to the collective guilt shows how they are caught in the hegemonic ethnic nationalism of Korea, while Korea has come to be a multinational and multicultural country long after their emigration. Ethnocentrism in the emigrants' long distance nationalism is stronger than that of homeland nationalism in Korea.

This farcical tumult shows us a vivid, though not accurate, example of how victimhood nationalism is nourished by the trans-pacific long distance nationalism and vice versa. Indeed the victimhood comes into a relief on the transnational space more than the national one. The transnationality of victimhood nationalism regarding Yoko Watkins's novella is not confined to the trans-pacific space, but broadened into the global space. The globalization of the victimhood nationalism is witnessed well in the frequent emphasis of historical parallelism between Jews and Koreans as victims. One customer review of the *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* by a Korean American in Amazon.com reads: "it is completely distorting the truth about the Japanese WW2 aggressions and atrocities. It makes as if atrocities were committed by the victims rather than the aggressor... If Anne Frank were a German and she were still alive to this day and if she wrote about the mindless rapes committed by Jewish resistance fighters and Jewish American soldiers after WW2 and no mention was made about the Holocaust during WW2. Wouldn't you think that is a DISTORTION of history?" The other customer review reads similarly: "This book is akin to an escape narrative of an SS officer's family running away from Birkenau Auschwitz concentration camp while the heroin daughter of the Nazi officer is running away from cruel and dangerous Jews freed from concentration camps and Poles. Such a narrative is morally irresponsible and disgusting material to force upon innocent children."<sup>16</sup>

These customer reviews can be read as a criticism of the decontextualization of history in the novella of Yoko Kawashima Watkins. The decontextualization of history in Yoko Watkins's novella is in stark contrast with Guenther Grass's novella *Im Krebsgang*. While *Im Krebsgang* focuses on the tragic fate of about eight thousand German civilian refugees on the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, which was torpedoed and

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<sup>15</sup> A history of perceiving East Asian history in the American context may justify their worry partly. See Yoneyama Lisa, 'Asiagye Mikukin gwa Ilboüi Jönjaengbömjoi', A Paper Presented to 4<sup>th</sup> Symposium of Korean-Japanese Solidarity 21. July 14. 2007. Carter Eckert's insistence on the necessity of a proper historical annotation on the Japanese colonial rule to Yoko Kawashima Watkins' novella can be understood in the similar context. He also recommends to read Richard Kim's *Lost Names* along with Yoko Watkins, which depicts a Korean boy's hardship under the Japanese colonial rule. See Carter Eckert, "A matter of context," *The Boston Globe*, December 16, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.amazon.com/review/product/0844668109/ref=cm\\_cr\\_dp\\_all\\_helpful?%5Fencoding=UTF8&coliid=&showViewpoints=1&colid=&sortBy=bySubmissionDate-Descending](http://www.amazon.com/review/product/0844668109/ref=cm_cr_dp_all_helpful?%5Fencoding=UTF8&coliid=&showViewpoints=1&colid=&sortBy=bySubmissionDate-Descending)

sunk by a Soviet submarine, it never fails to contextualize historically that disaster by alluding to the history of the ship in service of the Nazi's 'Strength through Joy' campaign, the Nazi career of its dedicatee, and the existence of non-civilians on board. This novella carries the message that reads the thousands of German victims on the board of *Wilhelm Gustloff* in consideration of their roles as Nazi collaborators-victimizers. The historical meandering implied in the title of the 'crabwalk' gives a warning against the naïve dichotomy of victimizers and victims in the abstract level and absolute terms. Grass's balanced contextualization of the tragedy of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* does not necessarily endorse the overcontextualization of the colonial history to negate any suffering of the ordinary Japanese on the ground that she/he belongs to the Japanese nation. If de-contextualization of the colonial history was the Yoko Watkins's narrative strategy, the overcontextualization was the counter-narrative of the victimhood nationalism in Korea.

The historical parallelism between Jews and Koreans in these customer reviews of Amazon.com seems a narrative tactic to convince American readers that victims are not Japanese but Koreans. But its origin is traced back to the era of development dictatorship. The Jewish-Korean historical parallelism had been not rare in the Korean nationalist discourse through 1960s and 1970s. But it had been focused not on the victimhood but on heroism. In the era of Park Chung Hee's development dictatorship, Israelis' Zionism occupied a role model to be followed by Koreans. The impressive victory of Israel in the Six Days' War, supposedly unexpected, was hailed as the victory of the patriotism among young Israelis. Newspapers were filled with stories, believe it or not, of American Jews who volunteered to the Israel's army at the cost of comfortable lives, honeymooners who came back to the front after canceling the honeymoon, self-sacrificing heroes rather than passive victims. Leaders of the 'New Village Movement' and 'industrial worriers' were trained regularly in the collective farm called '*Ganaan*'. Park Chung Hee's regime tried to justify the self-mobilization system of mass dictatorship in South Korea by modeling on Israel. It was not passive subjects but heroic agency who could meet the demands of self-mobilizing mass dictatorship. A scant look at the post-colonial Korean historiography reveals that heroism goes hand in hand with victimhood in the nationalist discourse.

### <From Victimizers to Victims: Apologetic Memory in Japan>

Ernest Renan's insight that "shared suffering unites people more than common joy, and mourning is better than victory for the national memory"<sup>17</sup> is not confined only to victims. Victimizers suffered too when they lost the war. The victimhood consciousness among victimizers in Japan and Germany can be found little less than among victims in China, Poland and Israel. While these victims of the war of aggression, massacres and genocide were celebrating the liberation and war victory, the Japanese and Germans were mourning the defeat and war suffering.

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<sup>17</sup> Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Korean translation by Shin Haeng-sun, (Seoul: Chaeksesang, 2002), 81.

A bitter competition for the position of the Hitler's first victims between Germans and Austrians may show a paradox that victimizers are in more urgent need to explore the experience of being victimized as if the transgressions of victims exonerate the crimes of victimizers. For instance, the Japanese atrocities committed on the POWs of Western allies were thought to be counterbalanced by the suffering and massive death of the Japanese POWs in the Siberian gulags. The innocent killing of the German civilians in the Allied bombing and sufferings of the German expellees from the East have been emphasized in a similar vein. But the victimhood is unequal and asymmetrical between Germans, Jews, and Poles, and between the Japanese, the Chinese, and Koreans. That explains why victimhood nationalism in Japan and Germany looks more complicated, sophisticated, and even shameless.

Compared to Germany, Japan as 'the only nation ever to have been atom-bombed' (*yuiitsu no hibakukoku*) could enjoy the privileged position in the competition for victimhood. Decontextualized from the history of the 'fifteen-year war', "this declaration is replete with the single-minded assertion that Japanese were the victims of the atomic bomb" in the words of Imahori Seiji.<sup>18</sup> American writers' frequent remarks of 'Auschwitz and Hiroshima as terrible twin symbols of man-made mass death,' especially after the Soviet Union's acquisition of the first nuclear weapon, seemed to evidence the Japanese victimhood.<sup>19</sup> Radhabinod Pal, an Indian judge at the Tokyo trial, confirmed the Japanese victimhood of the atomic bomb by suggesting that the American use of the atomic bomb might be deemed to be the closest counterpart to Nazi atrocities in the war.<sup>20</sup> In the public memory of post-war Japan, however, it was Japanese military leaders who victimized the innocent Japanese even before the A-bomb. Fire bombings, the repatriation of the Japanese civilians from Manchuria and Korea, and wartime sufferings such as hunger and military oppression on the home front have been emphasized also to indicate the Japanese victimhood. Citing John Dower, "it became commonplace to speak of the war dead themselves-and indeed, of virtually all ordinary Japanese- as being victims and sacrifices."<sup>21</sup>

The public memory of war to mythicize the ordinary Japanese as innocent victims of a system rather than accomplices of the war atrocities was not only self-generated. The Supreme Command for the Allied Powers fanned this morally comfortable tale the other way round. The SCAP worked on the assumption that Japanese people had been slaves of feudal habits of subservience to authority. A secret report by the Psychological Warfare Branch of the US Army reads: "The Japanese personally have contributed their full measure to the war effort and fulfilled their obligation

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 112.

<sup>20</sup> John W. Dower, 'An Aptitude for Being Unloved: war and memory in Japan', in Omer Bartov et. al. (eds.), *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 226.

<sup>21</sup> John W. Dower, 'An Aptitude...', 228.

to the Emperor. All their effort is to no avail because their military leaders have betrayed them. The people are not to be blame for their suffering... The military clique has practiced false indoctrination.”<sup>22</sup> By patronizing the Japanese people, the SCAP’s Orientalist view exempted the ordinary Japanese from the war culpability and guilt. The ordinary Japanese paid its own agency for this discursive amnesty. Those Japanese experts in USA and Britain regarded the Japanese people as an ‘obedient herd’ “trained to play follow-the-leader.”<sup>23</sup> Deprived of its agency, the ordinary Japanese became the passive subject blindly loyal to the authority and, thus the people had been innocent of the nation’s various transgressions done in their names and with their participation. Victims, deprived of the agency, cannot be held accountable for the misuse of power. Both the left-wing activists and right-wing politicians appropriated the Japanese victimhood in their own way. It was a good device for them either to blame the Cold War US-Japan security alliance or to detach themselves from the legacy of militarism and war responsibility.<sup>24</sup>

The term of the ‘Pacific War’ imposed by the SCAP was another deliberate conceptual tool to waive the Japanese war responsibility to its Asian neighbors. The SCAP substituted the ‘Pacific War’ for the ‘Great East Asia War’ which, paired with the ‘Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Zone’, had been designated by the Japanese total war system to legitimize the Japanese invasion to Asian neighbors. With its focus on the conflict between America and Japan, the term of ‘Pacific War’ downplayed the Japanese military aggression against its Asian neighbors. That term brought into relief the Japanese aggression against Americans or Europeans such as the maltreatment of Allied POWs. The Japanese military transgressions such as Unit 731’s biological warfare, forced labor mobilization through Asia, comfort women and the other violations of human rights in Asia fell into oblivion. That explains partly why “the Japanese people don’t have much consciousness of having invaded China and have a tendency to emphasize only the suffering they bore in the Pacific War.”<sup>25</sup> Doubtlessly that exemption of the Japanese people from the war guilt contributed to building victimhood nationalism in postwar Japan.

It was in the antinuclear pacifism that Japanese war victimhood was most easily detached from Japanese wartime atrocities. The atomic bomb exceptionalism of ‘the only nation ever to have been atom-bombed’ decontextualized this traumatic tragedy from the historical background. All the anguish and agony that Japanese people suffered from was to be epitomized in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hiroshima as the absolute evil was often compared with the Holocaust. A popular novella singled out the Japanese and Jews as the archetypal victims of White racism.<sup>26</sup> But the

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 215, 218.

<sup>24</sup> James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 7, 14, 15, 32 and passim.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ian Bruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*. Korean translation by Chung Yonghwan (Seoul: Hangyoreh Shinmun, 2002), 119–26.

public memory of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been repressed by the censorship of the SCAP. By the early 1950s it had been treated more or less as an unexpected natural calamity. It was only through the Lucky Dragon Incident on March 1, 1954 that the atomic victimhood developed into victimhood nationalism with a pacifist tint. Thus “Hiroshima became an icon of Japan’s past as innocent war victim and a beacon for its future as pacifist nation.”<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the victimhood narrative of *Hikiage* including Yoko Kawashima Watkins’ novella had the anti-war pacifist movement as its cultural matrix of collective memory. As the ‘Yoko Story’ controversy shows, in historically structured antagonistic complicity of nationalisms in East Asia, Japanese obsession with the victimhood of the A-bomb spurs on the victimhood nationalism in Korea. ‘A distasteful competition over who suffered most’ seems inevitable.

Although the Japanese wartime aggression was totally forgotten in the victimhood discourse, Japanese conventional war atrocities seemed relatively insignificant in comparison to this apocalyptic hell. The story of the aesthetical origins of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park is very intriguing in this respect. The design for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, selected through a public competition in 1949, shares a nearly identical ground plan in common with the Commemorative Building Project for the Construction of Greater East Asia projected in 1942 as a grandiose Shintoist memorial zone to be built on an open plain at the foot of Mountain Fuji. In fact it was Tange Genzō a world-renowned architect who projected both designs. The striking parallels between the imperial commemorating project of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and the Hiroshima memorial site for peace and mourning of the victims of the atomic bomb are symptomatic of the Japanese apologetic memory based on the shift from victimizers to victims.<sup>28</sup> It is also noteworthy that Yamahata Yosuke, who became world famous for his photo of a Nagasaki A-bomb victim child, campaigned with the Japanese Army in China as a war photographer during the ‘Fifteen-Year War’ and had taken lots of photos of innocent Chinese children smiling with Japanese soldiers.<sup>29</sup>

Victimhood nationalism is *ahistorical* since it dwells on the realm of overcontextualization and decontextualization. If the overcontextualization inherent to historical contextualism gives rise to historical conformism of whatever happened in history, the decontextualization results in *ahistorical* justification of the historical aftermath. Indeed the specters of decontextualization and overcontextualization are hovering over the controversy in regard to victimhood, which made the historical reconciliation vulnerable to politicization. It is true that the Japanese fell into victims by Koreans and Germans were victimized by Poles and Czechs upon the defeat of World War II. But it is also true that both the Japanese and German expellees

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<sup>27</sup> Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 52.

<sup>28</sup> Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1–3.

<sup>29</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: media, memory, history*. Korean translation by Kim Kyoungwon (Seoul: Humanist, 2006), 127–33.

were hardly innocent of responsibility for atrocities of the colonialism and Nazism. With its unilateral emphasis of victimhood, decontextualization by the Japanese and German victimhood nationalism gives rise to a furious response from their counterparts who had been victimized before the World War II. They are responding to the decontextualization of the Japanese and German victimhood nationalism with overcontextualization, which would seemingly justify their perpetration against the civilian expellees of Japan and Germany. The competition for the exclusive victimhood between opposing victimhood nationalisms is geared up. What is left is the antagonistic complicity of victimhood nationalisms among unequal victims.

### <Responsibility: From Whom to Whom?>

Collective memories are not fixed but floating. They are floating with the continuous negotiations between available historical records and current social and political agendas. But historical responsibility is not floating. If one refers to English dictionaries, she/he may find an interesting synonym of responsibility, namely 'answerability' – an ability to answer. Indeed 'Verantwortung', 'odpowiedzialność', 'responsibilité' as equivalents of the 'responsibility' in other European languages have the same connotation. The word of answerability sounds very casual. But if a question of 'answerability to whom?' rises, this word suddenly becomes very hot. Answerability presupposes listenability to the voice of others. If we remind ourselves of Derrida's remark that 'the Other is my justice', listening to others is a substantial part of my justice and yours. The voice of others is very often dissenting. Listening to the outrageous, distressing, moaning voices of others is very often disturbing and painful. The historical responsibility would mean listenability and answerability to the voices of others who passed away in the brutal past.

Ontologically nobody can be either blamed or convicted for what one did not do. One can be responsible only for what one did. In other words, "only murderer is responsible for the murder." Collective guilt or innocence would not help us to come to terms with the brutal and tragic past of mass dictatorship. It would booster people to perceive reality by way of thinking in national terms and thus justify victimhood nationalism. The perpetrators' principle of 'a reductive selectiveness' would remain intact. It would signify a posthumous victory for the oppressors. However, to deny the collective guilt does not equal to deny the 'cultural collective', constructed out of a sense of participation in a common past spanning over a period of many generations.<sup>30</sup> Adam Michnik's confession is intuitive in that sense: "I do not feel guilty for those murdered, but I do feel responsible... I feel guilty that after they died they were murdered again, denied a decent burial, denied tears, denied truth about this hideous crime, and that for decades a lie was repeated."<sup>31</sup> If responsibility means answerability to the others' voices and pains, historical responsibility equals the responsibility for the present memory of past. We, historians, are responsible

<sup>30</sup> David Engel, 'Introduction to the Hebrew Edition of *Neighbors*', in *Neighbors Responded*, 413.

<sup>31</sup> Adam Michnik, "Poles and Jews: How Deep the Guilt?" in *Neighbors Responded*, 435.

for the apologetic memory of victimhood nationalism, as memorial collective is still in the making, with us doing our parts.

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## Transnational History of Victimhood Nationalism – On the Transpacific Space

### Abstract

The Author explores the problem of nationalism in a specific context, which he calls "victimhood nationalism" and defines as competing collective memories for the position of victims. Victimhood nationalism is used by nations as well as individuals to gain the position of "victimhood" in international context and in this way justify the acts of violence committed by those very nations or individuals against the others. Victimhood nationalism engages whole nations in a specific international competition, which adds to the phenomenon of nationalism a "transnational" dimension. The Author illustrates his ideas by examples from the WWII, particularly history of Japan and Korea but also Germany, Austria and Poland.

**Key words:** nationalism, victims and culprits, historical memory, collective memory