

Ryang Yong-Song. *Hyōmo p'yohyōn-ŭn wae chaeil chosōnin-ŭl kyōnyang-hanŭn'ga* [Why Is Hate Speech Aimed at Zainichi Koreans?]. Translated by Kim Sōnmi. Seoul: Sanbooks, 2018. 336 Pages. ISBN13: 9788990062864. ISBN10: 8990062861.

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The Reason Why a Coalition against Hate Is Needed in East Asia

Amid the globe's fight against the spread of COVID-19 in 2020, the city of Saitama distributed masks on March 10 without extending the distribution to a Zainichi (ethnic Korean) school, leading to a major outcry. The measure, which was a case of racial discrimination against the young children attending the school, was not a surprise. In October 2019, the Shinzo Abe government implemented a program that provided free daycare and preschool, but only Zainichi schools were exempted from the program. Given that the Japanese government is perpetrating these kinds of discrimination against children aged 0-5 years because of their "ethnic Koreanness," this book, which investigates the roots and solutions to racist discrimination against ethnic Koreans, provides readers with a great deal to think about.

Ethnic Koreans who crossed over to Japan after losing their country to Japanese imperialism became citizens of the Japanese empire but were nothing more than second-class citizens who enjoyed no rights under the family register system, which divided up the population into "insiders" and "outsiders." In December 1945, right after Japan's surrender, ethnic Koreans faced the start of full-fledged discrimination efforts by the Japanese government by being stripped of their political rights, followed by the Alien Registration Ordinance on May 2, 1947, that changed their status to that of "aliens." The Japanese government unilaterally placed the word "Korean" on their nationality during the process of "foreign registration" of ethnic Koreans. The Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were not yet established at the time, which meant that it was the Japanese government that first created the title and expression "Korean nationality."

The status of ethnic Koreans in Japan (Zainichi Koreans) was ultimately decided after the Treaty of San Francisco in 1952, which was signed between Japan and the Allied nations. On April 28, 1952 when the treaty came into force, Taiwanese and ethnic Koreans lost their Japanese citizenship. Because the

status of ethnic Koreans living in Japan had been determined through separate stipulations, the Japanese government enacted Article No. 126 that permitted ethnic Koreans in Japan to reside in the country under what was called “special permanent residence.” In short, this article allowed ethnic Koreans in Japan to “stay in Japan due to unique historical circumstances, but they are not Japanese, and as stateless persons, they may not enjoy any rights.” This was essentially a discriminatory move by the Japanese government to grant ethnic Koreans in Japan no other rights than the right for them to take up residence in the country. Zaitokukai 在特会 (short for Zainichi Tokken wo Yurusanai Shimin no Kai 在日特権を許さない市民の会, or Citizens against the Special Privileges of Koreans in Japan) and other far-right organizations, however, believe that the Japanese government bestowed stateless ethnic Koreans in Japan with “special rights.” In other words, the “special” permanent residence granted to Zainichi Koreans created the false perception that ethnic Koreans are enjoying “special” treatment. Zainichi Koreans, however, are not only aliens, but also stateless persons, which means they are living their lives in the face of state-organized discrimination. Ethnic Korean schools are still not considered official schools by the Japanese government, and this is another example of the government’s discrimination against stateless persons. From the perspective of far-right racists, however, the Japanese government is affording “unlicensed schools with special privileges.” Zainichi Koreans are unable to enjoy any rights whatsoever and are having to face ridiculous criticism that the discrimination they are suffering is in fact tantamount to “special privileges.”

The author of *Hyōmo p’yohyōn-ūn wae chaeil chosōnin-ūl kyōnyang-hanūn’ga* [Why is hate speech aimed at Zainichi Koreans?], Ryang Yong-Song, was born in Tokyo in 1982 and is a third-generation Zainichi Korean who attended an ethnic Korean school. A Ph.D. student in Linguistics and Society Research at Hitotsubashi University, Ryang created the Anti-Racism Information Center (ARIC) in 2013, when a counter movement to the rise of hate speech toward ethnic Koreans was on the rise by Zaitokukai and has been active along with around four other activists in “monitoring hate speech on

¹ The transcript of this interview was published in the webzine @ *Shidae-wa ch'ölhak* [©Era and Philosophy] under the title of “Ch'abyöl ch'ölp'ye tongashia yöndaerül mandürögapshida—paninjongjuüijöngbosent'ö (ARIC) taep'yo, chaeil chosönin 3 se ryangyöngsöng-ssi int'öbyu” [Let's create solidarity in East Asia for the elimination of discrimination—an interview with Ryang Yong-Song, a third-generation Zainichi Korean, representative of the Anti-Racism Information Center (ARIC)]. Available at: <http://ephilosophy.kr/han/53087/>.

campus.” I met with Ryang in February 2020 for an interview¹ in Fuchu, a city located in western Tokyo Metropolis, where he revealed that the members of the ARIC are diverse, including a majority who are Japanese, but also exchange students from Africa, Spain, and South Korea, along with a large number of Zainichi Koreans.

During the interview, Ryang explained the significance of ethnic Korean schools to Zainichi Koreans, who are a minority in Japan. In contrast to the common perceptions held by South Koreans, Ryang emphasized that the schools have historically been built by Zainichi Koreans themselves, not by North Korea. According to him, the schools are fundamentally centered on promoting the collectiveness of ethnic Koreans in Japan. Japanese schools do not allow for the study of Korean, nor do Japanese students learn about the history of Japan's invasion of other countries in Asia. Japanese schools do not offer students the opportunity to study the historical background of why Zainichi Koreans exist in Japan, either. Moreover, the chronic discrimination perpetrated toward ethnic Koreans in Japan means that many Zainichi Koreans are unable to even admit that they are ethnically Korean. Ryang argued that Zainichi Koreans had to operate their own schools in order to protect the lives and physical and mental health of ethnic Korean children, given that there is no community in which minorities can gather safely.

That being said, the fact remains that many Zainichi Koreans supported North Korea after the inter-Korean division that emerged following the Korean War, and the activists who run ethnic Korean schools are associated with the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (abbreviated as Chongryon or Chosen Soren 朝鮮総連). Ryang admitted that it is a clear fact that Chongryon supports North Korea, but argued that in the schools' curriculums North Korea is not taught to be the only Korea that exists and that the significance of the schools lie in the fact that they are self-governing educational institutions and communities for a minority group to learn its own language and to understand its uniquely formed identity through Korean colonization and division, the situation after the Korean War, and other historical situations.

In the book's Korean language introduction, Ryang tells readers stories about the minority identity that he himself shares. His entire family, except for himself, obtained South Korean citizenship in the early 2000s, but he resisted doing that and kept his ethnic Korean nationality (de facto statelessness) because "I wanted to resist the nation-state logic that human rights can only be permitted if one has a nationality" (p. 12). Hannah Arendt argued in her essay "The Rights of Man: What Are They?"² in modern nation-states "human rights" is reduced to "the rights of members," in other words, the rights of those with nationality. This argument is evidenced by the Zainichi Koreans in their own lives. In short, Ryang is resisting the discriminatory logic of the nation-state by keeping his "ethnic Korean nationality." He sees limits to his campaign to resist the far-right and racism just in Japan and believes that building equal societies without discrimination internationally will help the fight against discrimination in Japan. That is why Ryang hopes for the quick enactment of a law to prohibit discrimination in South Korea, stating in the text that "I hope this book becomes a practical weapon for people fighting against discrimination who are as yet unseen" (p. 18).

Let's take a look at the major claims made in the book. Ryang argues that social norms against racism (discrimination against certain peoples) should be established to clarify what racial discrimination is. "Racism is characterized by the fact that it can only 'be seen' when criteria regarding anti-racism norms are established" (p. 79). Similarly, in regards to sexual harassment, no one perceived certain acts to be sexual harassment until norms against sexual harassment were established. In fact, not too long ago in South Korea, workplace managers were not generally thought to be engaging in "sexual harassment" when they made assessments about their underlings based on their appearance. On the other hand, following the "MeToo" movement, people now largely believe that sexual harassment includes comments or judgements about someone's appearance, even if no direct physical interaction has taken place. In this context, Ryang believes that it is important to establish the roots of anti-discriminatory and anti-racism norms in society.

² The essay was first published in 1946 as a response to Hermann Broch's project for an International Bill of Rights, and was republished both in German and English in 1949. See W. Hamacher and R. Mendoza-de Jesus, "On the Right to Have Rights: Human Rights; Marx and Arendt," *The New Centennial Review*, 14.2 (2014): 169–214.

However, these kinds of social norms have not existed in Japan, so the Japanese government has quietly acquiesced to the hate speech promoted by Zaitokukai and other organizations. The risks of hate speech are that they lead to physical violence in societies without social norms against racism, and that the police and other government institutions essentially help support such violence. For example, take the attack against the ethnic Korean school in Kyoto on December 4, 2009. Eleven members of the Zaitokukai illegally entered an elementary school campus and perpetrated physical violence and lobbed hate speech through a loudspeaker. The police helped them penetrate the school for 30 minutes after being called to respond. This kind of attack on Zainichi schools and Zainichi Koreans has a long history. There have been cases of spontaneous acts of violence against Zainichi Koreans, including a case where a female student at a Zainichi Korean school had her skirt and traditional Korean jacket ripped, along with incidents where Zainichi Korean students have been attacked and beaten by groups of Japanese people.

Ryang reminds us that the state's role has always been important when spontaneous and small-scale acts of hate have led to violence, such as genocide. "The 'promotion of discrimination from the top down' has always played a decisive role when hate speech shifts to genocide" (p. 93). The "promotion of discrimination from the top down" that is implemented institutionally by the state gives moral justification to ordinary hatred and discrimination on the part of individuals, providing it with even more power. In regards to the massacre that killed more than 6,000 people after the massive earthquake in Guandong, the Ministry of the Interior threw support behind lies that ethnic Koreans were carrying explosives and had engaged in arson. This effectively turned ethnic Koreans into the "enemy," and vigilantes perpetrated direct and organized killings of ethnic Koreans while the state stood quietly on the sidelines. As this shows, there is an imperative for societies to create the social conditions that make "promotion of discrimination from the top down" impossible to prevent the occurrence of racial violence that acquires justification from the state.

Ryang tries to explain racism as not something reduced

to just psychological phenomena between individuals, but something linked with a society's fundamental economic structure and situation. For example, he claims that there is a correlation between neoliberalism and racism. In his words, "neoliberalism rejects welfare and rights obtained outside of market competition, considering them 'crafty'; creates a social atmosphere that does not permit the rights of minorities; and, similarly, provides the pretext that prevents government funds from being provided to ethnic Korean schools." Under this kind of "neoliberal racism," measures aimed at protecting minorities are considered no more than "special privileges" (p. 214).

Ryang's explanation about the link between a society's economic structure and racism leads to criticism against "Japanese-style corporate society." Corporate society is a society where corporate competition principles dominate the entirety of civic society. Japanese-style corporate society has, at a basic level, weakened the power of labor unions, and led to a social atmosphere where people believe it is natural that employment involves discrimination. For example, even if a man and a woman have the same professional background, there is discrimination in how much they are paid. This discrimination in employment, in turn, impacts the social status of men and women. Japanese people, as a result, believe it is natural that racial discrimination exists. "The discriminatory Japanese-style employment system has become a social norm and, moreover, its role as a strong driver for social cohesion has had a decisive negative impact on the anti-discrimination movement" (p. 273).

Unlike Japan, Europe and the United States established social norms against discrimination and racism thanks to the achievements of their human rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s. In Germany, Germany enacted the *Volksverhetzung* in 1960, the US enacted the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the United Kingdom enacted the Race Relations Act in 1965, the United Nations put in place the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1965, while France enacted a law against racism in 1972. Ryang calls this series of enactments "anti-racism 1.0." After the 1970s, the US and Europe moved forward with more refined

and broad-based legislation against discrimination, which the author deems “anti-racism 2.0.” On the other hand, Japan has not even passed through the doors of “anti-racism 1.0,” which allows “promotion of discrimination from the top down” to still occur. Whenever reports about North Korea’s abduction of Japanese people or the DPRK’s nuclear or missile tests emerge, major news outlets and politicians turn North Korea into the enemy, and this social atmosphere, in turn, leads to discrimination against ethnic Koreans in Japan. For example, after the DPRK’s shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, the Democratic Party of Japan introduced legislation to provide high school education for free but excluded ethnic Korean schools from the law. As this shows, “promotion of discrimination from the top down” and the social atmosphere it creates easily lead to acts of terrorism against Zainichi Koreans. Even today, students at ethnic Korean schools are unable to obtain the qualifications necessary for entering college, and this kind of institutional discrimination towards ethnic Koreans on the part of the state makes it seem like it is “alright to discriminate against Zainichi Koreans.”

Indeed, the Japanese government and far-right groups’ denial of history gives strength to racism. The emergence of the Zaitokukai in particular shows how denial of history and racism can come together. When considering the unique historical position of Zainichi Koreans, the denial of history inevitably leads to negative perceptions against their existence. In other words, failing to consider the division of the Korean Peninsula and Japan’s colonialization of Korea feeds the logic that Zainichi Koreans are receiving “special privileges.”

How does one fight against this? Ryang avoids theoretical analysis and considers practical “strategies,” proposing that Japan needs to legislate anti-racism norms (“anti-racism 1.0”) to go up against historical distortions. That is because there are limits to using history to fight against history denial by the Japanese government and far-right groups. In fact, ordinary Japanese people are largely ignorant or disinterested in Japan’s history due to the efforts of the Japanese government and far-right groups. Given these circumstances, presenting “historical facts” to bring the fight directly to historical distortions could

be an uphill battle because most Japanese are disinterested in historical details. However, fighting historical distortions with anti-discrimination norms, such as anti-racism, could lead to a reaction among Japanese people that “I don’t know much about history, but that is strange, indeed.” In other words, the focus would be on making people think that while they “might not know much about history, there is no place for discrimination,” and that this sentiment could form the basis of the most practical way to respond to historical distortions espoused by the Japanese government and far-right groups. In fact, the reason that the hate speech promoted by the Zaitokukai has to the group’s isolation in Japan’s civic society after the rise of a counter-movement is due to this very set of circumstances.

This writer’s personal experience lines up with Ryang’s perceptions about the situation. Last February, I conducted a seminar about hate speech in Japan and Japanese-South Korean relations with Korean language students at the Ooka Community Center in Yokohama. The students were ordinary middle-aged to elderly people with an interest in Korea. As a result, they had an above average interest in the situation in Korea and Korean-Japanese relations than average Japanese people. Still, many of the students considered historical issues as something barely connected to them and “stories that they heard from their father in childhood.” They agreed that Japan made mistakes in the past but did not understand why the events of the past were a stumbling block in Japanese-Korean relations in the present day. That being said, they all showed a very critical attitude toward hate speech and discrimination against foreigners. What does this tell us? First, most of the students were in their 50s or older, which strongly suggests that it would be difficult to bring about solidarity around history-related issues among even younger generations. Second, the fact that most of the students showed clear opposition to “hatred and discrimination toward foreigners,” including hate speech, suggests that “opposition to discrimination” could be a way to bring about solidarity among a greater number of people.

However, it is still difficult to imagine that Japan will establish norms against racism due to the fact that the civic

movement's capacity to bring that about is too weak. Ryang predicts that the legislation of a law banning discrimination in a country that has a stronger civil society than Japan, such as Taiwan or South Korea, could help a similar movement in Japan. As such, the legislation of a law banning discrimination in South Korea would not just be significant for ending discrimination in South Korea but have a broader significance. If the passing of an anti-discrimination law leads to a wave effect that brings about anti-discrimination norms throughout East Asia, activists in Japan could protect Zainichi Koreans who are facing daily discrimination, hatred, and violence, and could even combat historical distortions. Ryang is deeply considering the potential for solidarity and synergy between movements in East Asia along with the movement in Japan. His deep thinking on this issue will, in this writer's view, have also important significance for South Korean civil society, which fights against discrimination and hatred and has to struggle against Japan's history denial.