

Dilemma of Historical Reflection in East Asia and the Issue of Japanese Military “Comfort Women”: Continuing Colonialism and Politics of Denial*

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Abstract

This research aims to look at and resolve the issue of Japanese military “comfort women,” an issue that sits at the core of the conflict over history in East Asia, from the perspective of politics of denial that inevitably intervenes in the phase of stagnant purging of the past. To this end, first of all, it is necessary to presuppose the recognition that the military “comfort women” issue is not a narrow Korea-Japan relations issue but one related to responsibility for colonial rule and to shared transitional justice in East Asia. Second, based on such presupposition, I introduce some of the debates and arguments within civil society in regard to the historiography of *The Comfort Women of the Empire*, as an example that shows the dilemma of historical self-reflection in East Asia. Third, I critically review the problems of the historiography of *The Comfort Women of the Empire*, positioned largely within historical revisionism in East Asia, from the standpoint of Stanley Cohen’s theory on denial. Fourth, I extrapolate theoretical and practical tasks implied by the foregoing discussion, from the perspective of possibility of historical dialogue in East Asia.

As a conclusion, this paper seeks to reflect on the fact that the issue of denial, which emerged as a social fact during the process of debating on history in East Asia, raised the need for

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intellectuals of our time to sincerely self-reflect upon responsibilities of the academia. In other words, there is a need to fundamentally reflect upon the social sphere in which historiography and representations take place—in short, upon the transitive dimension of intellectual activity where historical knowledge competes and communicates.

Key words: Dilemma of historical self-reflection in East Asia, Japanese military “comfort women” issue, continuing colonialism, politics of denial, *The Comfort Women of the Empire*

1. Dilemma of Historical Self-Reflection in East Asia and the Japanese Military “Comfort Women” Issue

The starting point of this article is that the Japanese military “comfort women” issue is neither an issue of the Japanese Military’s “comfort women” themselves nor an issue of Korea-Japan relations. With regard to the Japanese military’s “comfort women,” gender and nation (*minchok*) cannot be separated from one another. General theory on wartime women’s human rights cannot capture the issues relating to accountability for colonial rule, and the frame of Korea-Japan relations, whereby resolution is thought to be found in reconciliation between the governments of the two countries, cannot accommodate the complexity of why this issue of military “comfort women” has still not been resolved.¹⁾ Historically, the structural origins go back to the San Francisco system, which obstructed proper clearing of the remnants of World War II. The right to claim compensation under the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea was shackled to the framework of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and this treaty between the two countries concluded simply as a “resolution between two governments,” without any contrition or compensation for the colonial rule. This is the fundamental source of the issue of historical responsibility surrounding the Japanese military’s “comfort women”—an issue that has still not been resolved.²⁾

1) This kind of generalization can be seen in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s statement on the 70th anniversary of the end of the war. For example, the comment that “the dignity and honor of many women were severely injured during wars” does not clarify what kind of women suffered what kind of injury. There is no room for accountability for colonial rule within the Abe Statement, which dealt with women’s suffering in such a way (Yonhap News, 2015; Itagaki and Kim 2015, 249).

2) One factor making this possible was not “goodwill” of the victor nations or of people in victim countries, but “Japan’s geopolitical position during the Cold War” (Itagaki and Kim 2015, 247-248).

In other words, the issue of military "comfort women," from the very beginning, has had the characteristics of being the remnant of an imperial regime, reflected in the post-war Cold War in East Asia. Since the 1930s, Japan has committed war crimes commensurate to genocides in various parts of East Asia. Then throughout the history of the Cold War in East Asia, colonialism and war of aggression innate in the imperial regime and the historical wounds left by war crimes overlapped with geopolitical tensions, aggravating one another. This is the essential difference between the post-war Cold War order in East Asia and that of Europe. For example, in Europe, Germany was reunified based on a complete breaking away of the country's post-war politics and society from the perpetrators of war crimes. Contrarily, in East Asia, regional integration between Japan and Korea and the *de facto* military coordination progressed without the dominant groups of post-war Japan deconstructing the historical continuity of the war criminals. In this sense, it is necessary to recognize the premise that the issue of Japanese Military's "comfort women" is one of responsibility for the colonial war, which comprises a part of the (great) division regime of East Asia, as well as being a matter related to a shared transitional justice in East Asia (Kim Myung-Hee, 2016a).³⁾

The culmination in the regressive flow toward the Cold War regime in East Asia was the action taken by the governments of Korea and Japan on December 28, 2015 (hereinafter referred to as the "2015 Agreement"), in disregard of the opinion of the victims.⁴⁾ Through this "2015 Agreement," Japan sought to finalize

3) The (great) division regime of East Asia is a concept used by Lee Sam-Sung (2015) to capture the multi-dimensionality of divisions and structural characteristics innate in post-war East Asian order, which, unlike the European order, is being maintained and reproduced beyond the Cold War and the post-Cold War. Transitional justice is a concept that broadly encompasses justice that operates during the stage of purging the past, as well as being a constitutionalist term that seeks to reform, from a human rights and democratic perspective, the oppressive old regime that had led to severe human rights violations (Kim 2016a, 16).

4) The 'comfort women' issue is a complex one, intertwining historical and legal matters. Also, as a form of 'wartime sexual slavery', constituting a war crime, crime against humanity, slavery, trafficking and forced labor under international law, it is a grave human rights violation. However, the "2015 Agreement," by completely failing to mention international law, does not explicitly recognize Japan's legal liability according to international law (Cho 2016, 79-80). Another important problem of the "2015 Agreement" is that it excluded the victims. In fact, throughout the history of the "comfort women" movement, the victims have always been considered to be the main actors and subjects. However, the victims were completely excluded from participating and exercising their right to testify in both the content and procedure of the "2015 Agreement" (Yang 2016, 14-17).

its post-war process of purging the past, and to establish an image of itself as being even more earnest than Germany in purging past history by demonstrating to the international community that it had tried to console the victims twice through a civilian donation and a government fund purely out of humanitarianism, even though it did not have any legal obligations to do so. Specifically, the “2015 Agreement,” through its provision that the agreement is a “final and irrevocable resolution,” has pre-determined the way the issue is to be solved in the future, during negotiations with North Korea.

So, what is to be done and how? Before going into this, I want to further the discussion by directly dealing with the “dilemma of historical self-reflection in East Asia.” Lee Sam-Sung (2015) articulates two fundamental dilemmas in regard to the historical-psychological division of East Asians. One is the dilemma related to responsibility of Japan that refuses to reflect upon itself. This is a manifestation of the lack of historical reflection and mental immaturity, but in a larger sense, it stems from the characteristics of what Lee calls “division regime in East Asia”—the post-war alliance between the United States and Japan, allowing the latter a status in which it does not have to critically self-reflect. The other dilemma is that, nevertheless, victim nations of the colonial war crimes and the post-war generations cannot help but call for self-reflection. This is the essence of the ensuing “dilemma of historical self-reflection in East Asia” and the core of the mental closed circuit embedded within East Asia’s great division regime.

2. New Challenge Posed by Historical Revisionism : Between Continuing Colonialism and Academic Freedom

The dilemma of historical self-reflection in East Asia recently manifested itself in a new phase through the debate on *The Comfort Women of the Empire*. As many critics have pointed out, this book is positioned within the trend of historical revisionism in East Asia, which has accelerated since, broadly, the 1990s (Kim 2016; Chong 2016; Shin 2016). However, the new aspect of this debate was the reaction showed by the (progressive) academic circles in Korea and Japan. In fact,

when *The Comfort Women of the Empire* was first published in Korea in 2013, it did not draw much attention from academics and civil society organizations who were working on the "comfort women" issue. It was only in 2015, with the overlapping of several events, that the book rose to the center of the stage. In June 2014, nine "comfort women" survivors filed a complaint against Park Yu-Ha for "defamation by spreading false information" with the public prosecutors in Korea and applied for an injunction against distribution of the publication *The Comfort Women of the Empire*, triggering a heated debate.

On November 26, 2015, fifty-four Japanese and American writers and academics issued a statement against the indictment of Park Yu-Ha saying, "What to certify as facts and how to interpret history are issues that should be left up to academic freedom. [...] according to the basic principle of modern democracy, public authority should never encroach into that arena."⁵) Following this statement, on December 2, 2015, 194 Korean academics also issued a joint statement expressing concerns over possible oppression of academic freedom and freedom of expression, saying "Trying to legally determine the correctness or incorrectness of claims by an academic is anachronistic."⁶) On the same day, December 2, and then again on December 9, 380 researchers and activists working on the "comfort women" issue criticized, "*The Comfort Women of the Empire* is a book that gives pain to the victims through its explanations that lack sufficient academic grounds," and expressed concerns that the crux of the matter was being distorted into an issue of "academic freedom and free speech."⁷) On 3rd December 2015, three organization, including the House of Sharing, where former "comfort women" reside, jointly issued a statement explaining the reasons behind their filing of complaint to the prosecutors, citing, "While space for healthy discussion should remain open to resolve the comfort women issue, [...] the act of continuously

5) "Murayama and Kono Issue Statement against Indictment of Park Yu-Ha, Author of *The Comfort Women of the Empire*," Hankook Ilbo, November 27, 2015, <http://www.hankookilbo.com/v/0792115a47364af28346aa853a8c6e1d>.

6) "Violation of Academic Freedom or Justifiable Legal Punishment? Debate Over Park Yu-Ha's *The Comfort Women of the Empire*," *Kyungnyang Shinmun*, December 6, 2015, <http://h2.khan.co.kr/201512031631051>.

7) "*The Comfort Women of the Empire* and the Start of the Trials," *Kyungnyang Shinmun*, December 12, 2015 http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201512121327051&code=940100#csidx1d5f66e9fe947b59a01cce136f3fda.

making the Japanese military ‘comfort women’ victims suffer from incorrect expressions under the pretext of academic freedom is unacceptable.”⁸⁾ With the start of the litigation process, various expressions and explanations regarding the comfort women (in particular, “voluntary prostitution” and “comrade-like relationship”) that are used by *The Comfort Women of the Empire* came to be known by the broader society, leading to a full-fledged controversy. Court proceedings over the allegation of spreading false information still continue as of December 2016.

Should “how to interpret history [...] be left up to academic freedom”? At this juncture, I feel the need to look more carefully into the politics and the analytical frame that cut across *The Comfort Women of the Empire*. As mentioned earlier, the frame adopted by the book (hereinafter *Empire*) to perceive the military “comfort women” issue and its propositions on “resolving” it is in line with the tide of Japanese version of historical revisionism that started from the 1990s. According to Takahashi Tetsuya, there is an extremely wide gap between the international community that calls “comfort women” sexual slaves of the Japanese military and considers the system to be a grave violation of international humanitarian law, and the Japanese government that persistently denies any legal liability. This is because if the **system** of Japanese military “comfort women” is deemed to be a war crime, then the perpetrators obviously have to be punished. The graver the crime, as in “crimes against humanity,” the higher the justification for punishment of the perpetrators (Takahashi 2015, 103). The overall tone of the *Empire* is that of denying “legal liability” of Japan, and its narration is in the form of using and reinterpreting various materials and testimonies under such tone. Numerous materials are placed relatively consistently under the teleological premise of “promoting reconciliation” between Korea and Japan.

This is the part that disturbed many researchers of history. Like Japan during the 1990s, Korea also witnessed the dawning of an “era of testimony” under the tide of purging the past, and an effective method of creating a rupture in the state-centric dominant historiography and forging a counter-discourse was

8) “Opposing Indictment of Author of *The Comfort Women of the Empire* Comes from Ignorance of the Essence,” News1, December 3, 2015 <http://www.news1.kr/articles/?2505869>.

collecting oral history or testimonies. In fact, a turning point that opened a new phase in the military “comfort women” movement that allowed it to go side by side with the victims, was the courageous testimony in 1991 by a survivor, Kim Hak-Soon. In short, oral history and collection of testimonies were a part and an important tool of the military “comfort women” movement. However, the historiography of *Empire* completely differed from other existing historiographies in the sense that the same method was used to rupture and deconstruct the social consensus that had, to a certain extent, been formed in regard to the historical truths and the counter-discourse. The methodological errors committed by the book—the great number of errors including very basic mistakes in interpreting historical material, arbitrary selection and interpretation of testimonies, concurrent use of mutually contradicting arguments, hasty conclusions, distortion of arguments of prior research and others—have already been dealt in detail by Chong Young-Hwan in the book *Reconciliation for Whom*, which was published in Japan and Korea in 2016, so I will not mention them here.⁹⁾

Instead, this paper seeks to focus on the flow in which the main stage of a historical war changes from a sphere of testimony to a sphere of interpretation, from politics of testimony to politics of representation. The *Empire* is clearly different from the existing forms of denial, which had negated the existence of Japanese military “comfort women” themselves or its legitimacy as a case. The following discussions will place the characteristics of the intellectual lineage manifested by the *Empire* within the context of time of “continuing colonialism”¹⁰⁾

9) According to Chong Young-Hwan (2016), *The Comfort Women of the Empire* received accolades in Japan due to “two historical revisionisms.” The Japanese military “comfort women” issue raised the responsibility of both the Japanese Empire as well as that of post-war Japan. In other words, the Japanese military “comfort women” issue was a symbolic case that also questioned the history of post-war Japan, which had buried, under the Cold War regime, Japan’s responsibilities without it being held accountable for its wrongdoings in Asia. However, Park Yu-Ha portrayed Japan’s post-war history as one that had faced responsibility for the war and colonialism. In short, *The Comfort Women of the Empire* controversy was the result of the desires of those who were obsessed by “two historical revisionisms,” based on optimistic hope of the Japanese Empire and the optimistic hope of post-war Japan by claiming innocence of the Japanese military.

10) “Continuing colonialism” was a concept used by Seo Kyung-Sik in his criticism of Japanese liberal forces regressing toward nationalism following the 1995 publication of *Post-Defeat Theory* by Norihiro Kato. Basically, the idea of Japan being responsible for the war, according to the version of Japanese liberal forces manifested in the debate about the military “comfort women,” attacks the unidentifiable monster of nationalism, thereby creating the effect of historical revisionism in which responsibility of the Japanese people for colonialism is negated. It also becomes easily exposed to “violence in the name of

as well as within denialism that inevitably intervenes in the stagnant purging of the past, and will look into the strategies of denial and related implications.

3. Politics of Denial Manifested by *The Comfort Women of the Empire*

Compared to Germany and France, the circumstances in East Asia whereby civil and criminal lawsuits have been filed against the Empire by the surviving victims and an intense debate is underway show that historical self-reflection in East Asia is being delayed and stalled. For example, in Germany, the so-called Auschwitz lies or the denial of the Holocaust continued until after World War II. Some major examples of the Auschwitz lies claimed by the ultra-right wing or neo-nazis include, “There was no single plan to exterminate the Jews, and therefore, the Holocaust did not exist”, “There were no human gas chambers at Auschwitz nor at any other concentration camp”, “There is no documented proof to back allegation of genocide, so one can only rely on testimonies”, “The Holocaust is a story made up by the Jews in order to attain their goals, one of which is founding of Israel.” To deal with such denial of the Holocaust, Germany came up with provisions under Article 130-3 in its penal code, opting to legally regulate such acts (Kim 2016, 55; Maeda 2016, 82-84).

Recently in Korea, denialism has also become a socio-political issue and a topic of academic debate, at the background of which lies the denial of the May 18th Gwangju Democratization Movement of the so-called “New Right” media outlets, the Ilbe Storage (also known as Ilbe) and some other sources (Denial of the Sewol tragedy of April 16, 2014 is also important). Denial of purging of the past usually takes place under a certain historical occasion after the past has somewhat been settled. The problem is that denial of the truth exacerbates the suffering of the survivors. For example, according to Kang Un-Suk (2012), who analyzed the life

reconciliation” (Seo 2011, 274-327). At the same time, this concept is compatible with post-coloniality. Post-coloniality is a structuralist concept that encompasses the aftermath of colonial rule, continuation of being a colony, transformation and reproduction (Yang 2006, 2015).

histories of the members of the May 18th Movement Citizen Militia through the frame of "social traumatism," the trauma suffered by these individuals were connected to the fact that the past was settled and compensation paid out without the perpetrators being brought to justice. In particular, Kim Bo-Kyung (2014) conceptualizes the strategy of organized denial in regard to the May 18 Movement and explains that such denial worsens the side-effects of those who are trying to live through their trauma from the movement. It is inevitable for anger and unresolved bitterness (*han*) to be particularly severe among emotions of those who had experienced trauma where genuine mourning was barred by concealment of the truth. These researches support the fact that the social context of transitional justice affects social suffering of individuals.¹¹⁾

Denial of the May 18 Movement and denial of military "comfort women"—despite many similarities—show clear differences. In the case of the former, judicial revelation of the truth has more or less been completed at the level of the state, and the results have been reflected in laws and policies. However, in the case of the latter, although the truth has been revealed socially to a certain extent, the perpetrators have not acknowledged their responsibility and relevant measures and poli-

cies have not finalized. On the surface, Empire, under the pretext of an "academic debate" seems to be targeting this realm of "social truth." However, by pitting the narrative of "multiple forms of comfort women" or "multiple forms of perpetrators" against the existing one, the book is able to exert its ultimate effect of defending the military "comfort women" issue so that it does not enter the realm of "judicial truth."¹²⁾

11) For further details, refer to Kim Bo-Kyung (2014), Kim Myung-Hee (2014; 2016b), Kim Jong-Yup (2016), Kim Myung-Hee and Kim Wang-Bae (2016), and Kim Jae-Yoon (2016). For example, among Cambodian survivors who had experienced the Khmer Rouge regime, it has been found that those who feel truth has been revealed showed lower incidence of PTSD (Choi 2015).

12) The differentiation between judicial and social truth comes from the four ideas that Cohen proposes in regard to truth (2009, 467-268): 1) Factual or forensic truth, 2) personal and narrative truth, 3) social truth, and 4) healing and restorative truth. My expression "judicial truth" refers to 1) factual or forensic truth, which is based on facts, and legal and scientific information attained through accurate, objective and impartial procedures. On the level of overall society, it refers to the documentation of the context, causes and type of the human rights violation. Contrarily, 3) social truth refers to truth as articulated by the change of opinion, discussion and debate among people. For more on the social meaning of legal recognition over acts of perpetration, in other words, the importance of judicial revelation of truth and significance of citizen collaboration in purging the past, refer to Katsumi Matsumoto (2007).

In order to detail this aspect further, it is necessary to refer to the discussions of Cohen in his *States of Denial* (2009), which deals with political sociology of denial.¹³⁾ According to Cohen, strategic and ideological focus of denial can transform according to the changes of the times. He categorizes denial amidst human rights violations of the state into three different types.

① “Literal denial,” as the simplest form of denial, is denying the fact itself.

② “Interpretative denial” usually takes place when the facts have been revealed and it is no longer possible to deny them. One would acknowledge the facts, but apply a different interpretation to insert the case into a new category. Interpretative denial includes the “use of euphemisms” to endow neutrality to brutal acts, cover up reality and make it seem harmless, “legalism” to make excuses using legal terminology borrowed from publicly accepted human rights discourse, “denial of responsibility” using obedience within hierarchy, obedience, necessity and splitting, and ‘claiming isolation of the event’.

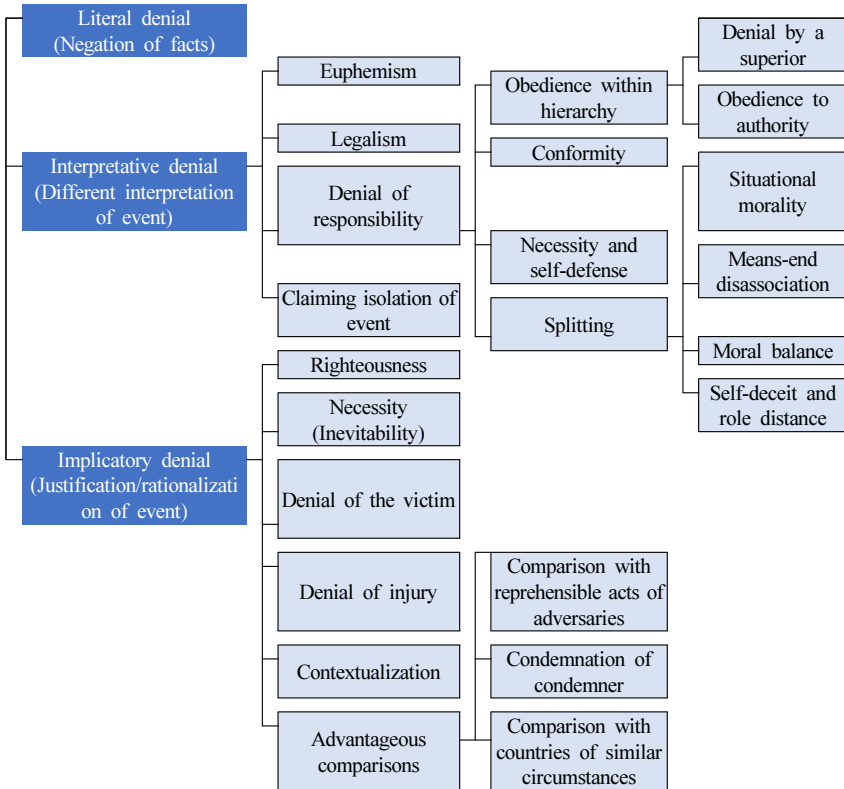
③ “Implicatory denial” refers to acknowledging the existence of the event itself but attempting to justify or rationalize it. It entails the denial or reduction of psychological, political or ethical implications of the event. Arguing righteousness or inevitability, denying the existence of victims or injury, contextualizing and making advantageous comparisons are some examples.

Of course, in the case of official discourse of denial, all forms of denial, including literal denial (“Nothing happened.”), interpretative denial (“That was not actually the case.”) and implicatory denial (“It can be seen from another angle.”), can appear. They can appear consecutively or simultaneously. These various forms of denial can be expressed as the following diagram.¹⁴⁾

13) Cohen looks into numerous human rights violations committed since the 20th century and theorizes the phenomena of denial that appeared among perpetrators, observers and victims. He identifies human rights violations and acts of instigating or exacerbating social suffering of humans as ‘denial’ and the move toward mitigating or resolving those acts as ‘acknowledgement’. ‘Politics of denial’ that I propose based on this theory, refers to the socio-political dynamics of multi-layered actors who intervene in the process of denying purging of the past and in human rights violations. It is a concept that aims to capture the complexity in each phase of transitional justice, which cannot be captured by the lineal causal relationship of “fact → revelation of truth → punishment and sanction → prevention of recurrence”.

14) For further details, refer to Cohen (2009, 58-62, 237-341). The analytical frame in Diagram 1 follows the structuralization by Kim Bo-Kyung (2014, 330), who summarizes Cohen’s discussions.

<Diagram 1> Analytical Frame of Denial



In the case of Empire, “literal denial,” which is denying the existence of the event itself, is not really apparent.¹⁵⁾ Rather, it acknowledges the existence of “comfort women” but interprets the characteristics of the injury differently. More precisely, it changes the essence of the injury thereby revising or replacing the perpetrator. Ultimately, it blurs the responsibility of the perpetrator, distorts the discussions on the military “comfort women” that had so far progressed and takes the issue back to the starting point. “Interpretative denial” and “implicatory denial”

15) Hereinafter, the source of ‘critical reading’ will be first edition of *The Comfort Women of the Empire: Colonial Rule and the Struggle Over Memory* (unabridged version) published by Puriwaipari in 2013. Citations from the book hereinafter will be denoted by the page number in brackets.

are the main forms that appear in the book. This is evident in five different aspects.

a) From Denial of Existence of Victims to Denial of Injury: Partial Acknowledgement and Recontextualization

Denial of injury is the method in which the injury or damage resulting from a certain action is devalued, thereby nullifying a wrongdoing. If the human rights violation is too obvious, then “partial acknowledgement” constitutes an important part of denial. It involves partially acknowledging human rights violation under certain circumstances and depicting the situation as if accepting the seriousness (Cohen 2009, 253-254). Empire also neither denies the existence of “comfort women” nor the injury itself. The author repeatedly makes such acknowledgement through the fact that there was “structural forcefulness.” However, the book does not refer to “structural force” that caused the violation to become “structural violence” or organized form of “forced recruiting.” In fact, the book points to private businesses as the subjects of “actual forcefulness,” separate from the subjects of “structural forcefulness” and assigns legal liability—if indeed one were to seek legal liability—on them. Also, the book, in order to demonstrate that there was no military “sexual slavery” even though there may have been “sex work”—in brutal form due to the structural force of “poverty”—reconceptualizes the preliminary form of “comfort women” within historical and cultural specificity of Japan’s “Karayuki-san (17-32).”¹⁶⁾

Just as the denial against the Holocaust started from questioning the accuracy of the number of victims, Park Yu-Ha also starts from such uncertainty. In other words, she distorts and questions the conventional knowledge that “military comfort women amounted to 200,000.” Some testimonies from the compiled collection of testimonies were extracted as “general facts” whereas existing testimonies that mention the average age of “comfort women” to be “girls” were dismissed as “exceptional facts (49-54).”¹⁷⁾

16) Recontextualization, or contextualization—according to Cohen—is a method whereby governments that had committed human rights violations “accuse their critics of not knowing, understanding or mentioning the context in which the violations took place (Cohen 2009, 249-250).”

17) According to Cohen, ‘isolation’ is an important form of interpretative denial. The government acknowledges

b) Denial of Perpetrators: Euphemism or Techniques of Neutralization

Park Yu-Ha, starting off from uncertainty of numbers and succeeding in asking provocative questions, uses the same methodologies as denialists in order to blur the responsibility of recruiting "comfort women (Shin 2016, 160)." She transposes the responsibility of the military into that of pimps and private businesses, and argues that although there was "condonation" by the state, there was no organized involvement. She thus offers a different fundamental explanation about social violence.

What is interesting is how she calls pimps and private businesses direct perpetrators at the same time labeling them as "collaborators within ourselves (33-42)." This kind of labelling takes place in a direction different from that argued by P. Levi and others—that the discussion on the gray zone includes reflection over the mechanisms of bureaucracy functioning in the process of organized and systematic crimes being committed by the state and over the agency of violence.¹⁸⁾ Empire uses this category of "collaborators" to neutralize the responsibility of the perpetrators and others involved. Furthermore, she transforms the relationship between the Japanese military and Korean comfort women as "comrade-like relationship" within the sphere of the same "nationality (67, 264-265)." The use of euphemism is also quite clear in the process of her relocating the relationships between the Korean brokers, Japanese soldiers and Korean comfort women. Euphemisms play the function of denying or misrepresenting cruelty, thus giving them a neutral and respectable status and covering up reality (Cohen 2009, 242). In various parts of the book, there are emphases on the day-to-day fondness between Japanese soldiers and comfort women, and the book points out that the

the violations and responsibility for them. However, it argues that the acts were not systematic, routine or repeated. The acts were 'isolated' (Cohen 2009, 247). For a counter-argument based on positive data on Park Yu-Ha's theory that the average age of comfort women was 25, refer to Kim Bu-Ja (2016, 132-135).

18) For more, refer to Browning (1992), Milgram (2009), Bauman (2013) and Kim Myung-Hee (2016b). Gray zones exist in all societies and can act as the mediator in a system of crime. They refer to the space between the victim and the perpetrator that is filled with "ordinary and obscure people" (Refer to Levi, 2014). In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Hannah Arendt discloses the uncomfortable truth that some Jews had collaborated with the Nazis. However, she does not question the fact that the main perpetrators of the Holocaust were German Nazis. Likewise, in the case of the crime of "comfort women," the appropriate order would be, first of all, establishing the main perpetrators of the crime and then discussing responsibility of accomplices and collaborators (Lee 2016a, 353).

portrayal of Japanese soldiers as evil is wrong (65-70, 73-76, 122, 159-160). As a result, the book switches perpetrators to victims, and by consecutively placing Korean soldiers or nice Japanese soldiers, breaks down the structure of the victim and the perpetrator.¹⁹⁾

c) Denial of Responsibility: Legalism

Another characteristic of the Empire, found generally across its narrative, is the use of “legalism” to negate the legal liability of the state. Legalism highlights legal excuses from legal annotations that circulate between governments and their critics or within legal-diplomatic loops and UN committees, and it is from here that powerful forms of interpretative denial is deduced (Cohen 2009, 243). For example, when “actions that were not considered to be ‘sins’ that the time and ‘crimes’ that were already legal regulated as thus are differentiated” (27), it is difficult to say that the state had committed the crime (217-218). At that time, “as long as it was not legally banned, it is difficult to seek legal liability” for sex work (191), and thus reparation as a crime committed by a state is not possible (203, 232-237, 247). Under this kind of legalism, all responsibility is stripped down to either abstract structures such as imperialism or patriarchy, or to individual actors (private businesses or individual soldiers).

d) Disparaging Supporters (Defenders)

A point not proposed by Cohen, but nonetheless I find worth mentioning, is that the biggest danger posed by Empire, I believe, is the disparagement of the support groups of victims in Korea and Japan to deconstruct the relationship of solidarity that had been opened by the military “comfort women” movement. This point will be the main theme of Part 2 and Part 3.²⁰⁾

19) The complexity of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim that intervenes in the trauma process of victims of sexual violence or torture has already been discussed by Herman’s Complex PTSD theory and the concept of ‘captivity’ (Herman 1997; Kim 2014, 317-321).

20) For details, refer to Part 2 Chapter 4 “Problems of Japanese Supporters” and Part 3 Chapter 3 “Contradictions of Korea’s Support Movement.”

For example, Empire criticizes that representation of military "comfort women" by the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan not only oppresses the various memories of the survivors but also has become a powerful force of its own, and that the support movement in Japan has used the "comfort women" issue merely as a political means to change Japanese society. As a major example, by charging Emperor Showa as an offender, the 2000 Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery simply worsened the circumstances (256). Such argument cannot come easily, if one had rational understanding of the suffering and trauma of the survivors. Because the survivors cannot speak on their own, the process of them voicing themselves out inevitably requires help, alliance and mutual solidarity from supporters (defenders) (Lee 2016). The act of separating the survivors from their supporters is ultimately once again isolating the victims within the prison of "not being able to speak."

e) Condemnation of the Condemner

In an official discourse of denial, the technique of "condemnation of the condemner" is deviating from external criticism on one's behavior and instead questioning the critic. Any wrongfulness of others become the main issue. The language becomes explicitly political. External critics are attacked for being partial or are said to have no right to intervene. The wrongdoer tries to deflect attention from his or her own offense to the motives and character of the critics who had pointed a finger at the wrongdoer.²¹⁾

Another notable point is, within the discourse of the New Right media dealing with the debate around the Empire, the tendency in which the "pro-North Korea ideology" is used to block criticism itself. As a case in point, just before the fourth trial held on November 8, 2016, a news article arguing that "The trial of Park Yu-Ha, author of *The Comfort Women of the Empire*, has been perverted to an

21) Cohen compares this defense to the mechanism of 'projection' in psychoanalysis (Cohen 2009, 158). For more on the methods through which critics of *The Comfort Women of the Empire* are categorized as the same "Korean-Japanese," etc., refer to Park Yu-Ha (2015, 465).

arena filled with the voice of and political attacks by the progressive left-wing and pro-North Korea left-wing, rather than that for debating on historical or academic truths related to scholarly conscience.”²²⁾ This article elaborated the profile of the prosecutor as well as the observers at the trial. It also made a detailed list of the names and the history of the scholars who had academically criticized the Empire. The pro-North Korea frame, which intervened during the latter part of the court battle, shows one dimension of the manifestation of international political constraints and regression toward the Cold War that bar a rational resolution of the Japanese military ‘comfort women’ issue.

f) Mini-conclusion

Intended or not, ultimately, Empire comes up with the logic of “denying the responsibility for colonial rule – a view that is the starting point of historical revisionism” (Shin 2016: 158). The problem is that the book takes on a much more complex form of representation. In fact, many research on the Holocaust show that “Denying the facts themselves, obscuring reality, erasing hints and traces of obvious truths and others are **not separate actions but part of the act of the killing.**” In other words, it is necessary to remember that **denial goes beyond being a “substantive goal” toward being a part that is always included in the act of genocide itself**, as well as being “a part of the complex motive that lead to a genocide in the first place.”²³⁾ Stanley Cohen’s title of the book *States of Denial* refers to both the “state that denies” and “the situation of denying.” It refers to both the state (and the perpetrators) that violated human rights but denies such act, and the tendency of society to deny its knowledge of the human rights violation and social suffering of humans even though it knows. In this regard, the recent insightful research result that highlights that after a mass-scale human rights

22) “‘Truth’ is nowhere in sight, only ‘pro-North Korea’ or ‘left-wing’ People criticizing Park Yu-Ha,” Meadiawatch, November 7, 2016, <http://www.mediawatch.kr/news/article.html?no=250754>.

23) Of course, there are differences between various human rights violations, however, the Holocaust is important in that it was denied ever since the moment of perpetration. In other words, denial takes place not only during explanation after the act of violation but also during the initial stages of warning, planning and implementing it (Cohen 2009, 191-192).

violation, “repeated attack on the victims” and denial by the government, its supporters, and the media take on the characteristics of being “state-society crimes” has important implications (Lee 2016b). All individuals that are a part of this culture of denial can become potential bystanders, so the position as a neutral observer is not easily allowed. Therefore, it is necessary to directly face the issue of denialism, which emerges in the same pattern in mass-scale human rights violations, as a social fact—like “unintended consequences,” as Max Weber had said.

4. What *The Comfort Women of the Empire* Lacks : Possibilities of Historical Communication in East Asia

Let’s go back to the issue of “dilemma of historical self-reflection in East Asia,” raised in the first part of this paper. Is the recent controversy over *Empire* simply an one-off event resulting from multiple coincidences? Or is it an extension of continuing colonialism and a prologue to the denial of military “comfort women” that will become full-fledged in the future? If latter is the case, then I want to look for possibilities of historical dialogue that can overcome the dilemma of historical self-reflection in East Asia, focusing on two aspects that have been overlooked in *Empire*.

First of all, we need to think about the fact that denialism, as a political ideology, is exercised while being bolstered by a certain epistemological supplement. The contentious epistemological point raised by the debate on the historiography of *Empire* is the dichotomy that strictly separates statement of facts and statement of opinions. For example, according to this dichotomy, interpretation of facts, which is related to defamation and constitutes the center of the issue, is merely the opinion of scholars. Questioning this would be violating freedom of thought. Such argument ignores a major discovery of contemporary philosophy of science that all statements of facts are theory-laden, context-dependent, and even value-dependent. Interpretation or opinion of a certain event cannot exist separately from that event. Strictly speaking, opinion on a historical fact is yet another social

fact, and is a part of the historical fact.²⁴⁾ If one argues that statement of facts and evaluative testimony have to be strictly differentiated, this is nothing other than value-neutral or value-relativist ideology of “leaving academic disciplines outside morals and politics”, and it merely shows the shortfalls of some of the claims around Empire. However, in fact, the historical process of the military “comfort women” movement has already gone beyond this kind of dualism.

Secondly, the academic work of Empire overlooks the obvious starting point, which is suffering of victims and survivors, as well as the reflection over positionality of the related scholars. It comes as no surprise that recent research on historical or cultural trauma focus on the fact that trauma does not arise from the event itself but from the gap between the event and its representation. In particular, according to Jeffrey Alexander, who proposes the concept of cultural trauma, trauma is closely related to the process of representation by the carrier group, which delivers the dominant narrative of the traumatic event to the public audience—namely, 1) nature of the pain, 2) nature of the victim, 3) relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience, and 4) attribution of responsibility. Collective memory and national identity are also affected by this process. The lack of recognizing traumas and failure to enter the public sphere rest on “inability to carry” of the carrier group, and this in turn constitutes a part of the trauma (Tota 2006, 84-85; Alexander 2007, 230-233; Kim 2014; Kim 2015, 40-42).

Alexander’s insight that the essence of trauma lies in the gap between an event and its representation opens the possibility of understanding the matter of a carrier group that is deeply involved in historical revisionism or denialism as core mechanisms in the process of trauma being created and reproduced, rather than as something outside trauma. According to Alexander, a carrier group has ideal and material interests. It is located in a particular place within the social structure. It can be composed of elites but also marginalized classes, and within a fragmented

24) Refer to Hanson (1972) and Putnam (2002). For example, as the well-known duck-rabbit picture illustrates, observation on *x* is formed by prior knowledge. In fact, if analyzed more deeply, one does not make facts but rather a testimony of facts. As can be seen in the discussions on the origin of the word, facts are historical events—they are real—that have already been formed (Bhaskar 2007, 122-126). Also, opinion about those facts are also real as well as being social facts—that are subject to rational evaluation and judgement (Durkheim 1982, 232). Therefore, all statements of facts that are located within certain social relations have the obligation to integrate all values and opinions regarding historical facts.

and polarized social order, it can be institutional, representing one specific social sector or organization against another sector or organization. Thus, there can be several carrier groups. In short, the representation executed by the carrier group, which represents an event, does not exist outside historical suffering. Large numbers of recent research on trauma prove that violence of representation, whereby the truths of an event and the essence of the injury are represented wrongfully, aggravate the suffering of the survivors.²⁵⁾ Therefore, if one were to respect the contribution made by survivors in their transforming, in the public sphere, the pain left by an historical event into an issue of historical responsibility and human rights, then one needs to proactively consider the issue of writing based on human rights in order to mitigate, rather than aggravate, the suffering. Ultimately, this debate is raising anew to intellectuals of our time the need to sincerely self-reflect on responsibilities of academic discipline rather than academic freedom.²⁶⁾

Likewise, the matter of healing should be approached more broadly, going beyond the level of the individual and monetary compensation. Based on the right to know the truth, one needs to take on a perspective of explanatory healing, relational healing based on solidarity, and social healing based on human rights and justice.²⁷⁾ 'Reconciliation' is not much different. "The most important thing for victims of organized crimes by the state and structural violence is structurally clarifying why such unprecedented atrocity could take place (Yasuko Ikeuchi 2016)." This is because it is only when structural truth has been elucidated that truth on the level of relations that was complicit in structural violence can gain meaning. This becomes the premise for going beyond state-centered solutions

25) Refer to Oh Soo-Sung, Shin Hyun-Kyun, Cho Young-Beom (2006), Kang Un-Suk (2012), Kim Bo-Kyung (2014), Kim Myung-Hee and Kim Wang-Bae (2016), Shim Young-Hee (2000), and Yang Hyun-Ah (2006). For recent research on how (in cases of sexual violence) inappropriate perspective toward victims has more damaging effect than the violence itself, refer to "Conventional Thinking is More Damaging Than the Act of Sexual Violence Itself (Narang, 2015)."

26) At this juncture, we need to pay attention to the opinion that what we need is not sensitivity toward nationality but rather sensitivity toward human rights (Yun 2014), and to Maeda Akira (2016, 90), who said it is the responsibility of the academia and the media to sharply point out the lies that are camouflaged as scholarly work.

27) As C. Lasch says, "Because retributive justice has been substituted by therapeutic justice, what came out of resistance against over-simplification of morals can bring about destructive results for moral responsibility" (1989, 269-270).

toward establishing victim- and society-centered justice.²⁸⁾

Against this backdrop, it can be said that developing a way for historical dialogue to contribute to gradually deconstructing, rather than exacerbating, the dilemma of historical self-reflection in East Asia is very critical. A starting point to all this can be found, in part, in searching for solutions in historical communication through solidarity of public memory. Recent research on social memory differentiates the use of collective memory and that of public memory. Collective memory is generated when people remember the same event individually. In short, collective memory is closer to “massive convergence of those who remember the same thing without knowing each other personally (Casey 2004, 23-24).” On the other hand, public memory is formed when people remember something through and within relationships with other members of society (Goodall and Christopher Lee 2014, 4-6). In other words, public memory is created when members of society share a historical event within relationships with one another and agree upon a common perspective of that event.

In fact, as the history of Japanese military “comfort women” movement shows, tight solidarity formed from consideration and interest toward lives/life of others can play a political function, supporting the coming out toward public sphere and protecting those who are speaking out. Here, it is very important to establish solidarity that is personal, voluntary, direct and face-to-face, and is a part of everyday life, thereby barring separation from social space. However, this kind of solidarity is not created naturally. It is mediated by a process in which the voices of those who do not have their own voice are moved from the sphere of moral

28) For propositions on victim- and society-centered fact-finding and establishing of justice, refer to Kang Sŏng-Hyŏn (2016). Since the “2015 Agreement,” one of the most important debates within the Korean academia was “who the victims were.” Since the testimony of Kim Hak-Soon in 1991, a total of 238 women registered themselves in South Korea as victims. The Korean government’s attitude is that of limiting the scope of victims to those still surviving out of all those who registered. However, in Korea, on top of those who testified, lived and died, there are also victims in the broad sense. In this context, Yang Hyun-Ah calls the victims who had registered themselves to the Korean government but had passed away as “victims in the narrow sense.” She considers the “200,000 or so victims,” whose exact number cannot be ascertained, as “victims in the broad sense,” and believes the family members and relatives of those victims and citizens to also embody victim-ness in the widest possible sense. The idea that there are multiple layers of victims is intertwined with how to resolve the issue—through individual recovery from injury or collective recovery from injury, for example (Yang Hyun-Ah 2016, 38-39). From this kind of perspective, it will be possible to search for ways to gain broad victim-ness and its recovery that go beyond the dichotomy of the perpetrator country and the victim country (actors on the state level).

disinterest to a space of appearance, and by a process of discourse where people define and take exclusive ownership over issues they had thought individually, to make them into common issues. To encapsulate, public memory, formed through relationships with others, creates a route of communication for mutually linked location-relational actors, and thus can play the role of encouraging historical self-reflection by reconstructing East Asia's mismatched historical memory into public memory.²⁹⁾

My discussions until now show that the bridging role of "mediators" who carry and represent events, people and the truths relating to their relationships, in other words, an alternative carrier group—like researchers, NGO activist, writers and others—is rising as a new task in East Asian historical communication. Put differently, there is a need to fundamentally reflect upon the social sphere in which historiography and representations take place—in short, upon the transitive dimension of intellectual activity where historical knowledge competes and communicates.³⁰⁾

29) For further details, refer to Junichi Kondo (2003); Kim Myung-Hee (2016b, 386-389).

30) Historical knowledge has both an intransitive dimension that refers to the object itself of knowledge as well as a transitive dimension that refers to the object that is expressed in the knowledge. These concepts remind us that historical knowledge encompasses the ontological dimension as well as the epistemological dimension. It also shows that social activities surrounding historiography, in other words, the transitive dimension of historical knowledge, intervenes dialectically in existing historical processes. For example, the intransitive dimension of historical knowledge negates neither the historical events that took place independent of our knowledge nor the realness of their cause. The transitive dimension does not negate the part that is enacted by reality but rather justly provides us with self-reflection over the process of social construction of historical knowledge, i.e., the possibility of communication. One case in point is the idea of "public history (Lee Dong-Ki 2016)," which is proposed as a juxtaposition in specialized academic research centered in universities and the academia. When the history of the military 'comfort women' movement is looked back from the perspective of public memory or public history, then the significance of the Statue of Peace becomes all the more great.

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