



# HISTORICAL MEMORIES AS SOCIAL-POLITICAL PROCESSES: East Asian Examples

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## I. Introduction

Academia and popular media in both Korea and Japan have begun commemorative activities this year for the 100th anniversary of the Japanese annexation of the Korean peninsula in 1910. In South Korea, a number of events are being prepared to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War. With any commemorative event, observers of politics and society ponder how and why past events influence present political and social landscapes. Indeed, we do not have any hard evidence that commemorative activities or intensifying political and historical memories can actually change or impact the real political structures at both domestic and international levels. While we can expect that the 100th anniversary of the annexation will increase public discourses on the relationship between Korea and Japan, any re-arrangement of the current relationship between the two countries will be largely determined by more tangible political and economic interests rather than historical symbolism marked by commemorations.

Nonetheless, we have to be attentive to the complex relationship between national and social

interests and the role of political and historical memories since the former and the latter cannot be easily separated. As I will discuss further in this paper, the notion of hardcore national interests frequently obscures the question of political subjectivities. When we presume that there is a distinct national interest in global politics, we often ignore the reality that national interests are not simply the aggregated sum of individual interests of a society. When American dissents criticized the Bush Administration for its decision to invade Iraq, they charge, the president with being subject to special interests rather than national interest. But, the problem is that the distinction between national and “special” interest can never be concrete and based upon unanimous agreement among members of the community. For example, a bilateral agreement, such as Korea-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA), can easily ignite intensive social debates around the notion of national interests. Opponents of FTA criticized the Korean government for being submissive to *chaebol's* interests at the expense of national interests, which is seen as the representation of the ordinary

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people. Supporters of FTA counterattacked the opponents for promoting the special interests of farmers at the expense of national interests that should be, instead, translated by Gross National Product and increased exports of Korean industrial outputs. As such, national interest, as a political rhetoric, cannot be calculated simply by examining the current socio-political and economic interests.

We can raise an even more radical question. Is unification with the North a national interest for South Korea? It is quite certain that virtually all South Korean would answer “yes” to this question. Nevertheless, if a survey asks “will national unification benefits your individual life and economic situation?,” respondents might hesitate to answer since South Koreans are not used to reflecting on the issue of unification in terms of individual well-being. Here, we can contemplate what factors shape public conviction to the extent that unification is seen as an uncontroversial Korean national interest when Korean citizens are not really thinking about the real impact of unification to their own lives. With this point, I am neither advocating a certain position regarding Korean national interest nor arguing that unification is not a Korean national interest. Rather, I suggest that the concept of national

interest should be constructed in a specifically way that accounts for the social and public imagination regarding the type of political community we live in and how we should assign political priority in establishing national consensus. In this regard, I suggest that we must think more seriously about issues of national identity that are constructed through the processes of making public memories and national histories.

In this short piece, I will discuss the nature of political and historical memories by examining the relationship between social memories, nationalism and society. Primarily, I define historical memories in a political community as a product of socio-political processes rather than fixed social facts. Memories about the past, especially those from second-hand experiences, are constantly re-defined and re-interpreted by contemporary socio-political dynamics. From this perspective, I argue that there is underlying politics of identity beneath the conflicts of historical memories in East Asia. In other words, any attempt to solve these problems among East Asian nations must be based upon framework of identity politics rather than a framework of historical inquiries searching for facts and truths.

## II. Memory, History and Nationalism

Since the revolutionary work of Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (1941), the study of memories has entered into various fields of social sciences research.<sup>1</sup> As a sociologist influenced by the intellectual tradition of Emile Durkheim, Halbwachs virtually invented the term collective memory while separating it from the understanding of individual memory as a philosophical and/or psychological subject. Just as Clifford Geertz’s innovation of cultural studies

reveals the public nature of cultural meaning,<sup>2</sup> Halbwachs’ notion of collective memory emphasizes the contemporary reconstruction of past events through socio-political agreements, both explicit and implicit. This sociological concern led to his study of how social segments, such as religious sects or classes, construct different collective memories to confirm the contemporary divisions among social groups. In other words, differentiated social grouping requires

distinct collective memories for each group while differentiated collective memories consolidate socio-economic differences between social groups.

While the contribution and significance of Halbwachs' seminal work to the study of social and political memory is uncontroversial, our understanding of collective memory has become much more sophisticated and broader due to the Andersonian revolution in nationalism studies during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>3</sup> The collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s and the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself during the early 1990s can be seen as the watershed for the study of nationalism. The political map of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has been radically changed by newly (re) appearing nationalities demanding their historical right to form autonomous nation states. The end of the Cold War transformed the fundamental structure of political struggles in many other regions of the world as well, in turn, replacing ideology with national and ethnic identity as the basis of collective political claims. The academia quickly responded, and nationalism literature in the 1990s mushroomed so fast that it is very hard to tell which perspective is dominant and which is revisionist.

Of all the theoretical debates and controversies over the sources of nationalism in the 1990s, Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined community impacted the academic world the most because of its novel finding that the nation state could emerge only through refashioning a collective sense of temporality. In other words, a nation could be imagined by the construction of uni-linear temporality. This, in turn, allows us to understand a nation as an organic entity. Compared to divinity oriented temporality, which is circular and non-progressive, a newly emerged progressive / linear temporality in the age of modernity, the nineteenth century, allowed nation states to impose the way in which national

subjects experience time. Through national public education and the proliferation of national museums and memorials, "national history" became the most privileged prism to understand the passing of time. Simultaneously, a nation as an imagined community became the ultimate target of political loyalty since the differences of societal and economic lives were subsumed by the homogeneity promoted by the unified nation. In sum, "[national] history became the mode of being, the condition which enables modernity as possibility, the nation-state is the agency, the subject of History which will realize modernity."<sup>4</sup>

This newly found significance of temporality and history in the study of the nation allows us to better analyze the tension between individual experiences, social memories and national histories. For the purpose of clarification, I assume that individual experiences as segmented, atomized and particular, whereas social memories are locally shared and agreed upon by communities. National histories, however, are the products of nation states, which must secure the political loyalties of their own subjects. In a strict sense, these three do not belong in the same category. Indeed, within the context of national history, virtually all of our daily individual experiences are forgotten and disappear not only from communities, but from the subjects' memories as well. Unless you are a local community historian, local and social memories do not escape from very strictly confined realms. National histories, however, achieve a much longer lifespan since they are supported and legitimized by vast state institutions, such as public schools and museums.

Though they are categorically separated, a national history frequently recruits individual and community memories by refashioning the process of narration. For example, Lu Xun, one of the most important novelist and cultural leaders in early twentieth century China, describes his

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own personal experience when he was a medical student at Tohoku University. He was watching a news film in which the Japanese army beheaded a Chinese man who was accused of being a Russian spy. He describes the incident as follows: “This was during the Russo-Japanese War, so there were many war films, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a film showing some Chinese, one of whom was bound, while many others stood around him. They were all strong fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians, who was to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle.”<sup>5</sup> This personal experience was a critical moment for Lu Xun who just realized that the real source of the Chinese national problem was not physical diseases that could be cured by medical knowledge but spiritual decay that allowed the Chinese people to enjoy the spectacle of the beheading of their own compatriot without a slight sense of sympathy. According to his description, he was not the only one watching the news film in 1905. Then, why and how was this specific personal experience translated into the fate of the Chinese nation? As a talented and spirited novelist, Lu Xun’s will to translate his own experience into the national allegory, and his choice to explore the world of literature for that purpose served as the connecting medium between his personal experience and Chinese national history.

Here is a more personalized example. Three years ago there was a conference on the publication of an alternative East Asian history textbook at the University of Hawaii at Manoa<sup>6</sup>. As one of the participants, I sat with a number of Korean historians in the auditorium of the

Center for Korean Studies. During the middle of the conference, a Japanese history teacher started his presentation with his sincere apology to the Korean people. He mentioned atrocities committed by Japanese militarism, especially the suffering of Comfort Women during the Second World War. I became quite confused by this historian’s sincere apology directed at the Korean presenters and attending audience members. Is it appropriate for me to listen and accept his apology? Why was he looking at a group of Korean male scholars and teachers, including myself? Without it being said, there was a tacit agreement. The suffering of the Comfort Women was, and is, a national matter without a shadow of doubt. Let’s imagine an alternative scenario. What if the conference was strictly based on feminist historiography? Then, I would need to be the one apologizing for being a male scholar who analyzes and interprets a highly patriarchic East Asian historiography. Indeed, the most straightforward and direct demands and offerings of apology can be done between the parties directly concerned with the atrocity, the treatment of Comfort Women, and the Japanese government. As to the question regarding “who apologizes to whom?” all other relations are subject to, and require, different modes of historical interpretation. The military can apologize to civilians. Men can apologize to women. Colonialists can apologize to the colonized. In that auditorium, a Japanese teacher apologized to Korean participants. In this specific incident, national identity was the most important category for both parties. In other words, both parties could understand the full meaning of the apology as they embrace the notion that national subjectivity is the primary prism to understand historical events like the atrocity of Comfort Women.

As shown in the two examples discussed above, the relationship between individual experiences and national history are not prefixed

or unchanging. National histories constantly appropriate individual experiences or social memories in diverse ways. In that sense, collective memory, either social or national, can be seen as a process rather than a fixed social fact. In the following section, I will further explore the understanding of memory as a social process

### III. Remembering the Comfort Women and the Nanjing Massacre

It is important to note that the Comfort Women issue has never been part of the national history until early 1990s. South Korean national history since independence has been shaped by the master narration of independence, division, war and development as well as a regaining the masculinity of the nation after the humiliating colonial experience. As many Korean feminist historians suggest, the history of the nation was highly genderized through endowing masculinity as the condition for proper national citizenship.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the suffering of the nation was the suffering of Korean men, whereas the feminist perspective of the Korean nation was interpreted as the property of Korean men without its own political subjectivity. From this lens, female victims of sexual violence, such as Comfort Women, were seen as humiliating the patriarchic Korean nation, or the de-masculinization of the Korean male. In other words, Comfort Women were unfortunate individuals who might vitiate the dignity of the nation.<sup>8</sup> This public consciousness also penetrated the self-consciousness of the victims. The Comfort Women's earlier testimonies clearly show that they were suffering from self-contempt, humiliation and isolation from the time of their horrible experiences to the emergence of a new public consciousness based on feminism.<sup>9</sup>

As to the question, "why was the issue of the Comfort Women not raised until early 1990s?" a

by examining how past events emerge in the interactions among individual experiences, social memories and national histories and through an investigation of the emergence of Comfort Women narratives and the history of the Nanjing Massacre in the public realm.

majority of studies on this issue tend to highlight the patriarchic and dictatorial nature of Korean politics as the central barrier. Nevertheless, few have explored the factors that enabled the individual tragedies of the Comfort Women to be translated into collective memories of Korean women and the nation. To question "barriers" without investigating the issue of "enablers," however, implicitly obscures the complex relationship between events and memories, as the former question presume that historical events could speak for themselves if no social or political barriers exist. Rather, as I explored in another work, the emergence of a specific experience as historical memory should be investigated in terms of the formation of political subjectivity, that is to say, "who can remember."<sup>10</sup>

The emergence of the Comfort Women atrocity as collective memory is largely indebted to the rise of feminist consciousness in Korean society and the growth of Korean civil society organizations with feminist agenda. In particular, the establishment of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (*Chungdaehyup*) in 1991 was the constellation of the Korean feminist movement in the post-democratization era. With the mobilization of critical resources through this organization, Korean feminists were able to overcome two hegemonic keywords, "nation" and "class" both of which had

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dominated the Korean democratization movement by elevating women's issues and women's history into the Korean public sphere.<sup>11</sup> As "women" became an independent political category, the activists supporting the Comfort Women survivors were able to form strategic alliances with existing progressive social forces and, in turn, negotiate with hegemonic discourses of nationalism. They were able to translate the tragedy of the Comfort Women into different social languages. To make an alliance with progressive, left-wing nationalism, the Comfort Women issue was written in the language of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. At the same time, these feminists used the universalistic concept of human rights to promote their cause in international spaces. For instance, they were able to drastically increase international awareness of the Comfort Women issue by comparing it with the mass rape of Bosnia in the mid-1990s. When Kim Dae-Jung was elected as the first progressive president in South Korea, the feminist activists quickly pressed the government to incorporate the tragedy of the Comfort Women as a key component into the national history. In sum, the newly rising feminist political subjectivity in South Korean civil society was the enabler that translated individual experiences of Comfort Women survivors into the collective memory of Korean society and nation.

If the establishment of the Comfort Women tragedy as collective memory was enabled by the emergence of a new political subjectivity, the emergence of the Nanjing Massacre as the icon of Chinese national suffering was made possible through the transformation of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) self-understanding. Let us recall the key identity of the Chinese Communist Party in their early years. Though initially started as an elite movement led by prominent intellectuals, such as Chen Duxiu or Li Dazhao, Mao's CCP, from his rise to power

in the mid-1930s to his death in 1976, can be easily characterized as the agency of peasant revolution with a strong sense of nationalism. Indeed, the Chinese Revolution was the only major social revolution that started from rural areas and ended with the surrounding and seizing of urban areas, which were formerly controlled by the Nationalist Party – the champion of Chinese capitalist modernity.<sup>12</sup> From the perspective of the earlier CCP, the fall of Nanjing, the capital city of the Republic of China, was not an event that proves the brutality of Japanese militarism but instead provides evidence for the incapability and irresponsibility of the Nationalist Party and its failure to defend its capital city and protect its citizens. Hence, it is not surprising that we cannot find any article mentioning the Nanjing Massacre in the nine volumes of *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. For Mao's China, the Nanjing Massacre was not a national trauma at all.<sup>13</sup> After all, the victims in Nanjing were not the revolutionary subjects in their party history.

While the first textbook controversy between Japan and China in 1982 initiated the reinvestigation of the Nanjing Massacre in Chinese official historiography, the most important factor that relocated the event to the center of Chinese national history is the redefinition of the CCP by itself and the emergence of a new type of nationalistic subjectivity in China during the era of reform. While the Nationalist Party was no longer seen as the archenemy of the PRC after the PRC's successful entrance into the United Nation Security Council, the reforming CCP started to identify itself as a modernizing force in metropolitan areas, such as Shanghai and Beijing. When the skyscrapers of Shanghai became the symbol of the success of the CCP-led economic reform, 1930's Nanjing should now be understood as the forerunner of Chinese modernity.

The emergence of societal and public

nationalism in Chinese society also contributed to the elevated status of the memory of the Nanjing Massacre. The transition toward a market economy and the end of class politics in Chinese society undoubtedly weakened the ideological coherence of the CCP.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the Chinese government strengthened nationalistic and patriotic history education throughout the 1990s,<sup>15</sup> the rise of the Chinese cultural market also contributed to the emergence of commodified historical memories in China. The partial liberalization of the publishing industry and the under-defined VCD and CD markets in the 1990s allowed non-state players to enter into the business of producing political and historical discourses that used to be strictly monopolized by the CCP.<sup>16</sup> Since the late 1990s,

discourses of chauvinistic nationalism and graphic descriptions of the Nanjing Massacre have enjoyed commercial successes.

In contemporary Chinese society, the memories of the Nanjing Massacre are still fresh and unstable as they emerged in the process of the reform. The broadened room for non-state and non-official interpretations of the Nanjing Massacre in the growing Chinese cultural market also force us to consider the dynamics of interactions between state and market in the formulation of public memories on the Nanjing Massacre. In sum, Chinese collective memories of the Nanjing Massacre are not homogeneous and static in spite of the lack of civil society and constant reformulation based on socio-political processes.

#### IV. Toward the Community of Memory?

East Asia is space of shared collective memory and history. This is not only because each nation shares them but also because the memories of one community's is inseparably interlocked with its imaginations about the others. Japanese national identity historically emerged through century-long endeavors to distinguish herself from both the West and Asia at the same time. Hence, the imaginations and interpretations about Chinese and Korean history emerged almost simultaneously with the self-understanding of Japaneseness. When Japan was "othered" and 'orientalized' by the West with essentializing Orientalist discourses, she had to impose even more strengthened Orientalist schemes upon her neighbors. At the same time, Japan had to define herself as an Asian nation to fend off the totalizing and universalizing claims of Western civilization by manufacturing a deep sense of cultural and racial hierarchies among Asian nations.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the Korean national identity was the

product of long-lasting struggles to differentiate herself from two neighboring empires: Japan and China.<sup>18</sup> The deployment of 'nomadic people' or 'horse riding people' to separate Korean identity from China, despite the fact that Korea at the dawn of modernization was predominantly an agricultural society, blurred the borderline with Japan. The authentic Confucian civilization, or literati tradition, to differentiate Korea from Japanese 'military' history damages the borderline with China. China itself has long been swayed between China as a civilization with universalist principles and as a nation with particularistic claims. The un-sinicized territories and people inside of the border disallows the straightforward pursuit of the nationalistic identity, whereas the Westphalian world system in the 19th and 20th centuries has forced China to forget the imperial tribute system. Overall, all nation states in East Asia heavily rely on each other to sustain a concrete national identity; often with countless

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loopholes and logical inconsistencies.

Though the problems of history and identity started from the onset of Western modernity in the nineteenth century, East Asia as a community of shared memory and history becomes particularly significant with the continuing problematization of the memories of the colonial and war-time periods, since the political legitimacy of each nation state largely starts with the national memories of these periods. For China and Korea, the history of anti-Japanese imperialism along with the memories of collective suffering as state-less people been the foundational discourses of the post-war nation state building processes. For Japan, the denial of the militaristic history has been the course of the post-war Japanese identity as a ‘peace-loving’ and ‘civilized’ nation.

The fact that the memories of the colonial and war periods are the sources of national identities for all three East Asian states does not mean that these nations share the same forms and contents of the memory. Ironically, since each nation has too much at stake in their historical interpretation of the same period, the politics of memory has become one of the most difficult problems among these nations. A series of recent events show that each nation state invests equal amount of passion and energy to produce an ethno-centric historiography of the Second World War: Japanese top leaders’ visits the Yasukuni Shrine (especially from 2001); the tension aroused by the emergence of a revisionist textbook sponsored by statist business and political circles in Japan and the subsequent hysterical reactions in China and Korea; and the incessant mobilization of anti-foreigner (*sankokujin*: meaning Koreans and Chinese in Japan), and anti-Japanese sentiments by nationalist politicians in each country. At the center of all these political tensions and popular distrusts against one another lie each nation’s competing claims for the authentic/factual knowledge about

history that presumably makes the distinction between victims and victimizers indisputable. In this sense, East Asia is a community of shared memory and history in a twisted way; a sustainable national identity for each nation state is possible only through denying the others’ history. The morality, legitimacy, and glory of each national history are possible only at the expense of the others’ claim of historical subjectivity.

As to the intensifying politics of memory in East Asia, I argue that the controversies and debates regarding the colonial and war histories in East Asia were escalated because of a futile belief and/or hope that historical accuracy could solve political conundrums in the region. Nationalistic debaters in East Asia accuse neighbors of distorting and politicizing regional histories, especially the traumatic experiences of colonialism and wars. The Japanese have a deep mistrust regarding the political use of the Nanjing Massacre by the Chinese Communist Party, which is in dire need of legitimizing itself during periods of radical economic and social changes. Both Koreans and Chinese are suspect of the underlying connections between the newly emerging Japanese revisionist history and Japan’s ambition to remilitarize herself. For all these claims and suspicions, debaters warn the politicization of history, or political exploitation of historical events.

Here, I like to make a bold claim regarding the relationship between national history/memory and politics. The emergence of history as a modern academic discipline in late nineteenth century Europe cannot be understood without comprehending modern nation states’ need to produce collective identities. A properly designed nation state was supposed to produce a linear collective memory and a national identity to suppress localized interests and reduce mounting class struggles. Local and parochial histories, including dynastic histories, had to be reinterpreted

and re-written as the modern history of the national community. In that process, historical narrations were categorized as legitimate and illegitimate, national and local, orthodox and heretic, and official and popular. This was why certain temples were branded as representatives of superstitions and others were preserved and revered as national treasures in nineteenth century Japan. All the efforts and endeavors of categorization and legitimization stemmed from the newly established historical perspectives centered around the nation state, the ultimate target of political loyalty. Hence, at the very center of any national history, there is the politics of nationalism and the nation state.

If we recognize the inherent politics of national history, the expression of ‘politicized history’ is tautological, if not flawed, as national history is the product of the politics of nationalism. Since all national histories are serving for the politics of nationalism, we cannot simply criticize politically motivated historical narratives. In a similar vein, tensions and conundrums emerging from history and memory cannot be solved by efforts “to set facts straight,”<sup>19</sup> since the central issue of historical narrations is not the problem of distorted or straight facts but the laborious processes of memorization and forgetting through which a nation state becomes the protagonist of any historical narration. At the same time, the demarcation of “us” and “them” in historical narration tremendously contributes to achieving the goal of “exclusion,” which is at the core of the politics of nationalism.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the problem of history is nothing but the problem of political subjectivity. National historians, as the conscious or unconscious accomplices of these nationalizing projects, have concealed the subjectivity of historical writing by not questioning the volatile but delicate relationship between authors and historical facts. By doing so, the historical inquiries were separated from the issue of political

identities by not raising the question of ‘who?’ but instead by confining themselves to the question of ‘what?’

I believe that the solution to the tensions and conflicts over historical memories lies not in the realm of facts but in the questions of political subjects and in the field of identity politics. As I argued elsewhere, the Comfort Women issue and the Nanjing Massacre could be narrated as a collective memory through the formation of new historical subjects.<sup>21</sup> The new historical consciousness produced by the democratization movement and the rise of feminist consciousness in South Korea enabled the collective memory of Comfort Women and, eventually, produced the history of victimization as the core of identity formation by adding women as co-subjects of national suffering, while making a sharp contrast to the developmental nationalism symbolized by the Park Chung-Hee era (1961-1979). In other words, the victims’ individual experiences (kidnapping and rape) as un-interpreted bare facts were transformed into collective experiences by making women legitimate national subjects in South Korea. The ever-changing discourses of the Nanjing Massacre also reflect the shifting position of the Chinese Communist Party and the new subjectivity emerging in Chinese society during the era of reform. The peasant identity of the Chinese Community Party has been replaced by the symbolism of skyscrapers in Shanghai and Beijing. Hence, destruction of Nanjing, the capital of the Kuomintang and one of the most modernized Chinese cities in the 1930s gains new meanings since the start of the reform. Taiwan’s move toward independence by distancing itself from the Chinese nation and its construction of a hybrid identity, that is to say, a Chinese/Japanese/Indigenous nation, also forces Chinese popular nationalism to admit to unending national humiliation. Occasional voices

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of ‘denial’ from Japan are actively vitiating the Chinese Communist Party’s identification with the ‘victorious’ Chinese nation. As such, the memories of the Comfort Women and the Nanjing Massacre have never been stabilized nor will they be in the near future. This is not because of the vagueness or instability of historical inquiries about these two events, but because of the ever-changing nature of the political subjects in these societies that remember past key events as the ultimate source of political legitimacy.

In a similar vein, inclusion and exclusion of the Comfort Women and the Nanjing Massacre in Japanese history textbooks primarily depends on the fluctuating Japanese collective identity as opposed to the factuality or truthfulness of those events. The emphasis on political subjectivity in historical writing and reading, however, neither implies nihilistic or cynical perspectives of history nor endorses the deniers’ claim, as both attitudes are based on the normative superiority of objectivity and factuality in historic writing. To the contrary, history, as the field of political struggle, is the space of both problems and solutions for contending political identities. As I mentioned earlier, East Asia is a community of shared memory and history defined by ‘negativity.’ I believe that the overcoming of this negativity of history and memory in East Asia is possible only through the formation of multiple subjectivities that ignore national borders and effectively challenge nation-centered historical consciousness in each society. In that sense, recent movements in East Asia to produce society-initiated history textbooks are noteworthy. For instance, *The Modern History of East Asia*, written by a number of progressive scholars in China, Japan and Korea, tries to provide a new mode of historical consciousness in the region. Though there are numerous criticisms against this book, such as the segmented writing styles have failed

to overcome the nation-state centered history writings, its efforts to avoid East Asian history as national competitions and “us” versus “them” perspectives are praiseworthy and meaningful. The interpretation of early twentieth century East Asia is largely based on transnational “elements,” such as class, industrialization, revolution, fascism, anti-colonialism and peasants, that frequently require non-national prisms for appropriate understanding. Similarly, *The Modern History of Korea and Japan through the Women’s Eye* is an impressive attempt to read modern histories of Korea and Japan from a gendered perspective. By refusing to recognize the nation and nation state as the primary unit of historical analysis, this book suggests a transnational alliance between Korean and Japanese women in a highly patriarchic East Asian social climate.

The new attitudes presented in these two publications imply the ultimate solutions to the conflicts over historical memories in East Asia. The problems of memory embedded in the nation centered histories of East Asia can be overcome only through the production of non-national, transnational identities that are willing to and capable of constructing their own histories.

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Notes:

- 1 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective memory*, Edited, Translated and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. For recent theoretical studies on collective memory that stem from Halbwachs’ perspective, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003; Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998); James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 2 Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).
- 3 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections*

- on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London, Verso, 1991).
- 4 Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 20. Consider our everyday expression regarding modernity. We are used to mention that a nation's advance to modernity or post-modernity. For instance, we can say that "China is modernizing," or "Japan as a post-modern nation." But, we do not say that "Mr. Smith became modernized," or "working class of France was modernized in the late nineteenth century." As such, we understand the issue of modernity exclusively through the lens of nation states.
  - 5 Lu Xun, "Preface to Call to Arms," <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lu-xun/1922/12/03.htm>
  - 6 An international conference, "History that Opens the Future: A Multinational History Textbook," hosted by The University of Hawaii School of Asian and Pacific Studies, the Northeast Asia History Foundation, and East-West Center, October 7-8, 2009 at the Center for Korean Studies.
  - 7 Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).
  - 8 Chin-song Chong, *Ilbongun Song Noyeje: Ilbongun Wianbu munje ui silsang kwa ku haegyol ul wihan undong* (The Japanese Military Sexual Slavery: The Realities of the Comfort Women Problem and the Movements toward a Solution (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2004), pp. 99-101.
  - 9 See Sangmie Choi, Schellstede ed., *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000); Keith Howard ed., *Tue Stories of the Korean Comfort Women: Testimonies Compiled by the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan and the Research Association on the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan*, translated by Young Joo Lee (London: Cassell, 1995).
  - 10 Jungmin Seo, "Politics of Memory in Korea and China: Remembering the Comfort Women and the Nanjing Massacre," *New Political Science*, volume 30, no. 2 (September 2008).
  - 11 An interview with a chief staff of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, October 2008.
  - 12 Tang Tsou "Interpreting the Revolution in China: Macrohistory and Micro mechanisms," *Modern China*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2000).
  - 13 For a further discussion of the dismissal of the Nanjing Massacre by CCP until early 1980s, see Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in History and Memory: Japan, China, and the United States, 1937-1999," Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1997.
  - 14 Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity and International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
  - 15 Suisheng Zhao, "A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, volume 31, no. 3 (1998).
  - 16 Jungmin Seo "Nationalism in the Market: The Chinese publishing industry and the nationalistic discourses in 1990s," Ph.D. Dissertation, the University of Chicago, 2005.
  - 17 Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
  - 18 Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
  - 19 *China Daily*, June 10, 2005.
  - 20 Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York: Verso, 1991).
  - 21 Jungmin Seo, op. cit.