



## Globalization of 'Gaiatsu' Network by Kim Jin Hyun

I must say I quite welcome Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's comments that there was no proof that the so-called "comfort women" had been forced into military brothels during the World War II. In fact, I half-hope that he dons his Shinto robes and visit the Yasukuni Shrine sometime soon. Better yet, maybe we could have Emperor Akihito break the practice since 1975 and go pay respects to the shrine where class-A war criminals are honored.

The more Japan shows its true colors of historical distortion, the more the world will see that ignorance, shallow economic interests, or short-term security issues are not reasons enough to turn a blind eye to the uncivilized, historically fallacious, anti-humanitarian, and illogical displays by mainstream Japan. It is time to demand Japan be humane, logical, and reverent of history. The more Japan's government and jingoist main stream politics slip back into denial of the Tokyo Tribunal's verdict on its war crimes, the more the victims of its war in Asia (China, Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Korea...) and the civilized world will be compelled to resist against it in unity.

Mr. Abe is not the only Japanese authority figure who has recently voiced remarks ducking responsibility for the atrocities committed by Japan during the war. The foreign minister, the education minister, and the ruling party policy chief are among those who have recently publicly denied wrongdoings by Japan in the war, such as the mobilization of war sex slaves. The Japanese government from time to time causes an uproar in neighboring Asian countries by approving history textbooks that intentionally distort the facts about Japan's role in the war.

At the moment, there is also an ongoing chauvinistic drive to revise the present Constitution that bars Japan from the potential to start another war and to pave the way for nuclear armament. Every August, Japanese politicians belligerently visit the Yasukuni Shrine to commemorate the ending the World War II.

These displays are all the more lamentable because they are not meant to be political tactics; rather, they are taken to be the sincere expressions of the genuine beliefs of these politicians on the war. The severity of the problem rises with the fact that most of these politicians were born after the war and are products of an affluent post-war era. These are the elites who were educated on 'democratic citizenship' in the finest of Japan's schools under the so-called MacArthur Constitution. Led by these elites, the general public also harbors such nationalist sentiments inwardly.

This is not a phenomenon to be dismissed as a random collection of 'personal' or 'unofficial' opinions of individual politicians. It is a question of just how truly reformed

mainstream Japanese politics are from the times of the war. Why can Japan not get rid of its extreme rightist, nationalist, and "samurai" ambitions despite its high level of education, social liberalization, and success as a high-tech economy? Why are post-war politicians even more defiant than their fathers? There could be various explanations. Angst against the 'lost decade'? Reacting tough to intimidate latecomer China? Lashing out in fear of North Korea's long range missile and nuclear threat? These, however, are only superficial reasons.

The truth is, nothing has changed about mainstream Japan since the days of Mr. Abe's father and his grandfather. It has only put on a pretense of changing, pressured by the censure of international society. One might note the fact that such lamentable displays started increasing in volume and intensity since the days of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. It had to do with the fact that with the closing of the Cold War era, the pressure was off Japan. Unfortunately Japan's mainstream politics today is controlled by the same militaristic nationalist forces that emerged during the Meiji Restoration and ruled the nation from before, throughout, and after the war.

Japan has a neatly enclosed citizen society but it is not a citizen nation. It is, in a strict sense of speaking, a hierarchical country with a closed political structure, with taboos on the emperor, the "*burakumin*" like 'untouchables' in India, and the "*gaijin*", a term usually referring to the Chinese and Koreans living in Japan. Japan has never in its history had its government or constitution changed by popular consent, social intellectuals, or political opposition. To the Japanese, change and reform only came through "*gaiatsu*" (external pressure) and military defeat. The only significant changes in Japan's history came either with foreign military *gaiatsu*, such as the Perry expedition in 1853 and General MacArthur's governance in 1945, or with foreign financial *gaiatsu*, such as the 1985 Plaza Accord.

The only way to change Japan's nationalist mainstream represented by Mr. Abe and his colleagues is through an international network of pressure against Japan. Such a network might include internationally known figures like former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, former Prime Minister Helmut Schmidt of West Germany, and Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore, who have already voiced apprehension of Japan's unrepentant ways. It would also consist of conscientious politicians such as the Japanese-American Democratic representative from California, Mike Honda, and World War II veterans from Australia, Great Britain, and the Netherlands among other countries. Modern Japanese historians, including John Dower and Herbert P. Bix from the United States and Australia's Gavon Daws, could also be called upon to lend their voices to the network. Also, international humanitarian and women's organizations, UN

agencies, and Asian NGOs could act as major network initiators through such efforts as the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal held in Tokyo in 2000.

To be sure, there are good-willed citizens and groups in Japan. Unfortunately, there are too few of them to make an impression on the mainstream. If you want to see Japan change by herself without *gaiatsu*, you have to change the emperor. The only power to lead a reform in Japan comes not from its citizens, businesses, or universities, but only from the emperor. If that proves impossible, then we can only wait for the outcome of the late London School of Economics Professor Michio Morishima's "Why will Japan collapse" published in 1999, to happen in real life. Wrong politics create enervation in the people and enervated people in turn create wrong politics. Japan will collapse from within with the proliferation of the loneliest youth with the lowest sense of self-esteem in the world, as hinted by the depiction of Japanese youth in all the opinion surveys since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

South Korea has arrogant China to the west, a 3,000-year-old stronghold of centrist hegemonism. To the east, it has a theocratic Japan, cheating history and unrepentant. Belligerent North Korea, led by the mystic Kim Jong-il regime, is to the north.

Does the Republic of Korea have the will, the wisdom and the ability to survive against these adversities?

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