

Hate Speech or Voice from Minority? - Media's Dilemma under Multicultural Pressure

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This research examines the mass communication discourse on Japanese hate speech incidents and briefly sketches the related arguments. The analysis seeks to offer insights into the recent backlash against minorities. The incidents appear to be the product of a combination of contemporary deprivation and systematic racism, compounded by neo-conservative xenophobia and ethnocentrism which are fundamentally caused by the *jus sanguinis* (Latin: right of blood) law¹. Despite these occurrences, media discourse tends to downplay the problem of Japanese harming the ethnic Koreans, portraying these racists as alienated youth who consider hate speech as one form of identity politics. Facile multiculturalists let these racists speak and act freely, as if the facts about mistreatment of minorities and their being were merely options. This creation of a new, disadvantaged minority may lead to further hostile responses and strengthen existing ethnic divides; often it causes members of the general public to distance themselves from the issue.

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¹ This is a principle of nationality law according to which citizenship is determined not by one's place of birth but having one or both parents who are citizens of the state..

What Is Hate Speech?

The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers Recommendation 97(20) on "hate speech"² defined the term "hate speech" as all forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, or discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin. National hate speech laws have progressively been invoked to criminalize speech that is deemed insulting to one's race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality.

There are considerable differences between the United States and other Western democracies in terms of their responses to hate speech. In the United States, speech in general is attached broad constitutional protection. Hate speech is accepted from a legal viewpoint as protected by the basis of the First Amendment. Contrarily, in other Western nations such as Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom, it is largely prohibited and subjected to criminal sanctions under international human rights treaties.

The recent Japanese proliferation in street protests using hate speech against ethnic minorities has attracted worldwide attention. The U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the U.N. Human Rights Committee on Racial Discrimination have called on Japanese authorities to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute individuals as well as organizations responsible for hate speech and to combat hate speech in the media including the Internet. Moreover, the U.N. Human Rights Committee on Racial Discrimination urged specific and comprehensive legislation prohibiting racial discrimination.

Cultivation Of Racism

◆ From Xenophobia to Ethnic Cleansing

Japanese hate speech has become more aggressive recently, with protesters openly advocating ethnic cleansing. Finally, following some initial reluctance, the Japanese media have begun to cover this issue. However, sociologists and others have expressed

² Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation No.R(97) 20 to Member States on "Hate Speech," adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 October 1997 at the 607th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.

concern that the government has yet to take the situation seriously and consider whether rethinking the legality of hate speech might be worth the risk of reducing the freedom granted to legitimate expression³.

Most of the protests appear to have been organized by a vocal new group, Zaitokukai, whose website boasts of almost 14,000 members. The protestants believe that their unfortunate status is caused by foreigners especially those ethnic Koreans who believe that their misfortunes have been caused by foreigners, especially ethnic Koreans, who perceived to be receiving favorable treatment from the Japanese government. The protesters are relatively small in number, and their strident anti-Korean stance is viewed with contempt by most Japanese. It is widely believed that the members of Zaitokukai tend to be young Japanese men who feel alienated by personal failures and their inability to land stable corporate jobs and who express their resulting frustration by blaming foreigners. The media coverage of hate speech inclined to treat Zaitokukai as a minority activist group (as will be explained later). When we closely observe the media discourse on hate speech, it is understood that the media have tended to portray the members of Zaitokukai as a marginalized minority. But then, why are their views getting wide spread attention? Are they really a marginalized minority?

◆ A Revisionist Trend

The discussions regarding Zaitokukai demonstrate the complexity of racism in Japan. Some sociologists and Journalists say they are to mistake the problem of economic deprivation, unequal distribution of wealth and racial hierarchy (see Kayano 2011⁴). Some say that its members lack a clear ideology but usually step forward to violence, unlike traditional right-wing groups. However, a closer look at the group reveals that its members have been politically awakened by historical revisionism⁵. Because Right-wing historical revisionism set its targets on Korea, Zaitokukai s began targeting ethnic Koreans⁶.

This revisionist trend has blanketed Japan. Books and periodicals highly critical of both China and South Korea are bestsellers, prompting leading publishing companies to the bandwagon and take advantage of the trend⁷. The weekly magazines in isolation

³Asahi Newspapers, March 16, 2013. Section 37.

⁴Kayano, Toshihito. 2011 *Is Nationalism Evil?*NHK Publications.

⁵Higuchi, Naoto, 2013 “To Capture the Core of Ethnocentric Movement :Research on Zaitokukai” *Journalism* no.282, pp.66-73. Asahi Shimbun.

⁶ Ibid. 71

⁷ “Publications disparaging S. Korea and China are hot sellers in Japan” Feb. 12. 2014.

have not created this boom. At the root of the trend is the mass media's tendency of to report public characters' discriminatory remarks without criticism.⁸ Also, Japan has systemically discriminating against ethnic Koreans residing in Japan.

◆ Systematic Discrimination on Ethnic Koreans

Koreans, who constitute Japan's largest minority group, still face discrimination in Japan. Ethnic Koreans have the legal status of foreigners even though many of them have been living in Japan for generations, as descendants of those forcibly brought to Japan during its 1910-1945 colonial rule of Korea. They are called "Zainichi" which means "residing in Japan". The use of this term reflected the overall expectation that Koreans were living in Japan on a temporary basis, and this expectation has precluded their full membership in Japanese society. Their status is not parallel to that of immigrants in other countries, such as Korean Americans in the U.S. The vast majority of ethnic Koreans are legally classified as foreigners and hold foreign passports.

Nationalization as a Japanese citizen often emerges as a central issue with regard to the role of state institutions in marginalizing ethnic Koreans, because it is perceived as "the only option for many in the full attainment of rights as citizens of Japan."⁹ This kind of systemic racism against ethnic Koreans may also be a root to cause for the prejudice against them.

Japanese sociologist Shiobara Yoshikazu explains, that discussion of racial/ ethnic issues needs to begin from the assumption that inclusion and recognition of ethnic minorities have not made much progress in Japan.¹⁰ The existence of ethnic minorities is still unrecognized. The circumstances under which such groups can engage in public discourse as equals while expressing their identity have not yet been established.

The following sections will examine in detail the media discourse on hate speech issues in Japan.

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201402120004> accessed in July 7, 2015.

⁸ Mori, Chikako, 2014 "Relationship of Hate Speech and Racism: why we need to understand" in Kim (ed.) *Hate Speech Legal Approach*. Pp3-14.

⁹ Chapman 2008: 62, Yoshioka 1978: 27. Chapman, David. 2008 *Zainichi Korean Identity and Ethnicity*, N.Y: Routledge. Yoshioka, Masuo. 1978. "Zainichi Foreigners and Japanese Society, Shakaihyoronsha.

¹⁰ Yoshikazu, Shiobara. 2013 "Hate Speech and Sociology of Vulnerability" <<http://synodos.jp/society/5846>> accessed Oct. 11, 2014.

Analysis: Media Discourse On Hate Speech

Initially, the mass media was reluctant to report on activities expressing hatred toward particular social groups, because they did not want to spread information that was harmful to people's self-esteem and dignity fearing their reports be triggering. However, Zaitokukai was able to reach a broader audience effectively by using video sharing sites. Its growing visibility both on the Internet and on the street garnered maximum public and media attention.

◆ Hate Speech as Activism by a Minority Group in a Multicultural Society

Zaitokukai attracted attention by marching in Tokyo's ethnic Korean neighborhood of Okubo, shouting anti-Korean slogans. Several protesters were arrested after a confrontation with counter-activists. In this incident, the mass media framed Zaitokukai as minority in Japanese society and positioned the counter-activists and victims in the same way. The following comments are typical of the mild media criticism of the protest:

“There would be some people who are offended by the demonstration.”

“Freedom of expression” is important, however offending one's heart or stirring up hatred is disappointing.” (Yomiuri Newspapers, August 7, 2013, Education section)

Minority1 Zaitokukai: Someone who is not us

The media have dubbed Zaitokukai the Net far right, because they are loosely organized via the Internet, and gather together only for demonstrations. They function as a virtual community that maintains its own websites to announce the time and venue of protests, exchange information, and post video recordings of their demonstrations. Here are two examples of how Zaitokukai has been described in the media.

“A group brandishing xenophobic claims... Why do they throw such violent expressions out?” (Asahi Newspapers, April 28, 2013, Section 39).

“It is certain that their demonstration would harm the national interest” (Asahi Newspapers, March.16, 2013, Section 37).

Minority2: Shibakitai—counter-group---

“Shibakitai” is the shortened form of “Racist wo Shibakitai.” Shibaki means to punch. This group describes itself as a resistance movement opposing those who discriminate. Media coverage has not been any more favorable to this group than to its opposition.

I get the impression that demonstrating group and Shibaki (counter demonstrators) are both to blame. (Asahi Newspapers August.10 2013 section13)

Police began breaking up the fight and started arresting some members of both groups, including *Zaitokukai* leader Makoto Sakurai and three of his members, along with the counter-protest leader Kenji Kubo plus three members of his group as well. They were all detained on suspicion of criminal assault. (Yomiuri Newspapers June.17, 2013, Osaka local).

Mainichi Newspapers wrote a feature article on a member of the resistance troops. In this article, a leader of the counter-group is portrayed as an outsider character.

“<70years of peace> never to repeat Korean Massacre after the Great Kanto earthquake¹¹... now hate speech”

Here is a right-wing youth who is against hate speech: the leader of “Yuukokukadoukai,” Jiro Yamagushi (29). He does not stop his actions even his right-wing friends call him a betrayer. “Emotionally I can’t ignore the situation that [the demonstrators] are crowds bullying the weak.” He started his counter racist activity in February 2013 opposing the hate speech groups

screaming “North and South Koreans must die.” He stands in front of them before they throw out expressions of hatred. “For the time being, I try to be non violent,” he said. Still, sometimes the counter-activity produces a major fight. Participants include a man

¹¹ After the earthquake, the mindless slaughter of thousands of ethnic Koreans. Rumors spread that Korean residents in Japan had poisoned wells that provided drinking water or attempted to foment rioting through attacks of arson. The government declared martial law, which led to a wave of killings of Koreans in the disaster areas (Koji Kitabayashi “Remembering Koreans massacred after Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923” *Asahi Newspapers* 2013. 9.1.).

with a tattoo who be mistake as mafia. “My look is not great, so I am okay with being the bad guy. But I want to stop it if someone is being discriminated against, no matter what.” He expresses his anger towards the racists who threaten students at Korean schools by spitting on the storefront.(Mainichi Newspapers, September 1, 2014, Gunma local)

At this point, the mass media are equating, with regard to status, the group which engages in hate speech and the counter-protesters, casting both of them in a marginal position. By placing both groups of actors in the same minority status, the mass media process the issue as a standardized collision between minorities lacking full understanding of racism or multiculturalism.

◆ **Multiculturalism?**

This minority vs. minority depiction is often criticized by researchers on race relations as leading both groups to amplify hatreds toward each other. Both groups are perceived to be outside the majority of “normal” Japanese as they trade barbs in a culturally marginal setting..

In media discourse, solution to this problem of hate speech can be expressed in the word “kyosei”, the term used to symbolize a multicultural society. It can be translated as multicultural co-existence or multicultural integration.

In Everyone’s Park: Japanese and Koreans, Should Happily Coexist by Korean student JAEWOO JEONG (age 19) says, “Is there any way to have reconciliation with those Japanese who hate us? I heard there was a counter demonstration regarding hate speech toward Koreans in Okubo Park a few days after my arrival. Will someday Japanese and Koreans coexist happily together some day? If another demonstration should occur, I would join it. I wish from the bottom of my heart that Japanese and Koreans could coexist without any hard feelings. (Mainichi Newspaper October.26, Tokyo, Section9)

A third generation Ethnic Korean Mr. No speaks regarding hate speech, “Do we need to have ethnic identity which lead to confrontation? We need to think of the ways to coexist in same society.” (Mainichi Newspaper, June 18, 2013, West Section25).

However, this ideal of coexisting and inclusion in the host society is possible only if the minority compromises by giving up its ethnic distinctiveness. This coexisting inclusion undermines the minority group by asking it to align itself with the majority. In this way, the promotion of multicultural coexistence by both the media and the government aims at integrating non-Japanese residents rather than creating a society that is truly amenable to all types of ethnic backgrounds.

Conclusion

The systemic ethnocentrism that is currently prominent in Japan and the rise of neo-conservative xenophobia together have fanned the flames of ill feeling against minorities. Correspondingly, the traditional right wing's current version of historical revisionism has set its targets on Korea.¹² The right wing has not only emphasized confrontation between racial groups but also media discourse has failed to consider seriously the problem of Japanese who harm ethnic Koreans.

The Japanese mass media have viewed counter-protesters as equivalent to violent street protesters and positioned both as minority activities while reinforcing the view of victims as members of marginalized ethnic groups. This positioning potentially encourages apathy among the general population. This creation of a new minority may lead to further hostile responses, strengthen existing divisions, and cause the general Japanese public to feel distanced from the issue. Portraying Zaitokukai's hate speech as a result of more stratified society reflects another dilemma brought on by multiculturalism, the dilemma of identity politics.

¹² Higuchi 2013 71-72.