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## Sensibility, "Categories," and the East Asian Community

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### INTRODUCTION

If history refers to the totality of what happened in the past, we can "represent" only a minuscule portion of it. This is why, I believe, Jacques Le Goff wrote that history is a "narrative, which can be true or false, based on 'historical reality' or on pure imagination" (1992:192). In other words, history is only what we manage to narrativize in writing and/or in speech, is always contested in terms of "truth," and is thus in "the realm of the inexact" (Ricoeur, quoted in Le Goff *ibid*:105). Nonetheless, to still pursue "historical reality," we resort to various tactics that include: 1) dividing time into eras ("ancient," "medieval," "pre-modern," "modern," etc.); 2) dividing space into parts ("empires," "nation-states," "regions," "cities," "villages," etc.); and 3) categorizing people, the subjects of history, into groups in terms of nationality, race/ethnicity, gender, occupation, generation, class, status, and so forth ("Japanese" and "Americans," "men" and "women," "soldiers" and "civilians," the "old" and the "young," the "rich" and the "poor," the "enemy" and the "friend," the "vic-

timizer" and the "victim," the "colonizer" and the "colonized," etc.). The history of East Asia is no exception to this rule. Particularly since the end of the last world war, as the state has become one of the active story tellers of history, these "concepts" (all the words above in quotation marks), some of which form a binary, seem to have gained new power as the means of politics. Yet, do these concepts help us to expand the range of history that we could narrativize? Do they assist us better to reach historical realities? And if they instead prevent us from doing so, what are the alternatives? In this chapter, while attempting to answer these questions, I would like to invoke and discuss "sensibility" as the means of interrogating these "concepts," which have been conventionally used in the writing of East Asian history, particularly since 1945.

What I will propose is not new: rather, it is something we often forget, and I was indeed reminded of my own forgetfulness by the book by a German linguist, Uwe Pörksen, titled *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language* (1995). While this is not the place

where I summarize this book, one example of such "plastic words" will suffice my purpose, "develop" or "development." Pörksen argues that the verb "develop" is both transitive and intransitive verbs. As a transitive verb, it means: "The subject A develops the object B." As an intransitive verb, it means: "B changes over time." Yet, the conventional meaning of "development" fails to indicate "who changes what", and we confuse "development" with "forward change" or even with "history." Are many concepts we use today in writing East Asian history plastic words? And if so, does our "sensibility" to these words help us to untangle the problems we ourselves create by relying on conventional concepts? These are the questions I pose in this chapter.

## TWO NARRATIVES OF MEMORY

Let me begin with the narratives of Ishihara Yoshirō (1915-1977) and Aizawa Yoshi (1914-2004), who in my view tried to rescue themselves out of the established concepts/categories of history to reach closer to "historical realities."

Ishihara was one of the members of the Kwantung Army, Japan's 700,000-strong Manchurian garrison. When the Soviet Union declared war on Japan on August 8, 1945, the Army was decimated and some 55,000 of them were believed to have died within a week. Most of the remaining soldiers, including Ishihara, were sentenced to terms of 15 to 25 years for a variety of "counter-revolutionary" offenses against the Soviet Law and interned in the Soviet gulag in Siberia. Ishihara did not return to Japan until 1953. Since before his repatriation,

he had tried to put his experiences in narratives of poem and prose. What follows is a passage from one of his publications, *Nichijō e no kyōsei*, published in 1970.

Perhaps when violence and harm are juxtaposed, the victim "exists only as a collective." What is of infinite concern to me is the "retreating figure" of the man who, amid the flux of harm inflicted and harm suffered, is shocked by the discovery in himself of a steadfast victimizer, withdraws alone from the group, and leaves it behind him (1970:256-57).<sup>1</sup>

Aizawa Yoshi was a teacher of Harbin Higher School for Japanese Women in Manchuria whom I met in Tokyo in 1999. In 1940, she lost 20 students and 2 colleagues of this school in the typhoid epidemic that brazen through the city of Harbin. For several decades after Japan's capitulation and her repatriation, Yoshi believed it was the general lack of hygiene in China that caused the epidemic. When I met her, however, she conveyed to me her firm belief that her students and colleagues got sick and died of typhoid caused by bacilli spread by Unit 731, a biological warfare unit of the Japanese imperial army. In comparison to the pain of thousands of Chinese victims and their surviving families, "my pain is only the size of a poppy seed" (私の痛みは芥子粒ぐらいのものだけけれど), so prefacing her remark, she said:

Recently, I was deeply surprised to hear that those who had sprayed the bacilli were the soldiers of Unit 731, the notorious bacteriological unit that ap-

<sup>1</sup> It is Andrew Barshay, a historian at the University of California, Berkeley, who alerted me to Ishihara and his works. The translation of the original in Japanese is also his, which appears in his unpublished article "The Painted Gulag: Kazuki Yoshio and The Siberia within Me." The original is the following: "おそらく加害と被害が対置される場合では、被害者は「集団としての存在」でしかない...私が無限に関心を持つものは、加害と被害の流動の中で、確固たる加害者を自己に発見して衝撃を受け、ただ一人集団を去っていくその「後ろ姿」である" (石原 1970: 256-57)

pears in Morimura Seiichi's documentary, *Akuma no hōshoku* [Devil's Gluttony]. Unit 731 threw the bacilli in a pond for the purpose of infecting the Chinese. Without knowing it, a Chinese who washed the vegetables in that pond came to our school and a dormitory houseboy bought these vegetable. Having learned this, I feel outraged but I do not know to whom I should direct my anger. Since my fellow countrymen did this, rather than being concerned about myself, I feel deeply sorry for the people in China. My hatred against war, that often changes humans to devils, has grown further (1999, personal communication).<sup>2</sup>

In these narratives, both Ishihara and Yoshi face the formidable limit posed by the binary of the “victim” and the “victimizer,” and in the sense that they suffer from this challenge, both emerge as the “suffering victimizers.” In the conventional narrative of the history of East Asia, however, there is no such concept/category as the “suffering victimizer.” Hence, Ishihara could only express his identification with the “suffering victimizer” in the process of first “discovering” the “victimizer” in himself as he oscillates between the “victim” and the “victimizer,” and leaving alone the collectivity of the “victim,” and yet he could show only his “back” to the “victims.” Likewise, Yoshi struggled with the category of the “war victim,” the boundary of which was by no means clear in her mind. After all, it is the Japanese state that counts the “Japanese war dead,” but even the category of the “Japanese” is unclear in the context of

the multi-ethnic and vanquished Japanese Empire. Furthermore, while the Japanese “civilian” victims have been incorporated into the “Japanese war victims,” they have been hierarchically placed under the “soldier victims.” For this reason, their surviving families have never been entitled to any form of compensation from the Japanese state. While the state assumes that “soldiers” died for the sake of the country, the same state also assumes that the “Japanese civilian victims” were killed by Japan's enemies and thus died for the sake of the country. Those killed by the Japanese army, then, are not war victims but merely the products of unfortunate accidents. Since the 22 victims of typhoid whom Yoshi remembered were “nothing” to the state, Yoshi became skeptical of the ways in which the conventional narrative of the history of East Asia has always categorized people into the “Japanese” and the “Chinese” or the “friends” and the “foes.” Here, then, I would like to propose the “history of sensibility” to replace the “history of concepts and categories” to rescue Ishihara and Yoshi from what Ishihara calls *nichijō* (daily routines), and many other survivors from the same predicament. But first, a few words about “sensibility.”

In my own discipline of anthropology, “sensibility” is often considered to be one of the twins: another twin is “culture.” In the introductory course of cultural anthropology, for example, we learn that the notion of “culture” has only been democratized since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, the idea that “everyone is cultural” or “everyone has culture” was new then in the

<sup>2</sup> This quote is my own translation of the transcribed records: “最近ね、私の（経営する）本屋さんに来たある方がね、チフス菌をばらまいたのはあの731の隊員だと言ったの。ほら、あの森村誠一の“悪魔の飽食”に出てくる細菌部隊よ。731がまず満人をチフスにかからせるためにチフス菌を池にまき、それを知らずにとある満人がその池の水で野菜を洗って、その野菜を学校の寮の食堂のボーイが買ったらしいの。このことを知ってからね、怒りがおさまらないのよ、でもその怒りを誰にぶつけていいのかもわからないの。我が同胞がやったわけだから、自分自身がどうのこうのというよりも、中国の人たちにたいしてほんとうに申し訳がないの。戦争というのは人を悪魔にかえてしまう—だからその戦争を憎むしかないのよね。” See Tamanoi (2000) for the full discussion of my interview with Aizawa Yoshi.

West, as before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, only a small segment of population—the middle- and upper-class Europeans— were considered to be cultural. The founders of cultural anthropology wrested this “culture” from the European elites and made it into the property of everyone while battling with the Social Darwinism popular in the West. This is how I was taught of the democratic foundation of cultural anthropology. The history of “sensibility” in the West is almost parallel to this history of “culture.” Thus, Daniel Wickberg writes that there are two roots of the modern concept of “sensibility”: one lies in the 17<sup>th</sup> century British empiricism that equates “sensibility” with the human biological capacity for sensation; another root lies in the idea of moral and emotional capacity beyond the narrow biological capacity for receiving impressions from the external world. This second root suggests that only a fraction of people—the (European) elites—had “sensibility” while others did not. Yet, akin to what happened to “culture,” “sensibility” too was democratized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and became the capacity of everyone. As Franz Boas would say, every human being is cultural and sensible. I will therefore use “sensibility” to refer to the capacity to perceive and feel, which anyone is believed to possess, and here I am interested in the sensibility of the one who narrativizes history, whether s/he may be a scholar, an author of autobiography, the state, or the so-called informants of our inquiry.

### TO THE HISTORY OF SENSIBILITY

The question, then, should be: what should we learn from the sensibilities of Ishihara and Yoshi? Or how can we as researchers cultivate our sensibility to reach closer to the historical realities of East Asia? In my attempt to answer this question, I will make the following proposals, but note that these proposals are still half-baked and

come with their own problems (which I will discuss in conclusion).

#### 1) Question the established concepts and categories.

In so doing, we should be “sensitive” to that: (1) each category/concept does not represent a homogenous entity; (2) each category/concept has a porous boundary; (3) there are always those who refuse to be categorized and those who are unsure of which group they belong to; and (4) such a category/concept may prevent us from exploring the intricate power relations among those who claim their memberships in it. Here, I specifically note that the “past” and the “present” are also already established categories/concepts. Relying on the divide between the two, we often define the past and the present un-problematically, as the colonial period (the past) and the post-colonial period following the end of formal colonialism (the present). We therefore must be sensitive to that: the present determines the way people narrativize the past experiences to a great extent.

#### 2) Be sensitive to the narratives of memory.

Since the 1990s, East Asia has become one of the most “remembered” geopolitical regions of the world, causing at times a war of memories. “Memory” in itself is a vast subject. Memory is infinite because all consciousness is mediated by it. Memory is also social, as people tend to share memories with others. In addition, memory never exists in isolation from social context. Thus, we must approach memory with due caution, and in this respect, the four approaches to memory that Ann Stoler and Karen Strassler have recently proposed are useful for anyone who attempts to write the history of sensibility of East Asia. The first approach—a storage model—envisions memory as a storehouse of knowledge that contains the information about particular events in the past. The second—a hydraulic model—is

a variant of the first: it interprets memory as a repository of alternative histories and subaltern truth. The third—an identity model—views memory as constructions of and for the present. Stoler and Strassler then argue that each of these three models has its strength and weakness. The storage model is valuable for empirical research, but anyone who relies on this model must be aware of the interpretive problem that it elides: both memory and experience come to us only through mediation of narration. The hydraulic model can be credited or discredited for the same reason. Yet this model is useful when we think of the (lack of) power of those who remember the subaltern truth. Under this model, remembering may be an act of resistance by a marginal group of people. The identity model, which places more emphasis on what remembering does for the present than on what can be known about the past, best points to the nature of memory as constructions for and of the present. Yet, in using this model, we should keep in mind that memory is not a mere construct, nor is it a functional response to the need of and for the present. Hence the need to integrate all these approaches calls for yet another model, which Stoler and Strassler call “memory-work”: to treat memory as an interpretive labor, and for this end, to examine “not only *what* is remembered but *how*” (Stoler and Strassler 2000:9, emphasis original).

Indeed, the narratives of Ishihara and Yoshi have already suggested to us the importance of memory-work. They did not just “recall” the event; rather, remembering for them was an arduous process, which had no end or destination as long as they kept remembering. In other words, we need a dialectic treatment of memory, in which the divide between the past and the present has no place. If they keep remembering, we researchers must keep remembering with them. We should not be satisfied with *what* has been remembered in the name

of “facts,” but explore *how* individuals, groups, nations, and states have remembered to challenge the hegemony of remembering and forgetting.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to respond to the possible critique to the history of sensibility. Such critique may be twofold and they are related to each other. One, the history of sensibility may seek for those “Japanese” who identify themselves with the “victimizer” and/or those “Chinese” or “Koreans” who sided with the “Japanese” authorities. Two, we need something that can be named. Without it, we cannot criticize the formidable power of imperial “Japan” and “Japanese” people, nor can we assess the power of the collectivities of “Chinese,” “Korean,” or people of any other nationalities who were courageous enough to challenge the imperial power. The argument expressed in these critiques is based on the history of concepts and categories, and it is precisely this history that I try to reorient in this paper. Here, in lieu of answering these critiques directly, let me briefly discuss what Alexis Dudden has recently called an “international apology boom” (2008). Think, for example, the “official apology” made by the generation of Japanese prime ministers since the early 1990s to the international community, which goes something like: “That war turned out to have given much agony and sorrow to the people of many countries, particularly of our neighbor countries of Asia” (Obuchi Keizō 1998). Here, I would like to note that: (1) this apology has little to do with history in terms of finding out what happened to whom, when, where, why and how it happened; (2) this apology has been coopted by the Japanese state leaders to make national apologizing work to strengthen the state; (3) this apology has become for some state leaders of East Asia and civic groups the primary goal

to attain; (4) this apology in itself has helped generate and spark the unstable present; (5) this apology is no longer about history but about political policy; and finally (6) this apology has created the problem of who would decide when an apology was real. The root of these problems, then, is the fact that this apology lacks sensibility, is tantamount to "wishing to turn the page and, if possible, wiping it from memory" (Adorno 1986:115), and is also based on the history of concepts and categories. Against "apology," then, can we think of something else, that is, "reconciliation," which is grounded in the arduous process of remembering of what happened to whom, when, where, why and how it happened, and which involves not only the states but numerous individuals. I do not think that the history of sensibility dismisses the power of Japanese imperialism or the power of collective resistance against it, for the one who tries to narrativize history with sensibility never miss the power of such collectivities while capturing its effects on him/her and others regardless of their nationalities, classes, genders, generations, and so on. The history of sensibility, then, demands us to get together in one place and dialogue where each one of us is the subject of history.

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