

The Daily Us (vs. Them) from Online to Offline: Japan's Media Manipulation and Cultural Transcoding of Collective Memories

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Since returning to power in 2012, the second Abe administration has pressured Japanese mainstream media in various ways, from creating the Secrecy Act to forming close relationships with media executives and promoting anti-journalism voices on social media. This article focuses on the growth of a jingoist group called the 'Net-rightists' ('Neto-uyo' in the Japanese abbreviation) on the Internet, which has been supporting the right-wing government and amplifying its historical revisionist views of Japanese colonialism. These heavy Internet users deny Japan's war crimes against neighboring Asian countries and disseminate fake news about the past, which justifies Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's hostile diplomatic policies against South Korea and China. Over the past years, the rightist online discourses have become powerful to such an extent that the editorials of major newspapers and TV reports shifted to more nationalist tones. Who are the Neto-uyo? Why have they emerged from the online world and proliferated to the offline world? Two significant characteristics of new media are discussed to analyze their successful media manipulation: cultural transcoding and perpetual rewriting of collective memories. These characteristics have resulted in constructing and reinforcing the data loops of the 'Daily Us' versus Them, technologically raising current diplomatic tensions in East Asia.

Keywords: Internet, social media, collective memory, colonialism, Japan, Neto-uyo

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Introduction

Since the launch of the Internet in the late twentieth century and the subsequent prevalence of various electronic social media, a number of discourses presuming those media's positive impacts on democracy and social change have been publicly introduced: the new media disclose and convey information across national borders, connect different kinds of people directly, and democratize societies globally. Internet pioneers, innovators and business leaders of the information communication technologies (ICTs) expressed dreams and promises that they were developing non-hierarchical flows of data, which everyone can access, unlike the mainstream media, controlled by a small number of professionals. In fact, with almost every major collective action for democratization that has arisen, from the so-called "Arab Spring" to the protests in Iran, Turkey and Ukraine in the early 2010s, the groundbreaking roles of the new media were later reported by the older media, implying that advanced technologies are liberating and civilizing the 'backward' people.

However, scholarly work remains skeptical about such a simplistic view of new media as a force for only positive social change (Sunstein, 2001; Hand, 2008; Pariser, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Couldry, 2012). A contradictory phenomenon to new media as a democratizing power has arisen in ICT-saturated Japan in the past decade. The Internet there has produced a novel nest of de-democratizing power, called the 'Net-rightists' ('Neto-uyo' in the Japanese abbreviation). These heavy Internet users disseminate hostile discourses against Koreans and Chinese and call for antagonistic nationalism in state policies against those neighbouring countries (McLelland, 2008; Yasuda, 2012; Schäfer et al., 2017). Growing from anonymous online chat rooms, they have come out to the offline world, organized hate groups, and attacked ethnic minorities in Japan, especially the Koreans and Chinese who are descendants of former subjects of Imperial Japan. The Net-rightists revitalize Japanese colonial culture that despises any Asians other than Japanese, among the postcolonial generations.

Correspondingly, Japan's right-wing party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led by Shinzo Abe, returned to power at the end of 2012, and immediately deployed de-democratizing and militaristic policies. Prime Minister Abe has succeeded in passing a series of highly controversial laws, such as the Secrecy Act (2013), the Security Act (2015), and the Conspiracy Act (2017). The Secrecy Act can mandate punishment of up to ten years to any government whistleblower and journalist who leaks 'national secrets', as designated by the government. The Security Act legalized Japan's *collective* self-defense, which allows its Self Defense Force to take up arms when 'allies' (like the United States) are under attack, not only Japan. Finally, the Conspiracy Act criminalizes citizens who have only communicated a crime and agreed to it but have not taken any criminal actions (Ogasawara, 2017). These and other laws and policies have facilitated both visible and invisible surveillance of Japanese civil society and have caught international attention. As a result, a free-press organization ranked Japan 72 out of 180 countries in the World Freedom of Press Ranking in 2016 and 2017, which shows a significant ranking plunge from 11 in 2010 (Reporters Without Borders, 2016, 2017).

What is much less known internationally is the fact that the LDP coalition government and Net-rightists bond with each other on the Internet, Facebook, and Twitter, while attacking the

mainstream media as another target. In discussing *present* politics, the two spread discourses to justify Japan's colonial *past* prior to 1945. This is because Japan's postwar politics has always reflected the public experiences of the defeated (Dower, 1999; Oguma, 2002; Michiba, 2005). The lost war and subsequent occupation formed the foundation of postwar institutions that value democracy and peace, and such valorisation seems the exact target by the Neto-uyo in their online activities. The mainstream media and the majority of citizens seem to distance themselves from the Neto-uyo comments, but do not protest, either. They tend to conform to racist discourses thus normalizing hate speech in mainstream politics. A silence has begun to cover Japanese civil society under the loudly repeated voices of the right-wing regarding the past and the future. Some call this political dissolution a new form of fascism, or a quiet coup d'état (Ogura, 2005; Hemmi, 2013), whose crucial first step was taken by the new media (Yasuda, 2012).

This article focuses on the growth of Net-rightists who deny Japan's war crimes against neighboring Asian countries and disseminate fake news about the past, which justifies Abe's militaristic agenda. The understanding of present policies and past experiences are in parallel, in this sense. By obscuring boundaries between facts and propaganda, the rightist online discourses have been pushing the editorials of major newspapers and TV reports toward more nationalistic tones over the past decade. Who are the Neto-uyo? Why have they emerged from online spaces and proliferated to the offline world? Two significant characteristics of electronic media are discussed to analyze the successful media manipulation: cultural transcoding and perpetual rewriting of collective memories. I argue that these characteristics have resulted in constructing and reinforcing the data loops of the 'Daily Us' versus Them, technologically raising the current diplomatic tension in East Asia.

In the following discussion, I first illustrate how politics, collective memory and media relate to one another theoretically. None of the three alone created the current situation, but these three have been the central arenas where rightist discourse has shaped sovereign power and practice. The discourse consists of the discursive practice of rewriting collective memory about the war and colonialism in the new media. Memory is not just a natural recollection of the past, but, rather, a construction of the past that produces meanings and symbols collectively (Halbwachs, 1992). Individual members of a group, including the state, remember, forget, or give specific meanings to past events within the political framework of the time and place. Media are the carriers to construct and distribute collective memory with members of the group (Assmann, 2011).

Secondly, I explain the political framework of collective memory in postwar Japan: how the devastating end of the Great Japanese Empire prepared the demilitarization and democratization of postwar institutions, most embodied in the new Constitution. In this sense, Japan's postwar national principles developed from a collective reflection on the failed wars, which can fall into the category of "politics of regret" (Olick, 2007). However, this framework was soon reversed by U.S. policies under the Cold War and by Japanese leaders who returned to power. As a result, Japan's public deeply inscribed its memories as war victims, not as perpetrators of aggressive wars in Asia. Many memories of war crimes and colonial rulings were not brought to light and were disposed to silence.

This disproportionate framework of collective memory was challenged by the survivors of war crimes after the 1990s, but it has later induced frustrated reactions from young Net-rightists. I describe how they emerged on the Internet, echoing the old voices from colonial days, and how traditional rightist politicians strategized to capture and nurture the youth, in my third point. Finally, I discuss the effects of social media platforms, which have amplified the emotional shouting and persistent murmurings of Japanese colonialism. The Internet's enhanced filtering capacities personalize data for the individual user, invite opinion polarization, and accelerate the social amnesia of complex and unpleasant stories (Sunstein, 2001; Pariser, 2011). This cultural transcoding (Manovich, 2001) destabilizes collective memory through electronic overwriting. As a result, user-friendly, personalized selection of the past can uniquely contribute to promoting neo-fascism through the daily practice of comfortable othering of the misidentified enemy.

The Relations of Collective Memory, Politics, and Media

Memories of the wars have always been linked to political decision-making in post-World War II Japan. Maurice Halbwachs (1992), a pioneering sociologist who used the term 'collective memory', found a constructive characteristic between memory and group. He observed that an individual shapes memories through interaction and confirmation with other members of the group, rather than merely recalling the past. An individual family or community member tends to lose the memory when he leaves the group. "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollection" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 43). Similarly, Halbwachs (1992) noted that political change also brings alterations or loss of individual memories. "We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated" (p. 47).

Collective memory has been shaped within social frameworks of group and politics. In turn, the cohesive effect of memory stabilizes the group and produces a common identity among the members. Memory carries the symbolic meanings in the group structure, according to Halbwachs (1992). This meaning construction can be retrospective, as well as prospective; therefore, one event can construct and reconstruct different meanings in continuous reflection, binding the past and the future. The Nation is one of the most obvious entities where this dynamic occurs through the construction and distribution of remembered discourses. The shared discourses turn an individual into a member of the group, for example, by giving a person the subjectivity of a loyal soldier in wartime Japan and of a victimized citizen in the postwar framework. Lost war memories carry the symbolic meanings that change people's perception of self, the world, and accordingly, political choices.

Halbwachs' essential work on collective memory was rediscovered in the 1980s during the 'memory boom'. Forty years after World War II, it was the time when living memory transformed into 'memory of memory' (Olick, 2007; Van Dijck, 2007). What should be publicly remembered became highly controversial in the countries involved in the war, and many war survivors broke their silence about their unpleasant past. All this evoked the configuration of social memory studies (Assmann, 2011; Kastner et al., 2011). A timely concept of 'cultural memory' for these new

narratives and frameworks of memory was proposed, based on Halbwachs' findings, as "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 126).

Cultural memory theoretically allows a plurality of collective memories, rather than a single memory authorized by the group. At the same time, the plural memories challenge the established history. While most studies, including Halbwachs', draw a distinction between history and memory, some attempt to equate history with memory (Assmann, 2011). Aleida Assmann avoids reducing history to memory, the flattening of history, for the sake of objectivity and historiographical criteria, but she maintains the dynamic relation between the two, and has further developed cultural memory as open to history. She remarks on the effects of politics and media in the construction of cultural memory.

Living memory thus gives way to a cultural memory that is underpinned by media [...] While individual recollections spontaneously fade and die with their former owners, new forms of memory are reconstructed *within a trans-generational framework, and on an institutional level, within a deliberate policy of remembering or forgetting*. There is no self-organization and self-regulation of cultural memory – it always depends on personal decisions and selections, on institutions and media. (Assmann, 2011, p. 6, emphasis added)

Assmann (2011) proposes two models in cultural memory: functional memory and storage memory. Functional memory represents normative memories that are chosen, interpreted, and appropriated elements for configuration of story. It legitimizes or de-legitimizes personal memories, for example, China's national history versus the counter-memory of the Tiananmen Square Incident. Legitimization of memory simultaneously produces subversive memories whose bearers are the conquered and the oppressed. It is future-oriented, overtly or covertly requiring censorship and coerced rites of commemoration to maintain the political contours of memories. In contrast, storage memory is a remnant of functional memory, unused and unincorporated into stories, "the amorphous mass" of untouched elements (Assmann, 2011, p. 125). Those are continuously forgotten and disposed into unconscious layers that can be reconnected with the functional dimension of cultural memory. Storage memory exists as a background for function memory. Yet, when any of its elements obtain personal acknowledgement and take part in stories shared by the group, it comes to the foreground of functional memory. This transformation breaks up the dominant contours of memory, and the unquestioned relevance to the past gives way to latent and formerly excluded elements of history. In this sense, storage memory can also be seen as future-oriented, as an important reservoir for functional memories.

Assmann's two models illustrate how the contours of memories are politically fixed and altered. For nations, legitimization of memory is vital because it grounds the origin of sovereignty and produces functional identities among the people to be governed. Media are inseparably involved in this process as the material carrier of memory, especially in the case of the modern nation state, and memories are inevitably mediated to be passed on for generations (Van Dijck, 2007). Following the long dominance of printing, Assmann (2011) sees a paradigm change in electronic

writing and image. Instead of lasting written letters, electronic media enables the continuous rewriting of texts.

This perpetual rewriting, furthermore, can be amplified in the effect of remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). The new media depends on the older media, such as newspapers, movies and TV, for content and interface, and the older media do not die out easily against the common assumptions. Linking different types of media in a time-space conversion, remediation promotes the perpetual transformation of data. But importantly, Bolter and Grusin (1999) note that remediation tends to be less acknowledged in electronic media because of the nature of immediacy. Immediacy aims to make mediation seen transparent to the viewers and tries to show it as natural, rather than arbitrary. Though every medium has a specific structure and code to carry (or not carry) content (Lessig, 1999), and its arbitrary settings may be doubled, tripled or multiplied in extended remediation, “[t]he digital medium wants to erase itself” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 44). Cultural memory is not only overwritten in electronic remediation faster and wider than ever, but it also fades away from its origins, sources and backgrounds. Remediation fragments memory discourses and simultaneously embeds its structure and code in memory flow.

In the ongoing computerization of media, Manovich (2001) also points out that ‘cultural transcoding’—among his five principles of new media (numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and cultural transcoding)—brings the most substantial change to our lives. When all categories of media are eventually stored into databases, transcoding inscribes the computer’s novel rules in the materials, instead of traditional structures and logics of the older media. Hand-written stories and printed pictures now follow digital organization of data. “The computerization of culture gradually accomplishes similar transcoding in relation to all cultural categories and concepts. That is, cultural categories and concepts are substituted, on the level of meaning and/or language, by new ones that derive from the computer’s ontology, epistemology, and pragmatics. New media thus acts as a forerunner of this more general process of cultural reconceptualization” (Manovich, 2001, p. 47). Computerization develops its own means of representing politics and cultural memory.

In summary, collective memory, politics and media are indispensably related to each other: collective memories are constructed within the political frameworks of the group, binding the past and future. Politics draws lines of legitimacy between functional memory and storage memory, in other words, what should be remembered and forgotten. Simultaneously, collective memories carry the symbolic meanings that restrict or open up political choices for the present. Media are involved in this process, nowadays transcoding memories into the digital sphere by its own rules of overwriting and remediation. To empirically analyze the relation between politics and memory, I will now focus on the political framework of collective memory regarding war and peace in postwar Japan.

The Political Framework of Collective Memory in Postwar Japan

Catastrophic personal experiences of World War II prepared the foundation of nation rebuilding after 1945. The radical demilitarization and democratization conducted under Allied Forces' occupation of Japan (1945-1952), often called the revolution from above, was only possible with common feelings of sorrow, bitterness, wrath, and regret about the war among the Japanese. Historian John W. Dower defines this Japanese postwar foundation as a "hybrid Japanese-American model", constructed between the loser and winner of the war (Dower, 1999, p. 558), and depicted it as the very first state of postwar Japanese *Embracing Defeat*, as his book is entitled. The two forces planned a national future, in contrast to the crazy and desperate yesterdays that were never to be repeated. The Japanese postwar politics that followed, reflected through and determined by a collective memory of the war, can be described as the 'politics of regret' (Olick, 2007). Jeffrey K. Olick examines the postwar politics of West Germany, another loser of WWII, as a reflection of past misdeeds, the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. He finds that politics and collective memory restrain each other through the mechanism of mnemonic dynamics in Germany and beyond, where the state confronts its own dark past of institutional violence. Yet, in Japan, the embraced relationship between war memories and democratic policies was soon divided by the Cold War and an insufficient investigation of war crimes. Before examining this transformation, I briefly look back at a series of Japan's wars up to 1945, the source of profound regret.

Japan's modern state building began in 1868 when the Meiji Emperor was placed atop the constitutional monarchy, replacing the Tokugawa feudal era. Because of Western pressure to modernize and trade, Japan pursued the national goals of enriching the nation and strengthening the military. In 1894, Japan engaged in the first modern war against China, which was under the Qing Dynasty, and acquired Taiwan. Since then, Japan conducted official wars every ten years and extended its territory in East Asia, during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, and World War I in 1914. After annexing Korea in 1910, Japan occupied Northeast China and declared the quasi-state of Manchukuo in 1932, by installing the Qing's last emperor Puyi at the top. The Western powers did not admit this puppet regime, which resulted in Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations. In international isolation, Japan's military officials expanded their power in both internal and external politics through acquisitions of cabinet positions and enlargement of the covert wars in China. Japan engaged in official military action with China in 1937, but before seeing victory in this colonizing war, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941 on the side of the Axis. It then deployed troops to the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, and other parts of the region in the Pacific.

The purpose of these wars was clearly expansion of territory, colonization of neighbouring areas, and enhancement of sovereign power. However, the Japanese government calls these serial attacks the Great East Asia War, in which holy Japan liberates fellow Asians from Western imperialism, and establishes a new world order. On the other hand, this logic often turned into self-defense discourse, with Japanese shouting slogans like 'Manchuria is Japan's life-line' (Young, 1998). The more the front lines of the battles were advanced, the more censorship entered the media. Newspapers and magazines critical of the wars were stopped from printing or selling, and

dissenters, especially the communists and socialists, were criminalized, tortured and often killed by the police (Ogino, 2012). The repression of freedom of press enabled the government to expand the imperial wars, and led the public to a war fever, without negative information on the wars. Newspapers, radios, professional writers and academia participated in the war institution as messengers of the militarists, or even as the volunteer 'Pen Corps' at the front lines (Hemmi, 2005), mobilizing the population for total war (Young, 1998).

Most Japanese learned only after August 1945 that their holy soldiers had already lost in many battlefields in the early stages of WWII and that newspapers had lied about almost all the prospects of winning the war. When Japan lost the Pacific Islands, and even when the U.S. burned most local cities and used atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the media kept underestimating the damages, if not reporting at all. Three million Japanese had been killed by the time Japan unconditionally surrendered to the Allies, while Japan had killed even more overseas, more than 15 million in China alone (Dower, 1999). Many family members, husbands, sons and brothers never came back, and it is unknown where and how they died. Many women and children were abandoned, injured, raped or killed when returning from colonized Korea and China. In the aftermath, people suffered from a shortage of food, and many died of malnutrition and diseases, lacking medical care and habitation.

Reflecting on the devastating end of the Asia-Pacific War, it is fair to say that the Japanese public deeply regretted the war. The experience of defeat was life-threatening to most individuals. The Japanese welcomed the postwar disarmament and democratization, when the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces (GHQ) commenced to dismantle the political and economic institutions that enabled total war, from family law to land ownership to the military-industry conglomerate. People supported social change because of mass sentiment to never again engage in the perils of war and a militarist regime. Japan's new Constitution crystalized this public regret of the war into three principles: 1) sovereignty rule by the citizens, and no longer by the emperor, 2) pacifism, i.e. renunciation of war and military force, 3) establishment of basic human rights, including freedom of expression and women's equal rights. The Constitution represents the primary political framework of collective memory in postwar Japan.

However, other victims damaged by Japan's wars, Koreans, Chinese, and other Asians, were neither acknowledged nor welcomed to participate in nation rebuilding (Dower, 1999). While Japan was undeniably defeated by the U.S. and the Allies, the government obscured whether Japan had lost its colonizing wars in Asia. It officially did, through the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, which states Japan's abandonment of external territories gained by the previous wars. Yet still, many Japanese maintained the colonial mindset of looking down on other Asians and believed in benign intentions to direct them as the 'excellent student of Asia' (Dower, 1979), as was repeated in war propaganda. The Koreans and Chinese, the former colonial subjects of imperial Japan who stayed in Japan after the war, were unilaterally deprived of Japanese nationality in 1952, and the Japanese government attempted to send them 'home', even though many were born in Japan. Twisted public mentality against the former colonial population created the term 'third country personnel', implying that they were neither winners nor losers of the War, but suspicious Others.

Thus, Japan's political framework of collective memory of the war has been racialized. While most Japanese were immediately attracted by material abundance and liberal democracy when Douglas MacArthur and his soldiers showed them off in Japan, they continued to find the poverty and 'backwardness' of former colonies as signs of inferiority. Dower (1999) argues that the hierarchical structure of the Allies' occupation itself was highly racialized, and embodied white supremacy. The GHQ soon intended to limit Japan's demilitarization and democratization for American hegemony. The GHQ did not adequately investigate war crimes by the Japanese Army, and exempted Emperor Hirohito from the status of a war criminal in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, generally called the Tokyo Tribunal (1946-1948). Although Japanese soldiers were trained and sent to kill and be killed for the supreme commander of holy wars, the GHQ protected Hirohito in order to piggy-back on his power and maintain postwar hierarchy (Dower, 1999; Oguma, 2002). This evasion by the absolute leader from taking responsibility for the war tremendously enabled a political culture of systematic irresponsibility in postwar Japan. When the top is not held accountable for negative outcomes, who can seriously accuse his subordinates of misdeeds committed under his order?

As a result, the massacres and rapes against Asians, as well as the brutal assimilation policies under colonization, fell into a vast blind spot of Japan's postwar collective memory. In addition to the systematic destruction of war crime records in the aftermath of the defeat, the experiences of operating atrocities were masked or disposed into storage memory, as Assmann (2011) says. In other words, postwar Japan has constructed a framework of collective memory casting the Japanese as war victims, but not as perpetrators. In contrast to the German case, the politics of regret has encompassed a one-sided view of war experiences as functional memory.

Among many unacknowledged or underestimated atrocities, the Nanking Massacre and the sexual slavery known as the 'Comfort Women' issue have been the most controversial arenas of war memories. Japan's military killed numerous civilians (an estimated 80,000 to 200,000) and burned them when occupying Nanking in 1937. Though there was evidence written and testified by Japanese, Chinese, and Westerners, a considerable number of conservative politicians and their supporters have maintained total denial. The Comfort Women caught the collective attention only after 1991, when a Korean victim spoke up to demand an official apology and compensation from the Japanese government. Following her, other victims in Korea, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Holland broke their long silence, which shocked many Japanese women and men, including myself. It was a precise moment when the postwar framework of war memory was seriously challenged; some elements of storage memories as war perpetrators were transformed into functional memories of Japanese colonialism.

Following the global memory boom, Japan's 1990s can be defined as 'the age of historical testimony' (Suk & Takahashi, 2000). The Japanese public heard the victims' personal stories, saw the individual faces, and even the conservative media, such as *Yomiuri Shimbun*, expressed empathy with their unendurable pain and trauma. Newspapers and TV stations constantly reported the women's narratives and investigated how the state organized sexual slavery. On the other hand, Japan's government and courts have steadfastly refused to take responsibility for this unlawful

human trafficking. Though the government made an apology to the Comfort Women in the Kono Statement of 1993, finally admitting the state's involvement, it evaded the issue of redress, insisting all individual claims were made null and void by the normalization treaties. Japanese courts have repeatedly failed to bring government responsibility and have persistently prevented Japan's collective memory from integrating the voices of colonial victims.

The Net-rightist as a Backlash

The rise of right-wing Internet users in the next two decades can be seen as part of a backlash against the trend of reframing the collective memory by acknowledging the perpetrating side of the wars and colonialism. With the advent of the Internet, frustrated conservatives started posting negative comments against Koreans and Chinese on early-stage portal websites, such as the '2-channel' (McLelland, 2008). The 2-channel has no registration system and its users chat with each other using handle names. Despite the broad themes of postings, the overwhelming reflections on Japanese supremacy characterize the 2-channel communication: the postings assume that all users are Japanese, such that 'Who do you hate more, Chinese or Korean?' (McLelland, 2008, p. 822). In a homogeneous sense of community, if any critical comments to Japanese supremacy appear, the poster is judged as Korean. The Comfort Women victims were subjected to the most emotional attacks by the Net-rightists, and branded as 'whores' or 'liars'. Mass media did not pay serious attention to the disproportionate online discourse tending to categorize those internet users as lonely 'geeks' mumbling to one another (Tsuda et al., 2013).

Virtual aggression escalated and augmented when linked to real-time political events, such as the FIFA World Cup in Korea and Japan in 2002, and North Korea's abduction of Japanese citizens officially admitted in 2002. In the former, the *Neto-uyo* condemned Koreans' 'impoliteness' and 'hostility' toward the Japanese, and in the latter, they evoked mass hatred and mockery against the 'most criminal state' (Yasuda, 2012). As a spin-off, their attention went to the Koreans who live in Japan, and shouts of 'go home' have hovered over the former colonial descendants ever since. The Net-rightists are assumed to be mainly 20- to 40-year-olds and, by their own definition, their common features are 'patriotic', 'anti-Choson (Korea)', 'anti-Sino (China)' and 'anti-left' (Tsuji, 2009; Yasuda, 2012). For them, the Nanking Massacre never happened and the Comfort Women were completely invented by Koreans who want to deprive Japan of its money. Their historical revisionist views and irrational disrespect for other Asians are nothing new, but have been amplified more than ever through the decentralized and uncensored channels of the Internet and social media.

Some online commentators formed offline organizations, one of them called "The Civil Group That Does Not Permit the Privilege of Koreans in Japan", *Zaitokukai*, in short in Japanese. *Zaitokukai* calls it a privilege that Koreans living in Japan are awarded permanent resident status and receive some social welfare as Japanese citizens do. The 'Net Charisma' President Makoto Sakurai spoke in the first meeting of *Zaitokukai*, which brought together 100 members.

Some report that one out of ten Koreans in Japan is a *Yakuza* (gang). What kind of race is that? We have let them do whatever they liked. In addition, we have been giving them social welfare. Think of that. How many Japanese could not receive the social welfare and hanged themselves? Is it fine that the tax money earned by our blood and sweat are used by foreigners? (Yasuda, 2012, p. 48)

Later, Sakurai's speech in Korean towns and schools turned into pure hate speech, such as "Kick out cockroach Chosons", "Sink Sinos into Tokyo Bay", or "Kill them now" (they always use the colonial appellation of Koreans and Chinese, sounding disdainful) (Yasuda, 2012, p. 19). Most people on the streets do not stop and react indifferently. The main way they recruit membership, up to 11,000 in four years, is through websites and YouTube. They take videos of hate speeches and violent performances and upload them to YouTube. In response to interviews by journalist Koichi Yasuda, many members answered that their friends and families did not respond positively to their actions, and they only found the 'fellows' on the Internet (Yasuda, 2012). They said that, for the first time, they gained confidence with Sakurai's decisive agitation on YouTube, saying, "I found the 'Truth' only on the Internet". Yasuda (2012) states, "In the vast space on the net, the divided individuals found and united with each other without common attributes [...] It is not rare that the members do not know each other's real name or home address. The blogs and videos uploaded on the net play the role of bait, to hook new members" (p. 76).

In his book *Net to aikoku (The Net and Patriotism)* (2012), Yasuda notes that the core mentality of Net-rightists is a feeling of being victimized, not the victims of war, but the victims of 'elite leftists', typically bureaucrats, teachers, labour unions and media, who have ruled postwar Japan in their view. Thus, a leading member of Zaitokukai described their activities as resistance and class struggle against the 'mainstream left'. In the beginning, they (mis)identified the Koreans and Chinese as their enemies but later extended the targets to other ethnic minorities, the mainstream media, and the anti-nuclear movement that emerged after the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster in 2011 (because Zaitokukai believes that Japan should equip itself with nuclear weapons to counter China and Korea). Such views do not necessarily represent the majority of Japanese, rather, they are categorized as eccentric. In this sense, it is true that the mainstream media had distanced itself from this kind of naked racism and restrained from covering those voices. However, Yasuda found many Japanese quietly share an uncomfortable feeling toward other Asians in Japan, without expressing it by the abusive vocabulary that Zaitokukai specializes in. Their anxiety and anger synchronize with the one-sided framework of war memory that the majority of Japanese have carried on after the war. As Yasuda (2012) puts it, "I am often asked 'who is Zaitokukai?' I respond, 'that's your neighbour'" (p. 364).

The Net-rightists' most favorable government, which precisely shares their hatred of leftist influence in postwar politics, was realized in December 2012. It was the second Abe Administration, whose Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) had been in power almost continuously since 1955. But since losing the majority in 2009, the LDP has shifted from conservative to ultra-right, distinguishing itself from the majority right-of-centre Democratic Party of the time. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is a grandson of Nobusuke Kishi, who signed the wage of the Pacific War as

the Minister of Commerce and Industry in 1941, and was arrested as a war criminal and sentenced by the GHQ, but became prime minister in 1957. Kishi ratified the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty to establish the official military alliance, against massive dissent in the Diet in 1960. Sharing a colonialist view with his grandfather, Abe never hid his long-term desire to legitimize Japan's participation in the American wars abroad as collective self-defense and allow Japan to possess nuclear bombs (Hemmi, 2005). In his book *Utsukushi kuni e (To A Beautiful Nation)* (2006), Abe glorifies the past and militarizes the future as two sides of the same coin in his political plan. However, his first Cabinet failed within a year in 2007, due to his old-fashioned rightist radicalism. He commented that Comfort Women were not coerced to serve Japan's army 'in the narrow definition'. He soon faced international criticism and apologized to U.S. President Bush, but not to the victims. Abe believed that the mainstream media forced him to resign (Tsuda et al., 2013).

Unsurprisingly, Net-rightists have eagerly supported Abe for his second race for prime minister, sharing his strong hatred against Korea, China, and the mainstream media. Abe sought to enlarge his popularity online rather than offline and strategized to make the Internet LDP's key arena. LDP hired new media public relations experts from ICT companies, used Facebook and Twitter, recorded TV news programs 24/7, and denounced anything they found 'unfair' to LDP. "Let's fight against the existing media! The time of the Internet has come!" shouted Abe in his campaign (Tsuda et al., 2013, p. 57). The crowd surrounding Abe on the street of the geek town Akihabara, Tokyo, cried, "Mass media, go home!" (Tsuda et al., 2013, p. 49). Observing the positive impacts, Abe's second Cabinet legalized the usage of the Internet for election campaigns for the first time in 2013 (Schäfer et al., 2017), and lowered the legal age for franchise to 18 years old in 2015, which came into effect after 2016.

Increasing confidence from the response of Net-rightists, Abe's second Cabinet deployed ultra right-wing policies combining glorification of the past and militarization of the future. It sets about to review and possibly cancel the Kono Statement of 1993, the government's apology to Comfort Women, (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2014, March). Abe prayed at the Yasukuni War Shrine, the place of commemorating the dead soldiers and war criminals equally as holy spirits (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2013, December), abolished the national ban on export weapons (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2014, April 1), and reactivated nuclear power plants that were halted after the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2014, April 12). Abe and his colleagues' ultimate goal is to revise the democratic Constitution, especially to nullify Article 9 on the renunciation of war. In order to reverse the postwar principles of demilitarization and democratization, the right-wing politicians and intellectuals have pushed back the growing functional memories of colonial crimes into storage and further erased them. In fact, the descriptions of Comfort Women had completely vanished from middle school history textbooks by 2012, censored by the government (*Donga Ilbo*, 2010, April). The old rightists discovered the new media as the most reliable sites to fish for potential young supporters and to instill the historical revisionist view to those who have no colonial experience nor knowledge.

The Construction of Daily Us (versus Them)

The number of Zaitokukai members, 11,000, may be seen as insignificant compared to other political organizations. However, Abe's cabinet has succeeded in manipulating media discourses by utilizing the loyal support of virtual Neto-uyo. The electronic media has amplified rightist voices among the sites and through remediation with older media. The mainstream media are incompetent at effectively responding to the rightists, and rather compromise and ingratiate themselves with the Abe Administration (Hemmi, 2013). This is perhaps because the mainstream media also recognized that a large number of people share the rightist mood and feeling the Net-rightists have spread by revitalizing the racist view of other Asians. For example, Neto-uyo threatened a former Asahi Shimbun reporter Takashi Uemura, one of the first journalists to report on the Comfort Women issue, and his family members, leading to his appointment procedure for a university professorship being discontinued (Kitano, 2019). The Asahi Shimbun, one of the major daily newspapers in Japan, apologized for the past 'mistake' in reporting on the Comfort Women issue in 2014, though the mistake was minor and unclear (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2014, December). Right-wing online activities have increasingly induced chilling effects among the mainstream media by shouting that Asahi Shimbun is anti-Japanese and Comfort Women are whores.

Technically, the social media platforms provided a comfortable nest for isolated individuals with anonymity to release their victimized mentalities. On the Internet, users can visit only the chat rooms where they get praise and assent from like-minded people, without risking meeting and knowing each other. Consequently, regular members visiting the same sites resemble each other. They don't hear different opinions, nor see different backgrounds for the stories. Cass Sunstein calls this 'The Daily Me', "a communications package that is personally designed, with each component fully chosen in advance", originally named by Nicholas Negroponte (Sunstein, 2001, p. 7). Sunstein warns such personalized information on the Internet may undermine the basis of democratic debates. As information consumers, individuals choose only what they are interested in, and do not come across other kinds of information as they may see when skimming newspapers. But for the well-functioning of democracy and free expression, asserts Sunstein, people need to be exposed to materials that have not been chosen in advance, and should have a range of common experiences beyond individual self-interest. Without shared knowledge and experiences, the sense of public dissolves and society risks fragmentation.

As a principle of social media, Manovich (2001) also foresees that variability of online information paradoxically induces selection of contents, and it becomes a significant part of technologies and practices of electronic media. Personalization or customization occurs interactively between user and interface, not only by users, but also by software (and the people who utilize it). "Information about the user can be used by a computer program to customize automatically the media composition as well as to create elements themselves." (Manovich, 2001, p. 37) An individual can select the information from a large number of databases, and, at the same time, personalization technologies automatically offer her the information selected in accordance to her lifestyle, behavior, or ideology in the circle of remediation.

Eli Pariser (2011) calls for more careful attention to be paid to the rapid development of such personalization software, which has become increasingly more invisibly embedded in remediation. Advanced algorithms collect information concerning behaviours from individual users and send the data to ICT companies, internet service providers, and data banks. These are prediction engines that extrapolate what the user seems to like; they constantly create and refine patterns of behaviours, and seek the effective personalized advertisement to incite further purchases. Facebook, Google, Amazon, major credit companies, and mega databanks such as Acxiom put these technologies into practice without public or individual notice. Ultimately, what users clicked before determines what they will see next. It may be comfortable for some, but Pariser notes concerns that the ‘filter bubble’ confines individual thoughts. “The filter bubble’s costs are both personal and cultural [...] [P]ersonalization filters serve up a kind of invisible autopropaganda, indoctrinating us with our own ideas, amplifying our desire for things that are familiar and leaving us oblivious to the dangers lurking in the dark territory of the unknown.” (Pariser, 2011, pp. 14-15)

Invisibly filtered knowledge alters individual perceptions of the world and the self. As a mirror of The Daily Me, a self is trapped in the loop of mediated similar data. Your assumed identities shape your media, and the media then shape what you believe. Against the early dream of the Internet that explores the wide world, the data loop narrows down interests and identities through interactions with already existing or familiar people and things. And all these processes are, due to the nature of immediacy of media and advanced algorithms, difficult to sense.

There is no doubt that Net-rightists have augmented their voices in personalized environments, whether they intended to or not, and refined their extreme identities and perceptions in homogeneous interactivity. Internet enabled Net-rightists to collectively form ‘The Daily Us’ by tying like-minded people physically apart, beyond the walls of their families, friends or communities around them. By excluding criticism, contradicting narratives and disturbing history, they built purely comfortable settings for their everyday engagement, which the older media, including conservative stations, have never offered before. The homogeneous online communities are the outcome of their active participation, but personalizing filters further reinforce their misperception of Koreans and Chinese as the enemy-within when they hear more and louder echoes of their own voices. In turn, the data loop keeps justifying their paranoia and configuring their identities as victims: the more rightist comments they put in, the more rightist sources they receive collectively. The loop fosters the intimate sense of community that excludes Others. Their collective feeling is directly shared and legitimized, even by the Prime Minister now, wherever or whenever they are; when Abe throws just “Good morning!” on Facebook, and immediately receives 40,000 “Likes”! (Tsuda et al., 2013)

Pariser (2011) finds that the impact of the filter bubble is more serious and pathetic in politics than in marketing, though both fields are deeply connected. On the Internet, the more topical, scandalous, emotional and viral news gets a large number of clicks and follow-ups, and so those stories thrive in filter bubbles. On the contrary, “[t]he filter bubble will often block out the things in our society that are important but complex and unpleasant. It renders them invisible. And it’s not just the issues that disappear. Increasingly, it’s the whole political process” (ibid, p. 151). The

political issues and long-time consequences tend to be left behind intended and unintended filters, and this problematic process is embedded and naturalized by software.

Net-rightist's scandalous and emotional comments easily attract forms of online attention, whose characteristics then fit in with online cultural transcoding (Manovich, 2001). Distinctively, the Net-rightist discourses lack the historical backgrounds and political consequences of Koreans and Chinese living in Japan that explain why and how they are in Japan today as descendants of former Japanese subjects, and what they have been facing in postwar racism within Japanese societies. The components missing in their discourses correspond exactly with the complex and unpleasant memories of the Great Empire of Japan contained in storage. They focus on the present, and the simplistic comments fit the formats of social media platforms where the cultural transcoding of collective memory takes place. Technically, it is almost impossible to explain Japan's colonial policies within 140 letters on Twitter, and it would be even more difficult for narratives of Comfort Women to get many "Likes" on Facebook. But it is possible and often praised to toss around short, simple lines, such as "Kick out Koreans" or "They are children of spies", leaving complex and unpleasant context far behind. Transcoding texts into electronic formats neglects or fragments details of narratives.

In addition, perpetual rewriting in electronic media (as distinct from print), Assmann (2011) points out, can facilitate lack and fragmentation of historical narratives. Permanent overwriting cannot only erase the experiences of colonial Others, but also produce fake news on the past. For example, in *Neto-uyo* discourses, Koreans came to Japan by their own will, and the Comfort Women served the Japanese army as prostitutes by their own will. They can make the colonial others responsible for having disadvantages in both past and present. By cutting off or distorting the historical backgrounds, Net-rightists can slander and denounce the targets as pure evil.

Those prejudiced judgements are not precisely news, in the sense that they are written by professional reporters. But when the amounts of such baseless comments exceed the colonial narratives in the Japanese social media, through continuous rewriting in the effect of remediation, the offline media shift the positions towards the news regarding Korean and Chinese relations, which they professionally produce on a daily basis. After the *Asahi's* odd apology on the past report about the Comfort Women was attacked by the Net-rightists, the major national newspapers and TV stations became passive on reporting the colonial damages. In 2018, most media took an editorial position condemning the Korean court which had ordered Japanese companies to compensate the wartime victims of forced labour. Tellingly, those articles do not mention the facts of forced labour, and rather only discuss whether or not the individual claim still exists. This tendency of the mainstream media follows the collective amnesia or negligence of colonial damages by *Neto-uyo*. Perpetual rewriting in electronic media has functioned to exclude the experiences of Japan's war crimes and brutal colonialism, and the fake news on the past is powerful enough to manipulate news production in the mainstream media.

Conclusion

The political debates in post-WWII Japan have always reflected on the living and cultural memory of the war. The life-threatening horrors and miserable sorrows made the Japanese regret the war, and then appreciate the defeat, because it was the only chance for them to construct another world, without repeating the past. John Dower (1999) demonstrated the plural processes for creating peace and democracy, which were orchestrated by GHQ and the Japanese public in the aftermath of WWII, but soon restrained to preserve the social order for U.S. hegemony in the Cold War; Emperor Hirohito was awarded immunity, and the colonial crimes went unaccused. As a result, Japan's principal framework of collective memory on the war became one-sided as victim, lacking the other side as perpetrator. This framework was also beneficial for the war leaders, soldiers, and anyone who did not want to be held accountable for the dark past. In this sense, Net-rightists came from the blind spot in postwar cultural memory, as a backlash to the age of historical testimony by colonial others. A one-sided memory fed the Net-rightists and the frustrated emotion has expanded out to a larger number of Japanese.

It is significant that Net-rightists' discourses focus on the present. There are no references to the relevant past, as to why Korean and Chinese descendants, the major targets of their hate speech, live in Japan. If anything, they immediately create stories that make Koreans and Chinese responsible for their *choice* to come to Japan under colonization (so it is their privilege or fraud to receive social assistance in Japan). This is exactly the view the Abe Administration shares and further aims to spread as national memory. Japan under Abe's leadership and Net-rightists' praise seems to be a country without memory, where modern Japan came from and where it is now going.

There can be multiple explanations as to why Net-rightists emerged in early twenty-first century Japan, including economic, political and social factors. But social media brought together isolated individuals who felt victimized and amplified their resentment against the misidentified enemy, based on the information they found on the Internet. Acting invisibly, personalized filters on the social media repeat the hollow voices looping the same beliefs, and provide The Daily Us to the users. The Daily Us is a maze of causality, replacing the order of cause and effect, of input and output. Memory and its consequences follow the utterances of initial emotion, rather than memory and consequences forming utterances. Instant emotion fits nicely into the formats of electronic media and filtered communications, where cultural transcoding of collective memory occurs. The homogeneous data loops misrepresent the size of the world, support the status quo, and reinforce political inertia as well as social amnesia about the complex and unpleasant past (Pariser, 2011; Couldry, 2012). Electronic media thus enables the continuous rewriting of texts, through which a one-sided cultural memory of Japanese colonialism is radicalized.

Together with those effects of remediation, the influence of Net-rightist discourses now looms large in the offline world, no longer staying online; the Internet and social media have drastically changed the landscape of Japanese journalism and contributed to the growing conformism of mainstream media to the Abe Administration. This is certainly not good news for deliberative democracy. Media manipulation was achieved without official censorship, relying instead on online fake news and aggressive emotions invoking the colonial past. When the glorification of imperial Japan fills online discourse, the post-WWII principles of demilitarization and

democratization are at stake. It is not accidental that remilitarization and de-democratization are ongoing under the Abe Administration with the support of Net-rightists, for the eventual revision of the pacifist Constitution. What should be remembered remains in the vital arena of present debates over global peace and democracy. Analyzing the mechanisms of the online production of cultural memory is more important than ever to open collective memory storage, and to give voice to the oppressed past in East Asia.

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