

The Politics of Victims: Jeju April 3 Incident, Battle of Okinawa, and Taiwan February 28 Incident

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Based on examples of war and massacres in the island regions of East Asia in the mid-twentieth century, this book concerns the overcoming of the past for the purposes of relief measures, the pursuit of truth, and reconciliation leading towards a post-conflict society, and aims at the construction of a conflict study rooted in the deployment of experiential knowledge as created and demonstrated by local communities, as well as a comparative investigation thereof. For this purpose, in keeping with criticisms of transitional justice theories that have been seen as useful in reckoning with “negative history” in post-conflict societies, the author presents the latent potentiality of local knowledge and its deployment by those who have lived through a conflict.

Specifically, the author first describes the mechanism that transforms victims of a group of nationally recognized deceased persons into products of legal and systemic involvement in overcoming negative histories. The ethnic and national ideologies that harbor such a victimization of the dead, as well as the issues that subsequently arise, are then examined. Second, the activities carried out by bereaved families accompanying petitional activities aimed at categorizing their deceased close relatives as victims are studied, and various social factors operating in the background of this process are explained. Third, the wisdom of and means devised by bereaved families regarding the assigning of meaning to the deaths or missing status of their close relatives are clarified.

Based on an awareness of these issues, this book is concerned with, on one hand, the phenomenon of giving meaning to mass deaths, which is an aim of modern post-conflict societies attempting to overcome the past during transitional periods, and, on the other hand, approaches this process through the formation and deployment of experiential knowledge that is created, accumulated, and demonstrated in local communities of familial and close relational groups. Such an examination is employed with the intention of transcending the limits of transitional justice theories, which have as their premises the incremental development of post-conflict societies and the advance of history.

Accordingly, as an example of the wars and massacres that occurred in the island regions of East Asia in the mid-twentieth century, this book focuses on the Jeju April 3 Incident in Korea and the Taiwan February 28 Incident.

The following is an abbreviated introduction to how the identification of and debate regarding the problems outlined above are concretely developed in this book.

A discussion focused on the case of the Jeju April 3 Incident in Korea is taken up in Section One.

In Chapter 1, an introduction to the Jeju April 3 Incident is given to form the background of Section One, followed by a discussion on the reckoning with the past undertaken by the Korean government to overcome the negative legacy left by the incident during a more than 30-year transitional period from an oppressive

military dictatorship to a democratic system. In particular, emphasis is placed on the problem of how laws and institutions devised to reckon with the past give rise to new misunderstandings in current historical awareness. Furthermore, in looking at the victims, who have not been the subject of discussion to date in Jeju Incident studies, an inquiry is made focusing on the mechanism that created them as a product of reckoning with the past, as well as the problems of historical awareness exposed by this process.

As a result of this analysis, it was learned that through official policy, specifically the Victim Review and Determination Standards promulgated by the Korean government, both the killers and the killed were regrouped into a single category as victims; at the same time, by excluding those who were incompatible with these standards, the actual relationships among the dead during the incident were obscured. Along with eradicating specificity regarding the killers and the killed, resistance, self-governance, and unification in the form of Formal Objections to the Legitimacy of the Republic of Korea and Towards Self-Governance, which constituted an additional historical significance of the Jeju April 3 Incident, were forgotten as a result of the state's avoidance of responsibility.

Chapter 2 focuses on memorial facilities, highlighting the "Jeju April 3rd Peace Park" as a space for the modernization of infighting in regard to the meaning of the victims. In particular, how the victims, who were created as the major byproduct of reckoning with the past, are represented and revisited in public memorial facilities is examined, with consideration given to inscriptions on monuments, exhibitions in memorial halls, and government-sponsored memorial ceremonies. The phenomenon of conflicting memories, as ascertainable in inscriptions, exhibitions, and memorials, as aspects of the transitional period of reckoning with the past is examined, and the integration and exclusion of the image of the victims developed through memorial facilities is reexamined.

As a result of this analysis, it was learned that monuments and memorial halls perform a mutually complementary function while concurrently contributing to the sanctification of the victims and the veneration of locations. Among the locations, in monuments, the homogenization (integration) and ranking (exclusion) of the dead is particularly inherent in government policies towards victims, and through the monuments as well as the ceremonies conducted there, the victims are transformed into objects of public memorials (fallen heroes). Meanwhile, the exhibitions at memorial halls are constructed on the basis of historical facts that the state can verify and emphasize what can be demonstrated and verified rather than the "reconciliation and coexistence" or "harmony of the people" emphasized by monuments. Therefore, monuments and memorial halls, while sharing the same goal of widely disseminating the results of reckoning with the past through exhibitions and education and jointly exercising their respective functions of pacifying the spirits of and memorializing the dead, are both positioned as structures inherently at odds with each other in terms of ideology and provability.

Based on petitions regarding the loss of life of their close relatives submitted by bereaved families to official bodies in Korea, Chapter 3 examines how these families understood, positioned, and attached significance to the deaths or missing persons status of their relatives from the time of the incident to the future in accordance with the laws and institutions for reckoning with the past. How the interpretations were put into writing by the bereaved families is also included in this analysis. Through a review of the records of the

petitions from the circumstances under which close relatives died or became missing persons in the massacre space to the interpretation and evaluation of those circumstances by bereaved families, a focus is placed on a transcendence of the defects of fragmented transitional justice theories.

As a result of this analysis, it was found that while those experiences that were anticipated by the bereaved families to be in conflict with the regulations for exclusion were expunged in the victim statements submitted to the Jeju April 3 Committee, at the same time, by emphasizing the stories of their ordeals, a trend towards the distortion of experience and memory was observed. Regarding the deaths caused by systematic government involvement and intervention, a movement towards a reorientation of the deaths of close relatives according to the “convenience, necessity, and usefulness of ordinary unaffected citizens” can be identified, at times cooperating with and at other times resisting the government’s coercion and order with the intent to bring about justifiability during and after the incident.

Chapter 4 examines genealogical records (removals from census records <jejeokdeungbon>, genealogy tables <jokbo>, and grave inscriptions <myobi>) of the families and relatives of the deceased to demonstrate how the numerous civilian deaths caused by the Jeju April 3 Incident were understood and expressed by the surviving families and relatives. Furthermore, through an analysis of the friction and conflict arising between the bereaved families’ devising of interpretations of and the government’s attempts to create meaning for the deaths, the image of society and the creation and deployment of local knowledge by people regarding incidents and their aftermaths thus far disregarded by transitional justice theories are explained from a different perspective than that in Chapter 3.

As a result of this analysis, inconsistencies, including deletions from census records, genealogy tables, and grave inscriptions, in the genealogical records of civilian deaths during the Jeju April 3 Incident were observed, all of which were the products of the surviving families’ attempts to interpret the deaths. In contrast to the deletions from census records engaged in by dissembling and fragmented politics, the genealogy tables and grave inscriptions reflect the changing times because they record historical facts that are to be remembered and passed down within the life-world. Although these strategies are meandering and complicated, they are undertaken for the sake of fostering a positive forward-looking vision of the future of society and the self by providing different interpretations of these deaths, along with the postmortem treatment of close relatives who died or became missing persons.

Based on the problems proposed in the Introduction, Section Two consolidates the findings obtained in Section One and attempts an examination from multiple vectors. As concrete empirical research, and as an attempt to discuss this issue in a wider perspective through a comparative and contrastive discussion of the Jeju April 3 Incident, postwar management and victimization is examined from the perspective of the ordinary civilian war dead in the Battle of Okinawa (Chapter 5), and the genealogical records of missing persons (of Japanese citizenship) from the Southwest Islands who were caught up in the Taiwan February 28 Incident are studied (Chapter 6), deepening the discussion in Section One.

In order to add depth to the discussion concerning petitions submitted to official bodies in Chapter 3, Chapter 5 examines the significance of the inclusion of civilian war deaths within the category of war dead by making use of the expanded application of the “Act on Relief of War Victims and Survivors” within the

postwar management of the Battle of Okinawa and the “Petition Regarding War Participants”. In addition, at a level different from that of the overwhelming power commanded by the state, how bereaved families attached meaning to the war deaths of their close relatives on the local stage and how the signification by the state of those deaths was in turn grasped within theories of the life-world are studied based on the involvement of the bereaved families in submitting petitions.

As a result of this analysis, although the postwar management of the Battle of Okinawa and the reckoning with the past regarding the Jeju April 3 Incident cannot be compared exhaustively, the underlying factors among the results of the studies in Chapter 3 could be discerned. First, regarding the victimization of the dead attempted within the framework of the nation-state, by dividing the dead into two categories—victims and non-victims—their complex histories were erased, resulting in an observable trend towards new inclusions in the victims’ group of those who were the beneficiaries of these laws and institutions. Second, as a device for gaining official recognition from the state for close relatives who had been killed, by rewriting the description of the experiences in the petition rather than the factuality of the experiences, the practices of the bereaved families intending to resolve the issues confronting them were identified.

Through an examination of the Taiwan February 28 Incident, Chapter 6 deepens the discussion from Chapter 4 on the bereaved families’ assigning of significance to the deaths through the genealogical records of the families and relatives. For this purpose, the genealogical records of the missing persons (of Japanese citizenship) from the Southwest Islands who were caught up in that incident are examined, and as a result, show the corroborative and multifaceted nature of how the bereaved families expressed the violence experienced by their close relatives and their memories thereof through the assigning of their own social and cultural significance. Specifically, as an actual example of the assigning of such significance to missing persons conducted at the blood–relation level, the records of those who went missing as recorded on memorial tablets, funerary urns, and so on are examined. In addition to the two kinds of genealogical records mentioned above, public records were also compared.

As a result of this analysis, through the February 28 date signified as the date of death within the extremely personal media of the genealogical records, the continuity of memories spanning generations regarding those among the close relatives listed as missing was discernible. For the bereaved families, the number 2-28 is symbolic in relation to the incident because it reveals those who went missing.

In the final chapter, the points developed in each of the preceding chapters are retraced and an overall discussion is provided.