

# The Memory and Interpretation of August 15, 1945 —Koreans' Perception of Japan as Reflected in Comic Books\*

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In Korean comic books, there has been “remorse” for the fact that Korea had acquired its liberation dependently on August 15 in 1945. In other words, the remorse for the historical dependency in modern Korean history leaves trauma. This trauma tends to be resolved by three ways as follows. First, Korean residents in Japan are created as male heroes who are strongly opposed to Japan. Through this hero fighting against Japanese, Korean people satisfy their resentment against Japan in their inner hearts, not in reality. Second, the future relationship between Korea and Japan is described catastrophically. In this “fictional” future, Korea always inflicts revenge or punishment on Japan. Third, Korean national power overcomes that of Japanese through the growth of capitalism. Japan is represented as an opposite axis, which realizes the normative value of Korean nationalism. In this way, Japan becomes “the other.” These understandings of Japan in Korean comic books show how contemporary Korean society processes, remembers, and transmits the memories of the past on condition that the state monopolizes/controls interchanges between the two countries. Therefore, Japan in Korean comic books functions as a mirror through which the goal of contemporary Korean society is revealed. Viewed in this light, the point of view about Japan in these comic books has been shaped through the process of fitting historical experiences into the national development or social context and reprocessing them with Korean personal memories and experiences.

However, there have been some regular changes. Due to the open-door

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\* My sincere thanks go to Professor Kim Chang-nam who helped with collecting data and writing the paper. I note that a forthcoming paper titled “Japan/Japanese and the Korean Pop Culture-- Focusing on Commercial Films” (Kwon Heok-Tae, 2005) takes a similar and overlapping view with this paper.

policy and the rapid growth in information nowadays following not only a lowering of the wall between Korea and Japan but also the interchange cost and expanding interchanges between the two nations, a conflict with the existing view about Japan is likely to occur. In other words, tension appears between the view locked in the historical memory as the 15<sup>th</sup> of August (Day of Korean Liberation) and the view brought about by personal experience. This tension appears to deepen through the current inclination of today's youth toward post- historic and -political, as well as individualistic trends. This new tendency seems to be a sort of reaction against the comic books prior to the 90's that mostly concentrated on a "national remorse" assuming extreme opposition between the two nations. The issue is on the type of future to be expected with such "new views about Japan" based on individual encounters.

*Keywords: Comic books, strong state/strong nation, Korean residents in Japan, overcoming Japan, memories of history.*

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## **Introduction**

This paper aims to reveal how post-war Korean society remembered, interpreted, and reproduced "a series of events symbolizing the 15th of August" from the context of contemporary history of Korea. It uses comic books as a window to the formation and reproduction of the memory of the 15<sup>th</sup> of August.

It is obvious that the 15<sup>th</sup> of August in this context means more than the unconditional surrender of Japan that brought back independence to the Korean people. Rather, it is about a series of historical events ranging from colonization and independence to the division of the Korean peninsula and the Korean War.

In this regard, the focus can be placed on how to unveil the contents and mechanism of recognizing Japan at that time as another axis of the stream of modern and contemporary Korean history mentioned above. From this viewpoint, this paper analyzes the way Korean comic books depict Japan which wielded a strong influence upon the modern and contemporary historic trends of Korea, instead of directly looking at how they deal with the modern and contemporary history itself. By doing so, it intends to provide the indirect clue to the historical implication of the 15th of August.

Korean comic books handle Japan as a subject in a number of ways. Still, it is possible to group such varied approaches in three categories. The first

approach discusses the mentality and thought of the Korean comic book writers of the early colonial era. This viewpoint stems from the fact that these comic book writers were educated in Japan and therefore their works are inseparable from such experiences.

Also, other perspectives pay attention to the direct influence of Japanese *manga* (Japanese comic books) on their Korean counterparts produced in the same period. Viewed in this light, a “violent, vulgar, erotic” Japanese pop culture is claimed to have undermined the purity and soundness of Korean culture. Also, copying and plagiarizing were taken into account. From the aspect of cultural industry, the third approach relates *manga* and its impact on the competitiveness of the popular comic book industry in Korea, as is easily found in the recent debate over whether Korea should open its pop culture market to the influx of Japanese comic book industry.

This paper intends to take another path of analyzing Koreans’ general perception of Japan/Japanese through comic books in the context of contemporary history.

Under the condition of Korea’s democratization and the change in inter-Korean relations, the rise of conservatism in Japan, and the introduction of a market economy in China, the three nations are required to cooperate to build a new system for regional peace and prosperity, replacing the previous security system of the Cold War era based on the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, the difference in interpreting history makes this transition quite challenging. To overcome it, effort should be made to clarify the differences in historical perception and to interpret such in the framework of peace and co-prosperity, which will lay a foundation for sharing of solidarity.

Despite the necessity of the resolution and our willingness, however, dehistoricization, or impeachment of historicity, is well underway in these countries, widening the existing gap over historical events. Dehistoricization emerged in the generations of the barbaric times of colonialism and war are now aging. Along comes the collective oblivion of history following individual oblivion, both being accelerated by rapid social change. Such waning of memory takes a form of social violence in which the generation of oblivion forces the generation of memory to abandon the past. The differences of the three nations in interpreting history and the trend of dehistoricization should be seen as a phenomenon of “collective oblivion.” This suggests that it is time to judge the extent of decrease in historical recognition at a social level. However, there is more to be done. Instead of simply reemphasizing the importance of history or proclaiming/pro-

moting a collective revival of memory, the changes caused by the diversification of transmitting aids or memory aids should be taken into account. With the disappearance of those who transmitted personal experience to collective memory contributing to the formation of historic recognition, various forms of transmitting aids or memory aids now deliver history to future generations. Transmitting aids or memory aids include textbooks, public systems, memorials, museums, and media (comic books, newspapers, films, etc.).

The media as transmitting aids have a very complicated character because of their scope and characteristics. In general, media are comprehensive, diverse, and hard to chronologically analyze. Only a few forms of media allow time-series approaches for analysis. At the same time, attention should be paid to the uniqueness of each form of media. For example, comic books, animations, films, and pop songs are subject to market principles while newspapers and broadcasting pursue guidance and satire. *Daehan News* and other governmental media promote the governmental policy of an administration. Therefore, media analysis can only produce a conclusion with certain limitations.

The subject of analysis in this paper is mostly comic books published between the 1980s and the 1990s which drew attention on a social level.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Aspiration to “Self-Won Liberation” and “the Strong Nation-States”**

As far as I know, not many comic books handle the issue of the 15th of August directly. Of the few examples is *Bongnamiui moheom* (The Adventures of Bongnam) by Kim Yong-hwan. Published just after liberation in *Eorini sinmun* (The Children’s Times), the comic book depicts the hope and expectation towards independence with a ship named the “Independence” which “can go to sea and land, wherever it wants to” (Choi Yeol 1995: 85). Kim Jong-nae, who represents the 1960s and the 1970s, features a similar optimism in his 1964 comic book titled *Joguk* (The Fatherland) through the soliloquy of the hero, a conscripted student who forecasts the fall of Japan at the Soviet-Manchurian border.

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1. The scope is limited to this time bracket because comic books published before 1980s are hard to find. Some comic books of the 1970s or before mentioned in this paper are in the collection of Bucheon Comic Book Information Center.

“Collapse, Japan. Just like me, all the Japanese people call for peace! ...Your (the Japanese) defeat shall be bitter; still I believe you want the end of the imperialists and invaders as well as the birth of democratic Japan. This will lead to the bright future of an independent Korea. Out of shackles, we then will move forward.”<sup>2</sup> (Kim Jong-nae, *The Fatherland*)

The author blames the Japanese military and rulers for the Japanese invasion of Korea, instead of seeing it as a national confrontation between two countries. The author also impressively concludes that the fall of Japan will lead to “the birth of a new Japan” and “the bright future of Korea that will move forward.” In other words, liberation itself is “freedom” and the hope for the foundation of a new country. As for Japan’s part, it will restore democracy. However, such optimism was intended to highlight other tragedies of historical distortion that followed liberation, most notably the division of the Korean Peninsula and the Korean War.

Heo Yeong-man is known to put vigorous effort in reproducing the 1980s. Some of his works show his ideas on the 15th of August issues. In *Oh, the Han River*, a student activist say as follows about liberation:

“We are first to blame. We were deprived of independence, but we were so feeble that we never waged a war against Japan over the last thirty-six years. The U.S won the Second World War, bringing peace back to us. However, it can never be independence because we are now a de facto colony of America. Now, we should drive the Yankees away and free ourselves.”

In the finale of *Sajayeo saebyeogeul noraehara* (*The Dead, Please Sing the Song of Dawn*, 1987), a story about Koreans’ resistance against Japan, Yi Hyeon-se writes:

No struggles, no independence. Just as Japan replaced China, the Allies will take the position to Japan. Their victory means nothing but another ruler to us.... The nuclear bomb destroyed Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

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2. Only part of *The Fatherland* is available now. The source of the quotation is *Gungnae huigwi manhwa moeumjip* (*The Collection of Rare Comic Books in Korea*), vol. 2, Bucheon Comic Book Information Center.

Imperial Japan finally perished. Did it bring the dawn to Korea? Never! The liberation was made not by our resistance, but by the victory of the Allies. They treated Korea as a prize that could be divided. Russia took half and America took the other half. The liberation led to the division. Why should our land, not Japan, be torn like this? We mourn, and we lament. The dawn is still too far away. Alas, we are divided, and we have nowhere to go.

The liberation is viewed as a mere road to the division. This is attributed to the fact that the liberation was not the achievement of self-reliant Koreans but a by-product of the victory of the allies. In other words, Kim Yong-hwan and Kim Jong-nae see the liberation as the freedom from Japanese control while Heo Yeong-man and Yi Hyeon-se see it as a matter of self-reliance. The transition of the views reflects the influence of the democratization movements in the 1980s in terms of their characteristics and achievements. Then, how do comic books resolve the issue of this lack in self-reliance?

Yi, one of the most well-known comic book writers of the 1980s, has an interesting theory of “weak nation-states” on which his works rely, leading to the desire for “strong nation-states.” *Gongpoui woeingudan* (The Invincible Outsiders) which, published in 1982, made a great hit, is a good example; there is a truck driver who the hero is indebted to. He is good-natured, diligent, but poor. His son criticizes him and Yi evaluates the modern and contemporary history of Korea through his remark like this,

“You suffered because you are ignorant and feeble! ...Remember how you got furious when our plane was shot down by the Soviets? I will not let it happen again. I have sworn and I promise again, I will be stronger and stronger, and the Yankees and Japanese will never look down on us again! I promise.”

This remark attributes the tragedies of the 15th of August to the weakness of the Korean people who did not have the strength to survive the fierce rule of power of the times. It also recognizes that power comes before the word of justice in a grim world society. As is mentioned later, such recognition saw *Power* belonging either to an individual or to a nation; it was the key word of comic books from the 1980s to 1990s. In other words, the recognition of Korean tragedies as a result of weakness led to a yearning for a strong nation-state.

What is notable is that such yearning for a strong nation-state is not only restricted to the norm of the future but also reflected in the way comic book writers illustrate colonial times. Relying on the norm of “a strong nation-state,”

comic books portray the struggle of Koreans in colonial times. Attributing the misfortune of modern and contemporary Korea (colonization, the Korean War, division, and poverty...) to the weakness of the nation inviting the intervention of outsiders, such a historical viewpoint leads to the desire to describe the resistance against Japan as mighty and fierce. That is why so many comic books set in the colonial times are about armed conflict or heroic anti-Japanese independence activists. These comic books have the following characteristics.

First, the comic books shed light on the mighty armed struggles in demonstrating the era of Japanese imperialism. The most representative case is *Nakhwa* (The Falling Flowers 1964; Choi Yeol 1995: 115) by Kim Jong-nae, a story about a great independence activist who organized a resistance force called Mugunghwadan, or the Army of the Rose of Sharon in Manchuria, after his father's failed effort to raise an army under his leadership as a county chief. Similarly, Park Gwang-hyeon talks about the independence movement group carrying out paramilitary actions in northern Manchuria in *Heuksudan*.<sup>3</sup> Also, Wang Hyeon's *Taepyeongyangui bulkkot* (The Flame of the Pacific) published in 1962 features a Korean draftee in the Japanese army who in the Philippines saves American POWs and defeats Japanese soldiers in the end reflecting the viewpoint of the sixties. Such historic view features in these works are furthered by Park Won-bin's *Gwangyau norae* (The Song of the Wilderness, 2000) about the anti-Japanese struggle of Righteous Brotherhood (a secret anti-Japanese organization) and *Yuk hyeolpo* (The Six-Shooter, 1996), Yi Hyeon-se's *The Dead, Please Sing the Song of Dawn*, and Yi Sang-se's *Arirang* (2002).

In *The Dead, Please Sing the Song of Dawn*, Korean students refuse conscription and hide in a mountain where they wage armed struggle. After being caught and sent to Burma as Japanese soldiers, they desert from the barracks to join the Burmese resistance, fighting against Japan for liberation. Again, behind the story lies the belief in a possible independence achieved without external help.

*Arirang* deals with the hope toward self-reliant liberation in a more outright manner. The main characters are an aristocrat-turned-leader of the conservative independence movement and a farm servant who joins its leftist counterpart. There is the scene of the former leaving a will to the latter, asking to defeat Japan "with thousands of soldiers and the Taegeuk flag ahead, on behalf of me

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3. Partly available through *Gungnae huigwi manhwa moeumjip* (Collection of Rare Comic Books in Korea), Bucheon Comic Book Information Center.

and for the sake of our people.” This symbolizes the dream of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the cooperation between right and left, through the analogy with the colonial times. The fictional alliance between the left and the right in the comic book realizes the possibility of self-reliant independence that never came true in the real world.

Second, the comic books present non-Korean supporters for the armed resistance, expanding the theme of the justifiability of armed struggles against Japanese rule from one involving both Korean and Japanese to a more universal and just one. For instance, *The Dead, Please Sing the Song of Dawn* features the Burmese insurgents against the ruling British. Two sons of a Japanese general stationed in Japan support and engage in the Korean independence movement in *Heukbaram* (The Dust Winds) by Yi Sang-mu. In case of Yi Sang-se’s *Arirang* and Park Won-bin’s *Majeok* (The Bandits), Chinese bandits work with Korean activists. American soldiers appear in *The Flame of the Pacific* by Wang Hyeon, implying the armed struggle around Korea was a universal issue involving non-Koreans. In short, the four works mentioned all propose that the anti-Japanese armed struggles were not a matter limited to Korea but a matter which held universality in the context of the world history.

### **The Emergence of Zainichi Koreans and “Vicarious Realization”<sup>4</sup>**

The regret over the lack of self-reliance in comic books is resolved in the three following ways to attain power greater than Japan’s:

- by setting a Zainichi Korean sports hero or *yakuza* (Japanese gangster) as a historic substitute, and demonstrating his victory against mainstream Japanese society;
- by illustrating a future where powerful Koreans extract thorough revenge;
- by showing Korea’s marvelous economic achievement excelling Japan’s.

Let’s take a look at the first approach. Zainichi Koreans have appeared so frequently in the Korean comic books since the 1960s that it became a must topic for the analysis of the general recognition of Japan in Korea. Such an intensive

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4. The description of the Korean-Japanese depends on the author’s paper which adopted three filters (anti-communism, development, Japan) for the analysis (Kwon Heok-Tae, 2003).



focus is quite exceptional given the extent of general research or social attention on similar issues. Interestingly, Zainichi Korean characters in the comic books are usually sports heroes or *yakuza*.

The comic books about sports stars who succeed after discrimination and innumerable challenges are as follows.

- Boxing: Bak Gi-yeong, 1984, *Dojeonja* (The Challenger)
- Baseball: Yi Sang-mu, *Grounde buneun baram* (The Wind over the Ground), 1984; *Gitbareul ollyeora* (Raise the Banner), 1981; Heo Young-man, *Jil su eopda* (Defeat Is Unacceptable), 1987
- Martial Arts: Goh U-yeong, *Dae yamang* (The Great Ambition), 1975; Bang Hak-gi, *Baramui paiteo* (The Wind Fighter), 1994
- Pro wrestling: Bang Hak-gi, *Piwa kkot* (Blood and Flowers), 1997-1998

Zainichi Korean *yakuza* are present in the following comic books.

- Son Ui-seong. 1965. *Donggyeong 4-beonji* (Tokyo #4)
- Yi Sang-mu. 1991. *Gaosalgu* (The Wild Apricot); 1991. *Jeonseorui yeongung* (The Legendary Hero)
- Son Tae-gyu. 2000. *Gangkokujin* (A Korean)
- Kang Chon. 1996. *Gangkokujin* (A Korean)
- Choi Byeong-nyeol. 2004. *Taegeukgiga barame peolleogimmida* (The Taegeuk Flag)
- Kim Ji-won. 2002. *Dead Line*
- Yi Hyeon-se. 1993-1995. *Nambeol* (The Conquest)
- Park Won-bin. 1989. *Simonosekiui yong* (The Dragon of Shimonoseki)
- Jo Myeong-hun. 2003. *Gukbu* (The Father of the Nation)

Meanwhile, Bak Gi-jeong's *Huingureum Geomeun Gureum* (White Clouds, Dark Clouds), a story of an ordinary Zainichi Korean, and Heo Yeong-man's *Du eolgul* (Two Faces) about a Zainichi Korean entrepreneur's personal life are rare exceptions.

Behind the description of Zainichi Korean as sports heroes or *yakuza* is a Korean tendency to highlight the hardship and discrimination Koreans went through in Japanese society and the hatred of the Japanese towards Korea relating such historical experiences to colonial history. This tendency in turn leads to the expectation of a reader to assimilate him/herself with the Zainichi Korean

character who struggles with adversity. Zainichi Koreans at that time were like heroes of a simulation game in which Koreans materialize their abstract view on Japan. Therefore, comic books usually depict Zainichi Korean heroes as those who suffer most from a de-facto colony life and engage in a lonely struggle with Japanese society without compromise.

For example, in Jo Myeong-hun's *Gukbu* (The Father of the Nation) the hero's grandparents were forced to move to Japan as his grandfather was drafted and his grand mother became a comfort woman. Similarly, the father of the hero is killed by Japanese while fighting for the independence of Korea in *Geuraundeue buneun baram* (The Wind over the Ground) by Yi Sang-mu. Likewise, some North Korean comic books claim that Rikidozan, a Zainichi Korean pro wrestler, went to Japan because he was blackmailed by Japanese policemen to do so (See footnote 8). To sum up, Zainichi Koreans are depicted as leading a de facto colony life, forever destined to wage an all-out liberation war with Japan.

This reflects Koreans' desire to narrow the gap between their reality (avoiding face-to-face confrontation with Japan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and their lost historical purity, a norm value that should have been realized (the self-accomplished liberation by armed-resistance, and a complete purge of the past).

The frequent appearance of such characters were made because they symbolize vividly how Japanese society discriminates against vulnerable, unprotected Koreans using the rule of power as is shown by the following examples.

“The Japanese always look down on Koreans. But they do not once you become a *yakuza*. They bow to *yakuza* out of fear.” (*Gangkokujin*, A Korean)

“We are in Japan. We are proud of Koreans, not Japs...Father said you should be strong to survive in this harsh place.” (*Gukbu*, The Father of the Nation)

“We are in Japan, and I am despised as a Korean here. I should keep fighting. Be stronger, be stronger, I cried battling the tire. I was not a naive boy dreaming to be a baseball player. I played baseball to beat my despair.” (*Jil su eopda*, Defeat is an Unaffordable Luxury)

“Koreans are discriminated against and suppressed. Being Korean is a scarlet letter I can never erase. Don't cry. You will lose the battle... Put up with it. Just put up with it. Fight and defeat your enemy. Be strong. Be invincible. Be steadfast like a stone. Silence their contempt.” (*Defeat is*

*an Unaffordable Luxury*)

“(A Korean Japanese baseball player who lost one arm in a car accident) I would bet my life to recover and do everything I can rather than live in contempt under the Japs.” (*The Invincible Outsiders*)

“I became a *yakuza* with a single dream: to wield my power in Japan.” (*Deadline*)

“(Mentioning a Zainichi Korean hero,) He must be tougher like a weed. Koreans face so much contempt and ill treatment here.” (*Gaesalgu, The Wild Apricot*)

The Zainichi Koreans in the above examples are completely isolated from Japanese society. The impressive fact is that the authors commonly make contrasts between Japanese society and individual Koreans, not the Korean community. Accordingly, the self-reliance of Zainichi Koreans is realized only at an individual level instead of at the social level, stressing the tragic situation more deeply. This interpretation is derived from the recognition that Zainichi Koreans were still treated as second-rate citizens just as the colonial Koreans were since Japan remained unchanged even after its defeat. Under these circumstances, the only thing an individual Zainichi Korean can depend on under such circumstance is his own power.

Then, how does an individual Zainichi Korean relate himself with his motherland?

Yi Hyeon-se intends to show that individual self-reliance earns real meaning only when it is in line with the interest of the motherland through the setting of *Nam beol* (The Conquest) in which the main character, a helpless Korean, fights against Japan with the help of his motherland, South Korea and North Korea.

“The search for the motherland” takes a more concrete form in *Hangugin* (Koreans) by Yi Sang-mu. Two sons are born to a family with a Japanese mother and a Korean father who was brought to Japan through forced mobilization, where he worked hard amid harsh abuse and discrimination to survive. While the elder son leads a life as a thru-and-thru Japanese, the younger does not give up being Korean out of respect for his dead father who died alone of illness. Both become successful baseball players in Japan, but joining a Korean baseball team was the only way to overcome their confusion over identity. The younger keeps refusing naturalization solely because of his yearning for his deceased father. After he has learned about his real national identity he finally regrets his narrow and personal perspective of the motherland. This process is contained in

11 volumes. The titles of the volumes are: (1) I am Korean; (2) Korean: People of Strong Will; (3) Korean: People of Perseverance; (4) Korean: Honorable People; (5) Korean: Proud People; (6) Korean: Victorious People; (7) Korean: The Great People; (8) Korean: People of Resistance; (9) Korean: People of Devotion; (10) Koreans Never Give Up; (11) May Koreans Prosper Forever. These titles show the perception of post-war Korean society over the identity of Korean-Japanese.

Likewise, Jang Hoon, a hero of *Jilsu eopda* (Defeat Is Unacceptable) by Heo Yeong-man, says on his visit to Korea that “I used to have only a vague idea about my homeland and my people. Now that I am here, I can see what they are really about. “

From this perspective, Zainichi Koreans go through the process of “suffering from an extended de-facto colony life—being severely discriminated—maintaining Korean identity at a personal level—relating it with the motherland.” The personal hardship is therefore a mere tool that leads to the inclusion of the character into the Korean identity or maximizes the effect of yearning.

Consequently, Zainichi Koreans in the comic books give up their ordinary life to fight to the end against Japan, or to live up to their patriotism and success despite all the discrimination with no private life. In the cases of Rikidozan and Choi Yeong-ui, to emphasize their pride in their nationality, their specialties of using karate were replaced with Taekwondo.<sup>5</sup> This implies that Koreans then expected Korean-Japanese to be either anti-Japanese activists or suffering from discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

In this case, how is the tragedy of the contemporary Korean from the colonial times to division and the Korean War resolved in comic books? *Gukbu* (The Father of the Nation) and *Nambeol* (The Conquest) adopted the rule of thorough retaliation, claiming that the barbarism dominating the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Korean history can only be overcome by the rule of power. This is the second method the comic books use to resolve the regret over the lack of self-

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5. Such trends are intensified in the North Korean versions which depict Rikidozan as an anti-American, anti-Japanese hero. See Kim Nam-hun (2003) and Kim Ji-na (1995) for more detail.

6. There are of course exceptions to this trend. For example, Yi Yang-ji, a Korean-Japanese writer, talks about a Korean-Japanese studying in Korea in *Yu Hui*. Though her nervousness and breakdown is confusing to the Korean home stay family, they try to embrace her. Through the story, the writer points out that the family are still treating the student as Japanese as is common in Korea, rather than focusing on the problem the student has as part of her identity anomaly.

reliance. In *Gukbu*, the main character and other second- or third- generation Zainichi Koreans establish an independent country on Hokkaido after an armed dispute with Japan, which tried to invade Korea with Russian nuclear weapons. In *Nambeol*, Korea and Japan reestablish their relations through a bilateral accord after an all-out war.<sup>7</sup> Comic book writers try to justify such endings by presenting the following historic implications.

“Can we forget the devastating past and simply forgive Japan just because it happened a long time ago? I don’t think so. I will never! The sin should not remain unpunished. I will give a lesson that wrongdoings cannot escape judgment. (*Gukbu*)”

“In 1952, King Seonjo was dishonored for fleeing from the capital to the North during the Japanese invasion. We have gone through a life of disgrace since then. A hundred years have passed, and finally comes the time for revenge. Now, we are the powerful one.” (*Nambeol*)

“(Heading omitted) Good-natured but powerless, my people went through innumerable invasions and difficulties. I see that as shameful. I will not let my country become a victim again. Never again shall another country force my motherland to pay yield under pressure. I will not allow the Japanese to force Koreans to bow to their shrine. They shall not kill a single Korean again. So, I will make my country strong and powerful. Being good and moral is not everything.” (*The Invincible Outsiders*)

Of course, not every comic book drives its ending into catastrophic retaliation and confrontation. Produced since the 1980s, so-called business comic books deal with Korea’s economic miracle, some of which relate this topic to Japan’s econo-

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7. The new bilateral accord in *Nambeol* reflects Koreans’ dissatisfaction with the current relations. The accord (1) denounces the previous accord; (2) requires Japan to make a complete and clear apology to Korea for the invasion; (3) guarantees the legal status of Korean-Japanese and makes immediate compensation of their physical and mental damage; (4) requires a thorough investigation of the sex slave issue and immediate reparation; (5) requires a thorough investigation and inclusion in textbooks of the assassination of the Last Empress Myeongseong; (7) requires the return of Korean treasures stolen in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Japanese invasion; (8) recognizes Dokdo as Korean territory; (9) replaces the name *The Sea of Japan* with *The East Sea*; and (10) reduces the size of the Japanese Self Defense Forces (Yi Hyeon-se 1993-1995(5): 350). Kim Chang-nam evaluates Yi’s nationalism as being “simple, naïve, and thus contains excessive nationalistic spirit” (Kim Chang-nam, 1996; Gwak Dae-won et al. 1996: 84).

my. In such comic books, Korea successfully excels Japan in terms of economic achievement. This is the third way how the regret over the lack of self-reliance in comic books is resolved in comic books. The most well known example is *Asphalt sanai* (The Man on the Asphalt) by Heo Yeong-man. It is about a Korean automaker that beats Honda and Ford and dominates the world market. The scene of presidents of the two companies kneeling down to admit their defeat is the climax of the comic book based on nationalism and *Geukilron*, the idea that Korea should surpass Japan, instead of merely hating it. As critics point out, Heo Yeong-man's nationalism is limited in that it is only for complacency. If *Oh! Hangang* (The Han River) is an inward-oriented expression of nationalism with the theme of unification, *Asphalt sanai* (The Man on the Asphalt) goes to the other extreme (Kim I-rang, 1996; Gwak Dae-won et al., 1996).

## Conclusion

Korean comic books resolve the problem of a real history lacking in self-reliance in three ways: by featuring successful Zainichi Koreans with thorough fictional retaliation in a future setting based on the image of a catastrophic future, and through the idea of *Geukilron* based on Korea's economic development. These three approaches all regard Japan as a counterpart of Korea through which Korea realizes its norm value on its national identity. The perception Korean pop culture has on Japan demonstrates how Korean society tried to perceive, remember, and transmit the memory of the past at the time of exchange with Japan was controlled and dominated by the government. In this regard, Japan in the comic books can be seen as a window through which Koreans define their own goals. Also, the viewpoints of related comic books are formed through the modification of historic experience in the context of economic, political, and social development and the readjustment of this modified history according to personal memory and experience.<sup>8</sup>

Such trends are changing these days. In the era of globalization and informa-

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8. Yi Hyeon-se and Heo Yeong-man once said that they drew about Japan not because they thought much about it but because it was an easy topic to pass deliberation on (The Comic Book Commentators' Association, 1995). In this case, the deliberation system determined the direction of the comic books and the viewpoints in the comic books reflect the government's perception of Japan.

tization, the cultural barrier between Korea and Japan and the costs exchange involves have been significantly lowered. As a result, a sweeping flood of exchanges are spreading rapidly in a number of fields, raising the likelihood of a possible clash with the old viewpoint on Japan. In other words, tension can exist between the past-oriented viewpoint contained in the historic trends of August 15<sup>th</sup> and new ideas built up through individual experiences. Such a trend appears to be widening in association with the de-historicization, de-politicization, and the individualism of the younger generation. For example, Japan is no more than an advanced country and the historic context is only peripheral information in Kim Su-yong's *Hip Hop*. Also, Zainichi Koreans are only ordinary "bilingual kids" speaking both Korean and Japanese.<sup>9</sup> This new trend has arisen in opposition to the excessive nationalism commonly found in comic books published up until 1990. The problem is what kind of future relation with Japan these new, individual-oriented comic books have in mind when the matter of past and nation is out of scope.

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9. Similar comic books include Yun In-wan's *The Island* and Kim Ji-won's *Ilbonegan gogyo 4-nyeon saeng* (A Fourth-Grade High Schooler Goes to Japan). Kang Cheol-soo's *Bamsakura* (The Cherry Blossom of Nights) also mentions history, but more generally it is a satiric comic book about the relations of the two nations featuring individual contact.

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