Historical Narrative and the Misrepresentation of Wartime Labor Recruitment in *Kenkanryū*

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Abstract Historically, Japanese manga has been used to comment on social and political issues in the present, as well as describe and narrate events in the past. Since the early 1990s a growing amount of revisionist manga has been published alongside increasingly vitriolic public debates concerning Japanese colonialism and the Greater East Asian War. These two groups have been known to influence one another. One example of this can be seen in manga artist Yamano Sharin's *Kenkanryū*, a work that aligns itself with leading scholars and commentators denying the ills of Japanese colonialism in Korea. This article examines some of the visual and narrative techniques used by Yamano to narrate and subsequently distort the history of Korean laborers during the war.
Key words Yamano Sharin; historical revisionism; forced labor; historical representation

"Korea: the more one learns about it, the more one starts to hate it" (Yamano, Kenkanryū, back jacket flap). *Kenkanryū* (*Hating the Korean Wave*) by Yamano Sharin is a work that raises important questions of historical revisionism, toxic nationalism[1], and racism against Koreans living in Japan (often referred to as *zainichi* Koreans). It concerns itself with examples of Japan's historical and cultural relationship with Korea, concluding in all cases Japan's superiority over an inferior Korea. Yamano's work offers one critique of Korean history and culture. He asserts that those who find Korean culture fascinates or repeats the various negative aspects of Japanese colonialism from 1910 to 1945 do not know the "truth" about Korean history and culture, a "truth" that has been hidden by widespread "lies" (1:33 – 34)[2].

Since the late 1990s, Korean popular culture, including television dramas, film, and music have become widely consumed by audiences in Asia, including Japan. This production, promotion, and exportation of Korean cultural content worldwide has been dubbed as the Korean Wave (Korean: *hallyu*; Japanese: *kanryū*). Over this same period, South Korean presidents Kim Dae-jung (1998 – 2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003 – 2008) began to develop closer ties with Japan. Kim's opening of Korea to Japanese cultural imports, banned since Korea's independence in 1945, and Roh's advocating of forward-looking relations with Japan greatly improved popular perceptions of the other in both Korea and Japan. This period of improving

relations arguably peaked in 2002 with the successful joint hosting of the World Cup and the unprecedented popularity in Japan of the Korean television drama *Fuyu no sonata* (*Winter Sonata*), leading many women in Japan to pledge their undying devotion to actor and heartthrob Bae Yong-joon (affectionately dubbed *Yon-sama* by the Japanese media).

The Korean Wave eventually evoked a backlash in Japan, characterized by a belief in Japan's superiority over its former colony and neighbor. This movement (*kenkanryū*) eventually led to the publication of a manga series by the same name. The premise of *Kenkanryū* follows Kaname, a first-year college student and his girlfriend, Itsumi, as they participate in their university's extracurricular "Far East Asia Investigation Committee". After classes, club members discuss, debate, and discover the so-called truth about Korean history and culture and its relationship with Japan. Throughout *Kenkanryū*, club members take part in after-school debates against *zainichi* Koreans, always winning in the end.

Beginning with the annexation of Korea in 1910 until the defeat of Japan in 1945, hundreds of thousands of Koreans migrated or were forcibly relocated to Japan, resulting in an estimated two million residing in Japan by early 1945 (Pak Kyŏng-sik 57). Approximately 600,000 Koreans remained in Japan after the war. Until the 1970s, many *zainichi* Koreans endured discrimination in the workplace (Chapman 33 – 36), were denied access to social services (Yoshioka 226 – 229), and faced problems obtaining an equal education compared to their Japanese counterparts (Aoki 158 – 160). The history of Koreans migrating or being forced to relocate to Japan is complex and open to a variety of interpretations which has produced a large body of literature on the subject expressing polarized views of Koreans in Japan as victims, on the one hand, and willing migrants to Japan on the other.

Nationalist histories of Japan's involvement in the war are nothing new, as can be seen in prototypical works like Hayashi Fusao's "Affirmation of the Greater East Asian War", serialized from 1963 to 1965 in the journal *Chūō Kōron*. In this work, Hayashi denied Japan was an imperialist power and argued that Japan had waged a defensive war in Asia against Western aggression. Since then, others including Fujioka Nobukatsu, an outspoken politically conservative commentator and professor of education at Tokyo University, have echoed this line of reasoning. Like Hayashi, Fujioka viewed the Greater East Asian War as just and pushed for the emergence of a "proper Japanese sense of nationalism" (McCormack 63). His bestselling 1997 book *Kyōkasho ga oshienai rekishi* (*The History Textbooks Don't Teach*) presented a group of upbeat stories about men and women in Japan that readers could take pride in. Fujioka has also described apologies for Japanese war crimes as "masochistic," arguing they present an excessively negative view of Japanese history in his book *Jigyakushikan no byōri* (*Masochistic Views of History*).

Similarly, manga illustrating Japanese history or politics in a nationalist or revisionist manner is not new or unique. Historically, manga has been mobilized to comment on political issues and influence public opinion, as demonstrated by early-twentieth-century works like *Tokyo Puck* that commented on the Russo-Japanese War and the annexation of Korea, for instance (Han and Han). One of the most well-known

contemporary manga serials presenting a nationalistic and positioned view of Japanese history is Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Gomanizumu sengen* and *Sensōron*. Other works, including Akiyama Joji's *Chūgoku nyūmon* (*An Introduction to China*) and Masanao Okada's *Manga Kitachōsen* (*Manga North Korea*) have presented similarly positioned and revisionist views of history.

Like the works of Hayashi, Fujioka, and Kobayashi, *Kenkanryū* presents a historically revisionist and nationalist depiction of Japanese history before, during, and after the war. Originally conceived as a webcomic, *Kenkanryū* was first published in print in 2005. Since then, the series has grown to four volumes selling over 900,000 copies and has spawned a (thus-far) one-volume spin-off, *Kenchūgokuryū* (*Hating the Chinese Wave*) and many other related publications (Yamano Vol. 4: cover). What differentiates recent revisionist and nationalist manga like *Gomanizumu* or *Kenkanryū* from the works of Hayashi and Fujioka is their widespread circulation in popular media and culture. As a result, this genre of historically and politically-charged manga has gained unprecedented visibility and popularity among[3] younger generations in Japanese society. Academic critiques of these works abound . For instance, Sakamoto and Allen have argued that a worsening economy, coupled with unstable employment prospects brought about by globalization, has heightened social anxieties. This has resulted in the "re-injection" of crude nationalist discourses "into [the] wider public discourse... [which] have come to be tolerated, if not accepted, by many Japanese" (Sakamoto and Allen). Echoing this analysis, Japanese writer and activist Amamiya Karin, a former self-professed nationalist, described her attraction to Kobayashi's work as:

> *Gōmanizumu* was packed with all the "society" issues that I wanted to know about... There was no other way for me to get to know about the world. Books sold at the bookshops that dealt with issues like politics or society were really thick, and easily cost close to 2000 yen. But *Gōmanizumu* was serialized in the weekly magazine "SPA!" which I could buy for 370 yen. I fiercely wanted to know about this society that I was living in; about how to live in a society whose bottom was starting to fall out; about the reality of the "postwar Japan" in which we were living; and about the reason that I couldn't help feeling this suffering in the midst of what people called "peace and prosperity." (259)

This article focuses on chapter three of the first volume of *Kenkanryū*, examining Yamano's attack on the issue of *kyōsei renkō* (enforced recruitment) of Koreans during the period of 1939 to 1945.[4] I begin by briefly outlining some of the significant works on enforced recruitment before moving on to an analysis of Yamano's key arguments for discounting the enforced recruitment of Koreans. I show that Yamano's overall reasoning is extremely similar to arguments by other politically conservative and revisionist researchers, especially in his explanations and references to the so-called myth of enforced recruitment. Unlike previous critiques of *Kenkanryū* (Pak Ⅱ) and the issue of enforced recruitment, I argue that one of Yamano's key methods in discounting enforced recruitment is tied to the otherness of Koreans as a people distinct from Japa-

nese people, and that he mobilizes a broader fear of Communism and North Korea to support these claims. In making these assertions, I identify particular narrative and visual techniques used by Yamano that evoke these particular arguments through written language and the visual medium.

The Myth of Enforced Recruitment

One way to describe myths as traditional stories provides explanations for early histories of civilizations and societies. Applying such a label to historical events, however, implies that these events misrepresent what people are interested in as historical truth or what are widely exaggerated about what happened in the past. Many politically conservative researchers and commentators argue that the history of Koreans in Japan is mythologized in relation, specifically, to the claim that Koreans were forcibly brought to Japan during the colonial period of 1910-1945. In *Kenkanryū*, Yamano is keen to impress upon his audience the "real history" of Koreans in Japan (*hontō no rekishi*) that is directly opposed to the widely perpetuated "myth" surrounding the origins of Koreans in Japan (1:80, 83).

Such arguments can appear plausible as, problematically, there is no one generally accepted definition for the phrase "enforced recruitment". Many researchers fail to specify exactly when, where, and how labor recruitment took place and consequently often arrive at radically different conclusions (Ropers 274). Historian Kim Y? ng-dal wrote extensively on the issue of language and terminology in describing enforced recruitment, noting that "it's not the language used to describe enforced recruitment that's the issue. Enforced recruitment is a matter of historical fact. [The problem is that] confusion and misunderstanding are often bred due to the various and different meanings people have [of the term *kyōsei renkō*]" (24, 26). In most works analyzing the Korean enforced recruitment issue, three methods are typically discussed: *boshū* (literally recruitment, taking place from 1939 to 1942), kan'assen (government mediated recruitment, taking place from 1942 to 1944), and *choyō* (conscription, taking place from 1944 to 1945). Although these dates serve to indicate when different and widespread forms of enforced recruitment began, they are, however, by no means definitive dates, and all these methods were used to some extent over the period of 1939 to 1945.

Yamano's bemoaning of a myth of enforced recruitment echoes arguments by politically conservative researchers, particularly Tei Tai Kin in his book *Zainichi kyōsei renkō no shinwa* (*The Myth of Korean Forced Recruitment*). In this book, Tei argued that most histories of labor recruitment have "disproportionately exaggerated the Japanese people as perpetrators and Korean people as victims" (61). By selectively picking testimonies of Koreans who willingly migrated to Japan for economic or family reasons, Tei crafted an argument that was arguably representative of the majority of Koreans who migrated to Japan willingly, yet wholly misrepresentative of the important minority of Koreans who were coercively brought to Japan from 1939 to 1945 (Ropers 275 –276).

This same misrepresentation of Koreans' experiences in Japan is present in *Kenkanryū*. Yamano cleverly implies that *zainichi* Koreans have been brainwashed to

think their ancestors living in Japan in 1945 were all forcibly brought to Japan (1:83). "If Koreans had been forcibly recruited," he asks, "wouldn't they have all gone back to Korea after the end of the war?", referencing the 600,000 who stayed in Japan (1:84). Even Koreans who were conscripted into the military against their will were not forced, according to Yamano: "To put it simply, conscription was a duty of Japanese citizens. How dare they call it 'forced recruitment'!" (1:88). Of course, full citizenship rights including the right to vote was only extended to Korean men living in Japan over the age of 25 and included additional qualifications that excluded a significant part of the electorate (Weiner 163 fn 149).

Using this and other unsound lines of argument, Yamano claims to prove that no Koreans were forcibly brought to Japan, thus asserting the revisionist interpretation advocated by Tei and others. Instead of logically justifying his views with the use of evidence, *Kenkanryū* appeals to readers' emotions. Yamano therefore presents the stereotypical and colonial dichotomy of an impoverished Korea versus a prosperous Japan, setting up migration as a perfectly natural and understandable occurrence attested to by migrants themselves (1:87–88). While correct that a great deal of migration was voluntary (Tei 67–108), Yamano and other revisionists' discount or bury testimonies illustrating enforced recruitment for ideological reasons.

The arguments in Tei's *Myth* and Yamano's *Kenkanryū* also share certain characteristics with the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho wo tsukurukai*), a group that repudiates Japanese war crimes during the Greater East Asian War including enforced labor, enforced military prostitution (so-called "comfort women"), and the Nanking Massacre. Efforts to promote the group's views were characterized by intimidation and resembled those of pre- and postwar politically right, ultranationalist groups in Japan (*uyoku dantai*) (McCormack 64). A 1995 textbook authored by the Society characteristically whitewashed brutal Japanese assimilation policies carried out in Korea and described the colonization of Korea as a "natural" process (Saaler 55). In this way, the Society, like both Tei and Yamano, constructs the migration of Koreans to Japan as a natural occurrence. By purporting a history based on incomplete bodies of evidence, by ignoring the testimonies indicating that a large minority of Koreans migrated to or were brought to Japan against their will, Yamano and his ideological allies are supplanting one so-called myth with an even more egregious one: that no Koreans were forcibly recruited.

Is Language Static?

Another argument Yamano presents to justify the claim that enforced recruitment is an imagined and conceived event is that the phrase "enforced recruitment" (*kyōsei renkō*) did not exist during the war (1:85). Such a revelation stuns the protagonists Kaname and Itsumi, leaving them speechless as upperclassman Ryūhei explains how they have been deceived by historians (1:86). Yamano is correct that the term "enforced recruitment" did not become widespread until first-generation zainichi Korean, Pak Kyŏng-sik, published his groundbreaking work *Record of Korean Forced Recruitment* in 1965 (1:86). However, this argument fails to recognize the ever-evolving nature of language and binds the history of enforced recruitment to terminology used by Japa-

nese perpetrators during the war. To draw an illustrative analogy on how language evolves, let us consider the development and usage of the word "genocide" in historical research.

The Oxford English Dictionary notes that the word only came into use in 1944 with Raphael Lemkin's book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. Writing that "New conceptions require new terms," Lemkin went on to state that he coined the word genocide from Greek to denote an old practice in its modern development. Many authors, instead of using a generic term, use currently terms [*sic*] connoting only some functional aspect of the main generic notion of genocide. These terms are also inadequate because they do not convey the common elements of one generic notion (Lemkin 79–80).

Even though "genocide" was a word coined in 1944, many historians, scholars, governments, and international organizations acknowledge the systematic elimination of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1917, consistently referring to this historical event as "genocide". Of course, this characterization is still disputed by the Turkish government today: although they acknowledge that Armenians died during this period, they disagree with the number of victims and assert that massacres were committed by all sides during World War I. Yet, at the time, onlookers referred to the killings of Armenians as an "extermination" or "annihilation" (Dadrian 349, 352). Responding to this kind of issue, Lemkin observed that older terms like these only referred to one aspect of the killings and ignored the "biological aspect" of a group's elimination (Lemkin 80).

From 1939 to 1945, the Japanese government referred to the act of enforced recruitment using terms like *boshū*, *kan'assen*, or *choyō*. This kind of terminology does not change the nature of recruitment for many Koreans as enforced. These terms serve as euphemisms for different methods of labor recruitment, and the postwar phrase "enforced recruitment" effectively joins these different methods as one simple phrase. It further highlights the victims' forced position rather than a Japanese perpetrator's position. For these reasons, the fact that the government and military did not see such recruitment as enforced or coerced is moot.

The Specter of Communism

Critiques of Koreans resident in Japan often presuppose an existing anti-Japanese relationship with North Korea, characterized by Yamano's tactic of referencing North Korea in his discussion of enforced recruitment (Yamano, 1:92–93; Lie 141). Although the history between Japan and North Korea is too lengthy to explain at great length here, recent major issues between Japan and North Korea include the issue of Japanese citizens abducted during the 1970s and 1980s, ballistic missile tests, an active nuclear weapons program, drug smuggling, and compensation and an apology for colonial rule. These issues have all contributed to a relatively poor Japanese perception of North Korea.

Between 1959 and 1984, some 90,000 *zainichi* Koreans repatriated to North Korea, facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) with the co-

operation of Japanese and North Korean officials[5] (Morris-Suzuki, "Freedom", 40). Given that Yamano argues Koreans willingly migrated to Japan in the first half of chapter three (1:87–88), it is not at all surprising that he uses this as evidence to discount wartime enforced recruitment (1:92). After all, what could be more natural than Koreans willing coming and then leaving Japan? A man with the Japanese character for "north" inscribed on his oval, black face beckons malevolently towards Japan, as Yamano narrates:

> *Zainichi* Koreans were enticed with propaganda promising things like 'free education' or 'full employment'... Repatriation to North Korea was done under the authority of the North Korean government and Chōsen Sōren [the main organization representing North Korean interests in Japan, also known as Chongryon]. The Japanese government even paid for part [of repatriation expenses] and cooperated [with officials], yet Koreans seem to be ungrateful. (1:92)

Having made no mention of the ICRC's role in mediating repatriations, he then goes on to describe in detail the discrimination *zainichi* returnees suffered in North Korea (failing to mention any kind of discrimination of Koreans by Japanese people).

Repatriation to the North was, for the most part, not driven by Koreans' political affiliation or personal connections, but rather because the South Korean military government's suspicion of politically left-wing *zainichi* Koreans made emigration impossible (Morris-Suzuki, "Dream", 364–65). When the Japanese government unilaterally stripped Koreans of their Japanese nationality in 1952 and imposed restrictions on welfare benefits to the Korean community, life became increasingly and intolerably difficult for Koreans living in Japan (Morris-Suzuki, "Freedom", 48–49). According to Morris-Suzuki, three reasons for repatriation stand out. First, *zainichi* Koreans were without a defined right of residence in Japan until the 1965 Normalization Treaty between Japan and South Korea. Second, Chōsen Sōren provided information to potential returnees that painted a misleading picture of life in the North that enticed many Koreans in Japan. Finally, whether or not women or children were in a position to reveal their desire to remain in Japan is questionable (Morris-Suzuki, "Freedom", 58–60). Unmentioned by Yamano, Japanese support for repatriation was, as Japanese Foreign Minister Fujiyama Aiichirō put it, based on the prospect of "ridding [the] country of [the] Korean minority," a minority that was "vaguely Communist" and perceived as a threat for Japanese postwar stability (qtd. in Morris-Suzuki, "Freedom", 48, 49). And, although the 1959 Calcutta Accord that outlined certain exit procedures and interviews for returnees, these assurances were reneged upon by North Korea and accepted by the Japanese government (Morris-Suzuki, "Freedom", 55).

By using the repatriation issue as an example of *zainichi* Koreans' close association with North Korea, Yamano is able to tap into pre-existing knowledge and emotions that his Japanese readership may have about North Korea. This technique lends *Kenkanryū* a kind of immediacy, allowing readers to confirm Yamano's threatening historical depiction of Koreans with recent events, such as missiles flying over Japan

or a nuclear-capable power on their doorstep.

"Us" versus "Them": Depicting Difference in Visual Terms

Morris-Suzuki observed that after the Russian Revolution in 1917, Soviet poster art drew sharp distinctions between "us" (the Soviets) and "them" (the enemy) through the use of exaggerated physical features and divergent graphic styles within the same image (*Past* 192 – 195). In *Kenkanryū*, Yamano utilizes comparably exaggerated visual techniques to emphasize the differences between Japanese and Koreans. Specifically in chapter three, Koreans are often drawn in a hyperbolized style that differentiates them from their Japanese counterparts. There is an emphasis on certain physical attributes including tiny, slanted eyes and smaller facial features that contrast them to Japanese characters who are drawn with comparably larger features, particularly their eyes and hairstyles with both Itsumi and Ryūhei sporting blond and styled hair. While these kinds artistic techniques are not necessarily indicative of a clear desire to delineate Japanese or Koreans based on ethnicity (after all, large eyes are a widespread characteristic in Japanese manga), they do serve to starkly differentiate Korean and Japanese characters in this chapter and work as a whole.

However, the techniques used to visually construct difference between Japanese and Korean characters are not necessarily static and change between chapters. For example, during a discussion on issues of postwar compensation (*sengo hoshō mondai*) in chapter two, Yamano's depiction of Koreans is different from those in his chapter on enforced labor (1:38 – 76, esp. 45, 48). Here, several Koreans are drawn with a different set of facial features including prominent chins and exceedingly long and pointed noses. The key point here is that the ways in which ethnicity and difference are constructed are in no way constant as some commentators like Onishi have previously argued, except, I would argue, in that Korean characters are almost always depicted with hostile or negative emotions.

Visually, it is this continuity of Koreans' emotions throughout *Kenkanryū* that starkly differentiates the Japanese "us" from the Korean "them". Importantly, neuroscientists have experimentally proven what many people have always known: the inherent communicative power present in people's facial expressions (e. g., Blair 561; White 372). Surprisingly, we are able to discern and recognize facial expressions (and therefore emotions) with less detail than we need to identify a face as belonging to a specific person (White 372). In a recent experiment, Ulf Dimberg and colleagues at Uppsala University found that people confronted with positive or negative facial expressions unconsciously and rapidly react to and mimic those expressions, leading them to conclude that "emotional reactions can be unconsciously evoked" (Dimberg 86). Throughout *Kenkanryū*, Koreans are often depicted with expressions representing negative emotions like anger (1:93, 166, 219), embarrassment (1: 210, 230), overt violence or murderous intent (1:60, 148, 150, 169), or greed (1:56) to name a few. In his chapter on enforced recruitment, no Korean actively smiles except for the one man who is shown taking pleasure in punching a Japanese person after the surrender in 1945 (1:81). These kinds of facial expressions construct Koreans explicitly as enemy figures opposed and hostile to Japanese people and

subconsciously predispose readers to a negative reaction.

Conclusion

In this article, I examined three different ways Yamano Sharin cast doubt on the existence of enforced recruitment of Koreans from 1939 to 1945, examining the terminology used, the supposed relationship between *zainichi* Koreans and communist North Korea, and the visual illustration of Koreans and Japanese. By taking an extremely contrived position similar to many politically conservative researchers and commentators, Yamano persuades or confirms for his target audience that Koreans were not forcibly recruited using emotional and fear-based appeals instead of sound historical research methods. In many ways, Yamano's work is preaching to an already converted audience that agrees with his ideas.

Whether or not it is possible to present controversial histories in the medium of manga is a question I have not attempted to answer in this article—suffice it to say, I do believe such presentations are possible. One such work, Chŏng Kyong-a's *Manga "ianfu" repōto* (*Manga Report on "Comfort Women"*) examines the issue of Japanese enforced military prostitution during the Greater East Asian War by drawing upon and incorporating academic studies in her presentation of the issue. Yamano's first volume of *Kenkanryū*, however, misrepresents not just the history of Korean enforced recruitment, but that of Korean culture (chapter 4), the Korean phonetic writing system (*hangul*, chapter 6), the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (the 1965 Normalization Treaty (chapter 8), to name a few topics. We should not underestimate the popular appeal of manga like Kenkanryū, but whether we should see them as representing the majority opinion of younger Japanese people today is questionable. Scholars like Sakamoto and Allen have noted statistics citing increased political conservatism among younger Japanese people today (Sasada 119, qtd. in Sakamoto and Allen), although other surveys by the Japanese national broadcaster NHK found that a majority of Japanese people ages 16 to 59 believe the postwar generation still bears some kind of responsibility for the war (Makita 10, 19, qtd. in Saaler 142). Academic Sven Saaler's own surveys of university students have also found a clear rejection of revisionist interpretations of history like those found in *Kenkanryū* (Saaler 143). Doubtless these questions will continue to be hotly debated as historically revisionist manga continues to be published and consumed online and in print by the Japanese public.

Notes

1. Japanese and Korean names are presented in the customary order of last name first. I follow received Western spellings of certain Korean names in this article. In other cases I follow the McCune - Reischauer romanization system.
2. There are four volumes of *Kenkanryū*. Here the "1" refers to the volume number. There is a citation later referring to volume 4, so I have been consistent in adding them throughout the article.
3. In English, see Sakamoto, "Will you go to war? Or will you stop being Japanese?", Sakamoto and Allen, "Hating 'The Korean Wave'", Clifford, "Cleansing History, Cleansing Japan",

Rosenbaum, "Historical Revisionism in Contemporary Manga Culture".

4. My translation of the Japanese term *kyōsei renkō* as "enforced recruitment" differs from most researchers in the field who typically translate it as "forced transportation" or "forced migration".

5. Yamano quotes a figure of "approximately 100,000" (1:82).

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