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## The Old Empire Coming Back: Revisiting Another Experience of Liberation Under Occupation

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Celebrating this year's International Women's Day, US President Bush proudly stated that the attacks against Afghanistan and Iraq brought liberation to more than 25 millions of women and girls, suggesting that military force is an effective tool for women's liberation. While this "new empire" which claims to be the champion of women's liberation is certainly serious concern for us, feminists in Asia, in this presentation I should like to focus on the old empire that still dominates our life.

The "Operation Iraqi Freedom" was reportedly based on the Japanese model, the successful "regime change" of 60 years ago from aggressive authoritarian military regime to liberal democracy. Surely it was proved to be a success for the United States, as the Japanese government remains firm as most royal ally in supporting the "war for freedom," even violating its Constitution that prohibits the government from sending troops overseas. One should wonder, however, whether democratization had ever taken place after that disastrous Pacific War, as a number of politicians justify the past aggressions against Asian peoples, openly attack sex education or gender-free education, and make misogynist statements like "women who don't bear children got no right to receive pensions". In short, we are seeing the old authoritarian anti-democracy anti-women empire coming back, hand in hand with the new empire that calls for "just war" to free repressed women. How should we understand this peculiar "alliance of the will"?

It is such an irony that those who claim for Japan's full participation in the US-led "war for democracy" are the same people who deny legitimacy of the democratization that took place after the defeat of the imperial military regime in 1945. They denounce the democratization which included disarmament and women's liberation as "forced upon" by the occupiers, and represent the process as "feminization of the nation", which only resulted in all kinds of modern social problems such as increase in crimes, divorces, prostitution, selfish youths, and lesser childbirth. In fact, granting equal rights of women in civil life and in family affairs was one of most critical reforms in the democratization process, over which nationalists have deeply regretted. It should not be regarded merely as a gift from western liberators for poor repressed Japanese women, considering that in most of western countries women did not enjoy suffrage at that time. To understand the important meanings women's liberation had in the democratization of Japan, one has to remind how patriarchic family system functioned in the former military regime.

In the imperial military rule, Emperor was God - Father, untouchable absolute authority, and individuals as his children were encouraged to abandon self-autonomy to be a part of the nation as a big family that is bonded by "natural" respect and love. Family, each of which had a small emperor-father, was major institution through which the state exercised control over individuals. It suggests that liberation for women could not be achieved just by granting them civil rights, but requires confronting with militarism and nationalism that is closely connected to patriarchic family systems. It was this recognition from which Japanese feminists started questioning how women were mobilized by the state as mothers and wives for colonization and invasion, while women in occupied territories were forced to be subject to brutal rapes and sexual slavery.

Contrary to the claim of the revisionists, Japanese people who were tired of suppressive military rule eagerly welcomed the "forced democratization" 60 years ago. However the US soon betrayed its own ideals of achieving peace through disarmament and democracy, as they reconciled with the ruling elites of the old regime, in order to transform Japan into the major fort of the military-economic block against communism in Asia. In spite of the dominant discourse that the Imperial Japan was successfully transformed by the US into a democratic, peaceful and pro-women state, the old empire has never gone. It was saved by the new empire that utilized its legacy to exercise power over Asia throughout the "Cold War", in which freedom of speech and association was suppressed, thousands were killed,

and victims of the sexual violence were silenced.

While nationalists put blame on feminists for destructing family, it was rather development of capitalism that has played major role in retreat of traditional family systems. In the War on Terror which emerged from the uneven development of global capitalism, the state is re-finding political values of family. As the North Korea is represented as another “evil state”, the whole Japanese nation is encouraged to identify with the families of the victims abducted by the North Korea. On the contrary, when peace activists were taken as hostages by an Iraqi armed group, the government and mass media shamelessly sponsored right-wing attacks against the victims and their families for being critical to the state policy of supporting the US occupation. I think it was very suggestive that the government used the neoliberal term “self-responsibility” when they asked the hostages to pay back the costs for rescuing them. While welfare state is supposed to assure economic security and social rights of citizens, it is assumed that neoliberal state owes limited responsibility for protection of life and assets of citizens. However, this case suggests the fact that there is no more unquestioned category of “citizens” who can unconditionally expect even minimum protection of life from the state. The War on Terror is in fact a process through which citizenship is redefined in terms of royalty to the dominant systems. Unlike wars between nation-states, the boundary between citizens to be protected and “enemies” to be killed is intentionally left vague in this war, contributing to increased anxiety and fear. And it is this anxiety and fear that calls the old empire back, which demands royalty to the nation that is represented not as union by contracts but as naturalized community of an extended family.

A few weeks ago, the ruling party of Japan suggested to drop gender equality from the Constitution to enshrine family as the foundation of the nation. Of course I am not in a mood to celebrate gains of women’s movement since Beijing. I have to be very critical that the issues of violence against women have been de-politicized, for we failed to make the Japanese government to address the “comfort women” issues properly.

While the old empire attacks feminism that reveals the fiction of family and nation as union by unconditional affection, the new empire blatantly takes credit of women’s liberation to distinguish between “civilized” and “barbaric” nations. What should we do to these two empires? I am very furious to see that Japan has again become the worst war criminal state, together with the US and the UK, even without participating in armed combats, and that they used the experience of “successful” regime change of Japan 60 years ago to justify the

invasion of Iraq, which has nothing to do with realities of women and men in Asia who have experienced unacceptable violence of imperialisms. It strikes me, while lives of Asian women have always been shaped by those imperial powers, we have been so separated from each other and prevented from sharing our stories, while they have monopolized history of the region and universal ideas such as democracy, freedom and self-determination. Fighting against the attacks on memories should be central in our struggle against nationalisms and imperialisms, since the new imperialism has direct interest in monopoly of history, as it distinguishes itself from the old empire. I also would like to stress that taking back our memories from the hegemonic discourses can only be achieved through transnational efforts to give a voice to those who have been silenced, to share diverse experiences of women, and to examine how they have been shaped by complex power relations. As we face the War On Terror that is turning our daily life into the battlefields everywhere, we need to share not only memories of the past war, but also how we have differently experienced militarization, occupation, existence of military bases, "high-level security", economic development or underdevelopment, in order to get back our words and public spaces from the empires. Although they attempt to define democracy and women's liberation by power and interests, we shall be able to define democracy by nonviolence and gender equality. And we shall not confuse women's suffrage with civilization, or universal norms with imperialism. It is not Bush, Osama bin Laden or Emperor to determine basic principles of gender justice. They must come from on-going dialogues within transnational women's movements based on solidarity and respect to each other's lived experiences.