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Passing Down the Memory of Aggression in China: Grassroots activism and the war in contemporary Japan

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abstract

Grassroots activism has been one of the ways to take part in public debates concerning history and memory of the Asia-Pacific War in contemporary Japan. For many civil society organisations bringing together citizens with critical views of Japan's role in the war, passing down testimonies about Japanese aggression in Asia has been an important undertaking, mostly because the testimonies reveal the horrors of the war thus promoting peace, but also because they recognise the suffering of non-Japanese victims. Fushun's Miracles Inheritance Association is a citizen group that collects and publicises war testimonies uttered by Japanese veterans who confessed to their wartime crimes in China. This essay examines memory work of the Inheritance Association and contextualises it within Japanese efforts to address the war past at the popular level.

1 Introduction

Between 1950-1956, approximately one thousand Japanese war-crime suspects, who were transferred from Soviet work camps to the People's Republic of China, underwent a process of re-education in the specially arranged correctional facilities in Fushun and Taiyuan (Fushun War Criminals Management Center, 2010; Utsumi, 2005). As a result of soul-searching exercises, the war criminals—as the Japanese were called in correctional facilities—started to admit wrongs they committed during the invasion and occupation of China. With time, most also expressed remorse for their wartime actions and openly apologised to the Chinese people. A group of 45 Fushun inmates responsible for particularly serious atrocities including bayoneting, rapes and medical experiments on captured Chinese soldiers and civilians were indicted in military tribunals held in Shenyang in the summer of 1956 and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment, albeit none were condemned to death (Hayashi, 2005). The transformation of Japanese soldiers 'from devils to humans' that led to the public expiations and self-condemnation was described as the 'miracles of Fushun' (Kumagai, 2005).

After their repatriation to Japan, former detainees at Fushun and Taiyuan formed the Chinese Returnees Liaison Association (*Chūgoku kikansha renraku kai*, hereafter Chukiren[1]). Though it was initially meant as a self-support group to facilitate reintegrating into Japanese society, Chukiren members soon embarked on what has become an important movement within post-war Japanese anti-war and peace activism. Since its establishment in 1957 to its disbandment in 2002 (owing to the aging of its members), Chukiren advocated improved Sino-Japanese relations and stimulated friendship between Japanese and Chinese people via informal channels. Above all, however, its members devoted themselves to the mission of revealing the Imperial Army's atrocities in China in war testimonies.[2] Delivered orally or as written reports, the testimonies adhered to the progressive interpretation of war history that recognises Japanese responsibility for attacking Asian nations in the pursuit of imperialism. Like many war testimonies produced in post-war Japan, the narratives of Chukiren members contain facts, thoughts and feelings from and about the wartime, but unlike most they disclose, sometimes with graphic details, and dwell on the crimes committed by their authors.

The 'miracles of Fushun' have often been labelled 'brain-washing,' and Chukiren's memory work, perceived as self-criticism inspired by the communist ideology, has been contested in post-war Japan including by right-wing authors (Tanabe, 2002; see also Seaton, 2010). On the one hand, the testimonies by Chukiren members have been undermined for factual accuracy, and on the other their focus on Japanese war crimes has remained a sensitive issue within the discourses

►1 This Japanese acronym of the organisations' name is commonly used in Japanese and international literature.

►2 A list of publications by Chukiren members containing some of their war testimonies is available online at http://web.archive.org/web/20100613041026/http://www.ne.jp/asahi/tyuukiren/website/action/info.htm (accessed 6 December 2013). (Note: Owing to the maintenance and relocation process of the content of the website to a new domain, the online references to the website could be obtained via the web.archive function of the previous domain at the time of the completion of the essay. The address of the new website is www.tyuukiren.org .)

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about national identity. Indeed, even if Chukiren members' narrations put on display the true face of the war, they sharply contrasted with the experiences of the majority of Japanese during the wartime.

Despite—or perhaps precisely because of—the controversies that the 'testimonies of aggression' (*shinryaku shōgen*) provoked, Chukiren has inspired some Japanese citizens to continue its activism as the Fushun's Miracles Inheritance Association (*Bujun no kiseki wo uketsugu kai*, hereafter Inheritance Association). Founded in 2003, the Inheritance Association strives to pass down the experience of Chukiren members—both their transformation in China and activism in post-war Japan—to the subsequent generations as a contribution to a peaceful East Asia. In praxis, the group makes efforts to ensure the recognition of Japan's role in the war through documentation and dissemination of memories related to aggression in China and other countries in the region (Tsuboi, 2002). Its members also assume the position of a go-between in Sino-Japanese relations, continuing the tradition of the so-called 'people-to-people diplomacy'[3].

Chukiren and the Inheritance Association are representatives of the large and vibrant milieu of Japanese progressive grassroots groups who, over the post-war decades to date, have been addressing the dark aspects of Japanese war past. Such organisations of civil society are spread across Japan and in addition to participating in the ongoing disputes regarding post-war Japan's politics of memory they have often sought rectification of Japanese war crimes. It is beyond the scope of this essay to delineate the ways in which the Japanese and commemorate the narrate war in the public sphere (for a good description see for example Seaton, 2007); however, it should be stressed that societal memory about the wartime encompasses diversified narratives from focusing on the horrors (as in the case of Chukiren's testimonies) and misery of the war through the discourse of the just war to glorification of the war as a means to take national pride. All these narratives coexist but at the same time compete.

Whereas various observers of Japanese war memories have pointed to the important functions that civil society plays in this process (Gardner-Feldman, 2010; Gluck, 2007; Lind, 2008; Rose, 2009; Seaton, 2007; Seraphim, 2006 and 2007b), there are only few studies exploring Japanese war memories-related activism from 'inside' (for an example see Szczepanska, 2012). Based on qualitative social research, this essay is an attempt to fill in this gap by providing an insight into 'memory activism' of the Inheritance Association.[4] After briefly outlining the main characteristics of grassroots groups dealing with 'history problems' (*rekishi mondai*) in contemporary Japan, it looks at the Inheritance Association through three lenses: people, memory sites and activities, and aims to answer the following questions: who are its members, what does their activism involve, and how and why do they carry it out.

►3 For example, the Inheritance Association played a pivotal role in co-organising the 60th anniversary of the correctional facility in Fushun. It headed the delegation of more than one hundred Japanese activists including two former Chukiren members.

►4 The fieldwork for this essay was partially financed by a grant obtained from the Matsushita Foundation. The author is also grateful to members of the grassroots groups examined here for their collaboration, as well as to the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

2 Grassroots activism and 'history problems' in Japan

Describing the mechanisms that govern the processes of dealing with the past in modern nation-states, Ashplant et al. (2000, p.16) have suggested that the politics of memory involve a struggle among various different societal actors including individuals, interest groups, civil society, businesses and governmental institutions to 'give public articulation to, and hence gain recognition for, certain memories and the narratives within which they are structured.' Belonging to the civil society realm, grassroots groups—which are the focal point of this essay—are defined as autonomous, non-profit, voluntary and typically local associations bringing together citizens witha common goal (Smith, 2000). In East Asia, where the shared history of the Asia-Pacific War remains contested, grassroots groups who get involved in activism related to memories of the war have gradually become more important in terms of their number, scope of activism, and agency—especially since the 1990s (Gluck, 2007). On the one hand, they act as watchdogs of government-sponsored and other dominant versions of the war and often challenge them; on the other hand they resonate with popular opinions regarding the wartime past and transmit alternative understandings of that past to the general public. As interpretations of the wartime past in Japan are negotiable (Seraphim, 2007), grassroots groups—just as any other of the societal actors listed above—seek reassessment of the existing narratives to ones they consider to be factually *more* accurate, ideologically and morally *more* correct, or *more* amendable to the causes of their activism. They do that via different forms of advocacy such as links to policy makers, publicity, media coverage of their activities, as well as via 'performative history'[5] and exhibitions, peace museums and monuments erected on historical and memory sites.

Given that activism—of any kind—signifies commitment to a cause, members of Japanese grassroots groups that deal with the recent Japanese past tend to have clear-cut opinions about the Asia-Pacific War and more polarised judgments regarding Japan's role in it. Their historical consciousness (*rekishi ninshiki*), that is the knowledge about the facts from the wartime combined with the ability to see their resonances within the broader context of contemporary politics, society and culture, is thus apt to become more solidified. Moreover, citizens who associate in such groups often participate in study circles that convene historians and other specialists to learn about and discuss particular topics related to the war. With a factual grasp and argumentative skills, through activism they develop an intellectual basis that helps them expand their understanding of the backdrops against which their memory work takes place and the problems that it engages. But activism might also at times lead to overlooking the complexity of the processes corresponding to the

►5 For more, see Duara (2008).

formation of war narratives in modern societies. Activists run the risk of deeming the problems related to the wartime past and its present-day legacies as black and white, whereas there are many nuanced areas of both societal and personal wartime experiences that cannot always be seen in simple, categorical terms. Overall, activism is a learning process, not only with regard to the nature of the issues it addresses, but also, more generally, one that calls forth a concerned participation in public life.

Activists associated in grassroots groups complying with progressive views of Japan's history by and large condemn Japan's unjustified war of aggression in Asia and the Pacific and acknowledge that Japanese soldiers committed numerous atrocities in occupied territories.[6] They censure Japanese society for being indifferent to Japan's war responsibility and too focused on Japan's own victimhood (although they also condemn war crimes committed against Japanese by the Allied Powers). Members of progressive grassroots groups also criticize post-war Japanese governments for being reluctant to apologize to and compensate war victims in Asia (even though Japan paid reparations under the terms of post-war treaties and the Japanese government has offered numerous apologies to various victim groups in different countries). In a way, the perceived tardiness and negligence of the Japanese government in the settlement of 'history problems' helps explain the existence of so many different progressive grassroots groups in contemporary Japan.

With regard to their organisational structure, progressive grassroots groups that deal with war memories are not different from other citizen associations in Japan and tend to be small and typically have no formal status, i.e. as a registered non-profit organisation, but some have a founding document that defines their causes and methods (the statute of the Inheritance Association will be discussed shortly). Financially, they largely depend on membership fees and fund raising campaigns carried out by their members. The activists also generate income through distributing materials such as magazines, booklets and books that they produce. To hold their meetings and carry out memory work, progressive grassroots groups often make use of public welfare infrastructure, for instance community centres or municipal facilities for citizens' use.

An additional feature of Japanese grassroots activism related to wartime legacies is its regionalism. Many progressive groups operate locally and focus on local aspects of the Asia-Pacific War.[7] In their quest to (re)discover lost or forgotten stories from the war, such grassroots groups frequently raise problematic, neglected or taboo themes connected to the present lives of their communities to public awareness. The Inheritance Association, too, albeit the majority of its members live in Kanto area and the head office is located near Tokyo, is practically speaking a network of regional, independent branches.

►6 This essay examines progressive grassroots activism in contemporary Japan, however it is important to bear in mind that in Japan there also exist numerous citizen groups that adhere to revisionist or nationalist views of Japan's war past, as well as groups with moderate views such as peace movements (*heiwa undō*) (see for example Yamamoto, 2005). Perhaps the most notable representative of the former is the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukuru kai*). In short, revisionist or nationalist grassroots groups' members affirm Japanese colonialism and war in the Asia-Pacific (which they often prefer to call the Greater East Asia War). They glorify militarism and the bravery of the Japanese military (for instance the kamikaze) and promote the narrative of a just, necessary and defensive war against Western domination in Asia in which Japan was the victim. They consider Japanese reparations and apologies to be unnecessary and consequently judge post-war governments as too apologetic, especially towards China and South Korea.

►7 For a good example of a local group see the description of the Post-war Generation Joining Hands Society (*Te o tsunagu sengo sedai no kai*) in Kurahashi (2009, especially pp. 58-65).

3 Fushun's Miracles Inheritance Association: People, memory sites and activities

The statute of the Inheritance Association provides its members with both ideological and operational guidelines for their activism. Article Three outlines the main aims of the group: 1. To contribute to the anti-war and peace movement through the promotion of improved Sino-Japanese relations in the spirit of Chukiren; 2. Through fostering historical consciousness among Japanese citizens, to contribute to the creation of a society in which the past is not forgotten; 3. To collect and disseminate testimonies uttered by the members of Chukiren and convey the 'miracles of Fushun' to the subsequent generations (Bujun no kiseki o uketsugukai, 2007).

In line with these aims, the Inheritance Association gets involved in specific memory works such as the publication of former Chukiren members' testimonies; management of the Chukiren Peace Memorial Museum (*Chūkiren heiwa kinenkan*) and all materials stored in it; the editing of the *Chukiren Quarterly* (*Chūkiren kikan*), a magazine containing war testimonies and essays about war memories-related themes; the promotion of exchange, mutual understanding and improved relations between Japan and China through the organisation of visits to historical places in China, mostly with the purpose of learning from the past and participation in collaborative projects with other like-minded groups engaged in anti-war and peace activism in Japan and East Asia.

4 *People*

The Inheritance Association has 400 members, approximately 70 per cent are male and 30 per cent are female (Arakawa, 2010; Bujun no kiseki o uketsugukai, 2009). All are volunteers. Members pay a fee of 3,000 yen per year and make optional donations. They are divided into eleven regional branches that are spread across the country and vary in size.

The group's website states that new branches can be established with three or more members. The newest regional branch was launched in Iwate prefecture in May 2008. In 2003 and 2005, two local schoolteachers interested in war history visited China, including Fushun. They organised meetings to report on their trips and gathered together a bigger group of interested citizens, including school and university students, for another historical tour in China in the winter of 2008. Eventually, the participants decided to establish a local branch of the Inheritance Associ-

ation to deepen their knowledge about the 'miracles of Fushun' and atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers in China. The establishment of the Iwate branch typifies how new activists are enrolled during events or through personal connections. However, people can also contact the Inheritance Association via its website, join by filling in an online form, and learn about recent and upcoming activities and publications.

The members of the Inheritance Association come from many walks of life: school teachers, academics, journalists, the self-employed, housewives, civil servants, company employees, entrepreneurs, part-time workers ('freeters'), retirees and students. The largest age cohort comprises activists in their 40s and 50s (Arakawa, 2010).

Perhaps the best way to understand the motivations, dedication and expectations of Inheritance Association members is to give brief profiles of some of them. The three activists presented here are core members of the group, devoted not only to its memory work but also to its functioning as a civil society organisation. Most importantly, however, their involvement illustrates that Chukiren's cause and mission of passing down the testimonies of aggression to subsequent generations is first and foremost realised within the group itself.

Many members of the Inheritance Association belonging to the baby-boom generation were active members of the student movements that mushroomed in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s as a protest against the Vietnam War. One such person is Kajimura Taichirō, who objected to the war primarily because of his youthful need to counter the generation that fought in the Asia-Pacific War (Kajimura, 1997). Activism became a *raison d'être*, closely related to his work as a foreign correspondent and author. In the Berlin Compendium (*Berurin saijiki*) published regularly in *Chukiren Quarterly*, Kajimura has written about post-war Germany and its remembrance culture, often contrasting it with Japan's. He also wrote about contacts between German and Japanese activists, particularly the Japanese-German Peace Forum (*Nichi doku heiwa fōramu*) created by novelist Oda Makoto who was also founder of Beherein, a movement opposing the Vietnam War (Kajimura, 2004 and 2007). Devoted to publicising the testimonies of Chukiren members in Japan and abroad for several decades, Kajumura was a key figure during the establishment of the Inheritance Association in 2002 and acts as a bridge between former Chukiren members and the younger generation of activists.

Kumagai Shinichirō, a representative of the younger generation of activists and the secretary general of the Inheritance Association, is editor of the progressive magazine *Sekai* and author of a booklet about the history of Chukiren and the Inheritance Association (Kumagai, 2005). As a student of philosophy in Tokyo, Kumagai became interested in problems stemming from East Asia's shared past, particularly Japan's guilt, war responsibility, and perpetration – victimhood dichotomy (Kumagai, 2009). In testimonies published by former Japanese soldiers who spoke out about the atrocities committed in China, Kumagai encountered insights

into Japanese self-reflection about the Asia-Pacific War as well as expressions of individual remorse for wrongdoings and a genuine apology to the victims. Above all, Kumagai was moved by Chukiren members' testimonies delivered during the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery held in Tokyo in 2000, when Kaneko Yasuji confessed to raping Chinese women and paying visits to the so-called 'comfort stations'.[8] Kumagai thought Kaneko's testimony was very courageous, given the taboos it broke. He further learned from Nishino Rumiko (an activist from a progressive group called Violence Against Women in War Network Japan, which helped bring about the Tribunal), that Kaneko's testimony was positively received by some victims of wartime sexual slavery and plaintiffs in the Tribunal. Kumagai started to collect and publish testimonies of the members of Chukiren and eventually became contributor to the *Chukiren Quarterly*. An additional motivation for Kumagai's commitment to progressive activism was the election of Ishihara Shintarō[9] as governor of Tokyo in 1999 (Ibid.).

Belonging to the younger generation of Inheritance Association members is also Arakawa Michiyo. She joined the Inheritance Association after reading Honda Katsuichi's book Travels in China (*Chūgoku no tabi*), which reveals the cruelty of Japanese aggression in China through the memories of the victims (Arakawa, 2009 and 2010). Arakawa came to the conclusion that the Japanese mainstream media, in particular television, consistently whitewash historical facts related to the Asia-Pacific War and its legacies (Arakawa, 2010). She began to reflect on Japan's war responsibility and to search for the reasons why Japanese society is not concerned with the wartime past and its present-day legacies to the extent it should be. Arakawa read widely on topics such as the 'comfort women issue' and the Japanese official stance regarding the apology and compensation of war survivors in Asia. When she read in a news report that the testimony of Kaneko was edited out of an NHK documentary about the Women's Tribunal in 2000 following a request made by prominent Japanese Liberal Democratic Party politicians, including current Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, she wanted to know why.[10] She found some answers on the Inheritance Association's website and started subscribing to *Chukiren Quarterly*. Consequently, Arakawa became active in collecting testimonies from Japanese veterans. Arakawa, like many other members of the Inheritance Association, is a member of various progressive groups simultaneously and has co-organised several joint Sino-Japanese events both in China and Japan.

As can be seen from these three brief profiles, what motivates members of the Inheritance Association to get involved in progressive grassroots activism is a profound sense of injustice about not only atrocities committed by Japanese during the Asia-Pacific War but also the ways in which politicians and media in Japan have treated war history-related issues. Being involved in a group such as the Inheritance Association is for them a proactive step to counter the forgetting or denial of war crimes within Japanese society, and the dissemination of testimonies of former

►8 A report on the Tribunal, including Kaneko's testimony, was published in *Chukiren Quarterly* 16.

►9 Ishihara, a staunch revisionist, has made several controversial statements about the wartime past, including the denial of the Nanking Massacre. In addition, he supports visits to Yasukuni Shrine by government officials and politicians and promotes the resumption of the worship of war dead souls at the shrine by the Emperor.

►10 For background on the NHK 'program revisions issue,' see Field (2007).

Chukiren members is regarded as an effective method of doing this.

5 *Memory sites*

Memory sites related to the Asia-Pacific War serve as a reference to the Inheritance Association activism, but also become places where the actual memory work is carried out. In China the sites include the war criminals correctional facilities, especially in Fushun where a museum was established, and places epitomizing Japanese aggression against Chinese people such as Nanking, Pingdingshan and the headquarters of Unit 731 in Harbin. In Japan, places related to the exploitation of Chinese forced labourers during the war, notably Hanaoka (where more than 400 Chinese workers died or were killed following uprising against bad treatment), have a special meaning for the group. The Inheritance Association organises visits to those places both to conduct memorial services, during which they pay their respects to the victims, and study tours, during which they learn about the history of the war. Members of the group have created their own memory sites, too—for instance the aforementioned Chukiren Peace Memorial Museum and virtual memory sites in the Internet.

Following is the analysis of three memory sites: Fushun, the Chukiren Peace Memorial Museum and the Internet. The three sites were selected because they encompass the different forms of the Inheritance Associations' activism. Also they illustrate how a Japanese grassroots group operates at local, national and transnational level, hence putting on display the networks that the Inheritance Association established with other grassroots groups.

Fushun is the location of two important places on the historical map of Sino-Japanese relations: Pingdingshan village on the city's outskirts is the site of the first mass killings of civilians by the Japanese Kwantung Army; and the war criminals correctional facility in the city centre is where Japanese soldiers started to testify about their war crimes in China and make apologies to the Chinese victims. Because of space constrains, the analysis here centres on Pingdingshan Massacre site.

The Pingdingshan Massacre took place on 16 September 1937, soon after the outbreak of the all-out war in China (Takao, 2005). An estimated 3,000 civilians were machine gunned in an act of vengeance after they allegedly did not follow a military order to report anti-Japanese guerrillas and sabotage in their zone. Although Japanese commanders intended to exterminate the whole population of the village, including women and children, some 30 villagers survived by hiding under the dead bodies and subsequently escaped to shelters in neighbouring villages. The corpses were burned and put into a ditch at the massacre site. Today, the

main building of the Pingdingshan Massacre Museum is built over the six-by-eighty-meter ditch. The buried bodies have been exhumed and are on display to visitors today.[11]

Both members of Chukiren and the Inheritance Association have mourned the victims on the site of the massacre during their visits to Fushun. Though the nature of the mass killings in Pingdingshan is known to historians, there is little knowledge about the massacre among the general public in Japan. The Pingdingshan Massacre was first introduced to a broader audience by *Asahi Shinbun* journalist, Honda Katasuichi, in *Travels in China* (first published in 1972); with other Japanese progressive grassroots groups, the Inheritance Association seeks to save from oblivion the fates of the victims of Pingdingshan massacre.

One such group is the Committee to Narrate the Future from Fushun (*Bujun kara mirai o kataru jikkōiinkai*). Its members provided assistance to surviving victims of the massacre and the bereaved families of the dead who demanded an apology and compensation from the Japanese government. The demands were rejected by the Japanese Supreme Court in 2006, but the group continues its memory work on the massacre particularly through contacts with present-day inhabitants of Pingdingshan. The committee belongs to the Network to Bring about the Demands of Chinese War Victims (*Chūgokujin sensō giseisha no yōkyū o jitsugen suru nettowāku*), which provides legal, financial and moral support to Chinese victims including the so-called comfort women, forced labourers, and peoples subjected to medical experiments by the Japanese Army.

The second important memory site for the Inheritance Association is the Chukiren Peace Memorial Museum (*Chūkiren heiwa kinenkan*). Located in an adapted storehouse in Kawagoe, Saitama prefecture, the museum was established in November 2006 with individual donations from former Chukiren members and Inheritance Association activists, as well as sympathisers from across the country. Takahashi Tetsurō, the last secretary general of Chukiren, played an important role in establishing the museum. During the opening he acted as a guide for Chinese Embassy officials who were special guests at the event. Regarding the reasons for creating the museum, Takahashi stated that, despite the activism of Chukiren and the public testimony by its members about the realities of Japanese aggression in Asia over the post-war decades, 'we have to admit that not enough has been done to raise Japanese people's awareness of their roles as victimisers more than sixty years after the war' (Tanaka, 2006).

The museum stores important original documents and secondary sources related to the Inheritance Association's activism. Hence, it could be also described as a documentation centre. According to Niki Fumiko, curator of the museum since its foundation, its primary function is to provide scholars and interested citizens with the opportunity to read, study and analyse the war testimonies of the former Japanese soldiers detained in China (McNeil, 2007). As well as testimonies published by Chukiren members in Japan, the museum preserves their written state-

►11 For a report about Japanese citizens' visits to the Pingdingshan Massacre site and museum, see Shigeta (2003).

ments (*kyōjutsusho*) used during the trials in Shenyang (Okabe et al., 2010). According to Niki (2009), the materials collected in the museum are proof of Japanese war of aggression and the numerous war crimes committed by Japanese soldiers in China and other countries, and the most powerful weapon for demonstrating the dramatic truth of the war. As a result, the museum faces the risk of attacks by revisionist groups. In fact, one of the first visitors to the museum was a member of a right-wing organisation (Ibid.). Over the years of its operation, the museum has assumed several additional functions for both progressive activists and the local community. For the members of the Inheritance Association it is the head office and a place for testimony hearings, symposiums, lectures and workshops; for the local community it serves as a meeting and cultural centre.

The third site, the Internet, is a vital tool for grassroots groups, not only for disseminating information about their causes, but also for organising and carrying out their activism. The Internet has revolutionised the work of grassroots groups just as it has many other arenas of public life. For activists engaging with history problems, the Internet provides a space for expressing opinions; at the same time it has also created the possibility of building (or reconstructing) memory sites in the virtual realm. In particular, online publication of Japanese soldiers' testimonies, offers a new way to present personalised stories from Japanese aggression in China to wider audiences, and through it educate younger generations in Japan about the war. Given that more and more people in society acquire knowledge from the Internet, websites have become a key means of promoting the main aims of the Inheritance Association.

Thus far, the Inheritance Association has made available online only a very limited number of the testimonies of former Chukiren members. This is partly because of copyright reasons, and partly because of the money and time required. Although the project has not yet been realised, members of the group have deliberated establishing an online archive that would contain selected and edited video testimonies in a similar manner to the NHK's online archive War Testimonies (*Sensō shōgen*)[12] (Kumagai 2009). Apart from being a pioneering project for a Japanese grassroots group, such an online archive would capture the zeitgeist of the information age and unite it with the decades-old efforts to promote awareness of Japan's role during the war in the Asia and Pacific among Japanese public.

6 *Activities*

As stated earlier, collecting and publishing war testimonies of Chukiren members is the mission and the main activity of the Inheritance Association. In Japan, there is a long tradition of narrating personal experiences (*kataribu*) that was

►12 For more visit NHK archive's website http://www.nhk.or.jp/shogenarchives (accessed 6 December 2013). Internet audio and video archives with testimonies about World War II exist also in other countries. Note for example an online archive containing oral history records by forced labourers employed in German companies during the war Forced Labor 1939-1945: Memory and History (Zwangsarbeit 1939-1945. Erinnerungen und Geschichte) available at http://www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de (accessed 6 December 2013).

popularised at the beginning of the twentieth century (Buchholz, 2004). With regard to the war, letters from the front that the Japanese soldiers were sending to their families contain an important account about individual involvement in the war. During the post-war, numerous Japanese, veterans and civilians alike, have told their wartime stories through different, often standardised, narrative forms such as war diaries (*sensō nikki*), self-histories (*jibunshi*) and war memoirs (*senki mono*); some of them were published and circulate in local libraries and community centres.

With this broad spectrum of individualised war-related literature, testimonies of aggression produced by Chukiren members have made a significant contribution to understanding the causes and consequences of the Asia-Pacific War. But perhaps even more importantly, as contemporary witness' accounts they constitute a particular segment among the diversified war memories in post-war Japan (Arai, 1999; Okabe, 2010)—one which has added a detailed description of perpetration to Japanese war narratives. Such a perspective of the war conduct has been appreciated by historians and social psychologists who seek to understand the mechanisms leading to committing crimes during wars (see for example Noda, 2009). Moreover, a testimony may have a therapeutic or healing effect, too, primarily to the person who is giving it as either victim or perpetrator. In the case of victimiser testimonies, the victims might welcome the vindication of their sense of victimhood (although reactions of anger and resentment would be understandable, too). Members of the same group—national, ethnic or religious—to which the victimiser belong are challenged to undergo a process of reflection, even if some will respond by denying or delegitimizing the perpetrator testimonies.

The testimony collection by the Inheritance Association takes place in various settings: during open meetings or events with former Chukiren members (or other Japanese veterans) or visits to their houses. Also, activists from the Inheritance Association edit previously written testimonies in preparation for publication. Members of Chukiren, from the creation of the group to its disbandment, have given their testimonies at numerous venues (Kaneko's testimony about rape delivered during the 2000 Women's Tribunal in Tokyo was mentioned earlier). In 2008, Ohkawara Koichi, a former member of the Hokkaido branch of Chukiren, was a speaker at a symposium about peace and historical reconciliation in East Asia organised by local progressive grassroots activists (including members of the Inheritance Association) to coincide with the G8 Summit held in Hokkaido that year (Zablonski and Seaton, 2008). To an international audience of more than 200 people, Ohkawara spoke about his participation in the invasion of China, and called on both the Japanese government and civil society to work towards a resolution of history problems in the region. The Inheritance Association also organises talks by Japanese veterans in schools and community centres and facilitates contacts with former Chukiren members for research purposes.

According to Kumagai, from the perspective of the listener, the most strik-

ing testimony is when it is heard as a live narration, when all the non-verbal elements such as intonation and pace play an important role and help convey the nuance of the experience. However, other forms of testimony have advantages as well. For instance, reading a written testimony allows for a more reflective encounter with its content (Kumagai, 2009). Transcribing testimonies and distributing them as published material is the most common form of testimony collection as practiced by the activists from the Inheritance Association.

Following the collection of testimonies, some Inheritance Association members are then active in disseminating them in their personal and professional environments. For example, Ohara Masaki, a member of the Hokkaido branch, is an elementary school teacher and uses some of the Chukiren members' testimonies in the classroom. Within the peace education curriculum, Ohara was finding it difficult to talk about war and peace in Japan, in particular about Japanese aggression in Asia. Some individual experiences narrated by Chukiren members helped him to touch upon those themes in a way accessible to the children, who could identify with personalised stories and understand the cruelty of the war (Ohara, 2009). Ohara is also a coordinator of a writing skills circle[13] in which school children learn how to describe their actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts. They choose themes for their short essays related to their daily lives, relationships with others and imagination and then write about them. On one occasion, after introducing the theme of war in Japan, Ohara assigned members a task over the New Year break: to ask grandparents and elderly family members about their personal war experiences and memories and then write them down. This activity was in essence war testimony collection and re-presentation through the eyes of school students. By engaging in the activity, they realised how narratives and memories of the war exist in their immediate surroundings and among their closest family members. Those testimonies were then shared and discussed during a meeting of the circle (Ibid.). This simple exercise exemplifies an interesting approach to peace and anti-war education in Japan, as well as the extent to which membership in a grassroots group can permeate other aspects of activists' lives.

The Inheritance Association shares the vocation of collecting and disseminating war-related testimonies with other progressive groups with which it does collaborative work. In 2009, Inheritance Association members helped organise the exhibition Testimony and Silence (*Shōgen to chinmoku*) at the Women's Active Museum in Tokyo and the accompanying symposium The Sexuality of Former Soldiers on the Battlefield: Testimony, Silence, PTDS (*Motoheishi no senba no sei. Shōgen to chinmoku soshite PTSD*). Both the exhibition and symposium focussed on the 'comfort women issue' and the difficulty of confessing about sexual crimes committed during the war. Among others, the exhibition spotlighted the life and war experience of members of Chukiren including Suzuki Yoshio, who, like Kaneko, publicly testified about raping Chinese women and visiting the so-called 'comfort stations' (Women's Active Museum on War and Peace, 2010).

►13 'Nihon sakubun kai'. For more visit the circles' website http://homepage3.nifty.com/nissaku/ (accessed 6 December 2013).

Another joint project co-organised by Inheritance Association members was the Nanking Film Festival (*Nanjing eiga sai*) held on 13 December 2009, the seventy-second anniversary of the fall of the Chinese wartime capital, in Tokyo. As mentioned earlier, denial of the Nanking Massacre has become a core issue within debates about Japan's war responsibility, so Kumagai, Arakawa and other progressive activists from younger generation founded a group called Road to Nanking: Association to Protect the Historical Truth (*Nanjing e no michi – jujitsu o mamoru kai*) (Arakawa, 2009). The group organises visits to Nanking and symposiums to discuss the controversies regarding the massacre and its commemoration in Japan and China. The film festival featured four movies and a panel discussion.[14] The panellists included film director Takera Tomokazu and a representative of the so-called new right wing (*shinuyoku*) Suzuki Kunio. They discussed the recent representations of the Nanking Massacre in popular culture and its place in public discourses. With regard to the latter, the panellists touched upon the issue of the freedom of speech in Japan and how it relates to the history problems in East Asia. Despite threats to disrupt the event from radical nationalist groups, around 900 tickets for the films were sold and the panel discussion was attended by around 300 people.

These different activities in which Inheritance Association members engage show that within the wide-ranging aims of 'collecting and disseminating testimonies' from the war there is space for varied grassroots activism. The activists use the testimonies in their professional lives, collaborate with other like-minded groups and promote the spread of progressive views of war history in other cultural forms such as museums and cinema. Testimony collecting faces the problem of the aging of war generation members, a fact that has added greater urgency to such activism in Japan. The need to save diversified, first-hand war memories from disappearing gives the Inheritance Association a stronger sense of historical and social purpose.

►14 For the complete program of the festival visit its website: http://jiji-tu.com/filmfestival2009 (accessed 6 December 2013).

7 Conclusions

Numerous progressive grassroots groups addressing war-related legacies have emerged in post-war Japan. Their members, motivated by moral, ideological, political or personal reasons, have often challenged official, dominant narratives of the war by suggesting a more contrite reflection about Japan's role in the Asia-Pacific War. While advocating anti-war and peace agendas, activists have focussed on Japanese war atrocities committed in China and other regions of Asia as a means to express remorse for and an attempt to rectify wrongdoings from the past. Through such a perspective on history problems, progressive activists have also

sought Japan's improved relations with nations who suffered under Japanese imperialism during the first half of the twentieth century, thereby promoting historical reconciliation.

The activism of the Inheritance Association illustrates that keeping alive memories of a difficult past is an arduous undertaking in the twenty-first century. Within a larger movement of historians, journalists and concerned citizens to keep war memories alive, the mission of the Inheritance Association consists of collecting testimonies of aggression in China. In the information age, more and more creativity is required to get the content across to the wider audience. It is difficult to measure the real impact of the groups' memory work, especially as it engages in a variety of activities that take place in different settings. However, both nationally and throughout East Asia, the group has maintained its position for the preservation of an important narrative within Japanese war memories. In this personalised approach to Japan's war history, the Inheritance Association represents views of those from the post-war generations who not only seek to know and to avoid repeating the errors of the war generation, but also try to give pride of place to the sufferings of the victims in countries attacked by Imperial Japan. The fact that the group comprises citizens of different age indicates that even in times when the war inevitably becomes an increasingly distant part of the past, its memories and legacies are at stake for coming generations within Japanese society.

This essay has introduced peoples, memory sites and the activities of the Inheritance Association in an attempt to illuminate the dynamics and processes that take place within the realm of war memories-related grassroots activism in contemporary Japan. There are many different reasons why people become involved in this kind of activism: ideology, moral urge, altruism, self-realisation, as a pastime, as a means to socialise and make new friends, or through a desire to contribute to a better world. The levels of activists' engagement in and commitment to the memory work of the group they belong to depends upon these motivations, but it also concomitant with personal circumstances such as spare time or money. The motivations behind the activism also lead to identifiable patterns of organisational aims: the continuation of the mission of Chukiren, in particular spreading war testimonies of its members; fostering friendship with China or expanding interest in 'things Chinese'; incorporating narratives of Japanese aggression in Asia into peace education; and promoting reflection about the Asia-Pacific War in a broader historical context in Japan.

For many members of the Inheritance Association—and this is also true of other progressive grassroots groups—activism is a borderland between their private and professional lives. It is not only a way of addressing history problems in the public sphere, but also something that structures their identities and behaviour. Therefore, while the way in which the testimonies they collect and publish are received in Japanese society and in China is certainly very important for the group, so too is the way in which the act of partaking in such an activism brings a sense of

self-realisation, comfort and content in their own lives.

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