

“Racists Go Home!”, “Go Crawl Back to the Net!” - Anti-Racism Protestors Confront the Zaitokukai レイシストは帰れ!」、「ネットに這って戻れ!」在特会に立ち向かう反レイシズム活動

Matthew Penney

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 10, Issue 54 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

Matthew Penney

“Murder the Koreans!”

“Smash the Korean cockroaches!”

“AIDS infected Korean whores get out!”

“Tear them limb from limb and burn their houses!”

“Hang them, poison them, slaughter them all!”

In the first months of 2013, the rhetoric of the Zainichi tokken wo yurusanai shimin no kai (Citizens’ League to Deny Foreigners Special Rights) or Zaitokukai has turned more and more extreme. The above quotes are representative of Zaitokukai slogans and placards in 2013. Now there are signs that anti-racism protestors and ordinary citizens are fighting back.

The Zaitokukai was founded in 2006. It claims over 12,000 online members. The group is devoted to ending the so-called “special privileges” of Japan’s Korean community. Alexis Dudden detailed the group’s history and the violence of their rhetoric in the 2010 article [Memories and Aporias in the Japan-Korea Relationship](#). Tessa Morris-Suzuki has described some of their recent protest activities in [Freedom of Hate Speech: Abe Shinzo and Japan’s Public Sphere](#).

Shin Okubo in Tokyo’s Shinjuku Ward has become the main target of the Zaitokukai’s protests because of the large number of Korean restaurants and shops selling South Korean pop culture products. The other major target is the “Korea Town” at Osaka’s Tsuruhashi. While PM Abe Shinzou and other conservatives have used the North Korea threat and the abduction of Japanese citizens to push their political agenda, it is South Korea and Koreans in Japan that are the primary targets of the Zaitokukai. Issues

like North Korea's recent brinksmanship and issues such as the standoff with China over the Senkaku / Diaoyu Islands are entirely secondary. At a March 31 demonstration targeting Shin Okubo, they started with calls for "cutting off all relations between Japan and South Korea". On the same day in Tsuruhashi, a young girl warned local Koreans that "the Japanese" are ready for a repeat of the Nanking Massacre, this time targeting the local Korean community.

While little is known about the girl in the video, journalist Yasuda Kouichi reports in the April 18 issue of *Shukan Bunshun* that she is a middle school student and the daughter of a far-right nationalist who participates in Zaitokukai activities. The girl's father holds that there is nothing wrong with his daughter's views. He claims they are "natural" given that "South Korea is always trying to pick a fight with us... they burn our flag and took Takeshima from us by force." Yasuda reports that despite having been to dozens of such demonstrations, the extreme nature of girl's rhetoric and open calls for massacre came as a shock. He sees it as a sign of escalation as the group stakes out its territory as the farthest of the far right. One member told Yasuda that they use the Shin Okubo and Tsuruhashi demonstrations to gain attention online, win notoriety, and increase their numbers.

Zaitokukai protests typically attract only a few participants. Yasuda estimates an average of fifty. Most of the group stays within the online sphere of anti-Korea hatred described by Rumi Sakamoto in the article '[Koreans, Go Home!](#)' [Internet Nationalism in Contemporary Japan as a Digitally Mediated Subculture](#). The biggest public gathering, which included both the

Zaitokukai, members of other right-wing groups, and flash mobs of netizens along for the ride, took place in August 2010 when crowds in the hundreds or several thousands (reports vary) gathered in front of the Fuji Television building in Tokyo to protest what they perceived to be an overabundance of South Korean TV dramas on the air. That this issue has been the largest draw suggests that usual bugbears such as North Korean missiles take a back seat and Zaitokukai and related activities cannot be understood as following the "ordinary" logic of neo-nationalist confrontation favored by pundits such as Tamogami Toshio, Watanabe Shouichi, and Kobayashi Yoshinori. Yasuda, an expert on the online right who won the Kodansha Non-Fiction Prize and Japan Congress of Journalists Prize in 2012 for his book *Netto to aikoku* (The Net and Nationalism) suggests that Zaitokukai rage is an emotional outlet for marginalized individuals who see little hope in the orthodox politics of things like "Abenomics" or the TPP. Yasuda argues that feelings of economic and social alienation among the "working poor" have led some to displace class resentment onto a racial other. This theory echoes the writings of freeter Akagi Tomohiro who wished in a controversial 2007 [essay](#) for a war that could bring about violent social upheaval and the possibility of release from soul-crushing precarious employment.

With this social context in the background, the Zaitokukai is resorting to increasingly extreme rhetoric in order to grab attention in the crowded sphere of online vitriol. [Channel Sakura](#) is the main online right-wing video network. It regularly hosts commenters like Watanabe Shoichi (on the [Nanking Massacre](#) - "Originally, the idea of 'massacre' did not even exist in Japan... The Chinese, however, they loot, they kill, they'll do anything."). Even Channel Sakura, however, now considers the Zaitokukai too extreme and [broke](#) with them in

2012.

Too hot to touch by “mainstream” neo-nationalists, the Zaitokukai seems even more divorced from Japan’s cultural mainstream. While Japan’s relationships with its neighbors remain tense because of history, territorial disputes, and other factors, the era of the Zaitokukai’s protests has actually seen an increase in pro-South Korean feelings, a dramatic rise in the popularity of Korean dramas, music, and other examples of pop culture among Japanese consumers, and the more open branding of ubiquitous *yakiniku* (grilled-meat) restaurants as “Korean”. In many contexts, the South Korea “brand” is at a height of popularity. A 2011 Associated Press [poll](#) of 1000 adults placed South Korea as Japan’s third “most liked” country behind the United States and Germany. The number of foreign visitors to South Korea has [doubled](#) since 2000 with Japanese, along with Chinese, making up the largest groups. Korea’s popularity was shaken by the August 2012 visit of President Lee Myung-bak to the disputed islands of Dokdo / Takeshima, but compared to the 80s and 90s image of South Korea as a backward imitator of Japanese products, the country’s standing in Japan’s culture market and sphere of ideas and pop culture fantasies has risen dramatically.

While this *Sankei Shimbun* [article](#) takes a nationalist position and attempts to show that South Korean cultural exports are “reliant” on the Japanese market, the statistics it cites from Korean sources indicate that 80.8% of the sales of South Korean cultural exports such as movies, films, TV dramas and other examples of popular culture are to consumers in Japan. The *Sankei* uses these numbers to frame “reliance”, but they are just as indicative of the widespread appeal of Korean pop culture in Japan.

There are also indications that the “soft” nationalism tied up with sports is increasing positive feelings between Japan and Korea rather than damaging them with pumped-up “rivalries”. Figure skater Kim Yu-Na tops a [list](#) of the most well-liked Korean personalities in Japan just as skater Asada Mao is the most popular Japanese figure in Korea. Dueling Japanese and Korean netizens denigrate one or the other, but for the mainstream, their “rivalry” is a friendly one.

Yasuda Kouichi describes passersby during Zaitokukai marches as typically averting their eyes, crossing the street, or otherwise trying to avoid the ugliness. As the group’s rhetoric has escalated in violence, however, a real popular backlash has begun to come together. On March 31, anti-racism protestors and a diverse group of ordinary citizens confronted the Zaitokukai in Shin Okubo and Tsuruhashi.

Tweeter [Takuyama Ichirou](#) reports that the anti-racists included non-activists such as K-Pop fans and ordinary passersby who joined with the protestors in shouting down the suddenly outnumbered Zaitokukai members. Tweeter Rin Shichisei ([Giellrim](#)) reports that the counter demonstration at Tsuruhashi attracted more than 150 to the Zaitokukai’s 60.

Arita Yoshifu, a House of Councilors member (Democratic Party) and journalist with 63,000 followers on Twitter, was one of the individuals who organized the anti-racist protests. He later tweeted that the Japanese public has insufficient awareness of racism, hate speech,

and related issues and that the anti-racism demonstration should help to inspire more public debate. Arita reports that he has been the target of frequent threats – everything from “We’ll kill you” to “Have you checked on your family today?” – because he has been outspoken against the Zaitokukai. He has not backed down, however, and is now a central figure in the new campaign against them.

In response to the attention generated among progressives by the anti-racism demonstration, lawyer-activists like Sawafuji Touichirou and Azusawa Kazuyuki are [arguing](#) that the Zaitokukai’s extremist rhetoric could lead to prosecution under current laws. Their protests are usually surrounded by Security Police who put a stop to violent acts but do nothing about violent rhetoric. Arita has already raised the issue in the Diet and there are hopes that a crackdown on open threats of violence will follow.

Weekly magazine *Shukan Bunshun* has, overall, a conservative orientation but it ran the article by Yasuda Kouichi ‘*Chosenjin wo korose!*’ *Shin Okubo* ‘hate speech’ *dantai tte nani mono?* (‘Kill the Koreans! Just who is the ‘hate speech’ group in Shin Okubo) an indication that the Zaitokukai are finally getting critical scrutiny from the mainstream press. In it, Yasuda quotes a Korean resident of Shin Okubo “With this sort of thing going on [almost every week] I feel uneasy about my life in Japan”. Another woman says tearfully “In my daily life Japanese people are always friendly and respectful. I was shocked when I learned that there are others

who attack us with dirty words.” A passing Zaitokukai member screams that she is a “whore”. Now that more people are becoming aware of this vile rhetoric, there are hopes that the Zaitokukai will be shamed off the streets and driven back to their seedy corner of the web.

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Asia-Pacific Journal articles on related subjects include:

Rumi Sakamoto and Matthew Allen, ["Hating 'The Korea Wave'" Comic Books: A Sign of New Nationalism in Japan](#)

Matthew Penney, [Nationalism and Anti-Americanism in Japan](#)

Mikyoung Kim, [Human Rights, Memory and Reconciliation: Korea-Japan Relations](#)

John Lie, [Zainichi Recognitions: Japan's Korean Residents' Ideology and Its Discontents](#)