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# Struggles over national memory and “shame”- based nationalism in Japan

## Analysis of audience reception of the documentary film *Shusenjo*

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Junki Nakahara

Thursday  
2024-11-07  
18<sup>00</sup>~19<sup>30</sup>



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# Struggles over national memory and “shame”-based nationalism in Japan

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This lecture examines the complex role of digital platforms in constructing counter-hegemonic collective memory in Japan, focusing on audience reception of the documentary *Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue*. Produced by Japanese-American filmmaker Miki Dezaki, *Shusenjo* addresses the historical controversy surrounding the so-called “comfort women” (*ianfu*)—a euphemistic term for Asian women forced into providing sexual services to Japanese soldiers before and during WWII. The film captures the sociopolitical tensions surrounding Japan’s wartime and colonial responsibility, presenting both traditional and revisionist-nationalist perspectives on Japanese war memory.

The *Shusenjo* case study forms part of a broader research program on the critical intersections of media, technology, and suppression/liberation, specifically examining the contemporary institutionalization of nationalism entangled with racism, xenophobia, historical revisionism (e.g., denial of wartime atrocities), and misogyny. This research addresses the politics of war memory surrounding cultural products and their implications for the (re)construction of national identity—specifically how everyday people actively problematize, make sense of,

and narrow or expand the meaning of the nation.

By analyzing audience review comments through critical discourse analysis, this study offers nuanced insights into ongoing public discourse and sentiment surrounding this controversy. The documentary creates a space for the (re) construction of perspectives on collective war memory, adding layers of complexity to this process. The research demonstrates how digital spaces—such as discussion boards, user comments, and film reviews—become enmeshed into a gestalt that both stirs and structures the memory production process. This participatory and evolving construction of memory not only influences interpretations of Japan’s wartime history but also reflects contemporary debates over Japan’s role in regional relations, gender equality, and migration. The analysis finds the prominence of “shame”-based nationalism within a dialectic of memory production, wherein contemporary visions of Japan’s future inform retrospective understandings of its past, with war memory serving as a rationale for national identity and future/prospective goals.

### Junki Nakahara

is a postdoctoral fellow at the Stanford Next Asia Policy Lab ([SNAPL](#)), housed within the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center. Her research interests include nationalism and xenophobia, critical and cultural studies, feminist media studies, and postcolonial/decolonial international relations. She studies the contemporary dominance and institutionalization of nationalism, entangled with racism, xenophobia, historical revisionism (e.g., denial of wartime atrocities), and misogyny, primarily focusing on East Asia. She earned her PhD in Communication (2023) and MA in Intercultural and International Communication (2019), both from American University. Her publications include contributions to *New Media & Society*, *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, and *Discourse Approaches to an Emerging Age of Populism* (edited by I. Iñigo-Mora & Lastres-López). As an inaugural member of SNAPL, she leads the „Nationalism and Racism“ research team, investigating how nationalism and racism intertwine to create various forms of suppression and intolerance across the Asia-Pacific region, where entanglements among race, ethnicity, nation, and postcoloniality add complexity to these debates.



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