

Tensions high as hate speech-driven anti-Korean rallies clash with counter-protests

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Since last year, heavily Korean areas of Tokyo have been targeted almost weekly by hate speech-fuelled rallies, one of which resulted in arrests after clashes between marchers and counter-protesters on June 16.

A *Mainichi* reporter was on the scene during that march and others to learn more about what drives these Japanese flag-waving protesters, apparently so determined to spread anti-Korean prejudice.

"Cockroaches, maggots, Koreans. We will crush every last one of you," shouted the marchers at the June 16 demonstration in Tokyo's Shin-Okubo district, an area with many Korean restaurants and shops.

Unleashing the inflammatory words through a megaphone was the march's organizer Shusei Sakurada, a member of the group "Shinshakai Undo" (movement for a new society), which touts what it calls "active conservatism." By a Metropolitan Police Department estimate, around 200 people, organized through the Internet, had gathered for the march. Around 80 percent were men in their 20s and 30s. However, there were also working age and elderly women, and even some mothers pushing baby strollers.

"How much longer can you keep up your prejudices? Have you no shame?" came an angry call from counter-protesters. One of the some 350 counter-protesters held a placard reading, "That's not an argument; it's just hate speech."

One man bled from the face, an injury sustained from having fought with someone. The counter-protesters' chants of "Go home! Go home!" heated up against the marchers, one of whose signs read, "Kill all Koreans," and riot police stepped in to separate the groups.

A 25-year-old man holding a placard that read, "Be ashamed of your discrimination," said, "They have gone past the bounds of free speech." Another man, holding a wide banner reading, "The chain of hate will not solve anything," said that the hate speech marches "are nothing more than picking on the weak."

A 45-year-old South Korean restaurant owner said with a furrowed brow, "If this is reported in South Korea, people will misunderstand and they'll protest."

There were eight arrests over violence on this day, including 41-year-old Makoto Sakurai, chairman of the group "Zainichitokken o yurusanai shimin no kai" (Citizen's group that will not forgive special rights for Koreans in Japan). The same group was involved in an August 2010 incident in which they blasted "Beat Korean schools out of Japan" and other anti-Korean slogans during class time at a Korean elementary school in Kyoto. Four people were arrested for interfering with the school's operations.

A PR representative for the group told the *Mainichi* in March that, while he didn't endorse hate speech, "There is no clear definition of what constitutes hate speech, and I think the marches are OK

as a form of protest.”

After the June 16 demonstration, a man visited the Shinjuku Police Station to decry the day’s arrests, saying, “Patriotic people have learned the truth through the Internet and risen up. The marches are a protest against South Koreans and their invasion of Takeshima.” Another, smaller march was held on June 17.

The June 16 march was the fourth time that this reporter has visited one, the first being one in Kyoto on June 8. Few demonstration participants would agree to interviews, saying they couldn’t trust the media. Many of the participants are thought to have, through the Internet, become interested in Japan’s disputes over history with other nations. The media, criticized as biased, is another target of the marchers’ hate speech.

“They use language that can destroy a fair society,” freelance editor and counter-protester Yasumichi Noma, 46, said of the demonstrations. Meanwhile, a 24-year-old graduate student at the Kyoto counter-protest, carrying a placard reading, “Opposed to discrimination,” told the Mainichi that the anti-Korean marchers “are just saying things that shouldn’t be said. That’s why I joined the movement to stop them.”

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