

# Racism under Covid-19 in Japan

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Covid-19 crisis that has spread worldwide since 2020 had various impacts on Japanese society. Under the crisis, the power of the Japanese left/centre-left parties weakened. On the other hand, the power of far-right parties and the right-wing opposition parties has increased. Under the situation, oppression to socially vulnerable, ethnic minority, and sexual minority is very severe. There are also far-right forces praising persecution of Jews. Racism is emerging or amplified especially after Covid-19 crisis that insists on persecuting foreigners such as Koreans and Chinese living in Japan in the same way as Jewish persecution. Japan has a law which prohibits ethnic discrimination Law. But it does not include legal penalties. Incomplete legislation threatens living and life of ethnic minorities living in Japan.

After the 6<sup>th</sup> wave of Covid-19 in Japan, Japanese racist attacks on people with different races or ethnicity have become more intense. And infection of exclusive antagonism has also spread to ordinary Japanese. Several restaurants in Yokohama Chinatown, Japan's largest Chinatown, had received letters stating, "Chinese people are garbage! Get out of Japan soon!" Hospitals that accepted virus-infected persons on cruise ships from abroad were flooded with protest calls saying, "Don't spend taxes on foreigners" and "Keep foreigners out of Japan." And the phones became unusable. The attacks on Koreans in Japan (Korean-Japanese), which were traditionally the targets of the most racist attacks in Japan, were also fierce. Every time the relationship between Japan and their home country (North/South Korea) deteriorates, the contradiction has been directed toward Korean women and children.

After the 6<sup>th</sup> wave of Covid-19, the government agency started to report that amusement facilities were the major cause of Covid-19 infection. After the government's report, racist attacks were directed at the amusement facilities which were mainly run by Korean-Japanese. The racists said "The Japanese version of "Kristallnacht" is near." The persecution of foreigners in Japan today is government-made racism deliberately created. Seriously, government-made racism has traditionally existed in Japan for about 100 years. And the main leaders of the persecution were the ordinary Japanese, who were inspired by the government's publicity.

In the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, about 6,000 Koreans were killed by discrimination, prejudice, and groundless rumor intentionally created by Japanese government [1]. Even today, Korean-Japanese often talk about and are worried about the massacre by the Japanese in every natural disaster such as earthquakes [2]. Every time a natural disaster occurs, Japanese SNS is flooded with posts that made foreigners "dangerous" and they suggested "murder [3]". And there was no exception to the Covid-19 crisis. In March of this year, the second ethnic Korean-Japanese school in Japan, which was established just after the Second World War, was closed. Racism amplified by Covid-19 destroyed the main educational facility which defended the right to study for ethnic minorities living in Japan.

The conflict between the intentionally divided Japanese and Koreans is also serious. And the united front movement against racism was built almost exclusively by Koreans with very weak financial bases. Confronting racism and driving xenophobic discrimination out of society is an urgent task for populations in Japan today. We are very concerned about Japanese society [4] still has a dangerous prelude to persecutions reflecting the long history of racial and political oppression.

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## **Footnotes**

[1] Japan's state power deliberately spread the groundless rumor that "Koreans and Communists poisoned the well" in order to avoid public dissatisfaction with the government's measures against the earthquake. And police officers and civilians who believed it slaughtered a large number of Koreans and communists.

[2] When Great East Japan earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011, some Korean-Japanese immediately talked about the previous massacre of Great Kanto Earthquake and exchanged their Korean nameplate to Japanese one which are set in front of their house.

[3] As if responded to those incitements, a racist set fire to a Korean-resident area in Kyoto in December 2021. And five buildings were burned down. The suspect has previously been charged with arson and facility destructions which targeted Korean-Japanese.

[4] In Japan, the national anthem and national flag as symbols of emperor which led the former war of aggression against Asian countries still remain without any changes.