

## "The Question of Responsibility"

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### Abstract:

How ought we to think about the responsibility of individuals in cases of structured injustices (where wrongful acts or objectionable outcomes are attributed to corporate agents or highly organized and purposive social groups), and of structural injustices (where unintended harms or wrongs result from social structural processes in which millions may participate).

With respect to structured injustices, such as aggressive war and other political catastrophes involving states as structures and agents of injustice, two particularly complicated types of questions about individual responsibility arise: (1) Can individuals be morally responsible, and accountable, for the acts of others? (2) If responsibility is attributable to the state as a corporate agent, are all members of the state (and not just the executive) liable for the acts (or the consequences of acts) that are done in their collective name? With respect to structural injustices, the question is whether individuals can bear any kind of responsibility for unintended, undesirable outcomes of uncoordinated social structural processes.

I explore the implications of a 'structural injustice' approach to thinking about responsibility for colonialism, and in particular, the case of Japan's colonization of Korea. How should we think about historical responsibility for Japanese colonial injustices, and in particular, for the military comfort system?

According to a structural injustice approach, assigning moral culpability to the leading figures of the Japanese state and military is appropriate, but insufficient, as such an accounting leaves unexamined the unjust social structural processes in international society, as well as within Korean society, that contributed to the production of specific patterns of harms and victims.

Acknowledging colonial injustices as structural injustices generates a 'political responsibility' to effect structural reforms that ought to be shared by Japanese and Koreans, as well as by the international society of states. To the extent that this political responsibility is unmet and structural injustice persists, the political responsibility to effect just social structures and conditions is a legacy that those who contributed to the production of structural injustice pass on to their descendants.