

Taking a Step Forward for ‘Sustainable’ Genocide Prevention: Genocide Research in Japan

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It was not until the late 1990s that genocide study began in Japan. What was the background at that time? First, we already know the tremendous impact of the successive occurrences of genocide right after the end of the Cold War. Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and so on—these new icons of genocide were how it all started. Second, we then witnessed the growing influence of “historical revisionists” openly alleging that the Holocaust was a fabrication or the Nanjing massacre was just a product of the war-time propaganda. More than a few historians faced with such unsupported arguments by genocide- and war-crime deniers believed the present cases of genocide should be scrutinized and documented to the extent that they would never be eradicated. Third, we can point out the growing activities of civil society promoted by the 1998 “NPO-Act,” an act established in response to the increasing number of voluntary activities to help victims of the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake in 1995. Civic-minded commitment and activities of NGOs working on global issues attracted much public attention.

At that time, it was not difficult for me to organize a research group with the purpose of establishing genocide studies. More difficult was fundraising. Fortunately, in 2003, a research project called “comparative genocide studies”—adopted as a JSPS “New Research Initiative in Humanities and Social Sciences” project—marked the beginning of genocide studies in Japan. Nine years have passed since then. Prioritizing historical analyses, we have emphasized the interdisciplinary approach¹. Individual cases of genocide are being scrutinized from a comparative standpoint to clarify the features of genocidal deeds. The interdisciplinary approach is absolutely necessary because genocide—a complex phenomenon—cannot be explained within the framework of a single field of academics. Along with the research, we have organized symposia and workshops and have published articles and books. Providing postgraduates with opportunities to gain insight into the many cases of genocide, the course on genocide studies has been a part of the curriculum of the Human Security Program at the graduate school of the University of Tokyo since 2004.

Definition of Genocide and Purpose Analysis

As to the selection of cases to be dealt with, we respect the definition of genocide given by the UN in 1948 that describes it as killings or other related acts committed “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”. However, we avoid

1 <http://www.cgs.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/index-e.htm>

restricting ourselves to this legal definition in order to avoid narrowing our research field. It should be noted that while perpetrators seem to be destroying a given group, they are often themselves creating groups to be eradicated. On this assumption, we propose a 'broader definition of genocide' that includes genocidal acts against victims in group arbitrarily invented by the perpetrators.

A vast majority of the victims of genocide are civilians. From their perspective, genocide appears an entirely irrational act: they are targeted simply because they belong to a particular group. Seen from the point of view of perpetrators, however, genocide that can happen against their initial intent or under unexpected circumstances is carried out at the end with a very definite purpose. Four major types of genocide can be determined on the basis of a genocide purpose analysis. I now proceed to describe these. The first type of genocide is carried out with the purpose of creating an ethnically or racially homogeneous society in the process of the creation or reconfiguration of a nation state. The second type is executed with the aim of exploitation of natural and human resources and territorial expansion or preservation; the most typical examples are those of the major colonial powers against the indigenous people on all continents. The third type is commonly seen after a regime change, either through a revolution or coup d'état. It is a method used by new political leaders to strengthen and consolidate their dictatorial power base. The fourth and final type of genocide is that which is implemented as a means of ensuring victory in external or civil war, through the elimination of 'dangerous groups' connected with the enemy. Each of these types can be considered an ideal type because every case of genocide is, in reality, a complex phenomenon triggered by multiple factors.

Preventing Genocide

Questioning the causes of genocide gives rise to further questions: can we prevent genocide, and how? In this regard, a noteworthy report was published in December 2008 by a task force for genocide prevention headed by former US-Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright and former Defence Secretary William Cohen. The background of the report is the repeated failures of the United States to stop the genocidal tendencies. In 2004, the US Congress and the then US President George W. Bush, being forced to do so, declared the violence in Darfur as genocide. However, nothing effective has happened. During the prolonged idle talks on the application of the crimes of genocide, over 200,000 people in Sudan have been left dead by violence or disease.

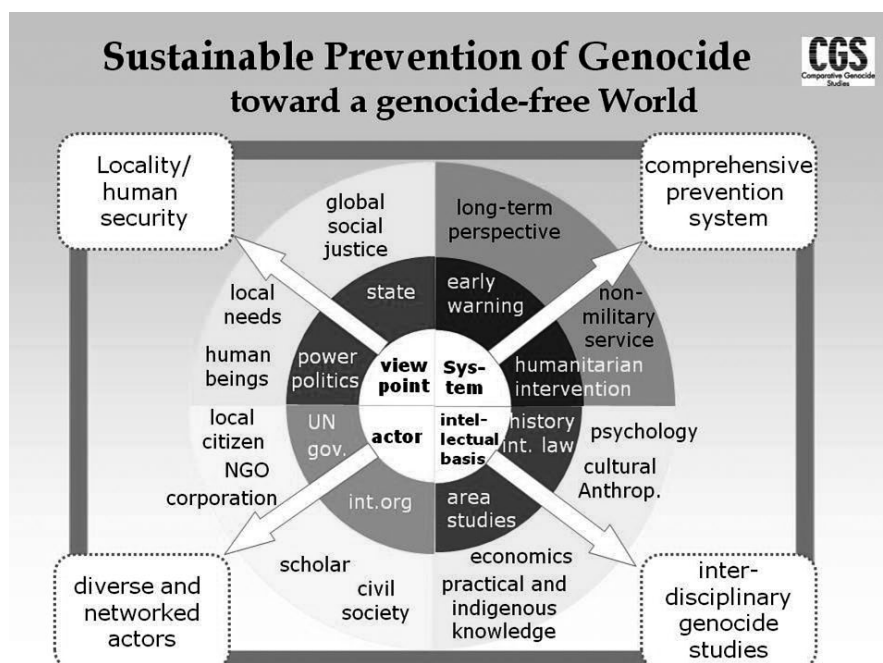
The Albright and Cohen's report is of remarkable contents, in that it includes as many as 34 recommendations to the President-elect Barack Obama for preventing genocide, and in that it explicitly declares genocide as threatening American value and national interests. Emphasizing that the goal of genocide prevention can be achieved with the right organizational structures, strategies, and international partnerships, it conveys both the determination to combat the issue of genocide and the readiness to work with international partners and civil societies.

Although the report seems promising, I believe it is still reactive and lacks a long-term

perspective that could enable a proactive approach towards the sustainable prevention of genocide. In order to determine a successful means to prevent genocide, at least four additional things should be taken into consideration. First, clarifying the external factors that influence the genocide is essential for a theory of genocide prevention. Sometimes great powers like the U.S. involve themselves in genocide if they support a dictatorial regime. Without reflecting on such relations, we cannot make sure which factors should be eradicated for the purpose of preventing genocide. Second, the close association of war with genocide cannot be overemphasized. In either an external or civil war, war itself functions as a catalyst for genocidal deeds executed by military units or the militia, especially when combined with racial discrimination. Third, the chain reaction of violence set off by the occurrence of genocide should be taken into account. Generally, victims can easily become the perpetrators looking for a chance to take revenge on their enemies. It is sensible to consider the victim-perpetrator relationship in light of the transitional justice. Fourth, the occurrence of genocide is not restricted only to the hotspots in African and Asian countries, but it can occur anywhere in the world, including industrialized countries. An intensified social crisis, when merged with extremely racial or exclusionary ideologies professed by leaders capable of mobilizing people, can lead to a genocidal situation. This notion can help to promote the anti-genocide education.

In Quest of a sustainable prevention of genocide

Let me illustrate the kernel of our idea for approaching the sustainable prevention of genocide. Please look at this schematic diagram. As you can see, we have divided a circle into the following four sectors: discipline (intellectual basis), actor, viewpoint, and system. They have been combined for the purpose of realizing sustainable prevention.



The inner circle, shown in darker colours, indicates the present constellation, and the outer circle, shown in lighter colours, indicates the area in which we are going to extend our task field. Let me explain this diagram, moving in a clockwise direction from the bottom right.

First, the intellectual basis behind genocide should be extended such that we can establish interdisciplinary genocide studies. Genocide, as a theme, has been individually studied in the fields of history, area studies, and international law. We now have to combine other related fields such as psychology, philosophy, geography, economics, and cultural anthropology. The cooperation of practitioners and scholars is essential. In addition, indigenous knowledge and the experiences of civil activists should be integrated into the intellectual framework.

Second, actors working on this subject have so far been members of the UN, governments, international institutions like the AU, and certain NGOs. The actors should be more diverse and systematically networked. In this regard, business should be motivated to confront his problem. Furthermore, civil societies in both the advanced and the developing countries should be linked and engaged in preventing genocide.

Third, genocide prevention has so far been viewed as a matter under the purview of the states and the UN, and has therefore been tossed about by the power politics of the concerned parties. We will now focus on the local needs from a standpoint of human security. At the same time we will advocate the global social justice and the common interests of our global community. An occurrence of genocide that brings about a great number of refugees would lead to a serious social instability on the globe.

Fourth, an integral system for the dissolution of genocidal factors should be contrived. In addition to an early warning system, we will have to build a comprehensive program to develop a social environment that can destroy these genocidal factors. We should improve the people's living standards by prioritizing non-military activities. At the same time, we must ensure the reconciliation process along with the restoration of peace and justice.