

Developing Skills for Peacebuilding and Human Rights: The Northeast Asia Regional Peacebuilding Institute Experience

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VIOLENT conflicts are associated with gruesome and terrible violations of human rights and human dignity. Japan colonized Northeast Asian countries and committed military atrocities during World War II. Japan is still being criticized for not fulfilling its moral obligation and social responsibility for committing crimes against humanity in the past. Unless properly addressed by Japan, the harm doer, establishing sincere and lasting relationship with its neighboring countries in the Pacific would be very difficult. To overcome this difficulty, there is a strong need to reframe diplomatic relations and enhance a mutually-positive and beneficial environment for both parties. The Northeast Asia Regional Peacebuilding Institute (NARPI) plays a grassroots role in reframing relations and in enhancing a beneficial environment for countries in Northeast Asia.

Ogawa (2000) wrote that

Japan's World War II occupation of a substantial part of Asia left indelible scars. The Nanking Massacre and the plight of the Korean "comfort women," stand out among examples of Japanese cruelty during the war era" (page 42).

If human injustice is committed, it is important to restore honor to those who have been treated in an undignified way. There is a need to call for basic human rights to uphold the dignity of human life and pursuit of justice. Processes of public forgiveness, apology, justice, and reconciliation are considered instruments for social healing (Montiel, 2002, 221). Thus one method of reconciliation and retaining justice is for all participants of Northeast Asia gather to learn and work together for peace in the region.

The mission of NARPI is to transform the culture and structure of militarism and communities of fear and violence, into just and peaceful ones by providing peacebuilding training, connecting and empowering people in Northeast Asia. War is the greatest violation of human rights. NARPI offers a place in Northeast Asia for peace activists and students where they can

receive practical education and training. Peace education, an interdisciplinary pedagogy which includes human rights education and conflict transformation education, is not widely understood concepts. They must become known in order to prevent armed conflict in the region.

History of NARPI

Northeast Asia is a subregion of historical, territorial, military and nuclear tensions. Today, vast amount of human and financial resources support the militarization of Northeast Asian nations. Transforming the existing culture of animosity and militarism into a culture of peace and reconciliation is possible through education and a fundamental paradigm shift. However, a void exists in the area of education and training where people can be empowered with the skills, knowledge and resources needed to bring about this change. This is why NARPI is such a necessary institute for this region, to provide vital training in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

The idea of NARPI was born in 2009 from the discovery of needs and demands from activists and students working in the field of peacebuilding. NARPI is made up of partners from Northeast Asia and trains participants primarily from within Asia.

NARPI has been working since 2009 to strengthen and empower people in Northeast Asia through peacebuilding training and cross-cultural network-building.

The NARPI Summer Training rotates to different locations in Northeast Asia every year, providing the opportunity for first-hand learning about



the history of conflict and peace in the entire subregion, and also giving a chance for more people to participate every year.

NARPI Program

The NARPI Program offers two five-day sessions with three days of local fieldtrip experience. There is a choice of three to four courses for the first and second sessions. Basically, Conflict and Peace Framework and Theory and Practice of Peace Education are introductory courses offered every year. There are courses held annually focused on restorative justice, peacebuilding skills and trauma healing pertaining to the needs of the place where NARPI is being held. Other courses cover local issues and needs. The list of training courses held, excluding the introductory courses, is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. NARPI Summer Training Courses

Training	Courses			
2011 Seoul & Inje, South Korea	Understanding Conflict and Peace	Historical and Cultural Stories of Peace	Restorative Justice	Trauma Healing
2012 Hiroshima, Japan	Community-based Restorative Justice for Schools	Historical and Cultural Stories of Peace	Critical Understanding of Conflict & Peace Issues	Peacebuilding Skills
2013 Inje, South Korea	Trauma Awareness & Healing	Restorative Justice: Aiming for Healing and Reconciliation	Gender, Sexuality and Peacebuilding	Nonviolent Communication & Facilitation
2014 Nanjing, China	Restorative Approach to Historical Conflict	Arts and Stories for Peacebuilding	– Presenting Our Histories Justly – Psychosocial Trauma: Awareness and Response	Peacebuilding Skills: Transformative Mediation
2015 Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia	Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development	Restorative Justice: A New Lens for Justice	Applied Theater in Peacebuilding	Conflict Transformation in Organizations
2016 Jinshan & Taipei, Taiwan	Restorative Justice: A New Lens for Justice	Trainer's Training	Nonviolent Struggle for Social Change	Optimizing Peacemaking by Ending Generational Trauma
2017 Nago, Okinawa	Identity-based Conflict	Restorative Justice: Rebuilding Identity, Community, and History	Nonviolent Response to Militarization	Optimizing Peacemaking by Ending Generational Trauma

All the courses offer active learning and experiential method of learning where participants experience the cognitive phase of awareness and understanding; the affective phase of being concerned, responding and valuing; and after returning to their respective countries they experience the active phase of taking practical action for change. In other words, NARPI offers an experience where participants think, feel and act for change.

Every training program has human rights content in relation to the topic areas offered. The program adopts the perspective that reforms in the international system would contribute to the protection of human rights and the establishment of a just legal system that maintains a peaceful world order. NARPI sees that the major learning comes from acquiring knowledge and skills needed to develop the legal norms for, and cultivate the social values of, a culture of peace. Such learning calls for an inquiry into the relationship among responsibilities, rights, and law, on the one hand, and the institution of war on the other. NARPI offers an educational experience that explores the values and principles associated with human rights and international humanitarian law in order to demonstrate how educating for human rights provides tools for the transformation of the current war system and culture of violence into a culture of peace. Furthermore, learning about humanitarian and human rights law and institutions is preparation for the realization of social justice. To assure peace, human rights must be protected. Many issues in Northeast Asia constitute human rights violations and obstacles to the fulfillment of international human rights standards such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Simulation activities are conducted to foster the study of the ongoing process of the International Criminal Court and War Crimes Tribunals dealing with violations committed in the wars such as Military Sexual Slavery (Comfort Women Issue) and Nanjing Massacre. As therapy for the human rights violations, learning activities that build skills such as Ho'oponopono (Hawaiian Circle Process of Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation) are held to provide means to reconciliation and healing.

Another aspect of human rights education is to develop a broader understanding of what is meant by human security. Learning about the process by which victims of human rights violations seek justice is important. In the restorative justice courses and field trips, participants meet and hear

survivors who give testimonies on the experience of hurt done to them. The participants conduct further investigation that includes the needs of both the victims and the perpetrators. A process that follows the stages in human rights learning adapted from *The Bells of Freedom*,¹ a training manual used in Ethiopia, is employed:

1. Developing respect for dignity and fair rules. All human rights are based on the value that respects the universal dignity of all persons;
2. Making links between human rights and social responsibility. Global citizenship education is offered to develop active citizens who can realize human rights for all and take responsibility to assure that rights are protected and fulfilled by the state and other citizens;
3. Seeking justice; using analysis. Human rights education advocates education for empowerment and action. Participants are taught to value justice, to critically analyze situations of injustice and the potential of human rights standards.

The training includes inquiry into specific ways of developing proposals to implement recommendations or assure the realization of the international human rights standards.





Fieldwork Experience

From the field trip experience and the sharing by guest speakers, participants learn the value of the stories and activism work of victims – both at the national and personal levels - in the local areas where the NARPI session is being held. Each field trip highlights incidents of violation of human dignity and rights that all members of humanity should be aware of and reflect on to prevent such incidents from being repeated in the future.

The August 2011 and 2013 field trips consisted of visit to the House of Sharing and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in South Korea which offered first-hand experiential learning for the participants. The House of Sharing is a museum and a home to former “Comfort Women” survivors of sexual slavery at the hands of the Japanese military during the Asia-Pacific War (1932-1945).

NARPI participants visited the House of Sharing and talked to women who survived sexual slavery at the “comfort stations” of the Japanese military during World War II. The victims of Japan’s military sexual slavery have carried the hurt and shame for more than sixty years (Coday, 1988; Mackey, 2005). It was a military institutionalization of sexual violence during the war. The victims were women who were abducted and confined to sexual slavery facilities.²

The victims and the civil society organizations that supported them filed lawsuits demanding that the Japanese government apologize and pay state reparations.

In the group debriefing held after the visit, participants processed what they learned through drawings and sharing of their reflections.



There are also evening events that included discussions on various topics, presentations about non-governmental organization (NGO) activities in the subregion, personal stories, and movie screenings. One of the participants wrote on the final evaluation form,

There was a big impact on my thinking and [study] about peace in NEA [Northeast Asia]. I was also able to deepen my understanding on the present situation in Korea regarding the “comfort women” issue, the Jeju Island issue (construction of a US military base), and the DMZ.

In the August 2013 field trip, participants spent time visiting Hiroshima Peace Museum and Peace Park and Okunojima, the site of poison gas manufacturing by the Japanese Army during World War II. At the Peace Museum, Sadae Kasaoka, a Hiroshima *Hibakusha* (survivor of the 1945 atomic bombing) shared her painful story of the devastation of the A-bomb. Though she had difficulty each time she told her story, she would still do so in order to “personally and urgently appeal for a peaceful world without nuclear weapons.”

The August 2014 training, the fourth annual NARPI Summer Peacebuilding Training, was held at Nanjing University, Nanjing, China. The field trip on 14-15 August 2014 consisted of visits to Nanjing Massacre Museum, John Rabe House Museum and other historic and cultural sites.

The field trip enabled the participants to experience the horrors of war. NARPI helped the peacebuilding participants process this terrible incident and envision a positive way forward by proposing what they could do to change this cycle of violence and hatred.

The lived story of a Nanjing Massacre Survivor was shared. The Nanjing Massacre happened in 1937 in Nanjing, China where the Japanese military committed the genocide of 50,000 to 300,000 victims (according to scholarly research the lowest estimate is 50,000 and the highest estimate is 300,000 given by the Chinese government). A survivor met by the participants was an eight-year-old girl in 1937. She and her four-year-old younger sister were the only survivors in her family. The Japanese soldiers forced their way into their house and killed her father immediately. A Japanese soldier took her youngest six-month-old sister from her mother and threw the baby on the floor. Her mother was killed. Her grandfather and grandmother led her, two older sisters and a younger sister to the room at the end of the hallway and hid them in a closet. In no time, the Japanese soldiers rushed into the room and shot her grandparents. When the soldiers tried to drag her older sisters out of the closet, the survivor bravely tried to stop them, and she was stabbed three times in different parts of her body. She fainted and woke up to see one of her sisters naked on the table and the other naked on the bed. Both of them were dead. Her younger sister was saved by hiding inside a box and gradually recovered. She and her younger sister both lived a hard life. Her sister was taken to an orphanage. She was brought up by her uncle and aunt. She withstood all hardships and lived to tell the story.

The records of the cruel history were displayed at the Nanjing Massacre Museum. The walls with 300,000 names to commemorate the victims were the first sight that caught the eyes of the participants at the entrance hall. All the visitors paid respect to the people named on the wall. The museum was filled with records of inhumane atrocities that took place in Nanjing.

During the subsequent briefing session, the participants (young Chinese, Koreans, Mongolians and Japanese who have taken peace education and peacebuilding courses) all thought deeply of the museum visit and responded in solidarity: What we need to do is to design peace education and human rights education programs that would enable present and future generations to find nonviolent ways to resolve conflict and change the structure of the world from the culture of war to the culture of peace. Having taken the peace building and education sessions, they felt that their attitudes

had changed. Some Chinese participants said that they were brought up to hate the Japanese, but the five-day training completely changed their mindset to more cooperative and accepting attitude. They eased their ill feelings as they worked together with the Japanese and learned about peacebuilding.

This change of attitude is the hope of the future. The young generation can learn how to make decisions and find positive ways to go forward. Peace education and human rights education focus on the learning of values, attitudes and behaviors to learn to live together in a world of diversity and pluralism.

In August 2015, NARPI held its training in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Experiential learning included tasting cheeses, curds, horse milk, and the overflowing mounds of meat of the local cuisine, entering the *comfy ger* of a nomadic family, and learning about the history, culture, and current issues of Mongolia. These were all part of a community-based peacebuilding movement that was still a new field of practice and academic concern in Mongolia.

The Victims of Political Persecution Memorial Museum is a little-known museum in Ulaanbaatar. The museum was formerly owned by Prime Minister Genden. Though initially backed by Stalin, he was arrested by agents of the then Soviet Union for speaking out against the destruction of institutional Buddhism in Mongolia and for his increasing nationalism. He was executed on 26 November 1937, Mongolia's Independence Day. His daughter initiated the idea of converting their house into a museum.

The participants learned about the political victims of the Stalinist repression (1937-1952) at the museum. During the repression period, many of the intellectuals, nationalists, wealthy people, and especially those practicing Buddhist Monasticism were targeted for being anti-Soviet. 22,000 to 33,000 Mongolians were believed killed under Soviet and Stalinist influence. After visiting the museum one participant raised a question: "How can humans be so cruel?" Also, many of the Mongolian participants admitted that they had never taken the time to think about their history despite their knowledge of what had happened. The time spent at this museum was truly meaningful as all of the participants, both Mongolian and non-Mongolians, reflected on the history of Mongolia and of Northeast Asia.

Once again, the field trip reminded the participants of the gruesome record of the past of Mongolians including Mongolian Buddhist monks being brutally massacred, a grave violation of human rights and dignity. The expe-

rience touched the heart of the participants and triggered their determination to continue their work for peace so that such genocide would not recur.

The NARPI Summer Peacebuilding Training took place in Taiwan for the first time on 7-20 August 2016. Week 1 courses were held at the Jinshan Youth Activity Center in Jinshan, New Taipei City, along the northern coast of Taiwan. Week 2 courses were held at three different venues near the Taipei Teachers Hostel.

The three-day NARPI field trip provided a deeper understanding of Taiwan's history. The 228 Memorial Museum tells the story of the clash between soldiers sent from Mainland China after the Japanese Imperial Army left Taiwan and the people living in Taiwan. It started with an argument about contraband cigarettes on 27 February 1947, during which one officer shot and killed a bystander. Violence escalated quickly, and the troops from Mainland China under Chiang Kai-shek started a widespread massacre. The following era of suppression of political dissidents was called "White Terror," which lasted until 15 July 1987.

The Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial and Cultural Park was the site of the Jingmei Military Detention Center, where accused political dissidents were held and tried in military courts during the White Terror period. There, three former political prisoners shared their personal stories and also gave a tour of the memorial. It was a deep honor for the participants to meet these individuals who suffered under the most violent faces of war, including imprisonment and torture, and who lived with a passion to ensure that the next generations in Taiwan would protect human rights.

In addition to witnessing the history of Taiwan, a great example of current peace work happening in Taipei was introduced by Jiazhen Wu, a representative from the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty (TAEDP). She shared the struggle of human rights NGOs in Taiwan against the death penalty policy.

Throughout the field trip, the key phrase that appeared often in both sessions on Taiwanese history and on current NGO work was "human rights." The participants learned that along with democracy and freedom, respecting human rights was one of the main values of the Taiwanese society. These learnings are reflected in the NARPI courses.

In August 2017, the NARPI summer training was held in Nago, Okinawa. During the field trip, the venue was moved from the isolated mountain-top Nago Youth Center to the more urban Naha International Youth Hostel.

During the field trip, there was invaluable first-hand learning through three full days of stories, site visits, and history discussions. The theme of the first day was “Feel the present,” with a focus on the presence of U.S. military bases in Okinawa. The second day focused on history, specifically the Battle of Okinawa - “Touch the past.” And the third day was more forward-looking - “Imagine the future.”

The participants heard stories from four survivors of the Okinawa Battle. The survivors shared their memories during the war as children, and the impact of the experience on them till the present. One memorable experience of a male survivor was the hiding in a cave of thousands of villagers while Japanese soldiers searched through the wreckage of destroyed homes and buildings.

On the second day of the field trip, the participants visited Abuchira Gama, a natural cave in southern Okinawa area where soldiers and civilians hid and students of a girls’ school tended to the wounded during the Battle of Okinawa. The cave was used as hospital, lodging area, and supply storage. The back cavern of the cave was used as a place where wounded soldiers



were left alone in the dark to die because the Japanese army had lost the capability to take care of them. We also saw the abandoned attempt to create an alternative exit to the cave. One of the chilling moments during the visit to the cave was when the guide asked everyone to turn off their lights. The participants all stood together under the weight of the impermeable darkness thinking of the soldiers and civilians who were in the cave surrounded by the dark damp rock walls during the Battle of Okinawa. While the cave has a heavy past, these days it has become a peace education site for students and other people.

On the third day of the field trip, the session focused on imagining the future of Okinawa. There were five small groups, and each group heard from local peacebuilders and discussed ideas related to their topic. The issues discussed were:

- How to put an end to crimes related to the U.S. bases – Solidarity between women victims in Okinawa and throughout Northeast Asia;
- How to win social justice – A trial that reviewed data and facts to evaluate the need for the existence of the U.S. Marines;
- How to connect the past with the future – Aging survivors and young successors;



- How to overcome divisions and conflicts among community members – Utilizing a process of making multicultural community for peacebuilding;
- How to engage “ordinary” citizens in protest movements – Changing political-based movements to non-political-based movements.

Some groups had stimulating dialogue about the political climate in Northeast Asia; others heard moving stories of oppression, while others discussed possibilities for the future of peacebuilding in Okinawa.

The NARPI Participants

Since the first Summer Training in 2011, over 250 people from the subregion have joined the NARPI trainings and have shared a common vision for transforming this subregion.

The NARPI participants consist of the following:

- NGO/NPO staff and interns;
- Peace educators and activists;
- Teachers and professors;
- Students (high school graduates, university and graduate school students);



- Government officials, military and police;
- Community leaders;
- Religious leaders;
- Anyone interested in peacebuilding in Northeast Asia.

The participants have a commitment to peacebuilding and ability to participate in workshops conducted in English.

NARPI has acted as a “safe space” where participants of different backgrounds and nationalities can truthfully share, listen, and learn from each other and be trained and empowered as peacebuilders. Together they experience peace. However, peace, though sought by all, is often forgotten, overshadowed by the surrounding political reality. At the end of the training, participants return home with conviction, vitalized by the knowledge of the human capacity that they experienced at NARPI. Peace is the way.

Conclusion

Many people expressed commitment to share the NARPI experience in their home communities, and leave the training with a determination to work for





peace and human rights in their communities and with more skills to equip them. Some participants found new directions for their future through the coursework. One of the participants shared,

There was a learning opportunity far greater than what I had expected. I am determined to study more, get more experience and become a restorative justice practitioner.

Some participants shared about personal change resulting from their coursework. One participant wrote, “I can decide my way because of NARPI. The Trauma Healing class really helped to find the real me and to choose my future direction.” Others shared that their experience at NARPI will help them to mediate conflict, whether it is in their daily life or on the scale of community or region and that meeting people from all over the world and understanding the dream of peace that they have in common is what they liked best about NARPI.

Many of these individuals took ownership of the vision of NARPI.

These are some of the ways that NARPI alumni are working toward their vision of peace:

- Giving peace building trainings in their home communities;
- Pursuing study or work in peacebuilding areas;
- Staying in touch with other NARPI alumni by sharing knowledge and resources and visiting each other to find out more about different peacebuilding efforts in the region.

These are some ways that NARPI alumni are supporting NARPI:

- Sharing about their NARPI experiences with family, friends, and colleagues;
- Continuing to join the NARPI Summer Peacebuilding Training;
- Recruiting participants for the NARPI Summer Training each year;
- Giving small donations to NARPI.

Both participants and NARPI people learned and were reminded of the many important aspects of peacebuilding in Northeast Asia during the 2017 training in Taiwan. They rediscovered that all were influenced by the same history of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations. They also re-realized that the mission of their generation was to find ways to respond differently and creatively to this history of past generations.

In 2018, NARPI will be held in Jeju Island, Korea. There is an expectation of another successful training in developing facilitators for peacebuilding.

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Endnotes

- 1 Action Professionals' Association for the People (Addis Ababa, 1996).
- 2 Yayori Matsui (2000, para. 2) reported that "Japan's military sexual slavery [the so-called "comfort women" system] before and during the Second World War was one of the most horrendous forms of wartime sexual violence against women known to this century." About forty-five years after World War II in 1990, the Korean "comfort women," victims of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, spoke for the first time to unveil these atrocities. This revelation was followed by victims from China, Taiwan, North Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Netherlands. Matsui (2000, para. 4) further informed:

At the Fourth UN World Women's Conference in Beijing, the Platform for Action was adopted which clearly stated that systematic rape, sexual slavery and other forms of violence against women in armed conflicts are war crimes and crimes against humanity; and that governments and international organizations should in-

investigate, and prosecute alleged war criminals to the end of offering full redress to victimized women.

Ahmed (2004) further described that “despite the tireless work of legal scholars in articulating the principles of international humanitarian law throughout the twentieth century, the unresolved cases of the ‘comfort women’ make it painfully clear that these principles are still far from being realized” (page 122). This is a crime against humanity or violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.