

## **Pursuing Historical Reconciliation in East Asia**

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The theme of my presentation is historical reconciliation. The traumas of large-scale war, especially World War II, the Holocaust, and other horrors, have inflicted deep physical and psychological wounds on human history. One of the primary goals of historical reconciliation is to heal the wounds of the victims and to reunite the world peacefully. The globalization of the world's economies and the potential threat of nuclear weapons around the world have made the process of historical reconciliation increasingly imperative. East Asia has seen the gradual development of a regional community through increasing economic interdependence and international cooperation to promote denuclearization. In order to further the creation of a peaceful East Asian community, historical reconciliation is essential, and it is vital that the various countries of East Asia strive to come to common understandings of the past.

Usually, reconciliation among belligerents is carried out through peace treaties. The peace treaty concluded between Italy and the Allies in 1947, just before the beginning of the Cold War, acknowledged Italy's responsibility for the war and demanded in Article 74 that the government pay reparations to various countries including the Soviet Union, Ethiopia, Greece, and Albania. Through this, Italy made a major first step to reconciliation with the Allies.

In the case of Japan, a lasting peace treaty was not concluded until 1951. Nevertheless, China and the Koreans – the countries most devastated by Japanese aggression – were not invited to the peace conference in San Francisco. Instead, the peoples of Asia and the Pacific were not allowed to represent themselves at the conference but were typically represented by their former colonial masters. As a result, the peace treaty merely offered an amicable settlement between

Japan and forty-eight nations. The Cold War helped to bury issues of compensation and reconciliation between Japan and its neighbors. The process of reconciliation, if there even was any, was slow. Instead of providing direct reparations, the Japanese government provided aid through the Official Development Assistance (ODA).

It was in the 1990s that the issue of Japanese reconciliation with its neighbors rose to the forefront as a major issue. Japan's emergence as an economic power increased its presence in East Asia, and neighboring nations became concerned about Japan's aspirations to become a military power. As a result, issues of historical reconciliation have, since the 1990s, often been discussed in terms of Japan's awareness of the past and its vision regarding the future.

World War II was an all-out war. The development of weapons of mass destruction, such as the atomic bomb, chemical weapons, and biological weapons, meant that war damage was not limited to ordinary people. As a result, it became critical that reconciliation take place not only among sovereign nations, but also among the peoples that inhabited them. The primary target of historical reconciliation has shifted from the national level to the individual level as individual victims attempt to seek redress and receive reparations. In recent years, survivors have sued the Japanese government and various companies. It has become increasingly clear that reconciliation has to go beyond the government-to-government level, and that the simple rejection of claims based on governmental treaties will never satisfy the victims of Japanese atrocities. The process of reconciliation must take individual victims into account.

Japan concluded a treaty that established basic relations with the Republic of Korea in 1965, and it normalized diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China through the joint communiqué signed in 1972. In both cases, the United States played an important role, both

directly and indirectly. In the case of South Korea, President Lyndon Johnson pressured President Park Chung-hee to accept Japan's patronage. Otherwise, Johnson insisted, South Korea's diplomatic and economic prospects as well as Asia's status in the free world would grow weaker. In the case of China, Nixon's visit, which took place without any consultation with Japan, prompted Japan to revise its policy toward the PRC. Because of the international and domestic political contexts, these treaties only tangentially treated Japan's responsibility for war and the colonial past.

In the 1965 treaty between Japan and South Korea, there was some contention regarding the interpretation of Article 2. That article went as follows: "It is confirmed that all treaties or agreements concluded between the Empire of Japan and the Empire of Korea on or before August 22, 1910 are already null and void." (On August 22, 1910, Japan had formally annexed Korea, which was ruled by the Choson dynasty.) The point of contention between the two governments regarded exactly when the treaties and agreements became null and void. The South Korean government insisted that all the treaties and agreements had never been valid because the Japanese empire forced the dynastic rulers to sign them. In contrast, the Japanese government believed that the treaties and agreements were nullified in 1948 when the Republic of Korea was founded; therefore, according to the Japanese interpretation, the treaties and agreements were valid through 1948. The position of the government remained the same until 1995 when the Socialist Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama addressed the Diet and stated he did not think both the Choson dynasty and the Japanese empire were equal in status.

The end of the Cold War inspired both the South Korean and Chinese governments to reevaluate the treaties they had concluded with Japan. The National Assembly of South Korea

proposed to revise the 1965 treaty with Japan, and in China, there is an ongoing discussion about whether it was Mao Zedong or Zhou Enlai who made the greatest blunder by renouncing claims for war reparations from WWII.

### **Recognition of Responsibility**

In the normalization treaty with South Korea in 1965, there was no explicit settlement regarding the historical past. When the parties signed the treaty, Japan's foreign minister Shiina Etsusaburô merely expressed his deep regret (*ikan*) and repentance (*hansei*) about the "unfortunate past," but he only did so at the United States' urging.

In the case of Japan's normalization with China in 1972, the communiqué included Japan's awareness of its war responsibility in the beginning of the treaty as follows: "The Japanese side is keenly conscious of the responsibility for the serious damage that Japan caused in the past to the Chinese people through war, and reproaches itself deeply." This statement was carefully worded because the Japanese side realized the importance of wordings of apology after Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei had apologized at his welcome reception by stating that Japan caused immense "annoyance" (*meiwaku*) to the Chinese people during the war. The following day, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai had told Tanaka that his usage of the term "annoyance" would infuriate the Chinese people because it sounded as if the war was just a minor irritant. Zhou stressed that the war not only killed millions of Chinese people, but also caused significant damage to the Japanese people. Because of Zhou's remark, Tanaka and other Japanese delegates realized the importance of acknowledging war responsibility and included it in the communiqué.

### **Ambiguity in Terms and Definitions**

As mentioned above, in 1965, both Japan and South Korea interpreted differently the date

of the termination of the colonial treaties and agreements. The South Korean government insisted these treaties had never been valid, whereas the Japanese government comprehended that they were terminated in 1948. In regard to Japan's treaty with the PRC, the communiqué declared that "the abnormal state of affairs that has hitherto existed between Japan and the People's Republic of China is terminated on the date on which this Joint Communiqué is issued" (Item 1). The phrase "abnormal state of affairs" was originally "state of war" in the Chinese draft. Nonetheless, the Chinese government agreed to change the term because the Japanese government stressed that the state of the war had already been terminated between Japan and Taiwan in 1952. In sum, neither party protested, but it was ambiguous whether they agreed on the date that the state of war had ended.

### **Issues Regarding Reparation**

In the 1972 Joint Communiqué, the Chinese government "renounce[d] its demand for war reparation from Japan" (Item 5). The Chinese draft originally used the phrase "*right to claim war reparation*" (*baishō seikyūken*), but because Japan's previous agreement with Taiwan renounced the claim for war reparation from Japan, the PRC and Japan made a political compromise. As the PRC renounced its "claim," not the rights to make those claims, one could argue that the PRC still retains its right to claim individual war compensation. In the 1990s, with the help of Japanese lawyers, Chinese survivors of Japanese atrocities began to file lawsuits in Japan demanding reparations. At first, the Chinese government neither supported nor disapproved of these lawsuits. In March 1995, however, the Chinese government clarified its position and stated that it had not renounced claims from individuals for reparation because of the war. Since then, increasing numbers of Chinese survivors of Japanese atrocities, including sexual slavery, forced

mobilization, and chemical and biological warfare, have sued the Japanese government and demanded compensation. In recent years, some district courts sided with the Chinese plaintiffs, ruling that the Chinese government had not renounced the right of individuals to claim reparations.

In 1965, South Korea and Japan concluded the Agreement Between Japan and the Republic of Korea Concerning the Settlement of Problems in Regard to Property and Claims and Economic Cooperation. Article 2, Section 1 of the agreement stated that the parties confirmed that reparation claims “have been settled completely and finally.” Although the Japanese government supplied products and services equivalent to \$300 million and provided long-term, low-interest loans equivalent to \$200 million, they were explained in the Diet *not* as reparations, but as money to promote economic cooperation and to congratulate South Korea on its independence. In contrast, the South Korean government explained internally that \$300 million amounted to reparations from the Japanese government. The South Korean government established a committee to compensate the victims of Japan’s colonial rule. Nevertheless, it limited eligibility for compensation. Victims of atomic bombs, those who were left in Sakhalin, and those who were forced into sexual slavery were not eligible to apply.

From the beginning of the negotiation of the settlement agreement, the Japanese government stressed the legality of the annexation of Korea through the Choson rulers. Although the issue involved damages that resulted in conjunction with the laws that were then in existence, the Japanese government failed to consider whether the annexation was valid or whether their rule as colonizers was unjust. In this regard, the settlement suggests Japan’s lack of awareness of its responsibility in colonizing Korea.

The remainder of this paper will highlight some issues concerning Japan's diplomatic normalization with South Korea and the PRC. First, the South Korean and the Chinese governments gave precedence to national security and economic development rather than settling the issue of the colonial and wartime past. For this reason, individual demands for compensation in these two nations were suppressed until the end of the Cold War. Since the 1990s, however, both nations have started to face long-suppressed demand for compensation among their citizens. To settle the colonial and wartime past in a way that satisfies public demand has become an important domestic political issue for these two nations, and the two governments have been compelled to reevaluate the history of Japanese colonialism and aggression. It was only natural, therefore, that this historical issue suddenly became an international and diplomatic issue. Peace and economic interdependency in North East Asia cannot be promoted by one nation alone. In my opinion, the question of how to solve the problems of history will only grow in importance in the twenty-first century.

Second, Japanese political leaders do not seem to be fully aware of the gravity of historical issues in the context of domestic politics in China and South Korea. Prime Minister Tanaka's usage of the term "annoyance" (*meiwaku*) shows one good example of the Japanese lack of sensitivity. This lack of awareness of the gravity of the situation has not changed much among Japanese politicians. On August 15, 1985, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone paid the first official visit in postwar history to the Yasukuni Shrine as prime minister (not as an individual). In 1986, however, he decided not to visit again after learning that an official visit to Yasukuni might strain Japan-China relations. He was informed through an informal channel that the Chinese government urged him to reconsider the visit and that a visit would surely provoke

undesirable results. It was only then that Nakasone finally realized how damaging his visits could be. One sees another example of a lack of historical awareness in the dispute over the island Takeshim (Dokdo) between Japan and South Korea. Few in government circles, including even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), seem to realize fully that the reasons for the dispute arise in the difference in opinions regarding the history of Japan's colonial period.

Because of changes in the political structure of China and South Korea, by the late 1990s these historical issues had become linked with domestic politics, mass movements, and nationalism. The internet also helped infuse mass movements over historical issues with a new vitality. When intertwined with populism and nationalism, historical issues tend to go beyond government control. It has been crucial for the government to re-define the historical problems. Yang Bojiang of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations has stressed the importance of avoiding wounding interests of the entire nation by separating historical problems from other pivotal diplomatic issues. Historical issues have often provoked nationalist reactions in East Asia, and therefore it is important to strengthen the politics of reconciliation in order to prevent the collision of different forms of nationalism.

In May 2001, when the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) approved a nationalistic junior high school history textbook, the South Korean government demanded the Japanese government revise the contents of the textbook. The South Korean government protested that the content of the textbook differed from three documents: the statements of Cabinet Secretary Kiichi Miyazawa in 1982, the comments of Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995, and the joint communiqué on the partnership between Japan and South Korea concluded in 1998. The Japanese government did not comply, and the issue caused



diplomatic strain. Seemingly, the only positive outcome of the textbook furor was the successful campaign initiated by concerned teachers and members of the public, which minimized the popularity of the textbook in schools. In 2002, its market share was less than 1%, and in 2006 the share decreased to 0.4%.

In general, the bureaucracy has dominated the policy-making process in postwar Japan, but from the 1970s on, the prime minister's office occasionally became actively involved in the decision-making process for foreign affairs and other vital high-level policy issues. In those situations, it led the bureaucracy instead of simply following bureaucratic initiative. Miyazawa's statement was an example of such political will and leadership. Nevertheless, the power of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party has substantially declined since then, as it can no longer hold office without collaborating with other political parties. In the absence of strong political leadership, MEXT and MOFA in essence weakened the accomplishments of political initiatives. As a result, Japan was not able to act upon a strong political will or formulate policy objectives regarding historical problems, and repulsion and mistrust toward Japan grew among neighboring nations.

In September 2005, Prime Minister Jun'ichirô Koizumi and his Liberal Democratic Party won an overwhelming victory in the House of Representatives. Koizumi effectively appealed to the masses through the media and successfully mobilized populist sentiment. This populism turned into chauvinistic nationalism, however, as the news broadcast reports of North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens and anti-Japanese protests in China and South Korea which took place as the result of Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. The rise of nationalistic sentiments in recent years has contributed negatively to Japan's diplomatic relations with its neighbors.

In September 2006, Shinzô Abe became the new prime minister of Japan. Just the previous year, Abe had opposed a Diet resolution to offer an apology to the victims of Japanese wartime aggression, and even earlier in 1997, he had expressed his disagreement with Cabinet Secretary Yôhei Kôno's statement of 1993, declaring that "in many cases they [comfort women] were recruited against their own will, through coaxing coercion... and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments." Nevertheless, when he became prime minister, he explicitly stated that he and other ministers in the Cabinet would continue to endorse Murayama's and Kôno's announcements. Even after his controversial remark on March 1, 2007, Abe reiterated that his administration would stand by Kôno's statement, though his definition of "coercion" does not seem to be the same as Kôno's. He and other political leaders should thoroughly recognize that settling historical issues is necessary for the political progress of East Asia. As we enter the twenty-first century, it is increasingly important to foster dialogues between Japan and its neighbors, not only at the level of government, but also at the grass-roots level, in order to promote reconciliation across East Asia.