

Confronting the Legacy of the Past: Promoting Justice and Reconciliation in East Asia

4:00 – 4:30 PM - Concluding Remarks

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I certainly have the difficult task of trying to give some concluding remarks, and I'm not about to try and summarize the discussions for today. I learned a great deal from this intellectually rich discussion, and on top of that I was truly moved by the moral passion and commitment that all of the participants, and especially the panelists, gave to the work they are doing and it will take me quite some time to sort everything out. So rather than try to form a grand synthesis, what I would like to do is to give some observations, and I was trying to think of how to organize my thoughts. Someone had a very nicely typed set of remarks, and I'm afraid my notes are all messy and I'm not sure I can read them all, but I thought Lily Gardner-Feldman's point about the need for a variety of fronts in order to address this issue was very important: the need for civil society, the need for political leadership, and also maybe the role of third parties. I want to use these categories to organize my comments.

First, in terms of civil society and the general public, I could not agree more with Professor Kasahara that, regretfully, the issue of history and the matter of dealing with past wrongs has tended, in Japan, to be used as a tool of ideological conflict, rather than to try to search for some kind of humanitarian definition and solution to the issue. I hope in the future that humanitarian element can be expanded. Nevertheless, the reality is that in Japan, ever since the end of the war, I don't believe that there has been quite the amnesia in Japan; it's just that Japan is very divided, and the political system has tended to accentuate those divisions rather than bringing a consensus. I think we see another period of acute intensification of this division. And so, I admire the work of progressive civil society activists, but civil society as the panelists pointed out also has a very nationalistic, revisionist element. But that is part of Japanese democracy, and there is a pluralism of views. Hopefully from a dialogue amongst these views, some kind of a more positive consensus would emerge.

But I guess I would just point out one problematic issue. Despite this kind of pluralism of views and discussion, what I find particularly alarming is the role of right-wing intimidation. Intimidation from the most fanatical elements, which makes it impossible to have a really fair and open debate. I myself have been to some extent involved in that kind of right-wing intimidation, and I think that's real. What happened to the Diet member Katô Koichi's home when it was burned in Japan was deplorable, but what was more deplorable for me was that it took a couple of weeks for the Prime Minister of Japan and the Chief Cabinet Secretary to come out publicly and condemn that act of terrorism and intimidation. And the excuse was that Japan was in the middle of a holiday season. So I think that is one of the most worrisome elements, less the fact that there may be people who disagree, but more that it is hard to have a fair and open debate.

I believe that one person mentioned the absence of religious groups in Japan in addressing this issue. Certainly in Europe, I think the religious groups had a positive role to play. But here, I would remind everyone that when the bill to nationalize the Yasukuni Shrine was being debated and discussed- ultimately it failed to pass in the National Diet- there was the mobilization of a broad coalition of groups against the nationalization of the Yasukuni Shrine in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I was in Japan at the time, and saw the activities, and it brought together many religious groups as well. Christian groups, Buddhist groups, and I'm somewhat puzzled why, today on the history issue, those religious groups aren't galvanized to be active in this, because I think that those groups provide an opportunity to transcend a nationalist perspective, and bring in the issue of a common humanity.

As Ms. Nishino mentioned, another problem I see in Japan is really the imbalance in terms of media forces today. I think it has changed dramatically in the last thirty years since I began studying Japanese society. As Nishino-san has indicated, when you go to the bookstores, and I'm an avid reader of monthly magazines, now there are probably two monthly magazines that are read by the general public that deal with a more progressive view on this issue: *Sekai*, whose circulation has decreased, and *Ronza*. Just about all the other monthly magazines are on the conservative side, and when you read those

magazines, it's usually the same people who say the same things in all the different magazines, and so it's like you give those voices a huge megaphone. And the voices on the other side have no microphone at all, and I think that has very much skewed the debate, and so then when the Western press picks up the debate, there is much focus on this right-wing and almost total dismissal of the other voice in Japan.

Another point I'd like to make about the general public and civil society relates to the generational issue. And I think the conventional wisdom is that the younger generation does not know much about history, and that they tend to be more nationalistic, more forgetful, and want to just move and be future-oriented. I think, to some extent, that's true, but it's kind of a conventional wisdom without much solid empirical evidence. And I just happened to attend another workshop this week, sponsored by the Hiroshima Peace Institute, and at that Institute, a couple of sociologists, one Japanese and one American, presented research findings on a survey of American and Japanese university students. And it really turned the conventional wisdom on its head. They're trying to compare how American youth and Japanese youth look at the past, think about the past. First, they asked the American and Japanese students what things about their past or their society do they feel shameful about, do they see as dishonorable. And the American students mentioned slavery, the Vietnam War, or the treatment of American Indians. The Japanese students, by far, (54.4%) mentioned issues related to Japan's actions in Asia, in the context of the Asia War. Some of the responses were quite specific, whether it was the Manchurian Incident, the Nanking Massacre, the comfort women issue, the 21 Demands, the annexation of Korea. So it suggested there was quite a bit of knowledge about the war among the Japanese university students. And then what was extremely interesting was the sociologists asking the American and Japanese students how responsible they felt for those shameful developments in their own country. And the American students, about 10%, said they felt responsible for slavery, for the Vietnam War, or the treatment of American Indians. The Japanese students, the majority of them- over 50%- felt that they had some responsibility for these events, and even on the comfort woman issue, it was 40%, so it wasn't that they were shirking their responsibility. They felt that they shared their responsibility with what their forebears had done in the past. And the final thing is

that the conventional wisdom is that the Japanese have a shame culture rather than a guilt culture. I think that's Ruth Benedict's hypothesis. If that were the case, then the Japanese students would be more concerned about the reputational consequences, about the dishonorable things Japan did in the past, rather than the intrinsic evilness of what was done. Here again, the results went against the conventional wisdom: 29% felt that these issues soiled Japan's international reputation, but 51% thought these things were deplorable because of the inherent badness or evilness of these Japanese actions. I think this at least opens to question the conventional wisdom and also suggests there is a potential to address these issues in a way that resonates with the young people.

Another point I would like to make about civil society and the Japanese public is that I think there is a sizable (in some sense I would think it is a majoritarian) middle-ground. Activists on the history issue have to address and develop arguments that resonate with this middle ground of opinion in Japan. And I think the middle-ground opinion has the following three components: first, I think most Japanese recognize that Japan did some terrible things in the past, for which Japan should feel remorse and which it should address in a positive way. But, they also feel other countries did terrible things as well, and Japan is not particularly bad in that sense. They would also say that Japan is not like Nazi Germany, that Japan may have done terrible things, but that Imperial Japan was not like Nazi Germany. The second point they would make is that Japan is not intrinsically an evil or militaristic country, and therefore Japanese can and should be proud of their own country. And then, finally, I think this middle group of opinion would hold that Japanese should continue to adhere to this anti-militarist identity and policy, but the notion that there should be this one-country pacifist country, to adhere to one-country pacifism, is either too idealistic or perhaps irresponsible, and that Japan should play a more active role in international security affairs and Japan has the right to defend itself. I think that is kind of the middle ground, and in order to resonate with the larger Japanese public it is very important for activists working on this issue to make arguments that appeal to this centrist force.

Secondly, on the whole issue of political leadership I think it's terribly important and it's

by no accident, as Professor Park mentioned, that a large part of the positive progress in the region has taken place under new leadership. I think the change in government, and the change of the party in power, the formation of a non-LDP coalition, was decisive in changing the atmosphere. When Prime Minister Hosokawa in his first press conference, without any provocation, said that 'Yes, Japan launched a war of aggression,' it kind of brought a breath of fresh air, because there weren't all the caveats and equivocation. And then, for Prime Minister Murayama, we know how difficult it was for him to issue that statement. But once that statement was issued, it meant that LDP politicians, who never would have issued such a statement, had to then go and reinforce it. And without that statement, it would be very hard for the Foreign Ministry of Japan to defend that stance. And I believe Prime Minister Obuchi also exercised leadership. So what this suggests to me is that some kind of change in leadership is fundamentally important, and one of the problems about Japan --- I was kind of taken by one remark that Korean democracy may be more advanced than Japanese democracy --- is that we really need in Japan an alternation of the political party in power through elections.

Finally, regarding the role of third parties and the focus on the U.S. role, I agree with Admiral McDevitt that the United States has a keen interest in this issue. The United States, I think, wants Japan to be confident, respected, and influential in Asia. The United States is finally moving beyond the hubs-and-spokes approach toward this alliance, the United States would like to see Japan have better relations with other allied countries, including the Republic of Korea. But I think ultimately the U.S. interest, and this harks back to President Clinton's speech in 1993 talking about a community, is the creation of a peaceful and prosperous East Asia-Pacific community, and this history issue poses some critical opportunity to pause there. I can understand why Rich Armitage and Mike Green would counsel against U.S. government involvement, but I think there are ways that this could be done. When Ambassador Thomas Schieffer spoke to the press in Tokyo and said that he found the testimony of comfort women to be credible and there was forced coercion, I think it was a very helpful remark, and I think there are other ways the U.S. government can speak up.

But in the end, I'm not sure that the American role is to play the role of a judge, even to play a role of a mediator, because I'm not sure the United States can take a righteous position on this issue. There are a lot of things problematic about Americans' role in Asia. The Taft-Katsura agreement is basically a trade-off of Japan's imperial and colonial control over Korea in exchange for U.S. control over the Philippines, of course the atomic bombings, the fact that Unit 731 was not discussed at the Tokyo Trials, the fact that imperial responsibility was never fully explored, the fact that the United States did not address the comfort women issue, because in the early period of the occupation, the United States too played a role in establishing the equivalent of comfort facilities for the occupation forces. So U.S. hands are unclean, and in that sense, I don't think it's the U.S. role to judge or to mediate, but probably to play the role of a participant in this dialogue. The best way the United States can do so is to help create an institutional infrastructure so that there is a regional public sphere, and at the societal level there can be the kinds of discussions we've had today. These discussions ultimately transcend national identities, nationalities, so that finally the participants can address these issues on the basis of some common humanity. I think this workshop is one major step in that direction.