

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

### Transcript

11:00 – 12:00 Noon - **Discussion Session One**

*Panel Discussant: Daqing Yang, Department of History, George Washington University*

Thank you very much. It is great to be back at USIP. As I mentioned, we have been beneficiaries of the support from USIP. I want to commend USIP for hosting this distinguished group of Japanese scholars and activists. The issues they are dealing with concern not only Japan's neighbors, but also concerns, in my view, the future of Japanese democracy.

The three presentations we heard this morning are important, because they bring out a lot of activity and information that we tend not to get in newspapers in this country. Headlines here tend to seize on statements made by politicians that create diplomatic troubles, but a lot of the efforts made by people here, like our panelists, do not get covered. So I urge all of you to read the papers, as I understand Takashi has taken the pains to translate them into English.

Because of the limitations of time, a lot of the information has not been presented this morning. So, for example, the Documentation Center for Japan's War Responsibility that Professor Arai mentioned has been in existence for quite a long time. You can go to its website; it has English translations of many of its contents. It is a significant source of information and publishes a quarterly journal. I personally found it a very useful source of information. And then the so-called Common History of China, Japan, and Korea that Professor Kasahara referred to in his presentation, even though my colleague Professor Jordan Sand and I have tried to publicize this, [although I understand Takashi's book mentioned it,] generally it is not widely known in this country. So again, I think that this group brings such important developments to the Washington audience and elsewhere.

Second, as activists and professionals at the same time, these panelists are deeply involved in addressing what might generally be referred to as the problem of history and reconciliation in Japan and East Asia. They are an important part of civil society in Japan, and for what they are doing they have been branded as anti-establishment activists, and I think their activity demonstrates the vitality of a significant sector of Japanese society, because they are working in a non-governmental sector of Japan, and face significant difficulties and resistance and obstacles in their own field, which I will touch upon.

Thirdly, they raise the issues which are important not only in the context of Japan but in terms of how modern democracies, democratic countries, deal with such painful and difficult issues such as past wrongs: how to address past injustices, and make them part of the contemporary political agenda. Sometimes the example of Germany has been referred to as more of a successful example, but often that also raises many difficult issues: to what extent is post-war Germany comparable to post-war Japan? We have many German experts here- but I think the level of how democracies deal with this painful past injustice is something that could be compared across national boundaries.

Hearing their presentations, I have the feeling that civil society activists, professionals, face enormous resistance. For example, this is especially true in the first presentation made by Mr. Oyama, who had been long involved in various lawsuits to deal with the government screening of history textbooks, and more recently, with the re-dress lawsuits filed on behalf of Chinese victims. And here we have the evidence that they're really fighting an uphill battle, and if the next month's decision by the Supreme Court comes down against the plaintiffs, meaning the end to a lot of the legal measures to seek re-dress in Japan. Already, a few years ago in the United States, efforts to use the court as a method to seek re-dress for forced labor and American POWs have largely ended in failure. So, in order to overcome such obstacles, almost an impossible thick wall, Mr. Oyama suggested the method of legislation. Indeed, I understand that Germany has taken that path. But then again, in Japan, how do you move toward that goal--- to enact legislation that overcomes the limits of existing laws? I understand that a few years ago, the Democratic Party of Japan tabled some legislation, but I don't know what the status

of such an effort is in the Diet now. So perhaps Mr. Oyama can update us, as well as the prospect, of whether such a route can indeed be realized.

And when you consider the information presented by Professor Kasahara about the make-up of Japan's Diet, especially the membership of these nationalist, conservative, or right-wing (as the British press would use) Diet member coalitions, based on their views of historical issues, then it seems to me that the prospect of getting legislation through the democratic process of the Diet is not very promising. So again, I'm looking for a more, perhaps more hopeful, answer to this. Perhaps Mr. Oyama or anyone else could give us some pointers.

On the issue of domestic politics, which directly affect policy issues such as compensation or textbook screening, again based on the evidence provided by Professor Kasahara, personally again I feel the sense of hopelessness, or maybe powerlessness, at least in the short-run, in the sense that the public media has been saturated, or tends to be saturated, by right-leaning commentators and elected politicians. If you look at the numbers he gave, really it has taken up, for example, half of the LDP Diet members belong to this nationalistic coalition. And even members of the so-called opposition, the Democratic Party of Japan, as in the case of the prefectural governor Saitama, is a supporter of such a more conservative stance. Now does civil society provide a viable alternative? Now here, the picture is also complicated. In fact, in his paper, Professor Kasahara used the term "grass-root conservative." As some of you may know, the latest round of textbook revisions are indeed supported by conservative or nationalist civil society movements. Although towards the end, Professor Kasahara pointed out a sort of more hopeful movement, namely the transnational dialogue civil society, which led to the production of this unprecedented trilateral history. But then again, in terms of electoral politics, in a democracy like Japan, whether there will be a significant change in the political landscape is my question.

In the area covered by Professor Arai, I think there is some reason for hope, in the sense that his Center of Documentation of Japan War Responsibility, as well as many

historians, have uncovered a really amazing wealth of information. Despite the destruction at the end of the War, and despite some resistance by certain government agencies to release these documents, I think the latest developments that the Diet library has published a collection of documents concerning the Yasukuni Shrine enshrinement of the war criminals, again, is an indication that important evidence is coming out, often thanks to the efforts by many individuals and NGOs like Mr. Arai's.

So to get this information out to the public is the very first important step. But how you get such historical evidence into the consciousness of the general public, into the textbooks that can be widely used, remains another question. As Professor Kasahara mentioned, the facts about the Nanjing Massacre as an academic subject have largely been settled in Japan. And yet, if you look at the Diet members, the LDP Diet members' group, that has been set up to revise the history of the comfort women and the Nanjing Massacre, then we ask ourselves the question, how do we bring this historical scholarship to bear on the political process?

So I'm sure there are many questions from the audience, but my basic question for the panelists is, "Where do we go from here, and specifically, what are the prospects for influencing the political process in a democracy like Japan's to overcome the historical injustice?" Just one last thing --- this is something that Professor Arai's paper mentioned but he didn't have time to speak about it --- namely, why there seemed to be a conservative resurgence in Japanese politics. And, I think he offered a very original explanation, namely that the post-war settlement between Japan and the Republic of Korea, and with the People's Republic of Korea, were settled by politicians who exercised the political leadership, and yet within Japan, in the post-war period, the bureaucracy has maintained a very strong hold on decision-making. And now, with the change in the political leadership, generational change and also ideological change, the earlier settlement is now being undermined by the current generation of politicians and leadership. That goes back to the more recent attempts to turn back the apology made by then-Cabinet minister Kono Yohei in the early 1990s. So I think again, it just goes back to the nature of Japanese democracy- that of the power of politicians and how they

influence policy-making. Think of the example of Mr. Abe's alleged interference in NHK's comfort women program issue, which maybe addressed later in the afternoon. Again, it comes into the discussion and is relevant to how in a democracy these issues are to be addressed.