

Uneasy neighbors across the sea

Japan's colonial rule in Korea between 1910 and 1945 has left open wounds that are still far from being healed

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The 1965 treaty normalizing relations between South Korea and Japan is often invoked by the Japanese government as evidence it has not neglected this shared past. It also points to the \$800 million in loans and aid it provided then as a concrete gesture of contrition. Tokyo cites the 1965 agreement to fend off individual claims for reparations, arguing that the South Korean government was obliged to distribute a portion of the settlement to individuals and that further claims were waived.

Koreans counter that at that time Tokyo withheld information regarding forced labor, and the comfort-women issue was buried until the 1990s, so the waiver does not pertain to these claims.sk

Given that South Korea was a military dictatorship until the late 1980s, and civil rights were routinely suppressed under a succession of generals, the Japanese legal position may be solid, but it is also politically awkward.

In 2005, the South Korean government released the normalization negotiation documents, sparking public fury and highlighting the difficulties of relying solely on a legalistic approach to the extremely emotional issues of colonial subjugation. The reality of a lingering, widespread sense of injustice among Koreans makes Japanese assertions that the 1965 treaty can be a lockbox for history little more than wishful thinking.

Compensating forced labor

Togo contends that Japanese companies and the government now have a chance to live up to their moral responsibility regarding claims for forced-labor



Martyr's day: Children in Seoul at a memorial service in 2005 for Ahn Jung Geun, who opposed Japan's rule in Korea and in 1909 assassinated former Japanese Prime Minister Hirobumi Ito soon after he stood down as Resident General of Korea. KYODO PHOTO

compensation.

He states, "In May 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that neither the Japanese government or companies bear any legal liability and are not criminally responsible for forced labor, but I think that this opens up an opportunity to consider the moral point of view.

"It behooves Japan to establish a joint fund by government and the private sector to provide individual compensation to victims . . . but the problem is determining the criteria and which victims are eligible."

Seizing this chance may not be easy, because it has implications for Chinese forced laborers, POWs and others who seek individual compensation. But this year Mitsubishi has agreed to compensate some 300 conscripted Korean women workers at its wartime Nagoya aircraft factory.sk

According to William Underwood, a U.S. historian with a doctorate in political science from Kyushu University, who has conducted groundbreaking research into the forced-labor issue, this decision, "is potentially Copernican . . . the big factors were the committed demonstrations against Mitsubishi in Seoul and Tokyo and well-coordinated transnational activism at the community level. Then there was a petition signed by more than 130,000 South Korean citizens and 100 members of the National Assembly, and talk of a boycott, that put this effort over the top. It is hard to see how Mitsubishi will now draw a line between the *teishintai* (Conscripted Women's Brigade) and other Korean citizens conscripted into working for its various companies. A Mitsubishi program for compensating its former labor conscripts would up the ante for other companies to follow suit."

Underwood also finds it encouraging that, in March 2010, the Japanese government finally provided "the long-sought civilian name rosters and payroll records that the South Korean government needs to carry out its own program for compensating former conscripts and their descendants."

Why it took 65 years to do so speaks volumes about Japan's mishandling of reconciliation, and why Koreans remain so resentful.



However, standing in the way of compensation is the unawareness and denial in Japan concerning forced labor and abuses. It is astonishing, Underwood says, that, during the time he was prime minister (2008-09), the LDP's Taro Aso "could contend, with media support, that the

10,000 Koreans at Aso Mining (his family's firm in Kyushu during World War II) were well treated and not unduly coerced. The Japanese media, which rarely covers the vigorous activism within Japanese society that seeks to resolve historical issues . . . barely covered the Mitsubishi announcement. It is also amazing that the Keidanren (Japan Business Federation) has been able to completely ignore the myriad claims upon Japanese industries by taking a *mokusatsu* (ignore with contempt) stance, especially in this age of corporate social responsibility and despite Keidanren's charter on ethics valuing human rights."sk

Underwood also points out that a comprehensive settlement of forced- labor compensation is complicated by claims of conscripts from North Korea, with which Japan does not have diplomatic relations. Unlike with South Korea, there are no treaty waivers.

Underwood proposes that the Japanese government release the money — including mandatory "patriotic" savings, wage arrears, end-of-work allowances, death and disability benefits — that deterred conscript workers from fleeing. That money was transferred by Japanese companies to the national treasury between 1945 and '48.

Further, Underwood suggests that those funds be used to build twin memorial museums to conscript labor in Busan (South Korea) and Fukuoka (Kyushu), the ports through which most of those workers passed. According to Underwood, an "air of mystery still surrounds the unpaid wages" and the Japanese government has not indicated what it intends to do with the money — adding, "and the hapless Japanese media has never asked."

Since the money cannot be returned to the conscripts or their relatives without setting a precedent and undermining the 1965 treaty waiver, Underwood suggests this would be a worthy use of the money, although there are North Korean claims to worry about.

Yasukuni Shrine

This past summer, one of my Korean students recalled how Junichiro Koizumi's six visits while prime minister to Yasukuni Shrine in central Tokyo had left an indelible impression.

When the news of his first such visit to this iconic Shinto shrine was announced in 2001, she recalled that her teacher stopped the class and shared his anger, explaining why such visits are intolerable.sk

To be educated in Korea, evidently, is to have no doubt about the evils of Japanese colonialism — and Yasukuni Shrine is seen as a talismanic symbol of

an unrepentant view of that imperialism. While there is much media attention focusing on the 14 Class-A war criminals that were secretly enshrined there in 1978, and on the adjacent Yushukan Museum that promotes a vindicating version of Japan's 20th-century depredations, Koreans are also incensed that some of their countrymen have been enshrined there without permission.

Given that many Koreans in the Imperial armed forces were forced to serve, and were subsequently stripped of any veterans' benefits, the enshrinement at Japan's ground zero for nationalism only adds insult to injury. Before the end of World War II, 415 Korean conscripts were enshrined at Yasukuni, but beginning in 1958, an additional 21,000 Korean souls were enshrined without permission and without bereaved families being notified.

Curiously, from a constitutional point of view regarding the separation of state and religion (as stipulated in Article 20 of the Constitution), the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare provided the list of war dead to this private religious facility that was used for the Koreans' enshrinement. The government's evasive justifications notwithstanding, its role in facilitating deification breached the Constitution and, in many cases, offended bereaved families.sk

For its part, Yasukuni Shrine has officially explained that the Koreans were actually Japanese at the time they died and thus remain so after they died. Alas, enshrinement is something of a consolation prize as this logic has not helped any Korean veterans or their survivors obtain pensions after the government rescinded their Japanese nationality following World War II.



Doing penance: Japanese scholars visiting Namyangju in northern South Korea in July 2007 pay their respects and apologize for the past at the tomb of Empress Myeongseong, Queen Min, as she is known, was assassinated by Japanese zealots in 1895. KYODO PHOTO

However, the shrine maintains that the Koreans were enshrined also, "because they fought and died believing that they would be enshrined as deities of the Yasukuni Shrine when they die as Japanese soldiers."

Perhaps, but this argument has not convinced many Koreans about the virtues of soul-snatching.

In 2007, an octogenarian veteran named Kim Hee Jong was surprised to find that he was enshrined at Yasukuni and notified authorities that he was still alive and wanted his soul back. But apparently that was an exorcism too far.

In 2001, relatives of enshrined Koreans sued the government to expunge the

names and liberate the souls of their deceased relatives from Yasukuni, arguing that "the souls of the victims, who were forcibly mobilized and were killed during Japanese colonial rule, were enshrined as deities for the war of aggression — against the religion of the victims themselves and the will of the bereaved families — and have been violated for over a half century." That case was dismissed in 2006, with the judge falling back on the 1965 treaty and justifying the handover of names to the shrine as ordinary administrative procedure.sk

Consequently, in 2007 relatives sued the shrine directly for inappropriate consecration, and are seeking an apology and ¥1 as symbolic compensation.

Taiwanese have also had no success in gaining dis-enshrinement for the straightforward reason that shrine officials do not want to set a precedent.

In resisting pressure from some quarters to remove the Class-A war criminals, one of the shrine's main "attractions," priests there maintain that deification is a one-way ticket. Purging the shrine of colonial souls might open the floodgates for other restless souls and shift attention to establishing a national war cemetery without Yasukuni's historical baggage.

Islands of eternal dispute

A French whaling ship, Le Liancourt, was nearly wrecked in 1849 on a cluster of 90 islets and reefs located between the Korean Peninsula and Japan — explaining why they are known to some as the Liancourt Rocks. The Rocks comprise twin, jagged islets surrounded by outcrops and reefs that both Japan and South Korea claim, referring to them as Takeshima and Dokdo respectively.

The South Koreans maintain a Coast Guard presence and an octopus fisherman and his wife permanently reside there.sk

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