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RECONCILING COLONIAL MEMORIES IN KOREA AND JAPAN

David Hundt and Roland Bleiker

The Republic of Korea and Japan share a tumultuous history, but arguably no period has caused greater trauma in bilateral relations than the twentieth century. After Japan's four-decade long colonial occupation of Korea, the two countries took two decades just to establish diplomatic relations. Subsequent interactions have remained seriously compromised by the memory of colonialism. This article reviews the tensions behind the tempestuous bilateral relationship, focusing on the depiction of Japan's wartime past in school textbooks. We advance three suggestions for reconciliation: viewing reconciliation not as the restoration of a harmonious pre-conflict order, but as an ongoing, incomplete process; expanding promising bilateral dialogues; and accepting that there will always be differences between Korea and Japan, most notably with regard to representations of the past. Rather than being an inevitable source of conflict, these differences should contribute to an ongoing process of negotiation between the two neighbors.

Key words: South Korea-Japan relations, history of East Asia

Introduction

Japan and South Korea have much in common, from shared cultural values to interlinked economic interests and a common

desire to contain the threat of North Korea. Both countries are liberal democracies. Both have made remarkable economic progress over several decades. And both have close political and security ties with the United States. But despite these strong bonds, significant problems often hamper the bilateral relationship between Tokyo and Seoul. The key source of tension is the memory of Japan's colonial occupation of Korea during the first half of the twentieth century. Although more than sixty years in the past, the wounds of that period are still fresh enough to generate significant political obstacles.

All political communities are in one way or another formed around questions of memory, most notably around how past traumas are used to construct a sense of shared purpose and identity. This process of identity formation is as inevitable as it is problematic. But the issues at stake are particularly significant and sensitive in Northeast Asia. Both Japan and South Korea have constructed their sense of national identity around a particular understanding of the past. And in many instances these understandings stand in sharp contrast to each other, thus generating regular political tension. The consequences of such tensions could be quite substantial, for a close relationship between Japan and South Korea may well be necessary to address a range of future security challenges in the region, such as dealing with a volatile North Korea or finding ways to mediate a possible clash between the United States and an increasingly powerful China.

Perhaps the most important (and certainly the most symbolic) point of friction is the manner in which Japanese school textbooks depict the actions of the imperial army in Korea, China and other countries. Strong disagreements have emerged between South Korea and Japan on how to represent this colonial period, and how to teach the respective "facts" to future generations. Korea regularly accuses Japan of painting a far too benevolent picture of the past—a picture that does not adequately recognize the pain and trauma inflicted by Japan's aggression and subsequent occupation of the peninsula. From a Korean perspective, Japanese leaders frequently exacerbate the situation by playing down the extent of the imperial army's responsibility for initiating and conducting war. Symbolic of this attitude are regular visits of prime ministers to the Yasukuni Shrine, designed to

honor the spirits of the war dead, including convicted war criminals. This act is seen in Japan as a way of respecting the past and affirming a sense of national identity, but in Korea the same actions are perceived as a form of disrespect, even aggression.

The clash between these different representations of the past has been publicly debated for years. Politicians and intellectuals in both Korea and Japan comment on them, with positions ranging anywhere from hostile accusation to attempts at compromise. But no lasting resolution seems in sight. The impasse remains as fundamental as ever, and significant political tensions over the issue of historical representation resurface on a regular basis.

The purpose of our article is to analyze the reasons for this recurring impasse and, more importantly, to arrive at theoretically informed but practically relevant suggestions about how to address them. After identifying tensions between Korea and Japan we focus in particular on competing understandings of the past. We observe the evolution and significance of disagreements about history textbooks, demonstrating how they remain a source of tension. We also pay attention to the Yasukuni issue and how it links past and present in a highly symbolic manner for both Japan and Korea.

The second part of the article then advances three suggestions about how to promote a culture of reconciliation between Japan and Korea. First, we stress the need to view reconciliation not, as is commonly done, as an attempt to restore some authentic, pre-conflict harmony between the parties engaged. Instead, we highlight the inherently political and ongoing process of reconciliation: the fact that both parties need to be aware of the problematic nature of coming to terms with a violent colonial past. Second, we stress the importance of dialogue, particularly the need to exchange ideas about how to represent (and teach) an understanding of history that is acceptable to both sides. While substantial progress has been made in this realm, most notably with the joint production of a history textbook in 2005, we also highlight a third, less recognized component: the need to accept that there will always be differences in how the past is represented and understood. Rather than seeing them as an inevitable source of conflict, differences in historical understanding should be recognized as part of a normal, ongoing, and

perhaps even enriching process of negotiation between two respectful neighboring states.

A disclaimer is in order before we can start our inquiry. Relations between Japan and South Korea do, of course, take place in a larger context of highly complex regional political and economic interactions. Given the limited scope of this article, we can touch only marginally on related issues. As a result, there will, for instance, be no detailed engagement with the highly significant economic dimensions of bilateral relations. Nor will there be any analysis of the division of the Korean peninsula and of the threat that North Korea's nuclear ambitions pose. The latter is of equal concern to Seoul and Tokyo and forms an important part of political dynamics in the region. Finally, our focus on South Korean reactions to Japanese school textbooks needs to be placed in context. Japan is, of course, not the only country to be accused of teaching its national history in a highly politicized manner. The political appropriation of education in both Koreas is just as apparent. This is not surprising given the tumultuous century of occupation and division that the peninsula has endured. Dennis Hart, for instance, stresses that school textbooks present "tales of national identity" that reflect the very specific and politically motivated preferences of both North and South Korea.¹ In the North Korean case, a strong discourse of anti-imperialism, focused largely on the role of Japan and the United States, is an essential element of national mythology. Highly significant as the related political dynamics are, a brief essay—like the present one—cannot engage them in detail. Our purpose remains limited to examining the interactions between South Korea and Japan.

1. Dennis Hart, "Remembering the Nation and Self: Construction of the March First Movement in North and South Korean History Textbooks," paper presented at the International Studies Association Conference, Los Angeles, March 18, 2000, p. 2; Dennis Hart, "Creating the National Other: Opposing Images of Nationalism in South and North Korean Education," *Korean Studies*, vol. 23 (1999), pp. 68-93; and Roland Bleiker and Hoang Young-ju, "Remembering and Forgetting the Korean War: From Trauma to Reconciliation," in Duncan S. A. Bell, ed., *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship between Past and Present* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 195-212.

The Roots of Persisting Tensions

Japanese Colonialism in Korea

Constituting a natural link between the Asian mainland and Japan, the Korean peninsula has always been an important factor in the security policy of the surrounding powers. It is also likely to remain so in the future. The importance of the peninsula intensified particularly at the end of the nineteenth century. In the wake of the entry of the Western powers into East Asia, Korea and its neighbors were forced to open up in the mid-1870s. Ushered into action by the appearance of Commodore Matthew Perry's "Black Ships" in the 1850s, Japan sought to join the imperial contest in an attempt to avoid exploitation at the hands of the West. Influence over Korea was seen as essential in this process. In 1876 Japan became the first country (other than China) to establish formal diplomatic ties with Korea. A decade later Japanese ambitions regarding the peninsula started to become more menacing, particularly when the minister of war, Yamagata Aritomo, linked Japanese independence to a dual defense strategy. He argued that besides Japan's line of sovereignty running along its borders, Tokyo also had to defend a certain line of interest. The Korean peninsula, Yamagata reasoned, was within this line of interest because whoever occupied it would wield enormous control over East Asia.² As a result, Japan fought two wars for the control of Korea, one in 1894-1895 against China, the other in 1904-1905 against Tsarist Russia. The outcome of these conflicts was the basis for Korea's annexation into the Japanese colonial empire in 1910.

Although Japanese control of the peninsula ended in 1945, the colonial period remains firmly embedded in the collective memory of the Korean people. For Japan, Korea was the first step toward the goal of regional dominance. During the occupation, the Japanese colonial administration tried everything possi-

2. Marlene Mayo, "Attitudes toward Asia and the Beginnings of Japanese Empire," in Jon Livingston, Joe Moore, and Felicia Oldfather, eds., *Imperial Japan, 1800-1945* (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 214-15; Mikiso Hane, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey*, rev. ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986), pp. 157-62.

ble to eradicate Korean identity—to the point that schools were not allowed to teach Korean history, culture, or language. Koreans were forced to adopt Japanese names and to worship at Shinto shrines, thus affirming their fealty to the Japanese emperor. The Korean economy was forcibly incorporated into the Japanese imperial project, disrupting the traditional lifestyles of millions of people. All attempts to thwart colonial control were brutally suppressed, although guerilla forces such as that headed by future North Korean president Kim Il Sung defied the Japanese until 1945. Without an appreciation of the harshness of the occupation, and the traumatic impact it had on Korea and its sense of identity, it is impossible to understand the sensitivity that surrounds current disagreements on questions of historical representation.

Post-War Tensions Despite Rapprochement

In the process of dismantling the Japanese colonial empire, American and Soviet troops occupied the peninsula, dividing it into two parts along the thirty-eighth parallel. This arbitrary partition of Korea in 1945, and the ensuing Korean War (1950-1953), transformed a supposedly provisional settlement into a permanent division of the peninsula. That change must to a substantial degree be attributed to the strategic and symbolic importance of Korea in the emerging cold-war power struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. Initially the competition over the Korean peninsula was largely a rivalry between these two hegemony. However, the struggle for influence in Korea did not remain a Soviet-American affair. With the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s and the reemergence of Japan as an economic power, the situation in Korea became directly linked to the security and economic interests of the four great powers: the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan.

Despite this increasing regional intertwinement of politics and economics, relations between Japan and South Korea were almost nonexistent during the first two decades of the post-war period. The two countries established official diplomatic ties only in 1965, and only then under pressure from the United States. Strategic calculations were the primary reason why Washington wanted to resolve the diplomatic impasse between Japan and Korea. The United States sought to coordinate its var-

ious bilateral alliances in East Asia in a more coherent alliance network. This became especially important during the mid-1960s, when Washington searched for allies that could participate in the unpopular war in Viet Nam. Because memories of Japan's militaristic past were still far too fresh, Washington expected Tokyo to play a primarily logistical role, which it did. South Korea, in turn, contributed ground troops to Indochina. In return the United States integrated Seoul closer into its alliance network and financed an expansion of South Korea's military capacities.

Economic reasons also motivated the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan. Washington sought to encourage a mutually beneficial scenario whereby South Korea would serve as a market for Japanese manufactured goods, and Japanese firms would invest in Korea. The result was a process that re-created the economic sphere that had existed during the colonial period. A brief look at Korean economic development in the post-war period reveals that this strategy was a resounding success. Japan has indeed served as an economic model for South Korea. For instance, the latter has adopted many of Japan's basic strategies of development, from a state-led industrialization process to the promotion of an export-oriented manufacturing sector.³

Without the push from Washington the initiation of a rapprochement between Tokyo and Seoul would most likely have taken much longer, and South Korea may not have enjoyed such high rates of economic growth in the past few decades. But the burgeoning economic relationship between Japan and Korea has come at a heavy price. The fostering of economic relations was a response to the strategic-military problem that the United States faced in the 1960s. However, this did not adequately address the underlying political issues in Korean-Japanese relations. It is thus not surprising that the atmosphere of the newly established bilat-

3. Wookhee Shin, "Geopolitical Determinants of Political Economy: The Cold War and South Korean Political Economy," *Asian Perspective*, vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall-Winter, 1994), p. 123; Bruce Cumings, "The Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy: Industrial Sectors, Product Cycles and Political Consequences," *International Organization*, vol. 38, No. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 1-40.

eral relationship remained rather distant and formal initially.

Reasons for the odd combination of a close economic collaboration with rather distant political relations can be found within the internal dynamics in both Japan and South Korea. Park Chung Hee, South Korea's president from 1961 until his assassination eighteen years later, had numerous reasons to establish closer ties with Japan. He had served in the Japanese imperial army. Park was also a noted admirer of the Japanese state, despite the calamities that it had wrought upon his own country. He was particularly drawn to the idea that national security and economic development were two sides of the same coin. Termed *fukoku kyōhei* ("rich country, strong army"), the slogan served as one of the guiding principles of Meiji-era Japan. Upon his seizure of power via a military coup in 1961, Park sought to imitate the Japanese model by establishing a strong state that could then drive the process of national development. Normalizing relations with Japan was an opportunity for Park to achieve what he considered to be two key goals at once: to ensure the ongoing support of the U.S. and to launch a process of economic development.

But Park's desire to normalize relations with Japan faced a major political obstacle: the memory of Japan's colonial occupation. Park knew that most South Koreans fervently opposed normalization. Even though his regime had a substantial security apparatus and proved willing to suppress challenges to its authority, promoting normalization with Japan was a significant political risk for Park. Tellingly, Park justified the renewal of diplomatic ties with Japan in terms of Korea's obligations to its cold-war patron, the United States, which had come to the rescue of the South in 1950. He also used Korea's position in the anti-communist alliance system to justify the dispatch of troops to Indochina. Little or no mention was made of the importance of reaching some sort of reconciliation with Japan. As a result, there was never a substantial public debate within South Korea about the merits and demerits of normalizing relations with Japan, leaving a major gap in how the population perceives its powerful neighbor. This is one of the reasons why anti-Japanese sentiments remained highly prominent even in the 1990s and beyond. The democratization of Korea from the late 1980s provided an opening for long-held and long-repressed feelings of resentment to emerge. A popular undercurrent of anger thus

remained and manifested itself in large-scale demonstrations against Japanese leaders who dared defend their country's wartime record or make statements perceived as slighting Korea.

Questions of reconciliation (or even normalization) were addressed in an equally inadequate manner within Japan. Instead of reaching an adequate political settlement with the peoples of its former colonies, Japan's interaction with the region has largely been economic in nature. For instance, political relations with China have for decades remained basic at best, problematic at worst. This uneven regional engagement can be traced back to the so-called Yoshida Doctrine, which foresaw that Japan would rely on the United States for its security so that it could devote itself to economic recovery.⁴ The structures of the cold-war alliance system thus held back, at least to some extent, a process of regional political engagement that could have dismantled some of the tensions among former enemies. They are also one of the main reasons why there has been far too little critical evaluation of Japan's war record within the country itself.

The lack of normalization—and the related tension—between Japan and South Korea became more visible with the move into a post-cold war order. The dissolution of the USSR weakened the rationale for the American presence in Northeast Asia. The United States thus wants its allies to accept a larger share of the burden of ensuring regional stability. Seen from Washington, the most obvious candidate for taking on greater regional responsibility is Japan. It has one of the biggest economies in the world alongside a relatively low level of defense spending. The scale and sophistication of Japan's military are nonetheless substantial, all the more since it has started to feel less constrained by the so-called Peace Constitution that U.S. occupation forces imposed on the country after the war. Tokyo has also tried to leave behind the constraints of the Yoshida Doctrine and adopt a more "normal" foreign policy. In some ways this transition parallels the situation in Europe, where the task consisted of finding a *modus operandi* with the wartime aggressor, Germany. And here the model suggests that successful economic integra-

4. Michael H. Armacost and Kenneth B. Pyle, "Japan and the Unification of Korea: Challenges for U.S. Policy Coordination," *NBR Analysis*, vol. 10, No. 1 (March, 1999), pp. 11-12.

tion eventually resulted in more intimate political ties.⁵

But the situation in East Asia has turned out to be different. China and both Koreas are inherently suspicious of Japanese ambitions in the region. Victims of Japan's wartime aggression, these countries fear that Japanese influence is reemerging despite Tokyo having not yet fully acknowledged and apologized for its highly problematic actions in the past.⁶ Until Japan has successfully embarked on a process that the Germans call *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past), countries such as South Korea believe that Tokyo is unfit to play a bigger regional role.

The Past as a Source of Conflict: Japan's History Textbooks

The main source of tension between South Korea and Japan is thus the past. Or, to be more precise, the two sides differ markedly in their understandings of what took place in the past and how the politicians in the present should represent and account for those differences.

The past can, of course, never be remembered authentically. A certain selection of facts, perspectives, and interpretations shapes all understandings of history. The combination of forgetting and remembering is inevitable in this process. History, in this sense, is as much about the present and the future as it is about the past. At the time an event takes place there is no memory. Historical awareness emerges later and by necessity includes values and interests that have nothing to do with the original occurrence. History is thus one of the prime sites of politics, as Nietzsche was well aware. He was particularly critical of periods during which historical understandings lacked critical awareness of this process—situations, say, when powerful rulers failed to gain legitimacy on their own and thus relied on the misappropriation of historical figures and events to justify par-

5. Gilbert Rozman, "Japan and Korea: Should the US Be Worried about Their New Spat in 2001?" *Pacific Review*, vol. 15, No. 1 (March, 2002), pp. 2-3.

6. Michael Heazle, "Sino-Japanese Relations and Japan's Emerging Foreign Policy Crisis," *Griffith Asia Institute Regional Outlook*, May 2005, p. 3.

ticular forms of governance, even dominance.⁷ Signs of such political appropriation of history are certainly evident in both Japan and Korea, where the past is still far too close and far too traumatic to allow for even a remotely objective agreement about historical facts.

One of the most contentious issues between South Korea and Japan has indeed revolved around how to represent the past—most notably the imperial and colonial period—in history textbooks. Before we engage the issues at stake it is necessary to stress that education is one of the most central societal mechanisms through which histories and political identities are produced, reproduced, and entrenched. Laura Hein and Mark Selden argue that “schools and textbooks are important vehicles through which contemporary societies transmit ideas of citizenship and both the idealized past and the promised future of a community.”⁸ What students learn during the first few years of their lives inevitably influences their political and social attitude for decades to come. While narratives of nationhood create boundaries between self and other from the very beginning of the educational cycle, secondary school education plays a particularly crucial political role. It is at this level that historical narratives are first taught in detail, thereby providing interpretive and factual foundations for the previously established sense of identity.⁹ School education is thus a powerful way of promoting a particular form of political socialization. The objectives of a state can often be achieved most effectively “at a distance,”

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben,” in *Unzeitgemässe betrachtungen* (Frankfurt: Insel Taschenbuch, 1981), pp. 106-7, 111.

8. Laura Hein and Mark Selden, “The Lessons of War, Global Power and Social Change,” in Hein and Selden, eds., *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany and the United States* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), p. 3. See also Sirkka Ahonen, “Politics of Identity through History Curriculum: Narratives of the Past for Social Exclusion—Or Inclusion?” *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 33, No. 2 (February, 2001), pp. 179-94.

9. Lee Yoonmi, *Modern Education, Textbooks and the Image of the Nation: Politics of Modernization and Nationalism in Korean Education* (New York: Garland, 2000); Georgie D. M. Hyde, *South Korea: Education, Culture and Economy* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1988).

through various mechanisms that seem, at first sight, of a non-political nature. They include not only education but also the organization of welfare, health, town planning, and the regulation of crime and the economy.¹⁰

Public perception in Korea and elsewhere often suggests that Japanese textbooks have ignored the war and the pain Japan inflicted upon the peoples of surrounding countries. The situation is, however, less static and more complex. Reflecting larger political patterns, periods of conservative historical attitudes sometimes gave way to more progressive ones, only to yield again to more hardened positions.

Japanese history textbooks, like those in most countries, have been revised about once every four years. The Japanese Ministry of Education has the power to “oversee,” and if necessary correct, these revisions. Perhaps more than in other countries, political motives have driven this practice. The most contentious issues have often revolved not around what was *added* to the narrative about sensitive periods, such as war or occupation, but around what was *omitted*. For instance, the Japanese textbooks produced soon after the end of the war were largely factual accounts of the atrocities committed by the imperial army. But in the 1950s, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government sought to erase mention of events such as the Nanjing Massacre.

During the mid-1990s a turn took place toward a significantly more critical appraisal of Japanese history. This transition was facilitated by the removal from power of the more conservative elements of the Japanese polity. The long reign of the LDP ended in 1993. Power passed to the more progressive Social Democratic Party (SDP) and others from outside the traditional political elite. Several symbolic steps soon followed. With the LDP in opposition, the Japanese parliament (Diet) marked the

10. Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, 2nd ed. (London: Free Association Books, 1999); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999); Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

fiftieth anniversary of the war's end by passing a resolution that stressed the need to learn from the past. Although the resolution was passed with less than half of Diet members in attendance, it was nonetheless considered an important step toward a more critical engagement with the nation's problematic imperial past.¹¹ This changing attitude was also reflected in history textbook publication. For instance, the factually more accurate term "invasion" was reintroduced after it had previously been dropped in favor of a more "neutral" vocabulary. The textbooks that were released in the early and mid-1990s also included accounts of events that were previously ignored, such as the active role that the Japanese government played in coercing women from Korea and other occupied territories into sexual slavery.¹²

This shift in historical consciousness within Japan, symbolic and minimal though it was, contributed to an improvement in relations with South Korea. Of further benefit to this process was the election of Kim Dae Jung, a former dissident, as South Korea's president in 1998. Reacting to Tokyo's opening, Kim pursued a more conciliatory stance toward Japan. He did so largely against public sentiments in Korea, which were at this time still largely hostile to Japan. Kim nevertheless called for the two countries to put the past behind them. He chose a symbolic first step by agreeing to reduce, and subsequently eliminate, longstanding barriers to more sustained cultural relations. For instance, he lifted a longstanding ban on Japanese movies and cartoons. Koreans had maintained this ban due to widespread fears that Japan would once again seek to dominate their country and erase their identity, as it did during the colonial period. The high point of Kim's Japan diplomacy came during his October 1998 visit to Tokyo. According to the official transcript of the president's meeting with then

11. Yeong-ho Choi, "Nambukhan Daeil Woegyo Jeongchaek Bigyo-wa Jeon-mang" (A Comparison of and Prospects for the Foreign Policies of North and South Korea toward Japan), *Hanguk Dongbuka Nonchong*, vol. 6, No. 4 (December, 2001), p. 132.

12. International Crisis Group, *North East Asia's Undercurrents of Conflict* (Seoul and Brussels: International Crisis Group, Asia Report No. 108, December 15, 2005), pp. 13-14; see also Arif Dirlik, "'Past Experience, If Not Forgotten, Is a Guide to the Future'; Or, What Is in a Text? The Politics of History in Chinese-Japanese Relations," *Boundary 2*, vol. 18, No. 3 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 29-58.

Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo, Kim stressed that “the present calls upon both countries to overcome their unfortunate history and to build a future-oriented relationship based on reconciliation as well as good-neighborly and friendly cooperation.”¹³

The Reemergence of Tension over School Textbooks

The 1990s thus witnessed a more conciliatory approach to the issue of history teaching, which also led to an improvement of relations between Japan and Korea. A basis for reconciliation appeared to be forming. But by the end of the decade things started to change again for the worse. Signs of a return to a more conservative position had already started to emerge in Japan. Just as the LDP’s absence from power created the conditions for a more tolerant understanding of history, so the party’s return to power in 1996 gradually increased conservative pressures for Japan to stop apologizing for the past. To conservative forces in Japan, the insertion of references to issues such as the “Nanjing Massacre” into school textbooks was a problematic concession towards what is sometimes termed a “politically correct” or “black armband” view of history in countries such as Australia and the United States. Why, conservatives asked, should Japan be forced to repeatedly apologize for things that happened long ago, especially when some inaccuracies have been found between accounts of those events? Conservatives thus tended to see complaints about history textbooks primarily as attempts by Japan’s neighbors to prevent Tokyo from assuming a more self-confident role as an important regional power.

Subsequent LDP governments allowed textbooks to be revised in ways that are far less critical of Japan’s wartime past than the versions released in the first half of the 1990s. As the changes became more prominent the South Korean government began to publicly oppose them. It did, for instance, suggest more

13. “Japan-Republic of Korea Joint Declaration: A New Japan-Republic of Korea Partnership towards the Twenty-First Century,” in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 8, 1998, online at www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/korea/joint9810.html); see also Armacost and Pyle, “Japan and the Unification of Korea,” pp. 22-23.

than thirty changes to new and existing textbooks released in 2001. The issues Korea highlighted included the inadequate mention of the forcible annexation of Korea into the Japanese empire and Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea in 1592.¹⁴ Most complaints related to changes made to the *New History Textbook*. This textbook was produced by the conservative Senkai Shimbun's Fusosha publishing house and commissioned by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*), a nationalist organization that has vehemently criticized the version of history that appeared in Japanese textbooks in the 1990s.

The history debate recently intensified again when the Tokyo metropolitan government approved a new version of Fusosha's textbook for use in 2005. As was the case four years previously, South Korea and China complained that this textbook presented Japanese schoolchildren with a distorted view of their country's wartime actions. A Korean non-governmental organization, the Asian Peace and Harmony Education Network (APHEN), draws attention to what it believes are the most egregious distortions in the 2005 version of Fusosha's textbook. The book claimed that Koreans participated in colonial institutions, such as the imperial army, for commercial reasons. That is, the textbook gave the impression that Koreans voluntarily joined the Japanese army to further their careers. Also implied is that the so-called comfort women were not victims of war, coerced into sexual slavery by the imperial army. Instead, the textbook suggests that they were simply professional prostitutes who chose to work in the Japanese army, which adequately paid them. APHEN also claims that the revised history textbook makes no mention of those Japanese who opposed the war effort, as well as Koreans and Chinese who resisted Japanese rule. The overall impression is that there was little or no resistance to Japanese domination. Japanese schoolchildren could thus surmise that other countries in East Asia welcomed and benefited from Japanese rule.¹⁵

14. Choi, "Nambukhan Daeil Woegyo Jeongchaek Bigyo-wa Jeonmang," p. 133.

15. Asia Peace and Harmony Education Network, "Waekok Naeyong" (Content of Distortion), 2005, online at www.ilovehistory.or.kr; see also Tae-Young Lee, "Problems in the Writing of Korean History Textbooks,"

In response to these accusations, Japan's minister for education claimed that the old depiction of history in school textbooks was simply too "self-torturing" for the country. It stressed, instead, that Japan should be proud of its history. The minister later apologized for his remarks as did various other officials. But the ministry did not use its powers to prevent the publication of the Fusosha textbook in its "revised" state.¹⁶

Reacting to this changing Japanese attitude, the new South Korean president, Roh Moo Hyun, signaled a departure from the conciliatory approach of his predecessor, Kim Dae Jung. Seoul explicitly opposed the reemergence of Japan as an active regional power unless Tokyo first acknowledged its wartime past and assumed responsibility for ensuring that current and future generations of schoolchildren have access to a full account of relevant historical facts about their country's involvement in the war. Roh stressed that "we can no longer stand by and just watch [Japan's] intentions to realize hegemony once again."¹⁷ In concrete terms this meant that South Korea would oppose a stronger global role for Japan, such as a possible permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

There is, of course, no uniform agreement in Japan about how its imperial past ought to be represented today. There are heated debates about how to deal with the textbook issue and related political challenges. Indeed, some of the most vociferous criticism of a conservative, patriotic rendition of Japanese history has come from within Japan itself, rather than from countries such as China and South Korea. A coalition of leftist politicians, liberal intellectuals, and schoolteachers had, in fact, succeeded in removing at least some of the most obvious inadequacies from textbook presentation of the imperial army's past.¹⁸ A number of

Korea Journal, vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 323-36.

16. Victor D. Cha, "Nuclear Sea of Fire," *Comparative Connections*, vol. 6, No. 3 (October, 2004), pp. 130-31; Heazle, "Sino-Japanese Relations and Japan's Emerging Foreign Policy Crisis," p. 9; David C. Kang, "Improving and Maturing, but Slowly," *Comparative Connections*, vol. 6, No. 4 (January, 2005), pp. 141-42.
17. Quoted in Won Go, "Daeil Ganggyeong Daeung-ui Jeongchijeok Hamui" (The Political Implications of a Hard-Line Response to Japan), *Donghyang-gwa-Bunseok*, March 31, 2005, p. 11.
18. *North East Asia's Undercurrents of Conflict*, pp. 12-13.

civic groups, led by Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21, also protested specifically against Fusosha's new textbook. The Japan Teachers' Union went as far as to indicate that its members would resist pressure from the Ministry of Education to adopt the book. So far the book has indeed not been widely used. The Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform aimed at an adoption rate of 10 percent, but initial estimates indicated that less than 1 percent of Japanese schools decided to use the book.¹⁹ In other words, the proportion of Japanese schoolchildren exposed to the less critical version of their country's history is not yet significant. But this does not change the fact that the new textbook, and the public debates surrounding it, remain a major source of tension in relations between Japan and Korea.

Politicizing the Past: Yasukuni Shrine between Japan and South Korea

Statements and gestures by Japanese leaders have further intensified the most recent round of disagreements with South Korea. The most significant—and symbolically charged—of them were the repeated visits of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro to the Yasukuni Shrine. Yasukuni honors Japan's war dead, including several politicians and military leaders who were executed for war crimes. The government in Seoul saw these visits as highly public and symbolic attempts to legitimize Japan's aggression prior to and during the war. South Korea, as well as other victims of Japan's imperial ambitions, thus interpreted the visits as a clear refusal of Japan's current leaders to disassociate themselves from the country's problematic past.

Koizumi was not the first senior politician to visit the shrine in the post-war period, not even since the enshrinement of several war criminals in the late 1970s. Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro's visit in 1985 attracted particularly widespread media coverage—and a strong reaction from neighboring countries. Prime ministerial visits then ceased until 1996, when Hashimoto

19. David C. Kang and Ji-Young Lee, "Little Progress on North Korea or History Disputes," *Comparative Connections*, vol. 7, No. 2 (July, 2005), pp. 136-37; *North East Asia's Undercurrents of Conflict*, pp. 13-14.

Ryutaro visited the shrine upon the return to power of the LDP. That visit again provoked a strong public protest from China and Korea. Hashimoto's successors abstained from visiting the shrine, at least in a public function. But senior LDP politicians began to visit the shrine more openly in a "private capacity."²⁰ Tokyo's conservative governor, Ishihara Shintaro, has also visited the shrine on several occasions in an official capacity.

Koizumi made one visit to the shrine for each of the six years that he served as prime minister, usually on or about the anniversary of the end of World War II. For instance in May 2001, the prime minister announced that he would visit Yasukuni on August 15 in a private capacity. He flagged the likelihood of repeat visits, which would be in an official capacity. The reaction from China and Korea was predictably negative, sparking another cycle of recriminations between Japan and its neighbors. Perhaps to appease the sentiments of other countries in the region, Koizumi visited the shrine two days prior to the sensitive anniversary of the war's end.²¹ Further visits took place in subsequent years, causing repeated bouts of opposition in China and Korea. For instance, after Koizumi's January 2004 visit, President Roh said: "a national leader should not behave like a thoughtless person or a politician hungry for popularity."²² The fifth visit took place in October 2005, in response to which the leaders of both South Korea and China cancelled their scheduled summits with Koizumi at the following month's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Pusan. These leaders also cancelled a trilateral summit at the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)-Plus-Three gathering in December.²³

The timing of the sixth and final visit was arguably the most controversial, falling on August 15, 2006. Once again Japan's neighbors took umbrage at what they considered to be an act of gross insensitivity. At the same time it was well known that

20. Kazuhiko Togo, "A Moratorium on Yasukuni Visits," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 169, No. 5 (June, 2006), pp. 6-10.

21. Choi, "Nambukhan Daeil Woegyo Jeongchaek Bigyo-wa Jeonmang," pp. 136-37.

22. Quoted in Victor D. Cha, "Happy Birthday, Mr. Kim," *Comparative Connections*, vol. 6, No. 1 (April, 2004), p. 119.

23. David C. Kang and Ji-Young Lee, "The Big Chill," *Comparative Connections*, vol. 7, No. 4 (January, 2006), pp. 125-27.

Koizumi's retirement was impending, and that no further damage could be done to relations with Korea and China. There were hopes that Koizumi's successor, Abe Shinzo, would adopt a more circumspect approach to the shrine visits.²⁴ But at this writing Abe's intentions are unclear.

The main reasons for Japan's seemingly stubborn insistence on maintaining these visits seem to be linked to the perceived need to establish a more self-confident sense of national identity, one that is linked to pride about Japan's role in the region and the world as a whole. Koizumi, in particular, seemed intent on leaving a legacy of a more confident Japan. He represented parts of the political spectrum that believe the country has apologized sufficiently for the past. Korea and China, so this argument goes, will never be satisfied with Japan's apologies. They will always hold the past against Japan. This is why conservative elements in Japan see the past as something that its neighbors must simply "get over." The most radical representatives of this position hold that, as a result, Japan should neither feel constrained by its neighbors nor try to appease them. It should simply pursue its own approach to the teaching of history or the formulation of foreign policy.²⁵

As with the specific issue of textbooks, the symbolic visits to Yasukuni are far from uncontroversial within Japan. They are hotly debated. Not everybody agrees with the prevailing governmental line. The editor-in-chief of the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Watanabe Tsuneo, broke with conservative ranks by calling for a resolution of the history issue. In an interview in early 2006 he stressed how Yasukuni acts as a symbolic impediment to better relations with other countries in the region. Watanabe clearly pointed out that the "Yasukuni Shrine operates a war museum that incites militarism and displays exhibits in praise of militarism. It is wrong for the Prime Minister to visit such a place."²⁶ This is not an isolated

24. Deborah Cameron, "Silvertail Hawk to Take Helm at Crucial Time," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 20, 2006; G. John Ikenberry, "Japan's History Problem," *Washington Post*, August 17, 2006.

25. Taku Tamaki, "Taking the 'Taken-for-Grantedness' Seriously: Problematizing Japan's Perception of Japan-South Korea Relations," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol. 4, No. 1 (February, 2004), pp. 153-54.

26. Quoted in Deborah Cameron, "Shrine Could Be Straw that Breaks Koizumi's Back," *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 22, 2006. The results of

position. Others too think that the Yasukuni controversy does not serve the national interest. Indeed the current Japanese head of state, Emperor Akihito, who has played a key role in improving relations with Korea, has never visited the shrine. And it was revealed in July 2006 that Akihito's father and the wartime emperor, Hirohito, stopped visiting the shrine in the 1970s after he discovered that it housed the spirits of war criminals.²⁷ Thus, just as conservative politicians began publicly visiting the shrine as an illustration of national pride, the emperor—the embodiment of the nation—deemed it inappropriate to do so.

Reconciliation as an Ongoing Political Project

Some form of reconciliation between Japan and South Korea is still needed, even though the two countries have long normalized economic and diplomatic relations. The task ahead is not gargantuan either. Economic relations are relatively close already and no military conflict is likely to break out between these neighbors. But problems nevertheless exist and they continue to hamper collaborative efforts. Political, security, economic, and cultural relations would improve substantially if Tokyo and Seoul were to find a basic agreement on how to deal with their diverging approaches to representing and dealing with the past. And such an improvement is badly needed to deal with various security challenges, from dealing with the threat of North Korea to finding ways of integrating an increasingly powerful China into the region. A close working relationship between South Korea and Japan could provide substantial stability to a region that could otherwise experience serious tension and conflict.

We make three suggestions here about how to advance the process of reconciliation. The first point is a basic one, related to the conceptualization of reconciliation as such. The concept has gained particular prominence in the post-cold war period. It usually refers to attempts at establishing basic political stability

Yomiuri's critical evaluation of Japan's war record are presented in "Showa War Verification Special," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 13, 2006.
27. Deborah Cameron, "Emperor Ignites War Crimes Row," *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 22, 2006.

in societies divided by the memory of a violent past. Prominent examples include South Africa's effort to overcome the effects of the apartheid period and attempts to embark on peacebuilding processes in places like East Timor, Bosnia, and Rwanda, where devastating ethnic conflicts had torn apart much of the societal fabric. Other examples include political processes in Australia and Canada, where tension persists between the majority settler community and the (largely decimated) indigenous population.

Although usually associated with processes of healing within a certain society or political system, the concept of reconciliation can also apply to bilateral relationships, such as between Japan and Korea. The idea of reconciliation is, indeed, part of a long tradition, rooted in Christendom and linked to key modern philosophers, such as Hegel. But this Western heritage is, of course, also linked to particular Western values. It is thus reasonable to question whether or not the concept of reconciliation can or should be applied to a fundamentally different cultural environment in Northeast Asia. Some of the traditional understandings of reconciliation are, indeed, rather problematic. This is particularly the case with approaches that see reconciliation as an effort to establish some form of authentic political and social harmony: an original situation of idyllic relations that is said to have existed prior to the conflict in question. In a quasi-religious manner these approaches seek to establish idealized notions of community, but by doing so risk preventing, rather than encouraging, political understanding of the reconciliation process.

The task of reconciliation, then, is not to restore a pre-conflict order, but to create a new one. Andrew Schaap, through extensive scholarship on the subject, recognizes this danger. He stresses that reconciliation is not about settling accounts or restoring preexisting relationships between parties in conflict. The key task, he insists, is of a more intricate and perhaps also more unsettling nature. It consists of actually enacting "a radical break with the social order that underpinned the violence of the past."²⁸ Schaap furthermore stresses that this process cannot be

28. Andrew Schaap, "Agonism in Divided Societies," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 32, No. 2 (March, 2006), pp. 255-77. See also Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (London: Routledge, 2005); and "Reconciliation as Ideology and Politics: An Exercise in Reconceptual Retrieval," unpublished

determined in advance, fixed through some universal code that is good for all places and times. Rather, reconciliation must be seen as an ongoing, even open-ended process. It is one rooted less in a set of laws and procedures than in what some scholars called an “ethos of critical engagement”: a form of ethics that promotes respect for multiple parties and perspectives.²⁹

Engaging the residues of deep-seated antagonisms, as they still exist between Korea and Japan, is neither easy nor straightforward. This is all the more the case if one conceptualizes reconciliation, as Schaap does, as “openness to listen to those who appear to us unreasonable and a willingness to question what counts as reasonable political speech.”³⁰

We now seek to spell out what such an open-ended approach to reconciliation would look like in the context of the difficult relationship between Japan and South Korea. And we do so by focusing on two key tasks: first, promoting dialogue to reach at least a basic understanding of what happened in the past, and how this past should be represented; and second, dealing with the inevitable differences that remain once such a process of dialogue has been exhausted.

Reconciliation as a Dialogue about the Past

Susan Dwyer identifies three stages in the process of reconciliation, particularly in the context of coming to terms with traumatic events that took place in the past. The first, she says, consists of an effort to find agreement on “the barest of facts.” The second stage involves identifying a range of different interpretations of the respective events. And the third stage entails narrowing things down to a limited set of interpretations that the two sides can tolerate. While such a goal of agreeing to disagree seems modest, the way toward it is littered with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The first hurdle alone is huge, for

ms., July 2006.

29. William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 51, 155; and Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. xv-xix.

30. Schaap, “Agonism in Divided Societies.”

Dwyer defines agreeing on “the barest of facts” as finding a clear view on “who did what to whom and when.”³¹ Disagreements between South Korea and Japan exist precisely on this issue—establishing exactly “who did what to whom and when.”

While the end point envisaged by Dwyer’s understanding of reconciliation is highly ambitious, perhaps even elusive, the route she maps out is compelling and, indeed, necessary. Reconciliation cannot take place without the parties in conflict engaging in a dialogue about what happened in the past. Such a dialogue starts with the simple task of comparing different understandings of past events. Richard Kearney refers to this process as an “exchange of narrative memories.” Although writing in the context of Northern Ireland, Kearney’s recommendation is just as relevant for reconciliation between South Korea and Japan, for such exchanges would allow the opposing sides to “see each other through alternative eyes.”³²

A History-making Initiative

We now examine the potential and limit of reaching dialogical agreements on past events by focusing on a particular and highly promising recent initiative, the so-called *History Opens the Future* project. The Kim Dae Jung government initiated the project in 2001 in collaboration with its Japanese counterpart. It is noteworthy that the project began prior to Koizumi’s ascension to the office of prime minister. It brought together historians, educators, scholars, and NGO representatives from China, Japan, and South Korea, who collectively faced the very problem of conflicting memories of the past. They started by comparing different understandings of the turbulent relations between these three countries during and after the end of the nineteenth century.³³

31. Susan Dwyer, “Reconciliation for Realists,” *Ethics and International Affairs*, vol. 13, No. 1 (March, 1999), p. 89.

32. Richard Kearney, “Narrative and the Ethics of Remembrance,” in Kearney and Mark Dooley, eds., *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 26-27.

33. *Mirae-reul yeoneun Yeoksa: Han Jung Il-i hamgye mandeun Dong Asia 3guk-ui Geunhyeondaesa* (History Opens the Future: The Contemporary and Modern History of Three East Asian Countries) (Seoul: Trilateral Joint History Editorial Committee, Hangyeorae Sinmunsa, 2005). Hereafter

This project is intended to supplement, not replace, existing history textbooks in each country. The objective was thus different from those of *normal* history textbooks. Most history textbooks either recount national histories or cover specific events or periods from a particular, nationalist perspective. The authors of *History Opens the Future*, by contrast, sought to provide a single unified narrative of one of the most controversial periods in North-east Asian history.

Trying to arrive at an understanding of history that was as objective as possible, they drew on sources from all three countries, including testimony from survivors of that period.³⁴ After spending several years debating the “bare facts” that needed to appear in a unified regional narrative, the authors of *History Opens the Future* produced a volume that succinctly deals with key issues. It is thus in the truest sense a textbook, often devoting one to two pages to subtopics before reverting back to an overall narrative. For instance, the book briefly introduces sensitive issues, such as the comfort women, the Yasukuni Shrine, and the importance of history textbooks.³⁵ Each of these topics is presented in a way that encourages readers to draw their own conclusions about the meaning and significance of the issues at stake.

Taking this practice one step further, the authors of *History Opens the Future* used materials from all three countries. For instance, the section on relations between Japan and its neighbors during World War II contains the following diverging points of emphasis. A Korean textbook is cited as stating that “due to the war of invasion by the Japanese empire, our country reverted to a logistics base supplying the resources for Japan’s war . . . The Japanese empire not only physically plundered Koreans in this way but also forcibly enslaved them and consigned them to hard labor in mines and factories.” This account is then juxtaposed with an extract from a Chinese textbook, which states in part: “The Japanese invaders used arms to maintain colonial control in the occupied zones. They estab-

referred to as *History Opens the Future*.

34. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, “Asia’s Textbook Case,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 152 (January-February, 2006), p. 80.

35. *History Opens the Future*, pp. 230-31, 234-35, 232-33.

lished institutions such as a military police, a police force, courts and prisons to repress the Chinese people." In contrast, a Japanese textbook is cited as indicating a quite different perspective: "These [victories of Japanese troops in a series of wars] were victories that were possible due to the cooperation of people who had suffered under the colonial yoke of the white man for centuries. By winning this series of wars, Japan delivered the dream of independence to most people in Southeast Asia and India."³⁶

These three different accounts of the same political dynamic highlight the difficulty that the authors of the joint history textbook faced in overcoming what are essentially nationalist accounts of regional history. The authors sought to tell how Japan invaded its neighbors over a fifty-year period, and how those neighbors resisted. The narrative of *History Opens the Future* focuses on the themes of invasion and resistance rather than the liberation, which Japanese textbooks emphasize. The input of the Chinese and Korean members of the joint committee ensured an emphasis on how Japan's invasions violated the sovereignty of other East Asian countries, while the Japanese account emphasizes that East Asian countries were not exercising full sovereignty over their territories prior to Japan's invasion. One explicit drawback of this focus is that while Western and Japanese imperialism are properly scrutinized, there is no mention of other forms of power and domination that the region has experienced. How, for instance, is one to assess adequately, and represent to future generations, the function of U.S. hegemony in the region or China's often problematic role in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan?³⁷

History Opens the Future is thus not a comprehensive political history of the region, nor does it try to be. The range of countries involved is limited, bringing into question the value of using the term "East Asia" in the book's title. Historians from countries such as North Korea, Viet Nam, and Taiwan would undoubtedly dispute some of the "barest of facts" needed to produce such a textbook. Other contentious issues, such as the ongoing dispute between China and Korea over the status of Goguryeo, also fall outside the textbook's objectives. Goguryeo was one of the

36. All quoted *ibid.*, p. 232.

37. *North East Asia's Undercurrents of Conflict*, p. 13; Wasserstrom, "Asia's Textbook Case," p. 82.

three kingdoms that unified to form the Korean state in the seventh century A.D., but China claims that the kingdom was but one territory that formed part of the traditional Chinese empire. It is not at all clear whether China and Korea circa 668 A.D. can be treated as nation-states—at least in the contemporary understanding of the term, with its focus on state sovereignty. And yet the joint history project treats these countries as full-fledged nation-states at the end of the nineteenth century, replete for instance with the capacity to defend a defined territory and population.³⁸ In a similar manner, there is no discussion on ties between the three countries since the end of World War II. This avoids issues such as the participation of the People's Republic of China in the Korean War, the national division of Korea, as well as the status of various Chinese territories such as Taiwan.

Despite its shortcomings, the production of the joint history textbook is one of the most concrete and significant steps taken toward the problem of diverging understandings of the past. In their attempt to reach consensus on the bare minimum of facts, the joint editorial committee faced the difficulty of dealing with three interpretations of history. The next step for Korean-Japanese relations could be to further reduce the scope for dissension by producing a joint history textbook on a bilateral basis. Such a project could cover the most sensitive of issues in the history of bilateral relations, including Hideyoshi's war of 1592 and of course the colonial period. However, it could also address issues such as cultural exchanges across the millennia, commonalities in the historical evolution of the two languages, the current status of ethnic Koreans in Japan, and the contribution of Japan to Korean economic development.

Reconciliation as Respecting Difference in Representations about the Past

The *History Opens the Future* project highlights two important

38. Narida Ryuichi, "'Dong Asia'-ui Ganeungseong" (The Possibility of "East Asia"), *Changjak-gwa-Bipyong*, No. 131 (February, 2006), pp. 406-10; Scott Snyder, "A Turning Point for China-Korea Relations?" *Comparative Connections*, vol. 6, No. 3 (September, 2004), pp. 109-11.

issues: that dialogue can help parties in conflict to reach at least some agreement about what happened in the past; and that an ultimate agreement on the bare facts of what happened to whom and when is unlikely to ever occur. No matter how successful dialogical interactions between opposing sides are, they always have to deal with the remainder, with positions that cannot be subsumed into compromise or, perhaps, not even be apprehended from the vantage point of those who do not live and represent them. South Korea and Japan may never officially agree on one common historical representation of the past.

Another form of ethics is necessary to deal with this problematic remainder—not an ethics of dialogue, but an ethics of difference. The task ahead thus consists of articulating a form of reconciliation that does not eradicate differences between two sides, but seeks to establish a political environment in which these differences can be accepted and lived out in a respectful and nonviolent manner. Ethics then becomes a question of developing a relationship with the other side that displays understanding of and respect for the other's inherently different (and perhaps incompatible) standpoint.³⁹

Recognizing the existence of historical differences is thus a crucial element in the effort to promote a culture of reconciliation between South Korea and Japan. Nietzsche refers to such approaches as “critical histories”: attempts to challenge the notion of a single historical reality and create the political space in which diverging narratives of the past can compete with each other, perhaps even respect each other despite the differences that divide them. Numerous philosophers and historians stress the importance of this point. Paul Ricoeur proposes that by “acknowledging that the history of an event involves a conflict of several interpretations and memories, we in turn open up the future.”⁴⁰ Linking an ethics of difference with a promotion of a tolerant historical consciousness entails a variety of different

39. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, Penna.: Duquesne University Press, 1987); and Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Penna.: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

40. Paul Ricoeur, “Imagination, Testimony and Trust: A Dialogue with Paul Ricoeur,” in Kearney and Dooley, eds., *Questioning Ethics*, p. 13.

dimensions. Dipesh Chakrabarty uses the term “minority histories” and refers to the need to protect various versions of the past, even if they contradict each other and cannot be subsumed into prevailing narratives of the nation.

Advancing an ethics of difference does not entail abandoning the ability to judge, particularly when it comes to questions of responsibility for Japan’s imperial ambitions and colonial occupation of Korea. Not every version of the past can be sustained. Although the content of a historical account is inevitably intertwined with the values espoused by the narrator, a historian cannot simply make up events and interpretations. Ricoeur seeks to avoid an abuse of memory by grounding it in “what really happened.”⁴¹ This is, of course, an aspiration that inevitably remains unfulfilled, for history is a form of representation, and a representation is always incomplete and, at least to some extent, distorted. It cannot capture the object it represents as it is, devoid of perception and perspective. But Ricoeur stresses the need to supplement historical memory with documentary and archival evidence. He illustrates this inevitable combination between event and representation, fact and narration, as follows: “You have to accurately count the corpses in the death camps as well as offering vivid narrative accounts that people will remember.”⁴²

Even so-called postmodern historians stress the need for rules of scholarship and verification. Hayden White, for instance, admits that every historical narrative contains a “desire to moralize” the event it seeks to capture. But to count as “proper history,” White emphasizes, the narrative “must manifest a proper concern for the judicious handling of evidence, and it must honor the chronological order of the original occurrence of events.”⁴³ Chakrabarty, likewise, defends the notion of “minority histories” while rejecting the relativist position that may dismiss such accounts as purely personal or arbitrary. He stresses that an alternative memory of the past can only enrich, or be absorbed into the mainstream historical discourse if the following questions can be answered in the affir-

41. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

43. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 4, 14.

mative: "Can the story be told/crafted? And does it allow for a rationally defensible point of view or position from which to tell the story?"⁴⁴

Keeping these guiding lights in mind, the authors of the *History Opens the Future* project could take their project one step further. They could examine each historical period or event separately, trying to find out which of the barest facts the three countries can agree on, and where exactly the remaining differences are located. They could search for ways to turn the remaining disagreements into situations through which differences between the two sides can be seen as a normal, perhaps even enriching, part of bilateral relations. At the same time one has to acknowledge that if a historical approach based on an ethics of difference is to be placed in the service of reconciliation, it has to go beyond merely acknowledging that the two sides have different notions of the past. Leaving it at that would only entrench existing antagonisms, and thus legitimize or even intensify the existing conflict. An ethics of difference must seek to create the conditions under which different identities can co-exist and explore commonalities. Doing so is not easy, nor can it be reached overnight. Reconciliation inevitably takes time. The pain of past events, such as the memory of Japan's colonial occupation, is deeply rooted in societal consciousness. But an approach to reconciliation that combines dialogue with respect for difference is likely to help the respective societies sort out their differences in a nonviolent and respectful manner. If Japan and South Korea were to pursue such an approach with determination, then their so far rather tense political relations will most likely take on a more conciliatory nature.

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